

Lexicography to the Aid of a Problematic Pastoral Proverb: With What Should Christians Be Content in 1 Timothy 6.8?

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Abstract

What are the essential needs for survival? One answer to this question lies in 1 Timothy 6.8. But a quick comparison of various Bible translations will reveal that the answer is not so easily discernible. Some translations use the word pair “food and clothing” while others have “food and shelter.” These are vastly different answers. This study will examine primary source materials in order to seek an accurate translation and interpretation of the word σκέπασμα in this important verse. An examination of primary source materials with an emphasis on synchronic evidence will demonstrate that 1 Timothy 6.8 most likely refers to clothing and not to housing or shelter.

Keywords

1 Timothy 6.8, contentment, cloak, clothing, housing, home, shelter, food, *skepasma*

1. Introduction

With what should all Christians be content?¹ The answer to this pastoral question cannot be easily answered on the basis of 1 Tim 6.8.² The ESV and

¹ William D. Mounce comments, “By saying ‘we,’ Paul generalizes the truth to all believers . . . it carries the force of a command” (2000, 343).

² The literature on the debate over the Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy is voluminous. I hold to Pauline authorship but this is not germane to the argument here. According to Raymond F. Collins, the Pastoral Epistles should be considered “double pseudonymous” because the recipient and the author are “literary fictions” (2002, 10). For a study on the implications of one’s position see Porter 1995. For a rejoinder to Porter see Wall 1995.

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NASB 1995 translations are very similar in their theoretical approach yet they differ in one critical noun in the protasis clause in 1 Tim 6.8 (ἔχοντες δὲ διατροφᾶς καὶ σκεπάσματα, τούτοις ἀρκεσθήσόμεθα). Consider the following translations or glosses of σκέπασμα (*skepasma*) in italics below:

But if we have food and *clothing*, with these we will be content. (ESV)

If we have food and *covering*, with these we shall be content. (NASB 1995)

In the one case (ESV; also RSV and NIV), a narrow provision is made for food and *clothing*. In the other case (NASB), a *covering* is likely to be understood to have broader implications that may include housing or a home. In another case, a strong contrast between translations is made quite clear, as in the New English Translation:

But if we have food and *shelter*, we will be satisfied with that. (NET)

Given the universal and timeless importance of housing (or shelter) for the human condition, it is striking that such different positions hang on a single word. And the exegetical intrigue does not stop there. The word about which formal-equivalent translations come to such different conclusions is a *hapax legomenon*. Both words for “food” and “clothing” (διατροφή and σκέπασμα) only occur once in the New Testament and there is no evidence of any substantial textual critical issue.³ The former word is less controversial and is widely understood as “food.” A lot more hinges upon the second word. If this simple maxim provides us with the foundation for a hierarchy of needs for Christians, it is important that we identify these possessions. The pastor, preacher, teacher, and exegete are left with little information to adjudicate the question, *What possession besides food should Christians be content with in 1 Tim 6.8?*

2. Methodology

Before providing some methodological footholds for the study to follow, we should note that the current scholarship on this *hapax* in 1 Tim 6.8 is insufficient. We may agree with the conclusion that the text communicates that “the standard for possessions is sufficiency” (Mott 1993, 274). But this does not explain which possessions are sufficient and some commentators simply leave the problem unresolved.⁴ Lexicons offer little help and most of them note that σκέπασμα can be glossed as clothing or shelter.⁵ BDAG

³ There is no reference to 1 Tim 6.8 in Metzger 1994.

⁴ It is not clear what position Mounce favors (2000, 344).

⁵ *EDNT* remains neutral by stating, “This noun can refer to either clothing or a house” (“σκέπασμα,” 3:250). The UBS concise dictionary also refers to both clothing and shelter (s.v. “σκέπασμα,” Newman 1993, 163). Likewise, *NIDOTTE* remains neutral (clothing or shelter) when discussing NT parallels of the Hebrew verb “to cover” (Domeris 1997, 3:253). E. A. Sophocles glosses σκέπασμα as a “covering for the body” or “raiment” (but not shelter!) (1887, 2:993).

seeks to unify the two options of clothing and housing under the more basic or general category of covering. When lexicons note that σκέπασμα can only mean “clothing” it is not clear why they differ from those that give more options.⁶ Commentators do little better. Philip H. Towner simply states in a footnote that “in the context of this discussion of self-sufficiency, ‘clothing’ is the better sense” (2006, 401 n. 46). Gordon Fee follows a similar train of thought: “The second word literally means ‘covering’ and could refer to shelter, but ‘clothing’ seems much more likely in this context” (2011, 147). In both cases it is assumed that the reader knows what this context is. This is a surprising answer because the immediate context of 1 Tim 6 is not as decisive as Towner suggests. We will pursue that avenue further in the section of this study on word-pair analysis (Section 6). Another unsatisfactory answer comes from John Stott, who makes a unique move by suggesting that “food and clothing” should be “extended to include shelter” (1996, 150). This may be possible on theological grounds but not on strictly exegetical grounds. Again, the pastor, preacher, teacher, and exegete are left with little information for exegesis about 1 Tim 6.8.

First, we will examine diachronic uses of σκέπασμα in Classical Greek. Diachronic linguistics is concerned with language over time as opposed to the usage of language at a single point in time.⁷ One of the approaches to deal with the problem of *hapax legomena* is to examine the (diachronic) history of the word. Of course the Greek language was (and is) always in a state of development on a continuum (Lee 2004, 67). That does not mean that we cannot establish boundaries for what is historically relevant. Even if we defer to the synchronic analysis, it will be helpful to have the historical data for comparisons. Second, I will adopt a Saussurean approach to linguistics and defend the primacy of a synchronic analysis of σκέπασμα.⁸ Third, I will utilize *lexical pragmatics* to explore the word pair in 1 Tim 6.8. This stands in contrast to the theory that meaning is primarily encoded in individual words. Here, I am interested in the way that the word σκέπασμα works together with the word διατροφή as a single unit of meaning (Green 2007).

To summarize, the diachronic primary sources will include those written in Classical Greek and the synchronic primary sources will include those

⁶ Louw and Nida gloss σκέπασμα as “clothing” without mentioning shelter or housing (s.v. “σκέπασμα,” 1996, 1:73).

⁷ For expanded definitions of diachronic and synchronic linguistics see Campbell 1998, 4. I also want to point out that linguists have questioned whether these two approaches are *rigidly* different. On this rigidity see Crowley and Bower 2010, 4.

⁸ Mark Hale translates Saussure’s explanation in the “Primacy of Synchronic Linguistics” thus: “For example—and to begin with the most obvious fact—they [i.e., the synchronic and diachronic approaches to linguistic analysis] are not of equal importance. Here it is evident that the synchronic viewpoint predominates, for it is the true and only reality to the community of speakers. The same is true of the linguist: if he takes the diachronic perspective, he no longer observes language but rather a series of events that modify it” (Saussure 1984, 128, as translated in Hale 2007, 6).

written in Koine Greek (300 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.). We will examine several relevant uses of σκέπασμα—based on the list of occurrences in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG) and the *Perseus Digital Library*.

3. Diachronic word usage

In this section of our study we will examine uses of σκέπασμα in primary sources from the perspective of *diachronic* linguistics. According to the *Perseus* search engine, the noun σκέπασμα occurs several times in Aristotle and Plato (cf. BDAG).

3.1 Aristotle

In Aristotle's first work, the word occurs twice in the same pericope in *Metaphysics* (8.1043a.30-35). The word σκέπασμα also occurs once in *Politics* (7.1336a.15-19). There are several salient points to highlight from these two important sources, however far removed they are from the time when 1 Timothy was written. First, the only instance of σκέπασμα that BDAG cites for the possibility of glossing as "house" is in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. In this single instance, it is best to state that σκέπασμα "refers to a house but does not itself mean 'house' but the basic sense of 'covering.'"⁹ The second use of σκέπασμα in *Politics* clearly refers to clothing.

3.2 Plato

According to the *Perseus* database, the noun σκέπασμα occurs five times in the extant works of Plato. Four occur in the dialogue between Socrates and the Stranger in the *Statesman* (279c-e, 280c). What is interesting about the fourth instance in the *Statesman* 280c is that the word σκέπασμα is used for coverings which come from skin-making. This is set in *distinction* to the "arts of shelters" (στέγασμα) and house-building (οικοδομικός). The fifth occurrence is in Plato's *Laws* in Book VII on sport and military training in the subsection on "Military Service" (12.942d). This usage refers to the protection that clothing provides when it is used on the head and feet. The next line (12.942e) refers to these as the "extremities of the body." So there is no doubt that σκέπασμα refers to clothing such as gloves and shoes.

3.3 Summary

We have covered eight uses of the noun σκέπασμα in Aristotle and Plato—both Classical Greek primary sources. They are considered diachronic

⁹ As noted by Dr. John A. L. Lee in personal correspondence.

sources because they represent a form of Greek that is several hundred years removed from the Koine Greek in which 1 Timothy was written. Nevertheless, we can make some brief conclusions before moving on to sources that are more contemporary with 1 Timothy. First, we can agree with LSJ that σκέπασμα primarily means “a covering” and that it is generally used of clothing. Second, in these works from before 300 B.C.E., Plato gives the clearest evidence in *Statesman* that the word was associated with various objects that could be classified and differentiated in different ways—and these all have some relationship to clothing.

4. Synchronic word usage: The Second Sophists

What complicates our study to some extent is the existence of the Second Sophist movement (ca. 50–230 C.E.). The essence of this movement was the imitation of classical authors of an early period (roughly 400 B.C.E.). This was done through select vocabulary from Attica or the region of Athens. This means that the use of σκέπασμα might be based on sources such as Aristotle or Plato, skewing the results of a time-oriented analysis. Thus our synchronic sources for lexicography form roughly two distinct groups: the Attic or Sophist group and the Koine group, which will be dealt with in Section 5.

4.1 Dio Chrysostom (ca. 40–ca. 120 C.E.)

In Dio Chrysostom’s work, the noun σκέπασμα occurs twice in his *Orations* or *Discourses*. The first instance falls under the discourse delivered “in Celaenae in Phrygia” (*Or.* 35.12). The second instance is in the sixteenth discourse under the heading “ΠΕΡΙ ΛΥΠΗΣ” or “On Pain and Distress of Spirit” (*Or.* 16.8). In both instances, the noun is used for coverings that protect against the weather. The subject using this covering may be an animal or person. The second instance could be clothing of some kind but may include a special blanket or covering against the elements.

4.2 Aelius Aristides (117–181 C.E.)

The noun σκέπασμα occurs two times in the works of Aelius Aristides.¹⁰ His “Hieroi Logoi” or “Sacred Tales” are perhaps part prayer and part autobiography in the form of speeches that cover about twenty years of the author battling illness (Pernot 2006, 247). The title “Hieros Logos” indicates a form of divine revelation. In both occurrences of σκέπασμα in Aelius

¹⁰ Pieter Willem van der Horst (1980, 68) does not refer to 1 Tim 6.8.

Aristides, the word denotes a covering of the body that was used to promote good health (a compress or fomentation; *Orat.* 26 and *Orat.* 24).

4.3 Dionysius of Halicarnassus (ca. 60 B.C.E.—ca. 7 C.E.)

In Dionysius of Halicarnassus's works there is one use of the noun σκέπασμα in *Antiquitates romanae*, in conjunction with the verb σκεπάω or σκέπω. In this instance, the covering-like nature of clothing is highlighted in the details of battle (*Ant. rom.* 8.67.5).

4.4 Summary of the Second Sophists

In all three writers that fall under the category of the Second Sophists, the word σκέπασμα is used for covering the human body with clothing, medicinal wraps, or special garments for protection against the elements.

5. Synchronic word usage: Koine writers

This section will cover synchronic or near-contemporary uses of σκέπασμα by writers who used Koine Greek style and vocabulary. These Koine writers differ from the writers above because they were not intentional imitators of the Attic style and vocabulary. Based on the *Perseus* database at Tufts University, we find the occurrences of the noun σκέπασμα in the following sources near the time of the first century.

5.1 Philo of Alexandria

In Philo of Alexandria, *TLG* and the *Logos* electronic edition both list the noun occurring five times in five different works. First, the word occurs in the plural form in *That the Worse Is Wont to Attack the Better* (*Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat* 19). This context makes the meaning rather clear because the noun σκέπασμα is specifically for the “body” and can only mean clothing, as opposed to coverings or shelter. What is even more significant is that the context refers to “meat or drink.” This demonstrates that, in a context of basic needs for the body, the noun σκέπασμα is used to refer to clothing. Second, the word occurs in *Allegorical Interpretation* (*Legum allegoriarum*). This usage is particularly important because the context defines “clothes” as “covering of the body.” It also happens to associate clothing with the basic bodily necessities of food and drink (*Leg.* 3.239). Third, the word occurs in *On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* (*De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*). This use is metaphorical but relies upon the imagery of clothing as indicated by the reference to appearing “naked” (*Sacr.* 84.3). Fourth, the word occurs in *On the Migration of Abraham* (*De migratione*

Abrahami 215.1). Fifth, the word occurs in *On the Decalogue* (*De decalogo* 77.4).

5.2 Josephus

In the works of Josephus, *TLG* and the Logos electronic edition both list the noun occurring four times in two different works. The first occurrence is in *Antiquities of the Jews* (*Antiquitates judaicae* 15.310). Second, in Josephus's *Jewish War* (*De bello iudaico*), the noun σκέπασμα occurs in the context of a discussion about the purification rituals. In this instance in Josephus, the word is clearly used for clothing (*War* 2.129). The third occurrence is also in the *Jewish War*. This usage is the closest to a physical building but is better understood as a shield-like covering that protected men from darts being thrown at them in battle (*War* 3.165). The fourth occurrence is also in the *Jewish War*. Again, this word is used for a structure that functions as a shelter or covering for protection. However, it is not used for a dwelling or living structure (*War* 3.170).

5.3 Strabo (64/63 B.C.E.–ca. 24 C.E.)

Strabo's work entitled *Geography* contains two uses of σκέπασμα in Book 11 on "Eastern Asia Minor and the Caucasus." In both instances, the word refers to clothing that covers the body. The first instance refers to "coverings for the body" (*Geogr.* 11.5.1). The second instance refers to coverings for the feet (*Geogr.* 11.13.9).

5.4 Plutarch (ca. 45 B.C.E.–120 C.E.)

Plutarch's works *Lucullus* and *Crassus* each contain one use of σκέπασμα (*Luc.* 27.6¹¹ and *Crass.* 24.1). In both of these instances, the word σκέπασμα is related to armor, albeit with slightly different uses. In the first instance (*Luc.*), the word refers to leather coverings for the armor or to the armor itself. In the second instance (*Crass.*), the word refers to battle dressings or armor that covers a horse.

5.5 Dioscorides (ca. 40–90 C.E.)

Pedanius Dioscorides was a physician who practiced under Nero. He studied medicine, pharmacology, and botany. His five-volume encyclopedia about medicine is entitled *De materia medica*. In this usage, the word σκέπασμα is used to describe the covering of an urn or jar. It is found under

¹¹ The translation by John Langhorne and William Langhorne does not include the reference to leather coverings (Plutarch 1840, 2:444-45).

the heading “Psimuthios” which may mean “cerussa” or “white lead” in “Book Five: Vines and Wines” (*Mat. med.* 5.88).

5.6 Erotianus (first century C.E.)

Erotianus, or Herodianus, likely lived under Nero and wrote *A Collection of Hippocratic Words* (*Vocum Hippocraticarum collectio*). His use of the word σκέπασμα occurs in a short entry in a volume that is essentially a medical dictionary (*Vocum* 72.2). The last clause of this entry uses σκέπασμα as a comparison word: “such as a σκέπασμα.” Here it seems that Erotianus was referring to a medicinal wrap for the body.

5.7 Musonius Rufus (first century C.E.)

Gaius Musonius Rufus was a Stoic philosopher who was expelled under Nero. The noun σκέπασμα occurs once in a discussion about clothing under the lecture entitled “Of Clothing and Shelter” (“De vestium, aedium et suppellectilis magnificentia” 6).

5.8 Soranus (first to second century C.E.)

Soranus was a physician from Ephesus who wrote a four-volume guide to gynecology. The noun σκέπασμα is in Book Two under the section “What is the Care of the Woman after Labor?” (*Gyn.* 2.39). In this context, the word refers to the swaddling clothes that are wrapped around a baby.

5.9 Severus Iatrosophista (first century C.E.)

Severus Iatrosophista wrote the medical book, *De instrumentis infusoriis seu Clysteribus ad Timotheum*. The word “iatrosophista” is simply a title that designates Severus as a medical doctor and serves to differentiate him from other authors with a similar first name.¹² Severus uses the word σκέπασμα twice in a context that discusses bile in the intestines (*Cly.* 34.8; 34.12). In the first instance, the word refers to the skin or the body’s covering of the area around an oozing sore. In the second instance, the context identifies those who have removed their clothes or coverings (σκέπασμα) as being naked.

5.10 Summary of Koine writers

In Koine writers that are close to the first century, the word σκέπασμα can be glossed as (1) a covering, or (2) clothing. In all of the Koine writers that

¹² For a short note on the author see Sarton 1927, 307.

use the noun, the word is never used for a shelter or house. This does not mean it was not used that way in non-extant works. We can only draw conclusions from the literature we possess as it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to prove how a word was not used.

6. Analysis of the word pair

The major weakness of both lexicons and the diachronic/synchronic methodologies is that they engage the word σκέπασμα as an island unto itself. Any cursory reading of the sentence in the context of 1 Timothy will reveal that it is similar in genre to a proverb, maxim, or apothegm. Moreover, it is found together with another word, which also happens to be a *hapax legomenon*, διατροφή. The point that must not be missed is that the words are paired together as a unit.¹³ This requires that we utilize some methodological insights from lexical pragmatics. Gene L. Green defines “lexical pragmatics” as “the way word meaning is modified in use” (2007, 800). In this section we ask the question, How does the pairing of the words σκέπασμα and διατροφή determine meaning in 1 Tim 6.8? Because these words are not used elsewhere in the New Testament, we will look for similar word pairings that reflect conceptual and literary similarities. This represents the unexplained but common reflex of commentators to seek comparisons between 1 Tim 6.8 and passages from Old Testament, New Testament, and extra-biblical literature.

In Section 1 we cited several commentaries that refer, without any specificity, to the “context” of 1 Tim 6.8. Commentators have noted that the “context” likely points to the meaning of σκέπασμα as “clothing” rather than “shelter.” Our conclusions may not differ drastically from some commentators but we do hope to tease out the detailed process by which we will arrive at our conclusion—a luxury that most commentaries do not have due to size limitations. In sum, we will now explore, through a word-pair analysis, the fact that the first context of σκέπασμα is the word διατροφή.

One important qualification is in order. By stating that the first context of σκέπασμα is the word διατροφή we do not mean that we can simply determine their meanings separately and then add them together. On the contrary, we are arguing that because these words work together as a pair in this proverb or maxim, their individual meanings cannot be totally separated. This approach not only takes into consideration the subgenre of 1 Tim 6.8 as a maxim, but it recognizes the pragmatic usage of a word pair: the two words are separate but united.

¹³ Thanks to Dr. Albert Pietersma for pointing this out in personal correspondence.

The biggest problem we face is that in every parallel passage where a similar word pair might be found, this particular word pair (σκέπασμα + διατροφή) does *not* occur. The word pairs we do find are either conceptual parallels or pairs that match only one word. There is a quotation of 1 Tim 6.8 by Basil of Caesarea (ca. 329–379 C.E.) in *Epistulae* 22 (*Letters*), but this occurrence falls in a series of short quotations from Scripture with little exposition to indicate how Basil understood them.¹⁴ The fact that the word does not appear in another word pair does not mean that the noun σκέπασμα was rare. In fact, the verb form σκεπάζω in Rahlfs's edition of the Septuagint occurs forty-one times and the shorter noun form σκέπη occurs twenty-one times. On the one hand, it is obvious that the LXX was a diachronic source to 1 Tim 6.8 in some sense, as it was an already very old translation of the Hebrew source text by the first century. On the other hand, the number of allusions and citations from the LXX points to its strong and contemporary impact on the cognitive environment in which 1 Timothy was written. One might say that the LXX is both a diachronic and synchronic source for New Testament lexicography.

6.1 Letter of Aristeas

Another noun closely related to σκέπασμα is the noun σκέπη (see BDAG). Based on this noun σκέπη, we find a very interesting parallel to 1 Tim 6.8 in the pseudepigraphical *Letter of Aristeas* (l. 140, in Charles 2004, 2:108). The distinctive phraseology “of meats and drinks and clothing” led R. H. Charles to state the following in his commentary:

men of meats and drinks, &c. Cp. Matt. 6:31-2 “After all these things do the Gentiles seek.” The word translated “clothing” (σκέπη) also means “shelter” or “protection” and this may possibly be the meaning here. (2:108)

It is not clear why the author thinks “shelter” is a possible meaning here, but even this conclusion is tentative.

Unfortunately, the *Letter of Aristeas* does not use σκέπη again and the context is indeed vague. It seems unlikely that the word pair consisting of “meats and drinks”—which relies upon obvious and material divisions of a meal—would be combined with an abstract concept such as protection. The immediate context also explains that the Jews were protected by God in this way (*Let. Aris.* 142).

¹⁴ Basil 1926, 139. For another reference to the pair “food and clothing” see Basil 1955, 2:83.

The section in which we are reading is a defense or apology for the Mosaic Law. The writer states that Moses wrote the law with “exceeding care” (*Let. Aris.* 144). In light of this, the reference to “what we . . . touch” may refer to touching unclean clothing (cf. Deut 22.11; Lev 15.21; 16.32; etc.). This is not definitive and the difficulty with translating σκέπη in *Let. Aris.* 140 is similar to the difficulties in 1 Tim 6.8. However, both the social context and the literary context make “clothing” the more *likely* choice.

6.2 Septuagint Genesis

Another usage comes from LXX Gen 28.20-21:

And Iakob made a vow, saying, “If the Lord God would be with me and should carefully guard me in this way that I go and should give me bread [ἄρτος] to eat and clothing [ἱμάτιον] to put on and should bring me back to my father’s house [οἶκος] in safety, then the Lord shall become god to me.” (*NETS*)

Because 1 Timothy is full of intertextual relationships to the LXX, it is difficult to handle the vocabulary strictly with synchronic considerations.¹⁵ In other words, the text of 1 Timothy is full of intentional connections and relationships (quotations, allusions, and echoes) to literature that is much older than first-century literature.¹⁶ The “context,” Green explains, is drawn from the “common cognitive environment” (2007, 84), which includes the LXX. This text is significant because it brings together at least the elements of food and clothing. However, it is likely that “my father’s house” is a reference to his family unit rather than a physical shelter.¹⁷

6.3 Septuagint Deuteronomy

The next important conceptual pair comes from LXX Deut 10.18-19:

. . . doing justice to the guest and orphan and widow and loving the guest, to give him food [ἄρτος] and clothing [ἱμάτιον]. You shall also love the guest for you were guests in the land of Egypt. (*NETS*)

¹⁵ Donald Guthrie notes, “In the preceding verse in 1 Tim 6:7, we read: ‘for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.’ This idea strongly echoes Job 1:21 and Eccl 5:15” (1990, 127). Neither of these passages refers directly to food and clothing or shelter.

¹⁶ Walter Lock draws attention to Gen 28.20 (1924, 69).

¹⁷ Thanks to Daniel Noonan for suggesting this point on LXX Gen 28.20-21.

Again, it is important to stress that we are interested in this word pair and find it relevant for 1 Timothy because of the LXX's impact on 1 Timothy and Hellenistic Jewish writers in general. The LXX is a translation of an ancient text and is not conventional Greek usage. But it did have an impact on the vocabulary and thought processes of the first century. The context of this passage is Yahweh's covenantal requirements of Israel. The focus on the "heart" or internal state of the people is connected to Israel's own past.

6.4 Matthew and Luke

Jesus' teaching on not being anxious about "food and clothing" provides another example where food and clothing are conceptually tied together.¹⁸ The long parallel passages from Jesus in Matt 6.25-33 and Luke 12.22-31 are almost completely dedicated to anxiety about food and clothing. This pair can be clearly seen in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6.25-26 // Luke 12.22-23). It is striking that the bevy of questions in Matt 6.31 does not include, Where shall we live? Such a question may have arisen among Jesus' followers, but it is not closely tied to the issue of food. In sum, food and clothing are tightly held together and are defined as the essential items for life.¹⁹

6.5 James

In the context of faith without works, James describes what dead faith looks like in practice. He connects food and *clothing* tightly together as he describes what is essential for living (Jas 2.14-16). While the word for food in Jas 2.15 (τροφή) parallels the word for food in 1 Tim 6.8 (δια-τροφή), James uses an adjective to describe the brother or sister who is "naked."

6.6 John of Damascus (ca. 645–749)

The last occurrence in this section of a word pair similar to 1 Tim 6.8 is in the work *Vita Barlaam et Joasaph* (*Barlaam and Josaphat*) which is attributed to John of Damascus. This text is a Christianized version of the life of Buddha but was widely regarded as authentic in the pre-critical era. In the context of this statement, the text is speaking of the hermits and their characteristics of self-denial. This is the only text in which food and shelter are possibly paired together:

¹⁸ Walter L. Liefeld finds a strong parallel between 1 Tim 6.8 and Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (1999, 204).

¹⁹ When the Seventy-two go out on mission from Jesus, all the Synoptics writers agree that they should not carry extra food or clothing (Wells 1998, 212).

wandering in wilderness and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth, self-banished from all the pleasures and delights upon earth, and standing in sore need of bread [ἄρτος] and shelter [σκέπασμα]. (12.102)

Although the translator for this Loeb edition has chosen to render σκέπασμα as “shelter,” there is no contextual clue that prohibits it from being clothing. Even if the word is used for shelter, John of Damascus seems so focused on the imagery of caves from Heb 11 that the shelter would likely refer to “caves of the earth.” In a second occurrence (14.118), we find διατροφή paired very clearly with clothing (or lack thereof).

6.7 Summary of the word-pair analysis

This word-pair analysis has sought to examine parallels to the word pair found in 1 Tim 6.8. We have utilized lexical pragmatics to consider how the word is modified in the specific use in 1 Tim 6.8. We may draw several conclusions from this section of our study. First, as noted above, the parallels do not match the exact vocabulary in 1 Tim 6.8. Second, they demonstrate that food (bread) and clothing were a common conceptual unit—both constituting the necessities of life. The evidence from word-pair analysis is moderately strong in favor of pairing food with clothing in 1 Tim 6.8; however, it is likely not going to be conclusive by itself. Last but not least, “the plural σκεπάσματα in 1 Tim 6.8 fits better with ‘clothing’ than ‘housing’ (‘houses’?).”²⁰ In other words, the two plurals διατροφάι and σκεπάσματα in the word pair work together naturally as “food and clothing.”

7. Conclusion

This lexicographical study of σκέπασμα was driven by wider exegetical and theological interests from 1 Tim 6.8 that remain open for further research. Before stating our conclusions, we must note that they are historical and therefore a matter of probability. Simply stated, the best probable English translation of σκέπασμα in 1 Tim 6.8 is “clothing” for the following reasons:

First, the synchronic lexical evidence that is closer to the first century also tends toward usage for (1) a covering or (2) clothing. Coverings may extend beyond clothing for people to coverings used to shroud armor and horses. There are no *known* instances of Koine writers using the word with reference to shelter or a house. To repeat an important qualification of this argumentation, this silence does not mean that the word was never used for a shelter or house, only that we do not currently possess evidence that this happened.

²⁰ A point noted by Lee.

Second, we have examined this word both in isolation and in connection with διατροφή as a word pair. Although we were not able to locate an exact duplicate of the word choice in 1 Tim 6.8, there are several conceptual parallels to consider. What we do find is significant evidence from the “common cognitive environment” of 1 Timothy that food and clothing were often paired together as the essentials of life.

Last, we might consider some implications and avenues for further study. Some view 1 Tim 6.8 as a maxim that endorses “a simple lifestyle” (Towner 2006, 401). Yet, this does not likely account for the full narrative behind the proverb. Thomas C. Oden’s pastoral commentary is unusual in that he places the whole pericope of 1 Tim 6.7-10 in the context of pilgrimage (1989, 105). Indeed, the allusions similar to 1 Tim 6.8 from the LXX invoke the pilgrimage from nakedness to nakedness.²¹ This would parallel how 1 Tim 1.15-16 sets Christ’s eternal life in contrast with “this present transient existence” (Wieland 2006, 103).

We may now briefly consider some vistas that have opened up through our study of σκέπασμα in 1 Tim 6.8. In the one case (ESV; also RSV and NIV), provision is made for food and clothing. Thus, Paul is urging all Christians to find contentment with a lifestyle compatible with pilgrimage and wandering. In the other case (NASB), covering is understood with broader implications and can be taken to include housing or a home. Thus, 1 Tim 6.8 is urging all Christians to find contentment with a lifestyle that is settled and sedentary. Our conclusions point to the former, rather than the latter.²²

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²¹ For a discussion on the difficulty of defining the terms “echo” and “allusion” and the unlikely prospect that scholars will agree, see Stamps 2006, 12-14.

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Abbreviations

BDAG	<i>Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich 1999)
EDNT	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (Balz and Schneider 1990–1993)
ESV	English Standard Version
LSJ	<i>A Greek–English Lexicon</i> (Liddell, Scott, and Jones 1996)
LXX	Septuagint
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NET	New English Translation (NET Bible)
NETS	<i>New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> (Pietersma and Wright 2009)
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> (VanGemeren 1997)
NIV	New International Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TLG	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae</i>