

JEWES AND GREEKS: THE BROADER CONTEXT FOR WRITING THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jennifer C. Lane

When Paul wrote his epistles, he adapted his subject matter to the Saints' earlier beliefs and challenges from their peers. He described this broader context and his message this way: "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:22–23). Understanding the broader philosophical and religious setting for the writing of the New Testament allows us to make more sense out of the topics Paul and other writers chose to address. In examining the key assumptions Jews and Greeks may have had about the doctrines of Christ, we can better understand New Testament writing, modern-day resistance to the gospel, and the essence of the gospel itself.

This broader context helps us understand the people to whom the Gospels and epistles would have been written. In appreciating their concerns and background, we can better understand the message of the New Testament. The witness of Christ found in these writings came to

Jennifer C. Lane is an assistant professor of religion at Brigham Young University–Hawaii.

people who had various worldviews that created challenges to their acceptance of the gospel. The assumptions that the Jews and Greeks held can explain how the testimony of Christ can be seen as “foolishness” to those who have different beliefs about reality. Recognizing the differences in their basic premises also explains that a witness of Christ will not come with “enticing words of man’s wisdom” but only “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4). In examining the broader intellectual and religious worldviews that create the context for the New Testament, I will look first at the Greeks and then at the Jews. Clearly the scope of this project is vast, but learning some simple points about basic beliefs can provide a valuable entry point into a foreign world. For each of the worldviews indicated by the terms “Greeks” and “Jews,” I will give an overview of their beliefs and how those beliefs caused them problems in understanding the gospel message.

“THE GREEKS SEEK AFTER WISDOM”

When people think of a Greek or Roman worldview, some immediately think of Greek and Roman religion and deities such as the Greek gods Zeus and Hera and their Roman counterparts, Jupiter and Juno. The worship of traditional Greek and Roman deities continued through the first century AD. Many additional Near Eastern deities were even adopted during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. But it is significant that Paul emphasized *philosophia*, or the love of wisdom, when trying to characterize the challenge Gentiles faced in accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was the philosophical assumptions developed in this pursuit of wisdom, rather than the belief in different gods, that created barriers to the gospel for the educated.

An analogy from my days as a missionary in France might be helpful. Before I left, many people said to me: “You’ll be going to a Catholic country; I’m sure that will be challenging.” My experience, however, was much the same as Paul’s. It was not the traditional religion that was primarily the barrier. By the late twentieth century, most people in France had their worldview shaped by naturalism, not Catholicism. In other words, most were atheists, not Catholics. Most people’s concerns about the gospel message were driven by the basic assumptions of the

Enlightenment, such as “there is no God” and “religion is a manipulative tool.” Of course, there were many people who were devoutly Catholic, but most educated people equated being religious with being ignorant, simple, or superstitious.

For hundreds of years in the Greek tradition, there had been growing philosophical resistance to the assumptions about Deity that were part of the traditional stories about the gods. In the Hellenized Roman world, traditional religion still had a very important place, but many of those who were educated wanted to see themselves as being religious but not superstitious. Superstitious, uneducated people saw the gods as fickle and dealing arbitrarily with people.¹ There was also a tradition within philosophy going back even before Plato and Aristotle that can be seen as a form of monotheism.² Because of this philosophical movement, the traditional idea of gods taking physical form and being involved in change and passions began to seem distasteful and ludicrous to the more educated.

During the first century AD, there was no one uniform philosophical system. Instead there were several important schools of thought in the Hellenistic world that functioned much as religious worldviews, including Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Middle Platonism.³ This period, however, was characterized by many shared attitudes; “in fact post Hellenistic philosophy . . . from 100 B.C. onwards was marked more and more by a tendency towards syncretism or fusion of the various schools.”⁴ While differences existed between the schools, certain general assumptions about reality were common. Many of these general attitudes stemmed from influential Athenian philosophers several hundred years earlier. During the first century AD, the basic assumptions of Plato and Aristotle were widely shared and perpetuated in Middle Platonism.⁵

Educated people shared philosophical assumptions about reality. Because of these views, the message of Christ’s Atonement would have been difficult to believe. Paul noted that “the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.” In contrast, he said that as Christians, “we preach Christ crucified.” This declaration of the crucified and risen Lord was, according to Paul, “unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:22–23). There were some general attitudes about reality that

would have made the gospel message sound foolish to those who shared the worldview of Greek philosophy. The two most significant areas were the prejudice against divine embodiment and Resurrection as seen in Platonic dualism and the prejudice against divine changeability or suffering that can be seen in Aristotle's "Unmoved Mover."

It has been suggested that "the belief in the resurrection of the body" was "possibly the strangest Christian tenet to pagan ears."⁶ The prejudice against divine embodiment and Resurrection stemmed from attitudes toward the body that are known as Platonic dualism. In Plato's writings, the soul was seen as radically different from the body, and embodiment could be characterized as a prison. These attitudes are clearly articulated in Plato's Socratic dialogue *Phaedo*, in which he portrays Socrates' discussion before his death. I will first show how these ideas about the body are seen in Plato's writing and then illustrate how this belief created a context for the New Testament.

Plato portrays the ideal human as "entirely concerned with the soul and not with the body. . . . He would like, as far as he can, to be quit of the body and turn to the soul."⁷ The body is seen as diminishing the soul's capacity because "the body introduces a turmoil and confusion and fear into the course of speculation, and hinders us from seeing the truth; and all experience shows that if we would have pure knowledge of anything we must be quit of the body, and the soul in herself must behold all things in themselves: then, I suppose, that we shall attain that which we desire, and of which we say that we are lovers, and that is wisdom."⁸

Hope for human beings was in being rid of the body after this life when "the foolishness of the body will be cleared away and we shall be pure and hold converse with other pure souls, and know of ourselves the clear light everywhere; and this is surely the light of truth. For no impure thing is allowed to approach the pure."⁹ The body was seen as part of what made the soul impure. Thus, "what is purification but the separation of the soul from the body, . . . the release of the soul from the chains of the body?"¹⁰ The general prejudice against the idea of Resurrection in the Greek world was so widespread and influential, even among the Jews, that "many Diaspora Jews rejected this form of

post-mortal hope and espoused a Hellenistic hope in the immortality of the soul.”¹¹

The influence of the worldview of Platonic dualism in shaping the broader context for the New Testament can be seen in New Testament writings that reaffirm Christ’s bodily incarnation, suffering, and Resurrection. A pointed example is found in 1 John 4:2–3: “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” The forcefulness of this clarification highlights the strength of the challenge of docetism, or the view that Christ, being divine, could not have had a physical body.¹²

Additional evidence for Platonic dualism in shaping the context for the New Testament can be found in the writings of Celsus, a Platonist arguing against Christian belief around AD 177–80. Sharing the basic premise of educated people, he maintained that “the soul is God’s work, but the nature of the body is different.”¹³ Since the body was antithetical to God’s nature, the idea of the incarnation and the Resurrection were against reason.¹⁴ Celsus spoke against the incarnation, saying that God would not “thrust his own spirit into such foul pollution.”¹⁵ Likewise, the idea of Christ’s Resurrection seemed foolish: “Jesus could not have risen with his body; for God would not have received back the spirit which he gave after it had been defiled by the nature of the body.”¹⁶ The basic assumptions of the educated within the Greek world made the declaration of the crucified and risen Christ seem as foolishness. It is important to remember that this perception grew out of widely shared assumptions about reality. As one scholar concluded, “Pagan disgust at Christian preaching of resurrection of the body is propelled by a set of convictions about God as reason, and spirit, and by an attitude towards the body as inferior matter. Resurrection is just one more of the more dramatic and disdainful examples of Christian credulity, ignorance, arrogance, and mistaken understandings of God and nature.”¹⁷

In addition to the prejudice against divine embodiment and Resurrection, there was also a built-in bias against the idea of divine

changeability or suffering. In Book I2 (Lambda) of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle explains the nature of the Supreme Being, his “Unmoved Mover.” This ultimate God is both unmovable and the source of all other movement. He says, “The first principle or primary being is not movable either in itself or accidentally, but produces the primary eternal and single movement.”¹⁸

These deep-seated assumptions about the nature of God go back to the pre-Socratic philosophers. Parmenides, living in the fifth century BC, laid the groundwork for this belief, stating that “being is ungenerated and imperishable, whole, unique, immovable and complete.”¹⁹ Even before Aristotle’s influential development of the Unmoved Mover, Plato upheld the idea of divine impassibility (God’s inability to suffer or feel pain).²⁰ In fact, in the *Phaedo*, where Plato develops the idea of the body as a prison, he also emphasizes the ideal quality of changelessness: “Absolute equality, absolute beauty, any absolute existence, true being—do they ever admit of any change whatsoever? Or does each absolute essence, since it is uniform and exists by itself, remain the same and never in any way admit of any change?”²¹ For Plato, “the realm of the soul is the pure, everlasting, immortal, and changeless.”²²

During the first century AD, Middle Platonists focused on the implications of God being unchangeable and unmovable.²³ The wide esteem in which being unmovable was held in the philosophical world can also be seen in Stoicism. For the Stoics, *apatheia*, or passionlessness, was the highest human virtue. They believed that “since the human soul is a part of the Divine Reason or God, . . . the principle goal of an individual is the pursuit of virtue. . . . The virtuous individual is one who has attained inner discipline by controlling all emotions and passions and, if possible, eradicating them completely.”²⁴

These views about the divine being unmovable or impassible can be seen in the shock of Celsus, the anti-Christian Platonist, at the implications of the incarnation and suffering of Christ. He shares the views of the educated in saying that “God is good and beautiful and happy, and exists in the most beautiful state. If then He comes down to men, He must undergo change, a change from good to bad, from beautiful to shameful, from happiness to misfortune, and from what is best

to what is most wicked. Who would choose a change like this? It is the nature only of a mortal being to undergo change and remoulding, whereas it is the nature of an immortal being to remain the same without alteration. Accordingly, God could not be capable of undergoing this change."²⁵ The idea that Jesus, being God, could "serve as a slave and be sick and die" seems to him as "wicked and impious."²⁶ Thus, he rejects Old Testament messianic prophecy as foolish: "It would be impossible to believe in the predictions that He should suffer and do these things."²⁷

The idea of God being capable of any kind of change was an affront to basic assumptions of educated people of this era. This reservation was related to the concerns about Christ's embodiment and Resurrection. How could a divine being undergo this kind of change? The sharp reaction to this doctrine can be seen when Paul taught in Athens. His teaching seemed to be well received, but "when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked" (Acts 17:32). It was precisely to avoid being mocked that some early Christians taught the idea of a spiritual resurrection. Orthodox Christianity did maintain a belief in the resurrection of the body, yet because Christian apologists moved toward characterizing God as impassible, this became part of the creeds. Of course, the Christians had to reconcile Christ's suffering and death with their belief in the impassibility of God, which was a source of debate and division.²⁸

"THE JEWS REQUIRE A SIGN"

While the phrase "seeking after wisdom" characterizes Greek philosophy of the Hellenistic-Roman era, the Jewish worldview can be summed up in the phrase "the Jews require a sign." It is true that *sign* has also been translated in other versions of the Bible as "miraculous signs"²⁹ or "miracles."³⁰ However, the basic meaning of the Greek word *sēmeion* is "the sign or distinguishing mark by which someth[ing] is known," which could also be rendered as token or indication.³¹ This meaning of *sign* more clearly describes the focus of intertestamental Judaism. In saying that "the Jews require a sign," Paul is describing the Jews' focus on outward performances that indicate faithfulness to God.

Just as there were various ways of being a philosopher in the first

century, there were also various ways of being a Jew. Different groups, comprising “sectarian” or intertestamental Judaism, had all developed in response to the Hellenistic context of their world. These groups included the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. While they had competing visions for the true form of Israelite religion in the Second Temple period, they also shared some beliefs. This is not to suggest that there was a standard form of Judaism at this time but that each of these forms of Judaism was drawing upon the Torah as establishing what God had commanded. These commandments were not limited to “signs” or outward performances; however, obedience to certain commandments was generally seen as required to be pleasing unto God.

All of these groups of Jews, even though taking different approaches, sought to keep the faith in an alien world. Most Jews, however, were not allied with any of these groups. The general population was known as the *‘am ha-‘aretz*, or “people of the land.” Their level of understanding and commitment to the outward signs of obedience to God’s law found in the Torah included circumcision, Sabbath observance, and participation in other rituals such as temple festivals. Some scholars today describe them as “liv[ing] faithfully according to the Law” and being generally observant.³² The Pharisees and other groups saw these “people of the land” as unreligious, ritually impure, and little different from Gentiles.³³ Other groups, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls sect or Qumran Community, viewed most Jews, including the Pharisees, as failing to live up to the demands of the Torah and as being in apostasy.³⁴ As we will see, however, all of these groups adhered to outward signs as a measure of their faithfulness, a practice which directly affected their perception of the preaching of the Christian gospel.

Paul observed that “the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.” In contrast, he said Christians “preach Christ crucified.” Believing that Christ is the source of hope and confidence before God was, according to Paul, “unto the Jews a stumblingblock” (1 Corinthians 1:22–23). Examining the general attitudes about reality shared by the Jews helps us understand why the gospel message would have been a stumbling block to them.

First, the key shared concept for the Jews was that God chose Israel as His covenant people and gave the Israelites His law. The five books

of Moses, known as the Torah, had a very important role in establishing the expectations for Jewish life, providing a shared sense of God's requirements and relationship with His covenant people. Jews did not agree uniformly about what constituted God's revelation. Some groups, such as the Sadducees, may not have accepted the Prophets and Writings that now are included in the Hebrew Bible.³⁵ Other Jews had a broader sense of revelations and covenants, as is seen in the pseudepigraphical writings and the Dead Sea Scrolls.³⁶ In addition, the Pharisees believed in a divinely given oral tradition known in the New Testament as the "tradition of the elders."³⁷ For all these groups, the Torah provided a collective foundation for God's covenant expectations and promises.

Expectations include circumcision, food purity laws, Sabbath observance, and temple festivals. New Testament scholars debate whether Judaism saw this obedience to the law as a way to gain merit through works or whether adherence to these "works of the law" simply functioned as a way to stay within the election of Israel.³⁸ Other lines of scholarship emphasize the alternate voices within Judaism that saw the people as a whole as not living up to the covenant requirements.³⁹ Most scholars, however, would agree that all these forms of Judaism saw themselves as having God's law and being His people, although there was internal debate as to who was living up to what they were given.

The general expectations regarding the biblical requirements of circumcision and food purity can be seen in the beliefs of those who criticized their contemporaries for their perceived laxness in obedience. As was mentioned before, some of the sects of this era had stricter standards than the less educated, who were, according to Calvin Roetzel, "not as scrupulous as others in observing some commandments (especially the laws of purity), and they were ignorant of much of the content of the Torah and shunned its study."⁴⁰ Thus, the common people "were doubtless shunned and ridiculed by those who were scrupulous about the laws of purity, observing the tithe and the study of the Torah, namely the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes."⁴¹

Those who sought to raise the standard for holiness in intertestamental Judaism focused on the observance of the law of Moses, what we might call "requiring a sign." No longer having prophets, the Jews

drew upon what they had in scripture as standards and resources to keep themselves separate from the encroachment of Hellenization.⁴² An example of this desire to “raise the bar” in efforts to live a holy life can be seen in concerns about circumcision.

The pseudepigraphical book *Jubilees*, dated to the second century BC, states that Israel was not living up to the conditions of the covenantal promise by not properly performing circumcision: “They will not circumcise their sons according to all of this law because some of the flesh of their circumcision they will leave in the circumcision of their sons. And all of the sons of Beliar will leave their sons without circumcising just as they were born. And great wrath from the Lord will be upon the sons of Israel because they have left his covenant and turned aside from his words.”⁴³ The writers of *Jubilees* saw the Jews of their day as being in “an epidemic of malpractice.”⁴⁴ Their failures to keep the law were understood as neglecting to circumcise altogether, as not being careful to circumcise on the eighth day, or as circumcising in a way that would cut away “less flesh than was normal—a style apparently adopted and preferred during the Hellenistic period in order to help conceal the marks of circumcision.”⁴⁵ The “works of the law,” or the signs of the covenant, were constantly being challenged by the cultural context in which Jews lived.

We can appreciate the importance of circumcision as a sign of the covenant when we realize its place within God’s relationship with Abraham: “And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you” (Genesis 17:9–11). Paul’s writings make it clear that the Jews’ emphasis on the signs of the covenant was a very important part of the context for the writing of the New Testament.

Circumcision and other signs of the covenant were major issues that Paul had to address. He taught the Saints at Corinth: “Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the

commandments of God” (1 Corinthians 7:18–19). His message was that their whole understanding of how to please God had to be revised: “If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law” (Galatians 5:2–3). Thus, to many Jews, the message of “Christ crucified” became a stumbling block because it meant that the signs of the covenant were no longer required.

Accepting the gospel message of salvation through the Atonement of Christ required accepting that older requirements could be superseded. Jews did not need to deny that God had given the law of Moses, but the new and challenging message was that the law had been fulfilled in Christ. The questions Paul was asked about the need to circumcise and keep food purity regulations shows the Jews’ struggles with the new law. In Acts and the epistles, we can see widespread concern with circumcision and food-purity as signs of the covenant (see Acts 10; 15; 21; Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8). These Jewish beliefs were an important part of the broader context for the writing of the New Testament. Thus, these issues are essential in understanding the Apostles’ efforts to strengthen and clarify the faith of early Church members.

“BUT WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED”

As we reflect on how important the worldviews of the Greeks and the Jews were in shaping the way they viewed the gospel of Christ, we can appreciate how the broader context of the New Testament sharpened the focus on testifying of Christ. In this contemporary context, the message of the cross of Christ was either foolishness or a stumbling-block. For many Greeks, the logical conclusion of their assumptions was that God could not and would not take on a mortal body, suffer, and then be resurrected. For many Jews, the logical conclusion of their assumptions was that God had already declared the terms of salvation through the Torah and that there was no need for any further revelation. Paul and other New Testament authors could not through logic persuade either Greeks or Jews of the truthfulness of the gospel, because their audience was starting with completely different ideas about the nature and revelation of God. Instead, as Paul explains, the testimony of Christ’s Atonement had to be given and received “not with

enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4).

Given these basic prejudices working against him, Paul had to stand his ground and focus on the essentials. He commented, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Everything else was peripheral, and every audience needed to understand the message of the Atonement of Christ.

In our day, barriers in teaching how to receive the blessings of Christ's Atonement through His restored Church are similar to earlier ones faced by Paul and other New Testament writers. Like the challenge of the Greeks, some concerns grow out of philosophical reservations. Like the difficulty for the Jews, some hesitations grow out of religious traditions. In the contemporary world, the philosophical reservations are primarily those of naturalism. This worldview developed along with the ability of science to explain natural phenomena without needing to refer to divine causation. Starting in the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century and being developed during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, basic premises about reality began to be accepted among the educated. With time these have gradually become widely available and influential. These assumptions describe a reality that operates in entirely naturalistic or materialist terms. In this worldview, there are no miracles and thus no resurrection or vicarious atonement.

Those who do not share all the assumptions of naturalism hold on to many different religious traditions. Many share a faith that God acts in history and works miracles in the lives of believers. With many other religious people worldwide, we believe that there is meaning and purpose to life. The specifics of the nature of God, our relationship to Him, and what He requires of us are not, however, uniformly shared. Whether we are talking about non-Christian religious traditions such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or various forms of Christianity, there are great challenges in presenting the message of the gospel. Like the Jews of Paul's time, people within each of these traditions will have reservations about the message of the Restoration based on their own tradition. The message of the restored gospel can be a

stumbling block given the assumptions they are starting with. Genuinely religious people may have felt divine influence in their lives, and they will already have assumptions about what God requires based on what they were taught in their own traditions. Unlike the challenge of the philosophically minded, it is not a lack of faith in revelation that can be a stumblingblock to the believers. Instead, it is the idea that revelation continues.

As Latter-day Saints living in a world much like the world of the New Testament, we can learn from how Paul responded to the broader context in which he found himself in his efforts to build the kingdom of God. While both Jew and Gentile had barriers to accepting the message of the gospel, Paul was undaunted and focused. Like him, we too can declare: “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 1:2). From the broader context of the writing of the New Testament, we can learn the importance of keeping our focus on the essential message of the gospel. All testifies of the Atonement—modern-day prophets, additional scripture, priesthood restored, temple ordinances, work for the dead, the importance of families, and the hope they can be together forever. Each aspect of our witness to the world stems from the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Rather than trying to preach the gospel in the “wisdom of words” (1 Corinthians 1:17), we can know there is another path, the one taught by Paul and reemphasized in our day. The witness of Christ is given and received “not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4). Just as in Paul’s day, Church members today come from many backgrounds. They had many different assumptions about reality before they joined the Church. But the Holy Ghost’s testimony of the divinity of Christ and this work was enough to overcome whatever philosophical or religious reservations they may have held previously. This is the only sure foundation for us in living the gospel and sharing the gospel. As Paul taught, “My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your

faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:4–5).

NOTES

1. These attitudes can be seen in *On Superstition*, usually attributed to Greek philosopher Plutarch (AD 50–120). See Robert Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 60–62.

2. Many people will refer to this line of thought as monarchy, in the sense that the existence of a Supreme Being did not necessarily mean that there were no other gods. These questions are developed in Frede. He notes that “the Platonists, the Peripatetics, and the Stoics do not just believe in one highest god, they believe in something which they must take to be unique even as a god. For they call it ‘God’ or even ‘the God,’ as if in some crucial way it was the only thing which deserved to be called ‘god’” (Michael Frede, “Monotheism and Pagan Philosophy in Later Antiquity,” in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede [Oxford: Clarendon, 1999], 43).

3. Middle Platonism is a development of Platonic thought from its original articulation several centuries earlier. I should also note here that I will not fully address all the philosophies of this era in any depth. In particular, the perspective of the Epicureans had a number of distinctive views that are beyond the scope of this chapter.

4. He continues, “Mutual influence must never be underestimated” (G. Watson, “The Problem of the Unchanging in Greek Philosophy,” *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 27 [1985]: 63).

5. “The most significant contribution of the movement was to bring together and equate the supreme Divine Mind of Aristotle and the Platonic world of Forms and Ideas” (Antonia Tripolitis, *Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002], 41).

6. Claudia Setzer, “‘Talking Their Way into Empire’: Jews, Christians, and Pagans Debate Resurrection of the Body,” in *Ancient Judaism in Its Hellenistic Context*, ed. Carol Bakhos, volume 95 of Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005), 155.

7. Plato, *Phaedo*, in *The Republic and Other Works*, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Anchor, 1973), 496.

8. Plato, *Phaedo*, 498.

9. Plato, *Phaedo*, 498–99.

10. Plato, *Phaedo*, 499.

11. A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology against Its Graeco-Roman Background* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987), 183.

12. For a brief introduction to docetism, see Stuart G. Hall, “Docetism,” in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason, and Hugh Pypers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 173.

13. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 4.58, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 232.
14. On the preposterous nature of Christian doctrine, Celsus comments, "But, indeed, neither can God do what is shameful nor does He desire what is contrary to nature" (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 5.14 [Chadwick, 274–75]).
15. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 6.73 (Chadwick, 386).
16. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 6.72 (Chadwick, 386).
17. Setzer, "Talking Their Way," 173.
18. Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Book XII*, part 8, trans. W. D. Ross (Raleigh, NC: Alex Catalogue, 2000), 129.
19. Parmenides, *Fragment 8*, cited in Watson, "The Problem of the Unchanging," 57.
20. Joseph M. Hallman, *The Descent of God: Divine Suffering in History and Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 1–2.
21. Plato, *Phaedo*, in *Plato*, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 273–75.
22. Hallman, *Descent of God*, 3. Emphasis on the immutable divine is also found in the *Republic*.
23. This can be seen particularly in the need to develop the idea of intermediary beings between the unchanging Supreme Being and the changeable world (see Watson, "The Problem of the Unchanging," 63–65). These assumptions about God's unchanging nature grow even stronger in the era of Neoplatonism with the writings of Plotinus (AD 204–70). It is this line of thinking that had such a profound impact on Church Fathers, such as Augustine, and the development of the creeds (see Watson, "The Problem of the Unchanging," 65–66).
24. Tripolitis, *Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age*, 38.
25. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 4.14 (Chadwick, 192–93).
26. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 7.14 (Chadwick, 406).
27. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 7.15 (Chadwick, 406).
28. This effort to resolve questions of Christology can be seen in Origen's response to Celsus. See *Contra Celsum*, 7.16–17 (Chadwick, 407–9). For an introduction to the doctrine of the impassibility of God in early Christianity, see Joseph M. Hallman, "Impassibility," in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson, 2d ed. (New York: Garland, 1997), 566–67.
29. I Corinthians 1:22; New International Version.
30. I Corinthians 1:22; Jerusalem Bible.
31. Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. "sēmeion."
32. Mark A. Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel: A Reconsideration of the Theology of Pre-Christian Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 54. This is E. P. Sanders's widely influential assessment. It is discussed by Elliott (53–55).
33. On the 'am ha-'aretz seen as being like Gentiles in the rabbinic tradition, see Calvin J. Roetznel, *The World That Shaped the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 60. Sanders maintains that the Pharisees, unlike

the Essenes, neither defined themselves as true Israel nor saw the “people of the land” as not being part of Israel (E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977], 156–57). See the debate in Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel*, 52–56.

34. Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel*, 108–13.

35. The question is addressed in W. J. Moulder, “Sadducees,” in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:279.

36. See Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel*, 119–43, 254–58.

37. While much is debated about the Pharisees, “what does seem certain—because it is the only thing upon which our otherwise irreconcilable sources agree—is that the Pharisees placed a great premium on something called ‘ancestral tradition.’” All sources consistently assent to the Pharisees’ focus on “ancestral tradition” that the rabbis would later call the oral law (Martin S. Jafee, *Early Judaism* [Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997], 79).

38. This idea of obedience as staying within the covenant rather than earning God’s favor is referred to by E. P. Sanders as “covenantal nomism.” In this debate, Seyoon Kim, in *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), defends a more traditional Protestant understanding against the “New Perspective” approach of E. P. Sanders and James D. G. Dunn. Dunn argues “that by ‘works of the law’ Paul intended his readers to think about *particular observances of the law like circumcision and the food laws*” (*Jesus, Paul and the Law* [London: SPCK, 1990], 191, emphasis in original).

39. See Elliott’s discussion of their view of apostasy in Israel (*The Survivors of Israel*, 108–13).

40. Roetzel, *The World That Shaped the New Testament*, 60.

41. Roetzel, *The World That Shaped the New Testament*, 60.

42. Elliott observes: “As is well known, establishing *religious authority* was one of the dominating concerns of Second Temple Judaism. This involved defining, or redefining, *who* or *what* was to provide the authoritative standard or rule for conduct and belief for members of God’s people at a time when the established offices and instruments of religious authority were breaking down” (Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel*, 119). He discusses changes in the intertestamental period (119–21).

43. *Jubilees*, 15.33–34; James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2:87.

44. Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel*, 398.

45. Elliott, *The Survivors of Israel*, 398.