

# Succession in the New Testament World

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## Abstract

*This article surveys the use of succession as a concept in Mediterranean literature from around the time of the New Testament. Ancient Mediterranean writers and readers understood succession with much more variation and depth than is found in modern ecclesiological writings, where “succession” virtually always refers to “apostolic succession” in hierarchical denominational structure. The author demonstrates that literature from the ancient Mediterranean uses succession for a variety of objects and with a variety of degrees of replacement. The article concludes with readings of several New Testament passages where the more flexible understanding of succession is important for understanding the text.*

*Key terms: Bible, church, New Testament, Greco-Roman literature, Jewish literature, ecclesiology, ecumenism, apostles, apostleship, succession, apostolic succession, unity, Pauline literature, Pastoral Epistles, Luke-Acts.*

## Introduction

For centuries, biblical interpreters have understood *succession* to be *Apostolic Succession*, as practiced in the Roman Catholic and other traditions. With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Talbert, 1977; Caulley, 1987; Rost, 1992), interpreters have projected this (later) understanding of succession back onto the New Testament and other early Christian materials rather than allowing these texts to describe

the phenomenon with their own voices, against their own backgrounds.

In this article, I challenge this consensus, in particular with regard to the Pastoral Epistles, by exploring the depiction of succession in the world of early Christianity.

In the dominant model, the object of succession (i.e., the thing that is passed on) is an office or official position, most properly the office of apostle. Succession is not understood to occur unless the successor replaces the predecessor on every level. Thus Cyprian (d. 258) equates the apostles with their heirs, the bishops: “the Lord ... chose Apostles, that is to say, bishops ...” (3.3.1) Likewise Leo the Great (d. 461):

Peter does not relinquish his government of the Church. ... He now manages the things entrusted to him more completely and more effectively. ... In this we can see his power lives on and his authority reigns supreme. ... Peter says every day, “You are the Christ, Son of the living God.” (3.3)

In these representative texts, succession is the complete passing on of an office or official position from a predecessor to a successor. The passing on of other objects—tradition, task, etc.—does not qualify as succession. Against this backdrop, Dibelius and Conzelmann assert, regarding the Pastoral Epistles: “There is no concept of succession, no extension of the position of the addressee into the present” (1972, 57). By their understanding of succession, this statement is correct. The Pastoral Epistles do not depict Paul making Timothy or Titus into apostles in his stead, nor him giving them the authority to make apostles in the future. Therefore (by the dominant model), there is no succession here.

In ancient texts, however, succession is a more flexible and subtle phenomenon. Succession involved a variety of objects, beyond the passing on of an office. Further, succession involved varying degrees of replacement. Ancient Mediterranean texts could apply succession language to everything from the delegation of a task to a subordinate (which I call “weak succession”), to the successor essentially acting as the “reincarnation” or complete replacement of the predecessor (which I call “strong succession”). If we are aware of how varied the objects of succession are, and of the different degrees of replacement found in texts describing succession, we can with new lenses read the Pastoral Epistles and other early Christian texts that describe relationships between leaders, particularly the relationships between Jesus and the twelve Apostles and those who followed them.

In this paper, I will proceed as follows. First, I describe my methodology for investigating succession in ancient Mediterranean texts. Second, I survey some of the objects of succession (the things being passed on) in these texts. Third, I survey texts of varying “strengths” (i.e., varying levels of replacement), some in which the successor fully replaces the predecessor and others where the successor replaces the predecessor only in very limited ways. Fourth, I apply this understanding of succession to the reading of several early Christian texts.

## Methodology

In my work on succession, I began by looking for two kinds of markers. These markers in a text indicate that a relationship may have been understood in terms of succession. These markers are semantic (terms normally or frequently used in relation to succession) and typological (phenomena normally accompanying succession.) The Greek terms relating most specifically to succession are διάδοχος and διαδέχομαι (successor, to be a successor.) Other terms frequently used in relation to succession are:

- παρακολουθέω, μανθάνω, ἀκούω, διακούω, μαθητής (to be a student, hearer, follower; disciple);
- δίδωμι, παραδίδωμι (to deliver something to a successor);
- διατίθημι, ἀπολείπω, καταλείπω (to bequeath something to a successor);
- τίθημι, καθίστημι, συνίστημι, χειροτονέω (to appoint a successor);
- διαμαρτύρομαι, ἐπιτάσσω (to charge/commission a successor);
- παρατίθημι, πιστεύω, ἐνχειρίζω (to entrust something to a successor).

The Hebrew Bible has similar semantic markers. When describing succession, the Hebrew Bible generally uses prepositional phrases rather than equivalent “technical terms.” The most common prepositions in such settings are *tahat* and *aharē* (usually translated “in place of” and “after,” respectively.) In such settings, Hebrew also frequently describes the successor as the predecessor’s *mesharēt* (“servant.”)<sup>1</sup>

The typological phenomena relating to succession tend to be very similar, regardless of milieu (i.e., Graeco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian.) These phenomena include:

- parallel events in the lives of predecessor and successor;
- symbolic acts indicating succession, such as anointing, transfer of clothing, transfer of glory or authority, laying on of hands;
- official commissioning via public speech or letter;
- public acclaim that the successor is like the predecessor in a vital way (e.g., Joshua 1:17, “We will obey you just as we obeyed Moses.”) (Stepp 2005, 15-16 has the most complete list of succession terms; see also Talbert and Stepp, 1998, and Talbert, 2003.)

Beginning with διάδοχος and διαδέχομαι, I worked in circles through a variety of texts. Using the TLG, I found texts which used these terms, which led to other terms, which led to other texts, which led to other terms, and so on. Once I had a

1 Latin texts use a blend of prepositional phrases alongside more specific terms such as “successor,” “succedit.”

text base of sufficient size, I began studying these texts to see how they described succession: What was passed on in the succession? How did the succession take place? What phenomena accompanied succession? What did the succession achieve? Why was the succession desired?

I followed this process through texts from the three milieux antedating 200 CE. Other than the differences in language, I found that texts generally treated succession in the same ways regardless of milieu.

## Objects of Succession

As I describe succession, the term “object” refers to what is passed on in the succession. For example, in Apostolic Succession, the object is the office of apostle. Talbert and Stepp (1998, 1.148-68) found that the markers of succession were applied to the following objects:

- βασιλεία, ἀρχή, ἡγεμονία, μοναρχία, δυναστεία, ναυαρχία, καθέδρα (rule and other forms of leadership and leadership positions);
- διαδοχή, σχολή, διατριβή, μαθητής, παραθήκη (a philosophical school or way of life, the teachings of a school, the students in said school, any body of tradition or teaching [e.g., magic, a craft, etc.], a particular way of life);
- λειτουργία, μαντεῖον, ἱεροσύνη (religious duties or leadership);
- possessions (a variety of terms, e.g., κλῆρος, etc.);
- tasks and crafts (variety of terms).

Situations where succession is invoked include relationships between rulers, priests, prophets, magicians, philosophers, jurists, monastics, bishops, military leaders of varying rank, and keepers of tradition, craft, and task that do not neatly fit the other categories.

## Varying Levels of Replacement in Succession

In ancient Mediterranean texts, succession does not require that the successor fully replace the predecessor. In *some* texts, we indeed find the successor acting as predecessor *redivivus*, replacing the predecessor so fully that it is almost as if the predecessor has returned to office, or come back to life. But in other texts, the predecessor passes on to the successor a task, limited authority, knowledge or tradition, etc., without a significant element of replacement. Modern observers might initially describe these transactions in terms of delegation, but the ancient texts describe them with the language and typology of succession.

The best way to understand these varying degrees of replacement in the ancient texts is to view this aspect of succession as a continuum with two poles. At

one pole is *strong succession*, where the successor fully replaces the predecessor. At the other pole is *weak succession*, where the predecessor delegates limited authority to the successor so that the successor can carry out a limited task. Here there is little or no hint of the successor replacing the predecessor.

In the remainder of this section, I have gathered texts that illustrate the poles of this continuum. Because strong succession is close to the dominant understanding of succession, I have only included two examples of strong succession.

**Strong Succession: 1 Kings 19 – 2 Kings 2:** In 1 Kings 19, Elijah has just defeated the prophets of Baal at Carmel. When he hears that Jezebel still seeks to take his life, he flees to Mt. Horeb where God addresses him. God tells him to anoint new kings over Israel and Aram, and to “anoint Elisha ... as prophet in your place” (Heb: *tahat*, LXX ἀντὶ σοῦ) (1 Kings 19:16).<sup>2</sup> Elijah travels to find Elisha plowing his family’s field. Elijah throws his cloak over Elisha’s shoulders, and Elisha follows after (*aharē*) Elijah, becoming Elijah’s servant (*mesharēt*: LXX καὶ ἔλειτούργει αὐτῶ) (19:19-21).

In 2 Kings 2, Elijah is preparing to be taken up into heaven. He and Elisha walk together to the Jordan River which Elijah parts by striking it with his cloak. They cross on dry ground (2:8). Then, Elijah, knowing that he is about to be taken, tells Elisha to request a gift from him, and Elisha asks for a double share of his master’s spirit. Elijah tells his *mesharēt* that this request will be granted only if Elisha watches him (Elijah) being taken away. Then a chariot and horses of fire pass between the two, and Elijah, dropping his cloak, is taken up into heaven as Elisha watches (2:9-10).

Elisha then picks up Elijah’s cloak. In the Hebrew text, the cloak has fallen to the ground; in the LXX, however, it falls *onto Elisha* (i.e., over his shoulders.) He returns to the Jordan River and strikes it with the cloak, just as Elijah did previously. Again, the waters part, and Elisha walks across on dry ground. When the other prophets see Elisha, they say, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha” (2:11-15).

**Strong Succession: Diodorus Siculus 15.93.1:** In a section describing the rulers of Persia, Diodorus tells of the succession of Artaxerxes I. When that king died, according to Diodorus, he passed on both his name and his βασιλείαν to his successor, Ochus: “The King of Persia died, ... and Ochus, who now assumed a new name, Artaxerxes, succeeded to the kingdom (τὴν δὲ βασιλείαν διεδέξατο Ὀχος ὁ μετονομασθεὶς Ἀρταξέρξης).” The people, because of their respect for Artaxerxes I, asked Ochus his successor to take the same name. In so doing, they hoped to get for themselves the same kind of skilled, benevolent rule as they had received from Ochus’s predecessor. Diodorus tells us that Artaxerxes “ruled well” and was “altogether peace-loving and fortunate.” So “the Persians changed the

2 Scripture quotes are from the American version of the NRSV, unless otherwise stated.

names of those who ruled after him and prescribed that they should bear that name.”

**Evaluation of the Texts Illustrating Strong Succession:** In both of these texts, I find semantic and typological markers of succession. In both cases, the successor not only fills the predecessor’s office, he is (or is hoped to be, in the case of Ochus), in some sense, the reincarnation of the predecessor. Thus the sense of replacement is very strong.

The following texts illustrate weak succession. My point here is not that we should read these texts as indicating anything more than delegation. I am rather pointing to the range of relationships to which succession-specific language was applied.

**Weak Succession: Lysias, Pension 6:** In this speech, Lysias’s client is a disabled Athenian who is in danger of losing his public pension. Public assistance was reviewed every year, and people could challenge the pensioner’s request for assistance. In his argument, Lysias describes his client as being unable to support himself. He has no children to support him, nor can he purchase a slave to succeed him in the work: “I am unable to procure someone to relieve me of the work” (τὸν διαδεξόμενον δ’ αὐτὴν ὄπωπα δύναμαι κτήσασθαι)—such a successor would take over the work, but the pensioner would receive the wage.

**Weak Succession: Esther 10:3:** At the end of the story of Esther, Ahasuerus (Xerxes) repays Mordecai’s faithfulness and virtue by making Mordecai his chief of staff: “For Mordecai the Jew was next in rank to King Ahasuerus” (ὁ δὲ Μαρδοχαῖος διεδέχετο τὸν βασιλεία Ἀρταξέρξηνην). Note the succession term in a context that, to modern minds, implies delegation rather than replacement.

**Weak Succession: 1 Chronicles 18:17:** “David’s sons were the chief officials in the service of the king” (LXX καὶ υἱοὶ Δαυιδ οἱ πρῶτοι διάδοχοι τοῦ βασιλέως). Notice the succession term.

**Weak Succession: 2 Chronicles 26:11:** Although Uzziah’s son, Jotham, succeeded him on the throne (26:23, where the LXX simply translates the Hebrew prepositions), the LXX uses succession language to refer to Hananiah, Uzziah’s second in command: Ἀνανίου τοῦ διαδόχου τοῦ βασιλέως.

**Weak Succession: 2 Chronicles 28:7:** When describing one of Ahaz’s defeats, the Chronicler differentiates between Ahaz’s son and heir Maaseiah (LXX Μασσαϊαν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ βασιλέως) and his second in command, Elkanah (LXX τὸν Ἐλκανα τὸν διάδοχον τοῦ βασιλέως). Note again the use of the succession term.

**Weak Succession: 2 Chronicles 3:12:** When describing Hezekiah’s reform of the leadership structure of the Temple, the Chronicler reports, “The chief officer in charge ... was Conaniah the Levite, with his brother Shimei as second” (LXX καὶ Σεμεί ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ διαδεχόμενος). Note again the use of the succession term.

**Weak Succession: 2 Maccabees 4:29:** “Menelaus left his own brother Lysimachus as deputy in the high priesthood” (καὶ ὁ μὲν Μενέλαος ἀπέλιπεν τῆς ἀρχιερωσύνης διάδοχον Λυσίμαχον τὸν ἑαυτοῦ ἀδελφόν). Note again the use of the succession term.

**Evaluation of the Texts Illustrating Weak Succession:** In these texts, the semantic markers of succession are clearly present, but the sense of replacement that I found in the stories of Elijah and Elisha, and Artaxerxes and Ochus is absent. Readers of the LXX were not to think that Mordecai was going to rule after Xerxes, or Hananiah after Uzziah. Nor was Lysias’s jury required to think that the pensioner intended to make his slave (or the slave he would have purchased could he afford it) into a freedman, or his heir or successor in every way.

So all these successions involve predecessors and successors who occupy different stations in society: slave and free man, king and subject, employer and employee, management and labor. Succession may allow the successor to ascend to the predecessor’s place, but it does not demand it. It merely requires that the predecessor pass on some important task, body of knowledge, or responsibility to the successor.

Modern observers would likely describe such relationships in terms of delegation. Ancient Mediterranean texts, however, describe these relationships using the semantic and typological markers of succession. Apparently, ancient readers understood that some kind of transaction had taken place beyond the simple delegation of authority or exchange of office or task. The predecessor transferred some of his/her authority or power to the successor, along with the task or office, or the markers of succession would not have been used.

## Succession in the New Testament and Other Early Christian Texts

I have now established that, in ancient Mediterranean texts, succession describes predecessor – successor relationships involving varying degrees of replacement. For the balance of this paper, I will briefly examine seven New Testament and early Christian texts where this awareness of succession impacts our readings of the texts. In the first pair of texts, the succession is between Jesus (the predecessor) and the twelve Apostles (his successors). In the second pair of texts, succession is between those Apostles and church leaders who followed. In the final group, succession is a chain that runs from Jesus to Paul to Titus and Timothy.

**Matthew 16:13-20:** In Matthew 16, Peter responds to Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” by confessing: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Matthew 16:15-16). Jesus responds by blessing Peter, and then says:

You are Peter (Πέτρος), and on this rock (πέτρα) I will build my church. ... I

will give (δώσω) to you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (16:18-19).

Jesus then begins describing for the Apostles what awaits him in Jerusalem.

Note the use of a succession-related term (δίδομι), and a symbolic act accompanying succession (the change of Peter's name, from Simon to Peter.) Jesus gives to the disciples, through their most prominent and vocal member, the keys to the kingdom (i.e., the authority to teach and administer the message that opens the Kingdom of Heaven.) During his earthly ministry, he has been the keeper of this authority and message. Now that his journey is taking him to Jerusalem and the cross, he passes this authority and message on to his successors so that the message will continue to be active and productive even after his earthly ministry has ended.

Thus the twelve Apostles are Jesus' successors in this important task—they properly use and administer the message that opens the Kingdom of Heaven, just as he did previously. They do not need to become Jesus' equals for this to qualify as succession.

How does this succession function? The disciples can have confidence that heaven will guide and confirm decisions they make regarding what is forbidden by their teaching and what is permitted by their teaching. They have this authority and wisdom because Jesus has made them his successors in administering this body of tradition, the message of the Kingdom of Heaven.

**Luke 22:28-30:** At the last supper, Jesus watches as his disciples fight amongst themselves over which of them will be greater. In response, he reminds them that, in *his* kingdom, the King is *their* servant. Then he says:

You are those who have stood by me in my trials: and I confer (δικατίθεμαι) on you, just as my Father has conferred (διέθετο) on me, a kingdom (βασιλείαν), so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (22:28-30).

Note the use of succession-related language (δικατίθημι, twice). Note also confirmation that succession has taken place in the parallels between Jesus' ministry in Luke and the disciples' ministry in Acts. Notice also how Jesus' ascension parallels the Elijah / Elisha story. And again, note that the disciples do not need to become Jesus' equal, etc., for them to be his successors.

In Luke 22:28-30, Jesus gives his disciples positions of authority in his kingdom where they will share in his bounty and (after Pentecost) continue a vital aspect of his ministry. That aspect of his ministry is the rendering of God's righteous verdict over oppression and unbelief. Jesus brought judgment to Israel by his ministry and his refusal to accept the popular conception of what the Messiah would be and do. So also the disciples will dispense judgment by asserting the



truth of who Jesus is and what he accomplished. They are empowered to do this because Jesus made them his successors in this vital aspect of his work.

**Acts 6 – 7:** In Acts 6, a serious problem confronts the church. The Greek-speaking Jewish Christians complain to the Apostles that their widows are being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. In response, the Apostles tell the congregation to choose seven men of spiritual maturity who they will appoint (καταστήσομεν) to oversee this vital ministry. The Apostles then pray over and lay hands on the Seven (6:1-6). The most prominent of the Seven is Stephen who immediately begins preaching and performing miracles—things that, to this point in Acts, only the Apostles have done.

Note the use of a succession-related term (καθίστημι). Note also the symbolic acts accompanying succession here: the laying on of hands, the parallels between the Apostles and their tasks and the work that Stephen immediately undertakes. Note also that Stephen has the honor of being the first disciple martyred, receiving the punishment that the Apostles themselves had earlier been threatened with (4:29, 5:33, 5:41).

Notice also how, as with the successions from Jesus to the Apostles above, this succession is partial. The Apostles do not confer the office of apostle onto Stephen or the others. They do, however, make the Seven their successors, passing onto Stephen and the others a limited amount of their authority, and with it spiritual enablement and power that allows the Seven to accomplish the task given them, and much more.

**1 Clement 42-44:** In this letter, Clement and the leaders of the church at Rome write to the leaders of the church at Corinth. The Corinthian congregation has deposed some of its older, established leaders, and set up younger leaders in their place. Clement writes to urge them to reinstate the established leaders and restore peace and harmony to their congregation. The focus throughout is on orderliness.

Clement first mentions succession in chapter 42 where he describes the orderliness with which the gospel entered the world:

The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus the Christ was sent forth from God. ... Both, therefore, came of the will of God in good order (42:1-2).

Further, the apostles provided that the gospel would continue to be passed on in an orderly way:

Preaching both in the country and in the towns, they appointed (καθίστανον) their first fruits ... to be bishops and deacons for the future believers (42:4).

In 43:1 – 44:1, Clement underlines the Apostles' rationale for the system of leadership they had instituted: just as Moses knew there would be ambition and

jealousy over the priesthood, and so caused a miraculous demonstration of God's choice of Aaron for that office (Numbers 17), so also the Apostles knew that the bishop's office would become an object of ambition and strife. So, with this fore-knowledge, the Apostles appointed the bishops and deacons mentioned in 42:4, and

... afterward gave those offices a permanent character; that is, if they [the appointed leaders] should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry (διαδέχωνται τὴν λειτουργίαν αὐτῶν). Those, therefore, who were appointed (κατασταθέντας) by them, or, later on, by other reputable men ... these men we consider to be unjustly removed from their ministry (44:2-3).

Notice the use of succession-related terms in chapters 42 and 44 – καθίστημι, διαδέχομαι. Note also that we have two generations of succession here. In the first, the Apostles pass on authority and tasks (care of the gospel) to the bishops and deacons. In the second, the bishops and deacons are able to pass on their ministries and functions to their successors. Only in this second generation does the succession involve the passing on of office, and not that of the Apostolate, but the offices of bishop and deacon which remain at least one step removed from the twelve Apostles. And note the function: the Apostles instituted this succession at God's direction to ensure that the gospel would produce orderly and harmonious churches.

**The Pastoral Epistles:** In the Pastoral Epistles, the central theme is Paul's departure and the problems with stability and authority that result. If we read in the order Titus – 1 Timothy – 2 Timothy, we see Paul's departure from Crete (which may symbolize his work establishing new churches), his departure from Ephesus (which may symbolize his work in overseeing established churches), and (finally) his departure from this life. In each instance, we see Paul using succession to address the problems in the churches: this reading works in much the same way, regardless of the position one takes regarding authorship.

In Titus, the linguistic evidence for succession is somewhat muted, although it *is* present. Paul's call to apostleship is depicted in terms of succession: he writes of the plan of God, revealed "through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted (ἐπιστεύθην) by the command (ἐπιταγήν) of God our Savior." Thus his call to ministry is depicted as part of a succession of tradition, in which he receives the gospel and its care. Titus's commission in Crete is also depicted as a type of succession:

I left (ἀπέλιπον) you behind in Crete for this reason, that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint (καταστήσης) elders in every town, as I directed you (1:5).

Here we see a succession-related term applied to Titus's relationship to Paul. We

also see a typological maker of succession: the parallel between Paul and Titus (both have the authority to appoint successors with limited authority.) Other typological markers include Titus's role as Paul's *mesharēt* (personal assistant and minister: see 3:12-15), a role he shares with Timothy (2 Timothy 4:9-13), and the common enemies that Paul and Titus share (Titus 2:7-8).

As for the function of the succession, the point seems to have been that Titus is now empowered to complete the work that Paul had left undone on Crete. This is a familiar theme in Greco-Roman and Jewish literature: witness the plans Alexander had for his Διάδοχοι (Diodorus Siculus 17-18; for the written agenda that Alexander gave to Craterus, see 18.4.1) and the plans for the Temple which David passed on to Solomon (2 Samuel 7 and 1 Kings 1-2).

This succession, like those above, is partial. Titus is Paul's replacement in a very limited way. His authority is limited to Crete. His stay there is temporary: Paul has set plans in motion to replace him with either Artemas or Tychicus. As with some of the "weak" successions above, we would likely not describe this relationship as a succession. Regardless, the text uses the semantic and typological markers of succession. Ancient audiences understood this relationship to involve more than the delegation of a task, some kind of spiritual enabling or empowerment was passed from Paul to Titus as well.

In 1 Timothy, the evidence for succession both from Jesus to Paul and from Paul to Timothy is much stronger. Regarding his succession from Christ, Paul writes of "the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted (ὃ ἐπίστεύθη) to me," and of how Jesus "judged me faithful and appointed (θέμενος) me to his service" (1:9 and 1:12, respectively). Regarding Timothy as his own successor, Paul writes of entrusting the commandment (παραγγελίαν παρατίθεμαι) to Timothy (1:18: the commandment is 1:3, where Paul authorizes Timothy to tell the people who are teaching false doctrine to do so no longer). Paul solemnly charges (παραγγέλλω) Timothy to keep this commandment perfectly (5:21), and instructs Timothy to "guard what has been entrusted" (τὴν παραθήκην) to his care (6:20).

How do these successions function? In 1:1-11, Paul contrasts his authority (and the authority of his agents) over the teaching in his churches with the perverted authority of the false teachers. Note:

- Where Paul is appointed to his task by God himself, the false teachers are self-appointed (they "desire to be teachers of the law," 1:7);
- Because Paul stands in a proper line of succession, his teaching and authority result in love and the proper administration of the church (οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ, 1:4-5). Further, he knows how the law should be used, as do his successors (1:8-11);
- By contrast, the teaching of Paul's opponents (because, being self-appointed,

inted, they do not know how to use the law, nor do they understand the things about which they make assertions) results in speculations, disputes, and meaningless talk (1:4-7).

Further, the succession empowers Timothy for a difficult task. While still partial, this succession is “stronger” than the one between Paul and Titus. And there is a reason: Timothy faces a more difficult task than Titus faced in Crete. In Ephesus, Timothy will be facing false teachers and troublemakers. Many of these are established leaders in the church, and they have already caused grave damage. Thus this succession, while still partial, is stronger than the succession in Titus. While both successions are limited geographically (Timothy has authority in Ephesus, but not elsewhere, Titus likewise has authority only in Crete), Timothy’s stay in Ephesus is open-ended. Paul hopes to bring reinforcements soon, but may be delayed.

In other words, Timothy faces a bigger and more difficult task than Titus did, and therefore requires a stronger succession from Paul than Titus required.

In 2 Timothy, the evidence of succession from Jesus to Paul and from Paul to Timothy is even stronger than that in 1 Timothy. Paul describes his calling to ministry in terms frequently used to convey succession:

For this gospel I was appointed (τίθημι) a preacher and apostle and teacher, and therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me (τὴν παραθήκην μου) (1:11-12, RSV).

Paul further describes his relationship to Timothy in terms of succession:

I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands (1:6).

Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard (ἤκουσας) from me ... Guard the good treasure entrusted to you (τὴν καλὴν παραθήκην) (1:13-14).

What you have heard (ἃ ἤκουσας) from me ... entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well (2:2).

Do your best to come to me soon. ... bring the cloak, ... also the books (4:9-13).

In these places and others (see also 3:10, παρακολουθέω; 3:14, μαθησάμενος; 4:1-2 διαμαρτύρομαι), we find the language and types of succession. As in 1 Timothy, Paul is Jesus’ successor in the care of the gospel: this succession is a warrant for his apostolic authority, and his life closely parallels that of his Lord as he waits to die for his place in God’s work. And, as in 1 Timothy, Timothy is Paul’s successor in the task of administering and using the gospel.

There is a significant difference in degree between 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy, however. In 1 Timothy, the succession from Paul to Timothy was limited to a single (albeit difficult) task: confront the false teachers and troublemakers in Ephesus. In 2 Timothy, Timothy is to suffer as his predecessor suffered and teach as his predecessor taught. He is even responsible for training and appointing successors to carry on the care and administration of Paul's gospel after his (Timothy's) ministry has ended (2:2), again following the model of his predecessor.

The succession from Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy is not limited to a single task, but rather encompasses the whole of administering Paul's gospel. The succession is not limited geographically or temporally. The succession is not even limited to Timothy's lifetime.

Note that there is still *one* limitation on the succession: Timothy never becomes an apostle. But in terms of the continuum of weak – strong succession, this succession is stronger than the succession in 1 Timothy and *much* stronger than that in Titus.

In sum, in 2 Timothy, Paul, knowing that he faces death, acts so that his gospel will continue to be taught and followed faithfully. Paul makes Timothy his full successor, entrusting the care and administration of his gospel to Timothy, and authorizing Timothy to pass this message and all that is attached to it on to others.

How does this stronger succession function? Because he is Paul's successor in the care of the gospel, Timothy is able to act as the official repository of Paul's gospel, voice, teaching, and example. He can train and empower other leaders to carry Paul's gospel beyond his own generation, in perpetuity. The churches that look to Paul as their spiritual father can have confidence that this body of teaching will be faithfully kept and administered.

Further, notice the difference between how Timothy is depicted in the two letters. The Timothy we see in 2 Timothy is not the weak, hesitant young man of 1 Timothy. Because Paul has made Timothy his full successor in the administration of his gospel, Timothy in 2 Timothy no longer needs to be instructed in the basics of leadership, or reminded "don't let people push you around." He is, instead, capable of carrying on the care of Paul's gospel and churches after Paul's death. He is also capable of suffering alongside Paul. Timothy's maturation across the letters is a significant feature of the Pastoral Epistles, and evidence of the good things that proper succession was understood to achieve.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have explored some aspects of the ways ancient Mediterranean texts describe succession. I have shown that succession was not understood in a monolithic, inflexible way. Instead, ancient Mediterranean texts applied the

semantic and typological markers of succession to predecessor – successor relationships with a variety of objects and varying levels of replacement. The early Christian texts that I have surveyed, including the three letters that constitute the Pastoral Epistles, describe relationships between leaders in language that ancient readers would have understood in terms of succession. In each of these texts, the predecessor uses succession to empower the successor, and the church reaps the benefits.

In the first pair of texts surveyed (Matthew 16:13-20, Luke 22:28-30), I showed how the gospel writers depicted Jesus making the twelve Apostles his successors, passing on to them limited parts of his ministry (administering the message that opens the Kingdom of heaven, announcing God’s righteous verdict on oppression and disbelief). In the second pair of texts surveyed (Acts 6-7, 1 Clement 42-44), I showed how the Apostles made other leaders their successors in particular tasks, thereby making certain that their work continued to be properly conducted to benefit the church.

In the final group of texts surveyed (the Pastoral Epistles), I showed how a succession of authority, task, and tradition (the administration of the gospel) passes from Jesus to Paul to Titus and Timothy. This chain of succession enables Paul and his followers to appoint new leaders, interpret Scripture properly, confront troublemakers and false teachers successfully, and face the leadership needs of the churches they served.

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## Sukcesija u doba Novog zavjeta

### Sažetak

Ovaj članak istražuje primjenu koncepta sukcesije u literaturi koja je nastala na području Mediterana u vrijeme Novog zavjeta. Drevni mediteranski pisci i čitatelji razumjeli su pojam sukcesije na mnogo dublji i raznolikiji način nego što je to slučaj u suvremenim eklesiološkim djelima, u kojima se pojam sukcesije gotovo uvijek odnosi na „nasljeđivanje apostolske službe“ unutar hijerarhijske strukture pojedine denominacije. Autor pokazuje da literatura nastala na drevnom Mediteranu koristi pojam sukcesije za niz različitih objekata i razina nasljeđivanja. Članak se zaključuje obradom nekoliko odabranih odlomaka iz Novog zavjeta za čije je razumijevanje potrebno šire poimanje sukcesije.

Ključne riječi: Biblija, Crkva, Novi zavjet, grčko-rimska literatura, židovska literatura, eklesiologija, ekumenizam, apostoli, apostolat, sukcesija, nasljeđivanje apostolske službe, jedinstvo, Pavlovi spisi, Pastoralne poslanice, Luka-Djela.