



# Recognising the Risen Lord Through Scriptures: The Apostle Paul as an Ideal Match for the Two Disciples on the Way to Emmaus in Luke 24:13–35

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**Abstract:** In the concluding chapter of his gospel, Luke culminates the “Journey to Jerusalem” with Jesus accompanying his followers on a journey not defined by geographical or chronological elements, but rather one immersed in discipleship. In the sequel to that journey to Jerusalem, the one to Emmaus, Jesus accompanies two disciples: Cleopas and an intentionally undisclosed follower (see 24:13, 18). The end of this journey, emblematic of faith in the suffering, crucified and risen Lord reaches its zenith in the two disciples recognising Jesus in the breaking of the bread. The moment Jesus disappears from their sight (24:31) elicits a reaction demonstrating the potentiality of discerning the Risen Lord even in the “opening of the Scriptures” (24:32).

This study endeavours to analyse the recognition of Jesus the Lord in the specific mystery of his death and resurrection through the opening of Scriptures as exemplified by the Apostle to the Gentiles. In this vein, Paul emerges as a speculative yet paradigmatic correlate to the unnamed second disciple.

Similar to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Paul too travelled the journey of recognising the Risen Lord, transitioning from a zealous persecutor of the adherents of Jesus of Nazareth and his message (see Acts 9:1–4; 22:7; 1 Cor 15:9), which had a decisive and definitive turn in the Christophany on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9; 22; 26), to an apostle in complete acknowledgement of Jesus as “Lord” (see Acts 9:5; Phil 2:11; Rom 10:12), and even to a believer “who has been crucified with Christ” (see Gal 2:19).

Analogously to the two disciples, Paul too went through the same developmental milestones as the two disciples, with Jesus, as it were, walking alongside him, elucidating the Scriptures—from perceiving Jesus as “the accursed crucified criminal” (see Deut 21:22–23) to affirming “Jesus is alive” (1 Cor 15:17–28) and proclaiming that “every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’” (Kyrios Iēsous Christòs)” (Phil 2:11).

This trajectory renders conceivable for all adherents to Jesus of all times the possibility to decipher the scriptural depictions of the Lord articulated by Moses, the Prophets, and the Scriptures (Luke 24:27, 44).

**Keywords:** disciples of Emmaus, Paul, crucifixion, Risen Lord, transformation, imitation

In the final chapter of his gospel, Luke concludes the “Journey to Jerusalem”<sup>1</sup> by portraying Jesus accompanying his followers on a journey characterised not by geographical or chronological elements, but rather one immersed in discipleship. Notwithstanding the fact that Jesus enters the geographical Jerusalem in Luke 19:41–45,

<sup>1</sup> Fitzmyer 1985, 163, 823–827; Marshall 1989, 400–699, 823–27; Bock 1996, 957–64; Bovon 2013.

his journey in making disciples continues even in his post-resurrection appearances, including the journey with the two disciples of Emmaus (see Luke 24:15, 28). After recognising him in the breaking of the bread, they return to the community of the Eleven and their companions in Jerusalem (24:33), narrate to them what had happened on the road to Emmaus and “how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (24:35). The aim for the Journey to Jerusalem from Luke 9:51 to 19:48 has been fulfilled: Jesus’ followers—both the Eleven and their companions, and the two from Emmaus—have become true disciples by proclaiming in Jerusalem that “He is risen,” that he has made himself known to them and that they have recognised him.

The journey to Jerusalem is not a chronological, straight line either, since in 10:38–42 Jesus is near Jerusalem, while later in the passage he is back in the North (see 17:11). Rather, it is a journey in time within the context of the necessity of God’s plan. Journey notes punctuate the passage from 9:51 to 19:48 (9:51; 13:22; 17:11; 18:31; 19:28, 45). Jesus travels to meet his appointed destiny in Jerusalem (13:31–35) (Bovon 2013, 4–8). The thrust of this passage is that Jesus initiates a new way to follow God (Aletti 1991, 153–69). It is the journey that ends with the declaration by the community of disciples in Jerusalem that “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” (24:34), and with the confirmation by the two disciples of Emmaus: “Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (24:35).

Even the literary structure of the Emmaus pericope in Luke 24:13–35 finds its chiasmic centre in the exclamation “He is alive” (v. 23c) in the vision of angels to the women who had gone to anoint Jesus’ body after his death (see Appendix; Aletti 1991, 153–55).

The walk to Emmaus, a sequel to the Jerusalem journey, features Jesus accompanying two disciples—Cleopas and an intentionally unnamed follower (24:13, 18) (Rastoin 2014, 379–81). The culmination of this journey, symbolic of faith in the suffering, crucified, and risen Lord, reaches its peak as the two disciples recognise Jesus in the breaking of the bread (*en tē(i) klásē(i) tou ártou* – 24:35). The moment Jesus vanishes from their sight (24:31) triggers a reaction that underscores the potentiality—or rather, what they ought to have done—of discerning the Risen Lord even in the “opening of the Scriptures”: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures (*hōs diēnoigen hēmin tās graphàs*) to us?” (see 24:32) (Marshall 1989, 898–99; Rossé 1995, 1030–31)

This analysis delves into the phenomenon of discerning the presence of Jesus through the act of engaging with the Scriptures, as delineated in Luke 24:32. This is exemplified by the shared experience of the two disciples en route to Emmaus and by the Apostle Paul, displaying noteworthy parallels with the disciples on the Emmaus road. The convergence between Paul’s spiritual and scriptural journey and that of the Emmaus travellers concerning Jesus’ death and resurrection prompts scrutiny that provides insight into the substantive connotations of Christian discipleship.

## 1. The Two Journeys

A prominent objection to the parallel nature of the two journeys is the assertion that they depict two entirely disparate contexts, precluding any potential intersection. In Luke 24, the two disciples express their disillusionment over unfulfilled expectations to “the only stranger [*mónos paroikeis*] in Jerusalem who does not know these things” (v. 18). Similarly, Paul faces disappointment when, despite being fully authorised by the High Priest in Jerusalem with letters to the synagogues in Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2), he is abruptly stopped by an unidentified figure, who later introduces himself as Jesus “*hon su diókeis*” (Acts 9:5b) and to whom he reveals his confusion: “Who are you, Lord?” (Acts 9:5a). Here, the two disciples perceive Jesus as *mónos paroikeis*, whereas, in Jesus’ own words, Paul considers “the Lord” as his persecuted adversary.

Both narratives present a lack of recognition. The two disciples’ eyes “were kept from recognising him” (Luke 24:16),<sup>2</sup> while Paul, struck blind on the Road to Damascus, “could see nothing” (Acts 9:8).

Each journey also embodies a distinct negativity. The disciples “stood still, looking sad [*estáthēsan skuthrōpoi*]” (Luke 24:17), while Paul’s demeanour is depicted as “still breathing threats and murder” (Acts 9:1).

In response to the disciples’ disappointment and lack of understanding, Jesus elucidates the lesson of how the Scriptures foretell his life and mission (Luke 24:25–27). Conversely, Jesus instructs Paul: “get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do” (Acts 9:6). While Jesus does not explicitly reveal himself through Scripture to Paul, Paul later frames his Damascus experience in terms of divine revelation in Gal 1:13–16: “You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it ... But when God ... was pleased to reveal his Son to me ... I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.”

The recognition of Jesus occurs through the “breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:35) at Emmaus, where Jesus takes bread [*labōn tòn árton*] (Luke 24:30) and the disciples’ eyes are opened. In Acts 9:19, Paul regains his strength after “taking some food [*labōn trophēn*].” Surprisingly, the disciples’ exclamation upon recognising Jesus in the “breaking of the bread” centres on their prior experience with him opening the Scriptures: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures [*hōs diēnoigen tās graphás*] to us?” (Luke 24:32)

<sup>2</sup> The optical aspect is emphasised over and over in the Emmaus pericope: “looking sad” (v. 17); “before [*enantion*, literally, “in the presence of”] God and all the people (v. 19); “they had indeed seen a vision of angels” (v. 23); “but they did not see him” (v. 24); “they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight” (v. 31).

Both the Emmaus disciples and Paul commence their journeys with a lack of true understanding of Jesus. Paul explicitly states his desire to know Christ in Phil 3:10, indicating his initial ignorance: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death.” In Gal 1:13–24, Paul further emphasises his emerging lack of understanding, describing the need for God’s revelation of his Son to him (vv. 15–16).

Paul’s initial ignorance of Jesus (“Who are you?”) stemmed from a Jewish perspective, particularly Deut 21:22–23. The theophany marks the beginning of Paul’s search for understanding, akin to Jesus guiding the disciples through the Scriptures to reveal his true identity. The one questioned in dismay, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place [*ouk égnōs tà genómena*] there in these days?” (Luke 24:18), is the same one Paul later acknowledges, “For I decided to know nothing [*ou gàr ékriná ti eidénai*] among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2).

## 2. “Were Not Our Hearts Burning Within Us?”

This study aims to analyse the recognition of Jesus the Lord through the “opening of Scriptures,” as speculatively and paradigmatically illustrated by the Apostle to the Gentiles. The resemblance between Paul’s transformative journey and the disciples of Emmaus’ collective experience prompts a juxtaposition, wherein the similarities can be examined and potential insights into Christian discipleship can be gained. In this context, Paul emerges as a speculative yet paradigmatic counterpart to the unnamed second disciple, since Luke provides the name of the first one: *Kleopas* in v. 18 (Dinkler 2017, 687–706; see the *synkrisis* literary device in Rastoin 2014). In the Emmaus pericope, Jesus demonstrates a different perception of “the things that have taken place (*tà genómena*) [*in Jerusalem*] in [*those*] days (v. 18; see v. 13, implying that “those days” referred to the days of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth). The two disciples specify that “the things” were his death (v. 20) and his resurrection (vv. 21–24).

In reply, Jesus explains what his perception of “the things” was: his sufferings, death and glory as Messiah were foretold in the Scriptures (vv. 25–27). Later in the evening, when the Risen Lord appears to the Eleven and their companions, together with the two disciples who had returned to Jerusalem, Jesus again refers to his crucifixion (vv. 39–40). Yet again, he explains to them how the whole of the Scriptures—the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms—must be fulfilled concerning his suffering, death and resurrection (vv. 44–46). Jesus’ death and resurrection serve as the focus and centre of all that the Scriptures have to say about him and what the disciples are to believe about him.

Similarly to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Paul underwent a life-changing journey of recognising the Risen Lord. He transitioned from being a fervent persecutor of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth and his message (see Acts 9:1–4; 22:7; 1 Cor 15:9), that had a decisive and definitive turn in the Christophany on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9; 22; 26), to an apostle fully acknowledging Jesus as “Lord” (see Acts 9:5; Phil 2:11; Rom 10:12), and even to a believer who “has been crucified with Christ” (see Gal 2:19). Yet, he too considered all there was to “hand on” (*parédōka*) about the Lord Jesus was “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3–4) (Wright 2003, 209–398). Thus, the focus of this paper will be the recognition of the Lord in his suffering, death and resurrection through the Scriptures at Emmaus and by Paul.

### 3. Differentiating Historical and Biographical Data in the Pauline Epistles and the Acts of the Apostles

At this point, an aside is indispensable. The Apostle Paul is a central figure for understanding early Christianity, yet reconstructing his life and mission is a complex task due to the distinct methodologies and perspectives of the Pauline Epistles and the Acts of the Apostles. To accurately grasp Paul’s life and contributions one needs to differentiate between historical and biographical data within these sources and recognise their individual contexts, authorships, and purposes (see Marshall, Travis, and Paul 2002, 31–45). “Luke wrote ‘Acts’ with a purpose,” is Morna D. Hooker’s straight statement concerning Luke’s method for writing Acts.<sup>3</sup>

#### 3.1. Acts of the Apostles as a Source

Attributed to Luke, the Acts of the Apostles should not be viewed merely as historical documentation but as “chrono-theology,” where history is used as a medium of divine revelation. Luke’s portrayal of events is thus theologically motivated, reflecting God’s self-disclosure through historical occurrences.

#### 3.2. Pauline Epistles as Sources

Paul’s letters are crucial for understanding his theology and mission. For instance, Gal 1:11–2:10 offers an autobiographical account of Paul’s conversion, which

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<sup>3</sup> For an exhaustive differentiation between the sources of Acts and the Letters of Paul, see Hooker 2003, 8–23 (ch. “What Do We Know About Paul?”).

holds higher credibility due to its first-person narrative. The interpretation of terms such as “then” (*épeita*) in Galatians significantly impacts the chronology of Paul’s post-conversion activities. Comparing these with 1 Cor 15:3–10, where *épeita* indicates the appearances of the Risen Lord, demonstrates how interpretative differences can alter the narrative. Additionally, Paul’s reference to his travels to Syria and Cilicia in Gal 1:21, alongside other texts, suggests these accounts are illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Chronological inconsistencies, such as those between the Jerusalem Council’s decisions and Paul’s confrontation with Peter in Gal 2:11–14, necessitate a re-evaluation of these narratives. Peter’s apparent ignorance of the Council’s directives at Antioch, despite his central role, further complicates the chronological coherence of these events.

### 3.3. The Pauline Corpus

The *Corpus Paulinum*, divided based on authorship and authenticity, canonicity and inspiration<sup>4</sup> includes Proto-Pauline Epistles, which are widely considered authentic and provide direct insight into Paul’s theology and missionary work. For instance, in Galatians, Paul offers autobiographical details about his conversion and early ministry (Gal 1:11–24), which are pivotal for understanding his self-perception and mission. The Deutero-Pauline Epistles, with disputed authenticity, reflect theological advancements indicative of different contexts or authorial intentions. Ephesians, for instance, emphasises the cosmic dimensions of Christ’s work and Church unity (Eph 1:3–14), suggesting post-Pauline theological evolution.<sup>5</sup> The Pastoral Epistles, generally viewed as pseudonymous, address Church organisation and pastoral care. These texts emphasise orthodoxy and Church leadership (1 Tim 3:1–13), reflecting an ecclesiastical structure more developed than the Proto-Pauline letters, indicating a later composition period addressing specific community challenges.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, distinguishing between historical and biographical data in the Pauline Epistles and Acts requires careful consideration of their distinct perspectives and methodologies. The Book of Acts provides a valuable narrative framework that must be critically assessed against Pauline letters. Integrating these sources with a nuanced approach enables scholars to construct a more comprehensive and accurate portrait of the Apostle Paul.

<sup>4</sup> Rinaldo Fabris differentiates between the Proto-Pauline, the Deutero-Pauline (“di tradizione paolina”), and the Pastoral Epistles: see Fabris 1997, 499–533.

<sup>5</sup> See Ehrman 2012. James D.G. Dunn (2003) states that a historical-critical analysis provides a framework for understanding the Letters’ distinct contributions and historical reliability. On the other hand, according to N.T. Wright (2005, 3–20), literary analysis examines rhetorical and stylistic features to differentiate authentic Pauline elements from later additions. See also Roetzel 1999, 76–81.

<sup>6</sup> See Hooker 2003, 24–31 (ch. “A Bundle of Letters”); Brown 1997, 409–12. Also Murphy-O’Connor 1996.

#### 4. Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms

The Mishnaic tractate *Avot* (= *Chapters of the Fathers*, a compilation of the ethical teachings and maxims from Rabbinic Jewish tradition) states: “Just as a ball is thrown from hand to hand without falling, so Moses received the Torah at Sinai and delivered it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, the elders to the prophets, and the prophets delivered it to the men of the Great Synagogue” (*Pirkei Avot* 1.1; Neusner 1988, 672). The trajectory traced out by *Avot* understandably moves along the Hebrew canon of Scriptures. This would also be the reason why Jesus rebukes the two disciples: “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!” (24:25). Luke also comments: “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures” (24:27), underlining what Moses, the prophets and indeed all the Scriptures say about him. Later, when the two disciples join the Eleven and their companions in Jerusalem after recognising him in the breaking of the bread and admitting that they should have recognised him from the moment he was opening the Scriptures for them, Jesus himself traces out to the disciples the tripartite division of the Hebrew Scriptures as proof of what he had to go through. In Jerusalem, Jesus reiterates to the incredulous disciples: “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled” (24:44).

#### 5. Recognising the Lord Through Scriptures

The New Testament offers a considerable number of instances where the Lord God or Jesus are recognised through the Scriptures. Paul rebukes the Jewish People for not acknowledging the presence of God or the Lord Jesus because of their hardened hearts (Hays 1989, 131–48). In 2 Cor 3:12–17, he explicitly shows that,

Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with complete frankness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, the same veil is still there; it is not unveiled since in Christ it is set aside. Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds, but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. (Aageson 1993, in particular, 31–44; Hays 1989, 122–53; Stanley 1992)

This goes in the same vein as the behaviour of the two disciples of Emmaus: “While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with



them, but their eyes were kept from recognising him” (24:15–16). Furthermore, the excerpt in 2 Cor 3 parallels what Jesus rebukes the two disciples for in verses 25–32 (see Bucur 2014, 690–91).

The same revelation, this time specifically about Jesus as the Suffering Servant himself, was made to the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:27–35 as he was journeying home from Jerusalem, where he had been “to worship,” (v. 27) and was reading the prophet Isaiah. So the deacon Philip, under the thrust of the Holy Spirit, ran up to him and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. “He asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ He replied, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him” (vv. 30–31).

The passage of the Scripture that the eunuch was reading was Isa 53:7–8. The eunuch inquired Philip regarding the identity of the person about whom the prophet spoke in the passage he was currently perusing. Then Philip began to speak, and “starting with this scripture he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus” (v. 35) (Evans 2012, 149).

## 6. The Two Disciples of Emmaus Read Their Own Story in Scripture

The two disciples were “reading” Jesus’ story (Luke 24:19–20—“The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him”). But they were also “reading” their own story into that of Jesus (Luke 24:21—“But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place...”) (Aageson 1993, 45–69) The two disciples were reading their salvation story (24:21). But they were also reading into the place the Messiah had in that story: (24:21—“we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel”) (Dinkler 2017, 384).

Consequent upon these multiple “readings,” the two disciples were reading their story into the Scriptures. Baring their souls to the “stranger” accompanying them, they exclaimed:

But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him (Luke 24:21–24).



Besides, Jesus' rebuke continues to show them how to read the Messiah's story into their own: "Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that *the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?*' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he *interpreted to them* the things about himself in all the scriptures (vv. 25–27)" (see Moloney 2013, 81–89). However, their reaction later on to their recognising him at the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:31–32) implies that they should have recognised him in the "opening of the Scripture" by Jesus on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Jesus made his, Israel's and indeed their own story fall into place (vv. 24–27).

In a few verses, a whole series of dynamic actions of recognition through the interpretation of the Scriptures by Jesus took place: "They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures [*diēnoigen*] to us?' . . . 'They were saying, «The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!»' Then they told [*eksēgounto* – 'they exegeted' to the Community what Jesus had done with them] what had happened on the road and how he had been made known to them [*egnōsthē*] in the breaking of the bread."

The interpretative action reaches its summit when the two disciples themselves could explain Scriptures to the Eleven and their companions that "He is risen" (24:35)!

## 7. The Apostle Paul Makes the Journey Through Scriptures

Paul's journey in recognising the true Jesus in his sufferings, death and resurrection went through developmental milestones akin to the two disciples of Emmaus: from perceiving Jesus as "the accursed crucified criminal" (see Deut 21:22–23) to affirming that "Jesus is alive" (1 Cor 15:17–28) and proclaiming that "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that 'Jesus Christ is Lord'" (Phil 2:11) (Fee 2007, 370–417). In Gal 3:13–14, Paul himself expresses the reversal of the situation of Jesus from a curse to an intermediary of blessing for everyone, Gentiles included: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree' [quoting Deut 21:23]—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." (Romanello 2018, 36–40) While Deut 21:1–9 speaks about protecting the land from cursedness through contact with the corpse of a murder victim, the present passage of Deut 21:22–23 concerns the corpse of an executed criminal. The hanging of his body on a tree or wooden post served as a deterrent effect the sight would have on other would-be criminals.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Vermes 2005, in particular, 62–83; McCane 2003; Brown 1994, 36–93; Navone and Cooper 1986, 108–303.

The Israelites, as well as some of their ancient Near Eastern neighbours, practiced the hanging of bodies to trees or some form of gallows (*w<sup>c</sup>tālītā 'al- 'êts*) (Clines 2007, 524, §3; Nielsen 2001, 269–71; Bauer et al. 2000, 549, §2b.c.) in a public place either as means of execution (see Josh 8:29; Esth 2:23; 5:14; 7:10; 8:7) or as a public display after the criminal died (see Gen 40:19, 22; Josh 10:26–27; 2 Sam 4:12; 21:12) (Fitzmyer 1978, 493–513). YHWH commands the Israelites to hang a criminal's body on a tree as an expression of that person's accursed state, i.e., to provide tangible evidence that this criminal is the object of a curse (Schneider 1967, 37–41). Being accursed is not the result of hanging on a tree but instead the cause for it. Paul makes use of this passage in Gal 3:13–14 to affirm that Christ hung “upon the tree” to beat the curse of the violated covenant and to turn away God's wrath from his people by delivering them from the curse of the law (Caneday 1989, 208). The law presented here limits the time that the body can be left to hang—the daylight hours that remain after the execution so that the next day would not have begun. To be hung on a tree is tantamount to being under God's curse, and to leave the corpse hanging there overnight is to desecrate the land that YHWH has bestowed on his chosen nation and to invite God's curse to fall on the entire land (Grisanti 2012, 672; Markl 2018, 179).

The profound radical transformation experienced by and within Paul in his apprehension of Jesus of Nazareth on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9; 22; 26) comes with his declaration in Gal 2:19: “I have been crucified with Christ” (*Christō(i) synestaúrōmai*)! (Wright 2003, 375–98) Even if Paul's is a response of faith, it is described in terms of death on the cross, a death inasmuch as it is an act of such complete identification with Christ's death as to be a participation in it, a “cocrucifixion” (*synestaúrōmai*) (Gorman 2004, 204; Martyn 1997, 277–80). The perfect tense of the Greek verb suggests a past act with ongoing consequences (Wallace 1996, 573–74); like Paul, believers remain in a constant state of being crucified and thus dead in Christ (Gal 2:20a).

## 8. Paul's Backward Journey Towards a More Comprehensive Understanding of Jesus

Just as the Emmaus pericope finds its centre in “He is alive” (*hoi légousin autòn zēn*) in Luke 24:23c, so also in one sweeping verse the Apostle Paul himself enunciates where the focus of all his and all Christian belief lies (Wright 2003, 312–74). In 1 Cor 2:1–2, Paul states: “When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” This definitely does not imply that Paul's belief stopped with Jesus' death. Only if Jesus had risen

from that terrible death could he be Paul's and all Christians' focus of belief (Pitta 2009, 150–53).

In fact, Paul's letters, and especially the Proto-Pauline ones, link together Jesus' death and his resurrection to such an extent that in Paul, the resurrection does not annul death; it rather highlights it! (Zumstein 2001, 486) A few examples would suffice:

“But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:8–11);

“For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living” (Rom 14:9);

“It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20);

“For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor 4:11);

“And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them” (2 Cor 5:15);

“For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God” (2 Cor 13:4);

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him” (1 Thess 5:9–10).

### 8.1. Moses

This solid belief in Jesus' death and resurrection is the point of arrival of a long journey that had its first—just as solid—steps in what “Moses and all the prophets” (Luke 24:27) had enunciated. In Deut 21:22–23, Moses lays down in the Toràh the law concerning criminals and their capital punishment. A Jewish rabbi (see Luke 7:40; 9:38; 11:45; 20:21, 39) who met the same fate as any criminal sanctioned by Deut 21:22–23 would not only not be a prospective Messiah but a curse from YHWH upon the Promised Land of Israel and its people.

It is totally understandable that “a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Don C. Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee... as to righteousness under the law, blameless” would be full of “zeal, a persecutor of the church” (Phil 3:5–6). It is just as comprehensible how and why in his “earlier life in Judaism,” and being “advanced in Judaism beyond many among [his] people of the same age... [and] far more zealous for the traditions of [his] ancestors” Paul was “violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it” (Gal 1:13–14) (see Young 1997, 11, 29–30; Aageson 1993, 45–69). In the Risen Lord's own words on the Road

to Damascus, Paul's persecution of the church was tantamount to persecuting Jesus himself: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:15).

## 8.2. The Prophet Isaiah and the Suffering Servant

Jesus Christ not only assumes the role of a perfect man, embodying the archetype of the second Adam, as argued by Paul in 1 Cor 15:21–50, but also manifests himself as our High Priest, Prophet-Redeemer, Final Sacrifice, Lawgiver, and King. These prophetic, redemptive, priestly, and kingly dimensions converge into the powerful current of messianic expectations, finding ultimate realisation in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ (Dunn 2003, 79–101; Aageson 1993, 105–16).

Within the Jewish theological milieu, these themes were ingrained, and anticipation prevailed regarding the Messiah's fulfilment of these multifaceted roles. Yet, the New Testament reveals that the unexpected nature of Jesus' manifestation in his incarnation and earthly life defied conventional expectations. Had Jesus assumed a triumphant stance, overthrowing Roman dominance, many might have construed it as a fulfilment of his anticipated kingly role. However, the revelation unfolds differently; Jesus fulfils these roles in unforeseen ways. The notion of a suffering Messiah, particularly one who undergoes crucifixion, proved to be scandalous.<sup>8</sup> The profound concept that the suffering Jesus was, in fact, God incarnate, was a revelation beyond the conceivable imaginations of contemporaneous observers.

Michael Gorman in his book *Reading Paul* (Gorman 2008) claims that Paul's Christological hymn in Phil 2:6–11 is essentially a re-interpretation of the Prophet Isaiah's (as one of the most important and quoted *nʿbiʾim*) description of the Suffering Servant in the light of Christ (see also Gorman 2004, 105, 422, 434). Gorman compares Isa 52:13; 53:4–5, 12 with the Philippians passage to show how Paul sees Jesus as being the fulfilment of the Isaiah prophecy. The Fourth Servant Song in Isaiah provides the most probable background to Jesus' foretelling that it is "written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt" (Mark 9:12; see also, 14:49), or as during the journey to Emmaus that, "Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?'" (24:25–26) (see Grindheim 2012, 59)

Paul echoes the resolute words of God's Suffering Servant in Isaiah's Third Cantic (50:8–9) when he fearlessly queries, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31) The Servant's proclamation, articulated in the first person singular, surpasses even Paul's boldness and is notably more intimate. The audacity of the Servant stems from his profound and comprehensive experience—he has endured scourging,

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<sup>8</sup> See 1 Cor 1:23: "we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block [*skándalon*] to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles."

endured insults and spitting, and suffered the grave indignity of having his beard forcibly torn out by adversaries. Rather than succumbing to despair, the Servant, resilient in faith, discerns a transformative apprenticeship within these agonising circumstances. The afflictions have become a crucible for discipleship, refining the Servant's voice to articulate words of hope and vindication, addressing the weary and down-trodden with resounding encouragement.

This notwithstanding, the enigma surrounding the Suffering Servant as depicted in the Fourth Cantic (Isa 52:13–53:12) represents a peculiar construct. This Cantic delineates the overarching mission of the Servant—namely, the sacrificial self-giving of a sinless individual for the redemption of transgressors. By surrendering his life as a sacrificial offering to ransom the multitude, the Servant earns divine exaltation, and God extends pardon to all on behalf of whom he has perished (see Phil 2:9–11) (Ross, n.d.). This prophetic proclamation arguably stands as the most significant anticipation concerning Jesus within the entirety of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, it is this very intricacy that prompted the apostle Paul to assert his resolution “to know nothing while I was with you but Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2), after tracing out the contours of the Suffering Servant in Jesus Christ in Chapter 1. It is within the presence of the Crucified One, identified as God's Suffering Servant, that the comprehensive outlines of God's grand design begin to emerge. Through the bestowal of God's Son—being destined for suffering and death for others—into the world, Paul ultimately attained a profound understanding and appreciation of the love of God, “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

One can never overestimate the paramount significance of the Fourth Cantic, noting that it crucially defines the essence of the gospel as salvation through the forgiveness of sins in accordance with Scripture as highlighted by Paul in 1 Cor 15:1–8. The reference to “according to the scriptures” specifically alludes to Isaiah, given that the Gospels have not yet been authored.

Jesus himself aligns his mission with the role of the Suffering Servant, embodying the narrative outlined in the Fourth Oracle of Isa 53:5–12. This prophetic passage delineates his suffering for transgressions and iniquities, bearing chastisement for the restoration of others and offering healing to them through shedding his blood. The description eerily parallels an eyewitness account of Jesus' passion, even though Isa 53 was written centuries before his birth.

The creedal statement in 1 Cor 15:3 emphasises the shedding of blood for the remission of sins, aligning with the depiction in Isa 53 of the Servant's death for the sins of many. This underscores the importance of recalling Jesus' actions at the Last Supper and which Paul presents as ‘Tradition, *parádosis*’ (1 Cor 11:23) in his argumentation concerning the Institution of the Eucharist in 1 Cor 10–11, in particular 11:23–26, in anticipation of Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary, emphasising the shedding of his blood for the forgiveness of sins: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” (11:25).

### 8.3. The Psalms

In the third part of the Hebrew canon—the *kētûbîm*, the Psalms themselves expressed the same attitudes that Paul must have experienced against God’s own enemies when he counted Jesus of Nazareth as one of them, seeing that he merited the punishment of crucifixion that Deuteronomy considered as a curse. In Ps 3:7, the psalmist eagerly invites YHWH—“Rise up, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked.” In Ps 139:19–22, the psalmist expresses himself in such strong terms: “O that you would kill the wicked, O God, and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—those who speak of you maliciously, and lift themselves up against you for evil! Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.” Similarly, Psalm 58 culminates the psalmist’s hatred towards the wicked by exclaiming in verse 6: “O God, break the teeth in their mouths” (Hays 2005, 101–18).

In Psalm 22, Paul, the staunch Jew, could perceive that even the God-loving psalmist could go through the terrible suffering that Jesus of Nazareth went through in his passion and death ordeal. Understandably, Paul must have asked himself: would this Jesus of Nazareth be the suffering faithful and trusting believer or YHWH’s Suffering Servant that the psalm depicts, instead of the curse that Deuteronomy proffers? (Sciberras 2023a, 393–96)

In a parallel vein to the two disciples of Emmaus’ scriptural experience, Paul went through analogous developmental milestones as the two aforementioned disciples, with the accompaniment of Jesus, who served as an elucidating presence expounding upon the Scriptures. This elucidation facilitated Paul’s perceptual shift from regarding Jesus as the condemned and crucified malefactor, a perception informed by Deut 21:22–23, to affirming the vitality of Jesus through the resurrection narrative outlined in 1 Cor 15:17–28. This transformative process culminated in Paul’s proclamation that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall avow the lordship of “Jesus Christ” (*Kyrios Iêsous Christôs*), as articulated in Phil 2:11. The cross and resurrection is the centre of Emmaus and of Paul’s life, belief and teachings (Sciberras 2023b, 55–75).

## Conclusion

In congruence with the narrative of the disciples’ encounter on the road to Emmaus, the apostle Paul traversed a transformative trajectory marked by the recognition of the Resurrected Lord. This trajectory witnessed a discernible transition in Paul’s ideological stance, evolving from an ardent persecutor of the adherents of Jesus of

Nazareth and his teachings, as documented in Acts 9:1–4; 22:7, and 1 Cor 15:9, to assuming the role of an apostle who unequivocally acknowledges Jesus as ‘Lord,’ as evident in Acts 9:5, Phil 2:11, and Rom 10:12. Furthermore, Paul progressed in his spiritual journey to embody the status of a believer who has undergone crucifixion with Christ, as delineated in Gal 2:19. This trajectory posits a plausible scenario whereby adherents of Jesus throughout various epochs may engage in the interpretative elucidation of scriptural representations pertaining to the Lord as enunciated by Moses, the Prophets, and the Scriptures, as delineated in Luke 24:27, 44. Paul’s paradigmatic transformation on the same scriptural lines as that of the two disciples of Emmaus is the irrefutable challenge that convicts every Christian to establish where their spirituality is truly rooted. Here lies the mimetic dynamics and power of proclamation: “Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me” (1 Cor 4:15–16), even if Paul had to come a very long way in his recognition of the true Jesus Christ. In 1 Cor 11:1–2, he raises standards even higher: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1, even when he could exclaim: “I have been crucified with Christ” [Gal 2:19]). He could even commend the Corinthian Christians: “because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions (*paradóseis*) just as I handed them on to you” (1 Cor 11:2), i.e. traditions such as that he proclaimed in 1 Cor 15:3–17 concerning Jesus’ death, resurrection and post-paschal appearances (Evans 2012, 159–60).





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