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A Disabled Apostle: Impairment and Disability in the Letters of Paul

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ABSTRACT

This first book-length treatment of Paul and disability builds on recent advances in the field of disability studies to show the nature of Paul's bodily condition as well as a whole new way of approaching the study of disability in ancient texts. Drawing on the socio-cultural model of disability offered by Anne Waldschmidt, I argue that Paul's circumcision (Phil 3:5) and the angel of Satan (2 Cor 12:7)—the latter which I understand to be a demonic force—were ancient disabilities. These conditions were embedded in a complex social and cultural network, where human bodies, social ideals, cultural artefacts, and sacred texts converged. This project advances scholarship in three significant ways. First, I offer an alternative approach for isolating and studying disability in the ancient world. Instead of analysing how sources depict and receive conditions deemed disabilities today, I provide a framework for isolating impairments and disabilities relative to their respective culture. This allows me to understand conditions excluded from conventional medical taxonomies. Second, I challenge the now widespread view that the specific nature of Paul's disabilities cannot be known. Rather than trying to medically diagnose Paul's condition, I focus on social perceptions of the functionality and aesthetic of Paul's body in its ancient Jewish and non-Jewish context. Finally, I demonstrate the relevance of disability for interpreting Pauline literature. My re-examination of circumcision and demonisation as disability in Paul's letters generates new questions for key Pauline passages. Such questions inspire new answers to well-worn themes in Paul like the circumcision of gentiles, bodily continuity in the resurrection of the dead, and Paul's understanding of God's (in)justice amid his suffering.

A DISABLED APOSTLE

Impairment and Disability in the Letters of Paul

A Dissertation

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MPhil (Oxon.), MTh, BCM, Dip. Min.

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
The Department of Theology & Religion



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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of primary sources follow the *SBL Handbook of Style, Second Edition*. In the case of works not included in the *SBL Handbook of Style* or where there is overlap, abbreviations follow the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4th edition) or the *Greek-English Lexicon* of Liddell, Scott, and Jones (LSJ) where possible. Abbreviations of Galen's works comes from *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Galen*. Greek epigraphic abbreviations adhere to G. H. R. Horsley and J. A. L. Lee, "A Preliminary Checklist of Abbreviations of Greek Epigraphic Volumes," *Epigraphica: Periodico Internazionale di Epigrafia* 56 (1994): 129-169. Latin epigraphy follows the *Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy*. Papyri are cited according to the abbreviations of J. F. Oates, R. S. Bagnall, S. J. Clackson, A. A. O'Brien, J. D. Sosin, T. G. Wilfong, and K. A. Worp, *Checklist of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca Tablets* (<https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/papyrus/texts/clist.html>), accessed 14 October 2020).

Texts from the New Testament use the *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland, 28th ed. while Hebrew Bible passages are based on the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

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Primary Sources

<i>Ab urbe cond.</i>	Livy, <i>Ab urbe condita</i> (History of Rome)
<i>Abr.</i>	Philo, <i>De Abrahamo</i> (On the Life of Abraham)
<i>Ach.</i>	Aristophanes, <i>Acharnenses</i> (Acharnians)
<i>Adv. Jud.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Adversus Judaeos</i> (Against the Jews)
<i>Aeth.</i>	Heliodorus, <i>Aethiopica</i> (Ethiopia)
<i>Agr.</i>	Philo, <i>De agricultura</i> (On Agriculture)
<i>A.J.</i>	Josephus, <i>Antiquitates judaicae</i> (Jewish Antiquities)
<i>Amic. mult.</i>	Plutarch, <i>De amicorum multitudine</i>
<i>Anab.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Anabasis</i>
<i>Ann.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Annales</i>
<i>An seni</i>	Plutarch, <i>An seni respublica gerenda sit</i>
Apoc. Paul	Apocalypse of Paul (Visio Pauli)
<i>Apol.</i>	Plato, <i>Apologia</i> (Apology of Socrates)
<i>Apol. Dav.</i>	Ambrose of Milan, <i>Apologia prophetae David</i>
<i>Bacch.</i>	Euripides, <i>Bacchae</i> (Bacchanals)
Barn.	Epistle of Barnabas
<i>Bell. civ.</i>	Appian, <i>Bella civilian</i> (Civil Wars)

<i>Bib. his.</i>	Diodorus Siculus, <i>Bibliotheca historica</i> (Library of History)
<i>Bibl.</i>	Apollodorus, <i>Bibliotheca</i> (Library)
<i>B.J.</i>	Josephus, <i>Bellum judaicum</i> (Jewish War)
<i>Bus.</i>	Isocrates, <i>Busiris</i>
<i>C. Ap.</i>	Josephus, <i>Contra Apionem</i> (Against Apion)
<i>Capt.</i>	Plautus, <i>Captivi</i>
<i>Carm.</i>	Horace, <i>Carmina</i> (Odes)
<i>Catull.</i>	Catullus
<i>C. du. ep. Pelag.</i>	Augustine, <i>Contra duas epistulas Pelagianorum ad Bonifatium</i> (Against the Two Letters of the Pelagians)
<i>Cic.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Cicero</i>
<i>Char.</i>	Theophrastus, <i>Characteres</i>
<i>Claud.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Divus Claudius</i>
<i>Comm. Gal.</i>	Jerome, <i>Commentariorum in Epistulam ad Galatas libri III</i>
<i>Comm. Isa.</i>	Jerome, <i>Commentariorum in Isaiam libri XVIII</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	Philo, <i>De confusione linguarum</i> (On the Confusion of Tongues)
<i>Crat.</i>	Plato, <i>Cratylus</i>
<i>Cyr.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Cyropaedia</i>
<i>De arch.</i>	Vitruvius, <i>De architectura</i> (On architecture)
<i>De or.</i>	Cicero, <i>De oratore</i>
<i>Princ.</i>	Origen, <i>De principiis</i> (First Principles)
<i>Def. orac.</i>	Plutarch, <i>De defectu oraculorum</i>
<i>Descr.</i>	Pausanias, <i>Graeciae description</i> (Description of Greece)
<i>Det.</i>	Philo, <i>Quod deterius potiori insidari soleat</i> (That the Worse Attacks the Better)
<i>Dial.</i>	Justin Martyr, <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
<i>Dom.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Domitianus</i>
<i>Enn.</i>	Plotinus, <i>Enneades</i>
<i>Enarrat. Ps.</i>	Ambrose of Milan, <i>Enarrationes in XII Psalmos Davidicos</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	Gregory of Nazianzus, <i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	Martial, <i>Epigrams</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	Seneca, <i>Epistulae</i> (Epistles)
<i>Ep. fest.</i>	Athanasius, <i>Epistulae festales</i> (Festal letters)
<i>Ep. Olymp.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Epistulae ad Olympiadem</i>
<i>Epist.</i>	Horace, <i>Epistulae</i> (Epistles)
<i>Epist.</i>	Jerome, <i>Epistulae</i>
<i>Eq.</i>	Aristophanes, <i>Equites</i> (Knights)
<i>Eust.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>In sanctum Eustathium Antiochenum</i>
<i>Exp. Ps.</i>	Ambrose of Milan, <i>Expositio Psalmi</i>
<i>Faust.</i>	Augustine, <i>Contra Faustum Manichaeum</i> (Against Faustus the Manichaean)
<i>Fr. 2 Cor.</i>	Didymus of Alexandria, <i>Fragmenta in Epistulam ii ad Corinthios</i>
<i>Fug.</i>	Philo, <i>De fuga et inventione</i> (On Flight and Finding)

<i>Georg.</i>	Virgil, <i>Georgics</i>
<i>Geogr.</i>	Strabo, <i>Geographica</i> (Geography)
<i>Gig.</i>	Philo, <i>De gigatibus</i> (On Giants)
<i>Gramm.</i>	Suetonius, <i>De grammaticis</i>
<i>Gyn.</i>	Soranus, <i>Gynaecceia</i> (Gynaecology)
<i>Had.</i>	Historia Augusta, <i>Hadrianus</i> (Hadrian)
<i>Haer.</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Adversus haereses</i> (Against Heresies)
<i>Her.</i>	Philo, <i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit</i> (Who is the Heir?)
<i>Hist.</i>	Herodotus, <i>Historiae</i> (Histories)
<i>Hist.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Historiae</i> (Histories)
<i>Hist. an.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Historia animalium</i> (History of Animals)
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius, <i>historia ecclesiastica</i> (Ecclesiastical History)
<i>Hist. plant.</i>	Theophrastus, <i>Historia plantarum</i>
<i>Hist. rom.</i>	Dio Cassius, <i>Historiae romanae</i> (Roman History)
<i>Hom. 1 Thess.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Homiliae in epistulam i ad Thessalonicenses</i>
<i>Hom. 2 Cor.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Homiliae in epistulam ii ad Corinthios</i>
<i>Hom. 2 Tim.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Himiliae in epistulam ii ad Timotheum</i>
<i>Hom. Gen.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Homiliae in Genesim</i>
<i>Hom. Gen.</i>	Origen, <i>Homiliae in Genesim</i>
<i>Hom. Phil.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Homiliae in epistulam ad Philippenses</i>
<i>Hom. Rom.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Homiliae in epistulam ad Romanos</i>
<i>Icar.</i>	Lucian, <i>Icaromenippus</i>
<i>Id.</i>	Theocritus, <i>Idylls</i>
<i>Imag.</i>	Philostratus, <i>Imagines</i>
<i>Inst.</i>	Quintilian, <i>Institutio oratoria</i>
<i>Inv.</i>	Cicero, <i>De inventione rhetorica</i>
<i>Jov.</i>	Jerome, <i>Adversus Jovinianum libri II</i>
<i>Ios.</i>	Philo, <i>De Iosepho</i> (On the Life of Joseph)
LAB	Ps-Philo, <i>Liber antiquitatum biblicarum</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	Cicero, <i>De legibus</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	Philo, <i>Legum allegoriae</i> (Allegorical Interpretation)
<i>Legat.</i>	Philo, <i>Legatio ad Gaium</i> (On the Embassy to Gaius)
<i>Lex.</i>	Lucian, <i>Lexiphanes</i>
<i>Ling.</i>	Varro, <i>De lingua Latina</i>
<i>Lys.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Lysander</i>
<i>Lysis.</i>	Plato, <i>Lysis</i>
<i>Marc.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Marcellus</i>
<i>Mart. Pol.</i>	Martyrdom of Polycarp
<i>Mat. med.</i>	Dioscorides, <i>De materia medica</i>
<i>Med.</i>	Celsus, <i>De medicina</i>
<i>Men.</i>	Lucian, <i>Menippus</i>
<i>Metam.</i>	Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i>
<i>Mem.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Memorabilia</i>
<i>MM</i>	Galen, <i>De methedo medendi</i> (Therapeutic method)
<i>Mos.</i>	Philo, <i>De vita Mosis</i> (On the Life of Moses)
<i>Mort.</i>	Cyprian, <i>De mortalitate</i> (Mortality)

<i>Nat.</i>	Pliny, <i>Naturalis historia</i> (Natural History)
<i>Noct. att.</i>	Aulus Gellius, <i>Noctes atticae</i> (Attic Nights)
<i>Nub.</i>	Aristophanes, <i>Nubes</i> (Clouds)
<i>Od.</i>	Homer, <i>Odyssea</i> (Odyssey)
<i>QG</i>	Philo, <i>Quaestiones et solutions in Genesin</i> (Questions and Answers on Genesis)
<i>Op.</i>	Hesiod, <i>Opera et dies</i> (Works and Days)
<i>Opif.</i>	Philo, <i>De opificio mundi</i> (On the Creation of the World)
<i>Or. Bas.</i>	Gregory of Nazianzus, <i>Oratio in laudem Basilii</i>
<i>Pan.</i>	Epiphanius, <i>Panarion</i> (Refutation of all Heresies)
<i>Pers.</i>	Persius, <i>Satirae</i> (Satires)
<i>Peregr.</i>	Lucian, <i>De morte Peregrini</i> (The Passing of Peregrinus)
<i>Phil.</i>	Polycarp, <i>To the Philippians</i>
<i>Philops.</i>	Lucian, <i>Philopseudes</i> (Lover of Lies)
<i>Plac. philos.</i>	Pseudo-Plutarch, <i>De placita philosophorum</i>
<i>Plut.</i>	Aristophanes, <i>Plutus</i> (The Rich Man)
<i>Polyb.</i>	Polybius, <i>Historics</i>
<i>Prob.</i>	Philo, <i>Quoid omnis probus liber sit</i> (That Every Good Person is Free)
<i>Probl.</i>	Pseudo-Aristotle, <i>Problemata</i> (Problems)
<i>Pseudol.</i>	Lucian, <i>Pseudologista</i> (The Mistaken Critic)
<i>Pud.</i>	Tertullian, <i>De pudicitia</i> (Modesty)
<i>Pyr.</i>	Sextus Empiricus, <i>Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes</i> (Outlines of Pyrrhonism)
<i>Pyth.</i>	Pindar, <i>Pythionikai</i> (Pythian Odes)
<i>Quaest. rom.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Quaestionum romanae et graecae</i>
<i>Ran.</i>	Aristophanes, <i>Ranae</i> (Frogs)
<i>Res.</i>	Tertullian, <i>De resurrectione carnis</i> (The Resurrection of the Flesh)
<i>Resp.</i>	Plato, <i>Respublica</i> (Republic)
<i>Sat.</i>	Juvenal, <i>Satirae</i> (Satires)
<i>Saty.</i>	Petronius, <i>Satyrica</i>
<i>Sept.</i>	Aeschylus, <i>Septem contra Thebas</i> (Seven against Thebes)
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	Sibylline Oracles
<i>Spec.</i>	Philo, <i>De specialibus legibus</i> (On the Special Laws)
<i>Stoic. rep.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Stoicos absurdiora poetis dicere</i>
<i>Superst.</i>	Plutarch, <i>De superstition</i>
<i>Symp.</i>	Plato, <i>Symposium</i>
<i>Thesm.</i>	Aristophanes, <i>Thesmophoriazusae</i> (Women at the Thesmophoria)
<i>Tib.</i>	Suetonius, <i>Tiberius</i>
<i>Tim.</i>	Aeschines, <i>In Timarchum</i> (Against Timarchus)
<i>UP</i>	Galen, <i>De usu partium</i> (On the Function of the Parts of the Body)
<i>Val. Max.</i>	Valerius Maximus, <i>Facta et dicta memorabilia</i> (Memorable Deeds and Sayings)
<i>Virt.</i>	Philo, <i>De virtutibus</i> (On the Virtues)

<i>Vita</i>	Josephus, <i>Vita</i> (The Life)
<i>Vit. Apoll.</i>	Philostratus, <i>Vitae Apollonii</i>
<i>X orat.</i>	Pseudo-Plutarch, <i>Vitae decem oratorum</i>

Journals, Editions, Series, Catalogues, and Reference Works

AB	Anchor Bible
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> . Part 2, <i>Principat</i> . Edited by Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972–
ASE	<i>Annali di Storia dell'Esegesi</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDF	Blass, Friedrich, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk. <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BFCT	Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie
BHGNT	Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BRv	<i>Bible Review</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CEJL	Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature
CH	<i>Church History</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> . Berlin, 1862–
CMT	Conceptual Metaphor Theory
CNT	Commentaire du Nouveau Testament
ConBNT	Coniectanea Neotestamentica or Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>

CQ	<i>Church Quarterly</i>
CPJ	<i>Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum. Edited by Victor A. Tcherikover. 3 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957–1964</i>
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Edited by Jean Baptiste Chabot et al. Paris, 1903
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
DCLS	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>ErJb</i>	<i>Eranos-Jahrbuch</i>
FB	Forschung zur Bibel
FC	Fathers of the Church
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HThKNT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IOS</i>	<i>Israel Oriental Studies</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JAJSup	Journal of Ancient Judaism: Supplements
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JPT</i>	<i>Journal of Pentecostal Theology</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
JSJSup	Supplements to Journal for the Study of Judaism
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSQ</i>	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTI</i>	<i>Journal for Theological Interpretation</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>

KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer- Kommentar)
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> . Edited by H. Christoph Ackerman and Jean-Robert Gisler. 8 vols. Zurich: Artemis, 1981–1997
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996
LSTS	The Library of Second Temple Studies
OG	Old Greek/Septuagint
OTL	Old Testament Library
MIP	Metaphor Identification Procedure
MT	Masoretic Text
NA ²⁸	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , Nestle-Aland, 28th ed.
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NET	Neutestamentliche Entwürfe zur Theologie
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
NTL	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PG	Patrologia Graeca [= <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus</i> : Series Graeca]. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–1886
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SFEG	Schriften der Finnischen Exegetischen Gesellschaft
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
<i>SVF</i>	<i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i> . Hans Friedrich August von Arnim. 4 vols. Leipzig: Teubne, 1903–1924
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigraphica
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum
THKNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigilae Christianae</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>WO</i>	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WUNT 2	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, Reihe 2
<i>ZAC</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Christianity/Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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Isaac T. Soon
Abbotsford, British Columbia
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For Mallary

רבות בנות עשו חיל ואת עלית על-כלנה

Who will tell in full of your public chains
and your tribulations, O glorious Apostle Paul?
the labours, the hardships, the vigils, the sufferings
in hunger and thirst, the basket, the beatings, the stoning,
the wandering, the depth [of the sea], the shipwrecks?
You became a theatre to angels and to human beings.

APOSTICHA HYMN, ST. ANDREW OF CRETE (ca. 660-740 CE)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Paul, a Disabled Apostle?

Ancient Christian visual culture memorialises the body of Paul the apostle. With contours of stone, glass, and wood, his figure is preserved in late antique bowls, catacomb frescos, gravestones, sarcophagus lids, and mosaics. The portrait of Paul on a late fourth-century gold-glass Byzantine bowl base is somewhat typical (Figure 1.1). As is the case with other early images we have, Paul's appearance is unremarkable.¹ Aside from retaining his signature bald head and pointed beard, he stands on two feet, has two hands, two eyes and appears functionally and aesthetically *able*.

The portrait we get from Paul's letters, however, has long suggested otherwise. His allusion to a "weakness of the flesh" (ἀσθένεια τῆς σαρκός) in Gal 4:13, his "marks of Christ" (τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) in Gal 6:16, his catalogue of sufferings in 2 Cor 11:23-29, and, most famously, the "thorn in the flesh" (σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί) of 2 Cor 12:7, all give the impression that there was something going on in Paul beneath the surface at variance with ancient conceptions of bodily health.

¹For further examples, see the fresco of Paul in the Catacombs of Praetextatus, Rome (4th CE), the sarcophagus lid from the Cenetary of St. Agnes, Rome (4th CE), and the fresco of Paul and Thekla in the Cave of St. Paul, Ephesus (6th CE). Other early portraits of Paul's head and face reveal less: e.g. Paul the Catacomb of Saint Thekla, Rome (3rd CE), Paul on the Gravestone of Asellus (4th CE), and the mosaic of Paul in the Archbishopal Chapel of St. Andrew, Ravenna (5th CE). For a comparison of the physical features of Paul in early Christian visual culture see my forthcoming article Soon 2021.



Figure 1.1: Bowl Base with Saints Peter and Paul Flanking a Column with the Christogram of Christ. Late 4th century. Diameter: 9.9 x 0.6 cm. Glass-Gold. Photograph courtesy of the Met Museum under CCO 1.0 Public Domain.

Taking their cue from these passages, early readers of Paul promulgated traditions about the supposed chronic pain that he experienced.² As an heir to these traditions, historical-critical scholarship of a previous era diagnosed Paul's body by exhausting every minute textual detail and allusion. With no enduring consensus, eventually this quest was abandoned. Today, scholarship remains largely agnostic about the exact nature of Paul's disability. Scholars are sure that he was disabled, but they are far less confident that we can identify his disability. Such an impasse permits only a limited understanding of Paul and disability, broad rather than concrete in nature.

In this first full-length treatment of Paul and disability, I build on recent theoretical advances concerning impairment and disability to show the nature of Paul's bodily condition and a whole new way of approaching disability and impairment in ancient texts. My approach to ancient disability uncovers fresh exegetical and theological avenues in Pauline texts.

This project advances scholarship in three significant ways. First, I offer an alternative approach for isolating and studying disability in the ancient world. Instead of analysing how ancient sources depict and receive bodily conditions that are deemed disabilities today, I provide a framework for isolating impairments and disabilities relative to their respective culture.³ This allows us to understand conditions not otherwise considered disabilities by conventional medical taxonomies. Second, I challenge the now widespread view that the

²See the analysis in Chapter Six.

³For a critique of restricting the study of ancient disability to modern medical conditions see §9.3.

specific nature of Paul's disabilities cannot be known. Rather than trying to medically diagnose Paul's condition as previous scholarship has done, I focus on social perceptions of the functionality and aesthetic of Paul's body in its ancient Jewish and non-Jewish context. Finally, I demonstrate the relevance of disability for interpreting Pauline literature. My re-examination of both circumcision and demonisation as disability in Paul's letters generates new questions for key Pauline passages. Such questions inspire new answers to well-worn themes in Paul like the circumcision of gentiles, bodily continuity in the resurrection of the dead, and Paul's understanding of God's (in)justice amid his suffering.

The present chapter provides an orientation to disability, my approach and method for interrogating disability in ancient sources, a history of scholarship, and an overview of my argument.

1.2 A Socio-Cultural Model of Disability

The shifting use of the term "disability" makes pinpointing its meaning a difficult task, especially in relation to the ancient world. "Disability" may have its roots in the Anglo-Norman word *disabilitic*, which meant powerlessness. From the sixteenth century onward, it referred to a lack of ability or, simply, to weakness. Since the latter part of the twentieth century, "disability" has come to refer solely to perceived physical or mental limitation. This usage corresponds to the rise in use of the adjective "disabled," a closely related cognate, which supplanted derogatory terms like "crippled" and "handicapped."

No term in ancient Greek, Latin, or Hebrew corresponds with how “disability” is used today. For instance, the vocabulary of disability in ancient Greek was pluriform, and there was no single overarching concept used to group conditions together.⁴ Some have argued that the term ἀδύνατος is analogous to our term “disability” (see Plutarch, *An seni* 15 [791D-E]; *Lys.* 24).⁵ However, ἀδύνατος does not refer to physical impairment in every context. Martha Rose demonstrates this point with an example from Lysias 17.1 (*On the property of Eraton*), where ἀδύνατος does not reference a speech impairment *per se* but the inability to speak well. The word simply refers to the inability to do or fulfil a task. This sense naturally overlaps with the use of “disability” in sixteenth-century English but does not correspond with how disability is now used as an umbrella term for physical impairments.

In Latin, *debilitas* referred to ill-health or illness but not necessarily physical impairment.⁶ In *Noct. att.* 4.2, Aulus Gellius draws a distinction between *vitium* (defect) and *morbis* (illness), possibly indicating that the former refers to a category comparable to disability. However, such a distinction is not widespread in Latin literature.⁷

In Hebrew, the word “defect” (מַיִם) is often associated with blindness and lameness, yet deafness and muteness are exempt from this category, at least

⁴See the breadth of terms in Samama 2017. For an analysis of the very diverse ways ancient Greek and Latin terms related to what we call disease and impairment, see Laes 2020.

⁵Penrose Jr. 2015, 507. Cf. Rose 2003, 14.

⁶See for example Cicero, *Leg.* 1.55 and Livy, *Ab urbe cond.* 2.36.5.

⁷Laes, Goodey and Rose 2013, 4.

in the Hebrew Bible.⁸ מום can also refer to “moral blemishes,” as Jacob Milgrom has pointed out.⁹ Alternatively, Jeremy Schipper argues that words which refer to disabled bodies appear in a *qittel* vowel pattern and that this pattern denotes “a particular conceptual category” of physical difference.¹⁰ He admits, however, that while many physical defects do appear in this form in the Hebrew Bible, there are also exceptions to this pattern that do not refer to physical defects at all.¹¹ One wonders whether this is in fact ancient or a modern red herring that arises out of the Masoretic apparatus.

It is not insignificant that the ancients lacked a term for disability. To assume that they understood disability as we do would be anachronistic.¹² But although there was not an overarching designation in the ancient Mediterranean world, this does not mean that disability did not exist. Just as the concepts of sexuality or theology are useful for interrogating ancient cultures, so also the concept of disability is useful even in the absence of equivalent nomenclature in the sources. While we do not share lexemes of disability, we share disability as a discourse—even if that discourse is only intelligible from our perspective.

Disability theory enables biblical scholars to analyse discourses of ancient disability in the absence of corresponding language. Theoretical advances in our

⁸Cf. Lev 21:17, 18, 21, 23; 22:20, 21, 25; 24:19, 20; Num 19:2; Deut 15:21; 17:1; 2 Sam 14:25; Song 4:7, Dan 1:4. See Olyan 2008, 47–61.

⁹E.g. Deut 32:5; Prov 9:7; Job 11:15 and 31:7. See Milgrom 2004, 266; Dorman 2007, 22.

¹⁰Schipper 2006, 65–67.

¹¹E.g. Ex 20:5; 34:7; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9. See his comments in Schipper 2006, 65–66, n. 11.

¹²On this point see the similar observations of Laes 2020, 14.

understanding of disability arose primarily out of the disability rights movements in the United States and the United Kingdom.¹³ Our present constructions of disability are a reaction to what has been called **the medical model of disability**. The medical model of disability was a dominant conceptual paradigm prior to the disability rights movement in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁴ This model pathologised bodies that deviated from what was considered scientifically and biologically “normal.” It made a distinction between “impairment” (the medical condition), “disability” (physiological limitations), and “handicap” (environmental and social obstacles that arise as a result of both the impairment and disability).¹⁵ Critics eschewed this model, arguing that it made disability the problem of an individual alone.¹⁶ In their mind, there was too much of an emphasis on correcting disabled bodies through technological expertise and prosthesis in order to bring them into conformity with a socially-held ideal.¹⁷

¹³In-depth histories of the development of disability can be found elsewhere: Schipper 2006, 15–24; Raphael 2008, 5–13; Shakespeare, T., et al. 2006; Gosbell 2018, 31–39. Biblical scholars have drawn almost exclusively from North American scholarship, often overlooking the important work produced in Germany, France, Norway, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Italy, and India. Current overviews of non-anglophone literature can be found in Thompson 2017; Waldschmidt 2005, 10–15; Noson 2014; Traustadóttir, Sigurjónsdóttir and Egilson 2013. Helpful theoretical and methodological reflections on disability studies can be found in Waldschmidt 2005; Dederich 2007; Kolářová and Storchová 2011; Griffó 2014; Söder 2009; Waldschmidt and Schneider 2007; Ghai 2015. At the present, disability research is lacking in non-English speaking countries, especially those that must deal with their “own specific colonial-settler histories” (e.g. India, South Africa, Asia-Pacific nations) Goodley 2017, 90. There are other typologies of overarching theories concerning disability. See especially Stiker 2013, 257–274; Kudlick and Stiker 2016, 142–144. Also Griffó 2014, 148–151.

¹⁴See World Health Organization 1980.

¹⁵Shakespeare, T., et al. 2006, 1102.

¹⁶Shakespeare, T., et al. 2006, 1103; Raphael 2008, 6.

¹⁷Devlieger 2005, 7; Gosbell 2018, 33.

Reactions against the medical model led to the development of the **social model of disability** in the United Kingdom during the 1970s. This model understands disability as being socially constructed.¹⁸ It maintains, like the medical model, that impairment and disability refer to two different things. Impairment, according to the social model, refers to a biologically defective physical condition. Disability, on the other hand, refers to the social barriers that limit and disadvantage people with impairments.¹⁹ According to Louise Gosbell's reading of the social model, disability is no longer a problem of the individual but rather is an issue of an individual's environment.²⁰ Whereas in the medical model, disability and impairment rested solely on the individual's biological condition (genes, natural selection, personal obstacles, etc.), in the social model responsibility for the "problem" is distributed between the individual and society.²¹

Recently, there has been a turn toward a **cultural model of disability**, especially among North American scholars of the humanities.²² While there are many biblical scholars who adopt what they describe as a cultural model of disability, there is no uniform definition or application of the approach. *The* model, as such, does not exist. Its practitioners often weave together a number of views from different theorists, each with their own emphasis. In this way, the

¹⁸Waldschmidt 2017, 20.

¹⁹For the sources of these definitions see Schipper 2006, 17.

²⁰Gosbell 2018, 33.

²¹So Raphael 2008, 6.

²²Originally conceived by Schipper 2006, 19 and Snyder and Mitchell 2006, x.

theory behind cultural models can be idiosyncratic and its definitions frustratingly opaque.²³

While North American scholarship seems to view the cultural model as distinct from the social model (at least in their language and typology), some German scholarship adopts the cultural model as a modification of the social model, admitting that disability is “*both* socially and culturally constructed.”²⁴ For the purpose of this study, I draw primarily on the socio-cultural model of disability put forward by German disability scholar Anne Waldschmidt. Waldschmidt’s version of the cultural model offers a clear and coherent frame for analysing disability in the ancient world.

In this socio-cultural model, disability is a way of characterising the relationship between impaired bodies and the negative social and cultural effects they generate. According to the WHO, impairment refers to “a problem in body function or structure” or a “health condition.”²⁵ That this physiological condition is named a “problem” shows that the WHO definition is predicated on modern medical ideals about how the body should function and look.

²³For example, even though Gosbell and Raphael draw on Schipper’s definition of the cultural model, each of them construes it in different ways. Compare Gosbell’s understanding of the cultural model (Gosbell 2018, 36–9) in comparison to Raphael (Raphael 2008, 8–9), and even to Schipper himself (2006, 20).

²⁴Waldschmidt 2017, 24. French disability scholarship, only recently drawing on North American cultural studies, tends toward anthropological emphases. See Stiker 2007; Stiker 2013.

²⁵In this middle of writing this dissertation the WHO altered its definition of impairment from “a problem in body function or structure” (World Health Organization 2020b) to a more ambiguous understanding of impairment as a person’s “health condition” (World Health Organization 2020a). The term “health” still denotes a socially constructed ideal concerning the form and function of the human body.

However, what constitutes an ideal behaviour or appearance changes from culture to culture. Ancient bodily ideals about form and function will not necessarily match our own, or vice versa. What might be considered an impairment in one culture may not be in another, as they are dependent upon “the expectations and arrangements in a particular society.”²⁶ Thus an **impairment** is a bodily condition that is functionally and/or aesthetically different from a socially constructed bodily ideal.

But just because impairment is socially constructed does not mean that the reality of impairments—their limitation, incapacity, frailty, pain—are socially constructed.²⁷ The pain people experience due to physical impairment is not symbolic. While pain is not socially constructed, the notion that painlessness is a bodily ideal is a social construction.²⁸ The ideal of a life free from physical pain is one with which we see Paul wrestle in our analysis of 2 Cor 12:7-10.

While an impairment is a condition that is functionally and/or aesthetically deviant from a socially constructed bodily ideal, a **disability** is an impairment that generates negative effects in its social and cultural environment.²⁹ As impairment depends on a socially constructed ideal, so too does disability rely on an environment’s unfavourable reaction to an impairment. The mere fact that something might be considered an impairment

²⁶Shakespeare, T. 2014, 22–23. Cf. also Waldschmidt 2017, 20.

²⁷Shakespeare, T. 2014, 49.

²⁸Neither is impairment always native to the body. It is not always caused by congenital or genetic factors. Impairment can come as the result of social forces and processes, like poverty, war, or even ethnic rituals. These forces may exacerbate previous conditions or cause new ones. On this see Shakespeare, T. 2014, 22.

²⁹So Schipper 2006, 20; Moss and Schipper 2011, 4.

does not automatically mean that it causes discrimination or should be considered a disability.³⁰ As Waldschmidt argues, it is “contingent upon and determined by hegemonic discourses.”³¹ According to Waldschmidt, the socio-cultural model “considers disability not as a given entity or fact, but describes it as a discourse or as a process, experience, situation, or event.”³² To speak of Paul as a disabled apostle is to say that he participates in and experiences disability as his impairments interact negatively with the society and culture around him.

Disability is fundamentally a place of social and cultural knowledge. The model of disability I employ seeks to understand how disability is a location of “cultural diagnosis.”³³ This approach reveals the ways societies and cultures influence impairment and disability *while being influenced* by impairment and disability.³⁴ On the one hand, an analysis of disability exposes the power structures that reinforce ideal bodies while demonising abnormal ones.³⁵ Disability can be used, as Waldschmidt puts it succinctly, “as a heuristic *moment*, whose analysis brings to light cultural practices and societal structures which otherwise would have remained unrecognised.”³⁶ Disability illuminates

³⁰Waldschmidt 2017, 24.

³¹Waldschmidt 2017, 24.

³²Waldschmidt 2017, 24–25.

³³Snyder and Mitchell 2006, 12.

³⁴Waldschmidt 2017, 20.

³⁵Ghai 2015, 309–310.

³⁶“Sie benutzen Behinderung als heuristisches Moment, dessen Analyse kulturelle Praktiken und gesellschaftliche Strukturen zum Vorschein bringt, die sonst unerkannt geblieben wären.” Waldschmidt 2005, 26.

how societies “narrate, interpret, and organise” culture itself *through* “abnormal” bodies.³⁷ On the other hand, disability is generative. It creates culture that is used and employed by society. I adopt the broad definition of culture given by Waldschmidt:

Culture...denotes the totality of ‘things’ created and employed by a particular people or a society, be they material or immaterial: objects and instruments, institutions and organisations, ideas and knowledge, symbols and values, meanings and interpretations, narratives and histories, traditions, rituals and customs, social behaviour, attitudes and identities.³⁸

Although I have defined impairment and disability separately, there is a recognisable overlap between the two. The strict binary between impairment and disability maintained by the social model drew criticism precisely because it is difficult to know when impairment ends and disability begins.³⁹ One cannot be truly separated from the other.⁴⁰ The experience of impairment and disability is a tethered reality, not dichotomous but different angles on a single experience.⁴¹ For example, when a society designates a particular physical condition as deviant, and thus an impairment, the process of differentiating deviant bodies is itself a negative social effect. Nevertheless, scholars maintain a *heuristic* distinction between “impairment” and “disability.”⁴² The use of the terms “impairment” and “disability” help to indicate the focus of my discussion,

³⁷Schipper 2006, 20.

³⁸Waldschmidt 2017, 24.

³⁹Schipper 2006, 18; Gosbell 2018, 38. See the lucid illustration given by Raphael about how disability and impairment overlap: Raphael 2008, 7.

⁴⁰Schipper 2006, 61; Raphael 2008, 7; Shakespeare, T. 2014, 24–25.

⁴¹Gosbell 2018, 38.

⁴²I follow Raphael 2008, 7; Laes 2018, 5–6; Gosbell 2018, 39.

whether on the physical dimension with the former or the effectual dimension with the latter.

Chart 1.1: Key Definitions

An **impairment** is a bodily condition that is conceived of as functionally and/or aesthetically deviant from a socially constructed bodily ideal.

Disability is the discourse of negative effects that arises as a result of an impairment's participation in its social and cultural environment.

By the definitions of impairment and disability offered above, I am not a person with a disability.⁴³ I have no medically diagnosed impairments, other than astigmatism. I do not face social or cultural disabling with regards to race (Chinese), ethnicity (Canadian), gender (cis-man), or sexual orientation (heterosexual). My conceptualisation of disability is from an etic perspective. I do not know what it is to live and experience disability. Instead, I draw extensively on the theory and reflections of those who actually live with disability. My aim in doing so is to promote the work of my fellow colleagues and to emphasise that the study of disability in biblical studies is not exclusively for those with disabilities.

1.3 An Approach for Unveiling Paul's Disability

My project adapts an investigative approach outlined by David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder.⁴⁴ It employs *biographical criticism*, a task that reveals historical figures whose disability had previously been unknown. This approach

⁴³On the question of whether non-disabled people can speak about disability see Shakespeare, T. 2014, 67.

⁴⁴Mitchell and Snyder 2000, 15–40.

draws attention to the unseen disability of authors—unseen to us and to their audiences. It perceives an author from the vantage point of disability in order to understand how their own experience as disabled creators affected their creations. In the case of Paul, it is a matter of outing his disability and then showing how that disability is culturally generative, e.g. how it affects our understanding of his letters.

In each part of this study, four main strategies are applied to reveal Paul's disability and explore its generative impact. These strategies are deployed in sequential order from chapter to chapter. The first strategy analyses and clarifies details of Paul's body as best as can be discerned from data within the New Testament. Out of the gamut of details given about Paul's body, my project focuses on the significance and nature of two: his circumcision (Phil 3:5) and his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7).⁴⁵ Granted that the nature of the former condition is far more straightforward than the latter, I spend more time scrutinising the details in 2 Cor 12:7 to uncover whatever may contribute to a clearer understanding of the condition of Paul's body.

The second strategy of this study examines Paul's bodily conditions in relation to the relative physical ideals and norms in ancient Jewish and non-Jewish evidence. Lennard Davis has argued that norms and normality are only a recent invention and that systems of bodily comparison vary from culture to culture.⁴⁶ Davis argues that the ancient world operated within a system of

⁴⁵Numerous features of Paul's body, historical or otherwise, litter our early Christian sources, e.g. scars (Gal 6:17), illness (Gal 4:13-15), emaciation (2 Cor 6:5; 2 Cor 11:27), nudity (Rom 8:35; 1 Cor 4:11; 2 Cor 11:27), and baldness (Acts 18:18).

⁴⁶Davis 1995, 23–49; Davis 2013.

“ideal” vs. “non-ideal” bodies.⁴⁷ The bodies in ancient Greek art do not reflect any living person; they are an ideal form, an amalgamation of cannibalised features. For this reason, bodies always fell short of such an ideal and there was little expectation for bodies to conform to that ideal.⁴⁸ On the other hand, Davis argues, in more recent times “the ideal” has been replaced with “the norm,” what might be conceived of “averageness.”⁴⁹ The advent of the norm, according to Davis, means that all bodies that do not cohere with this norm are deemed abnormal. He argues that the ancient culture of ideal and the modern culture of normalcy stand in contrast to one another.

Yet in the ancient world, averageness did exist. Ancient ideals and norms could overlap. As we will see in Chapter Two, Greek and Roman sources idealised foreskin. At the same time, the physical norm among non-Jewish men was foreskin. Although the foreskin of Greek men did not perfectly align with the ideal foreskin, it did not mean that their bodies were considered “non-ideal.” Rather it was only those whose bodies transgressed the threshold of normality (i.e. the circumcised, the foreskin/*ess*) who were considered deviant and non-ideal. Thus, an “ideal” physical condition can be understood as the perfected form of a physical “norm.”

The third strategy of this thesis investigates Paul’s impairment in relation to the negative social effects that it generated. This strategy involves perceiving

⁴⁷Davis 2013, 3.

⁴⁸Davis 2013, 3.

⁴⁹Lennard traces the beginning of normalcy to the beginning of statistics in England Davis 1995, 26ff. For other definitions of the “norm” in the ancient world see Husquin 2020, 16.

how ancient Jewish and non-Jewish sources participate in processes of “de-normalisation,” that is, the various structures, effects, and in essence “cultures” (as per Waldschmidt above) that render people with impairments disabled.⁵⁰ In this study on Paul we focus on the following types of de-normalisation processes: prosthesis, stigma, liminality, exclusion, stereotyping, ridicule, and violence.

Impairments that inspire prosthesis expose the desire to use technology or medicine in order to conform bodies to corporeal norms and/or ideals. Different bodies become stereotypes. In turn, these are used for the purpose of mockery or comical effect.⁵¹ Caricatures give way to stigma. Repugnance or disgust is an important indicator that a bodily difference is not just viewed passively, but actively disdained.⁵² Stigma generates other effects such as liminality or exclusion, where persons with impairments are pushed to the social and theological margins. Finally, the liminality or exclusion of persons can manifest itself in physical violence and even death. Bodily impairments that generate these effects signal the phenomenon of disability at work. Any combination of these effects indicates that the impairment we are speaking about should be considered a disability in its particular socio-cultural environment.⁵³

⁵⁰I use the language here of Waldschmidt 2017, 24.

⁵¹Stereotyping was brought into conversation with disability by Holden 1991, 20.

⁵²Marx 2002, 4. For a theoretical explanation of disgust see Lawrence, L. 2016, 53–58.

⁵³This approach is not unlike the approaches of other scholars, although my method is more explicit. See Vlahogiannis 1998, 14–15, 17–18; Marx 2002, 4–5; Olyan 2008, 2–3; Draycott 2015, 201.

The final strategy of this study re-reads Paul's letters in light of his disability. In the socio-cultural model of disability, while societies de-normalise those with impairments, at the same time those who are disabled end up generating and shaping culture. An awareness of Paul's disability increases the intelligibility of Paul's letters. My aim is to demonstrate that Paul's disability has a vital but thus far unrecognised importance for the exegetical, social, and theological interpretation of his letters. This applies not only to Philippians and 2 Corinthians, but for two other key Pauline texts: Galatians and 1 Corinthians.

1.4 History of Scholarship

Until the advent of disability theory, scholars did not have the means to speak about Paul's disability beyond medical diagnosis. Scholars based their diagnoses on key passages like 2 Cor 12:7, Gal 4:13, Gal 6:11 or 2 Cor 10:10. All manner of physical impairments have been proposed.⁵⁴

Some recent interpreters continue this approach, such as Adela Yarbro Collins.⁵⁵ Her analysis is exegetically detailed and sensitive to the history of interpretation for both 2 Cor 12:7 and its oft-cited counterpart, Gal 4:13-14. However, Collins' study does not engage disability theory; she approaches Paul from a singular biomedical point of view. Nevertheless, the attention Collins plays to early Christian interpreters of Paul's thorn is erudite, despite the

⁵⁴For a comprehensive list see §6.2.

⁵⁵Collins, A. 2011.

occasional infelicities in her analysis.⁵⁶ Collins draws on the work of Max Krenkel to argue that Paul's disability was epilepsy.⁵⁷

Reacting against this trend, recent scholarship has embraced the use of disability theory to analyse Paul in short studies.⁵⁸ Candida Moss emphasises ancient medical theory in order to enlighten Paul's rhetorical strategy in 2 Corinthians 12.⁵⁹ Martin Albl adopts David Wasserman's definition of disability, a model that firmly demarcates impairment (biological factors) from disability (social factors).⁶⁰ Michael Tilly's work is clearly conversant with some disability theory, as he recognises two "levels" of disability, the biological and the religious.⁶¹ Tilly acknowledges the immense power that social constructions of disability wield as they try to normalise the disabled toward a bodily ideal.⁶² Arthur Dewey and Anna Miller approach disability in Paul carefully by avoiding anachronistic retrojections of modern disability as well as affirming various models (e.g. medical, social, cultural).⁶³ Informed by the cultural model of

⁵⁶For example, in a reference to Paul's thorn by Epiphanius in *Pan.* 73.33.1, a closer look at the surrounding context reveals that these are not the words of Epiphanius himself, but of the bishop Melitius of Lycopolis, something that Collins does not seem to realise Collins, A. 2011, 168.

⁵⁷Krenkel 1890. A closer look at Krenkel's argument, however, betrays some fatal flaws which ultimately discount this reading. See the critique in §6.3.

⁵⁸Disability theory has not appeared on the radar of most NT scholarship and, in spite of recent studies, still remains marginal. There are many more detailed surveys of the history of disability theory in biblical studies elsewhere so there is no need to go over the material here except to note the near void especially in Pauline studies: Raphael 2008; Schipper 2006; Moss and Schipper 2011; Peckruhn 2014; Gosbell 2018.

⁵⁹Moss 2012, 320.

⁶⁰Albl 2007, 145; Wasserman, D. 2001, 219–222.

⁶¹Tilly 2012, 67.

⁶²Tilly 2012, 67–8.

⁶³Dewey and Miller 2017, 379–380.

disability, Rebecca Solevåg explores the intersection of Paul's disabilities in relation to ancient conceptions of gender and class.⁶⁴ Solevåg investigates how Paul navigates claims of madness and physical weakness (e.g. 2 Cor 5:13 and his thorn in the flesh in 2 Cor 12:1-10).⁶⁵

The move away from medical diagnosis to models of disability de-prioritised Paul's physical condition. Although Solevåg draws on previous scholars who attempted to identify how and in what way Paul was disabled, she ultimately does not find such endeavours fruitful. Her view is representative:

“In my opinion, it is impossible — and perhaps not so interesting — to diagnose Paul by pinpointing a particular disability or illness that he may have had.”⁶⁶

Consequently, the historical or theological function of Paul's indeterminable condition has replaced medical diagnoses. In his study, Tilly provides a succinct overview of disability as a theme in Paul's letters. He focuses specifically on the appearance and function of various disabilities (defined broadly to include sickness and suffering) as well as Paul's own spiritualisation of his disability by assigning a thorn to a demon.⁶⁷ Albl's study also provides a lexical analysis of Paul's language of weakness (ἀσθενής) and flesh (σάρξ), and finds that for Paul, disability is a mode of revelation through which God reveals

⁶⁴Solevåg 2018, 114–5.

⁶⁵Solevåg 2018, 108.

⁶⁶Solevåg 2018, 112.

⁶⁷Tilly 2012, 69, 73. Themes include the language of “weakness,” castration in Gal 5:12, Paul's thorn in the flesh, and Gal 4:13-15.

his power.⁶⁸ Dewey and Miller provide a wide-ranging commentary focused on the disability theology that arises out of Paul, especially in relationship to christology and Christ as a disabled Messiah.⁶⁹ For Moss, what appears to be a disability in Paul's life is actually an important part of his possession by the Spirit.⁷⁰ She argues that Paul uses "social marginalization and pain" in order to show that it brings him into alignment with Christ. Thus his disability is less of a weakness than it is a strength for Paul.⁷¹ Paul's "possession" by the Spirit is an indicator of the physical proximity that Paul has to Jesus.⁷²

Where I diverge from previous scholarship is also where the distinct contribution of my project lies. I demonstrate that the identification of his disability is neither impossible nor inconsequential for understanding Paul. One need not neglect Paul's own disability in order to analyse the historical and theological significance of disability in his letters. The opposite is the case. Neglecting the specific nature of Paul's disability masks problematic assumptions that scholarship holds about disability in early Christianity. While previous work on Paul gestures toward the significance of disability for the study of his letters, this thesis demonstrates its specific importance.

⁶⁸Albl 2007, 151.

⁶⁹Dewey and Miller 2017.

⁷⁰Moss 2012, 325.

⁷¹Moss 2012, 327.

⁷²Moss 2012, 329.

1.5 Overview of Argument

This project does not attempt to be exhaustive. It investigates two conditions that were disabilities in the ancient world. The first is circumcision, a condition that has never before been considered a disability. The second is demonisation, a condition that is well-known but under-analysed in relation to Paul.

There are a few reasons why this study focuses only on Paul's circumcision and demonisation. For one, it was important to limit the analysis both for the sake of space and in order to do justice to the complexity of uncovering conditions not previously understood as disabilities. At the same time, both conditions occupy complementary sides of a Pauline diptych, with circumcision as a disability in a non-Jewish context and Paul's thorn in the flesh, which I argue to be a demonic force, as a disability in a Jewish context. The two conditions also allow us to probe both the visible and unseen dynamics of ancient disability, as circumcision is most readily understood as a sense-perceptual feature of Paul's body whereas the thorn can be understood as an invisible feature of his person. These two ancient disabilities also serve as catalysts to explore different aspects of Pauline theology, as circumcision raises issues about Paul's ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology while his thorn raises issues related to divine justice and human suffering.

There are two parts to this study, and an examination of each disability occupies each part. The next four chapters analyse Paul's circumcision as an impairment (Chapter Two) and disability (Chapter Three) in his non-Jewish

context, followed by an analysis of Paul's own reinforcement and propagation of disabling attitudes towards circumcision (Chapter Four) before re-reading select themes from Paul's letters (gentile circumcision and Jewish circumcision in the resurrection) in light of questions raised by his disability (Chapter Five). The following three chapters provide an interpretation of Paul's thorn in the flesh (Chapter Six) as a demonic force that impaired and disabled his body (Chapter Seven), culminating in an examination of the strategies Paul uses to explain God's (in)justice in 2 Cor 12:9–10 as it relates to his thorn (Chapter Eight).

In the next Chapter, I argue that circumcision was an impairment from the perspective of ancient Greeks and Romans. Ancient archaeological evidence reproduces the ancient Greek athletic ideal, an ideal that maintained foreskin on men. Foreskin was so much the ideal that artists would depict lewd and violent sexual situations where erect and macrophallic penises still had their foreskins intact. The exposure of the glans was considered a hypersexual custom, synonymous with penetration, lust, and sexual dysfunction. Because circumcision exposed the penile glans, it too became synonymous with hypersexuality. Circumcision was also considered a barbarian practice (e.g. Jews, Syrians, Ethiopians). Furthermore, ancient depictions of circumcision on the bodies of *Mischwesen* (hybrid beings), like satyrs and centaurs, treat the condition as an animalistic feature. Meanwhile, ancient medical literature treated circumcision as a mutilation akin to castration that was only to be used as a last resort. The multiplicity of ways non-Jews differentiated circumcision from their phallic ideal of foreskin demonstrates that circumcision was an impairment.

The third Chapter addresses the de-normalisation processes that non-Jewish culture subjected on circumcised peoples, especially Jews. Circumcision for Jews carried a powerful stigma that manifested itself in ridicule, the use of prosthesis (e.g. fibula), expulsion, and even pogrom. Early Christian writers, authorised by an anti-Jewish interpretation of Paul, continued to de-normalise circumcision, this time in a theological frame. The negative social and culture effects Jewish circumcision generated reveal that it was a disability. Thus, Paul's circumcision was also a disability.

The fourth Chapter examines Paul's participation in cultures that disable circumcision. Rather than subverting such negative attitudes toward the practice, he is a proponent of them. In Phil 3:2, his invective against judaising agitators casts circumcision as a hypersexual, animalistic, and deforming practice. Even his use of circumcision as a trope for Jewish believers throughout his letters stereotypes Jews with the rite. In Galatians, I find Paul warning his readers that gentiles who circumcise are cut off from Christ and righteousness in him. In order to reverse this cataclysmic separation between gentiles in need of salvation and the grace of God, Paul alludes to castration (Gal 5:12) as the drastic means necessary to undo their circumcision.

In the final Chapter of Part One, I provide two re-readings of circumcision in Paul's letters that arise out of new questions generated from considering the rite as a disability. The first reading argues that Paul's Galatian audience did not actually want to be circumcised but was being coerced against their will. The final reading provided in this chapter explores Paul's conception

of the future resurrected body in 1 Corinthians 15 and how circumcision will be an important part of the future resurrected bodies of Jewish followers of Christ.

Setting aside circumcision, Chapter Six re-opens the case of Paul's thorn in the flesh. The history of interpretation reveals no consensus on the nature of the thorn. The merits of the strongest interpretations of the thorn—that it was a interpersonal conflict, persecution, or a medical condition like epilepsy—do not hold up against close scrutiny. An analysis of Paul's metaphorical language in 2 Cor 12:7 in light of recent cognitive linguistic theory proves that the thorn is not an external disease or condition but simply the angel of Satan. This angel restricted Paul's ability to communicate revelations that he heard while he was in Paradise upon the threat of a physical beating.

The seventh Chapter analyses the nature of the angel of Satan as a “demonic” force and how ancient Jews treated demonic forces as impairment and disability.⁷³ I argue that the angel of Satan inhabited Paul's body and co-habited it alongside the holy spirit. Ancient Jews did not consider the habitation of a demonic force inside a human to be an ideal bodily condition. Jews deployed magical practices and technology to bring demonised bodies into conformity with a demon-free condition. This points to demonic habitation as a physical impairment. Paul desired for the thorn to be removed from his body, suggesting that it was not a part of his physical ideal. This confirms the angel as an impairment. Those like Paul who were afflicted by demonic forces had to

⁷³On the overlap between “angels,” “spirits,” and “demons” see the discussion in §7.2.

deal with social stigma, exclusion, ridicule, and liminality through ritual pollution and emasculation. Thus, Paul's angel was a disability.

In the final Chapter, I analyse four strategies Paul uses to relate the thorn in the flesh to God's (in)justice. I demonstrate that although Paul's angel was a disability, the revelation that he received from God in 2 Cor 12:8 forced him to reconceptualise his disability from a weakness to a strength. By removing the negative association from disability, Paul presents it as a perfected ability. The reconceptualisation of demonisation as a strength is comprehensible in light of strategies that ancient Jews used to explain suffering in relation to God's justice. When Paul recasts his disability, he circumvents the need for theodicy and provides a solution to resolve God's participation in the giving of the angel of Satan.

Paul's disability reveals a history of complex interactions between social ideals, cultural artefacts, religious literature, and embodied existence. By tracing the nature and dynamics of Paul's disability in antiquity and the New Testament, my project advances scholarship on early Judaism, non-Jewish Mediterranean culture, as well as theology in the early Jesus movement.

PART ONE: THE CASTRATED JEW

2. CIRCUMCISION AS A PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT

2.1 Divergent Genitalia

Eight days after he was born, Paul's parents removed the prepuce of his penis involuntarily and without his own knowledge (Phil 3:5).¹ If early rabbinic accounts of Jewish circumcision can be trusted, the ceremony would likely have happened in his parent's house.² The person circumcising would say a blessing for themselves (t. Ber. 6:17).³ Beforehand, they would have prepared an instrument, probably an iron knife (כלי ברזל), for the excision (m. Šabb. 19:1). He might then have been washed (m. Šabb. 19:3) and then his foreskin amputated (m. Šabb. 19:2). The amount of foreskin cut off needed to expose

¹Not all Jews born in both the diaspora or Palestine were circumcised by their parents (e.g. 1 Macc 2:46; Jubilees 15:33; 2 Baruch 66:5; see also Kerkeslager 1997 and CPJ 3.519). On the complex situation behind 1 Macc 2:46 see Soon 2020.

²Details about how some Jews practiced circumcision come solely from the Mishnah (ca. 200 CE), supplemented by the Tosefta (ca. 250 CE). Circumcision in the Mishnah is only treated in an ancillary manner embedded in a larger discussion about Sabbath observance. The Mishnah's discussion of the ritual of circumcision itself is truly without any explicit temporal context. Internal details of the *mishnayot* provide no clues as to whether the material is early or late. For example, m. Šabb. 19:6 prohibits a priest who is eligible to eat the *Terumah* (the "heave-offering" or elevation offering) from eating it if the corona of his penis is not sufficiently exposed. Yet, this does not provide evidence for a pre-70 date as *Terumot* were not dependent upon the temple and continued even after its destruction. See Instone-Brewer 2004, 35. Past scholars were cautious using the rabbis to understand the period in which the New Testament was written, represented principally by the critique in Neusner 1978. Recently, scholars like Instone-Brewer have analysed Tannaitic rabbinic traditions (1-2nd centuries CE) in comparison to material in Qumran, Philo, Josephus, and documentary sources to corroborate their pre-70 date. Yet for this text we have no such evidence for whether the method described in m. Šabb. 19 was widely practised. Instone-Brewer 2004, 28–40. Even if Paul underwent a different circumcision procedure from m. Šabb. 19, for our purposes, the end result was the same. The ritual is used illustratively for this argument.

³It may have been his father or mother, cf. 1 Macc 1:60; 2 Macc 6:10.

the corona of the glans (m. Šabb. 19:6). Then Paul’s foreskin would be separated from the inner membrane on the penis itself, the preputial epithelium (m. Šabb. 19:2).⁴ The rabbis specified that if this inner lining was not torn, he was not considered circumcised (מל ולא פרע את המילה, כאלו לא מל).⁵ The person circumcising Paul would suck the blood from the wound (m. Šabb. 19:2), possibly washing him again (m. Šabb. 19:3). Wine, oil, and cumin would have been applied to his wound and it would be wrapped in a bandage (m. Šabb. 19:2). The circumcision now complete, full healing would come after ten to fourteen days.

While Jews saw circumcision as a sign of their covenant to God, their non-Jewish neighbours viewed circumcision quite differently. In this chapter I argue that circumcision is best understood as a physical impairment from a Graeco-Roman perspective. Chapter One argued that impairment is a bodily condition that is functionally and/or aesthetically deviant from a socially-constructed ideal. In other words, physical impairment is culturally relative not universal; it depends on standards of physical norms/ideals of the time. Although circumcision is not widely classified as an impairment today, this does not preclude it from being so in the ancient world.⁶ This chapter provides the

⁴Rubin argues that the practice of *periah* (separating the inner membrane of the penis) was a late practice. Rubin 2003.

⁵m. Šabb. 19:6. Jewish circumcision was distinctive from the way other nations practised circumcision, such as the Egyptians who either did a supercision or a triangular excision from only part of the foreskin to allow the organ to engorge without tearing the prepuce. Jonckheere 1951, 225–6.

⁶There is a growing debate in a number of European countries and among the Western medical community that argues that circumcision harms the “intactness” or the “bodily integrity” of the male body (i.e. mutilation) and even that circumcision can cause psychosexual effects (e.g. shame, grief, inferiority, resentment) and even functional

visual context that informed Paul's Greek and Roman hearers and their response to his circumcision.

Non-Jews differentiated circumcision both aesthetically and functionally from their phallic ideal, and this serves as an indicator that the condition was a physical impairment. Scholars have long known about the negative attitudes toward circumcision held by ancient non-Jews.⁷ Some have even noted that circumcision was a “deformity” or “pathological disfigurement.”⁸ Yet, the majority of claims about the otherness of circumcision leap from idealised bodies to circumcised bodies without showing the processes that differentiate circumcision from the ideal. This contribution of this chapter is an analysis and clarification of the processes that deviated circumcision from the Graeco-Roman ideal. Perceiving the ways non-Jews differentiated circumcision from the foreskinned ideal helps us to understand exactly why circumcision was not the ideal and, accordingly, why it was a physical impairment in the ancient world.

This chapter begins with a brief analysis of Greek and Roman visual culture (statuary, containers, reliefs, ex-votos, etc.) which praised and reproduced foreskin as the phallic ideal on men.⁹ Maintaining the shape and

impairment. E.g. Frisch, Lindholm and Grønbaek 2011; Munzer 2018, 6–8. On this see §9.4.

⁷E.g. Feldman 1993, 155–8; Schäfer 1997, 93–105; Barclay 1999, 438–9; Goodman 2004, 12; Gruen 2002, 28; Isaac 2004, 472–4; Yavetz 1993, 14; Feldman 1986, 31; Gager 1985, 56; Witherington III 1998, 455–6; Sevenster 1975, 134. The best source books for circumcision across Jewish, Christian, and pagan sources are Blaschke 1998; Mimouni 2007.

⁸Feldman 1993, 155; Hodges 2001, 400, 404.

⁹I classify different materials as “Greek” and “Roman” or even “Hellenistic.” Such terms are, as Cartledge notes, abstractions, “fiction[s] of genetic homogeneity.” Cartledge 2002, 3. The terms are ideological constructs by which historians

place of the foreskin and not revealing the glans of the penis was vital, so much so that even some penises depicted in erotic and aggressive sexual acts unnaturally kept their foreskins intact. When the penile glans was exposed, it only appeared in context of excess and hypersexuality, and since circumcision permanently exposed the penile glans, it became associated with the hypersexual. Its association with “uncivilised” nations and sub-human creatures, like satyrs and centaurs, cast circumcision as a barbarian and animalistic trait. Such stigma caused men to turn to ancient medical procedures to “restore” foreskin to an ideal state, framing circumcision as a dysfunction and an aesthetic in need of correction.

2.2 Sources and Approach

Much scholarship has ignored the complex relationship between ancient conceptions of foreskinned and non-foreskinned phalluses. To my knowledge, Frederick Hodges’ 2001 article, “The Ideal Prepuce in Ancient Greece and Rome,” is the only extensive analysis of ancient circumcision in relation to Graeco-Roman ideal prepuces. Unfortunately it has been mostly overlooked by scholars of the New Testament.¹⁰ Recently, Thomas Blanton has supplemented Hodges work by including Roman iconographic material and placed it in dialogue with Philo in order to correct what he perceives as the unbalanced

amalgamate a diversity of Mediterranean locations, cities, peoples, cultures, and bodies into groupings for the sake of simplicity.

¹⁰Hodges 2001. One exception known to me is Martin, T. W. 2016.

treatment of Jewish sources by Hodges.¹¹ This chapter furthers the work of Hodges and Blanton by using sources that are under-utilised for pagan constructions of circumcision: ancient visual culture.¹²

The study of ancient Jewish circumcision is primarily done through an analysis of the textual sources. While these sources are useful for understanding elite ancient Greek and Roman opinions of circumcision, they give us limited information about its visual impact. This limitation extends to foreskin. In the few places where ancient authors speak openly about foreskin, they do so favourably but without much elaboration.

Relying solely on literary sources for constructions of ancient circumcision without recourse to the material evidence veils aspects of how circumcision was valued in ancient contexts.¹³ The presence of circumcision on statuary, pottery, paintings, and mosaics allows for a different perspective, one that is attuned to the visual and the cultural values associated with circumcision. Material evidence is useful because it sometimes places circumcision in explicit comparison to what we know to be the ideal Greek and Roman phallic ideal. It also reveals the contexts which ancient Greeks and Romans deemed fitting for circumcision (e.g. the hypersexual, the barbarian, the animalistic).

¹¹Blanton IV 2019.

¹²Following others, I use the term “visual culture” to refer to all the things created and crafted, from sculpture to painting to votive objects encountered visually. See Hallett 2015, 22. For “art” in the ancient world see Steiner 2014, 22–24.

¹³For the importance of the material evidence in relation to ancient history, see Osborne 2011, 6–26.

My interrogation of circumcision in this material evidence focuses on the iconography (the subject of what is depicted) as well as the iconology (the values behind why the subject and circumcision in particular is depicted this way). Iconography often involves contextualising the material evidence in relation to ancient myth or historical event where possible. Iconology involves cross-examining the particular mode of depiction and what this mode reveals about the circumcised subjects depicted.¹⁴

In terms of the dating, this chapter prioritises visual culture, supplemented by texts, from Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman sources (e.g. sculptures, mosaics, votives, *fascina*, etc.) from the sixth century BCE through the second century CE. Material from such a wide range demonstrates the consistency in phallic representations from the ancient “Classical” Greek period (from material that is primarily of Athenian origin) to the Roman period (primarily located in material from Herculaneum and Pompeii). Although I am ultimately interested in how Paul’s audience might have understood circumcision in the first century, showing the ways circumcision is portrayed over a large period of time and culture shows how these representations were not merely idiosyncratic but well-known and widespread.

Tracing the consistency of images across time and location is far easier than pinpointing the context of use behind each visual image. We do not have the creators or owners or users present to give their impressions or intentions. Nevertheless, I endeavour to analyse the variety of evidence in its specific

¹⁴For the difference between iconography and iconology see Panofsky 1939, 3–17. For a critique of Panofsky’s method see Weissenrieder and Wendt 2005, 10–12.

material context, as far as can be discerned, in order to show that despite differences in nature, use, and location, there are nevertheless cultural tropes and trends that can be seen in how circumcision is depicted and visualised.

Provenance-wise, there is always a risk of presenting too great a generalisation of ancient values based on a paucity of evidence from only a few geographical locations. At the same time, my aim is not to be exhaustive but merely to show viable probabilities for how some of Paul's non-Jewish audiences would have interpreted the Jewish circumcision. Additionally, the narrow geographic spread of visual evidence specifically related to circumcision is constrained by the examples I am able to access (and what is extant). Further research into depictions of circumcision in other areas, such as Asia Minor, is necessary.

Although our visual sources are limited, there is some ancient Greek and Roman material evidence available that depicts circumcision. But the scarcity of visual culture depicting circumcision does not mean that ancient Greeks and Romans—no less Paul's gentile followers—were oblivious to its cultural significance and stigma. Male genitals appeared everywhere in the ancient world, and circumcised penises could be found if one looked closely. Additionally, although depictions of foreskinned phalluses were more prevalent than circumcised ones, early gentile Christ-followers in Pauline communities, unlike their contemporaries, had a greater reason to encounter and think more closely about Jewish circumcision: they were members of a Jewish sect, whose founder was Jewish, whose leaders were Jewish, whose origin was in Judaea, and whose writings and apostles, like Paul, spoke about circumcision openly and frequently.

If for some reason they had never considered circumcision before, upon following Christ and hearing Paul's gospel, it is more than likely that they would have had a heightened awareness of circumcision and its value.

2.3 The Ideal Greek and Roman Phallus

Images of male genitals in ancient visual and literary culture consistently show that foreskin was an important aspect of the ideal phallus in the Greek and Roman world. The foreskin was depicted in Greek literature as an alluring feature of a man's body. So, in Aristophanes's well-known comedy *Thesmophoriazousae* (the Women at the Thesmophoria), one of the characters tries on a dress only to discover that the dress smells like foreskin: ἡδύ γ' ὄζει ποσθίου ("there is the pleasant smell of foreskin!").¹⁵

Ancient visual culture reflects the literary idealisation of male foreskin. For example, a sixth century Attic red-figure *kylix* by the so-called Sosias Painter depicts Achilles wrapping the arm of Patroclus in a bandage (Figure 2.1). The focus is obviously the binding of Patroclus's arm; it occupies the very centre space of the painting. But Patroclus' penis and foreskin is exposed. The frame of the piece is the reason Patroclus's genitals are exposed. The encircling boundary forces his left leg to rest up against the side of the frame mid-air, exposing his penis beneath his already short skirt. In this "narcissistic pose," the artist has intentionally depicted the scene with Patroclus's genitals exposed

¹⁵ *Thesm.* 254; *Nub.* 1009-14. Cf. also Lucian, *Lex.* 12.



Figure 2.1. Achilles and Patroklos. ca. 500 BCE. Attic red-figure kylix attributed to the Sosias Painter. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz: Antikensammlung, F2278. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons under CCO 1.0 Universal Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Akhilleus_Patroklos_Antikensammlung_Berlin_F2278.jpg)

toward the viewer, genitals that align his body with the ideal Greek prepuce.¹⁶

For use during a symposium, an already sexualised context that had “a celebratory attitude toward homosexuality,” as the drinker drained more and more wine from the kylix he would have been pleasantly surprised and likely aroused by the sight of Patroclus’s beautifully exposed foreskinned genitals.¹⁷

In the Hellenistic period, the idealisation of foreskin continues to appear in Greek visual culture. For example, a fourth century BCE pebble mosaic of a Stag Hunt from the House of the Rape of Helen, depicts Alexander the Great’s hunting with his long-time friend Hephaestion in the nude (Figure 2.2).¹⁸ This mosaic pairs the youthful Alexander, who was born in Pella where this mosaic was found, in a heroic situation, not only taking down the stag but also with a body that reflects the ideal foreskin valued by Greek culture.

By the time of the Roman period, the ancient Greek phallic ideal remained unchanged in Roman productions and reproductions of Greek visual culture.¹⁹ This can be seen in Roman portrait heads. While the heads of ancient Roman portraits were personalised, they were attached to generic “stock

¹⁶On the lewdness of squatting and exposing the genitals see Keuls 1993, 70.

¹⁷Michelakis 2002, 42. Although there is no ancient term that corresponds to “homosexuality,” like disability, it is nevertheless a useful term. See the discussion in Williams, C. A. 2010, 4–7. The homo-erotic relationship between Achilles and Patroclus was well-known in the ancient world (e.g. Plato, *Symp.* 178e; Aeschines, *Tim.* 1.141-2; Theocritus, *Id.* 29.31-4; Martial, *Ep.* 11.43). Although later authors read Homer’s depiction of Achilles and Patroclus as lovers, the earliest explicit expression is in a fragment of Aeschylus’s lost Myrmidon play. See Michelakis 2002, 43; Morales and Mariscal 2003, 292.

¹⁸Moreno 2001, 11, 102–4.

¹⁹It is now well-recognised that the Romans were not merely crude conquerors hauling home Greeks spoils of war and then mechanically duplicating these originals *en masse*. On this transfer of culture see in particular the work of Kousser 2008; Marvin 2008.



Figure 2.2. Stag Hunt, Alexander and Hephaestion. ca. 330-300 BCE. Mosaic, Pella, Greece. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz: Antikensammlung, F2278. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons under CCO 1.0 Universal Public Domain (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stag_hunt_mosaic,_Pella.jpg)

bodies” that evoked well-known social roles such as the civic leader, military leader, or the nude hero.²⁰ For example, a first century BCE marble statue by the sculptor Ophelion from Tusculum depicts Octavius (Caesar Augustus) in full nude display with sword in hand, his cuirass down by his feet, and the *paludamentum* (a mantle of Roman generals) over his left shoulder and around his left arm (Figure 2.3).²¹ He has been intentionally stripped of his military attire, and the flaccid tapered foreskin of the stock body is on display as a feature of his heroic body.²²

In ancient visual culture, scholars often understood the athletic male body, to which Greek and Roman ideal foreskin was attached, as a model real men were obligated to reproduce.²³ The assumption is that ancient masculinity expressed corporeally through the male athletic body was the default against which all others bodies were judged.²⁴

Despite the fact that historians point to the depictions of male bodies in ancient visual culture as an example to follow, ancient views concerning the

²⁰Marvin 2008, 225.

²¹Musée du Louvre, Ma 1251 (MR 328).

²²See also a small portrait statue of a young man from Pompeii (1st century BCE), Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli 126249, pictured in Mattusch 2008, 104. This same kind of nude heroism can be seen in a fresco (ca. 50-79 CE) from Herculaneum of Theseus, the Minotaur, and the Athenian children (Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli 9049).

²³Lee 2015, 279. See also Stewart (1997, 11) who argues that the masculinity depicted through these images was the goal of male citizens.

²⁴Stewart 1997, 8, 11. In the Roman period, athletic behaviour and the degradation of the athlete’s body gave rise to ridicule toward athletes themselves. König 2005, 135. By “masculinity” I draw on Williams’s definition: “Masculinity refers to a complex of values and ideals more profitably analyzed as a cultural tradition than as a biological given: what is to be fully gendered as a ‘real man’ as opposed to simply being assigned to the male sex.” Williams, C. A. 2010, 4.

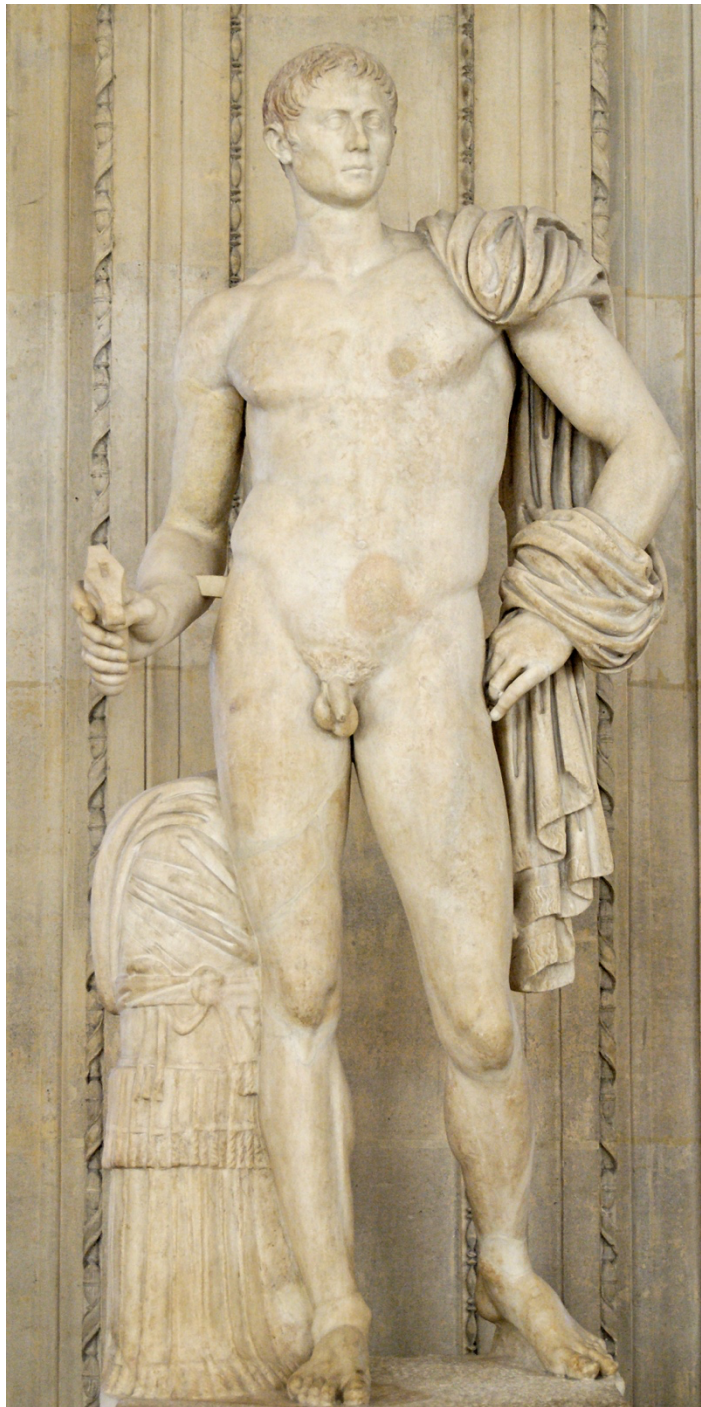


Figure 2.3. Heroic Statue of Octavius. ca. 1st century BCE, by Ophelion.
Louvre Museum, MA 1251 (MR 328). Photo © Marie-Lan
Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons 2008, CCA 2.5 Generic License
(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Heroic_statue_Octavius_Louvre_Ma1251.jpg)

fashioning of these images emphasise precisely the opposite. Such bodily perfection was unattainable.²⁵ The unobtainable reality of this perfect male body was due in part to the fact that creators understood images to be composite works that combined features from multiple living models. Cicero records a story about the painter Zeuxis who used five virgins from the *palaestra* as a model for beauty “because he did not think all the qualities which he sought to combine in a portrayal of beauty could be found in one person, because in no single case has Nature made anything perfect and finished in every part.”²⁶ Also, even while artists had done their best to perfect the male body, the claim to perfection itself was known to be a subjective matter (e.g. Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.10.2, Pliny, *Nat.* 34.55), something that only expressed the limits of human conceptions of perfection (Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. his.* 26.1). Greek and Roman men could not attain the physique in the visual culture they created.

Yet, living bodies could still partially reflect the forms represented in ancient Graeco-Roman visual culture despite the fact that there was not a total correspondence between the ideal and real. The artistic use of facets of living models suggests that an affinity with aspects of the perfected ideal male figure was possible. Ancient writers, while noting that it was impossible for men to attain to such figures *in toto*, at times also noted the hyperreality or life-likeness of the visual culture itself.²⁷ Undoubtedly, the quotidian bodies of Greek and

²⁵So Squire 2011, 60.

²⁶Cicero, *Inv.* 2.1.3 (Hubbell, LCL). Cf. Cicero. *De or.* 8-9. A similar idea is expressed by Xenophon (*Mem.* 3.10.2) and Plotinus, *Enn.* 5.8.1.

²⁷E.g. Petronius, *Saty.* 83; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. his.* 4.76.2-3; Vitruvius, *De arch.* 7.5.1-7.

Roman men not involved in athletics would find themselves straying from the ideal depictions on ancient statues. But there would have been “normal” features that many would have shared such as four limbs, ten fingers, ten toes, and most importantly for my analysis, foreskin. In the case of foreskin, the norm and the ideal were not worlds apart simply due to the fact that foreskin is congenital. To be sure, everyday foreskin was not exactly like the petite foreskin so often represented. Nevertheless, it still would have probably held a close resemblance to the ideal form.²⁸

One could readily turn to the abundance of “anatomical votives” (ex-votos) from the ancient world to attest that the ideal foreskin depicted in ancient visual culture for the most part reflected the real condition of the majority of ancient Greek and Roman men.²⁹ These “offerings” (*donaria* or ἀναθήματα) were a part of the ancient widespread practice of appealing to the gods in order to heal human bodies. Typically, a person would offer a prayer

²⁸There were, of course, exceptions. The fifth-century BCE red-figure Attic *pelike* from the so-called Geras Painter depicts Geras in a confrontation with Herakles (Musée du Louvre, Inv. G234, Paris). Geras (γῆρας), which means “old age” was the son of Nyx, the Greek goddess of the night. Geras is nude and his penis and foreskin are very large and distended. The negative portrayal of elderly foreskin is mirrored in another “sister” painting of this scene on another fifth-century BCE red-figure Attic *pelike* (Catalogue No. Villa Giulia 48238, Etrusco di Villa Giulia, attributed to the Matsch Painter, National Etruscan Museum, Rome). There the two figures are in a more amicable and less aggressive posture reaching out to each other. But Geras’s genitals are also depicted as large and thick swinging through his legs. Both depictions of Geras are disfiguring and comical, despite the presence of foreskin. These images are similar to bronze platter-sculptures from Pompeii of a *placentarius* (street bakery seller). Regio I, insula VII, nos. 10-12, House of the Ephebe, RP, Inv. no. 143760. Just because one had a foreskin did not necessarily mean that it was the ideal. Not all foreskins had the same value, and Greeks and Romans preferred the small, tapered versions.

²⁹On defining “anatomical votive,” “votive,” and “ex-voto” see Draycott and Graham 2017, 7. There are thousands and thousands of extant votives from both Greek and Roman contexts. Flemming 2016, 105.

asking a god to heal a bodily issue. They would then make a vow, and then upon receiving an answer to their prayer they would offer the votive gift. This exchange can be characterised as *da ut dem* (“give so that I may give”).³⁰ Extant votives are testimonies of the successful completion of this process, that gods healed bodies and people offered up depictions of their body parts as offerings.³¹

At various temples or ritual centres of healing (e.g. an Asclepeion), one would have found walls where scores of intermingled votive limbs and phallic votives were mounted in a gallery of divine gratitude. The phallic votives from the Hellenistic and Roman periods largely reflect the ideal foreskin found in ancient Greek and Roman visual culture, for example: a bronze votive phallus from first-century Italy (Figure 2.4), a marble votive phallus from sometime in the late Hellenistic or Roman Imperial period (Figure 2.5), and a number of clay Roman votives from the Wellcome collection (Figure 2.6). In the thriving ancient votive economy, makers of votives naturally would have relied on cost-saving moulds in order to cast their phalluses, which could be customised later, rather than making each new votive bespoke.³² Most phallic votives appear mass-produced with relatively small variation between them (e.g. length, pubic hair, etc.). Admittedly, no two genital votives appear exactly the same, however, the vast majority of them have their foreskin intact. Despite the range of size

³⁰Hahn 2012, 7031.

³¹So far there has been no evidence that votive offerings were given when people first prayed to the gods. Draycott and Graham 2017, 9–10; Rüpke 2007, 164. This would have been especially true given the narrow likelihood that the sick would have been able to travel the distance to the places of dedication. See Turfa 2006.

³²Flemming 2016, 118.



Figure 2.4. Roman bronze votive phallus. ca. 1st century CE. Private collection, London. Photo © Rupert Wave Ancient Art 2000
(https://oliverhoareltd.com/object_eotas15/066-roman-bronze-votive-phallus/)



Figure 2.5. Marble votive phallus, possibly Roman. ca. 200 BCE-400CE. Science Museum: The Wellcome Galleries, A641287. Photo © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum. Licensed under a CCA-Non-Commercial ShareAlike 4.0 License (<https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co84534/votive-male-genitalia-roman-200-bce-400-ce-votive-offering>)



Figure 2.6. Clay Roman votives. Date unknown. The Wellcome Collection.
Photo Licensed under a CCA 4.0 International (CC By 4.0) license.
(<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/b6nf6wk3>)

among votives, they nevertheless reflect the widespread ancient Greek and Roman norm and ideal.³³

As mentioned before, the Romans inherited and perpetuated the Greek ideal foreskin in visual culture that they reproduced and created. But there was also evidence that a bigger penis was considered better for some Romans.³⁴ How can we explain this dissonance? Craig Williams' explanation is that Greek and Roman ideals are simply different.³⁵ If this is the case then why might the Romans have continued the Greek portrayal of the small penis with its ideal foreskin? One possibility is simply that while in everyday life Roman men celebrated large penises, in their visual culture they chose to preserve the embodied performance of self-control, a key aspect of Roman masculinity culture.³⁶ Roman statuary was certainly not reflective of reality, as nudity was strictly taboo except in the context of the baths.³⁷ Thus, both the adopted

³³Occasionally, there were variations and exceptions to the norm. One example, a phallus from the 2nd-3rd century CE made of mixed copper alloy, departs from the ideal pattern displaying a penis with a foreskin almost as long as the penile shaft itself (Harvard Art Museum, 2012.1.131). The Roman votive on the right of Figure 2.6 appears to show a circumcised penis or at least a penis where the foreskin is retracted to expose the glans in a way that is indistinguishable from circumcision. The ambiguity of what this penis depicted illustrates the multivalence of votives. Draycott and Graham 2017, 17. It is unclear whether the penis is depicted flaccid or erect, although the majority of ex-voto penises appear flaccid. E.g. Grove 2017, 241. Despite the existence of phalluses which appear to show disfigured or diseased phalluses, ancient votives usually represented what was considered the "healthy" appearance of the body part. Adams, E. 2017, 200; Flemming 2016, 110. Past interpreters attempted to diagnose venereal diseases, such as phimosis, based on phallic votives, although the reliability of this analysis is debatable. Grove 2017, 225. In the case of the circumcised votive above, it may be that the person who offered it viewed it as the phallic ideal. Nonetheless, against the sheer number of foreskinned votives, it is clearly an exception.

³⁴See the numerous texts in Williams, C. A. 2010, 94–9.

³⁵Williams, C. A. 2010, 258.

³⁶Asikainen 2018, 32–35.

³⁷See Zanker 1988, 6; Hallett 2005, 61.

Greek ideal and the Roman ideal co-existed, with one reinforcing masculine standards of self-control and the other indicative of potency, virility, and sexual desire. In any case, while the ideal phallic size may have differed between Greek and Roman ideals, what remained consistent was that the ideal penis must have foreskin.

The nudity of men in ancient visual culture is surprising given the fact that in everyday living, male nudity was confined to only a few contexts, as Hurwit argues: “In real life, male nudity was mostly restricted to the bedroom and the symposium in the private sphere, and to the stadium, gymnasium, and *palaestra* in the public sphere.”³⁸ While there are depictions of nude men at symposia, in the bedroom, and training at the gymnasium, we also find Greek and Roman men going to war, doing battle, or hunting in the nude, despite the fact that this was not the case in reality.³⁹ The prevalence of male nudity suggests that it is more than a depiction of everyday life. Nudity in ancient Greek iconography was a costume.⁴⁰ It expressed “social and symbolic values.”⁴¹ Ancient ideal foreskin was a part of that ancient iconographic costume.

Classicists usually characterise the Greek male body to which the ideal foreskin is attached as being saturated with *kalokagathia* (sometimes as *kalos kagathos*, the beautiful and the good).⁴² The term *kalokagathia* is actually rare

³⁸Hurwit 2007, 45.

³⁹Stewart 1997, 32; Hurwit 2007, 46.

⁴⁰Echoing Bonfante’s well-known sentiment: Bonfante 1989, 543.

⁴¹Trimble 2017, 333.

⁴²E.g. Cohen, B. 2000, 4; Weiler 2002, 11–12; Bonfante 1989, 544; Reid 2012, 281; Barrow 2018, 23; Lee 2015, 179.

in our sources (cf. Plato, *Lysis*, 207a).⁴³ Known as an epithet for Zeus and aristocracy, it became synonymous with the youthful athlete whose body evoked divinity, warfare, and citizenry.⁴⁴ The ideal foreskin was not just a part of an approved bodily aesthetic, but of an ethical and moral embodiment of ancient Greek ἀρετή (“virtue”).⁴⁵ As mentioned previously in a Roman context, the flaccid foreskinned penis indicated σωφροσύνη (moderation, temperance, self-control).⁴⁶

The statues and images of men with small ideal foreskins was also performative.⁴⁷ Maud Gleason remarks that, “Masculinity in the ancient world was an achieved state, radically underdetermined by anatomical sex.”⁴⁸ While these images were of male bodies their manliness (or masculinity) was not simply assumed. The depiction of a petite penis with foreskin was a way of performing ancient Greek σωφροσύνη, in transcribing masculinity with the shape of an ideal genital. As ancient creators of visual culture perpetuated this ideal foreskin, they perpetuated the embodied performance of the youthfulness, self-control, and masculinity of ancient Greek athletes.⁴⁹

⁴³Weiler 2002, 11.

⁴⁴Weiler 2002, 11.

⁴⁵So Squire 2011, 8; Reid 2012, 285.

⁴⁶Reid 2012, 288; Dover 1989, 134–5; Hodges 2001, 384; Barrow 2018, 28.

⁴⁷That is, their repetition by artists and creators sustains a “gendered stylisation of the body”; the foreskinned phallus is a projection of their gender expectations. Butler 1999, xv. See also Wilson, B. E. 2015, 52–53 who herself draws on the work of Butler.

⁴⁸Gleason 1990, 391.

⁴⁹Male genitals are surprisingly absent from physiognomic treatises (i.e. Pseudo-Aristotle, Polemon) except for an anonymous 3-4th century CE text that argues that those with small penises are devoted to women (*De physionomia liber* 85). Popović 2007, 247, n.48.

2.4 The Deviant Aesthetic of Circumcision

Having established the foreskin as the Greek and Roman ideal, this section of the chapter traces the aesthetic deviance of circumcision. I start first with an analysis of the power of a penile glans and the lengths which non-Jews went to prevent its exposure. I then analyse the hypersexual synonymy between circumcision and erection. This leads to an exploration of the pathologization of circumcision. My analysis of circumcision's aesthetic deviance culminates with an investigation of its visual association with barbarian and animalistic people.

2.4.1 The Power of a Permanently Exposed Glans

The difference between foreskin and circumcision could not be more stark. Circumcision deviated aesthetically from foreskin because it permanently exposed the penile glans. Exposure of the penile glans was one apotropaic method used to ward off the evil eye, particularly by diverting it through laughter.⁵⁰ Though humorous, dealing with the evil eye through phallic images was not superstition alone. It was rooted in a naturalistic understanding of how envy could harm or even kill others when mediated through the eye.⁵¹ Varro speaks about a *scaevola*, a “repulsive object” (*turpicula res*, presumably referring

⁵⁰For a comprehensive treatment of the topic in the Graeco-Roman world see the work of Elliott 2016. In the plays of Aristophanes (*Nub.* 538-9), actors would wear oversized artificial phalluses that either hung or were tied up in order to mock the practice of *kynodesme*. Foley 2000, 280–1. These phalluses were used as props in concert with lyrical innuendo in order to make people laugh. The practice went out of use in the fourth-century BCE. Dover 1989, 131.

⁵¹Elliott 2016, 48, 63.

to a phallus), which is hung around the neck of boys to ward off harm.⁵² Pliny (*Nat.* 28.7.12) also records that the image of the god Fascinus (a *fascinum*) was placed beneath the triumphant carriage of a general to protect him against *invidia*, the evil eye (cf. Pliny, *Nat.* 7.2.23; Heliodorus, *Aeth.* 3.7). Effigies of phalluses appeared in the form of various items like charms, pendants, rings, lamps, and even chimes hung over the door known as *tintinnabula*.

The hilarity that might arise from *fascina* is vividly illustrated by a second century CE bas-relief in Leptis Magna that shows a phallus of a larger phallus with two hooved legs ejaculating on to an evil eye, on which a scorpion also stands attacking it (Figure 2.7). Scorpions were known for their deadly poisonous sting (Pliny, *Nat.* 11.30).⁵³ Here, the scorpion and the exposed phallus combine forces against the power of *invidia*. The ejaculatory act of the *fascinum* mimics that of spitting which was known to fend off the evil eye.⁵⁴ As Bonfante notes, “When the sexual organ was uncovered, its power was unleashed.”⁵⁵

The exposure of the glans was so powerful that ancient Greeks and Romans found ways of keeping the foreskin intact in order to prevent the exposure of the glans. Ancient Greek and Roman athletes, actors, and singers preserved the ideal foreskin aesthetic through the use of a κυνοδέσμη (lit. “dog-tie,” a device that secures the foreskin shut) and infibulation (the insertion of a

⁵²Varro, *Ling.* 7.97.

⁵³See the inscriptions and papyri documented in Tod 1939.

⁵⁴Ogden 2002, 223.

⁵⁵Bonfante 1989, 545.



Figure 2.7. Bas-relief of a fascinus, scorpion and the evil eye. ca. 200 CE. Leptis Magna (Kohms, Lybia). Photo by Shasha Coachman 2009. Licensed under a CCA-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bas-relief_of_fascinus.jpg)

pin through the foreskin to keep it in place, Celsus, *Med.* 7.25; Martial, *Ep.* 9.27; 14.215; Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.73).⁵⁶

Greek and Roman creators of visual culture also preserved the idyllic penile form in a different way: by allowing the penis to be erect while the foreskin remained tapered in place. A sixth-century BCE *kantharos* from Greece by Nikosthenes depicts an orgy where four men are shown to be erect but none of their foreskins have been retracted (Figure 2.8). Similarly, a fifth-century *oinichoe* by the Shuvalov painter depicts an erotic scene where a woman is about to mount a man whose penis is erect but whose foreskin remains unretracted (Figure 2.9). It is unlikely that the men in Figure 2.8 and 2.9 suffer from phimosis (tight foreskin), which both would make sex extremely painful in itself and its depiction here as unusually sadomasochistic. Rather as Dover noted, “Even when the penis is shown erect there is not, as a rule, any retraction of the foreskin.”⁵⁷

Erect phalluses maintaining their foreskin in place continue into the Roman period as a number of examples of the god Priapus from Pompeii show. In the House of the Vettii, a fresco at the entrance shows Priapus humorously weighing his enormous foreskinned member (Figure 2.10). An ithyphallic fountain was also found in the same house (Figure 2.11), another depiction of Priapus, his foreskin in place covering the glans. Priapus’s large foreskinned

⁵⁶On this see Schultheiss, Mattelaer and Hodges 2003, 758; Hodges 2001.

⁵⁷Dover 1989, 127.



Figure 2.8. Erotic scenes from the Nikosthenes Painter. ca. 520-510 BCE. Manufactured in Attica. Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 95.61. Photo © of Museum Fine Arts Boston. (<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/153641>)



Figure 2.9. Erotic scene with a young man and a woman. ca. 430 BCE. Locri (Italy). Attic red-figure *oinochoe*. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturebesitz: Antikensammlung, F2414. Photograph Public Domain courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shuvalov_Painter_erotic_scene_Antikensammlung_Berlin_F2414_n2.jpg)



Figure 2.10. Priapus weighing his member. ca. 1st century CE. House of Vettii. Pompeii. Photograph © Isaac Soon 2019.



Figure 2.11. Fountain of Priapus. ca. 1st century CE. Pompeii. Photograph from Michael Grant, *Erotic Art in Pompeii: The Secret Collection of the National Museum of Naples* (Ottawa: Octopus Books, 1975), page 54.

phallus is imbued with virility and life-giving potency.⁵⁸ At the same time, his unnaturally large foreskin prevents him from exposing the penile glans.

Retaining the foreskin on an erect penis was a way some Greek and Roman artists could “cheat” ideal phallic aesthetics without fully violating σωφροσύνη, while at the same time acknowledging the desirability or the ideological significance of a large member. As mentioned before, nudity was a form of costume in the ancient world that clothed the body both aesthetically and ideologically. Scholars have been careful to distinguish between the terms “nude” and the term “naked.” Whereas “nude” denotes an ideal form of dress, “naked” should be understood as a non-ideal form of dress.⁵⁹ There is a marked difference between nude and naked in terms of exposure. If nudity is costume, then nakedness is uncostumed body. A body that is naked involves negative exposure of parts, one that exceeds the limits and boundaries of what can acceptably be shown. The desire to keep the foreskin in place evinces the limits of penile visibility. The exposure of the glans through circumcision transgressed this boundary. If foreskin was nudity, then circumcision was nakedness.

⁵⁸Moser 2006, 36. Priapus was known to watch over gardens and vineyards (Suetonius, *Gramm.* 11; Virgil, *Georg.* 4.111). The fountain has water flowing out of the penis, as though to depict the life-giving ability of the god’s member. The fresco shows Priapus next to a basket of fruit and grapes, emphasising his horticultural and viticultural role in harvest. The owners of the Vettii House, freedmen Aulus Vettius Restitutus and Aulus Vettius Conviva, would have had reason to defend their masculinity as former slaves. Wallace-Hadrill 1994, 5; Severy-Hoven 2012, 548; Kellum 2015, 205. On the identity of its owners see Severy-Hoven 2012, 545.

⁵⁹Lee 2015, 151.

2.4.2 Circumcision as Mutilation

Besides permanently exposing the penile glans, ancient non-Jews understood circumcision to be a mutilation of what was the healthy form of the penis. Ancient Greek and Roman medical literature affirms foreskin as the phallic ideal by conceiving of it as “natural.” For example, the purpose of Soranus’s procedure on lipodermic patients (those born without foreskin) was so that the foreskin could assume its “natural” length (κατὰ φύσιν).⁶⁰ This phrase (κατὰ φύσιν) is also employed by Galen as he describes his own technique for stretching foreskin (*MM* 14.16). Soranus and Galen reinforce foreskin as the Graeco-Roman ideal, implying that other conditions, like circumcision, are aberrant forms of a natural penile condition.

The characterisation of circumcision, especially Jewish circumcision, as a mutilation is also well-known. For example, in Strabo’s portrait of the circumcision of the Creophagi: “the males have their sexual glans mutilated...in the Jewish way” (κολοβοὶ τὰς βάλανους...ιουδαϊκῶς).⁶¹ Diodorus Siculus also describes a group of people called *colobi* (κολοβῶν, mutilated) who were named in this way because they fully remove the male genitals of infants, an act Diodorus compares to those who “merely suffer circumcision.”⁶² The term κολοβός often was used in contexts of disfigurement, mutilation, maiming or stunted growth.⁶³

⁶⁰*Gyn.* 2.16.34 (36.103).

⁶¹Strabo, *Georg.* 16.4.9.

⁶²Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. his.* 3.32.4 (LCL).

⁶³E.g. Xenophon. *Cyr.* 1.4.11. For related words see Samama 2017, 126. That other Graeco-Romans viewed circumcision as a mutilation can be seen in the fourth-century

Greeks and Romans sometimes characterised circumcision (or circumcision-like states lacking foreskin) as a deformity or even a disease. For example, in Aristophanes, *Plut.* 265-7, Cario describes his new purchase of an older man, and circumcision serves as the “climax of physical debasements”:

πρεσβύτην... ῥυπῶντα, κυφόν, ἄθλιον, ῥυσόν, μαδῶντα, νωδόν· οἴμαι δέ, νῆ τὸν οὐρανόν, καὶ ψωλὸν αὐτὸν εἶναι (“old, filthy, hunchback, miserable, wrinkled, bald, toothless, and I think, by heavens, he had a retracted foreskin”).⁶⁴ Elsewhere, Galen characterises the lack of foreskin—whether due to putrefaction or congenital smallness (ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἔλαττον)—as part of a “class of diseases” (τὸ πάθημα τοῦ γένους τῶν νοσημάτων).⁶⁵ Finally, Petronius’ *Satyrical* jokes about an excellent slave with certain shortcomings: “Yet he has two defects, which if he did not have, he would be perfect: he is circumcised and he snores” (*Duo tamen vitia habet, quae si non haberet, esset omnium numerum: recutitus est et stertit*).⁶⁶ *Vitia* (defects) and *morbis* (disease) should have been declared when the slave was first bought as they could affect the price of the slave.⁶⁷ The speaker in the *Satyrical* has in mind physical impairments, as the next thing he states is that he does not mind that the slave has some kind of defective vision (*strabonus*).⁶⁸ The classification of circumcision as a physical defect on

Historia Augusta (*Had.* 14.2), where it gives a contestable account that the Bar-Kokhba revolts were because Hadrian forbade them “to mutilate their genitals” (*vetabantur mutilare genitalia*).

⁶⁴Henderson 2002, 463, n.17.

⁶⁵*MM* 14.16.

⁶⁶*Saty.* 68.8. Translation adapted from Heseltine LCL.

⁶⁷Schmeling and Setaioli 2011, 283; Nasrallah 2018, 71–2.

⁶⁸*Strabonus* probably comes from *strabus* (squinty, crooked, or slanted eyes). Schmeling and Setaioli 2011, 283. This may be related to *strabismus*, which may have

enslaved Jews is also documented in Ptolemaic papyri (e.g. P.Cair.Zen. 59076).⁶⁹ Non-Jews pathologised circumcision as a mutilation, a deformity, a disease, and a physical defect.

2.4.3 A Hypersexual Aesthetic

The pathology of circumcision was exacerbated by its hypersexuality. From a satirical Roman perspective, a Jewish man's exposure of his glans *via* circumcision was synonymous with his voracious sexual appetite. This was certainly the perspective of Juvenal who used the term *verpus* as a sobriquet for circumcised Jews (*Sat.* 14.96-106). *Verpus* language referred to a “*mentula* [vulgar: a dick] with a foreskin drawn back as a result of erection, or, perhaps excessive sexual activity, or, in the case of the Jews, circumcision.”⁷⁰ Graffiti from Pompeii shows the obscenity of these terms in daily parlance:

Hysocryse puer, Natalis verpa te salutat (CIL IV 1655)
Isochrysus, boy, Natalis's hard-on salutes you!

qui verpam vis/s]it quid cenasse illum putes (CIL IV 1884)
You saw his hard-on. What do you think he has eaten?

Tertiani hic (h)abitant Cresces verpa va(le) (CIL IV 2415)
Tertians live here. Cresces is a hard-on. Farewell.

Regulo feliciter quia verpa est ((phallus)) (CIL IV 4876)
Regulus is happy because he is a hard-on.

verpes [=verpa es] qui istuc leges (CIL IV 8718)
You are a hard-on, you who reads that.

been connected with what Horace calls *obliquus oculus* (*Epist.* 1.14.37) and related to the evil eye. Nuño 2012, 302.

⁶⁹See Popović 2007, 278–80.

⁷⁰Adams, J. 1982, 13.

The sheer crassness of the term meant that when Martial uses *verpa* to describe a poet from Jerusalem accused of sodomising a servant, it implies that his circumcision is indicative of his sexual appetite.⁷¹ This is consistent with Martial's portrayal elsewhere of some Jews as being "well-endowed and lustful" (*Ep.* 7.35.4; 7.55.6).⁷²

Frederick Hodges noted that the exposure of the glans "must have been deemed unseemly in public precisely because it was so strongly associated with erection."⁷³ The exposure of the glans appears in depictions of manual genital stimulation (masturbation).⁷⁴ It also occurred in acts of fellation/irrumation.⁷⁵ Since an erect phallus and a circumcised phallus were indistinguishable in regard

⁷¹Martin, T. W. 1999, 88.

⁷²Adams, J. 1982, 13.

⁷³Hodges 2001, 394.

⁷⁴For example, a red-figure *kylix* by the painter Phintias from the sixth-century BCE depicts two scenes one of a woman masturbating a man and another where a man masturbates himself. Recently, a second-century CE mosaic on the floor of a Roman latrine in southern Turkey was found depicting Narcissus stroking his macrophallus as he gazes at something in the other direction, presumably a reflection of himself (see the Antiochia ad Cragum, Archaeological Research Project). Masturbation was viewed as primarily a humorous slavish activity (Aristophanes, *Eq.* 24-29; *Ran.* 542-8; cf. *Nub.* 734) and was considered an indecent sexual act, especially if exposed publicly. It was for this reason that the cynic philosophers Diogenes of Sinope and Peregrinus Proteus would masturbate in public for the sole purpose of overturning societal customs. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 6.2 Diogenes (69); Lucian, *Peregr.* 17.

⁷⁵So, in a sixth-century BCE tondo attributed to the so-called Pedieus painter, a *hetaira* is on her hands and knees with a man's erect penis partially in her mouth, his foreskin half-retracted exposing his glans (Musée du Louvre, Paris. 200694). In the Greek period, oral sex was associated with prostitution, while in the Roman period it was severely looked down upon in part because it could cause halitosis. Richlin 1992, 96. To the left of the *hetaira*, a similar scene is depicted with the addition of a man penetrating the woman from behind. It is difficult to tell if these depict *irrumatio* (the men are thrusting) or *fellatio* (the women are active in motion). Williams (2010, 178) characterises these variations with the labels insertive (*irrumare*) and receptive (*fellare*).

to their exposure of the penile glans, it makes sense why the two were considered synonymous.

The overlap between a circumcised and an erect phallus can be further seen in the convergence of *verpus* and Priapus in the Latin poet Catullus. In Catull. 47.4, he calls Piso, the provincial governor, *verpus Priapus*. Uden translates this as “a Priapus, ready for action.”⁷⁶ As shown above, however, *verpus* could also refer to circumcision. Additionally, Priapus is not always depicted with his foreskin covering his glans, as can be seen by other frescoes from Pompeii, one that depicts him with features of the Roman god Mercury (Figure 2.12) and another that depicts him with *diphallia*, two penises fully erect each exposing their glans (Figure 2.13). Catullus’ combining of *verpus Priapus* exposes the negligible aesthetic difference between a circumcised penis and an erect uncircumcised penis with its glans exposed.

In the Roman imagination, both Priapus and the circumcised Jew reflected what Craig Williams call “the Roman male sexual persona...the phallus, ready, willing, and able to assert its penetrative power with another person, whether female or male.”⁷⁷ This raises the question of hypermasculinity and Jewish circumcision.⁷⁸ Because it was synonymous with erection, Jewish circumcision might have been conceived of as sign of penetrative force, and thus, an object that made other man passive, violating their masculinity. This

⁷⁶Uden 2007, 8. For the sexualised context of Catull. 47 see Dettmer 1985.

⁷⁷Williams, C. A. 2010, 29.

⁷⁸Asikainen defines “hypermasculinity” as “an overemphasis of the aspects of power and control that are important for the contemporary hegemonic masculinity.” Asikainen 2018, 14.



Figure 2.12. Priapus/Mercury. ca. 1st BCE to 1st CE. Pompeii. National Archaeological Museum, Naples s.n. Photograph © Isaac Soon 2019.



Figure 2.13. Di-(tri?)phallic Priapus. ca. 1st century CE. Pompeii. Fresco. Image is Public domain, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pompeii_-_Lupanar_-_Priapus.jpg)

analogy, while comedic in one sense, was also disturbing in another, as the permanent *verpus* of a Jew would have been seen as a weapon and instrument of undesirable penetration. The exposed glans like a circumcised penis could be seen as a deviant member that reflected sexual aggression and the transgression of bodily boundaries.

2.4.4 Barbarian Circumcision

When circumcision appears explicitly in ancient visual culture, it often occurs on barbarian bodies.⁷⁹ Its association with the barbarian further signals the non-ideal aesthetic nature of circumcision.

The association between circumcision and barbarians is well-known.⁸⁰ This relationship is explicit in the textual sources that we have.⁸¹ Not only, however, did circumcision become known as a barbarian practice but it became infamous as a physical disfigurement, as something unattractive and repugnant. Herodotus argued that when the Egyptians practiced circumcision, they prioritised cleanliness over physical appearance (προτιμῶντες καθαροὶ εἶναι ἢ

⁷⁹The term βάρβαρος originally lacked derogatory undertones as merely an attribute of unintelligible speech, after the Persian wars the term began to become synonymous with the moral, intellectual, and cultural inferiority of foreign peoples. Poo 2005, 8; Hall, E. 1989, 4, 11. While the Persian wars and Alexander's conquests served as catalysts for Greek self-definition and therefore the definition of the other, as Vlassopoulos has shown, the relationship between Greeks and non-Greeks was much less straightforward from the archaic, classical, and Hellenistic period. It was not simply that non-Greeks were all synonymously negative. See Vlassopoulos 2013, 10, 31; Ophir and Rosen-Zvi 2018, 248–9.

⁸⁰Foley 2000, 295.

⁸¹For example, in Aristophanes's *Archarnians*, Dicaeopolis questions the identity of some of Theorus's Odomantian warriors and whether they were actually Greeks since their penises had been "stripped" (τίς τῶν Ὀδομάντων τὸ πέος ἀποτεθρίακεν, *Ach.* 158). The implication is that the warriors are barbarian imposters posing as Greeks.

εὐπρεπέστεροι), suggesting that while it was hygienic it was visually repulsive (*Hist.* 2.37.2). In another example, one of Persius's *Satires* muses on circumcision as a sign of slavery.⁸² To Persius, such superstitious practices should receive the appropriate mockery they deserve (ll. 189-191).

A number of visual examples show circumcision as a barbarian deformity. The most well-known and oft-cited example is the depiction of the Greek mythological Egyptian king Busiris and other Egyptian priests cowering against Heracles on a fifth century BCE Attic red-figure *pelike* by the so-called Pan painter (Figure 2.14).⁸³ On the *pelike*, Heracles disposes of the three Egyptians, all of whom have the round glans of their penises exposed. As the story goes, Busiris tried to slaughter Heracles for a sacrifice at which point Heracles fought and escaped.⁸⁴

Bérard argues that while the exposure of their phalluses provoked laughter, the image itself was not in itself an ethnic critique.⁸⁵ However, the visual portrayal of the Egyptians demonstrates the complete opposite: the aesthetic comparison is an intentional critique of ethnic body modification via circumcision. Busiris is being thrown upside down which causes his penis to be exposed as his clothing falls down. The Egyptian priest poised to hit Heracles

⁸²Devoted to the Stoic theme of freedom, Persius criticises superstition as an enslaving force (*Pers.* 179-88). Persius connects superstition and Judaism through both the mention of Herod (*Pers.* 180) and the “Sabbath of the circumcised” (*recuititaque sabbata*, *Pser.* 184), or “Sabbath of the skinned,” see Cohen, S. J. 1999, 40, n.52.

⁸³Cf. Isocrates, *Bus.* (*Or.* 11); Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 2.5.11.

⁸⁴Apollodorus argues that it was because of barrenness in the land of Egypt that Busiris sacrificed Greeks (*Bib.* 2.5.11).

⁸⁵Bérard 2000, 394. Cf. Keuls 1993, 68.



Figure 2.14. Busiris and Herakles by the Pan painter. ca. 470 BCE. Attic red-figure *pelike*. Pompeii. National Archaeological Museum, Athens 9683. Photograph © Isaac Soon 2019.

has part of his garments tucked away so that his penis can be seen. The third Egyptian cowering on the ground is squatting with his genitals exposed. As Miller notes, the clothing of these Egyptians has been portrayed “in direct violation of Egyptian concepts of decency.”⁸⁶ Heracles, by contrast, dons the ideal foreskin. On this account, the barbarian phallus is directly contrasted with the heroic phallus of Heracles, revealing both the unseemliness and cowardice of the circumcised Egyptians.⁸⁷ This *pelike* portrays the foreskinned Greek overpowering the comical yet mutilated savage.

A potsherd from the Athenian Acropolis further depicts circumcision as a physical characteristic of “uncultured” peoples. The sherd from an unknown period depicts a man defecating while covering his nose (Figure 2.15).⁸⁸ Between his legs hangs his large circumcised penis. The man’s head is disproportionately larger than the rest of his body, and it is clear that this a visual caricature. The editors of the volume in which this image appears state that his hair is Syrian, a people who were also known to practice circumcision (Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.104).⁸⁹ The unseemliness of his circumcised penis parallels the dysmorphia of his head, and both contribute to an understanding of circumcision as a deforming barbarian practice.

⁸⁶Miller 2000, 430.

⁸⁷The Egyptians are depicted as inexperienced fighters, using pots and tables to fight, and even dropping weapons. One even scratches his head in befuddlement trying to figure out what to do.

⁸⁸Graef, et al. 1933, pl.82 n. 1073.

⁸⁹Graef, et al. 1933, 97.

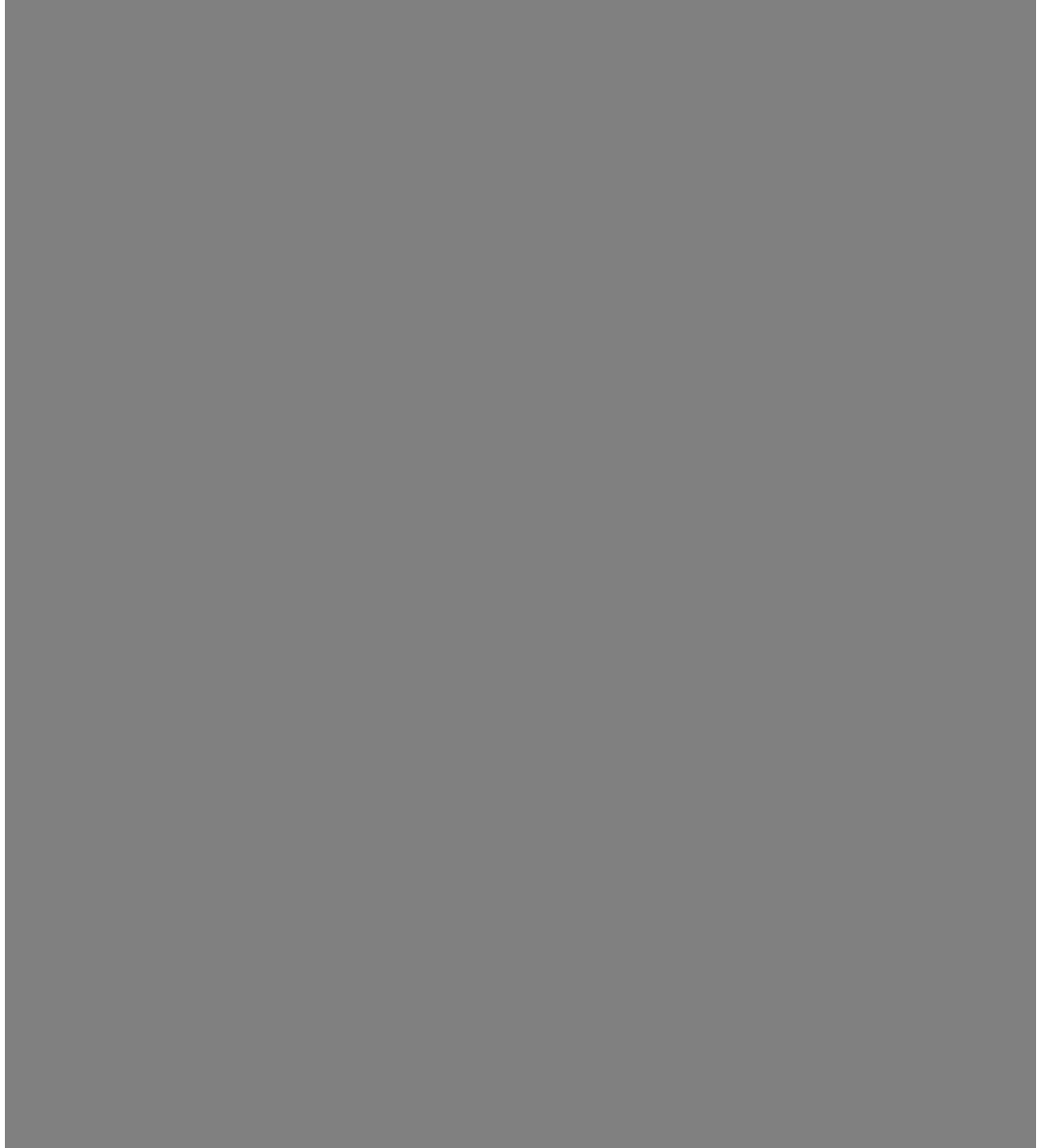


Figure 2.15. Circumcised Syrian. Date unknown. Pot Shard. Image from Graef, Langlotz, Wolters, Zahn and Hartwif 1933, 97.

The unseemliness of barbarian circumcision was instrumentalised and used to stimulate eroticism while at the same time avoid *invidia*. This tendency can be seen in a first-century BCE mosaic from Pompeii, from the House of Menandro. A mosaic floor on the entrance to the hot room, depicts a black-skinned servant, walking with two jugs of liquid, possibly water or oil (Figure 2.16). He is understood to be an “Ethiopian,” a kind of catch-all term for black-skinned peoples on the fringes of the empire.⁹⁰ His water jugs and rather skimpy clothing suggest that he is a slave attending the hot room and bath. In between his legs his testicles and his disproportionately large phallus can be seen. His glans is exposed, made explicit by the artist through a change to purple tesserae. The downward direction of the phallus suggests that it is flaccid, denoting that he is circumcised. Even if his member is erect, Ethiopians were known to be some of the earliest peoples to practice circumcision since at least Herodotus (*Hist.* 2.104). Below the servant are four strigils, which were used in the bath for scraping off oil and sweat.⁹¹ They have been arranged into a phallic pattern, the two at the sides signifying testicles and the two in the centre forming the shaft of the phallus. In the centre of the shaft, an olearia (an oil container) is placed in the centre imitating a urethra. The chains of the oil flask create a dagger-like pattern protruding out from the urethra.

⁹⁰Clarke 1998, 122. Although Romans did not necessarily discriminate based on skin-colour, this did not stop them from caricaturing darker-skinned peoples as barbarians with deviant phalluses. Historians still debate about whether the Greeks and Romans had any “racist” tendencies towards black peoples in the ancient world (whether they are “African” [Aithiopes]) Lybians, or Egyptians is not always clear. For a generous overview of the views of ancient historians see Snowden Jr. 1997. On ancient “Ethiopians” see also the work of Rothschild 2019.

⁹¹Beard 2008, 139.



Figure 2.16. Circumcised Servant from Threshold to Caldarium. ca. 1st century CE. Mosaic. House of Menander, Pompeii. Photograph Public Domain, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pompeii_-_House_of_Menander_-_Caldarium_-_Mosaic_1.jpg).

This mosaic stands on the threshold to the hot room, a threshold vulnerable to the evil eye. The threshold has a low ceiling and the floor has an uneven drop which mean that patrons would have had to watch their step to pass through, and in doing so they would be forced to face these images. The humorous image of barbarian circumcision is there to misdirect *invidia*. Of further significance is the dark monochromatic portrayal of the servant and the strigils in contrast to the water jugs, glans, and the urethral-dagger, which all share the same, purple-coloured tesserae. The implicit relationship between the objects in the purple tesserae show that the colour matching is intentional. The artist highlights fluid, arousal, and ejaculation. On his own, the circumcised servant would have been viewed as hilariously grotesque. But, in the context of the baths, the threshold between spaces, and the artistic arrangement with the strigils, sensual and apotropaic overtones infuse the servant's circumcision.

A similar use of barbarian circumcision can be found on a second century CE mosaic floor from the northwest baths of Timgad (modern day Algeria) that shows a black *furnacator* (furnace stoker) holding a shovel while ejaculating semen on to the floor from his macrophallus (Figure 2.17). Since ejaculation was viewed as a method for dispelling the evil eye, I am inclined to take the flow out of the African's penis as semen and not urine as others do.⁹² The apotropaic power of the Ethiopian servant with his circumcised phallus, lies in the fact that

⁹²Cf. Clarke 1998, 133. Elsner argues that the mosaic offers users an opportunity "to trample on the black demon of ill omen which popular superstition tended to associate with Ethiopians." Elsner 2018, 89.

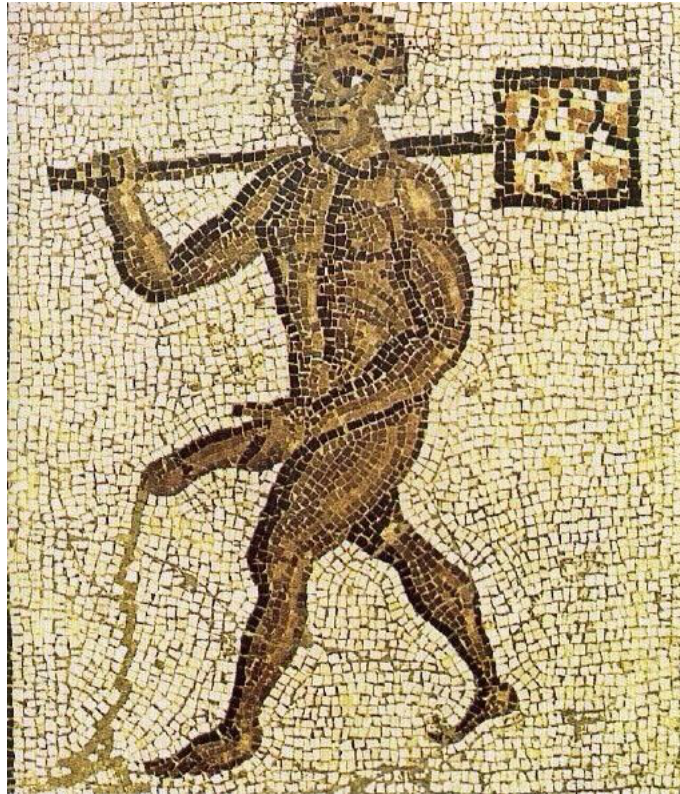


Figure 2.17. Ithyphallic Bath Attendant. ca. 1st century CE. Mosaic. Baths in Timgad, Musée Archéologique Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons under a CCA-Share alike 4.0 International License (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pétra._Esclave_noir_nu_apportant_des_braises_aux_thermes.jpg)

both his skin colour and phallus are effective due to their “strangeness” or “unnaturalness” (ἀτοπία).⁹³

From the perspective of ancient Greeks and Romans, circumcision was a sign of a barbarian body. Circumcised barbarians exhibited a permanent state of phallic deformity, one that Greeks satirised and Romans instrumentalised. However, barbarians were not the only people associated with circumcision in Greek and Roman artistic representations. Circumcision also had an affinity with creatures on the borderlines of natural human being.

2.4.5 Circumcision as an Animalistic Proclivity

The zenith of circumcision’s aesthetic deviance is its appearance on the bodies of ancient *Mischwesen*. Jeffrey Hurwit drew attention to the nudity of the male *Mischwesen* (hybrid beings) in ancient Greek sculpture and how they directly contrast the Greek heroic ideal.⁹⁴ These hybrid beings, such as centaurs, the Minotaur, and satyrs, were theriomorphic—they were part human and part animal. Some of these creatures were also often portrayed with their glans exposed in explicitly hypersexualised contexts, just like circumcised barbarians. Here we will examine two types of *Mischwesen* relevant to circumcision: satyrs and centaurs.

⁹³Clarke 1998, 131.

⁹⁴Hurwit 2007, 53.

Ithyphallic creatures that were half human and half equine known as satyrs/silenoi were ubiquitous in ancient Greek and Roman visual culture.⁹⁵ Rosemary Barrow notes that, “In a mythological world where metamorphosis from mortal to animal, or anthropomorphic god to animal, was common, Greek and Roman audiences were used to negotiating blurred boundaries between human and non-human.”⁹⁶ Although they were nature spirits and part of the entourage of the god Dionysos, satyrs were often portrayed as the quintessential representatives of ugly human men, having “a receding hairline or a wrinkled brow under a shaggy mat of hair, bugling eyes, very snub noses and big thick lips” and sometimes even as hunchbacks.⁹⁷

They most often appeared in sexual contexts, for example in a marble sculpture from Pollena Tracchia a satyr is poised to penetrate a nymph from behind (Figure 2.18). The depiction of the phalluses of satyrs, like the phallic herm or Priapus, often occurred with an aggressive arch-like shape to the penis, sometimes exposing the glans itself such as in a sixth-century *krater* depicting a silenos masturbating himself and another with an extremely bowed erection (Figure 2.19). As Bonfante notes, this type of depiction “is aggressive and protective in a way that athletic and ritual nudity (which emphasises youth and a small penis) are not.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵The distinction between satyr and silenus in the ancient material is ambiguous. By the Hellenistic period the features of both were often blended with one another. Hansen 2004, 279.

⁹⁶Barrow 2018, 153.

⁹⁷Dover 1989, 71; Stewart 1997, 189.

⁹⁸Bonfante 1989, 553, n.31.



Figure 2.18. Nymph and Satyr. Early Imperial. Pollena Trocchia. National Archaeological Museum, Naples. RP, Inv. No. 152873. Photograph © Isaac Soon 2019.



Figure 2.19. Silenos masturbating himself. Ca 560-550 BCE. Attic black-figure *krater*. National Archaeological Museum, Spain. 1999/99/65. Photograph by Luis García/Wikimedia Commons under a CCA-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license
([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Crátera_ática_de_columnas_\(M.A.N._1999-99-65\)_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Crátera_ática_de_columnas_(M.A.N._1999-99-65)_02.jpg))

The hypersexualisation of the satyr through oversized genitals and the exposure of the glans was due in part to their relation to the animalistic. A seventh century BCE frieze from the Attic black-figure volute famously known as the Francois Vase depicts Hephaistos returning to Olympus riding on a mule followed by a *silenos* (Figure 2.20). Both the donkey and the silenos are fully erect. Both have their glans exposed, the mule with a club-shaped member and the silenos with a more human shaped glans. The scene is overwhelmingly Dionysiac, as the only way to get Hephaistos back to Olympus was to get him drunk. This also explains the presence of the donkey, an animal involved in ancient wine production who was also known for its lasciviousness.⁹⁹ The animalistic correspondence between donkey and silenos can be seen by the resemblance between their phalluses.¹⁰⁰ The human nature of satyrs is diluted by the nature of animals, and the exposure of the glans signifies their unnatural animalistic nature. For satyrs, in particular, ithyphallicism was clearly humorous and comedic.¹⁰¹ At the same time, however, as Lissarrague argues, “Satyrs use the medium of parody to reveal a world under the aegis of Dionysos,” that is a world of *excess* or *transgression*¹⁰² While such images were humorous, they were by no means enviable.

⁹⁹Hedreen 1992, 16–7; Lissarrague 1990a, 55; Mitchell, P. 2018, 144–45. A relief now at the National Archaeological Museum in Naples (inv. 27712) depicts the god Pan (himself a satyr) riding on an ithyphallic donkey, which has its glans slightly exposed.

¹⁰⁰Lissarrague 1990a, 54; Hedreen 1992, 16–17.

¹⁰¹Lissarrague 1990a, 55.

¹⁰²Lissarrague 1990b, 235, 236. In fact, there is one image of Dionysos that appears to depict him as circumcised. A fourth-century BCE calyx krayter by the Erbach at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens depicts Dionysos and Ariadne (inv.



Figure 2.20. Hephaestus, Donkey, and Silenos, François Vase. ca 570-560 BCE. Attic black-figure *krater*. National Archaeological Museum, Florence 4209. 1999/99/65. Photograph by Egisto Sani/Flickr. Used with permission.

12598). Ariadne is in a chariot pulled by two horses both of which have flaccid penises with their glandes exposed. Dionysos similarly has a flaccid penis and an exposed glans.

But satyrs and silenoi were not the only half-human creatures who had their penile glandes exposed. No one has yet considered the exposure of centaur phalluses in relation to wider non-ideal phallic depictions. The centaurs in the examples below are particularly important for my discussion of circumcision because, unlike satyrs and silenoi, their phalluses actually appear flaccid and circumcised.

In a Roman marble copy (1-2nd centuries CE) after Pergamene original (ca. 200 BCE), an elderly centaur is haunted by the god of desire, Eros (Figure 2.21). It appears to be modelled after a similar motif to the Furietti centaurs found at Hadrian's villa in Tivoli and now housed in the Capitoline museum. The centaur is tortured by Eros. His hands are tied behind his back and the god reaches up to his head, perhaps signifying that he is filling the centaur's head with lustful desire. Unusually the glans of the centaur is exposed, but although the body of the centaur is of a horse, the phallus is not unnecessarily large or particularly "equine-like" such as the depiction on the Francois Vase. In fact, the penis itself looks flaccid. If this is correct, then the centaur looks circumcised. In this image there is a convergence here of torturous sexual desire, the animalistic, and circumcision.

This is not the only example of a centaur with his glans exposed (CW: violence, rape). In a 1st century CE encaustic on white marble with red outlines from Herculaneum we find a depiction of the Centauromachy, the battle between centaurs and the Lapiths, a legendary group of people who resided in



Figure 2.21. Centaur tormented by Eros (copy of a second century BC original). 1-2nd century CE. Marble. Louvre Museum, Paris MA 562 (MR 122). Public Domain, Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Old_Centaur_Eros_Louvre_Ma_562.jpg)

Thessaly (Figure 2.22).¹⁰³ According to the myth, the Lapith king Pirithous invited the centaurs to a banquet in celebration of his marriage to Hippodameia (see Ovid, *Metam.* 12.219-224; 12.346-349; Homer, *Od.* 21.295-304; Pausanias 1.17.2, 5.10.8; Strabo, *Georg.* 939; Horace, *Carm.* 1.18.5; Pliny, *Nat.* 8.15.36.5,4). The centaurs became intoxicated. According to Ovid, the wildest of the centaurs, Eurytus, grabbed Hippodameia by the hair and tried to kidnap her. The rest of the centaurs began to rape the women and the boys, inciting a battle between them and the Greeks, among whom Theseus was present. The encaustic from Herculaneum depicts this tale closely, with a woman being grasped by her hair, probably Hippodameia, the centaur grabbing her, possibly Eurytus, and a young Greek warrior grabbing him by the hair, possibly Theseus. What is alarming is that the centaur's glans is exposed, the slight line of his foreskin retracted back, even while his phallus is flaccid. The centaur has been depicted as being circumcised or at least in a way that is completely negligible from circumcision. In contrast to the centaur, Theseus is depicted in the heroic nude with the ideal foreskin. In this image hypersexuality, the animalistic, and circumcision converge again.

Although some centaurs were known for their wisdom (e.g. Cheiron), centaurs in general were known in the ancient world for their propensity for lust as the Centauromachy, the centaur tormented by Eros, and this Herculaneum encaustic show. Unbridled sexual desire was just a part of their innate nature; in

¹⁰³It is also possible but less likely that what is depicted is Heracles, Nessos and Deianira. For an overview of scholarship and the primary source traditions see Bremmer 2012.



Figure 2.22. Centaur seizing a woman. 1 century CE. Encaustic. Herculaneum. National Archaeological Museum, Naples 9560. Photograph © National Archaeological Museum, Naples (<https://www.weblimc.org/page/monument/2074217>)

one of the origin stories of centaurs, the founder of the centaurs, Kentaurus mated with Magnesian mares on mount Pelion (Pindar, *Pyth.* 2.42-48, Philostratus, *Imag.* 2.3).¹⁰⁴

Their connection with horses may be in part why centaurs are viewed as being hypersexualised, since the depiction of horses with erections goes back to at least the geometric period (7-8th centuries BCE).¹⁰⁵ We even have examples from first-century Herculaneum of horses that have their glans exposed.¹⁰⁶ The circumcision of horses is present even among other hybrid creatures. For example, in various depictions of Pegasos, we find that the half-avian, half-equine creature is circumcised.¹⁰⁷

It was not lost on ancient artists that the exposure of the glans was both animalistic and coloured by hypersexuality, as there were sometimes efforts to depict horses in a temperate state. So, in an Attic red-figure *pelike*, among a scene depicting the Gigantomachy (the battle between the Olympian gods and the giants), there is a horse depicted wearing a *κυνοδέσμη*, the “dog-leash” for its foreskin in order to keep its depiction moderate (Figure 2.23). He mirrors an

¹⁰⁴Cf. Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 4.70.1 for a different origin of centaurs from a group of men raised by nymphs. Often the myths account of the origins of particular centaurs rather than all centaurs together. Hansen 2004, 135.

¹⁰⁵For example, at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, a kantharos (760-35 BCE, inv. 16193) and a pedestalled krater from Thebes (690-70 BCE, inv. 12896) both depict horses with erections.

¹⁰⁶Two statuettes of horses, Inv. 4894 and 4996, now housed at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples.

¹⁰⁷For example, in a black *kylix* depicting Pegasos at the British Museum (ca. 350 BCE, GR 1842.5-7.19 [Vase F 541]); a plate also with Pegasos at the National Archaeological Museum of Athens (Inv. 1712) from ca. 420 BCE; and a red-figure *kantharos* depicting Bellerophon on Pegasus ca. 420-10 BCE (Inv. 12487).



Figure 2.23. Gigantomachy, Ares and the Dioskouroi attack the Giants from above, by the Pronomos Painter. ca. 400 BCE. Attic red-figured *pelike*. National Archaeological Museum in Athens, 1333. Photograph © Isaac Soon 2019

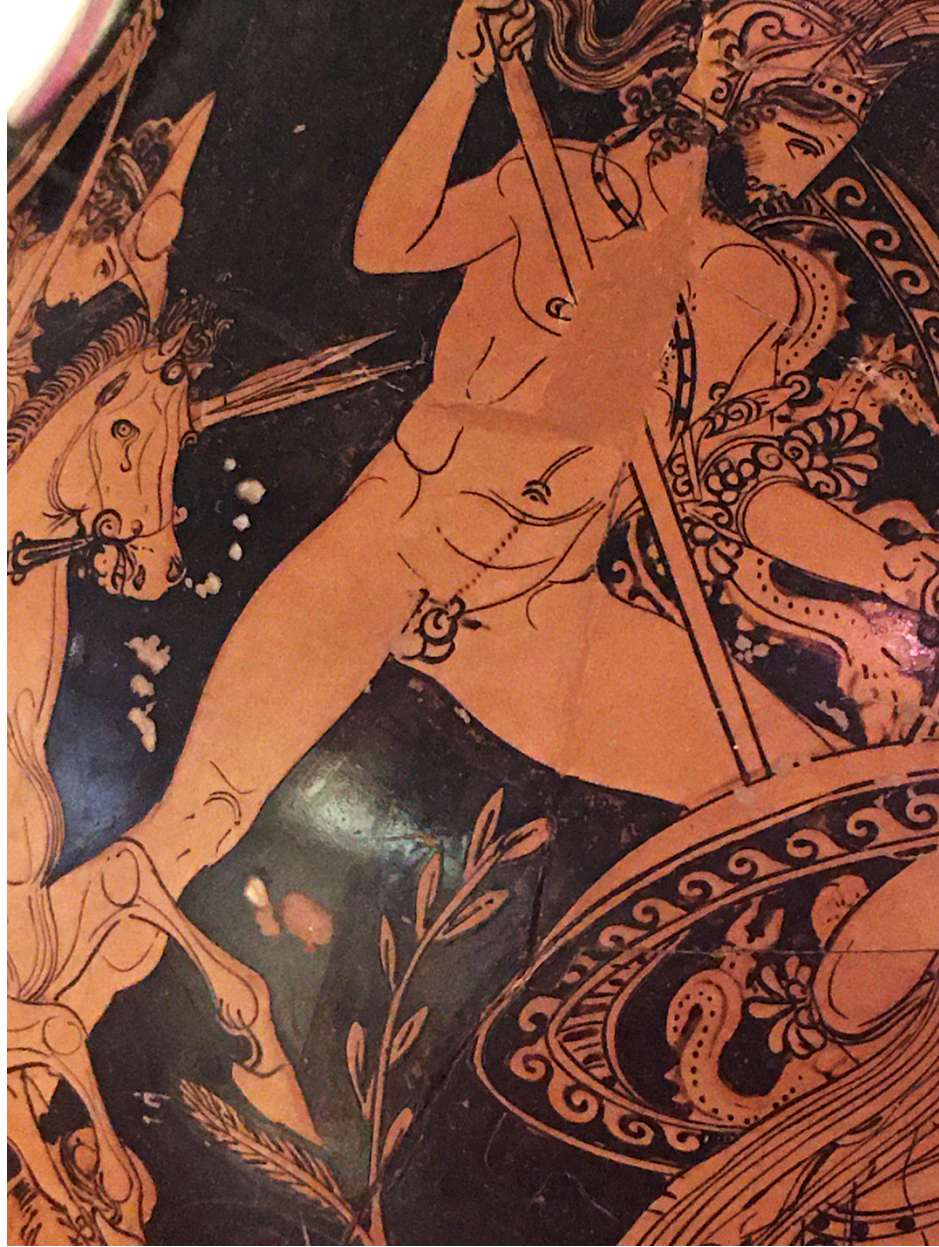


Figure 2.24. Gigantomachy, Ares and the Dioskouroi attack the Giants from above, by the Pronomos Painter. ca. 400 BCE. Attic red-figured *pelike*. National Archaeological Museum in Athens, 1333. Photograph © Isaac Soon 2019

adjacent warrior (perhaps the god Ares), who also has his foreskin tied neatly in a *κυνοδέσμη* (Figure 2.24). Here both horse and warrior are depicted in the heroic nude, with their glandes appropriately tucked away.

It is not as though the encaustic from Herculaneum is an outlier in its depiction of a circumcised centaur. A search through the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (LIMC) provides at least seven other examples of circumcised centaurs (*LIMC* Kentauroi et Kentaurides 180, 186, 191, 194a, 258, 268; Kenturoi in Etruria 12) depicted on ancient Greek pottery (see Figure 2.25-27). Some of these examples share the same Centauromachy context as the Herculaneum encaustic (e.g. *LIMC* Kentauroi et Kentaurides 186 and 191).¹⁰⁸ Circumcision on centaurs is a previously unrecognised pattern in ancient Greek and Roman visual culture. Such portrayals perpetuate the association between circumcision and hypersexuality that was seen in our analysis of ancient literary sources (e.g. Martial and Juvenal). Over and above that, ancient Graeco-Roman visual culture understood circumcision to be a part of a monstrous visual appearance.

From a Greek and Roman perspective, circumcision was a sign of the exoticism of barbarians, of their lewdness, slavishness, and sexuality. Meanwhile, the visual correspondence with circumcised *Mischwesen*, the satyr and the centaur, infused circumcision with the hypersexual and the bestial. As Louise Lawrence notes, “[T]he monstrous is used to counsel audiences about the

¹⁰⁸Examples can even be found on second-century CE sarcophagi, with depictions of Dionysiac processions (e.g. National Archaeological Museum of Naples, Sarcophagus Inv. 6776 and 6693).



Figure 2.25. Centauromachy, Herakles seizing a centaur by the Berlin Painter. ca. 525-475 BCE. Attic red-figured *amphora*. Manchester Museum, University of Manchester III.I.40. Photograph © Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester (<https://www.weblimc.org/page/monument/2073697>)



Figure 2.26. Centauromachy. ca. 500-450 BCE. Attic red-figure *kylix*.
Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, München 2640. Photograph ©
Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, München
(<https://www.weblimc.org/page/monument/2073466>)



Figure 2.27. Centaurs fighting warriors Attic red-figure *kylix*. Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, München 2641. Photograph © Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, München
(<https://www.weblimc.org/page/monument/2073490>)

threats posed to them by exaggerated, liminal, hybrid, and oft-times aberrant identities.”¹⁰⁹ Associated with such creatures, circumcision becomes a symbol of the subhuman, the hybrid, the animalistic, the uncivilised, and the sexually deformed. Circumcision did not and could not look like the Greek and Roman ideal penis.

2.5 The Dysfunction of Circumcised Penises

The previous sections have shown that circumcision deviated from the ideal non-Jewish penile aesthetic. A brief further analysis shows that circumcision was also considered dysfunctional. The reception of circumcision’s aesthetic is closely related to the reception of its function. Although the previous sections focused on the aesthetic, there were also underlying functional aspects tied to circumcision’s deviant form. The fact that circumcision was a mutilation, that it was a hypersexual aesthetic, that it was a barbarian and animalistic feature all at the same time indicate the dysfunction of the circumcised. Apart from preventing the exposure of the glans, the foreskin had other functions. One function was the preservation of the natural integrity of the body. Another function was moral, the insistence on moderation and self-control. Still further, was the social function of foreskin; it was a marker of civilisation. On the other hand, circumcision was dysfunctional because it did not preserve the integrity of the body. It did not perform virtue and restraint, and neither did it indicate a civilised nature.

¹⁰⁹Lawrence, L. 2016, 50.

The dysfunction of circumcision can be illustrated further by the procedures that ancients used to restore the state of the foreskin to what they viewed as its natural form.¹¹⁰ There were a number of different healing methods that ancients could use to rectify the absence of foreskin, all usually described by scholars under the general label “epispasm” (from the verb ἐπισπάω, “to draw, drag, pull over”). In 1 Maccabees and Josephus we find accounts of certain Jews who “make themselves uncircumcised” (ἐποίησαν ἑαυτοῖς ἀκροβυστίας) or “hid the circumcision of their privates, so that they would be Greeks when undressing” (τὴν τῶν αἰδοίων περιτομὴν ἐπεκάλυψαν, ὡς ἂν εἶεν καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν ἀπόδυσιν Ἑλληνας).¹¹¹ In 1 Cor 7:18, Paul mentions that a circumcised person should not try and undo his circumcision (μὴ ἐπισπάσθω). Soranus, in his second-century work on Gynaecology, describes a method of stretching the

¹¹⁰The only legitimate medical use for circumcision in ancient Greek literature was if the prepuce had begun to necrotise, and even then, this procedure only appears explicitly in our medical sources from the fourth century onward. Oribasius (4th century), *Collectionum medicarum reliquiae*, 50.7: “Ὁὐ περὶ τῶν διὰ θεότητα περιτεμνομένων νῦν ὁ λόγος ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ περὶ τούτων οἷς διαθέσεως αἰδοικῆς γενομένης ἢ πόσθη μελαίνεται (“Now, this section is not about circumcision as a result of religious reasons but concerning those circumcisions which result from a condition belonging to the private parts, namely the foreskin turning black”). This procedure is reproduced in Paul of Aegina’s (7th-century) medical compendium (6.57). In our non-medical literature, however, from the first-century period, there are accounts of the necessity for circumcision as an absolute last resort. Josephus, in his treatise *Against Apion*, recounts the grisly death of Apion and how it was necessary for him to be circumcised because he had an ulcer on his foreskin: περιετμήθη γὰρ ἐξ ἀνάγκης, ἐλκώσεως αὐτῷ περὶ τὸ αἰδοῖον γενομένης. Ironically, the circumcision which Apion had so mocked about the Jews (*C. Ap.* 2.137) was in the end unable to help his condition and his penis became affected with gangrene and he died (*C. Ap.* 2.143). While it is perfectly plausible that Josephus has constructed this story polemically (as Barclay suggests), it still nevertheless shows knowledge of using circumcision to counteract penile putrifaction medically. Barclay 2007, 242, n.519.

¹¹¹1 Macc 1:15; Josephus, *A.J.* 12.241. The *Assumption of Moses* prophesies that even those that concealed their circumcision would still face persecution by the nations (*As. Mos.* 8.3).

prepuce of an infant male who is without foreskin, and Galen describes his own technique for stretching foreskin (using papyrus and gum).¹¹² Celsus in *Med.* 7.25.1-2 describes a procedure in order to have the glans covered, what Robert Hall calls “the Cadillac of correctives.”¹¹³ Hall summarises the procedure: “The surgeon would cut around the glans freeing the sheath of skin surrounding the shaft of the penis, pull the skin forward and dress the wound carefully so that the skin would reattach to the glans leaving a foreskin.”¹¹⁴ Even Epiphanius centuries later noted that Symmachus, known for his own translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, had been circumcised a second time, the first time as a Samaritan and the second time as a Jewish proselyte.¹¹⁵ Anticipating the unbelief of his readers he argues for the truthfulness of his account, detailing “a certain medical art” (τέχνη τιὴ ἰατρικῆ) he calls σπαθιστῆρος that released the prepuce and placed it over the glans.¹¹⁶ By restoring the foreskin, these procedures restored the functional capabilities of the foreskin, namely to cover the penile glans as nature had intended.

The synonymy of circumcision with erection contributed to its dysfunction. A circumcised penis looked permanently erect. A circumcised penis exposed the glans while also flaccid, and this too could be problematic in its own way. A flaccid penis that exposed the glans was neither fully in a state of the

¹¹²*Gyn.* 2.16.34 (36.103); Galen, *MM* 14.16.

¹¹³Hall, R. G. 1992.

¹¹⁴Summary by Hall, R. G. 1992.

¹¹⁵Jacobs 2012, 28–29.

¹¹⁶Text from Moutsoulas 1973, 177.

Greek and Roman moral ideal (tapered and small) nor in the state of their sexual ideal (erection). Like the erect penises that left the foreskin in place, circumcision expressed an in-between state that did not fully fit in any one particular category. The only difference was that while the former preserved the seamliness of a covered glans, the latter exposed it at all times and in all places. The foreskin having been excised from a circumcised penis cannot appropriately cover the penile glans. A circumcised man has no control over whether his glans is exposed or not. Thus, he is constantly in a dysfunctional hypersexualised state.

Perhaps the greatest indicator of circumcision's dysfunction was its occasional association with castration.¹¹⁷ The interchangeability between Jewish circumcision and castration can be illustrated by a joke that Cicero once told in a trial of Verres, the propraetor of Sicily, recounted by Plutarch (*Cic.* 7.5):

βέρρην γὰρ οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι τὸν ἐκτετμημένον χοῖρον καλοῦσιν. ὡς οὖν ἀπελευθερικὸς ἄνθρωπος ἔνοχος τῷ ἰουδαΐζειν, ὄνομα Κεκίλιος, ἐβούλετο παρωσάμενος τοὺς Σικελιώτας κατηγορεῖν τοῦ Βέρρου. ‘τί Ἰουδαίῳ πρὸς χοῖρον;’ (LCL)

The Romans call a castrated pig, a “*verres*.” When, therefore, a freedman who was living Jewishly, named Caecilius, wanted to bring charges against Verres, pushing aside the Sicilians, Cicero said, “What does a Jew have to do with a pig?”

¹¹⁷Legal evidence from the second century CE shows that some believed Jewish circumcision outside of Judaism should be punished in the same way as castration. A rescript by Antonius Pius *apud* Modestine in *Dig.* 48.8.11, translated in Linder 1987, 100.

The “pig” in question obviously corresponds with Verres since his very name is a play on the Roman word for a castrated pig. Likewise, the “Jew” corresponds to Caecilius who was lived Jewishly.¹¹⁸

Cicero’s question is effective on three levels. The first is that Jews were known not to eat pigs and thus the answer to Cicero’s question is that obviously everyone knows Jews have nothing to do with pigs. The second level involves the fact that χοῖρος could mean both pig and a vagina, and a double entendre could be implied here (cf. Aristophanes, *Ach.* 733). We have seen how circumcision and even Jewish association with circumcision became synonymous with hypersexuality. At this humorous level, the answer to Cicero’s question is that a Jew has a lot to do with a “pig” (a woman’s vagina). The third level, most relevant for us, is further humorous and involves Plutarch’s specific gloss of the Roman word *verres* not just as a pig but as a castrated pig. The final answer to Cicero’s question is that a Jew is a lot like a castrated pig because both of them have mutilated genitals. Plutarch’s anecdote reinforces circumcision as a non-functioning non-ideal physical condition that distorted the human body. If circumcision was like castration, then clearly the penises of the circumcised could not function as they should. Because circumcision did not function or meet the aesthetic ideal of ancient Greek and Roman phalluses, it should be considered a physical impairment.

¹¹⁸On whether it is implied Caecilius was considered a Jew see Donaldson 2007, 386–8.

2.6 Paul's Circumcision as a Physical Impairment

This chapter has argued that in comparison to the ideal Greek and Roman phallus, circumcision in the ancient pagan world should be understood as a physical impairment. The testimony of literary and visual culture shows that Greeks and Romans praised and idealised foreskin as the phallic ideal. While variations on this male ideal did exist in particular contexts, they were limited so as not to expose the penile glans in an unnecessary way. Aesthetically, circumcision was a mutilation, evoking the hypersexual, the unrestrained, the barbarian, and the animalistic. Functionally, circumcision exposed the glans as though it were permanently erect while at the same time also being synonymous with castration. From the viewpoint of ancient Greeks and Romans, the circumcised Jew with his perpetually exposed glans would have existed in a constant liminal state between aesthetic deviance and sexual dysfunction. Thus, Jews like Paul who were circumcised existed in a permanent state of impairment.

Paul probably did not view himself as being impaired. But considering circumcision as an impairment for non-Jews in the Mediterranean can give us a new frame of reference for understanding the complex reception of circumcision for gentiles in Pauline communities, a point I address in Chapter Five. The association between circumcision and hypersexuality causes one to wonder how much pressure the Galatians or other early Christ-following communities must have felt to be circumcised, since circumcision was antithetical to the male physical ideals perpetuated and reinforced in the visual architecture of the world in which they lived.

In the pagan world, circumcision as a deviant and malfunctioning physical condition generated negative social and cultural effects that disabled the people who practised it. Already in this chapter we saw impairment and disability overlap as circumcision was de-normalised through the stigma associated with barbarians and *Mischwesen*. In the next chapter we analyse these disabling processes in greater detail.

3. CIRCUMCISION AS A DISABILITY

3.1 De-Normalising Circumcision

Late in 38 CE, Philo of Alexandria journeyed to Rome as the head of an embassy to Gaius (“Caligula”) to protest the local pogroms against the Jews in Alexandria (*Legat.* 120-131).¹ At the same time, the grammarian Apion was also sent as an ambassador for the Alexandrians to Rome in order to counter these Jewish claims (Josephus, *A.J.* 18.257). While Apion received a viewing with the emperor, records show that Philo was not allowed to counter Apion’s mockery of Jewish traditions because of the Jewish people’s refusal to acknowledge Caligula’s godship (*Legat.* 114-119; cf. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.260; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.5.1).² We know that one of the issues that Apion mocked was Jewish circumcision.³ Only sparse comments about Apion’s views of circumcision remain in Josephus. The essence of his critique was that it something to be ridiculed (*C. Ap.* 2.137). As others have noted, it was ironic for Apion to mock Jews for circumcision since, as an Egyptian, he also ended up mocking traditions of his own people.⁴

¹I follow Niehoff 2018, 246 for the dating of Philo’s works. For a detailed reconstruction of the events leading up to the Alexandrian pogrom and its aftermath for the Jewish community see Barclay 1999, 48–60.

²If Philo did indeed gain a hearing, it was not with the emperor’s whole attention: Barclay 1999, 56.

³Niehoff 2018, 18.

⁴Because of this Barclay understands that Apion speaks from a slightly different culture than that of his countryman. Barclay 2007, 240, n. 501. Apion’s commitment to Greek oratory as evidenced by his tour of Greece (Seneca, *Ep.* 88.40) and his self-aggrandisement (he adds himself to the ranks of Socrates, Zeno, and Cleanthes, cf. Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.134) indicate that his views of circumcision probably stem from his exposure to Hellenistic culture. Additionally, although he was Egyptian, Apion had

Although he was not able to publicly defend circumcision in the emperor's court, Philo did defend the practice in *De specialibus legibus* (On the Special Laws), reinforcing the moral legitimacy of the practice in spite of its wider cultural stigma. For Philo, if antipathy toward Jewish customs like circumcision were left unchecked, Jewish people would suffer, with massacres like the one in Alexandria as a fatal by-product. Philo's embassy to Rome, partly to dispel the cultural stigma toward circumcision, was not merely about intellectual sparring but a matter of life and death for the Jewish people.

Circumcision was not just an impairment in the ancient world, it was also a disability. In the first chapter of this thesis, I laid out specific de-normalisation processes that signal when an impairment participates in the discourse of disability in its particular social and cultural environment. In this chapter, I analyse the reception of circumcision—especially Jewish circumcision—through the de-normalising effects of mockery, stereotyping, prosthesis, stigma, liminality, exclusion, and violence.⁵ Impaired bodies are often ridiculed, mocked, and stereotyped. Prosthetics betray the use of technology to conform bodily aesthetic and function to cultural norms and ideals so that the disabled could “pass” as nondisabled and avoid stigma. Revulsion (stigma) pushed impaired bodies to liminal spaces socially, economically, geographically and

never been circumcised as indicated by the emergency circumcision at his death-bed (*C. Ap.* 2.143). This is further evidence that Apion was raised in a Hellenised Egyptian culture.

⁵The use of the language of “stereotype” refers to the oversimplification or caricature of people with disabilities. Stereotypes are culturally and socially reductive. As we will see below, the stereotyping of ancient Jewish men involved an association between circumcision and hypersexuality.

theologically. The convergence of these effects can manifest itself in violence against impaired bodies, sometimes even leading to death.

The beginning of this chapter analyses the overlap between the impairing of circumcised peoples in the previous chapter and the underlying disabling processes at work. Then, I investigate the negative effects generated by Jewish circumcision in its Greek and Roman environment, mediated primarily through Greek, Roman, and Jewish literature. Drawing on the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Jewish circumcision, I analyse early Christian literature to understand the processes that early Christian writers used to deplore circumcision along with their theological justification for doing so. The consistent de-normalisation of Jewish circumcision in Graeco-Roman and early Christian contexts, indicates that it was a disability. Thus, as a circumcised Jew, Paul should be considered disabled in this ancient non-Jewish context. Recognising circumcision as a disability allows us to approach circumcision texts in Paul's letters with fresh eyes, opening up new avenues of inquiry in Pauline studies.

3.2 Disabling Circumcised Peoples

In the previous chapter, the circumcised peoples displayed in Greek and Roman visual culture were primarily from Northern Africa and the Levant. Before I turn specifically to Jewish circumcision, this section explains how mockery and ridicule disabled circumcision more widely. While there is some consistency between the treatment of Jewish and non-Jewish circumcision, the contrast between the treatment of circumcision in this section and the sections

that follow shows that Jewish circumcision experienced a greater level of vilification.

The absurd depictions of circumcised North African and Levantine men prove that circumcision was a topos of ridicule. The artist of the circumcised Syrian in Figure 2.15 has designed the image to elicit laughter. Images like this were designed to mock circumcised peoples, an intent that appears in many of the examples from the previous chapter. The Syrian defecates in a manner so repugnant that he must hold his own nose to avoid the smell. The symmetry and shape of his body is intentionally distorted, being grossly disproportionate, with his enormous head and his large circumcised member dangling between his legs exposing his glans. Circumcision is purposefully depicted as uncivilised and grotesque.

Similarly, the mockery of “Ethiopians” on mosaics from Pompeii and Timgad (Figures 2.16 and 2.17) arises from their situational context. The men are attending to their regular duties, bringing water/oil and stoking the furnaces for the baths. Yet, amid these everyday activities they cannot control the exposure of the glans. The loss of self-control marks their effeminacy. At the same time, their comical macrophallicism evokes hypermasculinity. In this way they are liminal, display both excessive masculinity and a feminine lack of self-control. The apotropaic usefulness of these images depends on this liminality to generate laughter from viewers to subsequently drive off *invidia*.

The mockery and ridicule toward circumcision in the portrayal of Busiris and the Egyptians in Figure 2.14 takes on a more sinister tone. As noted previously, the skirts of the Egyptian priests have been intentionally shortened

so that their circumcised penises are exposed. In contrast to Heracles, one of the priests cowers; his body language betrays fear and weakness. Additionally, as Frederick Hodges observes, the Egyptians have “snubbed noses and monkey-like faces.”⁶ These too are for comical effect. The central focus of the scene is Heracles as he grips Busiris by the ankles and holds him upside down. It makes little sense that he has picked Busiris up by the ankles and is throwing him over his shoulder. On the contrary, Heracles wields Busiris as a weapon, ready to swing him against the priest who faces him brandishing a cudgel. Here the hero of Greek civilisation bowls down the uncivilised and circumcised Egyptians. While humorous in its ancient Greek context, underlying the image is the valourisation and justification of violence toward circumcised bodies.

Based on this iconographic evidence, Egyptians, Syrians, and Africans were among those circumcised peoples whom Graeco-Roman culture disabled through mockery and ridicule. Undoubtedly, circumcised peoples encountered derision. As to violence, we have no extant evidence that Greeks ever physically attacked circumcised Egyptians. Still, the vicious depiction of the beating of Busiris and his priests is itself an act of *cultural violence*. It promoted antipathy toward circumcision, antipathy that became reality when it came in contact with Jewish bodies.

⁶Hodges 2001, 386.

3.3 Disabling Circumcised Jews

Despite its caricature in ancient visual culture, non-Jewish circumcision did not generate nearly the same amount of negativity as Jewish circumcision.⁷ When it came to circumcised Jews, Greek and Romans disproportionately expressed their disdain toward the practice.

Jewish circumcision generated many negative effects in Greek and Roman culture, from ridicule to physical violence. Our reliance here on literature alone is simply due to the fact that we do not have any extant visual culture that explicitly depicts Jewish circumcision. The majority of the literary evidence is from the second-century BCE to the second-century CE. While circumcision among classical authors was associated primarily with the Egyptians, during the early Jewish period, circumcision became almost exclusively associated with Jews. The association of circumcision with Jews coincides with the growing stigma toward it, and it is in this period where Jewish circumcision most clearly manifests as a disability.

Josephus's account of Izates of Adiabene is one of the most well-known stories about circumcision (*A.J.* 20.17-52). Many focus on what this account can tell us about Jewish proselytism and gentile conversion to Judaism in the first century.⁸ My focus will be on the stigma toward circumcision explicit in the narrative.

⁷For example, historiographic literature noted the circumcision of these peoples, but lacked any sustained derision toward them for their circumcision. E.g. Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.104.

⁸E.g. Donaldson 2007, 333–38; Thiessen 2011, 113; Fredriksen 2017, 210, n.12; Goodman 2007, 95.

Izates reigned as king over the Parthian kingdom of Adiabene during the first half of the first century CE.⁹ During a sojourn in Charax-Spansinu, he met a Jewish merchant named Ananias who began teaching him Jewish customs, eventually becoming his mentor (*A.J.* 20.34-35). Inspired and wanting to be thoroughly Judean (εἶναι βεβαίως Ἰουδαῖος), Izates decides to be circumcised. Surprisingly, Ananias explains that Izates’s worship of God would be entirely sufficient without circumcision (*A.J.* 20.41).¹⁰ The reason he prohibits circumcision for Izates is due to the social and cultural ramifications of circumcision itself (*A.J.* 20.42). Helena, his mother, also warns that circumcision would be viewed by his people as “strange and foreign” (ξένων...καὶ ἄλλοτριῶν), and would put Izates in danger (κίνδυνος), creating enmity (δυσμενεία) between him and his citizens. Because circumcision is associated with being a Jew (*A.J.* 20.39), Helena and Ananias are sure that Izates’s subjects will not wish to be ruled by someone who follows foreign national/ethnic traditions that are not their own (*A.J.* 20.47). As a sign of the seriousness of these consequences, Ananias threatens to end his mentorship with Izates should he circumcise (*A.J.* 20.40).¹¹ For Ananias and Helena, taking on circumcision had grave political and social repercussions.

⁹For a historical background of Adiabene and Jewish relations see Neusner 1964.

¹⁰This is not to say, however, that Ananias thinks that Izates can become a Jew without circumcision: Nolland 1981; Fredriksen 1991, 546, n. 42. On the inseparability between circumcision and Jewishness see Schiffman 1987; Schwartz 2007; Cohen, S. J. 1987; Zeitlin 1959.

¹¹Marciál argues that Ananias and Helena’s reservations are not with circumcision but with the political effects of how the Adiabene nation will receive “Jewish ancestral customs” and “being Jewish.” Marciál 2012, 69. For Marciál, because circumcision is not mentioned explicitly by Josephus in relation to ethnic Jewish traditions, it is

When Izates does eventually go through with the circumcision at the advice of another Jewish teacher named Eleazar, Helena and Ananias's horror only multiplies. Now, there was the risk of the deed "coming out into scrutiny" (εις ἔλεγχον ἐλθούσης) and the loss of the kingdom itself (*A.J.* 20.47). Additionally, the two felt that their own lives might be in danger as the people might think that they advised him to circumcise. In order to suppress these negative effects, Josephus implies God intervened and protected Izates (*A.J.* 20.48). In Josephus's narrative, the people of Izates' kingdom share the same understanding of Jewish circumcision as Josephus's Graeco-Roman audience.¹² The stigma surrounding circumcision infuses the narrative, showing how it could be a catalyst to inspire exclusion and social upheaval. The story of Izates illumines the stigma associated with circumcision by non-Jewish cultures, stigma that was openly recognised and acknowledged by Jewish writers like Josephus.

Like the Egyptians, Syrians and Northern African peoples, the stigma of circumcision caused Jewish people to face mockery and ridicule. Apion mocked circumcision before the Emperor in Rome (Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.137). This practice is something that Philo admits is common among many people, despite the antiquity of circumcision (*Spec.* 1.1.-2).

excluded. This is problematic for the simple reason that nowhere is circumcision separated from Jewish ancestral customs or Judaism.

¹²Josephus dedicates his *Antiquities*, *Life*, and work *Against Apion* to a certain Epaphroditus who is most probably a non-Jew (*A.J.* 1.9; *Vita* 430; *C. Ap.* 1.1, 2.1). However, Josephus's wider audience has been much debated, although generally scholarship recognises that they are Roman (e.g. Tuval 2013, 142), although how much social capital Josephus had has recently been questioned (See Cotton and Eck 2005). John Curran (2011) has shown that Jews also likely comprised some of his audience as well.

Stigma elicited ridicule, and ridicule gave way to stereotyping. Although they were not the only nation that practiced circumcision, Jewish people became especially known for circumcision. For example, in Martial a Jew is not signalled solely by the term *iudaeus*, but attached to the adjective *recutitus* (“circumcised”).¹³ Additionally, the *verpus* language we examined in the previous chapter shows how the exposure of the glans became a stereotype for being a Jew (Martial, *Ep.* 11.94). Another example can be found in Suetonius, who records an incident during the reign of Domitian whereby the genitals of a 90-year-old man were examined in public to see if he was a Jew.¹⁴ The reason for this customary examination was because of the *fiscus Iudaicus*, the reparation tax (“Jewish tax”) levied upon all Jews in the empire for the rebellion in 66-70 CE, even to those in Rome who did not participate.¹⁵ As Shaye Cohen argues, “in the eyes of the state, at least under Domitian (81-96 CE) and at least in Rome, if you were circumcised you were Jewish.”¹⁶ By the end of the first century circumcision became synonymous with being a Jew.

With circumcision having a particularly Jewish stigma, it meant that Jewish men would have felt restricted from participating in common Hellenistic and Roman public areas where nudity was prescribed (e.g. the *palaestra*, the gymnasium, the baths). In order to avoid social exclusion, some Jewish men

¹³Martial, *Ep.* 7.30.

¹⁴*Dom.* 12.2.

¹⁵Cohen, S. J. 1993, 15.

¹⁶Cohen, S. J. 1993, 16; Gager 1985, 56. Another example of circumcision as a stereotype for Jewish people can be found in Petronius, *Saty.* 102.14 where circumcision is discussed as a way to look Jewish.

sought ways to give themselves the appearance that they were not circumcised or Jewish in the first place. In the gymnasium, activities were often performed completely nude and so hiding their circumcision reduced any unwanted attention or ridicule they might receive due to their immodestly exposed glans.¹⁷ It is for this reason, Feldman argues, that it is unlikely that those with circumcision would even have been allowed to participate in the Olympic games.¹⁸ An example of the stigma and mockery that arose from Jewish circumcision in the gymnasium can be found in a papyrus from the late first-century BCE and early first-century CE. In *CPJ* 3.519, Allen Kerkeslager has shown how a Jewish athlete somewhat surprisingly comes out on to the field with a “Jewish load” (i.e. a circumcised penis), which arouses both laughter and disgust from the audience.¹⁹

The impulse to avoid humiliating situations like the one in *CPJ* 3.519 drove some Hellenising Jews in the events leading up to the Maccabean revolt to remove circumcision because it allowed them to enter the gymnasium unnoticed (1 Macc 1:14-15). They may have turned to ancient medicine to remove the marks of circumcision through epispasm (1 Macc 1:15).²⁰ Other Jews might have turned to prosthetics, like a fibula, a pin/ring placed through the foreskin to keep it in place. For example, Martial mocks a man named Menophilus whose fibula slipped off in the middle of a crowded *palaestra* (*Ep.*

¹⁷Goldstein 1974, 200.

¹⁸Feldman 1993, 155.

¹⁹Kerkeslager 1997.

²⁰On this see §2.5 in the previous chapter.

7.82). Although it was assumed that the fibula was in place to preserve his voice, as fibulas often were, instead it revealed Menophilus to be circumcised. With the fibula dislodged, his foreskin retracted exposing his glans. The use of prosthetics helped Jewish men to “pass” as foreskinned Greek and Roman men, with no one the wiser that their bodies were in fact mutilated and impaired.²¹ These prostheses helped Jewish men circumvent the stigma attached to their genital condition.

For non-Jews, circumcision was just one facet of a wider Jewish lifestyle that they deemed to be misanthropic. There was a longstanding view among ancient Greek and Roman authors that the Jews were antisocial toward non-Jewish peoples—that is, that their religious and communal customs prohibited them from full integration in to Hellenistic and Roman life.²² In the second century BCE, this view intensified and Jewish self-separation was viewed with hostility.²³ Our concern here is not with the doubtful reality of whether Jews hated their neighbours, but on the impression of Greek and Roman authors that Jews excluded themselves, especially by means of circumcision. For the Roman historian Tacitus, circumcision was an act that Othered the Jew: “They have instituted the circumcision of genitalia in order that they might be recognised by difference” (*circumcidere genitalia instituerunt, ut diversitate noscantur*).²⁴ In another example, Juvenal remarks that Jews will only help those in need who

²¹On “passing” and disability, see Ghai 2015, 212–13.

²²E.g. Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 40.3; 35.1. Berthelot 2008, 8.

²³See for example, Philo, *Virt.* 141; Josephus, *A.J.* 13.245; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 5.33.4. Feldman 1993, 125; Berthelot 2008, 8.

²⁴Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.

are circumcised (*Sat.* 14.103-4). To some ancient writers, one effect of circumcision was self-exclusion. Circumcision prevented Jewish bodies from assimilating fully to the normative and ideal body that was both socially expected and experienced by Greek and Roman men. So, while Jews lived among them, their pagan neighbours recognised circumcision as a demonstration of Jewish self-exclusion from the communities in which they lived.

At times the incompatibility between Jewish customs and Roman society reached a breaking point, often resulting in the temporary expulsion of Jews. These may have been rare occasions but their significance is no less important.²⁵ NT scholars would be most familiar with the supposed expulsion of some Jews from Rome by Caligula (*Acts* 18:2; Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4) as well as the end result of the Bar Kokhba revolts in Palestine during the early years of the second century. However, there are two instances when Jews were expelled from Rome that have important connections to Jewish circumcision.²⁶

The first instance comes from Valerius Maximus who records the expulsion of Jews from Rome by the praetor Cornelius Hispalus in 139 BCE (*Val Max.* 1.3.3). The transmission of this account is only through the epitomes

²⁵Some scholars play down the expulsion of Jews from Rome in order to emphasise their rarity: e.g. Feldman 1986, 19; Goodman 2004, 10. Still, these expulsions, though occasional, give insight into the ways non-Jews dealt with Jewish customs, and in the case of circumcision, Jewish bodies when they overstepped their social limits.

²⁶Philo alludes to some kind of persecution in *Leg.* 159-61 but it is unclear whether or not this has any connection with the expulsions during 139 BCE or 19 CE. For arguments against the connection between Philo and the Tiberian persecution of 19 CE see Merrill 1919; Smallwood 1956.

of two late antique authors Julius Paris and Januarius Nepotianus.²⁷ Yet, both epitome accounts share the same core features: Hispalus expelled the Jews from Rome for trying to pass on their religious practices to Romans.

The second instance comes from Tacitus who records the exile of some four thousand Egyptian and Jewish slaves to Sardinia as well as an ultimatum to the rest of the Egyptians and Jews in Italy, to either renounce their practices or be expelled from the rest from Italy by a senatorial edict (*Ann.* 2.85), possibly sometime around 19 CE. The question of whether all the Egyptians and Jews actually left Italy aside, Tacitus's account shows active political efforts to expel Jews for their religious customs. Both Suetonius (*Tib.* 26) as well as Josephus (*A.J.* 18.81-4) repeat details about this expulsion, although Josephus attributes it to a humorous story about a greedy Jewish man, touting the laws of Moses and defrauding a wealthy woman named Fulvia who had embraced the Jewish religion.²⁸ A later account by Cassius Dio, very likely referring to the same event, goes against Josephus' reinterpretation and aligns more with Tacitus and Suetonius, clarifying that the Jews were causing the Romans to abandon their traditions (*Hist. rom.* 57.18.5).²⁹

In these accounts circumcision is not mentioned explicitly. Their silence, however, does not rule out the role circumcision played in these expulsions.

Romans were especially aware of three aspects of the Jewish religion: keeping of

²⁷On the textual history see: Shackleton Bailey 2000, 5–6.

²⁸Josephus's version of the story may be unlikely: Moehring 1959, 302. Josephus also places the episode in the time of Pontius Pilate: Williams, M. H. 1989, 770, n.29.

²⁹Williams (1989, 768) is far too skeptical about the connection between Dio's account and the events of 19 CE.

the Sabbath, abstaining from pork, and circumcision.³⁰ It can hardly be said that when these authors mentioned the Jewish religion that circumcision contributed nothing. That Tacitus and Suetonius both indict Egyptian and Jewish rites in their accounts is telling, since a religious custom that both peoples shared was circumcision of the foreskin.³¹ Some minimise the role Jewish rites had in these expulsions.³² But what underlies both the expulsion in 139 BCE and the expulsion in 19 CE is the issue of Jewish customs.³³ Whether or not sustained Jewish missionary activity actually happened, clearly these Roman authors betray their fear of the infiltration of Jewish customs—sabbath-keeping, food laws, and most notorious of all, circumcision.³⁴ Although circumcision alone did not cause Jews to be expelled from Rome, in concert with Jewish customs as a whole, it contributed to their social exclusion.

But temporary expulsions due to the spread of Jewish customs like circumcision did not match the same kind of horror that came about when stigma, mockery, and exclusion coalesced into a deadly combination. When

³⁰Feldman 1993, 155–8; Schäfer 1997, 93–105; Barclay 1999, 438–9; Goodman 2004, 12; Gruen 2002, 28; Isaac 2004, 472–4; Yavetz 1993, 14; Feldman 1986, 31; Gager 1985, 56; Witherington III 1998, 455–6; Sevenster 1975, 134.

³¹Moehring (1959, 303) notes that “It is exactly this inability, or unwillingness, of the Roman authorities to differentiate between ‘the other’ Oriental cults and Judaism which forces Josephus to introduce and emphasis this distinction in his own narrative.”

³²E.g. Rutgers 1994, 74; Williams, M. H. 1989, 774.

³³Others who argue that Jewish customs were viewed as reason enough for expulsion in these accounts: Smallwood 1956, 319; Stern 1980, 70. On Jewish proselytism and sustained missionary activity see especially Goodman 2007; Gruen 2002, 33. It is true, however, that there was no singular Roman policy toward Jews and the various expulsions of Jews from Rome betray an *ad hoc* approach to situational problems rather than a sustained policy toward the Jews. On this see Rutgers 1994.

³⁴Seneca alludes to foreign food customs which he himself adhered to for a time during the reign of Tiberius Caesar (*Ep.* 108.22).

vitriol toward Jewish customs mutated into pogrom against Jewish people, circumcision became a particular catalyst for violence. Although seemingly hyperbolic at times, Paul's rhetorical antipathy toward circumcision on non-Jewish bodies was surpassed in Greek and Roman cultures, both in terms of the extent to which ancient pagans went to ostracise circumcision and the violence they were willing to enact toward the circumcised.

The most disturbing observations about non-Jewish views of circumcision come not from Greek or Roman sources but from refractions in the Jewish sources themselves, most especially in retellings of the events leading up to the Maccabean revolt (CW: violence toward children; murder). Some of the most visually ecphrastic descriptions of Jewish persecution are portrayed by ancient authors during the Seleucid rule of Judaea and the execution of mothers with their circumcised sons (1 Macc 1:60; 2 Macc 6:10; 4 Macc 4:25; Josephus, *A.J.* 12.256; cf. *As. Mos.* 8.1-3). It is easy to focus on whether or not such accounts were valorisations of those who circumcised their children in spite of the prohibitions against the practice. Yet, the historical violence relayed in each of these retellings, each with slightly modified details, is a manifestation of non-Jewish attitudes toward circumcision perceived by Jewish writers. In 1 Maccabees, mothers as well as their families who circumcised their children are put to death, having their infants hung around their necks. In 2 Maccabees, the infants are hung around the mothers' necks and paraded around the city, and then thrown head first from the wall (a detail retained in 4 Maccabees).³⁵ The

³⁵The subtext of throwing down may be in anticipation of the heroic fall of Razis in 2 Macc 14:43 which aided in salvation (See Schwartz 2008, 282).

killing of such innocence is so horrific that it demands divine retribution (cf. 2 Macc 8:4).³⁶ In Josephus, instead of being paraded, the women are *crucified* and strangled to death, while their sons are hung around their necks.³⁷ Josephus's modification of the story highlights two features consistent across each iteration of this motif. First, the women and children dying by strangulation underscores the physical violence implicit in previous narratives that came upon not only the circumcised but the circumciser. Secondly, the consistent detail in all the accounts – the tying of the children around their mother's necks – is exposed for what it is: spectacle. The circumcised sons with their exposed penises are grotesque jewellery for the suffocating mothers to wear as they gasp for breath and die in the way of revolutionaries. The excessive treatment of those who practiced circumcision illuminates the animus that non-Jews held toward circumcision. They do not simply portray the carrying out of Antiochus's punitive orders. The visceral brutality with which the punishments were exacted was equal to the level of revulsion felt toward the Jewish rite of circumcision.³⁸

As an impairment in the Graeco-Roman world, circumcision disfigured Jewish bodies. This disfigurement generated stigma, mockery, exclusion, and sometimes violence against it. These intertwining processes of de-

³⁶Schwartz 2008, 382.

³⁷τὰς δὲ γυναῖκας καὶ τοὺς παῖδας αὐτῶν, οὓς περιέτεμνον παρὰ τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως προαίρεσιν, ἀπήγγχον ἐκ τῶν τραχήλων αὐτοῦ τῶν ἀνεσταυρωμένων γονέων ἀπαρτῶντες (“But strangling the mothers and their children, who had circumcised against a commitment to the king, they hung them around the necks of the crucified parents”).

³⁸The historicity of these persecutions is not usually questioned. On the general reliability of 1-2 Maccabees see Schwartz 2008, 38–44.

normalisation—and in the case of the Maccabean revolt, de-humanisation—show that ancient non-Jewish social structures disabled circumcision.

3.4 Disabling Jewish Circumcision in Early Christian

Literature

The disabling of the circumcised did not stop with Greek and Roman culture, but continued as non-Jews converted to Christianity. Early Christian writers continued and generated disabling processes to further de-normalise circumcision. For example, Origen (*Princ.* 4.1.18) notes that circumcision was unseemly (*obscentitas*).³⁹ The fourth-century Alexandrian dialogue between Athanasius and Zacchaeus, argues that circumcision was the “shadow” (σκιά) but now God has revealed the “truth” (ἀλήθεια), echoing the language of the epistle to the Hebrews (*Dialogue of Athanasius and Zacchaeus* 123).⁴⁰ A similar sentiment was later reinforced by the fifth century Latin-West dialogue between Simon and Theophilus, where the latter argues how Christ’s arrival precipitated the end of circumcision, giving birth to a totally uncircumcised Church (*Dialogue of Simon and Theophilus* 19).⁴¹ Such views were amplified due to

³⁹Early Christian writers inherited non-Jewish ideals about the foreskin, a reflection of the culture into which they were born. Scholars now recognise that early Christian conceptions of body did not totally depart from the pagan cultures around them: Cardman 2008, 937–9

⁴⁰On its Alexandrian provenance see Varner 2004, 18.

⁴¹Varner (2004, 87–88) suggests it was probably written in Gaul. Whether or not these *Adversus* texts were simply made-up by Christians or reflect actual encounters between Christians and Jews is not our concern here. The persuasive arguments of Judith Lieu (2002) have shown that Jewish reality and Christian projection of the Jew in such literature need not be antithetical.

post-Pauline interpretation of fleshly circumcision as superfluous and essentially useless (cf. 1 Cor 7:18; Gal 5:6, 6:15). Because of Paul, not only did circumcision have no soteriological use, but now *uncircumcision* was considered the phallic ideal for all believers including Jews, reinforcing the already dominant Greek and Roman cultural ideal.

In early Christian writings, there was an oft-recognised tension between denouncing and reaffirming aspects of Judaism.⁴² To be sure, not all Christians understood circumcision negatively. One notable exception to this is Augustine.⁴³ For Augustine, circumcision was a necessary observance which pre-figured Christ (*Faust.* 19.17). As a law-observant Jew who came to know Christ, Paul's body anticipated the coming Messiah. In presenting circumcision this way, Augustine understood circumcision not as a disabling force on Jewish bodies, but as an *actio prophetica* that served a divine purpose. Circumcision for the Jews before Christ was christologically *enabling*.

Syrian writers were also much more amicably disposed toward circumcision.⁴⁴ So Aphrahat "the Persian sage" in fourth century defended the use of circumcision in Ancient Israel as the means by which the Jews could keep themselves separate and distinguishable from unclean nations (*Demonstrations*

⁴²Paget (1997, 212–13) takes this as a sign that early Christians acknowledged that they shared a relationship to the scriptures with the Jews, while also indicating differences in interpretation.

⁴³Pointed out by Fredriksen and Irshai 2006, 1016.

⁴⁴It has been suggested that Eastern Christians writers were much more sympathetic toward circumcision because they were in dialogue with rabbinic traditions. Simkovich 2016, 258–260. Indeed, Maren Niehoff has shown that Genesis Rabbah was aware of arguments against circumcision used by Justin and Origen and that the rabbis respond accordingly. Niehoff 2003, 114–123.

11.4, 6).⁴⁵ For Aphrahat in particular, circumcision was given to prosecute lawbreakers who denied that they were descendants of Abraham when caught in the act of idolatry, fornication, and other such acts (*Demonstrations* 11.6). Such an idea was already present in Josephus (*A.J.* 1.192).⁴⁶ Rather than exclusion, Aphrahat understands circumcision to be a way of making sure Abraham’s descendants stay law observant.

Nonetheless, negative responses to Jewish circumcision outnumber the positive ones. A few early Christian writers viewed circumcision as divinely punitive for the Jewish people. Sometime between the end of the first century and the early second century, the author of the Epistle of Barnabas left a terse reference about how the Jewish insistence on circumcision was actually sinful because they disobeyed God’s command to be spiritually circumcised and instead followed an “evil angel” (ἄγγελος πονηρός, Barn. 9.4). In the Second Temple period, there is evidence (e.g. Jubilees, the Scrolls, Josephus) that some Jews understood the Torah as being mediated via angels (cf. Gal 3:19; Acts 7:53; Heb 2:2).⁴⁷ It is not entirely clear what ἄγγελος πονηρός Barnabas references, although his argument that circumcision was not legitimate because it was also practiced by other nations and “priests of idols” (Barn. 9.6) may be suggestive (cf. 1 Cor 10:20).⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the heart of his argument is to

⁴⁵For a translation of this demonstration see Neusner 1971.

⁴⁶Simkovich 2016, 259.

⁴⁷On the mediation of the Jewish law through angels in ancient Jewish literature in relation to Barnabas see Carleton Paget 1991.

⁴⁸Some critical interpreters have understood this evil angel to be Satan, the devil, although without explicit justification from the text: Hilgenfeld 1853, 22, n. 19; Prostmeier 1999, 359–60, 360–61; Vermes 2012, 150.

make sure that believers source knowledge from the right authority. Believers should rely on knowledge received from angels of God through the way of light and not the way over which angels of Satan are appointed, the way of darkness (Barn. 18.1). For Barnabas circumcision came as a result of disobedient epistemology that relied on mediators not ordained by God.

In Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, the topic of circumcision frequently arises. Not only does Justin stigmatise Jewish circumcision but he engages in a whole range of other de-normalisation processes, effectually attacking Judaism. Justin argues that circumcision along with Sabbaths and festivals was imposed on the Jews because of their sins and hardness of heart (*Dial.* 18). Furthermore, Justin makes clear that circumcision was given to demarcate Jews from other peoples; circumcision is stereotypically Jewish (*Dial.* 16, 92). Part of the purpose of circumcision for the Jews, argues Justin, is ἵνα ὁ λαὸς οὐ λαὸς ᾦ, καὶ τὸ ἔθνος οὐκ ἔθνος (“so that the people might not be a people, and the nation not a nation”).⁴⁹ He attributes this saying to Hosea (cf. Hosea 1:9, 10; 2:23). What Justin means is that circumcision was intentionally given to make Jews liminal. They are a people, but they are not actually a people. They are a nation, but they are not actually a nation. Justin amplifies this exclusionary understanding of Jewish circumcision by arguing that it is also a way of making sure that they are expelled from the Holy Land and Jerusalem because of their participation in Christ's death, referring probably to the Bar Kokhba revolt, but potentially also

⁴⁹Cf. Theodoret of Cyrus who similarly argued that circumcision was a sign to prevent Israel from “intercourse” (ἐπιμιξία) with the nations (*Questions on Joshua* 4). For text and translation see Hill and Petruccione 2007. The term ἐπιμιξία can mean either some kind of social or sexual relationship.

the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE (*Dial.* 16, 19, 92).⁵⁰ Tertullian similarly suggested that circumcision was given as a sign in order to exclude Jews from entering Jerusalem due to the Hadrianic ban after its destruction and occupation by the Romans in the Bar Kokhba rebellion (*Adv. Jud.* 3). For Justin, however, circumcision served as a sign of present justified suffering for the Jewish people.⁵¹

John Chrysostom takes a different angle on the function of Jewish circumcision. The problem with Jews, according to him, was that they have unrestrained lust for other nations (*Hom. Gen.* 39.14). It is for this reason that God give them circumcision, to curb their sexually deviant desires to have sex with non-Jews rather than “keeping the patriarch’s line uncontaminated.”⁵² Chrysostom’s perspective on circumcision as a cure for lust provides a different angle to Philo’s defence of circumcision as a beneficial way of removing sexual passion (*QG* 3.61). While both Philo and Chrysostom argue that circumcision is a sign of temperance, for Philo sexual desire is latent in *all* men not just especially Jewish ones (*QG* 3.47). Chrysostom hypersexualises Jews alone and stigmatises circumcision as a means of gaining control over the lust innate to Jewish men. Even more so, Chrysostom enslaves circumcised Jews by the metaphors he uses to characterise the function of circumcision. Circumcision is a bit in their mouths, a chain, or shackles on their feet (*Hom. Gen.* 39.14). In this framework, circumcision acts as a prosthesis in order to allow Jews to

⁵⁰Stylianopoulos 1975, 136.

⁵¹Livesey 2010, 127–9.

⁵²Translation by Halton and Hill 1990, 384.

function properly without being inhibited by their lusts. Simultaneously, however, circumcision also imprisons, restraining Jews from acting on their lustful nature.

Through sexual prosthesis, exclusion, divine chastisement, and angelic deception early Christians de-normalised circumcision. Such effects show how early Christian theological writings disabled Jewish circumcision.

3.5 Paul's Circumcision as Disability

I have argued that circumcised peoples, especially circumcised Jews, have been subject to de-normalisation processes by Greek, Roman, and even early Christian cultures. Combined with the fact that circumcision was an impairment in the ancient world as argued in the previous chapter, these processes reveal circumcision as a disability.

Since Paul was a circumcised Jew, his circumcision should therefore be considered a disability from a Graeco-Roman point of view. The same should be said about Jesus and John the Baptist, whose circumcision is made explicit in the gospel of Luke (1:59; 2:21), as well as the other Jewish disciples and members of the early Jewish Christian movement (e.g. Timothy, Acts 16:3). Without qualifying the extent to which circumcised Jews should be stigmatised, it is unclear how Jews like Jesus, the Twelve, and Paul would have escaped being associated with these negative cultural effects.⁵³ It comes as no surprise, then,

⁵³The work of Andrew S. Jacobs (2012) has shown how some early Christians struggled with Jesus's circumcision, both in terms of its necessity in the first place and its purpose for Christians who follow in Christ's footsteps.

that when a spoon was made with Paul's image as an athlete in the Late Roman Empire that his penis reflected the foreskinned ideal rather than his true Jewish circumcision (Figure 3.1). Such a portrait displays not how Paul was but how early non-Jewish Christians wanted him to be.

We should expect that early Christian communities to which Paul wrote (Rome, Philippi, Corinth, Galatia, and so on) would also have been aware of many of the negative effects generated by Jewish circumcision. An ex-pagan believer of Jesus Christ, whose head was filled with the knowledge that circumcision was vastly opposite to the corporeal ideals s/he was familiar with—that it resonated more with the animalistic than the civilised and that it generated a whole host of social problems—might look strangely at how Paul had confidence in circumcision over and against the “mutilation” of his gentile opponents in Philippians 3. From a non-Jewish point of view, were they not simply the same thing? Paul's confidence in his circumcision is confounding and contrary to everything that non-Jews knew about de-foreskinned phalluses.

From Paul's perspective—a Jewish perspective—his circumcision was neither an impairment nor a disability. It was socially enabling for him and it was a badge of obedience that in the time before the Messiah contributed to his own righteousness out of the law (Phil 3:6). Gentiles who understood Jewish circumcision to be theologically enabling may have viewed Paul's circumcision similarly. Furthermore, judaising gentiles (gentiles who took on circumcision) may have understood circumcision as enabling for both Jewish *and* non-Jewish bodies.



Figure 3.1. Saint Paul as an Athlete. ca. 350-400 CE. Syria. Silver, silver gilt, and niello. The Cleveland Museum of Art. John L. Severance Fund 1964.39.

Photograph courtesy of the Cleveland Museum of Art under CCO 1.0 Universal Public Domain license (<https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1964.39>)

Being aware of circumcision as a disability to non-Jews allows us to understand how Paul's circumcision in Phil 3:5 might be understood from one further perspective. Some gentile believers would have still viewed circumcision as a non-ideal physical condition for both Jew and non-Jew. If the evidence from non-Jewish early Christian writers is anything to go by, this was likely the perspective adopted by the many of Paul's communities.

It is not necessary for us to have explicit evidence that Paul experienced these processes of de-normalisation himself to argue that his circumcision was a disability in his Graeco-Roman social context.⁵⁴ The widespread evidence disabling circumcision indicates that Paul was himself very likely aware of the negative effects circumcision could generate. In fact, as the next chapter will show, not only was Paul aware of these negative effects but he was a proponent of them among his own missionary communities.

⁵⁴Troy Martin (1999) has argued that the "temptation of the flesh" in Galatians 4:14 refers to circumcision, but there is little explicit evidence in the Galatian text that makes this conclusion evident, hence why Martin's interpretation has not been widely accepted.

4. DISABLING GENTILE CIRCUMCISION

4.1 Does Paul Disable Circumcision?

Because of the vilification of circumcision by Greek and Roman culture, we might expect to find Paul counteracting negative or disabling portrayals of circumcision in the many places the theme appears in his writings. A closer look evinces a more complex situation. Paul does celebrate Jewish circumcision, including his own (Phil 3:5; Rom 3:1). He also acknowledges its importance as a seal of Abraham's righteousness, which unites both Jew and non-Jew in Christ (Rom 4:11-12). But elsewhere, Paul's rhetoric against circumcision for gentiles mirrors the ways Greek and Roman culture de-normalised the condition.

This chapter analyses the extent to which Paul perpetuates the very same disabling processes that disable his own circumcision. I focus in particular on Paul's use of circumcision in Philippians 3:2 and Galatians 5:2-12, two key passages where circumcision and Graeco-Roman conceptions of circumcision have the clearest overlap. I analyse the rhetoric of each instance in the wider context of Paul's letters before comparing Paul's use of circumcision with non-Jewish disabling cultures. In these passages, I find Paul not only reinforces prevalent disabling attitudes toward circumcision but, because of his christological beliefs, he is forced to add to the stigma of circumcision.

In Chapters Two and Three, I separated impairment and disability for the sake of my argument, but the two were clearly intertwined with one another. The ways that circumcision was differentiated aesthetically and

functionally from the ideal foreskin signalled that impairment was itself a process of de-normalisation. For brevity, I treat the evidence of impairment and disability in this chapter under the single category of disability.

4.2 De-Normalising Gentile Circumcision in Philippians 3

At the beginning of Philippians 3, Paul exhorts his audience to “rejoice in the Lord” (3:1).¹ He has spent the latter half of the previous chapter endorsing Timothy and Epaphroditus as model co-workers in Christ who, like him, should be honoured because they risk their lives for his gospel (2:19-30). By Phil 3:2, however, Paul shatters the mood of admonishment and joy with a warning about a different kind of ministering worker:

βλέπετε τοὺς κύνας, βλέπετε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας, βλέπετε τὴν κατατομήν.
Beware the dogs! Beware the evil workers! Beware the mutilation!

In this passage, Paul de-normalises gentile circumcision in similar ways to how Graeco-Roman visual culture de-normalised circumcision as analysed in

¹The argument of this chapter is not dependent upon the unity of Philippians as a letter. In my opinion, the evidence points to its unity. Despite a small number of lacunae, our earliest manuscript of Philippians (P46, ca. 200 CE) preserves Philippians in the familiar form known today. The mention of multiple letters in Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians (Pol. *Phil.* 3.2) may not mean multiple known letters, but may be a deduction based on Phil 3:1 (So Bauer 1920, 287). The absence of references to what is traditionally known as Letter C (Phil 3:2-4:3) or Letter A (4:10-20) in the so-called apocryphal Pauline letter to the *Laodiceans* leads some to conclude that the exemplar used by the Laodicean author must have been an earlier detached version of a Philippian letter (Sellew 1994). Aside from the valid critiques already given for this argument, there is also the question of comprehensiveness. We should not assume that the Laodicean letter meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive, especially in light of its brevity (see Holloway 2004, 9–11; Holloway 2017, 12–13).

Chapters Two and Three. To understand how Paul de-normalises circumcision in Phil 3:2, the identity of these “dogs” and their relationship to circumcision must be clarified.

The epithets that Paul uses in Phil 3:2 tell us who these workers are and what they are doing.² In the wider context of Philippians 3, ἡ κατατομή, often translated “mutilation,” has a clear connection with circumcision. In the very next verse, Phil 3:3, Paul uses an obvious wordplay (*paranomasia*) with ἡ κατατομή in Phil 3:2: “For we are the circumcision” (ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἐσμεν ἡ περιτομή).³ The wordplay between ἡ περιτομή and ἡ κατατομή suggests a relationship between circumcision and the activities of these “wicked workers.”

Scholars often assume a similarity between the workers in Phil 3:2 and the “agitators” compelling non-Jews to circumcise in Paul’s letter to the Galatians.⁴ Indeed, Paul’s contempt with ministers who try and convince non-Jewish Jesus followers to take on circumcision in Galatians (Gal 5:12) mirrors the contempt behind the epithets he uses in Phil 3:2. Paul prohibits non-Jews from circumcising precisely because they are justified through the faith of Jesus

² Phil 3:2 appears disconnected from the previous section, serving as a kind of “header” for the following discussion. Smit 2013, 117. In actuality, as Reed, argues, “3:2 resumes a series of present-tense imperatives begun in 2:29” (προσδέχεσθε...ἔχετε...βλέπετε). Reed, J. T. 1996, 86. The remark Paul makes in 3:1 (τὰ αὐτὰ γράφειν ὑμῖν ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐκ ὀκνηρόν, ὑμῖν δὲ ἀσφαλές) should be viewed as a parenthetical. See Reed, J. T. 1996, 88–89. In Paul, when the imperative βλέπετε is attached only to an accusative object and not with any auxiliary verb or clauses (e.g. Gal 5:15; 1 Cor 8:9; 16:10), it can denote both caution *as well as* a sense of visible sight (1 Cor 1:26; 10:18; 2 Cor 10:7). Kilpatrick 1968.

³ Vincent 1897, 92; Lohmeyer 1929, 125; Müller 1993, 147.

⁴ E.g. Martin translates ἡ κατατομή in Phil 3:2 as “those mutilators,” implying that they are workers going around mutilating non-Jews, presumably through circumcision. Hawthorne and Martin 2004, 173.

Christ and not through works of the law like circumcision (Gal 2:16). Because circumcision is unnecessary for non-Jews, it is essentially just a mutilation of the flesh. By calling these opponents in Philippians “the mutilation” as opposed to “the circumcision,” Phil 3:2 probably refers to people who, like the agitators in Galatia, “mutilate” the bodies of non-Jews with circumcision or are themselves “mutilated” by circumcision.

In fact, Paul’s use of κύνες points to a construal of these opponents in Philippians as having undergone circumcision themselves as judaising gentiles.⁵ The majority of interpreters take Phil 3:2 as a reference to Jewish Jesus followers.⁶ Since the time of Origen, interpreters have understood Paul’s use of κύνες Phil 3:2 to be a reversal of a well-known Jewish slur for gentiles, signalling that the κύνες are in fact Jewish.⁷ This is the only evidence that alludes to the Jewish ethnicity of the workers in Phil 3:2.

However, Jews did not refer to gentiles as “dogs” with any consistency or frequency.⁸ In other words, even in Jewish texts where gentiles are called

⁵I use the term “judaising” instead of “Judaisers” because the verb Ἰουδαίζω is best understood as an intransitive. For this see the discussion in Novenson 2014, 29–31.

⁶E.g. Dibelius 1925, 67; Müller 1993, 144; Friedrich 1976, 159; Barclay 1995, 113; Bockmuehl, M. 1997, 186; Fowl 2005, 145–6. Lohmeyer (1929, 126) thought it was non-Christian Jews. For an overview of the history of interpretation see Nanos 2009, 449–57.

⁷This interpretation is ubiquitous amongst modern commentators: Lohmeyer 1929, 124; Müller 1993, 142; Hawthorne and Martin 2004, 174; Fee, G. D. 1999, 132–3; Fowl 2005, 145; Reumann 2008, 146; Vincent 1897, 92. Origen. *Hom. Gen.* 3.4 (PG 12:178b) Origen says the mutilation in Phil 3:2 is “speaking about the Jews who are circumcised in the flesh” (*de Judaeis loquens qui circumciduntur en carne*). Interestingly, the translator of Origen renders κατατομή with *circumcisio* rather than *mutilatio*. Mark Nanos (2009, 454) had previously traced its origins to John Chrysostom, *Hom. Phil.* 11.

⁸Nanos 2009; Thiessen 2017.

“dogs” their “dogness” is not intrinsic to their gentleness.⁹ For example, in 1 Sam 17:43 Goliath mocks David’s choice of weaponry by comparing *himself* to a dog. While Goliath is compared to a dog in this passage, the text does not connect being a dog to being a Philistine.¹⁰ Some Jews did call gentiles dogs, but this is different from saying that all Jews called gentiles dogs or that calling gentiles dogs was a stereotypical Jewish idiom. Just because some Jews called gentiles “dogs” is not a sure indicator that Paul’s use of κύνες implies Jewish agitators.

Instead, the use of κύνες in the context of genital modification indicates the group in Phil 3:2 are gentiles and not Jews. Ancient Greek writers used the word κύων as a nickname for foreskin.¹¹ As mentioned before, in ancient Greek culture, athletes would tie up their foreskin with a ligature called a κυνοδέσμη (“dog-tie” or “dog-leash”).¹² The second-century CE grammarian Phrynichus of Bythnia describes the κυνοδέσμη as follows:

⁹Nanos acknowledges these texts but minimises them in his argument, eventually overstating in his conclusion that “Jews do not call Gentiles...dogs.” Nanos 2009, 481. See also Thiessen 2017, 26–28.

¹⁰Cf. 1 Sam 17:43; 2 Kgs 8:13; Philo, *Prob.* 89-91.

¹¹Here I draw on the forthcoming work of my colleague, Ryan Collman (2021), although he and I arrive at slightly different conclusions. Collman argues that in ancient Greek culture κύων served as a slur for the penis only.

¹²Julius Pollux (2nd century CE) describes it as “the cord with which they tie up the foreskin, they call this a dog-leash” (ᾧ δὲ τὴν πόσθην ἀπεδοῦντο, τοῦτον τὸν δεσμὸν κυνοδέσμιον ὠνόμαζον). Text from Dindorfius 1924. The term πόσθη can refer to the penis but can be found in our extant medical literature as referring to the foreskin. E.g. Dioscorides, *Mat. med.* 4.153.4. For translation see Beck 2005, 309. LSJ, s.v. “ποσθη” cites Rufus and Oribasius as using it in terms of foreskin.

αἷς τὰ αἰδοῖα οἱ Ἀττικοὶ ἀπεσκολυμμένοι ἀποδοῦνται. κύνα δὲ τὸ αἰδοῖον ἐκάλουν.

“Dog-ties”: by which the nude people of Attica bind their foreskins. They call the foreskin “dogs.”¹³

In light of this evidence, when Paul said, “Beware the dogs” (βλέπετε τοὺς κύνας), recipients could have heard κύνες and understood it as an allusion to “the foreskins.”¹⁴ The designations “the foreskin” and “the circumcision” are

¹³ Translation of this statement has been checked because of the verb ἀποσκολύπτω. Dingwall translates it: [T]he thing with which the people of Attica who have their prepuces rolled back bind their penis: they call the genitals (or ‘the glans’) κύων (dog), δεσμός being a chain.” Dingwall 1925, 70. This translation is problematic in numerous ways, one of which is because the purpose of the κυνοδέσμη is to keep the foreskin in place. Since Greeks did not circumcise nor wish to have their glans exposed, the descriptor “the people of Attica who have their prepuces rolled back” makes little sense. At the time Dingwall wrote, previous lexical evidence for ἀποσκολύπτω was sparse and so it was often glossed as found in LSJ (s.v. “ἀποσκολύπτω”): “to strip the skin off,” “circumcise” or “pull back the foreskin.” However, Aelius Dionysius, the second century CE rhetorician (*Attica onomata*, 162) defines ἀποσκολύπτω as ἀφελεῖν τὸ δέρμα ἢ ἀπογυμνῶσαι (“to take away or expose the skin”). Text from Erbse 1950, 95–151. The verb ἀπογυμνῶ can mean both to strip clothing off (Pseudo-Aristotle, *Probl.* 1.55 [866^a22]) or also to expose or reveal something (Hesiod, *Op.* 730; Appian, *Bell. civ.* 1.57; Pausanias, *Descr.* 4.22.4). This description makes a lot more sense in Phrynichus’s context since Greeks did not typically expose the penile glans or circumcise their foreskin. They did, however, train and compete in the gymnasium naked, and it is in this context where one sees the κυνοδέσμη out in the open. While the term αἰδοῖον generally designates the genital area, a κυνοδέσμη does not bind the whole of the genital area, nor of the penis, but only the foreskin. LSJ, s.v. “αἰδοῖον.” Therefore, αἰδοῖον must refer specifically to the foreskin.

¹⁴ The medical writer Oribasius (fourth century CE) affirms that the foreskin was called a dog. He writes concerning a condition: “From birth, with some the glans is not pierced according to nature, but the aperture [the penile meatus] is under what is called “the dog” and down the rounding off of the glans” (ἀλλ’ ὑπὸ τῷ κυνὶ καλουμένῳ καὶ κατὰ τὸν ἀπαρτισμὸν τῆς βαλάνου τὸ τρημὰ ἐστίν). *Collectionum Medicarum Reliquiae*, 50.3.1. Text from Raeder 1933. Oribasius appears to refer to a kind of glanular or even subcoronal hypospadias where a male baby is born with a urethral opening at the bottom or beyond the penile corona under the foreskin. Thus, here κύων does not refer to the penis as a whole but in particular its prepuce. There is evidence that κύων could refer not only to a man’s foreskin but a woman’s labia. In Aristophanes, *Lys.* 158, κύων is used in the expression κύνα δέρειν δεδαρμένην (“thrash the thrashed dog”). While Collman has taken this phrase to refer to penile masturbation, that κύνα and δεδαρμένην are feminine forms indicates that it probably refers to female masturbation. So Henderson 1991, 133. *pace* Collman 2021. Additionally, the wordplay on skin and skinning (δέρειν δεδαρμένην) may anatomically allude to the labia minora of a woman’s public region, which could be construed by

significant for Paul. Paul uses the expressions “the circumcision” (Rom 2:26-7, 3:30, 4:9; Gal 2:7, 8, 9) or “those out of circumcision” (Rom 4:12; 2:12) exclusively as an epithet for Jews.¹⁵ Likewise, he also uses the title ἡ ἀκροβυστία to refer to non-Jews (Rom 2:26, 27; 3:30; 4:9, 10, 11, 12; 1 Cor 7:18, 19; Gal 2:7; 5:6; 6:15). While it is often translated as “the uncircumcised” or “the uncircumcision,” the appellation ἡ ἀκροβυστία refers specifically to “the foreskin.” Although having foreskin is certainly a state of uncircumcision, ἀκροβυστία is not the same as the alpha privative ἀπερίτμητος, which specifically refers to being “uncircumcised.” Hearers who were knowledgeable of Paul’s use of ἀκροβυστία would have interpreted his use of κύων in Phil 3:2 as a reference to non-Jews.

If these workers are non-Jews circumcising other non-Jews, then it is probable that they have also circumcised themselves. The epithet Paul assigns to this group, ἡ κατατομή, not only refers to what they do but what has been done to them. Thus, these workers were judaising gentiles. Because these were gentiles who took on circumcision, then the derisive titles that Paul uses against them are also a disparagement of their circumcised condition.

Paul’s denigration of these judaising gentile workers in Philippians 3, who have circumcised and seek to circumcise other non-Jews, reinforces de-

ancient medical writers as being a foreskin-like aspect of female genitalia. Galen related the prepuce of a man to a woman’s pudendum, the vulva (*UP* 14.6).

¹⁵ A point noted by Dunn 1988, 120. This pattern is repeated in the so-called deutero-Paulines (Eph 2:11; Col 4:11) and the Pastorals (Titus 1:10). I do not make a distinction between the instance of “the circumcision” as metonym for Jews (e.g. Rom 2:26, etc.) and “those out of circumcision” (e.g. Rom 4:12) as Marcus does. Marcus 1989, 75–6.

normalising processes toward circumcision already happening in wider Graeco-Roman society and culture. In the first instance, his mocking of them and their condition to the Philippians through the use of deviant titles like “dogs” and “mutilation” shows his intention to generate and reinforce stigma about circumcision on gentile bodies. Additionally, even though these judaising gentiles had their foreskins removed, Paul refuses to include them among “the circumcised” (Phil 3:3). The title ἡ κατατομή is a means of excluding these gentiles despite their circumcised condition. Even though he and they are both circumcised, in Phil 3:2 Paul maligns the genital condition of his opponents.

His labelling of the judaising gentiles as a ἡ κατατομή, “a mutilation,” also indicates that they have altered their bodies in an undesirable way. In Greek texts around the time of Paul’s writing, ἡ κατατομή is used to express a division, groove, or channel that has altered the natural form of an object (e.g. rocks, quarries, rivers, plants).¹⁶ The term ἡ κατατομή is rare in ancient Jewish literature. Symmachus’s (2nd century CE) Greek translation of Jer 48:37 (31:37 OG) is the only extant instance where κατατομή is applied to a human body. There, it translates the word חַדָּג in the Hebrew expression עַל כָּל־יַיִדִים גַּדָּת (“on all the hands, slashes”), portraying κατατομή as a harmful alteration of the body. Additionally, the use of the cognate verb κατατέμνω in the OG occurs only in contexts concerning ritual self-harm (Lev 21:5; 3 Kgdms 18:28; Hos 7:14; Isa 15:2).¹⁷ In using ἡ κατατομή, Paul emphasises that, by

¹⁶Theophrastus, *Hist. plant.* 4.8.10; *IG II²* 1582 1.70; Plutarch, *Amic. mult.* 93F.

¹⁷On this point see Reumann 2008, 468; Thiessen 2017, 27.

“circumcising,” these non-Jews have modified their genitals away from what he views to be the non-Jewish ideal, foreskin. They have distorted the physical aesthetic of their penises. Thus, with ἡ κατατομή Paul perpetuates circumcision as a non-ideal. The removal of their foreskin was not circumcision but a mutilation, and their attempts to circumcise other non-Jews were not acts of circumcision but acts of genital violence.

While reinforcing circumcision as a mutilation, Paul also sustains the Graeco-Roman tendency to hypersexualise circumcision. In Phil 3:18-19 Paul describes “enemies of the Messiah’s cross” whose “god is the belly and glory is in their shame” (ὧν ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία καὶ ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ αἰσχύνῃ αὐτῶν). Francis Watson has observed that both αἰσχύνῃ (OG Ex 20:26, cf. MT; Rev 16:15) and κοιλία were euphemisms for the genital area (cf. OG Deut 7:13; 28:4, 11, 18, 53; 30:9; Ps 131:11; 2 Kgdms 7:12; 2 Kgdms 16:11).¹⁸ Some earliest readers of 3:18-19 understood there to be a connection between Phil 3:18-19 and 3:2 as $\mathfrak{B}46$ includes βλέπετε before τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ echoing the repetition of βλέπετε in 3:2.¹⁹ Paul portrays the workers of Phil 3:2 as worshippers of their “mutilated stomachs.” The judaising gentiles were obsessed with gashed genitals. For Graeco-Roman readers, the worship of the phallus would have recalled the cult of Dionysus or the Liberalia of Liber Pater, where fertility and excess converged in the symbol of large erect phalluses with exposed

¹⁸ Watson 1986, 76. For the latter observation on κοιλία, Watson draws on C. Mearns. Watson 1986, 203, n.28. Cf. Sandnes 2002, 145–146.

¹⁹ Cf. Reumann 2008, 570

glandes. By presenting these workers as deifying their circumcised members, Paul recalls and reinforces wider hypersexualisation of circumcision.

Paul's portrayal of these circumcised gentiles as animals is the most striking parallel between the depiction of these judaising gentiles in Phil 3:2 and wider Graeco-Roman disabling cultures. By using "dogs" (κύνες) as a metaphor for these agitators, Paul animalises them, marking them as sub-human. What is more, because these κύων are associated with circumcision by way of the expression ἡ κατατομή, Paul stresses circumcision as an animalistic practice. This promotes the bestial rhetoric witnessed in the visual culture from Chapter Two.

Turning away from the workers in Phil 3:2, Paul's use of "the circumcision" in Phil 3:3 and elsewhere in his letters perpetuates the stereotyping of circumcision as quintessentially Jewish. Joel Marcus argues that the Pauline expressions "the circumcision" and "the foreskin" were used by Jewish and non-Jewish Christians in Rome and elsewhere as insults against one another. However, there is better evidence to suggest that Paul himself is the one who coined this usage.²⁰ By appealing to Greek and Roman audiences with this language of "the circumcision" Paul does not introduce them to the stereotype, but concretises the already common notion that typified Jews with

²⁰ Marcus (1989, 76, 9) observes that even in ancient Jewish literature, Jews and non-Jews were rarely if ever referred to as "the circumcision" or "the foreskin," respectively, except in Paul. Marcus relies heavily on a reconstruction of a conflict between the "weak" and the "strong" in Romans for his case, but these terms are used in Galatians written years before the supposed conflict in Rome. There Paul uses "the circumcision" and "the foreskin" simply as designations for missional spheres (Gal 2:7, 8, 9).

circumcision.²¹ Rather than subverting the caricature of circumcision and Jews, Paul upholds it.

In Philippians, Paul reinforces the hypersexuality and animalistic nature of circumcision seen in ancient Greek and Roman visual culture. He echoes the Graeco-Roman view that circumcision was a bodily mutilation. In doing so he too marks circumcision as a physical impairment. Paul also perpetuates the use of circumcision as a reductive and stereotypical indicator of Jewishness, signalling circumcision as a disability. By distinguishing circumcision for a Jew from circumcision for a non-Jew, Paul deconstructs the wider Graeco-Roman stigma that says all circumcision, regardless of whose body it occupies, is mutilation. Instead, Paul limits that mutilation to non-Jewish bodies. For Paul, whether something is circumcision or not depends on a person's ethnic identity.

Although Paul makes a distinction between circumcision on a Jewish body and circumcision on a non-Jewish body, this does not mean that his audience would have been able to compartmentalise his disabling of circumcision from Jews. The effect of his circumcision-as-mutilation rhetoric in Phil 3:2 is that he stigmatises his own circumcision and recapitulates his own disability.

²¹ On the reduction of Jews to their genitals and its perpetuation in Pauline interpretation see Marchal 2019, 93–4.

4.3 Disabling Judaizing Gentiles and Redeeming them through Castration (Gal 5:2-6, 12)

Although Paul does not directly call circumcision a mutilation in his letter to the Galatians as he does in Philippians, he does point to the serious consequences gentiles would face if they became circumcised. These consequences heightened rather than neutralised cultures that treated circumcision as a disability. In what follows, I analyse Paul's argument in Gal 5:2-6 and its relationship to circumcision. For Paul, gentiles who circumcise will find themselves in a difficult spot when it comes to righteousness, and the only way out is to remove their circumcision through castration (Gal 5:12).

In Gal 5:2-6, Paul argues that Christ will not be any benefit to the Galatians if they take on circumcision:

2 Ἴδε ἐγὼ Παῦλος λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν περιτέμνησθε, Χριστὸς ὑμᾶς οὐδὲν ὠφελήσει. 3 μαρτύρομαι δὲ πάλιν παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ περιτεμνομένῳ ὅτι ὀφειλέτης ἐστὶν ὅλον τὸν νόμον ποιῆσαι. 4 κατηργήθητε ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ, οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε, τῆς χάριτος ἐξεπέσατε. 5 ἡμεῖς γὰρ πνεύματι ἐκ πίστεως ἐλπίδα δικαιοσύνης ἀπεκδεχόμεθα. 6 ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὔτε περιτομή τι ἰσχύει οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη.

2 Look, I, Paul, am telling you that if you become circumcised, Christ will not be of benefit to you. 3 I testify again to each man who becomes circumcised that he is obligated to do the whole of the Law. 4 You have been released from Christ, those who are being justified in the law; you have lost grace. 5 For in the spirit of faith we are eagerly awaiting the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision equals anything (in relation to righteousness), nor foreskin, but faith working through love (equals something in relation to righteousness).

In Paul's perspective, when a gentile circumcises he is obligated to do the whole Law (5:3). This is problematic from the moment of circumcision,

however, since in the act of circumcising as an adult, and not on the eighth day as commanded in Gen 17:12, a gentile has already broken a law for which there is no ritual means for making atonement (cf. Gal 3:10).²² As a result, those who take on circumcision are “released from Christ” and they have “lost grace” (Gal 5:4).²³ As John Barclay argues, Paul thinks that circumcision after accepting Christ annuls any benefit they might receive from the gift of Christ.²⁴

In Gal 5:2-5, gentiles who circumcise after they have begun following Jesus as Messiah ended up both covenantally and eschatologically disabled. Instead of being a part of the covenant, judaizing gentiles—both those who encouraged others to circumcision and the people they circumcised—lost access to righteousness through the gift of the Messiah. For Paul, the exclusivity of faith in the Messiah as *the* means to future righteousness excluded all other paths to righteousness for gentiles.²⁵ Put another way, Paul’s christology excluded circumcised gentiles from eschatological righteousness. Because of

²² Thiessen argues, rightly in my opinion, that the present tense-forms in Gal 6:13, περιτεμνόμενοι and φυλάσσουσιν, indicate that the non-observance of the Law has happened for the Galatian opponents concurrently with the circumcising. Thiessen 2016, 96. In other words, when they got circumcised as adults, because they were not circumcised on the eighth day (Gen 17:12, 14; Lev 12:3), they immediately became Law-breakers. Paul boasts in his eighth-day circumcision in Phil 3:5 in comparison to the mutilation of his opponents in Phil 3:2 for this very same reason. They opponents in Phil 3:2 are gentiles that have been circumcised as adults and therefore their circumcision is an illegitimate “mutilation.”

²³ For the translation of καταργέω as “released” see Rom 7:2 and 7:6. On the translation of ἐκπίπτω + genitive as referring to losing something see Josephus, *A.J.* 7.203, Philo, *Leg.* 3.183, 2 Peter 3:12. For the function of χάρις in Paul see the work of Barclay 2015. For the wider context of χάρις in ancient contexts of benefaction see Harrison 2003.

²⁴ Barclay 2015, 392.

²⁵ Barclay is correct to note that the indispensable nature of Christ marks Paul’s χάρις-language as the gravitational centre of Paul’s thought: Barclay 2010, 47.

this, his christology can be viewed as a process that disabled circumcised gentiles. At the eschaton, circumcised gentiles—disabled without Christ, without grace, without even obedience to the Law—would be judged and fall short on account of their unrighteousness. Circumcision at that point is not a symbol of a covenant to God but a symbol of rebellion against Christ. On this account, circumcised gentiles who followed Jesus would have had to face both the ridicule, exclusion, stigma, and mockery from their pagan neighbours as well as the theological shame from those within their own Jesus movement, Paul included.

On top of these disabling processes, it is tempting to add Gal 5:6 as a Pauline censure of circumcision's absolute value. If this interpretation is correct then it would be an additional way Paul reinforces the Graeco-Roman perspective that circumcision was worthless. A brief examination of what Paul means in Gal 5:6 suggests, however, that he does not consider circumcision to be totally devoid of value, but only that its value for righteousness is relative to Christ.

Whether circumcision has value or not is dependent upon how we understand the verb ἰσχύω. John Barclay translates Gal 5:6 as, “Neither circumcision is of value, nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love.”²⁶ He notes correctly that the verb ἰσχύω when paired with an accusative should be understood in a financial sense (“to be worth something”), citing Josephus

²⁶ Barclay 2010, 37.

(A.J. 14.106).²⁷ It is important to emphasise that this example does not refer to valuation *per se* but to *equivalence*. Josephus says the mina ἰσχύει 2.5 lbs, it weighs/is worth 2.5 units. However, if the statement is negated, it does not mean that the mina is worth nothing, only that it is not *equivalent* to 2.5 lbs.²⁸

In Gal 5:6, Paul gestures to the “worth” in question with the indefinite pronoun (τι). While it is often translated as “anything,” in context τι is clearly related to the reception of justification (Gal 5:4) and eschatological righteousness (Gal 5:5). The final clause of the verse suggests this connection: ἀλλὰ πίστις δι’ ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη implies the verb ἰσχύει and ἀλλά is meant to signal a reversal of οὔτε...τι (“but faith working through love equals something”). Paul is not making a universal statement, but only that faith is “something” in relation to righteousness.²⁹ Paul is concerned with whether the righteousness of circumcision or foreskin is equivalent to the righteousness of

²⁷ Barclay 2010, 52 n. 51.

²⁸ An examination of other instances of ἰσχύω + accusative shows that it is an expression about equivalence of worth. Polybius (*Poly.* 5.26.13) mentions how counters on an ancient abacus can be thought to be worth a copper coin in one moment or a talent on the next depending on the will of the calculator: ἐκεῖναί τε γὰρ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ ψηφίζοντος βούλησιν ἄρτι χαλκοῦν καὶ παραυτίκα τάλαντον ἰσχύουσιν (“For these [counters], according to the will of the calculator, are *equal* at one moment to a copper and then at another to a talent”). Likewise, in the Similitudes of Hermas (Herm. Sim. 6.4.4), those who spend a day in luxury will have a day of punishment *equivalent* to a year allocated to them (ὅλον ἐνιαυτὸν ἰσχύει ἡ ἡμέρα).

²⁹ Similarly, in Gal 6:3, Paul’s contrasts those who are “nothing” (μηδὲν) but think they are “something” (τι). This is not a universal statement, but is specifically related to pride (6:4). In 1 Thess 1:8, Paul speaks about not having a need to speak about “anything” (τι), which is specifically the community’s faith. Also in 1 Cor 3:7, those who plant and water not “nothing” at all, only “nothing” in relation to the growth of the community (1 Cor 3:8-9). In 1 Cor 11:18, Paul also uses τι to refer specifically to the report about division in the community, not just “something.”

faith working through love.³⁰ Although it is only faith working through love that equals “anything” in relation to future righteousness, this does not mean that circumcision/foreskin have no value at all, only that their value does not meet the level of righteousness that comes through faith.³¹ Thus, Gal 5:6 should be translated, “For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision equals anything (in relation to righteousness), nor foreskin, but faith working through love (equals something in relation to righteousness).” Gal 5:6 should not be understood as a reinforcement of Graeco-Roman antipathy toward circumcision, but a relativisation of circumcision in light of the righteousness that Christ offers through faith.

In Gal 5:2-6, Paul demonstrates the grave soteriological and eschatological consequences for gentiles who circumcised. If they did circumcise, what hope did judaising gentiles have? Was there a way for them to be re-connected to Christ and the hope of righteousness once again? Paul gives a clue in Gal 5:12:

ὄφελον καὶ ἀποκόψονται οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες ὑμᾶς
I wish those who are agitating you would cut themselves off.

³⁰ I think Barclay (2010) and I come to the same general conclusion on the centrality of Christ for Paul, but differ in our perspective on the situation. He looks at the Galatian situation backward to what he calls the “Christ-event” and I look at the situation forward to eschatological judgment.

³¹ The two other texts often invoked to illustrate Paul’s denigration of circumcision are Gal 6:15 and 1 Cor 7:19. For these passages, interpreters do not allow for hyperbole, that Paul only reprioritises circumcision when it is put in competition to new creation or obedience to God’s commands or faith working through love in Christ Jesus. On this point, especially in connection with Paul’s Pharisaic past see Kobel 2019, 163. Similar to the comparison between his Jewish badges of honour and Christ in Philippians 3, it is not that circumcision has no value at all for Paul. Rather it is that the value of Christ and his work so far surpasses the worth of anything at all so as to render everything else rhetorically valueless.

In the context of coercive circumcision, Paul turns the blade around on to the agitators and wishes that they would instead cut their own penises right off.³²

The ethnicity of the agitators is important to define because if they are Jewish missionaries circumcising gentiles then Paul's remark in Gal 5:12 is probably nothing more than a display of his disgust to those disturbing the Galatians.³³ But, if the missionaries are gentiles who are judaising—i.e. they have taken on circumcision—then his comment can be read as a sardonic solution to their christological predicament espoused in Gal 5:2-6.

The ethnicity of the agitators Paul addresses in Galatians has been a problematic area of contention among NT scholars since the time of F.C. Baur. Scholarship suggests the agitators were either Jewish or gentile Christians, with a consensus toward the former.³⁴ But what scholars mean by “Jewish” can be ambiguous. For some, the opponents were clearly Christians who were Jews by birth.³⁵ For others, like Mark Nanos, the agitators were Jewish and perhaps proselytes as well, meaning that they had formerly been gentiles and upon being circumcised were now Jews.³⁶

³² For a thorough overview of the reception of castration and eunuchs in the ancient world see Marchal 2019, 78–89.

³³ Mimouni 2007, 218.

³⁴ Walter Schmithals (1972, 13–64) had once argued that the agitators were Jewish-Christian gnostics, a view that has not gained many proponents.

³⁵ Dunn 1993, 9; Martyn 1997, 18; Longenecker 1990, 95; Betz 1979, 7; Lightfoot 1874, 27.

³⁶ Nanos 2001, 207.

In Galatians, the present passive participle οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι in Gal 6:13 is a key point of contention: οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι αὐτοὶ νόμον φυλάσσουσιν ἀλλὰ θέλουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι, ἵνα ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ σαρκὶ καυχῶσονται.³⁷ Translations of Gal 6:13 (RSV, NRSV, NIV, etc.) render οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι as “the circumcised” or “those who are circumcised.” This expression about the state of circumcision indicates to some that Paul has in view Jews who were born to Jewish parents and circumcised on the eighth day.³⁸ The lexical semantics of περιτεμνόμενοι in ancient Jewish literature suggest something much more specific. Περιτεμνόμενοι did not primarily emphasise the state of being circumcised, although this is inseparable from its meaning—but circumcising as a cultural practice.³⁹ The expression in itself does not point unambiguously to either Jews or judaising gentiles but to people who

³⁷ While Gal 5:12 might suggest they were Jews, it makes much clearer sense with gentiles who have been circumcised, as Paul may be mocking their obsession with mutilating their penises and that if they want to cut themselves and others so much they should go all the way and emasculate themselves. Richardson 1969, 89; Murray 2004, 36. A number of positive arguments for the agitators as Jewish rely on tenuous mirror-readings of Galatians that could be argued either way. Dunn (1993, 9), for example, argues that the Jewishness of the opponents is implicit in everything from the primary demand of circumcision to the Jewish themes throughout the whole letter. Some make much of Paul’s story of both the infiltrating judaisers in Jerusalem and the presence of certain people from James in Antioch as reported in Galatians. E.g. Betz 1979, 7.

³⁸ See Betz 1979, 316; Longenecker 1990, 292; Martyn 1997, 559.

³⁹ Josephus uses οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι when he quotes Herodotus’s description of the different nations who practice circumcision (*C. Ap.* 1.170, cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.104). Josephus is focused on those who practice circumcision, not just the state of being circumcised (*C. Ap.* 1.169). Philo uses the anarthrous participle περιτεμνόμενοι to describe a shepherd whose job is to “circumcise” anything superfluous from the lives of their flock (*Agr.* 39). Again, what is in view is the act of circumcising (in this case separating), not the state of being circumcised.

circumcise. Therefore, οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι should be translated as “those who circumcise.”

It may be that οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι is a phrase Paul uses to refer to the Jewish people, like περιτομή, since Jews practiced circumcision.⁴⁰ However, when Paul refers to the Jews by περιτομή he uses a nominal form not a verbal form (e.g. Gal 2:7, 8, 9; 2:12; Rom 4:12; 2:12; cf. Col 4:11; Tit 1:10). But when Paul mentions taking on circumcision for oneself, he uses a middle/passive verbal expression just like in Gal 6:13 (e.g. Gal 2:3, 5:2, 5:3).⁴¹ Thus οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι is not a circumlocution for the Jewish people. Paul has in mind someone who takes on circumcision, like a judaising gentile.

Further evidence that confirms οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι as a reference to judaising gentiles is the question of their law observance, which Paul raises in the passage. How can it be that they are circumcising but are also not keeping the law (οὐδὲ γὰρ...νόμον φυλάσσουσιν)? By circumcising, are they not observing the law properly? Matthew Thiessen argues that the present tense-forms, περιτεμνόμενοι and φυλάσσουσιν, indicate that the non-observance of the Law happens concurrently with the circumcising.⁴² In other words, when they got circumcised as adults, because they were not circumcised on the eighth

⁴⁰ Ryan Schellenberg (2019) has recently argued that οἱ πιστεύοντες was an early self-designation for Christ followers in Paul's letters.

⁴¹ The text of 1 Cor 7:18 is ambiguous about whether the person is Jewish or not. However, there is the strong potential that Paul is speaking about a judaising gentile since there is no evidence among early Jewish Christ followers that any sought to remove the marks of circumcision. Rather, it is likely that proselytes who had been circumcised might have felt pressured to de-circumcise themselves in light of Paul's anti-circumcision gospel directed toward non-Jews.

⁴² Thiessen 2016, 96.

day (Gen 17:12, 14; Lev 12:3), they immediately became Law-breakers. Paul boasts in his eighth-day circumcision in Phil 3:5 in comparison to the mutilation of his opponents in Phil 3:2 for this very same reason. The opponents in Phil 3:2 are gentiles that have been circumcised as adults and therefore their circumcision is an illegitimate “mutilation.” In Galatians 6:13, Paul marks the agitators as judaising gentiles. They are men who have transgressed the law by circumcising themselves after the eighth day. Based on the meagre textual evidence presented in Galatians, it is most likely that those disturbing the Galatians were judaising gentiles, non-Jews who had taken up circumcision.⁴³

Returning to Gal 5:12, if we read Paul’s statement in light of other Jewish texts concerning castration, there is a theological consequence that may benefit judaising gentiles who have cut themselves off from Christ through circumcision.⁴⁴ Interpreters associate Paul’s use of the lexeme ἀποκόπτω in Gal 5:12 with its appearance in Deut 23:2 because both texts share the same verb and context of genital mutilation:

MT: לא־יבא פצוע־דכא וכרות שפכה בקהל יהוה:

No one with crushed testicles or a severed penis should be allowed into the congregation of the LORD.

OG (Rahlfs): οὐκ εἰσελεύσεται θλαδίας καὶ ἀποκεκομμένος εἰς ἐκκλησίαν κυρίου

One whose testicles have been crushed and whose penis has been cut off will not go into the assembly of the LORD.

⁴³ Numerous scholars have argued this position in a variety of different forms since at least the beginning of the twentieth century: Ropes 1929; Lietzmann 1932; Hirsch 1930; Michaelis 1931; Munck 1959; Harvey 1968; Richardson 1969; Murray 2004; Thiessen 2016.

⁴⁴ The classic work on Paul and intertextuality is Hays 1989. See the critique of Hays by Foster 2015.

Deut 23:2 excludes those whose penile shafts have been dismembered from “the assembly of Israel” (MT: בקהל יהוה; OG: εἰς ἐκκλησίαν κυρίου). With Gal 5:12, interpreters tone down Paul’s wish for the agitators to mutilate themselves. Instead, they argue, Paul desires the end result of such a mutilation, which according to Deut 23:3 is communal exclusion, without requiring the actual physical act.⁴⁵ Following Paul’s logic in Galatians, those who circumcise will become children of the slave women, and in Gal 4:30 Paul does warn the Galatians that the children of the slave women will be driven away.⁴⁶ However, exclusion might seem superfluous given that circumcised gentile Christ followers already have no hope for righteousness. Does Paul merely want the judaising gentiles to leave the Galatian assemblies alone?

The use of ἀποκόπτω in ancient Jewish literature points toward a non-figurative understanding of Paul’s words. The verb ἀποκόπτω most often refers to amputation or mutilation of a bodily appendage.⁴⁷ While it can also refer to cutting off of other physical or abstract objects (e.g. clothing, stones, hope, expectation, debts, physical structures etc.), it never refers to

⁴⁵ E.g. Dunn 1993, 282–3; de Boer 2013, 327; Witherington III 1998, 374; Longenecker 1990, 234. Some do go further and suggest that Paul thinks they should exclude themselves from the community by castrating themselves. Burton 1921, 289; Matera 1992, 185; Tilly 2012, 71–72.

⁴⁶ On balance, I agree with Susan Eastman (2006) that the quotation of Genesis 21 in Gal 4:30 implies overhearing Abraham but not just because it is only a warning. It is clear, as Dunne argues, that in Galatians 5, real expulsion and excommunication is at hand (See Dunne 2017). I disagree with Dunne, however, that it implies that Paul will exclude them. In Galatians 5 it is that they have been cut off from Christ and I think in overhearing Abraham’s words in Genesis 21 at Gal 4:30, Paul implies that Abraham will cut them off, since Sarah’s speech is directed toward him.

⁴⁷ Deut 25:12; Judg 1:6, 1:7; 4 Macc 15:20; Mark 9:43; 9:45; John 18:10, 18:26; Philo, *Legat.* 3.8; *Spec.* 1.325; Josephus, *A.J.* 14.464; *Vita* 147, 177; *B.J.* 1.507, 2.246, 642, 644, 3.378, 527, 6.164.

excommunication.⁴⁸ Paul's statement in Gal 5:12 should be read at face value given that ἀποκόπτω refers to amputation. The fact that Gal 5:12 relates lexically and topically to Deut 23:2—a text which unambiguously refers to those who have mutilated genitals—confirms Paul's hope that the agitators will literally castrate themselves.

A closer look at Deut 23:2 also indicates that a connection between penile dismemberment and total expulsion from God's people is not in view. Saul Olyan shows how the phrase בַּקֹּהֶל יְהוָה in the HB refers specifically to the sanctuary of God's house, the Temple (cf. Lam 1:10; Ezek 44:7, 9).⁴⁹ Deut 23:2 does not intend total exclusion from the people of Israel but exclusion specifically from the sacred space of the tabernacle. This corresponds with the Levitical laws regarding blemishes and the priests (Lev 21:20) or sacrificial offerings to God (Lev 22:24). Excluding those with penile dismemberment is an issue of purity and is relevant only to sacred space.⁵⁰

If Paul does echo Deut 23:2 in Gal 5:12 then the specification regarding sacred spaces also does not map well on what we know about early Christian assemblies. To be sure, Paul uses the metaphor of sacred space to refer to believers, calling them the “temple of God” (1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16, cf.

⁴⁸ 2 Kgdms 10:4; Ps 76:9; Isa 18:5; Hermas, Sim. 9.9.2; Sib Or. 1.154; Josephus, *B.J.* 1.299, 1.143, 481, 625, 2.106, 324, 394, 403; 4.565, 5.512.

⁴⁹ Olyan 1998, 22.

⁵⁰ This makes sense for why Deut 23:2 appears among the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QMMT, 4Q394 Frag 8, III 1.10; 4Q396 I, 1.5; 4Q397 Frag 5, 1.1), as the Qumran community had an amplified conception of holiness, whereby all their members adopted Levitical laws concerning מומים (blemishes). Wassen 2008, 129. On disability among the Scrolls see in particular the work of Dorman 2007.

Eph 2:19-22).⁵¹ Yet even if one takes seriously that Deut 23:2 excludes those with mutilated genitals from the ἐκκλησία κυρίου, early Christians did not prohibit those with mutilated genitals from their communities. Paul is concerned about maintaining the purity of his communities, but only specifically with regard to sexual irregularity (1 Cor 5-7, 10) and idolatry (1 Cor 8). There is no indication that those with mutilated penises should be excluded. In fact, the opposite is the case. As Albrecht Oepke argues, citing Matt 19:12 and Acts 8:26-39, the inclusion of the emasculated, rather than their exclusion, is found in early Christian thinking.⁵²

Rather than trying to socially exclude the agitators, I suggest that in Gal 5:12 Paul provides the only solution to *remedy* their exclusion. While commentators on Gal 5:12 recognise an allusion to Deut 23:2, they do not recognise the oft-noted connection HB scholars make between Deut 23:2 and Isa 56:4-5.⁵³

MT: כִּי־כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה לְסָרִיסִים אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת־שַׁבְּתוֹתַי וּבָחָרוּ בְּאֲשֶׁר חָפְצָתִי וּמְחַזְּקִים לֹא בְּרִיתִי: וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחֻמּוֹתַי יָד וְשֵׁם טוֹב מִבְּנִים וּמִבְּנוֹת שֵׁם עוֹלָם אֶתְּנֶלְךָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִכָּרֵת:

For thus says the Lord, “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths and choose the things that please me and keep hold of my covenant, I will give to them in my house and within my walls a “hand” and a name better than sons and daughters. I will give to him an everlasting name that will not be cut off.”

OG: τὰδε λέγει κύριος Τοῖς εὐνούχοις, ὅσοι ἂν φυλάξωνται τὰ σάββατά μου καὶ ἐκλέξωνται ἃ ἐγὼ θέλω καὶ ἀντέχωνται τῆς διαθήκης μου, δώσω αὐτοῖς ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ μου καὶ ἐν τῷ τείχει μου τόπον

⁵¹ On this theme in Paul see MacDonald 1988, 67; Korner 2017, 246–250.

⁵² Oepke 1973, 165.

⁵³ Oepke 1973, 165 does mentioned Isaiah 56. Recently Joseph Marchal brings up Isa 56:4-5 in relation to Gal 5:12 but notes briefly that, “The person Paul wishes would be castrated is not blessed (as in Isa 56:4-5). Marchal 2019, 79.

ὄνομαστὸν κρείττω υἱῶν καὶ θυγατέρων, ὄνομα αἰώνιον δώσω αὐτοῖς
καὶ οὐκ ἐκλείψει.

This is what the Lord is saying to the eunuchs, “Whoever keeps my Sabbaths and selects the things that I want and holds on to my covenant, I will give to them, in my house and among my wall, a renowned place, better than sons and daughters, I will give to them an everlasting name and it will not cease.

Although Deut 23:2 excludes mutilated men from sacred space, Isa 56:4-5 prophesies that eunuchs who keep the Lord’s Sabbaths and keep hold of his covenant will have a place in the Lord’s house and greater than sons and daughters.⁵⁴ The context of Isa 56 is expressly eschatological. Eunuchs and foreigners not only have a place among God’s people but he brings them to his holy mountain (v.7; cf. Isa 2:1).⁵⁵ Part of what God promises to these mutilated men is that they will be given “a hand and a name” (MT: יד ושם)/“a renowned place” (OG: τόπον ὀνομαστόν) that will not be cut off. Interpreters have been puzzled particularly by the term יד, though it has been accepted that it probably means “place” or “monument/stele.”⁵⁶ But, the term is also clearly a double

⁵⁴ Winston argues (following b. Sanh. 93b), that Is 56:3-5 refers to Jews who were castrated under Babylonian rule, cf. 2 Kgs 20:18. Winston 1979, 132. Isaiah’s reference may include the Jews, but it is clearly not exclusive, especially given that foreigners (“τοῖς ἀλλογενέσι”) in the same passage are also allowed to become servants of the Lord and partake in the temple cult (Is 56:4, 6-7). Isa 56:3 speaks about the eunuch who bemoans that he is a “dry tree” (עץ יבש), a euphemism of his castration. Blenkinsopp 2003, 137. The term סריס, often translated “eunuch” (OG: εὐνοῦχος), is one of the few instances we can be sure refers to male genital mutilation rather than simply an official in a royal court.

⁵⁵ Childs 2001, 458.

⁵⁶ Van Winkle 1997.

entendre, since 7⁷ can also refer to the penis.⁵⁷ God offers to restore the eunuch's penis in order to allow him to enter into the congregation of the holy.

Isa 56 is not the only response to the exclusion of eunuchs in Deut 23:2. The Wisdom of Solomon (3:14) affirms the inheritance of eunuchs as prophesied in Isa 56:

OG: καὶ εὐνοῦχος ὁ μὴ ἐργασάμενος ἐν χειρὶ ἀνόμημα μηδὲ ἐνθυμηθεὶς κατὰ τοῦ κυρίου πονηρά, δοθήσεται γὰρ αὐτῷ τῆς πίστεως χάρις ἐκλεκτὴ καὶ κληρὸς ἐν ναῷ κυρίου θυμηρέστερο.
[Blessed] is the eunuch who worked no lawlessness by hand or meditated evil against the Lord, for a choice gift and a delightful share in the temple of the Lord will be given to him by faithfulness.

This passage affirms a eunuch's place in the future temple of the Lord. Where a circumcised gentile loses the gift (“τῆς χάριτος ἐξεπέσατε,” Gal 5:4), an obedient eunuch is given a “choice gift” (Wis 3:14).⁵⁸ Where a circumcised gentile has given up faith as a means of justification (Gal 5:4), a eunuch receives a share in the temple of the Lord by faithfulness (Wis 3:14).⁵⁹ Although Paul's christological emphasis differs from Wisdom's own emphasis on σοφία, the shared constellation of ideas involving a person with mutilated genitals, πίστις, χάρις, a future hope in God's presence, and a connection with Deut 23:2

⁵⁷ Phalluses and phallic like objects (e.g. herms) bore a striking resemblance with ancient stele/monuments in the Ancient Near East. Delcor 1967, 236–40; Blenkinsopp 2003, 139; Goldingay 2014, 79.

⁵⁸ Linebaugh 2013, 86.

⁵⁹ On πίστις in 3:14 as “faithfulness” (Treue) see Hübner 1999, 57; Linebaugh 2013, 38.

between Wisdom 3:14 and Gal 5:1-12 suggests that Paul directly engages with Wisdom.⁶⁰

Rather than taking Paul's words in Gal 5:12 only as a snide remark for the judaising gentiles to physically hurt themselves, or for them to be excluded from the assemblies of the Galatians, Paul's words can be read as a way for them to find a favourable judgment in the eschaton despite their current salvific alienation.⁶¹ In light of Isa 56:4-5 and Wis 3:14, if the judaising gentiles fully cut off their penis, then they may be able to gain access to the righteousness they lost the moment their foreskin was removed.⁶² The future tense of the verb ἀποκόπτω may be important, as it makes Paul's urge less hypothetical and more of a hopeful plea for the salvation of the judaising gentiles: "Oh that those who are disturbing you would (ὄφελον) dismember themselves!"⁶³ Paul reiterates to his Galatian audience how dangerous taking on circumcision is for non-Jewish

⁶⁰ Up until 1947, scholars acknowledged Paul's dependence upon the Wisdom of Solomon, especially between Romans 1:18-32 and Wisdom 13-15. Linebaugh 2013, 13-14. While it is no longer acknowledged that Paul reproduces the thought of Wisdom 13-15 exactly in Rom 1:18-32, it is still held that Paul was both aware of and engaged with Wisdom. See Linebaugh 2011; Dodson 2009, 3-4; Linebaugh 2013, 96.

⁶¹ *pace* Marchal 2019, 79.

⁶² Peter Craigie (1976, 296-7) argued that the command in Deut 23:2 is restricted to those who have intentionally emasculated themselves ("self-castrated"). As evidence for this position he cites Isaiah 56! Yet, it is ambiguous in the Isaianic context whether or not the eunuch is a "dry tree" by choice or by accident. Thus, as Tigay (1996, 210) argues, "It is not clear whether this law applies to all who have these conditions or only to those who acquired them voluntarily."

⁶³ Robertson characterises wishes that begin with ὄφελον as "impractical wishes." Robertson, A. T. 1914, 923. While the particle only occurs three times in the undisputed letters of Paul (1 Cor 4:8; 2 Cor 11:1; and Gal 5:12), only in one instance is the wish impractical: 1 Cor 4:8. In 2 Cor 11:1 Paul wishes that the Corinthians would put up with him playing the fool, something which he admits they have already been doing (ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀνέχεσθέ μου). While Gal 5:12 may be an impractical wish, it does not mean that it is an impossible one. Some recognise its attainability: Bruce 1982, 238.

Christ followers by showing the extreme measures required to repair their relationship with Christ should they circumcise. In order to get back what they lost in Christ, they would need to impair themselves further.⁶⁴

Paul takes gentiles circumcising very seriously because of the eschatological and soteriological consequences. But would Paul really have advocated for judaizing gentiles to mutilate themselves in order to regain access to Christ? It is not beyond Paul to suggest that chastisement of the believers' physical body is appropriate in particular circumstances. For example, I will argue in the second part of this thesis that, in order to prevent himself from boasting, an angel of Satan (his thorn in the flesh) was given to Paul to beat him. Also in 1 Cor 5:5, Paul consigns a person who has behaved immorally in his eyes to be handed over to Satan for the "death of his flesh" (παραδοῦναι τὸν τοιοῦτον τῷ Σατανᾷ εἰς ὄλεθρον τῆς σαρκός). Recent interpreters agree that what Paul has in mind is not the total death of the person, but the "death" of the "fleshliness" of the offender, that is the sinful propensity inherent to human bodies.⁶⁵ But this does not preclude physical chastisement, especially since in 1

⁶⁴ What is less clear is the extent to which the judaizing gentiles in Galatia would have to "be faithful" to the law. Although Wisdom is more general about law observance, the Sabbath is specifically prescribed in Isa 56:4. Paul never explicitly commands gentiles not to keep the Sabbath (cf. Gal 4:10; Col 2:16). Although many interpreters take Gal 4:10 as a direct reference to Sabbaths, I find de Boer's argument most convincing that it probably refers generally to any kind of calendrical observance of which Sabbaths may be included. de Boer 2013, 276. If, however, Sabbath is merely interpreted as "the norms appropriate to a life lived under torah," then the reception of God's Spirit would enable them to fulfil the law. Childs 2001, 458. On the other hand, if total Law observance is required, Paul does not object to a partial nomistic lifestyle for gentiles (e.g. not worshipping idols; avoiding sexual immorality); it is only when gentiles try to use works of the law instead of faith in Christ to be justified by God that circumcision or observing Sabbaths become problematic. Barclay 2015, 392; Longenecker 1990, 228; de Boer 2013, 315.

⁶⁵ See the discussion in Thiselton 2000, 396–9.

Cor 5:5 this individual is given over to Satan in a similar to way how Paul is tormented by an angel of Satan in 2 Cor 12:7. Some scholars have recognised that the purpose of these physical consequences is for the repentance of the offender.⁶⁶ Thus, in particular circumstances, Paul allows for physical effacement in light of ultimate salvific trade-offs. For Gal 5:12, it is certainly possible that Paul suggests a harsh physical consequence offset by the eschatological benefits it offers.⁶⁷

Paul's suggestion in Gal 5:12 is one way for circumcised gentiles to rectify their transgression of the Law, to become more mutilated, more impaired, and more disabled so that in the day of judgment they would be enabled to be judged righteous. If they fully dismembered their penises, at least they would be able to theoretically maintain their relationship with Christ since they would again retain the status of being uncircumcised.⁶⁸ Ironically, by emasculating themselves they would be mimicking the practices of the priests of Cybele in Anatolia who were known for self-castration, with the simple

⁶⁶ So Matthias Konradt argues that, "...this harsh measure should ultimately serve as an instrument of a *correctio fraterna* for the salvation of the brother" (diese harte Maßnahme soll letztlich als Instrument einer um das Heil des Bruders sorgenden *correctio fraterna* dienen). Konradt 2003, 321. Recently affirmed by Moses 2013, 190:

⁶⁷ Dunn broaches this interpretation when he notes that Paul's command may allude to the same principle behind Mark 9:43, 45, which emphasises maiming a sinful body part so that one's whole body can go into the kingdom: "In which case Paul would be saying that even such mutilation is preferable to replacing the offence of the cross with the offence of circumcision." Dunn 1993, 283–4. On amputation as a beneficial eschatological practice in Mark 9 see Moss 2019.

⁶⁸ This is certainly how Jerome (*Comm. Isa.* 15.20) takes Isa 56:4–5 as he argues that eunuchs are able to be saved if they are like the Ethiopian in Acts 8:27–31 who follows Christ. For translation see Scheck 2015, 709.

difference that such an act, instead of being a pagan mutilation would allow them eventually to be reconnected to Christ.⁶⁹

4.4 Paul's Disabling of Gentile Circumcision

Rather than undermining the social and cultural processes that disable circumcision, Paul is a proponent of them. In Phil 3:2, he uses the hypersexual, animalistic, and mutilated conception of circumcision to serve his invective against judaising gentiles. Besides that, he upholds the stereotype of circumcision as Jewish physical feature. In Galatians, the centrality of Christ for eschatological righteousness forces him to exclude from salvation gentiles who take on circumcision. Their circumcision prevents them from benefiting from faith working through love. Thus, gentiles who became circumcised would have experienced compounding disability, first from non-Jewish society, which would have looked at their circumcision as a mutilation and deformity, and also from Pauline communities where Christ was the *sine qua non* of righteousness for gentiles.

Gal 5:12 has Paul combating disability with impairment. He proposes using genital mutilation as a *remedy* to bring judaising gentiles back into an ideal bodily state (uncircumcision), all the while worsening the functionality and aesthetic of circumcised gentile genitals. Having no penis was not an ideal way to enter into the world to come, yet for Paul it was not ideal for these gentiles

⁶⁹The connection with the Cybele cult has long been recognised: Lightfoot 1874, 207. For the Anatolian context of genital mutilation in the cult of Cybele see the work of Elliot, S. 2003, 163, 340; Edwards 2011.

to mutilate themselves in the first place. If the promises of Isa 56:5 and Wis 3:14 were true, then judaising gentiles who fully emasculated themselves could look forward to a God-given “monument” prepared for them while they are also included in his holy presence.

Because Paul’s rhetoric involves mutilation in both Gal 5:12 and Phil 3:2, the two passages are often considered parallel caricatures of circumcision.⁷⁰ My argument in this chapter has shown that the two passages do not function the same. While Phil 3:2 does belittle circumcision for gentiles, Gal 5:12 can be read as a way of *restoring* an uncircumcised state. Castration in Gal 5:12 is not a mutilation in the same sense that circumcision is for gentiles in Phil 3:2. To be sure, castration removes flesh from the penis just as circumcision does, but it enables rather than disables gentiles in their relationship to Christ and eschatological righteousness. Paying attention to how disability functions illuminates the different functions of these texts that interpreters so often conflate.

⁷⁰ Betz 1979, 270 n.169; Longenecker 1990, 234; Dunn 1993, 284. See also Oepke 1973, 165 n.334.

5. GALATIAN COERCION AND PNEUMATIC CIRCUMCISION: RE-READING PAUL IN LIGHT OF DISABILITY

5.1 Re-Reading Paul in Light of Disability

This final chapter of the first part of this thesis provides re-readings of Paul focusing on two key issues in his letters. The first issue I address in this chapter is the question of whether the Galatians really wanted to be circumcised at all. This reading concerns the letter of Galatians as a whole and whether or not, in light of the stigma attached to circumcision, the Galatians had a desire to be circumcised or if they were being forced to circumcise against their will. The second issue I am concerned with is whether Paul imagines that Jews will retain circumcision in their resurrected bodies. I analyse Paul's conception of the resurrected body in 1 Cor 15:35-55 and whether or not circumcision has any part to play in the future bodies of Jewish believers like Paul. I turn first to the issue of Galatians and circumcision.

5.2 Questioning the Galatian Desire for Circumcision

Only a handful of NT scholars have brought the stigma of circumcision to bear on the NT itself.¹ As traditional scholarship holds, circumcision was

¹ Ben Witherington makes note of how circumcision was received in the ancient world, but it does not affect his interpretation of Galatians. Witherington III 1998, 446, 455–6. On the other hand, Troy Martin has argued, using the pagan attitude toward circumcision as a foundation, that Paul's circumcision was the “weakness of the flesh”

enough of a problem among non-Jews in Paul's communities that he felt he needed to write against it, first with Galatians and then briefly with Philippians. But the widespread stigma concerning circumcision among non-Jews should give us pause about whether our mirror-reading of Paul's rhetoric against circumcision, especially in Galatians, was proportionate to the Galatian desire to circumcise.

In this section I want to take seriously the stigmatisation of circumcision by non-Jews that we have analysed in Chapters Two and Three in order to suggest a new frame of reference for how circumcision was understood in early Pauline communities, specifically Galatia. What evidence do we have that Paul's Galatian audience *actually wanted* to be circumcised? The intention here is not to give an exhaustive answer, but to raise the question about whether scholarship has discerned correctly the stance of Paul's Galatian audience toward circumcision.

5.2.1 Forcing the Galatians to Circumcise

Much of the internal textual evidence that might contribute to our understanding of the Galatians' desire to circumcise is ambiguous and tells us little beyond Paul's own rhetoric about the situation. For example, in the first chapter of Galatians, Paul repeatedly speaks about how they are turning away to a different gospel (Gal 1:6, 9). He later contends that they have turned to observing special days again (4:10), an indication they are already well on their

mentioned in Gal 4:13. Martin, T. W. 1999, 87–90. Unfortunately, Martin provides no explicit textual connection to circumcision in Gal 4:13. Cf. also Dunn 1993, 336.

way to observing circumcision as well. In light of such evidence, the Galatians could be construed as a rebellious community who are eager to abandon Paul's circumcision-free gospel for gentiles. But no matter how hard we try to mirror-read Paul's rhetoric in passages such as these, they do not reveal anything substantial about the motivations of the Galatian community or the attitude with which they are apparently seeking out circumcision.²

However, there is one key passage that reveals a willingness to circumcise. In Gal 4:21 Paul asks: "Tell me, those who wish to be under the law, do you not hear the law?" (Λέγετέ μοι, οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι, τὸν νόμον οὐκ ἀκούετε;). Gal 4:21 appears to support the claim that the Galatians wanted to circumcise, since Paul directly addresses "those who wish to be under the law" (οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι). The expression "under the law" in 4:21 includes circumcision since later in the letter Paul says the Galatians will be "obligated to do the whole law" (Gal 5:3) if they circumcise.³ Circumcision and submission to the law are intertwined. Alternatively, it may be significant that Paul does not address the Galatians as "those who wish to be circumcised." The Galatians might wish to be "under the law"—that is, to be faithful observers of God's commands—while at the same time not wishing to be circumcised.

In any case, even if we take Gal 4:21 as a reference to a Galatian desire to circumcise, it is not entirely clear who Paul's addressees are. We know that Paul

² On the dangers of mirror-reading in Galatians, see the now classic article by Barclay 1987.

³ Even if one accepts Todd Wilson's argument that the expression "under the law" (ὑπὸ νόμον) is a shorthand for being "under the curse of the law," the ironic use in 4:21 does not negate circumcision. Wilson, T. A. 2005, 378–82.

does not address the agitators in 4:21 because any other time he refers to those who are “disturbing” the Galatians, he refers to them without addressing them directly (e.g. 5:7, 10, 12; 6:12, 13). Therefore, he must be speaking to the Galatian community.

Most interpreters understand Paul in 4:21 to be addressing the whole Galatian assembly, with some citing the direct address of the Galatians in 3:1 (ὧν ἀνόητοι Γαλάται) as evidence for this position.⁴ The whole Galatian community desires to be “under the law.” However, there is evidence that in Gal 4:21 Paul only references a sub-section of the community. Longenecker argues that if Paul had intended to address only a portion of the Galatian assemblies “he would probably have used the pronoun ὑμεῖς (“you”) to identify them more precisely.”⁵ However, this is precisely the *opposite* of how Paul uses second person pronouns throughout the letter. In almost all of the instances where the second person pronoun appears in Galatians, Paul openly addresses the entire community (Gal 1:6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 20, 2:5, 3:1, 2, 5, 28, 29, 4:11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 5:2, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 21, 6:1, 12, 13, 18). To be sure, second person addressees are implied in the two verbs Paul uses in Gal 4:21 (λέγετε and ἀκούετε). But he specifies exactly who he is addressing; in this case, the portion of the community who actually want to circumcise. This same pattern is found in Gal 5:4: “You have been released from Christ, those who are being justified in the law; you have lost grace” (κατηργήθητε ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ,

⁴ Betz 1979, 241, n.25; Longenecker 1990, 206; Dunn 1993, 245; de Boer 2013, 290; Burton 1921, 252; Schlier 1971, 216; Becker 1976, 56; Mußner 1974, 317.

⁵ Longenecker 1990, 206.

οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε, τῆς χάριτος ἐξεπέσατε). Those whom Paul addresses, οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε, do not refer to the whole of the Galatian congregation but the antecedent in Gal 5:3, “any man who circumcises” (παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ περιτεμνομένῳ).⁶ Paul’s use of masculine plural subjects in Galatians actually serves as evidence that Paul refers to only a portion of the Galatian community 4:21. Every time Paul specifies a grammatical subject with a masculine plural substantival expression (e.g. a noun, prepositional phrase, or verb), he spotlights a particular group of people:

- the brothers who are with him (οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοί, Gal 1:2)
- those who are confusing (οἱ ταρασσόντες, Gal 1:7)
- the acknowledged [leaders in Jerusalem] (οἱ δοκοῦντες, Gal 2:6).
- the acknowledged pillars [e.g. James, Cephas, John] (οἱ δοκοῦντες στῦλοι εἶναι, Gal 2:9)
- the rest of the Jews/Judeans (οἱ λοιποὶ Ἰουδαῖοι, Gal 2:13)
- those out of faith (οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, Gal 3:9)
- those who are disturbing (οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες, Gal 5:12)
- those who do [the works of the flesh] (οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντες, Gal 5:21)
- those who are of Christ Jesus (οἱ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, Gal 5:24)
- those who are pneumatic (spiritual) (οἱ πνευματικοὶ, Gal 6:1)
- those who are circumcising (οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι, Gal 6:13).

Given this letter-wide pattern, it is better to understand οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι in Gal 4:21 as a specification of a particular group within the Galatians rather than a general description of whole community.

⁶ The relative clause οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε is clearly restrictive since the other two clauses in Gal 5:3 depend on it for the sentence to make sense.

Longenecker also argues that Paul's use of inclusive personal pronouns in 4:21-5:1 indicates that the whole Galatian community is in view in Gal 4:21.⁷ However, this argument is circular, and depends on the presumption that Gal 4:21 refers to the whole community. If Gal 4:21 refers to only a section of the community, then Paul's inclusive personal pronouns still makes sense in context, since Paul is trying to make the case from Torah that desire of this group to be under the law jeopardises their status as children of the free woman.

The multiplicity of Galatian assemblies (Gal 1:1) further complicates Gal 4:21 as a portrayal of the desires of the whole Galatian community. Paul worries about the internal health of the community, warning them to love one another and not devour one another (Gal 5:14-15), and later, that each should examine themselves (Gal 6:4-5) and care for the household of God (6:10). This implies *intra-communal* conflict. It is therefore more plausible that one particular assembly or a subset of a particular assembly had an interest in being under the law, rather than the whole Galatian community. We should then understand Gal 4:21 as addressing only those among the Galatian assemblies who wanted to take up circumcision.⁸ We cannot assume that the desires of the Galatian assemblies were homogenous.

⁷ Longenecker 1990, 206.

⁸ Wilhelm Lütgert also argued for a similar understanding of Gal 4:21: "Diese Anrede wird nur dann verständlich, wenn Paulus sich nicht an die ganze Gemeinde wendet, sondern an einen Teil derselben, an diejenigen, welche sich der judaistischen Verführung hingegeben haben" (This address can only be understood if Paul himself does not turn to the entire community, but rather to a part of it, to those who have handed themselves over to judaising temptation). Lütgert 1918, 11 (481) and noted in Betz 1979, 241, n.25.

Paul's own perspective on the wider Galatian desire for circumcision is that the community were being forced against their will through coercion. The Galatians (less those who "want to be under the law") do not want to be circumcised. In Gal 6:12 Paul describes the opponents as "those who are forcing [the Galatians] to circumcise (οὗτοι ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι).⁹ Many of the major English translations add a modal verb like "trying" (NRSV, NLT, NIV, NASB) or "attempting" (LEB) in order to weaken the coercive force of the verb ἀναγκάζω in Gal 6:12. The ESV translates the verb with a conditional modification: "those...who would force you to be circumcised." These modifications reflect a trend in Galatians scholarship to treat ἀναγκάζω as having "conative force," i.e. an *attempt* to compel circumcision.¹⁰ However, there are a number of a problems with this interpretation.

Commentators make a distinction in use between the present/imperfect use of the verb ἀναγκάζω (Gal 2:14, Acts 26:11), which is supposed to be conative in force (according to BDF §319), and the aorist use of the verb (e.g. Mt 14:22; Mk 6:45; Lk 14:23; Acts 28:19), which supposedly refers to coercion that has been successful. However, the semantic difference between the present/imperfect conative and aorist resultative meanings of ἀναγκάζω is not

⁹ Barclay understands Gal 6:12 as a Pauline caricature (Barclay 1987, 75, 86). The opponents are not literally forcing Galatian foreskin off. Nevertheless, if we understand Paul's language as a characterisation of the Galatian attitude toward this circumcision, then we need not read it as a caricature.

¹⁰ E.g. Betz 1979, 315; Longenecker 1990, 291; Dunn 1993, 336; Bruce 1982, 268–9; Martyn 1997, 560; Matera 1992, 225; Bruce 1982, 268–9; Vouga 1998, 155; Schlier 1971, 280; Mußner 1974, 411. On the conative nuance see von Siebenthal 2019, 310, 318.

consistent with the examples often cited. In Gal 2:14—a supposed conative present—Paul accuses Peter of “forcing gentiles to live like Jews” (πῶς τὰ ἔθνη ἀναγκάζεις Ἰουδαΐζειν). It is not an attempt, however, as they are successful. In Gal 2:12 the Jews separate themselves from the gentiles, thus enforcing mealtime segregation.¹¹ Paul interprets Peter’s action as coercive, since in order for the gentiles to eat with their Jewish brothers they would have to live Jewishly. In Acts 26:1—another instance of an alleged conative imperfect tense-form—Paul gives witness to his previous life before King Agrippa and how he forced followers of Jesus to blaspheme (καὶ κατὰ πάσας τὰς συναγωγὰς πολλάκις τιμωρῶν αὐτοὺς ἠνάγκαζον βλασφημεῖν). The portrayal of Paul in Acts, however, depicts Paul using violence against believers (7:48, 8:1-3), something he even admits to in Acts 26:11! He did not attempt to force believers to blaspheme. He coerced them through physical violence. The present and imperfect tense-forms of ἀναγκάζω can refer to successful coercive acts just as much as the aorist tense-form of the verb.

English translations and commentators who focus on an illusory conative use of ἀναγκάζω also ignore the lexical semantics of ἀναγκάζω in relation to the verb περιτέμνω in other ancient sources.¹² The use of ἀναγκάζω + περιτέμνω has repeatedly been understood as coercive, a circumcision that is done against

¹¹ It is unclear why exactly this mealtime segregation occurs. Various ancient sources do reinforce that Jews ate separately (Jub 22:16; Jos. and Asen. 7:1; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 34.1.2; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.2). Still, many proposals have been put forward (e.g. the recent proposal by Paula Fredriksen that it was because they were eating in gentile households, Fredriksen 2017, 97–99) but the text does not provide enough evidence to make a firm judgment.

¹² Dunne (2017, 56–7) is an exception, although he portrays the situation as both conative and coercive.

the will of the person being circumcised.¹³ For example, the historian Ptolemy (1st century BCE) describes the forced circumcision of the Idumeans after they had been subjected by the Jews during the time of Hyrcanus (κρατηθέντες δὲ ὑπ’ αὐτῶν καὶ ἀναγκασθέντες περιτέμνεσθαι).¹⁴ Josephus (*Vita* 113) also describes instances where he stopped other Jews in Judaea from forcing non-Jewish political refugees to circumcise (τούτους περιτέμνεσθαι τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἀναγκαζόντων).¹⁵ Because of this established use, the phrase οὗτοι ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι in Gal 6:12 should not be translated with any modal or conditional additions, but simply as: “those who are forcing you to be circumcised.” Although the “action” of circumcision has not yet happened, the “action” of coercion has been achieved.¹⁶

In no way is this “compelling” an attempt “to get the Gentile Christians ready to accept circumcision *voluntarily*,” as Betz strangely argues, as though if the Galatians chose to take up circumcision such a choice would have been voluntary and not against their will.¹⁷ An act that is done because of coercion is not a voluntary act.¹⁸ From Paul’s perspective in Gal 6:12, the Galatians did not actually want to be circumcised but were being forced to do so.

¹³ Scholars have understood the expression ἐν ἰσχύι in 1 Macc 2:46 as evidence of forced circumcision, but I have recently shown that this expression does not refer to coercion. See Soon 2020.

¹⁴ See Stern 1976, 1.356. Cf. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.257; 15.254.

¹⁵ Coercion is explicit in this passage: Mimouni 2007, 93–4. For Josephus, consent to circumcision is expressed with the auxiliary verb θέλω (*A.J.* 20.139).

¹⁶ Cf. von Siebenthal 2019, 319.

¹⁷ Betz 1979, 315.

¹⁸ Bruce’s comment is typical: “If the trouble-makers insisted that circumcision was necessary to salvation, this was a *form of pressure approaching* compulsion.” Bruce 1982, 269, emphasis mine.

Another indication that most of the Galatian community had no desire to circumcise arises from the issue of social pressure. Paul alludes to the pressure faced by the Galatians in three places. In Gal 5:12 Paul describes the influencers as “those who are disturbing” (οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες) the Galatians. According to Paul in Gal 4:17, the persecution involves some form of exclusion, since he indicates that, “They [the opponents] desire you for no good, but in order to exclude you so that you desire them” (ζηλοῦσιν ὑμᾶς οὐ καλῶς, ἀλλ’ ἐκκλεῖσαι ὑμᾶς θέλουσιν, ἵνα αὐτοὺς ζηλοῦτε). Another reference to the social situation can be found in Gal 4:29. John Dunne reads “the child born of flesh persecuting the child born of spirit” (ὁ κατὰ σάρκα γεννηθεὶς ἐδίωκεν τὸν κατὰ πνεῦμα) as an allusion to the persecution the Galatians now face.¹⁹

The nature of this pressure on the Galatians is not clear. The agitators may expect the gentiles to observe the whole Jewish law including circumcision (e.g. Acts 15:1, 5). On the other hand, Paul’s remark in Gal 6:12 that the Galatians are being forced to circumcise so that the agitators themselves avoid persecution suggests otherwise. Martin Goodman argues that we should understand the origin of their social pressure in non-Jewish concerns, particularly the hostility toward the early Jesus movement as an illegitimate religion.²⁰ By attaching themselves to Judaism, gentile Jesus followers who circumcised might be able to pass as Jewish in their social environment and thus avoid exclusion from their wider community.

¹⁹ Dunne 2017, 253–255.

²⁰ Goodman 2019, 231–2.

Regardless of the specific circumstances, if we understand the Galatian predicament to be the result of social pressure, then we cannot say that the Galatians voluntarily chose to take up circumcision. None of the evidence in Galatians betrays an intent to circumcise for circumcision itself, only an intent to circumcise in order to avoid persecution or negative social consequences. Would the influencers require the Galatians' permission to circumcise? Absolutely. But permission through coercion is not consent but constraint. If the Galatians are attempting to circumcise under constraint, then they do not want to be circumcised. What they actually want is to avoid social liminality.

5.2.2 The Purpose of Paul's Letter to the Galatians: A Suggestion

Rather than finding evidence that the Galatians embraced circumcision, I have found that the opposite is the case. While there were some who wanted to be under the law (4:21), the wider Galatian community had no actual desire for circumcision. Circumcision was being thrust upon the Galatians against their will. It is not surprising given the stigma in ancient Greek and Roman cultures attached to circumcision that the Galatians would have had to be coerced to circumcise.

There is another way of conceiving the Galatian attitude toward circumcision that might take seriously the antipathy non-Jews had toward the Jewish rite. Perhaps the Galatians feigned an interest in becoming circumcised due to the pressure they were facing, when in reality they knew it conflicted with their bodily ideals but did not have the apostolic authority themselves to fully exclude it. Perhaps Paul's polemical letter was exactly what the Galatians

were looking for. Perhaps his anti-circumcision gospel for gentile believers was precisely what they *wanted* to hear.

5.3. Resurrecting Circumcised Pneuma

This final section brings the disability of circumcision in its ancient Mediterranean context into conversation with Paul's conception of pneumatic resurrection. I first analyse Paul's argument in 1 Cor 15:35-50 to show that his conception of resurrection involves the raising of human bodies. I argue that the substance of these future resurrected bodies was not only inhabited by πνεῦμα but made from it. Then I show how circumcision was widely viewed as the perfection of the human body in ancient Jewish literature from Jubilees to late rabbinic literature. This is followed by an analysis of Paul's views on bodily continuity in resurrection and whether circumcision will be present on the bodies of Jewish Jesus followers. In order to delineate the stages of resurrection in 1 Cor 15:35-50, I compare Paul against other ancient Jewish literature concerned with resurrection, especially 1 Enoch, Fourth Ezra, and 2 Baruch.

5.3.1 The Resurrection of Pneumatic Bodies in 1 Cor 15:35-50

In 1 Cor 15:12-34, Paul defends the resurrection of the dead in connection with the resurrection of the Messiah. At 1 Cor 15:35, Paul anticipates a rejoinder to his argument: "But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised? In what sort of body do they come?'" (Ἀλλ' ἐρεῖ τις· Πῶς ἐγείρονται οἱ νεκροί; ποίῳ δὲ σώματι ἔρχονται;). Although Paul rebukes the

person who asks these questions (1 Cor 15:36) he does so, not because the questions themselves are foolish, but because such questions stem from scepticism concerning the whole resurrection itself (1 Cor 15:12). In spite of what he views as a foolish question, Paul nevertheless goes on to answer the rejoinder of 1 Cor 15:35 in 1 Cor 15:36-49:

35 Ἀλλ' ἐρεῖ τις· Πῶς ἐγείρονται οἱ νεκροί; ποίῳ δὲ σώματι ἔρχονται;
36 ἄφρων, σὺ ὁ σπείρεις, οὐ ζοοποιεῖται ἐὰν μὴ ἀποθάνῃ· 37 καὶ ὁ
σπείρεις, οὐ τὸ σῶμα τὸ γενησόμενον σπείρεις ἀλλὰ γυμνὸν κόκκον εἰ
τύχοι σίτου ἢ τινος τῶν λοιπῶν· 38 ὁ δὲ θεὸς δίδωσιν αὐτῷ σῶμα καθὼς
ἠθέλησεν, καὶ ἐκάστῳ τῶν σπερμάτων ἴδιον σῶμα. 39 οὐ πᾶσα σὰρξ ἡ
αὐτὴ σὰρξ ἀλλ' ἄλλη μὲν ἀνθρώπων, ἄλλη δὲ σὰρξ κτηνῶν, ἄλλη δὲ σὰρξ
πτηνῶν, ἄλλη δὲ ἰχθύων. 40 καὶ σώματα ἐπουράνια, καὶ σώματα
ἐπίγεια· ἀλλ' ἑτέρα μὲν ἡ τῶν ἐπουρανίων δόξα, ἑτέρα δὲ ἡ τῶν
ἐπιγείων. 41 ἄλλη δόξα ἡλίου, καὶ ἄλλη δόξα σελήνης, καὶ ἄλλη δόξα
ἀστέρων· ἀστὴρ γὰρ ἀστέρος διαφέρει ἐν δόξῃ. 42 Οὕτως καὶ ἡ
ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν. σπείρεται ἐν φθορᾷ, ἐγείρεται ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ·
43 σπείρεται ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ, ἐγείρεται ἐν δόξῃ· σπείρεται ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ,
ἐγείρεται ἐν δυνάμει· 44 σπείρεται σῶμα ψυχικόν, ἐγείρεται σῶμα
πνευματικόν· εἰ ἔστιν σῶμα ψυχικόν, ἔστιν καὶ πνευματικόν· 45 οὕτως
καὶ γέγραπται· Ἐγένετο ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος Ἀδὰμ εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν, ὁ
ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζοοποιεῖν· 46 ἀλλ' οὐ πρῶτον τὸ
πνευματικόν ἀλλὰ τὸ ψυχικόν, ἔπειτα τὸ πνευματικόν· 47 ὁ πρῶτος
ἄνθρωπος ἐκ γῆς χοϊκός, ὁ δεύτερος ἄνθρωπος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ· 48 οἷος ὁ
χοϊκός, τοιοῦτοι καὶ οἱ χοϊκοί, καὶ οἷος ὁ ἐπουράνιος, τοιοῦτοι καὶ οἱ
ἐπουράνιοι· 49 καὶ καθὼς ἐφορέσαμεν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοϊκοῦ,
φορέσομεν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανοῦ. (NA²⁸)

35 But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? In what sort of body do they come?” 36 Fool! What you are sowing is not made alive unless it dies. 37 And that which you are sowing, you are not sowing the body it will become, but a bare seed—perhaps of wheat or one of the others. 38 But God gives it a body just as he willed, and a bespoke body to each of the seeds. 39 Not every flesh is the same flesh, but there is one (flesh) for humans, another flesh for animals, another flesh for birds, and another (flesh) for fish, 40 and there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly (bodies) is one while the (glory) of the earthly (bodies) is another. 41 There is a glory for the sun, and another glory for the moon, and another glory for the stars; even star differs from star in glory. 42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. (A body) is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 A soulish body is sown, a pneumatic body is raised. If there is a soulish body, there

is also a pneumatic body. 45 Thus it also has been written, “The first human, Adam, became a living soul, the last Adam (became) a life-giving pneuma.” 46 But the pneumatic body is not first, but the soulish one (is first), then the pneumatic one. 47 The first man was (made) out of earth, a man of clay; the second man (was made) out of heaven. 48 Whatever is the substance of the man of clay so also is the substance of those who are clay, and whatever is the substance of the heavenly one, so also is the substance of those who are heavenly. 49 And just as we wear the image of the man of clay, we will also wear the image of the heavenly one.

The rhetorical question that Paul poses (“in what sort of body do they come?”) already presupposes that resurrected humans are raised in bodily form. Using the metaphor of “sowing,” Paul explains that bodies are sown like seed in one form and then raised in a new body (1 Cor 15:36-37). What is sown “is not the body that it will become” (τὸ σῶμα τὸ γενησόμενον). Paul explains that, although the quality of body that is sown is not the same quality that is raised, the pre-resurrected state and the resurrected state both involve some kind of corporeal existence.

This point is reiterated in 1 Cor 15:42-44 when Paul compares bodies that are sown in “corruption” (φθορά), “dishonour” (ἀτιμία) and “weakness” (ἀσθένεια) and bodies that are raised in “incorruptibility” (ἀφθαρσία). “glory” (δόξα) and “power” (δύναμις). The implicit subject of the verbs σπείρω and ἐγείρω in 15:42-43 is σῶμα, just as σῶμα is explicit in 15:44. Thus, we can read these comparisons as qualitative differences between different types of bodies, both present and future: (a) corruption/incorruptibility (φθορά/ἀφθαρσία) relating to bodies that do/do not decay; (b) dishonour/glory (ἀτιμία/δόξα) relating to the radiance of bodies, as in the heavenly bodies mentioned in 15:41; and (c) weakness/power (ἀσθένεια/δύναμις) relating to the ability of such

bodies.²¹ Paul envisions resurrection as the raising of a transformed human body.

The substance of this resurrected body is more elusive. Paul says that people will be raised with a “pneumatic body” (15:44). But does this mean that they will be bodies filled with πνεῦμα or that they will be bodies made from πνεῦμα? The lexicographical evidence surrounding the adjectives ψυχικός and πνευματικός in 1 Cor 15:44 point toward the latter.²² Those against the materiality of πνευματικός argue that adjectives that end with -ιτιος indicate material, whereas those that end in -ικος express “ethical or functional

²¹ On δόξα as light see Conzelmann 1975, 282; Dunn 2002, 14; Meyer 2016, 124. Meyer argues (*pace* Wright, N. T. 2003, 345–6) that there is evidence in ancient Jewish and early Christian sources (including Paul) that glorified bodies and light/radiance are inseparable (OG: Ps 8:6; 21:6; Wis 7:25; Matt 24:30; Rev 18:1; Phil 3:21). Ware unnecessarily dichotomises quality and substance in his analysis of 15:42–43: “Paul’s series of oppositions does not describe two different bodies, distinct in substance, but two contrasting modes of existence of the same body, one prior to and the other subsequent to the resurrection.” Ware 2014, 831. It is true that Paul contrasts two modes of existence of a single body, but that these modes involve distinct (though continuous) substances. Modes of existence and distinct substances are not mutually exclusive.

²² Within the last thirty years, some Pauline scholars have returned to a materialist view of πνεῦμα, a view once widely held by nineteenth-century scholarship on Paul. E.g. Pfeleiderer 1877, 201; Lietzmann 1969, 84; Schrage 2001, 297–302. In particular, Troels Engberg-Pedersen and Matthew Thiessen have thoroughly traced Stoic and ancient Jewish conceptions of pneumatic materialism, arguing that Paul himself shared a similar materialism in relation to the resurrected bodies of Christ followers. Martin, D. B. 1995, 126; Engberg-Pedersen 2010, 8–74; Thiessen 2016, 135–154. For other scholars have analysed Paul in relation to the materialist notions of πνεῦμα in connection with ancient medical literature see Martin, T. W. 2006; Robertson, P. 2014. Their studies analyse a great number of ancient sources, which need not be reproduced here. Although Pauline scholars acknowledge the materiality of πνεῦμα in Paul’s wider Graeco-Roman and Jewish context, the view that Paul himself supported pneumatic materialism has not convinced everyone. See in particular the arguments of Rabens 2010. Those who argue against the substance of the resurrected bodies of believers as pneumatic are many: Moule 1966, 108; Maston 2016, 547; Ware 2014, 832; Wolff 1982, 199; Wright, N. 2013, 1400–1.

meanings” or “modes of being.”²³ This strict boundary between -ivos and -ικος adjectives is overstated. Moulton, who is often referenced for this point, states that, “The distinction in meaning between adjectives in -ικός and those in -ivos is *generally* maintained...”²⁴ Moulton recognises this as a common rule, though it is not a hard and fast one. For example, in Rom 15:27 Paul uses σαρκικός to refer to things that have substance, namely the Jerusalem collection.

Additionally, the term πνευματινος (or ψυχινος for that matter) is not found in our extant Greek literature.²⁵ Therefore, it is perfectly possible that lexicographically the adjective πνευματικός could denote material. Since Paul pairs πνευματικός with σῶμα, he presents the future pneumatic body as material, that it does have substance. It is not merely a body animated by πνεῦμα, but a body made of πνεῦμα.

This is confirmed in 1 Cor 15:45, where Paul elaborates on Gen 2:7 by saying that just as “the first human, Adam, became a living soul,” so also “the last Adam became a life-giving πνεῦμα” (ἐγένετο ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος Ἀδὰμ εἰς

²³ Rabens 2010, 95; Thiselton 2000, 1275; Wright, N. T. 2003, 351, n.120. Modern conceptions of matter stem from discussions in ancient Greek philosophy. See in particular the discussion in Porter 2010; Renehan 1980. As of yet there has been no study of how ancient Jews up to and within the early Jewish period thought of materiality. This may be possible first by examining how ancient Jewish writers who wrote in Greek used or did not use categories of materiality/immateriality known among Greek writers. From Homer onward, “[b]odies, objects, things, and their properties furnish a sense of materiality (of what was hard, resistant, or malleable; subject to agency, alteration, and destruction).” Porter 2010, 127. As philosophers, like Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle, developed the concept of immateriality in contrast to materiality, a clearer sense of the material helped clarify what was immaterial. What came to be defined as the immaterial was “the rare” (ἀραιός), “the incorporeal” (ἄσώματος), and “the empty” (κενός). As so defined in Porter 2010, 127–8.

²⁴ Moulton and Howard 1963, 378.

²⁵ Meyer 2016, 123; Lakey 2019, 57.

ψυχὴν ζῶσαν, ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζῶσσοιούν). The OG uses the term ψυχή to describe Adam, a term typically understood as immaterial in Platonic thought. But in the Old Greek/Septuagint translation of the HB, it is not as though this ψυχή is separated from materiality. Those who are ψυχή ζῶσα have bodies (Gen 1:20, 21, 24, 2:19). If they have bodies then they are not immaterial. Furthermore, Sumney argues that, “For most, the soul was composed of matter, but of higher forms of matter than the body that is visible in this world.”²⁶ On the other hand, the Stoics considered the soul to be a second type of body.²⁷ Thus, Paul’s gentile readers would not have been puzzled by Paul’s use of ψυχικός in 1 Cor 15:44 to describe their present bodies as is so often suggested by interpreters.²⁸ Adam’s body, which is implied in 15:44, corresponds with Paul’s statement that the pre-resurrected bodies are first sown in σῶμα ψυχικόν. This means that the body of the “last Adam” (i.e. the Messiah) as a πνεῦμα ζῶσσοιούν corresponds with the σῶμα πνευματικόν in v.44, implying that the last Adam’s πνεῦμα is in fact a material body.²⁹ That both the first and second Adams have different types of bodies is further implied by the neuter articular substantivisation of the adjectives ψυχικός/πνευματικός in 15:46 (ἀλλ’ οὐ πρῶτον τὸ πνευματικόν ἀλλὰ τὸ ψυχικόν).³⁰

²⁶ Sumney 2009, 14. On souls that were composed of different matter to earthly matter see especially Martin, D. B. 1995, 108–20.

²⁷ Klinghardt 2015, 231–232. For example, Chrysippus (apud Nemesius) says: “Death is the separation of the soul from the body. But something bodiless cannot be separated from a body, for neither does something bodiless touch a body. But the soul touches and separates from the body, therefore the soul is a body (*SVF* 2.790).”

²⁸ E.g. Sanders 2015, 393.

²⁹ Cf. Maston 2016, 547.

³⁰ Nordgaard 2011, 360–1.

Paul makes the materiality of future resurrected bodies most clear in 1 Cor 15:47. Here, the first man is said to be “from earth,” which Paul clarifies as being “made from earth” (χοϊκός), while the second man is “from heaven” (ἐξ οὐρανοῦ). His point is not about the location from which they come, but the material of which they are made. Although Paul does not add a clarification that ἐξ οὐρανοῦ means “made from heaven” as he does with χοϊκός, this clarification can be assumed after the pattern of the first man.³¹ Indeed, some of textual traditions (F G latt) recognised this and supplemented the text with ο ουρανιος (“made of heaven/heavenly”). If there is any doubt about what Paul means, in 1 Cor 15:48 he then clarifies that those who are made of earth (οι χοϊκοί) are made after the one made from earth (ὁ χοϊκός), and those who are made of heaven (οι ἐπουράνιοι) after the one made of heaven (ὁ ἐπουράνιος).³² Paul had already anticipated these heavenly bodies in 15:40 with the mention of σώματα ἐπουράνια. Paul expects that the materiality of those who follow after their predecessors, whether Adam or the Messiah, will correspond to the same material bodies as their predecessors, a point he clarifies in 15:49: καὶ καθὼς ἐφορέσαμεν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοϊκοῦ, φορέσομεν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανόυ (“just as we bore the image of the one who is made from earth, we will bear the image of the one who is made from heaven”). Thus, if Jewish bodies will be raised circumcised, their circumcision will be on a body made from πνεῦμα.

³¹ Some interpreters (e.g. Meyer 2016, 130) make much of this apparent “omission” in the text, despite Paul’s abbreviated language, the textual tradition, and the following use of ἐπουράνιος in the very next verse.

³² Thiessen 2016, 153. Cf. Fitzmyer 2008, 599 who take it as “the realm where God and the risen Christ dwell and are active.”

5.3.2 Perfected Circumcised Bodies in Ancient Judaism

Sometimes the bodies of transmundane or perfected persons bore circumcision in ancient Jewish literature. Jubilees 15:27 actually describes the “angels of the presence” and the “angels of holiness,” the two circles of angels most proximate to the God of Israel, as being born circumcised “from the day of their creation.”³³ For them to be circumcised, the author presumes that the angels have some kind of foreskin, implying that the angels are male. Indeed, in ancient Jewish literature the sexual organs of angels were well-attested (cf. 1 Enoch 15:3-7; 86:3-5).³⁴ Aside from these issues of gender, the angels were synonymous with sanctification and holiness since they served in God’s presence. Their circumcised bodies were also sanctified forms.³⁵ In other words, circumcised angelic bodies represented corporeal perfection.³⁶ For Israel to take on circumcision, then, was for them to assimilate to an angelic aesthetic.³⁷

Some of the patriarchs in early Jewish and rabbinic literature shared this feature of being born circumcised. In Ps-Philo’s LAB (1 BCE-1 CE), Moses is born “in the covenant of God and the covenant of the flesh” (*in testamento Dei et in testamentum carnis eius*), i.e. circumcised (LAB 9.13).³⁸ In rabbinic

³³ Translations on Jubilees from VanderKam 1989, 92; VanderKam 2018, 507.

³⁴ Scott 2005, 4; Martínez 2013, 17.

³⁵ VanderKam 2018, 521.

³⁶ Kalimi 2002, 5; Martínez 2013, 26–7.

³⁷ Blaschke 1998, 135.

³⁸ Translation by Harrington, D. J. 1985, 316. Jacobson explains that one of the reasons why the mother took such extraordinary steps for her son was because she recognised he was special through his being born circumcised. Jacobson 1998, 425.

material, native circumcision was synonymous with a person's goodness, righteousness, or perfection. For example, in the Midrash Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu (Tanḥuma B, Noach 5.3; 4-6th CE) on Genesis 6:9 understands the phrase *נה איש צדיק תמים היה בדורותיו* (“Noah a righteous man, perfect in his generations”) as meaning that *נה נולד מחול* (“Noah was born circumcised”).³⁹ In the Talmud (b. Sot 12a), some say the reason why Moses is said to have been “good” (תוב) is because he was born circumcised (*אחרים אומרים נולד כשהוא מהול*).⁴⁰ The criteria for being born circumcised appears to be because a person is “good” (תוב), “perfect” (תם or ישר), or “righteous” (תמים).⁴¹ Circumcision and bodily perfection were entwined.

In another version of Midrash Tanḥuma (Tanḥuma A, Noach 5.3), Adam and Seth are said to have been born circumcised, and the midrash cites Gen 5:3 (*בילד בדמותו כצלמו*, “He begat a son after his likeness and image”). Although Gen 5:3 explains Seth's native circumcision in relation to his father's, the use of the expression *בדמותו כצלמו* recalls God's creation of humanity after his own image in Gen 1:26 (*בצלמנו כדמותנו*). This motif is furthered in an 8-9th century CE midrash Avot D'Rabbi Natan 2.5 who admits that “the first man came forth circumcised as it is written, ‘And God created man in his image’ (Gen 1:27)” (*אדם הראשון יצא מהול שנאמר ויברא אלהים את האדם בצלמו*). What is implied

³⁹ Numerous men in rabbinic texts are circumcised, from Melchizedek to Balaam. See Blaschke 1998, 185–6. The Prophet Muhammed is also said to have been born circumcised in a Hadith transmitted by Anas b. Mālik and recorded by Al-Munāwī. On this see Kister 1994, 12–13.

⁴⁰ Indeed, the Hebrew of Ex 2:2 could be playfully translated as “And she saw his sign for [he was] good” (*ותרא אותו כי טוב*).

⁴¹ So Kalimi 2002, 4–5.

by this text is that *God himself is circumcised*. Adam was born circumcised because he reflected the form of his father, God. This explains why then goodness, righteousness, and perfection were associated with being born circumcised. Circumcision reflected God himself.

Despite the late appearance of the idea that God was circumcised in Avot D'Rabbi Natan, God's circumcision may actually be implied in Jubilees. In Jubilees 15, the layers of angels closest to God—the angels of the presence and angels of holiness mentioned previously—are circumcised as well as the people of Israel. Elsewhere in Jubilees, God joins Israel, the angels of the presence, and the angels of holiness as a staunch keeper of the Sabbath (Jubilees 2:17-20). In light of these details, Paula Fredriksen argues that God is in one sense “Jewish.”⁴² Certainly, God is father both to the angels and to Israel (Jub 1:24, 25) in Jubilees, and it is not farfetched to infer that if key members proximate to God in his holy assembly were circumcised, that God, the epitome of holiness, would also bear the mark of the covenant. In light of this, we might read circumcision as an *imitatio dei*.

The ancient Jewish trajectory of circumcision as a perfected bodily state, reflective even of the body of God, suggests that it is possible Paul may also have expected the future resurrected bodies of Jewish men to be circumcised. The evidence of bodily continuity in 1 Corinthians 15 confirms this future foreskinless-resurrected state.

⁴² Fredriksen 2018, 198–99.

5.3.3 The Continuity of Bodily Circumcision in Resurrection

To confirm the presence of circumcision on the bodies of resurrected Jewish believers, we must clarify how Paul understands the continuity between present and future bodies. In order to perceive the continuity between the present and future resurrected bodies, we must also understand Paul's conception of the process of resurrection in his ancient Jewish context.

Jon Levenson has noted that the rabbis tried, in part, to work out some of the ambiguous mechanics of resurrection. One such problematic aspect was the question of disability, or physical defects (מומן). In the Talmud, Reish Lakish (Rabbi Simon ben Lakish) tried to resolve a textual discrepancy between Jer 31:7, which suggests that there are blind and lame persons at the end of days, and Isa 35:6, which suggests the ability of the lame to walk and the mute to sing (b. Sanh. 91b). In order to resolve this contradiction, Lakish posits a two-stage resurrection: the dead will *first* arise with their infirmities and *then* they will be healed.⁴³ Rava (Abba ben Joseph bar Chama) comes to a similar conclusion upon contemplating Deut 32:39 ("I deal death and give life, I wounded and I will heal" [אני אמית ואחיה מחצתי ואני ארפא]). He explains that God is saying what he kills will be brought to life and honoured and *then* what is wounded he will heal (b. Sanh. 91b).⁴⁴ For the rabbis, there is a sense in which

⁴³ "How (do these two verses resolve)? They (the dead) will stand with blemishes and then they will be cured." (כיצד עומדין בומן ומתראין). Translation from Levenson 2006, 225.

⁴⁴ מה שאני ממית אני מחיה והדר מה שמצתי ואני ארפא

there must be consistency between the present body and the body in the resurrection.⁴⁵

A fair amount of ancient Jewish texts that deal with resurrection suggest that there is bodily continuity between the bodies that die and the bodies that are raised by God. One particular way of expressing corporeal continuity between the pre-resurrected body and the resurrected body was to emphasise the revivification of corpses.⁴⁶ An early mooring for this notion appears in Isa 26:19 where the prophet calls on Yahweh's dead to arise and for the scribe's (?) corpse (נבלתי) to arise.⁴⁷ The use of נבלתי implies the same body that is dead and decaying will be raised.⁴⁸ Likewise, in Ezek 37:12-13 Yahweh promises to lift the people of Israel "out of their graves" (מקברותיכם). Pseudo-Phocylides argues that it is not good to tamper with the structure of the human body ("to dissolve the human frame," ἀρμονίην ἀναλύμεν, 1.102), implying that they need to be whole when they arise again (1.103).⁴⁹ Fourth Ezra also records the

⁴⁵ Löwinger 1923, 77; Levenson 2006, 225.

⁴⁶ "Revivification" is often used to describe corpses simply returning to life as they were, where "resurrection" is used for a raised body that is transformed in some way. However, some resurrection processes involve both revivification and transformation. For this reason, I do not make a distinction between resurrection and revivification. Both are ways of describing corpses returning to life, although the degree to which the quality of the corpse is improved varies depending on the context.

⁴⁷ נבלתי is paired with the verb יקומו which is impossible since the former is a feminine singular and the verb is a masculine plural form. This suggests that נבלתי is an interpolation into the final form of the text, possibly replacing רפאים as in 26:14 where the prophet exclaims that the spirits of the nations will not arise. Blenkinsopp 2000, 370.

⁴⁸ This interpretation is affirmed by the LXX Isa 26:19 which reads ἐγερθήσονται οἱ ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις ("those who are in the tombs will be raised"). Collins (2000, 120) understands this as referring to the nation in general (as in Ezek 37), however, this is to exclude the personalisation of the corpse as noted above.

⁴⁹ Scholars have argued about whether this refers to the dissection of cadavers (van der Horst 1978, 184) or *ossilegia*, the practice of secondary burial by taking the bones of a

revivification of corpses out of their tombs (2:16, 31). Likewise, Ps-Philo (LAB 3.10) uses this motif to express continuity in the resurrection, as God brings “the dead to life and raises those who are ‘sleeping’ from the earth” (*et vivificabo mortuos et erigam dormientes de terra*).⁵⁰

2 Maccabees makes the implicit continuity of bodies explicit by revealing an expectation that the specific form of the bodies will be returned by God in resurrection. So, in the well-known passage of the third martyred son in 2 Macc 7:10-11, the son explains how he expects to receive his very hands (ταῦτα, “these hands”) back from God again after his death. Later in the narrative (14:46), the elder of Jerusalem Razis tears out his entrails and throws them at the crowd, bellowing for God to return them to him again (ταῦτα αὐτῷ πάλιν ἀποδοῦναι). Other texts, such as the Sibylline Oracles or 2 Baruch, further specify the exact continuity between the dead and the raised. So, in Sib. Or. 4.182, the Sibyll says that God will raise mortals up “as they were before” (ὡς

cadaver and placing it in an ossuary (Collins, J. J. 2003, 78, n.18). Either way, however, involves the deformation of the structure of the body, which is what Pseudo-Phocylides arguing against. Klawans (2017) argues that Pseudo-Phocylides is actually a Christian document, and that evidence for its “Jewishness,” such as the section on resurrection (103-4) actually attests to early Christian concern to “find resurrection” (over and against immortality) in ancient Greek sources. Although he argues that resurrection features rarely in Jewish-Hellenistic literature in Greek (e.g. 2 Maccabees), we do not have a representative portion of that literature to make such a claim. Additionally, although he draws on early Christian writers (most notably Hippolytus) to argue that resurrection is attributed to Phocylides by early Christians, he also notes that the work is never cited by the church fathers. Klawans 2017, 218. But if some early Christians took the time to create such a work and project on to this Greek gnomic poet then it should be expected that it would have been used for the purpose for which it was intentionally manufactured. Klawans may be right that the document as a whole is a Christian document, but it would not negate the fact that vv.103-4 of the text resonates with other Jewish conceptions of resurrection.

⁵⁰ Text from Harrington, D. J. and Cazeaux, J. 1976, 72.

πάρος ἦσαν).⁵¹ Likewise 2 Bar 50:2 emphasises that as God has given the body of the dead to the earth, so that same body, with nothing having changed in its form, is returned to life.⁵²

N.T. Wright argues we should understand ancient Jewish belief in the resurrection as “life after ‘life after death’”—that is, resurrection is an embodied state preceded by “an interim period of death-as-a-state.”⁵³ Aside from the fact that ancient Jewish conceptions of resurrection were not homogenous nor widespread, for many Jewish authors, including Paul, “life after ‘life after death’” was more complex than Wright has argued, as the example of b. Sanh. 91b shows above.⁵⁴ Indeed, there are some texts that view the departure of the soul/spirit from the body during the interim “death-as-a-state.” For the most part, however, in terms of what happens with the body, some Jews like Paul understood resurrection to involve two or more stages *after* death.

For some ancient Jewish authors, the revivification of bodies as they were was only the first bodily stage of their resurrection. They distinguish between the raising of the bodies and then a second glorification or transformation of those bodies.⁵⁵ So 2 Baruch mentions the rising of the dead as they were (50:2), and then anticipates that the glory of the righteous will change (51:1), that their face will transform into “the light of their beauty” (51:3), into the “splendour

⁵¹ Text from Geffcken 1902, 102.

⁵² Text from Dederling 1973, 26.

⁵³ Wright, N. T. 2003, 31.

⁵⁴ On the heterogeneity of ancient Jewish beliefs about resurrection see Cavallin 1974, 199; Elledge 2017.

⁵⁵ This may be implied in Sib. Or. 4.188-9 where the author notes the pious will live on earth again and God gives them “spirit and life and favour.”

of angels” (51:5).⁵⁶ The bodies of the righteous are transformed as far as their luminosity, however the text does not imply a structural change to the shape of their bodies. The bodies of the wicked, however, suffer deformation, as the shape of their bodies are made more evil (51:2) and they waste away (51:5). The bodies of the righteous are preserved in the resurrection, while the bodies of the unrighteous are distorted. These corporeal transformations reflect an intensification or amplification of the previous ways of righteous/unrighteous living.⁵⁷

A pattern of being transformed into the stars or an angelic-like existence is found also in Jewish resurrection texts that are not always explicit about the continuity of bodies in resurrection. For example, in Daniel 12:2-3 the dead who sleep in the land of dust will awaken, they will be judged, and then the “knowledgeable” and the “righteous” will become radiant like the stars forever.⁵⁸ In 1 Enoch 25, the righteous after the great judgment will be granted access to the fruit from the tree of life (25:4). The power of its fruit is so potent that when the righteous eat from it their bones are sustained by its fragrance (25:6).⁵⁹ That the righteous now exist in bones, implies they have been raised in their original bodies (a fact implied in the later *Book of Parables*, 1 En 51:1-2;

⁵⁶ Similarly, in Pseudo-Phocylides 1.104, once the dead are raised out of the earth, they will later “become gods” (ὀπίσω δὲ θεοὶ τελέθονται), implying they will become like the stars or possibly angels. Collins, J. J. 2003, 80; Wilson, W. T. 2005, 145.

⁵⁷ Lied 2009, 328; Vollenweider 2014, 471.

⁵⁸ I take the expression about the dead waking to eternal life and others to everlasting abhorrence in 12:2 as encompassing judgment. On the astral imagery of Dan 12:3 see Collins, J. J. 2000, 126.

⁵⁹ On this passage in the context of 1 Enoch and other prophetic literature see Nickelsburg 2001, 316.

62:15).⁶⁰ Having been sustained by the fragrance of the fruit, however, their bodies now enjoy long life on earth in garments of glory (cf. 1 En 62:16).⁶¹

Fourth Ezra presents its own unique perspective on the process of resurrection and the intermediate state of death. Once a person has died, their soul leaves the body (7:75, 78, 88, 100). The unrighteous wander (7:80).⁶² The righteous, however, have their souls placed into treasuries (7:91, 101) where they are guarded by angels awaiting glory in the last days (7:95).⁶³ At the judgment, the earth gives up the bodies of the dead and the treasuries give up their souls and the two are reunited (7:32) for sentencing.⁶⁴ This is, however, not the end, as Fourth Ezra admits that there is a future glorified state once the souls of the righteous are reunited with their bodies. During their soul rest (7:97), the righteous are shown how their faces will shine like the sun, how they will be made like the light of the stars (cf. Dan 12:3), and that they become incorruptible (*amodo non corrupti*). This undoubtedly refers to some kind of future angelic existence since angels were known to be like the stars (e.g. Job 38:7) and their faces were known to shine like the sun (2 En 1:5, 19:1; cf. 1 En 51:4). Fourth Ezra suggests that the righteous will even surpass the angels (cf.

⁶⁰ Although the *Book of the Watchers* is late, the wider context of 1 Enoch 25 seems to imply some kind of new life for the righteous and God's elect. Nickelsburg 2001, 315.

⁶¹ This extended life may not be eternal life, but an extended life like the patriarchs (1 En 10:10). See Collins, J. J. 2000, 122.

⁶² Cf. Ps.-Phoc. 1.108.

⁶³ The concept of treasuries for souls is not unique to Fourth Ezra (cf. 2 Bar 30:1; 1 En 51:1).

⁶⁴ The text assumes that the unrighteous too is reunited with their bodies, having wandered without reprieve or rest in the treasures of the righteous.

7:125).⁶⁵ Taken as a whole, Fourth Ezra presents three stages of resurrection for the righteous: (1) the keeping of their souls in treasuries, (2) the reunification of their souls and bodies as they were, and finally (3) the glorification and transformation of those bodies. While the quality or substance and appearance (as to radiance) of the bodies of the righteous appear to change, nothing in Fourth Ezra suggests that the shape of the bodies necessarily changes.⁶⁶

When we turn to Paul, we find that he also conceives of resurrection as a multi-stage process that involves bodily continuity much like some ancient Jewish writers that I have analysed. Setting aside those who are presently alive when the resurrection happens (15:51, “we will not all fall asleep”), in 1 Cor 15:52 Paul appears to understand that the last trumpet will sound and the dead will rise incorruptible (ἀφθαρτος) and be changed (1 Cor 15:52, cf. 1 Thess 4:16).

However, it is not totally clear that the raising into incorruptibility and the changing of believers (ἀλλάσσω) are the same event.⁶⁷ It is questionable to assimilate the raising and transformation of believers, especially given an overlooked aspect of 1 Cor 15:50, that what is corruptible (φθορά) cannot inherit ἀφθαρσία (immortality). If it is necessary for “this perishable body (τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο) to wear ἀφθαρσία” (15:53), how can it do so if a human with

⁶⁵ Stone 1990, 245.

⁶⁶ As Elledge notes, “Spiritual life, thus, still maintains some continuity with material features of the body, possessing a ‘face’ (*vultus*) and visibly shining like the heavenly bodies.” Elledge 2017, 29.

⁶⁷ Cf. Conzelmann 1975, 291; Segal 1989, 433; Pentiuic 2013, 329; Vollenweider 2014, 470; Fee, G. D. 1987, 802; Schrage 2001, 374.

a corruptible body (φθορά) cannot inherit ἀφθαρσία (15:50)? Paul implies the answer in 1 Cor 15:52: the dead are raised without the ability to be corrupted (ἄφθαρτος). Interpreters usually understand ἀφθαρσία and ἄφθαρτος as synonymous. But if ἀφθαρσία and ἄφθαρτος refer to the same thing, then for Paul to say that the dead were raised ἄφθαρτος would contradict his exclusion in 1 Cor 15:50 about the inability of the corruptible (φθορά) to inherit ἀφθαρσία. In order for 1 Cor 15:50 to be true, there has to be an intermediate stage before a body becomes ἀφθαρσία where it is not φθορά. Therefore, we should take ἀφθαρσία and ἄφθαρτος as describing slightly different bodily states. Ἄφθαρτος describes a somatic state that does not decay (but where destruction is still theoretically possible), whereas ἀφθαρσία refers to a state where destruction is no longer possible. Paul's point in 1 Cor 15:50-53 is significant because it highlights that the dead are not raised exactly how they were before in terms of materiality, but are raised in a state of incorruption, that is, in a material body free from deterioration (1 Cor 15:52). Paul's first stage of resurrection is the re-embodiment of a person in a body that defies entropy.⁶⁸ Once this person is in a body that does not suffer decomposition, it is now able to inherit ἀφθαρσία (15:50). This makes ἀφθαρσία a state beyond the raised incorruptible state in the first half of 1 Cor 15:52. Indeed, ἀφθαρσία is likely the changing of believers to bear the image of Christ mentioned in 1 Cor 15:49,

⁶⁸ It may be, as Matthias Klinghardt argues, that Paul imagines a kind of celestial embodiment during death, where believers become heavenly bodies, an intermediate stage between the present life and resurrection. Klinghardt 2015. It is unclear to me, however, how this might work with their re-embodiment Paul mentions in 1 Cor 15:52.

but also in Phil 3:21 and 2 Cor 3:18 where Paul believes followers will be metamorphosed into Christ's glorious body (cf. Rom 8:29).⁶⁹

The mention of judgment in Rom 2:7 is significant for our understanding of resurrection in 1 Cor 15:50-53, since in many of the resurrection processes analysed above, the bestowal of a transformed state for the righteous proceeded from the God's righteous verdict. Although Paul does not mention the judgment explicitly in 1 Cor 15:51-2, in light of our understanding of ἀφθαρσία as the final state of resurrection after God judges the dead, it can be assumed that it happens between the raising of the dead and their transformation in 15:52 just as it is explicit in Rom 2:2-7. The metamorphosis of 1 Cor 15:52 thus represents a second stage in Paul's resurrection process, the christological transformation of believers to reflect the glorious image of their saviour. Given that some ancient Jewish sources understood resurrection as a multi-stage process, first as revivification and then as metamorphosis, it is not surprising that Paul also holds this view.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Segal calls this "symmorphosis," to be morphed together with. Segal 1989, 419. In the Wisdom of Solomon, ἀφθαρσία and being made into the "image of God's own eternity" (εἰκόνα τῆς ἰδίας αἰδιότητος) are synonymous (2:23). Additionally, Paul in Rom 2:7 argues that who seek eternal life by perseverance of good works will be judged by God (2:5-6) and given "glory and honour and immortality" (δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν). As argued before, luminous, supra-mortal, and even angelic resurrected bodies were not uncommon among ancient Jewish theories of resurrection. The connection between the image of the Messiah and ἀφθαρσία falls within this trajectory.

⁷⁰ Pace Schrage 2001, 374. There is the question of what happens to the those who are not dead when the resurrection happens (1 Cor 15:51). Elsewhere, Paul explicitly says that those who are alive will not come before the dead (1 Thess 4:15) but they will appear before Christ in the air at the same time as the dead (1 Thess 4:17). If we harmonise this account with Paul's terse statements in 1 Cor 15:51-52, then we might assume that not only do the bodies of the dead become ἀφθαρτος at the trumpet's call but also the bodies of the living as well. Paul's reason for leaving this detail out may be due to the fact that the focus is on the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:35) not of the living. Furthermore, because of Paul's statement in 1 Cor 15:50, that what is

As a confirmation of Paul's two-stage view of resurrection, one should consider ancient Jewish conceptions of resurrection as a form of new creation modelled after Gen 2:7, evident in Paul's own argument about resurrection in 1 Cor 15:45. In the late second century/first half of the first century BCE, Ezek 37:1-10 (the valley of dry bones) was reinterpreted in the Scrolls community (the so-called document "4QPseudo-Ezekiel" II [4Q385, 4Q386 1 I; 4Q388 7]) not to just be an understanding of the revival of Israel but concerning actual individual eschatological resurrection.⁷¹ What is significant about both Ezek 37:1-10 and 4QPseudo-Ezekiel is that the revivification of the body in the prophesy follows a two-step process, firstly with the reformation of the body (Ezek 37:7-8; 4QPseudo-Ezekiel II, 5-6), and secondly with the breathing in of the spirit (Ezek 37:5-6, 9-10; 4QPseudo-Ezekiel II, 7-8). Karin Schöpflin has observed that this two-stage process is analogous to the creation of the first human in Gen 2:7, where God first forms the human (וַיִּצַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם) (עפר מן־הָאֲדָמָה) and then breathes a living spirit into them (וַיִּפַּח בָּאָפִי נְשִׁמַת חַיִּים).⁷² Just like in Ezek 37 and 4QPseudo-Ezekiel, the human does not become alive until they receive this second breath. The portrayal of resurrection as a two-stage process analogous to the creation of humanity in Gen 2:7 characterises resurrection as a kind of new creation.

perishable cannot take on immortality, those who have not fallen asleep are required to have their corruptibility removed before they can join with the dead and be changed as in 1 Cor 15:51, 52.

⁷¹ Dimant 2000, 532; Schöpflin 2009, 82. Here we follow the reconstruction of the text provided by Dimant 2001, 24.

⁷² Schöpflin 2009, 74, 82.

Paul also uses Gen 2:7 in 1 Cor 15:45 to characterise resurrection as a two-stage process. The first humanity is of the earth and the second humanity is from heaven; the first humanity is formed out of earthly material and the second is infused with heavenly material, in this case, heavenly πνεῦμα (15:46-48). This two-stage process is reflected in Paul's description of the resurrection as we have delineated it above. God raises the dead by reforming their bodies into an incorruptible state, and then those bodies undergo a pneumatic transformation into the image of Christ who is himself πνεῦμα ζωοποιῶν. Like Ezekiel 37 and 4QPseudo-Ezekiel, Paul has modelled his resurrection after Gen 2:7, and views its two-stage process after death as a new creation.⁷³

Now that I have sketched Paul's overarching framework for resurrection, I can query whether there is a change in form or shape of the body that accompanies the qualitative/substantive change from a σῶμα ψυχικόν into a σῶμα πνευματικόν. The continuity of bodies through resurrection was an important topos in early Christian literature. In the Gospels, there is continuity between Jesus's previous body and his resurrected one, as his disciples are able to recognise him and to view his scars (Luke 24:31, 39-40; John 20:17, 20; cf. Matt 28:9).⁷⁴ Candida Moss argues that this preoccupation with continuity

⁷³ The joint conception of earthly and heavenly material uniting in a single creation process discounts those who try to make the revival of the body and a heavenly transformation of the material mutually exclusive from one another. E.g. Ware 2014, 826.

⁷⁴ While some propose the discontinuity material-wise of Jesus's body in John 20:17 when he appears to Mary Magdalene, I think it best to understand Jesus's command for her not to touch him as having less to do with the substance of his body and more to do with the fact that he did not have the time to deal with her at his feet; thus he sends her off to tell the disciples as he is ascending. So Beasley-Murray 1999, 377.

between the present body and the resurrected body can be seen in Mark 9:42-50.⁷⁵ Continuity between the body of the dead and the body of the resurrected was taken up by some patristic authors especially in relation to disability.

Authors such as Pseudo-Justin (*On the Resurrection* 4), Irenaeus (*Haer.* 5.13.1), and Tertullian (*Res.* 42) understood that the dead would be raised in the condition that they died with their disability still present, even if in the case of some (e.g. Irenaeus) that healing occurs shortly after resurrection itself (like b. Sanh. 81b).⁷⁶

Turning to Paul, nowhere in 1 Cor 15:35-55 does he say openly that the form or shape of the resurrected body will be different from the one that believers have presently. He does speak about a difference in quality (pneumatic, luminous, etc.), which scholars have often mistakenly conflated, but this is not the same thing as the form and physical shape of the body. However, when bodies are raised at the last trumpet, their bodies take on incorruptibility, and then after the judgment are changed to be like Christ. Neither of these events necessarily implies a change in physique. With the latter, for example, Paul does not literally mean that believers will physically mirror the Messiah exactly. Additionally, in 15:53, the metaphor of being clothed with immortality suggests no alteration to the structure of the body itself. There is more. The same body sown is also the same body raised in 15:42-44.⁷⁷ To reinforce this point, Paul

⁷⁵ Moss 2019, 41–65.

⁷⁶ On the themes of disability and resurrection in Pseudo-Justin, Irenaeus, and Augustine see Moss 2011, 1004–11.

⁷⁷ Ware 2014, 824.

argues it is “this body” (τὸ φθαρτὸν τοῦτο i.e. the present body) that will take on immortality in 15:53-4, suggesting structural continuity with regard to shape and form.⁷⁸ We may also take as evidence Paul’s argument that “flesh and blood” (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα) is not able to inherit the kingdom of God.⁷⁹ This expression is a synonymous parallel with the expression οὐδὲ ἡ φθορὰ τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν κληρονομεῖ.⁸⁰ With the latter expression, I have argued that the only way for φθορὰ to inherit ἀφθαρσία is to first be made incorruptible. Flesh and blood too are both liable to decay (i.e. they can rot), but it is not that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God *ever*, only that they cannot inherit the kingdom *as they are*.⁸¹ If flesh and blood can be raised in an incorruptible state, they are thus able to inherit ἀφθαρσία, and if resurrected bodies maintain the flesh and blood of their bodies albeit in a new state without decay, then we may assume that the rest of the body (for which the expression “flesh and blood” is surely a synecdoche), including its physical shape and structure, is also retained.⁸² In the Jewish sources previously examined, nothing about the bodily

⁷⁸ Ware 2014, 825; Thiselton 2000, 1297.

⁷⁹ Joachim Jeremias argued that σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα in v.50 does not refer to human substance that could decay, but “the natural man as a frail creature in opposition to God.” Jeremias 1956, 152. This pattern continues, cf. Maston 2016. Yet, the OG sources Jeremias points to for his definition actually suggests the opposite: σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα is a circumlocution for *mortal flesh* (Sir 14:17-18; 17:30-32). The difference between a corrupted “stuff” of the human body and its earthly characteristics in these examples makes no sense. A critique made also by Dunn 2002, 14.

⁸⁰ Following Lang 1986, 239, cf. Jeremias 1956, 152.

⁸¹ Fee, G. D. 1987, 799. Cf. Engberg-Pedersen 2009, 128. Unlike Conzelmann and Wright, I do not take the expression in 15:50 as only applicable to the living but to both the living and the dead. Wright, N. T. 2003, 359; Conzelmann 1975, 289–90.

⁸² While I argue that the substance of the transformed bodies is pneumatic it is not clear to me, as it is to Engberg-Petersen, that it is solely made of πνεῦμα, Engberg-Pedersen 2009, 126; Engberg-Pedersen 2010, 32. Paul’s use of Gen 2:7, for example, suggests that although the future resurrected body is a σῶμα πνευματικόν, it is not

form of the resurrected changes, except for in 2 Baruch and there only in relation to the bodies of the unrighteous not the righteous.⁸³ There is no evidence, as Segal posits, that the new creation leaves behind “sexuality and gender.”⁸⁴ Rather the opposite is the case. For Paul, the body maintains its shape and form through the different stages of resurrection, even while its luminosity, pneumatic materiality, and Christ-like glory increase. If the resurrected body retains its shape and form, then the resurrected body of a Jewish male Christ follower should expect to retain his circumcision, especially given that circumcision was a feature of perfected heavenly bodies.

Not only does Paul believe that the future glorious existence of those who are in the Messiah will involve pneumatic corporeality, but that such bodies will exist in some kind of continuity with their bodies in the present. For Jewish men, circumcision was not a part of their present corporeal life that would cease to exist when they were transformed pneumatically. Rather, circumcision on their bodies anticipated the aesthetic of their future transformation into the image of the Messiah.

5.3.4 The Future Disability of Jewish Christ-Followers

When we think about the implications of Jewish bodies resurrected with circumcision, there are two important perspectives to consider. The first

solely πνεῦμα, since both earthly and heavenly substances participate together to bring life in the (re-)creation of humanity.

⁸³ Cavallin 1974, 213 tends to overemphasise the discontinuity, particular in view of the glorification or angelification of Israel in the sources.

⁸⁴ Segal 1989, 433.

perspective is that of the Jewish believers themselves and the second is from the perspective of gentile believers. For ancient Jewish believers, pneumatic circumcision would have been a magnificent corporeal transformation, an eternal reflection of God's covenant with them since it is embedded in material that does not decay and die, but instead radiated with the glorious πνεῦμα of God's Messiah.

From a non-Jewish perspective, gentile believers expecting an eschatological perfection of bodies would have been more likely to envision glorified bodies as having foreskin rather than circumcision, since foreskin was the physical ideal they held in their pre-resurrected state. The continuation of circumcision in resurrection would have been shocking. From a gentile point of view, the resurrection would actually prolong the impairment of Jewish bodies and would glorify them with uncivilised, barbarian bodies rather than after the Graeco-Roman ideal. From the perspective of the past pagan environment of non-Jewish believers, the future glorified bodies of Jews were resurrected in disability.⁸⁵ In order to accept this eschatological future, gentile believers would have had to disassociate the negative social and cultural stigma attached to circumcision and would have had to adopt the value that ancient Jews placed on the rite itself. Gentile believers would have been forced to view circumcision as an ability rather than a disability, a repairment rather than an impairment, something beautiful rather than a mutilation.

⁸⁵ To those judaising gentiles who castrated themselves to reconnect themselves to Christ, God's presentation of a divine τ for them at the parousia might come as a shock since the new "monument" they received may be circumcised.

Jews like Paul would be sowed in physical circumcision and raised in pneumatic circumcision. Through Greek and Roman eyes, the continuation of circumcision in the age to come would have been the continuation of Jewish barbarism from the present life. Because of his circumcision, Paul would have been disabled both in life and in the life after death.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that understanding circumcision as a disability allows us to ask new question of circumcision in Paul's letters. In order to show this, I analysed circumcision from two angles. The first angle from which this chapter analysed circumcision was from the perspective of Paul's gentile audience in the letter to the Galatians. Taking seriously the antipathy non-Jews held toward circumcision we argued that there is more evidence to show that the Galatians were being coerced into circumcision than evidence they actually wanted to be circumcised. By understanding of circumcision as a disability, I was able to correct the tendency among Pauline scholarship to exaggerate the gentile desire for circumcision among Paul's believing communities.

I then analysed circumcision from the perspective of a male Jewish believer, specifically in relation to his future eschatological body. I argued from 1 Corinthians 15 that Paul understood the future bodies of believers to be materially pneumatic. In Paul's two-stage process for bodily resurrection after death, such bodies would stand in continuity with the present bodies. Thus, like angels in the book of Jubilees or the patriarchs in rabbinic literature, I argue

Paul would have acknowledged that the future glorified bodies of Jews would bear the marks of circumcision. Paul's view of the resurrection actually reinforces the disability of Jewish circumcision and extends it beyond this present age.

PART TWO: THE DEMONISED
VISIONARY

6. ANGEL OF SATAN AND THORN IN THE FLESH

6.1 From Circumcision to Angels

No riddle in Paul's letters has tested the exegetical creativity and historical imagination of New Testament scholars more than Paul's "thorn in the flesh" in 2 Cor 12:7.¹ Despite the difficulty in narrowing down exactly what it was, the thorn has become an important locus for the physical health of the Apostle:

7 καὶ τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων, ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι, ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί, ἄγγελος σατανᾶ, ἵνα με κολαφίζῃ, ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι. (2 Cor 12:1-7, NA²⁸ modified)

7 And because of the sublimity of the revelations, in order that I might not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, in order to pummel me, so that I would not exalt myself.

Turning away from circumcision, the second part of this thesis focuses on Paul's thorn in the flesh as a disability. This chapter identifies the nature of the

¹ The argument in this second part of the thesis does not depend on the unity of 2 Corinthians. Many scholars argue that the letter is in fact a composite. The discussion of the various proposals for its unity or composite nature can be found elsewhere, and it should be noted that there is no single proposal that has garnered wide acceptance. Although there is ancient material precedent for combining multiple letters into a composite document even at an early stage, as shown by Brent Nongbri, the basis for 2 Corinthians as an amalgamation of documents still rests on internal evidence. Classic works such as those by Mitchell (2005, 317) and recent critical studies like that of Nongbri (2015, 54) claim that the majority of so-called "critical" or "serious" scholars are convinced 2 Corinthians is a multi-letter composite. Leaving aside what constitutes a "critical" scholar, a survey by Harris (2005, 42–43) shows that this is a misconstrual of the scholarly consensus. The myth of the majority is even perpetuated among the "minority," see Schmeller 2013, 74.

thorn as an angel and the effect it had on Paul's body. Chapter Seven investigates the ways ancient Jewish cultures de-normalised demonised conditions like the one Paul had. Finally, in the last chapter of this thesis, I analyse the strategies Paul uses to reconcile God's justice with his role in impairing and disabling Paul's body.

In this chapter, I argue that Paul's thorn *was* the angel from Satan. The literature on Paul's thorn is vast and the crossover of arguments is dizzying even for the seasoned interpreter. The first section of the chapter orients readers to different solutions to this puzzle offered throughout history. It provides a clear taxonomy of interpretive possibilities regarding 2 Cor 12:7 based on the first eight hundred years of its reception as well as the last hundred years or so of NT scholarship. I then assess the evidence of the most prevalent interpretations of Paul's thorn.

With the help of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), I then focus on the metaphoricity of Paul's language in 2 Cor 12:7. Instead of reverting to the now prevalent agnostic position, I offer my own argument for the identity of Paul's thorn in 2 Corinthians, that the thorn was the ἄγγελος σατανᾶ, the angel of Satan. Although this is not a new proposal, my approach (contemporary metaphor theory) to 2 Cor 12:7 is novel. A close analysis of Paul's language in 2 Cor 12:7 indicates that the scholarly fixation on Paul's metaphor of the "thorn" has obscured what is remarkably plain in the text.

The chapter then investigates the purpose of Paul's thorn in relation to the immediate context of 2 Cor 12:7. I propose that the purpose of the satanic angel is to inhibit Paul's ability to convey the revelations he heard in paradise (2

Cor 12:4). This hypothesis has explanatory power for the enigmatic way Paul reports on his heavenly ascent in 2 Cor 12:2-4. Paul is not free to speak whatever he wants to whomever he wants. Rather his ability to communicate oracles is restricted by the angel that God has so graciously given to him. Finally, I analyse the restrictive function of Paul's thorn in conversation with prophets and visionaries in ancient Jewish literature who share similar impairing like Balaam, the prophet Ezekiel, the Watchers in 1 Enoch, and the prophet in Apocalypse of Zephaniah.

6.2 Paul's Thorn through the Ages

From early Christianity to twentieth century scholarship, interpreters have tendered a multiplicity of hypotheses regarding Paul's thorn. Among ancient interpreters, some, such as Augustine, had no inclination about what they thought Paul's thorn was.² Some readers understood Paul's thorn to be a physical weakness. The earliest reception of 2 Cor 12:7 comes from the second-century bishop of Lyon, Irenaeus, where Paul's thorn is described as an infirmity (*infirmitas*, *Haer.* 5.3.1).³ So also for Ambrose of Milan who alluded to 2 Cor

² Augustine calls it mysterious (*Nat. grat.* 27.31).

³ In *Haer.* 5.3.1. where Irenaeus cites 2 Cor 12:7-9, we find some of the highest concentrations of the word *infirmitas* (weakness, sickness) in the whole work, which the Latin translator of Irenaeus has used for the term ἀσθένεια. *Infirmitas* in Irenaeus can thus refer negatively to the part of human flesh that is corruptible and divorced from the vivifying potency of the Spirit. There are times when the term *infirmitas* does not refer to bodily weakness or disease in Irenaeus but to the nature of human materiality itself. See *Haer.* 4.38.2, 4; 5.9.2. But there were also clearly instances when the term *infirmitas* in Irenaeus is used to describe an impairment or a disease. For example, when Irenaeus refers to the woman with the issue of blood, he calls it her infirmity (*infirmittatis*, *Haer.* 2.32.2). When he argues that Simon Magus and all the so-called

12:7 often by referring to Paul's *stimulus carnis* as an *infirmittatis* (*Enarrat. Ps.* 36.42; *Exp. Ps.* 118 3.36; *Apol. Dav.* 2.8).⁴

Others viewed it as a chronic health issue. In his commentary on 2 Cor 12:7-9, Didymus of Alexandria viewed the thorn as a physical consequence of the angel of Satan and possibly a disease (*Fr. 2 Cor. 12:7-9*).⁵ In his *Asketikon* Longer Response 55.4 (PG 31:1049d), Basil of Caesarea cited Paul's thorn as "a lingering illness" (ἀρρωστία) brought about in order to remind him and others that he was only human.⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus also viewed Paul's thorn

miracle workers who descend from him are not able to cure "bodily infirmity," he also uses this term in relation to the body (*corporalem infirmitatem, Haer.* 2.31.2).

⁴ Text from Gryson 1971, 116. Elsewhere he makes clear that this condition actually affects Paul's body and is not metaphorical ("Satan is the author of this corporeal grief and weakness of the flesh," *corporalis huius contritionis et carnalis auctorem debilitates, Paen.* 1.14.77).

⁵ While allegory and speculative exegesis is evident elsewhere in Didymus's work, his interpretation of 2 Cor 12:7-9 here is focused on the nature of the relationship between human epistemological limitations, physical sickness, and Satan. Paraphrasing, Didymus says Paul notes that "When I am *struck with a fist*, I know to flee to God" (κονδυλιζόμενος ἔγνω καταφυγεῖν θεῷ). Text from Staab 1933, 42. Additionally, the beginning of his comment indicates he is trying to show others how to maintain the *health* of the body (ποιεῖσθαι τὴν τοῦ σώματος ὑγείαν) and not to fuel "the way of the evil one to cause some *disease*" (μὴ βουλόμενοι ἀφορμὴν διδόναι καὶ μηδένα τρόπον ἰσχύειν τὸν πονηρὸν ἐμποιεῖν τινα νοσήματα). The language of being struck with a fist, as well as disease and health, allude to the thorn as a physically painful aspect of Paul's condition, perhaps even an illness.

⁶ Translation at Silvas 2005, 294. The "others" whom Basil envisions are the Lycaonians in Acts 14:12. There is a more tenuous instance where Basil uses Paul's thorn to refer to an opponent. On his letter to Amphilochius the bishop of Iconium (Letter 248), Basil speaks about a person who is defending heresy, a person he calls "a messenger of Satan." It is neither clear what the specific heresy was or who specifically this opponent of Basil was. Collins posits that the heresy is the Heterousian controversy (i.e. the denial that the Son shared the same essence as the Father), and the opponent is possibly Eunomius. Collins, A. 2011, 168. However, if we are to take 376 CE as indicative of the date of this letter (as is commonly accepted), at this time Eunomius was in the midst of an exile in Nanos in the middle of the Aegean. It could be very well that Basil's opponent was one of his mentors, Eustathius who in the 370s was embroiled in a vigorous battle over the divinity of the Holy Spirit with Basil. Delcogliano and Radde-Gallwitz 2011, 15. Either way, the reference is too vague for us to pinpoint the exact opponent. Furthermore, it is unclear whether his use of allusion

as a chronic illness, using Paul's language from 2 Cor 12:7 to allude to his own failing health.⁷

Other interpreters passed on a tradition that Paul had some kind of ear or head condition. Tertullian mentions that some think Paul's specific "buffeting" (κολαφίζη) was pain in the ear or head.⁸ Jerome also knows this tradition. In his commentary on Galatians he argues that the angel of Satan was chronic head pain (*Comm. Gal.* 4:13 [PL 26:361a-b]).⁹ Pelagius notes two possible trajectories for Paul's thorn, either tribulations or pain. He offers an example of the latter: "For instance, certain people say he was often in distress

to the angel of Satan is related to Basil's understanding of 2 Cor 12:7 itself, especially given his comment in the *Asketikon*.

⁷ In *Or. Bas.* 42.26 he argues before the second Ecumenical council of Constantinople that it is because of "the Satan" that he carries in his body that has caused him to step down from his position in Constantinople. In *Or. Bas.* 43.82 (PG 36:832d), in an oration to his now-deceased friend Basil the Great, Gregory asks for Basil to pray for his "thorn in the flesh." (σκόλοψ τῆς σαρκός). When we examine his letters to Gregory of Nyssa and others (e.g. to his successor or Amphilocius, Bishop of Iconium), it is evident that Gregory had some kind of debilitating disease during this time (*Ep.* 76 (to Gregory of Nyssa); 171 (to Amphilocius); 91 (to his successor); 183; 185). This illness is what prevented him from attending Basil's funeral (*Ep.* 76) and is likely also what caused him to step down as Archbishop of Constantinople. His correlation of the expression "thorn in the flesh" or "the Satan" in these orations in relation to his own illness reflect his interpretation of the nature of Paul's thorn as a chronic illness. His sickness is strikingly absent from treatments of his life: e.g. Daley 2006, 3–26.

⁸ *...si forte, cohibebatur, per dolorem, ut aiunt, auriculae uel capitis. Pud.* 13.16. Heckel argues that what Tertullian states here is an early oral tradition that he has received, which can be seen in later interpreters. Heckel 1993, 76. See also Micaelli 1993, 393. It should be noted, however, that many of those who do mention such a tradition later (e.g. Chrysostom, Eucherius, Severian), all reject it and replace it with their own theories.

⁹ Jerome used Paul's thorn in a number of different ways. At one point he relates Paul's chastisement of his own body with the thorn in the flesh (*Jov.* 2.3). At another point 2 Cor 12:7 is evoked in relation to pain and infirmities (*Epist.* 22.31).

with pain in the head” (*quidam enim dicunt eum frequenti dolore capitis laborasse*).¹⁰

A number of early Christian interpreters understood Paul’s thorn as the persecution he endured—the suffering, trials, tribulations, beatings, and violence Paul experienced during his ministry. For Cyprian, it was shipwrecks and scourging (*Mort.* 13). For Athanasius, it was hunger, thirst, and bodily persecution (*Ep. fest.* 13.2). For Ambrosiaster, it was trials and beatings.¹¹ For Eucherius, the thorn was persecutions.¹² For Theodoret, violence at the hands of rioting mobs.¹³

Other readers of Paul passed on traditions or opinions that involve persecution at the hands of opponents. John Chrysostom referred to the “thorn in the flesh” as all the persecutions he experienced, probably at the hands of opponents.¹⁴ Ephrem of Syria connected the tradition about the coppersmith

¹⁰ PL, Suppl. 1, p. 1268.

¹¹ Bray 2009, 259.

¹² *Instructions* to his Son, Salonius (CSEL 31:128-9).

¹³ In his commentary on 2 Corinthians (PG 82:449), see translation in Hill 2001, 293.

¹⁴ For example, Paul’s trials (*Hom. 2 Cor.* 2, commenting on 2 Cor 1:9 and 4:9), his suffering body (*Hom. 2 Tim.* 10, commenting on 2 Tim 4:20), his persecutions (*Hom. 1 Thess.* 4, commenting on 1 Thess 3:5-8), or the physical dangers he encountered (*Hom. Rom.*, commenting on Rom 8:26). See also *Ep. Olymp.* 17.3 in Mitchell, M. M. 2000, 305, n. 497. In *Eust.* 3 (PG 50:603), he argued that Paul calls those who oppose him “a messenger of Satan” (ἀλλ’ ἄγγελον Σατᾶν τοὺς ἀντικειμένους ἀνθρώπους καλεῖ). Mitchell translates ἀνθρώπους with a definite article, however, rather than referring to specific opponents, I think Chrysostom believed the term was ambiguous for Paul as a universal category for any person who opposed Paul. See Mitchell, M. M. 2000, 305, n. 496. For another example of “messenger of Satan” as Paul’s opponents see Chrysostom’s homilies on 2 Corinthians (*Hom. 2 Cor.* 26.2-3 [PG 61:577-578]).

Alexander in 2 Tim 4:14 with the thorn.¹⁵ Others, like Hilary and Severian, understood the opponents to be cosmic demonic forces.¹⁶

Some early interpreters even conceived of Paul's thorn sexually, an interpretation that was known in the medieval period.¹⁷ A 5th–6th century text known as Pseudo-Primasius provides multiple views of Paul's thorn, one of which says that he was afflicted by sexual arousal: “Some others say he [Paul] had been tormented by a titillation of the flesh” (*alii dicunt titillatione carnis stimulatam*).¹⁸ There are only surprising translations for the word *titillatio* here. It can refer both to “tickling” or “titillation” (which may be understood as lust or perhaps a chronic *arousal*). The later translation is more likely, as Augustine in his work against two letters of the Pelagians argues that some of the Pelagians even argued that Paul and the other apostles had insatiable lust (*C. du. ep. Pelag. 8.13*).

Significantly, the first eight hundred years of interpreting 2 Cor 12:7 are nearly unanimous that Paul's thorn was some kind physical affliction. Except for a single Pelagian tradition in Cassiodorus, every single interpreter conceives of

¹⁵ Ephraem 1893, 113.

¹⁶ For Hilary see *tractatus super Psalmus CSVIII* 3.16. In Severian of Gabala's exegetical commentary on 2 Cor 12:7 (*Fragmenta in epistulas s. Pauli*), he argues that it “is supposed by many that he had pain in the head (ἄλημα ἔχων περι τὴν κεφαλὴν)” but that “the truth is he speaks of persecutions (τοὺς διωγμοὺς), since the trials (οἱ πειρασμοί) were coming from devilish cosmic forces (ἀπο διαβολικῆς ἐνεργείας).” Text from Staab 1933, 297.

¹⁷ Aquinas understood the thorn as sexual temptation (“concupiscence”). See Collins, A. 2011, 170–1.

¹⁸ PL 68:581d. The text is a reworked version of Pelagius' commentary by Cassiodorus purged of any heretical content. See Souter 1906, 20; de Bruyn 1993, 27–28. The first interpretation he cites is the common notion that Paul suffered chronic pain in the head (PL 68:581d). Of the thorn, Cassiodorus says that “it should be thought of as continual tribulations” (*sed magis credendum est juges tribulationes*, PL 68:582a).

Paul's thorn as a physical affliction, whether through torture, persecution, or disease/illness. Interpreters today who opt for a non-physical interpretation must deal with the reasons for why a whole host of interpreters all understood it as a physical issue.

For recent critical interpreters, it is not difficult to discern their views of Paul's thorn. What is more difficult, however, is the categorisation of the many streams of interpretative possibilities. Most modern historical-critical hypotheses of Paul's thorn follow in the vein of ancient interpreters. As far as I can tell, there are five core hypotheses about the nature of Paul's thorn:

Hypothesis 1: The Antagonist/Opponent Interpretation¹⁹

Hypothesis 2: The Persecution/Trials Interpretation²⁰

Hypothesis 3: The Medical Diagnosis Interpretation²¹

Hypothesis 4: The Demonic/Cosmic Forces Interpretation²²

Hypothesis 5: The Agnostic Interpretation²³

¹⁹ Mullins 1957; Barré 1980; McCant 1988, 568, 572.

²⁰ Mangan 1943, 72; Woods 1991, 53.

²¹ For an overview of late 19th century/early 20th century interpreters in Germany see BDAG, s.v. *κολαφίζω*. Some held that the thorn was related to his ecstatic experiences: Pfeleiderer 1902, 62–3; Lombard 1903, 490; Bundy 1922, 229–31. Recent literature has focused on Paul and ecstatic experience but not necessarily in conversation with Paul's thorn: Shantz 2009; Tubiana 2012. Tubiana 2015.

²² Yoon 2016; Price 1980; Abernathy 2001; Tabor 1986; Gooder 2006; Bowens 2017, 125, 150. Candida Moss (2012, 325) gestures in this direction with relation to Christ possession rather than angelic possession. Her perspective on his thorn was that it was a physical infirmity.

²³ Lightfoot 1874, 191; Best 1987, 118–9; Garland 1999, 521; Plummer 1915, 351; Furnish 1984, 549–50; Harris, M. J. 2005, 859; Park 1980, 182–3; Thierry 1962, 308; Aejmelaeus 2000, 265, 268; Lim 2009, 187; Betz 1969; Güttgemanns 1966, 163; Solevåg 2018; Marguerat 2013, 86. There are some who are agnostic about its specific nature, but admit that it is a sickness: e.g. Allo 1956, 303, 311; Hotze 1997, 215; Schmeller 2015, 307; Thomas 1996, 44; Tilly 2012, 73.

There is no need to cover all of the literature here, as more comprehensive surveys have been done elsewhere.²⁴ Many of the hypotheses are self-explanatory, but a few require clarification. Although many interpretations acknowledge the role of the demonic with Paul's thorn, main proponents of the Demonic/Cosmic Forces Interpretation understand the messenger of Satan *as* the thorn itself (although many also include a subsidiary physical effect). Those who subscribe to the Agnostic approach will often present possible options but will hedge their interpretation based on the fact that we cannot know exactly what Paul's thorn was and that, even if we did, it might not be all that important.²⁵ Now that I have outlined the history of interpreting Paul's thorn in 2 Cor 12:7, I will assess the merits of the most viable interpretations.

6.3 Assessing the Merits of Recent Interpretations

It is not possible to evaluate the arguments for every recent interpretation of Paul's thorn. Ancient interpretations, such as those that posit Paul had some kind of painful head condition or that his thorn was lust, may be set aside since there is no early external evidence or an internal textual connection that can demonstrate such conditions other than relatively late

²⁴ The selection of interpretations here is enough to cover the diversity of views regarding Paul's thorn, but is no means comprehensive. For a glance at the literature just on Paul's thorn in its history of interpretation consult Lightfoot 1874, 186–91; Bundy 1922, 225–31; Thrall 2000, 818–18; Aejmelaeus 2000; Collins, A. 2011, 172–5.

²⁵ E.g. recently Solevåg 2018.

tradition.²⁶ Instead, I examine what I think are the best arguments put forward for the first three of the five hypotheses presented at the end of the previous section. The arguments for Hypotheses 4 (the Demonic/Cosmic Interpretation) and 5 (the Agnostic Interpretation) will be addressed in the following section.

Following Chrysostom and Ephrem, various scholars during the 1950s-80s argued for an Opponent/Antagonist interpretation of Paul's thorn. Although the hypotheses attached to this interpretation are able to place Paul's language within the wider context of Paul's letter or other Jewish literature, they are not without their problems.

In 1957, Terrence Mullins argued that the thorn was a personal enemy of Paul.²⁷ He did not, however, find evidence for the specifics of such persons. The basis of his argument was that "the normal, expected use of ἄγγελος is with reference to a person," and that the verb that Paul uses to describe the activity of the ἄγγελος in 2 Cor 12:7, *κολαφίζη*, suggests an activity of a person because it means "to beat with a fist."²⁸ Mullins also argues that the term for thorn, *σκόλοψ*, only refers to an enemy or foe in the LXX.²⁹ Finally, Mullins proposes that the thorn is a personal entity because of clues from the context of 2 Corinthians itself (e.g. the presence of false apostles, 2 Cor 11:13; Satan in 2 Cor 11:14). But if Paul was referring to those false apostles, why would he not

²⁶ This is not to say, however, that they are not possible, only that from a historical-critical point of view they are not verifiable.

²⁷ Mullins 1957.

²⁸ Mullins 1957, 301.

²⁹ Num 33:55; Ezek 28:24; Josh 23:18.

mention them explicitly in 2 Cor 12:7 as he does in 2 Cor 11:13? Additionally, the term ἄγγελος may simply refer to a divine messenger. The verb κολαφίζη may also simply be functioning metaphorically, that Paul uses the idea of “getting punched” to refer to an affliction that has physical consequences (especially in light of its use in 1 Cor 4:11).

Jerry McCant contended that the thorn in the flesh was the Corinthian rejection of Paul’s apostolic authority³⁰ McCant understood 2 Cor 12:7-10 as “a parodic aretology” because Paul “brought back no ‘Evidenz’ from his heavenly rapture.”³¹ But, it makes little sense for Paul to refer to Corinthian rejection in such a cryptic manner, as elsewhere he addresses it directly (e.g. 2 Cor 10:1-10). Furthermore, one fatal flaw in any of the hypotheses that posit that Paul’s thorn involved opponents is the question of time: if Paul was facing opposition, whether externally or internally within the Corinthian congregation, how could it have come fourteen years before (2 Cor 12:2), before even the congregation at Corinth existed?³²

As I mentioned before, a view held by writers like Cyprian, Athanasius, Ambrosiaster, Eucherius, and Theodoret was that the thorn was some kind of persecution as a result of Paul’s ministry. Michael Barré follows this trajectory of interpreters by arguing that Paul’s thorn was not a physical or psychological disorder but trials and persecution at the hands of his opponents during his

³⁰ McCant 1988.

³¹ McCant 1988, 572.

³² This important point is raised by Bowens 2017, 150.

itinerant ministry.³³ Barré’s iteration of the persecution/trials theory is complex, and while innovative, stretches the evidence. Ultimately it relies on a connection between the Greek verb ἀσθενεῖν (“to be weak, sick”) in 2 Cor 11:29 and the Hebrew root נָשַׁל (“to stumble”). Barré argues that ἀσθένεια language in 2 Corinthians 12 should mean something more like “persecution” because of the supposed connection between ἀσθένεια and “stumbling.” He notes the connection between the use of the verb κολαφίζω in both 2 Cor 12:7 and the trial-list in 1 Cor 4:9-13. Additionally, Barré compares Paul’s ideas in 2 Cor 12:7-9 with passages from the Scrolls (1QH^a X [Sukeniik II], 23-24; XVII [Sukeniik IX], 25-27; XI [Sukeniik XIX], 3; 1QM XI, 4-5), most especially the *Hodayot*, a collection of hymns from Qumran. While the two share similar motifs (e.g. moving from weakness to strength, relying on God’s grace, etc.), it is unclear to me what situational connection these parallels demonstrate. Just because the author(s) of the *Hodayot* attribute persecution to a certain “congregation of Belial” (1QH^a X, 22) and elsewhere shares similar themes of weakness to strength (1QH^a XVII), does not mean that because Paul employs the weakness to strength motif, that he also is facing persecution. Additionally, if Barré was able to show this idea from a single hymn from the *Hodayot* (rather than moving between hymns), and if the *Hodayot* was also written in Greek, the argument would be more convincing. The situational parallels between the *Hodayot* and Paul’s are too shallow on which to rest such a case.

³³ Barré 1980. Cf. Woods 1991.

Like others, Barré draws a connection between Paul's various persecutions (2 Cor 6:4-10; 11:23-29; 1 Cor 4:9 etc.) and Paul's thorn because they share the same overarching topos of weakness and God's power.³⁴ It is true that *κολαφίζω* appears both in 2 Cor 12:7 and 1 Cor 4:11, two contexts of hardship. But there is no connection between the physical trials in 1 Cor 4:11 and a messenger of Satan, even while the apostles are said to be spectacle before the angels (1 Cor 4:9). Furthermore, it would be redundant for Paul to refer back to his previous suffering so cryptically with an ambiguous image of the thorn in the flesh. Why would he not just use the same language as he does in 2 Cor 11:23-29 or elsewhere in his other hardship catalogues? There is also no explicit connection between his persecutions and the heavenly ascent account in 2 Cor 12:1-6 that precedes and is connected to his thorn in the flesh. If Paul has persecution in view, it is difficult to see based on evidence from 2 Cor 12:7.

Turning to medical hypotheses, although many different suggestions have been put forward for Paul's alleged thorn, none is as convincing as the one most recently revived by Adela Yarbro Collins, that Paul suffered from epilepsy.³⁵ The foundational work for this theory was accomplished by Max Krenkel more than a century ago, whom Collins follows extensively.³⁶

³⁴ E.g. Mangan 1943, 72.

³⁵ Collins, A. 2011. As my survey in the previous section indicated, there were numerous medical conditions that scholars have proposed as an explanation of Paul's thorn. However, the lack of concrete evidence in Paul's letters, no less 2 Cor 12:7-10, prevents us from making such a precise diagnosis based on contemporary medical classifications of disease and impairment.

³⁶ Collins, A. 2011, 173-4. Early twentieth-century scholars already mounted arguments against Krenkel's analysis, e.g. Lombard 1903, 471-5.

Treading a path initiated by Lightfoot (and Jerome long before him), Krenkel understood 2 Cor 12:7 to be directly related to the ἀσθένεια τῆς σαρκός in Gal 4:13 that Paul says the Galatians did not despise or disdain (οὐκ ἐξουθενήσατε οὐδὲ ἐξεπτύσατε). Krenkel argues that the two contexts could be read in light of one another.³⁷ Additionally, Krenkel also read the story of the epileptic boy in Mark 9:14-19 (cf. Matt 17:14-21//Luke 9:37-43) in connection with the verb κολαφίζω in 2 Cor 12:7 and ἐκπτύω in Gal 4:14. Although κολαφίζω is not mentioned in the Markan passage, Krenkel justifies the connection between the “mute spirit” (πνεῦμα ἄλαλον, Mk 9:17), which Krenkel interprets as a demon, and Paul’s ἄγγελος σατανᾶ, which violently handles the boy during an episode.³⁸ Krenkel interprets the boy’s symptoms as epilepsy. He then argues that Paul alludes to epilepsy in Gal 4:14 by using the verb ἐκπτύω, which has a direct correlation with notions of epilepsy as “the illness that is spit out.”³⁹ As evidence, he cites passages from Plautus’ *The Prisoners* (*Captivi*) and Pliny’s *Natural History*.⁴⁰ His reading suggests that the ancients took in the infection and then hastily spat it out to avoid getting it permanently.⁴¹ All this evidence points to Paul’s thorn as epilepsy, and while Krenkel’s argument is ingenious, it is not without some major textual problems.

³⁷ Lightfoot 1874, 186.

³⁸ Krenkel 1890, 51, 63.

³⁹ Krenkel 1890, 70–75.

⁴⁰ Plautus, *Capt.* 550-555; Pliny, *Nat.* 28.7.35; 10.33.69.

⁴¹ Krenkel 1890, 80.

The first problem lies with the critical text Krenkel draws on for Plautus, which is understandably now outdated. Plautus mentions epilepsy three times. In two instances, it is referred to as an illness (*morbis*) that people “spit on” (*insputo*).⁴² Krenkel does not focus on these two but instead on an earlier reference: *qui sputatur morbis* (“the illness that is spit out”).⁴³ Here Krenkel denies an emendation of the critical text, which reads: *insputatur morbis* (“the disease that is spit on”) instead of *sputatur morbis*.⁴⁴ Krenkel argues that the proximity of the *sputatur* reading to the *insputo* readings in *Capt.* 553, 554-5 is good reason for the reading to be *sputatur*.⁴⁵ He argues that it is not legitimate to read the prefix into the text because the joke relies on synaloepha (the merging of two syllables into one). Aristophanes thinks that Tyndarus says *qui insputatur* rather than *qui sputatur*.⁴⁶ However, Lindsay explains that the emendation *insputatur* is legitimate due to the frequent confusion of prefix use in the MSS tradition as well as its presence in the following lines of the play.⁴⁷ The subsequent uses of *insputare* are meant to reflect the same action described in the first instance (*Capt.* 550). It does not make sense if what is first intended is “spit out” and then what follows is “spit on,” especially since the discussion

⁴² Plautus, *Capt.* 553, 554-5.

⁴³ Translation based on the German from Krenkel 1890, 76.

⁴⁴ Lindsay 1900, 252. The change happened in the 4th edition of Brix’s critical edition.

⁴⁵ Krenkel 1890, 72, n.2.

⁴⁶ Krenkel 1890, 72, n.2; 91.

⁴⁷ Lindsay 1900, 252, n.550.

leads to an apotropaic punchline: “Stop being afraid — that illness tortures a lot of people for whom being spat on was helpful and beneficial.”⁴⁸

The second problem with Krenkel’s epilepsy argument is the translation and understanding of spitting and epilepsy in Pliny. In *Nat.* 28.7.35 Pliny discusses the various healing properties of saliva: *despuimus comitiales morbos, hoc est contagia regerimus*.⁴⁹ Krenkel translates this as: “We spit when we see epileptics. We do so to ward off infection.”⁵⁰ Krenkel cannot imagine that Pliny means that they spit on epileptics, even though *comitiales morbos* is the accusative object of the verb *despuo*, so he has adapted his translation with a temporal marker. Rather, Pliny’s statement should be translated: “We spit on epileptics, in this way repelling the contagion.”⁵¹ In both cases of Plautus and Pliny, then, it must be said that there is no indication of taking in epilepsy and then spitting it out as Krenkel supposes, but of spitting on the epileptics themselves to ward off the disease.⁵²

Without Plautus and Pliny there is little evidence that epilepsy is reason enough for the Galatians to spit in Gal 4:14. It could be, as some have suggested, that the Galatians could have spat to ward off the evil eye or some

⁴⁸ Plautus, *Capt.* 554-5 (Melo). This emendation was also used by de Melo in his recent updated translation of *Captivi* for Loeb. de Melo 2011, 562.

⁴⁹ Text from Ernout 1962, 31.

⁵⁰ Krenkel 1890, 77–78. Translation by Collins (2011, 174).

⁵¹ Translation by Elliott, J. H. 2016, 242.

⁵² Similarly, Theophrastus speaks about how someone who is superstitious spits into the lap if he sees an epileptic or madman. Theophrastus, *Char.* 16.14. μαινόμενον δὲ ἰδὼν ἢ ἐπιληπτον φρίξας εἰς κόλπον πτύσαι. The text is ambiguous about whether he spits on his own lap or the lap of the epileptic, although if one takes the evidence of Theocritus, one way of dispelling the evil eye was to spit on one’s own chest (Theocritus, *Id.* 6.39).

other omen.⁵³ On the other hand, it could simply be that they did not reject Paul. This latter reading has better lexical support. The only other time ἐκπτύω occurs in Jewish literature outside of Paul's letters is in Joseph and Aseneth where both it and ἐξουθενέω (also found in Gal 4:14) refer to rejection and not epilepsy.⁵⁴ Indeed, the omission of this verb from early witnesses like $\mathfrak{P}46$ may suggest that scribes viewed it as redundant with ἐξουθενέω. In the context of Gal 4:12-20 as a whole it is precisely that Paul contrasts their acceptance (and non-rejection) of him during his earlier ministry with their present apparent disdain toward him. Therefore, Paul's use of ἐκπτύω in Gal 4:14 should be understood as a reference to disdain not epilepsy.

Even if Gal 4:13-15 does allude to epilepsy, there is no concrete reason for 2 Cor 12:7 and Gal 4:13-15 to be interpreted in light of one another.⁵⁵ Lightfoot argues that “these passages so closely resemble each other that it is not unnatural to suppose the allusion to be the same in both.”⁵⁶ But, the resemblance between ἀσθένεια τῆς σαρκός in Gal 4:13 and σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί in 2 Cor 12:7 is mostly superficial.⁵⁷ Just because both passages use the language of σαρξ or ἀσθένεια does not mean that there is a connection between the two.⁵⁸ Some posit that the contrast between Paul's acceptance as an “messenger of God” in Gal 4:15 and the “messenger of Satan” in 2 Cor 12:7 indicate a

⁵³ Elliott, J. H. 1990, 268–9.

⁵⁴ Goddard and Cummins 1993, 105.

⁵⁵ Cf. Windisch 1924, 386; Aejmelaeus 2000, 265–6.

⁵⁶ Lightfoot 1874, 186.

⁵⁷ McCant 1988, 564.

⁵⁸ Mullins 1957, 301.

connection.⁵⁹ But the fact that both Gal 4:14 and 2 Cor 12:7 have the term ἄγγελος is incidental. In 2 Cor 12:7, the ἄγγελος is, as we shall see, a non-metaphoric belligerent agent associated with the σατανᾶς, whereas the ἄγγελος in Gal 4:14 is an metaphor for how Paul feels he was received by the Galatians. Suspending the relationship between Gal 4:13-15 from 2 Cor 12:7 invalidates the connection between epilepsy and Paul's thorn.⁶⁰

Having set aside the Antagonist/Opponent, Persecution/Trials, and the Medical Diagnosis hypotheses of Paul's thorn, there are two interpretive options left. Either we cannot know what Paul's thorn was (the Agnostic Interpretation) or that the connection between the thorn and the angelic is clearer than interpreters have previously been willing to admit.

6.4 The Angel of Satan was Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

Although many hypotheses have been offered for what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, none is able to explain the evidence of the text as simply as the one that supposes the thorn was the ἄγγελος σατανᾶ itself.⁶¹ In this section I

⁵⁹ Heckel 1993, 84; Collins, A. 2011, 174.

⁶⁰ Many have recognised that the connection between the two passages is irreconcilable, e.g. Mangan 1943, 70–71; Menoud 1953, 165; Thierry 1962, 310; McCant 1988, 564; Salis 1995, 38, n.42.

⁶¹ The genitive σατανᾶς in 2 Cor 12:7 is largely presumed to be a genitive of source or relationship. Were σατανᾶς given in the nominative then it might be read as “adversary” in 2 Cor 12:7 (cf. 3 Kgdms 11:14), which is how some interpreters, like John Chrysostom, understood it (*Hom. 2 Cor.* 26). Whenever Paul mentions Satan he uses the definite article (e.g. Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor 2:11; 11:14; 1 Thess 2:18; cf. 2 Thess 2:9; 1 Tim 1:20; 5:15). So, we should expect that if Paul had meant Satan he would have also included the definite article in 2 Cor 12:7. But, while σατανᾶς is anarthrous in 2 Cor 12:7, it does not necessarily mean it refers to a generic adversary as opposed to Satan. The general rule of Apollonius' Canon is that the genitive noun in a construction will match the articular status of its head noun. In the

will follow a number of previous interpreters by arguing that Paul's thorn was the angel from Satan, in other words a "demon."⁶² The veracity of this reading is shown by a close analysis of Paul's metaphoric language informed by contemporary metaphor theory.

At the centre of misinterpretations about Paul's thorn is confusion about what constitutes a metaphor, the nature of metaphor, and how metaphorical language functions in 2 Cor 12:7. Most interpreters understand one or both of the expressions, σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί and ἄγγελος σατανᾶ, as metaphors referring to something else that is not named in the text, such as illness, persecution, opponents, etc.⁶³ Some interpreters understand the ἄγγελος to be the cause of the σκόλοψ.⁶⁴ But, ἄγγελος σατανᾶ stands in apposition to σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί, Paul does not relate the two through causality; rather ἄγγελος is a clarification of the σκόλοψ.⁶⁵ Strangely, many scholars view the ἄγγελος as a personification

case of 2 Cor 12:7, ἄγγελος is anarthrous and therefore σατανᾶς is also anarthrous. The corollary to Apollonius' Canon is that both the genitive noun and its head noun will usually share the same definiteness (So Wallace, D. B. 1996, 250). But it is also the case that in a construction where both nouns are anarthrous (e.g. 1 Thess 2:13) the nouns can be definite. von Siebenthal 2019, 189 (133e). Paul does not feel the need to include the article because there is only one σατανᾶς he mentions his letters. Even if we decided to take both ἄγγελος and σατανᾶς as indefinite, the expression "an angel of an adversary" is vague, and thus unlikely. Readers of 2 Cor 12:7 clearly understood it to refer to Satan, as the indeclinable form of the name σατάν is found in a number of uncial correctors and important manuscripts (κ² A^c D¹ K L P Ψ 33 81 1175).

⁶² For a discussion of whether Satan's angels were demons see the next chapter, §7.2.

⁶³ Different interpreters attribute different roles to both expressions. Most view the thorn as a metaphor: Betz 1972, 92; Najda 2004, 162; Heckel 1993, 69; Plummer 1915, 349; Thrall 2000, 806; Zmijewski 1978, 370. Some also view σατανᾶς as a metaphor: Litwa 2011, 243; Garrett 1995, 83; Binder 1976.

⁶⁴ Thomas 1996, 44; Meier 1998, 149; Heckel 1993, 78; Harris, M. J. 2005, 855.

⁶⁵ The apposition of the two expressions is universally recognised by interpreters: Thomas 1998, 44; Binder 1976, 9; Lombard 1903, 461; Harris, M. J. 2005, 855; Zmijewski 1978, 366–7.

of the σκόλοψ, a metaphor of another metaphor.⁶⁶ But upon closer inspection, it is not clear that the expression ἄγγελος σατανᾶ is a metaphor at all, nor that σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί references something in Paul's body unmentioned in 2 Cor 12:7.

Our understanding of metaphor, especially from a cognitive linguistic perspective, has progressed in the last forty years, largely guided by the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson with their work on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT).⁶⁷ Essentially, metaphors function by having two components, a “source domain,” which is usually a more “concrete” referent, and a “target domain,” a more “abstract” referent whose qualities are usually mapped onto the source domain. For example, in the metaphor PAUL IS A SLAVE OF CHRIST (Rom 1:1, etc.), SLAVE is the concrete “source domain” and Paul is the more abstract “target domain.”⁶⁸ In the context of Paul's use, the term SLAVE does not mean what it typically means in its most basic context—that is, as a reference to someone who has been paid for and owned by a master, forced to do labour, etc. Rather, SLAVE is an analogy for Paul's relationship to Christ, in that he owes his life to Christ, that he serves him, and is indebted to him. In this metaphor, the term PAUL does not function metaphorically, but it is SLAVE which is metaphoric.

⁶⁶ Scholars who view the angel as a personification of the thorn: Allo 1956, 310; Najda 2004, 163; Heininger 1996, 255; Baumgarten 1975, 156; Plummer 1915, 352; Zmijewski 1978, 371.

⁶⁷ An updated version of their original work found in Lakoff and Johnson 2003.

⁶⁸ In Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT), it is standard practice to write metaphorical expressions using small caps.

The ability to identify which lexical units are functioning metaphorically and which are not is important for discerning the relationship between words in a metaphoric expression. Depending on the source and target domains in Paul’s language, we will be able to distinguish which is the more concrete expression and thus the relationship between σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί and ἄγγελος σατανᾶ. In order to analyse 2 Cor 12:7, I follow the particular procedure known as MIP (“metaphor identification procedure”) to understand whether a unit is functioning metaphorically.⁶⁹ First we need to determine whether the lexical unit has “a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context,” i.e. is it more concrete, related to bodily action, or precise.⁷⁰ Then we need to adjudicate whether the present meaning of the lexical unit in context is more abstract than its basic usage. If it is more abstract, then it functions metaphorically.

Since σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί and ἄγγελος σατανᾶ are in apposition to one another, and are therefore equated, we may articulate with the following expression: (THE) THORN IN THE FLESH IS AN ANGEL OF SATAN. Let us first break down the expression into its constituent lexical units:

(THE) THORN / IN / THE / FLESH / IS / AN / ANGEL / OF / SATAN
σκόλοψ / τῆ σαρκί / (ἔστιν) / ἄγγελος / σατανᾶ

The lexical units relevant to this analysis are thorn (σκόλοψ), flesh (σάρξ), angel (ἄγγελος), and Satan (σατανᾶς). In ancient Greek literature, a

⁶⁹ As outlined in Pragglejaz Group 2007.

⁷⁰ Pragglejaz Group 2007, 3.

σκόλοψ was something that was sharp or pointed (e.g. a palisade, a stake, a splinter), hence why it is frequently used for the translation of sharp objects, like thorns and fishing-hooks, in the OG.⁷¹ The OG, however, can also use σκόλοψ more abstractly as a reference to nations or God who afflicts the people of Israel.⁷² Paul's usage reflects this abstract use of σκόλοψ because there is no indication that Paul ever literally had a σκόλοψ in his body. The σκόλοψ refers to something that is afflicting Paul, but it is not literally a σκόλοψ itself. Thus, σκόλοψ is metaphoric.⁷³

Turning to Paul's use of σάρξ in 2 Cor 12:7. Paul appears to be using σάρξ in 2 Cor 12:7 with its basic meaning: his physical person. Its connection with σκόλοψ may suggest that it is metaphoric, for how could a non-literal σκόλοψ affect literal σάρξ? We should be cautious, however, since although the term σκόλοψ is not literal, the affliction to which it refers is real (metaphoric ≠ not real) and could very well have an effect on Paul's σάρξ. The basic meaning of σάρξ is physical material (e.g. "flesh"), and this is the way that Paul often uses it in his writings.⁷⁴ Although there is a subtle difference between some uses of σάρξ for Paul, all of its different semantic domains, have ties to the physical

⁷¹ E.g. Herodotus, *Hist.* 9.9; Xenophon, *Anab.* 5.2.5; Dioscorides, *Mat. med.* 4.49. See the analysis of Park 1980. Num 33:55 (שׂרִים); Hos 2:6 (סִרְיִם); Ezek 28:24 (סִלּוֹן). See also *Sib. Or. Frag.* 1.25 (35). It is because of this usage that Bowens 2017, 124 argues Paul is using military imagery.

⁷² Num 33:55; Josh 23:13; Ezek 28:24; Hos 2:6.

⁷³ Abernathy 2001, 71–2.

⁷⁴ Rom 2:29; 7:25; 1 Cor 1:26; 6:16; 7:28; 15:39; 15:50; 2 Cor 4:11; 7:1, 5; 11:18; Gal 2:20; 3:33; 4:13, 14; Phil 1:22, 24; 3:3; Phlm 16; Gal 6:12, 13.

body of a person.⁷⁵ As we will see in the next chapter (§7.3.1), malevolent angels could also literally inhabit the bodies of those they tormented. This would make sense of the dative syntagm, τῇ σαρκί. Confirmation that σάρξ refers to something physical can be found in the expression ἵνα με κολαφίζῃ (12:7d), which parallels 12:7b, ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί. In ancient Greek literature we do not find a sense of the verb κολαφίζω, which refers to figurative violence. It refers unanimously to real physical harm.⁷⁶ In light of this evidence, Paul's use of σάρξ in 2 Cor 12:7 should not be considered metaphoric.

A consideration of Paul's use of ἄγγελος and σατανᾶς in 2 Cor 12:7 also indicates that, like σάρξ, these words are not functioning metaphorically. Some scholars think that the language of ἄγγελος and σατανᾶς is clearly metaphorical, due in part to their supposed ambiguity (at least from a modern point of view), which suggests that it was already known by the Corinthians and was possibly their nickname for Paul's weakness.⁷⁷ However, this interpretation is possible only if one does not take seriously the basic meaning of ἄγγελος and σατανᾶς in their ancient Jewish context. Determining whether or not a lexical unit is a metaphor depends, in part, upon one's own assumptions about the words. In a post-Enlightenment context today the terms ἄγγελος and σατανᾶς would likely be viewed as mythological and therefore probably metaphorical. As Annette

⁷⁵ This was recognised by Fee, G. D. 1994, 352. In Paul, the term σάρξ can refer generally to a humans/person: Rom 3:20; 1 Cor 1:29; Gal 1:16; 2:16. It can refer to the physical body under the reign of sin: Rom 7:5, 18; 8:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12; 13:14; 1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 5:16; 10:2, 3; Gal 5:13, 17, 19; 24; 6:8. It can also mean physical heritage/ancestry: Rom 1:3; 4:1; 9:3, 5, 8; 11:14; 1 Cor 10:18; Gal 4:23, 29; Phil 3:4.

⁷⁶ E.g. Sib. Or. 8.292; Matt 26:67; Mark 14:65; 1 Cor 4:11; 1 Pet 2:20; Mart. Pol. 2:4.

⁷⁷ So Güttgemanns 1966, 165; Aejmelaeus 2000, 275.

Yoshiko Reed notes, “When confronted with pre-modern references to angels and demons by learned elites, it is common to presume that they must be symbols or ciphers for something else.”⁷⁸

For Paul, however, in the context of ancient Judaism, the reality of ἄγγελοι and the σατανᾶς was taken for granted. The basic meaning of ἄγγελος is “messenger,” and in a Jewish context, especially an intermediary between the gods and humanity.⁷⁹ Among ancient Jewish texts, angels were known to punish the wicked and the righteous (e.g. Gen 19; 32:22-32; Exod 4:24-6; Num 22:33; 2 Sam 24; 1 Chr 21; Ps 35:5-6; 78:49). When we look how Paul deploys ἄγγελος in his writings, he refers to such beings as a matter of fact, in a literal and concrete way, just as he believed in the reality of divine revelation, ecstatic visions, and the resurrection of the dead (Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 4:9; 11:10; 13:1; 2 Cor 11:14; Gal 1:8; 3:19; 4:14). This is the same for σατανᾶς (Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor 2:11; 11:14; 1 Thess 2:18), a loan word from the Hebrew (שָׂטָן), which means adversary or opponent.⁸⁰ The argument that the ἄγγελος was a personification of the σκόλοψ imposes a rationalistic and de-mythologised framework that is alien to Paul’s use of the term. Both ἄγγελος and σατανᾶς in 2 Cor 12:7 are concrete non-metaphoric referents.

In light of this metaphoric analysis we have found that the only lexical unit functioning metaphorically is σκόλοψ, while σάρξ, ἄγγελος, and σατανᾶς

⁷⁸ Reed, A. Y. 2020, 309.

⁷⁹ Martin, D. B. 2010, 666.

⁸⁰ This is not to say that σατανᾶς does not appear in metaphorical contexts (e.g. Rom 16:20) but that it does not function metaphorically as a referent for something else.

function non-metaphorically. Expressed differently, in the metaphor (THE) THORN IN THE FLESH IS AN ANGEL OF SATAN, THORN functions metaphorically. The expression ANGEL OF SATAN, however, does not function metaphorically. This means that Paul’s ἄγγελος σατανᾶ is not a personification of his σκόλοψ; it does not function as a metaphor to refer to the σκόλοψ. Rather it is the σκόλοψ that is a metaphor for the ἄγγελος σατανᾶ. Between σκόλοψ and ἄγγελος, σκόλοψ is the more “concrete” term and is therefore the source domain. The ἄγγελος is therefore the target domain to which the σκόλοψ refers. Given that Paul uses ἄγγελος σατανᾶ in a non-metaphoric way, I can also say that it is not itself functioning as a metaphor to refer to something external to the text, such as an illness or persecution. The ἄγγελος σατανᾶ is Paul’s thorn in the flesh.⁸¹

The profusion of theories concerning Paul’s thorn obscures what is actually the simplest and most basic reading of 2 Cor 12:7. Paul was given a “thorn” in the flesh, which, he clarifies, was an ἄγγελος σατανᾶ that could harm him. Instead of commas, a clearer form of punctuation would be the use of an em-dash to show Paul’s clarification: ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί—ἄγγελος σατανᾶ—ἵνα με κολαφίζῃ.⁸²

It is possible that Paul chose to characterise the ἄγγελος σατανᾶ with σκόλοψ because of a wider pattern in ancient Jewish texts to refer to evil angels (or demons) by the particular havoc that they wreaked. So, in Deut 32:24 God says that he will unleash “debilitating starvation, emaciating plague, bitter

⁸¹ This conclusion was anticipated by Gooder 2006, 197, Martin, D. B. 2010, 674 and Abernathy 2001, 71, although he takes the whole phrase “thorn in the flesh” as a metaphor instead of just the “thorn.”

⁸² E.g. Long 2015, 226.

destruction, and the teeth of beasts” (מזי רעב ולחמי רשף וקטב מרירי ושן־בהמות) upon those who forsake him. For readers in the Hellenistic period, the terms קטב and רשף did not refer only to cataclysmic events like plague or destruction, but were the actual names of demons. For example, קטב is also mentioned in Ps 91:6 as קטב ישוד צהרים (“the destruction that devastates at noon”) but is translated in the OG as δαιμονίος μεσημβρινοῦ (“a demon at midday,” 90:6). At Qumran, an incantation text to protect the righteous against demons, 11Q11, cites Ps 91 (11Q11 VI, 1.7). Although the text where קטב should be has not been preserved, we know by comparison with our MT that it probably reproduces Ps 91 verbatim (with the exception of an added סלה at 11Q11 VI, 1.6). The context has confirmed for interpreters that terms like קטב were “demonic representatives” of things like plague or destruction.⁸³ Paul may use σκόλοψ as a name for the angel of Satan in a similar fashion to the naming of demons in Deut 32:24, Ps 91:6 and 11Q11.

Expanding on the suggestion by previous interpreters that Paul’s thorn was the angel of Satan, I have upheld this previously recognised hypothesis through a detailed analysis of the metaphoric and non-metaphoric language in 2 Cor 12:7. This analysis provides an explanation of Paul’s thorn without hypothetical intertextual connections or medical conjectures. For those who are agnostic about the nature of Paul’s thorn (Hypothesis 5 - The Agnostic Interpretation), far from being impossible to describe, its nature has been present in his words all along.

⁸³ Fröhlich 2017, 91.

6.5 The Physical Effect of the Angel of Satan on Paul's

Body

Unlike previous proposals that take Paul's angel as a metaphorical reference to something external to the text, like an illness or persecution, the nature of my hypothesis limits our knowledge of how Paul's angel specifically affected his body. In the wider context of 2 Cor 12:1-7, there are details that suggest Paul's thorn was given in order to limit his ability to use the revelations he heard in Paradise to build up his own reputation. Because my argument concerns the coherence of the passage, I quote the passage in full:

12:1 Καυχᾶσθαι δεῖ, οὐ συμφέρον μὲν, ἐλεύσομαι δὲ εἰς ὄπτασίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεις κυρίου. 2 οἶδα ἄνθρωπον ἐν Χριστῷ πρὸ ἐτῶν δεκατεσσάρων, εἴτε ἐν σώματι οὐκ οἶδα, εἴτε ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματος οὐκ οἶδα, ὁ θεὸς οἶδεν, ἀρπαγέντα τὸν τοιοῦτον ἕως τρίτου οὐρανοῦ. 3 καὶ οἶδα τὸν τοιοῦτον ἄνθρωπον, εἴτε ἐν σώματι εἴτε χωρὶς τοῦ σώματος οὐκ οἶδα, ὁ θεὸς οἶδεν, 4 ὅτι ἤρπάγη εἰς τὸν παράδεισον καὶ ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι. 5 ὑπὲρ τοῦ τοιοῦτου καυχῆσομαι, ὑπὲρ δὲ ἑαυτοῦ οὐ καυχῆσομαι εἰ μὴ ἐν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις. 6 ἐὰν γὰρ θελήσω καυχῆσασθαι, οὐκ ἔσομαι ἄφρων, ἀλήθειαν γὰρ ἐρῶ· φείδομαι δέ, μή τις εἰς ἐμὲ λογίσσεται ὑπὲρ ὃ βλέπει με ἢ ἀκούει τι ἐξ ἐμοῦ. 7 καὶ τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων, ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι, ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί, ἄγγελος σατανᾶ, ἵνα με κολαφίζῃ, ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι. (2 Cor 12:1-7, NA²⁸ modified)

12:1 It is necessary to boast, although it is not beneficial. Nevertheless, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. 2 I know a person in Christ fourteen years ago—whether in the body, I do not know, whether out of the body, I do not know; God knows—such a person being snatched away until the third heaven. 3 And I know that such a person—whether in the body or without the body, I do not know; God knows—4 that he was snatched into paradise and heard ineffable words that are not lawful for a person to speak. (5 On behalf of such a person, I will boast, but on behalf of myself I will not boast except in weaknesses. 6 For if I wanted to boast, I will not be foolish because I will speak truth. But I hold back, in case someone credits to me something beyond what they see or hear from me) 7 And because of the sublimity of the revelations,

in order that I might not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, in order to pummel me, so that I would not exalt myself.

After appealing to his extensive hardships and persecutions in 2 Cor 11:23-33, Paul draws on his own experience with “visions and revelations” (ὄπτασία καὶ ἀποκάλυψις) in 2 Cor 12:1-7 to boast in his apostolic authority.⁸⁴ Ὅπτασία καὶ ἀποκάλυψις are not entirely synonymous with one another for Paul. In this particular context, the former appears to refer to the aspect of an ecstatic experience that involves sight, while the latter refers to the content mediated through oracular revelation and divine communication (cf. 1 Cor 14:6; 13:26).⁸⁵ Put crudely, one refers to sights, the other refers to sounds.

Instead of directly conveying his own heavenly ascent, Paul offers the account of a certain “person” (ἄνθρωπος) who was snatched up to the third heaven and to Paradise (12:2, 3).⁸⁶ Paul’s account is really a report of a heavenly

⁸⁴ Even though he says that such boasting will not be useful to him (12:1), he would not be boasting if it did not benefit him. Oropeza 2016, 658. Bockmuehl, M. N. 1990, 176. Cf. Harris, M. J. 2005, 835. Some interpreters have understood the movement to “visions and revelations” as a topic raised by Paul’s opponents, however, this is not explicit in the text. Little concrete information can be gleaned from 2 Cor 10-13 about who Paul’s opponents specifically were. He refers to them as the “beyond apostles” (ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι, 11:5; 12:11), who commend themselves (10:12). He calls them pseudo-apostles, disguised as apostles of Christ (11:13). Other than these instances, it is difficult to tell from mirror-reading alone which of Paul’s statements might apply to them. For example, in 11:22 Paul reinforces his Jewish ethnicity and election (a Hebrew, an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham) through a series of rhetorical questions. It is not clear whether his questions are meant to suggest that the opponents also share the same qualities or that he uses his own qualities rhetorically.

⁸⁵ I follow Mare 1970, 8; Goulder 1994, 55; Gooder 2006, 209; Bowens 2017, 132–33. While Mare and Goulder distinguish between “visions” referring to sight, and “revelations” referring to communications, Gooder argues that the former refers to “how the revelation took place,” which I take as a slightly varying angle on a visual experience. Cf. Windisch 1924, 368; Fee, G. D. 1994, 350; Heininger 1996, 245.

⁸⁶ On the many differing explanations for why Paul portrays himself in the third person see Gooder 2006, 177–78. As is often noted, Paradise sometimes occurs within the

journey than a narrative or apocalypse, as it lacks both formal qualities from those genres.⁸⁷ Paul does not know whether or not the journey happened in the body or out of/without the body, but God knows (12:2, 3).⁸⁸ Different ideas about what Paul may have seen in the third heaven and Paradise have been put forward, but ultimately he does not convey enough information to make a firm judgment.⁸⁹ Whether or not the vision in 12:2-4 actually happened is also impossible to tell. Either way Paul presents them with the impression that they actually happened.⁹⁰ Additionally, in this “person’s” journey to Paradise, he hears words he is not permitted to repeat (ἄρρητα ῥήματα, 12:4). Paul says that he is happy to boast “on behalf of a such a person” (ὕπὲρ τοῦ τοιούτου) but he will not boast on behalf of himself in relation to such visions (12:5). Although he does not name himself explicitly in such visions, most agree that he is the anonymous “person” in 2 Cor 12:2-4.⁹¹

locale of the third heaven in ancient Jewish apocalyptic literature (e.g. 2 En 8:1; 3 Baruch 11:1-2; Apocalypse of Moses 37:5). Paradise is often associated with Eden or a garden of the righteous (e.g. 1 En 32:3; LAE 25-29; 2 En 65:6, 10; T. Abr. 20.18; 4 Ez 6:2; Jub 3:9-13; 2 Bar 4:2-7).

⁸⁷ Hellholm 2008, 77. The pervasive theory about 2 Cor 12:2-4 as a parody put forward by Betz (Betz 1972, 84) is certainly not tenable. Cf. Gooder 2006, 195; Hellholm 2008, 80–1.

⁸⁸ Colleen Shantz explains that among those who experience ASC (altered states of consciousness), ecstatic experiences can be accompanied by the feeling of “an absolute subject sensation of pure space.” Shantz 2009, 85. Whether Paul is conveying what actually happened or trying to obscure the journey for his hearers is difficult to tell.

⁸⁹ Some have suggested he saw the Holy of Holies (Murray-Jones 2014), or God’s temple (Hood 2011), or perhaps even “the eschatological inheritance of the saints” (Bockmuehl, M. N. 1990, 176). I am inclined to side with Bockmuehl’s suggestion, for example, as surely questions arise about how Paul knows what he knows about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15.

⁹⁰ Aejmelaesus 2000, 234; Gooder 2006, 191.

⁹¹ Other unconvincing suggestions have been made such as Apollos (for references see Klauck 2007, 58; Thrall 2000, 778), Jesus (Smith, M. 1981, 415), or a friend of Paul’s (Goulder 1994; Goulder 2003). Yet, 2 Cor 2:6-8 serves as an instance where Paul

An important passage for our purposes is 2 Cor 12:4, where Paul says that, “he (the person) was caught up into paradise and heard ineffable words that are not lawful for a person to speak” (ἡρπάγη εἰς τὸν παράδεισον καὶ ἤκουσεν ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι). Paul’s use of ἄρρητα ῥήματα is unique despite the supposed parallels with ancient mystery religions offered by previous interpreters.⁹² By combining ἄρρητα with ῥήματα, Paul does not mean that such words are inexpressible, in the sense that they cannot be expressed in language. The joined expression οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι points toward things that *should not* be spoken to the uninitiated.⁹³ This is what Spittler calls “inexpressible by prohibition.”⁹⁴ For example, Philo argues that educated men would prefer to have their tongues cut off rather than speaking τὰ ἄρρητα (*Det.* 175). The implication is that they *can* express these things but that they should not.

The prohibition in 2 Cor 12:4 is directly relevant to Paul, since he is the one who has gone up into paradise.⁹⁵ A similar expression to οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ

obviously speaks about himself in the third person in a similar way to 2 Cor 12:2-4. Hogeterp 2010, 217.

⁹² The suggestion by Windisch 1924, 377–78 that Paul was using language of the mystery religions is tenuous. See the critiques of Thrall 2000, 796. The word ἄρρητα is certainly used in some contexts of mystery religions (e.g. Euripides, *Bacch.* 472), but it is also used more generally in any situation where secret knowledge is not to be disclosed (e.g. Herodotus, *Hist.* 6.135; Lucian, *Men.* 2). Additionally since Paul’s phrase ἄρρητα ῥήματα cannot be found in direct connection with ancient mystery religions, we should be cautious to conclude that Paul is using technical mystery language. Cf. also the critique by Spittler 1975, 263.

⁹³ Lincoln 1981, 82.

⁹⁴ Spittler 1975, 264.

⁹⁵ The word ἀνθρώπος in the expression οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι is usually translated as referring to any person. Furnish argues that the noun ἀνθρώπος refers to humanity generally because it is anarthrous. Furnish 1984, 527. In the construction ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ, the dative object with the participle verb ἐξὸν is logically meant to be

λαλήσαι appears in 4 Baruch 5:23, “If you were not an old man, and *one were allowed* to upbraid his elder, I would have ridiculed you...” (Εἰ μὴ ἦς πρεσβύτης, καὶ ὅτι οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ ὑβρίσαι τὸν μείζονα αὐτοῦ, ἐπικατεγέλων ἄν σοι...).⁹⁶ While the speaker refers to a general prohibition, the person who is primarily in view is the speaker. The same also with Paul in 12:4. It is primarily *the person who is experiencing the visions* that is not permitted to speak the things that he has heard. The emphasis of the text is on a restriction placed on Paul’s communication of divine revelations.

Indeed, Paul is reluctant to divulge the content of the revelations he heard in Paradise, as he notes in the parenthetical comments of 2 Cor 12:5-6.⁹⁷ In 12:5, Paul says he gladly boasts about the “person” who has seen these revelations but instead chooses only to boast explicitly about his own weaknesses. If he did boast, it would not be out of senselessness, but the truth (12:6). Paul has actually experienced these visions, yet he holds back (φείδομαι) from boasting because he does not want anything to be attributed to him beyond what someone sees or hears from him (μὴ τις εἰς ἐμὲ λογίσηται ὑπὲρ ὃ βλέπει με ἢ ἀκούει [τι] ἐξ ἐμοῦ, 12:6).⁹⁸ Paul’s unwillingness to openly boast in his visionary experiences is typically understood as an attempt to avoid

the subject of the verb as it is elsewhere. Cf. OG Est 4:2; Matt 12:4; Josephus, *A.J.* 20.202; 4 Bar. 5:23.

⁹⁶ Translation from Allison Jr. 2019, 405.

⁹⁷ I take 2 Cor 12:5-6 as a parenthetical remark, following Gooder 2006, 195, where the report in 12:4 is resumed in 12:7.

⁹⁸ The verb βλέπω followed by an accusative noun usually signals an attributive construction where the noun functions as a descriptor of what the someone “looks like” (see Aeschylus, *Sept.* 498; Aristophanes, *Eq.* 631).

legitimising his apostleship with it.⁹⁹ This may be true. However, although Paul does not disclose specifically what he has seen or heard, nevertheless, in 12:2-4 he has familiarised his hearers with enough of his apocalyptic resumé. If his intent was to avoid boasting in things other than his weakness, indirectly referencing his own apocalyptic experiences, even vaguely, hardly serves that end.

It is one thing to only boast in weakness, but it is something else entirely to be worried about being falsely attributed for something that did not originate from him. It seems to me that Paul holds back from boasting directly about himself, not only because he wishes to boast in weakness—the scarlet thread underlying Paul’s whole discussion until its climax in 2 Cor 12:9-10—but because he may unknowingly or, perhaps worse, intentionally disclose some of the revelations that he was not permitted to speak (12:4), in order to exalt himself and benefit his reputation. Given the context, one can easily draw a parallel between the ἄρρητα ῥήματα that he heard in paradise and things that Paul might boast of which are beyond him. The temptation is real, given the propensity of his opponents themselves to go *beyond* (ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι, 11:5; 12:11). If he were to disclose the words prohibited in 2 Cor 12:4, not only would he subvert his own primary desire to boast in weakness (12:5, 9-10), but he would be attempting to bolster his authority with unlawful revelatory secrets.

⁹⁹ E.g. Martin, R. P. 2014, 603; Harris, M. J. 2005, 848; Barrett 1973, 312–3. Cf. Furnish 1984, 546. On whether there was doubt cast about Paul’s account of visionary experiences, see Windisch 1924, 381; Lietzmann 1969, 155.

Let us imagine for a moment that Paul did decide to boast in himself and to be credited with the things beyond him, i.e. the ineffable words. What would happen? Since, he is not permitted to share these words, there must be some kind of consequence. According to 2 Cor 12:7, that consequence is the angel of Satan. Paul is given the angel of Satan because of these revelations. When Paul resumes his visionary account in 2 Cor 12:7, previously left off at 12:4, he draws a connection between the revelations he has heard in paradise (καὶ τῆ ὑπερβολῆ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων, v.7a), a restriction on exalting himself (ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι, v.7b), and the ἄγγελος σατανᾶ (v.7c).¹⁰⁰ The expression “the sublimity of the revelations” (ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων, 12:7a) refers to the oracular aspects of Paul’s visionary journey in vv. 2-4, most specifically the ἄρρητα ῥήματα.¹⁰¹ The “revelations” in 12:7b may refer to the revelations mentioned 12:1, however, its more immediate referent are the ἄρρητα ῥήματα in 12:4.¹⁰²

Many scholars treat καὶ τῆ ὑπερβολῆ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων as a continuation from 2 Cor 12:6 as opposed to being connected to the following clause διό ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι (NA²⁸). There are, however, problems with this textual reading.¹⁰³ The key argument that favours a connection between καὶ τῆ

¹⁰⁰ Many interpreters posit a connection between this heavenly journey and Paul’s thorn. Yet not all explain why the two are exegetically connected. For example: Oropeza 2016, 670; Lincoln 1981, 85; Meier 1998, 149; Baumgarten 1975, 150; Harris, M. J. 2005, 837, 855; Matera 2003, 276, 282. David Litwa has raised the question of how exactly Paul’s ascent is logically connected with the thorn in the flesh. Litwa 2011, 238.

¹⁰¹ Price 1980, 35; Harris, M. J. 2005, 853. Cf. Thrall (2000, 806), who argues that the plural ἀποκαλύψεων means that he must be speaking beyond vv.2-4, however, she overlooks the simple fact that the revelations that he hears in v.4 are also plural ῥήματα.

¹⁰² Price 1980, 35.

¹⁰³ For arguments in support of joining v.7a with v.6 along with counterarguments, see Harris, M. J. 2005, 851–2; Thrall 2000, 804–5. Bultmann (1976, 226) argued that it is

ὑπερβολῆ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων and the previous verse is the presence of the conjunction διό. The conjunction usually marks the beginning of a sentence in Pauline literature.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, it is not clear that διό was a part of the initial text in the first place. On the basis of external evidence, διό is retained due to its presence in a number of Alexandrian witnesses among others (Ⲡ, A, B, G, 33, 81, 1739). However, a number of other Alexandrian witnesses, one of which is our earliest copy of Paul's letters, omit διό from the text (Ⲣ⁴⁶, Ψ). This omission is also attested in both Western (D, F) and Byzantine manuscripts (e.g. K, L).¹⁰⁵ Its presence in textually diverse and, in the case of Ⲣ⁴⁶, early witnesses suggest that the omission of διό is a stronger reading for an initial text.

Metzger supports διό as the initial text because it is the more difficult reading.¹⁰⁶ However, whether or not it is the more difficult reading is, as Margaret Thrall has argued, a matter of perspective.¹⁰⁷ Metzger argues that the removal of the conjunction “seems to have occurred when copyists mistakenly

grammatically impossible to connect v.6 with v.7a. Some interpreters also extract causality out of the dative of τῆ ὑπερβολῆ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων and often put undue grammatical strain on the καί, giving it exegetical significance (e.g. “namely”). However, as Margaret Thrall has argued, an epexegetic καί is usually followed in Paul by a form of οὗτος (cf. Rom 13:11; 1 Cor 2:2; 6:6; 6:8), and thus καί probably functions connectively. Thrall 2000, 804–5.

¹⁰⁴ Rom 1:24; 2:1; 4:22; 13:5, 7, 22; 1 Cor 12:3; 14:13; 2 Cor 1:20; 2:8; 2 Cor 4:16; 5:9; 6:17; 12:10; Gal 4:31; Phil 2:9; 1 Thess 3:1; 5:11; Phlm 8; cf. 2 Cor 4:13 (a quotation of Ps 115.11 LXX).

¹⁰⁵ Litwa 2011, 242. The Nestle-Aland apparatus assigned F as supporting the reading διό, however a glance at the manuscript suggests that there are a number of reasons to think ΔΙΟ as an addition to the text. First, ΔΙΟ is set apart from the rest of the text within the column but disconnected from either vv. 7a or 7b. Second, in the MS all of the words are separated by a dot, whereas ΔΙΟ is orphaned off to the side with no marking on either side. Third, the parallel Latin translation, which stays close to the Greek, does not render ΔΙΟ.

¹⁰⁶ Metzger 1994, 516.

¹⁰⁷ Thrall 2000, 803.

began a new sentence with καὶ τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων, instead of taking these words with the preceding sentence.”¹⁰⁸ This only makes sense if one views καὶ τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων as a necessarily a part of 12:6 rather than as the beginning of a new sentence. The inclusion of διό may be the harder reading for us, but in an ancient context, it is the easier reading for ancient interpreters because it clearly marks what is the beginning of a clause. The reading without διό is more difficult in its ancient context. Thus, as the *lectio difficilior*, one should take καὶ τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων as being connected to ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι and directly to Paul’s thorn in the flesh in 2 Cor 12:7.¹⁰⁹

The connection between Paul’s revelations, his thorn, and the thorn’s function as a inhibitor of self-exaltation (ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι), indicate that Paul was given the thorn, not only in order to restrain his own view of himself, but in order to restrict him from using his knowledge of divine secrets for selfish gain.¹¹⁰ Paul’s exaltation of himself need not be some interior feeling of pride.

¹⁰⁸ Metzger 1994, 516.

¹⁰⁹ Tasker 1958, 173. Even if one takes διό as being a part of the initial text, like Thrall, one might also understand it as an “emphatic redundancy” that “takes up and emphasises the causal force of the preceding dative τῇ ὑπερβολῇ.” Thrall 2000, 805. On the causal dative of τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων see Thrall 2000, 806; Martin, R. P. 2014, 605; Harris, M. J. 2005, 852–3.

¹¹⁰ The verb ὑπεραίρω usually denotes some kind of prioritisation over something else (e.g. 2 Thess 2:4; 2 Cor 32:23; 2 Macc 5:23; Ps 37:5; Ps 71:16; Prov 31:29; Sir 48:12; Let. Aris. 16, 290; Josephus, *A.J.* 8.43; 18.290; *C. Ap.* 2.223; *B.J.* 3.316, 423). Paula Gooder argues that 2 Cor 12:1-10 is a failed ascent given that many ancient Jewish apocalypses have levels of heaven beyond the third heaven as well as her interpretation of the verb ὑπεραίρωμαι in 2 Cor 12:7 as meaning that Paul was restricted from literally “going higher.” Gooder 2006, 187, 200, 210, and recently reinforced by Bowens 2017, 177–79. An argument against Gooder’s proposal for her translation of ὑπεραίρωμαι is the middle/passive nature of Paul’s ascent (note the passive voice of ἀρπάζω in 2 Cor 12:2, 4), which implies that Paul was not in control of his ascent. If he already lacked control over his heavenly journey it makes little sense why he would

Paul could have bolstered his apostolic authority by mentioning the ineffable revelations of 2 Cor 12:4 to the Corinthians, especially given that he alludes to the possibility that he could use such material to boast (12:5-6). Because of the angel of Satan, however, Paul's ability to share that revelatory knowledge unlawfully is restrained by the threat of physical affliction.¹¹¹

This would explain why Paul tries to avoid attribution beyond what is seen and heard from him (12:6). If something was attributed to him beyond what he himself had shared, it may have triggered the ἄγγελος σατανᾶ to injure him. This has explanatory power for why Paul presents his visionary account in such an enigmatic way. Paul's silence on the revelations in 2 Cor 12:4 has been understood as virtue or modesty.¹¹² Others suggest that Paul does not explain

need an angel to beat him so that he might not “be lifted up” (ὑπεραίρω, 2 Cor 12:7). It is also tempting to assimilate Paul's account to the cosmological frameworks of ancient Jewish apocalypses, however, to do so would go beyond Paul. One of the major problems with Gooder's assumption that Paul understood there to be more heavens is whether or not this would have been intelligible to his non-Jewish audience. First, there is not an agreed upon number of heavens in ancient Jewish literature (ranging from one heaven to ten, according to Gooder's analysis). Gooder 2006, 184–5. Secondly, it is unlikely non-Jews would have been familiar with the apocalyptic Jewish material like 3 Baruch, 2 Enoch, or the various apocalyptic literature where there are more than three heavens recorded. Furthermore, if one turns to the heavenly ascent accounts in Graeco-Roman literature, there is by no means any monolithic schema for layers of heaven. In Plato's telling of the Myth of Er (*Resp.* 10.616-7), the spindle of Necessity (the layers beyond earth into the heavens, consist of eight “whorls.” In Lucian's *Icaromenippus*, there is a singular layer of Heaven in Menippus's journey where he speaks to Zeus (*Icar* 23). In Origen's account of the Mithraic ascent of the soul, there are eight “gates” in a ladder to the stars. As with ancient Jewish apocalypses, there is no standard number of heavenly layers, and Paul could just have meant that the third heaven was in his framework the highest framework.

¹¹¹ Lisa Bowens (2017, 179–80) argues that the angel of Satan prevents Paul from gaining further divine revelations from God. It is not clear to me that one can justify this position from Paul's text. Further, since Paul has already gained access to a repertoire of oracular material, why is it necessary for the angel of Satan to quell further revelations?

¹¹² Allo 1956, 305; Käsemann 1942, 63.

why he is supposed to remain silent.¹¹³ If the information in this particular visionary experience is sensitive and guarded by an angelic failsafe, it makes sense why he would want to avoid being directly attributed to the revelations. By speaking cryptically about the revelations in the third person, Paul can disassociate himself from them, effectually creating a rhetorical buffer.

God's control over the speech of prophets is not unique to Paul and his thorn. In some ancient Jewish apocalyptic texts, there are many cases where revelations are kept secret from others (e.g. Isa 8:16; Dan 12:4; 4 Ezra 14:4-6, 44-46; 4Q213b [4QLevi^c ar]). God sometimes even physically restricts those who have received revelations from sharing it with others. For example, in Ezek 3:26-27 God makes the prophet's tongue stick to the top of his palate (לִשְׁוֹןָךְ (אֲדַבִּיק אֶל־הֶחֱךְ) so he is not able to speak anything to the people, except whenever God enables him to speak ("I will open your mouth," אֲפַתַח אֶת־פִּיךָ). In the Book of the Watchers, Azazel and the other "fallen" angels hear a revelation from Enoch but they are not allowed to share it because they were not able to speak (1 En 13:9). They are not able to use the secrets of the revelations as they used the mysteries of heaven for their own advantage on the earth. In the Apocalypse of Zephaniah 5:6, the prophet enters a city whose gates were bronze and finds that his mouth is completely shut. The prophet is physically disabled from revealing anything that he sees in the city itself. Although Paul does not specify that a particular part of his body is restricted, the inhibiting of Paul by the angel upon threat of physical harm is similar to the way that these other ancient

¹¹³ Garland 1999, 516; Christiansen 2015, 221.

Jewish texts show physical impairment imposed upon prophets and angels in order to prevent the disclosure of divine mysteries.

This restriction of prophetic speech is typified by the prophet Balaam. An oft-neglected proposal by Verena Jegher-Bucher is that Paul alludes to the story of Balaam in Numbers 22 with the phrase ἄγγελος σατανᾶ.¹¹⁴ There are elements of the story that overlap with Paul's thorn, such as Balaam encountering an ἄγγελος, the ἄγγελος as an adversary for him (לִי יָשׁוּב, a satan), and the pattern of three times which the ἄγγελος interferes with Balaam's travel to speak against God's people (Num 22:23-27). However, what is emphasised again and again in the story of Balaam is that he is only allowed to speak revelations that the LORD tells him to speak (22:8, 13, 18, 20, 35, 38; 23:3, 12, 16, 26; 24:13). The reason God sends the ἄγγελος to obstruct his path is because Balaam so eagerly arises to travel with the Moabites to curse Israel.¹¹⁵ The ἄγγελος then reminds Balaam that he is only allowed to speak the oracles that God has allowed him to say (22:35). The messenger inhibits Balaam from being arrogant, just as the angel of Satan does with Paul.¹¹⁶

This looks remarkably similar to what is going on in 2 Cor 12:1-10. There, Paul's oracular activity mimics the role of prophets like Balaam. Paul elsewhere characterises himself with the likes of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah (Gal 1:15, cf. Is 49:1; Jer 1:5). Although Paul is familiar with having σατανᾶ as an obstacle for his own work (1 Thess 2:18; Rom 16:20), in 2 Cor

¹¹⁴ Jegher-Bucher 1997.

¹¹⁵ At least according to ancient Jewish interpreters. Milgrom 1990, 190.

¹¹⁶ Jegher-Bucher 1997, 396.

12:7, the ἄγγελος σατανᾶ is given by God (ἐδόθη, cf. the discussion in Chapter Eight) just like in the story of Balaam.¹¹⁷ Indeed, if Paul is playing the fool, the echoes of Balaam and the talking donkey would be a perfect allusion from which to characterise the limitations placed upon him by the thorn.¹¹⁸

In summary, Paul's thorn impaired his ability to communicate mysteries about what he learned during this specific visionary experience. In one sense, he is certainly capable of sharing revelatory information, as it would be the truth (12:6). However, in another sense, he is not able to share information without causing physical harm to himself. From 2 Cor 12:1-7, we can glean that the angel of Satan inhibited Paul's ability to communicate. His thorn impaired Paul's ability to share the details of his revelations in Paradise, upon pain of torture.

6.6 Conclusion

After a close analysis of Paul's metaphoric language in 2 Cor 12:7 I have found that Paul's thorn is simply the angel of Satan. It is not something outside of the text or something that the angel of Satan causes, like a disease. The angel itself is Paul's thorn. The answer for which many interpreters have tried to grasp, especially over the past hundred years, was actually hiding in plain sight. Although many assume a connection between the thorn and Paul's heavenly

¹¹⁷ Both role of God and the ἄγγελος are blurred with one another: Levine 2000, 155.

¹¹⁸ Since Windisch, many scholars have designated 2 Cor 12:1-10 as part of the wider "fool's discourse" (Narrenrede) of 2 Cor 11:21-12:10 as Paul frequently says that he has been a fool (2 Cor 11:16; 12:6, 11) or speaks about foolishness (2 Cor 11:1, 17, 21). Windisch 1924, 349.

ascent in 2 Cor 12:2-4, none that I have come across have make an explicit exegetical connection between the two. I argued that Paul's thorn was given in order to prevent Paul from revealing the unspeakable revelations (ἄρρητα ῥήματα) that he heard in Paradise. Paul has been "gifted" an angel of Satan that harms his body if he tries to reveal forbidden mysteries.

The danger of visionary experiences like those Paul had is reinforced by later rabbinic traditions, as Christopher Morray-Jones has amply shown.¹¹⁹ Since Wilhelm Bousset, the classic tale of the "Four Who Entered Paradise" in rabbinic literature (t. Hag. 2:1; y. Hag. 2:1 [77b]; b. Hag. 14-15b) has provided a helpful analogy to Paul's visionary experience and the angel of Satan.¹²⁰ In the story, four men — ben Azzai, ben Zoma, "Another" (later revealed as Elisha ben Avuya), and Rabbi Akiva enter Paradise and look in. However, it is only Rabbi Akiva who is able to go up and return down safely; the rest all suffer an unfortunate fate. Ben Azzai died, ben Zoma was harmed (i.e. he became sick), and Elisha "cut the trees" (רצק - *Yerushalmi* implies that he harmed other rabbis, y. Hag. 2:1 [77b]). What Morray-Jones has shown about ben Azzai, ben Zoma, and Elisha from other biographical clues in rabbinic sources is that though these men were scholarly individuals, they nevertheless remained *talmidim*, that is, they never became sages themselves.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ See the updated version of his 1993 essays that focus on the "Four Who Entered Paradise" in Hekhalot literature in Morray-Jones 2014.

¹²⁰ On its origin in critical scholarship before Gershon Scholem (with whom it is predominantly associated) see Morray-Jones 2014, 245–247.

¹²¹ Morray-Jones 2014, 255–57. On the status of ben Azzai and ben Zoma see y. Ma'as. Š. 2:10 and b. Hor. 2b. On Elisha see b. Hag. 15b. On all three see b. Ber. 57b.

Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, moved from being a *talmid* to a *hakham*, a sage.¹²² This distinction between student and sage is important because in the Tosefta, the story of the four in Paradise is connected to an exposition of m. Hag. 2:1, and specifically the idea that one can only expound on *merkevah* before a sage (ולא במרכבה ביחיד, אלא אם כן היה חכם ומבין מדעתו).¹²³ The *merkevah* (“the chariot”) references the visionary experience of Ezekiel in Ezek 1:4-26. m. Hag. 2:1 and t. Hag. 2:1 provide a prescription limiting the exposition of visionary (or apocalyptic) experiences to those who are able to interpret them properly. The consequences for those who are not sages, and thus not prepared to receive such divine revelation, are grave, as the Paradise story communicates.

In this light of these rabbinic traditions, it may be that Paul was not able to describe what he saw in his visions, not only for his own sake, due to the angel of Satan, but also for the sake of his Corinthian audience. Since they were but mere students and not sages like Paul (who is able to go and return from Paradise safely), were they to hear of these revelations, they may have been harmed. And although the angel technically can harm Paul if he tries to share the details of his revelations, as we argue here, it is not the kind of harm that ben Azzai, ben Zoma, and Elisha ben Aviyu suffer. The latter are harmed because they were unprepared to look into Paradise. Paul on the other hand, is able to look into Paradise but he is not able to communicate what he heard to anyone else. The angel of Satan prevents Paul from using divine mysteries to

¹²² b. Kid. 49b; b. Ber. 57b. This is even evident in the earliest account of the story in the Tosefta, as only Akiva bears the title רב (t. Hag. 2:1).

¹²³ m. Hag. 2:1; t. Hag. 2:1.

boast while simultaneously protecting the Corinthian audience from revelations which they are spiritually unprepared to receive.

7. PAUL'S ANGEL OF SATAN AS AN IMPAIRMENT AND DISABILITY

7.1 Attending to the Demonic

In the fourth-century apocryphal text known to us as the *Visio Pauli* (or the *Apocalypse of Paul*), early Christian readers finally caught a glimpse of what Paul was prevented from sharing in his heavenly ascent into the third heaven (2 Cor 12:1-6).¹ The way the apocalyptic vision is purportedly found mimics features of Paul's thorn in 2 Cor 12:7-9. A nobleman who lives in Paul's old house in Tarsus is told by an angel (ἄγγελος) to open the foundations of the house and publish what he finds (Apoc. Paul 1).² The man does not listen and after three times (cf. 2 Cor 12:8) the angel comes and forces the man to open the box (ἠναγκάσθη ὁ ἀξιωματικὸς καταλῦσαι τὸν θεμέλιον, Apoc. Paul 2).³ The Latin recension of the apocalypse clarifies that the angel "beat him" in order to coerce him (*flagellauit eum*), clearly mirroring Paul's own flagellation in 2 Cor 12:7 (κολαφίζω).⁴ The *Visio Pauli* encourages us to think about angelic beings as forces that impair, not just beings that cause other

¹ The *Apocalypse of Paul* should be differentiated from the *Coptic Apocalypse of Paul*. The date of the *Visio Pauli* is debated. A quotation from Origen which mentions an Apocalypse of Paul is preserved by the 13th century Syrian scholar Barhebraeus (Nomocanon 7.9). Bremmer 2009, 304. Whether or not this is the same popular Apocalypse as mentioned by the church historian Sozomenos around 445 CE is unclear. Klauck 2007, 68. We may then say that some version(s) of the *Visio Pauli* were in circulation possibly in the third century, with a revival in the fourth.

² This is a classic strategy of ancient self-authentication. Bremmer 2009, 304.

³ For the Greek text see Tischendorf 1866, 34–5.

⁴ For the Latin recension see James 1893, 11; Silverstein and Hilhorst 1997, 68.

impairments. Scholarship has been so preoccupied with the identity of Paul's thorn as an illness or condition no one has considered how the angel was itself an impairment and disability.

This chapter argues that Paul's angel of Satan should be considered an impairment and a disability in its own right, not just in relation to the effect it had on his ability to convey apocalyptic revelations. First, I analyse the terminological and functional overlap between angels, demons, and spirits to understand Paul's angel as a demonic force against the backdrop of ancient Jewish demonology. Then I explore the physiological relationship between Paul's body and the angel of Satan. Understanding how and where the angel of Satan afflicts Paul's body provides a way of understanding how the angel caused Paul's body to deviate from the ancient Jewish physical ideal. This makes it possible to analyse Paul's angel as an impairment and disability.

The chapter then moves to an examination of ancient Jewish texts that document the effect of foreign entities in the bodies of the demonised. Because the terminological and functional overlap between angels, demons, and spirits only appears in Paul's ancient Jewish context, the analysis of Paul's thorn as an impairment and disability in the remainder of this chapter depends primarily on ancient Jewish evidence. Many of these sources differ from one another and Paul in language, genre, provenance, and period of origin. Nevertheless, I am interested in the way they present, on the one hand, the bodily effect of demonic forces on humans, and on the other hand, the social and cultural implications by which they are portrayed in relation to the ideal non-demonised

body. In spite of their differences, these sources portray the mechanisms of demonisation in a broadly consistent way.

Ancient Jewish sources give information about curative practices and technology to restore bodies to an affliction-free state. The desire to heal indicates that demonised bodies deviated from ideal bodies. Because the demonised deviated from the bodily ideal, I argue that Paul's angelic affliction should be considered an impairment. From impairment, I shift my focus to social and cultural processes that de-normalised a demonised condition. Those who were afflicted by malevolent transmundane forces faced stigma, exclusion, ridicule and liminality. This suggests that demonisation was also a disability.

7.2 Paul's Angel in the Context of Ancient Jewish

Transmundane Powers

Paul's angel in 2 Cor 12:7 can be understood as a demonic force in the context of ancient transmundane powers. I borrow the language of "transmundane" here from Annette Yoshiko Reed to refer to forces that are "higher" than human beings but "lower" than divinity, like angels, spirits, or demons.⁵ Understanding Paul's angel in light of how ancient Jewish transmundane powers behaved in relation to human bodies helps me perceive how ancient readers would have interpreted its effect on Paul (§7.3), and ultimately how it was an impairment (§7.4) and disability (§7.5). This chapter

⁵ For her use of the term see Reed, A. Y. 2020.

does not provide this ancient Jewish context as a foundation for understanding Paul's argument in 2 Cor 12:7-10, with which I am concerned in Chapter Eight. Rather, the discourse about transmundane powers helps us to make sense of the ambiguous relationship between Paul's angel and his body.

Paul does not call his thorn in the flesh a "demon," but rather an ἄγγελος. In Paul's undisputed letters demons (δαίμονια) and angels (ἄγγελοι) are not equated with one another. Both ἄγγελοι (Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 4:9; 6:3; 11:10; 13:1; Gal 1:8; 3:19; 4:14) and δαίμονια (1 Cor 10:20-21) were spiritual powers differentiated from mortals and the God of Israel.⁶

Other than in 2 Cor 12:7, nowhere in Paul's letters does an ἄγγελος harm a human body. But neither does Paul view all ἄγγελοι as beneficial. He elsewhere alludes to the idea that ἄγγελοι might be obstacles towards believers (e.g. Rom 8:38; cf. 1 Cor 4:9; 6:3). Emma Wasserman argues that ἄγγελοι for Paul "have an indeterminate status, probably because they serve both as intermediaries and as mistaken objects of worship."⁷ In other words, they can both benefit and harm believers depending on the situation.

This is important for Paul's ἄγγελος in 2 Cor 12:7 because it is not just an angel but one associated with Satan (σατάν).⁸ As argued in Chapter Six, for Paul, Satan is not a metaphorical figure. He is both a divine antagonist of God

⁶ On the subordination of divine powers in Paul see Wasserman, E. 2018, 108–40.

⁷ Wasserman, E. 2018, 138.

⁸ Paul uses σατανᾶς and σατάν to reference Satan, both of which were used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (OG).

(Rom 16:20) as well as an servant of the divine will (1 Cor 5:5). He tempts (1 Cor 7:5), exploits (2 Cor 2:11), and hinders believers (1 Thess 2:18).

Although he is never openly related to δαίμονια, Paul does relate Satan to ἄγγελοι. In 2 Cor 11:14, Paul says that Satan “changes himself into an angel of light” (αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ Σατανᾶς μετασχηματίζεται εἰς ἄγγελον φωτός), like the pseudo-apostles who appear as apostles of Christ. If Satan is not an ἄγγελος in his traditional aesthetic form, what is his traditional form? Paul does not say. But, if Satan disguises himself into something that he is not, then he cannot exclusively be considered an ἄγγελος.⁹

Ancient Jewish transmudane forces went by many names. There were angels (ἄγγελοι/מלאכים), spirits (πνεύματα/רוחות), and demons (δαίμονια, δαίμονες/דמונים).¹⁰ In spite of this lexical diversity, multiple titles could describe the same being. The overlap between the language of angels and demons occurs in the Hebrew Bible. Both Deut 4:19-20 and 32:8-9 argue that celestial bodies

⁹ Provided that Satan’s angels (inferred from 2 Cor 12:7) share his ability to shape shift, ancient Graeco-Roman readers of both 2 Cor 11:14 and 12:7 would have understood ἄγγελος to be demonic, since demonic forces were known for their ability to transform themselves (e.g. Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 4.10).

¹⁰ The term דמו is used to describe a “demon” in the Scrolls, the Peshitta, as well as the rabbis, though, as Frey-Anthes explains (2008, 42) we are still unable to describe its philological origins. Demons (or “daimons”) in Plato referred to the gods or the children of divine beings (Plato, *Apol.* 27c-d). They were also synonymous with the souls of heroes (e.g. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 8.1 Pythagoras [32]), and sometimes were considered guardians of actions and judgments (Hesiod, *Op.* 121-6; Plato, *Crat.* 398a). They are sometimes portrayed as neutral, however in Homeric literature there were much more “sinister overtones” according to Brenk 1987, 2073. The nomenclature of “demon” has been useful for analysing the ways in which ancient Mediterranean cultures understood the relationship between mundane and transmudane beings. Petersen 2003, 39. Demonological specialists in HB have been particularly cautious in using “demon” to refer to anything in the Hebrew Bible. See for e.g. Frey-Anthes 2008, 41. This may be true of the Jewish scriptures in their specific historically constructed Israelite contexts, however, does not apply to the later *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the texts in early Jewish literature (e.g. LXX, DSS, etc.).

(sun, moon, stars, ornaments of heaven) and “sons of God” (i.e. angels, cf. 4Q37Deuteronomy^j) were set up among the nations by God (cf. Sir 17:17).¹¹ Although the MT for Deut 32:8 reads בני ישראל, a copy of Deut 32:7-8 at Qumran (4Q37 Deuteronomy^j) reads “sons of God” (בני אלוהים), a well-known expression for angels (Gen 6:4; Job 1:6; Ps 29:1; 89:6-7). This is also reflected in the OG translation of Deut 32:8, which has ἄγγελοι θεοῦ. Israel was warned that they would be tempted to worship such forces as deities (Deut 4:19), and by the end of Deuteronomy (32:17) God admits that his people had sacrificed to such beings, this time labelled “demons” (HB: שְׂדִיִּים; OG: δαμόνια).¹² The overlap between angels, spirits, and demons can be further demonstrated from the 1st century BCE apotropaic hymn, 4Q510, which equates “ravaging angels and bastard spirits” (מלאכי חבל ורוחות ממזרים) with “demons” (שְׂדִיִּים, 4Q510 1, 1. 5).¹³ Some ancient Jews understood angels, demons, and spirits to be interchangeable.

The interchangeability of these terms is evident even in the reception of this ancient Jewish language in early Christian gospel material. The Gospel of Matthew, which best reflects an evangelist who is influenced by and

¹¹ In some ancient Greek literature, demons were intermediaries between the gods and humanity (Plato, *Symp.* 202e; Philo, *Conf.* 174; Ps-Plutarch, *X orat.* 10 [415A], 16 [418E]). Some ancient Greek traditions presented demons as being appointed in order to rule justly over cities instead of human kings (e.g. Plato, *Leg.* 713c-d).

¹² For the relationship between the demons in Deut 32:17 and the evil spiritual entities in Deut 4:19-20 see Heiser 2008, 8. The notion that the deities of the nations were demons can be found elsewhere, even in Paul (Pss 95:6 [96:5]; 105:37 [106:37]; 1 Cor 10:20)

¹³ An additional case can be seen in the overlap between evil angels and the spirits associated with them elsewhere in the scrolls (e.g. 1QM XIII, ll.11-12; 1QS III, 1.20-21, 24).

knowledgeable of Jewish conceptions of transmundane powers, is a primary example.¹⁴ In the Gospel, Beelzebul (Βεελζεβούλ) is known as the ruler of demons (ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων, Matt 12:24; cf. Mk 3:22; Lk 11:15). Matthew parses the ruler of demons as ὁ Σατανᾶς (Matt 12:26). Matthew refers to Satan multiple times in the Gospel as διάβολος (Matt 4:1, 5, 8, 11; 13:39), and also describes the διάβολος as having ἄγγελοι (Matt 25:41).¹⁵ So while Matthew does not ever explicitly state that Satan's ἄγγελοι are δαιμόνια, they are nevertheless textually associated in the Gospel.

There were not only terminological overlaps between angels and demons, but also functional overlaps. Such an overlap is found in Josephus when he equates evil spirits and demons with one another (*A.J.* 6.166, 168, 211, 214, 223). Such forces can possess people, drive them mad, bring on illness and have the power to kill those whom they enter (*B.J.* 7.185). On the other hand, angels are for the most part divine messengers, intermediaries that bring divine communications to humans.¹⁶ Yet, angels in Josephus also have the power to kill, just like demons or evil spirits. In one instance Josephus mentions that the angel of God destroyed the Assyrian army of Sennacherib in one night (*B.J.* 5.388, cf. 2 Kgs 19:35). In another passage he mentions an angel of

¹⁴ There are good reasons to consider elements in the Synoptic Gospels as having an affinity with ancient Jewish literature, especially the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. Their subject matter (a Jewish messiah), use of Jewish scriptures and literature, and concern over Jewish customs and law observance all indicate familiarity, engagement, and continuity with other early Jewish texts.

¹⁵ The epithet διάβολος already in the OG was used to refer to רשע, cf. Zech 3:1; 1 Chr 21:1.

¹⁶ Because of this, Martin argues that angels are “mostly good” and de-emphasises the fact that any disease or killing enacted by angels is “in accordance with the divine will.” Martin, D. B. 2010, 672.

destruction unleashing plague upon Jerusalem as judgment from God (*A.J.* 7.327, cf. 2 Sam 24:15//1 Chr 21:15).¹⁷ Josephus retains the Hebrew Bible notion of angels as violent intermediaries under divine control. For him, angels and demons were not divided conceptually into separate malevolent and non-malevolent classes since both could harm humans.¹⁸

Philo is an important example because in his work I find evidence of both terminological and functional overlap between angels and demons. In his *De Gigantibus* (*On Giants*), Philo explains that what is an angel (ἄγγελος) to Moses is a demon (δαίμων) to philosophers (*Gig.* 6). One may look at the two as names for the same underlying thing (*Gig.* 16; cf. *Somn.* 1.141). Philo's primary reason for breaking down the semantics of angel and demon is first and foremost to avoid superstition (δεισιδαμονία). But, more importantly, since angels and demons refer essentially to the same kind of being, therefore angels, just like demons, can be both good and evil.¹⁹ It is not that these beings are “benign” but that the “angel”/“demon” can be “worthy” (ἄξιος) or “unworthy of the title (ἀνάξιος τῆς προσήσεως)”, i.e. that it can do both good and evil (*Gig.* 16).²⁰ For Philo both angels and demons referred to the beings that share the same behavioural possibilities.

¹⁷ Cf. 1 Macc 7:14; 2 Macc 15:22-27.

¹⁸ The functional overlap between angels and demons can also be seen when we look at the overlapping physical effects between the “mute demon” (δαμόνιον κωφόν) in Matt 9:33 (cf. Luke 11:14) and Paul's ἄγγελος Σατανᾶ. Not only is the demon associated with Beelzebul (i.e. Satan, Matt 9:34//Luke 11:15, cf. 12:24) but the man's speech is restricted by the δαμόνιον, similarly to Paul's own condition.

¹⁹ This point is noticed by Wright, A. T. 2005, 210.

²⁰ Cf. Martin, D. B. 2010, 671–2.

In light of both the terminological and functional overlaps between angels and demons in Jewish literature, when Paul speaks of an “angel of Satan” afflicting him (2 Cor 12:7), his Jewish audience would have understood such a being to be related to, if not in fact, a δαίμόνιον.²¹ Because it harms Paul’s body, his ἄγγελος is, in the wider context of ancient Jewish transmundane forces, a “demonic” force and he is a “demonised” person. I will proceed by using the term “demon” to refer to beings who act malevolently, whether they are referred to as demons, spirits, or angels.²² When referencing Paul directly, however, I will retain Paul’s use of ἄγγελος (angel) as a reference to his thorn in the flesh.

7.3 The Habitation of the Angel in Paul’s Body

Since Paul’s angel in 2 Cor 12:7 is intelligible in the context of ancient Jewish demonisation, this wider discourse can help us understand how the thorn interacts with his body as a demonic force. Hans Dieter Betz remarked once that “an ‘angel of Satan’ *dwells in* Paul, which causes sickness.”²³ The physical effect of Paul’s angel on his body can easily distract from how the angel itself

²¹ The intention of this argument is to contend that angels could sometimes share in demonic qualities, but not that all those who share in these qualities necessarily follow the later aetiology that demons were the “fallen angels” of 1 Enoch. On this aetiology see especially Stuckenbruck 2003; Stuckenbruck 2004; Stuckenbruck 2013; Stuckenbruck 2014; Bohak 2017, 128.

²² Others who follow this same approach include: Brand 2013, 30, cf. Alexander 1999, 331–2. The use of the adjective “malevolent” is not to make an judgment about the character of the beings, only about their behaviour (whether by their own will or the will of a divine superpower). On this distinction see the work of Kitz 2016, 448.

²³ “In Paulus haust ein ‘Satansengel’ (12,7), der die Krankheit hervorruft.” Betz 1972, 96.

relates to Paul's body in 2 Corinthians 12. Ancient Jewish writers understood malevolent beings not only to be with a person but, often, *inside them*. This relationship between Paul's body and the angels serves as an important foundation for recognising the angel as an impairment of his body.

7.3.1 Paul, the Possessed Apostle?

Ancient Jews were concerned that demons could violate the boundaries of their bodies.²⁴ In the incantation text 4Q560, the petitioner pleads to God for demons not to penetrate their flesh (עלל בבשרא 4Q560, Frag 1 I, 1.3). The demons in 4Q560 are described as being “penetrator of the male and penetrator of the female” (לחלחיא דכרא וחלחלית נקבתא).²⁵ Elsewhere in Qumran, a petitioner pleads for God to not let a satan or evil spirit take possession of his bones (11Q5 XIX l. 15-16), a statement made in parallel with the prayer for a satan or evil spirit not to rule over him (אל תשלט בי שטן ורוח טמאה מכאוב ויצר רע אל ירשו) (בעצמי).²⁶ That demons could enter into bodies is further reflected in the work of

²⁴ The infiltration of demonic forces into human bodies may be characterised by the metaphor of the invasion of a house (e.g. Mt 12:43-45//Lk 11:24-26). On this see Stuckenbruck 2014, 175; Verderame 2017, 71.

²⁵ There is some debate about what the term חלחל means, whether it refers to “poisoning” (Penney and Wise 1994, 638), “gnawing” (Hamidović 2017, 99), “shuddering” (Eshel 2003, 396; Reed, A. Y. 2020, 207), or “dig through/perforate” (Bohak 2008, 111). Bohak argues that חלחל is connected to the Aramaic of the rabbis (“to penetrate”) while Eshel argues that it is connected to the Hebrew (e.g. Nah 2:11, IQH X, 1.32). However, the OG may shed light on how Jews in the Second Temple period read חלחל in Nah 2:11 as it translates חלחלה בכל־מתנים (“all loins tremble”) with ὠδῖνες ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ὀσφύς (“pain/pangs of childbirth on every groin”). Childbirth is accompanied by trembling and shaking due to adrenaline but also tremendous perforation as the child must travel through a woman's vaginal canal, sometimes causing rupture. On this account, both Eshel and Bohak may be correct.

²⁶ Brand (2013, 205) detects this same language in 4Q511 48-49 + 51 II, 3-4, however while the text does speak about the body as a place of battle as well as the

Josephus, who describes a first-hand account where he witnesses a man from Judaea named Eleazar draw out a demon from inside of a man “through his nostrils” (διὰ τῶν μυκτήρων) with an apotropaically scented ring (*A.J.* 8.47).²⁷

The infiltration of demonic forces into human bodies signalled a loss of autonomy.²⁸ For example, in 4Q544, a copy of the Vision of Amram, Amram describes two angels, one of which is called Melki-resha‘, who are debating over who gets to take control of him (Frag 1, ll.11-12).²⁹ Interestingly, it is not only the demonic angel but the beneficent angel present (Frag 1, ll.14) who is also

“spirits of the bastards” it is not entirely that the specific passage deals with demonic habitation. 4Q444 also speaks about “spirits of strife in my (bodily) structure” (רוחי ריב במבניתי). For other possible texts which deal with demonic habitation (e.g. 4Q266) see Stuckenbruck 2014, 177.

²⁷ Later in the second century, non-Jewish writers such as Lucian (*Philops.* 16) and Philostratus also attest to accounts where demons entered humans, the former who witnessed a demon with a smoke-like appearance being drawn out of a person, similar to Josephus. Early Christian gospel texts too are key witnesses to traditions about malevolent spirits entering the bodies of those whom they demonise. See Stuckenbruck 2014, 174–5. Frequently during exorcisms, the narratives or dialogue describe (or command) the demon to come *out of* the person (Mk 1:26//Lk 4:35; Mk 5:8, 13; 7:29; Acts 16:18). Further confirmation that the demonised “housed” demons is Luke’s language of Satan entering Judas (εἰσηλθεν δὲ Σατανᾶς εἰς Ἰούδαν, Lk 22:3).

²⁸ In our Graeco-Roman sources, possession by an evil spirit could come with the loss of cognitive control, like madness (Philo, *Heri.* 69) or control over bodily functions (Lucian, *Pseudops.* 16; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 3.38). In Philostratus, a mother explains that her son’s demon does not allow him to stay at home, participate in archery, or even “to have a mind” (οὐ συγχωρεῖ αὐτῷ νοῦν ἔχειν), but drives him into deserted places (*Vit. Apoll.* 3.38). Elsewhere Philostratus describes a youth who is being controlled by a demon without his knowledge (*Vit. Apoll.* 4.20). These portrayals are not unlike what we see in the Gospels. In Mark 5:1-20, the demon of the Gerasene man would howl among tombs and bruise himself with stones (v.5), and in Mark 9:14-29, the boy with the mute spirit “seizes him, throws him down” (αὐτὸν καταλάβη ῥήσσει αὐτόν) and makes the boy foam at the mouth, grind his teeth, and become paralysed (v.17-18). The best example of the extent to which demons could control humans is the notion that Satan entered Judas (Lk 22:3) in order to destroy Jesus (22:4-6).

²⁹ The name Melki-resha‘ means “king of wickedness” and is also found in another Hebrew text from Qumran (4Q280). Stuckenbruck 2013, 62.

able to take control over Amram's body should he choose it.³⁰ Elsewhere, the document known as the Community Rule (or *Serek Ha-yahad*), the "Angel of Darkness" (מלאך חושך) has dominion over the sons of deceit and corrupts the sons of justice if they fall into his hand (1QS III, ll. 20-22).³¹

The degree of control demons have over the bodies that they enter is not always clear. Although the term demonic "possession" is often used, it is open to debate whether all demonic infiltration should be characterised in this way. As I see it, there are three types of demon influence. Demonic oppression is where a demon afflicts a person from outside of a person's body (e.g. Asmodeus in Tobit). Then, there is demonic habitation, in which a demon is present within a person's body and they lose a certain amount of control of whatever body part or aspect of the body under the influence of the demonic force (e.g. 11Q5).³² Demonic possession, I contend, refers to a person who loses total control over mind and body (4Q544).³³ For these latter two categories, habitation and possession, those demons who inhabited people were, in a sense, a part of their very bodies.

³⁰ Even though they technically are given a choice (according to the reconstruction of the text), all "sons of Adam" technically give up control over themselves to these angels (4Q544 Frag 1 l.12). Wright, A. T. 2005, 171.

³¹ Some have posited that the "angel of Darkness" and Melki-resha' are one in the same figure, however, as Stuckenbruck argues, the Visions of Amram is too fragmentary for any meaningful comparison. Stuckenbruck 2013, 62. Although the sons of deceit are under the power of the Angel of Darkness, they can still be susceptible to the Prince of Lights, just as the children of righteousness can be susceptible to the Angel of Darkness despite being under the aegis of the Prince of Lights. Hempel 2020, 115.

³² Various explanations have been given for why demons inhabit bodies. On these see Proctor 2017, 65. I draw on the language given by Stuckenbruck 2014, 177.

³³ Cf. also the boy with epilepsy in Mk 9:14-29 and Judas in Lk 22:3.

Paul’s language in 2 Cor 12 is cryptic but there are clues in the text that allow us to understand the angel of Satan as being housed in his body. His choice to characterise the ἄγγελος σατανᾶ with σκόλοψ, a piercing object, reflects the wider practice in ancient Jewish literature of characterising demonic forces as penetrative and suggests further that his angel has penetrated his body.³⁴ For example, demons like קטב were sometimes referred to as God’s “arrows” (Deut 32:23; Ps 91:5). Another example is MT Hos 13:14, which Paul alludes to in 1 Cor 15:55: “Where, O Death, are your plagues? Where, O Sheol, is your pestilence?” (אהי דבריך מות אהי קטבך שאול). The OG translates אהי שאול with ποῦ τὸ κέντρον σου, ὄδη, “Hades, where is your *sting*.” The term κέντρον can refer to anything with a sharp point like a goad or a spur. For the translator of the OG, however, it was synonymous with the demon קטב. As Fröhlich notes, demons could be “visualised as physical objects—arrows that smite humans and transfer illness into the body.”³⁵

More importantly, Paul’s thorn was τῆ σαρκί (v.7), in (his) flesh. Demonic infiltration is expressed with this same phrase in 4Q560 above (עלל בבשרא 4Q560, Frag 1 I, l.3). In the previous chapter’s analysis, I argued that the syntagm τῆ σαρκί does not function metaphorically (§6.4). Paul’s use of the syntagm τῆ σαρκί elsewhere in his letters (Rom 2:28; 7:25; 1 Cor 7:28; Gal 5:13) suggests that Paul is speaking locatively, simply noting where the thorn/angel of Satan is *in* his body.³⁶

³⁴ This point was recognised by Moss 2012; Christiansen 2015, 227.

³⁵ Fröhlich 2017, 91. Cf. Job 6:4.

³⁶ The dative of τῆ σαρκί as a dative of disadvantage (*dativus incommodi*), which is sometimes offered by interpreters, is superfluous to the context, where σκόλοψ,

The angel was not something only near to Paul, but something that was a part of his very body. Although it resides in his body, however, it did not have total control over him. According to the information given in 2 Cor 12:7 and our argument in the previous chapter, Paul appears to be in control over everything except his ability to express the revelations he heard while in Paradise. Therefore, the relationship between Paul and his angel is best described as a demonic habitation.

7.3.2 Demonic Co-Habitation with the Pneuma of Christ

Giovanni Bazzana affirms that Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 admits to knowing that evil spirits “could happen to possess even members of the Christ group,” most especially Paul himself.³⁷ But, a malevolent angel that inhabits Paul’s body raises anthropological and pneumatological problems given Paul’s understanding of the spirit of God.

For Paul, believers possess God’s spirit, also called the “spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9) or the holy spirit (2 Cor 13:14).³⁸ The spirit of God lives inside believers (1 Cor 2:11; Rom 8:9, 11). Since other ancient Jews believed that

ἄγγελος Σατανᾶ, in addition to Paul’s petition for it to be taken away (12:8) already indicate that this is something that inconveniences the flesh. Given that the angel “pummels” Paul, I think it less likely that the dative of τῆ σαρκί is a dative of association (a thorn “with the flesh”); it is not something that just accompanies Paul’s “flesh” (as in his person), but something that is a part of his very person.

³⁷ Bazzana 2020, 165, 176–7.

³⁸ Some in the past have contended that Paul’s understanding of the holy spirit is equal to spirit possession. While there are some qualities shared by demonic possession as evidenced in the Gospels and the holy spirit (e.g. supernatural speech and power to do miracles), other aspects, such as the loss of autonomy and self-harm, indicate that spirit possession, and Paul’s conception of the holy Spirit are not totally the same. Cf. Mount 2005, 317.

spirits could dwell in various parts of the body then it is not difficult to perceive that the holy spirit, which was held higher in Paul's cosmological hierarchy, could also dwell in humans. Paul's adherence to a material notion of πνεῦμα (as argued in Chapter Five) and his language about the πνεῦμα θεοῦ taking up residence in believers (οἰκεῖ, Rom 8:9) suggests that he understands the holy spirit to actually dwell in the bodies of the faithful.

Paul even gives a locale for the spirit: in the heart (Gal 4:6; 2 Cor 1:22; Rom 8:26-27). Philo of Alexandria understood physical circumcision to reflect an internal purification of the passions from the πνεῦμα around the heart ("the in-the-heart spirit," τὸ...ἐγκάρδιον πνεῦμα, *Spec.* 1.6, cf. Rom 2:28-29). The expression τὸ ἐγκάρδιον πνεῦμα is a decidedly Stoic conception, as there is evidence that Stoics believed the ἡγεμονικόν (the ruling faculty of the soul/mind) was in the heart or in the πνεῦμα around the heart (ἐν ὅλη τῇ καρδίᾳ ἢ ἐν τῷ περὶ τὴν καρδίαν πνεύματι).³⁹ To be sure, the expression τὸ ἐγκάρδιον πνεῦμα occurs only in later medical literature about the supply of the heart with πνεῦμα (air).⁴⁰ Philo shares this conception of Stoic anthropology, as he argues that πνεῦμα and blood are intermixed with one another in the body and, significantly, that there is a higher concentration of πνεῦμα to blood in

³⁹ Aëtius, *Plac. philos.* 4.5.6 (summarised by Pseudo-Plutarch and preserved in Theodoret). For the text see von Arnim 1964, 228. Likewise, Sextus Empiricus relays that the ἡγεμονικόν is a πνεῦμα to the Stoics (*Pyr.* 3.188, text in von Arnim 1964, 96).

⁴⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis*, 30.15 (Τὸ δὲ ἐγκάρδιον πνεῦμα διὰ τοῦ γείτονος ἐπεισάγεται σπλάγχνου), later repeated by the monk and physician Meletius Monachus (9th century) in his *De natura hominis*. For the text of *De natura hominis*, see Cramer 1836, 33, line 13).

arteries than in veins, although πνεῦμα is still present in both (*QG* 2.59).⁴¹ For Philo, like the Stoics, the heart is therefore surrounded by πνεῦμα. Paul need not have adopted Stoicism to agree that a person’s heart and blood were vital components of a living being’s life (cf. Lev 17:11, 14), and that divine πνεῦμα like *air* was essential for the life of Christ followers. Although one could take “heart” as a metaphor for a person’s will, Philo’s discussions about πνεῦμα around the heart in relation to circumcision suggests that Paul might have understood the housing of the πνεῦμα in a believer’s heart not as a metaphor but as a physiological fact.

Wherever followers of Christ store the πνεῦμα of God in their bodies, Paul fiercely protects the bodily boundaries of believers, especially from πορνεία (“sexual irregularity”).⁴² Two important texts in this regard are 1 Cor 5:5 and 1 Cor 6:15-20. 1 Cor 5:5 concerns the case of the person who has had sexual relations with his father’s wife. In order to preserve τὸ πνεῦμα on the day of the Lord, Paul hands over the man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. Given Paul’s statement in 1 Cor 3:17 that God will destroy the person who destroys his temple (i.e. the assembly), it is likely that τὸ πνεῦμα refers to the whole

⁴¹ Since at least Aristotle’s own observations about the large blood vessels of the body travelling through the heart (*Hist. an.* 513a-b), it was well-known in ancient medicine that the heart was supplied by numerous arteries and major blood vessels.

⁴² I borrow the language of Glancy (2002, 65), since the usual translation of “sexual immorality” does not capture the social constructedness of what Paul the word. The term πορνεία best reflects sexual practices that are best characterised as deviant from a user’s point of view. In the case of 1 Cor 5:1-5, it is a man sleeping with his mother-in-law. On the power dynamics of Paul’s rhetoric against πορνεία, see Hartman 2019.

assembly and not the individual's spirit.⁴³ As Michael Suh argues, “πορνεία is not just evidence of individual moral failing, but a serious breach of the ναὸς θεοῦ within which the Spirit of God dwells.”⁴⁴

Paul argues forcefully in 1 Cor 6:15-20 that the bodies of believers should not participate in πορνεία, since it drags Christ into an impure act. The combined bodies of Christ followers, Paul argues, are “members of Christ” (μέλη Χριστοῦ) and as such should not be united with a “prostitute” (πόρνη). Since they are a temple of God's πνεῦμα, believers have no possession over their own body (6:19). Drawing on Genesis 2:24, Paul argues that all sexual relations, not just marital ones, are acts that unite persons together. Since someone who is “united to the Lord” (ὁ κολλώμενος τῷ κυρίῳ) also shares in his holy πνεῦμα, for them to participate in πορνεία would bring Christ's πνεῦμα and unite it with someone else in what is deemed an impure act.⁴⁵ In fact, Paul's language in 6:15 of “taking along your bodies, the ‘members of Christ’” (ἄρας οὖν τὰ μέλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ) to make it a member of a prostitute suggests that the *whole* congregation along with Christ's πνεῦμα is forced to participate in one individual's act of πορνεία.⁴⁶

⁴³ Suh 2020, 75–76. On the various scholars who take up either of these positions see Suh 2018, 122–124. For arguments against the community interpretation see especially Dochhorn 2016, 140–142.

⁴⁴ Suh 2020, 77.

⁴⁵ Hartman 2019, 154 acknowledges the perspectival nature of purity in Paul's 1 Corinthian discourse.

⁴⁶ The verb αἶρω + accusative object refers to taking or carrying something along (e.g. Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34; 15:21; Lk 9:23). The object, marked by the article τὰ, is tied to the antecedent τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν in the previous clause, which specifically refers to the bodies of believers.

Although Paul argues that believers are united together with Christ, sharing the same holy πνεῦμα, this does not mean that demonic habitation is the same as acts of πορνεία. Paul clearly views irregular sexual behaviour as a sin (e.g. 6:18), whereas Paul's thorn is not. In fact, it is a gift (χάρις, 2 Cor 12:9) that God himself has given to Paul. This illuminates a second difference between Paul's protection of the πνεῦμα of God in the community and the ἄγγελος σατανᾶ that he has received in his body. Those who commit πορνεία do so wilfully. However, Paul has not received this thorn of his own choice, but by divine command.

Looking elsewhere, I find that Paul's statements about the relationship between believers and demons do not preclude a demonic force like the angel of Satan and the holy spirit co-existing in a Jesus follower's body. A closer examination of two key texts, 2 Cor 6:14-18 and 1 Cor 10:14-22, shows that such passages deal not with bodily habitation but with idolatry and its danger for the corporate body of believers.

In 1 Cor 10:20, Paul argues that participating in cultic sacrifices meant that believers would be participating in sacrificing to demons (cf. Deut 32.17), which, from the perspective of God, was an unlawful relationship (κοινωνία).⁴⁷ Paul argues that believers cannot participate in both the sacrifice to idols and the eucharist (10:21, "the cup of the Lord"). But it is not demon possession or habitation that Paul is concerned about, but rather idolatry. Participation in idolatry with demons betrays an intent to forge allegiance with cosmic forces

⁴⁷ Paul's concern is with the act of sacrificing at the altar and not with the idol meat from the sacrifices. On this see Lampe 2003.

that are not the God of Israel.⁴⁸ This is not the same as the infiltration of Paul's body by a transmundane force against his will.

Similarly to 1 Cor 10:20, in 2 Cor 6:14-18 one finds a comparison between believers (πιστοί) and their incompatibility with non-believers (ἄπιστοι, 6:14, 15). Paul offers five ways that believers and unbelievers are incompatible with one another: righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) cannot have a "partnership" (μετοχή) with lawlessness (ἀνομία, v.14); light (φῶς) cannot have a relationship (κοινωνία) with darkness (σκότος, v.14); Christ has no "agreement" (συμφωνήσις) with Beliar (v.15), a figure whom I take as a reference to an adversary of God, perhaps Satan; God (θεός) can have no "concord" (συγκατάθεσις) with idols (εἰδωλα v.16); and the pure should not wilfully touch (μὴ ἄπτεσθε) what is impure (v.17). Harris argues that Paul wants the Corinthians to withdraw from participating in pagan worship, and thus idolatry.⁴⁹ The appearance of κοινωνία, idols, and demons together suggests that Paul is, in one way, resuming what he said about idolatry in 1 Cor 10:14-22. In this passage, Paul does not argue that believer's bodies are impenetrable to demons, but rather a person cannot worship both God and demons at the same time (1 Cor 10:21-22).

⁴⁸ Emma Wasserman posits that "there is no hint that these other gods are malevolent or even capable of action or influence." Wasserman, E. 2018, 157. While it is true that Paul focuses specifically on God as a judge (1 Cor 10:22), although Paul does not explicitly say that such demons are harmful, when connected to his own demonic experiences (2 Cor 12:7), one might infer that the danger of idolatry is not from God's wrath but torment by demonic forces.

⁴⁹ Harris, M. J. 2005, 500.

One could argue that the prohibition from Isa 52:11 not to touch what is unclean, which Paul cites in 2 Cor 6:17, does not allow the habitation of demons in believer's bodies. As will be shown below, demons could cause impurity, and Paul's reference to Isa 52:11 may serve to exclude demonic habitation in a believer's body. However, the situation between 2 Cor 6:14-19 and the quotation of Isa 52:11 are different to that of Paul's circumstance in 2 Cor 12:7-9. In the latter, the demon is given to Paul against his will; he does not intentionally reach out to touch impurity, which is what the Lord prohibits in Isa 52:11/2 Cor 6:17. While he might inadvertently be made impure through God's bestowal of the demon, Paul does not wilfully attract the attention of demons through idolatry.

Neither does the presence of the holy spirit inside Paul exclude the possibility that it could co-exist with a demon in Paul's body. Such a co-existence is not foreign to ancient Judaism. As with 4Q560 and 11Q5 among the Scrolls, there are apotropaic prayers pleading for protection from demons as well as incantations in order to exorcise demonic forces from inside their bodies. While the members of the Qumran community believed themselves to be righteous and pure, they nevertheless could be susceptible to periods of demonic influence and habitation.

The well-known "Treatise of the Two Spirits," a text embedded in the Qumran document *Serek ha-Yahad* (1QS III,13–IV,26), exemplifies the co-existence of benevolent and malevolent spirits and angels in human bodies.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ There is considerable doubt as to whether the Treatise was generated by the *yahad* at Qumran. Stuckenbruck 2011, 161. On the development of the Treatise in relation to

Important for my argument about spirit co-habitation is the section that describes spirits of truth and injustice that “brawl in the heart of a man” (רִיבוֹ) (רוחי אמת ועול בלבב גבר, IV 23).⁵¹ For many scholars, the רוחות in the Treatise have been treated as metaphoric. Although many acknowledge its cosmological nature, there is a general avoidance of describing these forces as angelic or demonic.⁵² This is reminiscent of the way Pauline interpreters have rationalised the angel of Satan as a personification rather than a real ancient cosmological agent. Miryam Brand and Loren Stuckenbruck, however, have recognised that the language here is of demonic habitation, not simply a psychologising or metaphoricisation of internal human modalities.⁵³ The spirits in 1QS IV 23 might be taken as metaphorical, if not for the fact that it says that in the eschaton, God will rip out “every spirit of injustice from the soft tissue of

the rest of 1QS see especially Hempel 2010; Porzig 2019. The title is actually a misnomer, as the text appears to describe multiple different types of spirits from a number of different perspectives. 1QS III, 18-21 describes two spirits, one the “Prince of Light” and the other the “Angel of Darkness,” that rule over the “sons of justice” and “sons of deceit” respectively. Other spirits are described in 1QS IV, 3-4, 9 that appear to be separate from the “Prince of Light” and “Angel of Darkness” in III, 18-21.

⁵¹ Scholars in the past have described the Treatise as having a “dualistic anthropology,” a concept that has now proven both incorrect due to the number of spirits the text describes as well as a clearer understanding of the relationship between the spirits and humans (i.e. that they are not from creation and not merely psychological). On this see especially Popvić 2016; Stuckenbruck 2011; Wasserman, E. 2018, 92–100.

⁵² Skepticism toward treating the spirits in the Treatise as angels or demons was posited years ago (e.g. Wernberg-Møller 1961, 423; Treves 1961, 449) but persists (e.g. Maiden 2018). Even Shaul Shaked, who argued against such a reading, favours describing the spirits in Qumran metaphysically, and vaguely, somehow as both “inherent in man, i.e. ‘psychological’, and at the same time also existing on an independent level, i.e. as being ‘cosmic’.” Shaked 1972, 436.

⁵³ On this passage see Brand 2013, 257–274; Stuckenbruck 2014, 177–8. The internal opposition, especially the presence of a demon in the heart is not unlike the *yetzer hara* in Rabbinic discourse. On this see the work of Rosen-Zvi 2011.

[man's] flesh” (כול רוח עולה מתכמי בשרו, IV 20-21) and cleanse him “with the spirit of holiness” (IV 21).⁵⁴ The habitation of demons in parts of the body, reflects the wider recognition among the Scrolls that demonic forces could infiltrate people even to their very bones. Some ancient Jews understood that benevolent and malevolent cosmic forces could and did co-habitate in human bodies simultaneously.

Still, did Paul really think a holy spirit could dwell in the same place as an unclean spirit? For one, God had placed both spirits in Paul at the same time and so presumably they are able to co-exist despite one being pure and the other impure. Additionally, the ἄγγελος σατανᾶ is there to perfect the δύναμις in Paul (2 Cor 12:9). Candida Moss has argued that Paul's thorn makes his body susceptible to spirit possession and prepares a way for the “power of God” to “set up camp inside him,” alluding to Paul's words in 2 Cor 12:9: ἐπισκηνώση ἐπ’ ἐμὲ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Χριστοῦ.⁵⁵ Admittedly, δύναμις in some ancient sources (e.g. Philo) could refer to personified beings of God's power.⁵⁶ However it seems to me that δύναμις in 2 Cor 12:9 refers to the holy spirit, since power and the holy spirit are tethered in his letters (1 Thess 1:4-6; 1 Cor 2:4-5; Rom 15:18-19; Gal 3:5; 5:4).⁵⁷ It is best to read 2 Cor 12:9 to imply not the entrance of God's power into Paul's body, but the perfection of the power

⁵⁴ Hempel 2020, 107. For a thorough analysis of the term **תכ** (which appears numerous times among the Scrolls), tracing its meaning as “shoulder” through to its more general meaning as a part of the body, see Mizrahi 2018.

⁵⁵ Moss 2012, 325.

⁵⁶ Forbes 2002, 59–60.

⁵⁷ Both Gräbe Petrus J. 2008, 66 and more recently Suh 2020, 47–49 have recognised the conceptual overlap between πνεῦμα and δύναμις in Paul.

or “ability” (i.e. the holy spirit) already within him. That is, the presence of Paul’s weakness, his unclean demon in his flesh, *perfects* the holy spirit already in his body. Thus, we may conclude that Paul’s angel co-habitated his body with the spirit of God.⁵⁸

7.4 Demonic Habitation as an Ancient Impairment

Now that I have established that Paul’s angel was a part of his body, I turn to how the demonised deviated from the ideal body in ancient Jewish culture. As a reminder, I defined impairment in Chapter One as a bodily condition that is functionally and/or aesthetically deviant from a socially-constructed ideal. Because transmudane forces were not necessarily a visible part of people’s bodies—at least as indicated in the ancient evidence relevant to Paul—my analysis will focus on how the bodies of the demonised were functionally divergent from the ancient Jewish bodily ideal because of the presence of demonic forces.

In some early Christian and some Graeco-Roman literature, there were instances where demons were thought to enable human ability.⁵⁹ In most

⁵⁸ If all who believe in Christ are connected to the same πνεῦμα, then technically one might say that all Christ followers benefit from the demon that perfects the δύναμις in Paul’s body. The inter-bodily connection between Paul and the rest of the believers is implied in 1 Cor 5:4 when he argues that even though he is not physically present among them, what is present is his πνεῦμα and the δύναμις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ.

⁵⁹ For example, the accusation that Jesus was able to cast out demons by the prince of demons (Mk 3:22//Mt 12:24//Lk 11:15) as well as the girl with the “spirit of divination” (πνεῦμα πύθωνα) from Acts 16:16. In Mk 3:22 and its parallels, the overall thrust of the accusation that Jesus casts out demons by the Beelzebul is negative, however the demon in the minds of Jesus’ critics still has the ability to remove demons. For a full list of physical problems caused by demons and their location in the Gospels

ancient Jewish literature, however, demonic forces harmed the function of human bodies. They could cause bodily sores (Job 2:8) and fever and “heat of the heart” (4Q560 Frag 1, I, l. 4). They caused diseases and plagues (1QapGen XX ll. 19, 24).⁶⁰ They could suffocate and choke individuals, (Josephus, *A.J.* 6.166), and sometimes even put them to death (Tob 6:14-15; cf. Ex 4:24-26).⁶¹ Demonic forces also affected cognition. They obscured the “spirit of knowledge” within (רוח בינה, 4Q510 Frag 1, l.6). Elsewhere, they brought madness (what Philo characterises as a “bacchic frenzy” (βακχεύω) *Her.* 69) or fear (1 Sam 16:15).⁶²

Despite the debilitating physical effects caused by demonic forces, when we look at how ancient Jews dealt with and managed the demonised, it was the presence of demonic forces that caused their bodies to stray from the bodily ideal. For instance, the emphasis on healing that one finds in ancient Jewish sources indicates that a demonised person had a deviant body (e.g. 11Q11 V l.3; Josephus, *A.J.* 8.46). In his description of the affliction of King Saul by an evil spirit (cf. 1 Sam 16:14-23), Josephus (*A.J.* 6.166) describes Saul’s affliction

see Stuckenbruck 2014, 162. Candida Moss has pointed out how the ancient writer Aelius Aristides understood that the habitation of his *daimon* enabled his oratorical ability, similar to the oracle in Acts 16:16. Moss 2017, 287.

⁶⁰ In ancient Mesopotamian literature, demons and illness were synonymous. Fröhlich 2010, 121. Demons caused conditions that were not necessarily visible, and it may be because of the interiority these conditions and diseases that they were attributed to demons in the first place. On this point in relation to demons and illness in Egyptian sources see Lucarelli 2017, 55–6.

⁶¹ Demons in early Christian literature were known to torture the body as well (Mk 9:14-29//Mt 17:14-21//Lk 9:37-43).

⁶² Cf. Lucian, *Philops.* 16. On the study of madness in New Testament Studies see Solevåg 2018; Lawrence, L. J. 2018.

as a “suffering” (πάθος), for which doctors could not find a cure (θεραπεία). Elsewhere, Josephus labels David as “the sole physician” (μόνος ιατρός) who could alleviate the effects of Saul’s demon (*A.J.* 6.168).⁶³ The health language in these instances is not used primarily in relation to the physical impairments that the demons caused, but the spiritual forces themselves. Certainly, impairments caused by the demonic made human bodies diverge from culturally accepted norms. But healing of the bodies began by the removal of these malevolent forces, as though they were impairments.

Alleviation from the demonic in Jewish texts was facilitated by what Gideon Bohak calls “Jewish magical technology,” a term I borrow here.⁶⁴ The use of corrective technology to remove the demonic also suggests that such forces were impairments. Technology conformed a person’s bodily functionality to ancient Jewish bodily norms. As Loren Stuckenbruck argues from the Gospels, “[t]hese texts assume that a proper or ideal response to the conditions described involves the removal or mitigation of demonic activity.”⁶⁵ The same is true for ancient Jewish literature.

⁶³ Lucian described a Syrian from Palestine who “sends them [the demonised] away sound in mind” (ἀποπέμπει ἀρτίους τὴν γνώμην) (*Pseudops.* 16). In Luke’s description of Jesus’s healing of the woman in the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-17), Jesus uses the language of being set free (ἀπολύω), a metaphor of slavery, to indicate the woman’s transformation from the enslaved state of her “impairment” (ἀσθένεια) to what is considered normal (a straight back, Luke 13:13).

⁶⁴ Bohak 2008, 87. The use of “magic” language has a checkered past and was used often with a pejorative connotation to disparage religious rituals that were deemed reprobate and less than more sophisticated (read: Christian) religious practices. See Lyons and Reimer 1998; Bohak 2008, 62. Nonetheless scholars working on the intersection between ancient demonology and technology used in defence against malevolent beings often retain the use of magic language. E.g. Fröhlich 2013, 38.

⁶⁵ Stuckenbruck 2014, 162.

Ancient Jews used a variety of technologies to manage the demonic. For one, there were incantations that addressed demons in order to exorcise them.⁶⁶ The use of incantation texts against demons was prevalent in the ANE, and can be found in ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Zoroastrian literature.⁶⁷ In the early Jewish period we find such incantations, or descriptions of incantations, in the DSS (11Q11 V, l. 4-14; 4Q286 Frag 7 II; 4Q560; 8Q5) or in Josephus with his description of Solomon's incantation skills (*A.J.* 8.45).⁶⁸ In Late antiquity, amulets and incantation bowls were used to prevent demonic attack or to capture demons.⁶⁹

Ancient Jews also used apotropaic prayers or psalms to combat demonic forces (e.g. 4Q510-11, 4Q444).⁷⁰ In Jubilees 10:1-6, Noah prays to God that he not let the evil spirits rule over him and his children, which causes God to bind the spirits (10:7-8).⁷¹ In Pseudo-Philo's reworking of 1 Sam 16:14-23, David plays a psalm for the evil spirit to leave Saul (LAB 60:2).

⁶⁶ For the most part, we follow the categories outlined by Esther Eshel. Eshel 2003, 396. For categorisations based on style with reference to the DSS see Wright, A. T. 2005, 180. For a detailed examination of methods of expulsion in the scrolls see Guerra 2017, 158-89.

⁶⁷ See the works of Verderame 2017; Lucarelli 2017; Geller 2007; Scurlock 1991; Wiggermann 1992; Lucarelli 2011; Moazami 2014.

⁶⁸ The use of the name of Jesus Christ by Jewish exorcists in Acts 19:13 functions much like an incantation. Philostratus records a letter given to be read in order to dispel demons (*Vit. Apoll.* 3.38)

⁶⁹ Fröhlich (2010, 104) argues that we find the use of amulets in the HB (e.g. Jdg 8:21, 26; Isa 3:18).

⁷⁰ Eshel includes 6Q18 among these, but the fragmentary nature of the manuscript makes it difficult to connect with anything demonic.

⁷¹ Brand 2013, 197. On the depiction of Noah in Jubilees as a "physician" who was given medical knowledge from the angels to combat demons, see the work of Syfox 2018.

Apotropaic acts involving objects also served to dispel or avert malevolent beings. In well-known example of Tobit, Tobias uses the heart and liver of a particular fish whose smell drives away the demon Asmodeus from Sarah, his wife (6:18; 8:3).⁷² Josephus describes a root from a place called Baaras that looks like a flame, emits flashes, and can only be taken after female urine or menorrhoea (menstrual blood) is poured on it. It can kill someone who touches it directly and it can drive away demons (*B.J.* 7.180-86).⁷³ These technologies were methods of subjugating transmudane forces to the cosmological hierarchy ruled by God.⁷⁴ More importantly, these incantations, prayers, acts, and objects indicate the desire for ancient Jews to restore the demonised to a non-demonised bodily ideal.

In sum, the detrimental effects demonic forces had on human bodily function and their general physical and mental health, along with the need for healers to liberate such bodies, point to the deviance of the demonic. The use of technology, such as apotropaic prayers, incantations, and objects, to prevent, dispel, and protect bodies from demons further evince how the demonised diverged from the social ideal. To be demonised, to have a demon inhabiting or

⁷² This may imply that the demon can smell. Cf. Philo, *Gig.* 18 for demonic sensorial excess. The name “Asmodeus” comes from the Iranian “demon of wrath” (*aēšma-daēva*). Bohak 2008, 89; Fröhlich 2013, 37.

⁷³ The use of apotropaic objects can also be found in Acts, where face-cloths or aprons (σουδάρια ἢ σικκίνθια) were brought to the sick which could make evil spirits leave (Acts 19:12). Plutarch mentions that the frenzied acts of the Eleusinian mysteries was not performed for the sake of the gods but were apotropaic (ἀποτροπή) and done in order to avert daimons (*Def. orac.* 14).

⁷⁴ As Annette Reed argues, such technology “inaugurated an influential line of Jewish literary tradition whereby scribes, in particular, claimed authority over—and by—using technologies of textuality to organize knowledge about transmudane powers into broader theological and cosmological systems.” Reed, A. Y. 2020, 217.

controlling one's body, was to be impaired. The forces who indwelled the bodies of those they plagued—forces like Paul's angel—not only caused impairment but were themselves a physical impairment in the bodies of their hosts.

Paul's own words about the angel of Satan confirm that it was a physical impairment. 2 Cor 12:8 reads: ὑπὲρ τούτου τρίς τὸν κύριον παρεκάλεσα ἵνα ἀποστῇ ἀπ' ἐμοῦ (“concerning this [the angel], three times I appealed to the Lord in order that it would be kept away from me”).⁷⁵ The verb ἀφίστημι + ἀπό τινος means “to keep something from someone.”⁷⁶ In the context of his appeal it is unlikely that the subject of ἀφίστημι is God (i.e. that Paul wants God to keep away from him), and that it refers to the angel of Satan. Paul admits that the angel is something that he desperately wants to remove from his body. If he wants it removed, then it cannot be a part of his ideal body. If it not a part of his ideal body then it is an impairment.

Paul's characterisation of his angel in 2 Cor 12:9-10 as a “weakness” (ἀσθένεια) further confirms that it was an impairment. The alpha-privative of ἀσθένεια modifies the term σθένος which refers to physical or moral ability. In ancient literature, ἀσθένεια primarily refers to sickness or disease, sometimes in the context of afflictions from evil spirits (e.g. Lk 8:2; 13:11). The immediate context of Paul's argument concerns physical weakness and involves the degradation of his person, primarily through physical means (2 Cor 11:23-

⁷⁵ The pronoun οὗτος could refer both to ἄγγελος or σκόλοψ. However, given the word order, it most likely refers to ἄγγελος. Either way, since both are synonymous with one another it refers conceptually to the same antecedent.

⁷⁶ E.g. Tob 4:21; Sir 7:2; Lk 4:13; Ac 5:38; 2 Tim 2:19.

12:10).⁷⁷ The angel of 12:1-9 is no different. In addition to σθένος, however, ἀσθένεια can also be contrasted with δύναμις, itself an important term in Paul's argument here (2 Cor 12:9). In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul juxtaposes the present condition of the body, characterised by ἀσθένεια, with the future resurrected condition of the body, which is characterised by δύναμις (1 Cor 15:43).⁷⁸ Δύναμις is usually translated as “strength” or “might” but its most basic meaning is “ability” or “capability.” Thus, by characterising his angel as an ἀσθένεια, the opposite of σθένος and δύναμις, Paul characterises the demon as a physical inability or, as we might call it today, an impairment, a physical condition that departed from his desired bodily ideal.

7.5 The Demonic as Disability

Ancient Jewish texts preserve negative cultural responses toward those afflicted by demonic forces. These negative responses de-normalised bodies. When combined with an understanding of demonisation as a bodily impairment, they indicate that the recipients of these responses were disabled. In this section, I focus on four de-normalisation processes related to those whose bodies wrestle with demonic forces: stigma, exclusion, ridicule, and liminality.

⁷⁷ Even in the description of his escape from King Aretas in Damascus, although the report focuses on Paul running away from persecution, the fact that he is able to be lowered from a window by means of a basket (σαργάνη) may be suggestive of his height, namely that he was short enough to fit in a basket in the first place. I argue in a forthcoming article based on 2 Cor 11:33, Acts 9:25, and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* that early Christians understood Paul to be a short man, possibly even a dwarf. Soon 2021.

⁷⁸ Cf. Heb 11:34; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 4.8.3.

Stigma refers to negative reactions to physical impairment (e.g. fear). Exclusion deals with explicit instances of social and theological separation or segregation. Ridicule is a form of exclusion that uses mockery to reinforce the deviance of impairment. Liminality refers to the ways impaired bodies are marginalised. I examine marginalisation through impurity, bodily penetration, and the loss of self-control, all of which have a subsequent effect on the masculinity of the demonised. These social effects indicate that Paul's angelic affliction was a disability in his ancient Jewish context.

The circumstances of Sarah, who is afflicted by the demon Asmodeus in the book of Tobit, illustrate the stigma, ridicule, and exclusion that demonic forces could generate.⁷⁹ In Tobit, Sarah cannot escape the reputation of the demon that haunts her, the same malevolent spirit which has killed all seven of her previous husbands. The hero of the story and her husband-to-be, Tobias, expresses his concern with the angel Raphael, of what he has “heard” (ἀκήκοα ἐγὼ) about her, that the demon Asmodeus kills everyone who enters the bride chamber to “approach” her (6:14). The stigma of demonic forces generated fear of being afflicted by them.⁸⁰ The narrative heightens the stigma toward Sarah

⁷⁹ One might contend that Sarah and her family's stigma is merely a literary representation and not necessarily grounded actual stigma concerning the demonised. However, the stigma in the story generates cultural stigma as it participates and perpetuates the disabling of those who were plagued by demons in real life.

⁸⁰ A Graeco-Roman analogue of stigma and demonic forces can be found in Plutarch's *Life of Marcellus* where he tells the account of Nicias, a leading citizen in the city of Engyium, who was about to be arrested for his sympathetic leanings toward Rome and his denouncement of the goddesses of the city (*Marc.* 20.2-5). Just as he was about to be arrested, he tore his clothes and ran out of the city as though he had lost his mind (*Marc.* 20.6). The people of the city would not stand in his way or even touch him because they had thought he had come under the power of a demon (δαμονῶντι καὶ παραφρονοῦντι, *Marc.* 20.6). Nicias uses the stigma attached to demonic possession, especially the presumed fear (or “superstition” (δεισιδαμονία) as Plutarch calls it) that

through the expectation of her own father, Raguel. He expects Tobias to die and leaves the couple alone so he can go dig a grave in anticipation of the death of his new son-in-law (8:10).

The stigma toward the demonic causes ridicule against Sarah's family. Raguel intends to hide Tobias's body in order to avoid further "mockery and disgrace" (κατάγελως καὶ ὀνειδισμός, 8:10).⁸¹ The demonic force tarnishes both Sarah's reputation and the reputation of her whole family, which explains why Raguel is so intent on keeping Tobias's death quiet if necessary (8:10, 12).⁸² The fear of ridicule is exacerbated by the exclusion that the family already faces. As Fitzmyer notes, "Neighbors and fellow citizens of Ecbatana would have known about Sarah's earlier suitors and would have subjected Raguel to ridicule in trying again to marry off his daughter to yet another suitor."⁸³ At the same time, Sarah is obligated to get married, as is evident from the fact that her father has married her seven times before Tobias. Because of the demonic spirit, however, she is unable to fulfil her responsibility to bear children (Tobit 3:8). Another dead husband risks further exclusion of her and her family through disdain and mockery among their community. Such disdain is expressed in Tobit 3:7-9 where one of the servant women of the house accuses Sarah of being responsible for the death of her previous husbands. The social pressure

others could catch what Nicias had received just by touching him, in order to escape from arrest. The space created by the crowds around Nicias visibly manifests the social distance placed upon the demonised in order to avoid contamination.

⁸¹ The text follows the Sinaiticus recension (G^{II}).

⁸² Owens (2007, 285) notes that the irony is that although Raguel is fearful of embarrassment, it is the demon who "ends up a laughing-stock and object of ridicule."

⁸³ Fitzmyer 2003, 247.

that arises against Sarah is so great that she contemplates suicide (3:10 in both G^I and G^{II}).⁸⁴

The necessity to marry and bear children combined with Sarah's inability to maintain a husband because of Asmodeus signal the liminality that comes about as a result of this demonic force. Jonathan Z. Smith observes that a demon's place is "the marginal, the liminal, the chaotic, the protean."⁸⁵ The liminality of demons is best articulated by the story of the Watchers in 1 Enoch, whom Philip Alexander says, "occupy no place in the created order, but belong properly to the abyss, and to the chaos which God subdued at creation."⁸⁶ In the Enochic mythology, the products of angels and humans, giants, "embodied a violation of the created order" and "were neither fully angel nor fully human."⁸⁷ The liminality of the demonic can be further established in the pericopes where Jesus is said to have the ability to cast out demons because he himself has a demon, Beelzebul (Mt 9:34; Mt 12:24-30, cf. Mk 3:22-30; Lk 11:15-23). Such "deviance labeling" is an attempt to make Jesus liminal by characterising him as a deviant by his association with deviant beings.⁸⁸ If angels and demons were liminal beings between God/gods and humanity, then demonised humans were liminal beings between transmundane forces and humanity.

⁸⁴ On this see Egger-Wenzel 2015, 205–8.

⁸⁵ Smith, J. Z. 1978, 437.

⁸⁶ Alexander 1999, 350. The liminality of demons is also recognised in ancient Mesopotamian thought. See Konstantopoulos 2017, 22.

⁸⁷ Stuckenbruck 2014, 181.

⁸⁸ On the language of deviance labelling see Cserhádi 2013, 111.

Demonic forces also made people liminal by their association with the unclean and the impure. In the ANE, demons were impure because of the places where they dwelled: “[I]n rubbish heaps and latrines, places considered as impure, where refuse resulting from disintegration of human bodies, scraps of food, personal objects, and the like were to be found, through which they supposedly developed their noxious influence on humans.”⁸⁹ Jubilees describes demons as being impure in connection to idolatry and gentile worship (10:1).⁹⁰ In the Scrolls and even in the Gospels, the language of evil spirits/demons and unclean spirits overlapped (e.g. 1QS IV, ll. 21-22; 4Q444 2 I, l. 4; 4Q230 frag 1 l. 1-7; Mark 3:22, 30; Luke 4:33; 8:27, 29; Matt 10:1; cf. Mark 1:23, 26, 27; 3:11; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:25; Matt 12:43; Luke 4:36; 6:18; 11:24).⁹¹ Since demonic forces caused impurity, the demonised then might be understood as being impure since the demons that inhabited their bodies ritually defiled them.

Demons also jeopardised the masculinity of the men they infiltrated.⁹² Jessica Keady argues that hegemonic masculine culture reflected in some of the Qumran documents shows masculinity constructed around purity. In both 1QS (III, ll.1-12) and 1QM (VII, l.6), the hierarchy of the *yahad* is founded upon upright behaviour being tethered to ritual purity.⁹³ For these Jews, the body

⁸⁹ Fröhlich 2010, 107.

⁹⁰ van Ruiten 2007, 604.

⁹¹ On the motif of impure spirits in the Gospels, see Thiessen 2020, 140–7.

⁹² Some Jewish literature (e.g. Philo, Ben Sira, 4 Maccabees) mirrored a Stoic-like masculine ideal of self-control (σωφροσύνη). Wilson, B. E. 2015, 72. On early Jewish texts regarding masculinity and self-control see 4 Macc 5:23-24; cf. 15:29-16:4; Sir 9:1-9; 19:2-3; Philo, *Abr.* 253; *Jos.* 42-48; *Mos.* 2.68.

⁹³ Keady 2017, 77, 101.

was a boundary. For those who experienced demonic invasion, not only did demonic forces invade bodies, but they brought uncleanness into the body. From the perspective of the masculinity of the *yahad*, therefore, the corruption of a man's purity by demons was also a corruption of his masculinity. Demonic impurity could emasculate the men they inhabited.

The stigma, exclusion, ridicule, and liminality that arose because of demonisation shows how demonic forces would have negatively affected individuals and their families in their social and cultural context. When transmundane forces infiltrated human bodies, they defiled them and, for men, effeminised them. These de-normalising effects help us to understand ancient Jewish people afflicted by demonic forces—people like Paul—not just as physically impaired, but also as disabled.

7.6 Paul's Angel as an Impairment and Disability

This chapter has demonstrated that Paul's angel of Satan is intelligible in the context of ancient Jewish conceptions of the demonic. Considering how ancient demonic forces interacted with human bodies, Paul's angel can be understood as a transmundane force that transgressed his bodily boundaries and co-habited his body with the πνεῦμα of God.

Ancient Jews viewed demonic forces as foreign agents that harmed human bodies. Such forces were not viewed as being a part of an ideal body. Even, Paul's own language of his demon indicates that it was an undesirable weakness of his body. Consequently, ancient Jews tried to remove demonic

forces from the bodies of persons, through prayer, incantation, and apotropaic ritual. The deviance of demonised bodies because of the presence of transmundane forces indicates that such beings were themselves impairments. From an ancient Jewish perspective, Paul's thorn not only caused impairment; it *was* an impairment. An analysis of the stigma, exclusion, ridicule, and liminality associated with those afflicted by demonic forces suggests that Paul's thorn was also a disability.

By revealing that he is plagued by the demonic, Paul exacerbates the stigma of his weak bodily presence (2 Cor 10:10), raising further questions about the legitimacy of his apostolic credentials in Corinth. From the perspective of Jewish purity, the presence of an evil spirit in his body might have been understood as a defilement. His impurity may have even been seen as permanent given that he nowhere mentions its removal. The angel of Satan made Paul perpetually weak, impure, and disabled.

Rather than avoiding the negative overtones of his thorn, in the final chapter of this thesis, I will show that Paul de-centralises the non-demonised ideal, which was synonymous with the healthy, healed, and whole body. Instead, he centralises his liminal state as a new God-ordained bodily norm, sustained by the power of God.

8. GOD AND THE DISABLING OF PAUL

8.1 Paul and the Evil of God

The issue of divine justice in 2 Cor 12:9-10 is but one new interpretive avenue that arises when we consider Paul's angel as a disability. Is God the ultimate agent behind Paul's physical suffering and, if so, how can a just God disabled Paul? As Ralph Martin notes, "the need for a theodicy is urgent."¹ But interpretations of 2 Cor 12:7-10 that recognise God's participation in afflicting Paul skirt the issue of divine justice.

This chapter analyses the strategies Paul uses in 2 Cor 12:7-10 to reconcile his thorn in the flesh with God's justice. I confirm the frequently adopted position that Paul does understand God to be responsible for giving the angel of Satan. Then I analyse the strategies Paul uses to explain the giving of disability against the backdrop of other ancient Jewish literature, with particular attention to Job, Fourth Ezra, and the *Hodayot*. Each of these texts deals with divinely orchestrated suffering through a variety of different strategies. Even though these Jewish sources come from varying periods—some further than others from the time of Paul—their shared cognizance of the problem of God's justice and human suffering provide a useful analogue to understand Paul's own approach to God's justice.² The point is not to suggest

¹ Martin, R. P. 2014, 611.

² James Crenshaw argues that a synchronic analysis of biblical theodicies is preferable over diachronic one in order to avoid "an evolutionary timeline for their emergence" given that the precise dates for each of the texts cannot always be ascertained. Crenshaw 2005, 18. Although we may not be able to posit lines of influence relationships, we are nevertheless able to show theodicean patterns and trends both

Paul was influenced directly by these texts, but to show that Paul's strategies for dealing with divine justice and suffering stand in continuity with various Jewish approaches to the problem of evil. The final section of the chapter analyses the effect that Paul's strategies have on our understanding of his thorn in the flesh as a weakness in strength.

Various frameworks have been proposed in order to categorise responses to suffering in ancient Jewish literature.³ There is no single authoritative framework to which scholars appeal.⁴ This is in part because scholarly attention has been on evil more generally in ancient Judaism, whether in relation to Israel/Jews or the nations. My analysis of Paul relates him to Jewish texts that emphasise the suffering of God's *own* people, especially those who receive what appear to be unjustified suffering.⁵ This enables us to focus on Jewish strategies that are relevant to Paul's own situation.

Recent discussions about the problem of evil necessitate a brief explanation of my approach to ancient Jewish theodicy. The problem of evil is traditionally characterised as a problem of monotheism. With a single God who

diachronically leading up to the time of Paul and synchronically across Paul's contemporaries. The absence of early rabbinic sources in this chapter is for space. For issues of God's relationship to suffering among the rabbis see Belser 2017, esp. 200–207; Wyn Schofer 2010, 79–81; Weiss 2016, 75–76.

³ For two examples see Crenshaw 2005, 16; Charlesworth 2003, 471–2.

⁴ See the various chapters, for example, in Laata and de Moor 2003.

⁵ I leave aside the issue of the moral character of such a God, that is, whether causation of evil acts is an indication his moral character, which in light of texts such as Gen 18:24 does not appear compatible with some ancient Jewish notions of God. On this see Kitz 2016, 462.

is all powerful, there is no one else to whom one can attribute the pain and suffering in the world.

“Theodicy” was not a term known to Paul or his ancient context. It is nevertheless helpful as a way of referring to the problem of evil and God. Drawing on Paul’s language of god (θεός) and justice (δίκαιος) in Rom 3:4-5, Gottfried Leibniz coined the term “theodicy” (*théodicée*) with the title of his 1710 book, *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal*. The word describes attempts “to render suffering and evil intelligible.”⁶ Although the term became entrenched in apologetic defences of the Christian faith, questions about the relationship between divinity and suffering were present in ancient Jewish writings. For Paul, attention to theodicy is an attempt to understand the cosmological or theological intelligibility of suffering and evil.⁷ It is this definition of theodicy that is deployed in my analysis.

In the wake of the Holocaust, some Jewish philosophers rejected the task of theodicy. Typified by the work of Emmanuel Levinas, they argue that the justification of the suffering of others is an immoral pursuit.⁸ Indeed, if one

⁶ Laato and de Moor 2003, x.

⁷ Because theodicy is a relatively recent term, some have tried to restrict its application only to post-Enlightenment thought. However, as Sarot has demonstrated, “while remarkable changes in our way of thinking about God and evil took place simultaneously with the introduction of the term ‘theodicy,’ this does not warrant the setting a part of this term for Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinking about God and evil.” Sarot 2003, 22.

⁸ Levinas 1998. The example that Levinas uses is of the Jewish people during the Holocaust itself. To attempt to justify their suffering at Auschwitz and Dachau is to participate in the very same trajectory of the “final solution,” since to question God’s role in such evil is to question the roots of Jewishness itself.

looks to the origin of formal theodicean discourse, Leibniz argues that the evil permitted in the world by God is the best possible outcome of all possible outcomes.⁹ It is difficult to comprehend, however, how the events of the great wars and the Holocaust in the first half of the twentieth century could possibly fall within the category of a “best possible outcome.” Jennifer Geddes, drawing on Levinas and Primo Levi, argues that while it might be immoral to attempt to justify the suffering of others, we cannot discount the theodicy that others render for their own suffering. The person who suffers “may find meaning in her own suffering.”¹⁰ We approach theodicy in Paul and in other ancient Jewish sources from this position. The goal is not to superimpose a justification for their suffering, nor indeed on Paul, but to comprehend how they reconcile God’s justice with his allowance of suffering.

8.2 Demonised by a Gracious God

In 2 Cor 12:7, Paul is “given” the thorn in the flesh (ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί). Only the object (the thorn), which is grammatically the “subject” of the verb, and the recipient of that object (Paul) are textually explicit. The agent of the verb ἐδόθη is left unmentioned. So who exactly gives the thorn to Paul, Satan or God?

⁹ Leibniz 2007 [1710], 130.

¹⁰ Geddes 2018, 6.

The evidence points to God. This is a position adopted by most scholarship.¹¹ Although Paul describes the ἄγγελος as being “of/from Satan” (σατανᾶ) in 12:7, his appeal to God to remove the thorn in 2 Cor 12:8-9 implies that God was the one who afflicted him. It is possible that Paul received the angel from Satan and appeals higher in the cosmological hierarchy for God to remove it. However, even though Satan is an antagonist to God (Rom 16:20), he nevertheless acts as a servant under his jurisdiction in Paul’s cosmology (1 Cor 5:5).¹² Like in the book of Job, if Satan acts, it is because God has allowed it. Although Satan and the angel play an intermediary role, it is God who orchestrates Paul’s suffering via the thorn.¹³

The function of the angel is another indicator that God is responsible for Paul’s thorn. The thorn restrains Paul from having an overinflated opinion of himself (ἵνα μὴ ὑπεράρρωμαι, 12:7). If it is “unlawful” for Paul to speak some divine revelations he has heard (12:4: ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι), the angel inhabits Paul in order to prevent him from disobeying God’s command. This suggests that God is responsible, since elsewhere God sends malevolent angels to enforce his divine orders (e.g. Ex 4:24-26; Num

¹¹ See Choi 2010, 232–3; Schmeller 2015, 315; Zmijewski 1978, 368; Martin, R. P. 2014, 606; Harris, M. J. 2005, 855–6; Barrett 1973, 316; Furnish 1984, 547; Plummer 1915, 348; Witherington III 1995, 461–2; Wallace, J. B. 2012, 272; Nassauer 2019, 261, n.81. Some interpreters do choose to emphasise the role of Satan over God, for example: Thomas 1998, 65 although see Thomas 1996, 44–45. Uniquely, Bowens 2017, 164, attempts to argue that it is only Satan who is responsible.

¹² Dochhorn shows that Satan is not universally portrayed as an opponent to God in ancient Jewish and early Christian texts. Dochhorn 2012.

¹³ Many scholars recognise the joint involvement of both Satan and God: Zmijewski 1978, 374; Witherington III 1995, 463; Thrall 2000, 806; Wallace, J. B. 2012, 272; Garrett 1995, 90–91, cf. Martin, R. P. 2014, 606; Harris, M. J. 2005, 855–6.

22:23-35). The function of the thorn is ethical and the physical harm that it causes is only in service of this primary aim.

Finally, the fact that God is frequently the agent of the verb *δίδωμι* in 2 Corinthians (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; 5:18; 8:1; 10:8; 13:10) may suggest that he is the intended agent of *ἐδόθη* in 2 Cor 12:7. Additionally, the only other appearance of *ἐδόθη* in Paul's undisputed letters is found in Gal 3:21 (cf. Eph 3:8; 4:7; 1 Tim 4:4). The context concerns God giving the Law to Israel, and Paul describes the transaction between God and Moses with a similar *modus operandi*: angelic mediation (Gal 3:19). By itself, the use of *ἐδόθη* in Gal 3:21 is not sufficient. But in concert with the other evidence above, it affirms God's role in giving the thorn.

Although many scholars recognise God's role in Paul's suffering, few question God's participation in something we might perceive as pernicious and evil. Lisa Bowens minimises God's role in allowing the angel of Satan to afflict Paul precisely because it associates God with evil.¹⁴ In Paul, the present age is "evil" (*πονηρός*, Gal 1:4; cf. Eph 5:16), and in his letters, evil is attributed exclusively to humanity and not to God (Rom 1:30; 2:0; 3:8; 7:19, 21; 9:11; 1 Cor 5:13; 10:6; 2 Cor 13:7; Phil 3:2; 1 Thess 5:22; cf. *πονηρία* in Rom 1:29; 1 Cor 5:8).¹⁵

Like Paul, ancient Jewish writers rarely attribute evil to God. But the association of God and evil does occur in some ancient Jewish literature. The

¹⁴ Bowens 2017, 164.

¹⁵ For an overview of the topos of "evil" in Paul see Tilling 2016, 192–209.

Lord says to Cyrus in Isaiah 45:7 that he “creates evil” (בורא רע). In the dialogue section of Job, he has no hesitation in saying to his friends that God has “cheated him” (דעוֹאפוּ כִּי־אלוֹהַ עֹתַנִּי) (19:6).¹⁶ Qohelet accuses God of an “evil affliction” (חֲלֵי רַע), that he should give wealth to people but that only strangers can enjoy it (6:1-2). And in Ben Sira 11:14, the attribution of evil to God appears without qualification: “Good and evil, life and death, poverty and riches are from the Lord” (MS A, IV 1.4: טוֹב ורַע חַיִּים וּמוֹת רִישׁ וְעוֹשֶׁר מִיַּי הֵיא; LXX: ἀγαθὰ καὶ κακά, ζῶν καὶ θάνατος, πτωχεία καὶ πλοῦτος παρὰ κυρίου ἐστίν).¹⁷

The closest Paul comes to placing God in proximity to an evil act is Rom 9:14. Paul asks if God’s election of Jacob over Esau is an “injustice” or “wickedness” (ἀδικία). His emphasis in Rom 9:14-21 is that God remains just even though he participates in things that appear to be unjust—such as the election of the younger Jacob over the elder Esau (9:13) or the use of Pharaoh during the Exodus (9:17, cf. Exod 9:16). As Oropeza argues, “God is not arbitrarily selecting some individuals and rejecting others, but has a special purpose in mind.”¹⁸ The end justifies the means. Regardless of what Paul thinks about who God chooses and why he chooses them, God’s choices are God’s choices (Rom 9:15, 18).

¹⁶ David Clines (1989, 442) prefers to view Job’s statements as meaning that “God is the author of his bad reputation” even though in the wider context Job’s statements express, at worst, God’s injustice and, at best, his neglect.

¹⁷ Beentjes admits that “sometimes even evil has a function with respect of God’s judgment.” Beentjes 2003, 524.

¹⁸ Oropeza 2007, 64.

As we can see, Paul preferred not to openly characterise God's actions as evil. This did not mean, however, that he denied God's involvement in things one might perceive to be unjust. For Paul, acts that might be perceived as unjust require explanation rather than accusation. This is because Paul believes humanity lacks the ability to pronounce judgment on God's decisions (Rom 9:19-21; 11:33-35). Paul's appeal to the limitations of human knowledge is but one strategy employed by ancient Jewish writers to make sense of God's justice in times of crisis. In the section that follows, we will see that Paul was well aware of God's involvement in his own people's suffering like other ancient Jewish writers. But instead of characterising God's actions as evil, he provided strategies to reconcile God's justice with his involvement in the trauma that he was experiencing.

8.3 Paul's Theodicean Strategies in 2 Cor 12:7-10

Wayne Meeks claims that Paul "seems, at least in the extant letters, to offer no general theodicy."¹⁹ More recently, James Charlesworth argues, "There was no preoccupation with theodicy in the sect of Early Judaism known as the Palestinian Jesus Movement."²⁰ While it is true that Paul's letters evince no

¹⁹ Meeks 2003, 189. For a broad analysis of theodicies related to illness in the New Testament see Price 1986.

²⁰ Charlesworth 2003, 504.

sustained treatment of theodicy in comparison to something like Fourth Ezra, this is not to say that theodicean solutions are absent from them.²¹

There are four theodicean strategies operating in 2 Cor 12:7-10. The first is the displacement of suffering through shared agency with an intermediate being. The second is a revelation from God that justifies the giving of the angel of Satan. The third strategy is Paul's framing of the angel as a way of perfecting God's power in Paul. Finally, the last strategy Paul employs is the re-conceptualisation of weakness as strength, a theological *mystery*. We will begin first with the displacement of suffering through transmundane forces.

8.3.1 One Degree of Satanic Separation

The first theodicean strategy Paul deploys is the use of transmundane forces to hedge God's immediate involvement in Paul's physical suffering. Although God authorised the angel of Satan, Satan is a co-participant in this seemingly unjust act. Because he is a co-participant and most proximate to Paul's affliction, he can be viewed as the one most responsible.

Other ancient Jewish writers also displaced the responsibility of suffering and evil on to transmundane forces. This is most recognisable in the first two chapters of Job's introduction (Job 1-2). On the one hand, God is ultimately responsible for Job's afflictions. It is God who introduces Job to the adversary (1:8; 2:3), and it is this attention which leads to Job being tested by him.

²¹ This point is recognised by Garrett 1995, 82. Study has been done on the question of theodicy in relation to Romans 3 (Hays 1989, 34–83), Romans 9-11 (Oropeza 2007), and all major passages related to resurrection (Kirk 2008).

Although it is the adversary who has power over Job (1:12), when he approaches God with the proposal, the adversary says for God to lay *his hand* on all Job has (cf. 2:5-6). Nevertheless, Yahweh does not tell the adversary how to precisely “test” Job. He leaves the cruel details to the adversary’s own creativity. In this way, although God is involved, because Job’s suffering depends on the will of the adversary, God appears less liable for Job’s suffering.

The retelling of the Akedah (the sacrifice of Isaac) from Genesis 22 in Jubilees 17 uses this same displacement strategy to distance of God from the request to sacrifice Isaac. Modelled after the first two chapters of Job, the demonic spirit Mastema comes to God and provides him with the idea for Abraham to sacrifice his son (17:16).²² Similar to Job, it is the evil angel that provides the detailed ways in which the faithful should suffer, but God who must consent to such tests. Because the idea to sacrifice Isaac originates with Mastema instead of God, Jubilees partially absolves God’s involvement. God may have allowed it to happen (to a point), but at least he did not come up with the idea.

Although the actions of God and transmundane forces overlap in Job and Jubilees, Philo of Alexandria maintains a careful distinction between the two. Philo calls God “the governor of all things” (θεὸς ὁ πάντων ἡγεμῶν), who should only receive credit for the good in the world, whereas what is “contrary”

²² Surprisingly, the sacrifice of Isaac is not the first time that God tests Abraham, but rather is the last in a series of seven, including the test of circumcision (17:16). The testing of Abraham with ten tests was later known among the rabbis (e.g. m. Avot 5.3). Kugel argues that Jubilees only knew of six of the tests and that an interpolator later inserted the mention of a tenth test in Jub. 19.8. Kugel 2012, 109.

(ἐναντίος) to him is attributed to others (*Opif.* 75). It is intermediary cosmic powers who mete out punishments and prevent wrongdoing (*Conf.* 171), and evil acts must be disassociated directly from God (*Conf.* 180-82; *Fug.* 70): “God is the cause only of good things” (μόνων ἀγαθῶν ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς αἴτιος, *Conf.* 180). Philo’s maintenance of this boundary between God and evil is an attempt to preserve the goodness of the divinity, a common feature of Platonic philosophy.²³ In his *Republic* (*Resp.* 379c), Plato argues that god is responsible only for good things, but that the cause of what is evil must be found elsewhere, a hermeneutical technique mirrored in Philo’s words above.²⁴ Philo is not consistent, however, as elsewhere some of his language suggests evil is merely assigned to others (*Fug.* 70, God “assigned the origin of evil to others,” τὴν κακῶν γένεσιν ἑτέροις ἀπονεῖμαι). For God to allocate evil to others implies

²³ Philo’s assignment of evil to intermediaries rather than God may not have been as effective as he hoped. In his work *On Stoic Self-Contradictions*, Plutarch argues that for intermediaries to be assigned the affliction of the virtuous is nevertheless still an accusation against the god who appointed them, since it not only assigns evil (and is thus culpable) but also ignores the mistreatment of the virtuous (*Stoic. rep.* 37 [1051C-D]; cf. *Quaest. rom.* 376F-277A). It is perhaps telling that Plutarch (in *Stoic. rep.* 38 [1051E]) also understands that the Jews and Syrians do not believe in gods that are beneficent (χρηστός), what position he elsewhere describes as superstition (*Superst.* 165B). Plutarch is arguing specifically against a fragment from Chrysippus’s *On Substance*. The most thorough analysis of this section of Plutarch’s argument in the context of wider Stoic demonology is by Algra, K. 2009, 379 (reproduced in Algra, K. 2011). There is some question about whether Chrysippus is dealing with the purposeful affliction by the gods or mere negligence. Algra (2009, 380 n.63) assumes Plutarch’s perspective that what Chrysippus is talking about is bad things happen to the innocent. Additionally, there are many reasons for why we should understand Plutarch’s report of Chrysippus dubious, his conclusions notwithstanding. See Algra, K. 2009, 381.

²⁴ On this see Runia 2003, 580.

that ultimately the origin of the evil lies with the one who has the authority to defer it.²⁵

Like Job 1-2 and Jubilees 17, in 2 Cor 12:7 both God and a chief adversarial intermediary work together to cause suffering. However, Paul makes no effort, as Philo does, to mitigate the association of suffering with God completely. Paul might be purposefully obscuring God's role in his suffering by using ἐδόθη in 2 Cor 12:7 without an explicit agent. Alternatively, it may be that he was unconcerned with who initially allowed the thorn, but was instead preoccupied with the fact that God had allowed the thorn to continue (12:8). Either way, the presence of transmundane forces places a buffer of responsibility between God and Paul's ongoing suffering.

8.3.2 Words from the Whirlwind

When Paul reveals the oracle from God in 2 Cor 12:9 about why he has been given the thorn, he employs a second theodicean strategy. Although Paul's tongue is tied with regard to the mysteries of Paradise, heaven's doors appear to remain open to give a rationale for his suffering.²⁶ Following his petition to God for the removal of his thorn (12:8), Paul describes God's divine response and its implications for him in 12:9-10:

9 καὶ εἰρηκέν μοι· Ἀρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου, ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται. ἥδιστα οὖν μᾶλλον καυχῆσομαι ἐν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις μου, ἵνα

²⁵ Even Runia admits that Philo's arguments dealing with theodicy "are marked by a rather disappointing superficiality." Runia 2003, 586–7.

²⁶ That 12:9 was an oracle from God has been understood by others, e.g. Martin, R. P. 2014, 613; Aune 1983, 249.

ἐπισκηνώση ἐπ’ ἐμὲ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ Χριστοῦ. 10 διὸ εὐδοκῶ ἐν ἀσθενείαις, ἐν ὕβρεσιν, ἐν ἀνάγκαις, ἐν διωγμοῖς καὶ στενοχωρίαις, ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ· ὅταν γὰρ ἀσθενῶ, τότε δυνατός εἰμι. (NA²⁸)

9 But he said to me, “My grace is enough for you, for the power is perfected in weakness.” Therefore, I will instead boast very gladly in my weaknesses, so that the power of the Christ might inhabit me. 10 For this reason, I delight in weaknesses, in mistreatments, in calamities, in persecutions and troubles on behalf of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

This apocalyptic moment makes Paul’s thorn and the angel of Satan stand out among the rest of his sufferings.²⁷ Out of all the weaknesses that Paul lists in 2 Corinthians 11-12, it is only with this angel that Paul cries out to God for help. Paul brings up this particular revelation out of all the others that he has had (e.g. Gal 1:12; 2:2; 1 Cor 15:8, 51-55), because it is only in this instance that he is not able to convey the revelations to others.²⁸ It is in this one instance that he reaches the limits of his ability. It is in this weakness, that he is his weakest. At his lowest, God responds and grants him a revelation that re-frames his conception of weakness.²⁹

²⁷ By “apocalyptic” we do not mean what has become a trend in Pauline scholarship, the so-called “apocalyptic Paul” movement typified by the work of J. Louis Martyn, J. Christian Beker, Martinius de Boer, Beverly Roberts Gaventa, and Douglas A. Campbell. Apocalyptic, here in this study, refers only to its most basic meaning as something revelatory, a revelation (ἀποκάλυψις), especially given its use in 2 Cor 12:1 and 12:7, both of which suggest auditory revelations over visual ones (ὄπτασία). Wallace, J. B. 2011, 277. Given the heavenly ascent in 12:2-4, the revelation Paul receives from God bears an affinity with ancient Jewish “apocalypses.” We have intentionally refrained from referring to the “genre” of apocalypse given in the classic work Semeia 14, which is far too narrow. See the critique by Najman 2014.

²⁸ Morray-Jones 2014 argues that the vision in 2 Cor 12 corresponds with Acts 22:17-22, although there are no explicit connections between the two passages.

²⁹ Much speculation has occurred over whether or not Paul heard this while he was taken up in to paradise or afterward. On this see Nassauer 2019, 262.

What makes the oracle in 2 Cor 12:9 a unique theodicean strategy is that in comparison to other instances of revelation in Jewish literature, God actually alleviates Paul with a clear answer. The vast majority of ancient Jewish texts provide no direct rationale from God for suffering. For example, when God finally speaks from the whirlwind in Job 38-41, he gives no clear answer for why Job suffers. Instead, he tests Job's knowledge of creation. Likewise, Ezra's petitions for an explanation of the suffering of Israel are ignored in Fourth Ezra (2:22-25; 5:28-30), just as Job's petition is thwarted in Job 38-41. Assuming that Paul has not concocted this oracle out of thin air, 2 Cor 12:9 may be one of the few passages in ancient Judaism where God himself explains his infliction of suffering. In fact, in 2 Cor 12:9 God provides a theodicy for himself.

8.3.3 Perfecting Power through the Demonic

The content of God's revelation to Paul in 2 Cor 12:9—specifically God's χάρις and the perfection of δύναμις in weakness—serves as a third theodicean strategy that forces Paul to re-think his thorn and rationalise his suffering as a means of gaining blessing. Paul does not need healing/exorcism, i.e. the removal of the angel, because God's χάρις is enough (ἄρκει). In 2 Corinthians, Paul uses the term χάρις to refer to divine benefits or favour (1:12, 4:15; 6:1; 8:1, 9; 9:8) and also specifically “gift” of the Jerusalem collection (8:6, 7, 19). Paul clearly refers to the former. In Paul's other letters, χάρις is the gift of God's righteousness through Christ (Rom 3:24; 5:15, 17). In 2 Cor 12:9, the parallel between χάρις and δύναμις suggests that the specific “benefit”

that Paul has in mind is the power of God.³⁰ Paul repeatedly emphasises that he lives and acts based on the power of God (4:7; 12:12; 13:4), power that he boasts indwells in him (12:9, ἐπισκηνώση ἐπ’ ἐμέ) among his weaknesses.³¹ As argued in the previous chapter, the δύναμις is likely a reference to the holy spirit.³² God’s revelation to Paul is a reminder that the power that has been given to him is enough to sustain him in the absence of healing.

More than that, however, the angel somehow benefits God’s power in Paul’s body. While his body is not “healed,” in the sense that the demonic force remains, in light of God’s revelation, the angel is somehow supposed to perfect Paul’s power within him. How might this happen? Although there is power already in Paul’s body because of God’s spirit, he elsewhere envisions the fulfilment of that power in a way similar to how Christ’s power is “perfected” in his resurrection. After he is crucified, Christ “lives” by the power of God (2 Cor 13:4; cf. Phil 3:10; Rom 1:4). He will then “raise up” believers to glorious bodies in that same power that he has been raised (1 Cor 6:14; Phil 3:21; cf. Rom 8:11, 2 Cor 4:14; 1 Thess 4:14). With his afflicting angel, Paul follows the same trajectory set by Jesus. Just as the perfection of Jesus’s power occurred in the weakness of his crucifixion, so also is God’s power in Paul perfected in the

³⁰ O’Collins 1971, 522; Bultmann 1976, 229; Harris, M. J. 2005, 863; McFarland 2016, 175. Of course, Paul’s connection to Christ’s saving χάρις is essential for any connection to his power. So, Zmijewski 1978, 382.

³¹ The verb ἐπισκηνώω is rare in ancient Greek literature. With the preposition ἐπί it refers to habitation inside something else: e.g. Polyb. 4.18.8 (ἐπισκηνώσαντες ἐπὶ τὰς οἰκίας).

³² The δύναμις has been variously conceived of as the power to do miracles (Windisch 1924, 392), the power of resurrection (Zmijewski 1978, 383–4), or Paul’s perseverance through suffering (Thrall 2000, 824; Lim 2009, 189).

weakness of the angel. His physical suffering is a necessary pre-cursor to resurrected life. For this reason it may be better to read the verb $\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\alpha\iota$ in 2 Cor 12:9 not as a present tense-form but a future middle tense-form with a passive meaning: “For the power will be fulfilled in weakness.”³³ The future middle tense-form of $\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\alpha\iota$ with a passive meaning occurs in other oracular literature proximate to Paul, such as Sib. Or. 3.364, 4.47, 7.31, 8.215, 14.299 (all which can be dated between the second century BCE through the second century CE). Rather than inhibiting his power, the angel of Satan anticipates the glory of Paul’s future pneumatic existence.

God’s reframing of Paul’s thorn as a benefit corresponds with attempts in ancient Jewish literature to associate suffering with a divine method of discipline, instruction, and blessing. According to Genesis, God does not act unjustly (Gen 18:25; Job 34:12).³⁴ Everything that God allows is in accordance with what is deserved. Although God was in control of suffering, he inflicts suffering on the innocent *for a good reason*. Some instances affirm God’s participation in acts of evil and suffering against the innocent. But he does not oppress “with pleasure” (ענה מלבו, Lam 3:33).³⁵ Rather, affliction is a means for

³³ For the note of this alternative form from the regular future passive form (normally with the $-\sigma\theta\eta\varsigma$ - tense-formative), see LSJ (s.v. $\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\omega$).

³⁴ This is implied when Abraham speaks to Yahweh in Genesis 18:25: “Far be it for you to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the guilty and as the righteous is so the guilty are. Far be it from you! Will not the judge of all the earth do justice? (חללה לך) (מעשת כדבר הזה להמית צדיק עם־רשע והיה כצדיק כרשע חללה לך השפט כלי־הארץ יעשה משפט).” As Houtman notes, “there is no room for doubt” concerning God’s righteousness. Houtman 2003, 152. Elihu’s response in Job 34:12 mirrors Abraham’s response to the destruction of the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 18:25: “Surely God does not do evil and Shaddai does not pervert justice (אף־אמנם אל לא־ירשע ושדי לא־יעוֹת משפט).”

³⁵ For the expression מלבו as pleasure see 1 Sam 10:26.

future blessing. God tests (נסה) individuals, such as Abraham with the sacrifice of his son Isaac in Genesis 22.³⁶ This testing, though painful, sometimes results in blessing such as in Gen 22:17, where God confirms his promises to Abraham. The example of Naomi in Ruth is important. At the beginning of the narrative, she bemoans that the Lord's had has struck her (כי־יצאה בי יד־יהוה, Ruth 1:14) and that “Shaddai has done evil against me (ושדי הרע לי)” (Ruth 1:21). From her perspective, God has acted unjustly. But her initial suffering can be interpreted as a blessing from the perspective of her connection to the lineage of David at the end of the text (Ruth 4:22). As Korpel indicates, “God’s goals may span centuries and if it seems to human beings that God treats them badly, they should realise that He *may* have something far better in mind which transcends their own horizon.”³⁷ Thus, one might conceive of Paul’s thorn as a test out of which will come the reward of a future resurrected body. Although God causes Paul to suffer, ultimately this suffering is for Paul’s own future benefit. God oppresses in order to bless.

8.3.4 The Mystery of Weakness that is Strength

The final theodicean strategy that Paul employs in 2 Cor 12:7-10 is an appeal to divine mystery. Although God reveals in an unprecedented way his purpose for Paul’s suffering, the comprehension of this purpose is still restricted by the limits of human knowledge. At the heart of Paul’s explanation of his

³⁶ See also Ex 15:25; 16:4; Wis 3:5.

³⁷ Korpel 2003, 345, emphasis mine.

suffering is the paradox that when he is weak, then he is strong (ὅταν γὰρ ἄσθενῶ, τότε δυνατός εἰμι, 12:10). Various approaches have been offered to explain how this paradox functions.³⁸

One influential framework to explain the relationship between strength and weakness is the dichotomy proposed by Gerald O’Collins between what he calls the “revelatory/epistemological” and the “ontological.”³⁹ O’Collins asks whether Paul was speaking “primarily about the order of knowledge (his own knowledge and that of others) or about the order of reality?”⁴⁰ However, we need not view Paul’s conception of this relationship as either regarding knowledge or reality. Paul’s understanding of weakness is shifted when he receives divine knowledge from God. At the same time, however, it is also simultaneously about the reality of weakness: *when* he is weak, *then* he is strong. Paul’s apocalyptic knowledge changes his understanding of the nature of reality.

Some are uncomfortable with leaving Paul as a weak apostle. They deny, on the basis of the logic of paradoxes, that Paul equates weakness with strength. Jan Lambrecht is representative: “A paradox mentions only the antithesis and does not offer a complete presentation of the case. The paradox is not absolute.

³⁸ E.g. Choi 2010, 236; Héring 1958, 94; Wischmeyer 2003, 469; Wischmeyer 2004, 37; Lang 1986, 350; Lietzmann 1969, 156; Ebner 1991, 188; Lincoln 1979, 218; Hotze 1997, 222.

³⁹ O’Collins 1971. For a detailed history of interpretation and the variety of ways the strength/weakness paradox is construed especially in German literature see Aejmelaeus 2000, 280–5.

⁴⁰ O’Collins 1971, 528.

Weakness is not strength.”⁴¹ But, the whole reason that Paul writes 12:9-10 is because God has revealed that his weakness *is* strength.⁴² Additionally, “weakness” and “strength” can refer to two different perspectives for a single simultaneous reality, in this case Paul’s disability. His disability is characterised as a “weakness” from a human perspective and it is characterised as a “strength” from a divine perspective. Paul’s physical body can be both strong and weak at the same time. Paul’s disabled body can simultaneously represent weakness and strength.

Just because Paul’s thorn can be understood from two opposing perspectives did not mean that he viewed both perspectives as equally valid. Paul’s emphasis in 2 Cor 12:9-10 is not on his disability from the perspective of human society (weakness as weakness) but from the perspective of God (strength in weakness). In light of this perspective, Paul deconstructs his own human view of weakness in 12:7-8, a perspective that views weakness *qua* weakness. Although his disability does not disappear, Paul emphasises the divine perspective of weakness as strength in order to eclipse the human perspective of weakness as weakness.

2 Cor 12:9-10 is not the only place where Paul emphasises the perspective that weak bodies are strong bodies. A reiteration of Paul’s conception of weakness as strength may be found in an earlier passage of the

⁴¹ Lambrecht 1986, 131; Lambrecht 1996, 339. See also, Furnish 1984, 551–2; Garrett 1995, 95. Grindheim argues that “power is subsequent to weakness” not that the two are the same. Grindheim 2005, 103.

⁴² Others have argued similarly that Paul in 2 Cor 12:9-10 Paul understands weakness as becoming strength. E.g. Aejmelaeus 2000, 282; Christiansen 2015, 231, 233.

letter, 2 Cor 4:10-12.⁴³ There, Paul argues that he carries around “the νέκρωσις of Jesus” that simultaneously reveals “the life of Jesus.” In light of the context of persecution (4:8-9), the term νέκρωσις likely refers to Jesus’s persecuted and “dead” body subject to suffering.⁴⁴ Paul’s tortured appearance resembles the crucified Messiah, whose body was mutilated and afflicted (cf. Gal 6:17).⁴⁵ At the same time, his afflicted body is also resurrection life to those who put their faith in Christ. Paul’s body is an imitation of Christ’s body, and as Christ’s body is the locus of divine resurrection power, so too is Paul’s body a source of life for the Corinthians (4:12). Paul’s weak body, just like Christ’s weak body, shows exactly where God’s power is operating. Paul’s weakness is strength.⁴⁶

In paradoxical analogies from other Jewish sources, authors are also comfortable equating weakness with strength while emphasising one side of a paradox in order to give the divine perspective on a situation. One well-known analogy with Paul comes from Philo in his *Life of Moses*. There he provides an allegory of the burning bush in Exodus 3 as a symbol of enslaved Israel, which is simultaneously a brittle bush set alight and preserved by the fire. The message of

⁴³ This connection has been noted by others including: Grindheim 2005, 103–4; Ebner 1991, 241.

⁴⁴ One need not posit a dichotomy between Jesus’s condition of deadness and the process of Jesus’s suffering as done by Deibert 2017, 158.

⁴⁵ As Güttgemanns argued, it is the “earthly manifestation of the gospel” and a “somatic epiphany of the crucifixion.” Güttgemanns 1966, 123–124.

⁴⁶ As Ellington notes, “Paul’s ‘I’ illustrates that Christian life and leadership are not matters of moving beyond weakness. Experiences of vulnerability are not aberrations from an ideal; they grant access to the grace and power of Christ.” Ellington 2012, 340. Put another way, as Savage argues, “...only in shame can there be a demonstration of divine power.” Savage 1996, 169.

the symbol is plain: “Do not faint; your weakness is your strength” (μη ἀναπίπτετε, τὸ ἀσθενὲς ὑμῶν δύναμις ἐστίν, *Mos.* 1.69).

Another analogy to Paul’s words comes from among the Scrolls.⁴⁷ In the *Hodayot*, the hymnist describes the future transformation of all their suffering into strength as a mystery:

1QH^a XVII, ll.23-28

23 כי אתה אלי למוע[ד...] תריב ריבי כי ברז חכמתכה הוכחתה בי
 24 ותחבא אמת לקץ [...] מועדו ותהי תוכחתכה לי לשמחה וששון
 25 ונגיעי למרפא ע[ולם ושלים] נצח ובוז צרי לי לכליל כבוד וכשלוני לגבורת
 26 עולם כי בשכלכ[ה] הודעתני [ובכבודכה הופיע אורי כי מאור מחושך
 27 האירותה ל [למח...] מתי ולמכשולי גבורת פלא ורחוב
 28 עולם בצרת נפשי⁴⁸

23 For you, my God at the appointed time [...] you plead my case.
 For in the mystery of your wisdom you reprove me
 24 And you hide truth until the time [...] its season. Your rebuke
 will become for me jubilation and gladness
 25 and my disease (will be) healing ev[erlasting and peace] the insult
 and contempt of my enemy (will be) for me a glorious crown, and
 my stumbling (will be) for strength
 26 forever. For in yo[ur] insight [you have instructed me] and by
 your glory my light shines forth. For a luminary from darkness
 27 gives light for [...from the ar]row from my wound, and for my
 stumbling block, wonderful strength, and everlasting
 28 open space in the distress of my soul.

The speaker of this hymn is unsure about why he is being reproved (l. 23), but nevertheless trusts in God.⁴⁹ Like Paul, instead of viewing their

⁴⁷ The thematic overlap between 2 Cor 12:8-10 and 1QH^a XVII, ll.23-28 was recognised by Barré 1980, 218. The difference in column number can be attributed to new reconstructions of the column order that have since happened after Barré’s article in 1980.

⁴⁸ This transcription is from the *editio princeps*: Stegemann, Schuller and Newsom 2009.

⁴⁹ Hughes demarcates this section as between a part of two different stanzas for what she calls a “Psalm of Confidence” Hughes 2006, 148. This column of the *Hodayot* is a

suffering as suffering, the psalmist views it from the perspective of what it will become (תהי, 1.24): God's initial rebuke will become jubilation, disease will be healing, insult and contempt a glorious crown, and stumbling will be eternal strength. The term for "stumbling," מכשול refers to something preventing others from being able to do something, like an obstacle, and is synonymous with inability or "weakness" (cf. Lev 19:13; Isa 57:14; Ezk 3:20).⁵⁰ In fact, in Jer 6:21 (MT) God says that he will put מכשלים before his people, which the translators of the LXX rendered with the term ἀσθένεια. The author of this passage attempts to view what is presently weak in light of its future strength.

Both the *Hodayot* and Paul view present weakness from an eschatological perspective. For Paul the arrival of the Messiah means that with the gift of God's spirit, the transformation from weakness to strength has already begun. Additionally, both the *Hodayot* and Paul understand the relationship between human weakness and divine strength as a mystery (זר), a paradox that cannot be completely comprehended. Even though Paul emphasises the divine perspective of this thorn, the human perspective still remains. His thorn is both weakness and strength, and his suffering only remains partially intelligible.

Both Job and Fourth Ezra acknowledge the limitations of human knowledge in understanding God's purposes for suffering. In Job 38-41, God tests Job's knowledge of creation. But Job cannot reply. How could he in the

part of a section that scholars term the "Hymns of the Teacher" (cols. 10–17). Schuller 2011, 125.

⁵⁰ On this point see further Barré 1980, 218 n.11.

face of God's questioning? He instead chooses to say nothing (40:4-5; 42:3-6). The limited epistemic capacity of humans restricts their ability to criticise God in the middle of crisis.⁵¹ From this perspective, one cannot know why God participates in suffering, only that when it happens one must yield to God.

In Fourth Ezra, the mediating angel Uriel questions the scribe's ability to do the impossible in the same way God questions Job's involvement in the creation and maintenance of the world in Job 38:4-40:2. Can Ezra gather the rain, resurrect dead flowers, control the winds, or even present an image of a voice (4 Ezra 5:36-37)? Certainly not. Because of the scribe's inability to be God, he is not able to understand God's reasons for allowing his people to suffer (5:40). This kind of deferral of theodicy in Job and Fourth Ezra is part of a tradition Marvin Pope calls "anti-wisdom wisdom."⁵² Paul's paradox of weakness and strength coheres with Job, Fourth Ezra, and the *Hodayot*, who understand the relationship between God and the suffering of the innocent as a divine mystery that humans are not able to handle.

At the same time, glimmers of hope remain in spite of epistemic limitations. Hindy Najman notes in relation to Fourth Ezra: "Although the earthly Temple has been destroyed, the celestial Temple persists, and the destruction of its earthly counterpart is the necessary prelude to its revelation on earth, which will occur through God alone when the time arrives. *Even the destruction must therefore be seen as both wise and just.*"⁵³ With Paul, the

⁵¹ Illman 2003, 329.

⁵² Pope 1965, lxxiii.

⁵³ Najman 2014, 153–4, emphasis mine.

affliction of his body is a necessary prelude to the perfection of the God's power within him. This reveals an even greater mystery at the centre of Paul's conception of his weakness as strength: the mystery that suffering is an essential part of God's eschatological plan.

8.4 Subverting Disability and Circumventing the Problem of Evil

I have argued that God was ultimately responsible for Paul's thorn in the flesh. The strategies that Paul employed to explain God's giving of the angel of Satan correlate with how other ancient Jews dealt with the problem of God's involvement in suffering. Satan's involvement in 2 Cor 12:7-10 hedges God's participation in an apparent act of injustice. In order to justify his own actions, God discloses to Paul precisely why he is suffering, an unprecedented moment in ancient Jewish texts dealing with suffering. This oracle from God causes Paul to understand his thorn as the necessary means on the path to God's perfect resurrection power. The climax of Paul's argument in 2 Cor 12:7-10 appeals to a divine mystery that attempts to displace a human understanding of weakness as weakness and replace it with a divine understanding of weakness as strength.

This divine mystery has important consequences for our understanding of Paul's disability. Paul's thorn is intertwined with a theological re-envisaging of human bodies that involves the eclipse of social and cultural notions of what is physically strong and weak. Paul's emphasis on the strength of God's *pneuma* in his physical weakness overwrites his understanding of a condition once

considered disabled with an understanding of that same condition as a necessary stage in the perfection of God's power. By understanding weakness as strength, Paul counteracts the socio-cultural processes of de-normalisation which demarcate demonised bodies as impaired and disabled. He cannot control the ways in which society at large will receive his demonised body, but the recalibration of weakness and strength he has provided normalises his physical condition from a divine perspective, imbuing it with ability for both him as well as his Corinthian audience.

Paul's apocalyptic outlook on his disability compels his readers to step back from assumptions they have about corporeal ideals and the stigma that accompanies them, in order to perceive a world *beyond disability* and yet one in which disability is not on the margin, *but at its very centre*. It is a world beyond disability because Paul no longer conceptualises his physical condition as a weakness. What was once considered weak is now understood truly to be strong. This does not mean, however, that his physical condition disappears. Paul remains demonised. God's refusal to remove the angel in 2 Cor 12:9 testifies that the state of Paul's body is vital *as it is*. Disability is central to the habitation of God's power (ἐπισκηνώση, 2 Cor 12:9). If Paul's disability leaves, God's power cannot be perfected in weakness. As Arthur Dewey and Anna Miller argue, "The attempt to escape from one's situation, or to paint over it with a theological gloss, is precisely what Paul does not do. The physical reality of his situation is the starting point for a meaningful life."⁵⁴ Paul's disability is

⁵⁴ Dewey and Miller 2017, 402.

not peripheral to his apostolic identity, no more than Christ's crucified body is peripheral to the resurrection life he offers. The nature of his disability is at the centre of Christ's power, just as Christ's own disabled body is at the centre of God's grace.⁵⁵

Rather than being a location of suffering inflicted by an unjust God, Paul subverts the disabling cultures that would assign weakness to his condition and re-casts God's bestowal of the angel of Satan as an act of power. To be sure, God did not create the cultures which disable Paul's demonised condition, and he is still responsible for giving a condition that interacts negatively with the socio-cultural environment around Paul. But the normalisation of Paul's weak condition through the strategies he employs in 2 Cor 12:7-10 eliminates the need to defend God's justice in the face of the malevolent angel. By subverting disabling cultures, he makes superfluous the question of God's justice. If his disability is, in fact, a strength, and not an evil, then there is no need to justify God's gift of the malevolent angel. More importantly, by arguing that his disability is not inability but rather the perfection of God's power, Paul marks his disability as the present divinely-ordained ideal for his body. From Paul's point of view, the angel did not impair or disable; rather it *enabled* him.

⁵⁵ Although some understand Paul's conception of weakness as strength as a general principle for Christians, we should be very cautious to simply apply Paul's own conception of his disability as strength on to people with disability today. Martin, R. P. 2014, 614; O'Collins 1971, 534; Ellington 2012.

9. CONCLUSION: PAUL, A DISABLED APOSTLE

9.1 Summary and Contribution

With the help of disability studies, I have illuminated Paul's circumcision and the angel of Satan (his "thorn in the flesh") as ancient disabilities. Disability studies allow us to move beyond the diagnostic and agnostic impasse of previous scholarship on Paul's disability. In this, I hope that I have provided a robust and clear outline of what disability is and how it works. The socio-cultural model of disability I employed understands disability as an impaired physical condition that (a) deviates from culturally-established ideals and (b) generates negative cultural effects like stigma, exclusion, liminality, ridicule, stereotyping and violence. Two of Paul's conditions that meet these criteria are his circumcision and his thorn in the flesh, the latter which I have understood to be a demonic force.

For Greeks and Romans, circumcision was a physical impairment. The depiction of male genitalia in ancient visual culture and medical literature praised foreskin as the male ideal. Deviations from this ideal, especially conditions like circumcision that permanently exposed the penile glans, reflected mutilation, hypersexualisation, and sexual dysfunction. Since circumcision was a practice among nations at the edge of the Mediterranean, it also became known as a barbarian trait. Even more so, sub-human creatures like satyrs and centaurs bore circumcision, suggesting that circumcision was not the practice of humans but of animals. Finally, it was also a practice synonymous with castration. When

non-Jews treated circumcised bodies as deviations from the ideal foreskin, they marked circumcision as an impairment.

Treating circumcision as a deviant physical feature did not stop at ancient visual culture. Jews were subject to oppressive Greek and Roman cultural processes because of circumcision. Anti-Judaism was nurtured by the stigma, ridicule, exclusion, and persecution generated because of circumcision. Even early Christian writers generated culturally violent interpretations of circumcision in Jewish texts to theologically exclude and ridicule Jews. These negative effects show how circumcision was a disability in ancient world. Thus, Paul's circumcision was a disability too.

Instead of subverting wider negative attitudes toward circumcision, an examination of Paul's use of circumcision in Phil 3:2 and Gal 5:2-6 shows that he actually reinforces such attitudes toward gentile circumcision. In Phil 3:2 he links circumcision with hypersexual, animalistic, and deforming language in his invective against opponents trying to pressure gentiles to circumcise. In Galatians 5, the essential nature of Christ's faith for gentile righteousness creates an eschatological dilemma for gentiles who circumcise. If they take on circumcision, they will no longer have access to Christ and thus future righteousness. The only way they would be able to have access to God in the future is if they undid their circumcision by castration (Gal 5:12).

New questions for Paul's letters surface when circumcision is understood as a disability. If circumcision is a disability among non-Jews, then why are the Galatians so keen to take up circumcision? Is circumcision something that Jewish men can expect to retain once they have received their eschatological

bodies? These questions required a fresh look at parts of Paul's letters, some of which yielded surprising exegetical results. My re-examination of the Galatian attitude toward circumcision found that Paul characterises the situation as coercive, indicating that the community was being pressured to circumcise against their will. As for circumcision on resurrected bodies, I argued that Paul not only understands the future bodies of Jesus followers to be made of pneumatic material but that such material will likely retain the form and shape of the pre-resurrected body. Jewish Jesus followers could expect to retain their circumcision at the eschaton to the horror of their non-Jewish counterparts.

While circumcision as a disability tested my approach in uncharted waters, the analysis of Paul's thorn in the flesh from Chapter Six onward re-opened the case on a well-trod aspect of his letters. Paul uses "thorn" as a metaphor for the "angel of Satan." This angel restricts Paul from communicating forbidden mysteries that he is obliged to keep to himself. This restraint is necessary for Paul to avoid physical harm from the angel of Satan. Paul stands in a long tradition of prophetic figures whose ability to communicate are restricted by divine command.

Instead of focusing on diagnosing Paul's restricted condition, Paul's "angel of Satan" can be understood as an impairment and disability in the context of ancient Jewish demonology. Before Paul could dispel the angel of Satan, God forced the angel to co-habitate Paul's body with the *pneuma* of God. In no way were demonic forces a part of the ancient Jewish bodily ideal. Jews deployed prayers, incantations, and magical technology to dispel and avert demonic forces from inhabiting their bodies. The demonised also had to face a

barrage of stigma, exclusion, ridicule and liminality. Paul's angel was not just an impairment, but it was also a disability.

The gift of a demonic force to Paul raises the question of God's (in)justice in 2 Cor 12:1-10. God is clearly the giver of the angel of Satan. But how can something that is so clearly a disability be a gift? As Paul pleads for God to remove his thorn, in 2 Cor 12:8 God offers an oracle instead. The oracle provides Paul with an apocalyptic perspective on his circumstances, forcing him to rethink his weakness as strength. Paul's use of spiritual intermediaries, the concept of the thorn as a perfection of power, and the conceptual mystery of strength in weakness reflect strategies used by other ancient Jewish writers to handle God's proximity to injustice. Ultimately, Paul's reformulation of weakness as strength does away with the need to question God's justice at all. Since the angel that afflicts Paul's body is given to perfect the power in him, God's justice no longer needs to be questioned.

In the end, I have found that Paul was disabled in the most peculiar ways, ways that differ from conventional interpretations of Paul's letters. Rather than mere diagnostic facts to be relayed, Paul's disabilities are embedded in a complex social and cultural network. In this network, human bodies, social ideals, cultural artefacts, and sacred texts converge. Disability, rather than being of marginal importance for Paul, seems to have its tendrils in everything from his ecclesiology to his soteriology.

9.2 Ableism in Pauline and New Testament Studies

Underlying this thesis is a critique of the latent ableism in Pauline studies. Not only is disability often overlooked but it is frequently assumed that the key figures and founders of the Jesus movement were able-bodied people. Since Paul was so obviously *able* in other areas, scholars assume that Paul was not disabled at all. Lisa Bowens notes, “If he was afflicted with a debilitating illness, how could he have accomplished and endured so much?”¹ Ernest Best once expressed it like this:

Whatever aggrieved [Paul] he clearly thinks of it as a beginning at the time of his vision or as a consequence of it. It cannot then have been something to which he was always subject, for example, persecution or temptation. Equally it cannot have been a congenital physical illness or handicap, like a speech impediment, for that would always have been there. *Some physical ailments also seem highly unlikely because no one who suffered from them could have accomplished Paul’s missionary work or endured the sufferings listed in 11:23-29.*²

On the one hand, Best assumes that if Paul had an impairment it had to be congenital. This betrays a simplistic understanding of the dynamics of impairment and disability. Not all disability is congenital, and much can be acquired over time because of biological, social, economic, and cultural factors.

On the other hand, the assumption that Paul’s ability elsewhere discounts his disability in 2 Cor 12:7 is problematic, as though one cannot be able in one area while being disabled in another. How much of Paul’s body has to be disabled in order for him to be considered *disabled*? Best conforms Paul to

¹ Bowens 2017, 153.

² Best 1987, 119, emphasis mine.

what he considers to be a healthy able-bodied person. It is not a comparison between Paul and his missionary work but Paul and the bodily ideal held by the interpreter. In light of the argument of this thesis, the idea that Paul's great feats of travel required a "fully functioning body" should be laid to rest. Paul could be disabled and still accomplish all that he did. My study dismantles ableist notions that suggest otherwise.

The assumption that prominent figures of the early Jesus movement were able-bodied plagues not only Pauline studies but New Testament Studies more widely. By problematising the characterisation of Paul as a non-disabled person, I open up the field to explore other early Jesus followers through ancient disability, perhaps even of Jesus himself.³ For example, "Paul's" advice to Timothy in 1 Tim 5:23 about drinking wine instead of water highlights that Timothy appeared to suffer from a chronic ailment. What happens to our interpretation of Timothy or the letter if we view it from the perspective of disability? What disabilities of other early Christians have yet to be analysed and understood in the context of their social, cultural, and theological environments?⁴ The path lays open.

Finally, this thesis also serves as a gentle rejoinder to Pauline scholars who have been agnostic about the specifics of Paul's disabilities. It is true that past scholarship on Paul's thorn in the flesh overdiagnosed his condition repeatedly. To say that Paul's disability is totally unknowable, however, is an

³ Rendel Harris once explored the idea that Jesus and not Zacchaeus was the short one. Harris, J. R. 1926, cf. Parsons 2011, 97, n.1.

⁴ Most patristic and early Christian scholarship continues to ignore disability despite the past work that has been done: Moss 2011; Moss 2019.

overcorrection from this past tendency. Being agnostic about the specifics of Paul's disability in favour of the social and cultural dynamics of disability can suggest that the concrete nature of Paul's disabled body does not matter. More dangerously, it can give the impression that the embodiment of disability is not important. The task is arduous, but we must try harder, marshalling sources and methods wherever we can, to understand the ancient embodiment of disabled persons. This does not mean that specific disabilities should be concocted *ex nihilo*. I merely mean to point out that it is easy for any analysis of ancient disability to focus only on social discourses, while eclipsing the fleshly, physical, and visual reality of impairment and disability.

While this study shows how social forces acted upon Paul and his disability, ultimately it also presents Paul as an agent of culture. His disability shaped the world in which he lived, whether through his letters to assemblies throughout the Mediterranean, in his contribution to collective understandings of Jewish circumcision, or to his re-conceptualisation of demonic habitation as a divine benefit. Through this study, Paul's disability has also acted upon us as readers to shape our understanding of his texts and his world. When we attend to Paul as a disabled apostle, rather than constraining him to our ideal conceptions of what his body should be, we find our knowledge of him shaped by the way his body was.

9.3 Recognising Unrecognised Disabilities in the Ancient World

One unique contribution of my project is that I interrogate physical conditions that might not be considered impairments or disabilities in contemporary culture today. The focus of much disability study in the ancient world has been on conditions that are prescribed by modern medically-oriented conceptions of impairment: physical handicaps, sensory impairments, speech disorders, learning disorder or intellectual disabilities, mental conditions, or a combination of the above.⁵ But there are other conditions that anthropologists and ethnologists have recognised also might fit into the category of disability, such as dermatological conditions, twins, and left-handedness.⁶

The intersectional nature of impairment—that it overlaps with race, gender, and sexuality—can also be neglected in the study of ancient disability. Christian Laes argues that disability can appear “supremely vague, to the point of allowing inclusion to for example black people in a white majority, women in the historical context of men’s dominance and homosexuals in heterosexual normative cultures in the list of oppressed subjects under study. Surely, this is not what one expects to read in a book on disabilities in the ancient world.”⁷ Because of editorial limitations, Laes is obliged to restrict the definition of disability. But this does not mean that the overlap between disability, race,

⁵ This list is offered by Christian Laes (2017, 6) as a practical way of limiting the analysis of disability for his edited volume.

⁶ Laes 2017, 6.

⁷ Laes 2017, 6.

gender, and sexuality is irrelevant to analyses of ancient impairment. If impairment and disability is relative to specific cultures, what disabilities are we missing by narrowing our search using only modern categories?

A definition of disability not restricted to modern taxonomies of impairment has enabled me to understand conditions, like circumcision and demonisation, that would not normally have been considered disabilities. Disabled conditions are not “fixed or stable”; rather, they depend upon the performance of particular bodies in particular circumstances.⁸ To be sure, a definition of disability that allows for every physical condition—medical, intersectional, or otherwise—could lead to a saturation of meaning and ultimately dissipate into a useless term.

At the same time, accepting disabilities in the ancient world that are not disabilities today can help to interrogate and refine our own conceptions of disability. We may find that how we conceive of the dynamics of disability or its nature should be revised in light of ancient evidence. Still further, we can become aware of physical conditions in our present day that are not classified as disabilities, but nevertheless experience similar negative social and cultural effects as disability. As it so happens, this applies to circumcision and demonisation today.

⁸ Lawrence, L. 2016, 67.

9.4 Contemporary Implications of this Study

The disabling of circumcision and demonisation that we analysed in the ancient Jewish and Graeco-Roman world has contemporary analogues in our world today. In Chapter Three we noted that there is a growing debate in North America and Europe about the psychosexual effects and even impairment that circumcision causes to young boys.⁹ This has led some countries to make it medically or economically difficult to attain circumcision for boys without their consent. Some have even proposed banning the practice altogether, although no restrictions have yet been put into place. The medical community has found little physical benefit to circumcision and largely views it as an alteration of the “bodily integrity” of boys’ bodies:

“The issue here is to balance on the one hand respect for the religious and culture convictions of the parents and a sign for the child of belonging to the community, and on the other hand the right to *physical integrity*.”¹⁰

A “whole” body is an uncircumcised body. Thus, when someone alters a boy’s foreskin they are mutilating his body. The on-going medical and political discussion are reinforced by social activists called “intactivists,” a term which is a *mot-valise* of the terms “intact” and “activist.” They stand against genital modification without a child’s consent. Groups who advocate for “intact foreskin” often put an emphasis on the agency of boys, their future sexual health, and their safety.

⁹ See §3.1, n.2.

¹⁰ Belgium Advisory Committee on Bioethics 2017, 27. cf. The Royal Australasian College of Physicians 2010, 15.

But the movement has a dark side. A comic book called *Foreskin Man* was created in 2011 by an anti-circumcision activist. It depicts anti-Semitic caricatures like a “Monster Mohel” who takes pleasure in circumcising young boys against the will of their parents. There are even white supremacist tropes throughout, for example, when the main hero (who has blond hair and blue eyes) rescues a boy from the Monster Mohel, he meets the boy’s mother at a safe house for intactivists. At the end of the story a wooden intactivist emblem is lit on fire, echoing the practices of the Ku Klux Klan.

For intactivists, circumcision affects the aesthetic and functional integrity of boys. For them, circumcision is an impairment. The lobbying, protesting, and dissemination of material to stigmatise those who remove foreskin de-normalises the circumcised and the circumcisors. Although circumcision is not viewed as a disability by the wider public, for intactivists, circumcision *is* a disability. This movement, whether they are well-intentioned or not, impacts especially Jewish and Muslim communities since they are the ones for whom child circumcision is a part of their cultural life.

Our analysis of the disabling of Jewish circumcision in ancient Graeco-Roman culture showed that it was not simply the practice that was despised. The practice was connected to a whole way of living, a monstrous and barbarian way of being, that repelled non-Jews. The caricature of Monster Mohel in *Foreskin Man* is not far off from ancient animalistic and sub-human depictions of circumcision. In most of the panels the Mohel’s eyes lack irises, he has a sinister smile, and his fingernails are black and long like a beast. He is depicted as inhuman. By animalising Jews for practising circumcision, intactivist

propaganda like Foreskin Man echoes the hybridisation of Jews and animals during the Holocaust (Figure 9.1). This study cautions against viewing anti-circumcision movements like intactivism in the present day as something that is only concerned with educating others about the impact of circumcision. Intactivism involves de-humanising rhetoric that “disables” Jewish people because their genital traditions do not meet what is considered the physical ideal. Not only does such advocacy aim to restrict religious freedom, but it participates in a longstanding discourse where the imagination of Jews as sub-human eventually inspires the inhumane treatment of Jews.

Another contemporary analogue with this study is the continued belief in demonisation among religious communities worldwide. A YouGov poll from 2013 showed that 51% of Americans from the United States believed that someone could be possessed by the devil or an evil spirit, and 46% believed in the possibility of exorcising evil spirits out of a person.¹¹ The practice, especially of exorcism, shows that the infiltration of demonic forces in the body is still viewed like it was in ancient Judaism. Demonisation is not a bodily ideal and its cause must be eliminated to restore people to their ideal bodily state. The demonised are thus, in one sense, disabled.

The disabling of the demonised today is manifest most explicitly in the violence enacted toward those whom some people perceive to have demons.

(CW: violence, murder, death) In the winter of 2015, a woman in Germany

¹¹ “Poll Results: Exorcism.” YouGov, <https://today.yougov.com/topics/philosophy/articles-reports/2013/09/17/poll-results-exorcism>.



Figure 9.1. “Rotten. Udryd den” (Rats. Exterminate them). Poster from occupied Denmark, c. 1940s (<https://cdn.nybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Rotten.jpg>)

died after she was forced by her family to drink salt water in order to expel demons that caused her infertility.¹² In 2019, a man in the United States drowned his six year old son in order to get rid of the demon inside of him.¹³ Early in 2020, a pregnant woman, her five children, and a neighbour were found in a mass grave after their local community murdered them through brutal exorcistic practices.¹⁴ This violence toward the demonised is the exacerbation of de-normalising disabling effects. It also indicates just how deviant some consider demonised bodies. It is better for the person to be killed than for them to continue as someone possessed by a demonic force.

Medically speaking, those whom people think have demons are not necessarily classed as having an impairment or disability (diagnoses of mental health aside). But to the communities that sometimes violently exorcise demons from people, the demonised *are* disabled. Their bodies are impaired by demons and must be normalised by whatever means necessary. The stigma, exclusion, and liminality of disability can culminate in violence as an apotropaic tool of demonic liberation. Understanding the demonising of individuals as a disabling practice, allows us to illuminate and interrogate abusive beliefs, systems, and

¹² “Germany: Husband, in-laws charged in woman’s exorcism death.” The Associated Press, <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/germany-husband-laws-charged-womans-exorcism-death-70388329>.

¹³ “A man drowned his 6-year-old son while trying to cast out a ‘demon,’ police say.” Marisa Iati and Kim Bellware, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/10/02/man-drowned-his-year-old-son-while-trying-cast-out-demon-police-say/>.

¹⁴ “Panama: Seven people found dead after suspected exorcism.” BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-51144629>.

cultures in contemporary religious communities that believe in and practice exorcism on those they view as demonised.

9.5 The Future of Paul and Disability Studies

This study has reset the now abandoned quest in biblical studies to understand the nature of Paul's disabilities. With a clear understanding of disability that is informed by contemporary disability studies, the discipline can move beyond the agnostic impasse that allows scholars only to engage superficially with Paul as a disabled person. There is still more work to be done and it is encouraging to see new studies appear.¹⁵

In this thesis, I have not tried to provide a comprehensive analysis of Paul's disabilities. The method of this study has been experimental, and we have used it to delineate two of Paul's disabilities, his circumcision and his demonisation. However, there may be more.¹⁶ Future studies should not only attend to what is physically obvious about Paul in his letters, but should think more about the subtle ways his letters disclose details about Paul's body and whether or not this has implications for his disability.

We have also examined only the letters deemed "undisputed" by many Pauline scholars. Depictions of Paul's body in other corpora, like the deutero-Paulines, the Pastoral Epistles, Acts, or even early Christian "apocryphal"

¹⁵ An article by Louise Lawrence on Paul's appearance and health are set to appear in a forthcoming handbook on the historical Paul: Lawrence, L. J. 2021.

¹⁶ In a forthcoming article I argue that there is evidence from 2 Corinthians as well as the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* that Paul was a person of short stature, a dwarf: Soon 2021.

literature, may lead to further fruitful portraits of Paul as a disabled apostle.¹⁷

The reception history of Paul, especially in iconographic depictions, may be especially productive. Later images of Paul generated by early Christians are useful for interrogating depictions of Paul elsewhere in the NT.

For there to be a future for Paul and disability studies, scholarship must move beyond interrogating “images” and “portraits” of Paul that have nothing to do with his physical person. Studies that employ the term “image” frequently have little to do with the body of the apostle. Scholars can use pictorial language throughout their work (e.g. “image,” “portrait,” “perception”) without referencing the actual physicality of Paul himself, only his thought and theology. “Image” is a metaphor to refer to what Paul did or thought or what was thought about Paul. This study has taken the “image” of Paul’s body seriously. Because of this I have uncovered new historical and exegetical insights into Paul, circumcision, and ancient demonology. The future of Paul and disability studies relies on this same conscious recognition that he was, first and foremost, an apostle with a body.

¹⁷ Brittany Wilson has initiated some of this work in relation to Paul’s depiction in the book of Acts. See Wilson, B. E. 2015, 249–57.

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