

LISA M. BOWENS

# An Apostle in Battle

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*  
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# An Apostle in Battle

Paul and Spiritual Warfare  
in 2 Corinthians 12:1–10

Mohr Siebeck

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For my family, especially my parents,  
Reginald and Eunice Bowens,  
and in memory of my grandparents,  
Lawrence and Martha Bowens,  
Irving and Nettie McKoy and  
in memory of a spiritual father Otis Lockett, Sr.



## Preface

This monograph is a revision of my doctoral dissertation, “Engaging in Battle: Examining Paul’s Cosmology, Epistemology, and Anthropology in the Context of Spiritual Warfare in 2 Corinthians 12:1–10,” which was submitted to the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary. I am grateful to the editors of Mohr Siebeck for their helpful suggestions and comments throughout this publication process. I owe the completion of this project to many professors, colleagues, family members, and friends. I must give a very special thanks and appreciation to my committee members: J. Ross Wagner (Chair), Loren Stuckenbruck, Shane Berg, and George Parsenios. Ross Wagner, my *Doktorvater*, willingly shared his expertise in Paul, read closely many drafts, and constantly challenged me to sharpen my thoughts and my argument. I am very thankful to have had him as my advisor during this journey. The many conversations we engaged in and his reassuring presence enabled me to forge ahead and think creatively. His guidance and words of encouragement have been so instrumental to the completion of this endeavor. The idea for this dissertation originated in Loren Stuckenbruck’s Jewish Apocalyptic Literature course, and I am grateful that he urged me to pursue it. I am equally grateful for his eagerness to share his expertise in Jewish literature and his continual admonition to think ‘outside of the box.’ His readings of scripture are always provocative and challenge me as a Pauline scholar to think about the larger context of Paul’s world. I am also very appreciative of Shane Berg’s enthusiasm, expertise, and interest in religious epistemology, all of which served to spur my own interest in the topic. I am grateful for our many discussions and his advice to ‘challenge assumptions,’ to dig deeper into the text, and to find my own voice. George Parsenios has been a source of constant motivation and inspiration to press on. His faith in my ability means so very much and his untiring and relentless pursuit of knowledge encourages my own quest.

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To my entire family, who is God's gift to me, I give a special and eternal thanks for prayers, encouragement, and the many times you have offered a listening ear, especially Reggie, Vonnie, Anna, and Stephanie. Most of all, to my parents, Reginald and Eunice Bowens, who have sacrificed so much and have always encouraged me and supported me. Their steadfast faith in God, despite life's difficult circumstances, has been an anchor for my soul. I also recognize the late Pastor Otis Lockett Sr., who loved the Lord and the word of God with a deep passion and whose inspiring words compelled me to step out on faith. I also honor those beloved saints, old mothers and fathers of the church who never had the opportunity to engage in formal theological education but whose unwavering faith in God shaped my own faith. To God in whom I live, move, and have my very being I offer praise. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

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## List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
AJ	Josephus, <i>Antiquitates Judaicae</i>
AR	Archiv für Religionswissenschaft
BHT	Beiträge zur Historischen Theologie
Bib	Biblica
Bib Int	Biblical Interpretation
BJ	Josephus, <i>Bellum Judaicum</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BZ	Biblische Zeitschrift
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CD	Damascus Document
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
DSSR	Dead Sea Scrolls Reader
EKK	Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GAP	Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha
HBS	Herders Biblische Studien
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentary
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
IBC	Interpretation Bible Commentary
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	Israel Exploration Journal
Int	Interpretation
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JSHRZ	Jüdische Schriften aus Hellenistisch-Römischer Zeit
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSP	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha
JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
JU	Judentum und Umwelt
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1888.
LF	Library of the Fathers

NAC	New American Commentary
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NIB	New Interpreter's Bible Commentary
NIBC	New International Bible Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NovT	Novum Testamentum
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum, Supplements
NPNF	The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
NTS	New Testament Studies
ÖTBK	Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament
OTP	Old Testament Pseudepigrapha
PRS	Perspectives in Religious Studies
PTSMS	Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Monograph Series
PVTG	Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece
ResQ	Restoration Quarterly
RSB	Religious Studies Bulletin
S-CJ	Stone-Campbell Journal
SNTW	Studies in the New Testament and Its World
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha
ThHK	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum
VT	Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZTK	Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

### 1.1 Proem

The research presented in this study has four overarching primary concerns: 1) examining the epistemological, cosmological, and anthropological perspectives that undergird Paul's mystical experience in 2 Corinthians 12:1–10; 2) concentrating on the ascent's connection to the overall argument of 2 Corinthians 10–13; 3) defining the significance of the apostle's heavenly journey for him and his audience; and 4) addressing the relationship of Paul's ascent to the apostle's larger Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts. The pericope's relationship to the rest of the letter and the broader Hellenistic environment and its significance for Paul and the Corinthians are intricately linked to the martial imagery with which the apostle begins chapter 10. Much recent research focuses on the heavenly voyage solely as a response to Paul's opponents and although recognizing the existence of martial imagery in 10:3–6, recent discussions neither examine sufficiently the persistence of this martial language in the remaining chapters of the letter nor relate this warfare imagery to the apostle's heavenly expedition.

It will be shown in the following analysis that delineating this military language is vital for understanding the apostle's ascent to the third heaven and for grasping Paul's description of a broader cosmic contest that undergirds the problems in Corinth. The combat motif demonstrates that Paul both views and presents the Corinthian situation as greater than the presence of his opponents. By utilizing martial imagery, the apostle describes an existing supernatural struggle around the knowledge of God. The warfare terminology of chapter 10 anticipates his ascent, in which he faces satanic conflict, a conflict that illustrates the reality of an apocalyptic contest. This apocalyptic contest precipitates the apostle's prayer in 12:8, an invocation which corresponds to other petitions during this time period. Prayers of deliverance from evil forces become more prevalent around the first century, and this study contends that Paul's request fits into this genre. As will be discussed below, the apocalyptic contest foregrounded by the apostle's martial language grants insight into Paul's view of the human being, humanity's place in the cosmos, and how humanity gains access to knowledge of and from God.



## 1.2 Snapshot of 2 Corinthians 12:1–10 and Its Context

To say that 2 Corinthians 12:1–10 has generated considerable discussion and debate is an understatement. This pericope, which includes Paul's vision, heavenly journey, and thorn in the flesh, has been labeled by interpreters as "bizarre,"<sup>1</sup> "abstruse and esoteric,"<sup>2</sup> and "one of the more intriguing passages in the letters of Paul."<sup>3</sup> To make interpretive matters even more difficult, these verses occur in the midst of the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians, chapters described by many as argumentative in nature. Paul's tone seems harsher in this part of the letter and his criticisms of his opponents more direct and severe.<sup>4</sup> He also utilizes a number of rhetorical tools such as pleading and paraneis, sarcasm, threat, and condemnation.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Paul's "bizarre" experience appears in this larger rhetorically complicated section, 2 Corinthians 10–13.<sup>6</sup> In regard to the difficulties in this portion of the letter, Hans Dieter Betz observes, "II Corinthians 10–13 remains one of the most puzzling passages of the Pauline correspondence."<sup>7</sup> Betz's observation of the challenging nature of 2 Corinthians 10–13 underscores the complexity in interpreting 2 Corinthians 12:1–10. One must not only examine the pericope itself but also the context, albeit a difficult one, in which it appears.

In the opening verses of 2 Corinthians 10, Paul emphatically addresses himself to the Corinthians (αὐτοὺς δὲ ἐγὼ Παῦλος), highlighting that it is he himself who urges them and no one else. This emphatic speech, along with the way he characterizes himself in these verses, leads most interpreters to see Paul as "writing on the defense." He defends himself against charges of being weak

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<sup>1</sup> Robert M. Price, "Punished in Paradise: (An Exegetical Theory on 2 Corinthians 12:1–10)," *JSNT* 7 (1980): 33–40.

<sup>2</sup> Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 36.

<sup>3</sup> James D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Sze-kar Wan, *Power in Weakness: Conflict and Rhetoric in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 128.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, SP 8 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 327.

<sup>6</sup> The argumentative tone of 2 Corinthians 10–13 causes a number of commentators to view this section as distinct from the previous chapters. However, as the subsequent analysis will show, although Paul's tenor takes on a harsher character in these final chapters, he repeatedly returns to themes in chapters 1–9. Consequently, much of what Paul says in 10–13 is illuminated by these previous chapters. For the sake of our discussion, we will assume that these chapters belong to the same letter. Murray J. Harris (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 8–51) presents a detailed discussion on the various partition theories for this letter.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *Paul's Apology, II Corinthians 10–13, and the Socratic Tradition*, ed. Wilhelm H. Wuellner (Berkeley: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 2nd Colloquy on 5 December 1970, 1975), 1.

when present and bold when he is away (10:1, 10–11). Moreover, he faces accusations of walking or living according to the flesh, a charge he vehemently denies (10:2–3). The notion of war, which also appears in these opening verses (10:3–6), further underscores the view that Paul defends himself against his opponents and to the Corinthians. Chapters 10–13 are seen by most commentators as a defense letter or apology for his apostolic authority.<sup>8</sup> It is within this defensive framework that interpreters primarily understand Paul's ascent (12:1–10).

Yet the following investigation will show that to posit Paul's ascent as merely another tool with which Paul defends himself against his opponents does not do justice to the significance of this experience. Such a perspective divorces the importance of this episode from Paul's overall theological argument in this section of the letter. The apocalyptic/cosmic warfare language with which Paul begins chapter 10 sets the framework for the remaining discussion and suggests that his ascent cannot be reduced to the sole purpose of bolstering his apostolic claims against his opponents. The martial imagery in 10:3–6 does not merely depict a defensive posture but provides a glimpse into satanic conflict.

### 1.3 Paul's *Himmelsreise* in Recent Interpretations

#### 1.3.1 Garland, Murphy O'Connor, and Schweitzer

It is crucial to provide a careful history of the research of 2 Corinthians 12:1–10 in view of the interpretive questions put forward and omitted in the past regarding the text's function, language, and importance. This detailed survey

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<sup>8</sup> A number of scholars view the letter in this manner. Among them are William Baird, *1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians*, Knox Preaching Guides, ed. John H. Hayes (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980); Paul Barnett, "Paul, Apologist to the Corinthians," in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict: Essays in Honor of Margaret Thrall*, eds. Trevor J. Burke and J. Keith Elliott, NovTSup 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians*, IBC (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987); John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries 10, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. A. Small (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964); Victor P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB 32A (New York: Doubleday, 1984); Andrew Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought with Special References to His Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Margaret M. Mitchell, "The Corinthian Correspondence and the Birth of Pauline Hermeneutics" in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict: Essays in Honor of Margaret Thrall*, eds. Trevor J. Burke and J. Keith Elliott, NovTSup 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); John Howard Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); Tabor, *Things Unutterable*; Frances M. Young and David F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in Second Corinthians* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1987).

is also needed in order to unveil common presuppositions and assumptions adhered to in various explanations of this text in modern times. Many recent interpreters view this passage as part of Paul's foolish speech in which he reluctantly boasts of his revelations and visions in order to validate his apostolic authority to his Corinthian audience.<sup>9</sup> In fact, a survey of a number of commentaries and articles on this passage reveals a common line of interpretation in regard to 2 Corinthians 12:1–10. One frequent interpretation is that Paul only shares this experience because his opponents boast of their own visions and revelations. If they had not boasted about their own experiences, Paul would not have shared his. According to some scholars, Paul presents this ascent account to show that visions and revelations, while important to his opponents' idea of apostleship, are, in his view, no real proof of authentic apostleship. David Garland represents this view well when he writes, "[for Paul] visions have nothing to do with authenticating an apostle."<sup>10</sup> He asserts, "Paul rehearses this extraordinary episode in a way that only stresses how useless it is to prove anything about him."<sup>11</sup> For Garland and others, Paul's account demonstrates the insignificance of this event. Moreover, Paul's reluctance to tell of his ascent and his hesitation to boast about it indicates that he believes that visions and revelations are insignificant, or at the very least only important to him personally and not to be shared with others.<sup>12</sup> The following quote by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor calls attention to the relationship between Paul's account and his opponents' claims. Murphy-O'Connor also highlights the ascent's unimportance to the apostle and the personal nature of the encounter. He writes,

Once again underlining the pointlessness of boasting, Paul turns to the question of visions and revelations, on which his opponents laid such emphasis (12:1). It is neither a proof of

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<sup>9</sup> Along with viewing the letter as a defense speech, many commentators also agree with the designation of a Fool's Speech, though they differ on where the speech begins and ends. Among those following this trajectory are William Baird, "Visions, Revelation, and Ministry: Reflections on 2 Cor 12:1–5 and Gal 1:11–17," *JBL* 104 (1985): 653; Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 555; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 539; Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 828; Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC 40 (Waco: Word, 1985), 394; J. Paul Sampley, *Second Letter to the Corinthians*, NIB 11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 162; Margaret E. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, ICC 47 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 2:654.

<sup>10</sup> David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 512; see also Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet*, 77.

<sup>11</sup> Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 509. At the same time, however, Garland writes that "the incident was a cherished, life changing event for Paul; but it was also highly personal and not something he freely shared with others nor something about which he would brag" (511).

<sup>12</sup> Charles K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 34, 310; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 544; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 509, 511–512; Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet*, 77; Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, 238.

authentic ministry nor beneficial to the community. Unless one is prepared to lie or to embroider wildly, it is extremely difficult to speak ironically about such experiences. Paul gets around the difficulty very neatly by writing of himself in the third person (12:2–5), thereby distancing himself from the episode.... By attributing it to someone else Paul underlines the irrelevance of the experience for his ministry. It did not change him in any way and it did not furnish him with any information which he could use. The unstated critique of his opponents is obvious. If their experience was the same as Paul's, it contributed nothing. If their experience was something they could talk about, it was less ineffable than his.<sup>13</sup>

Like Garland, Murphy-O'Connor asserts that the apostle's heavenly journey adds nothing to his ministry. He maintains that the experience also holds no value for the community and that Paul's use of the third person accentuates its irrelevancy. His emphasis on the ascent's insignificance to the community and to Paul's ministry further suggests that he views the event as personal in character. Paul depicts the encounter in a manner that shows that these types of episodes add nothing to one's life and are not worth mentioning. And if one does mention them, they must not be all that significant.

To other interpreters, however, Paul recounts this excursion either to show that his visions and revelations are superior to those of his opponents and/or that this event makes him superior to his opponents. After all, he makes it to the third heaven and hears words not fit for human beings to speak.<sup>14</sup> In his early 20<sup>th</sup> century work, *The Mysticism of the Apostle Paul*, Albert Schweitzer's sums up well the latter point of view:

But the high importance which Paul always attached to [the ascent] is to be judged from the fact that in his struggle to vindicate his Apostolic authority he makes reference to it, holding it to be a unique distinction, from which must at once be evident his equality with the other Apostles, if not indeed his superiority to them. It was to Paradise that Enoch was translated when he was rapt away (Enoch lx.8, lxx.3). Paul had thus had an experience comparable to that of these pious men of early times, and remained for a time in the place which he visited! Which of the original Apostles had been granted such a favour!<sup>15</sup>

For Schweitzer and others who adhere to these positions, Paul's heavenly rapture makes him superior to his challengers. These perspectives reflect the

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<sup>13</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 117–118.

<sup>14</sup> Ferdinand C. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teachings* (1873–1875; repr., Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:291; Wilhelm Bousset, "Der Zweite Brief an die Korinther," in *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments: neu übersetzt und für die Gegenwart erklärt*, ed. J. Weiss (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907), 2:209; Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915), 339; Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions: Their Basic Ideas and Significance*, trans. J. E. Steely, PTSMS 15 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1978), 467; Hans Windisch, *Der Zweite Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924), 368.

<sup>15</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998; repr. London: A. & C. Black, 1931), 137.

broader prevailing view that Paul offers this account as part of his defense against the false apostles. However, the contention of this study is that the importance of the ascent cannot be viewed as a mere response to his opponents. To see the ascent in this manner reduces the weight of the experience for Paul's larger theological argument.

### 1.3.2 Baur, Plummer, and Windisch

For some scholars who view the apostle's heavenly rapture in light of his opponents, the naming of the false apostles holds the key for understanding Paul's ascent. That is, the opponents' identities shape their view of the Corinthian situation. For instance, Ferdinand C. Baur maintains that Paul's rivals were Judaizers who questioned Paul's authority. At the same time, Baur notices the absences of reference to the law in the letter, stating,

We should have expected that the Apostle would have taken as the subject of his objection, the principles propagated by the Judaizing opponents, but the contents of his Epistle do not carry out this expectation. The Jewish doctrines of the absolute value of the Mosaic law, and the necessity of its observance for salvation, are nowhere combated as they are in the Epistles to the Galatians and the Romans, and there is no mention made of the law, and all that depends upon it.<sup>16</sup>

In the quote above Baur recognizes that the letter itself contains no explicit reference to Paul's opponents as Judaizers. Yet he claims that this must be their identity for these are the rivals the apostle faces in other congregations.<sup>17</sup> These opponents coupled their "special zeal" for the law with an attack on Paul's authority.<sup>18</sup> Baur surmises,

The opponents not only worked against [Paul's] authority, but also called in question his merit of being the special founder of the Corinthian church. They indeed came to Corinth after the Apostle, but as they did not acknowledge Paul as a true Apostle, as *Χριστοῦ ὄντα*, they assumed to themselves the glory properly belonging to him, at least in so far as they pretended to have been the first to plant true Christianity.<sup>19</sup>

For Baur, the false apostles were connected to Peter and the original apostles and arrive in Corinth to usurp Paul's apostolic role. Baur takes the phrase super-apostles as a reference to the original twelve disciples and views Paul's opponents as delegates of Peter and the twelve.<sup>20</sup> The twelve disciples and Paul's opponents could appeal to knowing Jesus in the flesh and therefore substantiate their claim to apostolic legitimacy. One way that Paul chooses to combat their claim is to share his visions and revelations. According to Baur, Paul

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<sup>16</sup> Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, 1:270–1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:131–151, especially 1:133; see also 1:269.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:277.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:287.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:288–289.

"could only set an inward spiritual experience against the outward material experiences of the rest of the Apostles."<sup>21</sup> Although Paul shares this divine encounter to prove that he is just as good as the twelve, his visions and revelations are not good enough for the false apostles. For Paul's rivals, these experiences "could make no claim to objective truth, in comparison with the outward matter of fact relations in which the other Apostles had lived with Jesus."<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Baur declares that while Paul's experiences may have been real to him, they could not trump his opponents' claims because these visions were personal and belonged to the "sphere of [Paul's] own immediate consciousness."<sup>23</sup> Even though this heavenly journey is important to Paul and he discloses it to combat his opponents, it does not serve to enhance his credibility as an apostle.

Like Baur, Alfred Plummer argues that Paul recounts his ascent because of his opponents. He maintains that, similar to the Damascus flight, Paul's ascent had been used as a way to attack him since his rivals thought these experiences illustrated his delusion and his madness.<sup>24</sup> In the face of opposition, then, Paul affirms the reality of the event to the Corinthians. Plummer eloquently states that Paul "lifts the veil which usually covers the details of the most sacred moments of his life and allows the Corinthians to see enough to convince them that the revelations of which he has claimed to be the recipient were intensely and supremely real."<sup>25</sup> Plummer focuses on the genuine nature of the event and on the false apostles as the reason for its narration. But in contrast to other interpreters, he does not believe that the false apostles also claimed to have had visions. Consequently, he does not adhere to the view that Paul relates these experiences to show the superiority of his visions and revelations.<sup>26</sup>

Hans Windisch, who offers a variation on the perspectives presented by Baur and Plummer, avers that Paul does not share his ascent episode in response to his opponents' boasting of their visions and revelations. In fact, Windisch does not believe that the topic played an important role in the Corinthian congregation at all. He writes,

Daß auch die Gegner solcher Gesichte sich rühmen können, ist hier nirgends angedeutet – die Meinung, daß Visionen in Kor. besonders gepflegt und besonders hoch gewertet wurden, kann durch unseren Text nicht gestützt werden.... Das fehlen des Artikels macht es unwahrscheinlich, daß [Paulus] hier ein Thema anschläge, das in Kor. bereits eine ominöse Rolle spielte.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 1:291.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 1:292.

<sup>24</sup> Plummer, *Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 338.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 339–340.

<sup>27</sup> Windisch, *Der Zweite Korintherbrief*, 368.

For Windisch, Paul does not respond to an issue already under discussion in Corinth but, in effect, continues the list he began in 11:22 where he enumerates his merits. After providing an overview of his sufferings and worries, Paul resumes in 12:1 from where he left off in chapter 11. Windisch eloquently writes of the comparisons he sees the apostle making by sharing his revelatory experiences. In essence, Paul continues the pattern “Are they ... I too” in his heavenly journey narrative.

Wie kommt er dann auf diesen Gegenstand hier zu sprechen? Die natürlichste Antwort ist, daß er mit 12<sub>1</sub> ff. gewissermaßen den 11<sub>23b</sub> fallen gelassenen faden wieder aufnimmt. Er begann 11<sub>22</sub> seine wirklichen Vorzüge zusammenzutragen, schweifte dann aber ab zu seinen Leiden und Sorgen; mit dem Thema “Gesichte und Offenbarungen” leitet er nun wieder zurück zu den Begnadigungen, deren er sich rühmen kann; und wenn die erste Reihe der Auszeichnungen von dem Gedanken, “Sie – ich auch”, die zweite von dem “Sie – ich auch noch viel mehr” getragen war (11<sub>22</sub>–11<sub>23</sub>), so ist jetzt das Motto entweder “Sie – ich in ganz unvergleichlich reichem Maße” oder wahrscheinlicher “ich allein”.<sup>28</sup>

Windisch posits that Paul’s visions and revelations are a “third round” of comparisons in which Paul highlights his own distinctive claim to these experiences. Paul professes to be more than the false apostles and distinguished from them in regard to these events because he alone journeys to the divine realms. Unlike other scholars, Windisch does not believe the false apostles actually claimed revelatory encounters. But he does maintain that Paul only shares his experience because of his rivals. “Auch was er verrät, schreibt er nur gezwungen, weil er es zur Sicherung seiner Autorität geltend machen muß.”<sup>29</sup> Here again Paul presents the account to secure his apostolic claim.

### 1.3.3 *Schmithals and Reitzenstein*

Unlike Baur, Walter Schmithals argues that Paul’s opponents were Jewish Christian gnostic missionaries and not Judaizers who held a Pharisaic theology. He asserts that Jewish Gnosticism existed along with “orthodox” Judaism which included Pharisees, Sadducees, apocalypticists, Essenes, and other groups.<sup>30</sup> As gnostics, Paul’s opponents devalued the body, causing them to deny the resurrection and to despise suffering. In contrast, they emphasized the heavenly Christ, not the earthly Jesus, and as libertine pneumatics they believed that redemption comes from knowledge. Their practice of ecstatic raptures compels Paul to boast of his own ecstatic experiences.<sup>31</sup> Interestingly,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 296–297.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 210.

Schmithals maintains that because the apostle feels forced to engage in boasting, the ascent passage is “permeated with bitterness.”<sup>32</sup>

Paul's heavenly journey foreshadows what he will be in the future and not what he is in the present. Thus, Paul uses the third person to distinguish between his present self and his future self. For Schmithals, this distinction is the genius of Paul's ascent presentation.<sup>33</sup> Unlike his gnostic opponents who believe they already live in Paradise, the apostle separates the future from the present. Schmithals contends that in his heavenly rapture Paul

is the *ἄνθρωπος ἐν Χριστῷ* who he will one day become and already has been temporarily, fourteen years earlier, in a moment of most marvelous and exalted experience. Thus the modesty of the apostle is the attitude of the believer who knows about his future without having it in his possession.<sup>34</sup>

This quote emphasizes the proleptic nature of Paul's supernatural encounter. In addition, Paul's inability to determine whether the heavenly rapture took place in the body or out of the body illustrates his intention to disabuse the Corinthians of their emphasis on raptures that they believe take place out of the body.<sup>35</sup>

Richard Reitzenstein follows Baur's view that Paul's opponents hail from the Petrine community.<sup>36</sup> He writes that the super-apostles “in comparison with whom Paul utters his *ὑπὲρ ἐγώ* actually are the Twelve, or, in our particular case, Peter.”<sup>37</sup> For Reitzenstein, the Petrine origin of the super-apostles is important because it provides the reason for Paul's inclusion of his heavenly journey. In his eyes, Paul relates his ascent narrative to illustrate that he is “not inferior to the original apostles,”<sup>38</sup> for his heavenly rapture is evidence of his apostolic equality with the Twelve. Reitzenstein bases this interpretation on his belief that in the ascent Paul stands in the tradition of the pneumatics. The ascent reveals that Paul is “a divine being and in spite of his earthly body is caught up into another world which alone has value and truth.”<sup>39</sup> As the previous quote illustrates, Reitzenstein argues that Paul is a gnostic.<sup>40</sup> And as a gnostic the apostle is aware of the “weak man and the deity in him” as well as the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 216–217.

<sup>36</sup> Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions*, 467.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 468.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 469.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 84. In fact, Reitzenstein writes that “We encounter in [Paul] the beginnings of that basic Hellenistic consciousness, and the religio-historical way of considering these matters may place him in this course of development not as the first, but perhaps as the *greatest of all the gnostics*” (84; emphasis mine).



“duality of being.”<sup>41</sup> Paul’s Hellenistic understanding of *γνῶσις* as mystery and divine revelation underscores the importance of the ascent. According to Reitzenstein, Paul’s experience grants him divine authority. He observes:

[Paul] can base his claim, not to stand beneath the original apostles but rather above them, upon this vision only if both he himself and his community are permeated with the Hellenistic (and thus originally Oriental), not the Jewish, evaluation of this non-mediated vision of God – and if the Petrine party at Corinth does not have something similar to relate about *their* chief.<sup>42</sup>

Reitzenstein contends that Paul’s understanding of *γνῶσις* as a “non-mediated vision of God” must have been a shared understanding with his audience and the super-apostles for Paul’s appeal to his ascent to make sense. This “non-mediated vision of God” bestowed authority and divine approval upon Paul establishing that the apostle is not inferior in *γνῶσις* to the original apostles.

For Reitzenstein, as well as for the other scholars presented above, Paul’s opponents are in some way the reason for his sharing the ascent episode. Even though these interpreters do consider the larger exegetical context of Paul’s heavenly journey, for them its inclusion in the letter rests primarily upon the presence of Paul’s rivals.<sup>43</sup> They do not relate the ascent to the military imagery in chapter 10 nor do they argue for a relationship between the ascent and the satanic presence in the Corinthian congregations as I will do in the following pages. For these interpreters, Paul’s supernatural experience primarily serves the purpose of proving his superiority to or at least equality with the false or super-apostles. But to view the ascent’s primary purpose as “trumping” his opponents is to miss important links between this encounter and Paul’s framework of cosmic warfare and satanic opposition in chapter 10.

#### 1.3.4 Käsemann and Betz

Two other authors with immense influence on the modern interpretation of this passage deserve mention here, Ernst Käsemann and Hans Dieter Betz. Ernst Käsemann, in his work *Die Legitimität des Apostels: Eine Untersuchung zu 2 Korinther 10–13*, argues that the central issue of 2 Corinthians 10–13 revolves around different perspectives of apostleship. The opponents of Paul, he sur-

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 87 (emphasis his).

<sup>43</sup> Some of these interpreters, like Reitzenstein, do consider the even larger context of 2 Corinthians, such as the wider Greco-Roman world. For example, Reitzenstein looks at texts, such as the Mithras Liturgy and Philo, to compare Paul’s experience. Yet in relation to the ascent, the examination of these texts still serves the purpose of illustrating that the primary reason for its inclusion is the opponents.

mises, are Jewish pneumatics who work signs and wonders, which in their reasonings constitute legitimate criteria for apostolic authority.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, he regards 12:12 as originating with Paul's opponents and as providing a significant window into the conflict. The following quote highlights what Käsemann takes to be the opponents' view of apostolic authority and Paul's lack of charismatic signs. He writes,

Das ergibt sich schon aus dem gegnerischem Munde entstammenden Stichwort der *σημεῖα τοῦ ἀποστόλου* in 12:12. Denn Inhalt dieser »Apostelmerkmale« ist offensichtlich die Fähigkeit zum Wundertun.... Der Zweifel am Vorhandensein der Apostelzeichen verdächtigt also wiederum das Pneumatikertum des Paulus. So sieht dieser sich weiter veranlaßt, seine *ἐξουσία* zu verteidigen, da man ihm vorgeworfen hat, er dürfe es nicht auf *θαρρεῖν, τολμᾶσαι, λογίζεσθαι, πεποιθήσις* ankommen lassen. *ἐξουσία* und *πνεῦμα* sind jedoch Wechselbegriffe. Darin besteht also die vermeintliche Schwachheit des Apostels: Er soll kein rechter Pneumatiker sein.<sup>45</sup>

Käsemann's words focus on his notion of the central issue of these chapters, the relationship between signs and wonders and apostleship. Paul's opponents doubt his pneumatic qualities and so this becomes the alleged weakness of the apostle – he is not the right kind of pneumatic.

Furthermore, similar to Baur, Käsemann asserts that Paul's opponents are the original apostles. Paul lacks both pneumatic ability and appropriate apostolic credentials: he is not one of the original twelve. Hence, Käsemann insists that the struggle evolves around Paul's lack of signs, lack of connection with the original apostles, and lack of connection with Jesus. He maintains:

Damit sind die Gründe des Kampfes klar geworden: Es geht in c. 10ff. wirklich »vor allem um den echt christlichen Begriff der apostolischen Auktorität«. Das unterscheidet nach Ansicht der Gegner die Urapostel von Paulus: Die ersteren haben einen sachlich wie historisch fest umrissenen »Kanon«, der dem letzteren mangelt. Ihr Stand ist durch die Sendung Jesu, durch aufweisbare »Apostelzeichen« und durch die in der Unterhaltsaufbringung sich dokumentierende Anerkennung der gesamten Christenheit präzisiert.... Seinem Apostolat fehlt die nachprüfbare Eindeutigkeit. Seine Autorität ist nicht »legitim«. Sie ist es insofern nicht, als ihr die Verbindung zu der Autorität der Urapostel und der Urgemeinde fehlt und insofern auch die Beziehung zu dem Jesus, der diese gesetzt und entsandt hat.<sup>46</sup>

As seen in this citation, according to Käsemann, Paul has no legitimacy in the eyes of his opponents. Their apostleship is set in place by Jesus and confirmed through demonstrable signs, proving the authenticity of their call.<sup>47</sup> These signs

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<sup>44</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Die Legitimität des Apostels: Eine Untersuchung zu 2 Korinther 10–13* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956), 9.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 33–34.

<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Udo Schnelle, "Der 2. Korintherbrief und die Mission gegen Paulus" in *Der Zweite Korintherbrief: Literarische Gestalt - historische Situation - theologische Argumentation. Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag von Dietrich-Alex Koch*, ed. Dieter Sänger,

show that they continue the mission of Jesus, whom they knew personally. With these credentials Paul cannot compete. Consequently, he dismisses ecstatic experiences as legitimate criteria for ministry. While they may have importance personally, they do not provide valid qualifications for apostleship.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Käsemann contends that the ascent reveals that ecstatic experiences do not create the marks of apostleship and are irrelevant for ministry. Instead, the pertinent characteristics for apostleship are those that mark service to the Christian community: *ὑπομονή*, *ἀσθένεια*, *σωφρονεῖν*, and *ἀγάπη*.<sup>49</sup> The dichotomy that Käsemann creates between what is useful for the community (weakness and love) and what is not (ecstatic experiences) remains influential. Additionally, his proposal that the ascent really highlights Paul's suffering rather than ecstatic power continues to resonate with many interpreters. Käsemann, like the previous scholars, also relates the ascent to Paul's opponents. But instead of the ascent "trumping" his rivals, he claims that Paul shares the experience to show that these encounters really mean nothing at all for his ministry and, therefore, are unimportant for the Christian congregation. Correspondingly, they hold no value for true apostolic identity.

Käsemann's insight that the ascent highlights Paul's weakness is an important one. Yet his views that Paul shares this experience merely in response to his opponents and that he uses it to underscore its uselessness to ministry, and by extension, to the community are insufficient. As will be shown in the following discussion, Paul includes this account because it has great import for the current Corinthian situation. It is a significant encounter because it illustrates the larger cosmic conflict taking place around the knowledge of God and demonstrates humanity's vulnerable role in this contest.

Käsemann's claim that the ascent is an experience that only has personal, not communal, value, can be called into question. The fact that Paul shares the event with the Corinthian congregation in a letter that will be read publicly undermines the idea that this experience only has personal significance for

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FRLANT 250 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), who writes, "Die Fremdmisionare legten zwar Wert auf ihre jüdische Herkunft (vgl. 2Kor 11,22), das entscheidende Kriterium ihrer Glaubwürdigkeit war jedoch der sich in Zeichen und Wunder artikulierende Geistbesitz (vgl. 2Kor 12,12), sie konnten ekstatische Visionen sowie Zeichen und Wunder vorweisen (vgl. 2Kor 11,6; 12,1.12). Wahrscheinlich vertraten die Fremdmisionare eine Herrlichkeitschristologie, indem sie den Glanz und die Herrlichkeit des Auferstandenen rühmten und ihre Anteilhabe an dieser Herrlichkeit öffentlich zur Schau stellten" (317).

<sup>48</sup> Käsemann, *Die Legitimität des Apostels*, 64–65. Käsemann writes, "daß hier gerade der Verzicht auf jede enthusiastische Begründung des Apostolates ausgesprochen wird, daß Paulus seine ekstatischen Erlebnisse für seine ganz persönliche Angelegenheit ansieht und sich gegen ihre organische Verknüpfung mit seinem Amte aufs entschiedenste wehrt" (65; emphasis mine). See also 30–33; 38; 63–66.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 66.

Paul. Moreover, according to 1 Corinthians, both Paul and the Corinthian congregation were used to public ecstatic displays (1 Corinthians 12:7–11, 28–30; 14:3–6, 22–29). Thus, the idea that ecstatic experiences were *only* of personal importance to the Corinthians is unlikely. Furthermore, the dichotomy that Käsemann creates between what is important for the community (service through love and weakness) and what is not important (ecstatic experiences) is a false one. Indeed, in Paul's view both ecstatic experiences and service through love and weakness benefit the community, for Paul himself brings these dimensions together.

Hans Dieter Betz, in his monograph *Der Apostel Paulus und die Sokratische Tradition: Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu seiner "Apologie" 2 Korinther 10–13*<sup>50</sup> and in his seminal 1969 article "Eine Christus-Aretalogie bei Paulus (2 Kor 12,7–10),"<sup>51</sup> argues that both Paul's ascent and his subsequent request to the Lord are parodies of their respective genres. Paul's ascent parodies the heavenly rapture genre as indicated by his use of the third person as well as his inability to relate what he heard.<sup>52</sup> In addition, Paul's request for the removal of the thorn parallels the style of an aretalogy in which the afflicted asks the gods for a cure. Betz writes,

Formgeschichtlich gesehen haben wir in V. 7–10 ein »Heilungswunder« vor uns, das im Stile einer Aretalogie vorgetragen ist. Innerhalb der sog. »Narrenrede« kann eine solche Aretalogie nur als Parodie angesprochen werden. Obwohl die religiöse Parodie noch wenig erforscht ist, läßt sich der Schluß nicht umgehen, daß sich Paulus auch hier in gängigen literarischen Formen bewegt.<sup>53</sup>

Using a form-critical point of view, Betz claims that Paul employs popular literary styles. In this quote, since Paul is engaged in a fool's speech, Betz concludes that the apostle must be utilizing parody when he describes his request for a healing in the style of an aretalogy. In the rest of the article, Betz provides texts which he contends correspond to Paul's speech to the Lord.<sup>54</sup> That Paul parodies the form of a healing cure found in aretalogies is apparent in the Lord's refusal to heal the apostle. As several scholars note, not all of Betz's argument is equally convincing.<sup>55</sup> However, one of his basic conclusions continues to appear throughout subsequent scholarship on this passage: Paul re-

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<sup>50</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus und die Sokratische Tradition: Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu seiner "Apologie" 2 Korinther 10–13*, BHT 45 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1972).

<sup>51</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, "Eine Christus-Aretalogie bei Paulus (2 Kor 12,7–10)," *ZTK* 66 (1969): 288–305.

<sup>52</sup> Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus*, see esp. 84, 89, 92.

<sup>53</sup> Betz, "Eine Christus-Aretalogie," 289.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, e.g., 290–292.

<sup>55</sup> Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 827–828; Bernhard Heininger, *Paulus als Visionär: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Studie*, HBS 9 (Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 256–257.