

VISIONS OF WEAKNESS: APOCALYPTIC GENRE AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF PAUL'S OPPONENTS IN 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1–6

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The ascension motif, found in 2 Cor 12:1–6, has been the subject of much discussion and speculation.¹ Within this pericope Paul plays the fool and makes a strong boast against his opponents in Corinth.² He claims to have known an individual in Christ who took a journey up to the third heaven and heard “unspeakable words” (KJV). What does a journey into paradise have to do with boasting, and why is Paul using this apocalyptic motif in this passage? These questions and many others have been asked in an attempt to explain this difficult text in the Corinthian correspondence. Some have suggested that this passage is dealing with Hekhaloth literature or Jewish mysticism.³ Descriptive elements in the story, such as “the third heaven” and

¹ See William Baird, “Visions, Revelations, and Ministry: Reflections on 2 Cor 12.1–5 and Gal 1.11–17,” *JBL* 104.4 (1985): 651–62; Hans Dieter Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition: Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu seiner “Apologie” 2 Kor 10–13* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1973); Ernst Dassmann, “Paulus in der Visio sancti Pauli [or Apocalypse of Paul; II Corinthians 12.2–4]” in *Jenseitsvorstellungen in Antike und Christentum* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1982), 117–29, JAC Ergänzungsband 9); Andrew T. Lincoln, “Paul the Visionary: The Setting and Significance of the Rapture to Paradise in II Corinthians 12.1–10,” *NTS* 25 (1979): 204–20; C. R. A. Morray-Jones, “Paradise Revisited (2 Cor. 12.1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul’s Apostolate. Part 2: Paul’s Heavenly Ascent and Its Significance,” *HTR* 86 (1993): 262–92; L. L. Welborn, “The Runaway Paul,” *HTR* 92 (1999): 115–63.

² Victor Paul Furnish, *2 Corinthians*. (AB 32A; New York: Doubleday, 1984), 498.

³ See C. R. A. Morray-Jones, “Paradise Revisited (2 Cor. 12.1–12). The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul’s Apostolate. Part 1: The Jewish Sources,” *HTR* 86 (1993): 177–217; or C. R. A. Morray-Jones, “Paradise Revisited, Part 2”; Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (based on the Israel Goldstein Lectures, Delivered at the Jewish Theological Semi-

“paradise,” have been justly interpreted as coming from the Merkabah texts. On the other hand, Hans Dieter Betz sets forth a second possible interpretation by suggesting this passage is a parody.⁴ Within this interpretation, Paul is attempting to make a mockery of his opponents for telling incredible stories of journeying into heaven. If this interpretation is to be accepted, then the genre of this text should be understood in light of Greco-Roman rhetoric.⁵ Betz has been interpreted by scholars to mean that 2 Cor 12:1–6 cannot be autobiographical, thus dismissing the passage as non-historical in relation to any event in Paul’s life.⁶

While the autobiographical interpretation is the most widely accepted interpretation, it cannot be accepted without several serious reservations. First, Paul never makes a direct statement to suggest that he is the individual who experienced these revelations. Thus scholars have been forced to say that Paul is making use of irony. While it is possible that Paul is using irony, proving this claim is difficult. Is it possible that there is an easier explanation for this text if one were to accept the story as a parody rather than as autobiography? In this essay, I intend to show that the opponents of Paul have been identified in 2 Cor 12:1–6 by Paul’s creative use of rhetoric, thus recreating a description of the opponent’s claims to authority in the form of a parody common to Greco-Roman readers. Paul mocks the opponents through a parody in 12:1–6 and offers an antithesis in 12:7–10 that records a second visionary experience that leads to his own humiliation. According to Paul, the true sign of an apostle is found in weakness and subjection to Christ, not in self exaltation.

The best place to start is with an identification of Paul’s opponents in 12:1–6. The first issue to be addressed is Paul’s use of the third person to refer to the individual who made the journey to heaven. In 12:2–3, Paul speaks of “such a person” (τὸν τοιοῦτον ἄνθρωπον) as if he has no relationship with this person other than being able to boast of similar apocalyptic experiences. Initially, Paul’s use of τοιοῦτος does not draw attention to itself. This demonstrative pronoun appears merely to refer to the previous sentence, identifying the person about whom Paul is talking. A closer examination reveals this conclusion is problematic. This pronoun

nary of America; New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965).

⁴ Betz, *Apostel* 84.

⁵ Ibid. For information on this subject, see G. A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984). For the opposing view, consider Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia*. (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

⁶ Ibid., 89.

refers to ἄνθρωπον ἐν χριστῷ, but this does not identify the individual any more than the pronoun. One would think Paul would be more specific since this pronoun occurs three times in four verses, with the noun ἄνθρωπον occurring three times in these same four verses. The identity of the “person in Christ” is important to Paul although he does not explicitly identify this individual. The key is found in verse 5, in which Paul steps outside of the fool’s speech (in the same way he does in 11:1, 12, and 17) and articulates the purpose of speaking as a fool in general, and more specifically gives a summation of the importance of boasting and how boasting is to be accomplished. In this verse, Paul says “on behalf of such a one (τοῦ τοιούτου) I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses.” If one is to take Paul literally, then within this passage Paul identifies the opponents.

Who is the τοῦ τοιούτου? Paul uses this pronoun ten times within 2 Corinthians, and seven of these references are used to identify certain people in Corinth who have opposed Paul (2 Cor 2:6, 7; 10:1; 11:13; 12:2, 3, 5). Paul uses this demonstrative pronoun six times within the context of 2 Cor 10–13 (10:11 [twice]; 11:13; 12:2, 3, and 5). We shall consider each of these references. The first, 10:9–11 reads as follows:

I do not want to seem as though I am trying to frighten you with my letters. For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.” Let such people understand (τοῦτο λογιζέσθω ὁ τοιούτος) that what we say by letter when absent, we (τοιούτο) will also do when present. (NRSV)

Following this passage in 11.12–13, Paul states:

And what I do I will also continue to do, in order to deny an opportunity to those who want an opportunity to be recognized as our equals in what they boast about. For such boasters (οἱ γὰρ λογιζέσθω) are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. (NRSV)

In both passages, Paul makes an effort to identify those “of such a kind” with the opponents. In the first instance, Paul quotes from the opponents to identify the accusations they had been making against him. They accused him of having strong letters while being weak in appearance. The context also clarifies that the verb λογιζέσθω (“to understand”) is also a *terminus technicus* within the context of Paul’s arguments in chapters 10–13. The verb λογιζέσθω already appears in 10:2, 7, 11, and 11:5 and as a noun in 10:4. This confrontation juxtaposes what Paul has in mind in relation to what they “reason” about his ministry.⁷ The implicit dialogue filled with numerous

⁷ Furnish, 469.

subtle arguments characterizes the entire text, providing all the more reason to suspect that Paul uses τοιοῦτος in a subtle, yet specific way to declare that those who made the accusation should beware that Paul, like his opponents, can be weighty in person just as he is in his letters. The next step is to ask whether Paul is doing the same thing in 12:2, 12:3 and 12:5?

One may connect these earlier references with the ones that follow in chapter 12 for several reasons. First, Paul's use of this demonstrative pronoun in 10:11 and 11:13 explicitly points the Corinthian church to look at his opponents when he makes accusations against them. Second, Paul over-emphasizes the "person in Christ," but never makes an explicit identification of the person. At the same time, Paul makes a strong, indirect identification in 12:5 by contrasting "such a person" with himself. The only way to avoid Paul's clear contrast in 12:5 is to conclude either that Paul is using irony or that he is identifying someone else. Scholars have tended to reject the latter option because it clouds the interpretation of the passage if Paul were bragging about another person. On the other hand, if Paul was identifying the opponents rhetorically by his use of ὁ τοιοῦτος, then 12:2–4 is serving the function of a rhetorical mockery of the opponents by ridiculing their apocalyptic claim.

Paul is thus using ὁ τοιοῦτος to identify his opponents through implicit language. If one agrees that this interpretation is correct, then several key questions must be addressed. How does one make sense of Paul's argument, rhetorically speaking? How would boasting in the credentials of the opponents help Paul's case? To answer this question, one must keep in mind Paul's conclusion to all of his boasting. Paul is not truly boasting, but mentioning different areas within his resume that ultimately make him look weak. In 12:10, at the conclusion to the fool's speech, Paul clearly says that he wishes to boast only in those things that demonstrate his weakness. Paul boasts of his connection to Judaism, his sufferings and hardships, fleeing from Damascus, and then finally a visionary experience. These events are nothing to boast about. Paul's connections to Judaism are considered a loss in Christ (Phil 3:7). Hardships and fleeing from government officials are nothing to boast about; rather they demonstrate his limited power and resources. But the last example, the visionary experience is not easily interpreted by twenty-first century readers. An examination of Greco-Roman apocalyptic literature will demonstrate how Paul's last example in 12:1–10 demonstrates his weakness.

The way that Greco-Roman apocalyptic experiences influenced Paul has been dealt with only lightly. Betz attempted to draw out several examples that pose as possible parallels to Paul for the apocalyptic genre in Greek and Hellenistic literature.⁸ He takes several examples and provides a light

⁸ H. D. Betz, "The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre in Greek and Hellenistic

treatment of the material, while admitting that he is only scratching the surface.⁹ Collins made a study of “The Genre Apocalypse in Hellenistic Judaism” while admitting near his conclusion that “The relation of this material (Greek tradition) to the Jewish heavenly journeys has not yet been adequately explored.” Perhaps the Greek apocalyptic tradition had a stronger affinity to Paul than formerly thought possible.

Scholars readily admit to a strong tradition within Greco-Roman society to dreams, visions, and out-of-body experiences.¹⁰ Aune refers to the common understanding that the apostles (namely Paul) were considered prophets.¹¹ To be more specific, 2 Cor 12:1–10 has been considered the earliest evidence of an apocalyptic visionary experience within early Christianity. In Hanson’s study of dreams and visions in the Greco-Roman world and early Christian literature, he identifies several examples of a *terminus technicus* that indicate that a writer is entering into an apocalyptic genre. He mentions the words “revelation” (ἀποκαλύψις) and “vision” (ὄπτασία) as examples of this genre.¹² The fact that these two words are considered technical terms automatically makes the Greco-Roman connections to 2 Cor 12:1–6 much greater than ever thought previously. It is important to note that these two terms are found in Paul’s introductory remarks rather than within the actual ascension story itself. Paul is defining the events he is about to tell by preceding it with the technical road signs for the reader to follow in the midst of his rhetorical discourse. This definition places upon the text a specific genre for interpreting what follows in light of other apocalyptic experiences. It would have been difficult for a citizen living in Corinth to have missed such a signifier provided by Paul.

Several examples of the apocalyptic vision experience within other Greco-Roman writers can illuminate how well the experience that Paul mentions in 2 Cor 12:1–10 fits within this framework. The first example, Lucian’s *Icaromenippus*, relates a parody concerning a man flying into the heavens. The story begins by Menippus trying to play the part of an “astronomer” (ἀστρονομεῖς) by determining the distance from the earth to

Literature: The Case of the Oracle of Trophonius,” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12–17, 1979; ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 577.

⁹ John J. Collins, “The Genre Apocalypse in Hellenistic Judaism,” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, 596.

¹⁰ John S. Hanson, “Dreams and Visions in the Graeco-Roman World and Early Christianity,” *ANRW* 2.23.2 (1980):1396.

¹¹ David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 248.

¹² Hanson, *Dreams*, 1408.

the moon, from the moon to the sun, and finally the sun to the heavens.¹³ Menippus's friend quickly responds in astonishment that he is curious as to what Menippus is talking about. Menippus then tells his friend that he has just come back from making a journey into the heavens.¹⁴ As their discussion continues, the friend points out that it must have been a long dream for Menippus to have slept for "leagues and leagues." Menippus promptly responds that it was not a dream, but that he has just finished visiting with Zeus.¹⁵ *Λαυθᾶνω* ("to escape notice") is the first verb used in this text to portray Menippus "loosing himself."¹⁶ The satire within the text seems to revolve around people who "loose themselves" and go into visions and revelations. Next, Menippus gives several different measurements for the length of his journey. His friend immediately interprets it in the context of time, as in how long the sleep must have lasted. Menippus responds in turn that he has just come back from this journey that is fresh upon his mind.¹⁷ This type of language is also found in Diogenes Laertius's mockery of visionaries when he writes: "someone was discoursing on celestial phenomena, 'How many days,' asked Diogenes, 'were you in coming from the sky?'"¹⁸ In both Diogenes and Lucian, the context suggests that these writers were mocking people who had claimed to have made heavenly journeys. The context of the example presented by Diogenes expresses the common feeling in antiquity that the authenticity of such a prominent claim (such as going into the heavens) must be proven before one is allowed to expound about "celestial phenomena." Whether an individual is skeptical or sincerely wants to know when one has returned from a journey, such a claim must have some authentic proof. It is within a similar context that the "person in Christ" locates the time of his occasion fourteen years before. Such a journey is without a doubt a memorable occasion, and the necessary proof of authenticity is being presented.

A second example is found in the story of Bellerophon, a mythological character considered to be part of the royal family of Corinth and later deified as one of the gods and heroes of Corinth and Lycia.¹⁹ While this example does not demonstrate the use of parody in apocalyptic experiences, it does demonstrate other features of the apocalyptic genre also found in

¹³ Lucian, *Icaromennipus* (LCL; 8 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 268–69.

¹⁴ Lucian, *Icaromennipus*, 268–69.

¹⁵ Lucian, *Icaromennipus*, 271.

¹⁶ BDAG, 466.

¹⁷ Lucian, *Icaromennipus*, 271.

¹⁸ Diogenes Laertius (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 41.

¹⁹ Pierre Grimal, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (trans. A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop; 1986; Oxford: Blackwell, 1996; trans. of *Dictionnaire de la Mythologie Grecque et Romaine*; Paris: Pressus Univeritaire de France, 1951), 74.

Paul's account in 2 Cor 12:1–10. The interest I have with Bellerophon revolves around his relationship to Pegasus, the winged horse, and the latter part of his life when Bellerophon attempted to fly to the heavens. In this story, as Bellerophon flies higher and higher, Pegasus, in anger and rage, throws him off his back so that Bellerophon falls down to the earth.²⁰ Pindar writes: "But, if any man lifteth up his eyes to things afar, he is too short to attain unto the brass-paved floor of heaven; for the winged Pegasus threw Bellerophon, his rider, who would fain have gone to the homes of heaven and the goodly company of Zeus."²¹ Homer grasps the pride of Bellerophon when he compares this attempted journey to heaven to unattainable love.²² The comparison in this verse of Bellerophon to Phaëthon is interesting. When Phaëthon, the son of the god Helios, grew up, he asked his father if he might drive his chariot that carried the sun across the sky, and Helios gave him his permission. After driving the chariot for some time, Phaëthon became afraid and came too close to the earth, almost scorching the surface. Then he went too close to the stars, and the stars complained to Zeus. To resolve the conflict, Zeus struck him down with a thunderbolt of lightning, thus killing him.²³ After comparing unattainable love to Phaëthon, Horace then compares it to Bellerophon:

Scorched Phaëthon serves as a warning to ambitious hopes; and winged Pegasus, who brooked not Bellerophon, his earth-born rider, affords a weighty lesson, to follow ever what befits thee, and to shun an ill-assorted mate, deeming it wrong to hope for more than is permitted.²⁴

The story of Bellerophon ends in shame and disrepute from the gods as he walks the Alean fields. It was indeed his own grandson, Glaucus, who saved him from death, not from the fall, but at the hand of the Megapenthes, the son of Proetus, who almost killed him.²⁵

Several key features concerning the mythology surrounding Bellerophon are noteworthy. First is the tradition in Greco-Roman literature (also in

²⁰ Nonnos writes of this occasion in light of Pegasus's rage and disposal of Bellerophon (Nonnos, *Dionysiaca* 38 (ed. W. H. D. Rouse; 3 vols.; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 120–21.). On another occasion a horse is compared to Pegasus who, "flying high in the air as swift in his course as the wandering wind, threw Bellerophon" (Nonnos, *Dionysiaca* 28, 356–57). In yet another, Pegasus is compared to the angry horses who threw Bellerophon's father Glaucus to the ground just before his death (Nonnos, *Dionysiaca* 11, 368–69.).

²¹ Pindar, *Isthmian Odes* (trans. John Sandys. LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 94–95.

²² Homer, *Iliad*, 328–29.

²³ Grimal *Dictionary*, 363.

²⁴ Horace, *Odes* (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 328–29.

²⁵ *Greek Anthology* (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 102–3.

Lucian *Icaromennipus*²⁶) of journeys to heaven as a forbidden act. In the same way that Mennipus was allowed into the heavens with some resistance (this is part of the humor of *Icaromennipus*), so also the tradition exists that mortals are simply not allowed to go there (304–5). A common thread runs throughout the culture that such a visit is limited to the divine or to the dead. It was forbidden territory. Such is the explanation given for Paul’s “inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak” (2 Cor 12:4; NASB). L. L. Welborn convincingly argues this point using similar examples from Lucian.²⁷ Another example is found in Tantalus, who lived on Mount Sipylus. He was highly favored of the gods. The gods frequently allowed him to come dine with them, and he allowed his pride to become too great. He lost his favor with the gods because he began divulging the secrets of the heavens to other mortal friends.²⁸ As a result, his punishment in the Underworld was to have his head wedged underneath a “monstrous stone.”²⁹ Apparently, the stone was perpetually under the influence of gravity, yet suspended in that one spot to maintain the punishment for Tantalus.

Secondly, the fall of Bellerophon is without a doubt rooted in his pride of thinking that such a journey for a mortal is possible. Remembering how Horace interpreted this journey leaves little room for misunderstanding. The similarities to Paul are very interesting because Paul is trying to make the point clear that all such boasting is foolishness.

Third, one must take notice of the fascination of the ancient world of humans who made journeys into the heavens. Making a journey into heaven was a very impressive feat for any individual. These texts demonstrate the evidence for extensive traditions concerning the heavens in Greco-Roman literature and popular culture. They also illuminate the strongly divided line between heaven and earth and the difficulty for humanity to attempt to go from one to the other.

The most probable conclusion is that Paul was aware of these prominent apocalyptic, heavenly stories of the Greco-Roman world. It is highly possible that Paul and the Corinthian church would have been aware of Bellerophon, who was a local god and hero of Corinth. It is also highly possible that paintings of the events recorded in the literature were within some of the

²⁶ Upon his arrival to heaven, he knocks at the door and startles the gods, who were not expecting a man in Heaven (304–5). When Mennippus comes before Zeus to give account of himself, Zeus speaks in a “terrible voice: ‘What is your name, sir, whence do you come, and where is your city and hearth-stone?’” (306–7; Homer, *Odyssey* 1,170). Upon hearing this, he “nearly dropped dead of fright”; his “jaw was hanging”; and he was overwhelmed by “the loudness of his voice” (306–7). It is evident from the passage that gods were not pleased for a man to be there.

²⁷ L. L. Welborn, “The Runaway Paul,” 149.

²⁸ Grimal, *Dictionary*, 431.

²⁹ Pindar, *Olympian Odes* I, 9.

homes of the Christians in Corinth in the form of wall paintings that celebrated the hero.³⁰ These traditions could have had a significant influence upon what Paul chose to write to the Corinthians. Stories such as *Icaromennipus* attest that telling of journeys into heaven was popular in the first century. Diogenes Laertius accounts for this fact also. In addition, the parody presented by Lucian and the skeptical humor by Diogenes Laertius also attest to the practice of making mockeries of such journeys. In the case of Paul, it is not a stretch of the imagination to see Paul as parodying a journey to heaven in 12:1–6, followed by another revelatory experience (12:7–10) that Paul claims as true. In fact, it makes even better sense for Paul to make use of this genre inasmuch as the opponents were making claims to their authority over the Corinthian church based upon such journeys. This situation is the occasion for Paul to make full use of the Greco-Roman apocalyptic tradition to attack the opponents directly.

Although 12:2–4 undoubtedly refers to Merkabah or Hekhaloth literature, the effectiveness of Paul's argument is derived from the broader rhetorical genre of the passage. This interpretation accounts for the species of Paul's rhetoric (judicial³¹ [2 Cor 10–13]); the general structure and genre for each argument within the species (fool's speech³² [2 Cor 11:1–12:18]); the specific genre (apocalypse [2 Cor 12:1–10]); and the details within the specific genre (examples familiar to Hellenistic Jews³³ [2 Cor 12:2–4]). Such a mixture explains how Paul is able to use typical heuristics (invention) of Greco-Roman rhetoric for the purpose of combating his opponents.

If this assessment is true, then it changes the interpretation of the whole passage. First, Paul never identifies himself with the person he has mentioned

³⁰ Paintings and sculptures have been recovered in Pompeii and other cities that depict Bellerophon. See the pictures at the end of the article.

³¹ Kennedy, *New Testament*, 92.

³² Welborn has put forward the most specific identification of the genre of 2 Cor 11:1–12:18. He makes the argument that the fool's speech referred to in this passage has to do with the first-century mime, a hypothesis previously mentioned by Hans Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief* (repr. of 9th ed.; ed. G. Strecker; KEK, 1970), 316; cited in Welborn, "The Runaway Paul," 122. This genre is used to categorize the whole discourse from 11:1 to 12:10. The stock fools set forth by Welborn are "the 'leading slave' in 11.21b–23, acting the braggart warrior" in 11.24–27, evoking the 'anxious old man' in 11.28–29, and portraying the 'learned impostor' in 12.1b–4 and 12.7–9" (137). Afterwards, Welborn gives a short description of what is known of the satire surrounding the "learned impostor," or quack doctor. It is shown in antiquity that the philosophers were a point of satire and were often represented by the mimes in the comical skits performed at many of the street corners in the ancient cities of the Roman empire ("The Runaway Paul," 124, 135; Lucian, *Icaromennipus* 5).

³³ This is where the parallels from Hekhaloth and Jewish apocalyptic literature are incorporated into the text.

within the context of the apocalyptic story. Second, Paul has now identified the story of a journey to the third heaven with the opponents, thus suggesting that the whole story is biographical of the opponents. This explains why Paul is using terminology familiar within Judaism for the heavenly realm. If Paul is recounting the opponents' own story, then the interpretation that Paul is making a parody seems all the more appropriate since Paul is making a mockery of their story. When Paul states in 12:5, "On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses" (NRSV), he is evidently concluding that such boasting performed where self-commendation is the end result is foolishness. On the other hand, boasting in weakness is most important. In 12:7, Paul says, "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of revelation" (NKJV). Perhaps Paul has mocked the opponents' rapture into heaven, and now he will relate to them one of his many revelations in which his infirmity is exalted.

In conclusion, the evidence for reinterpreting this passage as a quotation or detailed description of the opponents, by Paul, has sufficient evidence. It is more appropriate that the connotations suggested by *τοιούτος* are extensive enough to warrant a reworking of the passage. The correct interpretation appears to be that Paul has found a way to mock his opponents by providing a parody of a journey into heaven filled with their own descriptions of the event. Within this context, Paul is able to make use of the popular apocalyptic genre to mock his opponents while using this event to insert several of the key claims that they have made concerning the facts of their journeys. Thus while Jewish apocalyptic literature provides one background for Paul's argument, Greco-Roman apocalyptic literature also gives a framework for the discussion. This serves Paul in his final argument that personal weakness and submission to the Lord rather than arrogant claims of glory legitimize his authority.