

In: Trevor J. Burke & J. K. Elliott (eds.), *Paul and the Corinthians*. Leiden: Brill, 2003: 327-339.

PubPage Below: 327

The Legacy of 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 in the *Apocalypse of Paul*

Vernon K. Robbins

Emory University and University of Stellenbosch

Biblical interpreters have investigated with great energy and skill Paul's assertions in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 about a man who was 'caught up into Paradise.'¹ Prof. Margaret E. Thrall, whom it is a privilege to honour with this essay, has contributed substantively to this activity.² Paul's comments reach deeply into Jewish and Hellenistic-Roman traditions about journeying into the heavens, and they exhibit many presuppositions in the Mediterranean world about the nature of a person in relation to the heavens.

Rather than focus directly on 2 Cor 12:2-4, this essay will explore the manner in which the third or fourth century author of the *Apocalypse of Paul* created an entire Apocalypse out of these verses.³ Overall, the essay is an exploration of the manner in which early Christians developed a first century apocalyptic rhetorlect into multiple

¹ The research has been so extensive that it is necessary to be highly selective in the notes. I am grateful to Robert von Thaden for his bibliographical assistance for this essay.

² Margaret E. Thrall, 'Paul's Journey to Paradise: Some Exegetical Issues in 2 Cor 12,2-4', in *The Corinthian Correspondence* (BETL 125; ed. R. Bieringer; Leuven: University Press, 1996), 345-363; *idem*, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (2 vols., ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994-2000), 2: 772-799.

³ In recognition of J. K. Elliott's contribution to NT scholarship and this honorary volume, this essay will use the translation of the Latin manuscript of *Apoc. Paul* in J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation based on M. R. James* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 616-644. Cf. Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 16-19. For an alternative English translation of the Latin text, which includes variants from other manuscript traditions, see H. Duensing, 'Apocalypse of Paul', in Hennecke-Schneemelcher (1965), 2:755-798.

literary apocalypses from the end of the first century through the fourth centuries C.E.⁴ More specifically, the essay investigates the resources

PubPage Below: 328

of invention early Christians used to elaborate basic apocalyptic *topoi* through amplificatory description.⁵ In addition, the essay explores the creation of a Christian cosmos that inspired Dante's *Inferno*.⁶

Only occasionally do commentaries on 2 Corinthians refer to the *Apocalypse of Paul*. Including this later literature can enrich our insights both into the NT and into early Christian discourse beyond the first century. First, the essay focuses on 'visions and revelations of the Lord' in 2 Cor 12:1. Second, it focuses on 'hearing unutterable words' in 2 Cor 12:4. Third, it focuses on Paul's body and on the journey of souls when they leave the body. The overall goal of the essay is to contribute to an environment for interpreting NT texts that moves down at least to the fourth century C.E.

Visions and Revelations of the Lord

Paul's reference to 'visions and revelations of the Lord' in 2 Cor 12:1 invites many questions. First, does 'the Lord' refer to God or to Christ? Second, if it refers to Christ, is the genitive subjective or objective? Third, if 'the Lord' has, in any sense, an objective function, does it mean that Christ appears directly to Paul? Victor P. Furnish asserts that the reference to the Lord 'is certainly to Christ, as in vv. 7-8.' Christ, and not God, is the

⁴ For rhetorolect, see Vernon K. Robbins, 'The Dialectical Nature of Early Christian Discourse', *Scriptura* 59 (1996) 359-361. Online:

<http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/robbins/dialect/dialect353.html>; *idem*, 'The Intertexture of Apocalyptic Discourse in the Gospel of Mark', in D. F. Watson (ed.), *The Intertexture of Apocalyptic Discourse* (Symposium; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002) forthcoming.

⁵ Robbins, 'The Intertexture of Apocalyptic', forthcoming. There is not space here to investigate the manner in which *Apoc. Paul* elaborates apocalyptic *topoi* by means of argumentative enthymemes.

⁶ Cf. Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 616; A. Hilhorst, "A Visit to Paradise: Apocalypse of Paul 45 and Its Background," in *Paradise Interpreted: Representations of Biblical Paradise in Judaism and Christianity* (Themes in Biblical Narrative, Jewish and Christian Traditions 2; ed. Gerhard P. Luttikhuisen; Boston: Brill, 1999), 129.

originator of the experience, but Christ does not actually appear to Paul.⁷ Margaret E. Thrall agrees that 'these could be revelations originating with Christ (with *kuriou* as a genitive of origin), visions bestowed by Christ.' She suggests in addition, following A. T. Lincoln,⁸ that we should consider it possible that Paul's statements 'imply a visionary experience of Christ.'⁹

PubPage Below: 329

One might suppose, on the basis of a near consensus in NT scholarship that 'the Lord' in 2 Cor 12:1 refers to Christ, that second through fourth century Christian apocalypses would feature Christ centrally in their writings and this central function would create a context in which 'the Lord' would almost always refer to Christ. Christ is important in *Apoc. Paul*, as we will see below, but it is not the case that the role of Christ produces a predominant use of 'the Lord' for Christ. Rather, most usually in *Apoc. Paul* 'the Lord' refers to the Lord God who made the earth and the heavens and all that is in it.

Apoc. Paul 3 begins with Paul asserting, 'While I was in the body in which I was snatched up to the third heaven, the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Speak to the people,...".' This is a prophetic commissioning that is not unusual in an apocalypse.¹⁰ As in Paul's writings, so here 'the Lord' could refer either to God or to Christ. The introduction refers to 'the shoes in which he [Paul] walked teaching the word of God' (2). Thus, 'the Lord' in 'the word of the Lord' could refer to God. Perhaps the phrase 'the word of the Lord' in *Apoc. Paul* 3 is an intentional merger of 'word of God' with 'word of Christ.' In this case, the Lord God could be the source and the Lord Jesus Christ could be the agent of the word, like Rev 1:1: 'The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants'

⁷ Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (AB 32A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 524.

⁸ Andrew T. Lincoln, "'Paul the Visionary": The Setting and Significance of the Rapture to Paradise in Ii Corinthians XII.1-10', *NTS* 25 (1979): 218.

⁹ Thrall, 'Paul's Journey', 359; cf. *idem*, *Commentary*, 774-775.

¹⁰ Cf. 1 Enoch 14:24: And the Lord called me with his own mouth and said to me, 'Come near to me, Enoch, and to my holy Word'. See G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 254-256.

'The word of the Lord' extends throughout *Apoc. Paul* 3-10.¹¹ 'The word' opens by commanding Paul to 'Speak to the people' (3) and continues by stating information he is to tell them. At the beginning the word warns against tempting 'the Lord who made you,' calls humans 'sons of God,' accuses people of doing works of the devil in the 'faith of Christ,' and asserts that humans sin against God while all other creatures serve God (3). This means that the only other use of 'the Lord' in the opening context refers to God. As *Apoc. Paul* 4-7 continues, four times the narration refers to 'the Lord' in contexts where the subsequent speech or narration indicates that the reference is to 'the Lord God Almighty.' In *Apoc. Paul* 9, the voice of God explains to the angels who oversee righteous people who hunger and

PubPage Below: 330

thirst because of God's name that God's grace is appointed to them (the angels), and God's help, who is God's well-beloved Son, 'shall be present with them [the suffering righteous], guiding them every hour; ministering also to them, never deserting them, since their place is his [the Son's] habitation.' When the discourse refers to Christ, it uses the term God's Son, rather than 'the Lord'. In the context of the opening 'word', then, when the discourse refers to Christ, it uses the term 'Son' rather than Lord.¹²

The cosmic interests of *Apoc. Paul*, like the cosmic interests of the Revelation to John, keep 'the Lord God' in a place of prominence. The Lord Jesus Christ is a highly important personage, but he functions in the context of the power of the Lord God Almighty who created all things. In other words, this apocalyptic discourse does not emphasize the role of the Lord Jesus Christ as the agent of creation, in the manner of precreation discourse.¹³ Rather, God is the source of creation, and Christ is a primary agent of its redemption through the grace of God which has brought forth the suffering,

¹¹ There is a shift in narration at 8, but 'the word' ends with the final sentence in 10.

¹² *Apoc. Paul* 11, 12 use 'the Lord' when referring to the potential helper for the wicked souls, which one would expect from 9 to refer to Christ.

¹³ Vernon K. Robbins, 'Argumentative Textures in Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation', in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts: Essays from the 2000 Lund Conference* (ed. A. Eriksson, T. H. Olbricht, and W. Übelacker; Emory Studies in Early Christianity; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), 54-63; cf. idem, 'The Dialectical Nature', 359-361.

death, and resurrection of the beloved Son.¹⁴ 'The Lord' in 2 Cor 12:1 probably refers to Christ, since it follows the statement about 'the God and Father of the Lord Jesus' in 2 Cor 11:31. In *Apoc. Paul 3*, in contrast, the originator of 'the word of the Lord' probably is the Lord God Almighty. As we will see, the Lord Jesus Christ remains at a distance from Paul throughout the composition, never appearing directly to Paul or speaking directly to him. It is possible, of course, that Christ still could be perceived by the reader to be the transmitter of God's word to Paul in *Apoc. Paul 3*. One cannot automatically presume, however, that 'the Lord' refers to Christ rather than to the Lord God.

As the narration proceeds, the term Lord occurs in the phrase 'the Lord Jesus Christ' in *Apoc. Paul 21*. While moving down from the third heaven to the great ocean, the angel tells Paul that 'the Lord Jesus Christ, the King Eternal' will come to reign over his saints for a thousand years in the land of promise, which will appear when

PubPage Below: 331

the first earth is dissolved. This differs from Rev 20:4-6; 21:2, where the thousand years of Christ's reign occurs before the first earth passes away (Rev 21:1).

In *Apoc. Paul*, 'the land of promise' exists outside of heaven, beyond the great ocean; and it is the realm of 'the light of heaven which lightens all the earth' (21). Prior to the appearance of the land of promise, souls of the just are dismissed to this place for a while when they have gone out of the body. References to 'the meek who shall inherit the earth' (Matt 5:5) and to 'those who hunger and thirst after righteousness' (Matt 5:6) in *Apoc. Paul 21-22* suggest that Matthean conceptions of 'the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (Matt 25:34) play a role in the function of the land of promise in *Apoc. Paul*.

As a result of a primary focus on the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2) and Paradise (2 Cor 12:3) in some scholarship on *Apoc. Paul*, there is not always a clear focus on the land of promise.¹⁵ In *Apoc. Paul 21*, Paul explains that 'the beginning of the foundation' of the land of promise is 'on the river which waters all the earth,' which is the great ocean. One gets there by going down from the third heaven through the second heaven to the

¹⁴ *Apoc. Paul 44*.

¹⁵ Cf. Hilhorst, 'Apocalypse of Paul 45', 138.

firmament and over the gates of heaven to the great ocean, where one sees the foundation of the land of promise (21). From the perspective of *Apoc. Paul*, this land would have been created on 'the face of the waters' when God said, 'Let there be light' (Gen 1:2-3). In other words, the light God created and separated from darkness (Gen 1:3-4) is a realm of light with its foundation on the great ocean. This realm was created before God created the heavens and the earth in the midst of the great ocean, with the ocean surrounding all of the heavens and earth (Gen 1:7-10). The realm of light with its foundation on the great ocean constitutes 'the land of promise' that will appear only when the present earth passes away (*Apoc. Paul* 21).¹⁶ In *Apoc. Paul*, this land is the special kingdom God has given to Christ (Luke 22:29), which the righteous inherit through Christ (Matt 25:34).¹⁷

PubPage Below: 332

References to Christ become frequent when the angel takes Paul to 'the City of Christ,' which is by the Acherusian Lake in the land of promise (*Apoc. Paul* 22-30).¹⁸ The angel explains to Paul that a journey into this city leads to God, so not everyone is permitted to enter it (22).¹⁹ If a person is a fornicator and impious, but has converted and is repentant, when the person first goes out of the body, that person is taken to worship God. After the person worships God, by 'command of the Lord' (read 'God') the person is delivered to the angel Michael, who baptizes the person in the Acherusian Lake. Then

¹⁶ For the relation of this description of the cosmos in *Apoc. Paul* to Babylonian and early Greek cosmographies, see Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 282-283. *Apoc. Paul* envisions the land of promise as one of regions beyond the river Oceanus.

¹⁷ It appears that the land of promise in *Apoc. Paul* is an insertion of the Matthean 'kingdom prepared for you' (Matt 25:34) into traditional apocalyptic cosmographies. This accounts for much of the overlap and confusion about the relation of the land of promise to Paradise in *Apoc. Paul*.

¹⁸ For the Acherusian Lake, see Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 283. For *Apoc. Paul*, the kingdom over which Christ is in charge (Matt 25:34) is currently a 'land' located beyond the river Oceanus in which the subterranean Acherusian Lake flows to the surface.

¹⁹ There is a direct mode of access between the seventh heaven, where God is, and the City of Christ, which is perceived to be in a region 'below' the heavens. Thus, the angel explains to Paul: David sings psalms before him [God] in the seventh heaven, and as it is done in the heavens so also below [in the land of promise] ... as it is performed in heaven, so also on earth [the new earth, which is the land of promise].

Michael leads the person into the City of Christ alongside people who have never sinned (22).

During Paul's journey through the City of Christ, he does not see Christ. The reason is that 'Christ the Son of God sits at the right hand of his Father' in the seventh heaven (29), and the City of Christ is in the land of promise outside of heaven. After the angel takes Paul throughout all the land of promise, including the City of Christ within it, he leads Paul outside this region, over 'the ocean which supports the foundations of heaven' toward the outer limit in the direction of the setting sun (31). There Paul sees the place of darkness, which existed before God created light (Gen 1:2) and which God separated from the light after creating the light (Gen 1:4). All kinds of sinners dwell in the place where all is darkness, sorrow and sadness, and the angel takes Paul to see all of them (*Apoc. Paul* 31-43). This is the outer darkness where the unrighteous 'weep and gnash their teeth' (16, 42).²⁰ Paul weeps and cries out at various times when he sees the punishments the sinners are enduring (33, 39, 40, 42).

Finally, when Paul is fully in the north he looks to the west and sees men and women in extreme cold and snow 'who say that Christ did not rise from the dead and that this flesh will not rise again' (42). When Paul stretches out his hands, weeps, and sighs, 'It were bet-

PubPage Below: 333

ter for us if we had not been born, all of us who are sinners,' the people see Paul weeping with the angel, and they cry out, 'Lord God have mercy upon us!' (43). At this point, Paul sees the heavens open and the archangel Michael descend with 'the whole army of angels.' Michael tells the sinners that he prays unceasingly for the entire human race, and he asks them to weep with him, and he will weep with them, the angels and 'the well-beloved Paul.' When the people weep and cry out, 'Have pity on us, Son of God!', Paul prays, 'O Lord God! Have pity on your creation, have pity on the sons of men, have pity on your own image' (43).

When Paul prays to God, he sees the heaven move 'like a tree shaken by the wind,' which allows him to see the throne room of God (44). In addition to seeing

²⁰ Cf. Matt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 25:30.

twenty-four elders and the four beasts,²¹ Paul hears a voice that asks why God's angels and ministers intercede for humans. When the angels answer that they see God's many kindnesses to the human race, Paul sees 'the Son of God descending from heaven' with a diadem on his head (44). When all the people in punishment cry out to the 'Son of the High God' to have pity on them, a voice goes out from the Son of God telling the people of his suffering on the cross. Then the voice of Christ tells them that for the sake of Michael the archangel, Paul the well-beloved, their brethren in the world, their sons, and for the sake of his own kindness, he gives all people in punishment 'a night and a day of refreshment forever,' i.e., a 'sabbath' rest every seventh day (44).²² After the sinners cry out, 'We bless you, Son of God ...,' the evil angels assert that the sinners received this great grace simply 'for the sake of Paul the well-beloved of God who descended to you' (44). After this episode, Christ does not appear again in *Apoc. Paul*.

In sum, Christ does not appear directly to Paul in *Apoc. Paul*. Paul is not taken before the throne of God, nor does he see a vision of Christ seated at God's right hand.²³ Paul sees the throne of God at a distance, and he sees Christ at a distance, observes the gracious-

PubPage Below: 334

ness of Christ's approach to sinners, and evokes a response of mercy from Christ for sinners. Paul does not see Christ in the third heaven, and he does not see Christ in the land of promise, which is the place of light in which the City of Christ is located. However, when Paul visits the place of darkness, sees all the suffering there, and responds to it with weeping and prayer to God, the heavens open and he sees the descent of the archangel Michael with a multitude of angels and, after a while, the descent of the

²¹ Cf. Rev. 4:4-6.

²² There are strong arguments that the source of this concept of 'sabbath' rest is rabbinic tradition: I. Lévi, 'Le repos sabbatique des âmes damnées', *Revue des études juives* 25 (1892): 1-13; T. Silverstein, *Visio Sancti Pauli: The History of the Apocalypse in Latin together with Nine Texts* (Studies and Documents 4; London, 1935), 79, 124, n. 96); cf. Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 17.

²³ Contrast J. D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 123-124; cf. Thrall, 'Paul's Journey', 359.

Son of God with a diadem on his head. The function both of Michael and of Christ are redemptive, relieving the suffering of sinners in the place of darkness. Paul's weeping, sighing, stretching out of his hands, and praying to God plays a role in calling forth the actions of kindness by God, by Michael and by Christ.

Utterances Forbidden to Express

It has already become clear that *Apoc. Paul* features Paul seeing many things as well as hearing many things. According to Paul in 2 Cor 12:4, the experience of the journey into the third heaven was auditory, but Thrall and others observe that Paul's experience had to be visual as well as auditory.²⁴ It is interesting that the opening paragraphs of *Apoc. Paul* (3-10) focus on Paul's hearing 'the word of the Lord.' 'The word of the Lord' instructs Paul to ask the people how long they will continue with their transgressions, their sins and their tempting of God. Paul is to tell them that they are sons of God, but they are doing the works of the devil in the faith of Christ. Every creature serves God, but humans sin against God 'more than all nature' (3). 'The word' continues by recounting instances where creation has pleaded with God to do something to deal with the impieties and injustices of the human race. The sun often addressed God about it (4); so did the moon and stars (5), and the sea and the earth (6).²⁵ God responded to all of them that his eye sees and his ear hears, but his 'patience bears with them until they be converted and repent' (4, 5, 6 [2]). After this sequence, the section explains the special arrangement in the cosmos for humans, since they are

PubPage Below: 335

the only ones in the world who sin. Every evening when the sun sets and twelve hours later when morning begins, all the angels go to God, worship God, and recount all the deeds of humans to God. 'The word' reaches an initial conclusion with: 'To you, therefore, I say, you sons of men, bless the Lord God without fail all the days of your life' (7).

²⁴ Thrall, 'Paul's Journey', 359; but see her comment that 'He focuses exclusively on the "word character" of the event' in *idem*, *Commentary*, 545.

²⁵ Cf. 1 Enoch 5:6, where the earth complains about the lawless ones in the universe.

Up to *Apoc. Paul 7*, Paul has only heard things. But these are not unutterable things. They are things he is commanded to speak to the people. This 'word' introduces all the events in *Apoc. Paul*, for the overall text deals with the sins of humans and the manner in which God deals with humans who sin and those who do not. *Apoc. Paul 8-10* appears to be a continuation of 'the word of the Lord,' but it is transitional. The description of action by 'the word' moves into narration that seems to describe things Paul actually sees. At the appointed hour, all the angels come to God, worship God, and report the deeds of the humans to which they have been appointed. Thus, when 'the word' ends with 'Know therefore, sons of men, that whatever things are wrought by you, these angels report to God, whether it is good or evil' (10), the narration has already moved beyond 'hearing alone' to both hearing and seeing.

While *Apoc. Paul* begins with direct command to Paul to speak things to the people, there is a context in which Paul encounters 'unutterable things.' The geography of the heavens appears to be the controlling factor for the presentation, for it is only when Paul is in Paradise that he hears things 'it is not lawful for a person to speak' (21). According to *Apoc. Paul 3*, Paul had been 'snatched up to the third heaven' when the word of the Lord came to him. This, however, is not Paradise. In 11, the angel leads Paul 'into heaven,'²⁶ where he is able both to look back upon the firmament and to look on high (11-12). Only in 19 does the angel lead Paul to the gate of Paradise in the third heaven. When Paul enters, Enoch meets him and hails him as 'Paul, beloved of God,' then Elijah meets him and expresses a wish that Paul receive great rewards for his labours on behalf of the human race (20). At this point the angel tells Paul he is to 'tell no one on earth' both what he sees and what he hears. Paul reports that he 'heard words which it is not lawful to speak' (2 Cor 12:4), then the narrative continues with the angel telling him

PubPage Below: 336

he will show him what he 'ought to report in public and relate' (21). The scene is similar in some respects to the angel's command to John in Rev 10:4 not to write down the content of the seven thunders. John does not write the content of the thunders, but

²⁶ Presumably Paul was simply at the opening of the third heaven, rather than actually 'in it.'

continues with a description of the unfolding events, just as he has been told to write them down in Rev 1:11.

In summary, there is no hint in *Apoc. Paul* concerning the content of the 'unutterable things' Paul heard in Paradise. Furnish's suggestion that he may have heard the utterance of the divine name,²⁷ while interesting in relation to Merkabah visions,²⁸ receives no support from *Apoc. Paul*, since there is no emphasis on God or mysteries of God in relation to Paradise. Some say there would be a vision of God or Christ in Paradise, but there is no support for this in *Apoc. Paul*. God and Christ are in the seventh heaven, and not in Paradise.

In the Body or Outside the Body

It is fascinating that 2 Cor 12:2 exhibits Paul raising the issue whether he was 'in the body or outside the body'. Furnish might well be correct to suppose 'that a bodiless journey would have been inconceivable to Paul'.²⁹ Paul's initial statement in *Apoc. Paul* skillfully avoids the issue by referring to 'the body in which I was snatched up to the third heaven' (3).³⁰ There is no indication in *Apoc. Paul* that Paul has an unusual body on his journey. He follows the angel, speaks to the angel, looks all around, weeps, sighs and prays. Enoch recognizes, embraces and kisses Paul when he comes into Paradise, and Elijah recognizes him as well (20). But *Apoc. Paul* describes similar actions on behalf of souls that have come out of the body when the body has died. For *Apoc. Paul*, earthly people taken into heaven and souls that leave the body at the point of death function in basically the same ways in heaven, namely, like normal bodies.

The topic of being 'outside the body' emerges in *Apoc. Paul* 13,

²⁷ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 545; cf. Thrall, *Commentary*, 795.

²⁸ J. W. Bowker, "'Merkabah" Visions and the Visions of Paul', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 16 (1971): 157-173.

²⁹ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 545.

³⁰ Based on the Latin manuscript translated in Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 620, but different from the wording translated by Duensing, 'Apocalypse', 760 (but see n. 2).

PubPage Below: 337

when Paul tells the angel he would like to see 'the souls of the just and of sinners going out of the world'. When the angel tells Paul simply to look down on the earth, Paul explains that he would like to see the manner in which the souls of the just and of sinners 'go out of the body' (14). Just at that moment a just man was about to die, so Paul watches the process. First, all the works the man did for the sake of God, and all his remembered and unremembered desires, stand in the man's sight in the hour of his need. Both holy and impious angels approach the soul, but the impious angels can find 'no place of habitation in it', since it is the soul of a just man. Holy angels guide the soul out of the body and rouse it by instructing it to remember the body it is leaving, because it must return to the same body on the day of resurrection to receive the things promised to the just. The angels kiss the soul, as if it were familiar to them and tell it to be of good courage, since it has done the will of God while on earth. Also, 'the spirit' meets the soul and tells it not to be afraid or disturbed, because 'I found in you a place of refreshment in the time when I dwelt in you, while I was on earth'. The spirit strengthens the soul, and 'his angel' receives it and leads it into heaven.

While another angel taunts the soul for daring to enter heaven, the angel and the spirit of the soul lead it to worship in the sight of God. When it ceases worshipping, Michael and all the army of angels worship God and tell the soul, 'This is your God of all things, who made you in his own image and likeness'. Both the angel and the spirit run ahead to God and remind God about the good works of the soul which they have reported daily. The voice of God tells Michael, the angel of the Covenant, to lead the soul into 'the Paradise of Joy', that it may become co-heir with all the saints. This brings forth hymns and glorifying of God (the Lord) from all the angels and archangels, the cherubim, and the twenty-four elders. At this point, the angel asks Paul if he has 'believed and known that whatever each man of you has done he sees in the hour of need,' and Paul answers, 'Yes, sir' (14). When an unjust man dies, the soul experiences rejection in the midst of a reminder of all the things that happen daily with God, and finally it is sent into outer darkness for 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' (15-16). When another unjust man dies, the angel is told that if he had repented five years before it died, he would have

indulgence and remission of sins. When none of this happens, this man also is sent to outer darkness (17-18).

PubPage Below: 338

In summary, a major difference in *Apoc. Paul* between being in the body and outside the body seems to lie in the function of the person's enlivening spirit. When a person is 'in the body', the spirit finds rest in the body. This means that only the angel who is assigned to the person, and not his spirit, confronts the person while he is in the body. Once the person is out of the body, if the person is just, both his angel and his spirit confront him, encourage him, lead him, care for him and plead his case before God. If a person is evil, his spirit rejects the soul, because it did not follow the spirit's will (16).³¹

Conclusion

The major players in *Apoc. Paul* are humans and angels. They are the 'workers' in the world. The task of humans on a daily basis is to produce good deeds, but, in overwhelming proportions, they produce evil deeds. The task of angels is to observe the deeds of humans and report them every evening and morning to God. A significant amount of God's work lies in the past when God created the universe and all that is in it. But God also has very special daily tasks: (1) to be present on the throne to be worshipped; (2) to listen to the morning and evening reports by the angels of the activities of individual humans; (3) to make decisions whether a soul who has been brought to the throne after leaving the body should be delivered to Michael (14), who will take it to Paradise, or to Tartaruchus (16) or Tartarus (18), who will take it to the outer darkness.

The archangel Michael, as we have seen, also is busy. He must be present whenever a soul comes to God, in case this is a person who should be taken into Paradise. In addition, he says he prays unceasingly for all humans (43). At certain times he descends from heaven to perform special tasks for the benefit of humans (43).

Christ performed very special work in the past for humans (44). Christ responded to special intercessory prayer by Paul for sinful human beings (43-44). Christ regularly

³¹ Thus, 'the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak', i.e., not willing to do what the spirit wills.

sits at the right hand of God in the seventh heaven (29). Perhaps especially in this role God calls him 'my helper' (9).³² In the future when the earth dissolves, Christ

PubPage Below: 339

will come with all his saints to the land of promise and reign over his saints for a thousand years in it (21).

The weeping and mourning of the angels and Paul, in the sight of the suffering and weeping of the unrighteous, are special features in *Apoc. Paul*. In some ways, the entire apocalypse is a lamentation over the sins of humans in the world. There are, however, extended moments of joy, in particular in the City of Christ when noteworthy people within the history of Israel greet Paul and bless him (25-27).³³ There is special emphasis on the manner in which Paul empathizes with the sinfulness of humans, and his identification of himself as a sinner plays a key role in causing both Michael and Christ to respond with mercy to the suffering of sinners (42).

Apoc. Paul does not express rebellion or disobedience beyond the human race that threatens the order of the universe, in contrast to phenomena of disobedience or disruption of order as described in 1 Enoch 18-21 or 80:2-8. Rather, the universe appears to function in *Apoc. Paul* as it should, in accordance with 1 Enoch 2:1-5:3 or 72-82. Evil desires in humans produce unrighteousness without any help from Satan or Satan's helpers. Evil, fierce angels do what they are supposed to do, namely, torment and punish the souls of unrighteous people when they come out of the body. In this apocalypse, then, focus on desires and disobedience within humans consumes the focus in many earlier apocalypses on dramatic acts of God that would end one age and begin a new one. It appears that the principalities and powers in the universe have truly become subservient to God and Christ (Col 2:15), overseeing the deeds of humans every moment of their lives both in the body and outside the body. How appropriate for Paul, then, knowing the man who was caught up to the third heaven, and into Paradise, to boast of nothing but his weaknesses (2 Cor 12:5). In later tradition, as exhibited in *Apoc. Paul*,

³² References throughout to 'the helper' of people do not always appear to refer to Christ, but perhaps they do.

³³ Also in the second visit to Paradise in 45-51, which is only in the longer Latin recension.

Paul's awareness of his own weaknesses allows him to identify with the sinfulness of humans throughout the world and intercede on their behalf with God and Christ.