

The Greek Concept of the “Seven Stages of Life” and Its New Testament Significance

R. LARRY OVERSTREET

NORTHWEST BAPTIST SEMINARY, TACOMA, WA

Particular words used in Greek and Roman cultures before, during, and after NT times provide insight into how those peoples recognized seven identifiable stages of life a person experiences during the aging process, from birth through old age. This is referred to as the hebdomadal system. Because the terms are also found in the NT, identifying their parameters is beneficial for understanding the implications of the various ages of individuals mentioned. Interpreters of the NT will define with greater precision texts that mention age. To accomplish this purpose, this article first examines the concept of life's stages in ancient literature and then considers the seven specific stages of life enumerated in that literature. The final section applies the understanding of the Greek terms for the stages of life to the NT.

Key Words: hebdomadal system, stages of life, Paul, Timothy, παιδίον, παῖς, μαιράκιον, νεανίσκος, ἀνήρ, πρεσβύτες, γέρον

INTRODUCTION

We are born. We mature as we age. We reach adulthood and the prime of life. We grow old. We die. The cycle of life affects us all, and we have our own ideas and concepts of what the stages of life are. Because Americans reach the age of 18 and are eligible to vote, are they mature adults? Because a man can fly a multimillion dollar jet fighter when he is in his early 20s, is he in the prime of life? Because you can join AARP at the age of 50, are you old? How do we determine the stages of life? Though I am aware of the aging process in my body, must I regard myself as “old”? Do others regard me as “old”?

To what extent does our modern perception of age influence our understanding of references to age in the NT? For example, when Nicodemus asked Jesus “How can a man be born when he is old?” (John 3:4; all Scripture quotations are from the NASB), is his reference to old age the same as when Paul referred to himself as “the aged” (Phlm 9)? When Paul exhorted Timothy, “Let no one look down on your youthfulness” (1 Tim 4:12), exactly what was youthful? What objective evidence does the language of Scripture provide to interpret references to age?

This article proposes to examine the terminology of the NT related to age identification with the purpose of leading to a clearer understanding of age references in the Scriptures. This is accomplished by tracing the words ancient writers used to identify the various “stages of life” and then applying the conclusions drawn to NT texts. While some flexibility existed in ancient literature in the use of terms for age, the evidence shows that both Greek and Roman civilizations recognized that a person’s life divided into seven stages, the hebdomadal system, extending in identifiable time periods from birth through old age. Those stages are explicated by words delimiting them, all of which, except one, are found in the NT. The first stage of life is represented by *παιδίον* (birth to 7 years), the second stage by *παις* (ages 7 to 14), the third stage by *μειράκιον* (ages 14 to 21), the fourth by *νεανίσκος* (ages 21 to 28), the fifth by *άνηρ* (ages 28 to 49), the sixth by *πρεσβύτης* (ages 49 to 56), and the final stage of a person’s life is represented by *γέρον* (ages 56 until death).

We will first survey the literature of the ancient writers themselves, from both Greek and Roman cultures, to determine the parameters of the terms related to age and the stages of life. In that process, we will integrate contemporary literature dealing with this subject, including that from scholars in the Classics, into the discussion. We will then specify the seven stages of life as to exact time periods of a person’s life. The conclusions we reach we will apply in the article’s final part to the Greek words for the stages of life as they appear in the NT. In this development, some problematic texts are explained.

LIFE’S STAGES IN ANCIENT LITERATURE

The Greek words referring to the age categories of a person must be examined to determine how Greek understanding of the terms reflects stages in the life process. These words were identified by researching reference sources, including established works such as LSJ, BDAG, and *TDNT*. In addition, the electronic database *TLG (Thesaurus Linguae Graecae)*¹ was also consulted. Before attention turns to an examination of those crucial Greek terms, a brief consideration of two other terms is given.

Terms for Young Children

Two Greek words are used to refer to children of a young age: *βρέφος* and *νήπιος*. Both words are more narrow in usage than other terms reflecting

1. *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (cited July 21, 2008. Online: <http://www.tlg.uci.edu>) was consulted, and scores of references were examined. The seven words studied for this article appear the following numbers of times in the *TLG* database: *παιδίον*: 4,682; *παις*: 13,552; *μειράκιον*: 1,383; *νεανίσκος*: 673; *άνηρ*: 28,437; *πρεσβύτης*: 1,071; and *γέρον*: 8,273. Due to these large numbers of potential references, a selective process was established. The sources used in this study were compared to the *TLG* database, and that database was further searched on the basis of key words occurring in the same context. Even with this selectivity, dozens of references were found, extending into the 12th century A.D. These were further narrowed to the times prior to the NT and within a few centuries afterward.

age. The word βρέφος is commonly used of a newborn baby, such as by Pindar (522/18–438? B.C.; *Ol.* 6.33), Aeschylus (ca. 525–456 B.C.; *Ag.* 1086), and Euripides (484?–406 B.C.; *Ion* 1399). Homer (9th–8th century B.C.; *Il.* 23.266) even used it to refer to the fetus of a mare. The standard lexicons assert that it refers either to “a child that is still unborn, *fetus, child*” or to “a very small child, *baby, infant*” (BDAG 183), as a “*babe in the womb,*” or “*new-born babe*” (LSJ 329). Oepke agrees with “embryo,” “small child,” and “infant.”²

In a similar fashion, the word νήπιος is used by Hippocrates (according to LSJ) of a fetus in *Aph.* 4.1 and of children up to puberty in *Epid.* 6.1.4.³ LSJ observes that, when used of a person’s age, the majority of this term’s occurrences refer to infants or small children; this is seen in Homer (*Il.* 2.136), Euripides (*Ion* 1399), and Aristotle (384–322 B.C.; *Pol.* 1340^b30). BDAG agrees with this identification and defines the word as “a very young child, *infant, child,*” and of that child “who is not yet of legal age.”⁴ Bertram observes that, while the term is often used for a fetus or infant, it can refer to “the small child up to 5 or 6, or even the child up to time of puberty” and that on burial inscriptions it is used “for small children from 1 to 10.”⁵

The term βρέφος occurs 8 times in the NT and is used of newborn babies in 7 of these occurrences (e.g., Luke 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16). The eighth is a metaphorical use (1 Pet 2:2). The term νήπιος occurs 10 times in the NT, 3 of which refer literally to young children (e.g., Matt 21:16) and 7 of which are metaphorical (e.g., Matt 11:25, Rom 2:20). Neither of these terms is commonly used in the literature of the various stages of a person’s life.

Terms of Chronological Age

Certain terms are used in Greek literature to refer to various stages of life through which a person goes. These words are significant in identifying accepted age limits and are relevant to NT studies.

Little Boy (παιδίον)

The first stage of a person’s life is early childhood, during the time of baby teeth. BDAG contends that παιδίον refers to “a child, normally below the age of puberty.”⁶ While many writers do not assign year limitations to this term, the emphasis is on the early stages of a person’s life. LSJ recognizes this, giving as the first definition for this term “*little or young child* (up to 7 yrs . . .)” with reference to Hippocrates and Philo for verification (discussed below, pp. 550–553).⁷ Oepke likewise asserts that in reference to age the word refers to a “little child,” to a “newborn child,” to a “growing

2. Albrecht Oepke, “παῖς, παιδίον . . . βρέφος,” *TDNT* 5:637–54, esp. p. 637.

3. LSJ 1174.

4. BDAG 671.

5. G. Bertram, “νήπιος,” *TDNT* 4:912.

6. BDAG 749.

7. LSJ 1287.

child," and, drawing from Hippocrates and Philo, to a child "up to 7 yrs. of age."⁸

Other ancient writers also placed the emphasis on young children. For example, Herodotus (484?–430/20 B.C.) referred to the exposure of an unwanted child (which was practiced in infancy) with this word, and to children offered in sacrifice (*Hist.* 1.110, 2.119). Aristophanes (447/46–386/80 B.C.) used this word of children in contrast to teenagers and men and of troubles endured "since childhood" (*Pax* 50; *Eq.* 412). The idea of "since childhood" is also found in Xenophon (ca. 431–350? B.C.; *Cyr.* 1.6.20). Plato (428/27–338/47 B.C.) quoted Socrates as referring to his three sons, one of whom was "nearly grown up" (using the word *μειράκιον*), but two others who were still "children" (using *παιδίον*; *Apol.* 34d). Aristotle referred to "children" who use rattles to keep them occupied (*Pol.* 1340^b30). Diodorus of Sicily (ca. 90–21 B.C.) stated that a child of this age was nurtured "on a mixture of honey and milk and [given] upbringing at the udder of the goat" (*Hist.* 5.70.3). The concept of the first stage of a person's life up to age 7 is, therefore, consistent with usage of the term in Greek literature.

Boy (*παῖς*)

The second stage of life is late childhood, during which time puberty is reached. The term *παῖς*, when used in a context stressing age, refers to a "child, boy or girl."⁹ The emphasis is on a child "normally below the age of puberty."¹⁰ Oepke helpfully compares the word to two other significant terms: "It can be used for a boy of 7–14 as distinct from one not yet 7 (*παιδίον*) or the adolescent (*μειράκιον*) of 14–21."¹¹

The word is used in a variety of ways in Greek literature. It can be used of a child who is too young to speak (Aeschylus, *Cho.* 755), but this is not its common usage. Sometimes it denotes a son in contrast to his father, without reference to a set age limit (Homer, *Il.* 2.205, 609; Thucydides, *Hist.* 1.3.4). In the feminine, it can refer to a man's daughter (Homer, *Il.* 1.20, 443; 3.175). In some contexts, it may refer to both sexes at the same time (Plato, *Leg.* 788a). On other occasions, it is used metaphorically of a mountain's "child," that is, an echo (Euripides, *Hec.* 1110). It may also be used periphrastically to refer to a type of people, such as "sons of the Lydians," that is, the Lydians themselves (Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.27, 5.49).

The term is used in many instances, however, with a connection to age. Homer used it to refer to a lad launching a ship, in contrast to the men who sailed on the ship (*Od.* 4.665). Aristophanes employed it to refer to a girl who was old enough to marry, at the opposite end of the age spectrum from a "greybeard" husband (*Lys.* 595). Xenophon applied it to the age "just following boyhood" (*Hell.* 5.4.25). Aeschylus used the feminine to

8. Oepke, "παῖς," 638.

9. LSJ 1289.

10. BDAG 750.

11. Oepke, "παῖς," 637.

contrast maidens from those who were matrons or ancient dames (*Eum.* 1027). The term, therefore, though used more widely, is nevertheless consistent with the second stage in the lifespan of a person, the context showing if a wider use is intended.

Lad (μειράκιον)

The third stage of a person's life is adolescence, during which time the beard begins to show. The word designating this time span is μειράκιον, which does not occur in the NT; therefore, BDAG does not include it. Oepke refers to it, distinguishing it from παῖς, stating that μειράκιον refers to the adolescent, ages 14–21.¹² LSJ identifies this term as referring to someone who has attained puberty but is "under twenty-one."¹³

While this word could be used of adults in a contemptuous sense (Plutarch, *Phil.* 6), it is more consistently applied to those who are in adolescence. Arrian (fl. 2nd century A.D.) identified this age with "adolescence" (*Anab.* 4.13.1). Aristophanes observed that this is the age when the "younger generation" does not want to be in school (*Nub.* 917). Plato recorded that Socrates had one son who was "nearly grown up" (μειράκιον), but his other two were still children (παῖς; *Apol.* 34d). For himself, Plato testified that "youths" (μειράκιον) are just out of boyhood (again using παῖς; *Resp.* 497e). From this age they pass into manhood (ἄνθρωπος; *Theaet.* 173b). With precision, Plutarch (A.D. 46?–119?) stated that a person in his "youth" was "in his twentieth year" (*Brut.* 27). Agreeing with Plutarch, Lucian (A.D. 120–80?) also asserted that a boy of this age was "about twenty" (*Dial. mort.* 19 [some editions: §9]). The emphasis of this term, then, fits well in the description of the third stage of a person's life.

Young Man (νεανίσκος)

Greek writers use this term of a man or woman who is in the vibrancy of youthful vigor and strength. BDAG observes that the term refers to "a relatively young man."¹⁴ Setting the chronological limits on "young," the related noun νεανίας is said to refer to a youth from "about the 24th to the 40th year."¹⁵ One reference used to support this assertion is from Philo, who asks several questions: "Where is the infant [βρέφος], where is the child [παῖς], where is the boy [ἀντίπαις], where is the youth [ἡβών], where is the lad [μειράκιον] whose first beard is growing, where is the young man [νεανίας], where is the mature man [ἄνθρωπος]?"¹⁶ While Philo did indeed use the term νεανίας, placing it in a sequential order, he gave no indication in this context that it extends from ages 24–40. Nor did he specify ages for

12. Oepke, "παῖς," 637. TDNT has no separate listing for μειράκιον.

13. LSJ 1093.

14. BDAG 667.

15. Ibid.

16. Philo, *Cher.* 114; the Greek text is identified from Loeb; however, the translation is mine.

any of the terms in this context. BDAG's statement, therefore, that it refers to someone in his 40th year is unsupported by this reference.

Another reference, which BDAG gives to support the idea of the term reaching to the 40th year, is from Diogenes Laertius (3rd century A.D.). Diogenes Laertius was a historical biographer whose contribution is helpful because he quoted from the Greek mathematician Pythagoras (580–500 B.C.). Pythagoras paralleled a man's life to the four seasons and thus observed four broad stages of development, rather than the more precise seven. In so doing, however, Pythagoras used the terms in the same chronological order as already observed. Diogenes quoted Pythagoras: "Twenty years a boy [παῖς], twenty years a youth [νεανίσκος], twenty years a young man [νενηνίης], twenty years an old man [γέρον]; and these four periods correspond to the four seasons, the boy to spring, the youth to summer, the young man to autumn, and the old man to winter." Having quoted Pythagoras, Diogenes then explained what Pythagoras meant by two crucial words in the phrase "by youth one not yet grown up and by a young man a man of mature age."¹⁷ That Diogenes had to explain the significance of the terms *youth* and *young man* indicates he was conscious that Pythagoras used them in a different sense than was their normal use. His discussion, therefore, seems not to support a common use of the term νεανίσκος extending to the age of 40 but uses it in a noticeably less-distinct manner.

Although Behm does not discuss either νεανίσκος or νεανίας, he does consider the related term νέος. When referring to age, Behm asserts that νέος "denotes the age (up to 30 at most . . .) of a child or young man," that it often stands in contrast to "πρεσβύτεροι or γέροντες" (see discussion on pp. 545–547 of these terms), and that in the "grouping of citizens in Hellenistic cities or in relation to societies it becomes a tt. [*terminus technicus*] for younger men over 20 as a group or body."¹⁸

Homer wrote of the young man who had a new mustache on his lip (*Od.* 10.278). He also referred to the young men who accompanied Odysseus in his adventures and slept beside him (*Od.* 14.524). Euripides used the term metaphorically to contrast an aged and tired foot with the "young" deeds it needed to perform (*Ion* 104). The feminine form was used to refer to the goddess Athena, who appears in disguise as a "maiden" (*Od.* 7.20). Xenophon used the term to refer to a son, a "young man" who was ungrateful to his mother (*Mem.* 2.2.1). Concerning another reference in Xenophon, Garland writes "When Sokrates asks a certain Charikles to suggest the age up to which Athenians are to be accounted *neoi*, the latter replies, 'Until they have reached the age when they are permitted to serve on the Council' (*Xen. Mem.* 1.2.35). That, as we know, was in the thirtieth year. . . . In Athens at least then, and probably elsewhere, the thirtieth year marked an important turning point in a man's life."¹⁹

17. Diogenes Laertius, *Pythagoras* 8.10, Hicks.

18. J. Behm, "νέος," *TDNT* 4:897.

19. Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Life: From Conception to Old Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 242.

Though what is regarded as "young" is not identified in these references, the implication of the term is a young man in his 20s.

When discussing the use of the related word νεότης in 1 Tim 4:12, many NT commentators refer to Irenaeus, Polybius, Aulus Gellius, and Josephus in support of the idea that this word extends up to the age of 40.²⁰ In his work *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus refers to Jesus in this way:

On completing His thirtieth year He suffered, being in fact still a young man, and who had by no means attained to an advanced age. Now, that the first stage of early life embraces thirty years, and that this extends onwards to the fortieth year, every one will admit; but from the fortieth and fiftieth year a man begins to decline towards old age, which our Lord possessed while He still fulfilled the office of a Teacher, even as the Gospel and all the elders testify.²¹

Several observations concerning the statement by Irenaeus are critical. These are well summarized in the footnote by Coxe found in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*:

The Latin of this clause is, "Quia autem triginta annorum aetas prima indolis est juvenis"—which it seems almost impossible to translate. Grabe regarded "indolis" as being in the nominative, while Massuet contends it is in the genitive case; and so regarding it we might translate, "Now that the age of thirty is the first age of the mind of youth," etc. But Harvey re-translates the clause into Greek as follows: "'Ὅτι δὲ ἡ τῶν τριάκοντα ἐτῶν ἡλικία ἢ πρώτη τῆς διαθεσεώς ἐστι νέας"—words which we have endeavored to render as above. The meaning clearly is, that the age of thirty marked the transition point from youth to maturity.²²

As Coxe astutely observes, Irenaeus does not support the concept that νέος or its cognates extend to age 40. Rather, Irenaeus emphasizes that 30 is a key transition point in maturing.

The Roman historian Polybius (ca. 200–ca. 118 B.C.) purposed to show the rise of Rome to world mastery in his multivolume history. He used νέος to describe the ages of individuals. He refers to the Roman general and statesman Flaminius (ca. 229–174 B.C.) who "was yet quite young" (νέος ἢ κομιδῆ) because of "not being over thirty" (τριάκοντ' ἐτῶν οὐκ εἰχε).²³ This reference confirms that νέος does not extend beyond 30. Polybius also uses the same phrase to refer to the Sicilian general Hiero, stating that he was

20. See William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 258; Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 314; George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 205; J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: Timothy I & II, Titus* (HNTC; New York: Harper, 1960), 104; J. H. Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Thornapple Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 70–71.

21. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.22.5, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 391–92.

22. *Ibid.*, 392.

23. Polybius, *Hist.* 18.12.5, Paton.

“still quite young” when he became cocommander of the Syracusan army in 275 B.C. (*Hist.* 1.8.3). Rorrer, professor at Drexel University, presents a biography of Hiero, asserting he was born ca. 306 B.C.²⁴ This would make him about the age of 30 at the time Polybius mentions. In another instance, Polybius used the same phrase to refer to Philopoemen, who lived in Megalopolis in Arcadia, to whom at first “no one paid any attention . . . since he had never held any command and was quite a young man” (*Hist.* 2.67.5). This was when Cleomenes, king of the Lacedaemonians, invaded Megalopolis. Instead of following Bernard’s comment that Philopoemen “was then over thirty,”²⁵ we should note that Plutarch states Philopoemen “was thirty years of age” when this event occurred.²⁶ Polybius’s statements, therefore, correlate with the age parameters of *véος*.

Aulus Gellius (ca. A.D. 125–180+) is also used as support for this term extending past the age of 40. Gellius states that soldiers are *iuniores* up to the age of 46. In context, Gellius refers to the “distinctions between boyhood, manhood, and old age” observed by “that most sagacious king,” Servius Tullius (legendary king of ancient Rome from 578 to 535 B.C.). When enrolling men in the army, three divisions were important: “for the purpose of making the enrollment, regarded as *pueri*, or ‘boys,’ those who were less than seventeen years old; then, from their seventeenth year, when they were thought to be fit for service, he enrolled them as *soliders*, calling them up to the age of forty-six *iuniores*, or ‘younger men,’ and beyond that age, *seniors*, or ‘elders.’”²⁷ Concerning the comments of Gellius, Parkin astutely observes that in military contexts only two broad age categories were noted, that of “*iunior* (17–45 years)” and “*senior* (46–59 years).”²⁸ Because of the limited category of age restrictions in a military context, therefore, the argument that Gellius supports the concept of *véος* extending to age 46 loses any force.

In addition, some writers appeal to Josephus as one who “calls Agrippa ‘youthful’ when he was almost forty (*Ant.* 18.6 §§143–239).”²⁹ The passage in Josephus relates to a time when Agrippa was arrested for plotting against the emperor Tiberius. While he was being transported to prison, a German prisoner, who supposedly had the gift of prophecy, came to him and addressed him: “Young man [*νεανία*], you are in despair at your swift reversal of fortune.”³⁰ He then proceeded to prophesying Agrippa’s future release and promotion to high position. Two items must be noticed

24. Chris Rorrer, “Biography of Hiero II,” n.p. [Cited January 27, 2008]. Online: <http://www.drexel.edu/~crreres/>.

25. Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 70 n. 1.

26. Plutarch, *Phil.*, in *Plutarch: The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (ed. Arthur Hugh Clough; trans. John Dryden; New York: Modern Library, 1932), 437.

27. Aulus Gellius, *Noct. att.* 10.28.1–2, Rolfe.

28. Tim G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 20.

29. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 258.

30. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.6.7 §197, Feldman.

about Agrippa's being addressed as "young." One is that Josephus is quoting the German prisoner, not giving his own opinion of any age limits of *νεανία*. The second is that the German addresses Agrippa by this term based on the appearance of Agrippa, not based on his birth date. The most that can be said is that to the German Agrippa appeared "young."

More precise identification of the age parameters of this term in 1 Tim 4:12 will be set forth below.

Man (ἄνθρωπος)

A common word for man is *ἄνθρωπος*, used in thousands of contexts by the ancient Greek writers. The dominant use of the term, however, is a man "in the prime of life, esp. warrior."³¹ BDAG agrees that the term refers to "an adult human male."³² Oepke observes that *ἄνθρωπος* can be used as a designation for man or even of the human species, but that when the term has age implications it denotes "an adult man as distinct from a boy."³³

This word distinguishes a man from a woman and refers to men as leaders (Homer, *Il.* 17.435, 11.687). It is used to refer to the men of a city (Plato, *Apol.* 34d; Pindar, *Ol.* 6.10). Being the dominant word for a man in the prime of his life (ages 29–48), this corresponds well with the concept of the fifth stage of a person's life.

Elderly Man (πρεσβύτης)

The word *πρεσβύτης* refers to an "elderly" man. LSJ identifies this as the "prose form of *πρέσβυς*," which refers to "the sixth of the seven ages."³⁴ BDAG agrees that ancient writers set the limits on this term as referring to "a man of 50–56 years."³⁵ Bornkamm stresses how this term and its more commonly used related terms can refer to "the older generation as compared to the younger," that with age comes "the positive element of venerability."³⁶ Bornkamm also observes that this term is used by Hippocrates and Philo to denote "the 6th of the 7 ages of man (between *ἄνθρωπος* and *γέρων*), namely 49–56 yrs. of age."³⁷

The ancient Greeks, using this term, observed the signs of aging, just as modern people do. For example, Aristophanes observed how the downward spiral of an actor's career occurred with his "old age," which was identified "as soon as the grey hairs appeared" (*Eq.* 525). Aristotle noticed that the "elderly" do not make friends as easily as young people because "their capacity to please is small" and because "they are inclined to be surly, and do not take much pleasure in society."³⁸ Plato contrasted the

31. LSJ 138; cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 5.63; Thucydides, *Hist.* 2.103.

32. BDAG 79.

33. Oepke, "ἄνθρωπος," *TDNT* 1:361.

34. LSJ 1462.

35. BDAG 863.

36. Günther Bornkamm, "πρέσβυς," *TDNT* 6:652.

37. *Ibid.*, 6:683.

38. Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1157^b14, 1158^a2, Rackham.

difference in the perspective of time between the “boy” (παῖδιον) and the “old man” (*Resp.* 608c). Plutarch connected the concept of unwise or foolish decisions as equal to being “senile” (*Fab.* 25). The concept of the physical decline of the body and mind is thus observed as a characteristic of age, and the term *πρεσβύτης* is used to identify that next stage of a person’s life.

Parkin identifies an additional factor as he discusses two elements of age. He compares modern culture to ancient culture: “Even today, in general contexts, one does not need to know a person’s exact chronological age before labeling him or her as ‘young,’ ‘middle-aged,’ or ‘old’; a judgment is made by appearances and circumstances, what one may term *biological age*.”³⁹ My own life illustrates Parkin’s emphasis. I remember how people thought I was in my early 20s when I was in my mid 30s, and how that all changed dramatically when I was offered my first “senior citizen discount” on my 48th birthday. My *biological* appearance changed significantly more in a 15-year span than did my chronological age.

Old Man (γέρων)

A person in the final stage of life is described by the words *γέρων* (“old man”) and *γήρας* (“old age”), with the Latin equivalents being *senex* and *senectus*. The words are consistently used in Greek literature to refer to old people.⁴⁰ BDAG notices that “acc. to Pythagoras a γ. is between 60 and 80 yrs. old.”⁴¹ This reference is found in the biography of Pythagoras written by Diogenes Laertius. This was the quintessential term for an old person in the final stage of life. It is seen, for example, when Lucian had Polystratus state that he “was old (*γεροντά*) and bald,” and in the context he is said to be 98 years of age (*Dial. mort.* 19 [§9]). Because this term is rare in the NT, *TDNT* has no discussion of it. Garland, however, observes that, in ancient Greek culture, a “man was probably accounted a *gerôn* when he was no longer liable for military service at around fifty-nine.”⁴²

The use of this word for an “old” person often places it in a contrasting sense with someone who is younger. For example, Homer used it to show how an “old” man should not be expected to fight effectively against a “younger” (*νεωτέρω*; *Od.* 18.53). Similarly, Isocrates (436–338 B.C.) spoke of friends who had been with him from his “youth” (*μειρακίων*) to his “old age” (*Ep.* 15.93).

Those who are “old” are frequently identified because of their positions of honor and esteem within a city. For example, Herodotus spoke of the council of “elders” at Sparta (*Hist.* 1.65, 6.57). Aristotle likewise referred to these “elders” of Sparta, the five old magistrates who had power over the king himself, and indicated that a similar government existed

39. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World*, 15 (emphasis original).

40. LSJ 346.

41. BDAG 195.

42. Garland, *Greek Way of Life*, 243. Garland also observes that the “role of a *paidogōgos* . . . is likely to have fallen mainly to elderly or infirm slaves” (p. 263), a subject that may be relevant in the study of Gal 3:24.

with the "elders" at Elis (*Pol.* 1265^b38, 1272^a7, 1306^a17). Aristotle even used the term to refer to "old" deer that were identified by having few teeth and no antlers for defense (*Hist. an.* 611^b3), which would parallel a man's aged condition.

As was the case with the Greeks, so it was with the Romans. Parkin considers numerous contexts in which the terms *senex* and *senectus* occur. He shows how Livy referred to Hannibal as a *senex* when he was only 44, when defeated at the battle of Zama in 202 B.C.; in contrast, Cicero refers to himself at the age of 44 as an *adulescens*.⁴³ These are references in which age is viewed from a relative perspective, the *biological*. At the same time, however, Parkin confirms that, while ancient Roman writers provide various ages that they identify as "old," generally 60 is "a convenient figure with which to work when studying Roman old age," and he concludes that "around 6 to 8 percent" of the population in the Roman world was "old."⁴⁴

SPECIFYING THE SEVEN STAGES OF LIFE

Perusing the literature of the ancient Greeks reveals that they used specific words to refer to the chronological ages of people. Ancient writers were precise in their specification of the terms for the various stages of life when not viewing life's stages from a generalized perspective.

Perspectives on Life's Stages

Some scholars in the Classics have investigated the terms related to the seven stages of life. Interestingly, however, their numbers are less than one might expect. Works by Garland, Parkin, and Hopkins have already been referenced. Others add to this discussion.

Herrin and Kazhdan confirm that the "ancient Greeks and Romans often considered the life of man as consisting of seven periods."⁴⁵ They also assert that in later years Augustine modified it to six age periods. To understand Augustine's reasons for modification, Eyben's comments are helpful.⁴⁶ He explains that Augustine applied his six-period approach to several elements. Eyben shows that Augustine held to "six periods of sacred history, the six days of the Creation and the six ages of man" and that on a religious plane a person also "goes through six spiritual stages." Augustine's motivation is to connect history, spiritual maturity, and a person's physical

43. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World*, 20–21.

44. The age of 60 as a convenient figure: *ibid.*, 18. This may be significant in Paul's direction that the elderly women were not to be enrolled if they were less than 60 years of age (1 Tim 5:9). That 6–8% of the Roman population was "old"; cf. *ibid.*, 50. An earlier study of the time of death in the Roman world confirmed that the age of 60 was significant as an indication of old age; see Keith Hopkins, "On the Probable Age Structure of the Roman Population," *Population Studies* 20 (1966): 245–64.

45. Judith Herrin and Alexander P. Kazhdan, "Age," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan; New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 36.

46. Emiel Eyben, "Roman Notes on the Course of Life," *Ancient Society* 4 (1973): 224–25.

life all to the symbolism of the six days of creation; therefore, he does not represent the common approach to the stages of a person's life. Later the Byzantines "knew the ancient seven-age theory but did not develop either it or Augustine's view."⁴⁷

Eyben further argues that in the progression of a person's life, ancient Greek and Roman cultures regarded the number seven to be "of primary importance," that in every seventh year "nature is decisively active, causing crucial changes" and that these views were "first voiced—though undoubtedly of much older date—in a famous elegy by Solon, [and] were also widespread in Rome, presumably since Varro,"⁴⁸ a Roman scholar and writer (116–27 B.C.). Eyben describes each of the seven-year stages of life, extending from birth through age 70, at which time a person is ready to die, consistent with the stages already observed in this article.

One of the most thorough discussions of the stages of a person's life was written by Franz Boll, originally published in 1913 and reprinted in 1950.⁴⁹ In an e-mail to me, Tim Parkin, professor of Classics at Manchester University in the UK, stated that "the study by Boll remains the most comprehensive overview for antiquity."⁵⁰ Parkin further stated that "As far as I'm aware (and I've just been looking at the acetates hominum again myself, for a Festschrift for someone's 65th birthday!), there is no significant new bibliography within the last decade."⁵¹

Boll was a German classical philologist, specializing in ancient astronomy and astrology. His emphasis on astrology led him to write a controversial astral interpretation of the NT book of Revelation, focusing on passages that he felt supported his astral approach. Boll's article details several approaches to the stages of life, held in varying degrees in ancient cultures, including associations between the stages of life and the cycle of the seasons, or the times of day, extending from summarizing life into two broad stages up to ten stages. His own astrological presuppositions led him to conclude that life is divided into seven stages:⁵² ages one to 4, 5 to 14, 15 to 22, 23 to 41, 42 to 56, 57 to 68, and age 69 to death. However, Boll also asserted that in ancient cultures the dominant number was seven:

The dominant number because of its widespread coverage and its influence is the number seven. Hardly any other number compares to it as the one always and everywhere that appears as a natural revelation. All things are fond of the number seven. Influenced by the rotation of the moon, confirmed by the Pleiades, the Heides, Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, Orion, and finally the number of the seven wander-

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., 228.

49. Franz Boll, "Die Lebensalter, Ein Beitrag zur antiken Ethologie und zur Geschichte der Zahlen," *Kleine Schriften Zur Sternkunde Des Altertums* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1950), 156–224.

50. Tim Parkin, personal communication, May 9, 2008.

51. Ibid.

52. Boll, "Die Lebensalter," 194–95.

ing stars [the planets] which make their own way through the fixed stars, so it [the number seven] appears in the heavens which, according to the Jews, Christians, and also the Greeks, reveals the glory of God in many ways. So also in post Christian centuries it remains the holy number, which has been since the time of Pythagoras the number of perfection. When a number is directly revealed in the cosmos as the most appropriate manner of defining the time periods, then it has in addition a support in the life of humans in matters of embryology, biology, and pathology which has been thought to have been observed in these physical sciences.⁵³

Boll identifies the stages of development in the hebdomadal system of the ancient cultures, as seen from the time of Solon onward: a person's first 7 years, tooth change; to age 14, puberty; to age 21, the beard; to age 28, physical strength peaks; to age 35, time to marry and have children; to age 42, full development of character; to ages 49 and 56, full development of wisdom and mind; to age 63, a retrogression; to age 70, death.⁵⁴

Garland and Wooster assert that a difference existed between the Pythagorean philosophers, who identified only four stages of life, and the Hippocratic writers, who acknowledged seven stages. They further observe that because "adult society was primarily organized on a two-generational principle, a threefold division probably served most practical purposes,"⁵⁵ as observed above when discussing military duty. Garland expands this concept in *The Greek Way of Life*, showing how elements of Greek society emphasized generalized stages of life. Concerning the four stages of life, he asserts that the Pythagoreans "identified four ages of man, namely *pais*, *neos*, *anēr*, and *gerōn*, in line with the four seasons."⁵⁶ Garland further asserts that "strictly speaking, however, these terms do not denote periods of life but rather the intervals between one period and another."⁵⁷ Likewise, from a practical perspective, Garland observes that "Greek society often divided people into the young, the middle aged, and the elderly."⁵⁸ At the same time, however, he stresses that the "concept of the seven ages of man is of very great antiquity,"⁵⁹ and much of his book

53. *Ibid.*, 183–84 (trans. Hermann Austel).

54. *Ibid.*, 186. An earlier work than Boll's, by John Winter Jones, also concluded that the ancient Greeks, Jews, and Christians recognized seven stages in the life of a person. After examining references such as to Solon, Hippocrates, and Philo and comparing the Jewish Talmud and midrash, Jones shows its continued occurrence in art and literature over a period of 2,000 years. See John Winter Jones, *Observations on the Origin of the Division of Man's Life into Stages* (London: Ellis, 1861).

55. Robert S. G. Garland and Margaret B. Wooster, "Age," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth; 3rd ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 38.

56. Garland, *The Greek Way of Life*, 6.

57. *Ibid.*, 294 n. 6.

58. *Ibid.*, 4.

59. *Ibid.*, 2.

builds around the assumption of those very ages, again being consistent with the thesis of this article.

Golden carefully researched the subject of children in classical Athens.⁶⁰ Although his purpose does not include a discussion of the full development of all stages of a person's life, he does focus on the Greek terms that are applicable to children, up to adulthood. He considers numerous synonyms used in Greek poetry and prose, as well as those occurring in a technical sense, to refer to age categories of childhood. He stresses that they consistently occur in sequence and that among them each of the categories derived from Hippocrates is "identified with a set age span: the first four are *paidion* (until age 7), *pais* (7–14), *meirakion* (14–21), *neaniskos* (21–28)."⁶¹

Seeking further contemporary sources dealing with classical scholars on this subject, I corresponded with other professors of Classics besides Tim Parkin. Graham Zanker, professor at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, responded to my inquiry: "I have nothing to add to your researches on the seven ages of man."⁶² John Duffy, department chair of the Department of Classics at Harvard University, kindly did a search for me in the catalog of that university's library but surfaced no additional source material.⁶³ In similar manner, a search of the database *L'Année philologique*, an index of publications related to the history, language, literature and civilization of ancient Greece and Rome, brought only one new source to light, the article by M. L. West referenced on p. 551 n. 68.⁶⁴

The information gleaned from all the sources provides an overview of the use of the terms in Greek literature, which consistently supports the ancient approach of seven stages of a person's life. This informs interpretation of these terms in the NT.

Contributions of Philo and Hippocrates

In NT times, the Jewish philosopher Philo (20 B.C.–A.D. 50) quoted favorably from the father of medicine, Hippocrates (460?–377? B.C.), identifying seven stages in the development of life from birth through death. In context, Philo sought to show how important the number *seven* is, and he drew upon numerous evidences to support his claim. One of these evidences is a summary of Hippocrates' observation on the stages of life: "And Hippocrates the physician, says that there are seven ages, those of the little boy [παιδίου], the boy [παιδός], the lad [μειρακίου], the young man [νεανίσκου], the man [ἄνδρός], the elderly man [πρεσβύτου], the old man

60. Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

61. *Ibid.*, 14.

62. Graham Zanker, personal communication, May 8, 2008.

63. John Duffy, personal communication, May 19, 2008.

64. Accessed June 18, 2008. Online: <http://www.annce-philologique.com/aph/>. Likewise, a search of the JSTOR database, an online system for archiving academic journals, revealed no additional sources; accessed June 18, 2008. Online: <http://www.jstor.org>.

[γέροντος], and that these ages are measured by multitudes of seven though not in regular succession."⁶⁵

Similarly, Hippocrates, in *Fleshes*, states the following:

A person reaches adulthood when he has acquired his definitive form, and this generally occurs between seven and fourteen years of age. In that time all the teeth, including the largest, are formed, once those that came into being from the nourishment in the uterus have fallen out. He continues to grow into the third seven-year period, in which he becomes a young man, and even until the fourth and fifth seven-year periods. In the fourth seven-year period two more teeth are formed in many persons, and these are called the wisdom teeth.⁶⁶

Having given the summary of Hippocrates, Philo then provided an extended quotation from Hippocrates that details these stages of life:

In man's life there are seven seasons, which they call ages, little boy [παιδίον], boy [παῖς], lad [μειράκιον], young man [νεανίσκος], man [ἄνθρωπος], elderly man [πρεσβύτης], old man [γέρον]. He is a little boy [παιδίον] until he reaches seven years, the time of the shedding of his teeth; a boy [παῖς] until he reaches puberty, *i.e.* up to twice seven years; a lad [μειράκιον] until his chin grows downy, *i.e.* up to thrice seven years; a young man [νεανίσκος] until his whole body has grown, till four times seven; a man [ἄνθρωπος] till forty-nine, till seven times seven; an elderly man [πρεσβύτης] till fifty-six, up to seven times eight; after that an old man [γέρον].⁶⁷

West may have identified the source of Philo's quotation. In his article "The Cosmology of 'Hippocrates', *De Hebdomadibus*," West traces the development of this document, which some include in the Hippocratic corpus, through various Latin versions, some incomplete Greek source materials, and translations of the Latin into Greek. *De hebdomadibus* presents a cosmology that "everything in nature is arranged in groups of seven, and that the human body is constructed on the same pattern as the whole world."⁶⁸ Although scholars disagree on the dating of *De hebdomadibus*, ranging

65. Philo, *Creation* 105, Sandys. In addition to Philo, the *TLG* database (references are shown with full *TLG* codes) shows that ancient writers placed the same seven words in the identical sequence, including: Iamblichus, Phil., *Theologoumena arithmeticae* [2023.005] p. 56, line 3; Anatolius, Phil. et Math., $\$*$ PERI\DEKA/DOS KAI\TW=N E)NTO\S AU)TH=S A)RIQMW=N& [2577.001] p. 13, line 24, and p. 14, line 2; Joannes Damascenus, Theol. et Scr. Eccl., *Sacra parallela (recensiones secundum alpheti litteras dispositae, quae tres libros conflant) (fragmenta e cod. Vat. Gr. 1236)* [2934.018] vol. 95, p. 1109, line 5. A few sources substitute βρέφος for παιδίον and reverse the order of γέρον and πρεσβύτης; a primary example is found in several entries of Ptolemaeus, Gramm; see, for example, *De differentia vocabulorum* ($=*$ PERI\DIAFORA=S LE/CEWN KATA\STOIXEI=ON&) [sp.] (*e coel. Ambros. E 26 sup.*) [1643.004] alphabetic letter *gamma*, entry 60, line 10.

66. Hippocrates, *Carn.* 602, Potter.

67. Philo, *Creation* 105, Sandys.

68. M. L. West, "The Cosmology of 'Hippocrates', *De Hebdomadibus*," *The Classical Quarterly* 21 (1971): 365.

from the mid sixth century to the early fourth century, West treats it as a part of the Hippocratic corpus. He provides a re-creation of the Greek text, as well as the Latin version and gives a commentary on the whole. In that commentary, he shows how the document presents the case that “Human life too has seven ‘seasons’, the so-called ἡλικίαι.” In addition to Philo, West connects this document with the Roman Censorinus, discussed on pp. 553 below, showing how that author also knew the Hippocratic division of life into seven stages.⁶⁹ West’s identification of the Greek text of paragraph five of *De hebdomadibus*, closely parallels the quotation found in Philo:

οὕτω δὲ καὶ ἐπ’ ἀνθρώπου φύσις ἐπτὰ ὥραι εἰσιν, ὡς ἡλικίας καλούμεν· παιδίον, παῖς, μειράκιον, νεηνίσκος, ἀνήρ, πρεσβύτης, γέρων, καὶ παιδίον μὲν ἔστιν ἄχρις ἐπτά ἐτῶν (καὶ) ὀδόντων ἐκβολῆς· παῖς δὲ ἄχρι γονῆς ἐκφύσεως ἐς τὰ δις ἐπτά· μειράκιον δὲ ἄχρι γενείου λαχνώσεως ἐς τὰ τρις ἐπτά· νεηνίσκος δὲ ἄχρις αὐξήσιος ὄλου τοῦ σώματος ἐς τὰ τετράκις ἐπτά· ἀνήρ δὲ ἄχρις ἑνὸς δέοντος ἐτῶν πεντήκοντα ἐς τὰ ἐπτάκις ἐπτά· πρεσβύτης δὲ ἄχρι ἐτῶν πεντήκοντα ἕξ ἐς τὰ ἐπτάκις ὀκτώ· τὸ δὲ ἐντεῦθεν γέρων.⁷⁰

Philo accepted these stages of a person’s life, with the modification that he subdivided Hippocrates’ 21-year identification of a “man” (ἀνήρ) into three categories of seven years each and subdivided Hippocrates’s final stage of life into two categories. In doing this, he asserted that he was following Solon, the Athenian lawgiver (ca. 630–ca. 560 B.C.). Philo described the stages of a man’s life in the following way:

during the first period of seven years the growth of the teeth begins; during the second the capacity for emitting seed; in the third the growing of the beard; and in the fourth increase of strength; in the fifth again ripeness for marriage; in the sixth the understanding reaches its bloom; in the seventh progressive improvement and development of the mind and reason; in the eighth the perfecting of both these; during the ninth forbearance and gentleness emerge, owing to the more complete taming of the passions; during the tenth comes the desirable end of life, while the bodily organs are still compact and firm; for prolonged old age is wont to abate and break down the force of each of them.⁷¹

Philo did indeed follow the approach of Solon, although some of Solon’s terminology employs synonymous words. Solon’s assertion was that life was divided into ten periods of seven years each:

In seven years the half-grown boy [παῖς ἄνηβος] casteth the first teeth he cut as a child [νήπιος]; when God hath accomplished him seven years more he showeth signs that his youthful prime [puberty,

69. *Ibid.*, 376.

70. *Ibid.*, 369.

71. Philo, *Creation* 103, Sandys.

ἡβης] is nigh; in the third seven, when his limbs are still a-waxing, his chin growth downy with the bloom of changing skin; in the fourth every man is at his best in the strength which men [ἄνδρες] bear for a token of virtue and valour; in the fifth 'tis time for a man [ἄνδρα] to bethink him of marriage and to seek offspring to come after him; in the sixth a man's [ἄνδρός] mind is trained in all things, and he wisheth not so much now for what may not be done; seven sevens and in eight he is at his best in mind and tongue, to wit fourteen years of both; in the ninth age he is still an able man [still capable], but his tongue and his lore have less might unto great virtue; and if a man [anyone] come to the full measure of the tenth, he will not meet the fate of Death untimely.⁷²

Philo's understanding of the Greek concept of the seven stages of a person's life geographically extends, therefore, from Athens, the home of Solon and Hippocrates, to Alexandria, his own home. Historically, it dates from the sixth century B.C. to NT times. It also extended into third-century Roman culture, as witnessed by Censorinus. He wrote *De Die Natali* (or *The Birthday Book*) in A.D. 238 as "a present to his best friend, the noble Quintus Caerellius," and in its pages he "sets down everything related to the idea of birthdays."⁷³ In chap. 14, Censorinus briefly refers to the suggestion by Varro that human life is divided into five stages of 15 years each and then discusses at length the positions of Hippocrates and Solon related to seeing life in multiples of 7. He asserts that Hippocrates divided a person's life into 7 stages and that Solon subdivided three of those so that he had 10 stages of 7 years each. Censorinus argues that "those who measure out human life into sevens seem to have gotten closest to Nature, for it is after each interval of approximately seven years that Nature shows us some turning point, and something new occurs during them."⁷⁴

Contributions of Others

Two additional ancient writers provide further examples of how stages of life are consistently identified through the centuries before and after NT times. These two represent how, even when writers do not specify the precise seven ages of life, they yet demonstrate that a progression of life exists, using the terms under consideration in this article.

Xenophon

Xenophon was a Greek historian who traveled through Asia and Persia with various contingencies of Greek armies until he finally settled back in Greece, near Olympia. From there he probably wrote many of his extant works. In his *Symposium*, he differentiated stages of a person's life.

72. Solon, fr. 27, Edmonds.

73. Censorinus, *The Birthday Book* (trans. Holt N. Parker; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), ix.

74. *Ibid.*, 14.7.

He observed that beauty continues in different forms as a person gets older: “for just as we recognize beauty in a boy [παῖς], so we do in a youth [μειράκιον], a full-grown man [ἄνηρ], or an old man [πρεσβύτες]. Witness the fact that in selecting garland-bearers for Athena they choose beautiful old men [γέροντας], thus intimating that beauty attends every period of life.”⁷⁵

Dio Chrysostom (ca. A.D. 40–112)

Dio Chrysostom was a Sophist and orator. He illustrated how a person attains wisdom and trustworthiness over the passing of time by comparing this to the physical aging of a person. While not seeking to provide a list of all the stages of life, his observation acknowledges a recognized progression of stages. He identified the passage of physical time as being “successively a lad [παῖδα], a stripling [μειράκιον], a youth [νεανίσκος], and an old man [πρεσβύτεν].”⁷⁶

Summary

On the basis of the foregoing information, the various stages of a person’s life may be summarized as constituting recognized characteristics, while allowing some flexibility. For example, the examination of νεανίσκος showed that it could extend, at most, to the age of 30, although a rigorous limit of its parameters would restrict it to 28. Further, the discussion demonstrated that in the Greco-Roman world, applying the relative term *old* could begin at age 59 or 60, rather than the more restricted age of 56. These are minor differences, however, and do not diminish the emphasis of clear demarcations for the accepted categories of the seven stages of life, which are:

1. Little boy (παιδίον): ages birth to 7 years; during this time he sheds his “baby teeth”
2. Boy (παῖς): ages 7 to 14 years; during this time he reaches puberty
3. Lad (μειράκιον): ages 14 to 21 years; during this time his beard begins to show
4. Young man (νεανίσκος): ages 21 to 28 years; during this time he reaches his full bodily strength
5. Man (ἄνηρ): ages 28 to 49 years; this is subdivided into three categories:
 - ages 28 to 35; this is the time of ripeness for marriage
 - ages 35 to 42; this is when the understanding reaches its bloom
 - ages 42 to 49; this has continued improvement of mind and reason
6. Elderly man (πρεσβύτες): ages 49 to 56 years; this is when the perfecting of mind and reason is achieved

75. Xenophon, *Symp.* 4.17, Brownson.

76. Dio Chrysostom, *Seventy-Fourth Discourse* 74:10, Crosby.

παιδίον	παῖς	μειράκιον	νεανίσκος	άνήρ	πρεσβύτης	γέρον	
0	7	14	21	28	49	56	death
little boy	boy	lad	young man	man	elderly man	old man	

Figure 1. The Stages of Life

7. Old man (γέρον): ages 56 until death

- ages 56 to 63; this is the time of patience and gentleness
- ages 63 through death (supposedly about 70 years of age); this is when the bodily organs fail

Greek and Roman writers from the time of Homer until after the time of the NT recognized that a person's life goes through distinctive stages. Several writers connect limiting years with those stages. They can be charted as in fig. 1.

GREEK WORDS FOR AGES AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The implications of the above findings will now be applied to the usage of these terms in the NT. Although many occurrences do not have special significance, some provide enlightenment into the lives of the people involved.

Terms for Young Children

The Greek word βρέφος is used in a literal sense seven times in the NT and metaphorically once (1 Pet 2:2). The term is used of a fetus twice (Luke 1:41, 44) and of infants the other times (Luke 2:12, 16; 18:15; Acts 7:19; 2 Tim 3:15).⁷⁷ This is consistent with the term's use in nonbiblical literature.

The Greek word νήπιος is used with apparent literalness in Matt 21:16; and with a literal sense combined with spiritual emphasis in 1 Cor 13:11.⁷⁸ The term occurs in a broad sense in Gal 4:1 referring to a "child" who has not reached legal age. Paul used that sense to expand to the metaphorical image of believers who in the past were spiritual "children" (Gal 4:3). The metaphorical use of the word also occurs in Matt 11:25 (cf. Luke 10:21), where it has the "idea of mental naiveté and spiritual need."⁷⁹ Similar metaphorical uses occur four additional times (Rom 2:20; 1 Cor 3:1; Eph 4:14; Heb 5:13).⁸⁰

77. In Luke 18:15, it "is best to think that parents were bringing their infants to be blessed by this high-profile religious figure" (John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* [WBC 35B; Dallas: Word, 1993], 881). This is consistent with the "practice of bringing children to the elders or scribes for a prayer of blessing upon them on the evening of the Day of Atonement" (I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 682).

78. Cf. David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 623.

79. Ed Glasscock, *Moody Gospel Commentary: Matthew* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 254. See also John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids:

Terms of Chronological Age

The terms used in nonbiblical literature to distinguish stages of development by chronological age must now be addressed to identify what parallels exist as they appear in the NT.

Little Boy (παῖδιον)

Secular literature identifies the ages of birth to 7 years old with the term *παῖδιον*. This word occurs 51 times in the NT. While some of these are clearly metaphorical in nature (e.g., John 21:5; 1 Cor 14:20; Heb 2:13, 14; 1 John 2:13, 18), the majority have a literal sense.⁸¹ At the time of Jesus' birth, this word is frequently applied to him (Matt 2:8, etc.).⁸² At the time of the circumcisions of John the Baptist (Luke 1:59) and Jesus (Luke 2:21), this word is used. Jesus frequently used the word to refer to actual children who interacted with him during his ministry (Matt 18:2, Mark 5:39, Luke 9:37).⁸³ Indeed, whenever the word has a literal connotation, it refers to children up to age seven.

An apparent exception is found in the miracle of the healing of Jairus's daughter. Three times in Mark's account, the girl is referred to as a *παῖδιον* (5:39, 40, 41). Her age is then identified as twelve years (5:42). Because the word *παῖδιον* could refer to a child who is too young to walk, Mark carefully identifies her as being 12.⁸⁴ Significantly, *παῖδιον* is not the only diminutive in this passage. The words *θυγάτριον*, "little daughter" (5:23), and *κοράσιον*, "little girl" (5:41, 42), also occur. The three words together

Eerdmans, 2005), 470. Marshall comments that the term here means "the childlike, innocent ones, unspoiled by learning with whom God is pleased" (Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, 434).

80. Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 162; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (WBC 38A; Dallas: Word, 1988), 112–13; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 124; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 289–90.

81. Metaphorical uses: see the discussions on 1 Cor 14:20 by Thiselton (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1119) and by Fee (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 678–79). Literal uses: concerning John 21:5, commentators frequently observe that *παῖδια* is "used much like British 'lads' or American 'boys' or 'guys'" (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* [PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 670; see also Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* [2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003], 2:1228; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 862). However, Köstenberger observes that this understanding "must be tempered with placing it in the larger context of first-century teacher-disciple relationships" (Andreas Köstenberger, *John* [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004], 590 n. 15).

82. "Jesus is referred to as τὸ *παῖδιον* (the diminutive of *παῖς*), 'the very young child,' throughout the chapter" (Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* [WBC 33a; Dallas: Word, 1993], 30).

83. Although Nolland asserts that *παῖδιον*, "apart from generally indicating prepubescence . . . offers no further precision about age," the evidence presented in this article shows that the word does indeed offer greater precision. See Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 731.

84. Nolland astutely observes that the mention of 12 years shows that "the girl is approaching the age for marriage, so the imminent flowering of her womanhood is under threat." See Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 419.

clearly connote endearment, which is evident throughout the passage in Jairus' expressions before Jesus. The word *παιδίον*, therefore, is used to show endearment rather than to demonstrate a strict chronological age.⁸⁵

Boy (παῖς)

The second stage of life, extending from 7 to 14 years, is represented by *παῖς* in extrabiblical literature. This term occurs 24 times in the NT and has a wide range of meaning, just as it does in secular literature.

The term, for example, frequently signifies a servant, that is, one who is a "child" as far as social position is concerned (cf. Matt 8:6, Luke 12:45, etc.).⁸⁶ It also occurs in the sense of "son, child," when in relation to the person's father. This is seen in Christ's relationship to his heavenly Father (Acts 3:13, etc.)⁸⁷ and in a metaphorical sense in David's relationship to God (Acts 4:25).

At the same time, the word connects to chronological age. Jesus, for example, at the age of 12, is called a *παῖς* (Luke 2:43).⁸⁸ Another reference where the age of youngsters easily fits into this stage of life is that of children crying in the temple (Matt 21:15).

The interrelationship of *παῖς* and *παιδίον* is seen in three accounts of the NT. In the account of Jesus' healing of the demon-possessed boy, Matthew refers to him with the word *παῖς* (17:18), while Mark uses the term *παιδίον* (9:24). Oepke observes how these words relate by saying that in Matthew the term refers to a "growing" child and that Mark refers to a child up to 7 years of age.⁸⁹ While this is possible, a better probability is that Matthew centered on the parent-child relationship, while Mark focused on chronological age. John also has the words in conjunction when describing the healing of the nobleman's son. John uses *παιδίον* when the nobleman speaks (4:49), which provides the chronological emphasis, and

85. See Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 275.

86. Oepke, "παῖς," 637. Nolland concurs: "παῖς may mean 'servant' or 'son', but since *παῖς μου* always refers to a servant in the LXX, servant is more likely here" (Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 354. See also W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel according to Saint Matthew* [ICC; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991], 2:20–21).

87. In Acts 3:13, *παῖς* may also be taken in the sense of "servant." It may well connect with the Suffering Servant of the LORD from Isaiah (see F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 88; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 31; New York: Doubleday, 1998], 285; John B. Polhill, *Acts* [NAC 26; Nashville: Broadman, 1992], 131).

88. Bock observes that "in this passage *παῖς* stands in contrast to οἱ γονεῖς," the parents. See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* (BECNT 3A; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 265.

89. Oepke, "παῖς," 5:637–38. Gundry suggests that "since the phrase ἐκ παιδιότητος, 'from childhood,' implied that the son is grown (v. 21), the editorial designation of the son as τοῦ παιδίου, 'the child' (v. 24), either puts him at the upper limit of childhood or, in conjunction with mention of the father, reflects back on the earlier spells of demonic possession that characterized the son's childhood." See Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary*, 490.

then uses *παῖς* (4:51) when Jesus speaks, which stresses the parent-child relationship.

The word *παῖς* is used of Eutychus (Acts 20:12), who fell out the third-floor window while Paul was preaching. Along with it, the word *νεανίας* (Acts 20:9) is used to describe this young person. The combination of the terms stresses that he was a youthful person, but the exact relationship of the terms to each other creates some difficulty. When referring to chronological age, *παῖς* denotes a boy from 7 to 14, but *νεανίας* identifies a young man from 21 to 28. How can Eutychus fit into both categories simultaneously? Four solutions to this seeming contradiction are offered. The first is that *νεανίας* is the term that accurately portrays the age of Eutychus and that *παῖς* is to be taken in the sense of “servant,” or as someone’s “child,” as it occurs elsewhere in the NT.⁹⁰ A second possibility is that *παῖς* is used here to place an age limitation on *νεανίας* in this text, and therefore Eutychus is a young boy.⁹¹ Newman and Nida recognize the age indications of the two terms and suggest a third solution, which is that *παῖς* may be used here to “imply some greater degree of endearment.”⁹² However, Newman and Nida prefer a fourth solution, which is that “more probably it [*παῖς*] is simply used in the more general sense of a young person.”⁹³ Since the context of Acts 20 refers to the time when Paul was preaching all night long, it seems less likely, although not impossible, that a boy younger than 14 would be in the audience for an all-night sermon. The more probable view, therefore, is that Eutychus was in his 20s (*νεανίας*) and is also identified as the “child” of someone in the audience, probably those who were “greatly comforted” (Acts 20:12).

Lad (μειράκιον)

Although the word *μειράκιον*, referring to someone between 14 and 21, is frequent in nonbiblical literature (*TLG* counts 1383 occurrences), it is not found in the NT. This should not be regarded as unusual because the references to people in the NT focus either on adults or children.

Young Man (νεανίσκος)

The words used by ancient writers to refer to a man from the ages of 21 to 28 are *νεανίσκος* and its related terms. While *νεανίσκος* is apparently used in a metaphorical sense in 1 John 2:13–14, the remainder of its NT occurrences and those of its related words are used in a literal sense. In nearly

90. Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 607; Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956; original: 1875), 692, 696; see also Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 717.

91. Polhill, *Acts*, 419.

92. Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles* (Helps for Translators; New York: United Bible Societies, 1972), 384.

93. *Ibid.*

all of the references, the identification of a man from the ages of 21 to 28 easily fits the context. The instances, for example, of the rich young ruler (Matt 19:20, 22), the young man in the sheet at Christ's arrest (Mark 14:51), the physical appearance of the angel in Christ's empty tomb (Mark 16:5), etc., are well understood within those age parameters.⁹⁴

A few references, however, demand special attention. Two texts using words related to νεανίσκος provide clues to the age of the apostle Paul. In Acts 26:4, Paul testifies that the Jews in Jerusalem knew him well from his "youth" (νεότητος). Paul states in Acts 22:3 that he was "born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city [Jerusalem], educated under Gamaliel." "The significance to this is that he was reared from childhood in Jerusalem, not in Tarsus, as is commonly supposed. His family must have moved to Jerusalem when he was still quite young."⁹⁵ As Paul grew up, his education with Gamaliel caused him to be well known, from his "youth up," pointing to an age in his early 20s. Furthermore, Luke identifies Paul as a "young man" (νεανίου) when he witnessed the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58).⁹⁶ Finegan argues convincingly that Jesus was crucified in A.D. 33 and that Paul's conversion occurred in A.D. 36.⁹⁷ Assuming this to be correct, Paul was probably in his late 20s when he was converted and would have been slightly over 40 years old at the time of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15, A.D. 49), in his early 50s during the time of his first Roman imprisonment (ca. A.D. 61–63), and about 60 at the time of his death (A.D. 67).⁹⁸ Paul was born, therefore, about the year A.D. 7. We will observe below that this chronology is consistent with another word used to describe Paul in reference to his age.

Another area of interest relates to the age of Timothy. Paul exhorted Timothy, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness" (νεότητος;

94. Nolland avers that the term νεανίσκος "is imprecise, but it appears to be one step up on μαιράκιον, which refers to one who is pubescent but not yet fully mature (stripling/lad'). A νεανίσκος is a young man who has fully matured physically" (Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 791. Davies and Allison assert that "In Philo, *Op. mund.* 105, we read that, according to Hippocrates, a νεανίσκος was between the ages of 21 and 28; but it would be hazardous to think so precisely." They do not, however, state why a conclusion such as this would be hazardous, and this article argues that this age distinction is exactly the case. See Davies and Allison, *Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3:45.

95. Polhill, *Acts*, 458; see also Witherington, *Acts*, 668–69; C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 2:1151.

96. Some scholars make no observation about the significance of νεανίας (see Polhill, *Acts*, 208–9; F. F. Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 169–70). In contrast, following Diogenes Laertius and one comment by Philo (see the discussion on pp. 558–559 above), Fitzmyer asserts that the term "could designate anyone from 24 to 40 years of age" (Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 394). Barrett is less precise in his discussion, saying that "the νεανίας falls between the πρωτογένετος (the youth with the first beard) and the τέλειος άνήρ. . . . These facts tell us little about Saul's age" (Barrett, *Acts*, 1:386).

97. Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (rev. ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 353–69, 390–95.

98. Finegan concludes that Peter and Paul were martyred on June 29, A.D. 67 (ibid., 389).

1 Tim 4:12). Does this indicate Timothy was perhaps in his late 20s when Paul wrote 1 Timothy, "in the middle 60s,"⁹⁹ about the year A.D. 64? Among all the references to age in the NT, this text may receive the most discussion. Scholars have differing opinions concerning the significance of how the word in this text relates to the age of Timothy. For example, Kent argues that Timothy "must have been at least thirty years old at this time" but does not provide any supporting evidence that Timothy's minimum age was 30.¹⁰⁰ Easton asserts that "Timothy is so young that he may be treated with contempt and he still must make his 'progress' evident; an age not much over twenty-five seems indicated."¹⁰¹ Mounce draws from Aulus Gellius, Josephus, Polybius, and Irenaeus (all considered above) as support that Timothy "was now in his late twenties to mid thirties."¹⁰² Knight also draws from Irenaeus and Polybius to assert that Timothy was "in his thirties (the estimate most would agree on)."¹⁰³ Stott, with no support presented, avers he was "probably in his thirties."¹⁰⁴ Kelly also bases his comments on Irenaeus and Polybius to advocate for the idea that he "may well have not been much beyond his middle thirties."¹⁰⁵ Bernard refers to Polybius, as well as Galen and Xenophon, to suggest that "Timothy must have been about 30 years of age at this time," further asserting "that *véος* was an elastic word, but that a reasonable limit to fix was 30 years."¹⁰⁶ And Towner concludes that he "would probably have been less than forty years old. Attempts at greater precision are speculative since we do not know his age at the time he was called."¹⁰⁷

Paul took Timothy with him on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1–4), about the year A.D. 50. Timothy was doubtless in his early teens when he began traveling with Paul. Becoming a disciple of a master in the teen years was common practice. "Formal education was usually concluded at the age of twelve or thirteen. At that point many young men began learning a craft or trade. Students who showed exceptional ability and

99. D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 572. Considerable discussion exists concerning the authorship and dates of the Pastoral Epistles. That discussion is beyond the scope of this present article.

100. Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 161; see also Ralph Earle, "1, 2 Timothy," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (11; gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 374.

101. Burton Scott Easton, *The Pastoral Epistles: Introduction, Translation, Commentary and Word Studies* (New York: Scribner's, 1947), 146.

102. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 258.

103. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 205.

104. John Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 119.

105. J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Harper's New Testament Commentaries; New York: Harper, 1960), 104.

106. Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 70 n. 1, 71.

107. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 314. See also I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999), 560.

desire might continue studies with a teacher or sage."¹⁰⁸ Indeed, "advanced study required that one attach himself to a great scholar."¹⁰⁹ Paul himself was no doubt about age thirteen when he attached himself to Gamaliel.¹¹⁰ In similar fashion, Timothy would begin his advanced studies under the tutelage of Paul at about the same age. The fact that Paul took the initiative to enlist Timothy (Acts 16:3) is a sterling tribute to his character and abilities. If Timothy was 13 years old at that time (A.D. 50), and Paul wrote 1 Timothy about A.D. 64, then Timothy was 27 at the time Paul wrote 1 Tim 4:12. This corresponds precisely with the most common usage of the terms related to νέος.

Man (ἄνθρωπος)

The word for "man" in the NT is ἄνθρωπος, a word occurring about 217 times. This word is consistently used in the NT to refer to an adult male and "is never used of the female sex."¹¹¹ It can refer to a "husband," regardless of his age, either in the betrothal period (Matt 1:16)¹¹² or in the actual married state (John 4:16). It is often used of a man in contrast to a woman (Acts 5:14). A common usage is simply to refer to an individual man (Luke 8:41) or to men as a group (Luke 5:18). Occasionally, it is used in a metaphorical sense (Eph 4:13). In its use in the NT, the age parameters of 28 to 49 are generally appropriate.

Elderly Man (πρεσβύτερος)

The word for a man of more elderly years is πρεσβύτερος, a man the ancient Greeks regarded as being age 49 to 56 years. This exact word only occurs three times in the NT (Luke 1:18, Titus 2:2, and Phlm 9), although the related word πρεσβύτερος occurs 67 additional times.

In Luke 1:18, Zacharias refers to himself by this term, responding to the angel Gabriel's message that he would have a son, "How shall I know this for certain? For I am an old man [πρεσβύτερος], and my wife is advanced in years." Taking this word as referring to chronological age would put Zacharias in his 50s.¹¹³ Numerous accounts throughout history and in our

108. J. Julius Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 258.

109. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 103.

110. E. F. Synge, "St. Paul's Boyhood and Conversion and His Attitude to Race," *The Expository Times* 94 (1983): 260–63.

111. W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Westwood: Revell, 1966), 3:34.

112. Commentators typically mention, almost in passing, that the noun ἄνθρωπος in this context means "husband." For examples, see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:183–84; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 112.

113. Interestingly, neither Marshall nor Nolland makes any comment at all about the age of Zacharias (Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 50; Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 32), and Bock identifies the Greek word for age, but he bypasses any comment about age identification (see Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 91).

current time testify to men in their 50s fathering children. That alone is not the crucial issue in this text. Rather, it is the emphasis on Elizabeth, whom the context has already identified as “barren” (1:7). We may assume that Zacharias was probably about 18 years old and Elizabeth about 14 when they married.¹¹⁴ When he was in his 50s, therefore, they had been married for more than 30 years, ample time for the conclusion that Elizabeth was barren. The reference to her being “advanced in years” is from the word *προβαίνω*. Literally, this word means “to make a forward movement, go ahead, advance,” but it can also be used metaphorically in the sense of “to make an advance in time, advance in years.”¹¹⁵ Elizabeth had advanced in her years, just as Zacharias advanced in his, and her advancing years testified to her barrenness.

Paul’s exhortation in Titus 2:2 that “Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance” also equates well with men in their 50s. The same is true with his exhortation in Titus 2:3 to the “older women,” *πρεσβύτιδας*, the feminine of *πρεσβύτης*.

The reference in Phlm 9 has occasioned different interpretations. Some writers suggest that instead of *πρεσβύτης* the word should either be emended to *πρεσβευτής* (“ambassador”) or taken as equivalent to it. In this case, “it would point to the authority granted to Paul and so underline the fact that he speaks as an ambassador of Christ.”¹¹⁶ However, the Greek text clearly reads *πρεσβύτης* and, as Vincent observes, “‘Ambassador’ does not seem quite appropriate to a private letter.”¹¹⁷ Rather, this text “gives us valuable information about Paul’s age [and] since age usually brought with it the wisdom of experience, the appeal is for the respect that a younger member of the same family or circle should pay to the elder.”¹¹⁸

Philemon 9, therefore, confirms the earlier comments concerning Paul’s chronological age. In appealing to Philemon, Paul refers to himself as “Paul the aged.” Although Bornkamm states, “The ref. does not enable us to fix Paul’s age with any exactitude,” he proceeds to add that “*πρεσβύτης* denotes the 6th of the 7 ages of man (between *άνήρ* and *γέρων*), namely 49–56 yrs. of age.”¹¹⁹ The idea of Paul being in his 50s when he

114. Rabbinic literature indicates that a girl was considered a maiden of full age at 12 and a half years, by which time she was commonly betrothed for marriage. The betrothal period lasted a year, which indicates she was approaching the age of 14 when she married. Boys could marry as young as age 12, but the more common age was 18 but prior to age 20. See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 363–69; Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 65–66.

115. BDAG 865.

116. Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (WBC 44; Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 290. See also Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (Eerdmans Critical Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 321–23.

117. Marvin R. Vincent, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976; original: 1897), 184.

118. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 327.

119. Bornkamm, “*πρεσβύτης*,” *TDNT* 6:683.

wrote Philemon is consistent with the evidence concerning the chronology of his life, discussed above.

Old Man (γέρων)

The final stage of a man's life is described by the word γέρων, referring to a person from age 56 until death. The English word *gerontology* comes from this Greek term, which only occurs once in the NT. When Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be "born again," Nicodemus queried (John 3:4), "How can a man be born when he is old (γέρων)?"¹²⁰ The use of this word is instructive in that it identifies that the old teacher (in his 60s? 70s?) was consciously aware that a younger rabbi, Jesus, had answers to questions that he lacked.

CONCLUSION

This article focused on Greek terms that delineate the stages of life a person goes through during the aging process. The seven stages of life that the ancient Greeks recognized are also represented in the vocabulary of the NT. Although examples of some flexibility in these words were noticed (e.g., with νεανίσκος extending to age 30, or πρεσβύτες extending to age 60), those seven stages are (1) little boy (παιδίον), ages birth to 7 years; (2) boy (παῖς), ages 7 to 14 years; (3) lad (μειράκιον), ages 14 to 21 years; (4) young man (νεανίσκος), ages 21 to 28 years; (5) man (ἄνθρωπος), ages 28 to 49 years; (6) elderly man (πρεσβύτες), ages 49 to 56 years; (7) old man (γέρων), ages 56 until death. This identification enables us to interpret texts with greater precision and to appreciate the character qualities of many of the people in the Scriptures.

120. Interestingly, commentators often do not discuss the question of the age of Nicodemus at this time. See Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 214–15; Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 1:545–46; Köstenberger, *John*, 122–23; Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 190–91.