

GREGORY E. LAMB

Living and Dying Well in Philippians

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zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*
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624



Gregory E. Lamb

Living and Dying Well in Philippians

A Comparative Analysis of Ancient Sources

Mohr Siebeck

Gregory E. Lamb, born 1972; pastor of various Baptist churches throughout North Carolina; adjunct professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina; lead and solo researcher at Docent Research Group in Austin, Texas; 2024 Recipient of the Society of Biblical Literature – De Gruyter Prize for Biblical Studies and Reception History.
orcid.org/0000-0003-1165-0693

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In memoriam

Rev. Earl J. Lamb
(1934–2000)

Doris W. Lamb
(1938–2020)

Rev. David R. Garner
(1953–2007)

Your lives were visible sermons to me.
Requiescat in pace.

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My parents (the late Rev. Earl J. Lamb and Doris W. Lamb) and mentor (the late Rev. David R. Garner) modeled for me what it truly means to live *and* die well as a Christian. Their lives and deaths were visible sermons to me. They continue to live and “preach” through the testimony of their beloved memories. Furthermore, the faith communities in which I and my family served during my doctoral studies helped me to think deeply, theologically, and pastorally about what truly matters most as we shared the highest peaks and darkest depths of life together as Bonhoeffer once wrote.

Lastly, and most importantly, thanks be to Christ, the Author and Finisher of my faith, without whom, no true flourishing exists. As Alex Honnold clung to El Capitan, so too, I clung to Paul's encouraging and empowering words regarding Christ and Christ's Spirit throughout writing this monograph: πάντα ἰσχύω ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με. It is my quotidian prayer that all academic labors I perform under God's hand might bear much fruit in serving his purposes and in bringing him honor and glory.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	VII
List of Abbreviations.....	XV

Chapter 1: Human Flourishing as a Subject of Pauline Research	1
--	---

A. <i>Kaleidoscopic Scope and Relevance for Biblical Studies</i>	1
--	---

I. Thesis, Scope, and Purpose.....	3
1. Thesis.....	3
2. Scope	4
3. Purpose	6
II. Why Study Paul’s Conception of Living and Dying Well in Philippians?	7

B. <i>Review of Literature</i>	10
--------------------------------------	----

I. Monographs.....	10
1. John Behr, <i>The Mystery of Christ</i> (2006).....	10
2. John M. Frame, <i>The Doctrine of the Christian Life</i> (2008)	14
3. John Swinton and Richard Payne, <i>Living Well and Dying Faithfully</i> (2009)	16
4. Michael J. Gorman, <i>Becoming the Gospel</i> (2015).....	18
5. Alexander N. Kirk, <i>The Departure of an Apostle</i> (2015)	20
6. Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica, eds., <i>The Apostle Paul and the Christian Life</i> (2016).....	24
II. Articles	25
1. James L. Jaquette, “Life and Death, Adiaphora, and Paul’s Rhetorical Strategies” (1996).....	25
2. Rollin A. Ramsaran, “Living and Dying, Living Is Dying (Philippians 1:21)” (2002)	28
3. Nijay K. Gupta, “‘I Will Not Be Put to Shame’” (2008).....	31
4. Jeremy Punt, “A Biblical Death-Wish” (2009)	33

III. Dissertations	37
1. James P. Ware, ““Holding Forth the Word of Life”” (1996)	37
2. Audrey Lynn Sharon West, “Whether by Life or by Death” (2001)	40
<i>C. Lacunae within the Current State of Research</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>D. Overview of the Study</i>	<i>47</i>
 Chapter 2: Comparative Methodology	 49
A. <i>Comparative Analysis and Philippians</i>	49
I. Comparative Analysis: Toward an Understanding	49
II. Comparative Analysis: A Viable Methodology to Study Paul and Philippians?.....	62
B. <i>Criteria for the Selection of Sources</i>	<i>65</i>
 Chapter 3: Living and Dying Well in Philippians	 78
A. <i>Flourishing as a Foundational Subtext</i>	78
B. <i>Exegetical Analysis</i>	<i>90</i>
I. Paul’s <i>Argumentatio: Propositio</i> (Phil 1:27–30)	90
1. Philippians 1:27.....	96
2. Philippians 1:28.....	101
II. Paul’s <i>Argumentatio: Probatio</i> (Phil 2:1–30).....	102
1. Philippians 2:2	102
2. Philippians 2:3–4.....	104
3. Philippians 2:5	106
4. Philippians 2:12.....	107
5. Philippians 2:16.....	110
6. Philippians 2:17–18.....	113
7. Philippians 2:29.....	115
III. Paul’s <i>Argumentatio: Refutatio</i> (Phil 3:1–21)	118
1. Philippians 3:1	120
2. Philippians 3:17.....	121
IV. Paul’s <i>Peroratio: Repetitio</i> (Phil 4:1–9).....	123
1. Philippians 4:1	125

2. Philippians 4:3	126
3. Philippians 4:4	127
4. Philippians 4:5	129
5. Philippians 4:6	130
6. Philippians 4:8	133
7. Philippians 4:9	133
V. Synthesis	135

Chapter 4: Living and Dying Well in Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and Second Temple Jewish Sources..... 139

A. <i>Variegated Voices on Living and Dying Well</i>	139
B. <i>Survey of Selected Sources</i>	140
I. Living and Dying Well in Greco-Roman Sources	140
1. Historians	141
1.1 Select Passages from Herodotus, <i>Historiae</i> (ca. 430 BCE)	141
1.2 Select Passages from Thucydides, <i>Historiae</i> (ca. 411 BCE)	143
2. Pagan Devotees	145
3. Philosophers	148
3.1 Select Passages from Plato, <i>Apologia</i> (ca. 392 BCE)	148
3.2 Select Passages from Plutarch, <i>Moralia</i> (ca. 100 CE)	150
3.3 Select Passages from Aristotle, <i>Ethica Nicomachea</i> (ca. 340 BCE)	153
3.4 Select Passages from Cicero, <i>De Finibus</i> (ca. 45 BCE)	154
3.5 Select Passages from Cicero, <i>Tusculanae Disputationes</i> (ca. 45 BCE)	156
3.6 Select Passages from Seneca, <i>De Vita Beata</i> (ca. 58 CE)	158
3.7 Select Passages from Seneca, <i>Epistulae Morales</i> (ca. 65 CE)	159
4. Summary of the Greco-Roman Sources	160
4.1 Summary of the Historians	160
4.2 Summary of the Pagan Devotees	160
4.3 Summary of the Philosophers	161

II. Living and Dying Well in Egyptian Sources	162
1. Select Passages from <i>The Book of the Dead</i> (ca. 4266 BCE)	170
2. Select Passages from the <i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i> (ca. second century BCE)	176
3. <i>KIP 506/L252</i> Inscription to Isis-Regina on Philippi's Theater (ca. first century CE)	178
4. Summary of the Egyptian Sources	179
4.1 Summary of <i>The Book of the Dead</i>	179
4.2 Summary of the <i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i>	179
4.3 Summary of <i>KIP 506/L252</i>	180
III. Living and Dying Well in Second Temple Jewish Sources	180
1. Extrabiblical Jewish Literary Sources: Philo	181
1.1 Select Passages from Philo's <i>Legum Allegoriae</i> III (ca. 35 CE)	181
1.2 Select Passages from Philo's <i>De Specialibus Legibus</i> (ca. 38 CE)	182
1.3 Select Passages from Philo's <i>Legatio ad Gaium</i> (ca. 40 CE)	184
2. Extrabiblical Jewish Literary Sources: Josephus	185
2.1 Select Passages from Josephus's <i>Bellum Judaicum</i> (ca. 75 CE)	185
2.2 Select Passages from Josephus's <i>Antiquitates Judaicae</i> (ca. 93–94 CE)	186
2.3 A Select Passage from Josephus's <i>Contra Apionem</i> (ca. 94 CE)	189
3. Epigraphic Evidence	190
4. Summary of the Second Temple Jewish Sources	193
4.1 Summary of Extrabiblical Jewish Literary Sources	193
4.2 Summary of Jewish Epigraphic Sources	194
IV. Conclusion	194

Chapter 5: Comparative Analysis of Flourishing between Philippians and Ancient Sources

A. <i>Paul's Christocentric Reappropriation and "Answerability"</i>	197
B. <i>Synthesis of the Comparative Data</i>	201
I. Shared Meta-Categories	202
1. Flourishing as "Gospel" Work	202

2. Flourishing as Right Character	203
3. Flourishing as Community	205
4. Flourishing as Eschatological Reward	207
II. Non-Shared Meta-Categories	210
1. Differing Meta-Categories of Flourishing within Greco-Roman Sources	210
2. Differing Meta-Categories of Flourishing within Egyptian Sources	216
3. Differing Meta-Categories of Flourishing within Second Temple Jewish Sources	218
III. Hypotheses Generated in Answering the Question, “Why?”	222
1. Greco-Roman Sources	223
2. Egyptian Sources	229
3. Second Temple Jewish Sources	233
IV. Conclusion: A Collision of Ancient Worldviews	239
V. Implications for Interpretation	240
VI. Implications for Christian Praxis	243
<i>C. Areas for Further Research</i>	244
I. The <i>Corpus Paulinum</i>	245
II. The Remainder of the New Testament and Beyond	245
III. What Does It Mean to Flourish?	245
IV. Dual Citizenship and Its Linkage to Flourishing in Philippians	246
V. What Does It Mean to Be Human?	246
<i>D. Concluding Reflections</i>	247
Appendix 1: Maat and the Weighing of the Heart of the Deceased	257
Appendix 2: Summary of Selected Sources’ Comparison to Paul in Philippians	261
Appendix 3: Philippi: The Historical Setting, the City, and Its People	281
Bibliography	299
Index of Ancient Sources	331
Index of Modern Authors	349
Index of Subjects	353

List of Abbreviations

Reference Works

<i>ABD</i>	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David N. Freedman.
<i>BD</i>	The modern Book of the Dead spell numbering system.
<i>BDAG</i>	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Revised and edited by Frederick William Danker. 3rd ed.
<i>BECNT</i>	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series.
<i>BHGNT</i>	Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament series.
<i>BOTD</i>	<i>The Book of the Dead: The Chapters of Coming Forth by Day</i> . By E. A. Wallis Budge.
<i>CII</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae</i> . Edited by Hannah M. Cotton et al.
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> . Edited by Theodor Mommsen.
<i>CIM</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae</i> . Edited by M. J. Vermaseren.
<i>CIPh</i>	<i>Corpus des inscriptions grecques et latines de Philippes</i> . Edited by A. Zannis, Ch. Koukouli-Chrysanthaki, and Cédric Brélaz.
<i>DPL</i>	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> . Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin.
<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider.
<i>EDOG</i>	<i>Etymological Dictionary of Greek</i> . Edited by Robert Beekes.
<i>EGGNT</i>	Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament series.
<i>GELS</i>	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint</i> . Edited by Takamitsu Muraoka.
<i>GG</i>	<i>Griechische Grabinschriften und neutestamentliche Eschatologie</i> . Edited by Imre Peres.
<i>GMP</i>	<i>The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation: Including the Demotic Spells</i> . Edited by H. D. Betz. 2nd ed.
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by Ludwig Koehler et al.
<i>KIP</i>	<i>Katalog der Inschriften von Philippi</i> . Edited by Peter Pilhofer.
<i>L&N</i>	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains</i> . Edited by J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida. 2nd ed.
<i>LGG</i>	<i>Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen</i> . Edited by Christian Leitz.
<i>LCL</i>	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i> . Copyright © 1911, Harvard University Press. Edited by Jeffrey Henderson.

LSJ	<i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Edited by Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones. 9th rev. ed.
MGS	<i>The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek</i> . Edited by Franco Montanari.
MMM	<i>Textes et Monuments figurés relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra</i> . Edited by F.-V.-M. Cumont.
NIDB	<i>New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld.
NTTTC	<i>New Testament Text and Translation Commentary: Commentary on the Variant Readings of the Ancient New Testament Manuscripts and How They Relate to the Major English Translations</i> . Edited by Philip W. Comfort.
OLD	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> . Edited by P. G. W. Glare. 2nd ed.
PDM	<i>Papyri Demoticae Magicae</i> .
PG	<i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca</i> . Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne.
PGM	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i> .
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley.
TLG	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae</i> . Copyright © 1972, 2014, the University of California, Irvine.
TOTP	<i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by James H. Charlesworth.
TuT	<i>Text und Textwert der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments: II. Die paulinischen Briefe, Band 3: Galaterbrief bis Philipperbrief, Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung 18</i> . Edited by Kurt Aland.

Bible Citations

EVV	English Bible Translations
LXX	The Septuagint, the Greek Translation of the OT
MT	Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible
NA ²⁸	The 28 th edition critical text of the Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece
NT	The New Testament of the Christian Scriptures
OT	The Old Testament of the Hebrew Scriptures
UBS ⁵	The fifth revised edition of the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament

Abbreviations typically follow the *SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed.

Unless otherwise noted, English translations of the primary biblical and extrabiblical texts are author's own original translations.

Quotations from the Greek Bible are taken from a database of a combination of the United Bible Society 5th edition/Nestle-Aland 28th edition. *Greek New Testament* (BGT/BNT) and Rahlfs' *Septuagint* (LXT). Copyright © 1998–2018 BibleWorks, LLC.

Chapter 1

Human Flourishing as a Subject of Pauline Research

A. Kaleidoscopic Scope and Relevance for Biblical Studies

Given modernity's explosion of diversity and specialization of knowledge, few ideas or concepts can be thought of as truly universal or unifying. However, the idea of living and dying well, also known as "human flourishing"¹ (expressed in antiquity as εὐδαιμονία in the Greek,² *ma'at*/Maat in Egyptian,³ and *ars vivendi/ars moriendi* in Latin⁴), has been a thematic thread that has woven its way throughout the tapestry of human history. This study is a comparative analysis of the subjects of living and dying well in Philippians and select ancient sources (up to 100 CE), including: Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and Second Temple Jewish sources.⁵ Upon consideration of Paul's Jewishness and

¹ The theme of "human flourishing" has become a pervasively popular topic in theological/biblical studies, especially, over the past decade. This is due at least in part to the Yale University Center for Faith and Culture's God and Human Flourishing Program as well as in evangelical circles through the Institute for Faith, Work, and Economics (TIFWE).

² While the Greek term εὐδαιμονία has often been translated as "happiness," numerous scholars suggest "human flourishing" is a more accurate translation as it better captures the holistic, "true, full happiness" of the whole being. For the purposes of this monograph, the phrases "human flourishing," "the good life," and "living/dying well" will be used interchangeably to connote a more holistic understanding of the concept of εὐδαιμονία. Contrastingly, "happiness" is often understood in popular culture as merely a temporary state of euphoria. See Daniel N. Robinson, *Aristotle's Psychology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 99–101; John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 2nd ed. (Oxford; London; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 103; and cf. "εὐδαιμονία," in LSJ 708.

³ In ancient Egyptian literature, Maat was seen as both a feminine deity as well as a philosophical way of life. See Robert A. Armour, *Gods and Myths of Ancient Egypt*, 3rd ed. (Cairo; New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2016), 133. The second edition of the *SBL Handbook of Style* distinguishes between the divine name (Maat) as well as the Egyptian philosophical conception of living and dying well (*ma'at*). See Billie Jean Collins et al., *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 45. However, it is doubtful that the ancient Egyptians, themselves, made such a sharp distinction. Thus, for the purposes of this study, this author will refer to the ancient Egyptian conception of living and dying well as "Maat."

⁴ The phrases *ars vivendi/ars moriendi* can be translated, "the art of living/dying."

⁵ The methodology of "comparative analysis" used in this monograph will be explained in further detail in Chapter 2. While scholars have traditionally utilized a monolithic Greco-Roman or Jewish lens through which to view and understand Paul and his letters, this study

theological training,⁶ possible Greco-Roman educational background through various *gymnasia*, and informal socialization as a Pharisee and as a Roman and Tarsian citizen, he may have been familiar with these ancient texts or at least their conceptions of living and dying well as he wrote his New Testament (hereafter abbreviated NT) letters.⁷

investigates Paul kaleidoscopically and eclectically – surveying both ancient Jewish and pagan sources that Paul may have encountered in his studies and travels. The use of the hybrid adjectives “Greco-Jewish,” “Greco-Egyptian,” and “Greco-Roman” belies the complexity and hyper-connectivity of the first-century Mediterranean world, which consisted in the co-existence of numerous antithetical and sometimes syncretized religious, political, cultural, and economical worldviews. See Gregory E. Lamb, “Beyond the Greco-Roman or Jewish Monocle: Reading Philippians and Paul ‘Kaleidoscopically,’” *Religions* 15.4.467 (2024): 1–22, doi: 10.3390/rel15040467 and John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 24. While some scholars use the terminology “Greco-Egyptian” to denote the Egyptian literature written in Greek during the Hellenization of the Greco-Roman Period, this study will analyze the Greek writings within the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (hereafter abbreviated *PGM*) as well as earlier literature, such as *The Book of the Dead*, not written in Greek. See Ian Rutherford, *Graeco-Egyptian Interactions: Literature, Translation, and Culture, 500 BCE–300 CE* (Oxford; London; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). The phrase “Second Temple Jewish sources” includes the Greek Old Testament (hereafter abbreviated LXX). For the purposes of this monograph, the descriptor “Second Temple” is meant to denote a time period which extends from the first to the last of the five great crises of the Jewish people: the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon’s Temple by the Babylonians in ca. 586 BCE and the destruction of the Second Temple by Titus in ca. 70 CE.

⁶ Paul’s “Pharisaic training” and “Torah knowledge” were vital to the organization and flourishing of the house-churches he founded, which became educational centers and communities of learning. See Janelle Peters, “Paul and Synagogues,” in *Paul within Judaism: Perspectives on Paul and Jewish Identity*, ed. Michael Bird et al., WUNT 507 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023), 194. Cf. Claire S. Smith, *Pauline Communities as ‘Scholastic Communities’: A Study of the Vocabulary of ‘Teaching’ in 1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus*, WUNT II/335 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 1.

⁷ Regarding Paul’s potential access to Greco-Roman education through various *gymnasia*, James Harrison argues, “Because most cities had built at least one gymnasium, the gymnasium remained the most famous and popular educational institution in antiquity.... It is not inconceivable that Paul encountered *gymnasiarchoi* [i.e., leaders of *gymnasia*] or visited a gymnasium, even though there were strict regulations as to who might enter a gymnasium.... Inscriptional and papyrus evidence reveals that Jewish men of the Diaspora received ephebic training at the gymnasium.... Paul as a Jew could not have escaped the pervasive influence of the gymnasium.... Paul would have been exposed to the gymnasiarchal culture even if ... he did not have the ephebic education of other first-century Jews.” See James R. Harrison, “Paul and the Gymnasiarchs,” in *Paul: Jew, Greek, and Roman*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 146, 148–49, 177. While the past decade of Pauline scholarship has a priori assumed much of Paul’s putative formal rhetorical education, others, such as Ryan Schellenberg, are not convinced. Schellenberg writes, “[F]igures, tropes, and rhetorical strategies as are found in Paul’s letters derive not from formal education but from informal socialization.” Ryan S. Schellenberg, *Rethinking Paul’s Rhetorical Education: Comparative Rhetoric and 2 Corinthians 10–13*, ed. Gail R. O’Day, Early

I. Thesis, Scope, and Purpose

1. Thesis

The thesis of this study is that Paul's conception of living and dying well in Philippians as a Christocentric, cruciform life and death stands in stark contrast to competing pagan and Jewish conceptions.⁸ Paul's concept was not genealogically dependent upon these ancient pagan and Second Temple Jewish sources to pen his Epistle to the Philippians. Any similarity is possibly an example of Paul deconstructing and reshaping erroneous cultural worldviews on flourishing represented within these ancient works to serve his own rhetorical purposes in light of Paul's own experience as a "slave of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:1).⁹ Contra some "New Perspective on Paul" (NPP) proponents,¹⁰ the

Christianity and Its Literature 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 5–6. Despite this lack of consensus on Paul's formal academic training, Pauline scholars agree that Paul's letters do evince a rhetorical strategy regardless of the provenance of Paul's knowledge. The qualifier "may" is key at this juncture, as it is impossible to speak with absolute certainty regarding the influence these texts or traditions may or may not have had in Paul's conception of living and dying well. See Jacob Neusner, *Rabbinic Literature and the New Testament: What We Cannot Show, We Do Not Know* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 16.

⁸ Sarah Ruden sees the value of reading Paul against the backdrop of ancient sources when she writes, "As I began to read Paul in connection to Greco-Roman writing, I seemed to be actually reading him: understanding his devotion and his constraints, and not simply listening to 1 Corinthians 13 with boredom and irritation, and with smug agreement to excoriations of his 'betrayal of Jesus' message'.... What Greco-Roman works can teach about Paul's writings is incredibly rich and virtually unexplored so far – and often rather mortifying to a previous knee-jerk anti-Paulist like me." Ruden, *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time* (New York: Pantheon, 2010), 4–5.

⁹ Paul's deconstruction of his opponents' arguments can be readily evinced in what Douglas Campbell sees as a rhetorical diatribe in Rom 1:18–3:20. See Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 572. The so-called "letter of tears" in 2 Corinthians 10–13 also displays Paul's deconstruction of his opponents' views in defending his apostolic authority. In Philippians 3, Paul deconstructs the views of those "dogs," "evil workers," and "those outwardly mutilated" yet having uncircumcised hearts (Phil 3:2). These individuals were apparently putting their confidence in their flesh and not in Christ. While not exactly a *reductio ad absurdum*, Paul uses a syllogism with both negative and positive parts in 1 Cor 15:12–19 to deconstruct the Corinthians' skepticism regarding the bodily resurrection of Christ and believers. See Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 753–54.

¹⁰ See e.g., James D. G. Dunn, "'A Light to the Gentiles': The Significance of the Damascus Road Christophany for Paul," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird*, ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 251–66. The nexus of the debate regarding Paul's Damascus Road event was initiated by Krister Stendahl's 1963 essay, "The Apostle Paul and the Intropective Conscience of the West," which many claim as the fount from which the nascent

Damascus Christophany became *the* defining event in Paul's life,¹¹ as it radically reshaped Paul's worldview and permeated the fabric of Paul's subsequent theological writings – especially, his Epistle to the Philippians. This transformative, missionary call reoriented every aspect of Paul's identity,¹² life, and death in a trajectory that was thoroughly Christocentric and dependent on the inner, transformative workings of the Holy Spirit.

2. Scope

The heart of this monograph is an investigative comparative analysis between Paul's Epistle to the Philippians and Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and Second Temple Jewish sources up to 100 CE. This will first require an analysis of the themes of living and dying well in Philippians – with a heavy emphasis on the primary sources for establishing the text of Philippians via text criticism – as well as the seminal sources relevant to Paul's conception of human flourishing in Philippians.¹³ This effort, as historian and philosopher Quentin Skinner has

beginnings of the NPP flowed. See Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *HTR* 56.3 (1963): 199–215.

¹¹ Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 420. See also Seyoon Kim, who writes, "The essential and constitutive character of the Damascus experience for Paul's theology is widely recognized by recent interpreters.... To assert that Paul's theology is to be derived from his Damascus experience, is not, however, to say that Paul at once obtained explicitly at the Damascus revelation his whole theology as seen in his letters. It says only that the main lines of his theology have their origin in the fundamental [Christophanic] event." See Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 102. However, proponents of the NPP, such as Dunn, are not convinced that Damascus Christophany is the locus of Paul's theology, and they are critical of Kim's thesis. Dunn contends that Kim's thesis lacks originality, and that Kim is assuming his conclusion before sufficiently arguing his case. Nowhere, claims Dunn, does Paul argue that "the law could no longer function as God's instrument of salvation, and that therefore the gospel of this Jesus should go to Gentile as well as to Jew." Moreover, Dunn posits that Kim is guilty of making a false dichotomy in that, for Kim, Paul was confronted with this soteriological alternative: "either the law or the crucified Christ." See Dunn, "'A Light to the Gentiles,'" 256–57; Dunn is citing Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 48. Cf. N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols., vol. 4 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013), 2:1418–19. Cf. C. J. Roetzel, "Paul the Apostle," in *NIDB*, ed. K. D. Sakenfeld et al., 5 vols. (Nashville; New York: Abingdon, 2009), 4:407.

¹² So Stendahl and Wright. See Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2:1420–21. Moreover, Paul exchanged his Jewish name (Σαούλ/Σαῦλος from שָׁאוּל) for that of his Roman name (Παῦλος) in his self-identification with Christ (Acts 13:9). Furthermore, in his epistles, Paul never refers to himself as "Saul." The identity transformation from Σαούλ/Σαῦλος to Παῦλος is perhaps in response to the apostle's God-given mission to the gentiles. See Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 445.

¹³ Despite this lack of dogmatic assertion and verifiability, these textual "echoes" can inform one's reading and understanding of Paul. Hays has argued that Paul did not see

warned,¹⁴ is not an exercise in locating some “timeless wisdom” in Philippians regarding Paul’s first-century conception of living and dying well – thus, risking the fallacy of anachronism. Rather, this study seeks to locate Paul within his own first-century context within the Greco-Roman world, which was an amalgam of competing worldviews, religions, and textual traditions.

The corpora to be investigated are, of course, vast, and an exhaustive listing of ancient sources that may have been relevant for Paul’s understanding of living and dying well is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, Paul’s conception of flourishing in Philippians will be read against the backdrop of select ancient sources whose ancient intertextual contexts make the most sense of Paul’s argument given the often competing religious, political, and cultural voices within the first-century Mediterranean world.¹⁵

himself “as a writer of Scripture.” Rather, for Hays, Paul was “interpreting Scripture” with the pragmatic and missiological purpose of exhorting these “fledgling churches” to “live as good citizens worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil 1:27). Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 2, 5. However, many disagree with Hays’s conclusions. First of all, whether Paul saw himself as writing Scripture or not, the writer of 2 Peter certainly did – equating Paul’s writings with τὰς λοιπὰς γραφάς (2 Pet 3:15–16). Second, Craig Evans takes issue with Hays’s “typological thinking.” See Craig A. Evans, “Listening for Echoes of Interpreted Scripture,” in *Paul and the Scripture*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, JSNTSup 83 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 47–48. Third, James Sanders states his fundamental differences with Hays’s methodology more bluntly when he writes, “There is indeed but one God at work throughout Scripture. As Hays rightly notes, Paul’s reading of Scripture is not typological *as that term is normally understood*; Paul does not fret about types and antitypes. Rather, Paul’s argument, like Isaiah’s and Luke’s, and indeed much else in the Bible, *is from theological history*.” See James A. Sanders, “Paul and Theology of History,” in *Paul and the Scripture*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, JSNTSup 83 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 53–54, emphasis added. Cf. Young S. Chae, *Jesus as the Eschatological Davidic Shepherd: Studies in the Old Testament, Second Temple Judaism, and in the Gospel of Matthew*, WUNT II/216 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 50–51. While some pushback is warranted against Hays’s methodology, it seems at least plausible that Paul was not only an interpreter of canonical Scripture (see e.g., Gal 4:21–31), but, as a church-planting missionary, was also an interpreter of the surrounding first-century cultures as well (see e.g., Acts 17:22–31; 1 Cor 9:19–23). Paul would have likely been familiar with the influential literary traditions driving the worldviews of the first-century pagan and Jewish cultures as his putative quotations of the Greco-Roman writers illustrate (see e.g., Paul’s seeming use of the Cretan philosopher Epimenides in Titus 1:12).

¹⁴ Skinner writes, “[A]ny statement [including Paul’s] is inescapably the embodiment of a particular intention on a particular occasion, addressed to the solution of a particular problem, and is thus specific to its context.” Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 88.

¹⁵ Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 11.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to articulate Paul's understanding of human flourishing through a close analysis of his letter to the Philippians including a contrast/comparison to the extant traditions of his day. Such delimitation probes beneath the surface of mere comparison and explores the pagan conceptions of key theological motifs such as living and dying well and the afterlife.¹⁶ The similarities/differences between these corpora will be defined as Paul's rhetorical response (pro and contra) to the expected Jewish and/or secular ethical norms commensurate within Paul's first-century *Sitz im Leben*.

Paul's conception of living and dying well permeates the entirety of Philippians. For example, Paul's focus on living in servitude to Christ is highlighted immediately in Phil 1:1 as he describes himself and Timothy as δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. Here, Paul Christocentrically reimagines the often denigrating and dehumanizing industry of slavery in vertical rather than horizontal dimensions.¹⁷ Paul's Christocentric view of living and suffering is also evident in Phil 1:12–17 in which Paul describes his imprisonment as a positive catalyst for the *missio Dei*.¹⁸ Paul's positive view of physically dying for Christ is described in the ecstatic expression πολλῶ ... μᾶλλον κρείσσον (1:23).¹⁹ Later in the epistle (Phil 2:17), Paul rejoices together with the

¹⁶ Critically important regarding pagan conceptions of the afterlife are Egyptian sources dealing with Maat such as *The Book of the Dead* as well as the later works within the *PGM*. Equally important for this discussion are the Hellenistic epitaphs presented in Imre Peres, *Griechische Grabinschriften und neutestamentliche Eschatologie*, WUNT 157 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

¹⁷ Philippians 1:1a can be translated as “Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus.” Unless otherwise noted, all New Testament references are author's original translations from the Greek text of Barbara Aland et al., eds., *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012). First-century slavery involved servitude, suffering, submission, and the slave's ownership by their master. Paul clarifies that he and Timothy are Christ's property – serving Christ and free of all competing man-made claims. See Angela Standhartinger, *Der Philipperbrief*, HNT 11/1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 75.

¹⁸ For a discussion of the various views regarding Paul's imprisonment and the provenance of Philippians see Douglas A. Campbell, “The Provenance of Philippians: A Response to the Analyses of Michael Flexsenhar, Heike Omerzu, Angela Standhartinger and Cédric Brélaz,” *JSNT* 43.4 (2021): 508–22; Angela Standhartinger, “Greetings from Prison and Greetings from Caesar's House (Philippians 4.22): A Reconsideration of an Enigmatic Greek Expression in the Light of the Context and Setting of Philippians,” *JSNT* 43.4 (2021): 469, 475–76; and Michael Flexsenhar III, “Paul the Trojan Horse: The Legacy of Triumph in Philippians,” *JSNT* 43.4 (2021): 438–40 – albeit these sources seem to a priori dismiss the plausibility of a Roman provenance.

¹⁹ This rather odd construction is translated “far better” (NRSV), “very much better” (NASB) and “better by far” (NIV) in the English translations. However, none of these translations fully account for this phrase, which if rendered woodenly could be (nonsensically) translated into English as “much more better!” Perhaps, “exceedingly better” more fully captures the ecstatic essence of Paul's words here.

Philippians (χαίρω καὶ συγχαίρω) at the prospect of his life being “poured out as a drink offering.” These and numerous other examples reveal that living and dying well is a pervasive, thematic “thread” that weaves its way throughout the tapestry of Philippians – holding it together in a beautiful unity.²⁰

II. Why Study Paul’s Conception of Living and Dying Well in Philippians?

There are at least five reasons why scholars should study Paul’s conception of living and dying well in Philippians. First, the themes of living and dying well are important theological motifs for Paul but relatively few studies have investigated these topics within Philippians.²¹ No current, comprehensive studies on Philippians focusing exclusively on living and dying well were found in relevant database searches.²² While many monographs and articles were found that focus on *either* a Pauline theology of living *or* dying, no works were located that focus specifically on Paul’s understanding of living and dying well in Philippians. This database search uncovered a journal article written by Nijay Gupta, “‘I Will Not Be Put to Shame’: Paul, The Philippians, and the Honourable Wish for Death,” which is a comparative study of death/suicide between Philippians, Jewish, Egyptian, and Greco-Roman sources.²³ Yet, given the scope of the article, only a few sources were investigated and Paul’s concept of living well was not addressed.

Perhaps the work most similar to this study is the chapter by Rollin Ramsaran (*Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts*, 2002), which sees Phil 1:21 as a rhetorical “maxim” in a “memorable” form of *adiaphora* to add weight and force to Paul’s propositions on Christ-centered living and dying.²⁴

²⁰ For a discussion of the debates surrounding the literary integrity of Philippians, see F. W. Beare, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 3rd ed., BNTC (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1973), 1–5; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 21–23; Wolfgang Schenk, *Die Philipperbriefe des Paulus: Kommentar* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1984), 1–28; and John Reumann, *Philippians*, AB 33B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 8–13.

²¹ See Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 3, 197.

²² This information is based upon WorldCat® and ProQuest® database searches on the titles of “living and dying well in Philippians,” “*ars vivendi* and *ars moriendi* in Philippians,” “human flourishing in Philippians,” “Paul and human flourishing,” “the good life in Philippians,” “Philippians 1:21,” “Christian living in Philippians,” “Christian dying in Philippians,” “Philippians and thanatology,” “Pauline Thanatology,” and “Leben und Sterben im Brief des Paulus an die Philipper.”

²³ Nijay K. Gupta, “‘I Will Not Be Put to Shame’: Paul, The Philippians, and the Honourable Wish for Death,” *Neotestamentica* 42.2 (2008): 253–67.

²⁴ Rollin A. Ramsaran, “Living and Dying, Living Is Dying (Philippians 1:21): Paul’s Maxim and Exemplary Argumentation in Philippians,” in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts: Essays from the Lund 2000 Conference*, ed. Anders Eriksson, Thomas H. Olbricht, and Walter Übelacker, Emory Studies in Early Christianity 8 (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity

Ramsaran notes that “the rhetorically effective maxim” in Phil 1:21 and “the accompanying personal example [vetting Paul’s ethos in 1:19–26] are often overlooked and seldom commented upon at length.”²⁵

Unlike these aforementioned works, this study seeks to provide a thorough analysis of the concepts of living and dying well in Philippians. This will include tracing the theme of flourishing in all four chapters of Philippians – discovering vocabulary, imagery, and literary devices that Paul used to convey his concept of flourishing. Paul often employed his critics’ tools to deconstruct their arguments and worldviews.²⁶ N. T. Wright explains how Paul often donned the rhetorical “garb” of his opponents to refute them. In his own words, “Paul was a master of the rhetoric that the Corinthians so prized, and that, like a good philosopher, he could steal his opponents’ clothes, using their rhetoric in order to say, ‘Rhetoric? Who needs that?’ ‘I am no orator, as Brutus is.’”²⁷

Second, the search found no scholarly studies that specifically focus on the themes of living and dying well via the methodology of a comparative analysis between Philippians, Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and Second Temple Jewish sources.²⁸

Third, in this study it shall be argued that these concepts are, for Paul in Philippians, inextricably linked. John Behr concurs, and sees the process of

Press International, 2002), 329–30. The term *adiaphora* is derived from the negativized Greek terms ἀδιάφορία/ἀδιάφορος, which are not found in Scripture, but are found in classical literature. These terms are composed of the alpha privative substantive διαφορά (“difference, variance, disagreement, distinction”) and the adjective διάφορος (“different, unlike, differing from”). See LSJ 418–19. In their classical usage (see e.g., Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.12.35 [1373a35] and Epicurus, *Nat.* 15G), ἀδιάφορία/ἀδιάφορος have the semantic range of: (1) “indifference; absence of difference;” (2) “neglect;” (3) “equivalence of signification;” (4) “not different; indistinguishable;” (5) “individual objects, as having no logical differentia;” (6) “indifferent;” (7) in Stoic philosophy, “things neither good nor bad; to be indifferent of the moral agent;” (8) “common;” (9) in reference to persons, “making no distinction;” (10) in mathematics, “negligible; not differing sensibly” and (11) used as an adverb, “without discrimination.” See LSJ 22–23. *Adiaphora* is used today to describe actions that are morally neutral or indifferent.

²⁵ Ramsaran, “Living and Dying,” 326.

²⁶ Numerous scholarly studies have demonstrated Paul’s use of rhetoric and forms of stylistic devices and argumentation. See Stanley E. Porter and Bryan R. Dyer, eds., *Paul and Ancient Rhetoric: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Context* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 23, 83, 283; and Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2:1365–67.

²⁷ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1:433.

²⁸ This information is based upon searches within WorldCat® and ProQuest® databases on the titles of “living and dying well in Philippians,” “the good life in Philippians,” “comparative studies in Philippians,” “comparative analysis in Philippians,” “Philippians and Second Temple Judaism,” “Philippians and Second Temple Literature,” “Philippians and Egyptian literature,” “Paul and Greco-Egyptian literature,” “Philippians and Greco-Roman literature,” and “Philippians and Graeco-Roman literature.”

dying as the beginning, not the end of true human living. In his words, “Death ... is a defining moment: not the end, but the beginning; not disappearance, but revelation.”²⁹

Fourth, most Pauline theologies tend to focus monolithically on either Paul’s Jewish or Greco-Roman background. There were no current monograph-length studies found via searches in the Worldcat® or ProQuest® databases that specifically focus on Paul’s conception of Christ-centered living and dying in Philippians from a combined Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and Jewish framework. The results of this study will, hopefully, fill this lacuna and help to contribute to a better understanding of Paul’s conception of flourishing.

Fifth, a study on living and dying well in Philippians is also important in that these themes form a major theological motif not only in Philippians,³⁰ but all the *Corpus Paulinum*.³¹ J. Cooper posits a nuanced approach to *theosis* (i.e., “participating in the ‘life of God’”) writing, “*Theosis* is thus a thoroughly Pauline theme that does not replace forensic justification, but stands alongside it as a complimentary soteriological reality.”³²

In investigating both sides of this debate and avoiding throwing the proverbial “baby out with the bathwater,” this study seeks to employ the fruit of Gorman’s work in Paul’s synergistic, participation in the suffering and conformity to Christ’s death, without bifurcating or elevating the theological concepts of participation and justification above the other. Ben C. Blackwell rightly notes that ontological distinction needs to be maintained in a Pauline understanding of *theosis* between God and humanity as it would seem to contradict the monotheism inherent in the Shema (Deut 6:4).³³

A comparative analysis between Philippians and other ancient works is important in that it helps situate Paul’s Christocentric views on living and dying well within his first-century, Mediterranean *Sitz im Leben*. This comparative analysis elucidates the stark contrasts between Paul and the world

²⁹ John Behr, *Becoming Human: Meditations on Christian Anthropology in Word and Image* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2013), 4.

³⁰ Allen Verhey, *The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 99–104.

³¹ N. T. Wright states, “Paul believes that apostolic life consists not only in *telling* people about the dying and rising of the Messiah, but also going through the process oneself.” See Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1:433, emphasis original. See also Jeremy Punt, “A Biblical Death-Wish: Paul Celebrating Dying in Phil 1:21,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 30.1 (2009): 202; and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 25–26, 451.

³² Jordan Cooper, *Christification: A Lutheran Approach to Theosis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 60.

³³ See Ben C. Blackwell, *Christosis: Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus and Cyril of Alexandria*, WUNT II/314 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 267–68; and Blackwell, *Christosis: Engaging Paul’s Soteriology with His Patristic Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), xxii–iii.

around him. Such contrasts (as argued in this monograph) are the result of Paul's experience in his Damascus Road Christophany.

B. Review of Literature³⁴

I. Monographs

1. John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ* (2006)³⁵

Behr begins his monograph with an epigraph from a journal entry³⁶ by nineteenth-century existentialist Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), “We only understand life backwards, but we must live life forwards.”³⁷ In other words, one comes to understand the purpose(s) in life retrospectively, however, one must live prospectively – toward the diachronic process of dying – and it is in this living toward the unforeseeable, opaque future (i.e., toward death) that one is in a position to “recognize the eschatological Lord.”³⁸

Behr describes his concise work as a systematic “account of Christian theology” based upon his earlier works, *The Way to Nicaea* (2001)³⁹ and *The Nicene Faith* (2004).⁴⁰ Behr's five chapters offer a whirlwind, theological journey through the Synoptics and the centrality of the cross (ch. 1), the complex process of canonization (ch. 2), the sinfulness of man and the power of the resurrection (ch. 3), the virgin Mary as mother of Christ and metaphor/symbol for the church (ch. 4), and lastly, glorifying God in life and death (ch. 5). Behr's thesis can perhaps be summarized as:

[T]heology is a confession, witnessing to the transforming power of God manifest in Christ: Light in darkness, Life in death, Word in flesh. What history would record as Jesus being put to death, theology confesses to be the very victory over death by one who gave himself for the life of the world.⁴¹

³⁴ This review of literature is not intended to be an exhaustive list of relevant works but is rather representational of important entry points to the contemporary discussion of Paul's conception of living and dying well. These works engage themes covered within this monograph, and/or have proven to set forth pervasive, formative views within the various circles of Pauline scholarship.

³⁵ John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006).

³⁶ Søren A. Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks*. Søren Kierkegaard's Writings. 55 vols. (Copenhagen: Gad, 1997–), 2:179.

³⁷ Kierkegaard, *Journals*, 2:179.

³⁸ Kierkegaard, *Journals*, 2:179–83.

³⁹ John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ Behr, *The Nicene Faith* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004).

⁴¹ Behr, *The Mystery of Christ*, 141.

Index of Ancient Sources

Hebrew Bible/Septuagint

<i>Genesis</i>		6:4	9
1	13	6:4–5	188
1:26–27	104	6:4–9	233, 236
1:27	223	6:5	93
2:7	15	7:8	93
2:17	13	11:25	249
3:7	32	11:26–28	13
5:5	13	15–16	122
5:24	11	19:14	186
6:11	11	21:23	256
11	13	27:17	186
11:4	13	30:6	122
		30:15–16	122
		30:15–20	13
<i>Exodus</i>		30:19–20	15
2:12	181	32:5	249
2:14	181	32:11	193
14:14	102	32:21	112
15:24	249	32:35	112
20:12	32	32:39	11
23:22	99	32:43	112
32:33	127	32:47	249
		33:29	209
<i>Leviticus</i>		<i>Judges</i>	
18:5	249	16:26	98
19:18	93, 105, 187		
26	13		
		<i>Ruth</i>	
<i>Numbers</i>		2:6	252
1:51	191	2:10	192
3:10	191	2:12	209
17:5	191	4:11	252
18:7	191		
		<i>1 Samuel</i>	
<i>Deuteronomy</i>		2:3	230–31
3:22	102	9:13	192
6	192		

18:1	42	<i>Psalms</i>	
		1	13–14
2 Samuel		2:11–12	248
8:10	99	8:6	249
12:4	192	8:7	249
15:19	192	15:3	42
		18:4–5	11
1 Kings		31:1–2	175
10:1	73	36:7	209
18:22–40	223	42:2	11
19:4	32	57:1	209
		63:7	209
2 Kings		68:29	127
2	11	77:1–7	192
18:32–35	241	77:1–8	236
23:4	190	78:1	190
		84:2	11
1 Chronicles		91:4	209
29:1–5	190	93:12	219
		102:12	216
2 Chronicles		104:29	15
2:1–10	190	104:29–30	11
5:11–14	190	111:1	219
26:16–21	190	118:1–2	219
		118:165	219
		127:1	219
Ezra		<i>Proverbs</i>	
5:12–14	190	LXX Translation	230–31
6:17	190	3:35	32
7:25–26	219	11:16	32
		15:9	122
Nehemiah		16:2	169, 230–31
13:3	190	16:25	122
		21:2	169, 230–31, 271
Esther		24:12	169, 230–31
8:12	96		
		<i>Isaiah</i>	
Job		10:14	193
7:15	32	13:6	210
9:18	15	25:8	11
13:16	22, 248	28:16	252
13:16–19	248	36:18–20	241
19:25–26	248	40–55	19
27:3	15	40:12	230
28:25	230	41:11	102
31:32	192	42:6	205, 249
31:33	13	43:25	216
33:22–26	169	44:20	189

45:16	102	<i>Daniel</i>	
45:18–26	248	7	211
45:23	248	12:1	127
49	39	12:3	111, 249
49:6	249		
52:7	252	<i>Hosea</i>	
52:12	248	13:14	11
53	19, 39	6:7	13
53:4–12	42		
53:12	248	<i>Joel</i>	
58:3–12	169	1:15	210
66:6	102	2:28–29	12
<i>Jeremiah</i>		<i>Jonah</i>	
6:14	254	4:3	32
8:11	254	4:8	32
8:23	249		
9:1	249	<i>Micah</i>	
20:7–18	32	7:9	216
29:7	254		
50:27–29	190	<i>Nahum</i>	
51:10–12	190	4:3	32
<i>Ezekiel</i>		4:8	32
7:19–22	190	<i>Malachi</i>	
7:20	190	1:6	32

Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

<i>Tobit</i>		2:44–46	217
3:6	32	2:50	219
		13:49	288 n. 49
<i>Wisdom of Solomon</i>		14:7	99
6–9	249		
16:2	192	<i>2 Maccabees</i>	
19:14	192	6:1	96
		6:10	217
<i>Sirach/Ecclesiasticus</i>		10:26	99
21:10–11	13	11:25	96
41:13	11		
51:13–30	249	<i>1 Esdras</i>	
		8:21–24	219
<i>1 Maccabees</i>			
1:15	217	<i>3 Maccabees</i>	
1:48	217	3:4	96
1:60–61	217		

<i>4 Maccabees</i>		104:5	210
2:8	96	104:6	249
2:23	96		
4:23	96	<i>4 Ezra</i>	
5:16	96	General Ref.	240
<i>Second Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)</i>		<i>Jubilees</i>	
General Ref.	240	3:21	32
<i>1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)</i>		<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>	
General Ref.	210, 240	General Ref.	240
16:13–16	249	8	190
16:94–96	249	8:21–22	190
37–71	211, 240	15:12	21
98:12	211		
104:2	111, 249	<i>Testament of Moses</i>	
104:4	249	General Ref.	240

Qumran Material

<i>IQM (War Scroll)</i>		<i>IQS (Rule of the Community)</i>	
Gen Ref.	240	9:11	241
<i>IQpHab (Peshar Habakkuk)</i>		<i>4QpNah (Peshar Nahum)</i>	
Gen Ref.	240	Gen Ref.	240

Philo and Josephus

Philo		5–6	185, 194–95, 220, 235, 276
<i>De vita contemplativa</i>		68–69	184, 194–95, 220, 235, 276
1.2	54	69	184, 194–95, 221, 235, 276
3.21–22	54		
<i>In Flaccum</i>		143	180, 184, 220, 254
29	182	147	180, 184, 220, 254
<i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit</i>		162–63	169
203	182	166	182
<i>Legum allegoriae III</i>		205	182
General Ref.	180–81, 194, 233	281	293 n. 68
3.37–38	181–82, 194–95, 219, 233–34, 274	<i>De vita Mosis II</i>	
<i>Legatio ad Gaium</i>		2.193	169
Gen Ref.	184, 276	<i>De posteritate Caini</i>	
		165	182

<i>De specialibus legibus I</i>		2.232–35	237
1.79	182, 194–95, 219, 234, 275	<i>Antiquitates judaicae</i>	
1.252	183, 194–95, 205, 220, 234, 275	General Ref.	186, 278
1.337–39	183, 194–95, 219, 234, 275	1.14	187, 194–95, 221, 237, 278
1.345	184, 194, 209, 275	1.155	187
<i>De specialibus legibus II</i>		1.223–24	187, 194, 278
2.38	184, 209	2.146–47	188, 194, 203, 236, 278
2.53	183	4.225	186, 194–95, 237, 219, 278
2.53–54	194–95, 220, 234, 275	12.121–22	235
2.192	184	15.158	188, 194–95, 221, 237, 278
<i>De specialibus legibus IV</i>		16.35–36	189, 194–95, 222, 237, 278
4.140	183, 194–95, 205, 220, 234, 275	16.36	187, 189
4.221	182, 194–95, 219, 234, 275	16.55	187, 194, 205, 278
4.222	182	16.107	188, 194–95, 222, 237, 278
<i>Josephus</i>		20.27–28	187, 194, 207, 278
<i>Vita</i>		<i>Bellum judaicum</i>	
416–29	235	General Ref.	185, 277
<i>Contra Apionem</i>		1.27	235
General Ref.	279	1.68–69	185–86, 189, 194 95, 219, 235, 237, 277
1.42–43	237	2.372–73	186, 194–95, 219, 277
1.48	235	3.245–46	237
2.85	169	5.194	191
2.85–87	189, 194–95, 205, 219, 237, 279	6.126	191

Egyptian Works

<i>The Book of the Dead</i>		43–54	171
General Ref.	170, 206, 271	55	174, 179, 204, 271
ix	171–72	76	174, 179, 271
x–xi	170	191–92	172, 179, 202, 206, 271
lxix	170	196–200	174–75, 179, 202, 204, 208, 216, 271
cxxix–cxxx	173, 258	199	173
clxxxiii	162, 173–74, 179, 271	201–02	174–75, 179, 204, 208, 216, 271
cci	172–74, 179, 202– 04, 206, 271	281	174, 179, 271
42–44	174, 179, 271		

327	174, 179, 195, 204, 206, 216, 231, 271	IV. 2170–77	176, 179–80, 195, 205, 216–17, 232, 272
<i>Oxyrhynchus papyri</i>		V. 370–439	171
12.1481	117 n. 177		
1380	171 n. 157	<i>Setne I</i>	
1380–82	163 n. 118	General Ref.	74
<i>Papyri Demoticae Magicae</i>		<i>Setne II</i>	
lxi. 63–78	172	General Ref.	69–70
<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i>		1.11–2.27	73
General Ref.	162–63, 176, 272	1.15–19	72
IV. 349–56	178, 180, 195, 217, 232, 272	1.15–2.15	72
IV. 475–829	177	1.15–2.25	73
IV. 720–24	177, 179–80, 195, 209, 216, 232, 272	1:25–30	72
IV. 1345–50	177	1.30–2.1	73
IV. 1350–75	207	2.4–9	72
IV. 1370–75	177, 179, 272	2.10–14	73
IV. 1375	177	2.11–13	72
		2.15–20	73
		2.26–7.10	73
		6.30–7.4	73
		7.5–9	73
		2.25–30	73

Greco-Roman Sources

Aeschines		<i>2nd Tetralogy</i>	
<i>De falsa legatione</i>		2.1	35
7	35		
Anaxandrides		Appian	
General Ref.	169 n. 149	<i>Bella civilia</i>	
		4.105	281 n. 4
Andocides		Apuleius	
<i>Contra Alcibiadem</i>		<i>Metamorphoses</i>	
10	35	General Ref.	169 n. 149
<i>On the Mysteries</i>		11.1–30	130
8.1	35	11.11	169
Antiphon		Aristophanes	
<i>1st Tetralogy</i>		<i>Acharnians/Acharnenses</i>	
4.1–2	35	General Ref.	141 n. 8

Aristotle		<i>Pro Sexto Roscio Amerino</i>	
<i>Ethica nicomachea</i>		11.29	35
General Ref.	153, 266	<i>De senectute</i>	
1.4.2	153	17.60	246
1.4.2–3	153, 161, 195, 214, 266	<i>Tusculanae disputationes</i>	
1.13.1	153–54, 204, 266	General Ref.	156–57, 268
1.13.5–6	154, 161, 204, 208, 266	1.74	157, 162, 208, 268
1.13.6	154	2.15	157, 161, 204, 268
<i>Rhetorica</i>		2.58	32
1.7.1–1.8.1	141	3.50	157, 161, 204, 208, 268
1.12.35	8 n. 24	4.84	157–58, 161–62, 195, 204, 214, 268
3.9.9	30 n. 179	5.2	157–58, 161–62, 195, 204, 215, 268
Cassius Dio		Cicero [?]	
<i>Historia romana (Rhōmaikē Historia)</i>		<i>Rhetorica ad Herennium</i>	
40.47	164	4.19	30 n. 177
47.15	164	4.27	29 n. 176
53.2	164	4.28	30 n. 178
54.6	164	4.40	35 n. 214
Cicero		Demetrius	
<i>Pro Cluentio</i>		<i>De elocutione (Peri hermēneias)</i>	
1.4	35	3.154	30
<i>De oratore</i>		Demosthenes	
2.257	250	<i>De corona</i>	
3.200–07	35	129	35
<i>Epistulae ad familiares</i>		<i>Epitaphius</i>	
3.11.2	246	15	35
<i>De finibus</i>		<i>Exordia (Prooemia)</i>	
General Ref.	154, 267	19	35
1.42	155–56, 161, 195, 204, 213, 227, 267	<i>Olynthiaca iii</i>	
3.2	155–56, 161, 204, 206, 228, 267	3	35
4.16	156, 161, 195, 215, 227, 267	Epictetus	
5.16–17	156, 161, 204, 267	<i>Diatribai (Dissertationes)</i>	
<i>Pro Lege manilia</i>		2.19.13	25
11.29	35	<i>Enchiridion</i>	
<i>De officiis</i>		1.9.13–16	35
1.153	155		

Epicurus		<i>Iliad/Ilias</i>	
<i>On Nature (Peri physeōs)</i>		9.467–69	164
15G	8	10.436	145
Euripides		Isocrates	
<i>Alemaeon at Corinth</i>		<i>Antidosis (Or. 15)</i>	
General Ref.	145	140	35
<i>Archelaus</i>		<i>De bigis (Or. 16)</i>	
General Ref.	145	39	35
<i>Bacchae</i>		<i>On the Peace/De pace (Or. 8)</i>	
General Ref.	145–46, 263	38–39	35
410	146	<i>Ad Demonicum (Or. 1)</i>	
416–22	212	1.12.43	256
416–31	146–48, 160, 195, 212–13, 222, 225, 263	<i>Helenae encomium (Or. 10)</i>	
423	205	29	35
572	143	<i>Panathenaicus (Or. 12)</i>	
565–75	146–48, 160, 195, 212–13, 222, 225, 263	22	35
		74	35
<i>Electra</i>		Ovid	
995	143	<i>Metamorphoses</i>	
<i>Hippolytus</i>		9.688	291 n. 64
751	143	9.692	291 n. 64
<i>Ion</i>		Plato	
473	143	<i>Apologia</i>	
<i>Iphigenia aulidensis</i>		General Ref.	148, 264
General Ref.	145	25.b.7	148
591	143	25.b.7–25.c.2	148, 150, 161, 203, 205, 264
<i>Supplices</i>		28.d.1	149, 205
997	143	28.d.1–2	149–50, 161, 203, 207, 264
Herodotus		36.d.6–10	149–50, 161, 195, 214, 225, 264
<i>Historiae</i>		37.a.1	149
General Ref.	141–42, 261	40.c.6–40.d.1	45, 148, 150, 161, 207, 264
2.50	164	41.a.6–41.c.7	149–50, 161, 207, 264
2.52	164	41.c.4	148–49, 207
5.7	145	<i>Gorgias</i>	
7.46	32, 79	491.e.6	121
8.143–44	142, 195, 211, 261		
Homer			

<i>Phaedo</i>		General Ref.	158, 269
61–62	32, 35	3.4	158–59, 162, 195,
62c	32		204, 215, 228, 269
66b	32	4.2	159, 162, 204, 206,
			208, 269
Plautus		7.4	159, 162, 208, 269
<i>Amphitruo</i>		8.1–2	159, 162, 204, 208,
641b–652	155–56		269
		8.2	159
Pliny the Elder		Servius (Maurus Servius Honoratus)	
<i>Naturalis historia</i>		<i>In Aeneida</i>	
5.73	54	2	244
		469	244
Plutarch		Sophocles	
<i>De Iside et Osiride</i>		<i>Antigone</i>	
General Ref.	163 n. 118, 168	461–64	48, 79
<i>Lives (Bioi Parallēloi)</i>		462–64	34, 45
General Ref.	45		
<i>Moralia</i>		Strabo	
General Ref.	150, 265	<i>Geographica</i>	
100c	151–52, 161, 204,	7.34 (Frag.)	291 n. 61
	265	7.41 (Frag.)	293 n. 69–70
101d–e	151–52, 161, 195,	7.42 (43) (Frag.)	281 n. 4
	204, 214, 265	14.5.13	248
116c	152, 208–09		
116c–d	152, 161, 214, 265	Suetonius	
116d	152	<i>Divus Augustus</i>	
572e	152, 161, 206, 208,	1.1	176
	265	<i>Divus Julius</i>	
1046e	152, 161, 265	7.1–2	46, 140
1087a–b	150	<i>Tiberius</i>	
1108c	150–52, 161, 195,	36	164
	208, 214, 265		
1129f	151–52, 161, 195,		
	214, 265		
Seneca		Tacitus	
<i>Epistulae morales</i>		<i>Annals/Annales</i>	
General Ref.	158–59, 270	2.85	164
58.32–34	159–60, 162, 204,	15.37	147
	208–09, 216, 229,	15.44	99, 139
	270		
58.34	160	Theon of Alexandria (Aelius Theon)	
<i>De vita beata</i>		<i>Exercises (Progymnasmata)</i>	

General Ref.	30	2.97.4–5	144–45, 195 n. 259, 212, 224, 262
Thucydides		2.97.5	143
		3.39.3	143
<i>Historiae</i>		3.39.3–5	144–45, 195 n. 259, 213, 262
General Ref.	143–44, 262		
1.6.6	211 n. 73	3.39.4–5	145, 195 n. 259, 213, 224
2.44.1	143 n. 18	3.39.5	143

New Testament

<i>Matthew</i>		8:31	19
5:1–11	14	8:32	19
5:3	83	8:36	19
5:3–4	83	10:45	37, 106
5:10	83	11:25	98
5:10–11	83	12:27	11
5:12	84	12:31	105
5:38–40	129	13:28	134
5:44	131, 188	16:14–18	39
7:13–14	13, 122	16:15–16	101
8:22	216		
9:13	134	<i>Luke</i>	
11:29	134	2:42–47	73
10:34–36	84	9:23	37, 122
17:25	78	9:60	216
17:25–27	78	10:20b	128
22:36–40	93, 188, 214	10:27–28	105
22:39	105	13:34	209
23:37	209	16:14	288 n. 51
24:32	134	16:19–31	50, 53, 69–74, 76, 84
25:35	188, 192	16:27–31	69, 72
25:35–46	174	16:29	74
25:38	192	16:31	74
25:43–44	192	16:48	288
26:28	115	22	45
27:50	15	23:39–43	188
28:16–20	39	23:43	84
28:19	36	24:44–49	39
28:19–20	101, 134	24:46–48	101
<i>Mark</i>			
1:14–15	188	<i>John</i>	
1:15	101	3:3–8	33
3:31	98	3:16–17	12
8	19	3:26	33

7:53–8:11	188
8:33–47	217
10:10	84
10:16	92–93
10:28	84
13–17	45
13:34–35	92
14:1–3	84
15:13	42
16:33	84
19:30	15
20:19–23	39

Acts

General Ref.	21
1:4–8	39
1:8	93, 101
2:3–11	13
3	21
4:32	207
5:41	114
9:18–19	219
10:34	104
13:9	4
14:8–10	229
14:18–19	219
16	40
16:9–10	253
16:11	283
16:12	281–82, 293 n. 74
16:12–13	292
16:13	292 n. 66
16:13–15	288 n. 49
16:14	288 n. 49
16:16	291
16:16–18	229
16:21	293
16:25	129
16:37–39	98
17:16–34	284
17:22–31	5, 67, 200
17:22–34	291
17:28	45
17:31	200
17:32	200
17:33–34	200
18:3–7	158
18:12–17	158
19:15	226

19:18–19	166
19:19	176
20	45
21:26–30	191
21:38	167
22:3	66
23:1	96
26:14	45
28:3–6	296
28:8–9	219

Romans

General Ref.	19, 25
1:18–32	228, 284
1:18–3:20	3
1:25	189
2:11	104
2:29	217
3:10	233
3:23	233
3:24–28	110
3:30	233, 284 n. 34
4:7–8	175
5	234
5:3–5	17
5:8	188
5:12	12, 36
5:19	37
6	20
6:1–11	12, 24
6:11	37
6:5	25
6:22–23	25
6:23	34, 36, 188
8:2	251
8:12–13	37
8:38–39	16–17, 26
9:4–5	249
9:21–10:15	252 n. 201
10:12–15	252 n. 201
10:15	252 n. 201
10:19	112
11:11–24	142
12:1	115, 233
12:19	112
14:4	98
14:7–9	26
15:7	39
15:10	112

15:19	212
15:24	212
16:2	116
16:23	192
<i>1 Corinthians</i>	
General Ref.	21, 25
2:2	97
3:5–16	284 n. 29
3:16–17	190, 233
4:2	120
4:17	253
5:10	202
6:15–20	190
6:19–20	190, 233, 238
7:29	120
8:4–6	233, 284 n. 34
8:10	285 n. 36
9:19–23	5
9:24–27	15
11:1	24, 36, 114
12:2	142
12:9	100
12:13	100
13	3
15:1–4	12, 101, 188
15:3–4	97
15:12–19	3 n. 9
15:21a	36
15:21b	36
15:26–50	11
15:27	249
15:33	45
15:47	247
15:54–57	79
15:55–57	36
16:13	98

2 Corinthians

General Ref.	19, 21, 25
1:8	79
1:10	79
1:11	79
4:7–12	33
5:1–21	255
5:4	15
5:6–8	95
5:15	12
5:21	18

6:16	190
6:18	177
8:1–6	115
8:9	18
10–13	3
10:1	129
11:23–28	44
12:9–10	12

Galatians

General Ref.	25, 43, 62, 83, 245, 292
1:16	238, 279
2:19–20	25
2:20	37, 255
3:8	74, 218
3:12	249
3:13	12, 18, 256
3:14	12
3:19–20	284 n. 34
3:28	104, 211, 218
3:29	251
4:21–31	5
5:1	98
5:14	105
5:17–24	122
6:2	174, 214
6:7–9	174

Ephesians

General Ref.	19, 25, 43, 62, 192
2:1	33
2:12	142, 192 n. 248
2:18	100
2:19	192 n. 248
2:25	15
4:4	100

Philippians

General Ref.	1, 3, 19, 21, 25, 43–44, 78–90 105 n. 123, 129, 135–38, 292
1	90
1–4	108, 135, 137
1:1	3, 6, 23, 102, 105, 108, 113, 116, 121, 188, 206, 216 n. 95,

	217 n. 103, 222, 235–36, 277	1:19–26	8, 28, 95
		1:19–4:13	29
1:1a	6 n. 17	1:20	19, 22, 94
1:1–2	86	1:20–21	94–95
1:1–26	96	1:20–24	41, 215 n. 86
1:1–2:5	108	1:20–26	216 n. 90
1:2	209, 218 n. 104, 224	1:21	7–8, 16, 19–20, 22, 25, 27–31, 33, 36, 44–45, 78–79, 95, 113, 148, 188, 204, 208–09, 212–13, 214 n. 84, 217 n. 100, 222, 255
1:3	131		22, 24, 29, 34, 215
1:3–11	86	1:21a	20, 34–35, 78–79, 152, 213, 217 n. 99, 232
1:4	93, 114	1:21b	149 n. 45
1:4–5	284		26, 34, 36, 39, 105
1:5	92, 114, 248, 253		27, 29, 35, 39, 95, 125
1:6	90–92, 94, 205–06, 209, 215, 220, 295 n. 83	1:21–22	35
1:6–11	109	1:21–26	205
1:7	91–92, 133, 170, 204 n. 29	1:22	6, 95, 148, 208, 217 n. 99, 295 n. 83
1:9	93, 203–04, 218 n. 104	1:22b	264
1:10	89, 202, 209, 295 n. 83	1:22–26	37, 79, 109
1:11	133, 151, 170, 204 n. 29, 205, 214 n. 81	1:23	29, 95–96, 114
1:12	89, 125	1:23–25	23, 108
1:12–14	79, 95, 253	1:24–26	5, 19, 92, 96, 98– 101, 108, 110–11, 114, 116–17, 119– 20, 123–24, 126– 27, 131, 134–35, 137, 208, 211, 213, 222, 224, 246, 297– 98
1:12–16	21	1:25	85, 88, 96, 100, 102
1:12–17	6, 205	1:26	96
1:12–18	113	1:27	101
1:12–26	27, 86		99
1:12–2:18	39		23, 28, 39, 86, 90, 96, 99, 102–03, 112
1:12–4:1	30		96
1:13	23, 108, 123		23, 109, 248 n. 194
1:14	19, 126, 166		86
1:14–18	92		85
1:15	105, 131	1:27a	95, 99, 101–02, 135, 137, 175, 209
1:15–16	22	1:27c–d	
1:15–18a	39	1:27d	
1:16–18	93	1:27–28	
1:17	19, 105, 131	1:27–30	
1:17b	22		
1:17–18	203 n. 26	1:27–2:11	
1:18	94, 114, 124, 133	1:27–2:18	
1:18b–26	31	1:27–3:21	
1:18d–26	21	1:27–4:9	
1:19	22, 92–94, 109, 248 n. 194	1:28	

	n. 65, 232, 252 n.	2:8	104, 108–09, 203,
	201, 295 n. 83		264, 298
1:28a	101	2:9	36
1:29	19, 79	2:9–11	108, 113, 119, 199,
1:30	95, 134		209 n. 61, 211,
2	102, 105, 298		241–42, 295 n. 83,
2–3	209		297
2:1	23, 100, 102, 108,	2:10	249 n. 195
	114	2:10–11	248 n. 194
2:1–2	109	2:11	94, 151, 205, 214 n.
2:1–4	107		81, 233 n. 149
2:1–11	109	2:12	107–10, 123, 131,
2:1–30	86, 102		136–37, 209 n. 65,
2:2	102–04, 106, 114,		249 n. 194
	127, 135–37, 207	2:12e	109
2:2–3	124, 137	2:12–18	112
2:2–4	103	2:13	110
2:3	104–05, 136, 174,	2:14	90, 110–11, 124,
	298		249 n. 194
2:3a	106	2:14–16	110
2:3b	106	2:15	85 n. 26, 110–11,
2:3–4	26–27, 104, 106,		249 n. 194, 250 n.
	109, 116		197, 284, 287
2:3–5	117, 203, 232 n.	2:15–16	111
	147, 242, 297 n. 97	2:16	19, 110–12, 136–
2:3–8	203, 205		37, 209, 249 n. 194,
2:4	104–05, 121, 136–		295 n. 83
	37	2:16a	111
2:4a	106	2:16b	39
2:4b	106	2:16b–18	21
2:5	19 n. 101, 20, 23,	2:16–17	137
	37, 92, 106–08,	2:16–18	105
	119, 122, 127, 129,	2:17	6, 21, 89 n. 49,
	136–37, 207, 214,		113–15, 136, 209,
	218		213, 215 n. 86, 216
2:5–11	18 n. 98, 20, 39, 89,		n. 90
	104, 107–09, 114,	2:17–18	83, 95, 113–15,
	121, 188, 206–07,		124, 136, 205
	228 n. 137, 236	2:18	84, 113–14, 120,
2:6–8	108		124, 137
2:6–11	12, 19, 23, 104–07,	2:19	125–26, 250 n. 198
	207 n. 43, 213, 229	2:19–24	85, 206
	n. 143, 241	2:19–28	116
2:7	102, 105, 114, 121,	2:19–30	121, 204 n. 29, 205,
	124, 206 n. 37, 214,		236
	217 n. 103, 222,	2:20	204
	224, 248 n. 194,	2:20–22	105, 116
	298	2:22	125, 216 n. 95, 217
			n. 103

2:24	126	3:7–8	198, 219, 221 n.
2:25	98, 114, 121, 213, 216 n. 95, 223, 250 n. 198	3:7–9	120 205
2:25–28	116	3:7–14	21, 212, 240
2:25–30	92, 206	3:7–20	113
2:26	134	3:8	105, 209, 255
2:26–28	131	3:8–10	214
2:26–30	219 n. 111	3:8–11	227 n. 131
2:28	114, 120, 124, 134	3:8–14	214
2:28c	117 n. 177	3:9	170, 224
2:29	114–17, 126, 136– 37	3:10	19–20, 36, 37 n. 223, 79, 114–15, 125, 203, 209, 216 n. 90
2:30	105, 114–17, 120, 206 n. 38	3:10–11	36
3	105, 118, 120–21, 123, 126	3:10–14	25, 108, 113, 118, 121, 126, 295 n. 83
3:1	84, 114, 120–21, 124–26, 128, 131, 133, 136–37	3:11	36, 208 n. 59, 209
3:1a	120	3:12	37, 90–91
3:1b	120	3:12–14	205
3:1–2	118	3:12–21	123
3:1–21	86, 118	3:13	125, 133
3:1–4:1	86, 128	3:13–14	215
3:1–4:9	123	3:14	23
3:2	3 n. 9, 90, 120, 166 n. 134, 169, 252 n. 201	3:14–17	249 n. 194
3:2–3	89, 120, 217 n. 102	3:15	90, 92, 119, 204– 05, 220
3:2–8	233, 237, 274, 279	3:15–19	118
3:2–9	217 n. 101	3:16	119
3:2–19	120	3:17	17, 20, 26, 36, 94, 114, 116, 121–22, 36, 126, 134, 136– 37, 207, 236, 291
3:3	23, 108, 118 n. 179, 119, 217 n. 102	3:17–18	122, 136
3:3–6	239	3:18	98, 203 n. 26, 234, 238, 274, 279
3:3–8	221, 242	3:18–19	102, 119–20, 147, 233, 237, 242, 250 n. 197, 274
3:3–9	118		
3:3–14	238	3:18–20	284
3:4	118 n. 179	3:18–21	249 n. 194
3:4–11	120	3:19	90, 151, 205, 207, 252 n. 201, 295 n. 83
3:5	218, 221, 246		
3:5–9	118 n. 179, 204 n. 29	3:19b	147 n. 38
3:5–10	222	3:19–20	119
3:6	202, 221, 232 n. 148, 170, 246	3:19–21	175
3:7	19, 212, 221	3:20	78, 98, 108, 118, 129, 205, 207, 209,

	211, 217 n. 100, 220, 222, 228 n. 137, 241–42, 246, 255, 297–98	4:9	27, 94, 125, 133–35, 137, 209, 220–21, 224
3:20–21	119, 121, 126, 242, 295 n. 83	4:9a	85
3:20–21a	247	4:10	92, 114, 124, 126
3:21	205, 209, 249 n. 194	4:10–13	34 n. 211, 212
4	123, 126	4:10–20	86, 92, 123
4:1	98–99, 108, 114, 120, 123–26, 136– 37	4:11	134, 151 n. 52
4:1–2	126, 212	4:11–13	204, 212–14, 219, 244
4:1–3	123	4:12	44, 104, 203, 264
4:1–4	112, 137	4:12–14	17
4:1–9	86, 123	4:13	29, 31, 133, 151 n. 52
4:1–20	86, 120, 123	4:18	114–15, 117, 250 n. 198
4:2	92, 126–27, 136–37	4:19	23
4:2–3	26–27, 101, 109, 117 n. 177, 123–24, 126, 206, 232 n. 148, 241, 250 n. 197–98	4:19–20	205
4:2–9	86, 123	4:20	151, 209 n. 65, 214 n. 81
4:3	100, 124, 126, 128, 136–37, 206, 209 n. 65, 216 n. 95, 250 n. 198, 295 n. 83	4:21	23, 90, 108
4:3–5	137	4:21–23	86
4:4	84, 114, 120, 124, 126–29, 131, 136, 241	<i>Colossians</i>	
4:4b	128	General Ref.	116
4:4–5	212	1:7	116
4:4–6	137	2:8	214
4:5	125, 128–30, 136, 220, 241, 295 n. 83	2:13	33
4:6	93, 124–25, 130– 32, 136–37, 241	3:5	37
4:6–7	130–33, 218 n. 104	4:12	116
4:7	23, 108, 132, 135– 37, 209, 212, 224, 228	<i>1 Thessalonians</i>	
4:8	125, 133–34, 137, 181, 204–05, 215, 218, 254 n. 208	General Ref.	19
4:8–9	125, 133, 137, 215, 235, 277	2:2	95, 166
		2:19	126
		3:8	98
		4:1	120
		5:9–10	26
		5:16–18	131
		<i>2 Thessalonians</i>	
		2:15	98
		<i>2 Timothy</i>	
		General Ref.	21
		2:3–4	127
		4:6	89, 114
		4:8	120

		1:12–15	13
		2:2–7	104
<i>Titus</i>			
1:12	5, 45		
2:13	116	<i>1 John</i>	
		2:7	92
<i>Philemon</i>			
General Ref.	116, 250	<i>Revelation</i>	
2	223	1	13
7	123	2–3	109
11	25020 123	3:1	33
23	116	3:5	127
		4:13	222
<i>Hebrews</i>		7:9	101
8:12	216	12:7–11	296
		13:17	288 n. 49
<i>James</i>		16:6	115
General Ref.	122 n. 192	19:11	296
1:2–4	17	21:4	79

Early Christian Works

1 Clement		General Ref.	12 n. 54, 21 n. 118
General Ref.	21 n. 118	<i>To the Romans</i>	
		6	12 n. 54
Anathanasius		Irenaeus	
General Ref.	18 n. 97, 100 n. 106	General Ref.	12, 18 n. 97, 247
Clement of Alexandria		<i>Adversus haereses (Elenchos)</i>	
<i>Stromateis</i>		5.9.2	13 n. 55
3.6.53.1	250 n. 198		
Codex theodosianus		Jerome	
General Ref.	290	<i>Epistulae</i>	
16.10.25	290 n. 56–57	107.2	163 n. 118
Didache		<i>De viris illustribus</i>	
1.1	13	General Ref.	270
Epistle of Christ and Abgar		John Chrysostom	
General Ref.	285, 287 n. 44, 47	<i>Homiliae in epistulam ad Philippenses</i>	
		9.170.24–25	110 n. 146
Gregory of Nazianzus		15.284.16–18	132 n. 227
General Ref.	100 n. 106		
Ignatius		Justin Martyr	

<i>Apologia i</i>		3.2	287 n. 46
5.1–6.1	197	4.1	288 n. 49
		4.1–3	288 n. 50
Justinian		4.3	288 n. 49
		5.2	288 n. 49
<i>Digest</i>		5.2–3	288 n. 50
50.15.6	282 n. 15	6.1	288 n. 49–50
		7.1–2	288 n. 50
Martyrdom of Paul		9.1	287 n. 46
General Ref.	21 n. 118	11.1–2	288 n. 49
		11.2	288 n. 51
Origen		11.2–3	287 n. 46
General Ref.	253	11.3	289 n. 51
		11.4	289 n. 51
<i>Commentarii in Romanos</i>		12.3	289 n. 53
1.1	250 n. 198		
<i>Homiliae in Exodum</i>		Socrates of Constantinople (Socrates Scholasticus)	
5.1	253 n. 202		
Polycarp		<i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>	
		5.16	163 n. 118
<i>To the Philippians</i>		Tertullian	
General Ref.	284, 287–89	<i>De anima</i>	
1.1	287 n. 48	VII	76 n. 127
2.1–3	288 n. 50		
2.2	288 n. 49		
2.3	288 n. 49		

Index of Modern Authors

- Abrahamsen, Valerie 166, 285–87, 294–96
- Aletti, Jean-Noël 239
- Allen, Thomas G. 162, 171–74, 179, 195, 202, 204, 206, 208, 216, 231, 258, 271
- Armour, Robert A. 1, 207, 209, 258–59
- Arnold, Bradley E. 44
- Ascough, Richard S. 103, 282, 293
- Assmann, Jan 170, 202–04, 207, 230
- Aune, David E. 66, 87
- Aus, Roger D. 38, 63
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 200–01
- Bakirtzis, Charalambos 179, 286
- Barclay, John M. G. 2, 60, 62–63, 65, 240, 242, 247
- Barrett, C. K. 38, 112
- Barth, Karl 100, 251
- Bassler, Julette M. 28, 256
- Bauckham, Richard 19, 233
- Becker, Eve-Marie 78
- Behr, John 8–13, 15, 23, 44–45, 48, 247
- Berthelot, Katell 199
- Betz, Hans D. 35, 82–83, 163, 176–77
- Bird, Michael F. 2, 91
- Black, David A. 23, 28, 86, 141
- Blois, Isaac D. 137
- Bloomquist, Gregory 28
- Bockmuehl, Markus 19–20, 23, 37, 40–41, 43, 63–64, 91–92, 94, 100, 105, 123, 125, 132, 249, 281, 291–92, 294
- Bornkamm, Günther 38
- Brélaz, Cédric 6, 248, 252–54
- Bremmer, Jan 147, 209, 243
- Briones, David E. 149, 154, 158, 229
- Brown, Jeannine K. 82, 138
- Budge, E. A. Wallis 47, 162, 171, 174–75, 179, 202, 204, 208, 271
- Bultmann, Rudolf 74, 242
- Campbell, Douglas A. 3, 6
- Cassidy, Richard J. 94, 106–07, 110, 126–27, 132, 134–35, 147, 221, 254
- Chan, Michael J. 84, 89, 245
- Charlesworth, James H. 64
- Collart, Paul 163, 179, 283, 291
- Cotton, Hannah M. 190
- Croy, N. Clayton 27, 32, 34–35, 39, 42
- Davies, W. D. 66
- Dodson, Joseph R. 149, 154, 158, 229
- Doniger, Wendy 51, 57, 60
- Droge, Arthur J. 31–32, 34–35
- Dunn, James D. G. 3–4, 24
- Ehrensperger, Kathy 112, 169
- Ehrman, Bart D. 69, 287, 289
- Engberg-Pedersen, Troels 26, 53, 63
- Evans, Craig A. 5, 45, 153–54, 251
- Fee, Gordon D. 7, 28, 42, 93, 100, 110–11, 115, 147
- Fletcher-Louis, Crispin 107, 199, 214
- Flexsenhar, Michael 6
- Frame, John M. 14–16, 43–44
- Frazer, James G. 58–59
- Fredriksen, Paula 221, 241, 253
- Freidenreich, David M. 57, 61, 65, 69, 76
- Frey, Jörg 137
- Geoffrion, Timothy C. 28, 98–99
- Giffin, Ryan Kristopher 91, 254
- Gnilka, Joachim 111

- Gorman, Michael J. 7, 9, 18–20, 44, 215
 Grabbe, Lester L. 66
 Gressmann, Hugo 50, 69–76
 Gülden, Svenja A. 162
 Gupta, Nijay K. 7, 31–33, 37, 79, 88, 91

 Hansen, G. Walter 22–23, 100, 115, 125
 Harnack, Adolf von 38, 64, 292
 Harrison, James R. 2, 106, 248, 254
 Hawthorne, Gerald F. 41, 111, 212, 251, 282, 294
 Hays, Richard B. 4–5, 45, 251, 253, 292
 Hellerman, Joseph H. 20, 31–32, 79, 85–87, 91, 93, 96–103, 106, 108–11, 114–15, 119, 123–25, 128–30, 135, 147, 209
 Hengel, Martin 248, 295
 Hock, Ronald F. 60
 Holloway, Paul A. 62, 88, 92–95, 99, 104, 110–11, 115, 117, 120, 122–23, 126–27, 130–32, 211, 251
 Hooker, Morna D. 107
 Horsley, Richard A. 29, 96
 Hurtado, Larry W. 107, 139, 197, 243

 Inselmann, Anke 137

 Jaquette, James L. 25–27, 39
 Jenks, R. Gregory 22, 44, 65, 163
 Jewett, Robert 31
 Jipp, Joshua W. 78–79, 81, 94, 113
 Johnson, Luke Timothy 22

 Karenga, Maulana 46, 74, 171, 174
 Käsemann, Ernst 107
 Kennedy, George A. 29
 Keown, Mark J. 95, 109, 112–13, 123, 147, 241, 250
 Kim, Seyoon 4
 Kirk, Alexander N. 20–24, 44
 Kleibl, Kathrin 164
 Kloppenborg, John S. 62
 Koester, Helmut 179, 286
 Koukouli-Chryssanthaki, Chaido 179, 254, 281–83, 285–86, 289, 291–93, 295–96

 Krentz, Edgar M. 98
 Kurek-Chomycz, Dominika 98
 Kurz, William S. 45

 Last, Richard 62
 Lehtipuu, Outi 69–71
 Lemche, Niels Peter 142
 Lichtheim, Miriam 72, 171
 Lloyd, Alan B. 207
 Lolos, Yannis 282, 291
 Long, Frederick J. 254
 Longenecker, Bruce W. 24–25
 Lucarelli, Rita 162, 170–72, 257–59

 MacIntyre, Alasdair 52, 54–55
 Magie, David 163, 168
 Malherbe, Abraham J. 26, 28, 46, 53, 63, 284
 Marchal, Joseph A. 88, 96–97, 103, 137, 167–68, 209, 217–18, 286, 293, 296
 Martin, Ralph P. 107–08, 111, 212, 251, 282
 Martyn, J. Louis 41, 245
 Mazurek, Lindsey A. 291
 McKnight, Scot 24, 44, 46, 62, 81–82
 Meeks, Wayne A. 26, 28, 43, 46, 82
 Mueller, Dierk 99
 Modica, Joseph B. 24, 44, 46, 62
 Moffatt, James 117
 Mommsen, Theodor 290
 Morgan, Teresa 199–200
 Müller, Georg 50

 Nanos, Mark D. 120, 147, 169, 217, 221, 286
 Neusner, Jacob 3, 54, 139
 Nickelsburg, George W. E. 139, 210
 Nikki, Nina 137–38
 Nock, Arthur D. 165
 Novakovic, Lidija 99
 Novenson, Matthew V. 233, 284–85, 294

 Oakes, Peter 88, 96–97, 108, 165, 254, 291, 294–98
 O'Brien, Peter T. 22, 32, 37, 54, 93, 100, 115, 128, 147, 250

- Ogereau, Julien M. 92
 Osborne, Grant R. 78, 80, 89, 288
 Osiek, Carolyn 30–31, 87, 95–96, 100–01, 103–04, 106, 116–17, 119–20, 123, 126, 130, 132, 250
- Payne, Richard 16–18
 Palmer, D. W. 31, 34
 Palmer, Martin J. 190
 Pennington, Jonathan T. 80–84, 89, 245
 Peres, Imres 6
 Perriman, Andrew 249
 Pfleiderer, Otto 59
 Picard, Charles 178–79, 283, 285–86
 Pilhofer, Peter 273, 291, 295
 Poole, Fitz John Porter 51–52, 56
 Porter, Stanley E. 8, 35, 65–67, 87, 281–82, 291, 293–94
 Poplutz, Uta 99
 Preisendanz, Karl 176
 Punt, Jeremy 9, 27, 33–37, 39, 42
- Ramsaran, Rollin 7–8, 28–31, 44, 46
 Reasoner, Mark 211–12, 248
 Reed, Jeffrey T. 28, 87
 Reumann, John 7, 23, 28, 43, 86, 88, 91, 93, 98–102, 106, 109–11, 123, 132, 147, 209, 282, 291–94
 Rizakis, Athanasios 102, 291
 Rowe, C. Kavin 49, 51–55, 62, 64, 68, 81, 158, 228–29, 255
 Rutherford, Ian 2, 168
 Ryan, Judith M. 141
- Sanders, E. P. 24, 38, 46, 54, 60, 62, 68, 70
 Sanders, James A. 5, 251
 Sandmel, Samuel 45, 50, 198
 Satlow, Michael L. 139
 Scaif, Foy 170–72, 258
 Schellenberg, Ryan S. 2
 Schenk, Wolfgang 7
 Schiffman, Lawrence H. 66
 Schnabel, Eckhard J. 284
 Schreiner, Thomas R. 9, 88
 Segal, Alan F. 177
 Silva, Moisés 119, 251, 292
 Smith, Claire S. 2, 88
- Smith, Jonathan Z. 49–51, 56–60, 62, 65, 68, 71, 201, 240
 Smith, Julien C. H. 128–29, 242
 Snavely, Andrea D. 244
 Sorek, Susan 164, 166–67
 Sourvinou-Inwood, Christiane 143
 Stadler, Martin A. 162, 170–72, 257–59
 Standhartinger, Angela 6, 95, 248–49, 283, 288
 Stendahl, Krister 3–4, 24, 46
 Staubli, Thomas 169
 Stowers, Stanley K. 28, 43
 Strawn, Brent A. 46, 80–81, 84, 89, 198, 245–46
 Swinton, John 16–17
- Tabor, James D. 32
 Tanzer, Sarah J. 54
 Thielman, Frank 40
 Thiessen, Gerd 70
 Thurén, Lauri 53
 Thurston, Bonnie B. 141
 Trebilco, Paul 62, 86, 252
 Troeltsch, Ernst 49
 Turcan, Robert 243–44
- Ulmer, Rivka 164–65
- Verhey, Allen 9, 16
 Verhoef, Eduard 166, 284, 286–87, 295
 Vermaseren, M. J. 177
 Volf, Miroslav 246, 255
 Vollenweider, Samuel 99
- Wach, Joachim 51–52
 Ware, James P. 21, 37–40, 249
 Watson, Duane F. 23, 28, 86–87, 141
 West, Audrey Lynn Sharon 40–43
 White, John L. 87
 White, L. Michael 28, 63
 Willis, Wendell L. 92
 Wills, Lawrence M. 297
 Winter, Bruce W. 46
 Witherington, Ben, III. 28–29, 86, 88, 292, 294
 Wright, N. T. 3–4, 8–9, 24, 63–64, 226

Zannis, Angelo G. 254

Zimmermann, Ruben 88–89, 166, 242

Subject Index

- Adfectus* 86, 123
Adiaphora 7–8, 25–26
 Afterlife (Eschatology) 6, 69–72, 74, 82, 84, 149, 170–75, 188, 193, 203–04, 206–10, 216, 221–22, 225–26, 228–32, 238, 241, 247, 257–60, 264–66, 268–71, 291, 294–98
 – as a journey 69–77, 170–74, 206, 208, 230–31, 257–60, 271, 294–96
Akh (“Transformed Spirit”) 171
 Alexandria 9, 70, 163, 169, 181, 230, 234, 248, 250
 Alexander the Great 46–47 n. 278, 140, 143 n. 16, 153, 190, 281
 Am-mit 72 n. 112, 173, 258–60
 Angels 177
 Animal Studies 145, 166 n. 134, 167 n. 142, 189, 259, 279
 – hybrid “humanimals” 259
 Antiochus Epiphanes IV 190 n. 240
 Anti-Semitism 111, 147 n. 39, 182
 Anubis 72 n. 112, 169, 209 n. 61, 259
 Apocalypse/Apocalyptic 3 n. 9, 26 n. 152, 35, 63, 65 n. 85, 69, 83, 111, 211, 245, 280, 288 n. 49
Argumentatio 86, 88, 90, 96, 102, 118,
 Aristotle 8 n. 24, 30 n. 179, 82–83, 140–41, 153–54, 161, 195 n. 255–56, 259, 203 n. 28, 204, 207 n. 45, 208, 210 n. 72, 214, 226–27, 266
Ars Moriendi (“The Art of Dying”) 1, 7 n. 22, 156
Ars Vivendi (“The Art of Living”) 1, 7 n. 22, 155, 157, 215
 Athens 66 n. 89, 145 n. 24, 149–50, 153, 248

Ba (“Soul”) 72 n. 112, 171 n. 155, 181, 188, 190, 258

 Body 15, 72, 94, 96 n. 81, 134, 157, 160, 171 n. 155, 208–09, 232–33, 238, 247, 273
 – as a temple/consecrated space 238, 273
 – of Christ 118–19, 126, 209, 247, 250 n. 197
 – of papyri (*PGM*) 162
 – of Philippians 21, 86
 Book of Life 127, 295
Book of the Dead 2 n. 5, 6 n. 16, 71, 162, 170, 171 n. 157, 172 n. 160, 173, 179, 257–60, 271
 Boundary Marker Language 142, 166 n. 134, 217 n. 102, 252
 – high boundary markers 252 n. 201

 Caesar 85, 97–98, 119, 132, 140, 211, 223, 228, 241, 247, 253, 278
 – as god 119, 165 n. 128, 254
 – Augustus 40 n. 237, 46–47 n. 278, 140, 166, 176, 180, 184, 220, 254 n. 208, 282
 – Caligula 164–65
 – Claudius 70 n. 99, 150
 – emperor worship 102 n. 114, 235, 252, 254, 276, 288 n. 49, 294
 – Julius 40 n. 237, 46–47 n. 278, 140, 165 n. 128, 293
 – Nero 139 n. 1, 147 n. 38–39, 158
 – Tiberius 164
 – Titus 2 n. 5, 190 n. 240, 235 n. 154
 – Vespasian 235 n. 154
Carmen Christi (“Christ Hymn”) 19–20, 23, 104, 107–08, 199, 221, 249 n. 195, 250, 254
 Christ Allegiants 99 n. 94, 104 n. 123, 284, 289–90

- Christ Communities 89, 92 n. 57, 110, 132, 163 n. 118, 200, 234, 250 n. 197, 253 n. 201, 281, 284
- Christophany 4, 10, 44, 221 n. 119, 226 n. 127, 237, 239, 265, 277–78 *see also* “Paul – Damascus Road event”
- Chthonic/Chthonian 146 n. 132, 209 n. 61 *see also* “Underworld/Nether-world”
- Cicero 32, 35 n. 214, 140–41, 154–57, 161–62, 195, 201 n. 18, 203 n. 28, 204, 205 n. 34, 206, 207 n. 45, 208, 210–11 n. 72, 213–15, 227–28, 246, 250 n. 198, 255, 267–68
- Circumcision 3 n. 9, 119, 217–18
- as a “malleable” concept 217 n. 102
 - [un]circumcised hearts 3 n. 9, 217 n. 102
- Citizenship 79, 83, 96–98, 101, 113, 118–19, 121–22, 126, 128–30, 135, 141–43, 160, 180–82, 186, 189, 194–96, 201 n. 18, 205, 207–09, 210 n. 72, 211–12, 217, 218 n. 106, 219, 222–24, 231–33, 234 n. 150, 236–37, 239, 241–42, 246–47, 253 n. 301, 256, 261, 274–75, 277–80, 295 n. 83, 297–98
- dual citizenship 211–12, 246–47
 - of Greek citizens 141–43, 261
 - of heavenly/celestial citizens 79, 83, 113, 118, 121–22, 126, 128, 130, 205, 207–09, 212, 217, 222, 231–32, 237, 239, 241–42, 246–47, 253 n. 301, 256, 278–80, 295 n. 83, 297–98
 - of Jewish citizens 181–82, 186, 189, 194–96, 212, 219, 274–75, 277, 279
 - of Roman citizens 97–98, 119, 211–12
- Cleopatra 164, 165 n. 128, 282
- Colonia* 281–82, 283 n. 19, 292
- Comparative Analysis 1, 4, 8–9, 20 n. 109, 32, 45, 47–49, 51–52, 54–77, 182, 197, 201, 240, 247
- Competitive Historiography 199
- Consecrated/Sacred Spaces 178, 180, 190–91, 220, 233, 238, 244, 273, 285 n. 36 *see also* “Body” and “Temple”
- shared sacred spaces 167 n. 142, 286–87
- Consolation 62, 108, 132
- Constantinization 290
- Corpus Paulinum* 9, 43, 48, 63, 82, 98, 116, 120, 126, 134, 163, 170–71, 242 n. 171, 245, 255 n. 213
- Cruciformity 3, 4 n. 11, 12, 17–18, 20, 30, 32, 37, 40–42, 44–45, 59–60, 70 n. 100, 80, 83, 88–89, 95, 97, 104, 106–09, 113, 122, 124, 126, 129, 136, 147, 163 n. 116, 178, 197, 209, 214–15, 217, 220, 226, 229, 231–32, 236–37, 239–42, 245–47, 249, 253, 255–56, 262, 264–65, 267, 272, 276–77, 279, 284–85, 287, 289
- Curse Tablets (*Defixiones*) 176
- Cursus Honorum* (“Course of Honors”) 105–06, 244, 246, 253–55, 276, 298
- Cursus Pudorum* (“Course of Ignominy”) 20 n. 109, 106, 224
- Cybele (*Magna Mater*) 147 n. 39, 167 n. 142, 169 n. 149, 180, 283
- Death 3–4, 7, 9–17, 20–23, 25–27, 30–37, 39–46, 59–60, 67, 78145 n. 24, 29, 78–79, 83, 85, 88–89, 94–95, 107–08, 113–18, 120, 124, 130–32, 135, 137, 145 n. 24, 148–50, 152, 156–57, 159–60, 170, 177, 188, 191, 193 n. 251, 194, 195 n. 259, 203, 205, 207–09, 213–17, 218 n. 106, 220–21, 223, 226 n. 126, 227–29, 231–32, 234, 237–38, 243–44, 246, 255–56, 259, 264–65, 267–68, 270, 275, 278, 280, 288 n. 49, 291, 295, 297 *see also* “Living and Dying Well” and “Noble Death”
- as conduit 78–79, 113, 148 n. 41, 208–09, 217, 227, 232, 237, 256, 267, 278
 - as reward (κέρδος) 20, 22, 29, 34 n. 211, 44–45, 78, 79 n. 5, 95, 113, 148 n. 41, 152, 156, 177, 207–08, 232, 255, 278
 - death masks 244
 - medicalization of 17
 - second death 259
- Demons/*Daimons* 132, 177, 207, 229, 244, 291

- demonic possession 291 *see also*
“Soul – spiritual warfare”
- Demotic 65 n. 87, 69–71, 171, 172 n. 160
- Diana (Artemis) 145, 169 n. 149, 286 n. 43, 289 n. 55, 294
- Dionysus/Bacchus 145–47, 160, 209 n. 61, 212–13, 224–25, 294
- Dogs 3 n. 9, 169, 181, 189, 259, 296, *Duolatrous* 285
- Egypt 46, 70 n. 100, 73 n. 117, 74, 162–64, 165 n. 127, 166, 167 n. 139, 168 n. 144–46, 175, 176 n. 178, 180–82, 193, 204, 207 n. 42, 241, 254 n. 208, 257, 291
- Egyptian Pantheon 68, 162, 163 n. 118, 165, 167, 168 n. 144, 169, 173–74, 178, 182, 206, 207 n. 42, 252 n. 200, 257–60, 275, 291
- Elephantine Papyri 166 n. 134
- Enemy/Enemies 11, 17, 98, 99 n. 94, 102, 119, 122, 131, 144–45, 147, 155, 160, 176, 182, 190 n. 240, 207, 213, 217, 219, 221, 224, 233, 252, 254, 256, 274, 289, 295 n. 84, *Ekphrasis* 209, 295
- Epistolary Analysis 28, 53, 83 n. 22, 86, 87 n. 38, 90
- Epaphroditus 29, 41, 102, 103 n. 116, 105, 110, 115–18, 120–21, 123, 131 n. 224, 206, 236, 250 n. 198
- Ethnocentrism 141–43, 160, 180–82, 185–86, 189, 194–96, 201 n. 18, 210 n. 72, 211, 218 n. 106, 219–20, 224, 233–34, 236–37, 246, 261, 274–75, 277, 279
- Eudaimonia/εὐδαιμονία* 1, 26, 67, 81, 94, 143–44, 146, 148–49, 151–53, 180, 182, 184–87, 205 n. 33, 224
 - as “flexible/expedient” 153, 161, 195 n. 259, 210 n. 72, 214, 226, 266
- Euodia 101, 109, 117, 123–24, 127, 250, 251 n. 198
 - name as a possible pun 117
- Euripides 140–41, 143, 145–47, 160–61, 193, 195 n. 255–59, 196, 201 n. 18, 203 n. 28, 205, 210 n. 72, 212–13, 219, 224–25, 227, 246, 263, 296 n. 89
- Evil Workers 3 n. 9, 169
- Exordium (Proemium/Proem)* 28 n. 169, 86, 133
- Faith/πίστις 1 n. 1, 21, 24, 72, 95–96, 99 n. 94, 100–01, 113, 116, 120, 123, 125, 139 n. 1, 179 n. 190, 187, 199 n. 9, 221 n. 119, 264, 284, 287
- Gentile/Hellenistic 4, 6 n. 16, 26, 27 n. 164, 32, 35, 37, 40 n. 237, 46 n. 274, 63, 66 n. 89, 120 n. 187, 142, 168, 188–89, 191–92, 201, 205, 211, 217 n. 102, 218, 220, 223–24, 233–34, 238, 242, 249, 251 n. 199, 252–53, 274, 281, 284, 293–94
 - as opponents in Phil 3:2 120 n. 187, 147 n. 39
 - background of the Philippians 242, 249, 251 n. 199
 - Hellenistic Jews 63
 - Hellenistic period 168 n. 144, 252 n. 200
- Gods/Goddesses 32, 50 n. 4, 59, 72–73, 75 n. 124, 145, 147, 150–51, 163 n. 118, 164–65, 167–68, 169 n. 149, 172–76, 178, 180, 189–90, 197, 199, 203 n. 27, 204, 206–07, 209, 217–18, 222, 226, 230–33, 241, 243–44, 252 n. 200, 254, 257–59, 271, 283, 285–86, 289 n. 55, 290 n. 57, 291 n. 64, 294, 298
 - as idolatry 254
 - capricious nature of the 147 n. 37
 - dying and rising gods 50 n. 4, 59
 - incorporation of 197
 - of Egypt 163 n. 118, 165, 167, 169 n. 149, 218, 230, 252 n. 200, 257–59, 291 n. 64
 - of Greece and Macedonia 252 n. 200
 - of lesser 233 n. 149
 - of Roman households 243–44
 - of ancient Philippi 233, 283, 285–86
 - wrath of the 150
- Gospel 4 n. 11, 5 n. 13, 18–19, 21–23, 27, 31, 36–37, 38 n. 229, 39–40, 67, 74–76, 79–80, 88–89, 91–98, 99 n. 94, 100–01, 103, 105 n. 125, 111–14,

- 116–20, 124, 126–27, 130–32, 134–38, 172–73, 175, 179, 187–88, 194–95, 198, 200 n. 12, 201–03, 211, 213, 225, 228–29, 236, 238, 241, 245 n. 183, 246, 251 n. 198, 253, 264, 268, 270–71, 278–79, 284, 286–87, 294, 297
- the Fourfold 69 n. 96
 - the “health and wealth” (prosperity) 213
- Grabinschriften* 6 n. 16, 102 n. 116, 292 n. 66
- Greekness 141–43, 168 n. 146, 223–24 *see also* “Ethnocentrism”
- Guild 54–55, 64, 69, 288 n. 49
- Pauline interpretive guilds 64, 69
- Gymnasium/Gymnasia* 2, 66 *see also* “Paul – his possible education” and “Progymnasmata”
- Hades/Hell/Sheol 72 *see also* “Underworld/Netherworld”
- as a god (Pluto) 209 n. 61
 - as a place of torment 72
 - as an abode of the dead 72 n. 112
 - relationship to Tartaros 177
- Hall of Maäti 174, 208
- Hauptbriefe* 25, 292 n. 66
- Heaven 78, 81, 83–84, 98, 111, 113, 118–19, 121–22, 126, 128–30, 135, 177, 190 n. 239, 207–209, 211, 213, 217, 227, 229, 241, 245 n. 183, 246–47, 249 n. 195, 254–56, 278, 280, 295, 297–98
- divine inhabitation of 249 n. 195, 254
- Helios 163 n. 118, 177, 216, 232, 272
- Henotheism 294
- Herod the Great 190 n. 240
- Heroes/Heroization 69 n. 97, 155, 286 n. 43, 295–97
- hero worship 286 n. 43, 295–97 *see also* “Thracian – religion”
- Herodotus 32, 79 n. 4, 140–45, 160, 163, 164 n. 119–20, 168 n. 146, 185–86, 189, 195, 201 n. 18, 210 n. 72, 211–12, 219, 223–24, 242, 246, 261
- “Hidden Transcripts” 29, 254
- Homer 32, 145, 164
- Horus 73 n. 117, 165 n. 128, 174, 258, 259 n. 8, 291 n. 64
- as Harpocrates’s equivalent 291 n. 64
- Human Flourishing 1, 4, 6, 7 n. 22, 20, 43, 45–46, 67, 79 n. 5, 80–85, 90, 113, 118, 137, 140, 143, 146, 153, 155–56, 176, 182, 185, 189 *see also* “*Eudaimonia*/εὐδαιμονία”
- Humiliation 37 n. 223, 108, 119, 124, 129, 203, 243 n. 174, 247, 264, 298 *see also* “Suffering”
- Ib* (“Heart/Mind”) 171 n. 155, 258
- In Christ/ἐν Χριστῷ 3 n. 9, 10, 12–13, 15, 17, 22–23, 25, 41, 44–45, 78–79, 81–82, 88, 89 n. 47, 91–92, 94, 98, 101–02, 105–08, 110–14, 116, 117 n. 177, 118–19, 121, 123–24, 127, 131–36, 138 n. 240, 142 n. 13, 151 n. 52, 188 n. 231, 197 n. 2, 199, 203, 205, 207, 209, 211–15, 217–27, 231, 233–39, 241–43, 245, 247, 250, 252, 255–56, 261–64, 266–67, 271, 273–77, 279–80, 284 n. 29, 287, 289, 292 n. 66, 295 n. 83, 297–98
- Insiders 85, 89, 119, 142, 189, 192 n. 248, 211, 217 n. 102, 240, 250 n. 197, 252, 266, 272, 277–78, 288 *see also* “Boundary Marker Language”
- as positive examples 85
 - “codified insider language” 89, 142
- Interpretation/Hermeneutic “Lenses” 1 n. 5, 15, 17, 19–20, 22–23, 27–28, 31, 35 n. 212, 37, 40–43, 44 n. 263, 51–53, 54 n. 25, 55, 60, 62–64, 69, 75–76, 80–82, 89, 97 n. 82, 100, 105, 109, 112, 133, 180, 187 n. 231, 223, 240, 249 n. 195, 250–51 n. 198, 253 n. 204, 292 n. 66
- Isis Regina 71, 163–65, 167 n. 142, 168, 178, 179 n. 190, 180, 218, 232–33, 252 n. 200, 258, 259 n. 8, 273, 283, 285 n. 38, 286 n. 43, 291,
- Ius Italicum* 99 n. 94, 282, 283 n. 19
- as a legal fiction 282
 - as it applied to ancient Philippi 99 n. 94, 282

- Josephus 67 n. 90, 169, 180, 185–89, 191, 193–96, 201 n. 18, 202–03, 205, 207, 218–19, 221–22, 235–39, 242, 277–79
- Jesus 3, 4 n. 11, 6 n. 17, 10, 12, 18, 30, 34, 36, 38 n. 229, 39, 42, 45, 50, 53, 59, 64 n. 84, 69, 70 n. 98, 100, 71, 73–76, 82–84, 89 n. 46, 90–93, 105–07, 109, 113, 115–16, 121, 127–31, 134, 139 n. 1, 176, 197 n. 2, 239 n. 161, 241, 246–48, 250, 254 n. 208, 278, 284–85, 286 n. 43, 287 n. 44, 290 n. 55, 295 n. 83 *see also* “Messiah”
- Jesus movement 139 n. 1, 176, 197 n. 2, 239 n. 161, 246, 248, 290 n. 55
- Jewishness 1, 46 n. 274, 50, 83, 189, 239, 240 n. 161, 246, 292 n. 66
- Judas Maccabeus 241
- Judgment 29 n. 169, 56, 111 n. 154, 175, 210 n. 69, 257–58, 260
- Ka* (“Vital Energy”) 171 n. 155
- Kaleidoscopic Reading 1, 2 n. 5, 64
- Khet* (“Body”) 171 n. 155
- Κρηνίδες (“Well” or “Spring”) 281
- Lar/Lars Familiaris* 243, 296
- Living and Dying Well 1–10, 12–13, 16–17, 20, 39–40, 44–48, 58–60, 65, 67, 69, 76–78, 80–81, 85, 89–91, 94–97, 101–04, 106, 108–15, 117–18, 120–21, 123–26, 128–35, 137, 139–40, 143, 148–49, 151–53, 155–58, 160, 162, 163 n. 116, 170, 173–75, 179–80, 188 n. 231, 190, 193–94, 196–98, 202, 209, 219, 221–22, 225–27, 233, 235, 239–42, 244–45, 247, 249–50, 252–55, 261, 265, 267, 271, 274, 290, 297
- Ma’at*/Maat 1, 6 n. 16, 46, 68, 72 n. 112, 74, 169 n. 150, 170–76, 179, 188, 202, 203 n. 27, 204, 206, 208, 228, 230, 231 n. 145, 253, 257–60, 271–72 *see also* “Gods/Goddesses – of Egypt”
- as feather in balance/scales 72 n. 112, 257–60
 - as flourishing 1, 46, 74, 170–76, 179, 188, 202, 203 n. 27, 204, 206, 208, 228, 230, 253, 257–60, 271–72
 - as goddess 1 n. 3, 68, 216, 257–60
 - in Hebrew Bible 169 n. 150, 216, 230, 231 n. 145
- Macedonia 92 n. 59, 93, 145, 179 n. 190, 252 n. 200, 253, 281–82, 284 n. 30, 291, 293, 294 n. 75
- Paul’s mission to 92 n. 59, 93 *see also* “Missions (Evangelism)”
- Magic (Spells)/Magical (Amulets) 2 n. 5, 73, 162, 171, 172 n. 160, 176, 177 n. 183, 178, 179 n. 190, 217, 272, 285 n. 38, 287, 291
- Male Vivendi* (Extreme Old Age) 160, 204
- Mark Antony 164, 165 n. 128, 282,
- Maxim 7–8, 28–29, 30 n. 184, 31, 40–42, 44, 214, 255,
- Messiah 9 n. 31, 18, 39 n. 230, 211, 233 n. 149, 235 n. 154, 241, 285,
- Military 98–99, 117 n. 177, 144, 151, 160, 167 n. 142, 224, 233, 251 n. 198, 282
- metaphors in Philippians 98–99, 251 n. 198
 - as religious catalyst 167 n. 142
- Mimesis* 24, 65 n. 86, 136
- Missions (Evangelism) 4, 5 n. 13, 18–20, 27, 37–40, 48, 64, 67–68, 73 n. 117, 79, 89, 91, 92 n. 59, 93, 95–96, 98, 100, 104 n. 121, 112, 136, 165, 170, 211–12, 215 n. 87, 226, 236, 248, 251 n. 198, 253, 283–84, 290, 292 n. 66, 294, 297,
- *Missio Dei* 6, 19–20, 79 n. 3, 98, 100–01, 127, 200, 206,
- Mithras 177
- Monotheism 9, 54 n. 25, 177 n. 182, 233–35, 236–37, 239, 241, 244, 279
- Monster/Monstrous 166 n. 134, 173 n. 164, 258–59
- Mutilation 3 n. 9, 169, 217 n. 102
- Myth/Mythology 11 n. 47, 33, 59–60, 67, 73, 145 n. 24, 226 n. 126, 254, 283

- Narratio* 28 n. 169, 86, 96, 123–25, 133
 Neapolis 179, 283, 285, 286 n. 43
 New Perspective on Paul (NPP) 3, 4 n.
 10–11, 24, 46 n. 274, 54, 62–63
 Noble Death 95 n. 71, 188, 194, 195 n.
 259, 218 n. 106, 221, 237 n. 155, 256,
 278 *see also* “Death”
- Obelisks 166–67
 Osiris 59, 69 n. 97, 72 n. 112, 73 n.
 117, 165 n. 128, 171 n. 157, 173,
 175, 209 n. 61, 291 n. 64 *see also*
 “Sarapis/Serapis”
- Outsiders 99 n. 94, 119, 131, 142, 189,
 192 n. 248, 211, 217 n. 102, 240,
 252, 278, 288 n. 51 *see also* “Bound-
 ary Marker Language”
- Pagan/Paganism 3, 5 n. 13, 6, 29–30,
 40, 43 n. 259, 45, 47, 50, 58–60, 67–
 69, 82–84, 95, 99 n. 94, 112, 121,
 128–29, 131, 141, 145, 147 n. 39,
 160, 163 n. 116, 165, 166 n. 134,
 167 n. 142, 169, 178 n. 190, 181,
 185, 188 n. 231, 192 n. 248, 193,
 196–99, 200 n. 12, 201–03, 205,
 207, 210 n. 70, 217 n. 102, 219,
 222–24, 227, 231 n. 145, 233, 237–
 40, 242–44, 247, 249 n. 195, 250,
 252–53, 256, 263, 269, 273–75, 279,
 283–87, 288 n. 49, 289–90, 294,
 296–97 *see also* “Gentile/Hellenis-
 tic”
- Papyri Graecae Magicae* 2 n. 5, 162,
 176–80, 272
- Parallelomania 45 n. 273, 50, 198 n. 6
 Parousia 91, 116, 126, 130, 202
 Paul 1–4 ff., 248–49
 – Damascus Road event 4, 10, 44, 221
 n. 119, 226 n. 127, 237, 239, 265,
 277–78 *see also* “Christophany”
 – in later Christian memory 287
 – his possible education 2 n. 6–7, 66–
 67, 122 n. 192, 180, 222 *see also*
 “Gymnasium/Gymnasia”
 – the pagans’ apostle 238, 253, 279
see also “Gentile/Hellenistic”
 – the church planter 5 n. 13, 39, 67,
 211, 224, 255 n. 213, 292
 – the exemplar 36–37, 39, 85, 94, 102,
 119, 121–22, 126, 134, 207, 218,
 228, 248, 267
 – the Jew 1, 2 n. 6, 66–67, 118, 122 n.
 192, 180, 198, 219–22, 229, 248
 Paul within Judaism (PWJ) 2 n. 6, 46 n.
 274, 66–67, 122 n. 192, 180, 198,
 219–22, 229, 248
- Pax Romana/Augustana* 135, 186–87,
 213, 219, 228, 234, 254, 269, 275
- Periautology/περιαυτολογία 238,
 238–39 n. 160
- Peroratio* 28–29 n. 169, 86, 120, 123,
 126
- Philippi 23, 31, 39, 40 n. 237, 65–66 n.
 87, 77, 92–95, 95–96 n. 75, 97, 98–
 99 n. 94, 102 n. 114, 109–10, 138 n.
 240, 146, 162, 164–65, 167–70,
 178–80, 206 n. 42, 211, 232–33,
 239, 241, 248, 251, 252 n. 200, 253,
 273, 281 ff.
 – geography 167, 239, 291–93
 – history 98–99 n. 94, 248, 253, 281–
 91
 – people 40 n. 237, 65–66 n. 87, 97,
 138 n. 240, 165, 211, 232, 248, 251,
 252 n. 200, 253, 273, 293–98
 – religion 92–95, 95–96 n. 75, 102 n.
 114, 109–10, 146, 168–70, 178–80,
 206 n. 42, 233, 239, 241, 248, 251,
 252 n. 200, 294–95
- Philo 66 n. 89, 67 n. 90, 169, 180–85,
 187, 193–94, 195 n. 255–57, 259,
 205, 209, 219–21, 233–35, 239, 255,
 274–76, 293 n. 68
- Plato 32, 35 n. 212, 45, 140–41, 148–
 50, 153, 161–62, 195, 201 n. 18,
 203, 205, 207, 210 n. 72, 214, 225–
 27, 246, 264
- Platonism/Neoplatonism 32, 35, 50, 67,
 141, 160–61, 181, 183–85, 197, 220,
 225–26, 232, 272
 – God as ultimate Platonic Form 220
 – of the body as a “soul-trap” 160,
 232, 246
- Plutarch 45, 140–41, 150–52, 161–62,
 163 n. 118, 168, 195, 201 n. 18, 203
 n. 28, 204, 205 n. 34, 206, 207 n. 45,

- 208–09, 210 n. 72, 214, 226, 246, 265
- Polycarp 284, 287–89
- Polytheism 142, 211, 287 *see also* “Syncretism”
- Probatio* 28 n. 169, 29 n. 169, 86, 102–04, 110, 115, 118, 123–25, 134
- Progymnasmata* 30
- Propositio* 28–29, 30 n. 184, 86, 90, 96, 102, 105–06, 123, 134
- Qumran 32, 54 n. 25
- Rā/Re 173–74, 206, 258
- Refutatio* 28–29 n. 169, 86, 105, 118, 120, 122, 124–26, 133
- Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* 49–50, 58 n. 48, 68
- Ren* (“Name”) 171 n. 155
- Repetitio* 86, 120, 123, 125, 133
- Resurrection 3 n. 9, 10, 12, 15, 17, 25, 30, 34, 36–37, 75 n. 125, 78–79, 81, 83, 97, 108, 113, 118, 121, 126, 130, 200 n. 12, 205, 208–09, 214, 228, 231, 239, 241, 247, 255–56, 260, 268, 271, 284, 295 n. 83
- of Christ 3 n. 9, 12, 34, 36, 75 n. 125, 97, 200 n. 12, 209, 247, 256
 - of Paul/human beings 3 n. 9, 10, 15, 25, 30, 37, 78–79, 81, 83, 108, 113, 118, 121, 126, 130, 205, 208–09, 214, 228, 231, 239, 241, 247, 255–56, 260, 268, 271, 295 n. 83
- Rhetorical Analysis 20, 28, 40, 87–88, 90, 123
- Romanitas* 98 n. 94, 166, 254, 293–94
- Saul of Tarsus 4 n. 12, 46 n. 274, 66, 248
- Salvation (Soteriology) 4 n. 11, 9, 15, 19–20, 22, 25, 72, 74, 75 n. 124, 82, 89, 102, 108–10, 131 n. 224, 135–36, 167, 171–73, 177, 183, 187–88 n. 231, 198 n. 5, 202, 211, 217, 220–21, 221 n. 119, 230 n. 145, 231 n. 145, 232, 244, 247, 295 n. 83,
- Paul, against works-based 198 n. 5, 221 n. 120
 - and rebirth 217, 232
 - salvation figures 177, 211
- Second Temple Judaism 1, 2 n. 5, 3–4, 8 n. 28, 46–48, 63 n. 73, 65 n. 85, 199, 209 n. 68
- Seneca 78 n. 2, 140–41, 154, 158–62, 195 n. 255–57, 259, 203 n. 28, 204, 205 n. 34, 206, 207 n. 45, 208–09, 211 n. 72, 215–16, 228–29, 269–70
- Sarapis/Serapis 291 n. 64, 163 n. 118, 164 *see also* “Osiris”
- Setne III* 50 n. 4, 69 n. 95, 70–74, 76
- *Setne I* 70 n. 99, 71 n. 105, 74
 - *Setne II* 50 n. 4, 69 n. 95, 70–74, 76
- Septuagint/LXX 2 n. 5, 21, 93, 105, 111, 114, 169, 175, 180 n. 204, 193, 199, 210, 216 n. 96, 218, 230–31 n. 145, 244, 248–49 n. 194–95,
- as competitive historiography 199 n. 9
- Shema 9, 188 n. 231, 192 n. 249, 233 n. 149, 284
- Shuit* (“Shadow”) 171 n. 155
- Sin 11–13, 15, 37, 101, 175, 215–16, 290 n. 57
- Adamic 11–13
 - mortification of 13, 15, 37
 - repentance of 72 n. 112, 74–75, 101
 - slavery to 215
- Sitz im Leben* 6, 9, 55, 57, 133, 244
- of Paul 6, 9, 55, 244
 - of the biblical writers 133
 - of the Philippians 133, 244
- Slaves/Slavery 3, 6, 96–97, 102–03 n. 114, 116, 105, 113–14, 116, 118–19, 121, 124, 165, 178, 188, 206, 213–15, 221–22, 224, 232, 262, 291, 297 n. 100, 298
- Social Identity Theory (SIT) 86 n. 31, 92 n. 57, 122
- Soul/Spirit 14–15, 17, 36, 44–45, 72–73, 79, 83, 85, 91–92, 94–101, 103–04, 113, 116, 118, 123, 125, 130, 132, 153–54, 155 n. 76, 157–60, 169 n. 150, 171, 173–74, 177, 181–84, 188, 190 n. 239, 192 n. 248, 193, 200 n. 12, 204–08, 211, 213, 215, 217, 219, 224–26, 232, 246, 258,

- 260–64, 270, 272, 275, 277, 290 n. 57, 292 n. 66, 296
- Holy/Christ's Spirit 4, 12–13, 15, 27, 30, 37, 90, 96, 98, 100, 124, 130, 190 n. 240, 208, 217, 220, 233–34, 238, 244, 275
 - spiritual birth/rebirth 177, 180, 195, 216–17, 232, 253, 260, 272
 - spiritual death 15, 232, 259
 - spiritual warfare 123, 132, 200 n. 12, 223–24, 234, 252 n. 201, 262, 275
- Stoic 8 n. 24, 35 n. 212, 37 n. 226, 40, 49, 53, 67, 141, 149, 154, 158, 161, 216, 227–29,
- Stoicism as a rival tradition 53
- Suffering 6, 9, 16–17, 19, 30, 34, 35 n. 214, 37, 39, 41–42, 44, 72, 78–80, 83, 95, 102, 113–14, 124, 128–30, 144, 148, 157, 204, 213, 216, 228–29, 234, 239, 252 n. 201, 253, 264, 267–68, 270, 275, 280 *see also* "Theodicy"
- Suffering Servant 42, 114
- Suicide 7, 17, 32, 34–36, 79 n. 5, 108, 160, 208, 216, 229
- religiously motivated 34–36
 - social and economic 108
- Syncretism 163 n. 118, 166, 167 n. 139, 176, 197, 199 n. 9, 201, 284, 286, 287–90, 296
- Synkrisis*/σύγκρισις 120
- Syntychē 101, 109, 117, 123–24, 127, 250, 251 n. 198
- Tacitus 99 n. 94, 164 n. 124
- Temple 54 n. 25, 71, 164, 167 n. 142, 190–91, 220, 233, 238, 244, 273, 285 n. 36 *see also* "Consecrated/Sacred Spaces"
- body as 233
 - pagan home as 244
- Tertium Comparationis* 59–60, 71, 139 n. 1
- Thanatology 7 n. 22, 16, 21, 23, 34, 167, 244, 247, 256 n. 216
- Theodicy (Problem of Evil) 73, 124, 210 n. 69
- Theodosius I 289 n. 55, 290 n. 55
- Theodosian Law 286 n. 43, 289–90
- Theophilus (Pope) 163 n. 118
- Theosis* 9, 18, 20
- Thoth 72 n. 112, 167 n. 139, 259
- Thracian 144–45, 181, 287 n. 47, 293–96
- culture 181, 287 n. 47, 293–95
 - religion 145, 287 n. 47, 294–96
 - Thracian Rider/Horseman 295–96
- Thucydides 140–41, 143–45, 160, 195 n. 259, 196, 201 n. 18, 210 n. 72, 211 n. 73, 212–13, 219, 224, 262
- Timothy 6, 29, 102, 105, 110, 116–18, 121, 206, 222, 236, 250 n. 198, 283
- as Christ's slave 6, 105, 118, 121, 222
 - as ethical exemplar 29, 102, 110, 116–17, 121, 206, 236
- Torah/Torah-Keeping 2 n. 6, 4 n. 11, 14, 46, 54 n. 25, 93, 105, 118, 186–87, 188 n. 231, 192, 194, 195 n. 259, 198, 201–02, 218–22, 235, 237–39, 253, 255–56, 274, 278
- Law of the Neighbor 93, 105, 187–88 n. 231
- Underworld/Netherworld 72 n. 112, 173, 175, 188 n. 209 n. 61, 249 n. 195, 259 *see also* "Hades/Hell/Sheol"
- Via Egnatia* 98–99 n. 94, 165, 167, 281–83, 288 n. 49, 291,
- Vindication 37 n. 224, 130, 190 n. 240, 211
- Virtue/Virtue Ethics/*Virtute* 46 n. 276, 81–84, 89, 149–50, 152, 155–59, 162, 184, 195 n. 259, 198, 203 n. 27, 204, 206, 208, 211 n. 72, 215, 226–28, 255, 268
- Weighing the Hearts/Spirits 72, 169 n. 150, 230 n. 145, 257–60
- Worldview/*Weltanschauungen* 2 n. 5, 3–5, 8, 35, 53, 59, 65 n. 87, 66, 68, 76–77, 114, 160 n. 155, 165 n. 128, 193, 199, 201, 202 n. 20, 210, 222–40, 242, 249–53, 291

Zauberpapyri (Magical Papyri) 162, 176
see also Papyri Graecae Magicae

Zeus 59, 119, 146–47, 163 n. 118