

The Counselor

BY BOB DEAN

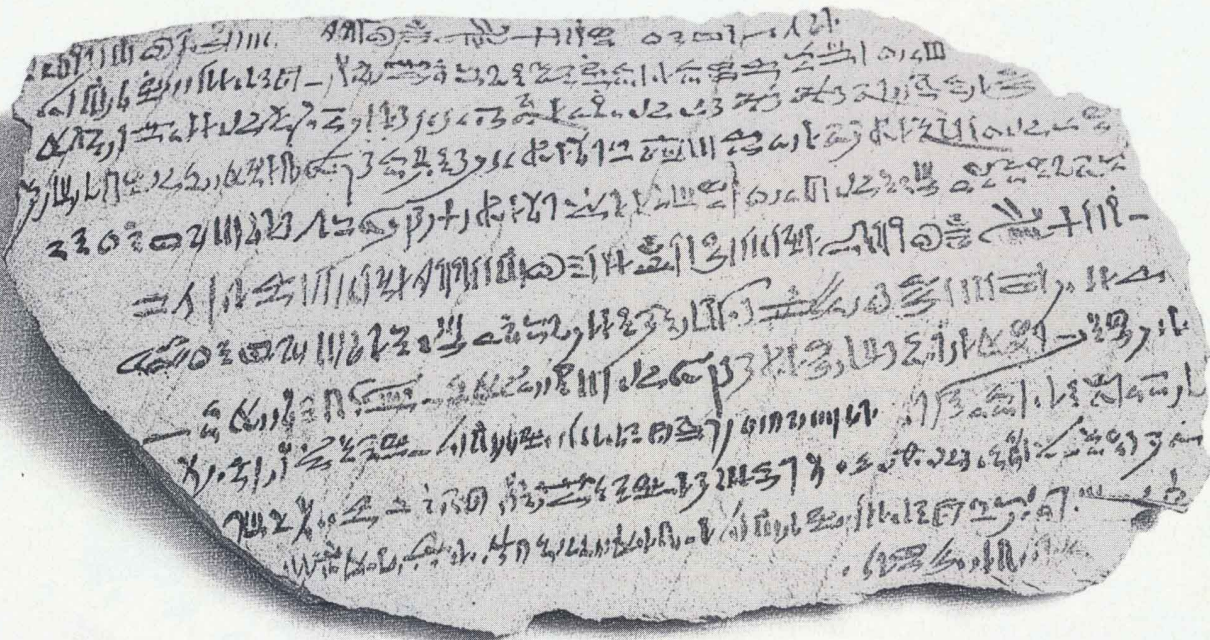


TRANSLATION IS AN EXACTING AND CHALLENGING TASK. The translator needs to have a thorough knowledge of the language being translated as well as an excellent understanding of contemporary American English. The goal is to find the contemporary word or words that best communicate the original meaning of the other language.

Translators of the Greek New Testament face a special challenge in seeking the best word to communicate the meaning of the word *parakletos*. This challenge becomes obvious when we compare the varied ways in which this word is brought over into English. *Parakletos* is found five times in the New Testament. All of these are in John's writings. Four are in Jesus' upper room discourses on the night before His death: John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7; and the other

is in 1 John 2:1. There is little difference in the translations of 1 John 2:1. Nearly all have the word "Advocate" (NASB). The differences are found in the four references in John's Gospel. Some translations have "Advocate" (NRSV, NEB). Others have "Counselor" (HCSB, NIV). Some have "Helper" (NKJV, NASB). The older English versions, including the *King James Version*, have "Comforter" (see also ASV).

The reason for the differences lies in different understandings of the meaning of *parakletos* in Greek use and in how Jesus used the word. The word is a verbal adjective used in a passive sense. As a noun, the word meant "one who is called to someone's aid." Most Bible scholars agree that the Greeks used the word primarily in a legal setting; however, *parakletos* rarely referred to a professional attorney.



Above: This 20th Dynasty Egyptian Creditor's Plea for Justice on limestone flake tells the tale of a debtor's broken promises to repay a jar of fat. It mentions one date in the year 17 of Ramses III and another in the year 3 of Ramses IV with the added remark: "amounting to eighteen years." A drawing on the verso (not shown) symbolizes the union of Upper and Lower Egypt. ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO DAVID ROGERS (425/24)

LESSON REFERENCE
ETBS: John 14; 15; 16

"In the few places where the word is found in pre-Christian and extra-Christian literature, it has for the most part a more general meaning: *one who appears in another's behalf, mediator, intercessor, helper.*"¹ The word was used of anyone who was called in to help: a witness or a friend of someone accused or a helper in a legal or a non-legal setting. "He might be a person *called in* when, for example, a company of soldiers were depressed and dispirited to put new courage into their minds and hearts. Always a *parakletos* is *someone* called in to help when the person who calls him in is in *trouble or distress* or doubt or bewilderment."²

Translators who emphasize the legal setting for the word use either "Advocate" or "Counselor." Those who see the word meaning "help" of a more general kind prefer "Helper." For students of the New Testament, the crucial question is how Jesus used the word. For one thing, Jesus clearly used the word as a title for the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). Jesus also called Him "the Spirit of truth" (14:17, NIV; 16:13). One of the themes of John 14–16 is the announcement of Jesus to the disciples that He was going away. This greatly upset them; therefore, Jesus sought to ease their minds in several ways. One of these ways was to tell them that although He was going away, He was sending them "another" *parakletos*. Jesus reminded them that He had been with them for a short time, but He promised that this other *parakletos* would abide with them forever (John 14:16).

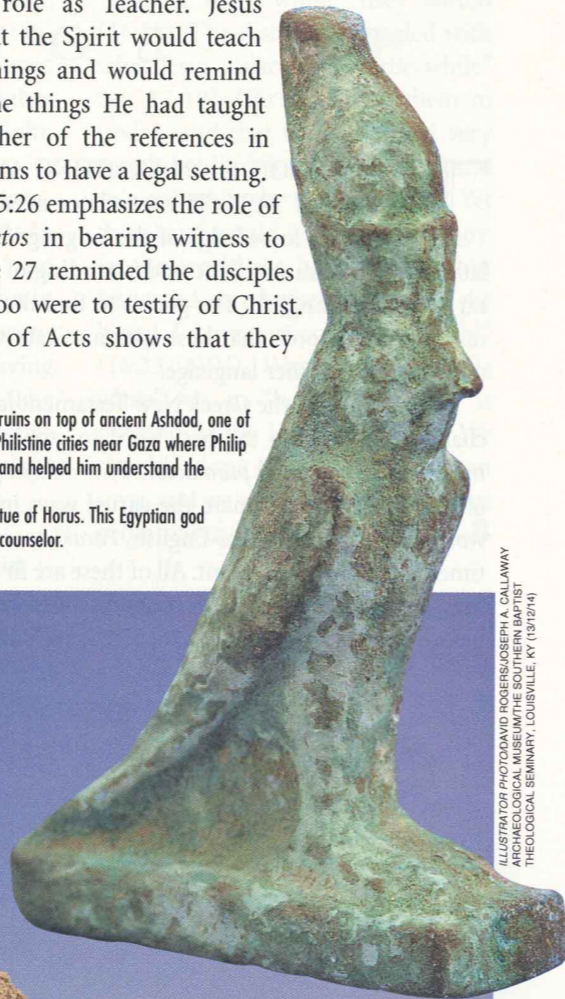
The word translated "another" in John 14:16 is *allos*, which means "another of the same kind." The implication is that Jesus had been for them a *parakletos*, and that "another" would carry on His work. This makes sense when we examine the predicted work of the *parakletos* in light of Jesus' ministry among the disciples. "Without exception the functions assigned to the Spirit are elsewhere in this Gospel assigned to Christ. Thus he is in the disciples (John 14:20; 15:4,5); he is their teacher (13:13). As the Paraclete bears witness, so does Jesus (John 8:14)."³

The reference to the *parakletos* in John 14:26 emphasizes His role as Teacher. Jesus assured that the Spirit would teach them all things and would remind them of the things He had taught them. Neither of the references in John 14 seems to have a legal setting.

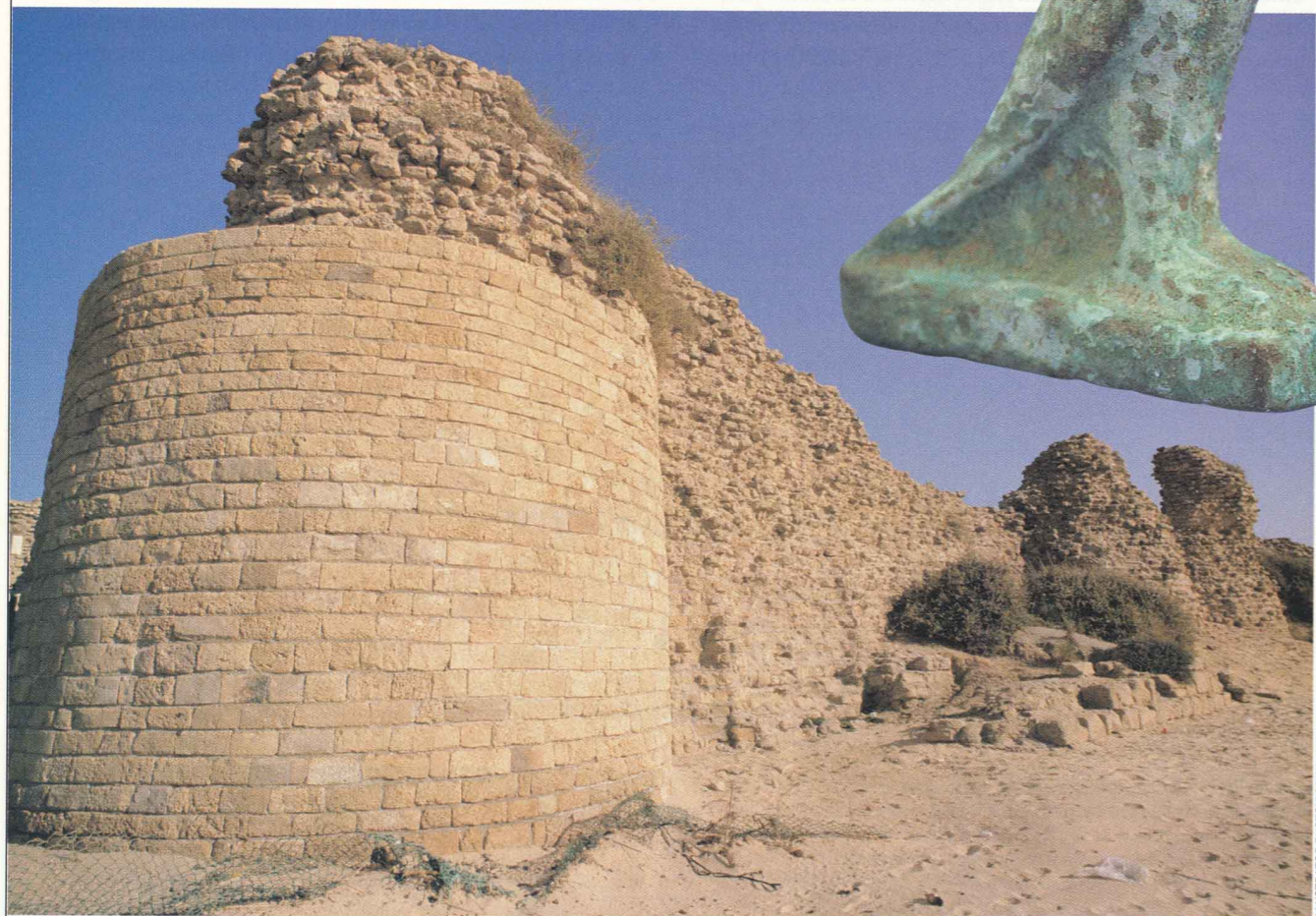
John 15:26 emphasizes the role of the *parakletos* in bearing witness to Jesus. Verse 27 reminded the disciples that they too were to testify of Christ. The Book of Acts shows that they

Below: Crusader ruins on top of ancient Ashdod, one of the five principle Philistine cities near Gaza where Philip met the Ethiopian and helped him understand the Scriptures.

Right: Bronze statue of Horus. This Egyptian god was known as the counselor.



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO DAVID ROGERS/JOSEPH A. CALLAWAY ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM/THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, LOUISVILLE, KY (10/12/14)



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO BOB SCHAZZ (9/25/20)



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTOKENTONLITCHTON (8/18/12)

Above: The traditional upper room where Jesus gave His disciples counsel before His death. This site was restored in the 14th century.

witnessed in the power of the Spirit. John 15:26-27 comes in the midst of two passages about the persecution coming on the disciples because they were followers of Christ (15:18-25; 16:1-4). Thus 15:26-27 may have a legal background if we think of their testimony for Christ being made in persecution settings. Jesus taught that in times of persecution, the Spirit would give His followers the words to say (Matt. 10:19-20; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11).

He told them that He must go away in order for the *parakletos* to come and that His coming would be of great benefit to them (John 16:7). Then Jesus described the work of the Spirit in convicting the world of sin (16:8-11). This has a legal setting, but it pictures the Spirit as a prosecutor, not as an attorney for the defense (unless He is a Perry Mason type of defense attorney who establishes the innocence of his clients by convicting the real criminal). John 16:12-15 in the larger context emphasizes that the Spirit does not call attention to Himself, but glorifies Christ.

Arguments can be made for both sets of translations. The translations "Advocate" and "Counselor" point out that this is the clear meaning in 1 John 2:1. Jesus Himself is there described in His role as intercessor with the Father on behalf of believers. A legal setting is claimed for John

15:26-27 and 16:7-11. Some Bible scholars seek to include all four references in a legal setting: "The Holy Spirit as the Advocate pleads the believer's cause against the world, John xvi. 8 ff. . . . and also Christ's cause with the believer, John xiv. 26, xv. 26, xvi. 14."⁴

Those who favor a more general translation like "Helper" make the following points. Although the Greeks often used the word in legal settings, the legal uses rarely point to a professional person who pleads someone's case or provides legal advice. There is little legal background in John 14–16. These passages emphasize the *parakletos* being with them and teaching them. "What is said about the sending, activity and nature of the paraclete (16:7,13-15; 15:26; 14:16f., 26) belongs to a different sphere, and here (compare Jesus in 14:16) *parakletos* seems to have the broad and general sense of 'helper.'"⁵

What has been the history of the way *parakletos* has been interpreted and translated since the time of Jesus? The Greek Fathers often used it in a nonlegal sense, to mean "Consoler" or "Comforter." Many of the Latin church fathers favored the legal meaning. They used the Latin *advocatus* to translate it. Other Latin fathers used *parakletus*. The Vulgate, the most lasting and influential translation into Latin, used *parakletus* in the John passages and *advocatus* in 1 John. This in turn influenced John Wycliffe's English translation. He used "Comforter" in the John passages and "Advocate" in 1 John 2:1. This translation was



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO DAVID ROGERS BRITISH MUSEUM (S48BA)

Above: A fragment from the temple at Bassae (Phigaleia) in the mountains of Arcadia. This temple was dedicated to Apollo Epikourios (“The Helper”).

followed by William Tyndale and by other English translations, including the *King James Version* of 1611.⁶

In considering the meaning of “Comforter,” we need to realize that the meaning of the English word has changed over the centuries. Earlier it meant “Strengthener.” In the background was the Latin *con*, “with,” and *fortis*, “strong.” This does not mean that comfort is not a part of the help provided by the *parakletos*, for it surely is part of His helping ministry.

Few contemporary translations use “Comforter.” Yet as recently as a century ago, the *American Standard Version* retained “Comforter,” although a note pointed out two other possibilities: “Advocate” and “Helper.” More recently, even the *New King James Version* used “Helper” instead of “Comforter.” Supporters of the translations “Advocate” and “Counselor” focus on specific aspects of the word *parakletos*. Perhaps they focus too narrowly. “Advocate” calls to mind a professional attorney. “Counselor” is more open, since the word often is used of a person who listens and helps by giving advice. “This leaves either the loan-

word ‘paraclete’ or ‘helper.’ Paraclete has the advantage and disadvantage of being neutral and meaningless, unless the Gk. background is known. Helper is an active word and does not convey the passive sense of Gk. etymology, i.e. someone called in. Nevertheless it is the one English word that is both meaningful and fits all the passages in which *parakletos* occurs in the N. T.”⁷

Whenever I study the meaning of this word and seek to select one English word for it, I find myself agreeing with Leon Morris: “It is impossible to find one English word that will cover all that the *parakletos* does.”⁸ Morris, therefore, prefers “Helper,” since it leaves open the kind of help.

Another support for the broad interpretation of *parakletos* is the use of the related words *parakaleo* and *paraklesis*. *Parakaleo* is the verb form, which means to “call,” “summon,” or “invite.” Sometimes it refers to calling on someone for general help. For example, the Ethiopian invited Philip to join him in the chariot to help him understand the Scriptures (Acts 8:31). Often the word means to “encourage” (Acts 16:40) or to “exhort” (Rom. 12:1). The noun *paraklesis* means “encouragement” or “exhortation.” Barnabas is called the “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36, HCSB). Barnabas can be called the “human paraclete” because he helped so many people. He stood up for Saul, the new convert (Acts 9:26-27). He encouraged the Antioch church (Acts 11:23). He encouraged John Mark after he had quit the missionary team (Acts 15:39).

The broad interpretation and application of *parakletos* does not exclude the work of the Spirit in a legal way as our Intercessor, Advocate, and Counselor. However, in John 14–16 and elsewhere the New Testament extends it to include other aspects of the Spirit’s work. A good example of the legal and nonlegal applications is found in Romans 8:26–27. “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (NIV). The conclusion of this article is that although we may use only one English word to translate *Parakletos*, we ought not to restrict its meaning to one word. The meaning and application in the upper room passages are as broad as the work of the Spirit. He is Advocate, Counselor, Comforter, and Helper. **B**

¹William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed. rev. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 623.

²William Barclay, *The Gospel of John in The Daily Bible Study Series*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), 194.

³Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John in The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 589.

⁴B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1900), 213.

⁵Johannes Behm, “παρακαλέω, παράκλησις” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Friedrich, ed., vol. v (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 804.

⁶Westcott, 211.

⁷G. Braumann, “Advocate” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 91.

⁸Morris, 589.

Bob Dean is retired editorial and curriculum specialist, LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville, Tennessee.