

Who was Alexander the coppersmith in the Bible?

Alexander the coppersmith in the Bible was a man who did significant harm to Paul's ministry (2 Timothy 4:14). The word coppersmith is translated from the Greek word chalkeus, which means "brazier" or "a worker of metals." The NIV translates it as "metalworker"; the ESV, KJV, and NASB have it as "coppersmith." Some scholars believe this Alexander the coppersmith to be the same Alexander mentioned in two other places in Scripture (Acts 19:33 and 1 Timothy 1:20), although we cannot be sure, since Alexander was a common name.

The first possible mention of Alexander the coppersmith occurs in the book of Acts. During his travels through Asia, Paul encountered some Greeks who were opposed to his preaching because it was damaging their business. Demetrius was a silversmith in Ephesus who made the silver shrines of Artemis, and he in turn gave business to many other workmen in the area. As the church in Ephesus grew, sales of the idolatrous shrines fell. Demetrius got the guild of tradesmen together and stirred them up: "You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty" (Acts 19:25-27). During the ensuing riot, Alexander was pushed forward to make a statement to the crowd. Since he was a Jew, however, the mob refused to listen to him (verse 34). It is possible that this Alexander was Alexander the coppersmith and that, being associated with the church and being a metalworker himself, he was chosen to try to make peace in Ephesus.

Another possible mention of Alexander the coppersmith is in 1 Timothy 1:20, as Paul writes to Timothy in Ephesus. Paul says that Alexander rejected his faith and conscience (verse 19) and that Alexander and another man named Hymenaeus had been “handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme” (verse 20). Alexander, who had obviously professed faith in Christ at one point, had “shipwrecked” his faith; that is, he veered off course, away from good teaching, and drifted into the dangerous rocks of false teaching. He had refused to follow the dictates of his conscience; he was walking according to the flesh and not the Spirit (see Romans 8:5-9), claiming the name of Christ while behaving like an unbeliever. As a result, Paul had pronounced an apostolic curse upon Alexander, allowing Satan to destroy or harm the man so that his soul might still be saved (see 1 Corinthians 5:5).

In Paul’s second and last letter to Timothy, we find the only direct mention of Alexander the coppersmith. Paul says, “Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to this deeds” (2 Timothy 4:14, ESV). Paul does not mention any details about the harm Alexander did, only that it was “great.” Notably, Paul did not seek personal revenge; instead, he wisely turned the matter over to the justice of God (see Proverbs 20:22; Hebrews 10:30).

Is Alexander the coppersmith, mentioned in 2 Timothy, the same Alexander whom Paul mentioned in 1 Timothy? Or is Paul’s specifying of one Alexander as “the coppersmith” meant to refer to a different person? No one can be certain. If it is the same Alexander, and if he is also linked to Acts 19, then his history would be something like this: Alexander was an influential Jewish metalworker in Ephesus. When the missionaries came to town, Alexander the coppersmith got to know them and was seemingly open to the

gospel. When the unrest broke out over the Artemis sales, Alexander was chosen as a natural liaison between the silversmiths and the target of their ire. Later, Alexander showed his true colors in the church, and it became apparent that he and Hymenaeus were living for themselves, not for Christ. Paul warned Timothy, who was pastoring in Ephesus, about the situation. Later still, imprisoned in Rome, Paul rues the fact that Alexander the coppersmith had continued to damage the cause of Christ and had become a personal enemy. Possibly Alexander had used his influence and financial standing to prejudice the Roman authorities against Paul. Whatever the case, “the Lord will repay him for what he has done” (2 Timothy 4:14).