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July 21st: Ezra 9 & 2 Timothy 4

July 20, 2021



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The people intermarry with their idolatrous neighbours. Paul's final charge to Timothy.

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Transcript

Ezra chapter 9. After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites, for they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost. As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak, and pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat appalled.

Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice.

And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands to the Lord my God, saying, O my God, I am ashamed and blushed to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt, and for our iniquities we, our kings and our priests, have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as it is today.

But now for a brief moment favour has been shown by the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our slavery. For we are slaves, yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving, to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem. And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments, which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, The land that you are entering to take possession of it is a land impure with the impurity of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations that have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness.

Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever. And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved, and have given us such a remnant as this, shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor any to escape? O Lord, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this.

The focus of the concluding two chapters of the Book of Ezra, Exogami, marrying outside of Israel, is one that unsettles the sensibilities of many modern readers. It has provoked much discussion among commentators. The insertion of ill-fitting categories such as ethnicity, race and nationality into our consideration of these passages can easily produce confusion of what is actually at issue.

Concern about intermarriage is hardly a theme peculiar to Ezra and Nehemiah, the same issue as a prominent one at the time of the Exodus, for instance. In Exodus 34, verses 11-16, we see the Lord speaking to this issue, emphasizing the importance of resisting intermarriage with the pagan nations. Observe what I command you this day.

Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. Take care, lest you make a covenant with the

inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars, and break their pillars, and cut down their Asheron.

For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous god. Lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrificed their gods, and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods, and make your sons whore after their gods. The warning here is about covenants with surrounding pagan peoples, leading to idolatry and syncretism, followed by intermarriage, which will confirm the Israelites in such idolatrous worship.

Deuteronomy 7, verses 1-4 present a similar warning, but with intermarriage in this case preceding and leading to idolatrous worship. When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Gurgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them.

You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons, or taking their daughters for your sons. For they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.

The story of Israel contained notable cautionary tales of intermarriage with pagans. The sin of Israel in Numbers chapter 25, when they yoked themselves to Baal or Peor, as a result of their intermarriage with idolatrous Moabites, is one example. More famously, the heart of King Solomon was led away from the Lord by his many foreign wives.

On the other hand, there are examples of Israelites having positive relations with foreign wives. Ruth the Moabites is the most prominent example of a foreign woman who married into Israel. Rahab is another.

Moses married a Midianite woman, Zipporah, and the Lord defended him from the complaints of Miriam and Aaron in Numbers chapter 25. The chapter opens with Ezra being informed of extensive intermarriage between the Israelites and the peoples of the lands. We ought to pay attention to the use of the phrase, and the inclusion of a typical list of nations, characteristic of that associated with the first entry of Israel into the land.

The Hivites and Gurgashites are not mentioned in Ezra, but the Ammonites, Moabites and Egyptians are, groups that were mentioned in Deuteronomy chapter 23 verses 3-8. The concern here is not, as many have mistakenly understood it, one of mere ethnic purity, but is rather about preserving the holy status of the people themselves. They are the

holy seed, replanted in the land after having been uprooted by the Lord's judgment.

It is imperative that they be a people set apart to the Lord, lest they suffer a similar judgment once more, and indeed such a judgment would almost certainly be final. The danger of mixing the holy seed with the wild seed of the nations is one that is often highlighted in scripture. Indeed, one could understand the rite of circumcision as representing a pruning of the seed of Israel.

We might also see this principle of separation symbolically represented in the law of Leviticus chapter 19 verse 19. You shall keep my statutes, you shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind, you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made with two kinds of material. While the concern not to intermarry with the nations has a straightforward moral concern underlying it, the concern that the people not be drawn away from the Lord in their hearts and their worship, there are also principles of cultic holiness present here.

Principles of cultic holiness concern being set apart and rendered distinct from others. Israel's principles of endogamy, of marrying within itself, were not merely about avoiding negative influences, but were also about jealously maintaining its own separateness and distinctiveness as a people. Not because ethnic separateness as such is so to be protected, but because of the covenant.

We should remember that many people of different ethnic backgrounds became part of Israel over time. Israel departed from Egypt with a great mixed multitude that assimilated into the people, for instance. However, whereas persons of other ethnic backgrounds and people groups could convert to the true worship of the Lord, become Israelites, and members of a set-apart people, and then intermarry with Israelites, Israel itself was not to mix itself with the nations around it and allow itself to be assimilated into them, or have mixed marriages that encouraged religious syncretism, or which compromised Israel's set-apart holy status.

This would likely also have restricted intermarriage with Gentile God-fearers, who, while true worshippers of the Lord, would compromise the covenant status of any children born. In addition to faith in the Lord, becoming an Israelite would be necessary for free intermarriage. The importance of maintaining distinctiveness that came with the set-apart status of Israel was especially pronounced for priests, as we see in Leviticus chapter 21, verses 6-7.

Again, we need to beware of treating these restrictions simply as if moral ones. There is nothing sinful or compromised about marrying a widow, for instance. Indeed, elsewhere, scripture encourages widows to remarry.

The point is rather that the high priest needs to be set-apart, and a virgin of his own people and tribe was the sort of wife that he would need to maintain the optimal

separateness and integrity of the high priesthood. The issue of intermarriage in Ezra chapter 9 is greatly exacerbated by the fact that the priests and the Levites have also been intermarrying. Not only was the separateness of the priesthood more imperative, but in intermarrying as they had, the priests and Levites were setting a bad example for everyone else.

We should also consider here the fate of the people of the former northern kingdom of Israel, who had been displaced among and assimilated into other nations, the Samaritan population contemporary with Ezra, for instance, was one that resulted from intermarriage and religious syncretism. Few things were more important than that the returnees not fall into a similar condition. We should also appreciate the way that the holiness of the entire people of Israel is more pronounced here.

All, not merely the priests, are a holy people and must jealously guard that status. The people are here described as the holy seed, language that is elsewhere only found in Isaiah chapter 6, verse 13. And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.

The holy seed is its stump. The hope of the people rests upon this holy seed. It is absolutely imperative that it not be corrupted, adulterated or compromised.

Intermarriage would always have held appeal when Israel was not the only group in the land. Intermarrying with wealthy and powerful Canaanite neighbours and other peoples would be a means of increasing influence, status, wealth and security. In the early years of Israel's life in the land, for instance, when they were vulnerable and often surrounded by more powerful neighbours, intermarriage would be a shrewd means to establish greater security.

For a king like Solomon, marriages would be ways of making alliances, treaties and alignments with wealthy and powerful families within the land and other nations around it. While desire for attractive women was part of what was occurring, it was far from the full picture. When he heard the news, Ezra was deeply shaken.

The returnees were supposed to be the faithful seed from which a great people would be regrown. That they would so compromise their set-apartness, both their moral and religious holiness in avoidance of the iniquity of idolatry and paganism, but also their covenantal holiness as distinct priestly people set apart from their neighbours, strikes at the very core of Ezra's hope for the people. He responds by dramatic acts of distress and mourning, expressing his horror at what he has discovered.

After many hours of publicly expressing his distress, at the time of the evening sacrifice, he begins to pray. He expresses his own shame and embarrassment as he comes towards the Lord, recognising that he comes as a representative and member of a people that has utterly disgraced itself. This is not just a matter of the current generation

of Israelites, the returnees who have intermarried with the pagan peoples, but also their ancestors whose sins had led to them being in exile in the first place.

At this point in history, after they had been put into exile, the Lord has shown great grace to them in giving them some measure of restoration. Ezra expresses this in verses 8 and 9, where, as Andrew Steinman notes, he expresses on four occasions the different gifts that God has given to them. God has given them a secure hold within his holy place.

God has given them a little reviving in their slavery. God has given them some reviving, in verse 9, to set up his house, and then has also given them protection in Judea and Jerusalem. That the people would sin as they have done at this moment in time, in the face of such grace, and also to jeopardise such grace, is scandalous and appalling.

The Lord has not forsaken them. He has caused the kings of Persia to show mercy and grace to them. He has granted them hope.

He has not destroyed them. That they would be prepared so to forsake him at this time is an expression of the most wicked ingratitude and faithlessness. Ezra expresses the sin that the people have committed.

The Lord has instructed them through his prophets, not least Moses himself, that they were given the Promised Land in part on account of the impurity of the peoples, and also in a manner contingent upon their not confusing themselves with the peoples. Their failure to observe this commandment, repeated on many occasions in scripture, threatens their very presence in the land. Just as the Lord seems to be granting them a foothold in the land once again, they seem to be prepared to throw it all away in their wickedness.

Ezra's prayer, more than anything else, is an expression of his distress at the faithlessness of the people, in the face of the gracious goodness of God. In contrast to great prayers of intercession that we find elsewhere in scripture, he presents no arguments that the Lord should show mercy, no appeals to the Lord's purpose for his people, to the promises and commitments of the covenant, or to the Lord's name among the Gentiles. He merely declares the sin of the people, declares the justice of God, and places himself and the people before the Lord.

A question to consider, where in the New Testament do we see the principle of the separateness of the people of God being applied to Christians? What can we learn from the example of Ezra and the people here? As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry. And give unto me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing. Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica, Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful for me for ministry. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.

When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the cuppersmith did me great harm. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds.

Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. At my first defence no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them.

But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.

To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen. Greek Prisca and Aquila and the household of Anesophorus.

Erastus remained at Corinth and I left Trophimus who was ill at Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you. The final chapter of 2nd Timothy and likely the final chapter of Paul's Corpus begins with a solemn charge from the Apostle.

Timothy has on previous occasions been addressed or charged in the company of many witnesses. Here Paul charges him in the presence of God and Christ Jesus in terms of the eschatological horizon of Christ's coming in judgment. He speaks of this event in three terms.

Judgment of the living and the dead, his appearing and his kingdom. Each of these terms brings out a particular facet of the event that Paul is looking forward to and in terms of which he wants Timothy to act. These realities are imminent.

The judgment of the world has already been set in motion by the death and resurrection of Christ and with AD 70 on the horizon the establishment of the kingdom and the judgment of this world is very near at hand. This has the effect of intensifying the sense of the urgency of Paul's charge to Timothy. The charge has a moral urgency but it also has an eschatological urgency.

The time is short and the judge is at the door. Timothy in this situation must preach the word. He needs to be a faithful servant of the message of the gospel declaring it boldly.

He must take every opportunity that is granted to him always being prepared to seize such opportunities when they present themselves He must be ready in season and out of

season. Many commentators have taken this expression as referring to the way that Timothy must take the opportunities whether or not they are convenient to him. However, Philip Towner suggests that a background in the philosophical discourse of the time makes more sense of the statement here.

Philosophers spoke, for instance, about the importance of taking the right moment to speak a particular truth so as to be most likely to receive a favourable reception. The problem is that when the time is short you do not have such a luxury. Truth must be presented urgently and persistently, not merely when the time seems most propitious for it.

Paul, in essence, seems to be saying, don't wait for the perfect moment and as a result find that all opportunity has passed you by. He must convict people with the truth. He must challenge false teachers and opponents in a more disciplinary sense.

He needs to exhort, encourage and to teach, to provide people with instruction that moves them towards the truth and righteous behaviour. And in all of this he has to act with patience and forbearance, with composure and mastery over his temper. Much of what Paul is doing in this charge is reinforcing points that he has made previously in the letter, for instance in chapter 2 verses 24-25 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

Besides the gravity of the eschatological frame within which Paul has presented Timothy's vocation, he also wants Timothy to recognise the urgency of the present time, as people are about to be desensitised to and drift away from the truth. A widespread rejection of the truth is on the horizon. This will occur as people become impatient with and intolerant of the truth and its teachers.

It will become unpleasant, tiresome, boring, unpalatable and burdensome to them, and they will turn away from it. Along with this will come an appetite for falsehood that will drive a quest for teachers who will satisfy it. Paul describes this with the colourful metaphor of itching ears.

People who reject the truth in this way will accumulate false teachers. Paul has described some of these movements already in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verses 6-7. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning, and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

As this movement away from the truth occurs people will wander off into myths. Elsewhere in the pastoral epistles Paul has warned against the impact of myths, the way that empty speculations and groundless fables and esoteric doctrines all distract and detract from the clarity of the truth in the gospel. Such false teachings are perhaps

attractive precisely because they do not have a practical bite to them.

They flatter people that they are particularly illuminated, that they have a peculiar insight into reality, but they do not speak with any moral force into people's lives. Faced with the rising tide of such false teaching and false teachers, Timothy's faithfulness in his charge is all the more imperative. He needs to be sober-minded, a person who is alert and serious, who recognises the gravity of the issues that he is dealing with and acts accordingly.

Once again, as he has done on several occasions in this epistle, Paul charges Timothy to endure suffering. In the days to come his mettle will be tested and he needs to come through proven and faithful. Timothy must do the work of an evangelist.

The exact nature of the evangelist's duties is not entirely clear. The role of the evangelist is mentioned alongside others in Ephesians chapter 4 verses 11 and 12. And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Philip was an example of an evangelist in the book of Acts. It is possible that the role of the evangelist is particularly defined by itinerancy. Persons like Philip travelled from place to place, they were not just pastors in a single location.

Nor for that matter were the apostles like the Twelve or like Paul. Perhaps the role of the evangelist was an early church role that mediated between the apostles and then figures like the overseers and the elders. The book of 2 Timothy is so important because the times are perilous.

Paul's apostolic ministry is reaching its end. He knows that he is about to die. False teachers are on the rise.

Former workers for Christ are deserting their posts and others seem to be falling back dismayed. Paul himself has experienced widespread personal rejection and persons he once depended upon have let him down. Faithful and trustworthy ministers are spread thin on the ground.

If there were ever a time when faithful and committed ministers were absolutely essential, it was that time. Paul speaks of his own situation. He is already in the process of being poured out as a drink offering.

What exactly Paul means by speaking of himself as an oblation is not entirely clear. Perhaps the sacrifice is that of Christ and he is being poured out upon that sacrifice. Elsewhere he uses similar imagery in a different context.

Philippians chapter 2 verse 17. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. There the sacrifice that

Paul is being poured out upon is the sacrifice of the Philippians faith and we might presume that the pouring out refers to his death.

In this passage in 2 Timothy, the pouring out is not directly identified with the death itself but seems to be connected with it more generally. The pouring out is the extended process that leads up to and is concluded in the death. This is another example of Paul's understanding of Christian service and ministry within a conceptual framework offered by sacrifice.

He shifts in verse 7 to a familiar imagery of athletic endeavour. He has fought the good fight. Paul might be referring to military imagery here or he might be working with the athletic metaphor.

He presents the Christian life and the task of ministry as like a race that he has run. In 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verses 24 to 27 he wrote. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly.

I do not box as one beating the air, but I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. Another instance of an athletic metaphor can be found in Philippians chapter 3 verses 12 to 14. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Here too Paul presents the faithful running of the race that was set before him as one with a great reward, the crown of righteousness, a reward that will be granted to all faithful servants who look for Christ's appearing. Paul has described Timothy as his son, as one who follows his example as a son would follow his father's example, presenting his own faithfulness in running the course of Christian ministry.

Paul wants to give Timothy something to follow. He also wants Timothy to recognise that he needs to fill the shoes of Paul as Paul leaves the scene. The charge that Paul is giving to Timothy here has many of the same elements as those in Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 and 2. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Those who faithfully run this race are surrounded by many others that have done so before them. Paul is like a relay runner, finishing his leg, shouting a word of encouragement to the man to whom he has passed his baton. The remainder of the chapter that mostly contains personal instructions gives a tantalising window into the final chapter of the Apostle's life.

Asking Timothy to come to him soon, Paul speaks of the way that he has been deserted and abandoned by some, of how he has been cut off from others as they have gone to different locations, and of the great testing that he has undergone in others' absence. Demas was a Gentile fellow-worker of Paul who is mentioned in Colossians chapter 4 verse 14. After having read of Demas as a faithful companion of Paul in other books, we might be horrified to discover that he abandoned Paul in such a serious manner.

Such love of the present age is described in 1 John chapter 2 verse 15. Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Paul's judgement of Demas' motives is sobering, especially considering that this is the last biblical reference to him. In contrast to Demas, Crescens and Titus had likely not abandoned Paul, but they had gone to other locations, depriving Paul of their company and assistance. Only Luke remained with Paul at that point.

For much of the end of the book of Acts, Luke had accompanied Paul in his travels, and it seems that he remained with Paul at this point in Rome. If the reference to Demas in verse 10 is a saddening reference to a once faithful and stalwart companion of Paul who had fallen back and backslidden, the reference to Mark in verse 11 has something of the opposite character. Paul had refused to take John Mark as a companion on his second missionary journey, not trusting him to stay the course.

In Acts chapter 15 verses 37 to 40 we read of this episode. Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark, but Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other.

Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. Now in the final period of his life, the best part of two decades after that original confrontation with Barnabas, Paul sees the value of having Mark by his side. Just as those who were once faithful can fall back like Demas, those who once fell back can prove faithful, like Mark.

Paul has sent Tychicus to Ephesus. Perhaps he is the one bearing this epistle to Timothy. Tychicus was also the bearer of the epistles to the Colossians and the Ephesians.

On his way to visit Paul, presumably in Rome, from Asia, Paul wants Timothy to pick up

the cloak, the parchments, and the books that he left behind in Troas. Towner describes the sort of item that Paul's cloak would have been. This garment was a heavy, circular-shaped cape, made from goat hair, hide, or coarse wool, for outer wear and especially important in the winter months.

It was not a garment one took lightly, for it would have been relatively expensive, most men owning only one such piece of clothing, and it doubled as an outer protective covering for sleeping. A person such as Paul, accustomed to travel and to nights in unpredictable situations, would certainly regard this garment as an essential and typical part of his kit, leading to his request to have it back by winter. Paul was a writer and a student of Scripture, and he requests that Timothy bring with him the books, and above all the parchments.

Considerable scholarly speculation has been prompted by this instruction, people wondering what exactly Paul had in mind. Are the books and parchments referring to the same item, the books, namely the parchments? Or are they two different classes of material? Did the parchments refer to Paul's own notebooks? Are the books or scrolls parts of the Old Testament Scripture? Are the early church writings maybe Paul's own writings, and perhaps parts of the New Testament Scripture? Such questions cannot be finally settled, but they do tantalise. Paul speaks here of a character called Alexander, who opposed the message of the Gospel.

He warns Timothy to beware of him, and he may be the same Alexander as the one mentioned in 1 Timothy 1, verses 19 and 20. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme. Verses 16-18 record some of the last reliable biographical details concerning the Apostle Paul.

His first hearing was likely a hearing in preparation for the trial, to see if there was a case to be heard. Many historically have taken this not as a hearing, but as a trial itself, Paul being released as a result. There is a long historical tradition of Paul having two periods of imprisonment in Rome, and what Paul describes here would be seen as the end of the first.

It is, however, I believe, more likely that this refers to an arraignment or hearing, a difficult event at which no one stood by Paul to offer moral support or evidence to back up his case. Nevertheless, the Lord was with Paul in this experience and supported him through it. Paul describes this in terms of being rescued from the lion's mouth.

Towner makes the intriguing case that this is part of a larger set of allusions to Psalm 22, a psalm in terms of which Paul is describing his experience. When we consider the importance of Psalm 22 in the context of Christ's crucifixion, this becomes all the more interesting. Towner picks out a number of expressions from the psalm.

This reference to the kingship of the Lord is also alluded to in the heavenly kingdom of which Paul speaks in verse 18. For Towner, the principal allusion around which all of these secondary allusions cluster is found in verse 21 of the psalm. By presenting his experience in terms of the psalm, Paul is articulating his struggle in terms of the righteous sufferer, and most notably of Christ.

Paul's use of several terms relating to deliverance and salvation is also picking up upon the language of the psalm. The final verses conclude with some remaining greetings, instructions and news. Priscilla and Aquila had worked alongside Paul in Acts chapter 18 and had travelled with him at various points.

They had lived in several different locations, Corinth, Rome and Ephesus among them. Anesophorus had been mentioned back in chapter 1 as one who had shown peculiar faithfulness to Paul. Paul had there expressed his desire that the Lord would grant his household mercy.

Erastus, who may be the same person as mentioned in Romans chapter 16 verse 23, was left behind in Corinth. If he is the same person as mentioned in Romans, he was the city treasurer. Trophimus, mentioned in Acts chapter 20 verse 4, had accompanied Paul for part of his third missionary journey.

Most notably, Trophimus had inadvertently precipitated Paul's capture in Jerusalem, which had led to him being taken to Rome. The Jews believed that Paul had taken Trophimus, the Gentile, into the temple, and as a result he was seized. Given the considerable danger of travelling during the winter months, Paul wants Timothy to make his way to him as soon as possible.

With the possible exception of Linus, who is identified as a Roman bishop within the tradition. The other figures mentioned in verse 21 are not known to us and are only mentioned here in the New Testament. Paul closes his second epistle to Timothy and his final letter with a personal greeting to Timothy, and then a more general greeting to Timothy and his companions.

A question to consider. In verses 3 and 4, Paul describes the process of drifting away from, and then rejecting the truth. What are the stages that we might discern in such a process, and what might be some of the signs that they are occurring?