1 Corinthians 2:9 in the Apostolic Fathers

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The text of 1 Cor 2:9–10 states, “But just as it is written, ‘Things that no eye has seen, or ear heard, or mind imagined, are the things God has prepared for those who love him.’ God has revealed these to us by the Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God” (NET). Within the collection now known as the apostolic fathers, similar materials appear in 1 Clem 34.8, 2 Clem 11.7 (cf. 14.5), and Mart. Pol. 2.3.

It was only fifty-one years ago that John Lawson, in his book A Theological and Historical Introduction to the Apostolic Fathers, could merely cite 1 Cor 2:9 without further discussion in his comments upon all three of these passages. Of course, scholars have a tendency toward complicating matters through further, intensive study. When placed under the microscope of scholarship, further details appear and in increasing complication. In the specific topic under investigation, an important impetus has been the expanding discovery, publication, and examination of relevant parallels from the early Common Era. Consider two representative lists from the works of William Stroker and April DeConick, which collate the following parallels: 1 Clem 34.8; 2 Clem 11.7; Gos. Thom. 17; Mart. Pet. 10; Acts Pet. 30; Acts Thom. 36; Ps.-Clem, Recogn. 1.44; LAB 26.13; (Apocr.) Ep. Tit. 1; Pr. Paul 1,A,26–35; Const. ap. 7.32; Turfan Manichean fragment M789; Dial. Sav. 56–57; Testamentum Domini 1.28; Testamentum Domini in Galilaea 11; and, (Apocr.) Gos. John 72–73. These two lists are by no means comprehensive, as various other examples are missing from both compilations, including but not limited to Mart. Ascen. Isa 11.34

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1 For 1 Cor 2:9’s function as a support to 1 Cor 2:6–8, see H. H. Drake Williams, The Wisdom of the Wise: The Presence and Function of Scripture within 1 Cor 1:18–3:23 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 202.
2 John Lawson, A Theological and Historical Introduction to the Apostolic Fathers (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 45 (for 1 Clem 34), 168 (for Mart. Pol. 2), and 188 and 191 (for 2 Clem 11, and 14).
5 Jonathan Knight, Disciples of the Beloved One: The Christology, Social Setting, and Theological Context of the Ascension of Isaiah (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 69. See also the
Paul's Source

Where did Paul himself glean the borrowed material found in 1 Cor 2:9? The apostle introduces his material with a formulaic, “However, as it is written.” But what source or sources is he quoting? Paul normally uses such formulae while citing the Hebrew Scriptures. Nevertheless, no OT passage exactly parallels this text.

6 "And he showed me all the resting-places and all the good things prepared for the righteous, and the things that eye has not seen nor ear heard, and have not come into the heart of men, that God has prepared for those who love him and do his will on earth (for, if they end well, they do his will)." English translation from Hedley Frederick Davis Sparks, ed., The Apocryphal Old Testament (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 448.

7 Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 107; and, Otto Michel, Paulus und seine Bibel (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1929), 33–39. Already in the fourth century, John Chrysostom mused, “Where are these words written? Either they are a paraphrase of some passage [such as Isaiah 52:15], or they were written in some book which has now disappeared” (John Chrysostom, Hom. 1 Cor 7.6; English translation from NPNF1 12:36). Cf. Hans-Christian Kammler, Kreuz und Weisheit: Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu 1 Kor 1, 10–3, 4, WUNT 159 (Tübingen: Mohr, 2003), 217–18.


9 Frankfurter posits, “Paul’s opening does not imply that Paul knew the source but only that the source was at least occasionally found in textual form.” See David Frankfurter, Elijah in Upper Egypt: The Apocalypse of Elijah and Early Egyptian Christianity (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 47. Cf. Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1911), 41–43.


11 Leon Morris, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary, rev. ed., TNTC 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 55. Inexact parallels that appear in "secular" Hellenistic literature, such as Plutarch, Quomodo adolescens poetas audire