

Entering Early Christianity via Pompeii

A virtual guide to the world of the New Testament



by Peter Oakes
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This learning resource is intended for members of the public and for students interested in early Christianity and the New Testament. It uses the remarkable remains of Roman buildings at Pompeii to reconstruct the social world of early Christian communities. Peter Oakes is Professor of New Testament at the University of Manchester. These materials are based on his extensive research on Pompeii and early Christianity and the publications that have come out of it. Benedict Kent has a PhD in New Testament studies from the University of Manchester.

Feedback: These materials are available for free download. The one thing we ask is for users to consider providing feedback to help us understand how the resources are being used, how useful they are, and how they could be improved. Please follow the links at the bottom of our homepage to complete our short online questionnaire after using the resource. It's even more valuable to us if you can complete both our 'before' and 'after' questionnaires. If materials have been used as part of a study group, we'd also welcome feedback from group leaders.

Come again: We're also interested in the benefits this material might have for users. If you'd like to return in the future and tell us about any effects the learning has had, we'd love to hear about it. Follow the relevant link at the bottom of our homepage to leave a comment.

Additional resources: For a guide to Pompeii, downloadable maps and many further valuable resources about all the key sites in the region, visit the official Pompeii web-site, <http://pompeiiisites.org/en/>. For house summaries, visit [AD79](#). For extensive photo collections of the houses, visit pompeiiinpictures.com.

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A church in the workshop

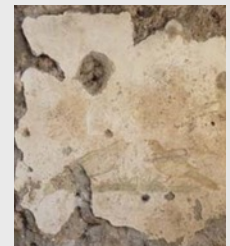
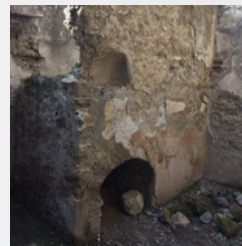
Community and support

A type of space found in abundance at Pompeii is the small workshop (*officina*), which usually also served as a living space. These workshops were vital to the town's economy. Some were run by free craftworkers on their own behalf, others by slaves or freed slaves on behalf of members of the elite.

The workshop in the insula of the Menander (L.10.6)

Just along from the elite House of the Menander is doorway 6 – a very wide entrance to a rather small space. This was probably a workshop owned by the elite house and dealt in rudimentary stone cutting. It has a small backroom in which dining equipment and wall paintings of birds were discovered. Inhabitants could live, work and sleep in these two rooms – working through the day, buying in street food for meals and reclining on mattresses to eat.

The living space could fit about 8 people at most (in among odd bits of stonework). Some more could overflow into the main workshop (in among even more odd bits of stone, maybe for garden ornaments).



Explore more spaces

Have a look at *Regio I* and compare smaller *officinae* (6.3; 7.4, 5; 10.12) with larger ones (7.15–17; 8.15/16) to get a sense of their varying styles and sizes.

Discuss more texts

Click [here](#) to download more discussion activities on what Paul writes next.

*Character cards

- ▶ What types of people would be most likely to join a church meeting here?
- ▶ What would be the strengths and weaknesses of a group meeting here?
- ▶ How might your character be able to support the needs of the group?
- ▶ How might they feel about your character joining?
- ▶ What would happen if the group grew?



A letter to Christians in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

In chapter 12, Paul addresses another cause of division among the Corinthians. Some members of the church appear to have been treating certain gifts of the Spirit, such as the ability to speak in tongues or to prophecy, as signs of their superior spiritual status. Paul responds by drawing on the idea of the human body with its different parts.

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. **13** For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. **15** If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. **16** And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? **18** But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? **20** As it is, there are many members, yet one body. **21** The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” **22** On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, **23** and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; **24** whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, **25** that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. **26** If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. **27** Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.



Paul argues that, while there are different roles within the church (apostles, teachers, healers, etc), all members are interdependent. God’s Spirit is given to all in different ways (12:4–6).

*Character cards

- ▶ What would your character think about the idea of all being members (meaning parts, e.g., leg, arm, foot) of the body of Christ?
- ▶ What would your character think the practical implications of this should be?
- ▶ How much difference would your character think that being baptised made to slaves?
- ▶ Who might your character see as being inferior—or superior?
- ▶ What difference would Paul’s instructions make?
- ▶ Consider the list of strengths and weaknesses that you saw the group meeting in the small workshop having. What differences could implementing Paul’s instructions have for each of these strengths or weaknesses?



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Download [this activity sheet](#) to explore how different meeting spaces can affect group behaviours and identities—both in the past and in the present

