Romans 1

This week, just to get us used to the format, we're going to start with discussing 2 verses in detail. In future weeks, we'll move to working on whole chapters at a time. For each verse, I'll talk you through the grammar and then we'll look at some ways to go about interpreting it well.

First, some general points about exegetical work.

1. Break the text apart into units of thought and meaning. Try to follow the argument closely.
2. In the Greek (or English) text, identify the "load-bearing" words -the words that pack the most punch or carry the most meaning. Below, for instance, I mention "Messiah" and "emissary." Those are load-bearing words. Look for those kinds of words and try to think through what they mean.
3. Ask as many questions as you possibly can about each word, each sentence, each verse, each paragraph. Keep track of your questions. I often will write down as many questions as I possibly can for one verse, and then slowly work through them.

With that, here we go!

Verse 1

> Παῦλος δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, κλητὸς ἀπόστολος ἀφωρισμένος εἰς εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ,

Translation:

> Paul, a servant of Jesus the Messiah, called "emissary," and set apart for the gospel of God.

Some Notes on Grammar and Vocabulary

The phrase δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ should be treated as a unit - all three of the words are in the genitive case (that's the -ου ending). It's what grammarians call an "appositive" - the whole phrase says something about the subject of the sentence (Paul).

After that, κλητὸς is a "verbal adjective." In other words, it's a verb (an action word) but it functions like an adjective (a describing word). It says something about Paul. Who is he? He is someone who is "called."

What is he called? He is called αποστολος. For now, you recognize this word, I'm sure, so we don't need to say anything more about it. I'll explain why I translated it as "emissary" in just a minute. Finally, ἀφωρισμένος is a perfect middle participle. We recognize such participles because they have verb stems (here, αφωρ) but noun endings (-ισμενος).

Some Notes on Exegesis

When I'm translating or working with New Testament texts, I try to think of ways to bring across the meaning so that my listeners or readers will pay attention. Here, I made two

choices: first, to translate Χριστος as "Messiah," and second to translate αποστολος as "emissary." Here's why. When we hear "Christ" or "apostle," we immediately jump to conclusions. We think we know exactly what those words mean. But the fact is that we don't. If we remember, though, that Χριστος refers to Israel's messiah, and αποστολος refers to someone specifically sent on a mission, then it's a little easier to keep our minds fresh and out of old patterns of thinking, if you know what I mean! As you go along, you'll find other places to make interpretive choices like that.

Verse 2

ὃ προεπηγγείλατο διὰ τῶν προφητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν γραφαῖς ἁγίαις

Translation:

Which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

Some Notes on Grammar and Vocabulary

If you've taken Greek 1 or 2 (or hopefully both) the vocabulary for this verse won't be hard for you. There's only one difficult word, I think, and it is προεπηγγείλατο. It means "promised before" or "promised ahead of time." If you look carefully, you'll see επαγγελια (which means "promise") and προ (which means "before.")

Two other points. First, ὃ means "which." You differentiate it from the word for "the" by the accents above it. Then, the δια followed by words in the genitive case is what people sometimes call an "instrumental genitive." You don't need to learn that word, but the concept is simple: the phrase talks about the means by which the promise was given. God gave the promise "through" (δια) the prophets.

Some Notes on Exegesis

When we read Paul, it's really important that we don't read him in a vacuum. We should try our best to understand his work and his thinking in light of his situation in his world. That's good exegesis, right? As we go along throughout the course, I'll be introducing you to ways you can find out more (on your own) about Paul's background.

Today, I'd like to introduce you to the Sefaria project. We're going to be making reference to it throughout this course. On Sefaria, you can read (for free) all of the great Jewish texts going back to the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible.

For this verse, there are certain texts that can help us make sense of the big question. If we read carefully, the big question that arises is this: Why does Paul care so much about his position (see verse 1) and his authority or message (here in verse 2)? Couldn't he just have introduced himself and gotten on with it?

If you turn to the Mishnah (one key Jewish text that contains traditions from Paul's lifetime and before), you'll see that other Jewish thinkers were very keen to make it clear where messages came from and who was responsible for keeping them. You couldn't just pull things out of thin air.

Read, for instance, the first two chapters of the tractate *Pirkei Avot* ("Traditions of the Fathers") on Sefaria. You can access it here. You'll see that the sages that are quoted there seem quite intent on making sure that the validity and authority of messages is preserved. Paul works along similar lines.

There. We've worked through two verses. Next week, we'll try to make the leap to working on an entire chapter.

Homework

Here's what I'd like you to do for an assignment. Take one verse from the rest of the chapter and write an interpretation like what I've written above. A few notes about the grammar and vocabulary, and a few notes about exegesis or interpretation. 300 words minimum.