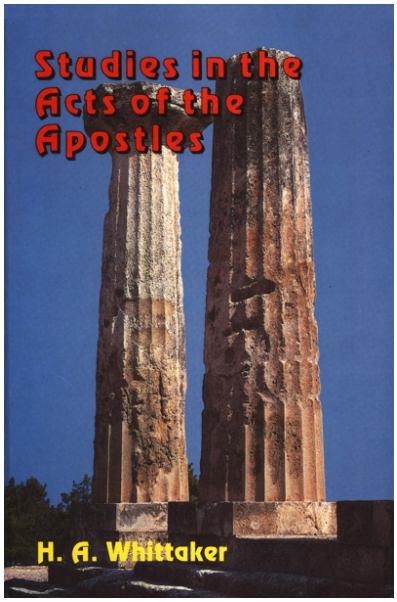
Studies in the Acts of the Apostles



H. A. Whittaker

Studies in the Acts of the Apostles

Harry Whittaker

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Temple of Apollo–Put out of business by Paul's preaching.

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The Acts of the Apostles

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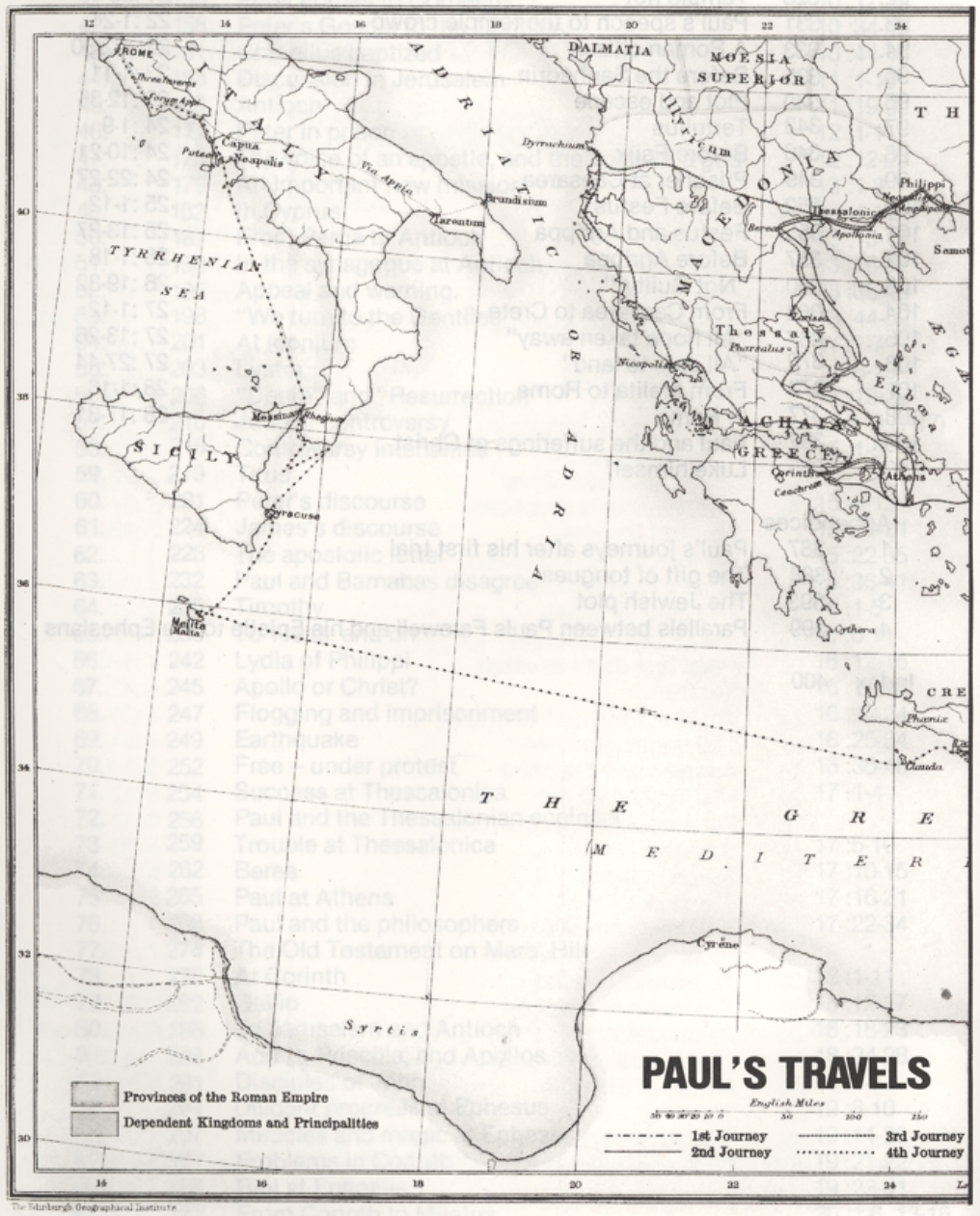

Map taken from Life and Letters of Paul by David Smith.
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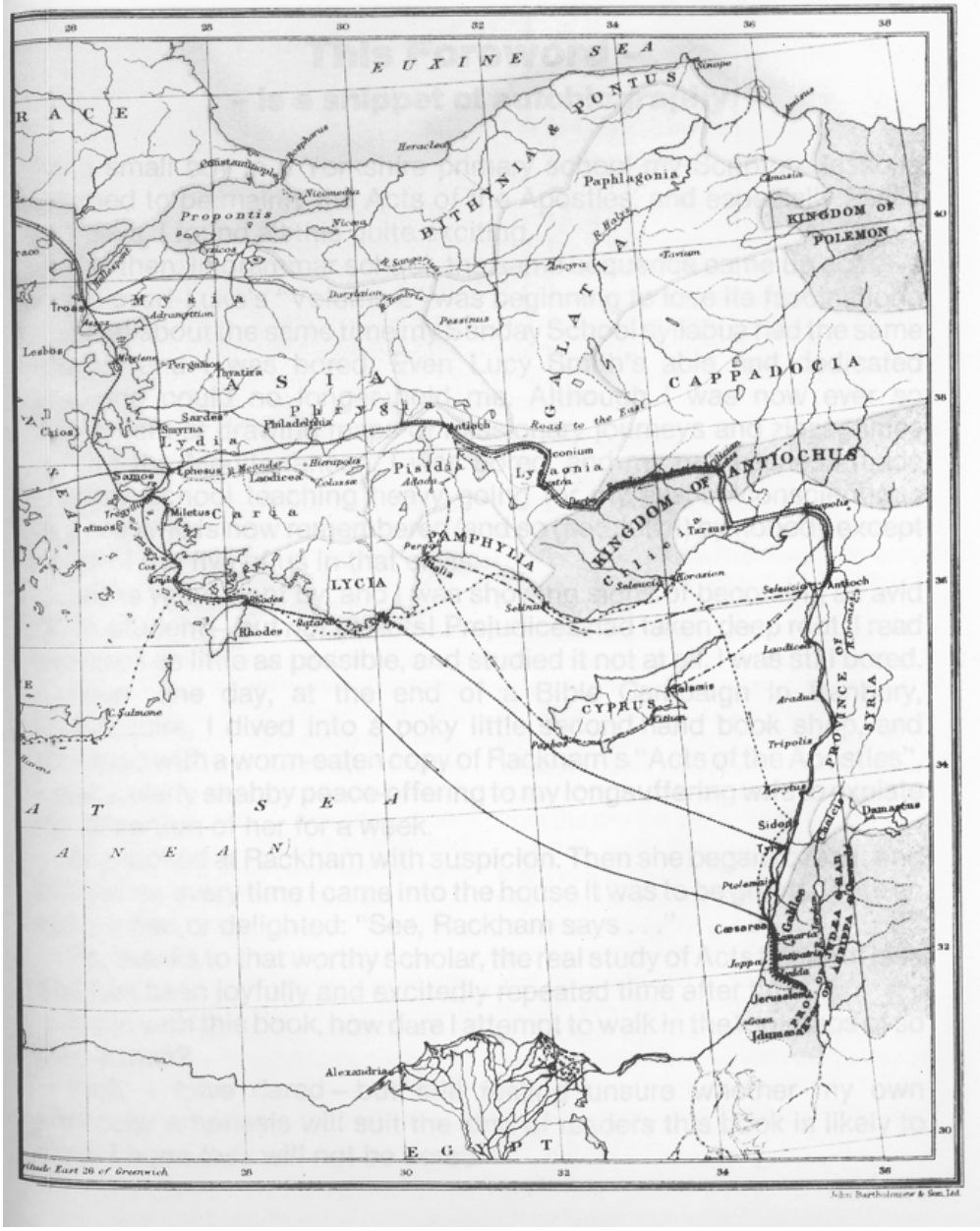
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Paphlagonia
KINGDOM OF POLEMON
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Mysia
Troas
Lesbos
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Phrygia
Sardes
Smyrna
Lydia
Chios
Samos
Ephesus
Laodicea
Hierapolis
Colossæ
Miletus
Caria
Patmos
Cos
Rhodes
Pisidia
Antioch
Iconium
Lycaonia
Road to the East
GALATIA
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Tarsus
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PAMPHYLIA
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This Foreword –

– is a snippet of autobiography

As a small boy in a Yorkshire primary school my Scripture lessons seemed to be mainly the Acts of the Apostles, and especially Paul's journeys. I found all this quite exciting.

But then, in grammar school, the same sequence came up again –twice over! Luke's "Volume 2" was beginning to lose its fascination.

Alas! about the same time my Sunday School syllabus had the same theme, and I was bored. Even Lucy Smith's able and dedicated teaching could no longer hold me. Although I was now ever so competent at drawing maps of missionary journeys and zigzag lines across the Mediterranean, I was bored, and my restlessness made Sunday School teaching heavy going for my ever–so–conscientious teacher who is now remembered (and so gratefully!) by nobody except three of the five of us in that class.

Some years went by, and I was showing signs of becoming an avid Bible student – but *not* of Acts! Prejudices had taken deep root. I read the book as little as possible, and studied it not at all. I was still bored.

Then, one day, at the end of a Bible Campaign in Banbury, Oxfordshire, I dived into a poky little second–hand book shop, and emerged with a worm–eaten copy of Rackham's "Acts of the Apostles", a particularly shabby peace–offering to my longsuffering wife to expiate my desertion of her for a week.

She looked at Rackham with suspicion. Then she began to read. And thereafter, every time I came into the house it was to be greeted with an astonished or delighted: "See, Rackham says ..."

So, thanks to that worthy scholar, the real study of Acts began at last, and has been joyfully and excitedly repeated time after time.

Now, with this book, how dare I attempt to walk in the footsteps of so able a man?

Well, I have dared–but still feeling unsure whether my own particular emphasis will suit the kind of readers this book is likely to have. I hope *they* will not be bored.

H.A.W.

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The Acts of the Apostles

1. A short introduction

It is, alas, not uncommon for commentaries on Acts, as on most other books of the Bible, to spend a lot of time and space on providing answers (arguing the pros and cons) to various questions and problems which the reader has little interest in: Who wrote it? When did he write it? Why did he write it? What is the dating of the narrative? What sources did the author draw on? Is the record dependable? – and so on, and so on.

Pirouetting of this kind is mostly futile. The main thing is to get on with the job of studying the text and learning from it. So here the preliminaries will be brief.

Only a blockhead would argue that the author of Acts was not Luke (Lk. 1:1–4; Acts 1:1). Here, as in the gospel, there is the same elegant Greek style, the same concern for women and down–and–outs, the same grasp of O.T. (LXX) teaching, the same interest in all things medical. "The Medical Language of Luke" (W. K. Hobart, 1882), still a standard work, shows how both the Third Gospel and Acts might well have been written by a "beloved physician" (Col. 4:14).

Date of Writing

There is a hint that Luke's gospel was published during or shortly before Paul's third journey: "We have sent with him (i.e. with Titus) the brother (his brother),[a] whose praise is in the gospel in all the churches" (2 Cor. 8:18). This date would be about A.D. 55,56.

Also, in 1 Tim. 5:18, Luke's gospel (10:7) is quoted as an authoritative Scripture.[b] So when Paul wrote to Timothy (64?) this gospel must have been already well known.

Then, when did Luke follow with Acts?

Since that book concludes with the end of Paul's two years as a prisoner in Rome, yet fails to mention the apostle's acquittal (a very strange point of suspense at which to break off!), it seems very likely that Acts was completed and published about that time (61?).

Another volume

But why did Luke break off at that point? the first phrase of Acts 1:1 supplies a hint: "The former treatise have I made...". Here the Greek word is really "first". "Former" would imply the first of the two, but "first" (if used exactly) suggests the first of more than two. In other words, Luke intended a third volume. The Muratorian Canon (A.D. 170–200) says he actually wrote it: "... as also he (Luke) clearly points out in a separate book, not only the sufferings of Peter, but moreover Paul's departure from the city (i.e. from Rome to Spain)".

If this testimony is to be accepted there is a problem. Why do we not have that volume 3 in our Bible? Is it credible that the Almighty guided Luke in the writing of that, as with Gospel and Acts, and then allowed it to disappear from human ken? Or was this volume 3 never accredited by Spirit–guided men in the early church endowed with the power of "the discerning of spirits" (1 Cor. 12:10)[c]? Answers to these questions are, at best, unsure.

Luke's purpose in writing Acts is certainly not just to compile a continuous chronicle of the progress of the early church. His narrative is far too selective for that. Even though Acts 1:2 makes clear that it is "The Acts of the

(Twelve) Apostles", the book concentrates on Peter and Paul. And even regarding these two amazing men there are omissions galore; for instance, Paul recalls that "thrice I suffered shipwreck" (2 Cor. 11:25), yet not one of these scarifying experiences is even hinted at in Acts. Again, it is possible to infer from the well–known "we" passages that at certain times Luke himself was with Paul in the course of his missionary work. Yet these are the only very indirect references which the author makes to himself. And his brother Titus[d], who worked with Paul more than anyone else did, is excluded from the record altogether.

The Judaist problem

One hardly needs to be a clairvoyant to discern that from beginning to end Acts is concerned with the antagonism of Judaism to the gospel. In his first volume Luke depicts in masterly fashion how the Lord's ministry led eventually to a head–on collision with the vested interests of Jewry. And the men of the temple won–until the third day when Jesus rose from the dead.

The story is repeated in Acts. There is the same build–up of rancorous opposition, ending again with a Judaist victory which clipped Paul's wings with an imprisonment first at Caesarea and then in Rome. And Acts 28 shows Paul after two years in Rome, now about to "rise from the dead" to resume where he had left off.

There can be no doubt whatever that the bitter opposition of Judaism to the Christian faith is the most important theme of Acts (and of much of the rest of the New Testament). A commentary which does not give it considerable emphasis is missing the mark very sadly.

Ironside Still, in his very able book: "St. Paul on Trial", propounds the attractive thesis that the purpose behind the writing of Acts was to brief a Roman administrator who was intimately concerned with Paul's appeal before Caesar. The suggestion is that Paul's first journey to Rome was deliberately contrived to force a test–case before the Roman judiciary: Is faith in Jesus of Nazareth to be deemed *religio licita,* a permitted religion, in the same way that orthodox Judaism has been for a long time?

This may well be an important part of the story; but the main emphasis in Acts goes very dramatically on the stubborn refusal of Jewry to give heed either to their own Scriptures or to the hard facts of the Holy Spirit's witness, wisdom, and power, in the apostles who had now picked up where Jesus himself left off.

Johannes Weiss has put it this way: "I cannot understand 'Acts' except as a defence of the Christian religion before the Gentiles against the denunciation of the Jews, which is meant to show how Christianity, with its mission to the world, has proved to be the annulling (fulfilment, surely) of Judaism ... What he (Luke) is absorbed in is the breach with Judaism; for in Judaism he sees the real opponent of Christianity".

The long eloquent passage in the Lord's Olivet Prophecy (Lk. 21:12–19), warning against the hardship of a much diversified persecution inflicted by Jews, finds its fulfilment in the Acts account over and over again.

Notwithstanding, the cause makes progress. Of course, for the Gospel of Jesus Christ is now being followed by "The Gospel of the Holy Spirit." Luke's Volume 2 could have no better sub–title.

Chronology

A note on the chronology of Acts is perhaps called for. Happily, exactitude here is rarely of special importance, for in this field the "authorities" display their complete lack of authority by their state of disarray. No two of them appear to agree. To illustrate this in only a small way, Angus's "Bible Handbook" gives the following samples:

		Harnack	Turner	Ramsay	Lightfoot	Ussher
The Ascension	1:9	29,30	29	30	(30)	33
Conversion of Saul	9:1–10	30	35,36	33	34	35
First visit to Jerusalem	9:26	33	38	35,36	37	38
Second visit to Jerusalem	11:30	(44)	46	46	45	44
First Missionary Journey	13:4	45	47	47	48	45
Council at Jerusalem	15:1–29	47	49	50	51	52
First visit to Corinth	18:1	48	50	51	52	54
Fourth visit to Jerusalem	18:22	50	52	53	54	56
Paul leaves Ephesus	20:1	53	55	56	57	59
Arrest in Jerusalem	21:33	54	56	57	58	60
Reaches Rome	28:16	57	59	60	61	63
Close of Acts	28:30,31	59	61	62	63	65
His martyrdom		64	64,65	65	67	67

It looks very much like a case of "Yer pays yer money, and yer takes yer choice!"

Cadoux has an interesting suggestion – that the history in Acts is sub–divided by Luke into five–year sections by seven "rubrics" (as he calls them) about the progress of the gospel. This gives a chronological scheme which approximates closest to that of Turner:

2:47	Pentecost	A.D.	30
6:7	Stephen		35
9:31	Cornelius		40
12:24	First Mission		45
16:5	Second Mission		50
19:20	Paul at Ephesus		55
28:31	Close of Acts		60

Luke's accuracy

Finally, a note on archaeological and historical evidence. Those who are not troubled with doubts about the authority or correctness of Acts are likely to find this more of interest than of help. But the commentators make a great thing of it, that Luke should be found to be invariably correct in the technical terms which he uses with reference to the rulers at various places visited by Paul.

Because Philippi was a "colony", the magistrates are correctly called *strategoi,* captains; and their "sergeants" are called *rhabdouchoi,* those who bear a rod.

At Thessalonica, a free city, the rulers are *politarchai;* and at Corinth Gallio is the deputy, *anthupatos.* Both instances have been proved to be exactly right. Yet only a year or two later (maybe less than that) Corinth had a propraetor, *antistrategos.* Luke could so easily have put his foot wrong here. The characterisation of Gallio (18:12–16) fits very well with the descriptions of him left by his personal friends. Sergius Paulus, the deputy at Paphos, is correctly referred to as *anthupatos.* A Cyprus inscription with his name harmonizes with the Acts record.

The picture given in Acts of the scene at Athens university is Athens to the life. It is not for nothing that Ramsay has described Luke as a thoroughly dependable historian. But readers of these words know that already.

Notes:

a. For the force of the definite article (in 2 Cor. 8:18) as meaning "his", compare Mt. 13:25; Mk. 14:46,47; Jn. 11:3,8,12. But of course it is only occasionally that this idiomatic usage comes in.
b. The quotation in 1 Tim. 5:18 is definitely from Lk. 10:7. Mt. 10:10 (Gk. text) has a slight variation.
c. "The discerning of spirits" – see "Studies in the Gospels" (H.A.W.), p.1.
d. Titus; see Ch. 59.

2. Recapitulation (1:1–5)

Luke's introduction to this, his second volume, calls for comparison with both the beginning and end of what he wrote in his gospel. The phrase: "having had perfect understanding of all things *from the very first"* uses a double–meaning word which could read: "from above", in which case Luke may be making a definite claim to divine inspiration. There seems to be a similar implied claim in the beginning of Acts; but again it is not certain. The opening phrase, "the former treatise," uses the word *logos,* one of the commonest words in the New Testament. But it has not been generally noticed that Luke uses *logos* almost exclusively with reference to inspired Scripture or to utterance known to be guided by the Holy Spirit (alas, the same can hardly be said to be true of modern enthusiasm for the term!). In Luke's writings the only clear exceptions (16:36; 19:38, 40) refer to the word of authority pronounced by a Roman official. Thus even here there is a comparable idea.

"The former treatise", then, takes in both Gospel and Acts under the same umbrella. What is true for one is true also for the other.

Some reject the idea that "former", which is really "first," implies Luke's intention to continue with yet another compilation about the progress of the gospel. But it is remarkable that, out of many occurrences, there seem to be only a few clear–cut examples of *protos,* meaning the first of only two, and those come in Hebrews.

It has even been argued that the separation between Gospel and Acts was dictated only by practical considerations. In the first century the useful limit for the length of a papyrus roll was about 35 feet. In his two writings Luke has gone right to the limit, bequeathing to his readers the two longest books in the New Testament.

Theophilus

Nobody knows who Theophilus was. The honorific title: "most excellent,.." identifies him as a prestigious Roman. The examples of this in Acts (23:26; 24:3; 26:25) are clear enough – Felix and Festus, Roman governors.

The absence of this title here in Acts might suggest that because of Christian sympathies or Christian faith Theophilus had now been demoted or had resigned from public service. There is also the possible explanation characteristically put by 17th century Thomas Fuller: "What! had Luke in process of time less civility, or Theophilus (with more age) less nobility? Surely neither, but Luke may be presumed purposely to waive his titles out of compliance to the temper of Theophilus, who in reduced (advanced?) age grew weary of worldly pomp, more pleased to have the truth of honour fixed within him than bear the titles thereof fastened upon him."

Certainly, Luke's word "instructed" (Luke 1:4), which is really "catechized, taught by word of mouth", implies that Theophilus was a convert, not an official with only detached judicial interest. So his name would be a baptismal name, familiar to the brethren, but hiding from others his Roman identity.

The greeting: "O Theophilus," suggests personal intimacy, for in the New Testament this interjection is always emotional, implying either indignation or gladness or affection.

"To do and teach"

From the very first verse Luke recapitulates on "all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which he was taken up" – that is, both during his ministry and after his resurrection. The Greek text neatly

implies that there was little essential difference between the doing and the teaching. But the phrase: "began to do" (without 'teach' being included) is actually a quotation from Genesis 2 3 LXX (the Septuagint was Luke's Old Testament): "all his works which God began to do". Yet this comes at the end of the six days of creative work, as though implying that a further work of creation — the New Creation in Christ? – was yet to be taken in hand.

It is noteworthy that at the very beginning of the Lord's ministry, Nicodemus linked the two activities together: "thou art a *teacher* come from God, for no man can *do* these miracles except God be with him" (John 3:2). The miracles were an essential part of the Lord's teaching; and his teaching was itself a miracle. On a lower level, all God's servants need to learn that doing and teaching must go together. To teach and not to do is hypocrisy. To do and not teach is a serious neglect. "Ezra prepared his heart (his mind) to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel." (7:10) – a worthy example!

Manifestly Luke could not cover *all,* everything, that the Lord Jesus said and did – as the conclusion of John's gospel perhaps needlessly emphasizes: "Even the world itself could not contain the books" (21:25). Therefore Luke must surely mean all the *kinds* of work and teaching which the Lord had made use of.

Unusual phrasing

Some suggest that *"began* to do and teach" is just another example of Hebraistic emphasis for "what he actually did and taught'. There are plenty of examples of this usage in the gospels, but the following phrase: "until the day ...," and also the context, both invite the reader to see the Lord's ministry as just a beginning, to be continued in the work of the apostles; or alternatively, presenting the Lord's work on earth as a prelude to his priestly work in heaven.

The Lord's ascension is described as taking place only "after he through the Holy Spirit had given commandment unto the apostles whom he had chosen." This language is pleonastic, more emphatic than is strictly necessary. Wasn't every commandment of the Lord given "through the Holy Spirit"? And weren't those eleven men apostles because he had "chosen" them?

Nevertheless, Luke knew what he was doing, for that mention of the Holy Spirit in Jesus leads on naturally enough to his promise to the eleven that they too should be baptized with the Holy Spirit; and the reminder that they were "chosen" underlines their authority to guide and direct the church after their Lord's ascension. Here, in short, is an echo of one specially momentous encounter with the risen Christ:

"As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye (Ye are receiving?) the Holy Spirit; whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20:21–23).

The commandments given to the apostles are summarised in Peter's word to Cornelius:

"He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead" (10:42).

How long after the ascension would it take the disciples to recall one of their Lord's last mini–parables?:

"The Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch" (Mark 13:34).

That seemingly superfluous expression: "apostles *whom he had chosen,"* is, then, not without its point. There is a reminder here not only that the Twelve were deliberately selected early in the

Lord's ministry out of a much larger group, but also that that choice was the outcome of a night spent in prayer about this very problem (Luke 6:12,13) – hence the words: "through the Holy Spirit," which should probably be linked with "whom he had chosen."

Also, "chosen" here prepares the way for the solution of the problem about a replacement for Judas: "Thou, Lord ... shew of these two the one whom thou hast chosen" (1:24/R.V.).

It emphasizes, too, that instead of Israel, the elect (chosen) nation, there was now to be a New Israel headed by Twelve "princes" whose carcases were not to lie in the wilderness.

At this point several verses are taken up with a summary of the Lord's charge to his apostles during the forty days.

Infallible proofs

"After his passion (the old ecclesiastical word for "suffering") he shewed himself alive by many proofs." Again, the word "alive" is, strictly, pleonastic. Yet, again, Luke knew what he was doing, for thus, in a word, it is emphasized that the disciples were not deceived by some visionary immaterial appearance.

And the proofs were many – first, they saw him; then they heard him speak: "Peace be unto you;" they were challenged to inspect the marks of crucifixion: "Behold my hands and my feet;" more than this: "Handle me and see that it is I myself;" not content with this, "he took food, and did eat before them" (Luke 24:38–43). And this kind of demonstration happened more than once.

Well might King James's men emphasize the truth of the resurrection by their phrase: "infallible proofs." There was a Greek word, *tekmar,* meaning 'a fixed boundary mark'. From this came *tekmerion,* a clear proof inferred from a sure sign.

But these tokens were given only to the Lord's friends, not to his enemies. He had explained beforehand why it must be so: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

The word used to describe how the Lord "shewed himself" means literally that "he stood beside" them, the Greek aorist probably implying sudden appearances. There may also be the implication of standing by to comfort, as when two angels "stood by" the disciples at the ascension to reassure them (v.10). "The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me," wrote Paul about his trial (2 Tim. 4:17).

The forty days

From the mention of a sabbath—day's journey (v.12) it can be inferred that, whereas the Lord rose on the first day of the week, he ascended on the seventh; and therefore the forty days mentioned by Luke (a detail which comes nowhere else in the resurrection narratives) must be reckoned exclusively. Thus the Lord was with his disciples, appearing and reappearing, for a period of six weeks.

Doubtless Luke's unusual exclusive reckoning was deliberately designed to remind the reader of how the Lord's earthly ministry had begun with a crucial forty days. Then, the challenge had been: If thou be the Son of God, work the signs of the Son of God. Now, during this forty days, Jesus did just that, to the astonishment of his awed and comforted disciples.

Was Luke also hinting at another forty days, during which the Land of Promise was explored and its blessings demonstrated. Rejection of those "infallible proofs" had meant for unbelieving Israel forty years of rejection by their God (Num. 13, 14). Forty years from the ascension the carcases of another faithless generation were strewn in a Holy Land now become wilderness, whilst the remnant who did believe were reckoned amongst God's New Israel led by Joshua–Jesus.

"Seen"

Another lovely touch in Luke's narrative is conveyed by his choice of the word "seen". Carefully throwing away no less than nine or ten other Greek words, any of which would be adequate, he goes out of his way here to use *optomai,* which occurs only in 1 Kings 8:8 LXX and in a passage in the Apocrypha.

When the ark of the covenant was installed in the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple, its staves "were seen from the holy place before the oracle, but were not *seen* without." Evidently Luke intended a delightful parallel. Only a priest on duty in the holy place saw the ends of the staves and so was able to infer that the ark with its mercy seat was truly there in the holy of holies. So also, only the disciples, now admitted to the holy place in the new sanctuary of the Lord, were able to infer from what they witnessed during the forty days that from now on he who had died as a sacrifice would be continually in the Father's presence, an assured means of their forgiveness and fellowship. Accordingly, in Luke 24:51 "he was *carried up* into heaven" has *anaphero,* the word very commonly used for the presenting of an acceptable sacrifice.

Even the Apocrypha passage (Tobit 12:19) is not without its point. The archangel Raphael is said to appear to the old man Tobit: "Fear not, for it shall go well with you ... All these days I was *seen* by you; but I did neither eat nor drink, but ye did see a vision." The story was well–known, and very popular, throughout Jewry. Then did Luke intend his readers to recall this incident and so gather how much superior Jesus was to any of heaven's seven archangels; for he did eat and drink with them (v.4 RVm), and was able to convince them that they did not merely see a vision (Luke 24:37,39)?

Further instruction

The Lord Jesus provided not only "infallible proofs" but also instruction – he spoke to them "the things pertaining to the kingdom of God": "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things (first), and to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). The speeches in the Book of Acts go a long way to amplify this brief opening statement.

There is now explicit reference to one particular meeting with the Lord. The AV says he was "assembled together with them," but RV margin prefers an alternative meaning of the Greek verb: "eating with them" (compare 10:41). There is good support for both of these readings, but the second is more likely, as making yet another allusion to what was already recorded in Luke 24 about the day of the Lord's resurrection (24:43,49).

At this meeting, he commanded them "not to keep on leaving Jerusalem (first one and then another going off to Galilee?) but wait for the promise of the Father, which ye have heard of me."

If in the age to come "the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Mic. 4:2), then was it not fitting that the same be true about the first message concerning the risen Christ?

"The promise of the Father" means quite simply: "what the Father promised" (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7).The Holy Spirit was to be the seal of their adoption as sons in His New Israel, that thus they might truly cry: "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:5, 6).

The instruction to "wait" was emphatic, employing an unusual word which, rather significantly, comes in only one other Bible passage – Jacob's words: "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord" (Gen. 49:18).

The promise of this second baptism, this time in Holy Spirit and with an endowment of power, is expressed (in the Greek phrase) in such a way as to imply a marked distinction from the water baptism which, very probably, most of them had received at the hands

of John three and a half years earlier (John had made the same distinction in his prophecy about the Holy Spirit; Luke 3:16).

"Not many days hence," the Lord had said. Actually the waiting time was precisely a week; for, since Passover had fallen on a Friday, the fiftieth day (Pentecost), "the morrow after the seventh sabbath" (Leviticus 23:15,16) was a Sunday (Whitsunday), only eight days away from the day of the Lord's ascension. How likely it is that much of that time would be spent praying that they might be worthy of the promised Gift.

Notes: 1:1–5

1. The first phrase in the Greek text has a lovely subtle touch which is quite untranslatable. The particle *men* (= this on the one hand), instead of being succeeded by *de* (on the other hand), is repeated in v.5a, with *de* following in v.5b. The implication is: The ministry of the Lord began with baptism in water for the repentant, but over against that Christ now begins a new ministry by baptizing his men in Holy Spirit.
1. If by *logos* Lk. implies inspiration, what of these examples?: Lk. 5:15;7:17; 16:2;24:17; Acts 10:29;15:6;16:36;18:15; 20:24.
   Made. Greek experts may like to enquire why this is Middle Voice.
   To *do and teach.* Why the reverse order in John 3:2?
2. *The apostles whom he had chosen.* The Muratorian Canon (200A.D.) calls the book The Acts of *all* the Apostles'. Yet Peter and Paul are given the lion's share of the narrative – and Paul was not one of those chosen originally.
4. *Assembled.* Josephus and others use the Greek word with precisely this meaning. But one of the Greek versions has it in Ps. 141:4: "eat". However, there is Lk. 22:16 to be considered.
   Depart. This word is also used for "divorce;" e.g. Mt. 19:6; 1 Cor. 7:10; and also Pr. 18:1, where Knox's version reads: "None so quick to find pretexts as he that would break with a friend." Then, was Jesus also implying that the twelve were not to "divorce" themselves yet from the temple because of the treatment meted out to their Lord?
   Which ye heard (followed by accusative) might imply that they had had the promise explained to them.
5. Does the emphatic pronoun *ye* mean only the apostles (v.2)?

3. A Commission to Preach (1:6–8)

It is not easy to decide whether these verses describe another later meeting of Christ with his disciples, or whether they simply continue the recapitulation already given. The phrase: "when they were come together," suggests the former, the word "therefore" looking back to "assembled together" (v.4).

The Kingdom – how soon?

At this later meeting with Jesus they kept on asking (such was their eagerness) if he purposed to set up his Messianic kingdom forthwith. Ruefully they had had to regret their inappropriate excitement at their Lord's triumphal entry into the holy city. But now, with all his Passover–time suffering behind him, what was there to hinder an assumption of royal majesty? More than this, the explicit promise of an imminent outpouring of the Holy Spirit there in Jerusalem probably reminded them of the familiar prophecy Joel had made about that (2:28–32) in what was certainly a Messianic context. So was there not every reason for confidence?: "Wilt thou at *this* time (since we were mistaken about the earlier occasion) *restore* again the Kingdom to Israel?"

A literal Messianic Kingdom

Modernists blithely brush on one side this talk about a literal kingdom, and coming soon. Here, they aver, the disciples were still obsessed with the purblind materialistic Jewish ideas of a literal Messianic kingdom, with their Jesus, Son of David, sitting on David's throne in Jerusalem. And they also imply: But we know better.

How strange, then, that Jesus did not regard this “error" as serious, and therefore take the trouble – two minutes' worth of talk – to set their ideas straight! How strange, too, that this blunder of theirs should come so very shortly after he had discoursed to them continually "of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (v.3)! Was Jesus so lacking in lucidity or themselves in intelligence as not to be able to grasp the "truth" that there was not going to be a literal kingdom at all? And how strange that even after this encounter and the abundant endowment of Holy Spirit power and wisdom, they still went on talking about a literal return of their Lord to establish a real visible rule of God in this world!

The Lord's response to their eagerness quietly implied: 'No, this is not the time either – "It is not for you know the times or the seasons." He did this by a most apt allusion to Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving for the enlightenment given him about Nebuchadnezzar's dream: "He changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings" (2:21). No plainer declaration could be wished for that the Almighty's purpose with this world is not tied to what human beings might consider a fixed programme. Hence, "of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, *neither the Son,* but the Father" (Mk. 13:32). So, even had he wished, Jesus could not have answered the disciples' enquiry.

In view of the earlier allusion to the apocryphal Book of Tobit (1:3), it is interesting to note here the appropriateness of another passage from the same book: "Again God will have mercy on them, and bring them again into the land, where they shall build a temple ...

until the times and the seasons be fulfilled ... and they shall build up Jerusalem gloriously ... as the prophets have spoken thereof" (14:5). Can it be that the apostles spoke with the Tobit quote in mind, and were answered by their Lord from Daniel? Later when Paul wrote to his new Thessalonian converts of "times and seasons" (1 Thess. 5:1), he was not interested in dates or calculations but in *signs.* Dates can be changed (Dan. 2:21), but signs inevitably lead without delay to the consummation they portend.

By a superficial consideration, the Lord's extended reply to his disciples' eager enquiry about the kingdom may seem like a deliberate non sequitur, as though he were deliberately pulling them away from an inconvenient or futile topic. Yet what he went on to urge was actually very relevant; thus: 'You will be given power to preach concerning me, and the time of the coming of the Kingdom will depend on your evangelism and the degree of success of your work.'

Apostles

The essential function of an apostle was to be a witness concerning Christ, both in the days of his flesh and after his resurrection; (v.22; 2:32; Jn. 15:27). During the ministry, Jesus had claimed the witness of John the Baptist, and also of Moses in the Scriptures, and especially of his heavenly Father through the amazing works of power he had so convincingly wrought (Jn. 5:31–59). Now to all this testimony was added the inescapable truth of his resurrection. The apostles must be unflagging in their testimony about it. "My witnesses," some manuscripts read. Many others have: "witnesses for me." The distinction is unimportant.

Certainly the resurrection of Christ was their main theme (e.g. 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39–43; 13:31; 17:31; 22:15; 26:16); and with this the coming of the kingdom, which they were now asking about, was constantly linked.

Adequate power for this work was to be given them in the imminent Pentecostal gift. When sent out in twos to preach during their Lord's ministry, they had experienced a remarkable endowment of wisdom and power (Mt. 10:1; Lk. 10:17). But apparently that authority had proved to be only temporary (Mt. 17:16, 19). On the day of his resurrection Jesus had "breathed on them, and said, "Receive ye (or, Ye are receiving) the Holy Spirit; whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ..."(Jn. 20:22, 23). Yet still it needed Pentecost. One is led to wonder whether the gifts were intermittent in later days also.

In their preaching they were to begin at Jerusalem – naturally! – and from there they were to cover all Judaea. Then Samaria. Since the Samaritans were a hybrid race, this may seem rather surprising. But during his ministry, Jesus had already shown the way (John 4); and in the last six months of his appeal to Jewry there had been plenty of warnings that non–Jews would yet be accepted into God's New Israel.

Galilee?

It is strange that Jesus made no mention of Galilee. Yet he himself had devoted most of his energies to preaching there. Was this the reason why? – Galilee had had its chance, and had scorned it (Lk. 10:13–15). However, after his resurrection Galilee still claimed attention (Mt. 26:32; 28:7, 10, 16). So the other valid reading: "the uttermost part of the land" (1:8), with reference to Galilee, may be correct. This would explain why for a long time the apostles made no attempt to take the gospel overseas – they interpreted their commission as covering the land promised to Abraham. Even the instruction to "teach all nations" (Mt. 28:19) may have been understood as meaning Galilee of the Gentiles. If so, the day came when they were to learn differently.

Notes: 1:6–8

6. There is another *"men ...de..."* formation here (see on 1:1), implying: Right now, not the kingdom, but the work of preaching about it!
   wilt thou ... ? The question is introduced, in Greek, by "if" (perhaps corresponding to interrogative H in Hebrew); compare 7:1; 19:2.
   Restore. Another significant occurrence of this word comes in Mal. 4:6 – first, repentance in Israel; then, the kingdom.
8. *But ye shall receive power.* There is much more on this in "Revelation: a Biblical approach," by H.A.W. pages 259–273.
   The Holy Spirit. Three times in four verses, here with reference back to the earlier mention in v.5, or to their earlier experience during the ministry.
   Come upon. This double–meaning Greek word rather remarkably has also the idea of: the coming on the scene of a second husband. Not inappropriate here! But "come upon" in the sense of "invade" will hardly fit.
   Jerusalem was, of course, in the middle of Judaea, but is here distinguished from it. This is the first of a large number of examples where Luke shows an unimpeachable topographical accuracy, for the rabbis always insisted in this distinction between Jerusalem and Judaea.
   Samaria. Note the contrast with Matthew 10 5.
   Uttermost part of the earth seems to be interpreted in 11:19 as meaning 'Jews within the furthest limits of Abraham's Land.

4. Ascension (1:9–12)

The weeks went by. For the disciples they were filled with the renewed thrill and gladness imparted by repeated encounters with Christ their Lord. Now it was no longer a case of hardly daring to believe that he actually was risen from the dead. Now they *knew* that he was. Each time they saw him there was further opportunity to fill out their inadequate grasp of the truths he had taught them earlier. And their insight into the Messianic themes of the Old Testament intensified at an amazing rate.

Then, one sabbath, he led them out from Jerusalem down into the Kidron valley, past the garden of Gethsemane, and up the slopes of the mount of Olives. It is an awesome thing to contemplate that that day not a few Jews, going to temple or synagogue, passed within a few yards of the immortal Lord of Glory without having the slightest inkling of their high privilege (Acts 10:41).

He led the disciples past the brow of the hill until they were looking "towards Bethany." There he bade them farewell, and no doubt said a prayer on their behalf. The prayer recorded in John 17 would have been marvellously appropriate, in every one of its details, to this occasion. But in that case there is no explanation as to why it comes in the gospel where it does.

Then with uplifted hands (hands still showing clearly the marks of crucifixion) he gave them his high–priestly blessing, as one of the order of Melchizedek; and they, in turn, "worshipped him."

Then he began to ascend into the heavens. It was by no means a sudden snatching away — Luke uses a continuous participle: "he going up" (v.10). The verb: "taken up" (v.9), can be read as implying a certain reluctance in the Lord to be parted from his friends – a marked contrast with his earlier impatience regarding the ordeal of the cross (Lk. 12:50; Jn. 13:27). In Luke, the phrase: "he was carried up into heaven," uses a word which in the New Testament is commonly used for the presenting of acceptable sacrifice. The appropriateness of this here is evident. Now, but not the for the first time (Jn. 20:17), he was about to display in the heavenly Holy of Holies the tokens of his own sacrifice.

Problems about the Ascension

The practical problem as to whether the Ascension was seen by others from a distance, or if not, why not, seems to have been given little serious consideration. Some who have realised that the problem exists have gone so far as to suggest that the ascension took place at night–time. But there is so much emphasis on the disciples *seeing* it happen and on their looking intently into the sky that such a conclusion is set in doubt.

The only alternative seems to be an assumption that what happened on the day of crucifixion happened again — a supernatural darkness shrouding the entire episode from unhallowed view whilst bathing the Lord in heavenly Glory – darkness to the "Egyptians" but light to the true people of God ("Studies in the Gospels" (H.A.W., chapter 231). Alas, the two records are all too brief!

The four–fold emphasis on the disciples beholding, and again on their looking stedfastly (s.w.2 Cor. 3:7) "into heaven", might be a hint that, just as Elijah was (apparently) taken away in the cherubim–chariot of the Lord, so also now. It is noteworthy that then there was a like emphasis on: "if thou **see** me," then a double portion of the Spirit; "and Elisha *saw* it and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof" (2 Kings 2:10,12).

It is fairly probable that as Jesus ascended the disciples were expecting the Cloud to disappear, leaving their Lord in their midst again, for, after all, had not this happened at the Transfiguration?

But now, instead, the Cloud of the Shekinah Glory took him away to heaven. Modern scientific ideas about space–time inevitably set the present–day disciple wondering about the physical aspects of the Ascension. It is certainly difficult to believe that Heaven is an actual locality in some remote invisible centre of the universe, and that the Lord Jesus was whisked away bodily at space–travel speed to the presence of the Father there. Most probably the sight of a literal ascension into the sky was a mode of concession to the limited ideas of the disciples of that time and succeeding ages. The resurrection appearances and disappearances of the Lord suggest that, like the angels of heaven, he now had powers of withdrawal into a kind of "fourth dimension." No doubt, in place of a visible transference upwards, Jesus could have vanished suddenly, by an act of will. But how mystifying and how much less instructive and reassuring to the disciples such an "ascension" would have been!

Archangels

So those men who for six weeks had rejoiced in the intermittent company of their Lord, with sudden appearances and disappearances, now had it made plain to them that he really was being taken away, for at that very moment, as their Master vanished in the Cloud, there appeared beside them two white–clad personages bringing a message of reassurance.

On the other hand, there had to be some distinction between this occasion and the sudden disappearances already experienced in order to teach that this separation was final – until the great day of his return in glory. Also, the fact that Mark's brief mention of the Ascension (16:19) uses the very words of Elijah's taking away (2 Kgs. 2:11 LXX) neatly implies a close parallel with the experience of that prophet. His "ascension" was not the end of his earthly life (see 2 Chr. 21:12), but was intended to signify the termination of his *public* work as a prophet and the beginning of a new phase of activity – a ministry of "the still small voice" among the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

Luke leaves it to the commonsense of his readers to supply the explanation that these men were archangels (cp. 10:3, 30). It is even permissible to speculate that they were Gabriel, the angel so much associated with Messiah (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Lk. 1:19, 26; 22:43), and Michael "the chief prince which standeth for the children of God's people," i.e. for the New Israel.

They addressed the disciples in terms of respect: "Men *(andres,* not *anthropoi)* of Galilee." Even such august beings as themselves do not have the exalted spiritual status of those who belong to Christ, the Lord of Glory: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:14).

Even so, the disciples were reminded of their own unexalted origins: "Ye men of *Galilee."* God had chosen the foolish and the weak to confound the wise and the mighty (1 Cor. 1:26–28).

His return assured

The angelic message set puzzled minds at rest: "This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

"This same Jesus"! For all the present manifestation of heavenly splendour, for all this undesired disappearance, he was still their gracious personal human friend, and would so continue.

And as they had seen him taken bodily away, so also he will return – both bodily and visibly, and with an accompaniment of angels and the cloud of the Shekinah Glory (Mt. 24:30,31; 16:27; Rev. 1:7; 14:14). More than this, he will return to

the same place: "His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives" (Zech. 14:4). Here surely is the reason why the Ascension took place from the mount of Olives.

And since the Ascension was gradual, and not sudden, may it not be inferred that so also the Return will be of a similar character so that all the world will become aware that the greatest event in human history is taking place: "they – the tribes of the earth – shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven."

It was two thousand cubits, a sabbath day's journey (so the rabbis had dubiously inferred), from Jerusalem where the disciples had this memorable experience. Luke mentions the detail so as to invite his readers to see special significance in it. It was the width of the "green belt" round a priestly city (Num. 35:5). It was the distance to be set between the ark and the common people when entering the Holy Land (Josh. 3:4). Then in the two thousand cubits now set between the temple and the ascending Christ, which was the holy and which the profane? Yet, strangely enough, it was in the temple where the disciples continued "blessing God," and thanking Him for what they had seen and heard.

The loss of their Leader was not regarded as an irremediable deprivation. Although in one sense taken away from them, he was nevertheless "with them to the end of the age." His resurrection appearances had already effectively established this conviction in their minds, that even when they thought him absent he was present with them. So their return to Jerusalem was "with great joy" (Jn. 16:22; 14:28).

Other "Ascension" passages

The sheet–anchor of apostolic Biblical exposition about the Ascension was Ps. 110:1: "Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool." Inevitably so, for they had learned this from their Lord (Mt. 22:41–45).

But this was not the only place. It would be strange indeed if so important an event as the Ascension should find mention in only one Bible text. Daniel also has a prophecy which needs to be read from this angle, the more so since at his trial the Lord Jesus quoted it, combining it with the text just mentioned: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Mt. 26:64).

There is no denying the connection between these words and Daniel 7:13: "And behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him." "One like unto the Son of man" means "One who *'is* the Son of man" (Ps. 122:3; Jn. 1:14; Rom. 8:3; 5:14; 6:5; 1:23RV; 1 Pet. 1:19; Philem. 9; Mt. 24:5; 2 Cor.3:18; Gen.5:1; Phil. 2:7).

It is a thing to marvel at that so many have failed to find incongruity about the equation:

Ancient of days = Christ;
Son of man = a multitude of believers.

One would have thought it obvious that:

Ancient of days = God the Father
Son of man = The Lord Jesus (why else should he call himself this? Compare also: Mt. 24:30; Rev. 14:14; 1:7a, 13a).

Solution of the seeming difficulty (Dan. 7:14, 27) is simplicity itself. The saints cannot receive the kingdom until it has first been given to their Messiah.

The correspondences between Dan. 7:13 and Acts 1:10, 11 are most impressive and should be sufficient to impress students of the former passage that here is a prophecy of the Lord's Ascension; but whereas Luke describes his departure from earth, Daniel gives an impressive representation of his honoured arrival in the Father's presence, there to sit at His right hand.

Revelation 5 fills out this picture. In chapter 4 there is a description of the heavenly court — the Almighty, the Ancient of days, enthroned. Then (5:6), when no one can be found worthy to open the Book of Life, there stands before him "a Lamb as it had been slain," yet alive. This Lamb is found worthy to take the Book and to open it, so that there is joy and praise on the lips of the "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" who are described as ministering to the Ancient of days (Dan. 7:10). This approach leads on to a very satisfying interpretation of much else in Rev. 5 (see "Revelation," by H.A.W. ch.5).

Another very satisfying prophecy of the Ascension comes in a sequence of passages in Ezekiel. In vision that prophet saw the Glory of the Lord remove from the Holy of Holies to the entrance to the Holy Place, and then to the east gate of the temple area., Thence it moved to the Mount of Olives, and was seen no more until in another vision Ezekiel saw it returning, with intensified brightness, by the same route (Ez. 10:4, 18, 19; 11:23; 43:2).

Notes: Acts 1:9–12.

8. *Taken up.* Note the variations:

	v.9:	"taken" (with emphatic *epi);*
	v.2:	"received up"
Luke	24 51:	"borne up."

The last of these: *anaphero,* normally refers to the offering of sacrifice: Heb. 7:27; 9:28; 13:15; Jas. 2:21; 1 Pet. 2:5,24; and very commonly in LXX. In Lk. 24 51, RV omits this phrase, and blunders badly in so doing.
Behold. The four occurrences here are worth studying: v.9,11a: *blepo,* the ordinary word for 'see'; v.10: *atenizo* (s.w. Lk. 22:56), from a word describing the stretch or strain in a rope or sail (Luke has a remarkably good nautical vocabulary);
v.11b: *theaomai,* gaze at with keen interest (cp. theatre). *Cloud.* cp. the Glory at his birth; Lk. 2:9.

9. *Apparel;* s.w. 20:33, and hence the blasphemy in 12:21; Also in Luke 24:
   a. *Towards Bethany,* which means 'date palms,' with Bible symbolism hinting at Gentile associations for the gospel hence–forth; Ex. 15:27; Rev. 7:9; Jn. 12:13 etc.
   b. *They worshipped him.* Then why the strange reluctance of disciples today? Do they know better?
   c. *He blessed them.* A Melchizedek blessing –"heaven and earth" (Mt. 28:18) = Gen. 14:19; and note in Ps. 110 the close association between v.1,4 = ascension and Melchizedek priesthood. The blessing was surely that of Num. 6:22 and Ps. 67.

10. *Men of Galilee.* By this identification the two "men" present their credentials.
Which also said. Here the force of "also" is; As the Lord himself has already told you.
Why stand ye gazing...? But why not? Was not this the most natural thing to do? Surely the question needs explaining. The Gk. word is the same as in Mt. 6:26, and similar to Acts 22:11; Ex. 3:6.
Have seen him go... The Gk. aorist seems to imply that by this time both Christ and the Glory were gone from sight. Other NT allusions to the Ascension: Acts 3:21; Eph. 4:8–10; 1 Th. 1:10; Heb. 4:14; 9:24; 1 Pet. 3:22.

5. Instead of Judas (1:13–26)

After their Lord's ascension the disciples did not scatter, as they had tended to do after his arrest and crucifixion (Jn. 16:32). Instead, back in Jerusalem they foregathered constantly in an upper room, probably the upper room where the Last Supper had taken place (Mk. 14:15). Since, in later days, they are found assembled in the house of the mother of John Mark (12:12), it has been surmised that this was also the location of the meeting Luke now goes on to describe. His word "abode" is probably to be taken as meaning that this was their rendezvous. It is difficult to believe that a hundred and twenty people, or even just the eleven, *lived* in this one room, even though it was of a considerably size.

The assembly

In repeating the list of the apostles, Luke uses one definite article for the group of them, as though to emphasize what he also says explicitly, that they were "of one accord" (a lovely word in Greek). The list given here suggests that although the Book of Acts is about only two of the apostles, they *all* did work of the kind described.

With the apostles there assembled a considerable number of others. These included not only the women mentioned in the gospels but also the Lord's own family — his mother and his brethren. In this last mention of Mary, she is pictured joining the disciples in prayer. What happened to her thereafter became the theme of various early church traditions. The most likely of these is that in later years when John moved to Ephesus he took her with him.

The presence of the Lord's half–brothers is surely one of the best proofs to be wished for of the resurrection of Jesus; for earlier the gospels represent them as not only indifferent but hostile to the Lord's preaching work (Mk. 6:4; Jn. 7:5).

Included also in the assembly were probably men like Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, Simon of Cyrene, Lazarus and his sisters, and various socially well–placed Jews who had already been influenced by Joseph and Nicodemus. "The number of the names was about one hundred and twenty." This expression suggests even in these early days the drawing up of an ecclesial roll. It also echoes the language of Numbers 1:5, 15 etc., as though to suggest that here was a New Israel gathered together at the beginning of their wilderness journey.

"All these continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" – prayer, most likely, for the promised return of their Lord and for the gift of Holy Spirit power which, he had assured them, would soon be their needful added blessing.

Peter and Judas

At one of their assemblies, Peter took the lead to press for appointment of a successor to Judas. After the experiences described in Luke 24, in which the risen Lord insisted that his sufferings and his resurrection and also his future glory were all to be traced in the words of the prophets spoken beforehand, it is natural enough to find Peter now building on the same authoritative foundation:

"Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled which the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas ...".

Peter spoke without any rancour concerning the traitor, being content to describe him quite simply as the one who "was guide (Lk. 22:47) to them that took Jesus" and who "had obtained by lot a share in this ministry" – the Greek behind this phrase seems to suggest that Judas had become treasurer not because of any financial expertise he may have had, nor because the Lord Jesus thought this experience of handling money and charity for the poor (Jn. 13:29) would refine out his native covetousness, but through the drawing of lots, (s.w. Lk. 1:9; Jn. 19:24; and in common classical usage). The particular scripture Peter referred to was Psalm 69: "Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein" (v.25); and this was reinforced by another from Psalm 109: "His office let another take" (v.8).

That introduction: "must needs have been fulfilled" – literally: "it was necessary" – has a distinctly predestinarian flavour about it; but the men of the New Testament never found anything incongruous about that; they never thought it necessary to spend long hours complicatedly reconciling predestination and the freewill of the individual.

Judas's end

Luke's explanatory parenthesis appears to tell the grisly story of Judas's death. It has also provided a long–lasting headache for those who deem it necessary to reconcile the details here with those in Matthew's record.

In the first gospel (Mt. 27:3–10), Judas repents after seeing Jesus condemned and comes to the priests making his confession and casting the betrayal money into the sanctuary. Then he hangs himself. The priests use the money to buy the potter's field for use as a Gentile cemetery.

In Acts it seems as though the potter's field was bought by Judas; there he fell headlong and died in a ghastly fashion.

The usual reconciliation of these apparently divergent accounts goes on these lines:

a. "The reward of iniquity" was not the thirty pieces of silver but that which Judas had been systematically filching from the apostolic funds (Jn. 12:6 RV). Certainly it would need more than thirty pieces of silver to buy a piece of real estate. Some suggest that Judas is said to have bought the potter's field, because it was paid for by the priests with money that had originally belonged to him.

b. As to the detail of his death, it is suggested that Judas hanged himself there, and that after a while the rope broke or that the body corrupted and fell, with the dreadful outcome described by Luke. Possibly!

Rather surprisingly, it doesn't seem to have dawned on the commentators that Acts 1:18b is capable of a completely different translation, thus:

"And becoming downcast (i.e. with remorse), he screamed out (the word normally described a loud noise) in the midst (of the chief priests), and poured forth all his feelings (this word "bowels" is *always* used figuratively in the New Testament and Septuagint of Old Testament)." If this reading can be sustained, the revolting and unnecessary (and inaccurate!) details of Judas's end disappear, and Luke's account is now remarkably like Matthew's (27:3, 4).

Aceldama

It seems not unlikely that before the betrayal Judas had already invested cash stolen from the common fund by buying the potter's field. After his suicide this would come into the market again, and appeared to the men of the temple as a suitable purchase (at a give–away price now) for Gentile burials.

Thus, through the death of Jesus, Gentiles were provided with a place of interment in the holy city.

The name Aceldama is almost exactly Aramaic for "Field of Sleeping" (cp. the Greek original of "cemetery"), but by a very small popular modification it became — with reference to Judas – "The Field of Blood."

The two psalms quoted by Peter (to be dealt with in detail separately) are both remarkably apposite first with reference to the enemies of David and then, more trenchantly, concerning those who sought to destroy Jesus. It is noteworthy that in Psalm 69:25 Peter turned the plural into a singular, so as to make more pointed allusion to Judas. But the plural is not

invalid. The fate of Judas was seen as a prototype of what would come on the evil men who used him as their tool.

Choosing a successor

Nor does "his habitation desolate" mean: "Leave his office empty." The parallel: "Let no man dwell therein" is seen to have reference to the use of that land as a graveyard. This first quotation, Peter pointed out, had already been fulfilled, and — he argued — it was now time for the second to be fulfilled also by the appointing to apostolic office of a successor to Judas: "His bishoprick *(episkope:* responsibility as overseer) let another take." Not that Judas had ever actually exercised such a high duty, but as one of the Twelve it was his prospectively. Now, with the Lord away, supervision and direction in what would soon be a growing ecclesia must be provided for.

The qualifications for a new apostle were succinctly set out. He must have been a disciple since the early preaching of John the Baptist (the words might even imply: 'baptised by John'); he must have been a constant follower of Jesus since that time right through to the day of his ascension; and especially he must have been a personal witness to the factual truth that the crucified Lord was risen from the dead.

It is most noteworthy that Peter's list of qualifications did not stress, or even mention, personal grace or innate ability, but rather a firm knowledge of basic truth.

The method

The mode of election of the twelfth apostle was somewhat remarkable. First, "they appointed two" who had the needful qualifications. In this selection of Matthias and Joseph Barsabbas there may have been the exercise of a democratic vote expressing the judgment of the assembly. It is remarkable that apparently there were only two who were deemed qualified.

To decide between these two there was now recourse to the drawing of lots, after the manner of the Old Testament Urim and Thummim. But first – and how rightly — they prayed (as Jesus himself had prayed before the appointing of the Twelve: Lk. 6:12, 13) that the Lord would manifest His will by over–ruling the decision thus to be obtained: "Shew whether of these two thou *hast* chosen." They knew that the heavenly choice was already made. They wanted that choice to be openly validated. And with that, "they gave lots for them," by having someone, probably Peter, choose from two marked objects in a bag. The technicalities of the Greek text are not easy, but in two details at least a method similar to that of Urim and Thummim seems to be implied (see "Samuel, Saul, David," Appendix, by H.A.W.).

Joseph Bar–Sabbas

Nothing more is known about these two men except what can be inferred from Joseph's double cognomen Barsabbas–Justus. The first name here identifies a zealot for sabbath keeping, and the second one who was a dedicated observer of the Law of Moses, as also was Judas Barsabbas (15:22; Joseph's brother?). In view of the Judaist tensions and contentions which beset the early church before very long, it may well be imagined what awkward situations would have arisen if such an one as Joseph had joined the Twelve. The Lord, who "knew the hearts of all men," knew not only the heart of Matthias but also the heart of Joseph, and he guided the lot accordingly. Thus the number of the Twelve was made up. "The lot is cast into the bosom; the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (Pr. 16:33).

A valid appointment?

There are those who express doubts about this. After all, it is argued, this method was one of human choice before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Ought not Peter and the rest to have waited for a lead from heaven in this matter? And since, before long, Paul was so emphatically an apostle — the "youngest" of the Twelve, as Benjamin was among the sons of Israel – was not the twelfth place his by right?

These plausible arguments have to give way before the clear witness of the inspired text in the rest of Acts: "Peter stood up with the eleven" (2:14); "the twelve called the multitude unto them" (6:2). Nor is it likely that Luke would have been guided to narrate this selection procedure in such detail if indeed it was a mistake from the start.

Judas had fallen away "to go to his own place" – here is the very phrase used (Num. 24:25 LXX) to describe Balaam, another "son of perdition" going away home with "the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5; Balaam again). By contrast, Matthias was "chosen to take *place* in this ministry" (v.25 RV). The Judas chapter was now closed – until the day of judgement.

Notes: Acts 1:13–26

13. *An upper room.* Possibly, in one of the outer buildings of the temple; cp. Lk. 24:53 and what is advanced here on Acts 2:1.
14. *Son of... brother of*. Note the italics. These genitives mean "son of" (e.g. Jn. 6.71). When Luke means "brother" he says so.
    With one accord. All the occurrences of this Greek word, except Rom. 15 .6, come in Acts; eight times w.r.t. the early church (s.w. Ex. 19:8 LXX).
    In prayer and supplication – for their Lord's return?
    Why should the preposition "with" be repeated?
    With the women. The Bezan text adds: "and children"!
15. *In those days.* Gk: *these days,* which reads strangely.
    An hundred and twenty. Ten has always been the requisite number of men for a synagogue. Therefore 12 synagogues in the New Israel (Jas. 2:2). Or, hinting at a triangular number. 120= 1 +2 + 3... + 15(153,276,666 etc. are also triangular numbers; why?)
16. *This scripture.* Which? Those quoted in v.20, or Ps. 41:9?
    Guide to them which took Jesus, But why should the high priests' men need a guide at all?
17. *Part* means also inheritance; Mt. 19:28.
18. Should this parenthesis (in Luke's style, not Peter's) include v.20?
    The reward of iniquity. The wages of sin; Rom. 6:23.
    Falling headlong. The suggested alternative traces the word *prènès* back to *pimpreni.*
    Bowels used figuratively in Ps. 109:18.
    Gushed out, or poured out, perhaps suggesting tears.
20. *Another.* Greek: someone different.
    Take. Better *receive.* Matthias did not *take* this high office.
    Companied with us. But 1 Jn. 3:6 shows how to test a false apostle.
    Went in and out. A Bible idiom for leadership, as a shepherd of the flock; cp. Num. 27:17; 1 Sam. 18:13; 2 Chr. 1:10; Acts 9:28; Jn. 10:9.
22. *A witness... of his resurrection.* Jn. 15:27; Lk. 24:46–48; Acts 26:16; 1 Cor. 9 .1 RV.
    Unto the day that he was taken up seems to imply that the Ascension was witnessed by more than just the eleven.
23. *They.* The women too had a say in this?
    Joseph. The same as Mk. 15:40? He was evidently the first and more obvious choice. But what seemed to be high qualifications were actually disqualifications, as inclining him to "justification by works"!
    Justus. Cp. James the Just, and Col. 4:11.
24. *Shew* by a clear unmistakable sign.
    Which knoweth the hearts. It is difficult to be sure of the reference of these words; cp. 15:8; Rom. 8:27; Rev. 2:23 etc.

6. Pentecost (2:1–4)

Because the Passover sabbath had coincided with the ordinary sabbath in this most important of years, Pentecost fell on the first day of the week, the day when God had said: "Let there be Light – and Light was" (Gen. 1:2, 3).

The rabbis had calculated – and they were probably right in this (Ex. 19:1, 16) – that the Ten Commandments were given at Pentecost. So in all Jewish minds the promulgation of the Law was specially associated with this feast.

It was also the beginning of the wheat harvest. On this day "two wave loaves... baken with leaven," were offered as "the first–fruits unto the Lord" (Lev. 23:17). Just as the wave–sheaf of barley, presented on the morning after the Passover sabbath, typified the risen Christ, so these wave–loaves represented his redeemed (why two?). Because that wave sheaf of barley was the true firstfruits, James refers to the believers as *"a kind of* firstfruits of his creatures (1:18).

With such pregnant associations, the disciples awaited the fulfilment of their Lord's promise in a spirit of high expectation. When the time came, "they were all with one accord in one place."

This is usually assumed to bean upper room in a private house (as 1:13). But, as will be shown by and by, this Pentecost experience took place in the temple. Nor is there any reason why that earlier assembly should not have been in an upper room in one of the buildings of the temple area. In such a case no doubts need arise about the adequate size of the room where they gathered together. The words are usually taken to mean all the 120 disciples.

Fulfilment

Luke's phrase says that "the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled," as though with reference to the fulfilment of a prophecy or type or the expiry of a divinely designated period of time (s.w. Lk. 9:51; 2 Chr. 36:21; Jer. 25:12; Dan. 9:2 LXX). Other possibilities are these: "In the filling up (of the Twelve) on the Day of Pentecost;" or, "in the filling up (of the temple) on the Day of Pentecost," There is room for both of these ideas, thus: The brethren came together early in the morning in a suitable assembly room in the temple area primarily to fill up the number of the Twelve by the choice of Matthias; and then, with full expectation that soon their promised baptism in Holy Spirit (1:15; Lk. 3:16) would take place, they waited all keyed up until the time of the morning sacrifice.

As at Sinai

As national Israel had come, all expectant, to Sinai, so now the New Israel were assembled on a holier mountain of the Lord. The number of marked resemblances between the two occasions (both of them Pentecost) is very striking. There is mention of wind and fire and the sound of a trumpet (Heb. 12:19 s.w.). Twelve men were the representatives of the rest (Ex. 24:4, 5). And the people were gathered together "with one accord" (Ex. 19:8 LXX).

In the Temple Area

That the disciples' place of assembly was the temple court or some part of the outer buildings of the temple to which they had access, seems very likely, for this was their normal place of assembly (2:46; Lk. 24:53). And the practical consideration has to be faced that there was nowhere else in the close–packed city of Jerusalem where a crowd of thousands could come together.

"When this sound was heard (v.6 RV) as of a rushing mighty wind," the great throng of worshippers in the temple area would be able to locate it immediately, so that in a matter of seconds the disciples would be the centre of universal attention.

Mention of "the house" has misled many readers into assuming that the centre of this sensational development was a private house, but this overlooks the fact that "The House" was the normal Jewish way of referring to the temple, (7:47, 49; Lk. 19:46; 13:35, and scores of places in the Old Testament). And certainly no private house in Jerusalem would be so sited as to allow of the concourse of thousands of people.

Theophany

The phenomena associated with the gift of the Spirit were such as to influence strongly all Bible–minded Jews. Every detail of Luke's description needs to be pondered carefully.

There was an actual sound (v. 6 RV), and apparently a mighty gust of wind. But, as with the appearance of fire also, Luke is careful to say *"as of...* a mighty wind" (v.2, 3). Ezekiel had found his vocabulary beggared when attempting to describe the Shekinah Glory of the Lord: "the *likeness* of a throne, as the *appearance* of a sapphire stone: and upon the *likeness* as the *appearance* of a man" (1:26); and the words "appearance, likeness" come another eight times in the next two verses. And now similarly, Luke's matchless vocabulary is utterly unequal to the occasion.

The description of "a rushing mighty wind" (AV) can be misleading, for "rushing" is certainly not the meaning of the Greek word there. It is actually a commonplace word which has been endowed, in some places in the New Testament, with a specialised meaning when the intention is to describe a divine prophetic inspiration. The outstanding example is, of course, 2 Peter 1:21: "Holy men of God spake as they were *moved* by the Holy Spirit."

It is useful to consider the marked contrast between this apostolic experience at Pentecost and the occasion after the Lord's resurrection when he "breathed on them and said, Receive ye (or, ye are receiving) the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 20:22). Was this earlier instance a prophecy of what was to come on them at Pentecost? or was it a separate inspiration of the divine Spirit of a temporary and less dramatic character than that at Pentecost? The tense of the verb suggests the latter, but other considerations (e.g. Jn. 16:7) seem to require the other conclusion. It is difficult to be sure.

The association of a "mighty wind" with a theophany is not uncommon. Indeed, it is to be expected, for the Old Testament word for "Spirit" also means "wind." The synagogue Haftarah for the Day of Pentecost, Ezekiel 1, has this detail about that theophany: "Behold, a whirlwind came out of the north...;" and there is emphasis on "the noise of their wings as ... the voice of speech, the noise of an host" (1:4, 24). There are plenty of significant examples of God's "stormy wind fulfilling his word" (e.g. Ps 148:8; Is. 29:6; Ps. 104:3; 18:10; Jn. 3:8; Ez. 37:9 = Rev. 11:11).

At the time when this awe–inspiring phenomenon was heard, the disciples were "sitting" in the Holy House, as David had "sat before the Lord" (2 Sam. 7:18) to pray and give thanks for the unique Promise given to him. With what fear and wonder did they now witness another token of the heavenly Presence! As they sat there, a mighty tongue of flame was seen. Then it subdivided and appeared to rest separately (or in succession?) over the head of each of the disciples. The fire which had appeared to Moses at the bush (Ex. 3:2) and to Israel and also to Elijah at Sinai (Ex. 19:18; 1 Kgs. 19:12) now brought an endowment of divine power to humble followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Had they not been promised a baptism in Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11)? The seven Spirits of God, seen in the heavenly vision as

seven lamps of fire (Rev. 4:5), were now an active power in their lives.

This divine fire was "seen by them" (this is the most natural way of reading the Greek phrase), and may have been seen by nobody else. The amazed reaction of the crowd when they "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance," seems to require such an inference.

It is difficult to be sure whether the word "all" is meant to describe the Twelve (as 1:26; 2:14 might suggest), or whether the wider context embraces the whole assembly of disciples. Certainly, it must be assumed that the apostles were assembled in the temple at this time accompanied by their equally enthusiastic brethren.

Divine directives

It is impressive to note how, from this point onwards, every significant new activity of the early church is specifically attributed to the Holy Spirit:

4:8	Peter's forthright rebuttal of priestly accusations.
6:3, 5	The new organization of welfare for the poor in Jerusalem.
8:15, 17	The acceptance of Samaritans into the church.
8:29	Philip's preaching to a eunuch.
9:17	The selection of Saul for a great work of preaching.
10:19, 44	Peter taking salvation to Gentiles.
13:2	The first missionary journey.
15:28	The decisions of the council at Jerusalem.
16:6, 7	Paul steered away from Asia to Macedonia
19:1	(Codex Beza) The full gospel brought to disciples of John the Baptist.
19:21	Paul's last fateful journey to
20:22	Jerusalem.

Notes: 2:1–4

1. *With one accord:* s.w. 1:14; Ps. 133:1 LXX
2. *Sound,* used of trumpet blast; also s.w. Lk. 21:25; Heb. 12:19; Is. 28:15,18 LXX.
   Filled all the house. So also other temples of the Lord: Ex. 40:35; 1 Kgs. 8:10,11. Is. 6:4; Hag. 2:7; Ez. 47 5,7; Jn 1:16
3. *Appeared.* This word commonly describes a divine vision; cp. also v.17. *Fire.* Cp. also 2 Kgs. 2:11; Is. 6:6; Jer. 5:14; 23:29; Ez. 1 4 13; Ps 29 7
4. *All filled.* Eph. 5:18.
   Utterance: s.w. in v. 14:26:25 (a claim to inspiration!). The same word, shorn of its prefix, and therefore less forceful in 4:18; 2 Pet. 2:16,18; and the noun in Rom. 10:18; 1 Cor. 14:7.

7. The Crowd in Jerusalem (2:5–21)

When Jesus was baptized in Jordan, a Voice from heaven declared him to be "my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:17). Now, his disciples were baptized in Holy Spirit, and again the Voice was heard, doubtless speaking similar words (the Greek word in 2:6, 14 is the same), words so different from The Ten Words spoken at Sinai.

Perhaps, as on other occasions (Jn. 3:8; 12:29; "Gospels", p.94, 590), it sounded to undiscriminating human ears like thunder, but whatever the localised audible phenomenon, it brought together within a minute a massive crowd of worshippers from all parts of the temple.

These thousands now crowding together before the disciples were Jews from every part of the Roman empire and from many lands beyond its borders. It is commonly assumed that the variegated character of this multitude was entirely the result of pilgrimage to the Holy Land specially to observe the feast of Pentecost. This is a mistake, for, whilst it is true that for the Jews of the dispersion Pentecost was a more popular feast than Passover (because of easier and safer travelling at that time of the year), Luke is careful to describe them as *"dwelling* at Jerusalem" (s.w. 1:19); that is, they were Jews from all over the civilised world who counted themselves fortunate to be able to come and live in Jerusalem for the rest of their lives. So the main part of the multitude were "devout Jews of the Diaspora who for the purpose of being near the Temple had taken up their residence in Jerusalem, perhaps to live and die within the city walls" (Expos. Gk. Test.). Luke's word for "devout men" (s.w. Lk. 2:25) suggests comparison with the aged devout Simeon. As he greeted the baby Jesus in the temple, so now these greeted the infant ecclesia. The word "proselytes" (v.10) encourages the idea that "out of every nation under heaven" means converted Gentiles also, otherwise the word "Jews" (v.5) is redundant.

Of course the crowd would include also a great number of Jews who were native to the holy city (v.14), besides lots of worshippers from Judaea and Galilee. But it suited Luke's purpose to stress the international character of this Jewish throng because he thus sought to emphasize this Pentecost as the antidote to Babel.

Babel reversed

When, at the outset, he describes how the multitude was "confounded" at the remarkable phenomena they witnessed, his Greek word is precisely that which is used about the builders of Babel (Gen. 11:7, 9 LXX). Also, the first of the countries in his impressive catalogue is Parthia, where the tower of Babel had been located. Much more significantly (as the previous chapter has suggested), now at Pentecost men from a wide scattering of nations (compare Gen. 10) found themselves all listening, fascinated, to divine truth proclaimed in one holy tongue – "our own tongue, wherein we were born." It was a pointed reversal of the apostasy of Babel.

"When this sound (of the rushing mighty wind) was heard", the crowd rapidly assembled in a state of bewilderment. They were stupefied, flabbergasted, for here surely was a special divine phenomenon (cp. Jn. 3:8; "Gospels", p.93, 94, note 8). It was the easiest thing in the world to recognize the speakers as Galileans. Their dress and especially their speech made them as easy to identify as twentieth century Scots.

These men are just ignorant provincials, uncultured northerners. Then how is it that we hear them so skilful in the holy tongue (v.8: singular) and so fluent in proclaiming in familiar foreign speech the wonderful works of God?' And the more they listened, the more their mystification intensified. Luke's text has the unusual *dialektos* for "language", perhaps to suggest the cognate *dialegomai,* and so to imply "reasoning, justification" – the very opposite of the incomprehensible gibberish of modern Pentecostals.

"Behold, are not *all* these which speak Galileans?" This detail seems to require restriction to the Twelve, for not all the 120 (1:15) were Galileans, nor were they all un–educated, nor could so large a number join effectively in a combined exhibition of the gift of tongues.

The Geography of Pentecost

In those days Jews were as international as they are today, so Luke was able to put together an impressive list.

First, the eastern countries – Parthia, Media, Elam. Strictly it was unnecessary to add to these: "dwellers in Mesopotamia," for that land was part of Parthia. Presumably, here Luke was hinting at a further reversal of the Babylonian captivity, for the Jewish communities which had not joined in the *aliyah* of Ezra and Nehemiah were large and prosperous.

There is cursory mention of Judaea (but why not Galilee?), and then the northern provinces: Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia. Next, north Africa: Egypt and Cyrene.

Jews and proselytes from Rome were specially noteworthy. The word "strangers" might mean Jews whose homes were in Rome, (e.g. Rom. 16:7), or (as in 17:21) Roman Jews now living in Jerusalem. The latter is more likely, and Luke's term for them normally (in Acts) means a Roman citizen.

The mention at the tail–end of the list of Cretans and Arabians seems to be rather lame. But a consideration of the surprising omissions from Luke's list may supply a clue. Why no mention, of Galatia, Cilicia, Macedonia, Achaia, Cyprus and Syria?

All of these would certainly be represented in that temple crowd. Is it possible that the deliberate omissions are of the provinces where in later years Paul preached the gospel with such marked success? And in that case, are Crete and Arabia tacked on to the end of the list because although Paul certainly did proclaim the gospel there, they were his outstanding failures? It is difficult to be sure.

The wonderful Works of God

The popular reaction to the Spirit–inspired utterances of the disciples was the same in everybody there — and yet very diverse. "They were *all* amazed" (the words are repeated: v.7, 12), the more so because of the ecstasy with which "the wonderful works of God" were being proclaimed.

In the Appendix on page 389f it is argued that in accordance with their Lord's promise of the Paraclete (Jn. 14:26) the disciples were having brought miraculously to their remembrance the little–understood Hebrew text of certain psalms which celebrate the "mighty acts" *(megaleia)* of God, and also portions of the foreign–language liturgies heard in Diaspora synagogues in Jerusalem. If so, Psalms 105 and 126 seem to be specially appropriate.

"Make known his deeds among the people ... talk ye of all his wondrous works ... remember his marvellous works that he hath done; his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth ... he hath remembered his covenant for ever ... which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant" (105:1–10).

"When the Lord brought back those that *returned to Zion,* we were like them that *dream* (cp. Acts 2:17). Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our *tongue* with singing: then said they among the *nations,* The Lord hath done *great things* for them; whereof we are glad ... They that sow in tears (as at the crucifixion) shall reap in joy (on resurrection day and at Pentecost). He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves (as at Pentecost; Lev.23:15, 17) with him" (126).

See also Note 11.

Mockery

In all who heard the disciples there was much perplexity. Luke's phrase: "they were in doubt" implies, in other places (5:24; 10:17; Dan. 2:3 Sym.), a worry about the logical consequences of what was happening or had just been witnessed.

Some said: "What meaneth this?" But others – cynical flippant men of Jerusalem? (Is. 28:14) – dismissed the whole affair as a triviality. Not hesitating to blaspheme against this latest manifestation of the Holy Spirit, they put on it the worst construction they could think of: "These men are full of new wine!" How right they were, though not in the sense which they had meant! As they intended their jibe, it was palpably absurd, for there could be no new wine available until the month of August at the earliest. So by a neat pun in his Greek Luke implies that *they* were the drunks.

It may be that they were attempting a witty allusion to a prophecy of Isaiah's: "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink" (5:11), in which case their cleverness was self–confuting, for the next verse goes on: "but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands. Therefore my people are gone into captivity ...". It is God's repudiation of those who repudiated His men.

How little these mockers realised that, all inadvertently, they were providing a superb fulfilment for another of Isaiah's prophecies. The detailed exposition of Isaiah 28 does not belong here. Just now two salient details will be sufficient.

"With stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people" (v.11). Paul applied these words to the gift of tongues (1 Cor. 14:21). The context denounces "the drunkards of Ephraim ... they have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way" (v.1, 7). So whilst the disciples were drunk with wine of the right sort, it was their critics who were fuddled in judgement.

One old commentator exposes the futility of the hostile criticism in these words: "Excess of wine may give men more tongue, not more tongues, and is so far from making them speak other, that it hinders the pronouncing of their own language."

Another — Matthew Henry — rather quaintly explains that Peter "stood up with the eleven" to prove to the crowd that he could stand up and therefore wasn't drunk!

Now, at the critical moment Peter, so much changed from the Peter who went to the palace of the high priest, by a special inspiration (Gk.) became chief spokesman. He had his eleven colleagues ranged alongside him, and his powerful voice filled the temple court. It may be taken as fairly certain that he spoke in Greek, and thus was understood by all.

His long speech – of which Acts 2 is doubtless only a précis – fell into three well–marked sections, each beginning with a personal address ("Ye men of Judaea... Ye men of Israel... Men and brethren"), and each ending with a Bible proof text.

His first concern was to rebuke the scoffers – local people, all of them, as his address: "Men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem" plainly shows (cp. Mt. 21:15, 16; "Gospels" p. 522; and contrast v.22).

So (v.14–21), he set himself to dispose of the scurrilous charge of drunkenness. Why did he bother? Had not his Lord said: "Cast not your pearls before swine" (Mt. 7:6)? But, as the outcome (v.41) was to prove, there were many here who were not in that category at all.

Both negatively and positively Peter repudiated the aspersion of drunkenness. "It is but the third hour of the day" – 9 a.m. The pubs are not open! And was it not a well–established rule that men go to the temple at the hour of morning prayer fasting? Therefore *these,* the eleven who stood up with him, were not drunk. There is implicit in this assertion that it was only the twelve who had been speaking with tongues.

A Biblical discourse

"Christ's scholars never learn above their Bible," says Matthew Henry. Therefore, for explanation let this crowd look to Holy Scripture: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel ... I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy ... And on my servants and on my hand–maidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophecy" (Joel 2:28, 29).

Here, both "servants" and "handmaids" mean "slaves." And since in Jewish life most slaves were of Gentile origin, this part of the prophecy implies the outpouring of God's gift on Gentiles as well as Jews, and even upon the most menial of Gentiles. But the time was not ripe for Peter to emphasize this. Indeed it may be doubted whether even he so understood this prophecy at that time.

There is a remarkable correspondence in ideas here with the well–known Jewish prayer (referred to by Paul in Gal. 3:28). "My God, I thank thee that I was born not a Gentile but a Jew, not a slave but a free man, not a woman but a man." Joel, Peter and Paul team up to cancel out these distinctions with their gospel theme.

The "wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath" found vivid illustration that day in the rushing mighty wind and in the apostle's speaking with tongues. Actually the word "signs" does not come in the Joel passage. However, as one writer put it, "God's wonders are always signs for those who have eyes to see." In fact, Jewry was given signs enough (1 Cor. 1:22; 14:22), but was too blind to see.

Another addition to the Joel quotation is "and they shall prophesy." This is useful as being almost an explicit interpretation of what speaking with tongues was. In David's appointments for the Sanctuary service, certain Levites were to *"prophesy* with a harp, *to give thanks and to praise the Lord"* (1 Chr. 25:3). At Pentecost those who spoke with tongues declared *"the wonderful works of God"* (v.11). And so also the first Gentile converts were heard to "speak with tongues and *magnify God"* (10:46; cp. also 1 Sam. 10:9–13; 19:20–24). These details harmonize well with what is suggested about "tongues" in Appendix 2 (page 389).

"The day of the Lord" is only too obviously the Second Coming (as in 1 Th. 5:2; 1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil 1:10). And the word for "notable" *(epiphaneia)* confirms this (Lk. 17:24; cp. 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 2:8). So it is hardly adequate to refer these words to a "coming" of Christ in the judgement on Jerusalem in A.D.70. The evidence for such a reading is virtually non–existent. At best, one can see that great horror ("fire and pillars of smoke" like the annihilation of Sodom; Gen. 19:28) as a kind of prototype of yet greater judgement still to come.

Some try to read into the phrase: "This is that ..." an intimation that Peter meant: "This which you now witness is *like* that which Joel foretold." But can "This is that" have any meaning but: "This is the very thing Joel foretold"? (Compare the phrasing in 1 Jn. 4:3; 1 Pet. 1:25).

Certainly on the face of it, this scripture is a prophecy of the coming of the kingdom of God. The entire context shouts for that kind of fulfilment. Yet Peter's inspiration led him to apply it to the first century. Why? Indeed he went

out of his way to change the Hebrew word *achar,* afterward, into *acharith,* the last days, a phrase which, with hardly an exception, belongs to the end of all Gentile times. It will not do to say that it means "the last days of Judah's commonwealth." The context in Joel bluntly disallows this. (For more on this problem, see "Revelation", by H.A.W., p.259).

Here, no doubt, is another scripture, like Psalm 2, with a certain degree of fulfilment in the early days of the church (Acts 4:25–27), and a more dramatic and complete fulfilment in the time of the Lord's second coming (Rev. 19:15; 2:27). But at the time Peter's inspiration led him to believe that the two would coincide. Yet he was guided to appropriate from the Septuagint Version the significant change from "pour out my Spirit" to "pour out from my Spirit," as though suggesting only a partial fulfilment in the first instance (cp. the usage in Acts 5:2). And certainly the grim signs foretold in heaven and earth, "the sun into darkness, and the moon into blood" have an admirable relevance, primarily, to the overthrow of Israel in A.D.70 (cp. Luke 21:11).

Whilst issuing his sombre warning against missing the essential meaning of this sensational Pentecost, Peter was tactful enough not to stress the implication behind the words: "my Spirit upon *all flesh,"* and *"whosoever* shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (v.21; in Rom. 10:13 Paul does not hesitate to extend this promise to Gentiles). It is easy to see why at this time Peter did not go so far. To begin now to instruct this bigoted Jewish multitude regarding a gospel for Gentiles also would have been to shut their minds for all time to the gospel of Christ. So instead he emphasized: *"your* sons ... *your* daughters ... *your* young men ... *your* old men, in the same way that Jeremiah's prophecy of the New Covenant concerns "the house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Heb. 8:8), yet it certainly covers all the New Israel in Christ.

Peter was to indulge in another similar ambiguity at the end of his speech: "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off..." (v.39). The time was not yet ripe for the opening up of these great truths. Perhaps his hearers assumed that Peter meant inclusion of Jewish proselytes in the promise.

There was no lack of other scriptures which Peter might have quoted; e.g. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will put my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring" (Isaiah 44:3; and by all means compare 32:15). And, of course, there is Psalm 68:18 – "Thou hast ascended up on high ... thou hast received gifts for men ... " – as expounded by Paul in Ephesians 4. So one is constrained to wonder if perhaps Peter did use these scriptures also.

Saved in Jerusalem

Certainly he used Joel to prepare the way for his final appeal: "Whosoever shall call the Name of the Lord upon himself (cp. Jas. 2:7) shall be saved" from the judgement foretold. Did not Joel go on to assure Israel that "in Jerusalem shall be those that escape" (2:32)? Just as God had called His Name upon Israel (Isaiah 43:1; 45:4 LXX), so now the New Israel must be similarly marked out – to be "saved" in what sense? Modern evangelicals equate this with "taking the Lord Jesus to be your own personal Saviour" (to quote their well–worn and quite un Biblical jargon). Yet in fact "to the Jew salvation would mean safety in the Messianic kingdom" (Expos. Gk. Test.). And today the Christadelphian has every right in the world to insist that that is what the words still mean. To be sure, no one can be saved unto the blessings of the kingdom except he thankfully accept the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ. And it is certainly correct to read "the Name of the Lord" here with

reference to the Lord Jesus, even though in Joel's text the Name is Jehovah, for has not "the Name that is above every name" been given to Christ (Phil. 2:10; Rom. 10:13), so that men will honour him even as they honour the Father (Jn. 5:23)?

Notes: 2:5–21

5. *Dwelling – katoikein,* not *paroikein.*
   Every nation under heaven. Not literally, of course, but the same effective hyperbole as in Col. 1:23. That they were *dwellers* in Jerusalem, and not just visitors, is emphasized over and over again in Peter's speech: "A man approved of God among you ... as ye yourselves also know ... him ye have taken, and ... have crucified."
6. RV: *Sound.* Did the "mighty wind" develop into a trumpet blast, as in Ex. 19:16? s.w. Mt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 14:7,8; 2 Chr. 5:13.
   Multitude This word (n. and vb.) comes 10 times in 9 chapters. Now note Heb. 11:12.
10. Ancient Jewish inscriptions have been found in Crimea (part of Pontus).
11. The wonderful works of God: s.w. Ps. 71:19,wherenotethecontext.TheBook of Acts is shot through with praise to God; 2:4,11,47; 4:24; 10:46; 11:18; 13:48; 16:25; 21:20; 27:35; 28:15.
12. *What meaneth this?* All the translators assume an idiomatic meaning here, as in 17:20. Literally, it is: What does he (God) wish this to be?
13. *Others.* Gk. *"heteroi":* others different from those just mentioned.
    Mocking. cp. Jer. 20:7; Lk. 7:34.
    Full of new wine. 1 Sam: 1:13,14 is another example. Gk: *gleukos* comes only in Job 32:19 (18). Then were these men learned enough to be making deliberate allusion to this passage?
    The new wine of the Spirit comes in new bottles (men new–born in Christ), and not in old bottles used to the old wine of rabbinic tradition. (Lk. 5:38; Jn. 2:10; Jer. 23:9).
14. *Said,* by inspiration of the Spirit; s.w. in v.4.
    Hearken. The same rhetorical appeal comes in two closely–related scriptures: Joel 1:2; Is. 28:23.
15. *Suppose.* This Gk. word very often means "answer."
17. S*aith God.* Could there be a more explicit declaration of the inspiration of O.T. prophecy? cp. Heb. 1:2. This phrase comes from Jl. 2:12, where again the context is appropriate!
    Of my Spirit. Here *apo* may be distributive, emphasizing different gifts to different people; cp. 1 Pet. 4:10.
    Pour out. Zech. 12:10 picks up this idea from Joel, where see 2:12–14, and cp. Acts 2:38.
    Your daughters shall prophesy. Anticipated in Lk. 2:36. In the first century there was a greater readiness to recognize a ministry of women than in the twentieth: Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5.
19. *Smoke.* The word comes 12 times in Rev. describing a judgement of God, and here only. Therefore this must refer to judgement: (a) A.D.70 (b) the Last Days. In Joel 2:30, "palm trees of smoke," i.e. mushroom clouds!
20. *Sun, moon.* An eclipse of Israel; cp. Gen. 37:9,10; Jer. 31:35,36.
    Notable. The corresponding noun *epiphaneia* always refers to the Second Coming. A.D.70 was not an *epiphaneia.*

8. "Jesus is risen!" (2:22–28)

Having brushed off the flippancies of the critics and instead prepared their minds for a message of great moment, Peter addressed himself with renewed earnestness to the vast crowd before him:

"Ye men of Israel ..." Was it a rhetorical apostrophe, or a deliberate reminder of their great forefather who, like these descendants of his gathered before him, had come back to the Land after long years in Gentile territory? If the latter, then it was surely intended that their minds should run on to consider how, thereafter, the choicest son, elect and consecrated, was rejected and got rid of by his brethren, only to be manifest to them a long while afterwards as a mighty ruler and a saviour.

At the moment even the most discerning mind in that temple court would hardly achieve such a degree of insight; but later when Peter's exordium drove the lesson home: "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly ..." then doubtless they saw what he was driving at.

First, came the reminder of all the shame associated with the name of Jesus of Nazareth: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (Jn. 1:46). And that very reproach had been written on his cross. Yet it was also a designation for disciples to be proud of, for it identified Jesus as The Branch *(nezer)* of the stock of Jesse, the promised Messiah, who, nailed to that dead wood, turned it into a Tree of Life (1 Pet. 2:24). The apostle's repeated allusion to Golgotha (v.23, 36) makes it likely that from the very first he intended to remind the crowd of the crucifixion which many of them must have witnessed so recently.

Basic Truth about Jesus

Peter was not one to beat about the bush. In his first few sentences he enunciated the basic elements of the creed of a disciple of Jesus:

1. All that transpired regarding him was foreordained by God. Jesus was the fulcrum of a grand divine design for the redemption of God's people.

2. Jesus was a *man;* but he was a man who came from God, in the sense that he had a special divine mission; cp. Jn. 1:6; 3:2; 17:18.

3. Attention to his claims became imperative because of a multitude of miraculous meaningful marvels.

4. Nevertheless the nation callously crucified him.

5. But God raised him from the dead – inevitably so, because of his peerless character.

There is not a hint of trinitarianism in Peter's advocacy of his Lord's unique work and status. God did the works through him; God did not allow his interred corpse to corrupt; God raised him from the dead; during his time of trial God was at his right hand; in his ascension he was made joyful with the Father's countenance. And all this was "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."

The reminder of "miracles, wonders, and signs" echoed the "signs and wonders" done by Moses before Pharaoh (Ps. 135:9), thus bidding the multitude consider Jesus as a prophet like unto Moses. But also it linked with the tokens of Holy Spirit power which they were witnessing there and then in the apostles, and were to witness in coming days (Heb. 2:8; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:12).

Guilty!

Yet, for the vile death of such a man as Jesus, so full of good works and graciousness, they — these men now listening to Peter – had been responsible. It took a great deal of courage to

say this, and in such an environment, yet this Peter was the Peter who had quailed a few weeks before at the accusing scrutiny of a servant–girl.

True, these Jews had not done the foul deed themselves, but it was their crime, their guilt, nevertheless – for had they not engineered it through the hands of the Romans, men outside the Law of Moses (s.w. 1 Cor. 9:21) and therefore less accountable before God than themselves?

Nor did Peter stint the delineation of the horror of it. His remarkable word for "crucified" presented a picture of Jesus being stretched on the cross and nailed to it, just as a tent is made secure by a succession of tent pegs, and then, without any concern for the excruciating pain of the process, roughly set upright, exposed before all, until he died there, slain by enemies who meant to have him slain.

God's Purpose in Christ

But though it had been indisputably *their* purpose that this should so happen, it was also, inscrutably, *God's* purpose. It was "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" that all this came about: "It pleased *the Lord to* bruise him; *he* hath put him to grief" (Is. 53:10).

The reconciling of this deliberate plan and purpose of God with the self–will of the evil men through whom it was brought about is not a task to be lightly undertaken. Nor is its successful accomplishment to be expected. Here in one verse Holy Scripture strongly emphasizes both sides of the problem, and without any explanation or harmonization being attempted. It is passing strange that what God's Book nowhere attempts, its readers are so often blithely willing to make good, rather than admit humbly that it is a mystery beyond their present powers.

The Purpose of God in this Jesus did not stop at presenting him as a sacrifice for sin. It demonstrated also the utter efficacy of such a sacrifice by his being raised from the dead: "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the birth–pangs of death."

Sacrifice and Resurrection

For this eloquent phrase Peter went to Psalm 116: "The cords of death compassed me, and the pains of Sheol gat hold upon me" (v.3). The entire psalm based on the chequered experiences of King Hezekiah, is eloquent of the trials and vindication of the Messiah. Here the use of the word "cords", appropriate to a sacrifice being bound to the altar of the Lord (Ps. 118:27), explains why Peter should speak of the birth–pangs of death being "loosed" – two figures of speech being run together.

The metaphor of "birth–pangs" was doubtless intended to present a picture of the grave bringing forth its Firstborn – "the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18), "the first begotten of the dead" (Rev. 1:5). And Bible–minded men in that crowd would be stimulated to recall that their Law required all firstborn to be devoted to God (Ex. 13:2, 12).

But in the ears of these men the most astonishing of all Peter's confident statements was this: "It was *not possible* that he should be held in death's grip." It had not been possible for the omnipotence of God to remove the cup of suffering from Jesus ("Gospels", p.716). Nor, when he was slain, was it possible that he should remain in the grip of death. Why was it not possible?

Psalm 16

For answer Peter went to a Scripture which the rabbis were not in the habit of expounding with reference to the Messiah. In the first place, the apostle declared, this Jesus is "the Holy One" of God; such a title was his by right, for: "I foresaw the Lord *always* before my face." How could a man so completely God–centred be held in the power of the Sin–Enemy he had so completely overcome? Listening to Peter that day were many who would gladly and loudly

have gainsaid the apostle's declaration of this utter faultlessness of Jesus. But they knew well enough that all through his ministry the character of Jesus had been under constant hostile scrutiny by clever enemies, yet never had they been able to pin a reproach on him; no charge against his character would stick.

Indeed, those hearers who were familiar with the Hebrew text of Psalm 16 would recall that "I foresaw the Lord always ..." implies "made like" the Lord in whom he took such pleasure.

"He is on my right hand ..." seems at first sight to be inconsistent with the familiar Messianic prophecy: "Sit thou at my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool" (Ps. 110:1). The distinction is between the days of his flesh and the time of his exaltation to heavenly glory. The ensuing phrase:" ... that I should not be moved," shows this; so also the words: "my *flesh* shall *tabernacle* in *hope,"* all of them terms appropriate to the days of his weakness.

"He is on my right hand" uses the figure of a legal trial, as though he had the angel of the Lord as his advocate. Or do these words describe literal truth? – an angel at his side, not only in Gethsemane, but also when his travesty of a trial took place before the Sanhedrin?

The psalmist's language of rejoicing (v.26) might seem irrelevant to Peter's argument; but in fact it is highly appropriate, for not only did it blend excellently with the theme of resurrection, but also it provided the best of all reasons why Messiah's followers should be intoxicated with unquenchable joy as they now proclaimed the truth about their Lord.

"My flesh shall tabernacle in hope" does not describe a cold corpse awaiting resurrection in the third day; it describes how Jesus was buoyed up during his ministry. Nor is it without significance that in many OT. passages the word "hope" is specially associated with the hope of children! This follows on admirably from the allusion to his birth–pangs as the firstborn of a New Creation.

There is a superb and valuable literalness about the prophecy: "neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." This certainly implies resurrection before corruption could set in (on this see Jn. 11:39). But there is more in it than this.

In Israel the normal mode of interment was cave–burial. After several generations it was by no means uncommon for the remains to be cleared into a remote corner so that the cave could be used over again. But not so with the burial of Jesus. With strong tautological emphasis it is recorded that he was laid in "a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid" (Jn. 19:41). Thus it was literally true that Jesus did not *see* corruption in his resurrection, for no one else had been buried there.

"Thou hast made known to me the ways of life" emphasizes resurrection not merely to another mortal existence, like Lazarus, but to immortality. And ascension to the Father's presence is surely required by the words: "thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance."

But why did Peter's quotation apparently stop there? for the last words of the psalm are also relevant to Peter's claims on behalf of Jesus: "at thy right hand (ascension is implied here also!) there are pleasures for evermore." More than this, these words prophesy an out–pouring of heavenly gifts now exemplified in the remarkable powers of the apostles. Perhaps Peter *did* finish the quotation, for his later comment (v.33) reads like an interpretation of the above–mentioned phrase: "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear."

Notes: 2:22–28

22. *Approved.* A word with a two–fold idea: (a) open demonstration; (b) steering from one to another. Here, very subtly, both surely. And the Gk. perfect tense implies: "and he is still approved", even though brought to the grave.
    Wonders. Concerning Jesus or the apostles this word never comes alone, but always in combination one or two of "miracles, signs, powers."
23. *The determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.* Cp. 3:18; 1 Pet. 1:2,20.
    Crucified. The same word without its prefix comes in Ex. 33:7; 2 Sam. 6:17 LXX; Heb. 8:2.
    Ye have taken. Highly inaccurate if indeed this crowd were made up of visitors to Jerusalem. Cp. v.5: "dwelling."
24. *The pains of death.* The same phrase comes also in Ps. 18:4,5 LXX. Note the psalm title: "Of the Beloved, the servant of the Lord ... in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Sh'ol."
25. In Acts 13:35,36 Paul quoted the same psalm, and then expounded it in just the same way.
    Concerning him is, literally, *unto him,* i.e. looking unto him.
    I foresaw the Lord always before my face. The word *always* was important for Peter's argument, as showing that the real reference was not to David; note v.29.
26. This verse appears to describe a risen Christ bubbling over with gladness – a concept not normally emphasized. LXX and Peter use "tongue" for "glory", recognizing the figure of synecdoche, by which the glory (praise and thanks) given to God is put for the tongue which utters it; cp. Ps. 108:1; 30:12; 57:8.
27. *Soul. Here* cp. *psuché* with *psuchos,* cold (the cold dead body).
    Holy One. Cp. Dt. 33:8 – priest!
28. *Made known.* This phrase disallows any personal pre–existence of Christ.
    With thy countenance. Gk: *meta,* not *sun* which a doctrine of co–equality would surely call for. There is a marked contrast with Moses; Ex. 33:20.

9. "Both Lord and Christ" (2:29–36)

Peter's forthright accusations about guilt for the death of Jesus, combined with the not–to–be–evaded accuracy of the prophecy he had quoted had by this time made the multitude restive with resentment. So now, as though with the skilled art of a practised orator, he–fisherman Peter! – proceeded to sway them in his favour with a friendly appeal: "Men, brethren–." Thus he sought to soothe their indignation. 'You find this topic an uncomfortable one? Then, I pray you, give me leave to talk instead about David, the great king of our nation. Here, too, I have every reason for boldness.'

David and Messiah

Immediately they settled down to listen once again, only to realise before long that David was to be a witness to them not only of the resurrection of Jesus but also about its impact on themselves.

"The patriarch David," said Peter. Normally the term was reserved for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the twelve fathers of the twelve tribes; but here "first father" was as appropriate a title as could be, for Peter wanted to talk about David as the first in a great line of kings leading on to the promised Messiah (cp.v.36).

"David is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day," a landmark in the city of Jerusalem, almost within sight from the southern gate of the temple. Men often talked about the way it had been plundered by John Hyrcanus, one of the Maccabees, to finance one of his military adventures. £360 million pounds! so they said. But Josephus was a great one for unmitigated exaggeration when it came to figures. That lively author goes on to tell how Herod the Great also looted the tomb of whatever of value Hyrcanus had left — and had two of his men mysteriously struck dead in the process. According to Jerome the mausoleum of David was still identifiable in the fourth century.

Listening, how many in that crowd bethought them of the frantic fuss there had lately been in Jerusalem about another tomb, known to have been found empty; yet without question Jesus, Son of David, also was known to have been "dead and buried"!

Peter forged ahead with his first proof that the psalm he had already quoted was not about David but about Messiah.

Virgin Birth?

'David was a prophet – no doubt about that! – and he knew that his prophecies related to the Messiah, for had not God sworn an oath (Ps. 132:2,11) that His great Promise about a Son of David would in no wise fail. It was a great Promise, truly, for when else had God sworn with an oath? Only when He made a like Promise to Abraham? (Gen. 22:16–18). *David's* Son, according to the flesh – but did not God also say: *I* will be his Father, and he shall be my son"? How could a man be Son of David and Son of God at the same time? And, remarkably, the Promise did not say "out of thy loins" but "out of thy bowels." Also, in that psalm which echoed the Promise (132:11) the words were "out of thy womb."! In all other places, the word is "loins."

As Peter mentioned in succession such strange things as these, were there some present who wondered uneasily about the extraordinary speculations there had been regarding the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

Resurrection

Peter went remorselessly on: 'According to the Promise, is not Messiah to reign *for ever?* Then does it not

require that he live for ever? Yet how can a mortal man live for ever except he be raised from the grave to triumph over death? And isn't that just what the Promise said? "I will *raise up* (LXX) thy Seed after thee ..." (2 Sam. 7:12). And does not the psalm say: *"Rise up,* O Lord, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength" (132:8). So, you see, that sixteenth psalm which I quoted you, cannot be about David, for he has seen corruption. It must be about Messiah, because other Scriptures, stress that he must rise from the dead.'

'Now, although there were plenty of details in their inspired words which the prophets could make little sense of (1 Pet. 1:10–12), David did know that these things which he was guided to see beforehand were about Messiah. It was concerning the Jesus we now proclaim that he prophesied: His flesh shall not see corruption. And now the words have been fulfilled This Jesus whom we proclaim, was raised from the dead. All of us believers assembled here are personal witnesses to that fact, and you must believe us. You must!'

Heavenly Glory

'But, you say, if that be true, where is he now? why do we not see him for ourselves? The answer to that is in another of David's prophecies: "Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool." This, plainly, is not about David himself, for you know well enough that no man goes to heaven, not even David. That Scripture is clearly about David's Lord, the Messiah, and according to this he is to continue in the presence of God until the time of his open manifestation in power. That is why we do not see him now. But beware! for does not that psalm say that those who are his foes will one day be made his footstool?'

'Even now, as I speak to you, he shares the Glory of God. The proof of this is before you today in the powers you are now witnessing in us, his disciples. Moses, you recall, ascended into the mount and there received authority to give to men rescued from captivity a share of the divine gift imparted to him (Num. 11:25; Ps. 68:18). Here now is a prophet greater than Moses who has ascended to the very presence of the Almighty to receive from Him these greater gifts now imparted to us. In the sight of you all he has poured them forth upon us, precisely as Joel prophesied. You know that Jesus of Nazareth worked miracles and wonders and signs. Now you may expect to witness the same signs in us, his followers. Even now you see a change in us from the ordinary men we were, and you hear us speaking in the holy tongue, and in languages you are familiar with, and with powers of Biblical exposition such as you never dreamed of - and this from men untrained for such exalted work. It is the power of the Holy Spirit - nothing less?'

Peter's confident use of Psalm 110 sprang not only from a consciousness of the Spirit at work but also from the memory of how he had heard his Master employ just the same argument to the utter confusion of his Pharisee and Sadducee adversaries (Mt. 22:41–46). Then the emphasis had gone on the higher status of this promised Son of David: "my Lord." Yet how could he be David's Lord, except he be also Son of God, and therefore born of a virgin? Now the emphasis was on the fact that he sits at God's right hand. He is therefore risen from the dead, and ascended to heaven, the Messiah sharing divine Glory, precisely as the earlier quotation from Psalm 16 had made plain.

'Therefore, from now on, those who have been his foes must become his humble suppliants, worshipping at his footstool (Ps. 132:7).'

So early in the proclamation of the good news it was hardly tactful for Peter to press the implication behind Joel's word: *"Whosoever* shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (v.21; Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:12, 13), as meaning a

gospel for Gentiles as well as Jews. For the present he was content to address himself to "the whole house of Israel": 'You men of Jerusalem crucified Jesus; there is to be no evading that heinous guilt. But today I have shown you past gainsaying that this same Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to God's right hand. He is not only David's Lord but yours also. He is not just the Messiah, an anointed King – he is also an anointed High Priest, as Psalm 110 indisputably says. And today he anoints his men with Holy Spirit power. Face frankly the facts concerning him and concerning your own unparalleled sin, and consider what you must now do regarding this grievous guilt'.

The apostle paused to let the message sink in.

Notes: 2:29–36

29.–31. In 13:35–37 Paul's argument follows exactly the same lines.

29. *Dead and buried.* Here is Peter's first proof that Psalm 16 is not about David.

30. *Being a prophet.* Gk: *huparcho,* probably intended to stress that from earliest days David was constantly under divine inspiration, and not just once. In Psalm 110:1, n'um means "by inspiration."
    According to the flesh. Cp. Rom 1:3,4 where the human and divine aspects of Messiah, clearly implied in 2 Sam. 7:12–16, are similarly distinguished. This phrase and "to raise up the Christ" are omitted by RV and other modern versions, mistakenly surely, for whilst textual evidence is fairly evenly balanced Peter's argument seems to require inclusion.
    Sworn with an oath. There were other oaths of God, some of them very terrible: Dt. 1:34 (Heb. 3:11); 1 Sam. 3:14; Is. 45:23; 54:9; 62:8; Jer. 22:5; 44:26; 49:13; 51:14; Am. 4:2; Ex. 17:16.

31. *Seeing this before.* Gal. 3:8 s.w., referring to the earlier oath of God.
    The resurrection of *the* Christ, that is, the eternal Messianic kingdom can only come about after the Messiah is risen from the dead.
    His soul. An emphatic way of saying: *he* was not left. Note the parallelism: Neither *his flesh* did see corruption.

32. *Jesus.* Both angels and disciples speak of him in this way: 1:11; 2:32,36; 17:3. But so also did his enemies, with very different emphasis.
    Raised up. Anticipated: Mt. 16:21; 17:9.
    We all. 1:8, might imply restriction here to the Twelve.
    Witnesses. "It is not proposed as probable, but deposed as certain" (Matthew Henry). Remarkably, Zeph. 3:8 LXX reads:
    "Until the day of my resurrection for witness."

33. *Exalted.* Is. 52:13 LXX s.w., and also – very differently – Jn. 3:14. In 5:31 Peter was to argue again very similarly.
    By the right hand. It is difficult to be sure that this is the correct translation. True, Ex. 15:6,12; Ps. 18:35; 60:5 etc. use exactly the same Gk. in LXX. But v.34 suggests the equally correct: "to the right hand."
    Promise, Put by metonymy for the thing promised.
    Shed forth this. A further answer to v.12,13. Not inappropriately, Zech. 12:10 LXX has the same word.
    See. Can this refer to the phenomenon of v.3? If so, there would surely have been no satirical comment. But what alternative?

34. *Sit thou on my right hand.* Not true of David. On one occasion he "sat before the Lord" (2 Sam. 7:18).
    Psalm 110 had been used also by Jesus at his trial; Lk. 22:69. And some of those now present must have heard and would now remember.

36. *Assuredly.* 16:33 s.w. Then is the implication here: You need not fear persecution (from men) or retribution (from God)?
    Whom ye crucified. Cp. 4:10; 5:30; 7:9; but contrast the change of pronoun in 13:29.

10. "Repent and be baptized" (2:37–41)

Peter's appeal proved wonderfully effective. Opposition was silenced, and many were conscience–stricken as never before in their lives: "they were *pricked* in their heart." Peter had just brought home to them their guilt regarding "Jesus whom ye crucified." Now, with a fine touch of literary artistry Luke uses a word *katanusso* closely akin to the word used for the piercing of Jesus on the cross – *nusso* (Jn. 19:34).

"Men, brethren" – they were returning to Peter his own friendly address to them (v.29) – "what shall we do?" Can such a sin as ours ever be forgiven? How do we escape judgment for it?

It was a characteristic Jewish reaction. These who had lived all their lives believing that a man can please God only by what he *does* inevitably responded with: "What shall we *do?"*

To their astonishment, doubtless, Peter's answer was: 'Yes, your great sin is forgivable. But not by what you choose to *do.* To receive remission of this sin and of all other sins, repent forthwith (Gk. aor.) and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ' (cp. Lk. 24:47). The essence of a Jewish conversion must be a sincere conviction that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah.

Here Roman Catholic versions read: "do penance," a palpably bad translation, especially since the next phrase implies: "resting upon, or showing your dependence upon, Jesus Christ."

In this crowd were some who had shouted: "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Mt. 27:25). Now — the marvel of it! – through repentance and baptism his blood would be on them and on their children, but how differently!

How well Thomas Fuller, Puritan parson, comments on this situation:

"Was this well done of him (Peter) to add grief to grief? What, more repentance still? Why further pain, to such as were pricked to their hearts? Was this any valour, to beat them with more blows, who al ready cried out for fair quarter? ... He prescribed them the same receipt he lately took himself; having found the great fruit thereof, when on his hearty sorrow, he obtained pardon for denying his Master. No sermons so sovereign as those which proceed from the minister's comfortable experience."

Joel, who had prophesied the coming of the gift of the Holy Spirit, had included in his message a like eloquent appeal for repentance:

"Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will not turn and repent ..." (Joel 2:12–14 – and 15–17).

"Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you" (Pr. 1:23).

Peter's urgent "Repent!" meant, in this context: 'Change your mind and attitude towards Jesus. Cease to think of him as an impostor or a deluded demagogue, forget the shame of his crucifixion, and in your mind acknowledge him as Lord and Christ, the promised Messiah, through whom there is the forgiveness of sins and this gift of the Holy Spirit.'

John's message

People impressed with the burning sincerity of John the Baptist had come to him, saying: "What shall we do?" (Lk. 3:10, 12, 14). And John, bidding them abandon the blatant immorality of their lives, had called them to the waters of Jordan to receive "the baptism of repentance for (into) the remission of sins" (Lk. 3:3).

Between that baptism and the rite now proclaimed by Peter there was no essential difference ("Gospels," chapter 16, by H.A.W.). John's baptism had pointed forward to "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." But now the baptism of the penitent looked back, as it still does, to that sacrifice which Peter had been expounding.

Baptismal formula

But why, it may be asked, did Peter call it baptism "in the name of Jesus Christ" (the first time that this name is mentioned in the teaching of the early church)? Elsewhere Paul refers to those who had been "baptized into Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:3 RV). Matthew's gospel records baptism into the three–fold name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (28:19).

These variations have provoked no small amount of discussion. The very fact that such variations are known to have existed at least makes clear that no desperate importance attached to any one formula. It is the idea behind the words, the conviction in the mind of the convert, which is all–important. "We are all baptized into the one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). It has been suggested that Jews, who needed only to be convinced regarding the claims of Jesus of Nazareth, would be baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus" or "in the name of Jesus as Christ;" but that the baptism of Gentiles would call for the more complete declaration of faith in the three–fold Name. Evidence one way or the other is hardly decisive, but the idea is attractive.

Problems

There is another problem here, more important and more difficult of solution: ". . . and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off (Zech. 6:15 LXX), even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

The questions calling for answer are these:

(a) Is the "promise" the oath sworn to David (v.30), or is it the gift of the Holy Spirit?

(b) Is it possible that the phrase: "and to all that are afar off," is intended to limit the promise to Jews in the Land and Jews of the Dispersion, not to Gentiles?

(c) If the gift is Holy Spirit, does it necessarily involve the characteristic *charismata* of tongues, healing, prophesying, and so on? Or could it be some non–miraculous sign of God at work in the life of the individual?

(d) Was this gift to be the endowment of every member of the church, or was it to be given to selected individuals in positions of responsibility?

(e) Does the promise "to you and to your children" mean just two generations, or does it mean every generation who follow in your footsteps!?

(f) And if this latter alternative, can it be construed as meaning: 'If the gift of the Spirit is not experienced now in this mortal life, the promise nevertheless will be fulfilled in Messiah's kingdom'?

And now, to attempt answers to these:

(a) Both alternative identifications of the "promise" are possible, but the balance of probability is distinctly in favour of the second. There is Peter's actual phrase: "the promise of the Holy Spirit" (v.33), whereas the covenant with David is not referred to here specifically as a promise. Also, in v.39 the immediate context (v.38b) is "Holy Spirit."

(b) There seems to be no adequate evidence for taking "them that are afar off" as meaning the Dispersion. The normal reference seems to be to Gentiles (Is. 57:19; Acts 22:21; Eph. 2:13, 17). But there is one place where the same phrase (LXX) is used in connection with the promise to David: "Thou hast spoken concerning thy servant's house unto far off" (2

Sam. 7:19). Is this a far–off time or people far–off in time? Here in Acts 2 the form of the phrase precludes the former of these meanings. Peter probably meant reference to Gentiles who would come to the gospel (cp. Joel's "whosoever;" v.21; Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:11), but he knew better than to say that explicitly so early in his preaching.

(c) Modern "Pentecostalists" take the promised gift of the Spirit as meaning the full charismata of the Spirit, available in every generation, including of course the present day. Neither Biblically nor by results do they prove their point. But others who know the truth of the gospel believe with fair reason that the Spirit is active today in the lives of believers, but not charismatically. Are they right to quote *these* words in support of their conviction? This is very doubtful, for Peter was emphasizing Christ's promise of "that which ye now *see* and *hear* — *a* very different thing from the much less perceptible guidance which these words have been quoted to prove.

(d) This is a question which can hardly be regarded as settled. On the one hand, there is the apparent force of the Joel quotation: "I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh ... sons, daughters, young men, old men, servants, handmaidens." On the other hand, the evidence of the pronouns, when carefully observed, appears to limit the gifts in the first instance to the Twelve (and later those to whom they communicated them; 8:17; but here "whomsoever" – v.19 – might imply a limited number); Lk. 24:33.48.49; Acts 2:1 (looking back to 1:22–26?); 2:7, 32, 33, 43. But in any case, the indications are that the expression of Holy Spirit powers was intermittent, according to present need (Mt. 10:1; 17:16,19; and compare Num. 11:25 RV). There is hardly room for certainty regarding this.

(e) Those who read "to you and to your children" as meaning two generations only, and then a withdrawal of Spirit gifts, have a strong case. It is clear (from Acts 8:17–19) that when the apostles were dead there would be no one else able to pass on the gifts to others. Taking the phrase "your children" idiomatically to mean all in succeeding generations following the same faith, is a difficult conclusion here.

(f) The solution to these uncertainties which has commended inself to some is to adhere rigidly to the idea of charismatic gifts, but to project the fulfilment of this promise into the Messianic kingdom. On reflection, this is not too satisfactory. For if Peter really meant the blessing of immortality in the age to come, why should he not say so plainly instead of concentrating on one limited or indirect aspect of it?

Another approach to the problems involved in this passage enables it to be taken completely at its face value, but at the cost of involving a difficulty of a different sort. Thus:

Peter, along with the rest of the early church, looked for the Lord's return at an early date. Plenty of New Testament passages express this anticipation. With due emphasis on this idea it is easy to understand the apostle as meaning that the gifts of the Spirit would be available to all believers right up to the time of their Lord's return, which was expected in the first century.

From this point of view no difficulty remains apart from that which crops up in two or three dozen places in the New Testament–inspired expectations of a Second Coming within the lifetime of the apostles, expectations which were not fulfilled. This problem, which has been diligently skirted round for several generations is discussed at length in "Revelation — a Biblical approach" (Appendix, page 259).

Exhortation

"With many other words did he (Peter) testify, and exhort" the people before him. The report in Acts is thus specifically declared to be only a summary of the apostle's argument and appeal. The "other words" were doubtless different but equally relevant Scriptures to those he had already used so effectively. Both the verbs "testify" and "exhort" are continuous, implying a sustained effort at persuasion, the first of them meaning that he went on protesting solemnly the truth of his message — or it may indicate that his exhortation was getting through to them.

Reminding his hearers of the "great and notable day of the Lord" foretold by Joel (v.19, 20), he bade them: "Save yourselves from this untoward (twisted) generation" – literally: "Be saved," i.e. accept the salvation God is now providing for you. There was here a clear implication that "not all Israel are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6). The entire nation was, in effect, being put out of fellowship and at the same time was being urged to make application for re–acceptance on better terms. A tough message to be proclaimed by a mere fisherman! And the element of election involved in "even as many as the Lord shall *call,"* today makes the message tough for those who grope after its meaning.

Response

Many welcomed it. The word "gladly" might even imply "with singing" (v.47), such was their exhilaration. The strong witness to the resurrection of Jesus, combined with the powerful testimony of one Scripture after another, superbly expounded, had gone home, so that that Day of Pentecost augmented the number of believers by no less than three thousand converts.

It is not necessary to assume that in the course of that one day all this great number were painstakingly interviewed and then baptized. Even the mere act of administering baptism to so many could scarcely have been got through in the time. Probably the record means that that day three thousand signified their decision to be disciples. The baptisms would be spread over ensuing days.

And as to personal interrogation before baptism, it needs to be remembered that all these applicants would already have an adequate knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures so that only a simple personal confession would be needed: "I believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah." Since then, times have changed!

It is interesting to note that the word for *"added* unto them" is one which in the Old Testament describes Levites joining the tabernacle service (Num. 18:2), and also Gentile's joining Israel (Is. 14:1; Esth. 9:27 LXX). On this day of Pentecost many Jews realised with dismay that before God they were Gentiles. Now, eagerly, they set themselves to join the true Israel.

There is a sharp contrast between this three thousand and the few hundred (at most) whom Jesus succeeded in teaching loyalty to himself. Here was a first fulfilment of the Lord's enigmatic prophecy: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to my Father" (Jn. 14:12).

After the five thousand and the four thousand mentioned in the gospels (Mt. 14:21; 15:38), this three thousand is followed by the accession of two thousand more (4:4). The phenomenon is similar to that of the Feast of Tabernacles' sacrifices (Num. 29:13ff). Is the expected one thousand to be found in the "great company of priests obedient to the faith" (6:7)?

Notes: 2:37–41

37. *Pricked in their hearts.* For the Greek, cp. Isaiah's: "Woe is me, for *I* am undone" (6:5 LXX); Ps. 4:4; 109:16 LXX; the latter of these is difficult to co–relate. For idea, cp. Heb. 4:12; Jn. 16:8.
38. *Gift, dorea.* used as equivalent to *charisma,* gift, in 8:20; 10:45; 11:17: Heb. 6:4.
39. *All that are afar off.* Quoting Is. 57:19?
40. *Untoward generation.* Ps. 78:8; Dt. 32:5 LXX; also Phil. 2:15.
41. *Three thousand.* "Peter's sermon (as set down) contained not so many words as it converted souls" (Fuller).

11. The first ecclesia (2:42–47)

The summary of life and activity in the early church with which Luke rounds off his account of the Day of Pentecost is admirable not only for its literary excellence but also, and more especially, for the attractiveness of its picture of the lovely new life into which the converts moved.

Its basics were "the apostles' doctrine and fellowship." The first of these sums up the fundamental truths to be believed about redemption in Christ and his coming kingdom. But is it just coincidence that emphasis on doctrine comes *after* baptism (v.41, 42)?

Doctrine and fellowship became in turn the basis for the spiritual life binding the brethren more closely together. The order of these most significant terms is important. Experience has proved over and over again that fellowship not based on a general agreement regarding essential truth concerning Christ is a fragile thing (though there is indeed the difficult problem of how we distinguish between fundamental truth and what is peripheral).

Luke's phrasing here strongly suggests the idea of a fellowship centring on the sacramental remembrance of a Lord who has gone away from his church: "the Breaking of Bread and the prayers." The sequence of definite articles in this passage seems to point to the use of these expressions as "technical terms" with a specialised meaning of their own: the Memorial of Christ and the accompanying prayers of thanksgiving for the Bread and Wine.

There is an interesting correspondence between these details and the outstanding features of the Holy Place in the Tabernacle:

1. Doctrine — the Candlestick and its light.
2. Bread and Wine – the Table of Shewbread with its loaves and flagons of wine.
3. Prayers – the Altar of Incense.

There is a good deal of textual support for a rearrangement of the details that follow, thus:

"And many wonders and signs (v.19) were done by the apostles in Jerusalem; and (as a result) great fear was upon them all." In no less than ten places Luke has this connection between 'signs and wonders' and the fear they provoked.

Apparently the outstanding gifts of power were restricted to the apostles. And those who feared would be the dwellers in the city who held off from yielding the loyalty which both message and miraculous gifts made imperative.

"All things common"

After this cursory mention, the spotlight of Luke's narrative focuses again on the happy condition of the Jerusalem ecclesia. There is here the first description of what has often, but most inaccurately, been called "the early church's experiment in communism."

"They that believed were together". If this means 'in the same place – the temple – such a practice must have been made possible through the good offices of some of the influential men in Jerusalem – men such as Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Barnabas, Gamaliel. But could three thousand believers assemble in one place? More probably *epi to auto* emphasizes unanimity of spirit. Isn't this what the context requires?

One expression of this was that the brethren "had all things common." This phrase does not necessarily mean that they shared everything out equally, but more probably that they were all content with a modest ordinary way of life.

There were so many believers who were desperately poor that even this was only maintained because the better–off brethren "sold their possessions (what they had made for themselves) and goods (what they had inherited), and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

The important thing to remember about this operation is that in every respect it was a voluntary arrangement in which a man joined just so far as conscience led him. The clearest detail on this is Peter's word to Ananias: "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" (5:4). So whilst the pattern was clearly one of whole–hearted generosity by all who had money or goods to spare, it was left to each man to decide how far his own beneficence should go.

The need for this carefully organized charity was probably due to the fact that the chief priests, holding the purse–strings of the vast revenues of the temple and already building up a strong resentment against these Nazarenes, had promptly cut off from those schismatics all material aid normally distributed to the poor.

This fine spirit of sharing in the first ecclesia, involving the sale of property, is often represented as a failure leading to a general impoverishment of the community in later days. This view is mistaken.

It is not to be gainsaid that in later days the problem of poverty amongst the brethren in Jerusalem and Judaea became acute. But the main reason for this (besides that already suggested) was the plundering of the Christians during the fierce persecution organized by Saul of Tarsus — hence Paul's ceaseless efforts throughout his missionary journeys to make some amends by means of the welfare fund which steered considerable Gentile contributions to the brethren in Jerusalem.

If it be asked: Why do not believers today have all things common, as did the early brethren? the answer is: They do. The method of contribution adopted in these days may be somewhat different, but the nett result is the same: no one goes short.

Not without a certain amount of repetitiousness, Luke expatiates on the almost idealistic tone of this happy ecclesia in Jerusalem.

The ecclesia and the temple

"And, continuing steadfastly in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people."

It is known that in the Breaking of Bread service the early church followed fairly closely the same pattern of procedure as the Last Supper. First, a meal of fellowship (they called it the Agape, the Love Feast), and then at or near its conclusion came the memorial Bread and Wine, preceded of course by appropriate prayers. It seems likely that in the temple court the brethren regularly and publicly had worship and fellowship on these lines. It is even possible that each day a communal meal was provided for all the brethren who cared to take part, by having the wealthier members sacrifice peace–offerings most of which, according to Lev. 7:12. would be given back to the offerer as a holy meal for himself and his friends. In a certain part of the temple court there were picnic tables set apart for the eating of peace–offerings, and these would be available for the disciples as well as for other worshippers.

The only other allusion to the brethren being actively involved in the temple service is in connection with Paul and the Nazirites (21:26, but see also v.20 there). However these instances are sufficient to establish that for a long time, probably right up to the siege of Jerusalem, the believers continued to find plenty of room in their devotions for both temple and ecclesia.

But had not their Lord angrily declared to the Pharisees: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Mt. 23:38)? With these words was he not abandoning the Holy House and, in effect, bidding his disciples do the same?

It seems likely that this solemn declaration was really a prophecy (expanded in 24:2 ff) of what Jesus saw as inevitable of fulfilment within a generation (v.36).

The joy of fellowship

The expression: "breaking bread" (v.46; cp. v.42) is used in the New Testament – with at most one or two doubtful exceptions – only of the memorial of Christ or, in the gospels, of the feeding of a multitude; and in John 6 Jesus had already given such miracles a sacramental significance.

The practice of frequent observance of the holy meal in this way was extended also to the homes of the brethren, only – of course – without any sacrificial accompaniment. "From house to house" is the correct reading.

In all this there was intense gladness – the joy of rich fellowship. The "singleness of heart" mentioned along with this really describes a plain, simple, humble way of life. Indeed it may be possible to go further and read into the Greek word an implication of "without stones," as though suggesting that this gospel soil was not stony ground (Mt. 13:5,20,21); there was no Judas, as at the Last Supper; all was unanimity and zeal.

There is also the implication that the high spiritual tone of the assembly was not marred by any spirit of self–seeking–converts joining the ecclesia for the sake of material personal benefit. In modern times the caution has been not infrequently uttered about the danger of insincere converts being drawn in by the prospect of "loaves and fishes". Of course, the early brethren had the wit to be aware of this possibility. But apparently they were prepared to take the risk, and even to put up with the abuse. It was only when an Ananias–and–Sapphira situation arose that it became needful for the Holy Spirit to take drastic measures.

In the temple court the Breaking of Bread would take place in the presence of a considerable crowd of spectators, thus anticipating the spirit of Paul's word: "As oft as ye eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, ye do *show forth* the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26). "By this (said Jesus) shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have the Agape among yourselves" (Jn. 13:35).

The mention of praise implies the public singing of hymns and psalms in the temple court. But what did Luke intend by their "having favour with all the people"? If this translation would stand, there would be little difficulty. But in the New Testament *Charis* hardly ever carries this rather vague meaning of "favour." Its three common meanings are with reference to Holy Spirit gifts, the forgiveness of sins, and giving thanks. Thus, there are here these alternatives:

a. "displaying the powers of the Spirit before (Gk: *pros)* all the people;"
b. "receiving forgiveness of sins (at the Breaking of Bread) before all the people;"
c. "giving thanks (for the Bread and Wine) before all the people."

It is difficult to decide between these. They are all very suggestive. The third is perhaps the most likely.

"And the Lord kept on adding in the same place (i.e. in the temple) daily such as were being saved (or, just possibly, such as were saving themselves)" (cp. v.21,40;1 Cor. 3:6).

This concluding expression is matched by six others dotted through the Book of Acts at fairly regular intervals (6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 26:5; 19:20; 28:31). They are obviously inserted at these points by design. But what kind of division are they intended to draw attention to? One modern scholar has made the interesting suggestion that Luke adopted this device to mark off his book into five–year periods — from A.D.30 to A.D. 60. He could well be right.

Notes: 2:42–47

42. In Mt. 28:19,20 Jesus had desired that priority be given to teaching. Here the Western text has: *the fellowship of the Breaking of Bread,* in this context reference to ordinary meals would be both futile and unnecessary. Luke's usage here is, of course, the same as Paul's, as in so many other instances; cp. 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24; Acts 20:7; 27:35; and see 9:19; Lk. 24:30.
45. *Possessions;* s.w. Pr. 23:10; 31:16 LXX.
46. *Breaking bread.* In the early Christian *Didache* (14:11; 9:7,9) this identical expression is used for the Memorials.
47. *Having favour with all the people.* If this is insisted on, then what a lovely parallel with Lk. 2:52 (but the important preposition is different there).

12. On the Day of Atonement (ch. 3)

Before embarking on a detailed consideration of the healing of the lame man, it will help to a better understanding of the high significance of this incident if first of all the evidence is considered that the miracle took place on the Day of Atonement, four months after the excitement of Pentecost. There is, of course, no explicit statement to this effect, but the accumulation of relevant detail available indirectly suggesting such a conclusion is fairly impressive:

Acts 3

1. Every phrase of verse 19 takes on fuller meaning when read with reference to the Day of Atonement: "Repent ... your sins anointed out (reference to the high priest splashing the sacrificial blood on the mercyseat) ... times of refreshing (the high priestly blessing; or, possibly, an allusion to the prayer offered on this day by the high priest for "a year with abundance of rain, of sunshine, and of dew") from the presence of the Lord (the Holy of Holies). "Sins anointed out" is a straight quote from Is. 44:22 where "as a thick cloud" certainly refers to the dense cloud of incense surrounding the high priest in the Holy of Holies (Lev. 16:12,13). Note here also: "Return unto me." Peter's "Be converted" is the exact equivalent of this.

2. "Every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people" (v.23) quotes Lev. 23:29, a passage about the Day of Atonement (see v.28).

3. "I wot that *through ignorance* ye did it" (v.17). This reads like an allusion to the comprehensive cover for sins not hitherto atoned for which the Israelite now had in the sin–offering of the Day of Atonement.

4. "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you" (v.14). There seems to be here a reference to the two goats – Jesus the sin–offering, and Barabbas sent away into the wilderness (and his nationalist people with him).

5. "Sent him to *bless* you, in *turning away* every one of you *from his* iniquities" (v.26). Here is the function of the Day of Atonement, and also the high–priestly blessing.

6. "Whom the heaven must receive ..." (v.21) – a picture of the high priest going into the sanctuary.

Acts 4

7. Verse 11 quotes from Ps.118, which at that time was used in the Day of Atonement service. In Herod's temple there was no ark of the covenant, but only a block of stone "which the builders rejected" (Ps. 118:22).

8. The delay (v.3, 5) in making a decision about Peter and John is readily explained as almost certain to happen because this was a day of complete fasting; so, as soon as sunset came, everyone would be eager for a meal. Indeed, for the high priest rabbinic tradition specifically prescribed it. The prisoners could wait.

   "They let them go" (v.23) might be a reminiscence of the Azazel goat being let go (Lev. 16:22). It was regarded as bearing a curse. The apostles would be thought of in the same light.

10. "They laid hands on them" (v.3) corresponds to the action of the high priest in laying his hands on the head of the goat (Lev. 16:21).

11. The context (v.6) puts special emphasis on the high priest.

12. "Neither is there salvation in any other" (v.12). The all–important sacrifice, like that on the Day of Atonement.

13. "By stretching forth thine hand to heal" (v.30). This unusual expression takes on much more meaning when read with reference to the high priest's blessing of the people on the Day of Atonement.

Nearly every bit of this evidence is inferential, but it is fairly copious. This kind of thing is characteristic of the allusiveness of Scripture; e.g. Isaiah 58, 59 are certainly based on the Day of Atonement ("Isaiah", H.A.W.), but without explicit mention of it. So also Hebrews 9, 10.

It is interesting now to note the special relevance of Is. 59:7 (a Day–of–Atonement Scripture): "that thou bring the poor that is cast out to thy house" – "He entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God."

13. A lame man healed (3:1–10)

If the suggestion advanced in the previous chapter is correct, then in more ways than one there seems to be special point in the timing of this sensational miracle. It was "the hour of prayer, the ninth hour," the time of the evening sacrifice which was offered "between the two evenings," that is, between mid–afternoon and sunset. This seems to imply that Peter and John had deliberately refrained from being present earlier in the day at the highly–important rites of the Day of Atonement, as though declaring by their absence that now, since the Lord's sacrifice made at Golgotha, they had no further need of Mosaic priesthood or sacrifice, but there was still need for prayer, now mediated by a better High Priest.

They came to the temple by the gate called Beautiful, about the identification of which there is a good deal of uncertainty. It may have been the big Nicanor gate on the east, with Solomon's porch (v.11) close by, or it may have been the Shushan gate, supposedly called that because it was a survival from the temple built after the Captivity by those who returned from Shushan.

Life–long disabilities

The lame man who became the focus of this remarkable witness to Christ was over forty (4:22) and doubtless a well–known character in Jerusalem, for evidently he had friends who regularly carried him to one of the temple gates to implore the charity of the worshippers. This would be his only living.

It is impressive to consider that, although he had probably sat there facing the temple gate some hundreds of times, he had never been into even its outer court! For ever since the days of David it had been laid down that "the blind and the lame shall not come into the House" (2 Sam. 5:8). One is left wondering how it came about that he never had the blessing of healing from Jesus in the course of the Lord's temple ministry during one of the feasts. Especially, how did he fail to be included in that mighty healing of the lame and the blind after the occasion of the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mt. 21:14; "Gospels", H.A.W., p.562).

Apostolic almsgiving

It would be surprising if the lame man had not already identified Peter and John as disciples of Jesus of Nazareth (would he not remember them from the days of the Lord's ministry?), and from Pentecost some four months earlier he would know them as leaders of the new sect. Now, confident of a gracious response from the apostles, he asked and asked again, whilst they stood hesitating and uncertain what they should do. Then at Peter's urgent word: "Look on us," he was all eager expectation.

Peter's next word must have startled him: "Silver and gold have I none." The Lord's commandment had been: "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses" (Mt. 10 .9). The apostles were now taking this instruction literally. The earlier passage about the selling of goods and giving the proceeds liberally for the benefit of their poor brethren (2:45) can be read as referring in the first instance to the twelve. The later repetition of this detail (4:34) with reference to "as many as were possessors of lands or houses" may mean that the apostolic example came to be followed by others. This would explain the repetition.

"No silver or gold: But such as I have (Peter was using a different word this time), give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

But Jesus was known by all to have been crucified. Then if his was the power now at work, must he not be alive again to exercise it now? Here was a renewed declaration of the resurrection, and the title "Christ" also asserted him to be the Messiah.

A dramatic moment

"Rise up and walk!" – it was a challenge to him to cooperate in faith. Would he make the effort or scornfully reply: 'What's the use?'? But here was Peter offering him the right hand of fellowship in Christ, and he took it. With a firm grip the apostle pulled him to his feet. There was no sign of demurring disbelief. The man responded. Even before he stood, he felt the change in the condition of his feet. And so complete was his confidence of imparted blessing that instead of a tentative hesitant attempt at standing, he actually leaped to his feet.

Excitement

And knowing himself to be fully and completely healed, with loud praises and thanksgiving on his lips he forthwith joined the apostles entering the temple court. His was now a double inexpressible delight – for the first time in his life mobility, the mobility of an athlete; and for the first time in his life the fulfilled aspiration of entering the temple for worship. He was glad, indescribably glad, when they said unto him (quite unnecessarily), Let us go into the House of the Lord.

So his unrestrained exuberance expressed itself in active agility such as he had always longed for but never known – he not only walked but also jumped vigorously, up and down, with all the delight of a child in a new accomplishment.

When the feet and ankle bones of a little child receive strength, he still has to learn, bit by bit over a matter of weeks, how to walk. But now there was the added miracle of an immediate faculty of balance and perfect control. Peter had not done his Lord's work by halves.

The sequence is pointedly picked out in Luke's account – 1. He leaped on his feet. 2. He stood. 3. He walked. 4. He entered by the Beautiful Gate. 5. He walked and leaped in the temple court. 6. He praised God.

A miracle with meaning

Luke doubtless wants his readers to see more than the surface meaning in "leaping and praising God." 2 Samuel 5:8 had banned the lame man from the temple. Now 2 Samuel 6 became relevant, for he, like David, now "danced before the Lord with all his might." It was on such a day when, like a high priest, David had been girded with a linen ephod, and had blessed the people in the name of the Lord (2 Sam. 6:14, 18).

Now *beautiful* (LXX: *hora,* cp. *horaios)* upon the mountains of *Zion* were the *feet* of this man bringing to all the people good tidings, publishing *salvation* (4:12) and declaring, Thy God reigneth! (Isa. 52:7).

An integral part of this personal witness was the familiarity of so many of the people with the man who made it. The Greek text implies a long sequence of recognitions and acknowledgements that in very truth an astonishing miracle had been wrought. Slowly but surely a reluctant people was being made to realise – though, alas, not to confess – that God was at work amongst them in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Is it possible that, that day, some of the more discerning men of the temple saw yet further meaning in this extraordinary occurrence — that in an acted parable they were being taught the time was now ripe for Christ to call *Gentiles* also to share the blessedness of his New Israel? So many of the details are significant:

1. A man lame from birth,

2. and barred from the temple,

3. is nevertheless a man of faith and a proselyte of the gate (cp. Lk. 16:20, which has a similar meaning).

4. After God's Day–of–Atonement sacrifice,
5. he seeks the aid of Christ's apostles,
6. and finds himself "redeemed, not with silver and gold" (1 Pet. 1:18).
7. Now he can enter God's temple as by right,
8. imitating David himself in his praise and rejoicing.
9. Against a certain amount of apostolic reluctance
10. he holds on to them (v.11),
11. and stands with them when they face Jewish persecution.

Peter hints at an interpretation of this sort by describing the man as "saved" (4:9), not "healed". And even the Lord's enemies made another unconscious prophecy by declaring the miracle to be a "sign" (4:16).

Notes: 3:1–10

2. The miracles of Peter and Paul go very much in step. With this incident by all means compare the identity of phraseology in 14:8–10. See Page297
   Carried. The imperfect tense here either means that this was customary or else that just then he was being carried to this advantageous place. *At the gate.* Gk: *pros,* towards – as though more intent on the temple than on the charity he hoped for.
6. *Silver and gold.* Note Peter's contempt for these esteemed commodities: 1 Peter. 1:18; 3:3.
   Such as I have. Did he mean: It isn't much, but it's the best I've got?
   Rise up. A test of his faith – and he responded.
7. *Took him.* The word often means "capture." This verse has three well–recognized medical terms, such as would be normal in Luke's vocabulary.

14. The guilt of Israel (3:11–18)

Peter and John, remembering how their Lord had many a time sought to avoid every smallest hint of sensation–mongering in connection with his own miracles, were now strongly inclined to leave the healed cripple in the midst of his outburst of joy and thanksgiving. Their wish now was to lose themselves in the crowd of worshippers, or even to get out of the temple faster than they had entered it. But the erstwhile beggar knew that it was the power of Christ by which he had been so completely restored and that to keep close to Christ he must keep close to his men.

So he grabbed the apostles, refusing to be parted from them. However, he held them only for a matter of seconds, for almost at once the three of them became so completely hemmed in by the curious and the startled and the sceptical that evasion of all this public attention was now a sheer impossibility.

The Lord Jesus did not intend that these apostles of his should neglect such an opportunity for witness to his Name. And indeed it must have taken no time at all for Peter to recognize that the Holy Spirit was at work in him not only to heal but also to preach.

So he struggled to a place of some eminence in the cloister close by, called Solomon's Porch, and had instant attention from the dense throng which had gathered.

It was here that, soon after the healing of the blind man, Jesus had an unpleasant encounter with some of the rulers. "Other sheep I have (he had said) which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice" – and this healing of the lame man now pointed to the blessing of Gentiles with the gospel. There also Jesus had said: "If ye believe not me, believe the works" – and here now was another of his works, an undeniable witness. But "the Jews took up stones again to stone him" – and on this occasion also the forces of persecution were very soon to go into action again (4:3; Jn. 10:16, 31, 38).

Jesus – the suffering Servant

Recognizing some eminent men in the sea of faces before him, he addressed them respectfully.

'Gentlemen! Israelites! Let me answer some of the questions now filling your minds and being spoken by many of you. There is no need to marvel at this man standing here, nor should you be staring so intently at us two, as though you could expect to see in us some marked sign of outstanding godliness or divine power. It is not anything special about *us* that has given this fellow, so familiar to many of you (v.16), the power to walk (cp. Gen. 40:8). The God of our forefathers promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob a wonderful Seed through whom His great Purpose with Israel is to be fulfilled. That Seed is also the Messiah, the Servant of the Lord, foretold in many diverse pictures by Isaiah and the other prophets.'

'That Seed, that Servant of Jehovah, is the Jesus of Nazareth whom you crucified. You remember? Just six months ago your leaders arrested him and handed him over to the Roman governor whom you hate. Pilate decided he was "Not guilty!" and was about to set him at liberty. But you shouted Pilate down, execrating Jesus as a blasphemer and treasonous, and so – imagine it! – you got him crucified. Now, this miracle, done by his power, bears witness to the fact that he is alive. He was the Holy One foretold by David, and the Righteous Servant foretold by Isaiah. Let me quote you some of the familiar words:

"Behold my Servant shall ... be exalted, and lifted up and be very high ... Many were astonied at thee ... To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ... He is despised, and we esteemed him not ... He was taken from prison and from judgement ... Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief ... My righteous Servant shall justify many ... he shall divide the spoil with the strong." 'The correspondences between the prophecies and the experience and character of Jesus surely proclaim him the Messiah, first suffering for sins, and then glorious. And today you have further witness, for does not Isaiah foretell that in Messiah's kingdom "the

lame man shall leap as an hart" (35:6)? So it is *his* power and holiness, not ours, which has made this man walk.'

More Old Testament witness

Peter's eloquence and Biblical reasoning were now in full spate. He was not to be deterred. And the crowd listened to him for the best part of three hours (3:1; 4.13).

Isaiah 49, another of the Servant prophecies, was likewise laid under contribution: "Thou art my Servant, in whom I will be glorified ... Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I (the Messiah) be glorious in the eyes of the Lord."

And, most of all, Isaiah 55:

Isaiah 55	Acts 3
4. A Leader and Commander to the people.	15. The Prince of Life.
5. They shall run unto thee.	11. All the people ran together.
5. The Holy One of Israel.	14. The Holy One and the Just.
5. For he hath glorified thee.	13. The God of Abraham hath glorified his Servant Jesus.
7. Let the wicked forsake his way ...	19. Repent.
7. And let him return unto the Lord.	19. And be converted.
7. For he will abundantly pardon.	19. That your sins may be blotted out.
10. Rain ... and snow from heaven ... watereth the earth, that it may bring forth and bud.	19. Seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.
8. My thoughts are not your thoughts.	17. This ignorance.
13. An everlasting sign.	4:16. Indeed a notable miracle (sign).

Peter, encouraging a spirit of repentance, went on to picture the magnitude of the national crime against Jesus. He whom God had vindicated and approved in a multitude of ways they had rejected and murdered, and in his place had clamoured for a notorious murderer as their special festal gift.

Yet that same Jesus was now risen from the dead by the power of God. Peter and his fellows were unshakable witnesses to the truth of this, and the powers they had exercised that day were a further witness. God had glorified His despised and suffering Servant. The miracle just witnessed had been done "in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." Then why not believe the evidence that he was alive? – the Christ of God, a Christ whom it behoved to suffer as a Saviour and Sacrifice, but also a Christ who must one day reign in glory. It may be that Peter even went on to stress an incisive parallel between Jesus and Joseph, the first Saviour of the nation. "The Prince of life" may be Peter's equivalent for Joseph's Egyptian name, Zaphnath–paaneah (Gen. 41:45). Certainly there is an emphatic resemblance between Peter's interpretation, that the rejection of Jesus was all part of God's plan and purpose, and the words of Joseph to his brethren: "Now therefore, be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life."

It seems highly probable that interwoven with the powerful witness educed from Isaiah 55, there was also pointed exhortation from Isaiah 1. The "perfect soundness" of the lame man contrasted forcefully with the spiritual condition of the nation: "no soundness (LXX — only occurrence of the same Greek word) ... but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores ... A sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity ... Righteousness lodge in her (Jerusalem), but now murderers."

Through "ignorance"

As Peter now led up to the climax of his speech, he succeeded in bequeathing to later generations a problem of no small magnitude:

"And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers."

On the face of it this is a comforting extenuation of their crime, as who should say: 'There is every excuse for both rulers and people because neither had any idea of the magnitude of the sin being committed.'

The problem is how to square this interpretation with the picture presented in the gospels of rulers confronted with the plainest of plain evidence that Jesus was the Son of God and not only acknowledging the facts but choosing quite deliberately to fly right in the face of them. "This is the heir: come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours" – this is a parable which the Lord's enemies had understood (Lk. 20:14,19). And after the raising of Lazarus, and the Lord's own witness to himself, at the trial before the Sanhedrin, how could they possibly miss the truth concerning him?

It has been suggested that when Peter said: "through ignorance ye did it", he meant ignorance of these Scriptures which he was now hammering away at.

Can it be said that this idea removes the difficulty, for did not Jesus in one discourse after another labour at Biblical demonstration of the truth of his claims (e.g. Mt. 21:4, 5, 16, 42–44; Jn. 10:11, 12, 34; 12:37–41)?

There is an alternative approach to this problem which seems, rather strangely, to have been overlooked. In the Septuagint this word translated "ignorance" and its corresponding verb certainly carry the meaning of "an act done by oversight or through ignorance of its seriousness", but it is also used as a synonym for *blameworthy* sin or iniquity (cp. Souter's Lexicon), and particularly for an act calling for the sacrifice of a guilt offering; as when Saul confessed to David: "I have *sinned* ... I will no more do thee harm" (1 Sam. 26:21); so also when Asa was denounced for his foolish pact with the king of Syria: "Herein thou hast *done foolishly;* therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars" (2 Chr. 16:9). Cp. Ps. 25:7; Dan. 9:15,16; 2 Chr. 28:13. This idea of *culpable* ignorance is required in several places in the New Testament also; e.g. "For they (Israel) being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness ..." (Rom. 10:13).

Thus, when Peter said: "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers," he was not excusing or comforting, but rebuking with point–blank censure. An immediate call for repentance was the logical next step.

Notes: 3;11–18

11. *The porch that is called Solomon's.* The present participle here implies that Acts was written before A.D.70 when the entire temple was destroyed. Solomon's porch is said, rather dubiously, to have dated back to Solomon. Another suggestion is that it was called this as being the resort of wise rabbis.

13. *The God of our fathers.* Is there a hint here of Joseph and his brethren and of all that was foreshadowed through their experience?
    His son. Gk: boy, lad – used also (in the sense of 'garcon') for 'servant' (Isaiah 52:13; 53:11; Jer. 23:5; and see 49:3).
    Glorified, in his resurrection (v.15) and also in this miracle (v.16; cp. Jn. 11:4). The remarkable thing is that apparently this was not the first sensational sign wrought by the apostles' Spirit–power; 2:43.
    In the presence of. The Greek implies opposition.
    Determined, meaning: had pronounced judgement.
14. *The Holy One and the Just.* Remarkably, this description was also used about John the Baptist; Mk. 6:20.
    A murderer. The Greek implies: 'a notorious murderer". On the Day of Atonement the two goats were always chosen to look as alike as possible. Now note that Barabbas means 'son of a Father (i.e. a rabbi)' and his other name was Jesus (Mt. 27:17– Syriac, Armenian, Origen, and one ancient uncial manuscript). Barabbas claimed to lead his men to salvation, yet he led two of them to crucifixion!
15. *The Prince of life.* Gk: *archegos,* a title used in the first century for (a) the founder of a family (cp. Heb. 2:10); (b) Caesar's heir. Rather remarkably, Zeph. 3:8 LXX reads; "Therefore wait upon me ... until the day of my resurrection for witness." Was this another of Peter's proof–texts?
16. The Greek of this verse is a bit strange, but there is no missing the emphasis on the Name (i.e. character and work) of Christ and on faith in him. Perhaps the meaning is: His Name, borne by us 'Nazarenes', has operated through this man's faith in his Name to heal him. The implication seems to be that the cripple knew Peter and John as disciples, and in faith responded to their word.
    This perfect soundness, both physical and spiritual; s.w. Jas 1:4.
18. All the prophets spake as with one mouth!
    His Christ (RV) This phrase comes in Ps. 2:2, and nowhere else in the Old Testament. Another of Peter's proof–texts! Cp. 4:26; Rev. 11:15; 12:10.

15. "Repent ye therefore" (3:19–26)

In bringing conviction to his hearers concerning Jesus, Peter's work was only half–done. He still needed to impress on them the supreme need for personal loyalty to this rejected Leader who had been so signally demonstrated to be the Christ. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted," that is, turn to the Lord instead of away from him. This had been Joel's appeal, woven into his message of judgement and Holy Spirit blessing (2:12ff), and it was to become the substance of Paul's preaching: "that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (26:20).

The consequences of repentance

This repentance was not only imperative but urgent (Greek aorists!), so that three much–desired results might follow:

a. "That your sins may be blotted out" (even their sins against Christ!)

b. "That there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."

c. "That he may send the appointed—for—you—beforehand Christ, even Jesus."

The Greek text plainly requires the reader to see each of these three consequences as *depending* on the right spiritual reaction of those to whom the message came. But what did Peter mean?

The first hardly needs explaining. But it is remarkable that the apostle harnessed another fine passage from Isaiah: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud (on the Day of Atonement; Lev. 16:12, 13), thy transgressions, and, as a cloud (of incense) thy sins: return unto me (be converted); for I have redeemed thee) Is. 44:22, and v.23 has a picture of the promised "seasons of refreshing"; and cp. 49 .9).

Precise identification of these "seasons of refreshing" is less easy. The phrase could mean respite from retributive judgement for the despite done to Jesus (cp. Jon. 3:4, 10). Or it could be a promise of spiritual comfort, in the spirit of Jeremiah's great promise; "and ye shall find rest for your souls" (6:16). But, more likely, according to the acted parable of the Day of Atonement, the reference is to the blessings of the kingdom of the Messiah when he "shall come from the presence of the Lord" (cp. Heb. 9:28). This conclusion seems the more likely since the second and third promises – (b) and (c) above – are introduced by the same single conjunction.

Repentance and the Second Coming

This third item is so simply expressed that it can mean only one thing — the Second Coming. But very unhappily the A.V. has failed to preserve the important connection with Peter's positive exhortation: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted ... *that he may send* Jesus Christ." There can be no evading the dependence of the final clause on what precedes. The time of the coming of the Lord depends on the proper spiritual reaction of those to whom he comes.

Rackham's commentary — the best yet written on the Book of Acts – puts it this way:

"Like the apostles (1:6) they wanted to know the times and seasons of the restoration. Peter's answer is that the delay was due to themselves, for an essential condition of the restoration

was their own repentance." (Cp. "The Time of the End", H.A.W. ch.2.). This idea was familiar to his hearers, for the rabbis taught that 'if all Israel together repented for a single day, redemption through the Messiah would come'. It is a principle the late Islip Collyer was known to teach, but which, alas, the New Israel is reluctant to believe, much less apply.

To the end of his days Peter stressed the same basic truth:

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise (of a Second Coming), as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us–ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Pet. 3:9). In other words, any seeming delay in the return of Christ is to be interpreted as a token of God's graciousness in affording unrepentant sinners a further opportunity for their own forgiveness.

The same idea is implicit in the words: "and account that the long–suffering of our Lord is salvation" (v.15); i.e. the grace of God holds back fulfilment so that those in Christ may yet come to thorough repentance.

The converse of the proposition also stands true, that the believers' holy way of life and godliness *hastens* the coming of the day of God (v.11, 12 RV mg — AV text here hardly makes sense).

The resurrection and ascension of Jesus had been indirectly yet forcefully proclaimed that day by the healing of the lame men. In particular, his ascension had been the necessary prelude to the outpouring of Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Now, Peter emphasized, it is needful that Christ continue in the heavenly glory "until the times of restitution of all things."

"Restitution of all things"

It is possible to establish the precise meaning of this expression by the careful comparison of two cognate Scriptures. "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things," Jesus had said, using almost identical Greek. His allusion was to the familiar Malachi prophecy: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord (this in turn quotes Joel's famous prophecy; 2:31): and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers ..." (Mai. 4:5,6; On this detail see "The Time of the End," p. 14; "Studies in the Gospels", p.11). Whatever its specific meaning, this is a prophecy of repentance in Israel. So it would be a mistake to read Peter's words with reference to the material benefits of Messiah's kingdom. Indeed, such an interpretation makes the sequence of ideas anything but smooth.

The meaning is, rather, that there can be no Second Coming until there are signs in Israel of a spiritual readiness to receive Jesus as the nation's deliverer.

This is a theme which "God hath spoken by the mouth of his prophets since the (Jewish) world began," for the first of such warnings and promises is to be found in Leviticus (26:40–42 – words spoken to the nation by Moses within a month of the setting up of the Tabernacle.

That the message concerning Jesus had been announced beforehand by the prophets was now being stressed by Peter for the third time. It was to take up all the rest of his discourse. Those who heard him could only disallow the force of his arguments by throwing away their own Holy Scriptures.

A Prophet like Moses

His next specific Biblical testimony was Moses' famous prophecy of how God would "raise up" a prophet like himself. Peter doubtless meant his hearers to catch the double meaning in that "raise up".

Yet another double meaning was probably intended in the phrase: "like unto me." The expression comes twice in the Hebrew text (Dt. 18:15, 18) in what is virtually the same form. Yet it is translated in the Septuagint in two different ways. The form Peter chose to use has the implication brought out in RVm: "as he raised up me (Moses)", that is, as Moses was rejected (see Acts 7:25 RV) and went away into a far country, took to himself a Gentile bride and then returned with power and authority to be a deliverer, so also would be the experience of the Prophet like unto Moses.

Peter did his duty faithfully. He went on to quote also the ominous warning of dire judgement on the head of the individual who rejects Christ. But instead of: "I will require it of him," he added more specifically "shall be destroyed from among the people."

There, in Jerusalem, the attitude of each man and woman in the crowd was become literally a matter of life and death.

Samuel and the prophets

Nor was Moses the only witness. Through many centuries they had had the testimony of other Scriptures: "all the prophets from Samuel ... have likewise foretold of these days." All the inspired men raised up by God — every single one of them ("as many as") – had spoken concerning Christ, yes, even such prophets as Hosea, Nahum, Zephaniah, Obadiah.

But when Peter said "these days" did he mean the ministry of Jesus, or these later days of Holy Spirit witness, or the future blessings of Messiah's kingdom, or the judgement of God to be let loose against the rejection of His Son?

And why should Peter begin his catalogue of Messianic prophets with Samuel who had bequeathed no specifically prophetic writings of his own? Yet the Psalm of Hannah was the first Scripture to use the word "Messiah" (1 Sam. 2:10). And Samuel was the first to denounce the sin of the people in rejecting God from being their King (as they had more recently rejected His Son).

And in his history in Judges and Ruth had not Samuel set down some remarkable types of Messianic deliverance?

But if indeed he had been warning of coming Judgement, Peter now swung back to a further reminder of the blessings offered them in Christ: "Ye are the sons of the prophets, and (the sons of) the covenant which God made with our fathers."

That phrase: "sons of the prophets" was neatly chosen to carry a double meaning. Peter not only meant: 'all that they promised is now to become your inheritance through Christ', but also, recognizing in the crowd some of the nation's learned men, he made indirect allusion to the colleges of "the sons of the prophets," founded by Samuel, who had become the spiritual ancestors of the rabbis and scribes of later times.

Then, if faithful to their trust, ought they not to give special heed to the full Messianic message bequeathed to them?

The Covenant with Abraham

And before ever the prophets said or wrote a word about the Messiah, he was already there in Genesis, the key to the great covenant God made with Abraham.

The climax of the Promise came in these words: "And in thy Seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18).

Some of the promises made to Abraham were about a multitudinous seed (e.g. 15:13–16; 17:4, 16; 22:17ab), but not this, for did not the angel of the Lord promise: "and thy Seed shall

possess the gate of *his* enemies" (22:17c)?

Peter proceeded to expound step by step: "Unto you first God, having raised up (as He brought back Isaac from death) his Servant Jesus (here is the Seed), sent him to bless you." And the blessing is specified – not the material advantages of a Messianic kingdom but by "turning away every one of you from his iniquities;" that is, the forgiveness of sins, through a sacrifice more efficacious than any offered on the Day of Atonement (cp. again v.19). Peter emphasized the greater value of the blessing by his use of a continuous form of the verb. All the sacrifices under the Law declared their limited value by the need for repetition, but here in Christ was a covenant–sacrifice providing a continuing forgiveness for the sinner oppressed by his own continuing need for forgiveness.

By his use yet again of the title "Servant" Peter alluded to Isaiah once more, this time to the Servant prophecy in chapter 49: "I will give (i.e. appoint) thee for a covenant of the people (Israel)" (v.8). But the same Scripture included this: "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (v.6).

This, too, Peter hinted at with his quotation: "all kindreds of the earth," and also his comment: "unto you *first ..."* Here was plain implication of an extension of blessing to Gentiles also (Rom. 1:16; 2:9). But the point was not developed or made explicit; for at this stage of gospel preaching it would hardly have been tactful to fly in the face of strong Jewish prejudice by insisting that henceforward God would accept Gentiles on exactly the same terms as Jews. Indeed, it may be doubted (in the light of Peter's later uncertainty; Acts 10; Gal. 2) whether at this time he himself could see clearly how, because of insurmountable Jewish prejudice, the blessing of the gospel was to come on Gentiles before the return of Jesus as Messiah.

What he did emphasize was the responsibility of each separate individual in the crowd before him; "in turning away *each one* of you from *your* iniquities." This grammatical solecism, fully attested by the texts, was deliberate, first as an appeal for individual response, but also as stressing the corporate guilt of the entire nation in rejecting Jesus – a guilt which lay on them all.

Doubtless Peter intended the climax of his speech to be as it had been on the day of Pentecost, an exposition of baptism as the only way by which his hearers might "turn from their iniquities" to a God–provided righteousness in Christ. But he was not allowed to get so far, for there came a rough interruption.

The temple guard appeared, and leading him away, they threw him in jail, and John and the healed man with him.

Notes: 3:19–26

19. *Repent and be converted.* Peter's own experience. Lk. 22:32,62.
    From the presence of the Lord. This Greek phrase is always in an adverse sense (2 Th. 1:9; Rev. 6:16; 12:14; 20:11; Acts 5:41; Ps. 97:5), except here. Remarkable! But note v.23.
21. *Receive until* ... An explicit denial of any doctrine of transubstantiation.
    Restitution. Josephus uses this emphatic and unusual word for the restoring of the Land to Jews returning from the captivity (Ant. 11.3,8,9).
    Mouth, not "mouths". i.e. all the prophets spoke with one mouth.

22. This quotation of Dt. 18:15,18 runs also right through John's gospel; e.g. 1:21, 25; 6:14; 7:40; 12:49; 17 (apart of a sustained parallel).
24. Note Samuel's strong lead towards national repentance, and the deliverance given by God: 1 Sam. 7:3, 6, 9, 10. And does 9:13 suggest a Day of Atonement?
    From Samuel. Perhaps hinting at the first great prophecy after Samuel – by Nathan: 2 Sam. 7:12ff.
25. *Covenant.* Was Peter leading them to see Jesus as the necessary covenant–sacrifice?
26. *To bless you.* Gk. – present participle indicates present, not future, blessing. Paul likewise expounds Gen. 22:18 with reference to forgiveness of sins. His phrase is "justification by faith" (Gal. 3:8).

16. Peter and John arrested (4:1–12)

Evidently there were leading men of the Sadducee party in the crowd listening to Peter, and his claim that all the great Promises of the Old Testament related to Jesus of Nazareth was more than they could stomach. So they had the captain of the temple, an official second only to the high priest himself, bring his Levite guard to arrest the apostles, who found themselves interrupted (s.w.6:12) before ever they could reach the climax of their message to the multitude. For good measure, the man they had healed was "picked up" also, he nothing loth, for he had every confidence of security with the men who had healed him (4:9RV, 14).

It is noteworthy that the earliest hostility to the Faith came from the Sadducees (4:1–21; 5:24–41; 6:12). There were two reasons for this. The unflagging apostolic emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus was a great offence to Sadducee belief that there is no life after death. It needed only one clear example to the contrary, and their dogma was in ruins. Also, there is fair evidence in the gospels that the words and works of Jesus had split the party of the Pharisees down the middle (see "Gospels", p.445). So, being divided in their attitude, they found it politic to offer publicly neither praise nor blame. Their turn would come.

There was serious worry that the movement might spread, and not wilt away as they hoped. There was also pique that untrained men such as the apostles (v.13) should assume the right to teach in the temple court as though they were rabbis. And doubtless there was high indignation at the inflammatory denunciations which Peter's speech had included (e.g. 3:14–17).

The discourse, of which 3:12–26 is only a précis, must have gone on for at least two hours, for it was "already evening." There is a touch of apostolic surprise about this phrase, as though expressing wonder at the way the hours had flown by. So, since the chief priests were about to settle down to a protracted meal after their twenty–four–hour Day–of–Atonement fast, the three prisoners were thrown in jail for the night.

That day Cephas and Caiaphas (the names are essentially the same) had used their keys in dramatically different ways!

Before the Sanhedrin

Next morning there was a formal enquiry before a fully–convened Sanhedrin, the same assembly which had condemned Jesus, and which was by and by to take action against the whole group of apostles, and was later to condemn Stephen. Almost certainly Saul of Tarsus was one of the number. In later days that Sanhedrin was to try Saul himself.

It has been suggested that the account of what follows was derived by Luke from the apostle John. It could well be so. The Greek of this section lacks something of the elegance with which Luke wrote, and it bears several characteristics resembling John's writing.

Because of the Day of Atonement the leading Sadducee caucus – the family of Annas – were all present. Naturally they were anxious to repress this Nazarene movement, but with the caution of men of their stamp they moved carefully lest they estrange the multitude which now tended to be on the side of the disciples. The number of converts in Jerusalem was very soon to reach the five thousand mark.

It was the duty of the Sanhedrin to investigate all new teachers and to pronounce, for the guidance of the nation, on their trustworthiness. Such investigation had been made regarding John the Baptist (Jn. 1:19) – but no pronouncement made! – and also regarding Jesus (Lk. 5:17; 20:1, 2).

There was, as yet, no definite charge: "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" The questions were put repeatedly, in different forms, with the skilled interrogator's technique of exposing inconsistencies in the story told. There could be no doubting that the man had been healed (cp. v.16), for over the years he had become a well–known character and now here he was, standing by, as fit and sound as any of them. Rather remarkably, the charge against Peter and John did not concern what they had been teaching but the healing that had taken place. There was an attempt to imply the use of some kind of magic (cp. 19:13).

Peter's inspiration

The apostles were in no way overawed by this august and hostile assembly. Peter, who formerly had flinched before a serving maid (Lk. 22:31,32) was now filled yet again with a surge of Holy Spirit power, precisely as his Lord had promised: "And when they bring you before … magistrates and powers, be not anxious how or what he shall answer, or what ye shall say. For the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that very hour what is necessary for you to say" (Lk. 12:11, 12).

It is interesting to note the stages in Peter's endowment with the Spirit:

a. When, with the rest of the Twelve, he was sent out preaching (Mk. 6:7).
b. The inspiration behind his great confession (Mt. 16:17).
c. On the day of the Lord's resurrection: "He breathed on them, and said, Ye are receiving the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 20:22).
d. Pentecost: tongues and preaching (Acts 2:4 etc.).
e. The healing of the lame man (3:7).
f. And now his witness before the Sanhedrin (4:8).

Apparently, there were different gifts at different times, according to need. Paul was to experience a similar progressive endowment (9:17, 22; 13:2, 3, 9).

Peter's speech

With some deference Peter began his defence, soon to become attack: "Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel." But as their attitude hardened, so also did his (v.19). The same features are readily traceable in Stephen's speech before the same assembly. At first, "Men, brethren, and fathers;" but he ended with: "Ye uncircumcised in heart and ears ..." (7:2, 51).

Peter's respectful address did not exclude irony: "If we this day be examined concerning a *good* deed done to an impotent man ..." Are good rulers to be a terror to *good* works? The man has been healed, permanently healed (Gk. perfect tense); more than that, he is *saved* (here Peter was emulating the example of his Master in employing a word of double meaning) Nor was this marvel to be attributed to either apostle, but to Jesus of Nazareth – the Christ! – whom that very Council had condemned to death and who would now like to do the same to his two witnesses before them. They had enquired: "in whom" was this healing done (v.7)? Peter's direct answer was: "in him (Jesus)" (v.10).

This Jesus God had raised from the dead. Why had there never been any Sadducee disproof of the claim? And now in this miracle there was further evidence for them to cope with, for dead men don't heal lame men! Let all that venerable Council, and indeed the entire nation of Israel ('we mean to tell everybody!') face this unique challenge.

Peter went on, with all the assurance of a long–established rabbi: 'You are all familiar with this prophecy which comes in our Hallel, repeated at both Passover and Tabernacles: The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner. Jesus himself quoted these words to you and you had no answer for him (Mt. 21:42). Instead, you set him at nought. It was *you rulers* who crucified him. You can't put the blame on the Romans! Now that

Scripture is more powerful than ever. Indeed, the entire psalm has become a prophecy not to be gainsaid. Only in this risen Jesus is there the Messianic salvation you look for. No other leader (not even Moses!) can offer the fulness of forgiveness and blessing which comes through him. His Name itself means Salvation. You look in vain for any other Messiah. The future can bring you no–one to compare with him. And now all Israel, yourselves included, are under obligation to seek humbly the salvation offered in him' (Is. 49:6, 8; 52:10).

A prophetic Scripture

The passage quoted by Peter (Ps. 118:22), when studied in depth, proves to be an amazingly appropriate Messianic prophecy, relevant to the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus and his ultimate vindication. The Stone — a "chief corner stone"–is also a "foundation stone" (Is. 28:16), and a "stone of stumbling" (Is. 8:14). ("The Stone of Stumbling," by H.A.W.)

It can only have been inspiration (or his Master's instruction during the forty days) that took Peter to this psalm, for phrase after phrase in it proves to be relevant to that situation in which he, along with the lame man, now found himself:

Psalm 118	Acts 3, 4
26. The Name of the Lord.	3:6. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth ...
14. The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.	3:7. His feet and ankle bones received strength. 4:12: Neither is there salvation in any other.
15. The right hand of the Lord.	3:7. He took him by the right hand.
19. Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the name of the Lord.	3:2. At the gate of the temple. 3:8. He entered with them into the temple ... praising God
21. Thou art become my salvation. 25. Save now.	4:12. Neither is there salvation in any other
23. This is the Lord's doing: it is marvellous in our eyes.	4:16. A notable miracle. 3:11. All the people, greatly wondering.
26. We have blessed you ...	3:26. Sent him to bless you.
3. Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy endureth for ever.	4:6. Annas ... Caiaphas ... as many as were of the kindred of the high priest.
2. Let Israel now say ...	4:10. Be it known to all the people of Israel.
24. The Day which the Lord hath made.	The Day of Atonement (commonly referred to as The Day; e.g. Heb. 10:25).

Peter concluded very boldly: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby it is necessary for us to be saved."

Their Day of Atonement was declared a futility. Their *Mosheh* was no longer a *moshiya.* Jesus, and Jesus only, has been given – appointed (a Hebraism) – for all time, as the Saviour of the people; and all Israel in every generation needs to recognize their present estrangement and their moral obligation ("must"!) to seek the salvation he offers.

Notes: 4:1–12

2. *Grieved.* Literally: 'much troubled'.
   They taught. So John, as well as Peter, shared in the witness that day.
   The resurrection from the dead. The Gk. phrase implies the resurrection of some, not of all. So also 1 Pet. 1:3.
3. *Laid hands on them.* cp. the arrest of Paul: 26:27–36. Contrast Peter's action 3:7.
6. *Annas* had five sons who all followed him in the high priesthood. The last of them had James, the Lord's brother, clubbed to death.
   Gk: *into Jerusalem.* Many of the men of the Sanhedrin would have fine homes in the country outside the city.
   John may have been Johanan ben Zaccai who, years later, was president of the Great Synagogue and who coaxed out of Vespasian permission for many Jews to settle in Jamnia when Jerusalem was in ruins.
   Alexander may have been the leader of the million Jews in Alexandra.
7. *Power.* In the NT. this word nearly always means divine power.
   Ye could be here in expression of contempt.
8. Contrast Paul's bold riposte: 23:1,6.
9. *By what means.* Or: in whom.
11. *Stone*– in Hebrew there is a not infrequent play on the resemblance to "Son."
    This Scripture would be brought forcibly to their minds only four days later when the Hallel was sung at the Feast of Tabernacles.
12. *Other ... other* Different words in Greek, implying: Neither anyone similar to Jesus nor anyone markedly different.

17. Set free (4:13–22)

Set in the midst of the great semi–circle of the Sanhedrin the three men found themselves subject to intense and continuing scrutiny, the more so because they seemed quite unabashed by their overnight imprisonment or by the awesome assembly before which they now found themselves. The Greek text implies that this boldness was specially evident in the demeanour of Peter.

"Unlearned and ignorant men"

This puzzled the rulers, for now, at last, they grasped what ordinary men, both socially and academically, they had to deal with. The word "unlearned" implies a lack of anything beyond the ordinary elementary synagogue–school education (Jn. 7:15). Yet these men had shown themselves able to handle the Scriptures like experts – indeed, better! "Ignorant" really describes status – they were mere laymen, with no official standing. The word was used for ordinary Jews, by contrast with priests and high religious authorities (note 2 Cor. 11:6).

Now the men of the Sanhedrin were able to recognize, and check, that they had actually seen these prisoners before – at the time of the arrest of Jesus of Nazareth. But then, what a difference in their demeanour! This Cephas had used a sword, and then had fled for his life; and there were witnesses that, later, in the palace yard, he had lacked the courage of a mouse! Yet see the difference in him now!

And there, too, stood the man who had been healed, manifestly fit and well, and all unperturbed by all this priestly fuss. Like the Gadarene demoniac and blind Bartimaeus, this man also was eager to continue with the one who had healed him.

Of course they'd had him carefully examined, to ensure that there was nothing fraudulent about this business, and were assured that the "facts" were facts.

The whole thing was inexplicable, and these men of learning were undisguisedly amazed — and they continued to show it.

Perplexity and deliberation

So the jailer was bidden remove his prisoners again, so that the judges might deliberate. Their real problem was: What policy to adopt towards these disciples of Jesus? "What shall we do?" Nine months before, when there was a wild claim that Lazarus of Bethany had been raised from the dead, there had been the same perplexity: "What do we (i.e. now)?" (Jn. 11:47). With the crucifying of Jesus of Nazareth the problem had not gone away. Evidently it was going to rear its head again and again. So they must settle how best to cope with it.

The trouble was that they were up against an unbudgeable fact. It was no rumour or opinion. The healing *had* been done, and much as they would *like* to issue a public denial (what a court of justice!), they dared not try that. It would only provoke a roar of derision from the common people (cp. Lk. 20:6), for this healing was generally accepted as a miracle; it had sent Nazarene popularity soaring.

'The less this is talked about, the better! Then why do we not scare them into silence with strong threats about what will happen to them if they come before us again? Left to itself this trouble will spread *into* the people (Gk.) like a summer fire on a hillside or like a cancer in a human body. So, shut their mouths! Forbid their propaganda, whether in public or in private. Give the crowd time to forget about them.'

Why, it may be asked, was the precept of Moses' Law not brought into operation?:

"The prophet which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak ... even that prophet shall die" (Dt. 18:20).

It may be fairly confidently assumed that had they dared, the Sanhedrin would have followed this lead with no small enthusiasm, but they feared the people. For these Sadducees, who were politicians more than they were men of God, vox populi was always vox Dei (v.21; 5:26).

The important Bezan text plainly implies that there were stubborn divided counsels in the debate concerning these two "unlearned and ignorant men," for it inserts: "When they had all consented to this opinion."

However, at last common ground was reached. The three were brought in again and were given, to their faces (Gk.), a strong dressing–down. No more of this inflammatory talk in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. All activities, both public and private, must cease forthwith.

Unabashed

The apostles were undismayed. It was a strange situation–bold prisoners confronting fearful uneasy men of power.

With fine irony Peter and John set *their* policy over against that of the rulers: "Whether it is a righteous thing in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye (perhaps they could manage such a judgement better than the decision they had just taken!), for we are not able *not* to speak the things which we have seen and heard" (cp. Jn. 1:14; 1 Jn. 1:2).

Whereupon the prisoners were hustled out of the chamber, and set at liberty. This first taste of persecution had been relatively mild. The mercy of God was enabling them to become acclimatised by stages to such hardships. Now, unwearied, they ran with the footmen. Soon they must contend with horses (Jer. 12:5).

Notes: 4:13–22

13. *Boldness.* A surprisingly common NT. word, used to describe the demeanour of Jesus and of his apostles.
    Men – anthropoi, slightly contemptuous; cf. *andres* (3:12), more respectful.
    Took knowledge, implies recognition; s.w. Lk. 24:16,31; Acts 3:10. Was Malchus, the high–priest's secretary, one of these? Jn. 18:10.
    With Jesus. And the man *with them* (v.14)
14. *Could say nothing.* The Gk. tenses imply: they kept on trying, but could not say a single thing against the miracle.
16. *Done by them* is, literally: 'through them'. Thus they inadvertently concede that Peter and John were only agents.
17. *Spread.* 2 Tim. 2:17 has a cognate word.
    Threaten – Literally: 'Let us threaten them a threatening' – a common intensive form in *Hebrew.* Threatening is *always* a sign of weakness. The form of the verb implies this to be done for their own selfish ends, not in justice. Cp. Jn. 9:22; 12:42.
18. *Speak.* There is a lovely double meaning here. *They* meant it in the sense of 'prate'. But elsewhere in Scripture it means 'speak with divine authority! Ps. 78:2; 119:172; Am. 1:2; 2 Pet. 2:16,18; and the cognate word: Acts 2:4.14; 26:25; (a claim to inspiration!) Dt. 32:2; Ez. 13:9,19.
    This ruling very quickly became a dead letter v.31; 5:12,21,42.
20. *Seen and heard;* cp. 1:8; Jn. 1:14; 1 Jn. 1:1,2.
22. Luke professionally notes ages and duration of sickness: 9:33; 14:8; Lk. 8:42,43; 13:11. But why is this verse inserted here? Out of place, surely.

18. Thanksgiving and boldness (4:23–31)

Peter and John, set free, quickly made their way to where they would find the other apostles (see v.23, 31), who – as in Peter's later experience (12:12) – were no doubt offering sustained prayer for their well–being. These "perceiving the working of God" (Codex D etc.), the two reported all that had happened to them, and the threats of the rulers. Thereupon they all gave themselves to prayer afresh, led in this perhaps by James the Lord's brother or by Peter himself, and, when he came to his citation of the Second Psalm, they all joined in fervently in the reciting of the familiar words.

The early part of the prayer was a remarkable amalgam of two other Scriptures – Psalm 146 and Jeremiah 32:

Psalm 146	**Acts 4**
3. Put not your trust in princes In whom is no salvation.	5, 8. The rulers (s.w. LXX) 12. Neither is there salvation in any other.
6. Which made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that therein is	24. (Quoted exactly.)
7–9. (The marvels of God's handiwork)	(The ministry of Jesus?)
7. Which looseth the prisoners	21. They let them go.
9. The way of the wicked he maketh crooked.	Contrast the lame man's crooked limbs made straight.
10. The Lord shall reign for ever ... O Zion.	Ps. 2:6: My king upon my holy hill of Zion.
Jeremiah 32	
16. I prayed saying ... The great and mighty God.	24. They lifted up their voice to God: Lord (Despot), thou art God.
17. Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power.	Which hast made heaven and earth ...
Thy stretched out arm.	30. By stretching forth thine hand to heal.
19. Great is counsel.	28. Whatsoever thy hand and counsel ...
Mighty in working.	24. Perceived the working of God (Codex D)
20. Signs and wonders.	30. Signs and wonders.
20. Hast made thee a name.	The name of thy holy servant Jesus.

In their prayer the parallel between present experience and the Second Psalm was worked out in some detail:

"Why do the Gentiles (Pontius Pilate), rage, and the peoples (the people of Israel) imagine a vain thing? The kings of the Land (Herod) stood up, and the rulers are gathered together (the Sanhedrin – same words exactly in v.5, 6), against the Lord and against his Christ (thy holy Servant Jesus, whom thou hast anointed) ... Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion (in this city – v.28, the best MSS).

Similarly, in Heb. 5:5, Psalm 2 is given an application to the resurrection of Jesus. Yet, no less than three times, the Apocalypse applies it to the Second Coming (2:27; 12:5; 19:15). This last day reference of the psalm so familiar to modern believers, is actually hinted at here also, for the plurals "Gentiles" and "kings" have only singulars – Pontius Pilate, Herod — to match with them in this first–century fulfilment.

It is interesting to follow through the detailed early fulfilment of the rest of this prophecy.

4. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.	4:31 The place was shaken where they were assembled together (it is the derisive laughter of God at the futile opposition of the Sanhedrin).
5. Then shall he speak to them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.	7:51. Ye uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit.
7. The decree.	Rom. *Declared* to be the Son of God 1:4 with power ... by the resurrection from the dead.
8. Ask of me and I shall give thee the Gentiles for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.	7:55. Jesus *standing* on the right hand of God (to ask: 'Give me the Gentiles'. Appropriately, the psalm goes on to the conversion of Saul to be an apostle to Gentiles).
10. Be instructed, ye judges of the Land.	The conversion of Saul, one of the judges (26:10 RV).
11. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.	9:6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord ...
12. Kiss the Son (Gentile word for 'Son'; LXX: accept correction) lest ... ye perish in the way.	9:9 (Saul a "dead" man till the third day).
Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.	(Paul's gospel of justification by faith). 4:31: To all who wanted to believe (Codex D).

The apostles prayed for no drastic divine action against their powerful adversaries, but simply that God would look on the hostility of these men. For the brethren it was sufficient that God should know of the despite done to His servants. Positively, all they asked for was that they be given "boldness to speak the word". (Who would have thought that they needed now to ask for *that?),* and that acts of power should vindicate the despised name of Jesus (cp. Lk. 11:13).

The earthquake, which doubtless scared everyone else in Jerusalem merely gave them further confidence. It was the only one of the great signs given to Elijah at Horeb (1 Kgs. 19:11, 12) which they had not experienced as yet. Mow it was as though the walls of another Jericho were being brought down before the invincible ranks of the New Israel.

Paul was to have a like experience (16:25, 26), also as a result of prayer, when he came to his first Gentile city.

Notes: 4:23–31

23. *Chief priests and elders.* Sadducees and Pharisees; the latter dominated the Sanhedrin. 25. The best Greek text reads: *The Holy Spirit, the mouth of our father David.*
    Rage. This word describes the snorting of excited, unruly horses.
    Peoples. In the OT. this word commonly refers to Israel (the twelve tribes).
    Stood up. Rather stood by (to give assistance).
    Against his Christ. And against his Holy Spirit anointing the apostles.
27. RV adds: *In this city.* Cp. Jn. 1:11; Lk. 13:33.
28. *Determined before to be done.* Peter's ready emphasis on the fore–ordained purpose of God: 2:23; 10:42; 1 Pet 1:2, 20
29. *Threatenings,* v.21. Contrast Mt. 23:3; Acts 23:5.
    Boldness, v.31, 33; Jn. 14:13. *Slaves* with *boldness* – what a paradox!
31. *Filled* is aorist. *Spake* is continuous.

19. "All things common" (4:31–37)

The healing of the lame man and the apostles' renewed witness, more boldly than ever, after they had been arrested and then set free, meant a vast amount of publicity before the people of Jerusalem. As a result, "many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand" (4:4), that is, a further two thousand since Pentecost (2:41).

The tone of this young and thriving Jerusalem ecclesia was all that could be desired: "The heart and soul of the multitude of them that believed was one." Here, as uniformly throughout Scripture, "heart" does not carry an emotional connotation, but refers rather to their thinking. Here was unanimity, primarily, of conviction. And "soul" in the New Testament commonly describes the natural man and his ordinary everyday activities and instincts. Accordingly, the record goes on to re–emphasize a selfless willingness to "have all things common." And, Codex D adds, "there was among them no division (i.e. discrimination, class distinction; or, possibly, disputation)."

The Holy Spirit at work

The apostles concentrated on their main duty of preaching: "With great power they gave witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus," that word "power"– *dunamis,* dynamite! – implying a vigorous activity of the Holy Spirit, for this is its meaning in scores of other places. Day after day they "gave back" their witness – it is a word which implies either fulfilment of a duty, or a ready response to any sign of hostile criticism.

But besides this specialized activity, "great grace was upon them *all."* Here, as one man, the commentators miss the point and drift into vague generalities about the favourable opinion of the populace or of undefined divine blessings. This woolliness arises through missing the early church's idiomatic use of "grace" *(Charis)* as a synonym for a gift *(charisma)* of the Holy Spirit.

Gifts for all, but not always

Here, then, is a further indication that the gifts of the Spirit were not restricted to the apostles, or even to them and other holders of office in the ecclesia. They were, apparently, available to all believers.

The evidence for this — fairly substantial – has been compiled by E.W.

1. Sons and daughters, old men and young men are included in Joel's prophecy of the Spirit (Acts 2:17), "even *as many as* the Lord our God shall call" (2:39).

2. In the house of Cornelius, "the Holy Spirit fell on *all them which heard the word"* (10:44) – "as on us at the beginning" (11:15).

3. "For by one Spirit are *we all* baptized into one body ... and have been *all* made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). "There are diversities of working (i.e. different gifts of the Spirit), but it is the same God that worketh all (these things) in all (members of the church)" (12:6).

4. "Unto *every one of us* was given (Gk. aorist) grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:7). Here the context (v.8–11) plainly shows that the "grace" referred to is the Holy Spirit, in one of its partial gifts (see "Studies in the Gospels", H.A.W., p.44).

5. And so also in this Acts picture of the church in Jerusalem: "and great grace was upon them *all*" (4:33).

6. "The Holy Spirit which God hath given to them that obey him" (5:32).

However, it needs to be recognized that this enjoyment of spirit gifts was only intermittent as the details regarding both Peter and Paul (and such repetitious passages as 2:4; 4:31) seem to indicate (see. ch.16).

Faith and Self Denial

One of the gifts listed by Paul is that of "faith" (1 Cor. 12:9). This can hardly be the faith in Christ that was common to all believers, and a necessary prelude to baptism (2:38). So it must surely refer to a special endowment of faith to enable a man to achieve what of himself he would never be able to rise to – in this instance, a willingness to let go wealth for the benefit of one's brethren and to depend in faith on the providence of God:

"As many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made to every man according as he had need." The phrasing of the Greek text here might well imply that this was a continuing practice whenever there was an emergency, and specially regarding inherited property, that is, that those who already had adequate home and livelihood and found themselves inheriting real estate, which was not *needed* forthwith contributed it to the common fund.

They did this the more readily out of a conviction that the coming of the Lord was not far away. (Twentieth century disciples believe the same, but act differently). It is useful to ask what would have happened to all that property if, instead, the believers had chosen to keep their houses and lands in the family for another forty years!

It is intriguing to note that no less than three times in the space of five verses Luke records that the proceeds of these sales were "laid at the apostles' feet", for all the world like soldiers making surrender and laying down their arms. Why this uncharacteristic repetitiousness? There was a similar, yet different, sacrifice years later in Ephesus, when books of magic worth al least half a million pounds(in modern inflation) were publicly burned (19 .19). Two kinds of witchcraft, both of them deleterious to faith!

In modern times a daily distribution to all in need has been gravely frowned upon as a form of "buying" converts and as liable to create all kinds of problems. The apostles, even if not aided by the Holy Spirit's wisdom, were level–headed enough to foresee that this was bound to happen (as indeed it did: 5:1–11; 6:1). But evidently it was not *their* method to refrain from good lest evil should come in its train.

Joseph Barnabas

One of the outstanding examples of this self–sacrificing faith was that of Joseph Barnabas, a Levite of Cyprus, who contributed the proceeds from the sale of an estate. Identification with the rich young ruler (Lk. 18:18ff) has been worked out at length in "Studies in the Gospels," ch.148. Only a few of the details are mentioned here. The Law had assigned no inheritance to Levites: "The Lord is his inheritance" (cp. Num 18:20–24 etc). It would seem that one of the sophistries by which Levites of those days got round the letter of the Law was by investing acquired wealth in property outside the Holy Land! Now, by the gift of faith through the Holy Spirit (11:24), Joseph sold up, and brought the money (s.w. riches; Lk. 18:24) to the apostles, who thereupon gave him his new name. Not that his original name was inappropriate, for the first Joseph had been a man of great wealth, yet not afraid to acknowledge his humbler brethren.

"Barnabas" has presented problems to the interpreters, but the identification suggested here smoothes away the difficulties, for "Son of consolation" is equally well "Son of exhortation" (as RV), that is, 'the man who did what he was told to do', namely, "Sell all that thou hast, and distribute (4:35 s.w.) to the poor ... and come, follow me" (Lk. 18:22). There must have been much inward wrestling before the decision of complete surrender was made. "With men it is impossible," Jesus had said about this young man, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (Mk. 10:27). And the context here in Acts 4 (and 11:24) strongly suggests that that decision was only achieved through the godly impulse of the Holy Spirit.

"Barnabas" has been a problem because no amount of Hebrew or Aramaic can turn it into "Son of exhortation." "Bar" is certainly the Gentile word for "son" (as in Ps. 2:12 – but not 2:7). It was appropriate as emphasizing how this Levite was at last abandoning reliance on works of the Law ("What shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?"; Lk. 18:18). But the rest of the name means "prophecy," not "exhortation." The allusion is, of course, to the veiled prophecy made about him by Jesus that God can save even a man who turned away, saying: 'No, I can't do it. You are asking too much.' "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God" (Lk. 18:27).

Notes: 4:32–37

32. *Not one* (RV), among so many!
    All things common. Cp. 2 Cor. 8:14,15, where an extension of this philanthropy is compared to Israelites in the wilderness sharing out manna. James 1 .5–12 is a passage deserving much careful study with primary reference to this situation in Jerusalem. ("The Epistle of James," by H.A.W.) It needs also to be borne in mind that this early charity was not used to encourage idleness: 2 Th. 3:10; Eph. 4:28. Later poverty in Jerusalem is often blamed on this first burst of benevolence. This is a mistake. Consider, rather, Acts 8:1–3; 22:4; 26:10, 11; Heb. 10:34.
33. Why did the Twelve not go preaching far and wide? The early church had a tradition (dependable?) that the Lord had commanded them to stay twelve years in Jerusalem. A later rationalisation, perhaps.
34. *That lacked.* LXX s.w. Dt. 15:7. By derivation, Gk. = needing to beg.
35. *At the apostles' feet.* Contrast 7:58.
    According as. NT. usage suggests a specially emphatic "because".
36. *A Levite.* Jer. 32:7–15 presents a problem. But this property of Jeremiah's was *in* a priestly town. Num. 18 prohibited the owning of land outside the priestly and Levitical cities.
    Consolation; Gk. paraklesis, exhortation – as in 13:15; 2 Cor. 1:5; 8:17; Heb. 12:5; 13:22.
37. This verse puts point to 1 Cor. 9:6.

20. Ananias and Sapphira (5:1–11)

Not for nothing does this paragraph in Acts begin with "But". Thus it points not only to a continuation of the idea of having all things common, but also to a sharp contrast in the tone of the narrative. This picture of the early church makes no attempt to idealise the first believers any more than the gospels seek to present the apostles as anything but the spiritually immature men that they then were.

The Son of man had sowed good seed in his field. Now, as the passing of time was to make more and more evident, tares began to grow up also:

5:1, 2:	The deceit of Ananias and Sapphira.
6:1	Grumbling.
15:1	Judaism.
Gal. 2:11–14	Weakness in withstanding it.
15:39.	Missionary quarrelling.

Just as the covetousness of Achan brought trouble in Israel at the beginning of their new life in Canaan, so also now the same sin bade fair to spread rottenness in the New Israel. The two stories have the same elements — not only covetousness, but also a "keeping back" (s.w. Josh. 7:1), and collusion, divine discernment, judicial death, and the spread of a great fear.

Motives

There is an irony about the name of Ananias (= the Lord's grace or gift) (see 4:33, and ch.19). It may be that he sold his property for the benefit of the brethren as a result of an impulse of Holy Spirit guidance. If this were so, it would not only add meaning to Peter's accusation about lying to the Holy Spirit but would also explain the extraordinary severity of the divine judgement.

It is perhaps possible also to infer (v.1: Gk. *aner)* that Ananias had already acquired some prominence in the ecclesia at Jerusalem, and so felt goaded to live up to a reputation he took pride in but did not deserve. This too would merit severe judgement. "Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain" (Prov. 25:14; and cp. Jude 12).

Apparently Sapphira was no better than her husband. Her name, which she would fain have been seen to deserve, means Beautiful (s.w. Dan. 4:12, 21: "fair"). Significantly enough, it has been found by the archaeologists on an ancient burial urn in Jerusalem. Hers?

These two, who should have been each other's spiritual reinforcement against temptation, actually encouraged each other in evil. Indeed, it is not unlikely that when Peter accusingly asked: "Why hath Satan filled thine heart ...?", the Satan he meant was Sapphira.

From the start it was a paltry sordid business, for it would be possible for Ananias to understate the selling price of the property by only a small proportion, or the figure specified to Peter would have seemed most unrealistic. Yet he and his wife evidently lacked the faith to believe that their Lord would see them adequately provided for. The assurance and comfort imparted by "that which is seen," even though carefully hidden away from the eyes of their brethren, was more real to them than "that which is not seen." (2 Cor. 4:18).

The narrative seems to imply that Ananias came to present the money to the apostles *(all* of them being present?) at a formal meeting of the ecclesia. The kudos that came from such prominence and approval was sweet to this deceiver — precisely what he loved and had aimed at.

Judgement

But he had forgotten that the risen Lord had imparted to his apostles the authority to "remit"

and "retain" (Jn. 20:22, 23) — to forgive and to censure – and this Peter now proceeded to do publicly. He used his Master's highly effective method of rebuke–by–questioning: "Whiles it remained, did it not remain thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? (here is plain proof that there was no commandment or compulsion about this practice). Why hast thou put this thing in thine heart (i.e. thought it out and approved it; cp. Mal. 2 .2cGk.)? Thou hast not lied (i.e. not only) unto men, but unto God." Peter's "Why?" probed at the motive for the deceit.

And Ananias collapsed forthwith and very soon died (1 Tim. 5:24) — for none that "make a lie" are to have their part in God's heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:27; 22:15). Luke's description employs a specialised medical term, and judging from its use with reference to Herod Agrippa 1 (12:23), a particularly miserable death may be implied.

At this cataclysmic happening, which came about without any direct exercise of apostolic power, all present, including the apostles, were startled and fearful. What a contrast this situation made with the idyllic happy fellowship there had been hitherto! It is not unlikely that even Peter was taken completely by surprise when Ananias collapsed.

After the assembly had recovered from the initial shock, certain minor officers of the ecclesia — called "the younger" in contrast to the elders–came forward and wrapped the body tidily in its own robes, just as the sacrilegious sons of Aaron had been after the judgement on their presumptuous sin (Lev. 10:4, 5), and took it away for burial (Dt. 21:23). Not improbably the interment took place in Acaldama, the graveyard which had been bought with the thirty pieces of silver brought back by covetous Judas. Speedy burials are common in tropical countries. Edersheim has assembled evidence that this was normal in ancient Jerusalem.

Sapphira

Some three hours later Sapphira came into that tense assembly, now made yet more tense by her presence. It is inconceivable that no one had as yet informed her of her husband's death, but it is much less likely that the details of Peter's charge against Ananias had been told.

Now she was comforting herself, doubtless, that, although widowed, she had some of the proceeds of the recent sale to help provide her with a reasonable subsistence. Indeed the narrative may imply–by that word "answered", in v.8 — that she even made bold to ask that the money Ananias had brought might be returned to her as a needful aid in her widowhood.

The apostle's indirect answer was: "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?" — indicating as he spoke the money which still lay undisturbed on a near–by table. He was deliberately providing an opportunity for repentance and frank confession (cp. Gen. 3:9). But the appeal fell on deaf ears, because the heart was hard.

Sapphira looked carefully, and answered: "Yea, for so much."

Why did she not stop to remind herself of the plain warning in the Law? "If anyone sin in that he heareth the voice of adjuration, he being a witness, whether he hath seen or known, if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity" (Lev. 5:1 RV).

That bland reply, repeating the lie of her husband, brought her sin on her own head.

"How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" — testing whether the Spirit in the apostles could be hood–winked, and whether she and her husband could refuse the directive of the Holy Spirit in themselves and get away with it (Rom 12:9).

"Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out."

And as those solemn–faced brethren walked to their usual places in the assembly, Sapphira slumped down on the floor at Peter's feet, just where, three hours earlier, her husband had laid that money of deceit.

Reaction in the ecclesia

As word about this judgement from heaven went round, a shock wave of fear went through everyone. The entire ecclesia was stunned by such a blunt reminder that the most intimate concerns of their lives were under the direct scrutiny of their Lord. There, but for the grace of God, go I! "Thou, God, seest me." The One who walked in the midst of the candlesticks, with eyes as a flame of fire, would one day be the Judge of quick and dead. But such is his power and authority, he need not wait until that day of reckoning!

Word of these momentous happenings would soon reach the chief priests, for there is reason to believe that those evil men had lost no time in planting their secret agents in the new ecclesia (e.g. Gal. 2:4). Then what was the reaction of those spies? One can imagine them asking for a fresh assignment!

Why was Peter not arraigned on a charge of murder? Wasn't this a fine opportunity for the rulers to bring the apostles into discredit? But what concrete evidence did they have? And in any case, would it be wise to add to the publicity these men of Jesus of Nazareth had had already?

What happened to that money? Would it be used? Two precedents — Judas's thirty pieces of silver (Mt. 27:7), and the tokens of the rebellion of Korah (Num. 16:37–40) – suggest that Ananias's money would be assigned for some useful purpose, if only that of providing a burial fund for poor brethren.

How like the first failure in Eden all this was! – a man and a woman in conspiracy against known duty, a ruinous lie, clear options of good and evil, fearful sinners given an opportunity to confess; and the outcome a mortal judgement.

Additional Note

An alternative and drastically different interpretation of this incident is perhaps worth mentioning.

From the very first, according to the Lord's own prophecy (Mt. 13:24ff – the tares), the Jewish adversaries of the gospel made serious efforts to wreck the early church by infiltrating agents into the ranks of the believers. Gal. 2:4 is quite explicit about this.

If Ananias and Sapphira were among the first of these dissimulators, several details take on a sharper meaning:

a. If the deception had proved successful, how much easier it would have been thereafter to discredit the apostles.

b. The remarkably drastic judgement meted out is now more readily seen to be appropriate to the situation. The two were condemned not just because of an ingrained spirit of money–grubbing or peculation, common to many people, but as the exposure of a deliberate evil spirit of anti–Christ.

c. "Why hath Satan filled thine heart ...?" now takes on an even more pointed meaning.

d. In the normal course of things the "coincidence" of two people dropping dead at the word of Peter would surely have provoked an official enquiry. But on this hypothesis, a full investigation of the circumstances is about the last thing the hostile rulers would want.

e. The apparent omission of funeral rites is striking. Were there no friends and relations to

lament the sudden death of these two?

f. The strange phrase: "And of the rest durst no man join himself to them (the believers?)" is a statement wondrously difficult to make sense of. The rest of whom? Joined to whom? The commentaries vary considerably here. But if "the rest" means "other would–be infiltrators" planning to insinuate themselves into the ecclesia, the sequence of ideas is much easier. Apart from this reading of the situation, there is a shouting contradiction between this v.13 and the next verse: "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women."

g. The allusion to Solomon's porch (v.12) is surely intended to remind readers of Jesus in Solomon's porch (Jn. 10:23, 24) dexterously using the wisdom of Solomon to cope with an evil attempt to entrap him with a tricky dilemma (see ch.21).

h. The high indignation of the Jewish rulers (v.17) is perhaps more readily seen as a reaction to the sudden death of Ananias, their "agent", than as a symptom of envy or political apprehension.

Notes: 5:1–11

1. *With.* Gk: *sun,* not *meta.*
2. *Kept back.* The same word is used in Tit. 2:10 of slaves misappropriating what is their master's. Cp. also Gehazi: 2 Kgs. 5:20–27; and the Unjust Steward: Lk. 16:6. The evil influence of money comes out pointedly in Acts 5:1,2; 6:; 8:20; 16:19; 19:25–27; 24:26.
3. Cp. Num 30:2.
   To lie. Yet Peter himself had lied and lied again; Mt. 26:74. Where lies the difference?
4. *Lied ... unto God.* This phrase and v.9: "to test the Holy Spirit," might imply that the two shared a scepticism about the divine authority of the apostles (Mt. 12:31).
5. *Fear.* Cp. 19:17.
6. *Young men.* Certain passages might suggest that here is a technical term for ecclesial officers: Lk. 22:26; 1 Pet. 5:5; 1 Tim. 5:1; Tit. 2:2, 6; 1 Jn. 2:13,14.
   Buried him. "No more an Ananias (LXX) in the house of the Lord" (Zech. 14:21).
9. Why not the kind of judgement described in 1 Cor. 5:5,13?
10. *The young men.* Not s.w. as in v.6. The one describes age relative to the elders. The other is a technical term (see earlier note).
    By her husband, in a tomb, not a grave.
11. *Church.* First occurrence in Acts of *ekklesia* (but Codex D has it at 2 .47). The Greek use of the term is illustrated by 19:32. But very often LXX (and 7:38) has *ekklesia* for the congregation of Israel (here, and in the rest of NT. the New Israel).

21. The healing Christ! (5:12–16)

In the time of Moses, when judgement came on Korah and his fellow–rebels, the reaction was that "all the congregation ... murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord" (Num. 16:41). But there was no such bitterness among the New Israel at the death of Ananias and Sapphira: "They were all with one accord in Solomon's porch." The spirit of unanimity so dominant immediately after Pentecost (2:42ff) still prevailed.

It is remarkable that the authorities permitted their thronged and enthusiastic meetings in the temple area, but evidently popular acclaim was so marked at this time that, in spite of the earlier prohibition (4:18) persistently disregarded, the rulers deemed it politic to turn a blind eye, at any rate for a while.

The allusion to Solomon's porch is not without significance, for it was there (Jn. 10:23) where Jesus had one of his toughest encounters with the rulers. It was there where he appealed to the witness of his good works (v. 25, 32, 37) as his apostles were now able to do. There also he declared concerning his "sheep": "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (v.28) – the twelve would remember this by and by, when they were arrested and then unexpectedly set free; what was written about their Lord proved true for them also: "Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand" (v.39).

A problem phrase

The "signs and wonders" done by the apostles, and apparently by none of the other believers, continued to make a great impression on the multitude. The reputation of the brethren stood very high at this time. Yet, somewhat unexpectedly Luke adds: "Of the rest durst no man join himself to them."

This has been variously interpreted as meaning:

(a) although the people admired the disciples, because of official disapproval they dare not give loyalty to the gospel (Jn. 7:28; 12:42; but note v.14);

(b) the rest of the disciples, influenced by the Ananias incident, treated the apostles with even greater awe and circumspection; but more probably

(c) since the Ananias story is really an exception and parenthesis, "the rest" alludes back to Barnabas the Levite – the rest of the Levites dared not, because of their official standing, openly follow their colleague's noble example of open discipleship; this conclusion is neatly supported by the use of the word "joined", with its clear allusion to the name Levi (Gen. 29:34). Later, after the advocacy of Gamaliel, scruples were thrust aside, and "and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (6:7).

(d) For an alternative to this, consider again the Additional Note at the end of ch. 20.

Popularity

Meantime, although certain segments of the populace felt discouraged, amongst others there was steady progress: "Believers were the more added to the Lord." This is really remarkable language, emphasizing the growth of the Body of Christ. It stands in sharp contrast to the earlier description that "the Lord added to the church daily" (2:47). Now the accession of converts warranted the use of the word "multitudes" – both men and women.

The exercise of the healing powers of the Holy Spirit soon brought fame to the apostles, and to Peter especially. In the city people took notice of his movements, and then brought out their sick folk on beds and mattresses in the hope that the apostle would pause to heal them or would at the very least pass so close that his shadow would linger over them, and bring healing (cp. 19:12; Lk. 8:44; Mk. 6:56), as though he were the Shekinah Glory of God (s.w. Lk. 1:35; 9:34).

And the disciples were reminded of an intriguing Messianic prophecy in Isaiah:

"Behold, a king (Jesus) shall reign in righteousness, and princes (his apostles) shall rule (the ecclesia) in judgement. And a man (the Messiah) shall be ... as the shadow of a rock (Peter) of glory in a thirsty land (Zion means 'dry place')" (32:1, 2). In later days there were to be plenty of examples of prophecies about Messiah being fulfilled by Messiah's men. The ensuing verses (v.3–8) are all appropriate to the stark contrast between apostolic power and preaching and the studied villainy of the rulers.

And of course these sick people were healed, even though the record does not explicitly say so (except in Codex D), and even though their attitude seems to the modern reader to be well–flavoured with superstition. If these sufferers were not healed, there would be no point whatever in including this remarkable detail in the narrative.

This rather pathetic enthusiasm spread. As the word went round, bad cases from towns well outside Jerusalem were brought before Peter in the wistful hope that the carry–over of the power which men remembered in Jesus of Nazareth would operate as effectively through his men. And it did.

Yet there is no word of these marvellous healings leading to a further surge of conversions. But Jesus had been happy to help these stricken folk out of an overflow of compassion for them in their sufferings. And so also with the apostles.

Notes: 5:12–16

12–14. The sequence is worth noting:
v.12a. The apostles.
v.12b. The ecclesia.
v.13a. The rest.
v.13b. The people.
v.14. The new converts.
v.15. The sick in Jerusalem.
v.16. The sick from further afield.
15. *Brought forth:* v.10 s.w. A contrast!
Into the streets. But not to the meetings!
16. *Vexed, healed.* Two well–recognized medical terms. The first means, literally, "crowded". Legion! With the second contrast Mt. 17:16.

22. More trouble with the rulers (5:17–32)

The exasperation and envy of the chief priests at the impressive preaching and healing by the apostles became explosive. The growing popularity of the Nazarene movement, together with the political danger that this enthusiasm might engender, really worried them. They could envisage a popular uprising against the power of Rome, bringing in its train an indescribable trail of ruin and misery, and for themselves an utter loss of authority (cp. Jn. 11:48).

Arrested – and freed, by whom?

So, one evening (as on an earlier occasion: 4:3), when the apostles were occupied with one of their meetings in Solomon's porch, they were rounded up and locked up in the common prison, but apparently segregated from all the city riff–raff who were there.

But as dawn approached they found themselves unexpectedly — or perhaps not so unexpectedly! (Ps. 146:7; Acts 4:21) – set free by "an angel of the Lord." It has more than once been speculated that this "angel" was some official who was willing to take risks on their behalf. There are several hints in the early part of Acts that secret sympathizers kept the disciples informed of what went on in the high counsels of the rulers and were prepared to give what aid they could, provided this could be done without undue danger. Certainly it is rather remarkable that next day, when the apostles stood before the Sanhedrin, there was apparently no interrogation: "How did you get your freedom? Doors locked! Men ceaselessly on guard! And you walk out undeterred?" Surely this seeming deliberate silence about a startling jail–break is best explained as due to a suspicion that someone influential had been making good use of money and personal authority to bring the prisoners out.

If this approach is correct, then who was the "angel of the Lord?" Suspicion falls on Malchus, the officer of the high priest who was not only smitten but also miraculously healed within a minute. Is it not likely that for the rest of his days such a man would be anything but a disciple of Jesus, if only in secret?

Another suggestion is that the Theophilus for whom Luke wrote was one of the sons of Annas, a man who actually succeeded years later to the high priesthood, only to be put out of office by the Herod Agrippa (Jos. Ant. 19.6.2) who commented satirically on the witness made by Paul concerning the resurrection of Jesus.

Whether by human agency or not, God was certainly at work on behalf of the persecuted. More and more the apostles were being made to realise that divine power was at work to prosper the cause of the Son of God. So without hesitation they went into action, as they had been bidden by their deliverer, proclaiming the truth of Christ before the early worshippers soon after sunrise.

A startled Sanhedrin

Meantime, a full assembly of the Sanhedrin had been called for a formal trial of the offenders. It consisted of the small but immensely powerful priestly party, the Sadducees, and the more popular majority, the Pharisees.

This august assembly was utterly startled by the report that, in spite of locked doors and guards on duty, the prisoners had vanished. The news brought consternation in the minds of all. Was this another of the remarkable "signs and wonders" which were now always associated with the name of Jesus of Nazareth?

They were even more nonplussed when there came word that the very men they were concerned about were at that moment preaching and teaching in the temple court where, the evening before, they had been arrested. What was this but cool effrontery (4:17–21)?

The temple guard was instructed to arrest the men once again, but in as unprovocative a manner as possible. Any sharply hostile action might well touch off an uncontrollable riot (cp. Jn. 7:45).

What was the surprise of the officers when their first mild demand that the twelve attend the Sanhedrin meeting met with immediate compliance! There was no hint whatever of resentment or truculence. "It shall be given you in that hour what ye shall say," their Lord had assured them, and already they knew that this would be true.

Charged! Undismayed!

Standing there before the great semicircle of reverend and influential men, the apostles heard themselves charged with two offences – first, disobedience of the Sanhedrin's earlier strict injunction (4:18) that they cease their propaganda; and second, that they were losing no opportunity to incite the crowd against their rulers: 'You are set on making us responsible for the putting to death of this man'. What a contrast with the cynical shout at the trial of Jesus:

"His blood be upon us, and upon our children" (Mt. 27:25). Now these rulers feared for their own skins.

Peter, if anything more confident than on the former occasion, was ready as spokesman of his brethren:

'Whom ought we to obey? – God or men? You know the answer to that! Our leader Jesus, the man whose name you are even afraid to mention, was raised up by God; but you, choosing to treat him as an impostor, had him put to death as a criminal of the worst sort. Nevertheless, God raised him from the dead, and has now exalted him at his own right hand. It is only in him that there is forgiveness of sins, and the necessary condition – yes, even for you governing elders of the nation! – is repentance. We who followed Jesus in his ministry are entrusted with this message, and we speak it with the Holy Spirit's authority just as much as did the prophets in ancient days. This is our duty, and we will fulfil it!'

Notes: 5:17–32

17. *Which is the sect of the Sadducees.* These words are literally true. The Sadducee party consisted only of the high–priestly families and their immediate friends and relations.
    Indignation. More exactly, "jealousy."
20. *The words of this life.* Possibly put for "these words of life;" cp. 13:26; Rom. 7:24. Or, perhaps this is an early church technical term – like "The Way" (19:23), "The Truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).
21. *Senate.* Gk: *Gerousia,* which comes several times in Dt. 21:2LXX. Hence, perhaps, v.28 here. The entire passage is splendidly relevant to the death of Jesus.
23. What a contrast with 16:20.
26. And yet another contrast: 21:30–36.
28. *This man's blood* seems to imply that the crucifixion was quite recent – in which case Acts 5 must follow chronologically quite close on Acts 4.
    Straitly charge. An emphatic Hebraism.
30. *Hanged on a tree.* Cp. Peter's words in 10:39; 1 Pet. 2:24. A neat harmony. Allusion to Dt. 21:22 (see note on v.21).
31. *Prince and Saviour.* Allusion to Joshua, who gave Israel their promised inheritance? The same word "exalted" comes in Josh. 3:7LXX. Peter's phrase: "hanged on a tree" might also echo Josh. 10:26 (Annas had five sons!).

23. Gamaliel (5:33–42)

Peter's bold rejoinder to the strictures of high–priest Caiaphas did more than take the breath away from the assembled Sanhedrin; it riled them exceedingly. Luke's word means, literally: "they were sawn through" – a marked contrast with the crowd which had heard Peter at Pentecost, and were "cut to the heart" (2:37), that is, pricked in their conscience.

So these rulers "took counsel", i.e. decided (v.28s.w.), to have the apostles put to death. It was a reaction of anger which they wouldn't have dared carry out.

At that moment Gamaliel, the undisputed leader of the Pharisee majority party there, stood up to advise differently.

This Gamaliel was one of the greatest figures in first–century Jewry, the first to be given the honorific title of Rabban. He was descended from David, and therefore in some way related to the Lord Jesus, for the house of David was far from numerous in those days. There is a tradition that he was related to Nicodemus, and gave shelter in his country home to that worthy man when persecuted by the Jews for his declared faith in Christ. His grandfather was the prestigious Rabbi Hillel who in his time had led the Pharisee party rivalling that of Shammai the austere. It is probably true, though not certain, that Gamaliel's father was the saintly Simeon who had blessed the baby Jesus in the temple (Lk. 2:25ff). Indeed, he was himself old enough to have been personally present in the temple on that remarkable occasion when the boy Jesus amazed the learned assembly there with his understanding and answers. (Lk. 2:46).

At the time of this trial of the apostles, and for nearly twenty years more, Gamaliel was acknowledged to be the most illustrious Sanhedrist of his time.

So when this man of authority commanded that the apostles be removed from the chamber, no–one demurred.

Subtle advocacy

Then began a remarkable piece of advocacy:

'Has the rising by Theudas been forgotten already? He claimed to be Messiah, and rallied a troop of four hundred men round him. Do you remember how he led them to Jordan, promising to part the waters as Joshua did? But before that or any other marvel could happen, they were cut to pieces by the cavalry of the Roman governor. And in the time of the census at the end of the reign of the first Herod, of execrated memory, there were many amazing happenings and startling stories, and one Judas of Gamala in Galilee took advantage of the excitement to assert that *he* was Messiah. But soon he was a dead Messiah, and his followers were scattered.'

What Gamaliel did not know at the time of this speech was that a few years later the sons of that Judas revived his movement so vigorously that, as the party of the Zealots, it continued right up to A.D.70 to be the most virile and violent faction in Israel.

Gamaliel's advice

However, he went on:

'So, I counsel you, learn the lessons of history and handle this situation with kid gloves. If it is a delusion and fraud, this Jesus — of — Nazareth movement will sooner or later collapse of its own accord. But if it is of God, nothing you may attempt will bring it down. Call to mind how you were once advised: "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him ... it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people." So you did not leave him alone — and now, the

problem is still with us. My advice, then, is this — that instead of making martyrs of these men, who in themselves are pretty insignificant, you hold back from any drastic action, and leave this movement to peter out, as it surely will if it is of no worth. On the other hand, if this new sect really is God–guided, would you wish to be found using all the strength of your authority against God?'

The superb cleverness behind this oration of Gamaliel's lies specially in this – that it was all spoken with tongue in cheek; he didn't believe his own arguments! Nevertheless he was able not only to carry his own party with him but also to make any possible objection from the Sadducees appear petty and niggling.

Secret sympathiser?

Rackham has commented regarding this speech: "It is difficult to exclude the suggestion of policy;" But what policy?

To that question, the best available answer is that Gamaliel was using all his superb ability to defend the apostles and their movement without appearing to do so. It seems very likely that, influenced by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, Gamaliel was a crypto — disciple. (There are indications that the early church firmly believed this to be a fact.) Carefully hiding his own personal convictions, he was doing everything in his power to save the followers of Jesus from the worst rigours of persecution.

Consider, first, how utterly inconclusive his main argument was: If this is not a God–guided movement, nothing can make it prosper. If it is God–guided, you can do nothing to quell it.

One of Gamaliel's own examples undermined his thesis, for although Judas of Galilee was slain (as Jesus was), his party very soon developed an irrepressible vigour.

Again, apply the same argument to such movements as the papacy or communism, and the utter futility of it is seen in a moment. Apply it, conversely, to the gospel of Christ, and again Gamaliel is proved hopelessly wrong, for the massive evidence of the New Testament is that even before the apostles had passed off the scene the Truth of Christ was being eroded at a phenomenal rate. Is the suspicion allowable that Saul of Tarsus, present in that assembly, saw through the speciousness of his venerable master's reasoning, but he respected him too much to offer opposition or criticism? Instead, at the first opportunity, he showed publicly his disagreement by mounting a vicious persecution of those whom his teacher had cleverly shielded.

Further grounds for suspicion

Other details chime in with this conclusion about Gamaliel:

a. He spoke (v.37) about how Judas of Galilee "drew away" much people after him. But this, as Gamaliel must himself have been aware, was the very expression used in the Law about false teachers and false prophets (s.w. Dt. 18:10,13LXX). Yet that very Scripture demanded that the nation's leaders take the most drastic action possible to stamp out the evil. When Gamaliel used such tendentious language, the ice was very thin indeed!

b. When he said: "If this work be of men ... but if it be of God," he made a small but highly significant change in that word "be" (from subjunctive to indicative) which, if pondered, would surely have told the alert listener that the speaker's judgement was on the side of the disciples: "This movement *is* of God."

c. That concise phrasing: "of men ... of God," may well have been borrowed from Jesus himself, for in the great final dialectic in the temple court the Lord himself had asked: "From heaven, or of men?" (Lk. 20:4). And it seems highly probable that Gamaliel was involved in that encounter, for in later days he was known to use against the Sadducees the very argument to prove the resurrection which Jesus used with such force on the same occasion (Lk. 20:37; "Studies in the Gospels," ch.165).

Whether deservedly or not, the great rabbi carried the assembly with him, if only by virtue of his own massive personal prestige among the majority party of the Pharisees. Indeed his warning against being "found to fight against God" stuck in the minds of his hearers, for, years later, his words were quoted in a worse Sanhedrin wrangle as to how Paul should be judged (23:9).

Freedom again

So the apostles were charged once again that they must cease all their propaganda and all their teaching concerning Jesus. Then, as punishment for their disobedience of the earlier veto (4:18), they were all given a flogging–"forty stripes save one" – and sent away. The reader is left wondering what sort of treatment would have been meted out to them if Gamaliel had counselled: "Do all you can to repress the activities of these men."

The apostles, quite unsubdued by their experience, remembered their Lord's exhortation:

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Mt. 5:11,12). They were suffering for "the Name"–that Name which was opprobrium on the lips of their adversaries (v.28; 4:17), but which they deemed to be their highest glory.

So the ministry continued unabated. In spite of the most stern prohibitions those open–air meetings in the temple area still went on. The apostles had the people on their side, and the rulers dare do nothing more against them.

But there were some of more timid spirit who were unhappy about risking another collision with the authorities. So for their sakes the ministry was also taken extensively into the homes of the brethren throughout the city.

Notes: 5:3–42

33. *Cut to the heart;* s.w. 7:54; 1 Chr. 20:3 where read: "caused them to cut with saws."
34. There were two Gamaliels in the line of the famous Hillel:

```
Hillel I
   |
Simon I
   |
Gamaliel I
(died 57 or 58)
   |
Gamaliel II
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35. *Take heed to yourselves.* The diplomatic appeal to self–interest. *To do.* The word suggests "policy".
36. *Theudas.* Because Josephus mentions a rising by one Theudas in A.D. 44–45, many critics accuse Luke of an anachronism here. But could there not have been an earlier Messianic movement by another Theudas (abbreviation of the very common Theodorus, Theodotus)? This seems likely, for Josephus mentions "a great multitude" of followers, as against Luke's "four hundred". It is useful to note also that Josephus mentions no less than four leaders of rebellion called Simon and three others called Judas, all within a period of ten years. One important rebel against Herod the Great in B.C4 was called Matthias, which is the Hebrew equivalent of Theudas.
    Somebody. Avoidance of the title "Messiah"; cp. v.28.
    Was slain. A tacit allusion to v.30 s.w.
    Scattered, brought to nought. Contrast 8:4. This "scattered" (in v.37 also) is probably a deliberate tactful allusion to Num. 10:35.
38. *Let them alone.* Codex D adds: Not defiling your hands – perhaps alluding to Ecc. 7:18LXX: "By this defile not thy hand: for he that fears God shall come forth well in all respects."
    This counsel, this work. Is this Jer. 32:19 (context), or Is. 8:10, 11, 14 (which Jesus and Peter had both used against the rulers)?
39. There is an ellipsis here. Supply: (I advise this), lest haply...
40. *Beaten.* Dt. 25:3; s.w. 2 Chr. 29:34LXX!
41. *Worthy ... shame.* A fine oxymoron; cp. 2 Cor. 6:10. See this theme expanded in 1 Peter 2:20, 21; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 12–19; 5:1, 10. And note the significant parallelism in Is. 48:9.

24. Seven helpers (6:1–7)

The apostles "ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus as the Christ," continuing to do this "daily in the temple, and in every house" (5:42), so that "the number of the disciples was multiplied."

This word "disciple", so commonplace in the gospels, and frequent also right through Acts, disappears completely from the epistles, its place being taken by "brethren," the cognomen used by Jesus on the morning of his resurrection (Jn. 20:17), and "saints", sometimes with special reference to Jewish (as distinct from Gentile) believers. So the frequency in Acts of "disciple," always implying Jesus as "teacher", may perhaps be taken as further small evidence that the author was a very early follower of the Lord.

By the use of "multiplied" Luke also steers his reader to a comparison with the multiplying of persecuted Israel in Egypt (Ex. 1:7,20). Now the New Israel was re–enacting that experience. This resemblance shows through with remarkable clearness when this paragraph in Acts is set alongside the account of the people's murmuring about the manna and of how Moses was helped by having seventy elders, endowed with the Spirit:

Numbers 11

4. A multitude, mixed in character,
1. murmur
9. about daily manna
17. The leader, unable to bear the burden of the people,
16. is bidden appoint 70 helpers,
16. who are to stand there (s.w.6:6) before the Lord.
25. In them the Spirit is specially manifest,
26. and particularly in two who also "prophesy" away from the rest.

Class distinction

The Jews in Jerusalem fell into two main classes – "Hebrews," those who were sabras, born in the Land, and greatly proud of the fact, and "Grecians." This latter designation has often been taken to mean Greek–speaking. But all the people were that. It is more likely that they were members of the diaspora who had settled in the Land but still retained much of their cosmopolitan way of life.

The social strain created in Jewry by this distinction came through into the ecclesia also, and showed itself especially in the charity distributed to the poor believers. So the Grecian brethren fell to grumbling about this "class distinction," which was doubtless more accidental than designed. The apostles were just too busy to keep an eye on everything.

An urgent problem

Although Luke says the "widows" were being neglected, it seems likely that the term was intended to cover all the poor and needy, for the same term was apparently used with this general meaning by James–"to visit the fatherless and the widows" (1:27).

Jewry had a *daily* collection tor the poor, but the official distribution to the needy was only *weekly,* on Fridays. The brethren, knowing that their righteousness should exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, had instituted a daily ministration. It may well be that they had been driven to this by the exclusion of their widows from the distribution made out of temple funds (this kind of tactic would be a pointed way of applying discouragement to the poor who showed enthusiasm for Jesus of Nazareth).

Over against strong twentieth century trends, it is useful to note that in Acts the early church's main concern with social problems was inside the ecclesia.

Whether the distribution was made in the form of money or meals is not clear, for the phrase "serving tables" could mean either (nor is 2:45 decisive).

Action taken

The apostles, realising that they must deal promptly with the problem of this "murmuring," called the multitude of the disciples together. When the growth of the ecclesia is taken into account, it is a problem to know how this could be done. Perhaps there was a series of meetings in certain synagogues specially favoured by the believers. It seems unlikely that a "domestic" question of this nature would be dealt with at a mass meeting in the temple court. Or were only delegates from various groups called together, as must have been the case with the later council at Jerusalem (chapter 15)?

It was immediately obvious that the apostles, whose main concern was public preaching, prayer, and instruction and exhortation of the flock, should not be saddled with such practical duties as the care of the poor: "It is not pleasing (to God) that we should forsake the word of God, and serve tables."

The Seven

So it was readily decided that a special committee of seven be appointed for this purpose; and even their work would be supervisory *"over* this need." The practical duties were probably left in the hands of capable dedicated women.

Why seven? Perhaps there were now seven distinct ecclesias in Jerusalem. Or maybe this was a deliberate imitation of a similar committee appointed by wise and zealous Hezekiah for the same sort of purpose in the time of his reformation (2 Chr. 31:14, 15).

The men appointed must be "of good report," that is, not only faithful and dependable brethren but by common consent recognized as such: men "full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom," that is, their special charismatic gift(1 Cor.12:8) was a capacity for the wise handling of the affairs of the assembly, and particularly for the administration of ecclesial benevolence.

It is remarkable that, although the apostles were the best judges of character and ability (as the Ananias episode had shown), the selection of the seven was left to the assembly, with a confirmation (not necessarily automatic) added by the twelve.

That this was a special appointment to cope with a special problem is seen from the fact that nothing comparable to this "benevolent" committee of seven is to be found elsewhere in the New Testament. When there was comparable work to be done, this was attended to by Paul and Barnabas and the elders of the ecclesia (11:30).

This arrangement left the Twelve free to concentrate on "the ministration of the Word" – a daily distribution of Bread of Life — whilst others saw to a more efficient "daily ministration" of practical aid and comfort. That word "daily" is one of Luke's medical terms, such as would be used today for "three times daily after meals."

The details about the seven are not without their interest. The names are all Greek, but this hardly proves that they were all Grecian Jews, for three (four) of the apostles bore Greek names but were certainly Jews born and bred in the Land.

It has been suggested, but without evidence, that these seven were made up of three Hebrews, three Grecian Jews and one Gentile *proselyte* – Nicholas of Antioch, the first non–Jew to be mentioned as coming into the faith, and he with full status as a Jew, a "proselyte of righteousness," not like such as Cornelius, "a proselyte of the gate".

Remarkably, nothing whatever is known about five out of the seven. But then, several of the apostles also are just names in the record.

Stephen

Stephen was outstanding. Like Barnabas (11:24), he is described as "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." Twice this is said of him. Then may it be inferred that, (by a special endowment of faith) he had been led, like Barnabas, to "sell all that he had and give to the poor" in order the better to serve and witness for Christ? If so — and this seems fairly likely – he was most suitably qualified to be concerned in welfare work of the kind now being undertaken.

Both Stephen and Philip were also quite outstanding preachers of the gospel. So evidently they were men of such burning zeal that they felt impelled to add copious other activities to this important responsibility now taken on.

Although the seven were selected by the ecclesia as a whole, it was still necessary to have apostolic approval. Presumably, the Twelve had a power of veto, though there is no evidence in the New Testament of such an exercise of authority.

The apostles now laid hands on the seven, it may be supposed to impart to each a further gift of Holy Spirit power in addition (chapter 4:31) to gifts already possessed – the gift of "helps" (1 Cor. 12:28)?

Thus another problem was resolved, and the main work of the gospel continued unhindered. "The word of God increased (this could mean that the Holy Scriptures were reinforced by inspired utterance and exposition); and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly." This development marked the climax of Christian popularity in Jerusalem. The insistence by the apostles that their main work suffer no interruption was thus fully vindicated. It is noteworthy that today welfare tends to usurp the priority which preaching and Bible study had in apostolic days.

Priestly converts

Most noteworthy of all in the gospel's progress was the beginning of a steady accession of priests as converts to the Faith. Apart from the power of the message itself, there were certain other considerations which had made a great impact on the priestly class. First, there was the impressive example of Joseph Barnabas the Levite, a former member of the Sanhedrin and a man of considerable wealth and social standing. But even more, the speech of the venerable Gamaliel before the Sanhedrin had flashed a green light which they now interpreted as meaning that priests could follow their convictions regarding Jesus of Nazareth without being called on to face persecution and without any risk of being banned from their cherished duties in the temple. Indeed, the way in which the believers continued to frequent the temple more assiduously than any others proclaimed clearly that there was no perceptible dissonance between temple and gospel.

So a steady stream of priests began to present themselves for baptism. In the time of Moses the appeal: "Who is on the Lord's side?" (Ex. 32:26), had brought the tribe of Levi loyally to the side of truth. And now again, the same cry, and the same response. These Bible–instructed priests were each girding his sword on his thigh. Their "obedience to the Truth" was thus described by Luke in a lovely phrase which he had learned from his friend Paul (Rom. 6:16, 17; 1:5; 10:16; 2 Th. 1:8) as a synonym for baptism.

Many of these priests would be in a poverty–stricken and socially degraded condition because of the callous and harsh treatment meted out to them by the imperious power–obsessed high priests (Jos. Ant. 20.9.2). The more humble of them were referred to by the rabbis as "priests of the people of the earth," but the gospel net gathered them in just the same. Had not Jesus said in one of his parables "fish of every sort"?

Notes: 6:1–7

1. *Multiplied,* with 6:1, 7 compare 9:31; 12:24, and then Gen. 22:17.
   Murmuring. Noun and verb come no less than seventeen times with reference to Israel in the wilderness. Extreme Judaist prejudices were at the back of this attitude, and they continued to make a more and more critical ecclesia in Jerusalem: 9:26; 11:2; 15:1,2; 21:21. Or does Gal. 2:4 supply the explanation of this phenomenon? Contrast 1:4.
   Against the Hebrews. Greek implies a direct confrontation, not subterranean grumbling.
   Ministration. Bezan text adds: "by the ministers of the Hebrews." The work had evidently got into the hands of brethren incapable of acting without prejudice.
2. *The twelve.* So Matthias was a true apostle; cp. 2:14.
3. *Good report.* Always necessary: 22:12; Tit. 1:6; 1 Tim. 3:7; 5:10; s.w. Heb. 11:39.
   This business. In the New Testament this common Greek word nearly always means "need."
6. *Laid their hands on them.* The meaning of this simple ritual was not always the same. It might mean identification with a sacrifice (Lev. 1:4*),* the imparting of a blessing (Mk. 10:16), healing (Acts 28:8), or a gift of the Holy Spirit (19:6). But in at least one instance it was simply the outward sign of commission to begin a new work (13:1–3; yet note Gal. 1:1). Giving the right hand is not infrequently an equivalent.
   7. *The word of God increased.* This is the second of the seven section–markers in Acts; see on 2:27.
   In Jerusalem. Surely implying that there were also disciples outside the city but that it was in the capital where there was such a surge of progress.

25. Stephen (6:8–15)

Luke was a matter–of–fact sort of historian. Even the experiences of his close friend Paul he set down in a detached well–balanced fashion with little indication of the intense personal enthusiasm and loyalty which he undoubtedly had for the great apostle.

Then what is to be said about Luke's admiration for Stephen, for regarding no other fellow–disciple is he so eulogistic.

Luke's eulogy

The piling up of phrases is remarkable:

a. "Full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (v.5). But this is the description also of Barnabas (11:24), who is most probably described in this way, because by an extraordinary God–given exercise of faith he sold his estate and gave the proceeds to help his brethren (4:36,37). Then was Stephen noteworthy for a similar act of generosity? This would make him specially qualified for the welfare work he was appointed to.
b. "Full of grace (not 'faith' as AV) and power, he continued to do great wonders among the people" (v.8). But "power" *(dunamis)* is very frequently used of Holy Spirit power, and the context supports this reading here. Also, "grace" is used for a gift of the Spirit (see Notes and "Gospels," pp.44, 299).
c. "The wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake" (v.10). Another charismatic gift!
d. "His face as the face of an angel" (v.15). See later comment on this.

Clearly at this time Stephen outshone the apostles in all respects — and they were content that he should.

Contending for the Faith

The enemies of the gospel knew that their own reputation and influence were in the balance. Something must be done, for here, as it seemed to them, was almost a second Jesus of Nazareth. So they looked back and asked themselves what it was that had brought them success against the man they had crucified. Right at the last the turning point had been when they had got the multitude to believe that Jesus was a blasphemer against Moses and the temple. Then surely the same tactics could be made to work again! Get the crowd on their side!

Stephen was a man of such zeal and energy that he was not content to handle merely the responsibility lately handed to him of superintending the considerable welfare activity in the ecclesia. In this he sets a pattern for the Lord's men of ability today. For such to be content to have only one iron in the fire is hardly a life of real dedication. "To whom much is given ...!"

Gospel propaganda had moved from the earlier open–air meetings in the temple court to public exposition and discussion in Jerusalem's many synagogues. Whatever the reason for the change–perhaps to avoid creating embarrassing situations for the many new brethren who were priests? – whenever critics and enemies of the gospel were present, discussion turned to lively Biblical disputation. At this Stephen excelled. So in at least three synagogues which he attended – that of the Libertines (liberated slaves), the North Africans, and the Cilicians and Asians – there was constant high debate concerning Jesus the Christ and his relation to the Law and the Temple.

In all this excitement none was able to gainsay the power and force of the Biblical arguments used by Stephen. Even the brilliant young rabbi Saul of Tarsus—in—Cilicia was exposed as inadequate. There is most probably an allusion to him, in his pre–Christian days, in Jas. 2: 2, 3, 6, 7.

Inspired wisdom

Stephen's natural ability and exceptional education were so reinforced by the intensifying power of the Holy Spirit, that, just as Jesus had promised, this protagonist of the Truth of Christ had "a mouth and wisdom, which all his adversaries were not able to gainsay nor resist" (Lk. 21:15). "I will be with thy mouth, and will teach thee what thou shalt say," God had promised Moses; and now it was true once more for this champion of the New Israel. Here the Bezan text adds: "They were convicted by him with all boldness. Therefore not being able to face the truth ...

Oddly enough, there are plenty of critical commentators who, when they come to Stephen's speech in chapter 7, cry out at the sequence of Biblical errors with which (so they say) his argument is peppered. Does it never occur to these self–confident critics that if indeed Stephen's methods were so slapdash, his very able adversaries both in synagogue and Sanhedrin would have been eager and quick to expose them as such?

Finding that head–on collision got them nowhere, they set about creating a build–up of prejudice against him in the minds of the people. This was earlier than might have seemed possible, for Stephen, with the clear clean logic begotten of a thorough grasp of the Almighty's redeeming purpose in Christ, could see that there was no further room for animal sacrifice since the offering of the one all–sufficient sacrifice; no room either for the copious explicit laws and ordinances given through Moses. When men were justified by faith in Christ, the temple and Moses must go, and Israel's position of privilege too. With fine Biblical reasoning from Law and Prophets Stephen argued his case, and could not be gainsaid.

Sinister plans

But he could be subtly mis–represented. It is a tactic prejudice never finds difficult. "This Stephen despises Moses and the temple" was the story they put round about him. A team of unscrupulous propagandists were bribed and drilled how best to get the slander into circulation.

The same campaign served also to swing the majority Pharisee party on the Sanhedrin away from the toleration recommended by the great Gamaliel, so that now, as when they had got rid of Jesus, both sections of the Sanhedrin were at one in their purpose.

Then, after a while, when popular sentiment was clearly beginning to turn against the believers, Stephen's enemies (Saul amongst them?) went into action. They hunted him down, and arrested him.

The rest of the procedure was easy. Whilst a formal assembly of the Sanhedrin was being called, certain unscrupulous fellows who had earlier been involved in disputation with Stephen were now carefully drilled to present evidence against him.

Misrepresentation

Jesus had said: "(You) unloose, take down *(luo)* this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it again" (Jn. 2:19). At his trial this was subtly switched to: "I am able to destroy *(kataluo) ..."* (Mt. 26:61). And at his crucifixion mockers twisted his words yet further: "Thou that destroyest *(kataluo)* the temple, and *buildest* it in three days ..." (Mt. 27:40). Now the charge was perverted further, and made to do double duty: "We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth (note this contempt in this phrasing) shall destroy *(kataluo)* this place ...".

The half–truth was sufficiently slanted to make a damning case against the prisoner.

And the rest of the accusation, just as bad in Jewish eyes: "Jesus of Nazareth will change the customs which Moses delivered us" was absolutely true, and anything but blasphemy. But how could he hope to persuade them to this?

The trial begun

So when high priest Caiaphas, utterly confident, turned to him and blandly enquired: "Are these things so?" Stephen was ready, and even eager, with a defence which quite unexpectedly was to become a searing exposure and accusation of his judges: "Ye who received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it" (7:53).

These learned and powerful men, sitting in a semicircle before him, stared intently at the prisoner in the dock, and then stared again in utter amazement. For they saw in his face what had been seen once before, by only a handful of those who had been present at the arrest of Jesus of Nazareth (Jn. 18:6; "Studies in the Gospels", p.727).

"They saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." And Stephen was himself aware of the phenomenon, for in his speech his opening phrase was: "The God of the glory," that is, of this glory (which you now see in me). This radiant glory shining from his countenance was surely the divine Light which Holy Scripture described as being on the face of Moses (Ex. 34:29). And yet their case against Stephen was that he was blaspheming Moses!

They remembered too that their great ancestor Jacob had looked on the face of an angel, and his life had only been preserved because of his humble persistent importunity — and even then he had gone crippled for life, to remind him that it was futile to rely on his own powers against those of God.

They listened uneasily, yet hating the man who looked so God–like.

Stephen and Jesus

There can be no doubt whatever that Luke has deliberately framed his narrative concerning Stephen so as to remind the reader as often as possible of the character and experience of Stephen's Lord.

He took on him the form of a servant.
He was full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, full of grace and power.
Great wonders and signs among the people.
Synagogue discourses and disputations.
His adversaries unable to resist the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.
Men (false brethren?) were suborned to campaign against him.
They came on him, and seized him, and brought him to the council and the same high priest.
False witnesses testified against him.
"This Jesus shall destroy this place (the temple)".
and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us."
A passionate outburst of denunciation finally settled his fate.
An identical confession: The Son of man at the right hand of God. In each case this was decisive.
The only New Testament mention of "Son of man" outside the words of Christ himself.
They saw his face as the face of an angel.
There was despiteful treatment of his person.
He saw the heavens opened, and beheld the Shekinah Glory of God.
They took him out of the city, to put him to death, at the same place (a very ancient tradition says Golgotha was "The Place of Stoning").
In dying he cried out with a loud voice:
"Receive my spirit," and "Lay not this sin to their charge."
Devout men carried him to his burial.
Stephen rose from the dead in the conversion of Saul.
The believers went everywhere preaching the word, even taking the message to the Gentiles.
"Stephen" means Crowned (compare "Jesus of *Nazareth, King* of the Jews").

* * *

There is not only genius but inspiration in the framing of such a narrative as this. Also, clear evidence of divine control of circumstances.

But the servant cannot be completely as his Lord. So there are such differences as these:

There was no charge of claiming to be a king.
Stephen did not keep silence before the Sanhedrin.
He was stoned, not crucified.

Notes: 6:8–15

8. *Faith.* Many good manuscripts read: "grace," a word often used as a synonym for a gift of the Spirit; e.g. Lk. 4:22; Rom. 12:3, 6; Eph. 4:7; Gal. 2:9.
   Did: was working, that is continually.
9. *Arose,* Compare 5:17.
   Synagogue. The Talmud has the absurd statement that Jerusalem had 480 synagogues. They got this by gematria for *"full* of righteousness."
   Libertines. Identification with Jews from Libertum in N. Africa is unlikely. The place was too unimportant: There was a synagogue of freed slaves in Pompeii. An interesting inscription (pre — A.D. 70) was found some years ago in the S.E. comer of Jerusalem: "Theodotus, son of Vettenus, priest and synagogue president ... has built the synagogue ... and the hostelry and the chambers and the cisterns of water in order to provide lodgings for those from abroad who need them ..." The Vettenus mentioned here must have been a Jewish freed slave of the Vetteni, an aristocratic Roman family.
   Cyrene, Alexandria. At least a quarter of the population in both places were Jews. It is commonly said, without real evidence, that Stephen was an Alexandrian. In his speech (ch.7) *all* his Old Testament quotations are from the Septuagint, which was made in Alexandria. This might prove Stephen one of the diaspora (for the Septuagint was the Bible of nearly all Grecian Jews), but not necessarily of Alexandria.
10. Consider Is. 54:17, and much else in that chapter.
11. *Suborned.* The Greek word describes whispering, plotting, bribery.
    Moses ... God. Note the order, and compare the use of "we" in Num 20:10. In v.13, the expression is stronger
12. *Stirred up the people.* This is the turning of the tide in Jerusalem; cf. 5:12, 13, 16, 25, 42.
13. *Seized:* s.w. 27:15; Lk. 8:29. This and "moved" are both medical terms.
13. A definite charge this time; contrast 4:7.
    This holy place; contrast Mt. 23:38.
14. *We heard him say.* Contrast what they heard him say, in ch.7.
    This Jesus. Compare 7:35,37,38,40; and also 18:13; 19:26.
    Destroy this place. 2 Chr. 7:20,21.
15. *The face of an angel* – because of 7:56. Compare Paul's allusion in 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4.6; In "The Acts of Paul and Thekla" Paul himself is described in the same way.

26. Stephen's "mistakes" (Acts 7)

Not a few commentators have aired their superiority by dwelling on the long catalogue of Biblical errors exhibited in Stephen's speech before the Council. So that the main study of this remarkable discourse can proceed un–impeded, it may be as well to consider these "howlers" one by one, to see whether there is any substance in the criticism.

The explanations given here depend a good deal on the excellent review to be found "The Oracles of God" (chapter 8), by the late John Carter.

1. Stephen says God first revealed himself to Abraham in Mesopotamia (v.2). According to Gen. 12:1, the first call came when he was in Haran.

   This objection can only be the result of careless reading, for 12:1 reads: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred ...". That phrase: "out of thy country" plainly implies that Abraham was still in his country (11:28, 31) when these words were spoken to him. Gen. 15:7,Josh. 24:3, and Neh. 9:7 all carry the same implication (For more details, see *Abraham, Father of the Faithful,* ch. 1,2, by H.A.W.).

2. Abraham left Haran after his father died, says Stephen (v.4). But according to the details in Genesis 11:26, 32; 12:4, Terah lived for 60 years after Abraham left Haran.

   The objection made here depends on the inference that since "Terah ... begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran," therefore Abram was the firstborn. But this need not have been the case. Noah's sons are not given in order of birth (Gen. 5:32; 9:18; 10:21). Further, there is indication that Abraham was probably the youngest in the fact that he married Sarah of the next generation, yet they were nearly of an age.

   It is agreed that this explanation requires that Terah must have been 130 when Abram was born, a fact passed over without particular mention; yet the birth of Isaac when Abraham was 100 is represented as one of the outstanding phenomena of divine power in the Genesis story. An alternative approach to this problem is to accept the reading in the Samaritan Pentateuch, that at his death Terah was not 205, but 145. This resolves both aspects of the problem. If indeed Luke was a Samaritan (ch.110), dependence here and in verse 16, is more readily understood.

3. There is inconsistency between Stephen's 400 years' bondage (v.6; Gen. 15:13), and the 430 years specified in Ex. 12:40.

   Since both figures are derived from the Old Testament, the inconsistency lies not in Stephen's details, but (if it exists) between the Genesis and Exodus accounts.

   But there is no inconsistency, as careful attention to the details reveals. In Genesis, *"the seed* shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs ... four hundred years." Since, demonstrably, the children of Israel were not in Egypt anything like this period, it must be taken to cover all the period that Abraham's seed were strangers; i.e. there is need to reckon from the birth of Isaac. But the 430 covers "the sojourning of the children of Israel," which (according to Heb. 11:9) includes Abraham's sojourning in a land not his, that is, from the time he left Ur of the Chaldees. Read this way, the figures allow for a 5 years sojourn in Haran, and then 25 years in the Land of Canaan before the birth of Isaac.

4. In v.6, 7 Stephen quotes Gen. 15:13, 14, and then adds a further quotation "and shall serve me in this place." But these words are from Ex. 3:12, and in their context they do not refer to Canaan, but to Sinai. But as put together in Stephen's speech there seems to be a misapplication to Israel's return to Canaan.

This criticism springs from a failure to recognize how compressed Luke's reporting is. Reference to Acts 3:1; 4:3 makes it evident that Peter's speech that day took approximately three hours to deliver. Yet Luke's version of it can be read in three minutes. So there is considerable compression. And so also in chapter 7– is it conceivable that Stephen's speech took only seven or eight minutes?

Verse 6 begins: "And God spake on this wise ..." the words are appropriate to both the quotations (v.6–7a and v.7b). An intelligent and not hostile reader will readily recognize that there has been some telescoping here. The same phenomenon crops up in v.42 also. There the telescoping of quotations is even more pronounced. So also in 13:22.

Just how accurate Stephen was may be observed by noting that whereas Ex. 3:12 has: "Ye shall serve God upon this mountain (Sinai)", this faithful witness had been quoting from Gen. 15:13,14, a passage which continues: "And in the fourth generation shall they come *hither* again." It needs a careful scrutiny of the Genesis record to recognize that that adverb of place takes the reader back to 14:18–the blessing of Abram by Melchizedek, priest–king of *Salem.* Hence Stephen's phrase: "in this *place",* which nearly always in OT. and very frequently in N.T. means a holy place, a sanctuary. Evidently David read that "hither" in this specific way, and thus inferred that before he could establish a fitting house of God he must first capture the specified site of it – Jerusalem.

5. Stephen makes the number of Jacob's family going into Egypt to be 75, whereas Gen. 46:26; Ex. 1:5; Dt. 10:22 say 70.

   It is to be observed that in all his Old Testament quotations, Stephen follows the text of the Septuagint precisely. And so here also, for Ex. 1:5; and Dt. 10:22 (Alex. MS, readings which Paul normally followed, and Cod. F) both have 75. Also, the Genesis passage has 5 extra names at verse 20, being members of Joseph's family born in Egypt (though, remarkably enough, the extra 5 are not allowed to inflate 70 to 75 in v.27 there). Thus Stephen has plenty of textual evidence on his side.

   It becomes another problem to sort out the variations in the Septuagint text. But if Stephen, "full of the Holy Spirit," was guided to quote the numbers thus, then surely these Septuagint readings should be accepted as valid.

6. Stephen alludes to the burial of the twelve patriarchs at Shechem (v.16; the plural verb at the beginning of this verse does not necessarily include Jacob; and Stephen knew right well that Jacob was buried at Hebron; Gen. 40:23,24). It is nowhere stated in the Old Testament about eleven of the tribal fathers that they were buried at Shechem, although the burial of Joseph there is specifically mentioned (Joshua 24:32).

   It must be agreed therefore that at this point Stephen diverged from his Biblical reasoning to include a well–accepted rabbinic tradition that the fathers of the twelve tribes were all buried at Shechem. As will appear in the next study he had good reason for wanting to include this detail, the correctness of which is also vouched for by Jerome who lived in Shechem for 30 years.

7. Did Abraham buy a sepulchre in Shechem from the sons of Hamor (v.16)? Was not the sepulchre he bought in Hebron (Gen. 23:16–20)? And was it not Jacob who bought land of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father (Gen. 33:19)? So surely Stephen was mixed up here!

   But certainly Abraham built an altar in Shechem (Gen. 12:6,8), and therefore, almost certainly, he would first buy the land on which he built it as a centre of worship. Doubtless in later years, in the absence of Abraham and then Isaac and then Jacob this land would be quietly taken over once again by the local inhabitants. So, when Jacob died, there is reference to "one portion (Heb: *Shechem)"* bequeathed to Joseph, "which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow" (48:22). In addition to this Jacob

also bought more land in Shechem "of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father" (33:19).

Evidently, then, this verse 16 is another example of compressed Biblical allusion (as in par.4) but without any factual error or misrepresentation.

8. In the first phase of his life, was Moses "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (v.22)? Exodus says nothing of this.

   Indeed Exodus did not need to say this explicitly. The idea was obvious enough. As the putative "son of Pharaoh's daughter" and in line for the throne, of course, Moses would have the best education Egypt could provide. Thus "mighty in his words and works" would as adequately describe in general terms an heir to the throne as it would describe the impressive ministry of Jesus (Lk. 24:19). Indeed it may have been used to describe Jesus to the Sanhedrin because it was currently a familiar phrase popularly applied to Moses in early life.

   The argument from omission on which this objection rests is a great favourite with the critics. Yet only very rarely does it have any logical force. Readers of modern commentaries should be constantly on their guard against being taken in by this slick device.

9. Where does the Old Testament say that Moses was forty when he made his first effort at deliverance? (v.30). Answer: Nowhere. It merely says that he was 80 at the exodus (Ex. 7:7), and died at 120 (Dt. 34:7). The division of that 80 into 40 and 40 was a familiar rabbinic inference which may have depended on the phrase: "when he became great" (Ex. 2:11 Heb.) meaning "come of age;" i.e. reached an age for formal designation to the succession (the time when he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter"; Heb. 11:24). This is not certain, but seems likely. Alternatively, it may be that the phrase repeated exactly in Ex. 2:11,23 Septuagint (but not in the Hebrew text) is to be read as indicating two equal periods. In any case, here Stephen is not found to be making a mistake, but at worst quoting a popular rabbinic conclusion quite acceptable to his hearers.

10. "He (Moses) supposed that his brethren understood how that God by his hand was giving them deliverance (i.e. then)" (v.25RV). It is objected that this is a clear addition to the Old Testament story which actually says nothing of the sort.

    Even if this were so, it would be possible that Stephen, "full of the Holy Spirit," was guided to make this further explanation. But such a device is hardly necessary, for two expressions seem to warrant Stephen's assessment of the situation: (a) In the objection: "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" the important word is the first, its antecedent or relative being, by implication, the word "God." So Moses' first effort at deliverance was *understood* to be divinely inspired. (b) Dt. 9:24: "Ye have been rebellious *against the Lord* from the day that I knew you" (i.e. Ex. 2:14).

    It looks as though Stephen read his Bible more carefully than some of his critics have done.

11. The criticism that Stephen said "Sinai" (v.30) when he should have said "Horeb" (Ex. 3:1) ought never to have been made, for there are plenty of passages which show that these are two names for the same area; e.g. Dt. 4:10; 33:2.

12. Immediately after a paragraph about Israel in the wilderness, Stephen goes on: "but God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven" (v.42). It is urged that this is an anachronism, for there is no word in the Pentateuch about this kind of false worship.

    But this criticism is badly mistaken for there are no less than three indications that at this point Stephen is switching his argument to consider Israel's waywardness in *later* days. He does it by allusion to three passages all of which belong to the later period of Hezekiah (or thereabouts) but which all make a pointed comparison with Israel's apostasy in the wilderness:

    a. "God turned." This is Is. 63:10 (note v.9, 11, 12, 13).

    b. "God gave them up." This is Ps. 81:12 (note v.4–11); all these Asaph psalms belong to the Hezekiah period.

    c. The Amos passage quoted in v.42, 43, is clearly another wilderness allusion, but with pointed reference to the abuses in the prophet's own day. The worship of the host of heaven is denounced in 2 Kgs. 17:16; 21:3, 5 – the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh.

    Read in this light, verses 42, 43 make an excellent bridge passage leading on to Stephen's next theme about the worship of God in tabernacle and temple. See note on "compression", ch.27; note on v.32.

13. It is confidently asserted that in his quotation from Amos 5:25, 26, Stephen (in v.42, 43) both altered the details and distorted the prophet's argument. Is this really so?

    One thing is certain — that the commentator who is qualified to speak confidently about this passage (in its double context) is a very rare bird indeed. Here are a few tentative suggestions. In Amos the point seems to be: In the wilderness did your forefathers offer sacrifices to me as they should have done? No, indeed they didn't, there was almost continuous apostasy. And now you, their descendants, show all the same depraved characteristics. So, as they were punished in the wilderness wandering, so also you shall be cursed with captivity – beyond Damascus, which was the limit of Israel's power and influence in the days of Amos.

    At this juncture in his speech Stephen's main point was: You are the children of the evil generations denounced by Moses and Amos; your worship is as false as theirs; in the wilderness a golden calf (v.41), and in later days Moloch and other gods; therefore as they were cursed in the wilderness and as they had to endure later captivity, so also you may well have the same unhappy lot. From this angle the two passages tell a fairly impressive story. But what of the details?

    The change to "beyond Babylon" was probably intended to be interpretative. Amos and his contemporaries did not know *where* they would be called on to suffer, only that it was to be somewhere "beyond Damascus." With hind–sight it was easy for Stephen, or any of his hearers, to fill in more precisely. The reading given by Stephen varies markedly from the Hebrew text in Amos. Instead, as in all his other Old Testament quotes, he adheres almost exactly to the Septuagint text. Then, because of the inspiration that was in him, this Septuagint reading must be accepted here as superior. The "Chiun" reading in Amos should surely be discarded as an O.T. textual corruption, especially since Stephen's Septuagint is so much more intelligible, thus: "The god Rephan" is probably Rapha' with a Graecized ending, that is, "the star of the giant god (Orion = Nimrod) types (in the sky) which ye appointed for worship." (It is rather remarkable that Chiun (Amos5:26) is so like Greek: KUON, Dog. Any connection with Dog Star, Sirius, which follows Orion across the

sky? (The point is not being pressed.)

14. Stephen's denunciation: "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" is written off as an exaggeration.

    It is true that the Old Testament has only a handful of examples of prophets being put to death by their contemporaries, but the fact remains that of those prophets about whose lives and experiences much is known, almost all were made miserable by the hostility which they had to face from their own people. How many exceptions to this besides Samuel and Nathan and Jonah? And did not Jesus himself make the same assessment as Stephen?: "for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." (Was Stephen quoting his Lord's words?).

15. "Ye received the Law by the disposition of angels." This statement, commonplace to Stephen's rabbinic audience, is dubbed an advance on the angelology of the Old Testament, inasmuch as there is no explicit statement that the Law was ministered to Moses through angels.

    In reply to this, Dt. 33:2 may surely be cited as providing fairly explicit support for Stephen's declaration (and so also Ex. 31:17,18, when due weight is given to the word "refreshed," which is meaningless as applied to the Almighty, but not inappropriate with reference to an angel).

* * *

In the light of the foregoing sequence of brief considerations, it is perhaps not inappropriate to enquire who is the more dependable in handling the Scriptures – Stephen or his critics?

27. Stephen's Defence (7:1–50)

With a remarkably mild form of expression the high priest invited Stephen to speak in his own defence. Without the information that his face was "as the face of an angel" (6:15), this unexpected absence of hostility would be something of a difficulty. Already, by this very fact, the charge of blasphemy was answered.

And apparently Stephen knew that this divine radiance in his face was visible to the assembly, for he began; "The God of the Glory", i.e. 'this Glory which you now see in me'. It was a title which the early church readily transferred to Jesus: "The Lord of the Glory" (Jas.2:1; 1 Cor. 2:8).

Charged with speaking "blasphemous words against this holy place (the temple)." Stephen proceeded to develop at length the theme that much of God's greatest work was independent of the temple, and indeed of the Holy Land, the implication being that veneration of that impressive, but as yet uncompleted, edifice need not be a necessary part of the religion of any good Jew. He might have asked also why the Jews turned a blind eye to the fact that the existing temple was being built for them by the Herods, as evil a set of thugs as they had ever known in all their history.

The geographical allusions in Stephen's speech, now catalogued here, form a main strand in Stephen's argument: Jerusalem and its temple are holy and venerable, but not necessary.

Verse

2, 4 The Shekinah Glory appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia (as also to Ezekiel!) and in Haran.
6. God guided Abraham's seed into Egypt.
8. Circumcision was not associated with the temple.
9. God was with Joseph in Egypt, but not with his brothers in the Land.
12. Corn in Egypt for God's people.
15. And sanctuary also. The Fathers died there,
16. and were buried in Shechem (now a great Samaritan centre). Buried too in a Hittite grave.
17. Israel multiplied in Egypt.
21. Moses was brought up by Pharaoh's daughter,
29. and was welcomed in Midian.
30. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in Sinai,
33. and called it holy ground.
36. God gave signs and wonders in Egypt, the Red Sea, and the wilderness.
47. Solomon's temple was a failure.
48. The Most High (this is God's outstanding Gentile name) "dwelleth not in temples made with hands."
49. Through Isaiah God explicitly rejected all temples of stone and splendour.

A further charge against Stephen was, of course, his advocacy of the claims and authority of Jesus of Nazareth. In reply, without so much as mentioning the name of his Master, he drew sustained attention to the remarkable parallel so readily traceable between Joseph and Jesus. As the discourse proceeded, the build–up of resemblances between the two, would impress itself more and more on the minds of that Biblically well–read assembly. It is true that Luke's report devotes only five verses to this phase of Stephen's speech, but it is almost impossible to believe that that was all that this learned man of God had to say on this topic. The Joseph type is so detailed and extensive that one is bound to believe this part of Acts 7 to be a brief précis of all that was said on this score:

Verse

9. Joseph, because of the envy of those who should have revered him, was rejected and sold for money. But God was with him. God can even use the hard–heartedness of

men to fulfil His redeeming purpose.

10. So Joseph was delivered, and glorified before the Gentiles.
11. The famine affliction of Israel and his family hints at the imminent affliction of those Judaists now rejecting Jesus. They "find no sustenance" because incapable of believing that he(Jesus) is alive and in heaven, a glorious and powerful high priest.
12. At the first encounter, no recognition (so Stephen was clearly convinced that his contemporaries would reject the gospel). "Corn in Egypt" prefigures the gospel among the Gentiles. If Jews are to survive, they must join the Gentiles serving "Joseph".
13. Succour for a suffering people at the second attempt (the Second Coming), but only then because recognized and acknowledged by his brethren (as by the Gentiles already).

Then, with a short bridge passage, Stephen passed on to develop a similar God–designed parallel between Moses and Jesus. "Blasphemous words against Moses" was another of the charges bitterly laid against Stephen. So, in his vindication of Jesus he exposed the double blasphemy of the nation in having rejected Moses' divine mission and, more recently, "the prophet like unto Moses."

Verse

20. The child of promise–"fair for God"–was saved when Gentile Pharaoh behaved like Gentile Herod against the babies of Israel.
22. Moses was mighty in words and in deeds, and king elect.
23. He became a God–sent redeemer. 25–28 His salvation was rejected by a nation that should have been eager to acclaim and follow him.
26. There was division in the nation over his claim to be a God–sent deliverer.
27. Especially they spurned his claim to be a ruler and a judge.
29. He was betrayed to the Gentile overlord. In "retirement" in a distant land he begat two sons (Jew and Gentile?).
30. After forty years a further opportunity of deliverance.

35,36 After many wonders and signs, Israel were delivered at last by the very man they had so emphatically rejected.

37: Moses pointedly declared that he was a type of One greater than himself. *"Him* shall ye hear."

38. Instead of Moses and the angel of the Lord, there is now Jesus and the Holy Spirit.
38. Instead of living oracles given to Moses in the mount, there is a greater revelation through Jesus at God's right hand (v.56).
39. Israel in spirit turned back to Egypt, saying (in effect): "We have no king but Pharaoh."
40. They spoke with contempt of "this Moses" just as now they reprobate "this Jesus" (6:14) And they chose to say: "We wot not what is become of him" when they knew perfectly well where he was!

A further charge against Stephen was that he spoke "blasphemous words against the Law." So, in reply, he hammered away at Israel's long–continued disloyalty to the Law they claimed to revere — the implication being: "Like fathers, like sons." The same accusation was still valid against those who accused him!

5, 17. Could the Law be greater than the Promise given on the oath of God?

38. The Law is divine in its origin and authority. Yet –

39,40. Israel were astray from it from the first.

42,43. And so always!
41–43. Moses was superseded by the people's own religious tradition and their own *works.*
42. They worshipped the host of heaven: (a) stars; (b) angels who ministered the Law. (A lovely double meaning here!)
40, 43. They preferred shadow to substance, the incomplete to the Perfect.
44. The Tabernacle itself, made under Moses' direction, was a shadow and temporary.
45. Jesus–Joshua was the true successor of Moses, taking possession of the Gentiles.
52, 53 The Law had been kept by only one Holy One!

Yet another charge against Stephen was that he had spoken "against this place" (6:14)–the temple. His reply included these arguments:

44. God was worshipped first in a tabernacle; and even then only by a faithful remnant (ecclesia; v.38) in a wilderness.
45. And this system lasted for 400 years.
46. All David's worship was associated with the tabernacle. If a temple was so important, wouldn't he have been allowed to build it?
47. The temple was built by Solomon, the first apostate king.
42. Even the prophets (e.g. Amos) denounced the temple system, and foretold its destruction (so why should not I, Stephen, do the same?)
46. David wished to build a house for God; but instead God promised to build him a house (i.e. a prosperous line). Solomon built a temple (v.47), but God doesn't dwell in temples of that sort (v.48). Instead, He seeks a house of humble people (v.49,50) and Jesus son of David builds that house. Verse 56 proves his priesthood of that temple.
48. Temples are made–with–hands, the word which the Septuagint uses only about idolatry.

Notes: 7:1–43

2. *And he said.* Even apart from the strong assertions in 6:5, 8, 15; 7:55; Mt.10:19 by itself guarantees the inspiration behind this discourse.
   Men, brethren. Contrast 4:8. Stephen speaks as one who has a status comparable to that of the men he addresses. What a striking contrast in v.51,52.
   Appeared. The Greek verb is in passive voice, perhaps implying that God was manifested through an angel.
3. *Come,* as though implying "with me."
   From thy father's house, omitted from the Gen. 12:1 quote, probably means the temple of the moon–god where his father worshipped (Josh. 24:2).
4. *When his father was dead.* Suggesting a recognition of the Fifth Commandment, and even at the expense of the First; and perhaps also implying: And *you* may have to bid farewell to the religion of *your* fathers.
5. *Not so much as to set his foot on.* Quoted from Dt. 2:5, implying Abram was as much a wanderer and a pilgrim as Israel were in the wilderness (cp. also Gen. 8:9). The phrase emphasizes: No legal right! True of Isaac and Jacob also.
7. *Serve me.* Greek: *latreuo,* serve in worship, by contrast with their service in Egyptian bondage.
   In this place. Certainly Sinai, as Ex. 3:12 shows. The Hebrew word implies "a holy place."
8. *And so;* i.e. *thus,* through circumcision, was born Isaac (but not Ishmael), the child of the covenant.
9. *Sold Joseph into Egypt.* Actually it was the Midianites (circumcised Ishmaelites!) who did this, but of course the brothers knew, and intended, what would transpire. Compare the way in which Christ was delivered to a Gentile, and crucifixion insisted on.
   God *was with him. Very* emphatically stated in Gen. 39:2, 21, 23.
   Compare also Luke 1:28,66. Joseph, a prototype Immanuel.
10. *Delivered.* Greek middle voice here implies: Not primarily for his own benefit, but for the furtherance of God's plan of redemption.
    Delivered him out of all his afflictions. Paul, in prison like Joseph, quotes these words with reference to himself: 2 Tim. 3:11. This entire verse is packed with allusions to the Septuagint version of the story of Joseph.
13. *Kindred.* Pharaoh already knew that Joseph was of Hebrew race. Now his actual family was made known to him.

14. In 200 years, Abraham's seed numbered 75 persons. Contrast the next 200 years!
16. *Were carried over* i.e. the twelve patriarchs, not Jacob.
    Hamor. Probably a dynastic title, like Pharaoh, Benhadad, Abimelech.
18. *Another.* The word means "a different sort of Pharaoh," i.e. a new dynasty.
    Knew not. This might mean "not acquainted with" or "unable to remember" Joseph; or, idiomatically, "took no account of, thought nothing of."
19. *Dealt subtilty.* Almost the same word in 2 Pet. 1:16 suggests the idea; "cooked up a cunning scheme." *Cast out.* The Greeks used this word for the exposure of unwanted babies.
20. *Exceeding fair.* This could read "fair *for* God," i.e. not Just a good–looking child, but one with a special place in God's purpose.
21. *Took him up.* This double–meaning word also signifies "destroyed" – she "destroyed" him from being a Hebrew child.
22. *All the wisdom of the Egyptians,* especially what they had learned from Joseph; Ps. 105:22.
    Mighty in words and in deeds. Possibly this was already a familiar phrase amongst the Jews to describe Moses. In that case, it looks as though it was taken up by the Lord's disciples to describe him, as "the Prophet like unto Moses;" Lk. 24:19. Josephus has a story (2.10.2) glorifying Moses as a young man; but certainly the tale about him marrying an Ethiopian princess is pure fantasy.
23. Literally: *And when was fulfilled for him a time of forty years.* This might mean a revelation telling Moses when he was to make his effort at deliverance. See on v.25.
    Visit Gen. 50:14; Ex. 4 31; both passages supporting the view taken here of v.25.
    It came into his heart. Jer. 32:35; Ez. 38:10 suggest plan, intention.
24. *Defended.* Gk. middle voice implies Moses' own emotional involvement, or perhaps that he meant this redemption of one Israelite as a token of his plan for the nation.
25. *Supposed.* Rather "he reasoned" – from the promise made to Abraham? Gen. 15:13–16. The verb forms that follow mean that Moses reasoned that his brethren were understanding that *God was delivering them* (i.e. then) by his hand. This is very different from the common and utterly wrong idea that here was a headstrong self–confident young man too impatient to await God's good time. (This notion, if correct, makes a sorry mess of Stephen's attempt to present Moses as a type of Christ! The more correct idea makes a perfect parallel with the ministry and rejection of Jesus). Dt. 9:24 also plainly implies that this was a *divine* deliverance. The fact that the slain Egyptian was hidden in the sand implies that this first move towards deliverance met with little approval from Moses' people; v.35a, Cp. Jn. 1:11.
    But they understood not makes a dramatic antithesis (cp. v.53). The Greek perfect tense implies: "and they still don't understand (the deliverance offered through Jesus)."
26. *Would have.* The original implies a sustained effort at reconciliation.
    Set them at one again. More exactly: "drawn them together into peace." Did Stephen mean peace with God? this Is very often the meaning of "peace" in Scripture.
    Ye are brethren. Cp. Gen. 13:8. But Israel forgot this, as in Joseph's day (v.9), and Stephen's – and, alas, the New Israel in the 19th and 20th centuries. *Sirs* is very respectful. They were both leaders in Israel.
    Why do ye wrong? They both did wrong, the one persecuting (because his fellow expressed faith in Moses as saviour), and the other in resisting the evil, and in the assumption: Moses needs *me* to help him out! But note the emphasis in v.27.
27. In this response to Moses' expostulation the important word is the first: Who? And the correct answer to that question is: God did! But this was challenged by an unbelieving people.
    A ruler and a judge. Jesus alluded to these words in Lk. 12:14, implying: Only when Israel is ready to accept me as their Deliverer am I prepared to fill the role of ruler and judge.
29. *Fled.* Not for fear of his life, but because his own people were taking sides with the Egyptians against him. Ex.2:14: "The word (about my plan) is made known (by my brethren, to the Egyptians)."
    Two sons. Gershom may mean: (a) A stranger there (where? in Midian or in Egypt?); (b) Banished by the people! Eliezer, named at circumcision, after the burning bush, means: My God is my help.
30. *Forty years,* a hint at a possible deliverance by Jesus forty years after this rejection of him?
    Expired is really "fulfilled," the word used of fulfilment of a prophecy (v.23). Then is it possible to infer that Moses had been told by God to stay away from Egypt for forty years? (see note on v.32).
31. *Wondered* (a) why it should be on fire; (b) why it was not consumed?
    Behold really means "consider."
32. *The God of thy fathers.* But Ex. 3:6 has singular "father". This plural is from 3:15,16 – another example of the compression in Luke's reporting of this speech; cp. also v.36,43.
    Trembled. Very often this means fear at having done something to displease God; Acts 24:25; 9:16; 16:29; 1 Sam. 16:4; Gen. 27:38. Then was Moses fearful for having shown a disobedient spirit? It was very near the end of his time in Midian when he married, intending to settle down there. Many details in Ex. 3,4 chime in with this.
    Durst not behold. Here Stephen cannot refrain from emphasizing the *difference* between Moses and Christ ascended to the Father's right hand.
    Groaning. Deliverance comes to God's people when they beg for it.
35. *This Moses* Five times in v.35–38. Contrast 6:14.
    Judge becomes *deliverer, redeemer,* implying near kinsman (Heb. *go'el);* cp. v.25: brethren. The change of word implies: not condemnation, but succour, through Jesus as through Moses. And Jesus will *be judge* also; v.60.
    In the ecclesia, the faithful remnant, not in the nation.
    Angel – singular; i.e. the angel of the covenant.

37. *Raise up* could imply resurrection.
    Like unto me. Stephen's argument requires this reading, and not R.V.
    Him shall ye hear. Mt. 17:5. As they did not receive Moses' first attempt at deliverance, so also with Jesus. Even Moses' later deliverance was accompanied by much Israeli murmuring and rebellion (v.39). But not so in the (here implied) second coming of Jesus: "Him *shall* ye hear."
39. *Would not:* i.e. had no wish to! Note the triple condemnation:
    v.39: They preferred the materialism of this world.
    v.40: They lacked faith.
    v.41: They worshipped their own ideas.
    In their hearts. Emphasis here on cool decision, rather than on emotional inclination.
40. *Gods.* This proves that elohim in Ex. 32:1 does not mean a *god,* as in RVm. The golden calf was intended to be the first of a set.
    Before, i.e. in time (so Gk.), rather than place. Then was the golden calf intended to placate Egypt when the Israelites returned?
41. A close paraphrase of Ps. 106:19LXX.
    Rejoiced. Gk. impf: they continued to rejoice.
    This verse covers wilderness apostasy, and goes at a 500–years leap to the calves of Dan and Bethel; v.42.
42. *Turned.* They turned (v.39), so God did; Josh. 24:20; Is. 63:10; Rom. 1:24.
    Have ye ...? Am. 5:25 and Gk. here both imply: No! But *now* Moloch and the rest.
42, 43 are intended as quick summary of Israel's later period.
43. *Moloch.* Lev. 20:2,3. It has been cleverly surmised that in Amos the Massorites pointed the text to read Siccuth (RV), Chiun, to suggest the vowels of *Shiqqutz,* abomination.
    Babylon. Did Stephen imply: If it was apostasy which took your fathers to Babylon, what brought you under Rome now? Since Babylon was a current Jewish nickname for Rome, there may be a hint here of a coming destruction – of the temple, as by Nebuchadnezzar.
44. Stephen now reverts to the wilderness story in order to pick up a fresh line of argument about the sanctuary of God.
    Tabernacle of Witness, so called because of the Ten Words (Ex. 31:18), all broken by Israel.
    Fashion is really "type", as though implying a higher reality; Heb. 8:5; 9:23, 24.
45. *Before the face of.* Cp. Dt. 11:23 Heb.
46. *Desired to build.* Quoting Ps. 132:4, 5.
    Found favour. This is O.T. idiom for "had his request granted"; see concordance on "find grace."
    Tabernacle. This word covers both tent and temple (e.g. Ps. 46:4).
    The God of Jacob. Almost certainly, allusion to Ps. 24:5 LXX. It is the psalm with which David brought the ark to Zion. 48.
    Most High. This divine name is often used with Gentile associations.
    Not in temples. Jn. 4:21,22. Here, in effect, Stephen pleads "Guilty," but hardly as they meant. Solomon also said the same: 2 Chr. 6:18.
    Made with hands. In LXX this word normally means idols; v.41: Ps. 115:4; Mk. 15:48?
49. The true context of Is. 66:1,2 is 65:17–25, the Messianic Age. At that time, the "resting place" of God (2 Chr. 6:41) will be the man who trembles at His Word.
50. *My hand.* God may rejoice in the work of His own hands, but no man has that right. In this Is. 66 quotation Stephen was, of course, leading his hearers on to "him that trembleth at my Word (Jesus)."

28. Accusers accused (7:51–53)

There are those commentators who suggest that Stephen, having reached the climax of his "apology" or "defence" (without mentioning the name of Jesus once!), now lost control of himself and instead of vindicating himself against the three main charges levelled against him, burst out into a tirade of denunciation of those who had brought him to trial.

Such a conclusion is surely a mistake. Indeed Luke seems to go out of his way to fend off such an error by his repetition that Stephen was "full of the Holy Spirit" (v.55; cp. 6:3, 5, 8, 10, 15).

In any case, the development of ideas strongly suggests that Stephen's sequence was fully intended; for the quotation from Isaiah 66, so familiar to that Bible–instructed Sanhedrin, would run on in their heads: " ... but to this man will I look (for my dwelling place), even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." Instead, to their consternation and confusion, Stephen went on: *"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears,* ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye."

Here was the logical conclusion of the long inexorable build–up of historical review which had taken up so much time and attention. Like Father, like son! From the very *first,* whilst still at mount Sinai, Israel had been stiff–necked – a stubborn beast like that which they made to worship — and for which disloyalty, but for the earnest intercession of Moses, the wrath of heaven would have slain them. "I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a *stiffnecked people:* let me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven: and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they" (Dt. 9:13, 14).

Now the situation was the same, or worse. But Stephen would not "let God alone"–"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". However, within forty years retribution became inevitable. As a nation Israel was swept away, and replaced in the esteem of God by Gentiles spiritually "mightier and greater than they" (Mt. 21:43; Pr. 29:1).

In these *last* days of the kingdom, they were no better, but rather *worse:* "To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? behold, *their ear is uncircumcised,* and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it (contrast Isaiah's phrase: 'tremble at my word')" (Jer. 6:10–the entire chapter needs to be read as a full–blooded warning to a nation again teetering on the brink of destruction).

In this vigorous indictment Stephen was but following the pattern set by his Lord:

"Ye build the tombs of the prophets ... and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers ... that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed in the Land ... Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come on this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee ..." (Mt. 23:29–37; cp.2 Chr. 36:16).

Stephen's censure went on in precisely the same vein: "Ye do always *resist* the Holy Spirit." Here he chose the exact equivalent of the Hebrew name Meribah, associated with the waters of strife in the wilderness of Zin and at Kadesh (Ex. 17:7; Num. 27:14). Here now was another perverse generation emulating the stubborn wilfulness of their fathers.

In a most eloquent passage Isaiah had given his solemn reminder of how, even though the angel of God's presence had saved them, and God Himself had borne them, and carried them all the days of old, they had nevertheless "rebelled, and grieved his Holy Spirit" (Is. 63:8–14). Once again, the only thing that could save them was a contrite spirit and a humble loyalty to the Leader God had given them.

The charge unanswered

This resistance to the witness of the Holy Spirit in Jesus and now in Stephen was only the first of three counter-charges which this eloquent fearless servant of Christ now pressed home:

a. Resisting the Holy Spirit.
b. Murdering the Man of God.
c. Not keeping the law they professed to revere.

Always their self–vindication had expressed itself in venomous hatred and persecution of the faithful spokesmen of the Lord: "Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?"

Even as he rammed this charge home Stephen took comfort from the memory of his Lord's reassurance:

"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you ... for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Mt. 5:11, 12).

Up to this point Stephen had won the attention of his learned audience not only by his eloquence and Biblical erudition, but also by the way in which he had bidden them identify with "our fathers" (v.39 etc). But now, to point a bitter contrast, the pronoun changed: "As *your* fathers did, so do ye" (v.51, 52).

"They (your fathers) slew them which shewed before the coming of the Just One (3:14; Is. 53:11)."At the hands of the fathers both Joseph and Moses had come within an inch of death. And Isaiah, who foretold more of "the Just One" than any other prophet, was "sawn asunder."

Yet this entail of guilt–"We have sinned *with* our fathers" (Ps. 106:6)–was a small thing compared with their latest crime, personally committed: "Of the Just One ye have now become the betrayers and murderers." The story of the rejection of Joseph and Moses had gone home. The divine Saviour, whom those two national heroes had foreshadowed, had suffered at *their* hands. What crime could be more heinous?

And what they reckoned their greatest glory and virtue — the honouring of Moses' Law – was their next biggest sin; for in countless ways, whilst being scrupulously literal, in wholesale fashion they had flouted the spirit of commandments written with the finger of God and ministered by angels.

In searing words Stephen excoriated these holy men who sought his life. How he had turned the tables on them! Caring little for what might become of himself, he exposed their consciences to the dazzling glare of Holy Scripture and the unimpeachable facts about Jesus of Nazareth. Would they muster the honesty to repent, and so save not only themselves but also their nation from impending well–merited wrath?

Notes: 7:51–53

51. *Stiff–necked ... uncircumcised.* Modern equivalents: heretics, infidels! For the latter, consider Lev. 26:41; Dt. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:26; Ez. 44:9; Rom. 2:25; and Dt. 10:16, 17, with its reference to "regarding not persons, nor taking reward"–two principles infringed in Stephen's trial. Saul of Tarsus, listening to this denunciation, was to echo its sentiments in later days: e.g. 1 Th. 2:15, 16.
52. *Which of the prophets ... ?* Cp. Mt. 21:35–37.
    The Just One; s.w. Mt. 23:29; Is. 53:11.
53. *By disposition of angels.* Cp. v.38; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2– based on Dt. 33:2.

29. The death of Stephen (7:54–60)

Luke surely had the story of the lynching of Stephen from Paul himself. His brief account is packed with vivid dramatic detail.

The climax of denunciation to which the Lord's witness came at last, was too much for the assembly which up to this moment had let him go uninterrupted. Now, "cut to the heart" (5:33) – literally: "sawn in two in their hearts" – they "gnashed on him with their teeth." It is remarkably easy to get the wrong impression from these phrases. The first does not mean that their emotions were aroused (though that was certainly the case by this time), But rather: their thinking was cut in two, they had become men of divided convictions (how true specially of Saul of Tarsus!). There was no escaping the impact of Stephen's sustained Biblical reasoning, yet prejudice and self–interest alike refused consent to the inevitable conclusion.

They sat there grinding their teeth, not "upon him" (as EV text), but "regarding him" and what he had said (same phrase in Rev. 1:7). This attitude had continued through much of Stephen's discourse. The words describe neither regret nor remorse (as they are often mistakenly read in the gospels) but anger; compare Ps. 112:10; Job 16:9; Pr. 19:12LXX.

A vision of Christ

Stephen, unperturbed by the signs of their intensifying hostility, was not to be hindered in his witness. Looking steadfastly *into* heaven precisely as the apostles had done at the time of the Ascension (1:10), he, like them, witnessed a remarkable vision of the Shekinah Glory of God, and the men before him saw that glory reflected in his face (6:15). Men of Israel could not "steadfastly behold" the glory in the face of Moses (2 Cor. 3:7). But this saint in Christ, pure in heart, saw God and was made bold for his final word of witness.

The vision took a specific form. He "saw the heavens opened," as Ezekiel had done (1:1) and as happened also at his Lord's baptism (Mk. 1:10), and Christ there in glory, "standing on the right hand of God," as though he were a High Priest ministering in a true Holy of Holies. Yet it was not to exercise his priestly mediation that Jesus now (in this unique place of Scripture) *stood* in the heavenly Presence (Heb. 10:10, 11), but in order to claim fulfilment of his Father's promise: "Ask of me, and I will give thee the Gentiles for thine inheritance" (Ps. 2:8). Already there was palpable evidence that the chosen race was hardening in its rejection of their Messiah. So now surely was the time when God's wider purpose of gathering in Gentiles should go into operation: "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord ... And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob ... I will also give thee for a *light to the Gentiles that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth"* (Is. 49:5, 6).

Stephen, ecstatic at sight of the heavenly vision and *recognizing* the person of his Lord told what he saw, consciously employing almost the very words which that same high priest and Sanhedrin had heard from the lips of Jesus at his trial: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (compare Mt. 26:64; and contrast Acts 7:33). Here was not only Psalm 110, which these learned men had heard quoted by Jesus to their own confusion (Mt. 22:41–46), but also in the use of "Son of man" (the only time that title was used by other than Jesus himself) there was deliberate appropriation of Dan. 7:13

with its vision of a Son of man ascended to the presence of the Ancient of days and receiving authority over Gentiles (v.14) as well as Jews.

The force of Stephen's sensational words was not lost on these men, least of all on Saul of Tarsus, the most nimble mind in that assembly. It could well have been he who led the shout with which that august gathering, abandoning all dignity, sought to drown any continuing testimony of faith. Symbolically expressing their horror at Stephen's "blasphemy", many of them clapped their hands over their ears; thus without intending it, they made clear confession that for all their learning they lacked an answer to their prisoner's Biblical reasoning.

A prophecy about Stephen

Luke's record here is packed with subtle Biblical allusions. "They stopped their ears" is taken from Psalm 58:4. It is a psalm which quite marvellously declares a special relevance to Stephen and Saul.

Psalm 58	Acts 7
1. Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation (Sanhedrin)? Do ye judge judge uprightly, O ye sons of men!	The perversion of judgement in Stephen's condemnation. Saul was one of the judges. Contrast: "Son of man."
2. The violence of your hands.	Stoning.
3. The wicked are estranged from the womb. Speaking lies.	"As you fathers did, so do ye." The charges against Stephen.
4. Like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ears.	"They stopped their ears."
5. The voice of charmers charming never so wisely.	Stephen's eloquence.
6. Break their teeth, O God.	"They gnashed with their teeth."
7. Let them be as cut in pieces.	"They were cut to the heart."
8. Like the untimely birth of a woman.	1 Cor. 15:8: Saul – "as of one born out of due time."
That they may not see the sun (Heb: *CHaZaH,* see in vision.)	Stephen saw the Glory of God.

Violent reaction

Again, the phrase "they ran upon him with one accord" uses the same uncommon verb which describes the Gadarene swine charging down the hillside (Mk. 5:13). It describes also the madness of the mob at Ephesus (Acts 19:29). And what a different sort of unanimity was this "one accord" from that displayed so graciously in the lives of the brethren (s.w.2:46; 5:12)! The Greek phrasing should not be read as implying absence of deliberation or vote among the judges, especially since "Saul was consenting unto his death" suggests the opposite (cp.26:10).

In irrepressible anger, with one accord (1:14; 2:1) they dragged Stephen out of the hall of judgement, out of the temple area, out of the city, to "the Place of Stoning," (according to tradition, identical with Golgotha; cp. Heb. 13.12) as though he were a blasphemer (Lev. 24:11,14) or a leprous thing (Lev. 14:40). And there with grim intent, men peeled off their long outer robes and laid them at the feet of Saul of Tarsus, a young sanhedrist (how old?) already

earmarked as successor to the great Gamaliel because of his fantastic knowledge and outstanding zeal for the Law.

Saul the judge

But if indeed Saul was so overflowing with righteous indignation against the believers, why did he not lustily join in the stoning of Stephen? The Biblical answer to this question brings to light an attractive "undesigned coincidence."

The Law (Dt. 17:4–7) instructed that when there is serious religious divergence,

"and it be told thee,
and thou hast heard,
and enquired diligently,
and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain:
then thou shalt bring forth that man ...
unto thy gates, and shalt stone him
with stones."

In the stoning, "the hands of *the witnesses* shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of *all the people."*

Now, in the next legal paragraph, a careful distinction is made between the judge (v.12) and "all the people." Thus the implication behind v.4–7 is that no judge was to be involved in the actual stoning. This was to be carried out by witnesses and the rest of the people.

It is not difficult to infer that at the trial of Stephen, Saul was one of the judges. The expression: "Saul was consenting unto his death" (8:1) implies this. More explicitly, Saul's own words carry the same meaning: "And when they (i.e. persecuted saints) were put to death, I gave my voice (vote; literally; pebble) against them" (26:10).

Here, then, is as tidy an explanation as could be wished regarding Saul's behaviour. The inference that the judge was not to take part in execution of a sentence means that a scrupulous Pharisee judge like Saul would feel himself barred from the actual stoning, much as his zeal would urge him to vigorous participation. So instead he made as positive a public gesture as he could — he attended the stoning in person, and showed his complete approval of what was almost a lynching by volunteering to look after the garments of the men who fired the first volley of stones.

A thousand years before, David had enunciated the principle in Israel that "as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff" (1 Sam. 30:24, 25). So, that day, before God Saul was as much responsible for the death of Stephen as if he had personally thrown the stones (compare Rom. 1:32).

Perhaps it is possible to argue from omission that Saul's burning indignation was not directed against any of the apostles, but only against un–Judaistic disciples like Stephen. The apostolic immunity (8:1) and the ensuing campaign in Damascus and other places (9:2) might suggest this. Not a few details in Stephen's speech had implied a widening purpose of God embracing Gentiles as well as Jews. Would anything be likely to exasperate Pharisee Saul more than this?

Yet this truth, about a gospel for Gentiles as well as Jews, had already sunk into his unwilling mind (see ch.34). Does this explain why, when the risen Christ was seen by Stephen and Saul, he was seen in a blaze of glory surpassing the experience of the apostles during the forty days? (Consider again Is. 49:5, 6).

As the execution began, Stephen repeatedly looked up to heaven, appealing not to Caesar but to Christ his Lord. It is even possible that the Greek expression should be translated: "calling (the name of Christ) upon himself" (as in 9:14; 22:16; Jas. 2:7). If so, then he may have been making repeated bold confession: "I believe in Jesus of Nazareth; I belong to him; his

Name was named on me in my baptism."

It is remarkable that in this long and much–compressed chapter the name of Jesus does not occur until this tragic point, the last verse but one.

"Receive my spirit"

Struck repeatedly by stones, and coming near to losing consciousness, saintly Stephen sank to his knees, and, like his Master on the cross, he prayed: "Lord, receive my spirit." But Jesus had offered this prayer to his Father (Ps. 31:5; Lk. 23:46). Now Stephen prayed the same prayer to Jesus. And he too "cried with a loud voice."

Misunderstood, the words are treasured by those who believe in an immediate disembodied immortality in heaven when death supervenes. Yet how to reconcile such an idea with the emphatic conviction, so often expressed in the New Testament, of resurrection of the body at the last day, is not usually made clear, or even attempted.

But what did Stephen — and his Master – mean?

The Old Testament counterpart to these words is in Ecclesiastes: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (12:7). Here the word "return" is the key to a proper understanding. It implies going back to where one has come from. But since *no* individual has ever had any memory of a conscious existence in heaven before beginning life on earth, the word "return" can hardly be taken to mean a conscious existence in heaven when this life is over.

Then what is the "spirit" which returns to God and is "received" by Him? The Book of Job explains: "If he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh shall perish together" (34:14,15). The life power of every individual comes from God, and returns to Him. Hence Paul's conviction at a time when he knew he had not long to live: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12), that is, the day of "his appearing" (4:8).

Stephen's first confession of faith was an exact parallel to this. His words: "Receive my spirit" imply: "Accept my life as a sacrifice readily offered." Similarly, martyred saints are spoken of as "souls under the altar" (Rev. 6:9). The figure is that of life–blood being poured out, like that of an animal sacrifice, at the base of God's altar. But what a difference in one respect–that whilst these also cry "with a loud voice," their blood cries for vengeance on their persecutors (2 Chr. 24:22) whereas Stephen prayed for mercy on his: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

Prayer for his enemies

The Law of Moses has no explicit commandment to pray for one's enemies. Yet Stephen did this (contrast 2 Chr. 24:22). Truly he was "changing the customs which Moses delivered us" (6:14). In this respect their accusation against him was true.

Hearing these prayers of Stephen, Saul, already breathing out threatening and slaughter, would be horrified by their "blasphemy." Now he would feel convinced that the drastic action taken against this disciple of Jesus of Nazareth was thoroughly justified. The time would come, and before long, when he would thankfully recall Stephen's prayer, realising now that it had been answered in his own conversion (1 Tim. 1:16).

Paul's imitation of Stephen

Rackham, ("Acts", p.109) has a brilliant note emphasizing that in days to come all that had happened to Stephen would come on Paul also: "The Jews disputed with and resisted Paul in the synagogue: he was falsely accused, mobbed at Philippi and in the temple, tried before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, stoned at Lystra. The same accusations were made against him — of blasphemy (19:37), disloyalty to Moses (21:21), and to the holy place and customs (21:28;

24:6; 25:8; 28:17). Verbally, compare "crying out' (21:28), 'rushed with one accord' and 'seized' (19:29), 'out of the city' (14:19). Further, he suffered persecution at Antioch (13:50), was dragged (14:19; cp.17:6) into prison (16:23), and was bound (21:11, 33); cp.8:1–3." Rackham might have added: And Paul was assured of a crown *(Stephanos)* of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8).

James and Stephen

Eusebius tells how years later (in A.D.62), James the Lord's brother was similarly stoned by the Jews, and died with the words of Stephen's prayer on his lips.

Thus Stephen, the most brilliant of the disciples, "fell asleep." But his work lasted; for a mighty impact had been made that day on the mind of Saul the Pharisee (9:5). And the persecution which Stephen's witness sparked off drove disciples far and wide, and everywhere the message went with them (8:4; 11:19).

Lynch law?

Jesus had foretold: "I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute." Opposition to the gospel was intensifying to this fulfilment. First threats, then stripes, next imprisonment, and now capital punishment.

How did the Jews get away with it? for regarding Jesus they themselves had confessed: "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death" (Jn. 18:31). There are all sorts of possible explanations:

a. By this time they had worn Pilate down, so that he was now like a teacher whose class knows it can flout his efforts at discipline.
b. A time gap should be read into the middle of verse 57, allowing for reference to the Roman governor for ratification of their decision.
c. This trial of Stephen fell conveniently, or by design, in the interval between the end of Pilate's regime in A.D.36 and the arrival of the next governor Marcellus. This is precisely what happened when James was done to death at the behest of Annas, the son of Annas, in A.D.62.
d. Vitellius, the legate of Syria, who sacked Pilate, is known to have followed a policy of maximum concession and friendliness towards the Jewish leaders, and it was he who sanctioned this violence.
   Which of these!

Notes: 7:54–60

54. *Cut to the heart.* Not momentarily, but continuing thus. The verb is the same as in 1 Chr. 20:3LXX, where the meaning is "caused them to cut with saws." It is almost the same as in Heb. 11:37; thus Isaiah, whom Stephen had just quoted, and who was himself sawn in two, now sawed his enemies asunder!
    Gnashed with their teeth. Consider Ps. 37:12 and context.
55. *Full of the Holy Spirit.* An expression used only of Jesus (Lk. 4:1) and Barnabas (Acts 11:24).
    Standing on the right hand of God. Saul the Pharisee would readily recollect Dt. 5:31 – Moses standing by the angel of the Lord to receive commandments, statutes and judgements to be taught to Israel. And now Jesus instead of Moses! Further blasphemy, the climax of Stephen's Moses argument!
56. Gk. perfect participle: I *have seen* (and can still see). The phrase looks back to 6:15. Stephen's allusion to Ps. 110:1 would also encourage many of those Bible scholars to recall the preceding verse: 109:31.
57. *Stopped their ears.* This and *cut to the heart* (v.54) make designed reinforcement of the strong words in v.51.
58. *Out of the city.* Cp. Abel, the first Old Testament martyr; Gen. 4:8LXX. *Laid ...at (Saul's) feet.* Contrast 4:35.
59. *Receive my spirit.* The word is not infrequently used in N.T. for the New Nature in Christ; e.g. Rom. 8:1–6,9. Gal. 5:16; 1 Tim. 4:12; Col. 1:8.
60. *Kneeled.* So also Jesus and Paul, about to face death; Lk. 22:41; Acts 20:36; 21:5.
    With a loud voice. What a contrast with the "loud voice" of his persecutors (v.57)!

30. Persecution (8:1–4)

So Stephen died, horribly. And Saul, his indignation still seething against this "blasphemer" whose eloquent Biblical arguments he could in no wise confute, "was consenting unto his death." The form of the Greek verb might even suggest a steady assertion of his attitude and decision in the face of efforts (by Gamaliel?) to persuade him otherwise.

Indeed, if such efforts were made, they only had the effect of intensifying the heat of his indignation against these "Nazarenes." That very day (see RV), persecution of the Jerusalem ecclesia was set in train. Soon it became a roaring flame, fanned and fed by Saul the Pharisee. Yet Luke, resisting the temptation to write a long purple prose passage about the afflictions of his brethren adds only this:

"As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling (that is, dragging) men *and* women committed them to prison."

The apostle James' mild picture of that trauma is this: "Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgement seats? Do they not blaspheme that worthy name which was called upon you?"

If the phrase: *"every* house," is to be taken at its face value, the question arises: How did Saul know in which homes he would find believers living? There seems to be here an implication of much efficient gestapo work already undertaken before ever the storm blew up about Stephen. Or it may be that here the phrase "every house" refers to the synagogues (Houses of the Law) where believers were known to assemble.

In Saul's eyes these disciples of the Lord were "found false witnesses of God, because they testified that he raised up Christ, whom (Saul was convinced) he raised not up" (1 Cor. 15:15).

So he laid them waste. Luke's word describes a wild beast ravaging a dead body (s.w. Ps. 80:13LXX). And the tense of the verb implies that having set about this grim task, he kept at it.

Psalm 80 is surely remarkable as a psalm about Stephen and his fellow martyrs:

"Thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth (the Glory seen by Stephen). Before Ephraim and *Benjamin* and Manasseh ... come and save us ... Cause thy face to shine (Stephen again!), and we shall be saved ... the bread of tears, tears to drink in great measure ... Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt ... and planted it (Stephen's speech) ... The boar out of the wood doth waste it (LXX: s.w. made havoc 8:3) ... Let thy hand be upon the Son of man (Stephen's phrase: 7:56) ... we will call upon thy name (as did Stephen; 7:59)".

Paul recalls the persecution

The additional details available about this persecution are the few which come in incidentally in Paul's own story about his early days as an enemy of the Faith:

"I persecuted this Way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (22:4).

And again,

"Lord ... I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee" (22:19). There is here a picture of a systematic combing of all the synagogues in Jerusalem for any disciples of Jesus who might be regular attenders there.

And again:

"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests: and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them" (26:9, 10). The plural pronouns are eloquent here. They allow of no other conclusion than that Saul had a hand in the death of a number of other faithful disciples besides Stephen, one of whom (see on chapter 26) was probably the father of John Mark.

Paul continues:

"And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme" (26:11). The campaign pictured by that last sinister phrase must have lain heavily on Paul's conscience for a long while after his conversion. On his first return to Jerusalem, he surely spent long hours seeking to reclaim those whom he had earlier bullied into apostatizing from the Faith.

More than this:

"Being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities" (26:11). Again there is a significant plural: "cities," intimating that that last momentous journey to Damascus was not the only one undertaken with the same intent. How many others?

In another place Paul pictures the ferocity of that campaign in these words:

"Beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it" (Gal. 1:13).

These shameful memories meant that for the rest of his days, in spite of all his personal brilliance and superb achievements in the gospel, he continued to be wondrous small in his own estimation:

"Not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Cor. 15:9), firmly believing them to be "found false witnesses of God" because "they testified that He raised up Christ" (v.15). Yet this Saul was to write himself: "a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious." "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim 1:13, 15).

A scattering of preachers

Before this hurricane of hostility, the brethren (according to their Lord's commandment; Mt. 10:23), fled forth–with (Gk. aorist) in all directions. But not to seek hiding: "scattered abroad, they went everywhere preaching the word" (cp. 11:19; and note the repetition in v. 12, 25, 30, 40). There is a telling contrast here with Gamaliel's earlier allusion to Theudas whose followers "were scattered, and brought to nought" (5:36).

Now, as wind increases flame, so the gospel spread. It is not for nothing that here Luke chooses to use the intensive form of the very word: "scattered abroad," with which Jesus had begun his parable of the sower (Mt. 13:3). The blood of the first martyr was already proving to be the seed of the church. Jesus had bidden his disciples "pray the Lord of the harvest that he send labourers into his harvest." Now that prayer was being answered, but in a most unexpected fashion – through the ferocity of Saul the persecutor.

This spontaneous preaching movement set in motion the next phrase of the programme of evangelism which the Lord had set before the apostles (1:8) – Judaea and Samaria. Yet they did not initiate it themselves: "All scattered abroad except the apostles."

The Apostles

This takes some understanding. It has been surmised that the main animus of Saul's persecution was directed against Hellenistic believers who were more ready to follow the logic of Stephen's arguments and, letting go rigorous observance of Judaistic tradition, were inclined to take the gospel to Gentiles also. But the apostles, showing themselves to be good Judaists, were let alone.

This explanation may not be the right one. For undoubtedly the vast majority of the disciples in Jerusalem would be men and women who had been reared in a careful observance of Jewish tradition and who would naturally continue to have this as their way of life after they came to faith in Jesus. Only a few, relatively, would be of the less rigid Hellenistic type. Certainly in later days (21:20) the many thousands of believers in Jerusalem were "all zealous of the law".

But at this time, *"all* scattered abroad" indicates a complete–but only temporary (9:26)–break up of the ecclesia. And the only alternative explanation of apostolic immunity seems to be that the Twelve went underground, staying in Jerusalem as the best centre from which to operate direction of the many small communities of believers now scattered through the land (Jn. 10:13).

There is an early tradition that the Twelve had been bidden stay in Jerusalem for a period of twelve years. If this explanation is not accepted, the only alternative is to believe that for some strange reason the apostles showed themselves rather lethargic about embarking on their wider assignment of evangelism (Mt. 28:19; Mt. 16:15), and therefore God first raised up Saul the persecutor to scatter the brethren and their message, and then went on to convert the persecutor into the world's most efficient preacher of the gospel, specially to Gentiles in "the uttermost part of the earth."

Here is the first noteworthy use in Acts of the lovely Greek word for "preach." It means "to carry a good message," and is used – remarkably! –only once in the gospels, but no less than 24 times by Luke and 22 (24?) times by Paul (it is *their* word!).

Stephen's burial

Stephen would surely have died the more happy had he been able to foresee the remarkable outcome of his own faithful work. His interment provided a further impressive witness for the Faith, for devout men gathered up his battered body and at his burial, undeterred by the virulence of Saul, “they made great lamentation over him." It was Jewish custom that there be no lamentation over the death of a man who had been stoned. So here was open proclamation of Stephen's innocence.

Who were these devout men? In the fourth century Augustine quoted a not unlikely tradition that they included Gamaliel and Nicodemus, and that the name of Stephen was inscribed on the tomb in Aramaic – Chaliel, garland (= *stephanos,* crown). And that tomb may well have been the tomb in which Stephen's Lord had lain.

Another of these "devout men" was surely the apostle James. Elsewhere ("The Epistle of James," by H.A.W.) James 5:1–11 has been expounded at length as the apostle's lamentation, protest, and exhortation at the burial of Stephen.

It is impossible to read such biting language (v.1–6) as an apostolic exhortation to brethren in the Faith, but if these words were addressed to wealthy Sadducees and Pharisees (including Saul?) at the graveside of Stephen, they take on an amazing relevance and force. (That paragraph could, of course, have been a rhetorical apostrophe addressed to them in their absence).

"Your miseries that shall come upon you (the inevitable judgement following their rejection of the gospel) ... ye have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just one (this is Stephen, not Jesus)."

Then turning to the disciples who were present: "Be patient therefore, brethren (i.e. show a spirit of endurance under hardship), unto the coming of the Lord ... stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh ... behold, the judge standeth before the door (James might well say this, as commentary on Stephen's words: "I see ... the Son of man standing on the right hand of God:"). Appropriately James rounded off with an exhortation about "suffering affliction and patience." With Saul of Tarsus girding up his loins for action he did well to speak thus.

Notes: 8:1–4

1. *Consenting.* 22:20 adds: "standing by," a Greek word often used in an aggressive sense: 4:1; 6:12; 23:27; 17:5; 1 Th 5:5; 2 Tim. 4:2,6; Lk. 20:2; 21:34. So there may be implication that Saul was one of those who actually arrested
   Stephen (6:12). Ch. 22:20 surely suggests that Luke had the narrative about Stephen from Paul himself.
   Persecution. Bezan text adds: 'and afflictions," thus emphasizing the fulfilment of Mt. 13:21.
   The church ... at Jerusalem implies that already ecclesias had come into being in other places also.
3. *Made havoc.* The Greek word sounds just like "eliminated;" cp. the modern use of that term!
   Haling, i.e. dragging on the ground; s.w. Mic. 7:17LXX.
   Women, including some of those mentioned in Lk. 8:2,3?
   Men and women is beautifully illustrated (foretold) by Isaiah 40:9: "0 (man of) Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O (woman of) Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength ... be no afraid; say unto the cities of Judah ..." The Hebrew imperatives are respectively masculine and feminine.
4. *Preaching.* Some OT. (LXX) occurrences of this word are specially interesting: Ps. 40 9; 68:11 (Heb. fem., LXX masc.); 96:2; Is. 40:9 (Heb. fem.); 52:7; 60:6; 61:1.

31. The Gospel in Samaria (8:5–25)

Next to Stephen, Philip (not the apostle; v.12, 13) was the "most wanted man" by the persecutors of the Faith (note v.26, 39). So, doubtless on advice, he left his young family (21:8), and went away on a preaching mission in Samaria. The detailed narrative of what happened there was probably given to Luke by Philip himself in later days (21:8).

Earlier, the Lord, although he himself had made remarkable use of a God–sent opportunity to preach the gospel in Shechem, had bidden his disciples keep away from Samaria during their first mission (Mt. 10:5) – this because of Jewish prejudice and the prior needs of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But before his ascension this prohibition was lifted (1:8). It is a thing to be wondered at that the gospel had not been taken to Samaria long before Philip got busy. Was Jewish prejudice still at work in the minds of the believers, as it is in modern times against brown and black skins, in the minds of some?

Which Samaritan city Philip went to is not specified. The text might mean Samaria itself, the capital, but is it not more likely that memories of the Lord's enthusiastic reception in Shechem led Philip there? This would also help to explain his immediate enthusiastic reception — though indeed merely to learn that Philip was persecuted by the men of the temple would be sufficient to guarantee him a welcome by the Samaritans. Hatred by Judaea ensured sympathy from all Samaritans. The psychology behind this campaign was right.

Simon the sorcerer

Even so, Philip might well have been daunted, on arrival, by the powerful influence of Simon the sorcerer. By sheer cleverness and deceit and by the very magniloquence of his claims this man had reduced the city's superstitious and almost over–religious population to a state of spiritual servility. Like the Jezebel of Thyatira, who "called herself a prophetess" (Rev. 2:20), Simon "gave out that himself was some great one ... the Great Power (i.e. angel) of God." It is possible but by no means certain that this word for "great" is actually a transliteration of a Hebrew or Aramaic word for "One who is manifesting (God)." Evil men love power, reputation and money. By his imposition on people's credulity, Simon had all three. But now, all at once, his spiritual dictatorship crumbled away to nothing. Philip proclaimed not himself but Jesus as "the Great Power of God;" and he exercise his own personal endowment of the Spirit in a sustained sequence of remarkable healings such as dwarfed into insignificance the paltry conjuring tricks of Simon the mountebank. Best of all, to the intense satisfaction of those who heard, he welded together all the vivid current Messianic expectations with the name of Jesus Christ, the Saviour–King. The woman at the well had confessed to Jesus: "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things." And Jesus had answered: "I that speak unto thee am He" (Jn. 4:25, 26).

Success

Now Philip filled out the message of the Kingdom of God as the great Messianic Hope of the future (14:22; 1:3, 6); and "from the least to the greatest" the people, as God's New Israel (Jer. 31:31, 34), joyfully learned the New Covenant, and its present assurance of the forgiveness of sins.

Clearly the privilege of the sacrament of baptism was a vital part of Philip's message, for as the preaching and the powers of the Spirit brought conviction, the people, "both men and women"–there is a pointed exclusion of children – continued to come forward for acceptance into the ecclesia of Christ through this rite.

There was an increased surge of success in this campaign when Simon himself, naturally enough impressed most by the power of the signs, openly proclaimed his own conviction of the truth of Philip's message, and he too was baptized.

Readers often fail to appreciate just what such a decision meant for Simon. It openly declared that all he had propounded hitherto was so much deceitful pretentious nonsense. All the authority and influence he had formerly exercised was now thrown away, and he himself became a spiritual apprentice – this is what the phrase: "he continued with Philip," seems to imply. As the people's powers of sane judgement had been paralysed by the pseudo–miracles he had performed, so now he in turn was repeatedly awe–struck by the miracles he continued to witness. It must have been a fantastic conversion that brought about such a dramatic change. Most charlatans would have reacted in fierce hostility to the newcomer. It is not a little to Simon's credit that he chose the path of discipleship.

When word got back to Jerusalem about the gospel's remarkable impact on the people of Samaria, there was immediate recognition of the hand of God at work. The Twelve forthwith decided that this new development–acceptance of despised and resented Samaritans into the Faith – must have top–level encouragement. So they deputed Peter and John to be their spokesmen in confirming the new converts as members of the ecclesia. (In similar fashion Barnabas was later deputed to confirm the accession of Gentile converts at Antioch; 11:22). The selection of John to go with Peter is specially noteworthy, for it was he who, but for his Lord's blunt veto, would have called down fire from heaven on unsympathetic Samaritans (Lk. 9:54).

Apostolic help

Even when the two apostles came to Samaria and had seen for themselves, they still sought through prayer the sanction of the Lord for the important step now being taken. Here before their eyes were a low–grade people who, having been baptized into Christ, were steadily maintaining the standards of their new beginning (this seems to be the implication behind the Greek verbs). But the "early rain" of the Spirit, promised through the prophet Joel, had as yet "fallen upon none of them."

Now, with the laying–on of the apostle's hands (19:6; Heb. 6:2, 4, 5), the Pentecostal gift came on these believers also, adding to their already considerable joy in the Lord (v.8). The imparting of gifts of the Spirit was necessary here if only to set at rest the otherwise inevitable misgivings of the Jewish brethren. Their anti–Samaritan prejudices would not be easily overcome; cp. 11:17.

The implication behind this Samaritan experience is very strong that the power to impart gifts of the Spirit rested with the apostles and with them only. Philip had exceptional gifts of prophecy and healing, but evidently (not being an apostle) he did not have the power to impart these gifts to others. Apart from the direct action of the Lord in heaven (2:1–4; 10:44) and the gift of the Spirit to Paul through Ananias (9:17) – highly exceptional instances! – the logic of the Samaritan situation seems to require that without an apostle for the laying on of hands there was no endowment of the Spirit; e.g. the Ethiopian eunuch (8:38–40), and the remote Gentile ecclesias which even Paul was unable to reach. The ensuing development of the Simon situation will be seen to prove this up to the hilt.

Simon's simony

The sorcerer – that changed, but not completely changed, character – stared in amazement as Holy Spirit powers showed themselves in one believer after another; and his old lust for power and money and reputation reasserted itself. He saw big possibilities in this situation. So he assembled a collection of valuable gifts and brought them all to the apostles as though offering a sacrifice to the Lord Jesus (so the Greek text suggests; cp; 19:19, a different kind of sacrifice).

But this offering was really a business proposition. Simon was trying to buy not the Holy Spirit but an authority (Gk.), like that vested in the apostles, to pass it on to others; and this he would then be prepared to do – for a consideration! – to *whomsoever* he chose, whether a sincere baptized believer or not. Here was the Gehazi of the New Testament, unable to resist an opportunity.

Rebuke and discipline

The explosion of indignation of one Simon against the other may be readily imagined:

"May thy money go to perdition with thee! (was Simon much different from Judas, the son of perdition?) ... Thou hast neither part not lot in this matter (neither Holy spirit gift nor power to impart it – unworthy to be "partaker of the inheritance;" Col. 1:12 s.w.): for thy heart is not right in the sight of God" – here the apostle quoted a Psalm about wayward Israel, where the very next verse stresses the longsuffering and forgiveness of God (78:37, 38).

"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought (device or scheming) of thy heart may be forgiven thee (s.w. Mt. 12:31)." It is noteworthy that Peter did not bid him be baptized again. That baptism already received, whether in a right frame of mind or not, was still made valid by the right and proper understanding on which it had been based. The doubt expressed by the apostle did not relate to that nor to the extent of the longsuffering of God, but–most probably — to the words of the Lord Jesus (Mt. 12:31) about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, a Scripture largely concerned with a cynical attitude of mind to the miraculous works of the Spirit (Mt. 12:22–24). Was Simon as far gone as those Pharisees?

"Thou art into (i.e. becoming) the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." Here the definite articles are pointless except as making allusion to familiar Old Testament Scriptures. Moses had warned against the attitude of mind in which a man "blesses himself in his heart, saying, i shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart (Peter's phrase: the thought of thine heart), to add drunkenness to thirst (that is, to *want* evil and deliberately to satisfy that want fully)." A man with such a cynical attitude to the Law of God was described by Moses as "a root that beareth gall and wormwood" (Dt. 29:18,19), because bringing by his undisciplined example so much bitterness into the lives of others.

Similarly, "the bond of iniquity" was that ingrained evil which Isaiah caustically exposed in the lives of his contemporaries who observed a hypocritical Day of Atonement: "Is not this the Fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness ..." (58:6). Simon was in grave danger of becoming once again just such a bond of iniquity on the rest of the people.

Repentance?

The one–time sorcerer was shaken to his foundations by the apostle's well–justified invective. It may even be that, as in the similar situation with Ananias and Sapphira, Peter's ominous "perish with thee" was intended literally and that Simon already felt the pangs of death bearing down upon him. He let out an agonized cry.

"Pray ye (both Peter and John) to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me."

That phrase "these things," to which there is no proper antecedent in the text, may imply that Peter had voiced a whole catalogue of various forms of dire retribution to which Simon's simony made him liable. The Bezan text adds that "he ceased not weeping greatly." If these words are valid — and it seems unlikely that they have been invented –they point to a very real degree of contrition. His appeal for their prayers on his behalf does not signify his own inability or unwillingness to pray for himself, but rather as acknowledging his own utter inadequacy and their divinely–appointed power to bind or loose (Jn. 20:22,23).

In Acts the story stops here. What happened next?

James's commentary

The point has already been made that James' Epistle is contemporary with the early chapters of Acts. It has these significant words:

"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him" (5:14,15).

The relevance of phrase after phrase here is very striking. It is not unlikely that their first reference was to Simon. In that case, they add a satisfying conclusion to Luke's incomplete report. (More on this in "The Epistle of James", by H.A.W.)

Neither the apostles nor Philip could stay on indefinitely in Samaria. After a further spell there of emphatic witness to the Faith, they all three returned to Jerusalem, but not directly. Instead, heartened by the first success in that area, they contrived to visit quite a number of Samaritan villages to spread the Word yet further.

It is remarkable that in spite of big success and "much joy in that city" Philip was pulled out of that area and instead sent away into the wilderness to find one sheep (v.26).

Notes: 8:5–25

5. *The sity of Samaria.* A tricky point of textual criticism here; Only 3 manuscripts have the definite article (A B X). But they are three of the finest. Then: "a city" or "the city" – which?
7. *Unclean spirits.* In his gospel Luke often has "demon," but in Acts not once out of 8 places. Here does he use 'unclean spirit' to emphasize a contrast with 'Holy Spirit'? This unnecessary and specific mention of unclean spirits in Luke's inspired record reduces to nonsense the much–too–popular "accommodation" theory. In Lk. 8:26–39 there are no less than twelve similar examples to this in the space of fourteen verses (and there are *many* others). For a Biblical approach to this problem, see "Studies in the Gospels" (H.A.W.), ch. 30.
8. *Great joy*– because of the gospel message, or because of the healings, or because fellowship with *Jewish* believers was now assured? Verse 39 points to the first of these.
   9–11. The repetitions here are striking:
   a. Before time ... of long time.
   b. Sorcery ... sorceries.
   c. Bewitched ... bewitched ... wondered (v.13 s.w.).
   d. Some great one ... the great power of God.
   e. Gave heed ... had regard ... gave heed (v.6) ... continued with (v.13, not s.w.).
   The people. Greek: *ethnos,* the nation, not just that city.
   And this word stamps the Samaritans as essentially Gentiles.
10. RV: *which is called great,* that is, so called in the Law (the only Samaritan Scriptures); cp. Dt. 4:37. A Messiah on the Moses pattern.
12. *Believed Philip.* The word form here is markedly different from, for example: "believeth into him" (Jn. 3:15). Kingdom of God. Also: 28:31,12; 19:8. For these Samaritans there would be special need for clear Biblical teaching on this subject, for they accepted only the books of Moses and knew little about the vast wealth of teaching in the prophets about the Messianic kingdom. No wonder there was great joy!
13. Was Simon attracted more by the power than the holiness?
    Continued; proskartereo may be compounded from pros–krateo–tereo.
14. *They sent.* The pope sent by his cardinals?
    The Word of God. Double meaning here? Normally, the proclaiming of the message: 11:1; 17:11; Lk. 8.13.

16. *He.* The masculine participle requires this reading, with reference to the Lord Jesus surely, for in this work there is no essential difference between Son and Spirit; cp. 13:2.
    Were baptized. The Gk. phrase implies that thus "they made a beginning"
17. *Laid their hands on them.* In 2:41 and 16:15, 33 no mention of this. Taken for granted because apostles were present?
    Received. Imperfect tense here implies a succession of signs.
19. *The Holy Spirit.* In the Gk. no definite article, but certainly charismatic gifts nevertheless.
20. *The gift of God.* Allusion to Jn. 4:10. And contrast Mt. 10:8.
21. *Part.* 1:17s.w.; cp. also Ps. 16:5LXX (and v.4 there).
22. *If perhaps.* Some doubt as to his repentance:
    Heart here notably means "mind" or "will"; cp. Ps. 78:37 (38); 7:10 (9)LXX.
23. *Perceive. Horao very* often signifies divine insight; e.g. 7:44; 22:15; Lk. 1:22; 16:23; 24:23.
    Gall of bitterness. In Heb. 12:15, with the same meaning.
    Bond. Also carries sometimes the idea of conspiracy: Jer. 11:9; 2 Kgs. 11:14.
24. *Spoken.* 26 occurrences; always means 'by divine inspiration'.
25. Some suggest that this further evangelisation was done by other preachers who were sent out from Jerusalem (note the order of the phrases).

32. A man of Ethiopia (8:26–40)

Philip was no sooner back in Jerusalem than he found a very different kind of mission assigned to him. The A.V. suggests a special revelation by "the angel of the Lord," but it may be that this angel was a human messenger, one of the brethren in Jerusalem with the gift of prophecy (later referred to as "the Spirit," (v.29, 39), who had perhaps already made contact with a distinguished pilgrim to the temple, but had wisely seen that this devout but frustrated man would more readily receive the gospel away from the hostile atmosphere created in the holy city by Pharisees and Sadducees.

Whoever the "angel" was, Philip lost no time in doing as he was bidden. "Arise and go at noon" (s.w. Gen. 18:1) – the wrong time of day, surely, for beginning a journey; nevertheless, "he arose and went", thus providing a classic application of the later precept: "Preach the word. Be instant (i.e. ready for action), in season, out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2).

It must have seemed to Philip a strange commission to undertake, for nearly all the way that ancient road was wilderness, and at that time of day deserted; and so also Gaza to which it went, on the way to Egypt. Generations earlier, in accordance with ancient prophecy (Zeph. 2:4), the place had been devastated, and later a new Gaza had been built two or three miles off the main road.

Puzzled, doubtless, but undeterred, Philip responded immediately. If John could "make straight in the desert a highway for our God", then he also. And his expectation of faith was not disappointed.

A Jew of Ethiopia

The Ethiopian eunuch on whom the spotlight now focuses has been commonly taken to be a negro. But there are serious difficulties in the way of such an assumption; for if indeed he were, then Cornelius was not the first Gentile to be brought to the Faith (yet everything about *that* conversion demands that it be read as the *first* opening of the door of faith to Gentiles). Nor can it be argued that this man was a negro proselyte to the religion of Israel, for the Law of Moses (Dt. 23:1) expressly forbad that a eunuch be accepted into the congregation of Israel.

On the other hand, it will be readily seen, as the narrative proceeds, that, here was a Jew who was in the service of the royal court of Ethiopia. From this point of view the progression of development of the gospel story in Acts proceeds as smoothly as could be wished — first, Jews of Jerusalem, then Judaea, then Samaria, next (here) the technically excluded Jew, and by and by the Gentile who is a "proselyte of the gate," to be followed very soon by Gentiles in Antioch, and then through the ministration of Paul other Gentiles far afield.

This eunuch was "of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians." The legend had been fostered that the kings of Ethiopia were children of the sun by a virgin birth, and from this stemmed the exceptional power vested in the queen–mother. Hence, the eunuch "had charge of all her treasure" (the Greek word is *gaza!).* Here then, if anything, there was danger of money being a hindrance to the gospel in a very different way from the case of Ananias in Jerusalem or of Simon in Samaria. But, as it proved, the eunuch's sterling qualities overrode this and all other hindrances.

Experience in Jerusalem

"He had come to Jerusalem to worship," and yet must have experienced there considerable disappointment and frustration. For, because of his physical disability (immediately evident to everyone by reason of his boyish looks and great fatness and unmasculine voice), in the temple he had been personally debarred from offering sacrifice or even from sharing the priestly blessing at the morning or evening sacrifice. To all intents and purposes he had been no better than a devout Gentile. All these weary miles, all these weeks of travel, for this! It is significant that Luke simply says he "had come" to Jerusalem. The normal term "going up"

(aliyah, anabaino), used for such a holy pilgrimage, is carefully excluded.

But the journey had not been a complete loss. There in Jerusalem he had acquired a copy of the Septuagint (Greek) text of the scroll of the prophecy of Isaiah, and he was reading it aloud, evidently for the benefit also of his chariot driver or some of his servants (for, almost certainly, so prestigious a person would have his own caravan).

Hitch hiker

Since Philip and the eunuch were both travelling the same way, who overtook whom? Most probably a halt in the journey enabled Philip, on foot, to come up with the other traveller who may have been using an intermission in the journey to read this fascinating Scripture to his men.

As soon as the caravan was sighted, "the Spirit in Philip said, Go near, and join thyself unto this chariot. "The Greek might well mean: "Stick to him". Whereupon Philip, now "instant in season," *ran* in order to make, and use, his opportunity. As he drew near it needed only a phrase read in that unmannish voice, to reach his ears, and the Scripture being read was immediately identified. Or it may be that the eunuch was so carried away with his reading that even after Philip came near he still went on with it, unwilling to break off.

When he did pause, here was Philip's matchless opportunity: "Understandest thou what thou readest?" There is a lovely play on words in this Greek phrase. There is also a subtle rather sardonic implication: "Understanding it? Not much, I imagine."

The reply revealed the remarkable humility of the man. Instead of brusquely rebuking Philip's presumption in so addressing a man of his importance, he was willing to confess that he was groping: "However shall I be able to, except some man (better than myself) guide me?"

Yet he had persevered with the reading. For, as one old commentator has put it, "Scripture by its sweetness affects and charms even a reader who does not fully comprehend it, as spices transmit odours through their wrappings" (Bengel). The same writer also worthily observes that "Philip did not, as we do, begin with the weather, the news, and so on".

Forthwith, and through no spirit of unselfishness, Philip was invited (Gk. *exhorted)* to share the chariot of his new acquaintance. "And as they went on the way," ("The Way"–see next chapter) Philip expounded (see ch.33).

The Gospel in Isaiah

The Scripture being read by this eager seeker for truth was the eloquent and moving prophecy about the Suffering Servant of the Lord who went to trial and slaughter unprotesting: "He was led to sacrifice as a sheep ... Through his humiliating of himself his condemnation (native to all the human race) was taken away. And who shall declare his generation? (a double meaning here: he will be cut off without having children?, or, who will be able to describe his new family; cp. Ps. 22:30?), for his life is taken from the earth (another double meaning: he is ruthlessly destroyed; or, he is raised up alive out of the ground; or, maybe, he will be lifted up from earth to heaven)."

The eunuch addressed a most courteous and humble enquiry to his new friend, yet there was no disguising his eagerness, for here in the Scripture apparently was one in like parlous state to himself, condemned to die without having any children. Then, 'of whom speaketh the prophet this? I must know, for this man is presented as a sacrifice for sin. For whose sin? For mine? And he emerges from his disabilities and trial vindicated by God; can I share his victory?'

Thereupon, Philip took a deep breath, and began. He explained that Scripture as a prophecy of the redeeming work of Jesus. And since he *"began* at the same Scripture," it may be presumed that he also combed the eunuch's Isaiah scroll from end to end, thus building up the complete and satisfying picture of Messiah's work and future kingdom–from virgin birth (7:14) to royal majesty (11:1ff). And doubtless he told of the mission of John the forerunner, and how on the basis of Isaiah 40 John had taught remission of sins through the baptism of repentance ("repent ye, repent ye;" v.1).

Disqualified from baptism?

The message was intelligently followed, and believed with intense fervour. Then at the crucial moment, as the exposition concluded, they came to "a certain water". "Behold, I will do new things, which shall presently spring forth, and ye shall know them; and I will make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the dry land" (Is. 43 .19LXX). It may well have been David's brook (1 Sam. 17:40), now well–filled by the early rains after the Feast of Tabernacles. But more probably (with strong early tradition to support it) this was one of the "springs of water" in the "south land" given by Gentile Caleb, who "wholly followed the Lord", unto his daughter Achsah as part of her dowry.

The eunuch saw his opportunity, and with an eager cry interrupted his instructor: "See, water! what doth forbid me to be baptized?" Back in Jerusalem he had learned through his own discouraging experience that the Law of Moses could not save *all* kinds of men. He himself, Jewish and more than ordinarily devout, had been shut out from the congregation of the Lord and from all the spiritual benefits which the temple offerings might bring to others. Then what about this fuller forgiveness, this better salvation, through Jesus of Nazareth? Was there any Bible passage (like Dt. 23:1) to forbid him this higher privilege?

It was, no doubt, a smiling Philip who promptly turned the spindles of that Isaiah scroll again, and began, to read:

"Thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls (even the wall of partition across the temple court) a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name *that shall not be cut off"* (56:4,5).

Only one thing could forbid this eunuch from taking hold of God's New Covenant in Christ, and that was disbelief: "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." Did Philip say this, remembering apostolic experience with the double–minded Simon?

Textual problem

Indeed, did he say it at all? For these words and the eunuch's response are omitted, or relegated to a footnote, by all the modern versions. This is a question of technicalities in textual criticism. The facts are these:

This verse 37 is omitted by an impressive block of ancient uncial manuscripts, but is included in a great lot of the later texts and the very early Syriac version; it is quoted by Irenaeus (late 2nd century) and other 'fathers' as early in date as the best MSS. Also, it is to be noted that with v.37 omitted there is a rather strange gap in the sequence of the narrative.

The view generally adopted is that v.37 was not part of the original text, but that it was added by the church at a very early time because of the need, as it was thought, to stress the importance of personal confession of faith. Yet whilst as a baptismal confession the declaration: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (cp. 9:20) would be adequate for a well–grounded Jew, it would hardly be adequate in later days when false doctrine had done its evil work.

Baptism

Evidently there was no doubt in Philip's mind. So the carriage was halted, and there, briefly but solemnly, the sacrament of union with Christ took place. Again, it says much for the humble spirit of this "man of great authority" that he was prepared to appear somewhat ridiculous in the sight of his own slaves – for no man being baptized ever looks dignified; indeed, how could he whilst openly declaring that his own flesh is worthless as grass?

United – separated

No sooner were these two united as brothers in Christ than they were separated by the Spirit of the Lord. One possibility is that the Spirit was manifested in a whirlwind (cp. Jn. 3:8) to take Philip away precisely as Elijah was snatched away from Elisha (2 Kgs. 2:16,17) or as Ezekiel was caught up to fulfil his mission elsewhere (3:14;8:3). If so, the eunuch only continued his chariot journey when he had witnessed Philip going off in his (2 Kgs. 2:11, 12). And it is remarkable that, whilst Elijah was not "found" in mountain or valley where he disappeared, Philip was "found" at Azotus, Ashdod, some twenty miles north of Gaza. (For another possible reading, see note on v.26 and cp. *harpazo* in Jn. 6:15).

Naturally, the eunuch was reluctant to bid his fine friend farewell, but he was the more filled with conviction and joy at this final demonstration of divine authority behind the message to which he had so eagerly listened and responded. So he went on his way rejoicing, as does every other sincere well–instructed recipient of the holy rite of baptism. Even in separation and isolation he knew the joy of fellowship (this is the dominant New Testament meaning of the word). Not that such a man would be content to hold his new faith unshared. "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God" (Ps. 68:31).

It has been suggested that the eunuch's joy was through the gift of the Holy Spirit (cp. 13:52; 1 Th. 1:6); and indeed Codex Beza says explicitly that "the Spirit fell on the eunuch." But this reading is unsupported. On the other hand there was great joy among the Samaritans (v.8) before ever Peter and John brought them the heavenly gift. So the point can hardly be pressed.

Philip now worked his way up the coast northward, preaching doubtless in places like Lydda and Joppa. When he came to Caesarea he evidently was joined by his family and settled down there, for he was still there twenty years later (21:8).

Notes: 8:26–40

26. *The angel of the Lord.* Probably the same as "the Spirit" (v.29,39). In each place this could be some Spirit–guided brother whom Philip met and went with from Jerusalem. Was it perhaps Titus, who had got to know Philip in Samaria? See ch. on "Titus".
    Toward the south. "At noon" is a more exact translation. Strictly A.V. reading is a paraphrase, and also tautological, for on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza it would be impossible to take any other direction but south.
28. *Read Esaias.* It could well be that in Jerusalem he had heard Christian preaching based on prophecies in Isaiah and thus had been stimulated to acquire of copy of that Scripture for himself. Such a possibility is not excluded by v.34.
30. *Ran.* A common Bible idiom for the function of a prophet or preacher; 1 Kgs. 18:46; Ps. 147:15; Jer. 23:21; Heb. 2:2; Ez. 1:14; Gal. 2:2; 2 Th. 3:1.
32. *Sheep ... lamb.* In Is. 53:7 the words come in reverse order, but like this in LXX. Yet it is a sheep, and not a lamb, that is sheared. This NT. quote appears to authenticate the wrong word order. Explanation?

35. *Beginning from this Scripture.* Cp. Lk. 24:27. Philip probably used the same classic proof–texts as Jesus did.
36. *What doth hinder?* A possible forbidding of baptism comes in 10:47; 11:17; Mt. 3:14. It is worth observing that in each instance the right and proper answer to the objection is: You may feel that you ought to forbid baptism, but you must not. Is there a lesson to be learned here?
37. *With all thine heart.* It is important to remember that in the Bible "heart" means "mind", i.e. one's understanding, not one's emotions. See "Studies in the Gospels", pp. 175,348.
    I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Cp. 1 Jn. 4:15; 5:5, 13.
38. The remarkable humility of this great man must not be missed. It comes out clearly again and again – in v.31 (twice). 34,36,38.
39. The parallel phrases in 2 Kgs. 2:16, 17, 11, 12 are worth setting out: "The Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up ... they found him not ... a chariot of fire ... he saw him no more." But what is the point of this designed resemblance?
    Azotus means Lifeless. That is why Philip had to go there.
40. *Preached.* The word comes five times in this chapter; v.4, 12, 25, 35, 40.

Additional Note

There are some remarkable and puzzling verbal contacts between this episode and the prophecy of Zephaniah:

3:10. From the rivers of Ethiopia, my suppliants, the daughter of my dispersed.
3:11. Thou shalt be no more haughty in my holy mountain (Jewish off–hand rejection of such as the eunuch).
3:12. They shall trust in the name of the Lord.
3:14. Be glad and rejoice with all the heart.
3:18. I will gather them that are sorrowful, for the solemn assembly (the eunuch's non–participation in the Day of Atonement?).
2:3. Seek ye the Lord, all the meek of the earth.
2:4. Gaza forsaken ... Azotus at noon–day.
2:12. Ye Ethiopians shall be slain by my sword (the Word of God preached in Ethiopia?).
2:11. Men shall worship him, every one from his place.

33. The Way

In these days we call it The Truth. The name came into existence in the 19th century. It was specially appropriate then, in an era when Bible truth had to contend with a welter of traditional error.

Today, in one of the most spiritually arid generations in British history, a more appropriate label would be The Faith. But in the first century, the brethren called it The Way.

This idiomatic usage in the Book of Acts has often been commented on. Many of the examples are self–evident in meaning:

1. In Jerusalem Saul "persecuted the Way unto death" (22:4).
2. Then he went off to Damascus, that "if he found any of the Way, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem." (9:2).
3. Aquila and Priscilla expounded "the Way of God more perfectly" to Apollos the enthusiast (18:25,26).
4. In Ephesus some "spake evil of the Way" (19:9), but Paul went ahead regardless.
5. Later on, in that city "there arose no small stir about the Way" (19:23), and riot in the "theatre" ensued.

These examples are obvious enough. There is a further lovely collection of them in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch:

6. "Understandeth thou what thou readest? ... How can I except some man lead me in the Way" (8:31). The eunuch didn't (then) intend a capital letter, but Luke did when he wrote it!
7. In fact, it was with purpose and double meaning that Luke described that road as "the Way that goeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza" (8:26).
8. So Philip hitch–hiked in that chariot, and "as they went on the Way," one expounding, the other listening, understanding and remembering, they came to a baptismal water (8:36). "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake ... he leadeth me beside the still waters."
9. Baptism duly administered, the eunuch "went on the Way rejoicing" (8:39), only now it was "his Way."
10. There is now a delightful relevance about the sequence of phrases in Isaiah 35:

    "In the wilderness shall streams break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground (of Ethiopia) shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water ... And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the Way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those, the wayfaring men ... they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

The idiom is, of course, taken straight out of the Old Testament which abounds with stimulating examples of *Derek Jehovah,* some of them being positively delightful anticipations of the New Testament idea.

Beginning with the appointment of cherubim to "keep (open) the Way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24), and the subsequent apostasy when "all flesh corrupted God's Way on the earth" (6:12), there is a profusion of splendid instances in the lives of Patriarchs and People. But the richest field here is in Psalms — and Isaiah, to a less degree; there are too many to quote. But any who care to spend time on this via the concordance will not go unrewarded.

Back to the New Testament:

11. John the Baptist came to his people "in the way of righteousness" (Mt. 21:32), but to little purpose.
12. He bade them "prepare the way of the Lord" (Lk. 3:4)–meaning their true approach to God? or the Messiah's authoritative coming to them? (see v.5).

13. In the teaching of Jesus there is an interesting contrast between his instruction to the Twelve to "take nothing for the Way" (double meaning again), when going forth to teach (Mk. 6:8).
14. Yet needful provision must be made for those who are as yet learners, lately come to Christ, lest "they faint in the way" (Mk. 8:3).

When narrating the Lord's last journey "going up to Jerusalem" (Luke's phrase), Mark has these "way" marks:

15. "In the way they (the twelve) disputed who would be greatest" (Mk. 9:33,34).
16. It was "when he was gone forth into the way" (10:17) that the rich young man came running to him.
17. It was when "they were in the way going up to Jerusalem" that Jesus went before them, his demeanour such as to make his men not only "amazed" but also "afraid" (10:32).
18. On the penultimate stage of the journey, blind Bartimaeus sat "beside the way," begging (10:46).
19. But by and by, with no more importunity, but with great rejoicing, "he followed Jesus in the way" (10:52).
20. Next day, with great acclamation, excited followers "spread their garments in the way, and strewed branches of trees in the way" (11:8), being confident that this was the way of a conqueror. Less than a week, and they knew it to be the way to a cross.

The Lord Jesus taught his disciples how to use this good word:

21. He spoke of himself as "the true and living Way" (Jn. 14:6).
22. He promised a Comforter "to lead you in the Way into all truth" (16:13).
23. He described the blessings of their pilgrimage: "the Lamb ... shall lead them in the Way unto living fountains of water" (Rev. 7:17).
24. Beforehand, inspired Zacharias had rejoiced that here was one to "guide our feet into the Way of peace" (Lk. 1:79) –
25. – a Way which unregenerate men know nothing of: "Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the Way of peace they have not known" (Rom. 3:16,17).
26. It is "a new and living Way" (Heb. 10:20),
27. "A Way into the holiest" (9:8). The idea here is palpably different from that of pilgrimage. These passages stress access and privilege.
28. There is a sad anticlimax in 2 Peter, for before he died that apostle had to lament the activities of false prophets who "cause the Way of truth to be evil spoken of" (2:2).
29. These are men who have "forsaken the right Way" (2:15). Instead, they follow "the way of Balaam."
30. It were better for such "not to have known the Way of righteousness" (2:21),
31. for they have now gone "in the way of Cain" (Jude 11).

34. The Early Days of Saul

Now that Saul the persecutor has moved into the centre of the stage in Luke's drama of the early church, it becomes desirable to assemble together the various fragments of information available concerning his origins and early life.

The specific declarations by Jerome (346–420) that he was born at Gischala in northern Galilee must necessarily be set aside since Paul himself asserted that he was "born in Tarsus" (22:3). It may be that his parents had originated in Gischala, and later emigrated to Tarsus because of Jewish disturbances there during the reign of Herod the Great.

On the other hand it is known that in B.C. 83 a lot of Jewish slaves were taken off to Rome and that later many of them were given their freedom and some even had Roman citizenship conferred on them. A number of these returned to the Holy Land. So this may have been the origin of Paul's "freeborn" Roman citizenship (22:28).

Origins

This settling in Cilicia, whenever it happened, was almost certainly for reasons of livelihood. Evidently tentmaking was the family trade (18:3), and Cilicia was famous for its goats–hair cloth, called cilicium, so eminently suitable for tents.

Practically nothing is known of Saul's family except that he had a sister married into a well–connected family in Jerusalem (23:14,16). The fact that he could describe himself as "a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5) seems to imply at least that there was no Hellenizing trend in the family at all. They lived in the Greek world but were not of it. Indeed they were Pharisees of Pharisee origin (23:6; 26:5) –not an easy life to live in such an environment as Tarsus.

Since Saul means "asked for," it may be taken as fairly likely that his parents were eager to have a son and commemorated his birth by naming him after the king who a thousand years earlier, had sprung from their tribe, but who, as David's persecutor, had brought the name into disrepute. So there must have been a special reason now for this name being given.

"God ... separated me from my mother's womb, and called me" (Gal. 1:15), Paul was to write about himself. (The Greek word here suggests a play on "he phariseed me ..." But in Acts 22:10 the perfect tense implies a *divine* purpose with him, appointed before ever he was converted.) So he saw himself as consecrated specially to God's service, as Jeremiah had been (Jer. 1:5), but it may be that there is further meaning here — that out of thankfulness his mother destined him for the role of rabbi if he should prove fit and worthy of it.

The date of his birth must have been somewhere about the same time as the birth of Jesus, for an explicit early–church tradition (pseudo–Chrysostom) says that "for 35 years he served the Lord with all eagerness: and having finished his course in the cause of religion he went to his rest about 68 years of age" (i.e. in A.D.67 probably).

Saul was also called Paul, probably from birth. It was normal for Jews of the dispersion to have both a Jewish and a Gentile name (e.g. John Mark). And it is unlikely that the apostle took this name out of a self–conscious humility after his conversion: he was not that kind of man who would call himself Paul, "the wee one," so as to declare openly "I am the least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9).

Education

There was a first–rate university in Tarsus, in those days reckoned the equal of Athens and Alexandria. But it may be taken as fairly certain that Saul did not study there. True, he had some acquaintance with Greek authors – Epimenides and Aratus the Cilician (17:28), Menander (1 Cor. 15:33), and Epimenides again (Tit. 1:12)–but these hardly establish a thorough–going classical education (even the illiteracy of the present writer does not exclude an occasional quote from Shakespeare!).

Instead, at a fairly early age (it may be assumed) he was sent off to Jerusalem to be brought up at the feet of Gamaliel (22:3). From hindsight it may be taken as certain that he was (from earliest days; Acts 22:3 Gk.) a quite outstanding pupil. Indeed he himself says so explicitly:

"I profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the patristic traditions" (Gal. 1:14). These eloquent words require reference to a fanatical obsession with *rabbinic* tradition.

Maturity

Another interesting passage (26:5) could possibly mean "they foreknew me from above ... because after the straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee," i.e. he was picked out by those in authority for promotion. "Foreknown" is the usual meaning of this word. Consequently whilst still in his early thirties he was elected to be a member of the Sanhedrin. This may be inferred from his own testimony that "when they (the early believers) were put to death, I gave my voice (vote – *psephos,* pebble) against them" (26:10).

And if he were a member of the Council, then he must have been a married man and a father, for these were regarded as normal qualifications.

Yet in Paul's writings there is no hint of either, apart from 1 Cor. 7:8: "I say therefore to the unmarried (i.e. the not remarried) and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I." So presumably his wife died young, in child birth, a double bereavement? It is hardly possible to be confident about these conclusions.

Did Jesus and Paul meet?

The intriguing question is often canvassed: Did Saul ever see Jesus in the days of his flesh?

Probably, though not certainly, Yes. The following points are worth mentioning:

1. "Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God." It is difficult to believe that this repeated commandment (Ex. 23:14,17; 34:23; Dt. 16 .16) was not taken seriously by Jesus and by Saul, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. So during the Lord's ministry, the two men would both be in Jerusalem at the same time on perhaps a dozen occasions. Is it conceivable that with all the excitement that centred on Jesus of Nazareth, Saul failed to see and hear him?

2. In the last week of the ministry, Jesus warned the leaders of the people against coming judgement: "He (God) shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others." Here Luke (20:16) adds the fascinating detail: "And when they heard this, they said, God forbid." This is the first and only indication in the gospels of one of the Lord's parables being understood by his adversaries (Lk. 20:19). That expression translated "God forbid" – *me genoito* – comes 14 times in the epistles of Paul, and nowhere else. Then, was this Luke's way of telling his readers that his friend Paul was in the crowd that day, understanding immediately what others were slow or reluctant to grasp, and exclaiming in horror at the prophecy? (If Paul was there, then he also heard Jesus speak a prophecy which, a year or two later, he (Saul) was to fulfil!).

3. "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more" (2 Cor. 5:16). These words are often read as establishing the point under examination. But they can be read as meaning that in the persecution period Saul judged Jesus as an unconverted man would judge him. So this is hardly decisive.

4. Necessary qualifications for an apostle were, apparently, that he should have known Jesus during his ministry and also after his resurrection (Acts 1:21,22). Paul seems to have insisted on this for himself: "Am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). And it looks as though the Lord himself made allusion to this at the time of Saul's conversion: "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and witness both of the things wherein thou didst see me (Gk. aorist), and of the things

wherein I will appear unto thee" (26:16).

5. When Saul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, he recognized him What does this imply? Do these testimonies make a case?

35. Saul's Conversion (9:1–9; 22:6–11; 26:12–18)

The persecution which had lynched Stephen never slackened in vigour or brutality; if anything it intensified.

All recognized that these disciples of the Nazarene lived exemplary lives. Even outsiders knew them as "saints," and saw them thrown into prison for their holiness (26:10). The strange problem is that the apostles themselves seem to have gone unscathed (8:1). Did they go into hiding? Were they protected by the goodwill of the crowd? These are hardly likely explanations.

The mainspring of all this *Sturm und Drang* was Saul of Tarsus. But he must have been able to gather round him a considerable team of others as resentful as himself of this Jesus Messiah. Single–handed he would have achieved little.

The Persecutor

With no small literary artistry, Luke tells the story of Philip's busy and well–rewarded preaching, and then goes straight on: "But Saul, yet breathing out threatening and slaughter ..." The contrast is superb.

That word "yet" implies a steady maintaining of the original burst of indignation against these believers. The storm showed no sign of blowing itself out. "Breathing out" might suggest to an English reader the snorting of a fierce wild beast, but the use of this word to describe "the *blast* of the breath of Thy nostrils" (Ps. 18:15) might even imply that Saul saw himself as an instrument of the wrath of heaven (cp. Ps. 27:12).

On the other hand, the repeated use of this word in Joshua for the rigorous extermination of "all that breatheth" in captured Canaanite cities might imply that "threatening and slaughter" were like Saul's native air at this time – he thought and talked persecution and surrounded himself by men of the same type as himself.

His great forefather had foretold that "Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning (i.e. in the time of king Saul, the persecutor of David) he shall devour the prey, and at even he shall divide the spoil" (Gen. 49:27). Now, through himself, there was a later fulfilment, and Saul gloried in the fact. Alternatively, should both halves of the verse be read with reference to Saul of Tarsus? – first, persecution; then preaching the gospel.

"Being exceeding mad against them, I kept on persecuting them even to strange cities" (26:11) was his own rueful reminiscence of this period. And the word "mad" means mad, an uncontrollable frenzy. Paul used it again when he stoutly declared: "I am not mad, most noble Festus" (26:24). Also, that plural: "cities," intimates that Damascus was not the first target for a round–up of these recalcitrant followers of Jesus. That was just one item in a sustained campaign.

There is the same implication about the comment which tells of the end of the persecution:

"Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria" (9:31).

The persecution was utterly ruthless. Not only men but also women were dragged off to prison. Three times the narrative emphasizes this determination not to discriminate (8:3; 9:2; 22:4). One wonders what happened to that well–known family at Bethany. "Haling (that is, hauling) men and women" presents a macabre picture of extreme reluctance and terror on the part of the victim, but they were taken just the same.

And in prison they were "given the treatment," so that many were "compelled to blaspheme" (26:11). Some read the imperfect tense there as meaning that Saul "tried to compel" abjuration of the Faith (with the implication of non–success); but the most natural way to read it is rather that "he kept on compelling" this denial, "time after time he compelled them to blaspheme." What a thing to have on his conscience in later days!

More than this, "when they were put to death, I gave my vote against them" (26:10). Again, the plural requires reference to more than just Stephen. It seems not unlikely (from the context) that James had these martyrdoms in view when he wrote: "Take, my brethren, the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord (New Testament prophets, as in Mt. 23:34), for an example of suffering affliction and patience," (Jas. 5:10).

It is a reasonable speculation that the father of John Mark was one of the victims of this onslaught. (There is an ancient suggestion that "the goodman of the house" (Lk. 22:11) was John Mark's father. But in Acts 12:12 the house is the house of John Mark's mother.).

No less than seven times in later days, Paul was to make reference to the terrorism he unleashed against the followers of the Lord. It evidently continued to lie heavily on his conscience. (See ch. 30).

This policy of Saul's represented a complete break from the authority of his famous and venerated teacher. Gamaliel was too mild by far. Perhaps already he was suspected of being a secret disciple. The Talmud has a story that when Nicodemus Bengorion needed sanctuary he found it away from Jerusalem at the home of Gamaliel.

The wise old man had counselled: "Leave this situation in God's hands. He will deal with it." But Saul's philosophy was the exact opposite: "I verily thought within myself, that I ought (that it was *necessary* for me) to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (26:9). God needed the zeal of Saul to be able to cope with the problem!

The Damascus plan

The expedition to Damascus, now being planned, was probably intended to be the climax of the campaign. Evidently it was known that many of the hounded believers had fled to Damascus to lose themselves among the tens of thousands of Jews already citizens of that fair city. "I went to Damascus to bring them which were there (Gk. thither; i.e. fled thither) bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished" (22:5).

So it was in a fever of excitement, that Saul now went to Caiaphas and the chief priests. He was still full of "threatening" (LXX: rebuke, of this Christian blasphemy) and "slaughter" (literally: murder). He knew that there would be no difficulty about being commissioned to bring back from Damascus a drove of these heretics in chains (22:5), for the pattern of procedure had already been set regarding other cities.

The Greek text (9:2) might even imply that certain outstanding disciples were known to have sought refuge in Damascus, and these were Saul's special target. And the double meaning of one phrase (22:4) could well hint at the betraying of those who had been his friends in former days.

It must have given those evil men of the temple no small satisfaction to have at their service one who hated the name of Jesus of Nazareth even more than they did. And the Pharisee majority of the Sanhedrin gladly added their authorisation (22:5). Never was there such an incongruous Pharisee – Sadducee alliance, except when Jesus himself was condemned and crucified.

There would be no legal difficulty about this exercise of *force majeure* in a foreign city, for at this time Aretas of Petra was overlord there, and he was on very good terms with the Sadducee priesthood in Jerusalem. In any case, by special Roman concession, Jews all through the empire were held subject to the local synagogue and, in the case of higher

appeal, to the men of the temple.

Probably even whilst preparations for the journey were being made, the news that the Wolf of Benjamin planned another foray reached the disciples in Damascus (9:14), for Christians had friends in high places in Jerusalem; so doubtless some of the disciples fled yet again before Saul arrived. It was to be precisely his own experience in later days, when hostile Jews "breathing out threatening and slaughter," were to chase him from one city to another.

The Journey

The distance from Jerusalem to Damascus is between 120 and 140 miles, according to route. The most obvious route to follow would be up the Jordan valley, and then skirting the Sea of Galilee, and so direct to Damascus.

It is possible to infer that Saul and his numerous party travelled on foot; for, when the vision of Jesus–was seen, they all fell to the earth (26:14); and when it was realised that Saul was now blind, he was led by the hand into Damascus, the Greek text (9:8) implying a helper on either side of him.

It was about noon (22:6), with a few miles still to go, that the journey was dramatically interrupted. Why were not Saul and his men taking the traditional siesta in the middle of the day? Even night–time travel was to be preferred to the scorching heat of noon.

The "explanation" usually offered is that Saul's irrepressible rage against the heretics would not allow him to rest. Even in the fierce heat he must be driving on to the accomplishment of his purpose: "Let me lay hands on these blasphemers!"

As an explanation this is hardly satisfactory, for what difference to his mission would an extra hour or two make? In any case, there is available a different kind of explanation which fits the circumstances and the man so much better.

Would not a dominant consideration with this bigoted Pharisee be avoidance of travel on the sabbath? When planning the journey this would be one of the first factors to be taken into account. So of course Saul had left Jerusalem immediately sabbath was ended, and by avoiding delays he would hope to be in Damascus before the next sabbath came on. It could just be done.

This seems to be a much more likely view of the situation. Then, if correct, Saul's conversion took place at noon on a Friday. Sabbath would begin at sunset that evening. If tradition identifies the spot correctly, there were still ten miles to go.

Encounter

It was in such a place, and at such a time, that Saul was stopped dead in his tracks by "a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun" (26 .13). It was as though he had stepped suddenly into the blinding flash of a hydrogen bomb, except that this was intermittent, for the text uses a word for "lightning flash" –"As the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth into the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day" (Lk. 17:24). On this day of the Son of man, that is how it was. Similarly, when the Shekinah Glory of the Lord was seen by Ezekiel, son of man, it was "a fire flashing continually ... and the fire was bright and out of the fire went forth lightning ... the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning" (Ez. 1:4RVm, 13,14).

Yet the unbeliever is not permitted to decry this experience as an unusual thunderstorm, for the sun was shining (26:13), and there was no rain (22:7 Gk: dust).

The phenomenon was precisely that witnessed by the shepherds of Bethlehem, when at the birth of Jesus the Glory of the Lord "shone round about them" (Lk. 2:9–the only other occurrence of this verb).

Such an appearance of the Lord in Glory had been known only to the three apostles at the Transfiguration and to Stephen, and later to John in Patmos. Nor was it to be the only time that there would be given to Paul "the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Scared men

Among Saul's entourage reaction was instinctive and immediate: "and when we were all fallen to the earth" (26:14). That word "all" is specially significant. How could Saul, the man who rose to his feet seeing nothing, know that without exception all the party had fallen to the ground in panic? There seems to be a clear implication here that all the rest were on their faces before he was. He saw every man among them go prostrate on the ground, yet for a moment or two he stood there, stubborn and defiant, because he knew immediately, and far better than any of them, the meaning of this traumatic experience.

Bezan text (22:9) adds concerning these men: "and they became terrified." And three ancient versions say about Saul that he was "trembling and astonished," using almost the very words which describe the reaction of the women to the vision of angels at the empty tomb (Mk. 16:6,8).

At this point the details of the narrative are so markedly like the description of Daniel's experience in his encounter with an angel of glory as to warrant closer comparison:

"And I Daniel alone saw the vision (it is evident that, similarly, Saul was the only one of his party to behold Christ there in person): for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves (then is this what Saul's men did as soon as they realised that the Light and the Voice, whatever they signified, did not concern themselves, but Saul only? Certainly they were on their feet again before he was; 9:7). Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me ... Yet I heard the voice of the words: and when I heard the voice of the words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me tottering (RVm) upon my knees and the palms of my hands (was this Saul's experience also?) ... Stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent (compare the Lord's command to Saul: Rise, and stand upon thy feet ... 26:16, 17)" (Dan. 10:7–11).

Luke seems to have framed his narrative to bring out this parallel, and also, perhaps, to use it as a means of filling out his own compressed record.

When describing how Saul fell to the ground he makes use of the unusual word *edaphos,* dust, perhaps with the intention of recalling Ps. 119:25: "My soul cleaveth to the dust: *quicken thou me* according to thy word;" i.e. by means of Thy Word – and this is precisely what the Lord proceeded to do for Saul.

The Lord's reproaches

The persecutor heard himself being addressed in Hebrew: "Saoul, Saoul" (not Saulos, as in 9:1, 8– the Lord calls his own sheep by name; Jn. 10:3)! But it is noteworthy that usually this repetition of name is a mode of reproach, as Martha, Martha (Lk. 10:41), O Jerusalem, Jerusalem (Lk. 13:34), Simon Simon, (Lk. 22:31), Moses, Moses (Ex. 3:4), Samuel, Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10)–and Abraham, Abraham (Gen. 22:11)?

It is not without significance that the Hebrew form of Saul is practically indistinguishable from Sheol (cp. the title of Ps. 18). So here was Jesus saying: "Hell, why dost thou pursue me — who am the Immortal One?" (Rev. 1:18). Had he not declared concerning his ecclesia: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18)?

The Lord's reproach could hardly have been put more concisely: "Why persecutest thou me?" Why, indeed! Simply because Jesus came from Nazareth and not from the city of David, and was by that simple fact a false Messiah.

But Saul's oppression centred on the disciples. Yet Jesus said: Thou persecutest *me.* It was Saul's first lesson in the First Principles of the Truth in Christ — the doctrine of the One Body (Eph. 4:4;1 Cor. 12:12), which to this very day many of his disciples put last and not first. Saul may not have been aware that Jesus had said: "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye did it unto me" (Mt. 25:40; cp. Mt. 10:40; Jn. 20:17), but disciples of today know the words well, yet neither heed nor greatly care!

The proud Pharisee there on the ground knew right well who it was who spoke to him, but he tried feebly to buy a second or two of time by asking: "Who art thou, Lord?" That title "Lord" was neatly ambiguous, for it could be the supreme honour which truly belonged to Jesus, or it could be (on a lower level) a fairly general title of respect (as in 16:19, 30). Perhaps the voice was the voice of an angel!

Seeing Christ

Yet there can be no doubt that Saul, when at last he dared to lift his head, saw Jesus (and recognized him?). This is plainly intimated no less than six times:

1. "The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee (literally: the one who was seen by thee) in the way ..." (9:17).

2. "Barnabas ... declared unto them how he (Saul) had seen the Lord in the way" (9:27).

3. "The Lord God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One ..."(22:14).

4. "To this end I was seen by thee ... a witness both of the things thou didst see me, and of the things I will be seen by thee" (26:16; the Greek here is a bit tricky; cp RV).

5. "Last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time" (1 Cor. 15:8).

6. "Am I not an apostle? have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1).

The Lord's explicit answer now made doubt or prevarication impossible: "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." He said "Jesus," and not "Christ" so as to put beyond doubt that it truly was a personal appearance, and not a hallucination of some kind.

Again, also, there was emphasis that this persecution bore on Master and disciple alike. The Lord had laid on him not only the iniquity but also the affliction of all his followers.

Kicking against the pricks

There can be no manner of doubt that Jesus really did add: "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," even though in the first record (9:5) modern versions omit the words, for in the third record (26:14) all the best and oldest manuscripts include them. The real problem here is: What did Jesus mean by this saying?

The commentators are unanimous in interpreting the figure as comparing Saul

to a beast reluctant to draw a cart or a plough, yet finding the compulsive irritation of the sharp–pointed goad too much for it. The problem here, scarcely ever given attention, is this — it is extremely difficult to believe that on such a crucial occasion such a man as Jesus would speak to such a man as Saul without making use of the words of Holy Scripture! (the rest of the colloquy has Biblical references enough). Yet this figure of speech, of an animal kicking against the goad, is not to be found anywhere in the Old Testament. One commentator has rather fatuously observed that "the Risen Lord appears to quote Pindar and Aeschylus" (because similar words and the figure of a kicking animal come in their writings — and in other writers as well).

There is need to start again from scratch in the examination of these words. Clearly, an interpretation which is found to depend for its force on the Old Testament has the scales loaded in its favour.

First, then, it has to be observed that the verb "kick" means, more precisely, "to kick with the heel" (Liddell and Scott). As already indicated, it had this special meaning in the classical authors. Next, the word *kentra,* translated "pricks", certainly carried that meaning (e.g. LXX of Prov. 26:3; Ecclesiasticus 38:25), but it also means "the sting of a serpent." This is its meaning in the only other New Testament occurrences. "They had tails like scorpions; there were *stings* in their tails" (Rev. 9:10). And 1 Cor. 15:56 surely has the same idea: "The sting of death is sin" (to read in the alternative meaning is to make nonsense of the passage).

Thus the Lord's expostulation to Saul was: "It is hard for thee to kick with thy heel against the stings of the serpent." Read in this way, the Biblical allusion becomes obvious. It is Gen. 3:15–the Seed of the Woman crushing the serpent Sin in the head, and in so doing suffering a sting in the heel. This sounds right. For what more fundamental Old Testament passage could the Lord have referred to?

But now let the implication behind these words be noted: Saul in the role of Saviour from sin, and Jesus as the great Adversary! This is exactly how Saul saw his present campaign. Jesus was the evil enemy of his people, and he – Saul–meant to be their redeemer from one who promised equality with angels as the fruit of an evil tree, coaxing men to believe that in him they would not surely die! (In Jn. 13:18, Ps. 41:9 there is just the same kind of meaning.).

Here, one is persuaded, is an interpretation of the familiar words somewhat less trivial than the idea of a stubborn animal protesting against discipline applied to its buttocks.

Hearing the words, Saul's nimble mind would go in a flash to the proper conclusion: My application of Gen. 3:15 was all the wrong way round; now I can see that Jesus, alive after crucifixion, truly is the Seed of the Woman – and I am the serpent Adversary, unless I quickly switch to a different role!

"What shall I do?"

This he now did as quick as thought. "Trembling" at the blasphemous danger he had been in, and "marvelling" that Jesus should be so gracious to one so evil and hostile as himself, he asked in chastened tones: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (cp. Num. 22:34, 35). *To do!* Instinctively this Pharisee still thought in terms of salvation by *works.* But it now took him only a matter of minutes to learn differently.

The Lord's first instruction, then, was the same as to stubborn Ezekiel when he saw the Shekinah Glory of God: "Arise, and stand upon thy feet" (Ezek. 1:28; 2:1–3). Here was an implied assurance of forgiveness. His faith, just expressed, was accepted in lieu of righteousness, of which hitherto he had none at all.

So, gladly, he stood, whilst his men, further away, marvelled at the whole transaction.

They heard a voice, perhaps like thunder, as on the occasion when the Father spoke to His Son, the crowd being present (Jn. 12:29); but the risen Christ, so visible to Saul, was hidden from them.

Called to be an apostle

Meantime, this persecutor heard a new and quite unbelievable commission now entrusted to him:

"I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a *minister* and a *witness* both of the things of which thou didst *see* me and of the things of which I will appear unto thee." It is worthwhile to observe that Luke is careful to stress that his gospel also was derived from *"eye–witnesses* and *ministers* of the Word (i.e. of Jesus"; Lk. 1:2). So also Paul when he became a preacher of the message.

Jesus continued: " ... delivering thee from the people (Israel) and from the Gentiles (here is an implicit promise of persecution, but also of continuing deliverance), unto whom now I send thee." The Lord used the word *apostello.* Saul was an apostle from this moment. The Son of Sorrow (Gen. 35:18) was now become Son of My right hand, and his mess was to be five times as much as any of his brethren (Gen. 43:34). And "little Benjamin" (Paul means "the wee one") will be prominent among the tribes rejoicing in Messiah's Kingdom (Ps. 68:17).

The promise of deliverance from adversaries of the gospel was markedly similar to the assurance given to Jeremiah in the beginning of his ministry. And as with Jeremiah, so with Paul — although time and again he was saved out of the hands of his enemies to continue the good work, there was no immunity from hardship and affliction.

Jeremiah, chapter 1, might well have been written about Paul and his work, so apt is the language:

"Before thou earnest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, (cp. Gal. 1:15), and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations ... Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces (Acts 18:9,10): for I am with thee to deliver thee ... Gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee ... Behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee: but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee to deliver thee" (Jer. 1:5, 7, 8, 17, 18, 19).

Saul's commission was couched in comprehensive terms: "Delivering thee from the people (Israel), and from the Gentiles ... to open their eyes (Israel again), to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God (Gentiles), that they may receive forgiveness of sins (Israel), and inheritance among them which are sanctified (Gentiles becoming the New Israel)." (26:17, 18; Col. 1:12–14 has many of these phrases).

But the operative phrase, covering Jews and Gentiles alike, was this: "by faith in me." So from the very first it was laid upon Saul that he was to preach justification by faith (20:21).

On to Damascus

This essential faith was forthwith exemplified in Saul's own case, for his Lord bade him "arise and go" (22:10). But although he had been able to see Jesus, when he arose he was now blind, so that he must needs walk by faith.

"There (in Damascus) it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do" (22:10). Just as Jesus had many things to say to the twelve which had to be deferred because they could not then bear them (Jn. 16:12), so also Saul needed peace and silence in which to come to terms with the utterly new world in which he was now coming to birth as a new creature. There in Damascus let him wait in darkness, with penitence and prayer, to the third day (cp. Job 5:12–14). The word of Jesus his Lord would come to him again.

A contradiction?

All this time–it wouldn't really be very long – the men of Saul's company stood at a distance, awestruck, mystified. The Greek word (9:7) means "dumb"–an echo of Isaiah 56:10: "His watchmen are *blind ... dumb* dogs, they cannot bark."

The point has often been made with a certain degree of satisfaction by those who are not friends of the Bible that in one specific detail the different accounts are irreconcilable:

"The men ... stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man" (9:7). On the face of it, this is not the same as "they heard not the voice of him that spake with me" (22:9).

It might be sufficient, in answer to this, to suggest that since the Lord spoke to Saul in Hebrew (26:14), these others not being competent in that language, heard a voice speaking (9:7) without understanding what was said (22:9).

For completeness there needs to be set alongside this probability the distinction between the genitive case in 9:7 in the accusative case in 9:4 and 22:9. When this grammatical point is appreciated, together with the difference of meaning which is implied, then it may be the more readily accepted that the men heard a noise of some kind, but to them there was nothing intelligible. (See notes).

A parallel instance is surely that occasion when Jesus prayed audibly in the presence of the crowd: "Father, glorify thy name," and God spoke in reply; "the people said that it thundered; others said, An angel spake to him" (Jn. 12:29). The word from heaven, perfectly understood by Jesus, was a meaningless noise to those who stood by. And so also on the Damascus road.

Blind!

When Saul's colleagues raised him to his feet (9:8Gk.) he was a blind man. At first he had seen Jesus; then because of the vividness of the Light, he had felt compelled to shut his eyes (9:8); now, "from the Glory of that Light" (22:11), his opened eyes saw nothing. It was "a light which no man can approach unto" (1 Tim. 6:16). Yet he had been bathed in it, and still lived, but only by the surpassing grace of Christ. It is significant that he is not described as blind, and rightly so, for now he "saw". Yet had he returned to Jerusalem in that physically stricken condition, he would have been refused access to the temple, for, ever since the days of David it had been a firm rule that "the blind and the lame shall not come into the House" (2 Sam. 5:8). However, on the third day he had his sight again, but now with no special eagerness for the temple in Jerusalem because he had instead full privileges in a new and better Temple.

This learned Jewish rabbi who had thought of himself confidently as "a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness" (Rom. 2:19), now found himself being led by one on either hand (9:8 Gk.) along the way that he could not see, into the city.

Farrar has a most eloquent passage describing this:

"He had meant to enter the city in all the importance of a Commissioner from the Sanhedrin, to be received with distinction, not only as himself a great "pupil of the wise," but even as the representative of all authority which the Jews held most sacred. And he had meant to leave the city, perhaps, amid multitudes of his applauding countrymen, accompanied by a captive train of he knew not how many dejected Nazarenes."

"How different were his actual entrance and his actual exit! He is led through the city gate, stricken, dejected, trembling, no longer breathing threats and slaughter, but longing only to be the learner and the suppliant, and the lowest brother among those he had intended to destroy. He was ignominiously let out of the city, alone, in imminent peril of arrest or assassination, through a window, in a basket, down the wall." (Life and Work of Paul, ch.10).

Saul continued in darkness, as of the tomb, from that Friday to the following Sunday, and like a dead man he neither ate nor drank. Thus in deepest penitence and self–castigation he afflicted his soul more than on any Day of Atonement. Someone has made the comment that in all world history there has been only one such period to compare with this for importance.

All he could do was to ponder and marvel and pray and pray again. And it would be strange indeed if his well–stocked mind did not race round the Scriptures he was so familiar with, and come to rest on such trenchant passages as these:

Prophetic Scriptures

"The Lord shall smite thee with madness (Acts 26:11): and thou shalt grope in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways" (Dt. 28:28,29). The curses God had pronounced on faithless Israel were now come in full measure on this Pharisee of the Pharisees!

Again:

"Your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity: your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness ... Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood ... wasting and destruction are in their highways ... we wait for light, but behold obscurity: for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men ... For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us ... Yea, truth is lacking, and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey ... So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" (Is. 59:3, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15, 19 etc.).

Quite surprisingly there are words in Job more apposite than might be expected:

"He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness (quoted by Paul: 1 Cor. 3:19): and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong. They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope in the noonday as in the night. But he saveth the poor from the sword, from their mouth, and from the hand of the mighty" (Job 5:12–15).

There are problems here. These passages do not read like prophecies about Saul of Tarsus, yet the aptness of the phrasing is not to be gainsaid. Then, is this by design or accident? Or is there something seriously defective about our usual understanding of Holy Scripture?

Again, did Saul ponder the remarkable features of the story of Elisha in Dothan (2 Kgs. 6)? When the enemy of the man of God comes against him in force, there is a vision of the Shekinah Glory, and the persecutors are smitten with blindness. They are led into the city and there their sight is restored, and they are given food and drink. And with that the enmity ceases. (For an even more impressive parallel, see "Exploring the Bible," H.A.W., p. 93).
How are such resemblances to be explained?

Notes:

9:1 *Breathing out.* Compare Mt. 27:12.
Threatening; s.w. is 8 times translated "murder."

9:2 *Women.* According to Josephus (B.J. 2.20.2), many Gentile women in Damascus were addicted to the Jewish religion – and thence to faith in Christ?

9:4 *Fell to the earth.* And so also John with his apocalypse: Rev. 1:17; and at the Transfiguration: Mt. 17:6.

9:5 *The pricks.* Jesus used the plural form. Doesn't that make the usual interpretation rather difficult?

9:7 May it be inferred from Dan. 10:7 that Saul's men, once they realised that they were not involved, removed themselves to a "safe" distance and stood staring? Three versions and Codex Beza add at 22:9: "they became greatly afraid."
Hearing the voice. Apparently there are exceptions to this grammatical distinction; e.g. 15:12, 13; 22:1. There is thus a possible alternative – that gen. emphasizes hearing the speaker, and acc. emphasizes the message. A fine point!

9:9 Is Rom. 6:3–11 autobiographical? Some of the phrases seem remarkably relevant to his own conversion. 22:5 *As also the high priest doth bear me witness.* Ananias (23:2) would be one of the Sanhedrin who gave Saul this authority. An important consideration with the leaders in Jerusalem would be the diminished financial contributions to the temple when Jews became Christians.

22:10 *What hath been appointed for thee.* This, with its perfect tense, implies the same idea as Gal. 1:15. But 9:6: "must do" (literally: is necessary) emphasizes personal choice and decision. The two ideas come together in 9:16. 26:13 *Above the brightness of the sun;* s.w. Is. 60:3. Note the relevance of this to Mt. 13:43.

26:16 *Minister.* New Testament usage always refers to an official. Then does this phrase mean "an official witness," i.e. an apostle?

26:17 *Delivering.* Gk: *exairomenos;* contrast v.10: *anairomenos.* In the context here, this was telling Festus and Agrippa: You will not be able to deliver me to death. A remarkable number of phrases relevant to the Lord's words and the conversion of Saul can be traced in Is. 42:6, 7, 13, 16, 19.

36. Saul's Baptism (9:9–18; 22:12–16)

Now the scene moves to the home of one of the brethren, called Ananias. He had been, and still was, a zealous observer of the Law. Probably for this reason he was in specially good standing with the Jews of Damascus, not only with the disciples but with all the rest (22:12). This fact surely implies that he was a long established citizen of Damascus.

Most probably the Lord's revelation to him concerning Saul came when, having heard by the Christian grape–vine of Saul's mission, he was praying that the Lord would protect his people from the impending onslaught. There is high witness to the quality of the character of Ananias in this personal appearing of the Lord Jesus to him. To whom else in the early church was this grace given? But how necessary this manifestation was in order to break through his sheer incredulity!

The reassurance given him in this theophany was appropriate enough: "I will show him how great things *he* must suffer for my name's sake."

Given a commission to go and find Saul, and restore his sight, Ananias demurred somewhat ingenuously: 'Lord, do you know what you are doing? Haven't you heard, as I have, what evil he has wrought among your followers in Jerusalem? And here he is bent on similar mischief, with the authority of the chief priests behind him!'

How did Ananias know that Saul had such high authority for his evil project? It is possible that the marvel seen on the Jerusalem road had set Saul's men talking. Another possibility, hinted at elsewhere in Acts, is that the Christians had sympathisers in high places, who leaked helpful items of information. Nor should it be forgotten that Saul was known to have taken his terror campaign to other cities before coming to Damascus.

"He prayeth"

This good man's horror at offering fellowship to the Wolf of Benjamin was set aside by a simple assurance: "Behold, he prayeth." This fact in itself laid an imperative, as it always does, on the Risen Lord. Something must be done for this contrite soul.

On the Day of Atonement, when the high priest went into the Holy of Holies, he was bidden wrap himself in a cloud of incense, "that he die not" in the presence of the Shekinah Glory (Lev. 16:12,13). Saul, as he pressed on to Damascus, had suddenly found himself face to face with the Lord of Glory, and he "a persecutor and injurious" – he brought no incense, but breathed only "threatening and slaughter." So he "died", with his face to the ground, his eyes now seeing only the darkness of the tomb.

But now: Ananias, go and lay your hand on him, and give him the Light of Life, for "behold, *he prayeth."* This was now his saving incense. That word "behold" might even mean that Ananias was given a vision of Saul fervently at prayer. His name, already shown to be susceptible of a sinister meaning can also be read as meaning: "one who is asking." The Lord's pregnant phrase: "Behold, he is praying" might imply: "Now, at last, he is praying." It would be natural enough for Saul, now fully convinced of the resurrection of Jesus and that he truly was Messiah, to spend a long time in black dark misery and hopelessness telling himself again and again: "Mine iniquity is greater than can be forgiven" (Gen. 4:13RVm) – this even in spite of the assurance he had heard that he was destined to be a matchless witness for Christ.

But now faith prevailed and he prayed for forgiveness as no man (except perhaps Peter) had ever prayed, and al ready the messenger of heaven was on his way to the street called Straight, which to this day still runs east and west through the city.

Straight Street

In "Innocents Abroad" Mark Twain tells how he and his party of tourists visited the city and concluded that "the street that is *called* Straight" is the only facetious remark in the Bible. "Straighter than a corkscrew, but not as straight as a rainbow."

Being no great Bible reader, Mark Twain could be expected to miss the point. This word "straight" was almost certainly meant in the idiomatic sense of "upright": "The street of honest business men." And of course Luke has included this relatively unimportant detail because of its ready Biblical associations; "the right ways of the Lord" (13:10), "make his path straight ... the crooked shall be made straight" (Lk. 3:4, 5).

The Lord Jesus also answered Saul's prayer by granting him to see in vision "a man named Ananias" coming to him, empowered to restore his sight. Since it is somewhat unlikely that in the vision Ananias was seen wearing a placard with his own name inscribed, it seems fair to infer that Saul was able to recognize him as Ananias; in which case the two men were already known to each other.

Ananias's mission

The incredulous astonishment of Ananias grew and grew as his Lord outlined the different destiny appointed for Saul. The heavenly Potter designed him as "a chosen vessel." Whereas he had seemed to the brethren to be fit only for reprobation, and therefore to be smashed (Lev. 11:33), he was in fact "a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use" (2 Tim. 2:21). Like an Old Testament prophet bringing "the burden of the Lord," he shall "bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel"–and indeed Paul's trials at which he told and re–told the story of his conversion did just that.

But bearing the burden of the Lord meant also suffering, as the bearing of the cross had meant for Jesus (9:15; Jn. 19:17 s.w.). He who had already brought such affliction into the lives of the Lord's people, both men and women, must know the same fiery trial in the cause of Christ: "I will shew him how great things he *must* suffer for my name's sake" (2 Cor. 11:25–28). The words refer to some future revelation (such as 22:17ff) given to Saul when he was fully ready for his work as a preacher of the gospel.

So, Ananias, marvelling, but with all misgivings set aside, went off to the house of Judas, that the enemy might receive his sight. The commission Saul was to fulfil on behalf of others applied to his own case first: "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light ... that they may receive the forgiveness of sins" (26:18).

Speaking to the stricken man in Hebrew, Ananias presented his credentials by showing that he knew (better than Saul's own friends) just what had happened on the road from Jerusalem. 'That Jesus has sent me to restore your sight, and to fill you with new power for his service.' It was manifestly true that Jesus had sent him, for otherwise why ever should he, a disciple, seek the company of the arch–persecutor?

In a few words, with a series of illuminating allusions to Isaiah's great Suffering Servant prophecy (see notes), Ananias outlined Saul's future work as a witness to all kinds of men, Jews and Gentiles alike, of what he had personally experienced concerning the risen Christ.

Sight restored

Then, laying his hands on him, and doubtless putting fingers on those sightless eyes, Ananias used the authority and power imparted to him, so that forthwith Saul's sight was restored: "there fell from his eyes *as it were* scales" – not that there was any kind of incrustation on those eyes, but physician Luke compares the transformation to healings he had known where men, bleary–eyed with infection, had found sight restored when dried sores were peeled off. To a disciple like Ananias, Saul the persecutor had appeared as loathsome as one of these,

but now there was normality and sight.

The guess has often been made that Paul continued to suffer from poor eyesight in later days, because he wrote to the Galatians: "ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and given them to me" (4:15). It is an unworthy inference, for it carries with it the preposterous implication that the Lord who could strike him blind in an instant could — or would! –only partially restore the sight he had taken away. Paul's reference more probably refers to his being struck in the eye when he was stoned at Lystra (14:19).

It seems a fair inference, though not certain, that the gift of the Holy Spirit (tongues? prophesying?) came on Saul at the same time as the gift of sight (cp. Mk. 16:18), that is, as with Cornelius and his household, before baptism (10:44).

All this happened in "the same hour" (22:13), and not forthwith, as soon as Ananias entered the house. So there is probably a hint here of time for Saul's personal outpouring of contrition and of new–born faith in Jesus of Nazareth; time also for Ananias to satisfy himself about the facts of Saul's conversion and his intentions for the future.

Baptism

Soon there came the splendid decisiveness of that ringing call: "And now, why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (22:16).

There is a remarkable and valuable implication about these words. As soon as that blinding light shone round him and the voice of Christ spoke to him, Saul knew the truth. In that moment he was instantaneously and fully converted to belief in Jesus as Messiah. Yet now, three days later, he was being urged to wash away his sins! Could there be any more decisive demonstration that for salvation a man needs not only conversion but also the open ineluctable sign of conversion. Not only must the Passover Lamb be slain and prepared, but also the blood of sacrifice must be openly displayed before God and men. Without any demur, Saul obeyed, "calling the name of the Lord upon himself"–this is, almost certainly, how the phrase should read (cp. Jas. 2:7RVm; 2 Sam. 12:28LXX). From this day forward he openly and proudly bore the name of Jesus of Nazareth. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" was his telling understatement of faith.

The imitation of Christ

The symbolism associated with the conversion of Saul has already been hinted at. Now it is appropriate to press this aspect of his experience a bit further.

It seems likely (see page 127) that the Lord's appearance to him happened about midday on a Friday. There he "died" and entered into darkness at about the very time that Jesus died on the cross. "Dead," he neither ate nor drank. Then, *on the third day,* his sight was restored – on the first day of the week, when Christ rose from the dead. This was the imperative of Ananias to him: "Arise *(anastas),* and be baptized."

The names involved are also significant. To the Jew Damesek would sound marvellously like "The Blood of the Messiah." And Ananias is, of course, "the grace of Jehovah." It was when recalling that wonderful change brought about in him by knowledge of the resurrection of Christ that Paul declared with deep feeling: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10), and here the last phrase may be intended as a deliberate echo of the name Jehovah.
On this first day of the week "he took food, and was strengthened." If this statement is given just its face value, it is so obvious and pointless as to be superfluous. Of course he ate food when he broke his fast, and of course he felt better for it. Did Luke have to take the trouble to tell his readers that? Then why mention it?

It was the first day of the week, when the disciples met to remember their Lord, and now Saul was with them, a brother in Christ. So the first meal he ate would be the Love Feast and its accompanying memorials of Christ. No wonder he was strengthened – *enischuo,* strengthened inwardly.

So what happened to Saul at Damascus was a typical imitation of the sufferings of Christ. It was a pattern which was to recur more than once in his experience as the years went by.

Notes: 9:10–19

11. *The house of Judas.* This Judas would, of course, be anti–Christian in attitude. Yet Ananias would have a good reception there, for he was of "good report of all the Jews" (22:12).
    Behold, he prayeth. The Law of Moses, which Saul had followed so assiduously all his days, nowhere commands prayer.
12. *In a vision.* Here, rather remarkably, is one vision inside another. There are two visions in 10:3,11.
13. *Thy saints.* The first New Testament occurrence of this term.
15. *Bear my name.* The cherubim chariot of the Lord? Ez. 1:20; Ps. 147:15; 2 Th. 3:1RV.
    Vessel. Rom. 9:21–23.
    Chosen. Jn. 15:19.
16. *My name.* Cp. also v. 15,21,27,28.
17. *Saul.* The Hebrew form of the name, as in v.4, but not v.1.
    Appeared unto thee. So this was told to Ananias in the course of his vision.
    Filled with the Holy Spirit. And again in 13:9. Cp. Peter's repeated experience; and cp. 2:4 (Jn. 20:22); 4:31.
18. *As it had been.* Cp: as it were, in Lk. 22:44.
    Scales. Gk: *lepides.* If this read *lepades,* limpets, there would be allusion to Ps. 58:8, to which (in LXX) Paul alludes in 1 Cor. 15:8. But there is a marked lack of textual support for *lepades.*
19. *Strengthened.* The same word comes only in Lk. 22:43. But here in Acts only two manuscripts have the verb in passive. So it is just as likely that it should read: "and he strengthened (them, the brethren)," by his witness and confession of faith.

22:12–16

14. This verse seems to be one long allusion to Isaiah 53, thus:

		Isaiah 53
know	11.	by his knowledge.
his will	10.	it pleased the Lord to bruise him.
the Just One	11.	my righteous servant.
Gentiles, kings. (9:15)	52:15.	many nations, kings.
the people of Israel	8.	the transgression of my people
hear	1 RVm.	that which we have heard.
the voice of his mouth.	7.	he opened not his mouth.

15. *All men; i.e.* all kinds of men; cp. "Studies in the Gospels", p.51.
16. *Calling on the name of the Lord.* This is Ps. 116:17. Note the appropriateness of v.12–19 to Saul's baptism, and to any other true baptism.

37. Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem (9:19b–31)

The phase of Saul's life immediately following his baptism is something of a headache to the commentators, especially to those who like to have their chronological framework nice and tidy. Certain phrases in this part of the record take some sorting out:

"Then was Saul *certain days* with the disciples" (9:19).

"After that *many days* were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him" (9:23).

"Neither went I up to Jerusalem ... but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus" (Gal. 1:17).

"Then after *three years* I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days" (Gal. 1:18).

Add to these Paul's own reminiscence of the Lord's appearance to him in the temple (22:17ff), and the problem as to whether it belongs to the first visit to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18) or later, and there are the makings of a nice chronological jigsaw puzzle.

One interpretation may be taken as fairly certain — that the "many days" (9:23) are the same as the "three years" (Gal. 1:18). Indeed, in 1 Kgs. 2:38, 39 the two expressions are used interchangeably. This is supported by the mention of "his (Saul's) disciples" (9:25RV), an expression which pre–supposes a fairly long period of preaching in Damascus, long enough for Saul to gather round him a fair number of converts.

A chronological doubt removed

The most uncertain point is just when to fit in the sojourn in Arabia, of uncertain duration. The Acts 9 narrative allows of it in the middle of v.19, at the end of v.19, or at the end of v.22; and some would even put it at the end of v.25.

There is a double hint, universally ignored, so far as one can tell, which points to the first of these solutions, namely, that it was *immediately* after his baptism that Saul went into Arabia.

The Galatians reminiscence has this: "When it pleased God ... to reveal his Son in me ... *immediately* I conferred not with flesh and blood ... but I went away into Arabia" (1:15–17). This sentence, stripped of its encumbering clauses, is seen to carry a very decisive "immediately." Also, "to reveal his Son *in me"* will soon be found specially significant in an almost literal sense. This unusual expression needs to be linked with another: "after that many days were *fulfilled"*– it is the word normally used to describe the fulfilment of prophecy or type; in this case, not the former, but, very beautifully, the latter, thus:

Baptism.
The wilderness of Arabia (for forty days?).
Return for three years of active preaching.
A Jewish plot against his life.
Escape.
Prayer in the temple (22:17).
The gospel going forth to the Gentiles.
Gentiles.

Already, then, for the second time, the experience of his Lord was being re–enacted in the life of this vigorous new disciple.

Arabia

It is readily understandable that immediately after his conversion Saul would want time to himself, in order to rethink his basic principles, to re–assess the meaning of so many

Scriptures which hitherto he had felt confident about, and to consider what was to be the pattern of his new life in Christ, and especially of his relations with his former rabbinic colleagues and with the Judaism which had always been the warp and woof of his life. Was he to be as vigorous a protagonist of the gospel as he had been of the tradition of the elders? Or, to save himself from ostracism by all the men of influence he had known hitherto, should he be content with a "low profile," a quiet life of winning influential friends for the Faith by dint of accommodating friendliness? This latter course would be a temptation. But had not the Lord plainly told him in the course of their blinding encounter that he was to be henceforth an apostle with a big and important mission?

In what part of Arabia this period of temptation and re–thinking took place is very uncertain. Many commentators lean strongly to the view that Saul went off to Sinai. Moses and Elijah each had their forty days there (and Jesus also?). And does not Paul himself refer to the Sinai region as Arabia (Gal. 4:24)? But from Damascus the double journey would be considerable. And if indeed this was the location of Saul's "retreat," why did he not call at Jerusalem en route? the fact is that he could have been in Arabian loneliness within a few miles of Damascus.

Preaching in Damascus

Back in Damascus, he lost no time in beginning there a vigorous mission to Jewry. It is surely unlikely that he made use of those letters from the high priests in order to reach the ear of packed synagogues. When it was known that he was discoursing, every Jew in the city would want to be present.

His main theme, naturally, was: Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah; he is the Son of God. This double idea, so basic to a right understanding of the Purpose of God, was first revealed in God's great Promise to David (2 Sam. 7:13,14), and trenchantly alluded to in David's prophetic psalms (2:6,7;89:26,27). It had been the ground of the condemnation of Jesus by the Sanhedrin: "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (Mt. 26:63). And to these illegal tactics he had replied with a clear–cut affirmative. Later, at Golgotha, these evil men, glad to think that their biggest worry was now a threat no longer, expressed their relief in an unrestrained and undignified mockery of his claim: "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross ... If he be the King of Israel ..." (Mt. 27:40,42).

For believers in his synagogue audience it must have been a great thrill to hear Saul handling the Scriptures in his already inimitable fashion. And what a contrast with his flogging of the brethren in the synagogues of Jerusalem and elsewhere!

Naturally many of the Damascus Jews were astounded at what they heard: "Is not this he that destroyed them which called his Name on themselves?"

Now they were incredulously asking: "Is Saul also among the prophets?", whilst the brethren were almost as incredulously thanking God that already, even before the advent of Messiah's kingdom, the Wolf dwelt with the Lamb. In this campaign Saul now came with letters from God's true High Priest, and he came breathing out liberty in Christ and the forgiveness of sins.

In all the disputation that ensued, "Saul increased the more in strength." The passive form of the Greek verb implies that strength was imparted to him, and this by means of Holy Spirit power, for the word nearly always has that particular usage in the New Testament. Thus, out of the eater came forth meat.

His mode of argumentation was that which became his normal practice. The word translated "proving" (9:22) means, more literally, "fitting together," like blocks of stone for a building, Saul's building blocks being Old Testament passages which became all the stronger for being fitted together (cp. Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:2,19; and contrast v.20: "proclaim," i.e. out of his own experience).

Hostility, Plotting

In reply to this increasingly powerful advocacy of the cause of Christ, the Jews marshalled their only alternative, the "logic" of violence, and now came the first of many such experiences when the apostle was "in peril from mine own countrymen" (2 Cor. 11:26); as he had schemed for Stephen's death, so now they for his.

The governor of Damascus, Aretas of Petra, being well disposed to the Jews (because of mutual hostility to the Herods), lent his men to guard the gates day and night against any possible flight by Saul.

The plot to take the apostle somehow became known, so his converts organized an escape. Some sympathetic home had a window in the city wall, and from this in the middle of the night Saul was let down in a large basket. Then, doubtless, someone accompanied him and steered his flight to safety. Did he, that night, ponder at all the resemblance of his experience to that of David on a grim night when Saul was the pursuer and not the fugitive? (1 Sam. 19:12; Ps. 59).

Throughout this episode, Saul seems to have been singularly passive — they "took him" and "let him down." He may have been a sick man at this time, and had to have everything done for him. This would explain why, years later, he referred to this experience as one of the most humiliating things to happen to him (2 Cor. 11:32, 33). Probably he was taken to the home of one of the brethren who lived outside the city confines, and when he felt fit for it, perhaps some nights later, the long journey to Jerusalem was begun.

Discouragement in Jerusalem

Back in the holy city, in the spirit of one of the Lord's parables (about taking "the lowest room;" Lk. 14:10), he made no attempt to seek out the apostles and present himself as an accredited addition to their company. Instead, he found some meeting of the brethren, and sought their fellowship, only to be rebuffed. What a dramatic irony there was about this situation! They had heard James the son of Zebedee exhort against giving undue respect to "a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel" (Jas. 2:2,3), and they read the words regularly in their copy of his exhortations.

But now here was the very man about whom those words had first been penned in the days when Saul the Pharisee was visiting their synagogue to learn more about the evil teaching of this sect of the Nazarenes; and since, to them, he was still Saul the persecuting monster, they shrank away from him in fear and would have nothing to do with him. This was the man who had vilely and callously dragged off brethren *and* sisters to prison, rough interrogation, hard treatment, and even death, who had plundered their homes and left behind him a trail of havoc and poverty. So of course this leopard had not changed his spots. Now he was feigning to be a convert just so that as a spy he could learn about their leaders, their perverted teaching, their hypocritical way of life, and their cunning secret organization. Convinced that this move heralded another reign of terror, they left him severely alone, and gave themselves to prayer against the tide of violence soon to swamp their lives.

Saul, dismayed and doubtless overwrought at the sore discouragement of this impasse, tried again and again (so the text implies) to convince the brethren that here was a different Saul, new–born in Christ, but he made no headway at all. If his story was true, why had he not brought a letter of recommendation from brother Ananias in Damascus? That purple story about frantic escape by night was obviously made up simply to cover his lack of credentials. The whole thing was too impossible. They may be babes in Christ, but they were not fools!

Barnabas to the rescue –

At last, desperate to resolve this frustrating situation and craving the comfort of fellowship at the Lord's Table, he sought out his former Sanhedrin colleague Barnabas. He had heard that this old friend of fine reputation, who as a rich young ruler had gone to Jesus willing to follow him in everything but open discipleship, was now a disciple after all and greatly esteemed

("Studies in the Gospels", ch.148).

How long did it take to convince Barnabas that that cock–and–bull Damascus story was literal truth? Barnabas had seen a miracle happen in his own person, so he was the more ready to believe the same about Saul.

The prestige of Barnabas now transformed the situation. He took Saul to Peter and James, the only apostles in Jerusalem at the time (Gal. 1:18, 19).Saul was evidently reluctant about this – was he so utterly discouraged by this time? – so the gentle kindly Barnabas had to take a strong line with him (so the text implies) to get his agreement to this move.

– and Peter

It worked, especially when big–hearted Peter made the fine gesture of saying: "Brother Saul, as long as you are in Jerusalem, you stay at my house!"

From that day Saul was accepted into the leadership of the ecclesia: "He was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem" (9:28). On this the Century Bible myopically says: "Observe the absence of all suggestion that the apostles did more than recognize Saul's brotherhood in Christ." This comment misses completely the force of the Biblical idiom for leadership and shepherding of the flock. Its first occurrence comes in Moses' plea that God would "set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd" (Num. 27:16, 17; see the notes for a list of other fine passages).

Hostility in Jerusalem

Now Saul settled down to a vigorous campaign which he doubtless hoped would convert Jerusalem into a city truly "Holy to the Lord." He began in Stephen's own synagogue with debates against the Grecian Jews, and soon found that the reaction to his Biblical reasoning was exactly the same as his had been in earlier days. So for a while he left Jerusalem in order to concentrate on further evangelism in the rest of Judaea, away from the bigotry of the capital (26:20).

But as soon as he appeared in Jerusalem again his traditionalist adversaries "went about (i.e. they set about scheming) to slay him."

However, the believers had some secret sympathizer with access to the counsels of power, and thus full details *(epiginosko)* were leaked to the brethren.

But Saul apparently was unwilling to recognize the wisdom of flight. He would wear down this prejudiced hostility by his assiduous attendance at temple services.

A further revelation

But it was in the temple where the decision was taken out of his hands. There, at the time of prayer, he again beheld the Lord of Glory, and heard a peremptory: "Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony" (what an under-statement!).

Saul remonstrated, even as Ananias had done, and about the same matter:

'Lord, they know my history; they know the vile ferocity with which I persecuted; they know how I had Stephen done to death. So, seeing the change in me, they are bound to listen."
But Jesus knew better.

'Away you go! Leave this stubborn unbelief, and take my gospel to the Gentiles – *they* will hear' (22:17–21).

That sharp imperative: "Make haste, and get thee quickly out," establishes that this vision, told by Saul in later days, was seen by him at the time suggested here. It is a kind of undesigned coincidence, explaining the untoward brevity of this Jerusalem visit.

Again, but for this revelation would not Saul have strongly resisted the efforts of the brethren to get him away to safety? It is easy to see that his natural reaction would be: "And if they do kill me, what does it matter? That is only what I deserve, that they should do tome what I did to Stephen!'

To Antioch and Tarsus

Yet instead of this insistence, he was utterly passive whilst the brethren organized his flight: "they *brought him* down to Caesarea, and *sent him forth* to Tarsus" (9:30).

According to his own account (Gal. 1:21) he went first to Syria – probably by coasting vessel to Antioch and the flourishing ecclesia there. Thence he went home to Tarsus, no doubt hoping to teach his new faith to his parents and family.

The indications are that this endeavour proved a bitter disappointment, for — years later — he was to speak of having "suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ" (Phil.3:8). If this loss was not disinheritance by a wealthy parent, what else might it have been? Ramsey has also suggested that Paul's remarkable double insistence (Col. 3:21; Eph. 6:4) that fathers provoke not their children to anger, lest they be discouraged, is an echo of a mighty family row which blew up when Saul went back home to Tarsus a disciple of the Nazarene.

Peace!

Meantime "the ecclesia (singular!) throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria had rest." No more persecution. The vulture was become a dove. All through this area the brethren who had known the searing hot wind of his implacable hostility could now relax. At first he had brought back to Jerusalem conflict of a different sort — bitter controversy in the synagogues and plots for his assassination. Saul was this kind of man. Whether champion of Law or Gospel he could not help but be the centre of vigorous activity and excitement. But now, he was gone away to his native Tarsus, and the brethren heaved sighs of relief. At last, peace!

But only for a while.

A Summary

It might be useful to bring together here an outline of the probable sequence of developments in Saul's experience at this time:

1. Damascus – "certain days" (9:19).
2. Arabia– forty days?
3. Damascus — three years (9:23; Gal. 1:18; cp. 1 Kgs. 2:38,39).
4. Flight.
5. At Jerusalem with Barnabas, Peter, and James (two weeks at Peter's house; Gal. 1:18).
6. Preaching in Judaea (26:20).
7. Back in Jerusalem. Vision in the temple (22:17ff).
8. Syria (Antioch), Cilicia (Tarsus)
9. Next visit to Jerusalem 14 years after his conversion (Gal. 2:1).

Notes: 9:19–31

21. *Said.* Gk. implied: 'they kept on saying, Is not this ...? Yes, it is!
    Destroyed. Gal. 1:13, 23 only. This word describes the sack of a city. So it was not an ill–conceived experiment in communism that brought the Judaean church to abject poverty, but the plundering campaign initiated by Saul. Hence his great eagerness later to make this good by the widespread collection in Gentile ecclesias for the Judaean poor. Note especially Gal. 2:10.
    Came. Gk. perfect tense might imply that he still had that secret intention. Suspicion everywhere! The change in him was just incredible.

22. *Confounded:* threw into confusion; s.w. 19:29,30; 21:31.
    Proving. 17:3 has a different word, implying a different method – setting Scripture and historical facts concerning Jesus side by side.
23. *The Jews.* This does not contradict 2 Cor. 11:32. Caligula, newly emperor, did some re–arranging of the rule of his eastern provinces. It is probable that giving Aretas authority in Damascus was one of these friendly gestures. The Jews acted with the connivance of Aretas.
25. Here some important MSS read: *his disciples;* i.e. converts made during his Damascus preaching.
    Basket. In 2 Cor. 11:33 a different word. But there is evidence that both were used to describe a large fish basket.
26. Assayed ... *afraid ... believed not.* These verbs are all continuous in form, emphasizing what happened time and again. For the idea of spying, see Gal. 2:4; there are many more passages besides this, but not quite so pointed.
28. *Coming in and going out.* Num.27:21;Dt.31:2;1 Sam. 18:13;2 Chr.1:10; Josh.14:11; Acts 1:21; Jn. 10:9; (finding not *nomos,* but nome) Ps. 121:8.
    In Jerusalem. More correctly: 'into', this suggests that Peter's present home was outside the city – at Bethany?
29. *To slay him.* This plot would put to sleep the last lingering suspicion about Saul.
30. *Caesarea.* So he probably stayed with Philip, Stephen's friend; 21:8.
31. *Then* should read *therefore,* that is, because the persecutor was now converted.
    Judaea, Samaria, Galilee. Judaean Jews despised the Galileans, and Galileans the Samaritans. Yet in Christ these were all one ecclesia.
    Walking. Halachah; not according to the traditions of the rabbis, but in the fear of the Lord and according to the Sermon on the Mount.
    Edified. Gk. they were upbuilt, as a house. It is a favourite word in Paul's epistles.

38. Aeneas, Dorcas (9:32–43)

The spotlight now switches, for three chapters, from Saul to Peter. As though preparing the way for the conversion of the first Gentile, Luke tells of two remarkable miracles wrought by the Holy Spirit through Peter.

The apostle was evidently doing a tour of inspection to satisfy himself that all was well with the communities of believers in western Judaea. More than half–way to the coast he came to Lydda. The brethren there were interested in a man, apparently not a disciple, who had suffered paralysis in his legs for eight years — ever since the crucifixion. Very probably Aeneas was a Gentile, for there was no better–known Greek name.

A Christ miracle

Peter remembered how on a number of occasions his Lord had shown a kindly interest in Gentiles, so he addressed the sufferer with stirring words of comfort.

"Aeneas, Jesus Christ healeth thee; arise, and make thy bed."

And instead of retorting with some resentful rejoinder, the man believed, made the effort, and with delight found that he was able to do as he was bidden. For the first time in eight years he stood on his own two feet.

How long after that did he remain a Gentile?

Word about that miracle went through Lydda and all that part of the Sharon plain like a prairie fire, and *all* the people (this must mean with very few exceptions) turned to faith in Christ. It was a massive and almost instantaneous conversion. Yet the entire story takes less than four verses.

Another Gentile "disciple"

Nine miles away at Joppa (Jaffa) on the coast there was intense sorrow in the ecclesia at the loss of a deeply–valued friend. Amongst the sisters in the ecclesias she was known by her Aramaic name Tabitha (derived from a Hebrew word meaning "beauty" and also "roe deer"); but she was equally well–known by the Greek equivalent of that: Dorcas, which also means "roe — or gazelle," being derived from a Greek word describing the large lustrous eyes of those timid creatures. Probably Dorcas was herself well–equipped in that respect!

As will be seen by and by, there are certain hints suggesting that, even though the word "disciple" is used with reference to her, she was probably not baptized into Christ but a kind of proselyte—of—the—gate, standing in the same relation to the ecclesia that Cornelius, as a proselyte—of—the—gate, did to Jewry.

She was a woman of exceptional kindness and endowed with a remarkable flair for needlework and all kinds of "dressmaking." The widows of the ecclesia specially lamented her, for her generosity had been their life–line and her gifts of beautiful garments a great joy and comfort to their old age. No doubt they had often quoted the encomiums of Proverbs 31 with reference to her.

But now she was taken from them. Within three days — so Jewish custom demanded — she must be interred. But the news of the healing of Aeneas at Lydda brought hope. Making all haste two of the Joppa brethren came to Peter, earnestly requiring him to come with them, and that without delay. But there is no word of expectation of a mighty miracle. The apostle made no demur. He came forthwith.

Arrived at the house, he was taken to the upper chamber where the dead woman lay. There widows forlornly filled the room with their lamentations as they displayed in their own persons (Gk.) the loveliness of the garments wrought by the kindness and patient skill of their dead

friend.

Peter acted decisively. Quietly but firmly he ushered everyone out of the room; and then, turning away from the corpse he prayed that the power of the Holy Spirit might cope with the present need of the stricken sisters.

Then, with a loud clear command which must have been heard downstairs, he bade Tabitha arise.

She did, but not immediately. First she opened her eyes and looked about her. Then, seeing Peter, she sat up. He promptly held out a hand, and helped her to her feet, at the same moment calling those whom he had just sent downstairs. It was only old age that prevented a stampede on that staircase. Within seconds there was such a reunion as they had never thought possible.

Again the word of the miracle travelled all through the town. Everyone marvelled, and a great proportion of the people believed.

Miracles with meaning

Luke's account of these marvels is fascinating in itself. Yet the reflective student cannot help but suspect that in inserting these brief but attractive episodes he had some other purpose than to impress the reader.

The palsied man who was bidden make his bed brings to mind one of the best–known and most obviously symbolic miracles of the Lord Jesus. On that occasion the palsied man, so readily identified with the spiritually–helpless Gentile could only be healed when brought to Christ through the aid of four fine friends. To get within range of the Lord's healing power he must be brought into the synagogue, to the Law of Moses, even if it meant breaking up the synagogue (see "Studies in the Gospels", chapter 34). But once healed, he could leave the synagogue and the Law, a new man, with sins forgiven and the power to master what had been his dominating weakness.

From this point of view Peter's miracle was a most fitting foreshadowing of the conversion of Cornelius.

Even more fitting was the story of the restoration of Dorcas. But first, the evidence must be considered that she should be seen not as a Jewess already converted to faith in Christ, but as a Gentile sympathizing strongly with these Nazarenes, yet unable to join the movement because the Jewish believers were not yet ready to grant to Gentiles the fellowship of their Faith:

1. It is known that Livia, the wife of Caesar Augustus, had in her retinue a woman called Dorcas who was famous for the superb quality of her needlework. If she were a different Dorcas from the one restored by Peter, the coincidence is very striking. The dating allows of her being now somewhat older and retired from royal service.
2. The emphasis on her being "full of good works and almsdeeds," in sharp contrast with Christian justification by faith, is appropriate; for in what better way could she show her intense sympathy with a movement which, as yet, she was forbidden to join?
3. When restored, "she opened her eyes." It is the very phrase used by Jesus to describe the coming enlightenment of the Gentiles (26:18).
4. "Not delay to come" means, more precisely, "Do not hesitate or scruple to come" – a very appropriate phrase if Dorcas was only a Gentile sympathizer.
5. The close similarity to the raising of the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue can hardly be accident. Luke has clearly framed his account to make the connection obvious';

    a. A much–lamented death.
    b. An appeal to the man of God to come and help.
    c. The need for haste.
    d. They are all put forth from the chamber.

e. "Taking her by the hand, he said unto her:
f. "Talitha (Tabitha), kumi (arise)."
g. Both Talitha and Tabitha are interpreted in the narrative (Mk. 5:41).
h. "She arose" – "He raised her up."
i. This girl, although close to the synagogue, was not as yet (at the age of twelve) admitted to synagogue fellowship.

A continuation of this parallel is suggested.

Thus, once again, there is here a superbly appropriate introduction to the Cornelius story. With what artistry Luke has put his history together!

Nor is this all.

Peter's gesture

"It came to pass that Peter tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner."

But the tanner's trade, with its constant inevitable contact with unclean animals and defiling carcases, was an occupation abhorrent to strict Jews. The rabbis laid it down that if a tanner married without mentioning his trade, his wife could divorce him. If the brother–in–law of a childless widow was a tanner, then the duty of levirate marriage could be set aside. A tanner's yard must be at least fifty cubits distance outside a town, and even further off if on the western side.

Yet, Peter, who must have had many a home in Joppa eager to receive him, lodged at Simon's house. It was a gesture, surely, to show where his growing understanding of the gospel was leading him.

Notes: 9:32–43

32. *Throughout all quarters* (note the italics) could read: "through all the ecclesias;" cp. Gk. in 20:25; Rom. 15:28.
33. *Eight years.* Professionally Luke mentions the duration of the disease; cp. 3:2; 4:22; 14:8; Lk.13:11. Eight is the number of resurrection and the New Creation; 1 Cor. 12:29–31; Jn. 20:26; Gen. 7:13; Jesus = 888; v.34: "arose" (Gk.).
34. *He arose,* thus making the cure beyond doubt.
35. Could read: "all that dwelt ... who had turned to the Lord, saw him."
    Sharon intended perhaps to echo: "the excellency of Carmel (Caesarea) and Sharon, they shall see the excellency of the Lord ... Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees" (Is. 35:2, 3).
36. Note that, wealthy enough to give alms, she was not content with that, but filled her life with good works also.
39. *Widows are* mentioned no less than twelve times in the writings of Luke.
    The phrase "saints and widows" (v.41) might well imply that these widows were a special group supported by the ecclesia; 1 Tim. 5:9.
43. *Simon a tanner.* Rom. 12:16.

39. Cornelius (10:1–8)

Caesarea was a fine modern city. It had been built in the best Roman style by Herod the Great to the honour of Augustus Caesar. And to this day Caesarea is still intensely Roman. The time was now ripe for it to be the scene of a unique caesarian birth, with Peter chosen to fill the role of mid–wife.

For among its inhabitants Caesarea counted a Roman soldier of quite extraordinary spiritual qualities, and him the Lord would have as the first Gentile convert to the Faith.

Cornelius — his name might well signify that he was a freed slave of a famous Roman family – was a relatively unimportant officer in the army, with status perhaps equivalent to that of a modern lieutenant. His unit was the Italian band which was made up of Roman volunteers, men who were more interested in the army as a way of life than as a livelihood.

What a character!

Luke evidently had a great admiration for Cornelius, for there are few characters sketched by him in such explicit and approving fashion.

He was "a devout man, one that feared God." Shunning the crudities of contemporary idolatry, like many of the better educated and spiritually minded Gentiles, he had been glad to learn the much more satisfying faith of Judaism. But, like most such, he was content to go only so far in his acceptance of the Jewish way of life. Not for him the rite of circumcision or the complicated pattern of punctilious rabbinic rules and regulations covering every detail of an outwardly sanctified life. So he was content to be a "God–fearer," "a proselyte of the gate," a respectful camp–follower of the Jewish religion who, with wise instinct, concentrated on inner sanctification. True, "he gave much alms to the people (of Israel)," dealing his bread to the hungry, caring for the poor that were cast out, and providing garments for the naked (Is. 58:7), needy Jews reaping his carnal things– his token of gratitude that they had sown to him their spiritual blessings (1 Cor. 9:11).

But, more than this, "he prayed to God alway." Devotion to God was, with him, a normal pattern of life, even though hitherto there had been no outward token that his prayers were heard. In these religious practices he must have been quite exceptional, for he was "of good report among *all* the nation of the Jews." What kind of a man was this Gentile, to be spoken of with appreciation, or even admiration, throughout Judaea?

Specially impressive are the indications that, as with Abraham (Gen. 18:19), his pious way of life was readily taken up by the soldiers and servants of his household – "he feared God *with all his house"* (v.22). And evidently also "his kinsmen and near friends" (v.24) were influenced by his fine example.

There was nothing of Roman hauteur about him, for he talked confidentially and on equal terms with his servants (v.7, 8), and when at last Peter came to his home, he prostrated himself in worship before him (v.25).

Continuing military service?

But the main problem concerning Cornelius is this: How could even such a man come to a true and full faith in Christ whilst committed to being a legionary? How can a man be an officer in the British army and also a fully–committed disciple of the Lord? Clearly, the answer is: He couldn't. He can't.

There are one or two small indications that Cornelius had himself already provided this kind of answer, and had retired from military service. He lived in his own house, not in quarters; he had

round him household servants and devout soldiers, and many kinsmen and friends (v.7, 24, 30). This is not the picture of a man living the rootless life of a serving officer.

Indeed, it must have been obvious to Cornelius that his faith in the God of Israel made him into a kind of Naaman who, until he was away from the service, would feel the need to seek forgiveness for his seeming idolatry; for worship of the emperor as a god and formal reverence to the pagan symbols in the legion's standards were a normal and unavoidable part of a Roman soldier's routine. So it may be taken as fairly certain that a man as dedicated as Cornelius already was, would be forced out of active service by the strength of his convictions.

Earlier contact with Jesus?

Very tentatively, it may be possible to trace the earlier history of this worthy man further back still.

The gospels give prominence to two Roman centurions sympathetic to the cause of Christ. There was the one whose afflicted servant Jesus healed in Galilee (Lk. 7:2), the synagogue builder who would not have Jesus sacrifice his reputation throughout Jewry by coming under a Roman roof. And there was the centurion who was on duty at the crucifixion.

Elsewhere ("Studies in the Gospels," number 225), it has been shown that there is good reason to believe that the latter of these two (who may also have been the former, chosen for Passover duty at Jerusalem because of his known Jewish sympathies?), came to faith in Christ through his experiences that day and at the tomb of the Lord. Certainly nothing could be more appropriate than that the last hours of Jesus would begin the conversion of the firstfruits of the Gentiles.

The considerable hindrances which Judaism set between an eager Gentile and the gospel were so formidable that it required special divine directives to both Cornelius and Peter before the barriers went down.

The vision

Cornelius was not only praying but also fasting to the Lord (v.30; was he observing in his own way the Day of Atonement?) when an angel of glory – "a man in bright clothing" (v.30) – appeared to him, addressing him by name as though he already belonged to the Israel of God: "O Jacob, fear not ... I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine" (Is. 43:1).

But Cornelius did fear. He, an experienced Roman soldier used to danger, was "affrighted" (RV), for this was no trance or vision but an openly manifest appearance, a reality.

"Sir, what is it?" he asked in awe, meaning not "Who are you?" but "What is your message?"

The message was first, reassurance, and then a positive directive. Cornelius had doubtless prayed: "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice" (Ps. 141:2). It was just then the time of the evening sacrifice, "the ninth hour." And the angel of the Lord replied appropriately: "Thy prayers and thine alms are *come up* for a *memorial before God."* Three separate phrases here use the language of sacrifice, the word "memorial" especially referring to the frankincense which sanctified a meal offering of good works in the temple (Lev. 2:2; 24:7).

Next came the encouraging instruction: 'Send men – now! – to Joppa, and bid them fetch to your house Simon Peter who is lodging outside the town, close by the sea, with Simon the tanner. When he comes, he will tell you what is *necessary* (Gk.) for you to do, what you need to do to be saved' (11:14). The plain implication of these words is that in spite of all his sincerity and godly life Cornelius was not yet in the way of salvation! It will be seen later that all

Peter added to his present understanding and pious living were Baptism (v.48) and the Breaking of Bread (11:3).

Then if the thing were so urgent and important, why should not Cornelius go in person to where Simon Peter was? Because there were others to be considered besides himself — his soldier–servants, his household, his kinsmen and friends (v.2, 24, 33).

Prompt action

So without a moment's delay — the angel was scarcely gone from his presence (so Gk.)– Cornelius summoned two servants and a soldier and proceeded to tell them in detail about this angelic appearance. Normally "the servant knoweth not what his master doeth." But these did. Then what sort of master–servant relationship was this? And what kind of a master was Cornelius?

It was already mid–afternoon, but nevertheless Cornelius bade his men make immediate departure so that, lodging overnight on the way, they might complete their thirty–mile journey in good time next day. In remarkably quick time they were on the road, as eager as their master. And since by noon next day – only eight hours of daylight – they had covered the thirty miles to Caesarea, they must surely have done some of their journey by moonlight.

Notes: 10:1–8

1. *Caesarea.* It is surely probable that the groundwork of preparation of Cornelius and his friends was done by Philip; 8:40; 21:8.
   The Italian band. Nothing else is known about this military unit except that it was on duty in Syria in A.D.69.
2. G*ave alms... prayed.* Also, he fasted (v.30). These three aspects of godliness come together in. Mt. 6:1–18.
3. *In a vision.* But it was real enough; v.30.
   Evidently means 'an open divine manifestation, a Phanerosis.'
   The ninth hour. He evidently observed the Jewish hours of prayer. This, and mention of "the people" to describe the Jewish nation, suggests that he was already a half–Jew. Is it just coincidence that the ninth, sixth (v.9), and third (2:15) hours are carefully specified in connection with important preaching and also in Mt. 20:3, 5? Luke (Samaritan; ch. 110) appears to use Jewish time, not Roman; 23:23; Lk. 23:44.
   D N D N D N
   A B C E
   D = Day; N = Night.
   A = Cornedius's vision.
   B = Arrival of messengers in Joppa
   C = Beginning of return journey.
   E = Arrival at Caesarea.
6. *Simon, a tanner;* according to Mt. 10:11. How this incident emphasizes that there was no pride in either Peter or Cornelius.

40. Peter's Vision (10:9–16)

The day after Cornelius's men left Caesarea for Joppa, Peter at the home of Simon the tanner was observing an extended Day of Atonement fast as a way of proclaiming before God that the problem on his mind, of whether the gospel should be taken to Gentiles as well as Jews (and if so how), was a most urgent responsibility regarding which he was sorely in need of guidance.

A major fellowship problem

The issue had doubtless already been raised with him by Saul during those two weeks of fellowship together in Jerusalem (9:35). Had not the Lord Jesus worked no less than three very significant miracles in all of which suppliant Gentiles had been healed?–but every one of them *at a distance.* Then what could this mean for the apostles now continuing the work? When the Lord had said: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me... unto the uttermost part of the earth" (1:8), had he merely meant the furthest corners of the Land of Israel (since the same word means both "earth" and "land")? or the Jews scattered to every province of the empire? or Gentiles everywhere without exception or distinction?

Then, too, there was the highly explosive issue which would inevitably arise if Gentiles were accepted into the Faith: Were they all to meet together in social and religious fellowship? Since even believing Jews were so completely wedded to their religious food laws and all the additional procedural scruples insisted on by the rabbis, how could Jews and Gentiles possibly mix together?

It was a headache of no small dimensions, and Peter knew he must pray and Pray again about it. So at noon, in accordance with the faithful pattern followed by the patriarch David (Ps. 55:17) and the beloved prophet Daniel (6:10) and the Lord Jesus himself on the day of his crucifixion, the time of prayer was not neglected.

The text almost seems to imply that from the rooftop Peter saw the approaching deputation in the distance, without – of course – realising that they were of special interest to himself. Even so it was with divided attention that Peter knelt to give himself to importunity regarding this obsessive issue, for now his well–built frame clamoured for food – "he would have eaten," literally, "he wanted to taste (food);" he'd be glad of a snack. But no! first things first. And he gave himself to prayer.

On the housetop (Lk.5:19) how was he to let down the eager Gentile into the presence of the healing Christ? Only by breaking up the synagogue and interrupting the authority of the Law taught there. (See "Studies in the Gospels", cp.34).

Did he express his problem and his aspiration in the words of one of his favourite psalms (1 Pet. 3:10ff)?

"O magnify the Lord with me, and *let us exalt his name together.* I sought the Lord, and he heard me ... They (the believing Gentiles?) looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were, not ashamed ... The *angel of the Lord* encampeth round about *them that fear him,* and delivereth them. O *taste* and see that the Lord is good: Blessed (forgiven) is the man that trusteth (has faith) in him ... The young lions (of Judah) do lack and *suffer hunger:* but they (the Gentile believers) that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Ps. 34:3–11).

Peter's lesson

Thus occupied, Peter "fell into a trance"–the phrase emphasizes a special divine revelation – and in his vision he saw a great linen sheet, a mainsail (s.w.27:40), being lowered from heaven. Well might this new divine instruction take such a form, for was not Peter a fisherman, and had he not, from the roof of that house close by the seashore, seen ships disappearing over the horizon? and had he not wondered uneasily whether he ought not to be

in one of them, taking the message of salvation to ignorant Gentiles far away? It was from Joppa that Jonah had sought to evade *his* duty to take the will of Jehovah to the benighted Assyrians of his day. Was Joppa now to see a like dereliction of duty in Simon, son of Jonah? (Jonah 1 .2, 3; 3:2, 3; 4:11).

In his vision Peter saw that that impressive mainsail was held at its four corners by four angels (of the camp of Israel?). And as they lowered it yet further, he stared in amazement at the indescribable conglomeration of living creatures assembled there — every beast, wild and tame, large and small; *every* bird in creation; *every* creeping thing, even including serpents.

One of the angels spoke with authority: 'Rise from your knees, Peter, you are hungry; then kill one of these for sacrifice, and when you have offered to the Lord, cook and eat it as a peace–offering.'

But the mere sight of that medley of creatures brought all Peter's innate Jewish prejudices strongly to the fore:

'Not one of them, sir! God forbid! I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.' Most of them were "common" because forbidden by the Law of Moses. The others, which were not proscribed by the Law, were made "unclean" through their contact with the rest. Peter's instinctive and wrong reaction was a declaration of "block disfellowship." 'None of them are fit for me, because even the clean are contaminated by their associations.' Since the apostle's day many another has made the same blatant error.

How like Peter to be yet again correcting the will of his Master (Mt. 16:22; Jn. 13:8); and just as impulsively as ever, too, for was it not obvious that every *clean* animal was there in the great sheet, along with all the rest? But he must needs speak his emphatic blanket refusal. The prophet Ezekiel, faced with a similar divine dictum, had reacted in exactly the same way. Indeed Peter had echoed his very words (so Ez. 4:14LXX).

The angel spoke again, more sharply this time:

"What God hath cleansed, do not go on calling common," the implication clearly being that if there is here nothing "common" there is certainly nothing "unclean."

Yet still Peter could not bring himself to master his lifetime's prejudices.

So the invitation and the warning were repeated no less than three times more, by each of the other angels in turn. Yet still Peter did not bestir himself to do as he was bidden. Even heaven's invitation to "kill in sacrifice" (Gk.) showed that God was willing to accept *any* of those creatures as an offering. Yet here was a servant who was set on being greater than his Lord! Did Peter actually refuse four times? When Pharaoh's dream was, in effect, given to him *twice,* the reason was "because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass" (Gen. 41:32). Then what was Peter to learn from a fourfold imperative?

The vision concluded, the apostle needed but little time to ruminate on the meaning of his experience. Had not his Lord said?: "They shall come from the east, and the west, and from the north, and the south (the four corners of that great sheet), and shall sit down in the kingdom of God" (Lk. 13:29).

But how could Jew and Gentile possibly have fellowship together in Christ, since the Gentile way of life was so abhorrent to every Jew, especially regarding food and eating together. Any attempt at a universal, truly catholic, church would surely be split down the middle from the very start. How was this spiritual impasse to be resolved?

The problem resolved

Years before Cornelius came on the Christian scene, the Lord Jesus had anticipated the problem and had spoken clearly regarding it: "There is *nothing* from without a man, that, entering into him, can defile him" (Mk. 7:15). "This he said, making all meats clean" (7:19RV). Here was an explicit ruling that, although the Mosaic food laws had much to teach, they must no longer be insisted on. In other words, the Jewish believer, and not the Gentile, must be ready to make the big concessions in religious practice. The supreme doctrine of the One Body must sweep lesser considerations out of the way.

On this issue the apostle Paul was to show himself kindly and considerate, yet at the same time most firm in his ruling and his practical counsel: "Every creature of God is good, and *nothing to be refused,* if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God (to Peter) and prayer (of thanks at the meal–table)" (1 Tim. 4:4,5).

Yet in matters of this sort, there must be a large–hearted spirit of tolerance of a differing point of view. This issue – what to eat and what not to eat, who to eat with and who not to eat with – must now be regarded as a matter of lesser importance. Fellowship in Christ must always have top priority. So Paul, out of the wisdom given unto him, was able to write (in the face of his own innate Pharisaic prejudices.):

"He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks... *I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself;* but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean... The kingdom of God is not meat and drink ... All things are indeed clean; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence (i.e. causing another to stumble)" (Rom. 14:6, 14, 17, 20).

The language of Peter's vision is shot through with the same basic principles, not so explicitly expressed. In the great sheet "were from the beginning (Gk: *huparcho)* all fourfooted beasts..." The allusion is to man's mandate of domination over *all* creatures, and to the fact that "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:26, 31).

Again, the heavenly voice said:

"What God cleansed" – Greek aorist, with reference to something already accomplished in past time, not just when the words were spoken. Accomplished when? At, and by, the death of Christ — when else? and thus Jews and Gentiles were brought together into One Body, "both reconciled unto God in one body by the cross" (Eph. 2:16).

But how was Peter to know without any shadow of doubt that this was a divine revelation that had come to him, and not just an ordinary dream? There was, of course, the character of the vision itself. But what clinched it was the superb coincidence, that at that moment, "Behold, three men seek thee," asking aid on behalf of a godly Gentile who himself has seen an angelic vision.

So that meal which Peter had so hungrily awaited was now shared with three Gentile strangers. The barriers were down already.

Notes: 10:9–16

10. *Very hungry.* The prefix in *prospeinos* is emphatic.
    Fell into a trance. "Fell" is the same word as in 8:16. "Trance" is not the same as "vision" in v.3. The angel seen by Cornelius was real enough. The sheet and living creatures seen by Peter were not.
11. *Sheet.* The word implies linen; now see Rev. 19:8.
    Four corners. There is not much point in supplying such a detail as this. But *archai* can also mean "angels", as in Rom. 8:38; for more details, see "Principalities and Powers," by H.A.W. "Held by four angels" makes better sense of the Greek, and also explains the repeated instruction to Peter.

12. For the symbolism of this verse, cp. Gen. 1:26; Ps. 8:4–8; Is. 11:6–10; Hos. 2:18. Is it strange that there are four such passages. Gk: *huparcho* might imply God's Gentile purpose from the beginning (Mt. 28:19). And how remarkable that the heavenly vision did not contrive to include fishes. Was this because Peter had been once for all called away from his fishing (Jn. 20; "He is risen indeed," ch.17)? Or for some other reason?
14. *Not so, Lord.* Other examples of men demurring from the will of God: 22:19, 20; Ex. 4:13; Dt. 3:26.
    I have never eaten. But he had lived many days in the environment of the uncleanness of a tannery; 9:43.
15. *Cleansed... common.* All men are one or the other. There is no middle ground.
16. *Into heaven.* 'So, Peter, God accepts these creatures whether you do or not!'

41. Peter comes to Cornelius (10:17–33)

With the angelic voice still ringing in his ears: "What God hath cleansed ...;" Peter came to, deeply perplexed about what he had seen and heard. There was no doubt in his mind that the vision carried some profound meaning. But what? Was it intended to be about food or about people? Was it intended to teach him that the Mosaic food laws, and all the trivia the rabbis had tacked on to them, were now of no consequence? Or was he to infer that unclean Gentiles were not unclean before God?–the gospel was for them also? To be sure, the two problems necessarily went hand in hand, for how could Gentiles share fellowship in Christ except believers shared the holy meal, the Love Feast, together? It was difficult to believe that many Jewish brethren would be ready for such a revolutionary move. With strong memories of his Lord's friendliness towards believing Gentiles, Peter himself was almost ready for the big step forward. And he felt sure that Saul of Tarsus was. But who else? It was a most difficult problem. He began to see that his vision showed the answer. But would the telling of it convince his bigoted brethren also?

The messengers

Whilst Peter pondered conclusions and policies, the messengers sent by Cornelius arrived. They had been asking their way through the town: 'Where is the house of Simon the tanner?' and everybody knew that it must be Simon the fisherman they really wanted, for was he not the most talked–of man in Joppa these days?

Now they were at the gate, calling out, repeatedly: 'Is this where Simon Peter lodges?'

Even as Peter heard them, he heard also another voice; it was the voice he had heard in his vision: "Behold, three men seek thee. Arise, therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them."

There at the gate they told their story, and were promptly brought in and given hospitality. Just as Abraham's steward, sent to find a worthy wife for Isaac, found his problem and his prayer and the proper person all meeting together at the same time and place (Gen. 24:21), so also Peter. Now he was completely convinced, and knew just what he should do.

It is noteworthy that this part of the narrative seems to be specially tailored to impress Judaist readers with the dramatic change in attitude now taking place. There were no scruples now about sharing a meal with these visitors –"then called he them in, and lodged them"–and once he had heard their story in fuller detail (about their *Gentile* master *fasting* and *praying!),* he doubted nothing as to the duty that lay before him. And the angelic instruction to Cornelius had been to send for Peter to come "into his house."

The Judaist brethren

But the real headache was how to convince his Jewish brethren who were far from being ready for such a drastic upheaval in their religious ideas. So the rest of that day was taken up with calling together as many of the brethren as possible and getting their agreement that at least Cornelius be visited by Peter in accordance with the two–fold angelic revelation.

But Peter foresaw difficulties if he made this new move on his own. So at last six of the brethren (11:12), "they of the circumcision," agreed to accompany him next day. That phrase: "they of the circumcision," used before ever acceptance of Gentile converts became a burning issue, seems to imply that already the mere anticipation of the problem had divided the church into two groups, pro and con. This doubtless was why so many years had been allowed to slip by without any Gentile missionary work being attempted.

The journey

Next day the party of ten men set off for Caesarea. Did those brethren reflect on the "coincidence" that in Jewry it has always needed ten men to make up a synagogue? During that journey of nearly two days progress was markedly slower than Cornelius's three servants had made. However it gave opportunity at mealtimes and overnight lodging for those Jewish brethren to face up afresh to the challenge to faith and insight awaiting them in Caesarea.

Nearing the city, one of the servants went on ahead (so Bezan text) to alert Cornelius, so as to allow time for the centurion to assemble a house full of kinsfolk and friends, Gentiles all of them.

By its awkward phraseology the Greek text seems to imply some sort of hold–up before the travellers entered the house. Were "they of the circumcision" having last–minute misgivings as to whether they ought to do anything so radical as entering the home of a Roman soldier? Peter was careful to say: "/(not *we)* came without gainsaying." Apart from all considerations of principle, the social consequences for each of these Jewish brethren could be considerable (cp. Jn. 18:28; Gal. 2:12). According to rabbinic precept, their action was "unlawful" (v.28).

Peter and Cornelius meet

Was it the way in which Cornelius came out to meet them, and his winning humility in worshipping at Peter's feet, which won their assent?

Peter brusquely rejected this veneration. He lifted Cornelius to his feet. 'No more of this,' he said, 'I am no angel, but a mortal man like yourself.' That emphasis was intended for his Jewish brethren as well as for Cornelius.

Rather ingenuously the centurion insisted on explaining in great detail why he had sent for the apostle, even though Peter had already heard it several times from the servants. But the details would surely impress Peter's colleagues–fasting, prayer, an angel, "thy prayer (for help to salvation) was heard," "thine alms remembered before God", "now we are all here present *before God."*

The apostle, on his part, explained how his natural Jewish prejudices had been forever trust aside by the repeated imperatives of the revelation he had received.

When the travellers felt ready for the encounter, they were brought into a room full of expectant friends whom Cornelius had brought together. A strange situation, truly! – an assembly of Romans, the master race, all waiting eagerly for instruction from a Galilean fisherman! And before Peter could utter a word he was assured that whatever he said would be received as an inspiration from God.

The narrative puts a remarkable repeated emphasis on Peter's message–"he shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved" (11:14; cp. 10:6, 22, 29 Gk., 32, 33). Yet, as will be seen the apostle told them only what they already knew (v.37). The only additional instruction was a command to be baptized (v.48).

Notes: 10:17–33

17. *Doubted in himself.* Jn. 13:7 is relevant. RV: "much perplexed" is a good translation; Gk: *di–aporeo*–the prefix is intensive.
    Behold. The word emphasizes how the coincidence of this vision with the arrival of the visitors, telling about another vision, brought complete conviction in Peter's mind.
19. *The Spirit.* The angel of v.3 and v.13: "for I have sent them" (v.20). Cp. 8:26,39.
    Three men. Two servants and a common soldier are dignified by the word *andres* – because of their piety and their errand.
20. *Doubting nothing.* In passive or middle, this verb means "doubt;" but in active (as in 11:12) it means "making a distinction." Was Peter trying to find reasons for evading the logical conclusion of his vision?
    With them. Gk: *sun,* not *meta.* And so also in v.27.

21. *Cause.* Normally this Gk. word describes a point of legal argument. Here, a religious question — or did Peter think the Roman soldier was here to arrest him?
22. *Of good report among all... the Jews.* Surely this is only to be explained by Lk. 7:5.
    Warned by God. Every occurrence of this interesting Greek word describes a divine revelation.
24. Wear *friends.* The adjective means "necessary." Those whom Cornelius couldn't bring himself to leave out, or those who refused to be left out?
25. *Coming in;* that is, into the house. In v.27, into the room where all were assembled.
26. *Took him up.* Was Cornelius elderly? The wordy and repetitious character of v.30–33 might imply that he was an old man. But see v.25 in Codex Beza.
    I myself also am a man. Why doesn't the pope – Peter's successor? – say the same thing, and make a like refusal?
    Today also in the ecclesias there must be no veneration of man by man (Rev. 19:10; 22:9; contrast Rev. 1:17).
28. *An unlawful thing.* Edersheim illustrates the tension here by mentioning that if a Gentile invited to a meal in a Jewish house were left alone in the room, then all the food in it was to be regarded as unclean.
    Another nation. Contrast this mild expression with the loaded phrase in 11:3: "men uncircumcised."
    But God... The conjunction is really "and,". It implies: "and (when I insisted on this)..."
31. *Thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.* It was surely rather ingenuous of Cornelius to mention this.
33. *Thou hast well done.* An idiomatic way of saying: 'Thanks for coming;' cp. Phil. 4:14. What other Jew besides Peter would have done this?
    Present before God. Cornelius has his priorities right.
    All things that are commanded thee. Why not "commanded us?" And why not "you"?

42. Peter's Gospel to the Gentiles (10:34–43)

It may be taken as certain that, like the other speeches reported in Acts, the exposition of Christian truth laid before his Gentile audience by Peter was only a summary. Indeed, later he implied that what he had to say was only an exordium (11:15). But it certainly calls for special attention as representing what may be regarded as the bare minimum of Christian knowledge which could be required of new converts before baptism, and all of it very markedly Christ–centred, in a way that all too often is not very evidently the case nowadays!

It is also important to observe that the apostle was making no attempt to *instruct* his hearers regarding the fundamentals of the Faith. This was not necessary, for "that word ye know." Peter was only recapitulating what these friends of Cornelius were already familiar with.

Philip's preaching?

How they had come by this instruction in Christian faith is not indicated. It may be that the enthusiasm of Cornelius had led him to seek fuller knowledge concerning the Jesus of Nazareth who had already made an impressive impact on his life (see chapter 39), and that then the learner had turned teacher for the benefit of his eager friends. Or – and this seems more likely — that fine evangelist Philip was now living in Caesarea (8:40; 21:8), and, though no longer peripatetic he was still very much a preacher of the gospel, daring to embark on the instruction of willing Gentiles, but realising clearly enough that it was not for him to use the keys of the kingdom which had been committed to Peter.

No respect of persons

The apostle's first point–indeed it was this truth that had brought him to Caesarea – was this: "I perceive (I am, at last, grasping the idea) that God is no respecter of persons." Why had it taken Peter so long to learn this principle which had already been clearly enunciated over and over again in the Old Testament Scriptures (e.g. Gal. 2:6,7–the context, as here, being circumcision)? Presumably because of the rooted Jewish conviction that if a man had the blood of Jacob in his veins he was by that natural fact qualified for God's high esteem, whatever his personal faith or righteousness; therefore the Law's insistence that God is no respecter of persons must apply within Israel, and not in His attitude to Jew and Gentile. Peter's brethren were still unwilling to learn this. Hence the apostle's emphasis here, primarily for *their* benefit. Their exclusive Judaism had hitherto made God a respecter of persons. It must do so no longer.

Now it must be readily recognized that in *every* nation the fear of God and the life of righteousness win the favour of heaven.

Peter's phrase: "he that worketh righteousness," has been read as teaching a doctrine of salvation by works. Other considerations suggest differently:

a. Peter's own insistence (v.43) that "whosoever *believeth* in him shall receive remission of sins."
b. The apostle was quoting Pr. 12:22, where the LXX actually has "he that worketh *faith* is accepted with him."
c. "This is the work of God, that ye *believe* on him whom he hath sent" (Jn. 6:29). Cp. the Lord's interpretation of his own parable: Mt. 21:28–32. See also Mk. 3:34, 35.

The apostle's words are to be read as a summary description of sincere Godfearing Gentile adherents to the synagogue.

Peter's summary

H is review of the message made a tidy summary of God's revelation of salvation in Christ:

(i) "The word (i.e. the Old Testament) was sent to the children of Israel" –this was their higher status, that they had the revelation first. But it was "by Jesus Christ." The Old Testament finds its true meaning only in him. And it was a message "proclaiming peace" – not peace as the antithesis to war, but in the sense of reconciliation with God; Israel needed that as much as anyone else. This promised Messiah is "Lord of all," i.e. of all kinds of man, Jew and Gentile, high and low.

(ii) That message became a *spoken* word (Gk: *rhema;* v.37– contrast *logos* in v.36) proclaimed by John the Baptist and by Jesus himself throughout the whole land, but it "began from Galilee (of the Gentiles)." The apostle's review of the work of Christ– preaching by the Holy Spirit, healing by the Holy Spirit –followed appropriately on the Holy Spirit's revelation in the Old Testament. "God was with him" (Jn. 3:2) – he was Immanuel, and therefore the one appointed to fulfil the Immanuel prophecies (Is. 7:14; 9:6, 7; 11:1ff).

(iii) The witness of Peter and his fellow apostles (and maybe of some of the six Jews now present) followed on logically. They had seen the mighty works of the Lord, they had been present at his crucifixion, and they had personal experience of his open manifestation on the third day and thereafter. Well might Peter use the word "witness" four times over about this (v.42 Gk. is specially emphatic). And it follows, without any strain on faith, that he who has himself overcome the power of death will one day exercise that power on behalf of those who are his: "he is ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and the dead" (cp. 2 Tim. 4:8).

This review, which Peter doubtless intended to develop in greater detail, came back to the Old Testament with which, apparently, Cornelius was already familiar: "To him give all the prophets witness." Did the apostle intend himself to be taken literally – *all* of them? – or was this a generalisation?

The forgiveness of sins through the Messiah, the mediator of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:34), was foretold by the prophets not only explicitly but also in a variety of sacrificial types and personal foreshadowings.

There can be little doubt that Peter was leading on to the importance of Christian baptism. His phrase: "that whosoever believeth *into* him," pointedly implies this. However his explicit exposition suffered an unexpected and sensational interruption.

Basic Principles
in
Peter's Gospel to the Gentiles

1. Old Testament preparation for Christ.
2. The Ministry of Jesus:
   a. John the Baptist.
   b. God was with him – Immanuel.
   c. Miracles of healing.
3. Atonement:
   a. Crucifixion
   b. Raised the third day.
   c. Fellowship with the disciples after resurrection.
4. The preaching of the gospel.
5. The forgiveness of sins –
6. through faith.
7. In the gospel, no respect of persons:
   a. Christ is Lord of all.

b. People called out of every nation (no racialism).

8. Christ is the Judge–
9. –of quick and dead; therefore, resurrection.

10. The only negative emphasis – Jesus was not God, but was raised up and guided by God:
    a. God was with him.
    b. God anointed him.
    c. God raised him from the dead.
    d. God ordained him to be Judge of all.

Modern Christianity has abandoned or contradicted about half of the foregoing.

Notes: 10:34–43

34. *No respecter of persons.* In Dt. 10:12–19 there is no verse which does not have details specially relevant to Peter and Cornelius.
35. *Worketh righteousness.* Is. 64:5, contradicted in the next verse! Pr. 14:34 has the Hebrew word for "Gentile." Note also Is. 56:6,7; 60:7.
    In every nation, but not in every religion. Modern sentimental oecumenism finds no encouragement here.
36. *Preaching peace.* Is. 52:7; 57:19; and especially Eph. 2:14–17; a fine re–statement of these principles.
    Lord of all. And therefore greater than prophets or apostles.
37. *Throughout all Judaea.* This is not told in the synoptic gospels, but only in John.
38. *How God anointed Jesus Christ.* Note Lk. 4:1,14,18. Here the Holy Spirit is linked with power, in 6:3 with wisdom, in 11:24 with faith, in 13:52 with joy, in Jn. 4:23; 14:17 with truth, and in 6:63 with life.
    Oppressed of the devil. In the Old Testament this verb is frequently associated with Israel's bondage in Egypt, the not uncommon type of a greater deliverance. Cp. also Lk. 13:11; and see "Studies in the Gospels," ch.30.
39. We *are witnesses.* Not only Peter, but the six who were with him.
    Whom they slew, hanging him on a tree. R.V. is correct here. A.V. is somewhat misleading. Peter's phrase applies the condemnation of the disobedient son (Dt. 21:22) to the Son who was wholly obedient. But why "tree", and not "cross"? In order to emphasize how that tree of death was transformed into a tree of life.
40. *Shewed him openly.* The same words, appropriately, in Rom. 10:20 (from Is. 65:1).
41. *Who did eat and drink with him.* Contrast Lk. 22:18. There was no sacramental sharing of bread and wine with them, but of course each meal expressed fellowship, as in so many other places in Scripture. The association of resurrection with eating of food (as the most convincing proof) is remarkably common: Mk. 5:43; Jn. 12:12; Acts 1:4; M,t. 26:29; and also Lk. 22:16; Rev. 3:20; 19:9; 2:7; Ex. 24:11.
    Alternatively, the words: "who did eat and drink with him," may be read as a parenthesis referring to the apostles' sharing in the Last Supper with their Lord.
42. The balance of phrases requires:
    To preach unto the people (of Israel), and *To testify* (to the Gentiles).
43. *Whosoever.* This is Joel 2:32 (Rom. 10:11). *Believeth.* 2:21 –Jew and Gentile alike.
    Remission of sins – from the *Judge* of quick and dead. What a paradox!

43. Cornelius baptized (10:44–48)

Peter's speech before that Roman assembly went unfinished. "While he yet spake," there came a divine interruption. It was Pentecost over again, this time specially for Gentiles. Indeed the manifestation may have been in precisely the same way, with wind and fire, for Peter's phrase: "which have received the Holy Spirit *as well as we"* seems rather to imply: *"just as we* also (received it)."

A Gentile Pentecost

Here now were unclean Gentiles speaking with the holy tongues precisely as the unlearned and ignorant disciples had done at Pentecost. In harmony with the interpretation of this phenomenon suggested earlier, it may be presumed that Cornelius and his friends had not infrequently attended synagogue services, and now the Holy Spirit was "bringing to their remembrance all things" that they had heard there of the praise of God in Holy Scripture and in Hebrew prayers. "They (Peter's Judaist brethren) heard them speak with tongues, and glorify God" (cp. 2:11). Once again "tongues were for a sign, not to them that believed, but to them (of the circumcision) that believed not" that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews (1 Cor. 14:22).

Had Matthew been given the chronicling of this remarkable happening, he would surely have written (as was his wont):'... that it might be fulfilled which was written by the prophet, I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring ... One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob ... and surname himself by the name of Israel' (Is. 44:3,5).

"They of the circumcision"

As they saw and heard, the amazement of the brethren was intense. Luke's phrase: "they of the circumcision" seems to imply that the problem of taking the gospel to Gentiles had already come in for considerable discussion in the ecclesias, and had already had the effect of bringing into being a circumcision party so strongly influenced by their life–lone Judaistic prejudices that they were unwilling to consider the inclusion of Gentiles in the faith except on the basis of a full and complete acceptance of Jewish faith and practice (cp. Gal. 2:12; Tit. 1:10). To become brethren in Christ, Gentiles must first become proselytes to Judaism.

But now these men, whom Peter had deliberately, and very wisely, included in his party, were nonplussed at the phenomena which their eyes and ears would fain shut out. Had it been that Cornelius and the others merely spoke with tongues, this might have been shrugged off (though not so easily as a true believer today rightly dismisses the glossolalia of a modern 'Pentecostalists'). But the sights and sounds so akin to their own experience at their own Pentecost ruled out all argument.

So a "humbly triumphant Peter" (to use A. D. Norris's phrase) was able to say with all confidence: "No one can forbid the water, can he, that these should not be baptized?" The challenge was addressed, of course, to those who had so reluctantly accompanied him to Caesarea. And they had no answer to offer except a tacit agreement. "Who was I, that I should forbid God?" (11:17; s.w. 8:36). The apostle's words held true for all his party.

The importance of baptism

Forthwith Peter "commanded" baptism. This detail in the record is valuable. Even though Cornelius and the rest had already been well–instructed in the Faith and were fully converted and eager for fellowship, even though by this outpouring of the Holy Spirit the Lord in heaven

signified his acceptance of them, the Holy Spirit in Peter (see notes) still required their baptism. "Except a man be born of water and the spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:5). It was impossible to emphasize more strongly the utter necessity of this Christian sacrament.

The phraseology seems to imply that the actual baptizing was not done by Peter (Paul's principle also: 1 Cor. 1:14, 15). Then who performed the rite? Can it have been anyone other than a member of the circumcision party present with them? Presumably there was one individual among them less bigoted than the rest, who, whatever the strength of their prejudices, had no authority to forbid.

It is worthwhile to reflect on precisely what blessing Peter had brought to these new converts. *Not* instruction in the Faith, for Peter himself agreed that "that word (concerning Jesus) ye know." *Not* the gift of the Holy Spirit, for there had been no laying on of hands – Peter's brethren would probably have protested against this; the gift came direct from heaven. Apart from the gesture of fellowship, by coming under the same roof as these Gentiles, all that the apostle added was his explicit command to be baptized. Could anything impart to this symbolic burial and resurrection a higher importance? Christian baptism is not an experience to be accepted or by–passed according to personal inclination (Jn. 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21).

Principles in conflict

There was this irregularity that, whereas the normal procedure, as illustrated at Samaria, was that first men believed and were baptized and then there followed the laying on of hands to impart the gift of the Spirit, here the procedure was reversed.

It is a good example of how, when two principles of godly practice come into collision, the less must give way to the greater. The sabbath law must give way to the higher duties of circumcision (Jn. 7:22, 23) and priestly offering of sacrifice (Mt. 12:5) and the healing of a stricken child of God (Lk. 13:16). Observance of the highly important Passover must have precedence over correct timing or scrupulous ceremonial cleansing (2 Chr. 30:15, 18, 19). There are times when the commandment of God must be feared, even though the king be dishonoured in the process (1 Pet. 2:17; Acts 5:29). And so also by mandate from heaven, in the first opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Fellowship

Now the barriers were down, and by and by at a Breaking of Bread service there would be the holding of the first Love Feast, the Agape, with Jew and Gentile sharing a holy meal together.

But how many Jews? The significant detail is added: "Then prayed they *him* to tarry certain days." The implication is that "they of the circumcision" were so horrified at what had happened that they forthwith withdrew, leaving Peter there on his own. The apostle was happy in the fellowship of his fine new Gentile brethren, but uneasy nevertheless. He knew for certain that the Ecclesia of the Lord in Judaea was faced with a crisis of massive proportions.

Notes: 10:44–48

47. *Can any forbid?* This apostrophe can only have been addressed to the Jewish brethren. And Peter's phrase may have meant: "Is anyone empowered (by God) to forbid the (baptismal) water?"
48. *Commanded.* Here at last is the response to v.33. This Greek word is always used in the New Testament of a divine command – Peter's apostolic authority.
    Then prayed they him. Gk. M.V. implies: "for their own benefit." Further instruction after baptism, always a wise procedure.

44. Tension in Jerusalem (11:1–18)

Peter spent a fairly considerable time with Cornelius (according to Codex Beza and other texts), but eventually found his way back to Jerusalem; and, being apprehensive about the possibility of controversy regarding this latest sensational development, he was careful to take with him Simon the tanner (V.11RV) and the six brethren "of the circumcision" (v.12) who had accompanied him to Caesarea.

Thanks to these recent events, the circumcision party had crystallised out very rapidly (6:7; 10:45; 11:2; 15:5; Gal.2:12). There had been earlier examples of human infirmity and small–mindedness in the ecclesia–deceitful covetousness (5:2), grumbling (6:1), and simony (8:18). Now, worse than any of these, there was prejudiced dogmatism and faction. Then, as often since, the cry was: "The Truth of Christ is in danger," with the unspoken implication: "and unless we contend fiercely, all is in ruins."

There were probably not a few who remembered Peter's patchy past, and for that reason (and their own supreme self–confidence) they had no qualms about taxing the apostle with his spiritual misdemeanours. At first they did not contend; they were content to express doubts (v.2 Gk.). But they did it in such a way as to imply that there were few real doubts in their minds: "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them."

The criticism, be it noted, was not: "Thou didst baptize Romans," but "Thou didst have fellowship with them, and didst eat their food" (compare the situation in Gal. 2:12). The Love Feast, the meal of fellowship immediately before the Breaking of Bread, must have involved the eating of non–kosher food and the most intimate spiritual fellows–ship with unclean Gentiles.

It was probably this development more than anything else which caused the apostles to suffer such a drastic loss of popularity with the Jerusalem crowd (2:47; 12:2,3). There was evident disrespect in the criticism. It is much to the apostle's credit that he made no assertion of holy authority in what he had done. Peter! you are a poor sort of pope! Nor did he fall back, as he well might have done, on the support of his fellow–apostles and the commission given to them by the Lord Jesus: "Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven ..." Peter saw it as more important to convince these Judaist brethren that neither Cornelius nor his food were unclean.

Peter explains

So, before the apostles and leading brethren (v.1; 15:6), he proceeded to tell the whole story in considerable detail. But why should Luke, having told it all once, now go on to repeat it with little variation?

Long centuries before, Joseph had declared to Pharaoh: "For that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass" (Gen. 41:32). By the time Luke wrote his history this Judaist contention had become one of the most corrosive evils the church had to contend with. So Luke's underlining was not amiss, indeed it was necessary.

Peter told the details of his vision, and how he had stared fascinated at that mighty assemblage of living creatures. Only fishes were missing, necessarily so in a great linen sheet; any fish there must have been a dead one, or dying, and how could that be since the fish (and not the cross) had already become a well–established symbol of Christ, for *ichthus,* the fish, was so meaningful:

I	Iesous	Jesus
Ch	Christos	Christ,
Th	Theou	of God
U	Huios	Son,
S	Soter	Saviour

Defilement?

Peter's scrutiny had told him that the great sheet held clean animals as well as unclean. Even so, to the heavenly invitation to "kill for sacrifice, and eat," he returned an emphatic "No," for his lifelong Judaistic prejudices had taught him to abhor even defilement by association. What clean animal could he choose for food from those which were intermixed with such an assemblage of unclean creatures?

More than this, Peter pondered the problem carefully (v.6.Gk.) before he dared to say: "Not so, Lord." This was no snap judgement. It was an expression of how he or any other Jew would react to such a situation. His prejudices were no different from those of the rest. The attitude adopted now by "them of the circumcision" was precisely how he had instinctively reacted to the challenge of Gentile faith and Gentile fellowship.

But that fiat from heaven was not to be gainsaid: "What God hath cleansed, make not thou common."

The implications were very far–reaching. In Peter's eyes, association had defiled even the clean animals he saw there. *He* had made them unclean. The command from heaven told him: 'You are not to continue with this attitude' (so Gk.).

The arrival of the men from Cornelius, just as Peter was pondering the vision, had provided an excellent lesson in the ways of God's providence, effectively over–ruling any remaining doubt he might have. And had not the Spirit explicitly bidden him go with the men, making no distinction (v.12 Gk.) between Jew and Gentile?

The out–pouring of the Spirit on Cornelius and the rest – "as on us" (v.15, 17; 10:47) – had brought irresistible conviction. This was the work of their Lord. Had not John the Baptist (Lk. 3:16) and Jesus himself (Acts 1:5) both foretold that to the rite of water baptism would be added a baptism in Holy Spirit?

The reminder about John's baptism was not out of place, for at the same time John had dealt ruthlessly with Jewish pride: "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father..." (Mt. 3:9,11). Did this boast and Jewish separation go hand in hand?

Happy agreement

Without the slightest hint of personal self–importance, but by simply telling his simple story Peter had made his case, so that all argument subsided. 'So it is true! Faith in Christ is to save Gentiles as well as those whom he chooses out of Israel!'

The superficial inconsistency between "they held their peace" and "they continued glorifying God" is readily resolved. No more contention, but plenty of thankful praise to God.

The strange thing is that after such decisiveness the problem was to arise again some years later, more dogmatically argued than ever. In fact, until the temple was destroyed, this bitterly contentious issue: Must Gentiles keep the Law if they are to have fellowship with Jewish believers? continued to ruin the peace of the Ecclesia of Christ.

Notes: 11:1–18

1. *Received the word.* But (10:37) they had already received the gospel before Peter came to Caesarea. So, here, this phrase must mean they were baptized.
2. *Contended.* The ambiguities about the translation of this Greek word (v.12; 10:20) are due to the fact that in active voice it means one thing and in passive or middle voice something different.

10. *All drawn up into heaven,* clean and unclean alike.

12. *The man's house.* Was the name of Roman Cornelius avoided to save provoking more prejudice? Yet consider 10:22.
14. *Who shall tell thee words.* Salvation depends not on emotion or sentiment but on words and the divine ideas they convey.
16. *Then remembered I:* "I was caused to remember." An allusion back to Jn. 14:26?
17. *Unto us who believed.* Peter's argument here: The Spirit was not given to us because of circumcision, but because of faith in Christ. These Gentiles have faith in Christ, so the like experience should be theirs also. Alternatively, with a different punctuation of the text: "God gave them who believed on *(epi,* not *eis*) the Lord Jesus Christ the like gift as he did unto us".
18. *Held their peace.* In LXX this Greek word commonly means rest from war.
    Then. Gk: *arage,* with a subtle implication of: Who would have thought it?

45. Antioch (11:19–30)

It is difficult to see why Luke did not continue his "Peter" narrative, rounding it off with the account of the apostle's imprisonment by Herod. Instead, he chose to interrupt the progress of that record with details about how the gospel, worthily led by Barnabas and Saul, forged ahead in Syrian Antioch.

Antioch was a large and beautiful city, after Rome and Alexandria the third in the empire. Its considerable commerce had attracted a large colony of Jews. But a superficial judgement would hardly have deemed it a good place for the preaching of the gospel, for its culture concentrated on art and literature, and there was every imaginable vice. Religion there was in plenty. Every crazy and outlandish cult of the empire found its devotees there. But what hope for the sober gospel of Jesus?

It was soon after the outbreak of Saul's persecution that the gospel got to Antioch, and also to Cyprus and the Lebanon. Fleeing from that onslaught, some of the brethren found safety in the north. The persecution had "scattered them as seed" (v.19). Nicolas, the proselyte of Antioch, one of the seven brethren who had administered relief to the poor of the ecclesia in Jerusalem (6:5), was doubtless one of these who fled thither. And there, undeterred, these refugees forthwith risked further hostility by a new vigorous preaching campaign. But since, as yet, no–one had thought of taking the gospel to any except Jews, this was still the self–imposed limitation of the scope of their message.

Jewish Jews, Greek Jews – and Gentiles?

There were certain of them who were not content to evangelize the orthodox Judaistic Jews. Since some of them were themselves Hellenistic Jews, that is, Greek–speaking and even accustomed to using the Septuagint version of the Old Testament in the synagogue, they gladly made use of wider opportunity to proclaim to Jews of their own sort that "the Lord (i.e. the Messiah) is Jesus" (v.20).

Their efforts were greatly blessed. "The hand of the Lord was with them (by miraculous signs? 4:30; 13:11; 2:47) and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord."

This group of zealous preachers at Antioch included "men of Cyprus and Cyrene," among whom may be fairly confidently identified Manaen (of Cyprus; 21:16) and Lucius of Cyrene and Simeon Niger (Simon of Cyrene; Mark 15:21), all three of whom were together in Antioch some short time later(13:1,2). The mention of *Grecian Jews* in this passage faces expositors with a considerable problem. The manuscript evidence in favour of reading "Grecian Jews (Hellenists)" in v.20 is overwhelming. The reading "Grecians," i.e. Gentiles, is found in Codex A and also as added "corrections" to Codex D and Codex Sinaiticus. All the rest, a considerable number, read "Grecian Jews." Nevertheless, with hardly an exception the commentators accept the reading "Greeks" because, they say, so many details in the context require this. These details and supporting arguments are set out separately at the end of this chapter.

The RV reading is unusual: "a great number that believed turned to the Lord." This appears to mean that many hitherto–uncommitted sympathizers now came forward for baptism, but there is no indication what brought about this sudden surge of progress, unless v.22a is meant to signify the witness of some remarkable miracles. Apparently this very successful preaching at Antioch was regarded in Jerusalem, when the news got back there, as a development of some considerable importance, for the brethren thereupon sent Barnabas as a one–man delegation to give advice and direction.

Barnabas the reconciler

But what was the particular problem which made such a decision necessary or desirable? The best guess available is that there had arisen some danger of fragmentation in the ecclesia because of the existence of two groups of brethren differing widely in outlook and way of life and methods of handling Scripture. The Hebraistic brethren were doubtless still very zealous not only for the Law of Moses but also for much of the superadded rabbinic tradition. On the other hand the Hellenistic believers thought nothing of having their synagogue and ecclesial services wholly in Greek and they tended to live more like Greeks than like orthodox Jews. This problem had existed in Jerusalem but in a much less acute form, and thanks to the presence of the apostles, it had not been difficult to reach authoritative and therefore satisfactory compromises. Now the pacific Barnabas was called upon to carry to Antioch the Jerusalem solutions or something fairly similar befitting the local circumstances.

Barnabas, "when he came and had seen the grace of God, was glad." This might mean either of two things — that Barnabas witnessed evident tokens of spiritual devotion in these converts, so assured were they of the forgiveness of sins (as in Rom. 3:24;6:1 etc.); or that he *saw* the powers of the Holy Spirit in action among them (e.g. Rom. 1:5; 12:3,6). This latter interpretation presupposes that the Holy Spirit had been given directly from heaven, as on Cornelius and the rest (10:45), since as yet none of the apostles had been to Antioch to impart the gift by the laying on of hands (8:15,17). Or, since Saul was now recognized as having the rank of an apostle (9:28), had he been used by the Lord to impart Spirit gifts in Antioch when on his way to Tarsus (9:30; Gal. 1:21)?

So all that Barnabas had to do was to "exhort them all" (that is, both groups of believers–Hebraistic and Hellenistic Jews), that with steadfastness of mind they would "cleave unto the Lord." Their initial enthusiasm would be of little value unless it was maintained (14:22; 15:32; 16:40). And the easing of the strains created by the different outlook and background of the two sections was to be found, of course, by centring their loyalty on Christ. With him dominating their affections they would learn readily enough to tolerate relatively unimportant divergences among their brethren.

Barnabas, "the son of exhortation," was certainly the right man to impart such exhortation. Who more persuasive than he? Apparently he also gave much encouragement to a yet more vigorous campaign in the city, for "much people was added to the Lord" (besides those mentioned in v.21). Thus, neatly, Luke makes an apt allusion to Barnabas's other name, for Joseph means either "the Lord is adding" or" he who is adding to the Lord,"

Saul as well

Barnabas also realised that here was a splendid opportunity for the further rehabilitation of Saul who had been received with such suspicion by the brethren in Jerusalem. So, knowing that Saul had last been heard of heading for Tarsus (9:30), he went off there to find him. In this action by Barnabas there is implicit a very lovely trait of character. He was evidently quite free from any spirit of self–importance. He did not now regard the brisk and highly successful preaching in Antioch as his own exclusive field of operation. He was perfectly willing to share his leadership at Antioch with one more able than himself.

Tracking Saul down evidently took some time, and then the exercise of a good deal of persuasion. The Bezan text reads: "He went forth seeking him. And when he met with him, he exhorted him to come to Antioch." It would seem, first, that Saul had already begun missionary work on his own in the Tarsus area, or Barnabas

would surely have found him at the synagogue on his first sabbath there; and, second, that Saul exhibited some reluctance to accompany Barnabas to Antioch. But this young man, whom Jesus had loved when he looked on him (Mk. 10:21), had more than ordinary powers of persuasion, so very soon these two old friends, who had once been colleagues in the Sanhedrin, were now together giving a superb lead to the thriving ecclesia at Antioch.

This work went on vigorously for a whole year, and the two leaders were "assembled together in the ecclesia, and they taught much people" – the phrase implies a yet further surge of success, and this in an environment which most would have judged to be quite unpromising.

But "assembled together" is a strange phrase to apply to *two* men (and this is the natural way to read it). However, the same word is used repeatedly in LXX for giving lodging or hospitality (e.g. Josh. 2:18; Jud. 19:15; 2 Sam. 11:27). So the reference may well be to a year's hospitality given to Saul and Barnabas at the home of Simon of Cyrene. (For details on this, see ch.48 and "Studies in the Gospels", ch.223).

"Christians"

"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." The assumption is almost universally made that as the believers became more widely known in the city, this was a nickname coined for them in a scurrilous or good–tempered fashion by the populace.

Such a view is quite palpably mistaken, for the word "called" translates most inadequately a Greek word which in every other occurrence (eight of them) requires the idea of divine guidance or inspiration. In other words, it was by the help of the Holy Spirit that this name came to be adopted. It may be possible to go further and infer from the immediate context (and the introduction of the Greek particle *te)* that it was either Barnabas or Saul to whom this revelation was given, more probably the latter, for why should a name with a Latin termination – Christ*ian*oi – be given in a Greek–speaking city, except with a view to future activity when the name of Christ would be taken to all parts of the Roman empire? Who but Saul would think thus then?

The New Testament has a wide variety of names for those in Christ — Nazarenes, Galileans, "this faction" (all of these unsympathetic), brethren, disciples, believers, saints, elect, faithful, the Ecclesia, the Way — but here now was a name of double value: it picked out those who were always talking about The Christ; and it lent itself easily to the idea of "The King's men."

But the commentators are not entirely wrong, for it did become a nickname. In popular speech *Christianoi* readily became *Chrestianoi,* the kindly folk. This confusion between *Christos* and *Chrestos* was recognized by the apostles, and even encouraged by them:

"His kindness *(chrestotes)* towards us
through Christ" (Eph. 2:7).
"If so be that ye have tasted that the
Lord is gracious *(Chrestos)"* (1 Pet. 2:3).
"Be ye kind *(Chrestos)* one to another
... even as God for *Christos* sake..." (Eph. 4:32).
"Evil communications corrupt good
(Chrestos) manners" (1 Cor. 15:33).
See also Rom. 2:4; 16:18; Tit. 3:4.

Eusebius says that Luke was a native of Antioch. This is not certain. He may have been confusing Luke with Lucius, mentioned in ch. 13:1,2. But it is rather remarkable that at this point the Bezan text has one of the famous "we" passages, thus implying that Luke was there in Antioch and able to report from personal experience: "and there was much gladness; and when *we* were gathered together ..." (v.28). But it is possible (see ch.59) that this touch of "we" narrative was supplied by Titus who was at Antioch at this time.

Agabus prophesies famine

Amongst those from Jerusalem now organized as members of the Antioch ecclesia were certain brethren to whom the Holy Spirit had imparted the gift of prophecy. One of these, named Agabus (which appropriately means "locust") made a formal declaration before the ecclesia that soon there was to be a dire famine. As in one of his later prognostications (21:11), he accompanied this prophecy with some appropriate symbolic action (not specified by Luke), after the manner of one of the prophets of the Old Covenant.

This famine duly came to pass in the reign of Claudius (41–54), especially in the years A.D.45,46 when there was serious scarcity in various parts of the empire. In the literature of the time there are plenty of explicit references to this — in Josephus, Pliny, the Egyptian papyri, for example. "In no other reign do we find such varied allusion to periodical famines," writes Knowling in the Expositor's Greek Testament.

There can be little doubt that, although the prophecy of Agabus seems to the modern reader to be comprehensive in its scope – "throughout all the inhabited earth" – Luke's reference was intended specially to Judaea, for evidently the brethren in Syria were not hard hit or they would hardly have been in a position to send relief to Jerusalem. Josephus (Ant.20.2.5) tells how Queen Helena of Adiabene, a convert to Judaism, bought up supplies of corn and figs in Egypt and Cyprus for the aid of the famine–stricken poor in Judaea. Similar action by the brethren would be made necessary by a probable exclusion of Christians from the poor–relief which was normal in Jewry in those days.

Aid for the poor brethren

The decision to help the Jerusalem disciples in this way was God–guided –through Agabus or one of the other brethren with the gift of "prophecy" or "wisdom." The Greek word for "determined" (v.29), in all its other six

occurrences, plainly means a divine over–ruling. (For further details on this systematic collection in Gentile ecclesias for the help of poor Jewish brethren, see Gal. 2:10; Acts 20:4;24:17; Rom. 15:16,26–31; 2 Cor. 8; 9; 12:17,18).' The brethren contributed each "according to his prosperity" (cp. 1 Cor. 16:1–4), the guiding principles clearly being: From every man according as God has blessed him, and to every man according to his need (Acts 4:32,35). "The Lord knoweth the days of the upright ... in the days of famine they shall be satisfied ... the righteous sheweth mercy and giveth" (Ps. 37:18,19,21). "The eye of the Lord is upon them that hope in his mercy ... to keep them alive in famine" (Ps. 33:18,19).

Barnabas was certainly an idea! choice as one of those to be entrusted with this ecclesial benevolence, for he was not only very sympathetic and understanding, but he had also set a matchless example to the rest by the selling of his real estate in order to make earlier contribution for a similar need (4:34–37). In this context he is very appropriately described as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (v.24). It must have required a special divine impulse to give a man, who had loved his riches and depended on them (Lk. 18:23), the faith to make such a drastic renunciation.

The choice of Saul as colleague of Barnabas in this good work may well have been suggested by a similar act of self–denial on his part. The indications are that he came of a wealthy family, and yet in later days, he was glad to accept financial help from Philippi (Phil. 4:10–16), and had to find time to work for his living (Acts 20:34). After all, many in the Jerusalem ecclesia had been reduced to abject poverty through his plundering and persecution, so it would be strange indeed if one of his first acts after conversion was not a drastic attempt at recompense.

Additional Note on Hellenists (Greek–speaking Jews) and Hellenes (Greeks, Gentiles) (11:20).

It has already been pointed out that the manuscript evidence strongly favours the former reading, and in the commentary here this has been taken to be correct. But almost every scholar (Westcott and Hort, and Kay, being honourable exceptions) has assumed that the context, and arguments based on it, *require* the reading "Hellenes." Their case, set out here, is very impressive:

1. The Greek construction: *men* (v.19)... *de* (v.20) ... , requires a contrast between Jews and Gentiles, not between Jews and Jews.
2. "The hand of the Lord was with them" (v.21) must surely mark a sensational development in the work. And the allusion to Is. 49:22 points to a Gentile context.
3. The special mission of Barnabas points to something highly important. But if v.20 means "Grecian Jews," men of this class had already heard the gospel in Jerusalem, in the ministry of Stephen (6:9).
4. In v.2 the Bezan text has this: "When Peter was come up to Jerusalem, and had announced to them the grace of God (i.e. the Holy Spirit on Gentiles; 10:45), they of the circumcision ..." Then, when Barnabas "saw the grace of God," was not that also an out-pouring of the Spirit on Gentiles?
5. "He exhorted them *all* that ... they would cleave to the Lord" surely means both Jews and Gentiles.
6. "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch," i.e. when Jews and Gentiles were first brought together in one harmonious community.
7. Relief for the brethren in Judaea (v.29) always came from Gentiles; cp. Gal. 2:9,10 etc.
8. The sequence in Gal. 1:16 (Gentiles), 21,23 is significant.
9. It was at Antioch where the Gentile fellowship problem first boiled up (Gal. 2:11–14).

None of these points can be called decisive, but the cumulative effect is pretty strong.

Notes: 11:19–30

23. *Cleave to the Lord;* cp. 14:22; 15:32; 16:40. In all ecclesial experience, few exhortations are more important: Do not be put off by any discouragement or difficult circumstance. Hang on, regardless! Mt. 11:6; Jn. 20 .29.
    Luke provides no detail of Paul's Cilician ministry. Is this because there wasn't one? or because his status as apostle was not yet generally recognized and his work therefore open to censure as unauthorised? But what of v.19,20? – was that authorised? 26.
    A whole year. This Greek word usually refers to the religious year; thus saying by implication that during that time they made no effort to keep the Feasts in Jerusalem.
28. This unusual incident was probably intended to be read as symbolic also of spiritual famine in Israel, whilst Gentiles prospered in the gospel.
    Signified. Cp. Is. 20:2,3; Jer. 18,19; Ezek. 4,5; and the same Greek word in Rev. 1:1.
    That there should be. Greek; *mellein* followed by a future infinitive must mean. God *purposed* that it should so come about.
    A great dearth. Acts 12:20 implies that it had not yet come about. The relevance of the Epistle of James to the early chapters of Acts has already been pointed out. There, in 5:17,18, there is a prophet of the Lord foretelling famine. And another passage just before that (5:14,15) seems to correspond very closely to the healing of Aeneas (Acts 9:32–35).
    World. In some places this word has a distinctly limited reference (to the Land of Israel); Mt. 24:14; Lk. 21:26; Acts 17:6; Rev. 3:10; 12:9; 16:14. The Romans used it not of the entire world but of the Roman habitable. Apparently Jews used it similarly about their territory.
29. More details about this in connection with 20:4.
30. This verse describes what was done when the famine came later on.
    The elders, that is, the governing body of the church at Jerusalem; 15:2,4,6; 21:6. The apostles had, of course, wider powers of control over ecclesias everywhere.

46. Peter in Prison (12:1 –11)

One of the interesting instances of Luke's splendid historical accuracy is his mention (in Acts 12) of Herod Agrippa I as king in Jerusalem. For, after Herod the Great and his son Aristobulus, for thirty years there was no king over Judaea, but direct Roman rule instead. The Herod Antipas of Luke 23:7 was king of Galilee, and only a visitor to Jerusalem at that time.

This Herod, brother of the Herodias who schemed for the death of John the Baptist, made such use of his friendship with the new emperor Claudius as to be granted the rule of all Judaea, Samaria, and Galilee. This lasted for only three years, and then there was no king in Jerusalem until the Crusades.

Herod Agrippa I

Yet Luke goes into some detail here about this Herod Agrippa, and is found to be chronologically and factually dependable. Acts 12 falls within those three years.

Like nearly all the Herods, this one was fascinating, profligate, spendthrift and cunning. His friendship with Caligula brought him the tetrarchy of Iturea, and his intimacy with the next emperor Claudius added yet further prosperity.

All at once it was as though he had turned over a new leaf. But this was just so much Machiavellian statecraft. He had the wit to realise that the only way to rule the Jews with tolerable success was to gain their religious approval. So, outwardly at any rate, he became a convert to Pharisaism. From now on, he appeared before the nation as one full of zeal for the Law.

There is a marvellous story of him reading publicly from Deuteronomy 17 at the Feast of Tabernacles. When he came to the words: "Thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother," he – an Edomite – broke down and burst into tears (real or feigned?). But the people cried out: "Be not disturbed! Thou art our brother, thou art our brother!"

Every detail about him in Acts 12 chimes in with this. He knew how to stage–manage a public occasion! He knew also that a good demagogue gives the mob someone to hate, so he turned on the Christians and by that deliberate choice he sealed his own fate.

The death of James

Earlier the Pharisees (8:1,3) and the Sadducees (5:17,18) had both let loose persecution against the brethren. Now the Herodians were making their effort. The date of it is fixed precisely by the death of Herod as being the Spring of A.D.44.

James, the son of Zebedee, was put to death, and at the same time others suffered also. The fact that James was slain with the sword and not killed by stoning indicates that the accusation against him was not religious. Then what could it have been? and why James in particular? There are paragraphs in the Epistle of James (this James!) which could not have been spoken and written against fellow–believers in Jerusalem (e.g. 4:4; 5:1–4). It may well be that denunciations such as these were spoken publicly against men like Herod, especially since there is little doubt that James, one of the three leading apostles, was a more vigorous character than his brother, as the expression "John, the brother of James" testifies (Mt. 4:21; 10:2; 17:1). But here Luke writes "James, the brother of John," because in later years the readers of Acts would be so much more familiar with the surviving
brother.

Clement of Alexandria has an impressive story, preserved by Eusebius in his Church History (2:9), that the man who "led James to the judgement–seat" (betrayed him? was chief witness against him?) was so impressed by the apostle's bearing that he thereupon confessed belief in Christ and was condemned to the same fate. "On their way, he entreated James to be

forgiven of him; and James, considering a little, replied: 'Peace be unto thee,' and kissed him; and then both were beheaded at the same time." James, a man of God, did not call down fire from heaven on Herod and his fifty (2 Kgs. 1:10; Lk. 9:54–56).

Very shortly before the crucifixion James and John had asked for the chief seats in Christ's kingdom, but instead were promised that they should share their Lord's cup and his baptism of suffering (Mt. 20:23). Now, for James the words came true (but very differently for his brother!).

It is remarkable that the martyrdom of one of the out–standing apostles should be recorded so very briefly by Luke. Assuredly the New Testament historians do not go in for purple writing. Straining for effect was no element of their technique. Can it be that Luke hoped to write another volume about the other apostles (including James), and hence his brevity here?

This summary execution of James gave the Jews a lot of pleasure, and appreciably increased Herod's popularity. Yet, not many years earlier, the believers had stood high in the esteem of the populace in Jerusalem (2:47). Probably there were two main factors bringing loss of popularity – the conversion of Barnabas and later of Saul, both of them distinguished members of the Sanhedrin; and the story that these Nazarenes were now accepting unclean Gentiles into their fellowship, a development which had doubtless been reported by spies planted in the ecclesia (Gal. 2:4).

How did Herod *see* that the execution of James had added appreciably to his public reputation? Presumably there was an enthusiastic demonstration before his palace, in response to which, glad to capitalise on this situation, he blithely promised them another victim.

Next, Peter

It was Passover, and there were great crowds in Jerusalem. The city would buzz with talk approving the king's action, so– master of publicity that he was!–he decided (and made the decision known; v.11) that as soon as Passover week was over Peter would be put on trial before the Sanhedrin, for this time it was a religious indictment. With this affectation of great scrupulosity about the holy week, Herod, with all the hypocrisy of an astute politician, now scored higher marks than ever with the crowd. They applauded his decisiveness and his piety.

But why did Herod not round up all the other apostles? Probably because they were away from Jerusalem at this time (v.17 seems to imply this).

So now, for the third time (4:3; 5:18) Peter found himself in prison, and in more dire danger than ever. Because of the remarkable escape on an earlier occasion (5:23), the apostle was most strictly guarded, Every three hours the watch was changed. Two soldiers were with him in the cell, chained to him, and two others were on duty outside the door.

The servant and his Lord

For a whole week the apostle was a prisoner, and all that time prayer was offered for him unceasingly by the brethren. Doubtless they had hoped that in answer to their prayers there would be a third–day "resurrection" like that of their Lord at an earlier Passover, but that third day had come and gone. And now it was the night before Peter's trial (v.6 RV), and their importunity was renewed the more fervently.

From this point on, the narrative has an astonishing number of verbal resemblances to the gospel record of the suffering of Christ and his resurrection, Passover, intense prayer (as in Gethsemane), Peter asleep, the coming of an angel, the apostle's rising up (same word as 'resurrection'), the iron gate was no obstacle (cp. the stone before the tomb) and the disciples believed not for joy. It is difficult to think that these correspondences are accidental, but what precisely is the point of them?

The ensuing details in the story must have been supplied by Peter himself. They probably reached Luke via John Mark.

When Paul was in prison he prayed and sang hymns (16:25). Peter, although shackled to a guard on either side, composed himself for a good night's sleep, even though it might be his last. "I question" says one old commentator rather sardonically, "whether Herod, who condemned him, slept half so soundly."

A startling deliverance

But all at once Peter felt himself being shaken into wakefulness. "He must be smote before he could be waked, and his shackles fell off easier than his sleep." First, a sharp blow on his side, and then he found himself blinking at an unexpected bright light shining in the darkness of the cell. But the two soldiers slept on.

The heavenly messenger spoke a brief imperative: "Rise up quickly." And Peter found that he could, for his chains were loose on his limbs.

"Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals."

Peter had doubtless recalled his Lord's prophecy: "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not" (Jn. 21:18). Now the time of fulfilment was come.

But no! for did not this unexpected visitor bid him: "Gird thyself"? It was Passover language, for in ancient days Israel had been commanded to have "loins girt, shoes on feet, and staff in hand" (Ex. 12:11), ready to go forth to freedom.

The apostle had doubtless been praying for help as fervently as his brethren in the city, but like them he was just as unwilling to believe that here was the answer to his prayer: "he felt sure (Gk.) he saw a vision" – it was surely a dream, more real than life.

The "angel" of the Lord

Who was this unexpected deliverer? A fair case can be made for the view that this "messenger of the Lord" was some highly–placed official who secretly shared the convictions of the brethren and who by drugs or bribery, or both, was able to contrive Peter's freedom. It is not impossible that such an individual might be used by God on the apostle's behalf. Nor is it impossible that Gabriel, the angel of answered prayer (Dan. 9:21; 10:12; Lk. 1:19,13,26,30; 22:43,44) should be on active service in this very striking deliverance.

Peter, stupefied, incredulous, followed his unrecognized helper as he quietly threaded his way between the two other sleeping guards outside. The great iron gate was already unlocked, they went down the seven steps (so Codex Beza), and Peter was then guided along one particular street outside, as though he were being steered in the most useful direction. Then, task accomplished, the deliverer went off into the darkness, leaving Peter to realise by degrees that it was not a vivid dream after all, and that since he had been left quite near the home of John Mark, he may as well go there first of all and get the news of his freedom to the brethren.

But first he paused a while in the darkness of the street to offer thanks to God for his escape.

Notes: 12:1–11

1. *Stretched forth his hands.* Foretold in Lk. 21:12.
   Certain. The prophets in 1 Th. 2:15 may have included some of those in 11:27. 3.
   It pleased the Jews. A dominant principle (lack of principle!) with politicians; 24:27; Mk. 15:15.

4. *After Passover.* Jn. 18:28 shows the same false scruple in the same kind of men.
5. *Prayer.* Of course they had prayed for James too, but then they had had No for an answer.
   Without ceasing. Literally: "stretched out," both in time and in intensity.
   For him. Gk: concerning; not, on behalf of — which might suggest that after the death of James they were now feeling unsure of the power or validity of their prayers. Verse 15a points to the same conclusion. 7. It may be inferred that this deliverance happened soon after 3a.m. Changes of guard would take place at 3 and 6. These guards slept till daylight at 6 (Passover time). Had they belonged to an earlier watch, they would have been disturbed by the guard–change at 3. It follows that all the excitement between v.7 and 17 was packed into about 11/2 hours – 3.30 to 5.
   The angel of the Lord. In the Gk. text both definite articles are missing. This might support the first of the two suggestions in the commentary; see also the note on v.10.
   Came upon him, and a light... The close similarity to Lk. 2:9 supports the second suggestion.
   Smote Peter. Contrast v.23 s.w. *Sandals,* not shoes. Evidently Peter took Mk. 6:9 very literally.
10. *Passed on.* The Gk. prefix here normally implies "beforehand." Then who was behind?
11. *Of a truth;* s.w. 10:34; 4:27. In each case, Peter.

47. The voice of an Apostle, and the voice of a god (12:12–25)

There in the darkness Peter at last realised just what had happened and where he now was– not in a cell, manacled and guarded, but a free man and within a stone's throw of a familiar Christian home. So with brisk step he betook himself thither. Of course, as soon as his escape was known there would be intensive search for him, especially in those places where the disciples were known to foregather, so he must not be found at any of them. To be taken thus would bring disaster on others besides himself. But he must let the brethren know that he was free.

Soon he was knocking at the door of the home where John Mark and his mother lived. It was a big house, used frequently by the disciples as a meeting place. Indeed it was probably there where Jesus had kept the Last Supper with the apostles. But now "the goodman of the house" (Mk. 14:14) was dead, possibly one of the victims of Saul's savage persecution (26:10).

Prayers answered

Now, that upper room was full, quite full, of praying disciples who had been called together to unite their final supplications on Peter's behalf. And doubtless there were other homes dotted round Jerusalem where the same intense importunity was being concentrated. But in those prayers was an element of hopelessness, for they all knew how the Lord himself had signified to Peter by what death he would glorify God (Jn. 21:18,19). Perhaps this was the time. Then should they pray contrary to what the Lord himself had preappointed? Perhaps it would be best just to pray that their loved and admired leader would be made strong to withstand this latest and worst trial.

But there were others who remembered too that Jesus had said: "When thou shalt be old..." Could Peter, now at most fifty, be described as an old man? And had he not on two former occasions been arrested and then delivered?

So there were differing degrees of faith and different kinds of prayer.

Rhoda

Suddenly they became aware that their prayers were being interrupted by a quiet but persistent knocking at the outer door. Rhoda, the servant girl, who had already that night greeted by name a large number of brethren as they arrived, now moved quickly and quietly to welcome this late–comer. But she hadn't even time to peer out through her peephole, for now Peter, having heard a footstep in the passage, added the urgency of his voice: 'Rhoda, it's me– let me in–quick.'

Immediately she knew who it was, and in her excitement ran back to the brethren, bursting in on their devotions with: 'There's brother Peter at the door. I'm sure it is he.'

The immediate reaction from more than one was: 'You must be crazy. It can't be.'

But she insisted. 'It is, I tell you, it is. I'd know that voice anywhere.'

'But how can it be?' said someone, cool and level–headed. 'Peter's in prison. And if they did let him out, they wouldn't free him in the middle of the night. But perhaps (Codex Beza) he's managed to send a message. That's it! It's his messenger who is there.'

Whilst Rhoda still protested, a few of them made a rush for the door, to answer that persistent knocking.

Now, as they set eyes on Peter in the dim light of Rhoda's oil lamp, they were all utterly

flabbergasted. By all means pray with all fervour on Peter's behalf, but it would be altogether too unreal to expect your prayer to be granted – and forthwith!

In a moment they were all talking at once. The clamour became considerable, so that Peter, fearing that the hubbub would disturb the neighbourhood and thus increase the danger, made a vigorous gesture for quiet.

Within the house he quickly and thankfully explained the marvel of his freedom. There was – one may be sure –heartfelt thanksgiving to God, and a plea for forgiveness that their faith should have been so unrealistic.

The "other place"

Then, with no loss of time, arrangement was made for messengers to go to other prayer–meetings of the brethren and especially to James, the Lord's brother, who by common consent had come to be recognized as the most fitting leader of the Jerusalem ecclesia. The other apostles also would have been specially informed, but they were now all of them busy in the work of the Lord away from Jerusalem; or, after the arrest of Peter, had they all been hustled out of the city to save them from Herod's persecution?

The obvious assumption was that, as soon as the prisoner's disappearance was known, a watch would be set at the city gates, all of them kept closed until first light. So probably the "other place" to which Peter was taken was some obscure Christian home where no one would dream of looking for him. Then, perhaps a few days later, the disguised apostle would be able to get away, mingling with the crowd at the busiest time of the day.

Where at last, he went for safety is entirely a matter of guesswork. Almost certainly it was to some place outside Herod's administration. The Catholic Church is emphatic that he went to Rome. Almost certainly (although Farrar argues strongly against it) Peter did visit Rome and die there in the Nero persecution. But among all the early church notices there is none that identifies an earlier visit except one by Eusebius who specifically mentions the reign of Claudius (i.e. Acts 12); but this comes in a very fanciful paragraph about Simon Magus which deserves little credence (Ecc. Hist. 2.14).

A much more likely guess is that Peter went to Antioch. He could just as easily evade search in that vast city as in Rome. It was outside Herod's jurisdiction, and it had a thriving community of Christians. Also, some time after this Peter certainly was in Antioch along with Paul and Barnabas (Gal. 2:8–14). Over against this, however, is the remarkable omission of Peter's name from the enumeration of prominent brethren busy at Antioch soon after this (13:1,2).

It is probable that Peter actually kept his intended place of refuge secret from the brethren so that, later, when Herod's men made investigation, under interrogation they would be able to say firmly and convincingly: "We do now know where he has gone. He did not tell us."

Action at the prison

Meantime, when a fresh quaternion of soldiers came on duty at Peter's cell at six in the morning, the guards were found to be asleep and the prisoner gone. The excitement created by this discovery was considerable.

The two main steps taken by Herod both proved futile. Christian homes were raided and numbers of them were brought in for questioning. But they all told the same convincing but incredible story. No one could give any hint as to where Peter had now fled.

The soldiers also were roughly cross–examined. Their stories harmonized but were utterly unhelpful, so Herod worked off some of his exasperation by throwing *them* into prison (according to the Roman code). The king was extremely angry, for had he not published his intention that that morning Peter was to be put on trial before the Sanhedrin? And now instead there was this vexing loss of face. But he could do nothing about it. So he went off to

Caesarea, hoping to distract the people's attention by a fine exhibition of statesmanship in the Tyre–and–Zidon crisis.

Herod at Caesarea

A mighty quarrel had sprung up between Herod and the rulers of these two highly prosperous commercial cities. They were "nourished by the king's country," so that good relations were an absolute necessity. Nearly all the commentators assume that Tyre and Zidon needed supplies from the wheat regions of Galilee and Peraea. But although such supplies were doubtless desirable, they were hardly necessary, for the mercantile marine of Phoenicia gave ready access also to the food–growing areas of Egypt and Cyprus. Besides this, was there not "a great dearth" in Israel at that time (11:28,29), so that with the best will in the world there would not be much food to export?

The issue, then, between the two states must have concerned the overland trade routes converging on Tyre and Zidon, since all of those from the south and east *had* to pass through Herod's territory. The king knew that he had a half–nelson on these prosperous neighbours of his, and he meant to make the most of it.

Stage–managing

Accordingly, in the amphitheatre which still exists in Caesarea full preparation was made for an impressive state occasion. It was arranged that immediately after sun–up Herod would make a highly important speech regarding this political problem.

The deputation from Phoenicia, desperately anxious about the outcome, had already made secret approaches to one of the king's high officials called Blastus, reinforcing their friendliness with a substantial bribe. Whatever persuasiveness and suavity that gentleman was able to pour into his master's ear, there is little doubt that, knowing the royal character, he had also recommended that plenty of well–primed "cheer–leaders" be planted in the crowd. Thus, as it turned out, in uncanny fashion, the canny Blastus quite unintentionally brought his lord to destruction.

Instead of a throne being set for Herod, there was placed a *bema,* the judgement seat of a magistrate, as a hint beforehand that Herod meant to speak as a dictator. He had the whip hand, and would now use it. "Agrippa could play the heathen at Caesarea with as much zeal as he could play the Pharisee at Jerusalem" (Farrar).

He came out before the assembled princes and politicians accoutred in a stately picturesque robe of silver which shone impressively in the rays of the rising sun. Then he proceeded to make a speech that was intended to overawe and impress all who heard. Here Luke is careful to choose a word of double meaning — not only "oration," but also "clap trap"!.

The prepared audience reacted in fulsome fashion. "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man," they kept on shouting. And Herod Agrippa did nothing to dissuade them, but basked in the sunshine of this palpable flattery. This was the man who, a few years earlier, had made almost superhuman efforts to persuade Claudius to countermand an order that the emperor's statue be installed in Jerusalem! And now this! When Peter received obeisance from a Roman centurion, he peremptorily said: "Get up. I also am a man." When Paul was worshipped as divine, he remonstrated: "Sirs, why do ye such things? We also are men of like passions with you." But Herod enjoyed getting drunk with wine of this sort. It was his most blissful moment.

The stroke of God

But the next was his worst. The angel of the Lord, who saved Israel at Passover in Egypt, had done his work of saving Peter from his chains at this Passover.

And the destroying angel who smote the Egyptian firstborn now struck down this latest oppressor with a horrible disease. Herod was suddenly seized with violent internal pain. That assembly broke up in disorder. After five days of agony Herod died, "eaten of worms" like a rotten cabbage (Luke's word is an agricultural term).

This came to pass, Luke comments curtly, "because he gave not God the glory." The allusion to Psalm 115:1 was not at all out of context: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name give glory ... Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands."

So died another evil member of an evil family.

"But (what a contrast!) the word of God kept on growing and multiplying" –the phrase quotes the description of Israel flourishing in spite of Egyptian oppression (Ex. 1:7).

Meantime Barnabas and Saul, who had concluded their duties of ministering aid to their Judaean brethren had already returned to Antioch. But they did not travel alone. Barnabas evidently persuaded his cousin John to accompany them: 'We are hoping to start missionary work overseas. Why don't you join us in this?' So he did. (Did they also take Peter with them?) And in token of dedication to a new phase of the Lord's work, John there and then (so the Greek text might suggest) took on a Gentile cognomen. Earlier, and separately, both Barnabas and Saul had been called to a special stewardship, each of them by the Lord himself. Now they were joined by John Mark. Big developments were afoot.

Notes: 12:12–25

12. *Praying,* all night! Cp. Jesus before choosing the twelve (Lk. 6:12,13), and in Gethsemane. Consider also Acts 20: 7–11.
13. *Hearken.* Literally: obey; i.e. obey the summons. Was Peter calling out as well as knocking? Cp. 10:18.
14. *Opened not the gate.* Fuller's quaint comment: "Conceiving that Peter might better stand without the door than the people stay without the news." Contrast v.10.
15. Another alternative: God has again (as in 5:19) sent an angel to release him.
17. *Beckoned* Literally: down–shaking – a motion of the hand to quell noise or disturbance. So also in 13:16; 19:33; 21:40.
    James and the brethren probably means *his* brethren (Mt. 13:55). There is an early tradition that Jesus bade the Twelve stay in Jerusalem for twelve years. They appear to have done this. Now they are all away from the Holy City.
    Another place. If Rome, then surely there would be some hint of this in 28:21,22 or in Paul's Epistle to the Romans.
19. One feels rather sorry for these men. But perhaps it was what they deserved because of their treatment of Peter.
    Put to death is a possible paraphrase, but doubtful. "Led away" is precisely what the word means in every other place. Led *away* to death or to imprisonment. LXX supports the latter Gen. 40:3; 42:16 s.w.
    From Judaea to Caesarea. Another admirable little demonstration of Luke's historical and geographical accuracy. At this time Caesarea did not reckon as belonging to Judaea (a fact only known from a hint in the Talmud).
20. Actual war between two provinces of the empire was out of question, but fiscal measures were not out of question.
    Chamberlain. This is what the word means literally. But apparently it was used also for "treasurer, chancellor of the exchequer."
21. *A set day.* Josephus (Ant. 19.8.2) has a detailed account of this big occasion. He says it was a celebration for the safe return of Herod's friend Claudius from Britain.
23. After Herod's death there was a violent reaction of feeling against him.
25. *Ministry.* Cp. 6:1; Rom. 15:31.

48. An important new Mission (13:1–3)

Although the Twelve were not represented in the ecclesia at Antioch, it was there that the next big development in the growth of the church took place, a step forward which would prove comparable to Pentecost. Indeed, the comparison is rather striking:–

a. A list of the leading persons involved (1:13).
b. The Breaking of Bread and the prayers (1:14; 2:46; cp. "ministered to the Lord").
c. The Holy Spirit imparted (2:2–4).
d. A surge of vigorous preaching (2:14ff).

Of the five leaders at Antioch, the Greek text picks out three – Barnabas, Simeon, and Lucius — as prophets, and two – Manaen and Saul – as teachers.

Why fasting?

The pointed omission of Peter's name suggests that either that apostle did not flee to Antioch (12:17), or that this new selection of Barnabas and Saul took place before Peter's flight from Jerusalem.

The latter conclusion seems to be made more likely by the fact that the brethren were fasting. Yet Jesus had given his disciples only one reason for "afflicting one's soul" in such a way: "The days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast in those days" (Mt. 9:15). That had happened over the weekend when Christ died, and presumably the brethren reminded themselves of this each Easter Friday and Saturday. And this was the time when Peter was in prison (12:3,4).

The names mentioned along with Barnabas and Saul provoke interesting speculations.

Simeon Niger

Simeon, called Niger, was very probably the same as Simon of Cyrene.

The details given about the latter in Mk. 15:21 strongly imply that the family was known to the readers of Mark's gospel; and Papias' declaration that Mark wrote in the first instance for Roman readers is regarded by practically all New Testament scholars as dependable. Incidentally, the nickname Niger (the darkie) is Latin, not Greek, and presumably was inserted by Luke because it would be appreciated by his Roman readers. If indeed this Simeon did come from North Africa, it is to be expected that he would have a swarthy skin (perhaps even with mixed Jewish and negro blood).

It is surely not coincidence that Paul's letter to Rome includes greetings to "Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." Here every detail fits the present hypothesis. Simon of Cyrene was "the father of Alexander and Rufus." "Chosen in the Lord" is a superb reminder of how Simon, chosen by rough Roman soldiers to help with the cross of Jesus, was by that very act chosen to bear the cross all his days — and his family shared this light burden.

And if during those Antioch days Paul was given hospitality at that home (see ch.45), it is easy to see how he would come to think affectionately of Rufus's mother as though she were his own.

Also, in Romans 16, close to the allusion to Rufus there is mention of Lucius also (v.24), as though to match the mention together in Acts 13 of Simeon and Lucius of *Cyrene.*

Simeon must have been one of the prophets who came down from Jerusalem to Antioch (11:27).

Manaen

Another probable bit of instant biography concerns Manaen, "brought up with Herod the tetrarch" who had John the Baptist beheaded ("Studies in the Gospels", p.315). The Greek phrase has two possible meanings — either that Manaen's mother was also Herod's wet–nurse, or that the two boys were educated together, in the hope that Manaen would prove a wholesome influence on the young prince. Almost certainly, the second meaning is what Luke intended: "The friend of the king" (1 Chr. 27:33), rather like the young men whom Rehoboam chose to rely on for advice (1 Kgs. 12:8).

Josephus (Ant. 15.10.5) has an interesting story that when Herod (the Great) was a youth, and with no hopes of power or influence, he encountered an Essene sage called Manachem (Manaen) who had a reputation for prophecy. This holy man clapped Herod on the back and fore–fold that one day he would be King of the Jews. When, against all expectation, this came about, Herod had this Manaen brought before him. "How long shall I reign? Ten years?" "Twenty – more than that, thirty!" was the oracular reply. So there was more royal favour than ever.

It has been surmised that by an act of grace the old man's grandson (another Manaen) was brought to court to share the education of young Herod Antipas.

When Manaen, now fifty or more, became a disciple is not known. Probably he, or else Chuza, Herod's steward (Lk. 8:3), was the nobleman whose sick child Jesus healed from a distance, (Jn. 4:46ff). It seems not unlikely that Manaen was the source of much of Luke's information about both Herod and John the Baptist(e.g.Lk.3:1,7–14,19,20; 9:7–9; 13:31,32; 23:8–12). He and Chuza were probably the two disciples who had access to John in prison, and who were sent by him to Jesus (Lk. 7:19 RVm).

Saul

Last in the Antioch list of five comes Saul. He whose ability and accomplishments were far ahead of the others and must have already been recognized as such, was content to be ordinary, even though the Lord Jesus had assured him that he was to rank with Peter and the rest, an apostle to the Gentiles. Probably his old reputation still hung round him. But in any case he had learned the basic lesson from one of the Lord's parables: "When thou art bidden of any man to a marriage feast (cp. Jn. 3:29), sit not down in the highest room, lest... he that bade thee come and say to thee, Give this man place ... But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room ..." (Lk 14:8ff).

The narrative of the first missionary journey moves on through a mere seven verses (v.9, 13), and already Saul is dominating the scene; and so to the end of his days.

Dedication

These men of God were occupied in the ecclesia, "ministering to the Lord" in prophesying and teaching and leading the Breaking of Bread service, when the Holy Spirit guided Simeon or Lucius to declare the Lord's will to the assembly:

"Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." The Greek text implies that the speaker was *Jesus* (cp. Rev. 2:7). The divine power of the Holy Spirit was at his command as it had been during the ministry. There is also the implication that both men had already been called by the Lord on some earlier occasion.

Regarding Saul there is no problem (22:21 takes care of this). But the only alternative to assuming that the earlier call of Barnabas is unrecorded is to accept the documented identification with the rich young ruler: "Sell all that thou hast, and distribute to the poor... and come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). "Studies in the Gospels," ch. 148.

It is worth noting that for overseas missions the Lord chose two of his most eminent and most gifted servants.

In the ecclesia the heavenly behest became an immediate imperative. They fasted again next day– Easter Saturday – and then without delay, after a service of laying on of hands (such as modern ecclesias choose to ignore entirely), the two missionaries were released (Gk.)

The text of Codex Beza says that the entire ecclesia took part in the service of dedication (cp. Num. 27:18,19). This is in harmony with other examples in Acts. The leaders of the ecclesia provided the initiative (under God), but there had to be ratification of their decision by the assembly (1:15,16,21–23; 6:2; 15:22).

It is interesting to note here how, like Peter, Saul had a gradual progress to office:

a. "God separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace" (Gal. 1:15).
b. "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness... to open their (Gentile) eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light" (26:16,18).
c. "The Lord, even Jesus, .. . hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (9:17).
d. "Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" (22:21).
e. "Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (13:2). (See additional note on v.2).

Notes: 13 .1–3

1. *Prophets and teachers.* 2 Cor. 12:28 makes a careful distinction. Later, Paul was both: 1 Tim. 4:14; Acts 16:3. See also 1 Cor. 14:18.
2. *Fasted.* Alternatively, they were fasting to show their eagerness for the Second Coming.
   Separate. Used of consecration to God of priests, firstborn, sacrifices – and lepers. At this point the Gk. text has an untranslated particle implying climax: "Now is the time."
   Separate unto me. Here the Gk. text includes *de,* a particle implying urgency, necessity.
3. *Fasted and prayed.* There is evidence that in the early church this was also done before a baptismal service.
   Laid their hands on them. Timothy's experience also: 1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14.

49. In Cyprus (13:4–12)

During his ministry the Lord Jesus had sent out his preachers in twos (Mk. 6:7). But now, after the Holy Spirit had selected afresh Barnabas and Saul for this work, the party was augmented by one, or perhaps two, more.

Mark, cousin to Barnabas (Col. 4:10Gk.), but specified here by his Jewish name John, was included in the party doubtless at the wish of Barnabas, but definitely not by the Holy Spirit's selection. Indeed the construction of the sentence in the Greek text *(men ... de ...)* makes a pointed contrast between the choice of the two leaders and the inclusion of John Mark. The hint given here prepares the mind of the perceptive reader for what is to come (v.13; 15:36–40).

"They had also John for their minister" is a description which has left many a commentator guessing. What function does this intimate? The same word "minister" is used by Luke for the synagogue official who cared for the scrolls of Holy Scripture (Lk. 4:17,20). And since Barnabas was a Levite (4:36), so also most probably was his cousin. Significantly, too, John Mark is mentioned here immediately after reference to the synagogues. So very probably, he went along as a secretary and scribe of portions of Scripture, as Baruch was for Jeremiah (cp. 2 Cor. 3:3).

Titus?

It may be that it was as a counterpoise to John Mark that Saul now suggested the inclusion of Titus in the party. Admittedly, the idea that Titus travelled with them rests on somewhat slender evidence. His name is not so much as mentioned in the record of this mission; but the same is true for the whole of Luke's record in Acts. It is known from 2 Corinthians that in the third journey Titus was an absolutely indispensable aide in Paul's work, yet there is no mention of him in Acts 19,20 – probably for the simple reason that (as will be advanced later) he was Luke's brother.

But why should it be even postulated that Titus was on this first journey? There are two small hints. In the early non–canonical writing called "The Acts of Paul and Thekla", the first portion of which is about Paul's first visit to Iconium, Titus is mentioned as associated with Paul there. Also in the Epistle to the Galatians, written between the first and second journeys, Paul twice mentions Titus in a way that would be rather pointless unless Titus were known to his Galatian readers.

The repeated emphasis (v.2,2,3,4,9) on this important new project being under the direction of the Holy Spirit seems to be mentioned as a kind of justification against some opposition or criticism. If indeed Saul was already talking about the possibility of taking the gospel to Gentiles as well as Jews, there would, of course, be a marked lack of enthusiasm among the Judaists.

Cyprus: a poor start

The little group of the Lord's preachers travelled the few miles from Antioch to Seleucia at the mouth of the Orontes river, and there they took passage across to Cyprus. It was a fairly obvious start to their missionary work, for Barnabas being a Cypriot by birth or at one time by residence must have been well–known to the plentiful Jewish communities dotted through the island.

So at Salamis and through the full length of Cyprus they visited synagogue after synagogue, and being known or recognized (by the robes they wore?) as doctors of the Law, they had no lack of opportunity to make known the message concerning the Lord Jesus. But to what purpose? Luke gives not the slightest hint of success attending their efforts. One of the most discouraging places visited by Paul was Athens, yet even that spiritually un–intelligent city brought Dionysius the university counsellor and Damaris and others into the family of Christ (17:34). But apparently Cyprus, for all its loveliness, fertility and prosperity, could not find one

Jew for the Lord. It was a discouraging start to their long journey.

However, they persevered, from city to city, from synagogue to synagogue, for already it was a settled principle in the preaching of the gospel: "To the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (13:46; 14:1; 17:2; 18:4,19; 19:8; Rom. 1:16).

Thus they "went through" the whole island" (v.6RV). Here Luke uses what evidently became in the early church a missionary word, for all its ten occurrences have this kind of context; yet, remarkably enough, it does not occur once in the first twelve chapters of Acts.

Paphos

At last they came to Paphos, the centre of administration at the western end of the island, and there they soon had opportunity to preach the word to the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus. How this came about is a matter of speculation. The word "found" (v.6) might imply that before reaching Paphos they heard about the Jewish sorcerer who had made such a hit with the proconsul, and on arrival there they sought him out (at the synagogue service?). Or it may be that Sergius Paulus, a man with a lively enquiring mind (Gk.), hearing that one of the preachers bore the same name as himself (v.9) and was also a Roman citizen, was moved by curiosity to enquire concerning their teaching.

Certainly the encounter promised a different kind of experience from what they had had hitherto.

Sergius Paulus

There is here another example of what a careful and dependable historian Luke is, for he attaches to Sergius Paulus just the right official designation: *anthupatos,* proconsul. At an earlier period, and again later in the reign of Hadrian the term proconsul would have been a misnomer. Similarly, Luke correctly refers to local governors at Philippi as *strategoi,* magistrates (16:36), and as *politarchai* at Thessalonica (17:6); also he correctly describes Derbe and Lystra as "cities of Lycaonia" (14:6), although included in the province of Galatia. A careless writer, or one of (say) a century later would almost certainly have blundered badly in details of this sort.

This Sergius Paulus apparently belonged to a Roman family permanently settled in Cyprus (there was another Sergius Paulus there some generations later). Pliny describes this proconsul as one with a keen interest in natural history. So since it was quite the done thing in those days for an intellectual aristocrat to keep his own tame philosopher, this would probably explain the status of Barjesus in his ménage. And it would seem that this rogue had made a deep impression on his sponsor – Luke implies this by his careful choice of a preposition (v.7 *sun,* not *meta).*

A Jewish mountebank

The pen–and–ink sketch of Barjesus is superlatively done. He was a man of consequence (Gk: *aner),* a sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew (there is no missing the disgust with which Luke wrote that last word).

The word "sorcerer" is *magos,* the description of the wise men of the east who were alerted and led by the star. "False prophet" means that he brazenly claimed to have personal revelations from God. And by his Jewishness he traded on the high standing which the religion of Israel had amongst many high–class Romans.

Josephus (20.7.2) has a circumstantial story about Felix (24:22–27) employing a Jewish Cypriot sorcerer called Simon to persuade that matchless beauty Drusilla to leave her husband and rejoice in his affections instead. The remarkable similarity of detail suggests that this was a later chapter in the unscrupulous career of Bar–jesus.

Several hints suggest that this fellow posed as an astrologer, as bogus as all the rest of them. The title Magos very commonly implied a specialist in astronomy, which for long centuries had been an integral part of Babylonian religion. His self–chosen cognomen: Son of Joshua, was doubtless intended to imply that he too could call upon the sun and moon to stand still. Probably this was why Paul chose to describe his inflicted blindness as "not seeing the sun for a season." The eclipse cycles were certainly known well before the first century, so probably this bogus prophet had made a big impression on the proconsul by a bit of astute forecasting.

His other name Elymas, given as an interpretation of *magos,* not of Bar–jesus, is not without its difficulty. In desperation the commentators have linked it with an Arabic word meaning "the wise one." In this they seem to have overlooked that in supplying an interpretation, Luke would necessarily have to move into Greek or Hebrew, and certainly not Arabic. Thus it seems more likely that Elymas is a condensed form of El–Olam (with a graecised ending)–the Mighty One of the Universe, a name that would chime in well with his astrological pretensions. Codex Beza and other texts give the alternative Etoimas, which would link unmistakably with a Greek verb for "get ready"–in other words "The One who prepares events beforehand."

Collision

This witch–doctor soon realised that in men of such sober quality and incisive intellect as Paul and Barnabas there was grave risk of exposure of his pretensions. So in the presence of Sergius Paulus he used all his influence in a derogation of the Faith which the men of God were now expounding.

The situation called for strong action, and so also thought the Lord in heaven, for all at once Paul found himself filled (Gk. aorist) with a fresh surge of power and guidance from the Holy Spirit (cp.4:8). Fastening his eyes on this plausible opponent of truth, he exposed him as a veritable seed of the serpent (had Paul been discoursing about the Fall in Eden?): "O full of all *subtilty* ... thou *son of the devil* (and not son of Joshua), thou *enemy* of all righteousness ..." – there is no missing the allusions to Genesis (3:1,15; cp. Jn 8:44).

Then, recalling his own experience when he was a violent enemy of the Faith (9:8), the apostle pronounced the same salutary judgement on this adversary: "blind, not seeing the sun until an appropriate time." This retribution for wilful wickedness began to operate forthwith, but gradually: "There fell on him (as from heaven) a mist" like the effect of a "ripe" cataract, like the fog afflicting the eyes of a dying man; and this quickly became total obscurity, "a darkness," so that now in great distress he groped here and there, piteously beseeching someone to be his guide–dog, and finding no help at all, so obnoxious had been his character in the days of his evil prosperity.

The seed of the serpent

With what superb aptness did Paul rebuke in the words of Holy Scripture! With what biting irony did he declare to this false prophet: "And now, *behold*(!), *the hand of the Lord is upon thee,"* not inspiration, but in judgement, for "perverting the right ways of the Lord."

"Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? *prudent* (like Sergius Paulus), and he shall know them? for *the ways of the Lord are right,* and the just shall walk in them; but transgressors (such as Bar–jesus) shall fall therein" (Hos. 14:9).

"They have made them crooked paths (cf. the right ways of the Lord) ... we grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noon day (not seeing the sun) as in the night: we are in desolate places (i.e. without a helper) as dead men" (Is. 59:8,10).

There is no intimation of the duration of the astrologer's blindness, except perhaps in the limitation of the judgement Saul himself had experienced. There would indeed be added power in the miracle, and more intense conviction, if Saul specified the period to Sergius Paulus, and on the third day was proved right.

Type of Israel

As Saul had re–enacted in his own experience the death and resurrection of the Lord, Bar–jesus anticipated in type the story of his own nation:

a. False prophecy, and unbelief of the gospel.
b. Deliberate hindrance to the preaching of the gospel to Gentiles.
c. Judicial blindness (28:26).
d. Avoided by all, and without help from any.
e. The Gentile, "seeking to hear the word of God," believes.

Conversion

The reaction of the proconsul to the remarkable development before his eyes involves a problem. "When he saw what was done, he believed." But the text does not say that he was baptized. However, there is the same omission in the account of Paul's preaching at Antioch (13:48), and again at Iconium (14:1); which surely indicates that "believed" implies baptism.

Yet it is difficult to imagine that Sergius Paulus was baptized there and then, for his official duties would necessarily involve him in the idolatrous routine inescapably associated with the army administration. Did he solve his difficulty as Naaman did (2 Kgs. 5:18)? Or did he delay receiving baptism until (like Cornelius) he had had time to pull out from imperial service? It may be that he was actually received into the faith a few years later, when Barnabas and John Mark were again in Cyprus (15:39).

In his book "Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen" Ramsay gives reasons for believing that the proconsul became a convert in the fullest sense of the word, and that in later days some of his children suffered martyrdom.

The unexpected phrase: "being astonished at the doctrine (teaching) of the Lord" seems to imply that, much as he marvelled at the miracle, he wondered yet more at the power of the message, so simple and satisfying compared with the complicated crudities of Rome's paltry paganism.

Saul is called Paul

It is in connection with the encounter at Paphos that Luke introduces: "Saul, who also is called Paul." And from now on, it is always Paul.

Some have guessed, most inadequately, that it was at Paphos where the apostle first assumed this Gentile name, and that he did so in honour of his first Gentile convert. This is highly unlikely. Inheriting Roman citizenship he would almost certainly have a Roman cognomen from earliest days. Now, regarding the conversion of Sergius Paulus as a sign from heaven, he decides that preaching to Gentiles must be his mission henceforth, and therefore his Gentile name must have precedence.

But why *this* name? Treated as a Latin label, it means "little, the wee one;" and no doubt Paul sometimes had this in mind, as when he wrote: "For I am the least of the apostles ... but I laboured more abundantly than they all" (1 Cor. 15:9); or as when he read, concerning Saul of Benjamin: "When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel?" (1 Sam. 15:17).

Yet for one who was far more a Jew than he was a Roman, is it not likely that he found in the Old Testament many a passage with a meaningful echo of his own name? The Hebrew words for "work", "wonderful", and "separate", all suggest the possibility of a play on the name Paul,

after the manner commonplace in the prophets. Would not Paul love to dwell on the italicised words in such passages as these?:

"God is my King of old,. *working* salvation(s) in the midst of the earth" (Ps 74:12).

"I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and *wonderfully made: marvellous* are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (Ps. 139:14).

"Paul, an apostle, *separated* unto the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1).

"God, who *separated* me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace..." (Gal. 1:15).

In these last two passages, the apostle was doubtless, as he often did, writing in Greek but thinking in Hebrew.

Notes: 13:4–12

5. *Minister.* When used in a Christian sense this frequently means the ministry of the word: 13:36; 26 –16; Lk. 1:2; 1 Cor. 4:1; (2 Tim. 4:11).
7. *Prudent.* LXX uses the same word about Joseph and Daniel; Gen. 41:33,39; Dan. 1:4.
   Desired RV is better: "sought". It may imply enquiry in the face of hindrances, or (classically) asking questions.
8. *Withstood them.* How?
9. *Saul who also is called Paul.* One of the early fathers comments that what Saul had inflicted, Paul suffered. Saul stoned, Paul was stoned. Saul inflicted scourgings, Paul five times had to bear them. Saul hunted the church, Paul had to be let down in a basket. Saul bound the believers, Paul was bound. Also, Saul was struck blind, Paul now inflicted blindness.
10. *The right ways of the Lord.* Cp. 2 Pet. 2:15,17 (v.11).
12. *The deputy believed.* Here is the first fulfilment of the Lord's assignment to Paul: "to bear my name before Gentiles and kings" (9:15).

50. From Perga to Antioch (13:13–15)

By any ordinary standards of judgement (and without allowance for any guidance by the Spirit) Luke ranks as one of the world's great historians. It is, then, somewhat remarkable that only very occasionally (e.g. 17:2; 19:10) does he supply his readers with any time indications. How long the preachers of the gospel spent in this place or that is left out. So it is difficult to tell even by inference how long Paul and Barnabas continued at Paphos after making such an impression on the Roman proconsul.

Most commentators assume that the stay at Paphos was very brief. But if so, why should it have been? Can it be that Sergius Paulus asked them to leave because of signs of angry reaction from the local Jewish community after the summary discipline meted out to the Jewish false prophet? Vivid as the narrative is it often fails to tell as much detail as the reader would like.

From this point on, Paul appears in the lead. Except when they were back in Jerusalem (15:12,25) or when the pagan judgements of the men of Lystra were involved (14:12), the spotlight is always on Paul. It says much for the character of Barnabas that he was content to have it so.

The phrase: "Paul and his company" – literally: "those around Paul" – surely suggests more than just Barnabas and John Mark, but there is indication of no other besides Titus (see ch. 49).

John Mark's return

The voyage across to Attalia, and so to Perga, was short. And now, at Perga, there developed a major crisis in this pioneering journey. John Mark cut short his participation in its work, and returned to Jerusalem.

All kinds of valueless unsupported guesses have been made as to the reason for this — fear of travel danger, fear of persecution, ill–health, homesickness, resentment that Barnabas had been supplanted, anxiety about the famine (12:25).

Careful attention to the details of the narrative reveals how, very cleverly, Luke has provided his reader with hints that at Perga there developed a major disagreement on policy. A glance at the map shows that Paul was now intent on reaching, via Antioch, the large cities of the province of Asia. He meant to preach the gospel to that considerable Gentile population.

John Mark evidently had a strong Judaistic prejudice, and found this Gentile policy quite unacceptable. It is noteworthy that:

a. Here his Gentile name Marcus is carefully omitted.
b. He "departed from *them."* So the issue was in some way personal, and did not concern health or any external factors of their travel
c. He returned not to Antioch, their starting point, but to Jerusalem the headquarters of the Law.
d. In verse 5 his name is carefully mentioned adjoining a reference to "synagogues of the Jews."
e. John Mark was not included (v.3,5) in the official commendation to the work given to Paul and Barnabas by the Antioch ecclesia.
f. As "cousin" to Barnabas, he was almost certainly a Levite.
g. The Greek *men ...de* construction in v.4,5 suggests an antithesis between Mark and the others.

Perga neglected – why?

The pointed omission of any mention of preaching activities in Perga calls for explanation. Ramsay has made a fair case for believing that Paul suffered from some recurrent sickness, probably malaria; he has further suggested that in the heat and humidity of low–lying Perga in early July, Paul was badly hit by this affliction, and had to clear out to the cooler drier atmosphere of Antioch at 3600 feet.

Galatians 4:13 becomes the key passage here: "Ye know that because of an infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you the first time."

The difficulty here is in the journey to Antioch — a hundred miles fraught with all kinds of difficulties and hardships:

"The journals of modern wanderers tell us of the drenching rains, the glaring heats, the terrible fatigues ... the stings of insects, the blinding storms of dust... the scarcity and badness of provisions" (Farrar, commenting on nineteenth century travel in that area). Certainly this Antioch road would specially merit Paul's description: "perils of rivers, perils of robbers" (2 Cor. 11:26). It was about this time that a Roman fort and garrison had to be established on this road to suppress brigandage.

Would a man much weakened by fever be equal to a journey of this kind?

Another even more drastic explanation points to the number of phrases in the Epistle to the Galatians which might support the conclusion that in Perga the Jews turned violently against Paul and actually crucified him (6:17; 2 .20; 3:1; 4:13,14; 2 Cor. 4:10; 12:7).

The theory needs much stronger support if it is to have precedence over a simpler and far more likely explanation – that Paul wished to get on to the great cities of Asia, and for that reason did not linger in Perga. Nor would he have stayed in Antioch but for "an infirmity of the flesh" which beset him when he got there. Whatever it was, it was evidently sufficient to dictate cancellation of more ambitious plans.

There must, in that case, have been some lapse of time after arrival in Antioch during which the apostle was too incapacitated to do any preaching, for when he did at length attempt this in the synagogues, the ravages of the disease could still be read in his appearance: "And my temptation which was in my flesh, ye despised not, nor spat out; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4:14). The reader is left wishing to know more about this briefly–documented part of Paul's experience.

Antioch

"Antioch of Pisidia" (RV) was actually in Phrygia. Then why this geographical misnomer, and why should Paul's letter to this and the other ecclesias be called his Epistle to the Galatians?
The explanation appears to be that, in spite of historical boundaries, Antioch was closely linked with Pisidia, being almost on the border. And, along with Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, it was included in the large Roman province of Galatia which stretched also a great distance to the north.

This latter fact influenced Lightfoot, the learned bishop of Durham, to propound the idea that the Galatian churches to whom Paul wrote his epistle were founded in the course of a considerable campaign, utterly unchronicled and never referred to, away in the north.

This theory, now completely abandoned, would never have been given credence but for the prestige attaching to the name of Lightfoot. It is a signal illustration of how a man may have weighty scholarship, and yet lack judgement. One day the theological world, followed at present by many others who should know better, will wake up to the fact that another of Lightfoot's great theories also needs to be discarded – the notion that Colossians, Ephesians, 1 John, and sundry other passages in the epistles and in Revelation were written against Gnosticism. If for "Gnosticism" Lightfoot had substituted "Judaism," his expositions would

have been much more lucid and intelligible, and his own reputation greatly enhanced.

When it says that in the synagogue at Antioch – there was only one – Paul and Barnabas sat down, it may mean that they took their seats on the rabbinic bench. If also they were wearing their rabbinic robes it is easy to understand why they immediately became the centre of much attention. Hence the otherwise remarkable invitation from the Chazzan and elders to two complete strangers to address the assembly:

"Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation (or consolation) for the people, say on."

If the phrase used here was more than a general term, its specific reference was to "the consolation of Israel," the coming of Messiah (Lk. 2:25), for which devout Jews everywhere had been specially on the alert ever since the news had gone like wildfire through synagogues everywhere about John the Baptist (13:24,25).

So Paul stood up to give them the very "consolation" they longed for. It is remarkable, if the apostle had suffered grievously from sickness or persecution before reaching Antioch, that it should have been he and not Barnabas who now addressed the congregation. The readiness of the latter to play second fiddle, here and elsewhere, is something quite admirable.

Evidently there was a considerable hubbub in the synagogue, for Luke records, somewhat unusually (see 21:40), how, when he began, Paul "beckoned with the hand." Probably this disturbance was due to the fact that now the entire congregation could recognize with ill–suppressed anticipation (for Jewish synagogue audiences are always noisy) that they were about to hear a great scholar from Jerusalem.

Notes: 13:13–16

13. *Paul and his company;* literally: 'those around Paul' – as though the travelling decision was taken by them and not by Paul. A sick man?
    Loosed. Besides its other meanings, this Greek word was also a sailor's term for setting sail. Luke uses it frequently in this sense: 16:11; 18:21; 20:3,13; 21:1,2 etc.
    Departing is a fairly strong word; s.w. Mt. 7:13. But in Acts 15:38 the word is even stronger. Note Pr. 25:19.
14. *Sat down.* It has been argued, from Lk. 4:20, Mt. 5:1, that Paul here assumed the role of teacher. But "sent" (v.15) disallows this. He and Barnabas must have been in the congregation. And here Paul stood up (v.16) to teach.

51. In the synagogue at Antioch (13:16–37)

From allusions made by Paul in the course of his speech, it is possible to infer with a fair degree of probability that the "daily readings" that day were from Deuteronomy 1 and Isaiah 1, and since these fell on the 44th sabbath, the time of year was the end of July.

Luke makes special mention of "the law and the prophets," and the following references to unusual words in the Septuagint Version are traceable in his summary of Paul's speech:

a. "bare them as a nursing father" (Gk: *etrophophorēsen,* v. 18, from Dt. 1:31).
b. "exalted" (Gk: *hupsōsen,* v.17, from Is. 1:2: "brought up").
c. "divided to them by lot" (Gk: *kate–klēronomēsen,* v.19 – RV: "gave them for an inheritance" – from Dt. 1:38).
d. There is also the allusion to "judges" (v.20; cp. Is. 1:26).

So it would seem that Paul began his discourse with a running commentary on the daily readings, stressing the unfailing guidance of God over Israel in good times and in bad.

It is noteworthy that Paul addressed himself not only to the "men of Israel" but also to the Gentile sympathizers with Judaism – "ye that fear God" – who were evidently present in unusual numbers. It was clearly the apostle's purpose that Gentiles should understand that the gospel was for them as well as for Israel (v. 16, 17, 26, 39, 42).

It is sometimes asserted that essentially Paul's speech at Antioch was a repeat of what he had heard Stephen argue in the course of his defence before the Sanhedrin. But this was hardly the case. Stephen had reasoned his way to the work of the Messiah via two outstanding types, Joseph and Moses. But Paul's method was to trace the clear evidences of progressive divine purpose through Israel's chequered history up to the time of David, and then to show that the promised Messiah would surpass even him.

So there was eloquent recall of how God guided the fathers and gave them His promises, how their descendants were impressively brought out of Egyptian affliction into the wilderness. Then, under Joshua seven Canaanite nations were uprooted, and their land taken over and shared out. The polychromatic period of the judges led on to the wholesome rule of Samuel. Then came the kings. First, Saul of Benjamin, a failure, now ruefully mentioned by another Saul of Benjamin. But next, by the grace of God, "David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will".

Here, in this first allusion to David, every phrase was carefully chosen.

"I have found" is an expression quarried from Psalm 89:20, where the text continues:"... David my servant, with my holy oil have I anointed him" (an echo of the work of Samuel; 1 Sam. 16). "Son of Jesse" was intended to bring to mind the Messianic prophecy about "a rod out of the stem of Jesse" (Is. 11:1).

"A man after mine own heart" echoes Samuel's prophecy of Saul's successor (1 Sam. 13:14). Yet, as Paul's hearers must have known right well, this description was often not true of David. Then why was it used, except to foreshadow Messiah, son of David?

So also, especially, with the next phrase: "which shall fulfil all my will." The words are culled from Psalm 40:8, a psalm of David which was never wholly true of David, but which the New Testament uses with great effect regarding Jesus: "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Heb. 10:6,7).

Paul was now at the centre of his argument: "Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus."

But how could the apostle expect his hearers to take *his* word for it that Jesus of Nazareth truly was the promised Seed of David? He didn't. There was the witness of John the Baptist to establish that Messiah could be expected forthwith. Word about John had gone all through Jewry, not only in Judaea and Galilee but to the entire Dispersion, and it was generally agreed that John was a true prophet. So if Jesus was not the Messiah whom he proclaimed, who was? And did not the name Jesus declare another Joshua who would conquer the Gentiles (with his sword or his message?), and give Israel their inheritance?

In this allusion Paul made adroit reference to three more Scriptures:

a. "Of this man's (David's) seed hath God .. . *raised* unto Israel a Saviour Jesus. This somewhat unexpected Greek verb echoes the usage in Zech. 3:8 LXX: "Behold, I will *bring forth* my Servant the Branch ... Joshua (Jesus) the high priest," and there follows an assurance of forgiveness and of Messiah's kingdom.
b. "John ... preached before his *coming."* This key word, distinctly unusual, is surely derived from Mal. 3:2 LXX: "Who may abide the day of his coming?" The preceding verse foretells the work of John. Luke's phrase, is literally: *"before the face of* his coming," which is precisely the wording of Mal. 3:1 LXX.
c. Also, "as John fulfilled his course," employs an even more unusual word *dromos,* which (as in 'hippodrome') is always associated with running. There is here an allusion to the way in which Elijah, the prophet like unto John the Baptist, ran before the chariot of Ahab, (1 Kgs. 18:46), thus appealing to him (in vain, as it turned out) to make it the chariot of the Lord. This explains Paul's use of "fulfilled," as of a prophecy or type.

The broad shape of Paul's argument so far begins to be impressive as it follows the very idea developed in his later epistle to these same people (Gal. 3:24,25; 4:1–7) – Israel (and also the New Israel) being educated by stages for the fulness of God's redeeming work in Christ; judges, prophets, a king, then David, the best king of all, pointing to Messiah. The sequence of names in itself suggested this progression: Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, John the Baptist, and then – Jesus. But the other names mentioned had a more ominous ring about them:

Canaan, Saul, Jerusalem (v.27), Pilate (v.28).

This Jesus, Paul now set about demonstrating, was the climax of Jewish history, even though his ministry had seemed to end in anticlimax. So the apostle made a special appeal for sympathetic attention: "Men, brethren (he was applying his apostrophe to them all, Jews and Gentiles alike), children of the stock of Abraham, and those (Gentiles) among you that fear God, to you (both classes!) is the word of this salvation sent." Most of them would recognize at once his play on the name Jesus. Refused by the men of Jerusalem, "the word of this salvation" was now being brought to the dispersion and to God–fearing Gentiles. "They (the rulers) knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets" which they had just heard read. Paul was making deliberate allusion to the Bible reading for that day: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel *doth not know, my* people doth not consider" (Is. 1:3). The apostle's words were in no way an effort at excuse for the rough rejection of Jesus. He used the words: "knew him not" in the sense of "they ignored him" and his claims (so also Peter in 3:17).

In their condemning of Jesus the rulers had fulfilled one prophecy after another, and had provided a signal demonstration of the truth of Isaiah's words read to them that very day: "She (Jerusalem) was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers" (Is. 1:21).

Proving the truth of his censure, Paul quoted the actual words of Pilate in the trial of Jesus: "Though they *found no cause of death in him,* yet they asked Pilate that he should be slain" (cp. Lk. 23:21; Jn. 19:6). And by repetition of that word, "asked", the apostle reminded them of the nation's earlier perversity in asking for a king, Saul (v.21); now they had blundered again in asking that the best king of all be put to death.

All through, Paul continued to harp on the exact correspondence between the story of Jesus of Nazareth and what the prophets had foretold (v.29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 40, 41). In all that he said they could not but marvel at this convincing marshalling of one Scripture after another, all of it with a sureness of insight and lucidity which carried them with him in spite of themselves.

The facts concerning the Lord's death and resurrection were set out simply before them – reminders really, for there can have been few Jews throughout the empire who had not heard them, and been stirred or gladdened or shaken by them. And now those varied reactions were all being experienced again in the synagogue at Antioch.

The congruence with the anticipations of the prophets was not to be gainsaid. Here Paul was anticipating the repetitious emphasis which he later made so familiar in one of his epistles: "according to the Scriptures ... according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3,4); and also in 1 Cor. 15:5–8, as here (v.31), an emphasis on *witnesses* of the fact of the Lord's resurrection.

a. There was special purpose in his allusion to the cross as a tree (v.29) which, literally, it certainly wasn't. Here was deliberate echo of Dt. 21:23, the Scripture he was later to use so effectively in his epistle to these Galatians: "Cursed is every–one that hangeth on a tree" (3:13). Already Paul was preparing the minds of his hearers for the drastic conclusion that a Law which thus brought a curse on an utterly innocent man was by that very fact invalidated.
b. "Good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers." Here, as in Galatians 3, is the idea, so consistently ignored by the churches today, that the gospel was proclaimed in the promises. The parallels here with Gal. 3:1 –15 are readily recognizable. They can hardly be accidental: "seed of Abraham" (v.26), "the tree" (v.29), "the gospel ... the promises (v.32), "forgiveness of sins" (v.38), "all (Jews and Gentiles) that believe are justified... not by the law of Moses" (v.39).
c. The resurrection of Jesus was established, somewhat unexpectedly, from Psalm 2:7: "This day have I begotten thee." Here the key word is "begotten." It can apply only to the virgin birth or the resurrection of the Lord, and since the words are spoken to a mature man, the former of these is excluded. Many argue that here there is no allusion to the resurrection of Jesus, but only to his being "raised up" in the sense that David was (v.22). But this must be disallowed for two reasons: 1. The Greek words are different. That in v.33 normally (though not invariably) means resurrection. 2. Psalm 2:7 is also used as a proof–text in Hebrews – to establish the divine status of Christ (1:5) and to prove his Melchizedek priesthood (5:5). In neither place can reference to the days of his flesh be read very easily.
d. A further Scripture (Is. 55:3) establishes that the Lord's resurrection was to be to eternal life, "now no more to return to corruption." But does "I will give thee the sure mercies of David" prove that? There can be no question that there is allusion here to the great promise made to David (the word translated "sure" comes in Ps. 89:28,37 LXX with reference to that promise). The original promise had harped repeatedly on the truth that the promised Messiah would reign *for ever* (2 Sam. 7:13,16), so of course he must be an *immortal* king. And the word "mercies" – literally, "the holy things" – neatly prepared the way for Paul's next Bible reference: God's "Holy One." The context in Isaiah 55 is so pointed that it is impossible to believe that Paul failed to use it. There is the futility of seeking justification by one's own good works (v.2a); instead, let there be justification by faith in the message (v.3a); the one who is promised is "a prince and a commander to Israel" (v.4); but also he draws to himself "the Gentiles who knew not thee" (v.5). All of this is strictly in the line of development of the apostle's thought in his discourse.
e. Following Peter at Pentecost, Paul next made powerful use of Psalm 16:10: "Thou wilt not give (i.e. appoint, a common Hebraism) thine Holy One to see corruption." There followed a ruthlessly logical exposure of the futility of being content with a fulfilment of these words in David's experience. *He* died, and was buried, and (Peter had been able to say) "his

sepulchre is with us (yonder!) unto this day" (2:29). So of course he saw corruption, and therefore of course that Davidic psalm could not apply to him, but must be about his Messianic Son.

f. Indeed, the promise made to David implied as much. Was it not to be fulfilled after "thou shalt sleep with thy fathers" (2 Sam. 7:12)? So Paul underlined the point confidently: "David, after he had served (God) in his own generation, by the will of God (expressed in the promise) fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption." The argument is precisely that of Peter at Pentecost. For David, as for all others, there was corruption, but for the Holy One of God no corruption, for he rose the third day. (See also chapter 8 about this).

Paul had now made his case, had made it over and over again, regarding Jesus. There remained now to lead his hearers to the practical consequences of this good news.

Notes: 13:16–37

16. *Ye that fear God*; v .48. Ps. 25:12–14 seems appropriate.
18. *Suffered he their manners.* Almost certainly the alternative reading, with one letter different, is correct: "bare them as a nursing father" (see AV mg). God did not "put up with their ways," He destroyed the rebels. But He nourished and fed the people, and at the proper time gave them Joshua–Jesus.
19. *Seven nations.* The list in Gen. 15:19–21 has ten. But the Kenites were Jethro's tribe, the Kentizzites were Caleb's, and the Jebusites were independent until the time of David.
20. *Four hundred and fifty years.* Critics have declared this figure utterly irreconcilable with 1 Kgs. 6:1. But there are two possibilities: (a) The total period of the judges totals 339 years, and the total period of the oppressions amounts to 111 years. It is very likely that some of these periods overlapped, but for Paul's purpose these figures would serve. (b) The text can be read as referring this 450 to the period from the time of the Fathers. In that case, 400 (:Gen. 15:13) + 40 (wilderness) + 10 (conquest). See also "Samuel, Saul, David" (HAW), ch. 22.
21. *Desired* is really "asked for," a play on the name of Saul.
    Forty years. So Josephus. But where did he get it from?
22. *Removed.* Deposed (1 Sam. 15:23); s.w. Lk. 16:4. The implication: If God can reject a man as impressive as Saul, may He not likewise reject Israel?
    Which shall fulfil all my will. Another possibility is that Paul was quoting Is. 44:28 LXX, for "he raised up" (also v. 22) may link with 45:13. (Also, 45:13 LXX has "all his ways are right" – Acts 13:10). These phrases would tell the discerning in Paul's audience that he was talking not so much about David as about Messiah. The Isaiah prophecy should in no wise be referred to Cyrus.

25. *He said.* He kept on saying.
    Whom think ye that I am? The Messiah? I am not!
26. *Stock of Abraham.* Another allusion to the teaching of John (Mt. 3:9,11) – and not inappropriate in view of v.46.
    The word of this salvation sent. From Ps. 107:20 (note "saveth" in v.19).
29. *Fulfilled.* s.w. Jn. 19:28,30.
    They... they... It seems odd to give these pronouns the same antecedent, but in view of the fact that Jesus was buried by two members of the Sanhedrin (Jn. 19:31), it is just possible. Or is this a sign of compression in Luke's reporting?
30. *God raised him.* Verses 31–37 completely establish this proposition.
31. *Witnesses.* Paul could have used his own experience.
33. *Hath fulfilled.* An emphatic form of an emphatic word.
34. *Sure* is really "faithful;" s.w. Is. 1:21,26 LXX, their Bible reading that day.

52. Appeal and Warning (13:38–43)

Paul came now to the climax of his powerful and persuasive discourse. It was marked by a fresh appealing apostrophe. He had begun: "Men of Israel, and ye that fear God" (v.16). Then: "Men, brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God" (v.26). Now, having set forth his message as a gospel for every man, he comprehended all his listeners in a simple effective: "Brethren!", persuading them to consider the marvel of divine grace in Jesus:

"Through this man is proclaimed unto you the forgiveness of sins." But to any Jew, schooled in the law, expiation could come in only one way – through the offering of sacrifice. So the rejection and death of Jesus of Nazareth may have been brought about through Jewish intransigence (v.27–29), but behind all that was a God–contrived atonement. And the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead surely established that that sacrificial death had been, in the sight of God, more than sufficient.

Justification by faith

All that was needed to appropriate the benefits of this sacrifice was an implicit faith in this Saviour–King: *"In* him (Paul surely expounded, or at least implied, baptism here) *all* that believe (whether Jew or Gentile) are justified from all things."

Here, for the first time, is a declaration of the great Pauline doctrine of justification by faith, which he was later to hammer away at in his epistle to these Galatians.

The apostle proceeded to enunciate the corresponding negative: "(From your sins) *ye* could not (in all your past endeavours) be justified by the Law of Moses" (cp. Gal. 2:16). Here, in contrast to *"all* that believe" he now pointedly said "ye (Jews)." He spoke here out of his own profound experience. He'd tried it! How he'd tried!!

There was need also for warning against rejecting the message as Jesus himself had been rejected: "Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets." There were drastic alternatives – unearned forgiveness or well–earned judgement – poised on the fulcrum of Paul's "lest." Every soul present must choose.

Biblical warning

The warning was thrust home with a dramatic quotation from Habakkuk:

"Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you" (1:5).

It is easy to see why Paul chose to make such play with this relatively obscure passage. Originally it was part of Habakkuk's warning to his nation in the time of Hezekiah (not Zedekiah, as is commonly assumed). Then the alternatives had been, on the one hand, desolation from the ravages of invading Assyrians, and on the other, protection and a glorious salvation in Jerusalem through faith in Jehovah and his Messianic king. The judgement did not by–pass those who had no faith in God's Passover in the holy city. Habakkuk had also said, with what fervour: "The man justified by his faith shall live" (2:4), and Paul probably made great play with that passage also.

But his main text harped on the threatened *work* of God in judgement on all "despisers." This LXX reading has a marked difference from the received Hebrew text: "among the Gentiles." Remarkably, this drastic change is due entirely to the tiniest possible variation in one Hebrew letter: BGOIM, BGDIM (in Hebrew the difference is even smaller than as printed here). Paul's use of the LXX version establishes its correctness.

In any case the context requires this, for without doubt at this point there was no need to admonish Gentiles, but every need to warn Jews.

But what judgement was he now warning against? – the wreck of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, or the second coming of the Lord? It is possible to infer that the former of these was meant, for the word "perish" can be read as a close equivalent of "I–chabod, no glory left!" This would be God's sensational work against their reliance on their own works. Word of it would come to these Jews of the dispersion who, being unable to believe the gospel, would also find themselves unable to believe the horrifying news of wrath against the holy city.

At this point in the narrative Codex Beza stands alone in adding: "and they fell silent," as though the synagogue crowd, normally restless and buzzing with comment, was now completely overawed by the power of Paul's appeal and warning.

Instead one or two other texts add "and he fell silent," through coming to an emotional crisis, or else through sheer physical fatigue (Gal. 4:13). But it is strange that these readings are not to be found in the manuscripts generally.

Eagerness

Immediately after this there is another textual problem. According to the AV, "the Jews went out of the synagogue," but the Gentiles asked for more. Yet there is strong manuscript support for the RV reading: "As *they* went out, *they* besought that these words might be spoken to them the next sabbath," the Greek text implying different reference for "they" and "they." No interpretation seems completely free from difficulty, but the most likely reading is that diehard Jews, resenting Paul's theme, now walked out in protest, while those who remained behind set up a clamour for more instruction on these lines.

The Greek phrase for "the next sabbath" is puzzling. Literally, it reads: "unto the between sabbath," or, just possibly, "unto the week between." The former would imply an extra sabbath, special for one of the feasts. But in that (known) time of the year there is no Jewish feast. So the alternative seems to be that they asked for further instruction at the mid–week synagogue meetings.

The grace of God

When the congregation broke up, many – both Jews and Gentiles – were so impressed that they followed Paul and Barnabas to their lodging, their spiritual appetite whetted by what they had heard. These people evidently encountered strong Judaistic dissuasion from such enthusiasm, but the apostles used sustained efforts to persuade them to adhere to this new faith. The Greek verb for "continue" implies an exhortation that these new hearers would come to and stay in "the grace of God."

Here, for the first time, is another magnificent Pauline word. All students of the New Testament need to be on the alert at each encounter with *Charis,* grace, to indentify which of its pregnant meanings best fits each context:

a. God's gift of forgiveness e.g. Rom. 3:24; 5:2,15,17,20,21; Gal. 2:21; 5:4:1 Tim. 1:14;Tit. 2:11;3:7.
b. God's gift of the Holy Spirit; e.g. Lk. 4:22; Rom. 15:15; 12:3,6; Gal. 2:9; Eph. 4:7; 2 Pet. 3:18.
c. Thanks for a gift; e.g. 2 Cor. 9:15; 2:14; Rom. 6:17; 1 Tim. 1:12; Philem.7;1 Pet. 2:9,20.
d. More vaguely, (and more rarely) in the sense of favour or kindness; e.g. Acts 24:17; 25:3,9; Lk. 2:52.

In the present instance there can be little doubt that the first meaning listed here is the correct one.

Notes: 13:38–43

38. *Forgiveness of sins* was implied also in the great promise to David – "the sure mercies": "I will settle him in mine house (temple!) and in my kingdom for ever" (1 Chr. 17:14,12).
39. *All that believe.* Peter's teaching also: 10:43; 15:10,11.
40. *The Prophets.* Was Is. 29:14 used also?
41. *Perish.* Gk: *aphanizo.* The same word, basically, comes in the Gk. text of Dan. 9:26,27.
    I work. A dramatic present, not inappropriate, for although the downfall of Jerusalem was twenty years away, it was already possible to see that disaster as inevitable.

42a. 43a. There seems to be a parallel case in 28:25,29.

42. *Besought.* The imperfect tense here implies that they persisted.
43. After *Paul and Barnabas,* Syriac text adds: asking to be baptized.
    Persuaded. Note the emphasis on Paul's powers of persuasion: 18:4; 19:8; 26:28; 28 23; Gal. 1:10.

53. "We turn to the Gentiles" (13:44–52)

In Antioch, as the week ran its course, religious excitement mounted higher. Codex Beza has the addition: "the word of God spread through the entire city." It is the first of five repetitions packed into this short narrative (v.43 Bez, 44, 46, 47, 49). When Paul and Barnabas went to the next sabbath service, the synagogue was crowded. Not just the "God–fearers" but "almost the whole city" was eager to hear more of the message. The Bezan text adds here that they were there to "hear the word of *Paul* and that "he preached for a long time."

Growing opposition

The Jews, who had strongly dissented on the previous sabbath, now came out in open hostility. Envious (Mt. 27:18) of the success of Paul's preaching, they mounted militant criticism, speaking against the Biblical reasoning in Paul's discourse and open blaspheming the name of Jesus.

This was an excess the apostles were not prepared to put up with. So they broke with the synagogue forthwith, but not before making a plain–spoken and Biblical rebuke:

"It was necessary (because the Lord himself had so commanded; Mt. 10:6; Lk 24:47) that the word of God (about the Word) should first be spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

By this they may have meant that by their hostility to the gospel these Jews were pronouncing judgement on themselves, or (more likely) here was half–veiled irony censuring their intransigence. Indeed, the form of the Greek verb for "ye put it from you" seems to require this latter inflexion.

The preachers' mandate in Isaiah

The Biblical mandate for this drastic re–orientation of policy was not lacking: "For so hath the Lord (Jehovah) commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light to the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth."

The words were quoted from one of the most eloquent (and most neglected?) of Isaiah's Messianic prophecies. It is hardly appropriate here to expound Isaiah 49 in detail. Quotation of two verses in the context must suffice:

"And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered (Jewry's rejection of the gospel), yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles ..." (49:5,6).

A common idiom

These verses, and indeed the whole paragraph, are plainly a prophecy about Christ. Yet the apostles dared to appropriate the words to themselves:' 'So hath the Lord commanded us ..." Nor was this "misuse" of Scripture questioned, for even these hostile Jews could see that what was declared true regarding Messiah must be valid for Messiah's men also.

The idiom has plenty of parallels:

a. In 2 Cor. 6:2 Paul quotes the same prophecy (Is.49:8) with reference to his own work of preaching.
b. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?"(Acts 9:4*).*
c. "Inasmuch as ye have done it into one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Mt. 25:40).
d. "He that receiveth you receiveth

e. me" (Mt. 10:40 and also 18:5 and John 13:20).
f. "They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:6).
g. "Your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10).

Rejoicing

The repetition shows the importance of the principle.

"And when the Gentiles heard this (Paul's stalwart maintaining of their right to hear the gospel), they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord" –this also in fulfilment of the Isaiah prophecy: "Sing, O heavens, and be joyful, O earth ... Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord" (49:13,5). By glorifying the message they glorified God (or should the text read "Word"?).

Luke, compiling the history, seems himself to have been made glad by it, for he records again that "the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Spirit." This latter phrase, anarthrous, can be read in more than one way – either as implying that through the laying on of Paul's hands gifts of the Holy Spirit had been imparted, or that their conversion showed itself in sanctified minds.

Predestination

There has been a good, deal of theological disputation over Luke's addition: ' 'And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (their baptism being taken for granted). By one school of thought that word "ordained" has been taken as explicit proof of cast–iron predestination. By others, who emphasize that all is of a man's own will, such a conclusion has been strongly resisted, the implication of "ordained" being explained away by one device or another.

First, it needs to be said, that, so far as over–all Bible teaching is concerned, both points of view are inescapably correct. Both are constantly assumed as fundamental, even though there appears to be no effort in Holy Scripture to reconcile the seeming inconsistency. The whole subject is too vast and complex for analysis of it to be set out here.

Secondly, "ordain" is not by itself decisive as to meaning. The word here means "arranged, marshalled (as a military squad), set in order," and the form of it suggests a continuing process, not something determined once and for all. Also, it may be read as meaning (in "middle voice") that it was a choice these converts were making on their own behalf. In any case, Scripture sometimes uses predestination language as meaning a fate which is not irreversible; e.g. "He that overcometh ... I will not blot out his name out of the book of life ..." (Rev. 3:5). It is implied here that a man's name may be inscribed in the Lamb's book of redemption and yet be subsequently erased!

Persecution and expulsion

Paul's zealous joyful converts did not stand still. They promptly turned themselves into evangelists in all the area round about: "The word of the Lord was spread abroad." With what subtlety Luke choose his key word here, for not only does it link with another word implying inspiration (2 Pet. 1:17,18,21; 2 Jn. 10; Acts 2:2), but it is a double–meaning word, suggesting also the idea of excelling over any rivalry (Lk. 12:7,24; Phil. 1:10;Mt. 12:12).

This progress provoked Jewish envy to yet worse antagonism. Their religion already commanded the sympathy of not a few influential women of the aristocratic class. These were now egged on by the men of the synagogue to use their power against Paul and Barnabas. Here is yet another example of how well Luke's history accurately reflects the times and places he writes about, for a good deal of contemporary evidence has come to light that in this particular province women were often admitted to the administration of public affairs.

Even the Jews of Antioch were not against having a woman as 'Chief of the Synagogue."

These influential women In turn persuaded the city's rulers – "The First Ten" – to take a strong line against the apostles. There was such persecution and affliction (Beza) – for all the believers (14:22) – as to make life really difficult. Years later Paul was to refer to "persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch" (2 Tim. 3:11). Probably it was here where he had to endure one of the five unidentified "forty stripes save one" which were etched in his memory as well as on his back.

Then the preachers were hustled out of the city. It was easier to mete out this sort of treatment to them than to attempt refutation of their gospel and the Biblical testimony which supported it.

As a final admonition to the Jews of Antioch, now left without excuse because of the witness they had heard, Paul and Barnabas solemnly shook off the city's dust from their sandals. This was not only in accordance with the instructions of the Lord Jesus to his first team of missionaries (Mt. 10:14), it also proclaimed that the Jews of Antioch were no better than spiritual lepers (Lev. 14:41). It is true that after a while Paul and Barnabas returned there, but not to do any more public preaching, only to fortify the loyalty of the new converts (14:20,21).

Sixty miles or more away, east by south, on the great main road, lay Iconium. The apostles now made their way there, probably leaving Titus behind in Antioch to consolidate the new ecclesia.

Notes: 13:44–52

45. *Spake against.* The continuous form of this verb indicates a sustained campaign.
46. *Waxed bold.* The Gk. word suggests a marked changed in attitude – triggered off by Paul's sudden recovery in health?
    Necessary. There might be an implication here of no high expectations of success. But Israel must always have priority: 3:26; 1:8; 13:5; Rom. 1:16.
    Ye put it from you. The Greek implying a drastic action, as though for their own benefit! Rom. 11:1,2 (s.w.), shows clearly that Jewry were not cast off until they cast themselves off. So also Mt. 22:5–9.
47. *Command us.* Gk. perfect tense, implies that these were ' 'standing orders."
    A light to the Gentiles. Contrast the false Elymas; v. 10,11.
48. *Ordained to eternal life.* The preposition 'unto' surely implies moving in that direction, but not having 'got there'. Note the opposite emphasis, in v.43,46, on exercise of personal decision. Yet what a contrast with 16:14; Jn. 6:44,37; 1 Sam. 10:26; Phil. 1:29. The believer's thinking must find room for both ideas, whether understood and reconciled or not.
50. *Stirred up.* A closely related word comes in a Greek text of 1 Sam. 25:14.
49, 52. A result different from what the persecutors had hoped for. Note the antithesis between persecution and its outcome in 4:21,31; 5:41,42; 8:3 (with 9:31); 12:1–3,24).

54. At Iconium (14:1–7)

Iconium had grown up in very ancient times as the centre of a small fertile area in the middle of a rather desolate tableland. It reckoned as part of the region of Lycaonia, but with his usual exactness in matters of this sort Luke makes a distinction (v.6), for the people were really Phrygians. Archaeologists report the finding of plenty of inscriptions in the Phrygian dialect and in bad Greek.

The Antioch pattern

There Paul and Barnabas followed exactly the same methods as at Antioch –the phrase translated "both together" (v.1) should read "after the same manner (as at Antioch);" cp. Lk. 6 23,26; 17:30 Gk. They attended the synagogue, a large one, and used so effectively their opportunities to preach that a great number of those hearing them, both Jews and God–fearing Gentiles, turned to the Faith.

Then, as night follows day, there came trouble stirred up by the Jewish leaders (17:4,5) with the aid of their Gentile friends. The Bezan text in this paragraph is unusually full and detailed, and bears all the marks of truth: "But the *archisynago–goi* (synagogue officials) and the rulers brought persecution against them, against the just (i.e. the converts), and made the souls of the Gentiles evil affected against the brethren. But the Lord quickly gave peace."

It is a likely guess that the Roman authorities, when pressed for action against the missionaries, ruled that there was nothing unlawful in their activities.

Nor could there be a synagogue ban because here so many of the Jews were eager for the message. So the work went ahead, both in the synagogue and privately: "Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord."

That word "therefore" creates a difficulty by seeming to make this sustained preaching a direct consequence of the persecution.

Some have suggested that Luke intended verse 2 as a parenthesis, put there to complete the picture, with verse 1, of believing Jews, God–fearing Gentiles, hostile Jews, and hostile Gentiles. Others, interpret as an indication that stirring up disaffection against the Faith was a long slow process during which time Paul and Barnabas pressed on vigorously. But most likely the explanation hinted at in the Bezan text, given above, is correct.

Progress

The campaign was made successful by two special features. The preachers spoke boldly "upon the Lord" (so the Greek text), that is, either with full faith in His blessing, or centring all their message in Christ. Also, by a special endowment of Holy Spirit power the Lord gave exceptional witness in "signs and wonders" of healing done through the laying on of the apostles' hands. The fact that "the Lord *granted* signs" suggests that the apostles prayed for aid in their work, and got it.

As the healing of the paralytic man in the synagogue had demonstrated Christ's authority to forgive sins, so also in Iconium there were similar tokens of "his grace", that is, of the forgiveness brought to them in the gospel.

There developed a great deal of public excitement over these gospel activities, everybody taking sides for or against.

The story of Thekla

It is at this point that it becomes possible tentatively to expand Luke's account with the aid of an early Christian document called "The Acts of Paul and Thekla." This is a remarkable story about an exceptional young woman Thekla whom Paul unwittingly converted. After the early

paragraphs a good deal of highly–coloured fantasy creeps into this tradition. But Sir William Ramsay and not a few other scholars are satisfied that the more sober part of the story is genuine enough.

Thekla lived in the next house to that of Onesiphorus which had become the centre of much of Paul's mid–week preaching. Sitting at the window she saw numbers of people, especially women, going in; and she had no difficulty in listening to the instruction which Paul gave them. Fascinated by what she heard, Thekla listened more and more, and at last sought out Paul and proclaimed herself a believer. When this became known to her family and she broke off her engagement to a young man in the city, the hostile Jews made use of this situation to stir up more animosity against Paul and Barnabas.

Here, probably, was the situation behind Luke's description of a plan concocted with the collaboration of the Jewish leaders to "use them despitefully, and to stone them."

This plot became known to the apostles, and, in accordance with the counsel of their Lord (Mt. 10:23), they fled to another city – to Lystra – and continued operations there. Luke's description includes "the region that lieth round about" (cp. 13:49), but since the language of the country districts was not spoken by the apostles (v.11) this part of the preaching work must have been done by Galatian converts already made.

Paul's portrait

The Thekla document mentioned, now extant in Greek, Syriac, and Armenian, is specially interesting for its inclusion of a description of Paul's personal appearance. Unfortunately the versions vary somewhat, but the over–all impression given is that this is no invention, but a genuine tradition: He was "small in stature, bald–headed, bow–legged, hollow–eyed (or, with large eyes; one version says: curly hair and blue eyes!), with meeting eyebrows and rather a long (or, crooked) nose; he was full of grace; now he looked like a man, now he had the face of an angel."

Who would invent such a picture as this?

It is noteworthy that it is in the Iconium narrative that Paul and Barnabas are first referred to as apostles. This must be read either in the lesser sense of being missionaries sent out by the church, or else as implying that the two friends both had apostolic qualifications – being able to bear personal witness concerning Christ not only before he was crucified but also after his resurrection. The possibility raises some interesting issues. Is it adequate to refer back to the Lord's own commission at the beginning of the missionary journey?: "Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I called them" (13:2).

Notes: 14:1–7

2. *Made their minds evil affected.* The same Greek words come in the same sense in Ps. 106:32 LXX, but in a very different sense (fasting?) in Num. 29:7;30:14.
3. *The Lord... gave testimony.* There are plenty of instances in Acts of the Lord's personal concern and activity in the work of his men: 7:55; 9:4,10; 13:52; 14:3; 16:7,14; 18:5;22:17;23:11.
5. The Gentiles would "use them despitefully." The Jews and their (synagogue) rulers would plan to stone them.
6. *Ware of it.* The Lord saw to it that a good grapevine operated on behalf of his persecuted servants: 9:24; 20:3; 23:16.

55. Lystra (14:8–18)

At Lystra the Jewish community, the apostles' usual springboard, was only small, so that there was no synagogue. However it seems very likely that they very soon made the acquaintance of the Jewess Eunice and her mother Lois and Eunice's son, Timothy, a youth of exceptional promise. Probably this home became their headquarters, whilst in Lystra. Eunice was the widow of a Greek who had been very well–known throughout the city (16:3; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:10,15).

Local religion centred on the worship of Jupiter, the chief of the gods. The temple of Zeus–before–the–gates stood immediately outside the city entrance, thus demanding the attention and reverence of all who came and went.

A lame man healed

This first part of Luke's account concentrates on a single incident which happened there.

One of the people of Lystra who gave unflagging attention to the message of these missionaries was a decrepit Gentile God–fearer (so Codex Beza), a man lame from birth and, presumably, dependant on begging for his livelihood. Time after time he hobbled or was carried to some vantage point from which he could listen to the preachers.

There came a day when Paul was inspired to turn this faithful adherence to practical advantage. It was a special harvest festival at the temple. Zeus was being thanked by the simple–minded throng for the season's bounties. At an open–air meeting near the temple, Paul, recognizing in the man the birth of a saving faith, made use of him as a spiritual object–lesson. Fastening his eyes on the cripple and shouting out with all the power he was capable of, so as to rivet the attention of the crowd, the apostle bade him in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Bezan text) rise up and walk in a normal healthy way. Without any hesitation the man did so. It was part of this amazing exercise of divine power that although the man had never walked before he did not need to learn how. He leaped and he walked. And every spectator knew that here was a genuine marvel and no trickery.

Gods, not men!

The reaction of the multitude was spontaneous and unanimous. Jabbering away in their local Lycaonian, in a way that was as meaningless to the two preachers as when English tourists hear Welsh country folk talking in their own historic incomprehensibility, these Lystrans assured themselves that this must be again the very thing they had often heard of in their national folklore – a visit from the gods. Hadn't one of their ancient kings been turned into a wolf for his sneering ill–treatment of a visitor who was none other than the divine Zeus? – and hence the name Lycaonia, wolf–land. And wasn't there that charming tale of how Zeus and Hermes, turned away inhospitably from one home after another, had been befriended in a near–by village by poverty–stricken but kindly Philemon and his wife Baucis?

So it took no time at all for the crowd to conclude that their harvest festival was being honoured by a visit from the gods. The tall dignified one was Zeus, of course. And, with more hesitation, the other must be Hermes – called Mercurius by the local Roman colonists – the interpreter *(herm–eneutēs)* and messenger of the gods to men, the inventor of speech, and bringer of good luck. In his epistle written maybe two years later Paul was to allude to this: "Ye received me as an angel (messenger) of God" (Gal. 4:14).

Worshipped

The identification caught on very quickly, but the apostles, bewildered by the strange uncouth noises all round them, hadn't a clue what all the excitement was about.

Meantime, the high priest of Zeus and his temple staff promptly decided that, whatever their own private opinions might be about this astonishing incident, it was certainly in their own professional interest to go along with this sudden flare–up of religious enthusiasm. So since the "divine" visitants showed no sign of wanting to glorify the temple precincts with their presence and since detailed preparations were already in hand for honouring Zeus as lord of the harvest, it would surely be, to say the least, tactful to bring their sacrifices to where "Zeus" and "Hermes" were before the temple gates.

Unable to follow all the excited talk, the apostles only realised what was afoot when an altar was being improvised and oxen sacrificed and themselves about to be bedecked with garlands.

Protest

When Paul and Barnabas realised that their own apotheosis was intended, without losing a moment they ran amongst the crowd, making vigorous protest – in Greek, of course, the only language by which they could get through to the ordinary folk: We are men, not gods. We are not all–powerful, but creatures of the same human nature as yourselves. And we are here as messengers, truly, but to assert not our own glory but that of the Living God, who "made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein." So we beseech you to "turn from these vanities."

In the excitement of the moment, they perhaps said more than they intended, for it was hardly tactful when face to face with priests and an excited populace to decry their highest religious intentions as "vanities." Very shortly this was to be remembered against Paul.

Since it was no good appealing to the authority of Holy Scripture, the only alternative was to reason from the evident facts of a beneficient Nature: "Rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (cp. Dt 28:47; Ps. 4:7). Thus they would fain steer the people's religious instincts away from ancient myths to the true beneficent Creator. "Rain from heaven" was not a blessing to take for granted, for Lycaonia is an arid plateau, the wells were, and still are, unusually deep.

One scholar suggests that the Greek of these expressions is rhythmic and implies that the apostles sought to harness to their protest the hymn to Zeus which they had heard sung that day.

Maybe. But it seems just as likely that a man such as Paul would instinctively express himself in the words and ideas of the Scriptures, even though Moses and the prophets meant nothing to these people. Psalm 146:6 and many verses in Ps. 147 (and Isaiah 55:10,4,7) seem to be specially relevant in their appeal.

The positive part of their protest was, very simple: *"Turn* unto the Living God" (precisely as in 9:35; 11:21; 15:19; 26:20; 1. Th. 1:9). And this too would be remembered against them by priests with a vested interest.

It was only with much difficulty that the populace were persuaded to let go the intention of their misguided fervour and to "go away each to his own home" (as two ancient authorities read here).

How long was it before disillusionment begat animosity? Years later the barbarous people of Melita switched suddenly from thinking of Paul as a criminal to revering him as a god (28:4,6). Before long the men of Lystra were to make a dramatic re–assessment of a more tragic nature.

Notes: 14:8–18

8. Paul's own claims to exercise miraculous powers: 2 Cor. 12:12; Rom. 15:19; Gal. 3:5.
9. *Fastened his eyes on him.* The expression comes ten times in Acts, three times of Paul. Then can he have suffered, as many aver, from defective eyesight?
10. *Walked.* Would the memory of this add point to Gal. 5:16? Here was one of the signs of apostleship, of value in later days when Galatian believers were turning away from Paul; Gal. 3:5; 2 Cor. 12:12; Rom. 15:19.

12. *Mercurius.* When the reaction came later on, it would be remembered also that Paul did not understand their speech, so how could he be the interpreter of the gods?
    And Mercury (Hermes) was also the god of good luck and the guide of disembodied souls going to the underworld. After stoning him, they would dwell on these ideas with a certain dramatic irony. And how could they possibly have taken this bald–headed, big–nosed, bow–legged man for the elegant glamorous Mercury?
13. *Sacrifice.* A Lystran coin has been found showing a priest and two oxen.
15. *Vanities.* Dt. 32:21; Jer. 2:5; 10:3; 8:19; 2 Kgs. 17:15. *All things that are therein.* Ex. 20:11,4.
16. *In times past.* But now a new era has been brought in; 17:30.
17. *Filling our hearts with food and gladness.* In the Bible "heart" signifies "mind" ("Studies in the Gospels," p.175,348). So this must be shorthand for giving us food and (thus) filling our minds with gladness."

56. "Death" and "Resurrection" (14:19–28)

It would be strange indeed if there did not come in the minds of the people of Lystra a marked reaction to the apostles' refusal to accept deification. So a renewal of Jewish persecution came at the psychological moment. It says much for the hostility stirred up in the minds of the Jews at Antioch that some of them were prepared to make the taxing journey of over a hundred miles to Lystra to fulfil this religious duty (as they saw it; cp. Mt. 23:15) and to indulge a personal satisfaction of doing despite to these preachers of a reprobate gospel.

First, there was a public contention against the message concerning Jesus. The Bezan text adds: "and as they were disputing publicly, they persuaded the multitude to withdraw from them, saying that 'nothing which they say is true, but all false!"

Stoning

Next, feeling that the crowd was now solidly on their side, these Jews set about stoning Paul, and in this they were no doubt promptly joined by the worst elements of the mob. The Jews saw this as a rightful punishment for the blasphemy of the gospel centring in Jesus (Dt. 18:20; 13:10). And after the Zeus–Hermes episode the local pagans would have a similar attitude. 'Why ever did we allow ourselves to be taken in? What resemblence between this unattractive fellow and our graceful Hermes?'

It was Paul they went for, for it was evident to everybody that he was the dominant personality in this preaching campaign. Barnabas on his own would make relatively little impact.

So the apostle took a fearful mauling that evening (2 Cor. 11:25; 2 Tim. 3:11; Gal. 6:17). They were sure they'd killed him. "They did not leave stoning him till they had the fullest evidence that he was dead; and so, most probably, he was" (Adam Clarke). Then he was roughly dragged away (cp. 8:3), to be dumped unceremoniously outside the city gate and, with sardonic satisfaction doubtless, before the entrance to the temple of Zeus! He had refused to let them offer a sacrifice to him as to one of the gods, had he? then here was a sacrifice of a different sort, laid before the temple gate of gods he had bluntly disparaged. Also, if it came to an inquiry about the corpse, it would now be less easy to trace who was responsible for the violence.

After dark (according to the Bezan text) some of the new disciples – including Eunice and the young fearful Timothy? –came to where the dirty blood–stained body of Paul lay. Convinced that he was past all hope, they made no attempt at resuscitation, but simply stood round him in prayer and utter sadness.

"Resurrection" and departure

To their indescribable astonishment, he came to, and stood up in the midst of them. With what gladness did they now take him with them back into the city –there was no alternative, they must take the risk of renewed violence from his enemies. Whether the apostle had actually been killed or not, there is no gainsaying the miracle of his recovery, for next morning (and early, doubtless) he and Barnabas were on the road south–east to Derbe. Persecuted in one city, they now fled to another, as their Lord had bidden them (Mt. 10:23). Certainly it is something of a marvel that on the morning after such a battering Paul was able and willing to attempt the long hike now undertaken. One pictures young Timothy carrying his pack for him, and then returning home next day.

And when Paul moved on, though sore in body he would surely feel easier in conscience, for the stoning he had organized against Stephen and the dragging away which he had inflicted on harmless believers had now been his experience also. It was a poor sort of amends that he had now made, and that not by choice, but no doubt he felt a lot better for it.

Derbe

The recorded details about the apostolic work in Derbe are meagre, probably because Titus, the ultimate source of this part of the history, was left behind in Lystra to nurture the new and somewhat apprehensive ecclesia there. But evidently in this small town there were no Jews with rancorous opposition, and the preaching went ahead quietly and effectively. One of the converts here was a certain Gaius of Derbe, a useful organizer of Paul's benevolent fund in later days (20:3).

The missionary work probably continued successfully at Derbe all through that winter. And in the spring, having "made many disciples" (v.21 RV), Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra. It may seem strange that, being so near to the Cilician Gates, the pass through the Taurus Mountains leading quickly to Tarsus and so to Antioch in Syria, they did not continue on that road. But these two preachers knew well enough already that missionary work without a follow–up of pastoral help is work ill done, especially too in Galatia where there had been such persecution at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.

Return visits

So they re–traced their steps "confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the Faith."

There had been formal expulsion from Antioch (13:50) and yet they returned there also. It may be that the expulsion had been for only a limited period; or perhaps there were now new magistrates not so severely inclined as the others. In any case the two apostles were not seeking to renew a public campaign. On this occasion they were concentrating on pastoral work. In Gal. 4:13 Paul refers to "the first time" he preached among them. The phrase implies a second visit. Thus there is a neat "undesigned coincidence" with the Acts narrative about this return journey.

Probably there was also another reason for their return to these inhospitable places. Paul was a Roman citizen; yet he had been maltreated in a way that would outrage the feelings of the Roman authorities when they knew. It would be Paul's intention, as at Philippi on the next journey (16:37–39), that they should know, for then there would be a reasonable likelihood of firm action being taken if later on there arose more Jewish persecution against the newly–founded ecclesias.

Exhortation

Even so, the brethren were solemnly warned that "it is *necessary* for *us* through much tribulation to enter into the kingdom of God." The first person pronoun is often read as implying, like the other "we" passages in Acts, that Luke was with Paul and Barnabas at this time. The likelihood of this is pretty small. More probably, this detail is part of the report which Titus passed on to his brother Luke, including, as in one or two other places the very words used by the apostles in their exhortation (see ch.59).

Because of their racial character it was needful that these Galatians be urged to steadfastness in their new faith. Within a marvellously short time the Lystrans had moved, in their attitude to the preachers, from deification to despite. It is noteworthy that this Greek word for "confirm," which comes four times in Acts, and nowhere else, is three times used regarding the Galatians (15:41; 18 23).

Subsequent events proved this exhortation to be very necessary, for within a short while of the return of the apostles to Antioch in Syria these Galatian churches were completely overpowered by the bulldozing self–confidence of Judaist subverted, so that it became

necessary for Paul to dash off his vigorous epistle exhorting them to "continue in the Faith" which he had taught them, and reproaching them that they had so easily succumbed to the wiles of false teachers (Gal. 1:6;3:2; 5:1; 6:12).

The imitation of Christ

It is impressive at this point to review this part of the story of Paul and to observe certain remarkable features of his experience at Lystra:

He preaches the gospel,
and is greatly applauded by the multitude,
especially as a result of a remarkable work of healing.
Because of this he is acclaimed as a divine messenger.
Bitter Jewish opposition
brings about his rejection.
He is punished as a blasphemer, and left for dead outside the city.
When the disciples come to him, he rises up (the Greek word for "resurrection")
and comes into the city again.
Then he goes away to a remote place,
but later on he returns,
confirming the souls of the disciples,
and talking about entering the kingdom of God.

Those who have no doubts about the divine character of the Bible records will not be surprised at features of this kind. Those who do will have some difficulty in shrugging off these resemblances to the experience of Christ as either coincidence or imagination.

It may be taken as fairly certain that Luke framed this part of his record in such a way as to bring out this parallel for the benefit of his readers, for apparently the resemblances were already familiar to the Galatians at the time. In his epistle to them, written within a year of concluding the journey, Paul refers to this providential
type as being readily recognizable by his readers:

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you ... before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" (Gal. 3:1).

"From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord "Jesus" (6:17).

"Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first" (4:13) – an allusion probably to his experience at Lystra sending him on, battered and bruised, to Derbe? or else to the way in which, persecuted at Antioch (13:50), **he brought the Good News to Iconium and Lystra?**

In each ecclesia a formal pattern of meetings and communal procedure was appointed, and elders were "ordained." The word means "to appoint by vote, literally, by show of hands." Other examples in Acts (1:23–26; 6:6; 13:1–3) strengthen the impression that men were selected for office by a vote of the assembly and these were then confirmed in office (but not invariably; 1 Tim. 5:22) by the apostles.

Mission accomplished

With deep concern for the well–being of these new converts, the apostles expressed their distress at having to leave them, by fasting and by special prayers on their behalf. Apparently, also, there was further preaching throughout Pisidia. What was in those days the chief city of Pisidia is today called by the name of Paul, and it has the ruin of a very ancient church! Perga also, the claims of which had been ignored on the way out, was also given its opportunity to hear the Word of Christ, and so also (according to Codex Beza) the sea–port Attalia. Presumably this last burst of preaching took place whilst the apostles were waiting for a passage back to Antioch.

On their arrival there was a special assembly of the ecclesia to hear all the exciting news about their journey and its God–blessed success – "they rehearsed all that God had done with them," a splendid phrase which humbly put the emphasis on God being at work rather than on what *they* had achieved. Almost from beginning to end their story told how, in one place after another, God had "opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" – another splendid phrase cognate with that about Peter's keys, which passed into the vocabulary of the early church (1 Cor.16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3).The context of Rev.3:8–"Behold, I have set before thee an open door" –suggests the idea of a door through which Gentile seekers for truth may be brought into the household of God.

On setting out Paul and Barnabas had been "commended unto the grace of God" (13:2), that is, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and under that guidance and protection the commission had been worthily and faithfully fulfilled.

There was evidently much work still to be done here in Antioch; for the two preachers who might have been tempted to go up to Jerusalem forthwith to tell their exciting news to the apostles, instead settled down in Antioch for an appreciable time, evidently picking up the threads of their earlier activity there – or was it that they were in hopes of being able to go off to Galatia again before long?

Notes: 14:19–28

19. For a like change of attitude by the crowd, see Lk. 19:38; 23:21; and also Acts 28:6.
20. *The disciples,* but apparently not Barnabas. Evidently the brethren insisted that he stay indoors lest he too be overtaken by a further display of savagery.
    Rose up. It is this verb which has begotten the more familiar *anastasis,* resurrection.
22. *Much tribulation.* Other instances in Acts: 9:16; 3:18; 17:3; 26:23. But the classic passage is, of course, 2 Cor. 11:23ff.
    Enter the kingdom. There is here a plain implication that the kingdom is future and not present, and also that tribulation is the safest path to it.
23. *Ordained.* There is some evidence in Josephus that this word for "show of hands" was also given a more general meaning: "appointed."
    In every church. So also Tit. 1:5. 27. *The door of faith,* not of works or circumcision.

57. Judaist Controversy (Gal. 2:1–17)

In the few months following the apostles' return from their Galatian mission there blew up the most serious crisis to be encountered by the early church. The earlier details regarding this are preserved only in the Epistle which Paul felt impelled to write to the Galatian brethren. Then, in Acts 15, Luke provides the story of the formal council at Jerusalem and the decisions it arrived at.

The controversy which led to these events has itself occasioned long–lasting controversy amongst the commentators as to the precise order of events. No one questions the correctness of the details in the two sources, but how to dovetail them together so as to resolve all difficulties is another matter. Also, Paul's phraseology in several places in Galatians 2 complicates the issue with several lesser problems, so that the whole subject is beset with uncertainty regarding chronology and interpretation.

A rough chronology

Paul speaks of a visit to Jerusalem along with Barnabas and Titus "after a space of fourteen years." Not a few authorities, including the prestigious Sir William Ramsay, equate this with the occasion (11:30; 12:25) when Paul and Barnabas were sent from Antioch with help for the poor brethren. This view, although not the only possibility, will be followed here.

The chronological sequence in the period under consideration was probably as set out here:

The Crucifixion.....	A.D.	29 or 30
The conversion of Saul		33
In Arabia (40 days?)		
Damascus (3 years; Gal. 1:18)		
Paul's first (short) visit to Jerusalem		
(Gal. 1:18; Acts 9:26–30)		36
Work in Tarsus and in Antioch (11:25; Gal. 1:21)		
The second visit to Jerusalem (11:30; Gal. 2:1–10)		46
The first mission – Cyprus and Galatia		47–48
Work in Antioch (14:28)		
Judaist contention at Antioch		
(Gal. 2:12–14; Acts 15:1,2a)		
The Epistle to the Galatians		49
Paul's third visit to Jerusalem (15:2–4)		
The Council at Jerusalem.		
The second mission – Galatia, Macedonia,		
Achaia.....		50–52

Paul says (Gal. 2:2) that he went up to Jerusalem "by revelation." This, presumably, is a reference to the prophecy made by Agabus (11:28) of the impending famine in Judaea. Barnabas was in charge of this relief project. The two friends were accompanied also by Titus who had already been picked out as a competent helper. Titus was not a Jew, and yet (as Paul was later at pains to point out to the Galatians) he was received by the brethren at Jerusalem without any insistence on circumcision.

Paul used the opportunity presented by that visit to discuss with the leaders of the ecclesia the format of his preaching amongst the Gentiles in Syria and Cilicia. He did this privately, not before the whole assembly, for to make this a matter for general discussion would have invited an explosion from the strong Judaist party in the church there. But he did take care to have the discussions not only with the apostles available for consultation but also with the very influential Judaist leaders – "them of reputation" – who were highly regarded there because of the great stress they put on the importance of continuing to observe the Law of Moses. He wanted to satisfy their scruples regarding Gentile conversions "lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain," that is, lest their open opposition should

vitiate this work by maligning it as inadequate or perverted. He did not need their sanction, but he did not want the hindrance of their disapproval.

The Jewish plot

Alas, some of the prominent Judaists were not genuine believers at all. Paul became aware of the fact that a deliberate attempt was being made by the Pharisee enemies of the Faith to infiltrate into the ranks of the brethren with the set intention of doing as much damage as possible to the movement by their surreptitious activities. The full force of Paul's blunt description has mostly gone unappreciated, but indeed his phraseology is so trenchant and emphatic as to allow of no other meaning: *"False brethren unawares (RV: privily)* brought in, who came in to *spy out* our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might *bring us into bondage* (the bondage of the Law, as the context plainly shows)" (2:4). In other words the intention was to convert the Christians back to Judaism by stealth through the machinations of clever unscrupulous men wrecking the movement from within. (See Appendix3; "The Jewish Plot").

Becoming aware of the activities of these schemers, Paul stood up to them boldly, for he saw in more clear–sighted fashion that any others just how great was the threat posed by their intrigue. Even though they were men of considerable prestige, "we gave place to them by subjection no, not for an hour ... but of these who seemed to be somewhat (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me; God accepteth no man's person:), for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me."

It is difficult to believe that Paul would use such language with reference to any of the apostles. He must have been writing about these self–confident Judaists who later even went so far as to arrogate to themselves the qualifications of apostleship (2 Cor. 11:13,22). For all their cleverness and academic standing they were not able to insist on the inclusion in Paul's preaching of anything which he did not already teach: "they added nothing to me."

There was also the impressive fact (2:7) that Paul had received personal revelations from the Lord Jesus regarding his special task as an apostle to the Gentiles, a commission which they could hardly question without openly calling Paul a liar. They may have insinuated this innuendo behind his back, but it was more than they dare attempt to his face.

In any case did not the facts validate Paul's apostolic status and soundness? Already it was becoming evident that Paul's work was being blessed just as much as Peter's was (v.8)

Support from the leaders

Certainly there had been no doubts expressed by the leaders about the soundness of Paul's outlook. James, the Lord's brother, was a man in very high esteem among the Law–observant believers in the Jerusalem ecclesia because of his own continuing dedication to "the customs and ordinances," and he found nothing amiss with Paul's approach to the Gentiles. And Peter and John who were pillars, the Jachin and Boaz of the new temple of the Lord, men unmatched in their authority, concurred in approving Paul's outreach to the Gentiles. Before all the rest these leaders gave to Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, approving beforehand the forward–looking policy which by the leading of the Holy Spirit ("the *grace* that was given unto me") these pioneers were already considering.

At the same time the Jerusalem leaders had used the opportunity to impress on the two eager evangelists that if in future preaching projects prosperous Gentile converts were encouraged to send generous help to their poor Jewish brethren in Judaea, this would go a long way

towards removing existing suspicions and prejudices. Not that Paul needed any urging in this matter, for from the very first, having a conscience still very sensitive regarding the fierce persecuting and ravaging of the early church which he had been personally responsible for, he had been eager by both personal example and exhortation to do all in his power to make good the wreck and ruin he had spread abroad in those earlier days. The "benevolent fund" was always a prominent feature in Paul's ecclesial activities; "which very thing I was also zealous to do"(v.10RV).

Antioch crisis

Later, when Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch, they were visited there by Peter, who without any scruple fell in with the easy way of life which had grown up in that ecclesia, believing Jews and Gentiles readily extending both social and religious fellowship to one another, unfettered by Jewish laws and customs which were still de rigueur in Jerusalem. Here, just as when he visited the home of Cornelius, Peter "did eat with the Gentiles" (v. 12).

But then there came to Antioch a group of the Jewish extremists from Jerusalem. These men, whom (here and in several other epistles) Paul carefully refrains from naming, claimed to have come with specific authority from James. Perhaps they had persuaded James that a closer liaison was desirable between the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem and those in outlying ecclesias. Encouraged in this seemingly well–intentioned activity, they now went far beyond their commission (see 15:24), using this as a cloak for the sinister policy of pressing for a return to full Judaistic practice. It is not for nothing that twice in one verse (v.13 Gk.) Paul uses the word "hypocrisy."

Subversion in Galatia

Apparently at the same time others of the same kidney went further afield, visiting the newly–founded Gentile ecclesias in Galatia. Here the new babes in Christ, scarcely out of swaddling bands, were no match for these astute unprincipled dissemblers. Of course they must be listened to. Did they not come from the mother–ecclesia and the home of the Law of Moses? – men who had actually known the Lord Jesus in person, so were they not as good as apostles? And if James, the Lord's brother, had committed this work into their hands, of course their emphatic requirement of circumcision for *all* believers and the assiduous following of an undiluted Judaism must be right.

So these somewhat bewildered Galatian converts settled down to learn how to be good Jews in order that they might acquire good standing as members of the New Israel. To be sure, there were a handful with firmer confidence in the earlier teaching they had had from Paul and Barnabas: "By him (Jesus) all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (13:39). These suspected that there was something wrong somewhere, and very soon a letter was on its way to Paul and Barnabas in Antioch. Was Timothy the bearer of it, and able to reinforce its details with a vivid description of Judaistic pressure brought to bear on himself?

Judaist argument

Meantime, the wily Judaists in Antioch were having a field–day. There, instead of a ponderous assertion of authority, they probably adopted more foxy methods, perhaps on these lines: In your ecclesia here we find Jewish and Gentile brethren sharing the holy meal (the Agape) before the Breaking of Bread! When this becomes generally known that there is indiscriminate fellowship of this kind in the ecclesias, there will be set up in the minds of all Jewry everywhere such a prejudice against the Christian gospel that we shall thereafter never convert a single Jew; with good intentions, doubtless, we shall be shutting out the chosen people from salvation in Christ. Then, for a while at least, why not respect this outlook universal in Jewry, and keep separate from our Gentile brethren? – that is, unless they choose to accept circumcision and keep the food laws, and then indeed we can really enjoy holy fellowship together at the Lord's table.

An argument as plausible as this would be difficult to resist, especially when put by Jewish brethren to Jewish brethren. How many would see it for what it really was? – what the sordid modern world calls blackmail! Either you do what we say, or we withdraw fellowship! The same unscrupulous methods have been piously applied not infrequently in this twentieth century.

Peter overborne

The effect on Peter was all that these men desired. That remarkable apostle had more than once shown a timid reaction after making a brave venture – as when he walked on the water, and in his great Messianic confession and its aftermath, and in his bold defence of an arrested Jesus followed by equally strenuous denials. And now, once again, after consistently applying what God had taught him through Cornelius, he "withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision," The form of the Greek verbs suggests that this was not a quick sudden decision, but a gradually implemented policy.

Naturally enough, the other Jewish brethren in Antioch followed suit. Who were they to set themselves against the example of the chief of the apostles? In any case many of them would not be loth to join in a public expression of zeal for the Law. Biggest surprise of all – Barnabas also went back on what that much–blessed missionary journey in Galatia had already expressed. He too, gentle soul that he was, gave way before the confident dogmatism of these aggressive

Pharisee brethren from Jerusalem.

It was a time of crisis which meant days of misery for Paul, for he only was clear–sighted enough to perceive that this sinister Judaistic campaign was intended to lead the Christian ecclesias back to the fold of Moses. Worse than that, it was *wrong* in principle, for by saddling the Jewish brethren with traditional laws and customs it either shut out the Gentile believers completely or else set a great stumblingblock before those who had happily sought, and (as they thought) found, salvation through faith in Christ. How could Paul and others go into all the world and preach *this* gospel to every creature?

Rebuke

So, with little loss of time, Paul chose his moment and courageously expostulated with Peter before all the assembly there at Antioch. If this had happened at Jerusalem he would have stood, humanly speaking, no chance at all of success. But here at Antioch was a considerable body of Gentile believers unwilling to be blinkered by Judaistic spectacles, and they gave moral support. Even so, it was touch and go.

Paul's argument was bluntly put: You, Peter, were born and bred a Jew. Yet since the days of your vision at Joppa, and certainly here at Antioch, you have lived with Gentile brethren, following their Gentile way of life. Yet now, all at once, you go back on your fully expressed conviction that keeping the Law of Moses, however desirable it may be in the eyes of a Jew, is not necessary for others. Justification by faith in Christ, and not by works of the Law, is a basic principle with us, is it not? Then why by your own influential example do you apply to our Gentile brethren the moral suasion, as good as compulsion, that they turn Jewish in order to be truly Christian?

Paul, learning also that away in Galatia the nefarious teaching of these Judaists was doing even worse damage than it was now achieving in Antioch, found time to dash off a letter of strong warning, expostulation, argument and reproach –his powerful Epistle to the Galatians.

In it he firmly asserted his own apostolic authority (ch.1; evidently there had been much personal denigration of him by the visiting Judaists). By sustained and powerful argument based on God's promises to Abraham (ch.3) and on types in Genesis and Exodus specially suited to Judaist reasoning (4:21–31) he drew his readers back to justification by faith. He warned bluntly against the unprincipled methods of his opponents (2:4ff; 4:17; 5:12,15; 6:1–13). And he appealed in moving terms for a return to the high tone of their former life in Christ (4:10–16–5:7–16).

And the letter did its work. The situation was saved.

Notes: Gal. 2:1–17

1. *Took Titus;* s.w. 12:25; 15:37,38. In a similar capacity?
2. *Which I preach.* The present tense implies: I still preach it; the message has not been modified.
   Them. .. of reputation. Verse 6 and 6:3 suggest that reference is not to apostles but to prestigious brethren out of the Pharisee party.
   Run. Emphatically *not* a reference to the Greek games (as so many of the commentators), but Hebrew idiom for a prophet urgent to communicate the Word of God: Jer. 23:21; Ez. 1:18,20; 1 Kgs. 18:46; Ps. 147:15; 2 Chr. 16:9; Hab. 2:2; Am. 8:12; Zech. 4:10; Is. 55:5; Dan. 12:4; 2 Th. 3:1 RV; Rev. 5:6; Phil. 2:16; Jude 11. 3–5 An almost impossible sentence in Greek. "This shipwreck of grammar" (Lightfoot).
3. *Titus,* whom you Galatians know. See the separate study about this fine disciple (ch. 59).
   Compelled to be circumcised. Emphasis on 'compelled.' Titus almost certainly had been circumcised before or during the Galatian journey, on the principle behind 16:3. Evidently (see Gal. 5:11) this was given a twisted interpretation by the Judaist opponents in Galatia.
   Greek means Gentile, as in 3:28, Mk. 7:26.
4. Perhaps the difficulties of this passage (in Gk.) are alleviated by assuming an ellipsis:' 'but this problem arose because of..."
   False brethren. Allusions to these men and this movement come in many N.T. passages: 1:7; 4:17; 5:12; 6:12;13; 2 Th. 2:2; 3:2; 2 Cor. 11:3,4, 12–15, 18–23; 10:2, 3, 10, 12, 17, 18; 12:7,10; 2 11; 3:1; Eph. 4:14,25; 5:11,12; Phil. 1:15,16; 3:2,18; Col. 4:11; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2 Tim. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:3–7; 4:1–3; Rev. 2:4, 6, 9; 3:9; 2 Pet. 2:1,10; 3:15–17; Acts 20:29,30;Tit. 1:10; 1 Jn. 2:26.
   Brought in; s.w. 2 Pet. 2:1. Classically, the word describes the introduction of foreign enemies into a city by a hostile group outside.
   To spy out; s.w. 2 Sam. 10:3; 15:10LXX; Heb. 11 31.
   Bring us into bondage. In Gk. a very strong word, and in a form implying confidence.
5. *Subjection.* A hint of the prestige of these men; note v.6; 2 Cor. 11:13,14,22.
6. *God accepteth no man's person.* Paul quotes the Law against these Law enthusiasts: Dt. 10:17, and context!
   Added nothing to me; i.e. did not excel me – in qualifications? in argument?
7. *Committed.* The Gk. perfect tense implies a permanent trust. No man takes it from me!

9. *James.* A telling mention, for his faultless keeping of the Law was known to everyone.
   Seemed. No irony here. The N.T. meaning is stronger than this. The implication here is: These Judaizers had confidence in them, but not in me.
   That we should go to the Gentiles. And how right, too, that two renegades from the Sanhedrin should concentrate on a Gentile ministry. What hope that they would make much impression on Jewish prejudice?
   The right hand of fellowship, as apostles. Equal status!
12. *Them.. .of the circumcision.* The preposition implies:
   (a) converts from Pharisee extremists; Acts 15:5; or (and more likely)
   (b) those who stood for emphasis on circumcision; cp. "of faith ... of works" (Gk.) in Romans.
   Fearing them. Cp. an earlier occasion (Mt. 15:12) when Peter feared them of the circumcision. In their determination to clear Peter from blame, the early fathers' coined some weird explanations; e.g. this Cephas was not the apostle Peter; e.g. it was a put–up job between the two apostles to bring the Judaisers to confusion; e.g. there was a lifelong antagonism between Peter and Paul. Pathetic!
   Them.. of the circumcision. Not = born Jews; but = those Jews who stood for circumcision as a necessary part of acceptable religion.
14. *Walked (not) uprightly.* The exact equivalent of this phrase comes in Ez. 1:7.
15. *Sinners of the Gentiles.* A Judaist phrase, full of contempt.

58. Growing Controversy (15:1–5)

Luke's version of Paul's head–on collision with Judaists in Antioch is very brief. For him the ensuing council at Jerusalem is more important, so the Antioch preliminaries get only brief mention.

"Certain men (Codex Beza: of them which believed of the sect of the Pharisees) ... came down from Judaea" to Antioch. In harmony with Paul's withering exposure of their false motives (Gal. 2:4), they are not dignified with the normal description as "brethren." These pursued a persistent campaign of teaching (Gk. imperfect) the Gentile converts there: "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved."

At first (Gal. 2:12) they had been content to insist on separation from the Gentile believers (a divided fellowship, the One Body in two halves!), except there be acceptance of circumcision. But now intensified discussion brought them right out into the open. Their real intention all along had been to require of the Gentile converts not only the receiving of circumcision but also a full observance of the Law of Moses (Gal. 5:2, 3). Without this, "ye *cannot be* saved."

Barriers going down

The widening spread of the gospel net was bound to provoke a crisis of this sort:

a. It included proselytes as well as Jews (6:5).
b. Stephen challenged the dominance of Mosaic practices (6:14).
c. The Samaritans heard the word (8:5).
d. A eunuch, excluded from the congregation of the Lord, was accepted (8:35).
e. Peter was sent to a Roman centurion – to his house! (10:20).
f. The principle of taking the gospel to Gentiles was officially accepted (11:18).
g. Grecian Jews, that is, Jews with a Gentile way of life were also brought into the church (11:20).
h. And now the issue, stark and clear: Does it matter whether believers keep the Law of Moses, or not? (15:1). The Jerusalem decision: a temporary compromise (15:28).

Pro–circumcision

The Biblical case which these Judaists could build up would be impressive. Was there not Isaiah's explicit declaration concerning "Jerusalem, the holy city" that "henceforth there shall not come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean" (52:1)? And that prophet's plainly conditional anticipation of the acceptance of Gentiles: "The sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord ... every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant (the covenant of circumcision! Gen. 17:19–21)" (Is. 56:6).

Had not the Lord Jesus said to Barnabas: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt. 19:17)? The Lord himself had observed the Law of Moses; and he had most emphatically asserted: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Mt. 5:17,18).

The Judaist faction

Already "the Circumcision" was a party label (the twentieth century has its parallels!). It is instructive to note how this faction developed:

a. "A great company of priests obedient to the Faith" (6:7).
b. "They of the circumcision ... astonished ... because that on Gentiles was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit" (10:46).

c. “They that were of the circumcision" in Jerusalem "contended with Peter," not over the acceptance of Cornelius and other Gentiles but because of the Apostle's social and religious fellowship with them (11:2, 3).
d. Now, a full–scale controversy about it in Antioch and Jerusalem (15:1,5).
e. And later on, lies disseminated in Jerusalem about Paul's attitude to the Law of Moses (21:20, 21).

The situation was serious. Why hadn't the heavenly visions and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and the rest settled the whole question? Probably these Pharisee–minded members of the church argued that the special revelation to Peter made that a special case from which it was not possible to generalise concerning other Gentiles.

Deep–rooted prejudice

In these days it is difficult to appreciate the cast–iron bigotry with which Jewish extremists of that period regarded circumcision. Two quotations from the Talmud illustrate:

"So great is circumcision (said Rabbi Judah the Holy) that but for it the Holy One, blessed be he, would not have created the world; for it is said (in Jer. 33:25): 'But for My covenant (of circumcision) I would not have made day and night, and the ordinance of heaven and earth.'"

"Abraham was not called perfect till he was circumcised. It is as great as all the other commandments (i.e. as great as all the rest)."

Thanks to Paul's staunch attitude, Barnabas was now once more on an even keel. The two now "had no small dissension and disputation" with the Judaists. In derivation that word for "dissension" means taking up a stand, i.e. sticking one's toes in. Classically it was used to describe a row between democrats and oligarchs in the Greek city states; in the New Testament the uproar on behalf of Diana of the Ephesians (19:40), and the insurrection organized by Barabbas (Lk. 23:19, 25). And "disputation" implies seeking out arguments or the weaknesses of an opponent's case; it has a marked legal flavour (6:9; 9:29). There is also a neat implication, supported by the Bezan text, that Paul and Barnabas were not disposed to be apologetic for their un–Judaistic attitude, but on the contrary sought to expose the error of the circumcision party. Truth was at stake. Paul's position was that "they (the Gentile converts) should abide even as they had believed" (Codex Beza; cp. 1 Cor. 7:20).

Realising that they were making no headway, the Judaists insisted that here was an issue important enough to be resolved by the mother–church at Jerusalem (so Codex Beza). Of course in Jerusalem they would be playing on their home ground and would doubtless derive no small reinforcement from the sympathies of the solidly Jewish ecclesia there.

The journey to Jerusalem

The Antioch brethren concurred, and promptly appointed Paul and Barnabas and others unnamed (including Titus?) as their representatives at what was now bound to be a full–scale investigation into the whole vexed question.

The Judaists went off quickly to Jerusalem, doubtless intending to use every minute there in mobilising beforehand as much support as possible. On the other hand Paul and his party decided to take their time over the journey to Jerusalem, calling at as many ecclesias as possible.

Leaving Antioch there were open expressions of goodwill from the brethren, a number of them accompanying the delegates on the first stage of their journey. There was no question as to where the sympathies of the Antioch ecclesia lay. They parted, doubtless, with heartfelt prayers for a wise and happy outcome to the impending deliberations.

Arrival and welcome

En route to Jerusalem (a journey which asserted their principles) time was taken to bring the ecclesias up to date regarding the sensational progress which, under God, had been made by Paul and the others in taking the gospel to the Gentiles in Galatia. It was news which those in Phoenicia and Samaria, also Gentiles, received with great joy. There was also a great welcome given to them in Jerusalem, the Judaists looking on without enthusiasm, and somewhat dismayed, doubtless.

The welcome was occasioned by the detailed story by Paul and Barnabas of "all things that God had done with them" – not what they had done for God. It would not escape notice that the Judaists had nothing to tell of what God had done with *them!*

However, those gentlemen were unquenchable in propagating their gospel of circumcision. So the controversy started again, these ex–Pharisees declaring with unflagging confidence and dogmatism that "it is needful (literally: necessary) to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" – both!

So there was nothing for it but to convene an authoritative conference to settle this vitally important issue once and for all. The church was at the crossroads.

Notes: 15:1–5

2. *Dissension and disputation.* It is difficult to see why Paul and the Twelve did not assert their apostolic *authority to* settle this issue. Were they over–impressed by the high status of these Pharisee debaters? The same word as "dissension" is translated "uproar" (19:40) and "sedition" (Lk. 23:25).
3. *Brought on their way.* A lovely characteristic of life in the early church. 20:6, 7,17; 21: 4–8,17; 27:3; Rom. 15:24; 1 Cor. 16:6. The Greek text underlines a significant contrast between v.3a and v.5a.
   Phoenicia, Samaria. This journey through Gentile ecclesias asserts the principle Paul and Barnabas stood for. In the Greek text there is a neat hint of unity amongst these brethren of the uncircumcision by contrast with disunion in Jerusalem.
   Great joy. as on a former occasion in Samaria (8:8). Nearly always this word describes the joy of fellowship, the highest joy of all.
4. *Received.* "Welcomed" is better. Bezan text adds: with great honour.
   The church... the apostles and elders; i.e. first a general assembly, and then a committee meeting with the leaders (Gal. 2:2). Omission of Peter's name might suggest that he deemed it best (because of Gal. 2:11–14) to avoid prominence.

59. Titus

It is difficult to compile a biography of this splendid helper of Paul's preaching work, because there is so little that is told about him explicitly. So, such conclusions as can be reached mostly have to be regarded as tentative. Yet some effort must be made to do justice to this fine young man who was so whole–hearted in the service of Christ.

1. He was very probably the brother of Luke:

    a. 2 Cor.8:18:"We have sent with him (with Titus) the brother, whose praise in the gospel is spread through all the churches." Here "the brother" is an idiomatic expression for "his brother" (1 Cor. 5:1; 1:1; Mt. 9:10;13:25 his men; Lk. 16:8;Col. 4:9; Jn. 11:3, 8, 12; Acts 7:25 etc.). It seems very probable that his brother is Luke whose gospel, just published, commanded general enthusiasm. Apart from this it is difficult to assign a meaning to the expression. And certainly only a few years later Luke's gospel was well–established as "Scripture" (1 Tim. 5:18).

    b. It is surely significant that, although it is known from the epistles that Titus was one of Paul's foremost helpers, there is no mention of him at all in Luke's Acts narrative. Nor does Luke mention himself, except by implication in the famous "we" passages although he was with Paul for a considerable time. Also, 2 Corinthians makes it very evident that on the third missionary journey Titus was exceedingly active, yet there is not a word in Acts about the grievous Corinthian problems with which he was much concerned.

2. Certain other evidence (ch. 110) suggests that Luke may have been a Samaritan. In that case, so also was Titus. It is noteworthy that all Titus's association with Paul was in connection with Gentile ecclesias. Even Jews who were Christians would not take too kindly to having a Samaritan teacher.
3. Titus was converted to the Faith by Paul (probably at Antioch in Syria). The apostle calls him "my true son" (Tit. 1:4).
4. When Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem (Acts 11:29) with a contribution from the Antioch benevolent fund, Titus went with them (Gal. 2:1). At that time there was no insistence on Titus receiving a formal (token) Jewish circumcision in addition to his normal Samaritan circumcision. Acts 8:5–17 and Acts 10 had already dealt with that problem.
5. There are one or two hints (e.g. 13:13; 14:22) that on the first mission Paul and Barnabas had other helper(s) besides John Mark; and the Book of the Acts of Paul and Thekla mentions Titus in connection with their coming to Iconium. So perhaps the remarkable details about Paul at Antioch and Lystra were passed on to Luke by Titus.
6. Returning with the apostles, Titus would be present in Antioch at the collision between Peter and Paul (Gal. 2:11–15) which was provoked by the Judaists. And when Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem for the special council, Titus had to be included in the party (Gal. 2:1), because of the Judaist's insistence: "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (15:1). This phraseology is very pointed with reference to such as Titus, for even though circumcised at birth, this Samaritan rite would not be recognized by Jews as being "after the manner of Moses."
7. It is highly likely that Titus set off with Paul on the second journey but was left to consolidate the work in Galatia (16:1), his place in the team being taken by Timothy (16:1–3); or else he stayed on with Luke in Philippi (16:16 is the end of a "we" passage).

8. Titus must have been glad to join Paul again in the course of the third journey. Because of problems at Corinth and Paul's inability to leave Ephesus at the time, Titus was twice sent to Corinth. The first time was with Paul's rebuke for their waywardness. It was an onerous duty, for, although older than Timothy (1 Tim. 4:12; Tit. 2:15), he was still a young man. However, his personality was such as enabled him to achieve complete success – to Paul's great relief and delight when they met in Macedonia. Paul promptly wrote 2 Corinthians and sent Titus off again to Corinth with it. Now he had the further duty of tactfully encouraging the brethren there to expedite the organization of their contribution to Paul's benevolent fund for the poor brethren in Judaea.
9. The next known contact with Paul was after his first imprisonment in Rome. Evidently the two held a campaign in Crete – "in every city" (Tit. 1:5). Titus was left behind there to consolidate the new ecclesias and to take any necessary action against troublesome Judaists (1:9–11, 13, 14).
10. That work completed, he met Paul by arrangement at Nicopolis (3:12) presumably with a view to holding a campaign in Dalmatia.
11. In Paul's last imprisonment in Rome, Titus came to him there, but was promptly sent off again to continue the work in Dalmatia (2 Tim. 4:10, a passage which mentions Titus and Luke side by side). How Paul would have liked to keep Titus with him in Rome! But the work is more important than any personal predilections.
12. Besides aspects of Titus's character already mentioned, there are other phrases which help to fill out the picture.

He was "my partner and fellowhelper concerning you" (2 Cor. 8:23). He was a ready volunteer for a difficult duty (8:17), a young man of great enthusiasm and affection for the brethren (7:15), and utterly dependable (12:18). He was clearly a tougher character than Timothy (1 Cor. 16:10; 2 Cor. 7:15). 13. This study of Titus offers as likely a solution as any to a textual problem which has plagued commentators on Acts for a very long time. One of the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament, Codex Beza at Cambridge, has a lot of textual additions in the Book of Acts, readings which are often supported by the Syriac and the Old Latin versions, two of the very oldest. A study of these variant readings makes it impossible to believe that they are haphazard additions by an irresponsible scribe. Time after time they ring true, even though they tend to be more wordy than Luke's delightfully concise style. The problem, then, is how to explain the origin of these Bezan additions which are manifestly too good to lose but which go completely ignored by the mass of New Testament manuscripts. Is it possible that a good deal of the narrative in Acts was supplied to Luke by his brother Titus out of personal experience of being with Paul? It is noticeable that the Bezan additions are much more common in the parts of Acts concerned with the work of Paul when, almost certainly, Titus was with him. Presumably Luke trimmed here and there the narrative supplied to him, hence the standard text of Acts; but, in some way which it is not now possible to know, the fuller text also got into circulation. This seems to be a more likely explanation of the Bezan problem than any of the rather freakish suggestions which the commentators have come up with at different times.

60. Peter's Discourse (15:6–12)

The conference now called together at Jerusalem was a full assembly of that very numerous ecclesia. Even though at first only the "apostles and elders" are specified, Codex Beza adds "with the multitude," using what had become almost a technical term in the early church. This Bezan reading is repeatedly confirmed by later details (v. 12,22,25).

The first stage of the deliberations was a kind of open forum, with full opportunity to ventilate all points of view on this increasingly sensitive issue of the relation of Gentile believers to the Law of Moses. Inevitably, then, because there were such widely differing convictions there was not only oratory but downright disputation. It may be assumed that the Judaists were set on making maximum use of the possibilities of publicity which this conference afforded them; and the opinions of many of those brethren, born and bred in the headquarters of Law and Temple, would be firmly on their side, at least, initially.

A noble spirit

Through all this, Peter must have felt decidedly uneasy as to what part he should play in this important business, for how could he forget the recent crisis in Antioch when his own ill–advised policy had called down upon him the open rebuke of Paul, the former Pharisee zealot. And since the story of that unhappy situation had been told in every ecclesia from Antioch to Beersheba, what right had he (many would doubtless ask themselves) to speak with any authority at all?

But Peter knew that as the leading apostle he had a duty at this critical juncture to exercise influence towards a wholesome decision and away from the unBiblical bigotry of ex–Pharisee brethren. To do this would mean eating humble pie, making public admission that at Antioch Paul was right and he wrong. So this last mention of Peter in the Book of Acts is to be read as the chronicle of one of the finest things he ever did.

His natural fervour was intensified by a special inspiration imparted by the Holy Spirit (so the Bezan text says).

Peter's entire speech is compressed into five verses. Yet one acute commentator has pointed out that in this short space there are no less than twelve phrases which are characteristic of Peter in his epistles and other speeches. The fact makes a neat indirect testimony to the truth of the record.

But though the voice is unmistakably that of Peter, the argument is that of Paul, especially in v. 10, 11, where contacts with Paul's reasoning in his Epistle to the Galatians are readily discernible. All honour to Peter that he was not afraid to say before them all: "Paul was right!"

Peter's argument

It is noteworthy that in all that he had to say, Peter (and also Barnabas and Paul when they followed with their witness) eschewed all appeal to emotion or sentiment, and stuck strictly to facts. These facts boiled down to three important truths:

a. It was common knowledge that in the early days the keys of the kingdom (Mt. 16:19) had been committed to himself. There was here the implied question: Is it likely, then, that God would allow me to misuse those keys? Is he not a "God which knoweth the hearts?" All through it was *God* who was at work (v.7, 8, 12,18).
b. There was the undeniable sequence of experiences which had led Peter to the house of Cornelius, there to witness an outpouring of Holy Spirit power on *Gentiles,* who were uncircumcised and who were certainly not observant of "the laws and customs" of Jewry. If God "put no difference," making no distinction, between "us and them", why should we attempt discrimination of that sort?

c. Every honest Jew must admit that keeping the Law of Moses rigorously was a thing that was quite beyond his powers. Then why be insistent that Gentile brethren wear this "yoke ... which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"

In making this last point Peter appears to have been alluding to what was almost certainly one of the favourite "proof texts" of the circumcision party: "Henceforth there shall not come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean" (Is. 52:1–3); for that passage continues: "Loose thyself from the bands (yoke) of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion ... Ye have sold yourselves for nought (an inadequate observance of law and ordinances); and ye shall be redeemed without money (the gospel offers a free unearned salvation)." Was it not evident from that experience at Caesarea that God was bringing into the lives of these "uncircumcised and unclean" a "purifying of their hearts by faith?" Then why "tempt God" with the challenge: "Is the Lord among *them* or not?" (Ex. 17:7). A lavish outpouring of the water of the Spirit from Jesus, the Rock of their salvation, had surely proved beyond gainsaying that He was.

It is possible that in his challenge: "Why tempt ye God?" Peter was making an eloquent allusion to the faithless rebellious spirit of Israel in the wilderness when they liked better the possibility of going back to Egyptian bondage than the prospect of inheritance of a Land of Promise (Num. 14:2,4; Heb. 3:8,9; 1 Cor. 10:9).

So the apostle expostulated against this attempt to fasten the yoke of the Law on the neck of the disciples. The last word proclaimed that these Gentile brethren truly were in Christ – "disciples" – even though as yet the Judaist insistence had not been complied with. And did they not already wear the light and easy yoke of Christ (Mt. 11:28–30)? whereas the yoke of the Law (it was a term the rabbis themselves used – hence Gal. 5:1) was a burden which neither their forefathers (Jer. 5:5) nor themselves (Acts 7:53) had the strength to bear. On this last point Paul was to be unflaggingly emphatic –that the main purpose of the Law was to demonstrate not the way to eternal life but that left to himself every man is a hopeless sinner (Rom. 5:20;3:10;4:15;7:8;Gal 3:19,23,24).

It is only through the grace (forgiveness) in Christ that we (Jews) – like those Gentiles– shall be saved; and as *they* are justified by *faith* (v. 9,11; 10:43; 13:39), even so *we* also. It is remarkable that Peter should put his summary of essential truth this way round, as though intending to warn his Jewish brethren against allowing *saving* faith in Christ to be swamped by their long–standing zeal for the Law.

The text seems to imply that when Peter ended his discourse there was hubbub in the assembly. However, when they fell silent (Gk. aor.) "the elders consented to the things which had been spoken by Peter" (Codex Beza).

The witness of Barnabas

Next, Barnabas and Paul were invited to contribute to the discussion. The order of their names, together with the fact that this was Jerusalem where the ravages of Saul of Tarsus were still a vivid memory, makes it almost certain that on this occasion Barnabas was the chief speaker.

Like Peter, he stuck to incontrovertible facts. He told the story of the hardships and successes of their recent missionary journey in Cyprus and Galatia, and – knowing that this would impress the symbolic minds of his audience – he recounted in detail what signs and wonders had so signally reinforced their message (2:22; Jn. 3:2).

At Paphos the cultured reverent Gentile had listened eagerly to their preaching, whilst the obstreperous Jew had been struck blind.

At Lystra a Gentile, lame all his life, had been healed by the power of God. Was not this also an acted parable of what God intended with the Gentiles?

And it was at Lystra also that Paul's remarkable experience had provided such an impressive recapitulation of the experience of Christ his Lord – a clear demonstration, surely, that the Lord greatly approved of the work these two friends were busy with in Gentile Galatia. Again there was a lot of excited talk, until at last James the Lord's brother, himself a staunch observer of the Law of Moses, rose to sum up the consensus of opinion. And again there was a great silence.

Notes: 15:6–12

6. *Came together.* The verb is passive: they were called together. The list of ecclesial assemblies in Acts is impressive: 1:15–26:4:23–32; 6:2–6; 11:2–18;21:18–25; 13:1–3; 14:27; 15:30–32.
   The matter. This divisive issue is described by the word LOGOS!
8. *Which knoweth the hearts.* One word in Greek. Its only other occurrence is 1:24, where not only was Matthias chosen by God to be an apostle but Joseph Justus Barsabbas was rejected, and (unless he was less human than most) he would feel rather sore about it. Justus describes a man zealous for the Law. Barsabbas means ' 'son of the sabbath," another Judaist emphasis. Then by the repetition of "God–which–knoweth–the–hearts" is Luke subtly steering his readers to the identity of the leader of the Judaist party?
9. *Purifying their hearts by faith.* Cp. 1 Pet. 1:22. And contrast 1 Pet. 3:21.
   By faith could, and perhaps should, read: by the Faith.
10. *Why tempt ye God?* Is Peter perhaps hinting at hypocrisy in the Judaist protagonists? Compare 5:9. 12.
    What God did. Not what *they* had done; cp. v.4; 14:27.

61. James's Discourse (15:13–21)

The next speaker was James, the Lord's brother. He was probably the chairman of the meeting. Traditions about him say that he wore a priestly robe of white linen, that he lived unmarried, and gave himself so much to prayer that "his knees were like camels'". He is said to have been nicknamed Obliam (= Father of the people, of the ecclesia?).

His speech is introduced with: "James answered, saying ... ," an expression often passed off as a meaningless Hebraism, but more likely implying that the discourses of the other three brethren had been followed by criticism from the Judaists (see v. 13a), to which criticism James's words were in part a rejoinder.

There can be little doubt that he addressed the assembly in Greek, for besides the Jerusalem brethren there were also Gentile believers in his audience. Also, it is noteworthy that in his key quotation from Amos he relied on the Greek version. The one or two Hebraisms in his speech are readily attributable to the Scriptures he alluded to.

Biblical reasoning

First, conclusions to be drawn from Peter's story: Just as God saved His chosen people out of Egypt, so now He was calling out Gentiles as part of His New Israel. Could there be any resisting the logic of that experience at Caesarea?

In any case the testimony of Holy Scripture pointed emphatically to the same conclusion. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." And the outstanding "works" of God are His redemption of men and women knowing their need of salvation (Ps. 145:9–12). There it was, written in the pages of the prophets, a message about the receiving of the Gentiles *as* Gentiles, a message ill–perceived until recent events and the guidance of the Holy Spirit (v.28) flashed a light on these dark places.

The sheet–anchor of James's argument was a remarkable passage from Amos 9 which is not without its difficulties, to be discussed by and by. However its main point is inescapable – here was proclaimed a future development of God's purpose which would certainly include "all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called," the special point (for James's purpose) being that God's name was to be called upon Gentiles without them becoming proselytes to Mosaic Jewry.

A Spirit–guided proposition

After discussing not only this but also various other related prophecies, James came to a concrete proposition. Whilst it was out of question that the Gentile believers should be brought under the yoke of the Law, it was manifestly desirable that Gentile disciples make some gesture of accommodation to Jewish outlook and the Jewish way of life. Otherwise how could Jews and Gentiles possibly live comfortably together in Christ?

Then let there be no continuing harassment of the Gentile brethren. They must be encouraged to consider themselves as members in good standing in the ecclesia simply on the ground of their faith in Christ. At the same time let them be strongly urged to observe four prohibitions (all from Lev. 17:7–10) regarding which their Jewish brethren were specially sensitive:

1. "Pollutions of idols," that is, any form of food which had already been dedicated as a sacrifice in an idol's temple (cp. Dan. 1:8).
2. "Fornication." It was a commonplace feature of heathen life to indulge in religious fornication with a priest or vestal "virgin" at one of these temples. In the Gentile world of those days such fornication was honourable, and not at all immoral. Another possibility is that by "fornication" was meant "marriage out of the Faith" (Heb. 12:16).

3. "Things strangled," e.g. a chicken with its neck wrung. Such a method of killing was not *kosher;* the blood was still in the flesh.
4. "Blood," i.e. any other form of killing which did not drain the blood out of the meat.

The over–all reason James advanced was: *"For* Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day." Here the implication was: Wherever the gospel goes there are Jews; so such Gentile concessions as these to ingrained Jewish sentiment and feeling would be a kindly expression of Christian charity.

But James so expressed himself as to imply also: Moses is not being set aside; Jewish believers can still observe the Sabbath and follow the Law they love so much.

Mutual concessions

Thus it was all settled on the basis of a principle enunciated in later years by Paul: "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations" (Rom. 14:1), that is, mutual respect for one another's differing convictions.

But this is only possible with teaching that is not deemed to be fundamental. James had ruled that for Gentile brethren the Judaist contention was not fundamental. More than this, by calling for a fourfold concession to ingrained Jewish ideas, he had tacitly assessed the believers with strong Jewish prejudices as being the "weaker brethren"! And so it is to this day regarding those who seek to insist that fellow–disciples observe food prohibitions.

The two parties, between whom there had earlier been "much disputing" now found a working agreement by a middle course in which both sides made concessions. The Judaists agreed to accept in full fellowship their Gentile brethren without insistence on a full observance of Moses' Law. On their part the Gentiles agreed to avoid giving offence regarding four specific items where Jewish consciences were particularly susceptible.

It would appear that the prohibitions regarding food came to be regarded as having only temporary force. When Jewish brethren had learned to live with this problem it became possible for Paul to write:

"Meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse" (1 Cor. 8:8).

"Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him" (Rom. 14:3).

"Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:4). See also "Studies in the Gospels," ch.98.

James's proposal commanded general assent, first from the apostles and elders, and then from the whole assembly. There was, of course, a minority of Judaistic dissentients. Later events were to prove this. But the majority vote in favour was so considerable that for the present the issue could be considered settled.

A difficult text from Amos

It now remains to examine in greater detail James's proof–text from Amos 9:11,12:

"After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things."

Apart from the obvious application of the words, already mentioned, there are not a few difficulties about this passage. Two of these are: (a) there are palpable differences between the Hebrew text and the Septuagint quoted here; (b) the LXX reading is itself quoted with minor divergences.

Briefly, the answers to these problems are on these lines: (a) since James was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and knew himself to be inspired, then the text he quotes from LXX must be a correction of a defective Hebrew text in Amos 9; (b) the apostle introduced his quotation thus: "And to this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written ..." – a clear indication that he was not building his case on just one Bible passage; the small variants from the LXX are indications neatly worked into the text by Luke as pointers to the other Scriptures James made use of.

Now to specific details:

1. In place of the Hebrew reading: "that they may *possess* the remnant of *Edom,"* LXX has "that the residue (remnant) of *men* might *seek after* (the Lord)." Here the difference between "possess" and "seek after" is the tiniest possible difference between two Hebrew letters. And "men" *(adam)* has one Hebrew letter missing from the name "Edom." In Amos it looks as though "men" gives better sense than does "Edom". Indeed, the suggestion has been made that this latter reading is due to a rabbinic alteration actuated by nationalistic hatred of Edom.
2. "In that day" (both Heb. and LXX) is changed to "after these things," almost certainly to echo Joel 2:28 LXX: "After these things I will pour out my spirit upon *all flesh* (Gentile believers as well as Jews)," precisely as Peter had been explaining (15:7,8). James may also have gone to Isaiah 2:2, where "last days" is closely similar (in Hebrew) to "afterward." That familiar prophecy goes on to speak of *all nations* flowing unto Zion.
3. There is omission from the Amos text of the words: "as in the days of old." But this is made good by verse 18: "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."
4. In place of "I will raise up," the text in Acts has: "I will return." Here is a hint of allusion to some other Scripture besides Amos. But which? – for there are several which appear eminently suitable:

    a. Num. 10:36. When the *tabernacle* was re–built in the midst of the camp of Israel, the people said: "Return, O Lord, to the thousands of Israel."'
    b. Zech. 1:16: "I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies: my house shall be built in it." Verse 15 has: "I was very sore displeased with the Gentiles," a passage James may have used to show that the Amos promise does not relate to *all* Gentiles.
    c. Hos. 3:5: "The children of Israel shall *return,* and *seek* the Lord, and *David* their king ... in the *latter days."*
    d. Is. 63:17–19: *"Return,* for thy servants' sake ... The people of thy holiness have *possessed* it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy *sanctuary...* they were not *called by thy name."*
    e. Jer. 12:15–17, a prophecy addressed to both Israel and *Gentiles* (v. 14): "*I will return ... then shall they be built* in the midst of my people."

It is difficult to be sure which of these passages James made use of. But probably more than one of them.

It remains now to consider the force of the Amos passage in its different possible applications.

The primary reference is, almost certainly to the dramatic events of the reign of Hezekiah. The context (v. 1–10) describes vividly the desolation of the Holy Land by the Assyrians at that time. The ruin of "the tabernacle *(succah,* not *mishkan)* of David" is probably a prophecy of the mortal sickness of Hezekiah, son of David. And "I will raise up the tabernacle of David" describes the good king's miraculous restoration (both Hebrew and Greek texts have a word commonly used of resurrection).

The promised possession of "the remnant of men" probably anticipates the expansion of

Hezekiah's kingdom into the territory of the desolated northern kingdom. Also, Gentiles "which are called by my name" were glad to be associated with the worship of Jehovah after that notable rout and destruction of the Assyrians (2 Chr. 32:23). The passage that follows (9:13–15) is, in the first instance, a lovely description of the lavish blessings which God gave to His people in the ensuing Year of Jubilee (2 Kgs. 19:29,30). All these ideas are worked out in detail in a separate study.

With very little difficulty James would be able to make impressive use of Amos 9 with reference to the Judaist problem besetting the church.

The tabernacle of David, fallen down and raised up, was Jesus himself (after the pattern of Hezekiah's experience), a figure all the more effective because "the Son of the fallen" was a familiar rabbinic way of referring to the Messiah. James would doubtless emphasize that this tabernacle of God was not a massive permanent temple, such as the Judaists took pride in, and that it was associated with "David" and not Moses.

The reference is not only to Jesus but to his church, broken down by the persecution of men like Saul and yet rising to greater influence by including Gentiles also, through the work of Paul and Barnabas. The earlier part of Amos 9 would remind Judaists that lack of faith in, and loyalty to, God's "David" must mean desolation of the Land and a scattering of faithless Israel. And the glorious concluding picture (v. 13–15) of blessedness throughout the Land is without doubt the Messianic kingdom which was then expected, even by inspired apostles, within a very short time.

There was plenty more prophetic material on this theme (e.g. Paul's passages in Rom. 15:9–12), some of it much more explicit than this Amos text. Yet James chose to conclude his exposition with an allusion to Is. 45:21 LXX: "saith the Lord, who doeth all these things" (not so obvious in the English text). It is a passage which emphasizes that God reveals beforehand the great developments of His purpose, including the in–gathering of faithful Gentiles: "To me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear" – Gentiles as well as Jews. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." That context also has this: "Surely... in the Lord (and not in the keeping of laws and ordinances) have I righteousness and strength."

There can be little doubt that the profound use of the Old Testament by the inspired men of the New Testament went a long way beyond the normal insight of the twentieth century believer.

Notes: 15:13–21

13. *Brethren.* "Let there be no strife, I pray thee...for we be brethren" (Gen. 13:8). James's "Men, brethren" is exactly as in LXX text here.
14. *Simeon.* Paul and Barnabas omitted. Their preaching activities had made them less persuasive to the Judaists.
16. There is Talmud evidence that Amos 9:11 was given a Messianic reference by the rabbis.
    The tabernacle of David. Cp. Jn. 2:19–22.
    Ruins The Greek word was also used of dying.
17. *Doeth;* continuous – He is even now at work.
18. *The world.* From the beginning of the Jewish world. This is very often the meaning.
19. *My sentence is.* Literally: I judge – I, not Peter! Then was Peter pope? But note the consciousness of Holy Spirit guidance; v.28. Even so, it was not an individual decision, but by agreement of "the whole church" (v.22).
20. All four items come in Lev. 17:7, 10 (strangling, by implication). The definite articles in the Greek text suggest an allusion to prohibitions already known (in Lev. 17). The food prohibitions here become less and less binding; 1 Cor. 10:19–29; Rom. 14:1–6, 14, 15; and especially 1 Tim. 4:3–5.Rev. 2:14 shows that the blatant flouting of these prohibitions was one way by which false teachers very deliberately tried to wreck the Faith.
    Fornication. Temple practice, as in Col. 3:5.
    Trouble. This Gk. word really means "cause extra trouble" s.w. 1 Sam. 28:15 LXX.

62. The Apostolic Letter (15:22–35)

James's proposal commanded general agreement – but not immediately, so verse 25 (Gk.) implies. There was now "one accord" (contrast v.7). Evidently a show of hands gave no sign of a dissentient vote. The dominant phrase: "it seemed good" (v.22, 25, 28, 34), was a kind of technical term in comtemporary parlance for announcing the decision taken by the assembly, rather like the minutes of a modern business meeting: "It was agreed that.. ." The meaning is stronger than the AV implies: "it has been decided." The word "decree" (16:4; Gk: *dogma)* is essentially the same word.

Later events show that the decision was anything but unanimous. The meeting had been noisy at times (so v.7,12 imply). The dissentient Judaists evidently decided that there was no hope of them swaying the meeting, so they dropped all signs of opposition – for the time being. Their later activities were to reveal that they were really as discontented as ever, and still firmly set on making the Faith – even the Gentile segment of it – Judaistic. However, just at present they had gained something.

Doubtless it was as a further sop to this circumcision party that it was decided to send officially–selected delegates to convey the formal decision of "the apostles and elders, brethren writing to brethren" their reply to the formal enquiry that had been addressed to "the apostles and elders" in the first place (v.2).

Of course Barnabas and Paul, who intended to return to Antioch anyway, could have done this job at least as well as any others who might be chosen. But their sentiments were known to be definitely against the Judaist trend. So lest they should appear to be reporting the decisions as though they were their own, it was thought better to choose Judas Barsabbas and Silas as the formal representatives of the Jerusalem ecclesia in this matter.

Judas Barsabbas and Silas

The former of these was probably the brother of the Joseph Barsabbas (1:23) who came near to being chosen as apostle in the place of Judas Iscariot. The cognomen suggests two men greatly zealous for the Law of Moses. So the choice of this Judas was likewise a move to placate Judaist opinion – though it may be taken (from v.32) that he was not a rigorous extremist. Perhaps his brother was now lined up strongly with the circumcision party, or he would surely have been even better qualified than Judas.

More is known about Silas, though not as much as could be wished. He was a Jew (15:22), but also a Roman citizen (16:27). From this point of view he would make an ideal colleague for Paul the missionary. Also, he had a special gift of prophecy (15:32), the context suggesting that this involved outstanding powers in the exposition of the Old Testament. Other details about him come up later on in the course of the Acts narrative. There is a theory that he and Luke are one and the same person, but it comes to grief on the "we" passage in Acts 16.

Appeal to Gentile brethren

The apostolic letter was addressed only to the Gentile brethren in the province of Greater Syria, inasmuch as the problem had first arisen in an acute form there. The specific mention of Cilicia (as part of the Syrian province) implies the establishment of ecclesias there, presumably through the work of Paul in his earliest days as a disciple (9:30; 11:25). It is difficult to understand why there is an almost complete lack of information about them. The fact that no attempt seems to have been made to inform the Galatian ecclesias also, at least not promptly (16:4), is probably explained by the knowledge that Paul had already written forthrightly on this topic in his Epistle to the Galatians. But it is remarkable that other ecclesias far afield were not informed about the decision taken – or were there no others to notify?

Another question which arises here is why the *Jewish* brethren were not specially addressed in this encyclical. After all, it was Jewish opinion especially that needed to be placated in this

crisis. Yet in the apostolic letter they go ignored. Certainly the "Grecian" Jews of Antioch were less rigid, in their attitude than those of Jerusalem, but there was dogma and prejudice enough in other Jewish communities of the diaspora, as Paul's later experiences were to prove. So the problem still awaits a clear–cut solution.

The letter from Jerusalem

The letter began with a brusque repudiation of the men who had created this crisis by their unauthorised activities.

'They went out from us (and they allowed the brethren in Antioch, and Galatia, to go uncorrected in their mistaken assumption that this mission had apostolic authority), and they have troubled you with words (Biblical arguments – of a kind), subverting your souls (the word describes turning house furniture upside–down). They told you to be circumcised and keep the Law; yet to them we gave no commandment at all (neither that, nor any other commission).'

'Instead of them, we brethren in Jerusalem are now sending to you, by common consent, two utterly dependable messengers, Judas and Silas, who not only bring you this approved letter, but will also add to it their own personal witness and especially the Biblical reasons why you should follow the course now recommended. And of course with them those well–tried servants of Christ, Barnabas and Paul, but for whose dedicated labours many of you would not know the

Faith. For your sakes they have taken all kinds of risk. You know you may depend on the report they bring you. It is only because of the campaign of denigration against them that Judas and Silas come also!'

'We exhort you, then – and it is the Holy Spirit which guides the writing of these words! – to realise what a light burden your life in Christ is. There is no intention to saddle you with circumcision and the fine formalities of the Jewish Law (v. 10). But we do ask you to make some concessions to the consciences of your Jewish brethren. Not that these things are necessary to your salvation, but in present circumstances they are necessary for the peace of the church.'

'Four items, then, which demand no great moral or physical self–denial. Refuse, we beg of you, any kind of food which Jews regard as utterly unclean through being dedicated in an idol's temple. Refuse also all meat which Jews consider non–kosher because it has the blood in it. And have nothing to do with the abominable fornications practised in heathen temples under the guise of holiness.'

'For your brethren's sakes especially we ask you to reject these things. If you do, you will do a good thing, and the Lord Jesus being pleased with you in this, he will bear you onward by his Holy Spirit, as by the cherubim–chariot of his Glory' (so Codex Beza seems to imply).

Only temporary

There is often failure to recognize the temporary and concessive character of this proposal. It was really a temporary expedient, to allow both Jewish and Gentile believers time in which to come to terms with a situation at present full of tension. It was important to save the Jewish extremists from rushing back to the synagogue. Dismayed Gentile brethren must also be reassured that there was neither need nor intention to load them with the cumbersome and

distasteful punctilios of Mosaic observance.

Within a comparatively short while this Jerusalem letter was a dead letter. The Judaists went ahead just the same with their campaign against Paul and the gospel he preached. And Paul on his part wrote off the food laws, at first in a tentative sort of way (1 Cor. 10:23ff), but later in more explicit fashion (Rom. 14:14; 1 Tim. 4:4,5; cp. Mk. 7:15, 18 RV).

Back in Antioch

The four brethren, accompanied by Titus, John Mark and others, lost no time in getting to Antioch with their news. Codex Beza says they arrived "in a few days," so presumably as soon as they got to Caesarea they had an immediate passage, and a fast one, in a coasting vessel.

Without any delay that burgeoning ecclesia at Antioch was called together. The whole multitude of them was excited to hear the outcome of the deliberations at Jerusalem.

First, the letter was read, and gave intense satisfaction to all. The explicit claim in it to Holy Spirit guidance was greatly reassuring. Joy was to be seen on every face.

Then Judas and Silas added at some length their own inspired testimony and exhortation from the Old Testament Scriptures. There was no need for Paul or Barnabas to say a word. Their approach to current problems was already well–known, and the special commendation of them in the Jerusalem letter, even though unnecessary, warmed these Gentile hearts.

When the time came for return to Jerusalem the travelling party included only Judas of the four leaders. Silas wanted to stay on, for already a close bond was growing up between Silas and Paul, a friendship destined to be fruitful in the work of the Lord. Gladly he joined Paul and Barnabas in the ceaseless activities of the ecclesia, teaching diligently those already in the Faith and proclaiming the gospel to all others willing to hear the Word.

Nor were these three the only labourers in that part of the vineyard. Many others showed a comparable zeal and energy. Abilities varied and methods and styles of preaching were anything but uniform, but in matters of this sort there was in the ecclesia a praiseworthy broad–mindedness which, in this respect, their successors of the twentieth century might well emulate. "Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" was Paul's outlook then, and to the end of his days.

Notes: 15:22–25

23. *Greeting. Chairein* is essentially a Gentile greeting to Gentiles. Yet when they in turn send a message to Jerusalem, it is *Shalom* – v.32: with peace.
    Brethren which are of the Gentiles. Reassuring them that they *are* brethren although they have received no circumcision.
24. *Certain which went out from us.* See Gal. 2:4,12; 5:12; and cp. 1 Jn. 2:19; 4:1.
    Troubled you; s.w. Gal. 5:10.
    With words. Perhaps a dogmatic insistence on the Ten Words, and especially on sabbath–observance, the Fourth Commandment (like the modern S.D.A.).
    Subverting. Other usages of this word:
    a. destructive arguments;
    b. to break camp, to make bankrupt, to ravage (Liddell & Scott).
    Your souls. The word implies emphasis on a low spiritual level. See 'Studies in the Gospels," p.484,714. *Ye must.* These two words are in italics. The Judaists were too subtle to say this explicitly
26. Praise of brethren is rare in the New Testament. Cp. 2 Pet. 3:15,16. Contrast the subverters: 2 Cor. 10:12.
27. *By mouth.* This reading can hardly be right: (a) No point in reading the letter and then saying it over again, (b) The Greek doesn't mean this. *Dia logon* probably, means 'by means of Bible evidence:' i.e. repeating the Biblical arguments used by James. So also in v.32 "much Scripture."

28. *The Holy Spirit: —the* Lord Jesus? 13:2 as Chairman of the meeting!
29. Since the first three items have to do with food, it has been suggested most plausibly, to read the fourth as *porkeia.* (swine's flesh) and not *porneia.* But alas, the manuscript evidence for this reading is non–existent.
    Fornication This Greek word was used in contemporary Jewry for mixed marriages – Jew and Gentile (cp. 1 Tim. 4:3). Contrast the spirit of these elementary prohibitions with the fine idealism Paul brought to bear on the same problem at the same time: Gal. 5:16–26.
    Being borne by the Holy Spirit. The same word with a similar usage: 2 Pet. 1:21, 17, 18; 1 Pet. 1:13; 2 Jn. 10; Heb. 6 1;. 1:3; Acts 2:2; Jn. 15:2.
    Keep yourselves; s.w. Gen. 17:10, but with very different reference!
31. *Consolation* The same word (v.32 also) as in Jn. 14:16: the Holy Spirit; cp. v.28 here.
32. *Confirmed,* the very opposite of *subverting,* v.24.
34. *Others; heteroi* means different from Paul and Barnabas.

63. Paul and Barnabas disagree (15:36–41)

Paul was not only a preacher of the gospel; he was also a shepherd of the flock. So, perhaps contrary to expectation, it was he, and not Barnabas, who first proposed a repeat of the first journey, with the emphasis this time on pastoral care for the ecclesias brought into existence in the course of that first preaching venture.

The Greek text has about it a certain element of urgency: "Isn't it high time that we visit those brethren to whom we taught Faith in Christ?" Paul was like a modern American with his "Let's go!" Apparently (v.41) the Jerusalem letter had not yet been taken round the Gentile churches of Syria and Cilicia, or if it had there was inadequate information as to how it had been received. So it cannot have been very long after the return of Judas Barsabbas to Jerusalem that Paul's anxieties concerning his converts led to action.

There is no mention in Acts of the Galatian defection to Judaism, perhaps because the Epistle to the Galatians, already written, told the story vividly enough of the crisis that had blown up in Antioch and also in Galatia; and Luke, compiling his history was aware that already copies of Paul's urgent letter were in general circulation.

A second mission?

At the time when Paul proposed this second journey there was still no news as to how the Faith was faring in Galatia. Only a visitation could satisfy Paul's apostolic concern, especially since the Jerusalem encyclical had not yet been delivered to the Galatians (Acts 16:4).
Barnabas was immediately agreeable. But as soon as it came to details there arose a crisis of discordant ideas.

It was understood, of course, that Titus accompany them, for he had been with them through all the chequered experiences of that first journey. He knew the Galatian brethren, and they knew him. (See Notes).

John Mark — a problem

But Barnabas liked the idea (AV: "determined" is too strong) of having his relative John Mark with them as well, even though on the first journey he had left them in the lurch. Understandably, Paul demurred at this. But (the Greek text implies) Barnabas persisted in his proposition. One can almost hear his mild apologetic tones. 'Agreed, he let us down badly before. But now he understands the Jew–Gentile problem better. And, besides that, he is familiar with the Jerusalem decision, and is ready to abide by it. Then shouldn't he be given another chance?'

Normally Paul would be the first to agree to such a proposal. He was not one to harbour a grudge. But it was in his mind that this new venture be a missionary journey as well as a pastoral tour of established ecclesias. Before, he had been prevented from getting through to the big prosperous cities – Ephesus and the rest– in the province of Asia. Now, the Galatian visit could easily be extended into that area. So even though John Mark might be willing to extend fellowship to the Gentile converts already made (because he'd heard that they had been persuaded to accept circumcision?), would he be as willing to be a preacher of the gospel to fresh Gentile cities, and without any Judaistic strings attached? It would be disastrous to have the preachers at variance among themselves.

So Paul stuck his toes in.

The guesses of the commentators, that John Mark had feared persecution, or had taken a dislike to the work, or, unused to being a long time away from home, had been stricken with homesickness, are all disposed of by Luke's distinctly censorious phrase: "he apostalized from *them* (Paul and Barnabas)." (compare also 13:13). (See ch. 50 on this).

The quarrel

There can be no doubt that in this difference of opinion Paul was entirely in the right. This is plainly indicated by the fact that when these two fine men dissolved partnership and went each their own way, it was to Paul and Silas that the Spirit–guided elders of the Antioch ecclesia gave their blessing (compare 14:26); whereas there seems to be a hint of self–assertion about the way "Barnabas took Mark, and sailed away to Cyprus." The narrative gives no hint of commendation to his project.

But, this having been said, it has to be admitted that men such as Paul and Barnabas should have managed to settle their difference, or else quietly agree to differ, without the sharp quarrel (Greek: paroxysm) which was allowed to develop. The opinion, blurted out by a boy in Sunday School when asked whose side he was on in this quarrel, could hardly be improved on: "Neither! They should both have known better!" Paul, do you not recall that, but for the graciousness of Barnabas (9 ;26,27), you might *still* be rejected by the ecclesia in Jerusalem? And do you not remember how he rescued you from the obscure work in Cilicia to invigorate a great drive of preaching in Antioch? (11:25,26).

So, Paul, could you not have had faith that God would not allow the work to suffer even by the inclusion of one weak link in the chain? How true were the words these two worthy servants of Christ had used on an earlier occasion! "We also are men of like passions with you" (14:15).

What made matters worse was that this intense disagreement was not confined to the two of them. The original text plainly implies that others took sides over this issue, so that there was now a serious danger of an invisible iron curtain descending in the middle of the Antioch ecclesia.

Indeed, in a less wise generation than theirs, the problem would have been aggravated and perpetuated (to the shame of the name of Christ's brethren) by making the issue one of fundamental importance in al! the ecclesias: "If you agree with him, you have no fellowship with me!"

Paul or Barnabas were not so foolish or headstrong. Unable to agree on this, they did at any rate agree to divide up the territory of the first mission. How like Abram and Lot (Gen. 13:11,14)! If only they had matched Abram's: "Let there be no strife, I pray thee — for we be brethren."

In Cyprus there had been, with the solitary exception of Sergius Paulus, no preaching to Gentiles but only "in the synagogues of the Jews" (13:5), so that area would suit Barnabas and John Mark fine, especially since the home of the former was in Cyprus. And Paul, already much concerned about the well–being of the Galatians, was eager to visit them again. So out of this evil God brought much good — two missions instead of one.

The solution

The rift between the two leaders was left to the healing power of time. And not in vain, for although Barnabas never worked with Paul again, there is a comradely allusion to him in one of Paul's letters about five years later (1 Cor. 9:6). And there can be no doubt that in later days John Mark came to agree completely with Paul's policy and outlook. Allusions to him in Paul's letters make this very evident: "Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11, the last paragraph we have from Paul's pen; compare also Col. 4:10).

Whereas Barnabas had gone off with John Mark in some haste, apparently, Paul was more deliberate. In the ecclesia at Antioch there was no lack of eager volunteers for the work (v.35), but "Paul *chose* Silas." There is an implication here of careful weighing of personal aptitudes.

Without doubt Silas was a good choice. A leading brother from Jerusalem, with good standing in the ecclesias, and also by reason of being a Roman citizen (16:37), one with real sympathy for Paul's aspirations to take the gospel to Gentiles everywhere. (See Notes).

These two (together with Titus, almost certainly) were now "commended to the grace of God" (14:26) – that is, the guidance of his Holy Spirit – and, forgetting now the things that were behind, they pressed on to fulfil the work which lay before them.

Through Cilicia

Firstly, they did the circuit of the young ecclesias in Cilicia, the hinterland of Tarsus. They too had been disturbed by recent Judaist activity. So Paul and his helpers "delivered the commandments to the elders" (Bezan text), and doubtless by careful instruction and exhortation "confirmed" them, that is, made them firm in the Faith.

There is a reassuring harmony, a kind of undesigned coincidence, about the five allusions which all concur in their implication or specific mention of ecclesias in Cilicia, yet no details are provided concerning them. The reader is left wondering why!

9:30: Paul is sent from Jerusalem to Tarsus

11:25,26: Barnabas finds Paul in or near Tarsus, and brings him to Antioch.

Gal. 1:21,23: Here is explicit mention that Paul was preaching the gospel in Cilicia.

Acts 15:23: The letter from the elders is addressed to the Gentile brethren in Antioch, Syria, and Cicilia.

Acts 15:41: The ecclesias in Cilicia are "confirmed" by Paul and his friends. No details are given, but there is a uniform assumption of successful developments in that area.

Notes: 15:36–41

36. *Go again.* Literally: turn back, often with the meaning "repent". Here it might suggest a change of policy – from preaching to pastoral work, or from reproof (in the letter to the Galatians) to comforting them.
    How they do. Literally: have, the word being used in the sense of "hold on (to the Faith)". The pastoral Paul is every bit as evident as the preacher or the theologian; e.g. 1 Th. 2:17; 3:10;Rom. 1:11;15:23; 2 Cor. 11:28; and the frequent references to his unflagging prayers for them.
37. *Take* (12:25 and Gal. 2:1 only) is a very expressive word in Gk., implying the addition of someone *else* (RV: also) besides the helper already included in their plans. (The use of *touton.* inserted at the end of v.38, carries the same implication.) The same word comes again in v.39 but this time without its significant prefix, because there applying to John Mark only. Also, this commentator is confident that in this section of the Gk. text it is possible to discern distinct signs of the more pleonastic Titus. It is probably he who supplied Luke with this part of the narrative. See also the end of chapter 59.
38. *Departed.* Barnabas could have argued from such a passage as Ez.44:10,11. But so also could Paul!
39. *Contention; s.w.* 1 Cor. 13:5, and also Heb. 10:24, this time in a good sense.
    Departed asunder. The passive form of this verb suggests that the separation was either advised or even insisted on by some mutual friend or the elders of the ecclesia. The only other occurrences of this word both suggest vivid figures of speech – Rev. 6:14, that of a scroll cut in two, so that each half curls up towards itself and away from the other; Ez. 43:21, a separate place which is part of the temple complex, yet not part of the sanctuary itself.
40. *Chose Silas;* s.w. Ex. 17:9; 18:25 LXX. It is an interesting speculation that Silus was Malchus, the secretary of Caiaphas, who lost and re–gained an ear at the arrest of Jesus (Lk. 22:50,51). The evidence is hardly copious. The name Silas may De Aramaic for healed. Malchus would almost certainly end up as a disciple of the Lord. Who better than he as a witness to the power of Christ? – and of his resurrection? (Mt. 28:11–15). His Roman citizenship would be a kind of O.B.E. for "public services" as an intermediary between Caiaphas and the Roman governor. A man of this character would be just right for the work assigned him in v.22. He is last heard of as Peter's secretary (1 Pet. 5:12). What a contrast with his original job as secretary (Jn. 18:10), and also with the first time he encountered Peter! Some of the exceptionally fine phrasing in 1 Peter may have been suggested by him.

64. Timothy (16:1–5)

The coast road from Antioch to Tarsus was dotted with towns each of which by this time doubtless had its Christian believers – Alexandria (not *the* Alexandria!), Issus, Mopsuestia, Adana. No doubt Paul's party spent time at all of these ecclesias, confirming the brethren in the Faith and communicating to them the apostolic letter to settle doubts raised by recent Judaist activities – for it may be taken as certain that those who had travelled to the new Galatian ecclesias to convert them to a Judaistic gospel of justification by works would not have neglected the opportunity to propagandise the Cilician ecclesias also.

The next stage of the journey took the travellers through the wild Taurus range, via the Cilician Gates, first to Derbe and so to Lystra, the home of young Timothy and his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, three converts from the first journey.

The party completed

Luke introduces his first mention of Timothy with "Behold!" an interjection he normally reserves for occasions of providential intervention (e.g. 1:10; 8:27; 12:7). Here, with the accession of Timothy was the further addition to the strength of the party which Paul thought was needed. If, as seems likely, an unmentioned Titus was one of the company (as on the first journey), then as Silas had filled the place of Barnabas so also Timothy became a second John Mark, though some would see him as a second "son of consolation" instead of Barnabas.

As Farrar comments, 'no name is so closely associated with Paul" as is Timothy's. Two of Paul's epistles were written to him. In five other epistles he is associated with Paul. He was with the apostle throughout most of the second journey, with him at Ephesus in the third journey, with him in his last journey to Jerusalem, and with him during his first imprisonment at Rome; and in Paul's final imprisonment in Rome the apostle wrote urging Timothy to come to him once again.

Timothy's family

Timothy was Paul's own convert in the course of the first journey ("mine own son in the faith"), but it was the boy's grandmother Lois who was the first member of the family in Christ (2 Tim. 1:5). His father had been a very well–known Greek (16:1, 3), still well–remembered, who perhaps because of his public status had not shared the religion of his wife.

By rabbinic ruling, the son of a Jewish mother is Jewish, whoever the male parent. Yet Timothy had not been circumcised. It is a fact which points to divided influences in that home, but under the blessing of God Eunice won through. Was it this situation which provoked Luke's unusual: "Behold!"?

There is, by implication, a lovely picture of Timothy as a little boy: "From a child thou hast known the holy *letters* which are able to make thee wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. 3:15). The little lad, bright and eager, was taught to read by the devout Eunice and Lois, and of course he was taught from the family copy of the Scriptures which at first would be to him "the holy letters," until he could put letters together to make holy words.

The brethren at Lystra – and also at Iconium, where the youth was probably a "visiting speaker" – kept on witnessing in terms of high appreciation to Timothy's zeal and promise. So Paul expressed his strong wish to have Timothy join them in the Lord's work. This was most unexpected, for at this time the boy could hardly have been more than seventeen or eighteen. Some fifteen years or so after this Paul could still write: "Let no man despise thy youth" (1 Tim. 4:12).

But Paul was not prepared to have Timothy enlist except by divine sanction. Accordingly, prophecies led the way to this decision (1 Tim. 1:18), the prophet concerned being, most likely, Silas (15:32). Also, through another prophetic leading, there was a service of dedication before Timothy was sent forth to the work. In this service Paul and the elders of the ecclesias at Lystra and Iconium solemnly laid hands on him, imparting some unspecified gift of the Holy Spirit, the better to equip him for the tasks ahead (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

Eunice was evidently a widow at this time (the Greek text of 16:3 probably implies this); so letting Timothy leave home must be seen as a real act of self–sacrifice on her part.

Circumcision

It was clearly needful that Timothy be circumcised before being accepted as one of the Lord's missionaries, for in every place the pattern of Paul's preaching was: "to the Jew *first,* and also to the Greek," and his method was: "unto the Jews i became as a Jew that I might gain the Jews" (1 Cor. 9:20; Acts 15:21; 21:26). Such a policy would have been hamstrung if one of the team of preachers had been only half–Jewish and uncircumcised at that. So the omission of the rite in Timothy's case (doubtless by decision of his father years before) was now made good.

There is no inconsistency between this policy now followed regarding Timothy and Paul's stubborn contention against foisting an obligatory circumcision on Gentile converts. In the Jewish crisis the quite erroneous argument had been: No circumcision, no salvation. Now the very different situation was that Paul wished to avoid provoking Jewish prejudices initially by coming to synagogues in a new mission field accompanied and helped by one not circumcised.

The Greek text seems to hint at a certain reluctance on Timothy's part, but if so, he suffered himself to be overborne by the needs of the situation. The commentators nearly all assume that the circumcision was done by Paul himself, but how much more likely it is that the rite was performed by the local rabbi. Thus it would be an outstanding witness to the Jews (16:3), that there was nothing anti–Jewish about Paul's gospel. Also, the time might come when that certificate of circumcision would prove useful.

"My own son"

In some respects not clearly specified Timothy was an admirable choice as fellow–worker. Throwing himself into the work of the gospel, he slaved at it (so the text of Phil. 2:22 implies). Before very long he was able to "bring to remembrance (in Corinth) my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Cor. 4:17) – that is he could be depended on to teach just as he had heard Paul teach. And he did this work out of love of it: "I have no man likeminded, who will naturally (i.e. as a born son of mine) care for your state" (Phil. 2:20). He had a natural flair for missionary work. He was "my beloved son, faithful in the Lord—my dearly beloved son—my workfellow", for whom Paul offered prayers night and day, "greatly desiring to see thee" (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2–4). This is endearing language. What modern missionary would not wish to have such a mentor, and such commendation!

When at Ephesus, Paul had so many irons in the fire that he had to make use of all possible help; so he sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia whilst he stayed on in Asia (19:22). It is a lovely picture of how a young but experienced preacher together with one who is old but inexperienced may together fill the role of one apostle.

But there was another side to Timothy's character which was a definite drawback. One allusion after another suggests that he was of a rather soft womanly disposition:

"Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear" (1 Cor. 16:10); the words seem to imply that some strong characters in the ecclesia at Corinth had at some time domineered over Timothy, or else (Paul feared) were liable to attempt this in the near future. Probably 2 Cor. 7:12 refers to the same human situation.

At another time Paul writes that he is "mindful of thy tears" – tears in a grown man! "God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of the Lord—" (2 Tim. 1:4,7,8).

Away from Paul he seemed unwilling to throw himself as whole–heartedly into the work as formerly: "I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ — preach the word; be instant in season, out of season" (2 Tim. 4:1,2). "Stir up the gift of God which is in thee—" (1:6). "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2:3).

Thus, for all his affection, Paul was not blind to Timothy's weakness, but gave firm undisguised admonition where it was needed:

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth — Flee also youthful lusts (probably sexual lusts, but not necessarily), but pursue righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:15,22).

Probably there was some connection between this diminution of activity and Timothy's "oft infirmities" (1 Tim. 5:23). A missionary needs to be not only tough in temperament but also endowed with exceptionally good health, and as it turned out Timothy wasn't.

However in his early days he took a prominent part in the Lord's work in Thessalonica (1 Th. 1:1; 3:2; Acts 18:5). In the course of the third journey, he was sent to iron out difficulties which had arisen at Corinth; but apparently he failed, for later on that duty had to be delegated to the much tougher Titus (2 Cor. 7:5ff).

Even so, his loyalty to Paul never flagged. It may be inferred that at the end, in response to the apostle's appeal (2 Tim.4:13:21),he travelled to Rome to be with his leader, but whether he arrived in time is unsure. However, since anyone close to Paul was by this time a marked man, it would seem that in Rome he was himself thrown into prison, but was given his freedom after a while (Heb. 13:23). If the cloak and the books and the parchments never reached Paul, it may be taken as certain that Timothy cherished them to his dying day. There is a tradition that as first bishop of the ecclesia at Ephesus, he was done to death by the mob there — a harrowing end for one as soft–natured as he.

Consolidation in Galatia

Progress of the missionaries through Galatia was probably slow, for each ecclesia they came to would clamour to have their company as long as possible. Warm as was the affectionate welcome given to Paul, there were also doubtless many embarrassing questions: "Why is brother Barnabas not with you?"

The "decrees" of the Jerusalem conference (which were not really decrees, for a man did not lose his fellowship in the ecclesia if he chose to ignore them) were read and explained in each place, even though they had been intended in the first instance for "the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia."

These decisions, together with Paul's personal presence and powerful exposition gave the coup de grace to any remaining tendency to accept Judaistic influence. The instability there which, earlier, had given Paul many a sleepless night was now a thing of the past. "So

were the churches established in the faith."

Also, the preachers renewed a vigorous campaign throughout that area, with the happy result that "the churches increased in number *daily"* – a marked contrast to the painstakingly slow progress of modern times. The Bezan text adds that the work was done "with all boldness." This phrase rings true, for after all the bitter opposition and downright persecution encountered on the first journey it would call for no small degree of courage to renew public witness in the same places.

It would be with uplifted spirits and much thankfulness to God for the satisfying evidence of the gospel's progress that Paul and his colleagues at last said farewell to Galatia and moved on to untried territory.

Notes: 16:1–5

1. *Came to.* As used by Luke this Greek word seems to mean: "arrived and made a stay there."
   Derbe and Lystra. There can be little doubt that Timothy's home was in Lystra, for this name is common to v. 1,2; and 2 Tim. 3:11 seems to settle the point.
3. *To go forth with him.* Thus, this journey, like the first, was now equipped with two leaders and two helpers.
5. This verse reads like one of Luke's "rubrics" (see on 2:47), by which there is indicated the end of a phase of development and the beginning of another. The same is also suggested by the *men—de* construction in v.5,6
   Established. Contrast the repeated phraseology in the troubled letter to the Galatians: "removed, trouble, pervert, hinder" (1:6,7 5:7).
   Increased. This expressive Greek word suggests overflow.

65. To Troas, and on (16:6–11)

Fifteen or twenty miles away from Pisidian Antioch was the border of the province of Asia on which Paul had almost certainly trained his sights during the first journey. Now was there anything to hinder a vigorous campaign amongst the prosperous cities there?

Yet, against all expectation, "they were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. "It is a likely speculation that the Spirit operated, in this instance, through Silas, who had the gift of prophecy (15:32). The Greek aorist tense here seems to indicate a complete ban: "Preach the gospel to nobody" there. This must have been a sore disappointment to Paul, and no small bewilderment. How could he know that Aquila and Priscilla, who were to be of outstanding usefulness and importance in the campaign there were not yet available? Not to worry, Paul; in due time Asia will be the most fertile field of all!

The sequence of circumstances which brought Paul to Troas, and so to Macedonia, is set out in such a way that there is no missing the evidence of divine control. It is almost as though Paul and his helpers were being hustled forward willy–nilly. The angel of the Lord, minister for divine affairs in the province of Macedonia, was getting impatient!

1. Forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word westward in Asia.
2. Blocked, again by the Spirit, from turning north–east into Bithynia.
3. Guided (evidently) to pass straight through Mysia.
4. And so to Troas, the end of the land. Where next?
5. Here they encounter Luke the brother of Titus (see ch. 110).
6. Paul's vision, and the sustained appeal: "Come over (s.w. Ps.37:23) to Macedonia, and help us."
7. From a careful piecing together of Scripture and their recent experience
8. they confidently gather that Macedonia must be the scene of their next venture.
9. Forthwith a sea passage is available.
10. Ideal sailing conditions provide a fast voyage to Samothracia.
11. And so, unhindered, on the next day to Neapolis, and on to Philippi.

With such experiences to put backbone into them, if indeed that were needed, they must surely have arrived at Philippi, confident and eager for success in the Lord's work.

This palpable leading of God marks the real beginning of the second journey. It represents a most dramatic parallel to the specific direction of the Holy Spirit which began the first missionary enterprise (13:1–3).

Rackham is surely right in his insistence that the second and third journeys were really one campaign, interrupted for a relatively short time by Paul's visit to Jerusalem which is described in less than a verse and a half (18:22,23a). And even whilst Paul was doing this travelling, Luke and Aquila and Priscilla (and Silas and Timothy and Titus?) were keeping the work going in various places.

Rackham is emphatic that this phase of Paul's preaching, compressed into at most five chapters (16:6–20 38), should be seen as the main part of his life's work. All round the Aegean and throughout the province of Asia, flourishing ecclesias were established in busy cities; and during that period, a mere five years, Paul also wrote his great epistles to the Thessalonians, and Corinthians, and also to the Romans. (And some would also include here Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians and maybe Galatians.) What years of industry and success!

In this section of the narrative (v.6–10), and that which follows, there is traceable (so Selwyn has suggested) a remarkable and unexpected parallel with the conquering work of Joshua. By themselves some of the points of correspondence at first strike the reader as trivial, but the build–up of parallels is quite remorseless and not to be gainsaid:

Paul and Silas, and the Book of Joshua–Jesus

1. With the crossing of Jordan compare the Dardanelles.
2. A divine vision: a man appearing to him;Josh.5:13;v.9.
3. "Come and help us;" 10:6;v.9.
4. The land divided by the pioneers into seven portions; 18:6; s.w. "part" in v.12. (Luke seems to take care to mention precisely seven Macedonian names).
5. The first lot is assigned to *Benjamin;* 18:11. Note v.12: "the first of the portion."
6. Jericho was taken on a sabbath; and so also Philippi; 6:15;v.13.
7. Corresponding to Rahab ("by faith") and the two spies – Lydia and two apostles; v. 15: "if ye have judged me faithful."
8. "And all her house;" 6:25;v.15.
9. "Scarlet thread;" 2:18; "a seller of purple;" v.14.
10. Jericho shut up and made fast; 6:1 LXX; v.24.
11. Earthquake; 6:20; v.26.
12. A great shout by the men of Israel; 6:20; v.25.
13. Circumcision, a necessary preliminary; 5:3,9;v.3.
14. "The Spirit of Jesus (Joshua);" v.7 RV.
15. "Assuredly gathering" (v.10) means, literally, "fitting or knitting things together;" in 9:22 the same word must mean: "fitting the testimony of Scripture together" (these Scriptures?).
16. 1 Th. 1:5 probably means: "in much fulfilment."
17. In later days Paul himself emphasized this parallel with the Book of Joshua. 2 Cor. 10:1–6 has at least ten indirect verbal allusions to the capture of Jericho.

Unexpected correspondences of this sort with parts of the Old Testament are, at first, unbelievable but, at last, are not only convincing but highly stimulating. They also do much to broaden and intensify one's concept of the inspiration of Scripture.

It is interesting to speculate why Paul was prevented from extending his campaign into Bithynia. It may be that Peter himself was already at work there (1 Pet. 1:1); and it was always Paul's policy not to preach the gospel where Christ was already known, "lest I should build on another man's foundation" (Rom. 15:20). Certainly not long after the time of Paul, when Pliny was proconsul there in the reign of Hadrian, that country was so full of Christians that the heathen temples were largely neglected.

To get to Troas the apostles did not by–pass Mysia (v.8), for they could not reach that city without passing *through* it. So very likely Ramsay's suggested alternative translation: "neglecting Mysia," is correct.

The place they came to was not the Troy of Homer and Virgil. That had fallen into ruin centuries before, and a new city arose on a fresh site in BC 300, built by one of Alexander's successors. Three times more Paul was to come to Troas– in the course of his third journey, when travelling from Ephesus to Macedonia (20:1,2); on his way back to Jerusalem, the sensational occasion when he restored Eutychus to life (20:6); and it was there where he ended his active ministry, being arrested by the authorities at the house of Carpus (2 Tim. 4:13).

Luke at Troas

It was at Troas where Paul and his company now encountered Luke the physician. This fact is an easy inference from the occurrence in the narrative here of the first of Luke "we" passages (16:10).

Since there is reason to believe that Luke and Titus were brothers (2 Cor. 8:18,19), it may be that some communication from Luke to Titus had exercised an influence in steering the party to Troas. It is perhaps significant that in verses 6,7,8,10 (and also in 15:41) instead of "go" or "went" the Greek text uses the word "come" or one of its compounds, as though implying an impatient Luke waiting in distant Philippi for this band of preachers who were steadily making their way across country to come to his aid with their preaching.

It was here that through the night (not, in the night) Paul saw a persistent vision of a man of Macedonia who besought, exhorted, urged him to travel to Macedonia and "help us." Ramsay's guess that the man in the vision was none other than Luke seems highly likely, for the Philippi narrative that follows shows several indications of close familiarity with the place; and certainly Luke spent a good many years there after this. It is like the modesty of this fine friend of Paul's to disguise himself under the description: "a man of Macedonia." The Greek text has: "a certain man . ..," using a word which very often implies someone familiar, "you know who."

The appeal: "Help us", surely implies that preaching of the gospel had already been attempted, but without that degree of ability and forthrightness which was never lacking from Paul's ministry.

It is at this point that the Bezan text persuasively adds: "When therefore he (Paul) arose, he related the vision to us."

Knitting together the Scriptures with all these experiences and indications (s.w. Col. 2:2,19; Eph. 4:16) they promptly concluded that God intended them to evangelize Macedonia, and especially Philippi. So without loss of time a passage across the Hellespont was sought and immediately found. Thus in very quick time they were on their way across the water and with a brisk following wind they made a fast crossing to Samothracia, a seaport backed by an unmistakable landmark of a five thousand foot mountain. Next day the same ship took them on to Neapolis, the port for Philippi which itself lay ten miles inland. One hundred and twenty–five miles in two days was very good going by the sailing standards of those times (contrast ch. 20:6, when the same journey, reverse way, took five days).

There was no Jonah on board.

Notes: 16 6–11

7. *Assayed* does not mean "they tried to," but "they tested," as though a trial preaching within the borders of Bithynia proved so discouraging that it was interpreted as the Spirit's directive not to press on in that direction. *The Spirit of Jesus* (RV). This reading is certainly correct. It comes again only in Ph. 1:19, written to *Macedonia!*
9. *A man of Macedonia.* Recognition by his dress is an absurd explanation. That part of the empire, and Philippi especially, was as cosmopolitan as Europe is today.
   Prayed. It is the familiar *parakaleo,* as though emphasizing again the Holy Spirit at work.
10. We endeavoured. The complete "we" passages are: 16:10–17:1; 20:5–21:18;27:1 to the end (and also 14:22?). The presence of Luke with Paul is implied in 2 Cor. 8:18;Col.4:14;2 Tim. 4:11.
    The Lord. The best manuscripts read "God." Thus, in this short paragraph guidance is attributed to God, to Jesus, and to the Holy Spirit.
6. The Gk. construction points to a sharp contrast between the success of v.5 and the discouragement of v.6.

66. Lydia of Philippi (16:12–15)

Normally Paul wanted to preach the gospel in every city of any size which he came to. Yet in Macedonia, there were several significant exceptions to this rule. The first of these, Neapolis, doubtless went unevangelized because of pressure from Luke who wanted to see the team busy in his own city.

There are quite a few considerations which identify Luke with Philippi:

a. The description of the city as (1) a city of Macedonia; (11) the first of the district; (111) a (Roman) colony. Luke does not match this kind of detail anywhere else in his writing.
b. There is care to assert that Philippi belonged to Macedonia and not to Thrace, which was regarded as a somewhat barbarous area.
c. The insistence that Philippi was "the first of the district" has created difficulty, for both Thessalonica and Amphipolis claimed that honourable title. But Luke stoutly assigns it to Philippi. And Codex Beza (Titus?) surely settles the question with the reading: "the head (city) of Macedonia."
d. Paul went to four other places which had the special status of Roman colony, but Luke mentions this feature regarding Philippi only.
e. There is markedly more space devoted to happenings in Philippi than to Thessalonica, the capital.
f. Neapolis, Amphipolis, and Apollonia were all by–passed on the way to Thessalonica, but not Philippi.

It is surely not too much to suppose that Luke, who continued to live here for the next six years or so learned to share the civic pride of the inhabitants and allowed this to creep into his narrative.

That title "first" has stretched the ingenuity of the commentators not a little. Perhaps it is called that because it was the first city of Macedonia where Paul preached. Perhaps an Asian usage had crept in here: Philippi was a 'first' city, in the sense of being distinguished. Perhaps the priority had just lately shifted to Philippi (although there is no contemporary evidence about this.) One particularly good classical scholar – Page – comments: "The use of *protos* (first) in this sense without any words to make it clear is unexampled."

All this uncertainty makes it all the more likely that the Joshua parallel detailed in the previous chapter supplies the correct explanation – and a Biblical one, to boot.

A colony

As a Roman colony, Philippi had Roman law and a Roman constitution, as did Lincoln (= Lindum colonia) years later. An important element in its population was a considerable body of retired legionaries whose pride in their Roman connection would never flag. These facts supply a further explanation why Luke was so eager to get his two Roman citizen friends there to help him with the work of spreading the gospel.

Paul's Epistle to the Philippians has two interesting allusions to this Roman citizenship: "Only express your citizenship worthily of the gospel of Christ" (1:27). "Our citizenship is in heaven" (3:20). Whereas Philippians were proud to be ruled direct from Rome, these Philippian Christians were to seek always to be governed direct from heaven.

It is particularly interesting also to note that by one small detail Luke tells his observant reader that this part of his Acts narrative was put together whilst he lived in Philippi: "And we were in *this* city abiding certain days" (v.12).

Why no synagogue?

The assumption is nearly always made that Paul was unable to follow his normal policy of preaching in the Jewish synagogue because there were no Jews and no synagogue.

But that is an almost incredible conclusion, for there was hardly a city of any size in the Roman empire which by this time did not have its Jews, few or many. And since Alexander the Great had always looked on the Jews with special favour, it is highly unlikely that his own native city had shut them out.

There is another explanation, which also serves to supply a neat "undesigned coincidence" confirming the truth of the record.

It was about this time that, because of disturbances in Rome, Claudius Caesar had banished all Jews from the capital (18:2). Then, since the colony (16–12) Philippi was more Roman than the Romans, it may be taken as fairly certain that there also the same policy would be put into operation with gusto. Of course there was a synagogue, but at this particular time what male Jews there were had either been compelled to depart or else had gone underground until the atmosphere was easier to breathe. Thus there were only Jewish women and a handful of God–fearers like Lydia to continue religious observances. A synagogue couldn't function without having ten men in its membership. So, "by the waters of Babylon (and in somewhat similar circumstances) there they sat down," at a place of prayer by the river.

Luke seems not to have known definitely of this arrangement – "where we *supposed* there was a place of prayer," This, and the fact that there were no friends to offer hospitality, until a stranger bade them "come to my house," suggests that Luke was not long resident in the city.

Witness to devout women

Meeting this assembly of women at their improvised place of worship, the four preachers abandoned all formality and proceeded to tell the purpose of their mission. This must have gone on for a number of sabbaths (the Greek continuous tenses imply this.) Luke was himself one of those who so witnessed, so it may be taken that he was not a new convert.

Outstanding among these women was Lydia of Thyatira, a devout Gentile who had migrated from the province of Asia (where Paul had lately been forbidden to preach! v.6). In Philippi she had set up in business selling the famous purple–dyed cloth that Thyatira specialised in. She was probably a widow, and may have been a freed slave, for it was common enough for such to be named from their place of origin – Thyatira was in the sub–province of Lydia.

God at Work

She soon gave special attention to Paul, as the one with outstanding ability in expounding the message – this because God was at work in her life: "whose heart the Lord opened." There is no other passage in the whole of the Bible so explicit in its declaration of an unperceived guidance from God. Lydia had a Bible and a knowledge of the fundamentals of the Jewish faith. More than this, she now had ready access to the wisdom of the world's finest expositor of Holy Scripture. But in addition the Lord opened her heart, that is, (as very frequently in both Old Testament and New Testament) her mind, so that there was eager attention to the message. There is no emotional emphasis in this phrase. It was only because of this divine influence that she gave heed to Paul's teaching.

There are many places where the Bible has this impressive idea:

"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

"Make me to understand the way of thy precepts."

"I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart."

"Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law."

"Make me to go in the path of thy commandments" (Psalm 119:18, 27,32,34,35, and many more).

Luke tells this part of his story as though assuming that if anyone gave serious attention to Paul and his message, then of course baptism would ensue: "And when she was baptized ..." Lydia also took the message to her household, whether children or servants, so that when at last she was baptized, so also were they, as the household of Cornelius had been (10:7, 24, 33, 48) and also in due time the households of Crispus (18:8) and the Philippian jailer (v.34).

Hospitality

Now Lydia pressed again the invitation which had almost certainly been made on ah earlier occasion: "If (that is, since) ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there." Perhaps she had just learned the instruction of Jesus to his preachers: "Into whatsoever city ye shall enter, search out who in it is worthy, and there abide till ye go thence. And if the house be worthy, let your 'Peace' come upon it" (Mt. 10:11–13). Lydia had wealth. The maintaining of this little band of missionaries would be a trifle in her eyes, but she would fain express her thanks for the gift they had brought and she sought the peace they would bring with them.

So, she constrained these strangers, precisely as Abraham, and Lot, and the two Emmaus disciples, had done, and –doubtless — with comparable blessing.

In later days, the ecclesia at Philippi repeatedly took thought of Paul's needs as he travelled and preached and suffered imprisonment. At least four times (Phil. 4:10, 16; 2 Cor. 11:8,9) they sent money to help his work, and very probably one of the most generous contributors on those occasions was Lydia.

Notes: 16 12–15

12. *Philippi.* Archaeologists have unearthed in the forum what was probably a place for public meetings. Possibly the very place mentioned in v. 19.
13. *The women.* In some cities of the Roman empire women were given an unusually high degree of freedom and dignity; e.g. 17:4, 12; 13:50. According to Lightfoot, this was specially true of Philippi.
14. *Purple.* Inscriptions found at Thyatira mention the guild of dyers.
15. *Baptized.* Dipped, died, and dyed (in the blood of the Lamb).
    Constrained; s.w. Lk. 24:29, the only other New Testament occurrence. So there may have been a certain reluctance on the part of Paul and his company; cp. 2 Cor. 11:9. Acts has some fine instances of the hospitality of brethren: 17:7; 18:3,7, 21:8,16; 28:14,15.

67. Apollo or Christ? (16:16–18)

With complete absence of Jewish opposition, the work went on smoothly in Philippi, Lydia's home and that place of prayer near the river being the main centres of activity. But then came a dramatic change.

Amongst the gods honoured in Philippi was Apollo whose shrine at Pytho in northern Greece is much visited by modern tourists. One of the priestesses associated with this local worship was a "Python" (Gk. text)–the name had come to be used classically for a ventriloquist, one who was able to deceive devotees into believing that they were hearing genuine oracular utterances from the mouth of the image of Apollo. It was an astute bit of priest–craft which depended entirely on the flair which this slave–girl had for ventriloquism, and credulous worshippers paid through the nose for the exciting experience of being deceived. So lucrative was this religious hocus–pocus that this girl had been turned into a limited company (Inc. as they say in America.) She had not one owner but several who waxed fat on the superstition and roguery which her remarkable knack encouraged.

An inadequate explanation

The usual but mistaken interpretation of this incident is that this girl was actually deranged – "possessed with a spirit." Somehow she got it into her head that Paul and his friends were in Philippi on a mission from heaven. Day after day, whenever she encountered them, with characteristic lack of control, she cried out to the populace: "These men are servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation." And having set this pattern, she proceeded to repeat the performance day after day, until at last Paul, vexed at suffering the embarrassment of having to put up with such a bad advertisement, peremptorarily bade the spirit "come out of her."

This happened forthwith. She returned to sanity, but found that her genius for ventriloquism had dried up. The holy trade had come to an abrupt end.

This reading of the episode is not without its difficulties. It has to be assumed that the whole city regarded a crazy girl as possessed by the spirit of a Greek god (cf. 1 Cor. 8:4). But if she was out of her mind it must have been obvious enough to lots of people that most of her utterances were just plain nonsense and not at all the divine wisdom that worshippers paid for. More than this, is it conceivable that *always,* when a worshipper came seeking guidance from the divine Apollo, this crazy girl managed to say something that could be interpreted as a message from the god? Is it likely that, out of her mind, she nevertheless managed always to switch on her ventriloqual faculty so as to give the impression that the image of Apollo was talking?

This "lunacy" explanation piles up more difficulties than it removes. There is an alternative which is more satisfying.

An alternative

She was of course, a ventriloquist, and a very quick–witted one too, for she would have to be able to weigh up the character and psychology of those who came seeking divine counsel and also to invent on the spur of the moment something which, transmitted from the idol through her ventriloquism, would send the devotee away satisfied with the wisdom of Apollo.

Evidently she had had some opportunity to listen to Paul and the others, with the result that one day, when she encountered them in the street, on impulse she turned and followed them, crying out her conviction that they were as genuine in their message as she was bogus:

"These men are slaves of the most high God (as I am supposed to be), and they shew us the

(true) way of salvation (and not of destruction – which is the meaning of 'Apollo')."

It was a most courageous thing to do, but having taken the plunge she persevered, and now made this public witness day after day. Being a slave she was not free to become a disciple. And in any case how could she serve Christ and at the same time continue the guileful quackery which was the main part of her everyday life? It was a strange situation, as she publicly testified to her own worthlessness and steered whose who heard her to faith in the message of the apostles.

Paul was increasingly vexed regarding this situation – not with the girl's witness to themselves and their gospel, but to the fact that here was a would–be disciple who was trapped by circumstances. So at last one day, he turned and rebuked the "spirit" in her (as the populace conceived it): "In the name of Jesus Christ come out of her." In *fact* what he expelled was her expertise as a ventriloquist.

The outcome

At the moment it seemed that nothing untoward had happened, there was no outward appearance of any change in her. But within the hour, when she went back on duty at that temple of deceit and extortion she found that her superbly clever gift of ventriloquism and quick invention had completely deserted her. There was no voice from the god. And devotees were now asking for their money back.

The narrative goes on to tell of the extraordinary experiences which thereupon befell Paul and Silas, but there is no further record about this brave nameless girl. It may be guessed that she suffered at least one severe thrashing from her angry and uncomprehending owners. It is almost certain that at the first opportunity Lydia, or some other believer, rescued her from the clutches of those racketeers and helped her to a happy life in "the way of salvation."

Notes: 16:16–18

16. *Divination,* puthòn. The word links directly with one of the Hebrew words for "serpent" e.g. Ps. 91:13; Is. 11:8; both very appropriate (and note Is. 11:8). There is also the Greek word *putho, to rot or corrupt;* again, very appropriate.
    Soothsaying. In LXX, used of false prophets and lying divination.
17. *Followed Paul and us.* A vivid memory in Luke's mind! But as always (e.g. v. 14) it was Paul who specially commanded attention.
    And cried. The usual "derangement" explanation is also in difficulties this way – Paul would know that, almost certainly, the girl's owners would make trouble about losing their income; then is it likely that he would risk this merely to remove a relatively minor inconvenience? But on the view advanced here, this action was necessary, regardless of consequences, to make the girl's salvation possible.
    The way of salvation. In the Roman empire "Caesar is Saviour" was a common cry of the populace. But now in Philippi "Christ is Saviour."
18. *Grieved;* s.w. 4:2. Also: Ecc. 10:9a LXX, and note the allusion to the serpent in v.8,11.
    Come out. With a nice literary touch Luke uses the same word in the next verse: "the hope of their gains was gone out." The problem why Jesus and Paul should seem so readily to fall in with the contemporary false notion of the existence of demons and unclean spirits is dealt with in "Studies in the Gospels," chapter 30.

68. Flogging and Imprisonment (16:19–24)

In the Book of Acts opposition to the Faith falls into two sharply defined categories. Jewish hostility always sprang from religious fanaticism. Gentile opposition was always based on self–interest or political considerations.

Now in Philippi, when the slave girl's remarkable powers had "gone forth" from her, her owners soon realised that their splendid source of income (19:27) was also "gone forth" (same word, in Greek). So they lost no time in taking vigorous action.

They laid violent hands on Paul and Silas, who were not only the leaders in the group but also the most obviously Jewish in appearance, and dragged them off to the market–place and to the court close by.

False charges

There, before the magistrates, the true motive for accusation was carefully hidden under a whitewash of intense concern for the public well–being. Three charges were made:

a. They are Jews. Did not Claudius command that all Jews be expelled from Rome – and therefore from Philippi, since we are a colony, part of the city of Rome? In fact, as Roman citizens Paul and Silas had more right to be in this colony than most of the accusers, for nearly all the temple inscriptions found in Philippi bear the names of slaves or freed men.
b. They exceedingly trouble *our* city (24:5). A splendidly vague and thoroughly chauvinist accusation, and not true, anyway.
c. They teach unlawful religious customs. Again, this charge could only be made to stick if it led to men refusing military service or some civic duty, and this had almost certainly not happened as yet.

What a contrast between these accusations and the true facts! The magistrates, had they wished to do so, could easily have probed to ascertain the real motive of these adversaries. But all the indications are that they had no inclination to do so. The high probability is that they were personal friends of the accusers and had been suitably groomed for the proceedings beforehand. So also had the rabble, for the word had gone round about Paul's conversion of temple worshippers. Thus, popular clamour at the courthouse made the magistrates' side–stepping of true justice all the easier.

Flogging

Without any proper trial being held (v.37), these two servants of Christ were publicly stripped and beaten – not, in Jewish fashion, "forty stripes save one," but just as many as the rulers thought their victims could take. Philippi was a relatively new colony, so perhaps these magistrates were specially anxious to prove their zeal and loyalty.

Months later, Paul was to include a vivid reminiscence of this experience in one of his letters to the Thessalonian believers: "... having suffered before, and been *shamefully* entreated, as ye know, at Philippi" (1 Th.2:2).

Later still, in that moving catalogue of sufferings for Christ's sake which he wrote to the Corinthians, he mentioned: "Thrice was I beaten with rods" (2 Cor. 11:25), this experience at Philippi being the only identifiable instance of the three.

And years afterwards this beating was still a vivid memory: "Suffering for his sake...the same conflict which ye saw in me" (Phil. 1:30).

It is a remarkable thing, and to this writer quite inexplicable, that in such circumstances (and so often repeated) Paul should have refrained from claiming the rights which went with his Roman citizenship. Later on (v.37) and for a very good reason (as will be seen), he did make an almost arrogant use of his Roman status. But why did he not do this from the very start of this persecution? (contrast 22:25). The commentators cite examples of Roman citizens having their rights flagrantly disregarded. But here at Philippi, as soon as Paul asserted his standing as such, there was almost timorous acknowledgement of the wrong done to him (v.38,39).

Imprisonment

But now the two apostles, with lacerated backs and suffering intense pain, were summarily hustled off to jail. There the commandant was put under solemn charge to see that their imprisonment was as rigorous as possible. Why this special urgency it is difficult to understand. Perhaps it was already recognized that the officer had a certain sympathy for these two prisoners. This might be inferred from the fact that whereas the "stocks" in use in those days often had five holes – for feet, hands, and neck –this jailor was content to leave Paul and Silas secured by their feet only. There might be a hint (v.26) that they were also shackled by chains.

Rackham has surmised that the prison was built into a hillside, and that the "inner prison" was a remote dungeon excavated out of the rock. If so, the site should be archaeologically identifiable, for even in the course of centuries hillsides do not disappear.

Notes

19. *Their gains.* The place of money in the Acts of the Apostles is worth considering: 1:18;5:2;6:1;8:18; 19:25;24:26. But see also 4:32,37.
    The hope of their gains ... gone might suggest that every persuasion and ill–treatment designed to get this girl to resume her former nefarious trade had been stubbornly withstood.
    Caught would perhaps be better translated "grabbed"; cp. 18:17; 21:30.
    The market–place...the rulers. In Athens court and agora had the same juxtaposition.
20. *These men... being Jews.* There is evident contempt in these phrases. For the charges, compare and contrast 24:5. For the hiding of true motive, compare 17:6,7; 1 Kgs. 18:17.
    Trouble. LXX uses this word for extreme fear (e.g. Ps. 18:4; 88:16), but will such a meaning hold here?
    Our city; compare 19:27.
21. *Being Romans.* The Greek is not the same as in "being Jews," for the simple reason given in the text. Years later, when writing to the Philippians, Paul alludes to this local pride: "For we are a colony of heaven" (3:20); i.e. our headquarters is far more exalted than Philippi's Roman connection.

69. Earthquake (16:25–34)

In such circumstances as they found themselves, Paul and Silas were surely justified in pitying themselves. If they did, then they had also the wisdom to fall back on the best of all specifics against despondency – prayer and praise. They committed themselves in their present wretched plight to God. And of course they prayed aloud, and the prisoners in the outer prison heard them, and knew what kind of men they were, and what kind of faith buoyed them up, and what kind of God they worshipped. And those rough uncouth characters were stirred and uplifted.

Comfort in tribulation

But then these two indomitable apostles proceeded to add further solace, both to themselves and to the rest, by singing some of the many psalms and hymns which had come to be adopted by the early church.

It is interesting to speculate as to their choice. Psalm 142 is splendidly appropriate to their circumstances, especially in its conclusion:

"Bring my soul out of prison, that I may give thanks unto thy Name ... for thou shalt deal bountifully with me."

Also Psalm 129:1–5 was surely in their minds and on their lips at this time:

"Many a time have they afflicted me... yet they have not prevailed against me. The plowers ploughed upon my back: they made long their furrows. The Lord is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked. Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion ..." And the first paragraph of Isaiah 45 has phrase after phrase tailor–made for these two witnesses in their desperate plight. When Luke tells how "the prisoners heard them," he uses a word which normally meant "listen for or with pleasure."

Earthquake

Then, all at once, there came a massive earthquake. During a minute of horror, the building waltzed on its foundations, walls cracked, the bars on cell–doors fell out, and the prisoners' chains, stapled into the walls, were loosened, so that now with but little effort practically all could have gained their freedom.

Instead of leaping at this unexpected opportunity to escape those hardened criminals, scared as they had never been in all their lives of violence, sought reassurance and comfort by crowding into the inner prison to be with Paul and Silas. In time of earthquake the universal instinctive reaction is to rush out into the open–air to escape being crushed or buried alive by collapsing buildings. Instead, the prisoners did the opposite, as though already fully convinced that their true safety lay with these men of God.

A desperate jailor

As soon as the shock of the quake was over, the commandant of the prison was more panic–stricken about the possibility of a jail–break. Rushing first into the outer prison, he immediately had his worst fears confirmed by observing (by some dim light in the passage?) that doors were open and cells empty.

Within seconds his mind had reviewed the inevitable official enquiry. Of course he would explain: "The earthquake gave them all a good opportunity to escape." And to that would come the sour sceptical reply: "You, accepting bribes, have connived at their escape, and now you use the earthquake as an alibi!" How could he disprove such an accusation?

So, unwilling to face disgrace and heavy punishment, he drew his sword in order to make the escape commonly adopted in those days by desperate men.

Paul, peering through the doorway of the inner dungeon, or perhaps making a quick inference from the ominous sound of a sword being drawn from its scabbard, and perhaps hearing the man's ejaculations of despair, shouted out urgently to him to desist from his purpose: "Do thyself no harm, for we are all hither." He used a word which plainly implied (17:6; 25:17;Jn.4:15,16) that the other prisoners had moved into his cell. Behind this there was also the further implication that if he, Paul, forbad them to escape, they would heed his warning.

The officer, almost unable to believe his ears, shouted to warders to bring lights, and within a minute he came into that cell trembling to think that these two men of God (as he knew they claimed to be) had been victims of his organized flogging a few hours before. Now, in the sight of prisoners whom he regarded as the scum of the earth, he humbled himself before Paul and Silas, expressing solicitude for their well–being and also, on a different plane, for his own.

A message of salvation

Like all Philippi he knew that they proclaimed a message of "Salvation" (v.17), a religion of truth and righteousness free from all the variegated hocus–pocus of the ancient cults, and calling for obedience and loyalty to an Almighty Creator who had chosen to reveal Himself specially to Jews. So, when he had brought them out into his own quarters, he made his humble submission: "Sirs, (literally, Lords), what must I do to be saved?" He did not mean: "saved from disciplinary action by the rulers," for not a prisoner had been lost. He used the word in the high sense which Paul had given it in his preaching.

The answer was, in effect. We are not Lords, but the Jesus we serve is. Believe in him, and you will know a salvation no other religion can give you. And the same saving faith is available to all in your household, male or female, slave or free, Roman or Greek or foreigner.' Thereupon he locked up his prisoners once again, but Paul and Silas he installed in his own house, and since all in it were awake and scared by the frightening violence of the earthquake, they were by and by soothed by the reassuring message about a Creator in control of all the world, a message now filled out at length by two weary blood–stained lacerated men who convincingly asserted that they spoke with authority given to them by the Son of God.

"Comformable unto his death."

How easy it would be to proclaim the message concerning a suffering Saviour, inasmuch as their own experience there in Philippi had so eloquently recapitulated it:

1. The casting out of evil has resulted in
2. evil men resenting the loss of their own profit and influence.
3. Arrest follows.
4. There are charges before the rulers:
5. "They trouble our city."
6. "They teach different religious customs."
7. "They are against Rome."
8. Over against these charges is the claim: "We are Romans, and loyal to Rome."
9. The multitude joins in the attack.
10. Stripped of their clothes, the two have many stripes inflicted on them.
11. With feet fast in the stocks (literally: the wood; s.w. 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; 1 Pet. 2:24).
12. they counter their suffering with a psalm to God.
13. Their prison is like the tomb,
14. and special measures are taken to prevent escape.
15. There is a mighty earthquake,
16. and all in the prison who put confidence in them are loose.
17. The guard, as good as dead, is given his life.
18. God's servants are vindicated by a higher citizenship.
19. Freed from bondage,

20. they comfort the brethren,
21. and go away to a distant place.
22. Along while later they return.

No wonder Paul was able to write in later days:

"I rejoice in my suffering for you, and fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:24).

And also, to these Philippians:

"... that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:10).

Baptism and fellowship

It was evidently only after a substantial amount of time spent in instruction of the assembled household that Paul allowed any attention to the less important matter (as he deemed it) of their backs, raw and sore and bloody from the beating which the jailor had himself superintended.

Every Roman house of quality had its hot and cold baths. So without further delay the officer saw to it that Paul and Silas were comforted with warmth, their backs sponged and anointed, and themselves arrayed in clean garments.

Then, in the bath which had washed their stripes, the jailor and all those with him who had heard Paul's instruction had their sins washed away in the blood of Christ.

Then he brought them into an upper chamber where, with little delay, food was set out for them all. There can be little doubt that they now all partook of a holy meal together, a Love Feast, culminating in the sacramental Bread and Wine in memory of the Lord whose sufferings and victory had just now been re–enacted in the experience of his servants.

Amongst them all, preachers and converts alike, there was a most profound sense of joy at the unexpected outcome of an untoward experience.

Notes: 16:25–34

25. *Midnight* Customary with Paul? 20:7;Ps,119:62,61.
    Singing hymns. RV. Peter, marvellously delivered out of prison, led the brethren in Ps. 2. Did Paul and Silas recall this, and use the same psalm? – with the same effect? 4:25,31. *He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh." The earthquake was God's derision at human opposition. Note also: (a) "Serve *the Lord* with fear and *rejoice* with *trembling;"* cp. v.29,31,34. (b) "Blessed are all they that put their trust (believe) in him;" cp. v.31. (c) "The uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." (d) "Break their bands asunder;" contrast v.26.
    The prisoners heard them. Does this imply that although shackled, Paul and Silas were not prisoners?
27. *The keeper of the prison.* Not improbably he is to be identified with Epaphroditus; Phil. 2:25–30, where note "fellow–soldier"–almost certainly the jailor was a Roman officer.
    Who would have killed himself. Note the grim force of 12:19; 27:42. If a prisoner escapes, then his penalty is visited on the man who guards him.
29. *Called for a light.* Considering the other occurrences in Acts of "light," is Luke hinting here at a double meaning? "Trembling" is the same word as in Dan. 10:11 (7).
30. Bezan text adds: "when he had secured the rest." *Must.* What is *necessary...?*
33. *Literally: he washed from their stripes,* a strange expression.
    He and all his. If this included his children, v.32 plainly implies that they were old enough to be instructed, and therefore to be baptized. Almost certainly the phrase also covers warders and slaves.
34. The Greek text makes a pointed link between v.33,34, hence the Love Feast suggestion, and Paul and Silas had no scruples about eating this holy meal with the uncircumcised. It would be surprising, if, next morning, Paul was not also given opportunity to preach the gospel to the prisoners on whom he had already made such an impression.

35, 36. The jailor does not delay to fulfil his first Christian duties; Mt. 25:36.

70. Free—under protest (16:35–40)

It seems not unlikely that as soon as Paul and Silas were thrown into prison, Luke went into action on their behalf not only with his prayers but also in a different way, pressing on the magistrates the need to re–consider their hasty decision.

Also, next morning, since the magistrates would be anxious about the earthquake's effects on the prison and the safety of the prisoners, their jailor doubtless sent in a report, taking care to mention that, but for the good influence of Paul and Silas, there would have been a jail–break of unexampled magnitude.

Thus the magistrates would be the more inclined to interpret the frightening earthquake as a drastic token of the anger of the God of Israel at the despite done to His servants. If so, they were fairly close to the truth (Ps. 18:6,7). The Bezan text reads: "And the magistrates assembled at the marketplace, and remembering the earthquake which had happened, they were afraid."

So without delay they sent their officers (why more than one?) with a message to the prison commandant: "Let those men go." They hoped doubtless that the two prisoners would be so relieved at being set free that they would immediately clear out of Philippi before further trouble befell.

Doubtless the jailor thought on these lines also as he conveyed the message: "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart and go in peace." Yet even as he said this he would be hoping that somehow his two prisoners might be persuaded to stay!

Vigorous protest

With what surprise then did he hear Paul demand that the officers be brought into the cell and deliver their message in person. Then came the apostle's unexpectedly brusque and indignant rejoinder: 'Since when has it been Roman procedure to send men to prison or to death without first giving them opportunity to answer the accusations laid against them (25:16)? We were condemned without proper trial – we, Roman citizens from birth! – and we were flogged, a flogging made the more shameful by being administered in public, and then undeservedly thrown into prison. And now, to add to the indignity, there comes this backstairs dismissal delivered with such supreme lack of courtesy that we get the message at third hand. Go to your masters and tell them that this casual attitude is not seemly. Instead, they will come themselves, in full regalia, to discharge us from this prison, and they will publicly give us an honourable acquittal.'

It was an astonishing outburst to come from a prophet of the Lord Jesus.

The reason for this seeming intransigence is not far to seek. Paul was not concerned for himself but for the new ecclesia in Philippi. If it could be ground into the minds of the city's rulers not only that Christians were law–abiding people but also that persecution of them was liable to backfire, then the new converts to the Faith, left soon without Paul's guidance, need not live under threat. So now, all at once, the apostle (who normally didn't care a fig for these things) was squeezing every pennyworth of value out of his Roman citizenship.

Apprehension

When the messengers reported back, the magistrates were in a state bordering on panic. For, only six years previously, Claudius Caesar had heavily punished the island of Rhodes for crucifying men who were Roman citizens. Was a like thing to happen to proud Philippi?

So (reads Codex Beza, with every appearance of truth), "they came with many friends, (i.e. notables like themselves) and besought them to come forth, saying, we did not know concerning your affairs, that ye are just men. And they brought them out, and besought them, saying, Go forth from this city, lest again they (the populace) make a tumult against us, crying

out against you." How true to life are these words with their self–excusing implication that it was the mob who were to blame rather than themselves!

The apostles agreed to do as they were desired, but in their own good time. They were not prepared to leave Philippi forthwith, but in due time they would. The whole city must know that when they left, they did so at their own convenience and not because of magisterial threat or compulsion.

Betaking themselves to the home of Lydia once again, they called all the new brothers and sisters together. Of course the jailor and his household and prison staff would be there, and also the young priestess of Apollo. They all heard words of good counsel and warm encouragement from the two apostles; and since Luke's text uses the word *parakaleo,* it seems very likely that through laying on of hands the Holy Spirit (the Paraclete) was imparted to some (or all?) of them.

Then, after a short while, three of the preachers– Paul, Silas, and Timothy–set off on their travels again, leaving Luke behind them as guide and leader of the young ecclesia.

Notes: 16:35–40

37. The effect of Paul's strong line does not seem to have lasted long, judging from Phil. 1:29; 2 Cor. 8:1, 2.
40. *They comforted them,* that is, it was Paul and Silas who comforted the believers, and not conversely, as might be expected in these circumstances.
    Whenever he could, Paul followed the policy of leaving someone behind to look after a young ecclesia; 17:14; 18:19; Tit. 1:5; 1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 4:20. Did Titus stay behind at Philippi with his brother? There seems to be no hint of his further activity on this second journey.

71. Success at Thessalonica (17:1–4)

The travellers moved on from Philippi, following one of the great Roman roads through Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica, a distance of ninety miles or so. In this journey there was no danger of robbers or other hazards of travel!

As one man the commentators infer from mention of a synagogue at Thessalonica that at neither of the first two places, was there a synagogue; therefore there was no good springboard for a campaign. They may be right in this, but the difficulty behind such a conclusion has hardly been given due consideration – why these prosperous cities, competing with Thessalonica and Philippi for priority in the area should be without their Jewish colonies.

It seems more likely that the recent decree of Claudius had made its impact here also, with the result that these cities had synagogues but no Jews. Trying, like Philippi, to be as Roman as Rome, they had lately expelled their Jewish communities. So, moved with strong feeling for his fellow–Israelites, and valuing the start to his preaching that a full synagogue would afford, Paul pressed on.

When describing how the small party "passed through" on its way to Thessalonica, Luke uses the same word by which he describes Jesus "passing through every city and village" (Lk. 8:1), and that was certainly not in the sense of "passing on." So it may be that some preaching was attempted in these other places but without response of a very noteworthy character.

Thessalonica was a thriving sea–port, next to Corinth and Ephesus the busiest in the Aegean area. Rackham emphasizes that, as in nearly all the Greek cities, there was here a constant tension between aristocrats and democrats, Luke showing by his choice of phrase a marked sympathy for the former.

"Reasoning ... opening and alleging"

Again, it can hardly be accident that Luke uses regarding Paul's preaching here almost the identical words by which he describes Jesus at work in Galilee: "as his custom was, he went in unto them (into the synagogue)" (Lk. 4:16). There for three sabbath days Paul had an open door. The parallel descriptions regarding Berea and Ephesus ("daily" 17:11; 19:9), suggest full use of synagogue opportunities during the week also. So also does the word "reasoning," with its normal implication of dialogue, discussion, question and answer. It is a word which from this time on is most appropriate to describe Paul's preaching method (17:17; 18:4,19; 19:8,9; 20:7,9).

There, before a congregation in which polarisation rapidly took place, he continued, "opening and alleging" the message concerning Jesus. Doubtless the first of these words referred to the masterly way in which he opened up the Messianic theme of the Old Testament (cp. Lk. 24:32, 45), whilst by its form the other word neatly implies setting alongside the teaching of Scripture the facts about the death and resurrection of Jesus which were within Paul's own personal knowledge and experience.

Which Scriptures would he concentrate on in teaching his variegated audience that "it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise again from the dead"? Such prophecies as Isaiah 53 and 49, Micah 7, Psalms 22 and 16 and 110 and 118 were probably among his proof–texts; and it would be surprising if he did not make use of the eloquent types provided in Joseph, Isaac, Moses, Hezekiah and Jonah.

At this point Luke's record slips easily into direct speech: "and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is the Messiah." Why the singular pronoun? Did Silas take no part in the preaching at all? Or can it be that Paul's anxiety regarding Philippi had him send Silas back there to reinforce their faith and loyalty? Or did Silas stay on longer in Philippi, and then join Paul and Timothy at Thessalonica later?

Help from Philippi

It is clear, from Phil. 4:16, that on two separate occasions the new ecclesia at Philippi sent money to Thessalonica to a hard–up Paul who was desperately trying to keep the good work going there whilst at the same time earning his own living, so as not to come under suspicion of being a scrounger or mountebank preaching for personal gain: "Ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God"–(1 Th. 2:9). "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable unto any of you" (2 Th. 3:8).

The repeated cash contribution from Philippi means that on two occasions someone made the journey between the two cities in order to bring this welcome aid. Was it Silas or Luke or Titus or Epaphroditus?

The response from the Jews at Thessalonica was only mediocre, and this in spite of miraculous demonstrations of Holy Spirit power (1 Th. 1:5). One of the converts was Aristarchus, who years later was to accompany the apostle to Rome, travelling as his servant (27:2).

Progress

The "devout Greeks" – proselytes of the gate – rallied to the gospel in large numbers, and doubtless provided Paul with much encouragement. So from its earliest days the Thessalonian ecclesia must have been largely Gentile. There is a suggestion that the two fairly similar epistles to Thessalonica, written within weeks of each other, may have been addressed, the first to the Gentile converts, and the second to those who were Jews, but there is hardly enough evidence one way or the other to prove the point.

Luke also mentions specially "the chief women," or – as it should probably be read – "the wives of the chief men." Westcott's idea that they were Jewish women married into aristocratic Greek families is distinctly possible, for otherwise would they need separate mention apart from "the devout Greeks?"

The accession of these converts is described by a highly unusual word: "they were assigned by lot to Paul and Silas." There is here, once again, the idea of God's over–ruling control (as in 13:48; 16:14). But since the word for "passed through" (v.1) is precisely that used of Abraham walking through the Land promised to him (Gen. 13:17), it may also be intended to emphasize again the "Joshua" parallel which Luke has already hinted at (see chapter 65).

It may be taken as certain that the campaign at Thessalonica lasted a good deal longer than the three weeks mentioned (v.2; 1 Th. 2:9; 2 Th. 3:8 imply a protracted stay). Even Paul could not have brought so many Gentiles to Christ–"a great multitude" – in so short a time. So it becomes necessary to understand a marked gap in the record at the end of verse 4. Evidently the pattern of preaching at Antioch in Pisidia and at Ephesus (first to Jewry, and then a sustained effort among the Gentiles; 13:46–49; 19:8–10) was followed at Thessalonica also.

Notes: 17:1–4.

3. *Opening.* The word is also used of opening the eyes of the figuratively blind and the ears of the deaf (Lk. 24:31; Mk. 7:34,35). Some would see an ABAB structure in this verse: "opening (the Scriptures) ... that Christ needs have suffered ... and alleging ... that this Jesus ... is the Christ.
   Must needs. Literally: "it was necessary ..." Compare Mt. 26:39, where such a prayer from such a Son would certainly have had affirmative answer if such had been possible. But it wasn't. Even Omniscience could find no other way to human salvation.

72. Paul and the Ecclesia at Thessalonica

It was no easy life that Paul led during the few months that he lived there, bringing into existence one of the finest of all the ecclesias founded by him.

There was constant opposition from Jews, of course: "We were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention (RV: in much conflict)" (1 Th. 2:2). He had to work day and night, not only in the gospel but also for his own subsistence. He was resolved that from the first these Thessalonians should see in him a worthy example of Christian character: "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe" (2:10).

Jewish defamation

Evidently there were malicious attempts by Jewish adversaries to damage Paul's public standing, or he would surely not have sought to justify himself in the way that several passages seem to imply:

"Our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile ... so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness (God is witness): nor of men sought we glory ... when we might have been burdensome, as apostles of Christ" (2:3–6). "He therefore that despiseth (us), despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit" (4:8).

When that extraordinary passage in 2 Thessalonians 2 is read as a warning against a contemporary Judaistic underground (and not against the church of Rome centuries later; why should Paul warn his Thessalonians against *that?),* it harmonizes perfectly with copious other allusions. (see: Appendix 3).

Paul's gospel

Clearly, it was Jesus as Messiah which dominated Paul's teaching at Thessalonica (17:3), for it is there in every chapter of his two epistles. There is remarkably little about Jesus as the means of atonement: – "salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us that ... we should live together with him. ... We believe that Jesus died and rose again" (1 Th. 5:9,10;4:14).

There are clear indications, in words which must be received as inspired, and therefore true, of an expectation of a very early return of the Lord. The commonly–heard improvisation that "the day of resurrection at the Lord's return is as near as the day of one's death (because of total unconsciousness in the sleep of death)" must be discarded for several reasons, of which two are these:

1. It is a point of view never once hinted at in Holy Scripture.
2. There are so many "early Second Coming" passages which it fails utterly to explain: e.g. "I pray God your whole spirit and soul and *body* be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:23); *"We* which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord" (4:17); "The judge standeth before the door" (Jas. 5:9, and v.7,8). (For a Biblical explanation see "Revelation", by H.A.W., p.259ff.)

Paul stressed to these new believers the essential connection between the hope of the Second Coming and the comfort of faith in the resurrection. He expounded it to his converts in a very explicit and realistic fashion (4:13–18).

The new life in Christ

But, as in all his epistles, he was as much concerned with their Christian living as with their faith. He alluded to the "How ye ought to walk" (4:1), as though it were a kind of pocket manual of moral instruction compiled for their benefit. Whether that or not, he had assuredly not left them uninstructed in the art of Christian living. Gentile converts especially needed to

be taught that the Christian who fails to reflect the character of Christ is no Christian. Gentile life in that era was riddled with evil of every kind, for the multifarious religions which competed for a man's devotion taught him almost nothing about moral standards.

Was there a tendency among these Thessalonians to batten on the good nature and beneficence of wealthier brethren and "the wives of the chief men" of the city (17:4)? Paul renewed commands to them that they "do their own business, and work with their own hands" (4:11 cp. 2Th. 3:10,11). There must be diligence not only in the Lord's work but also in their own day–to–day affairs.

In particular, there was serious need to pull these new–born Thessalonians right away from sexual depravity which ran through all ranks of Gentile society there. Even the excellent N I V is not as explicit as it might be in translating Paul's blunt warnings:

"It is God's will that you should be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter (he means: stealing another man's wife) no–one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure but to live a holy life—" (4:3–7).

In spite of his intense affection for these, his children in the Faith, Paul knew the need for a certain degree of severity. So for the sake of good order and seemliness in the ecclesia, he urged on all a proper spirit of respect for those in authority over them (1 Th. 5:12,13). Where there was a lack of discipline, the leaders were counselled to take strong measures – for the sake of the flock, and for the spiritual recovery of the dissidents:

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us – If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy but admonish him as a brother" (2 Th. 3:6,14,15).

Apart from such defects – to be expected in an ecclesia dredged out of the wickedness of a first–century seaport –there were certain very fine qualities almost unique to Thessalonica.

Persecution?

Almost from the earliest days they had to face persecution, And how well they stood up to it!: "Ye received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Th. 1:6). "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus; for ye also suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews" (2:14).

All this was after Paul's own heart. He gloried in their staunchness – "for your patience (i.e. dogged endurance), and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure" (2 Th. 1:4).

He comforted them with assurances that the day of judgement, "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire," would set all things straight – for themselves vindication and for their enemies retribution (2 Th. 1:6–10).

Worthy converts

The fine reputation of these Thessalonian believers travelled everywhere by means of a first–century "grape–vine" nearly as efficient as in modern times: "In every place your faith to God–ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything (concerning you). For they themselves (Paul's correspondents far afield) report concerning us what manner of entering in we had unto you" (1 Th. 1:8,9). Apparently, echoes of that campaign were coming back again to Paul, as though he himself were hearing them for the first time.

Best of all, these new converts were so fired by the Faith they learned that they forthwith became zealous evangelists: "From you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia ... (1:8). Paul could wish nothing better than this.

So his natural affection for them, as his converts, was later intensified by his absence from them and by encouraging reports received. In no other epistle are there such signs of overflowing love and joy as in these short letters written some months later.

Being "affectionately desirous" of them, he let his pen run into highly uncharacteristic phrasing: "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children" (2:7). Properly understood, the phrasing here paints a picture of a delighted mother cuddling her baby at her breast, and meantime indulging in happy meaningless baby talk. This is only one example. Chapters 2,3 (and 1:2–4) are sprinkled with instances of the same irrepressible affection the apostle held for them.

And well he might!

73. Trouble at Thessalonica (17:5–10)

The progress of the gospel, particularly among the "proselytes of the gate," provoked an inevitable reaction amongst the Jews. Indeed it is something to marvel at that Paul and his helpers were able to consolidate the new ecclesia as much as they did before trouble arose.

By this time the preachers, after the pattern of Philippi, had been pressed to make the home of a certain Jason, the centre of their activities. This Jason (the same as in Rom. 16:21?) was almost certainly a Jew who had taken this Greek name, as equivalent to his original "Joshua."

Jewish trouble–making again

As at Iconium and Lystra (14:2,19), the malevolent Thessalonican Jews got the riff–raff of the city on their side.

Farrar has a very eloquent passage regarding this hostility of Jews: "Never, till death released him, was he (Paul) wholly free from their violent conspiracies or their insidious calumnies. Without, they sprang upon him at every opportunity like a pack of wolves; within, they hid themselves in sheep's clothing to worry and tear his flocks ... Jealous, as usual, that the abhorred preaching of a crucified Messiah should in a few weeks have won a greater multitude of adherents than they had won during many years to the doctrines of Moses – furious, above all, to see themselves deprived of the resources, the reverence, and the adhesion of leading women – they formed an unholy alliance with the lowest dregs of the populace" (Life of Paul, p.290).

Unemployed loafing seems to have been specially characteristic of this city, tor in his epistles Paul twice came to allude to it. Indeed, these fellows seem to have earned for themselves a special nickname: "the market boys," because that is where they loafed around.

Egged on by the Jews, and doubtless bribed by them, they set going a surge of excitement and strong feeling against the apostles. Then, reinforced by others of the same sort, they attacked Jason's house and forced their way in, confident (from the result of prior observations?) that they would without doubt grab Paul and Silas. But, whether by providence or a timely warning, neither was to be found there.

The Mouse was diligently searched from top to bottom, and was doubtless ransacked in the process. However, since the intended victims were not there, the roughs laid violent hands on Jason, and one or two others, for the antagonistic mob which had now gathered outside the house would have to be satisfied with some victim or other.

"The voice of the common people is the voice of God" was a principle it was unwise to question in any Greek city in time of excitement. So, amid a tumult of shouting, the city rulers conceded that there was a case to be tried.

Charges laid

These rulers were called politarchs, chief men of the city. It is a title used, in Acts, only for the magistrates of Thessalonica. At one time this occasioned criticism against Luke's accuracy, as though he had invented an otherwise unknown title. But the critics crumpled up when it was pointed out that, at the very time of their criticism, in Thessalonica there was an arch contemporary with Paul, and still standing, bearing an inscription which included this debated expression. Fragments of that arch are now in the British Museum. The word politarchs has now been found on quite a number of other inscriptions.

Today no–one would be fool enough to question Luke's accuracy in this and similar respects.

The charges made against the brethren were threefold:

1. At Philippi they have "turned the world upside down," and they have now come here with the same intention.
2. They defy the decrees of Caesar. (This cry would sound very loyal!)
3. They teach honour to a different kind of king, a certain Jesus.

There was also a special charge against Jason that he had welcomed (s.w. Lk. 10:38; 19:6; Jas. 2:25) these disturbers of the peace.

That expression: "These ... are come hither also," surely implies that, although Paul and Silas had somehow evaded capture, at least two of Paul's party were now in custody – probably Timothy and Titus.

That unusual phrase: "they have turned the world upside down," may have been used with reference to what had been heard about happenings at Philippi – two men shut up, then a violent earthquake bringing city buildings to the ground. It was what Scripture said had happened at Jericho! And now the same men were here, and associated with another Joshua, so surely there was a great peril impending!

Or did those Jews mean that *their* world was being turned upside down by a message which proclaimed that Jews were no longer a nation of special religious privilege? The grace of God was now offered freely to Gentiles also. They may have heard Paul using such Scriptures as Ez. 21:27 and Is. 29:16,17 with reference to the rejection of Jewry.

From the rulers' point of view this first charge would be either too vague or a palpable exaggeration.

The second charge was just a plain lie, and to the magistrates, if they had the young and timid Timothy before them, it would be obviously that. And to think that Jews made such a charge: "They do contrary to the decrees of Caesar." The irony of it! for there was no people in all the empire who flouted the rules of Rome as the Jews did.

But the third charge: "They say there is another king, one Jesus," was a clever half–truth, calculated to raise strong prejudice at once. Of course, they did proclaim a king greater than Caesar, but as long as that king was not visible amongst men neither Claudius nor any other Caesar would deem this to be anything more than a prophetic pipe–dream. The decree of Claudius clearing all Jews out of Rome (18:2) had been Caesar's reply to a series of Jewish riots in Rome, all concerning a certain "Chrestus" (Christos!). Then what a nerve these Jews in Thessalonica had in daring to take the same hard line as in Rome, thus risking an application of the same decree!

Cautious judgement

The rulers of the city handled this explosive issue in a canny fashion. They put the little group of accused on bail, and deferred the hearing of the case – a good way of taking the steam out of the situation. Presumably Jason was fairly wealthy, and not hard put to find the money. But if not, there would be some influential supporter (v.4) who would put up the needful security.

It is a likely guess that one of the conditions attached to the decision was that Paul and Silas leave the city forthwith and not show their faces there again for, perhaps, a year. Otherwise it is difficult to understand why the apostles would be so passive when the brethren insisted that they leave Thessalonica that very night. It was not like Paul, having seen that the law was half on his side, to run away. But probably the brethren feared another explosion from the mob who were disappointed that the Christians had been treated so leniently, as they thought.

So next morning they were well on their way to Berea, fifty miles away. Doubtless at least one of the believers had good contacts there, and this knowledge would make Paul the more willing to let go Thessalonica for a new and promising venture, the more so since he was able to leave helpers behind to steer and encourage the new ecclesia in his absence.

Indications are that almost at once the Jews of Thessalonica stirred up a sharp persecution of the believers (1 Th. 1:6; 2:14–16; 3:3, 4; 2 Th. 1:4–7). But the only effect of this was to consolidate their faith and put a sharper edge on their zeal for the Lord. So Paul, vexed by compulsory separation, was nevertheless made a happy man by the news which later reached him from Thessalonica.

Notes: 17:5–10

5. *The Jews.* Note that almost resentful passage in 1 Th. 2:14,15.
   Moved with envy. The Greek aorist suggests a sudden (carefully timed?) flare up of antagonism.
6. *Jason.* If Rom. 16:21 is about the same, then perhaps it may be inferred that this outburst made Thessalonica too uncomfortable for him, so he left and became one of Paul's band of peripatetic preachers.
   Turned the world upside down. Remarkably enough LXX uses the same word to describe what Rome had done: Dan. 7:23. But it is possible that here *oikoumene is used of the Jewish world (Heb. 1:6; Rev. 3:10; Lk. 2:1; 21 .26, as kosmos* often is. The way this charge is framed suggests knowledge of events at Philippi. On that Roman highway through Macedonia news of excitement at Philippi would travel fast.
7. *Contrary to Caesar.* Does Paul allude sardonically to this in 1 Th. 2:15?
   Another king, meaning; a king of different sort. Cp. the charge made against Jesus himself; Lk. 23:2.

74. Berea (17:10–15)

Thanks doubtless to the good help of some convert in Thessalonica, Paul and Silas had no accommodation problem in Berea. So, losing no time they put in attendance at the local synagogue. Luke uses an unusual and unexpected word in describing the beginning of this new preaching effort: "they *went absent* into the synagogue" (this is the meaning in seven other places). Then, is the implication that those who escorted them to Berea were reluctant that appeal should be made to the Jews lest the Thessalonian situation repeat itself, so Paul and Silas slipped away to the synagogue unaccompanied? The two preachers were not to be gainsaid; and, as it proved, there was no lion in the streets. Instead, a most unexpected and stimulating response awaited them.

The reader of *Acts* can hardly fail to be impressed with Paul's persistence in his policy of going "to the Jew *first,* and also to the Greek." When consideration is given to the rapid hooligan Jewish opposition to his work on the first journey, and now again at Thessalonica, a reaction to the extreme of keeping as much away from Jews as possible seems the most obvious decision to take. But always and unquenchably his "heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel was, that they might be saved."

These Jews at Berea were "more noble" than any Paul had yet encountered in the Gentile cities. Luke's description is, literally: "more well–born." But since all Jews were from the same stock, the versions are certainly correct in translating more generally: "of more noble character" (NIV). Apparently contemporary writers had just the same impression about the citizens of Berea also.

There are those who insist that one of the main purposes behind the writing of "Acts" was to expose the vile intransigence of the Jews. But this brief but heart–warming account of the Berean synagogue hardly harmonizes with such an extreme interpretation.

A wholesome attitude

The response in this Berean synagogue must have been like a tonic to Paul. Not only were the Jews encouraging, but also the Greek women of quality, who were "proselytes of the gate," gave a ready hearing to the message. And, so the text implies, these women also encouraged their husbands (some of the leading men of the city) to welcome Paul's preaching. Paul is often accused – quite falsely! – of a prejudice against women. But no–one has ever laid such a charge against Luke, and his record of the gospel at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (16:14; 17:4,12) would not be written without Paul's approval.

The reaction of these Bereans was precisely what the apostle would fain have seen in every place. The sequence of ideas in Luke's brief description is impressive:

1. They showed a good disposition.
2. They "received the Word" forthwith (Gk. aorist), recognizing their need of such a message as this (Gk. middle voice).
3. They not only read the Scriptures; they *searched* them, to verify the degree of correspondence between message and prophecy. Here Luke has a word which usually implies careful legal examination. In other words, they were not prepared to swallow all they heard, at least not until they had carefully checked the Bible evidence which Paul advanced.
4. This was done "daily" and with enthusiasm – "readiness of mind" – at home, or in further synagogue meetings?
5. *"Therefore* – the inevitable result of such a wholesome attitude – many of them believed." There was a logical inevitability about this consequence. Luke doesn't take the trouble to mention baptism. This is taken for granted (as in 5:14; 8:13; 9:42; 11:21 etc.

Implacable hostility

There is no indication how long this satisfying activity went on. But all at once it was seriously interrupted. The Jews of Thessalonica heard that Paul had now transferred his activities to Berea. So, such was their malevolence against the gospel, they lost no time in organizing more terrorism.

Had it been the enlightened twentieth century they would, no doubt have planted bombs. However, their first century alternative – the raising of a mob –proved almost as effective. This tactic, so the text implies, was used more than once.

"Flee to another city"

The reaction in the new ecclesia was prompt and resolute. Paul must be saved from this harassment and danger. In any case the apostle could not afford to risk having the same charges made against him as had been preferred at Thessalonica. So, immediately (v.14; cp. v.10) they got him out of the city.

Timothy had already come on to Berea, so he and Silas would be more than adequate to take care of the ecclesia. These two faithful helpers were not under threat as Paul was. Jewish virulence was directed solely at him, for from the first the adversaries were convinced that Paul, and Paul only, was the challenge and danger to their Judaism.

The apostle's "travel agents" appear to have "leaked" his intention to move on by sea from a neighbouring port, in the hope, doubtless, that his persecutors would assume that he had abandoned his preaching tour and was returning to Antioch or Jerusalem.

Perhaps they made as though to get the apostle on board a big ship sailing for Ephesus or Antioch, but then quietly smuggled him on to a nearby coaster going south to Corinth.

These brethren not only saw him safely on board, they travelled with him as far as Athens, two hundred miles down the coast. The inference, sometimes made, that Paul eluded his pursuers and went by the coast road to Athens, is surely mistaken. Why should he wear himself out with such a long journey on foot when he could travel in relative comfort by ship?

Paul's health

And apparently the apostle was in need of both rest and recuperation. Three details suggest that he may have had a debilitating sickness at this time. Ramsey argues that Paul suffered from recurring attacks of malarial fever, to cope with which there was no wonder drug in those days!

a. The brethren *sent* Paul away. And he seems to have gone passively enough.
b. They accompanied him all the way to Athens. Yet, if he were a fit man, he was surely capable of looking after himself.
c. Codex Beza adds here: "But he by–passed Thessaly (the country immediately south of Berea). For he was hindered from proclaiming the word to them." In other words, whereas he could have disembarked for more preaching work at one of the intervening sea ports, something prevented him from following such a natural and obvious policy. What more likely than a lack of physical fitness, to explain this?

From Athens Paul sent back a message to Silas – and also to Timothy now back in Thessalonica (1 Th. 3:2) –bidding them join him there with all speed. And meantime he "waited" at Athens (v. 16). Such inactivity was so uncharacteristic that an explanation has to be sought. The one just advanced is surely more likely than the others.

Notes: 17:10–15

11. *Noble.* the only other occurrences of this word are in Job 1:3 LXX; Lk. 19:12; 1 Cor. 1:26, two (or all) of which seem to imply social standing. But as applied here to Jews, Lk. 8:15 and Jn. 7:17 seem to be the most relevant. *Readiness of mind.* Compare the usage in 1 Chr. 29:5, 6, 9, 17 LXX; 2 Cor. 8:11,12,19; 9:2;Mt. 26:41;Rom.1:15;1 Pet. 5:2.
12. The Greek text picks out a deliberate contrast between v. 12,13.
13. *People.* The plural is significant–crowds. And the verbs "stirring up and troubling" (RV) are continuous.
14. *The brethren.* Was Sopater (20:4) one of those full of concern for Paul's well–being?
15. *Conducted Paul.* In the New Testament this verb normally means "appoint to office". Then here does it mean "those that specially esteemed Paul, those who accepted his lead"? But Josh. 6:23 and 2 Chr. 28:15 LXX might well imply "those concerned to see him safe." An additional Bezan reading here seems to imply that the coaster on which Paul travelled called at various ports in Thessaly, but he was forbidden (by the Spirit or by his health?) to attempt any preaching there.

75. Paul at Athens (17:16–21)

The suggestion made earlier that at this time Paul's health was not good seems to find support from his apparent lack of drive on arrival in Athens. He "waited" to be joined there by Silas and Timothy. The word often describes hopeful waiting (e.g. Jn. 5:3; Heb. 11:10; Jas. 5:7); it might imply a certain impatience. Without his helpers Paul lacked initiative. For the time being he was content to be a tourist and sight–seer.

But Athens itself changed all that. When the apostle "beheld the city full of idols" his Jewish reaction was vigorous: "his spirit was stirred in him." Instinctively there came to his mind the curt Second Commandment and caustic prophetic censure of the puerility of all idol–worship (Jeremiah 10:1–16; Isaiah 44:9–20).

A decadent city.

Beautiful Athens, the intellectual and artistic capital of the world, also had in its streets and on its hills the tokens of every known religion. It was the world's religious capital also. Temples, altars, and idols were to be seen everywhere, so that even some of Athens' most famous sons made fun of the fact. One contemporary of Paul commented satirically: "Our (Athens) region is so full of deities that thou mayest more easily find a god than a man." Athens even had a statue of John Hyrcanus, the Maccabean high–priest.

It is difficult to be sure whether Paul's provoked "spirit" was Paul himself – a natural reaction of indignation – or whether there is here an indication of a sudden and strong burst of divine inspiration goading him into action.

"Therefore," in his disgust at all this intellectual pride and religious futility, the apostle turned away from the self–satisfied academics to others who, he hoped, were more ready to tremble at God's Word – to Jews in the synagogue, and proselytes of the gate, and the ordinary folk in the marketplace who were willing to leave their daily affairs to hear this unprepossessing Jew discourse on themes utterly foreign to the cleverness of their proud Oxford University.

This series of unconventional open–air meetings immediately began to make an impression. Here were Hyde Park Corner crowds of a sort Athens had never seen. Even some of the intellectual snobs of the city found themselves held by the message and the burning sincerity of Paul's oratory.

The technique of discussion, with question and answer, first tried out at Thessalonica (v.2), was just right for Athens. "Those that met with him" is almost certainly an inadequate translation of the difficult Greek word used to describe Paul's hearers. Rackham has suggested: "those sharing his conviction (about one true God)." Other possibilities are: "chance comers" or "those he could get (to listen to him)."

Patronising intellectuals

The supercilious attitude of many was expressed in their comment: "Whatever would this cock–sparrow, this intellectual amateur, want to tell us"? Their words probably carried more than a soupcon of envy that this Jew could command such ready attention. It is not unlikely that Luke, with a wry smile on his face, recorded their use of *spermologos* because he saw in it a possible double meaning about Paul's use of "the seed of the Word."

Another reaction was: "Assuredly he declares, as with authority, the existence of certain foreign demons." In Greece it was normal to reserve the word "gods" for the original pantheon of their mythology, whilst great heroes and other outstanding human characters whom they deified were called "demons." So, naturally enough the use of this term would be the hearers' reaction to Paul's message about the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

The suggestion (based on the plural "gods") has long been popular that these Athenians took "Jesus" and "Anastasis" (resurrection) to be the names of two new gods. But it is surely not conceivable either that Paul's message was so obscure as to be badly misunderstood or that his hearers were so unintelligent as to misconstrue his meaning so completely.

Of the various schools of philosophy then popular in Athens, it was the Epicureans and Stoics who specially took on Paul in argument, but in such a condescending sarcastic fashion: "Are we able to grasp this new teaching which is being spoken by you?" – as who should say: "We are only the best brains in the civilised world. We hope your message isn't beyond us!" They insisted that there be a formal hearing of this new teacher's claims before the Areopagus, the Athenian Sanhedrin. "Thou bringest strange things to our ears" might imply: "You are a prophet with a heavenly message, are you?"

Paul and Socrates

Judging from the satirical character of their comments and from certain remarkable resemblances it almost seems as though they were deliberately putting on a burlesque of the trial of Socrates, the great philosopher who, some four hundred years earlier, died in Athens for his "heresies", one of which was the introduction of "new gods." Like Paul, he had "reasoned" (by the Socratic method) in the agora. Like Paul, claiming a certain divine authority, he had charged his contemporaries with failure to fulfil their Creator's intention with them. And Socrates had ended up condemned by the Areopagus.

But this "trial" of Paul of Tarsus was a much less serious business, for now life in Athens was such a broadminded affair that in the field of religion these philosophers were interested in everything, but were serious about nothing. Hort's comment is relevant here: "The profound study of truth had withered into the idlest of imaginable frivolities. Athens was living on its reputation." All that these dilettanti were interested in was in hearing or publishing "something newer" than yesterday's stale ideas. Even the more serious of their own writers condemned them for their itching ears. So there was nothing accusatorial about the procedure, or surely Paul's speech would have been very different in its tone. Mars' Hill was chosen for its peace and quiet, an escape from the bustle of the agora.

It is not easy to summarise the kind of outlook these Athenian philosophers had developed towards the more important issues of life.

Epicureans —

The Epicureans had originally been taught by their leader Zeno an outlook which today would be described as "coming to terms with the world we live in." But what had been in some respects a fairly admirable way of life had now degenerated into taking the easy course, a seeking of pleasure and gratification of the senses. These Epicureans believed in the existence of the gods, but conceived of them as remote and withdrawn from this world. Thus each man was left to paddle his own canoe. With this emphasis on freedom of the will they took out of life a lot of the fatalism and blind superstition which made the lives of the majority bewildering or miserable. So at this time the Epicurean philosophy was little better than a pragmatic atheistic materialism, the kind of attitude to life so common in the twentieth century's affluent society.

— and Stoics

The Stoics put emphasis on human life being governed by an iron fate which it would be folly to struggle or gird against. So, let a man learn "indifference to every influence of pain or sorrow. Let hardship and pleasure be encountered in the same spirit of sublime indifference or superiority. It was the cultivation of this passionless conformity to unbudgeable circumstance which made a good man." This was the highest good. So they said.

Stoicism was hardly a religion for everyman. It fostered a certain element of intellectual snobbery. It taught a man spiritual pride, whereas Epicureanism emphasized pleasure. Stoics denied resurrection, but they believed in the immortality of the soul. Epicureans had no convictions about life after death. Thus these two schools were the Pharisees and Sadducees of Athens.

Notes: 17:16–21.

16. *Stirred.* There was surely anger here; s.w. 15:39; 1 Cor. 13:5; and in LXX the same word describes the anger of God with Israel's idolatry: Dt. 32:41; 9:18,19; 29:28; Jer. 32:37 etc. Clearly Paul was no Stoic.
    Saw. Gk.: *thēoreō* (whence "theatre") suggests a sightseer; v.23. s.w. *Wholly given to idolatry.* The Gk. word has a hint of contempt in it– and the Athenians also for Paul: v.18,19,32.
18. *A setter–forth: s.w.* v.23. The word implies declaring with authority. In the Apocrypha (2 Macc. 8:36;9:17) it means declaring the power of the God of Israel.
19. *Took him.* A fairly strong word, as in 16:19; 18:17;21:30. So probably reluctance on Paul's part is implied. But the same verbs: "took him and brought him" (s.w. 9:27) hardly seems to imply any hostile intent.
    Aeropagus. Does Luke include this name to hint at a play on the Gk. word for "a trap"? RV: *spoken by thee.* The Gk. word often means "to speak by inspiration."

76. Paul and the Philosophers (17:22–34)

They set Paul "in the midst of Mars Hill," that is, in the midst of the Court of Areopagus; and there before him – interested, sceptical, supercilious — was the cream of the world's education, men capable of bringing incisive criticism to bear on everything he said, and all the more able for that because they were full to the top with prejudice against what "that ugly little Jew" had to say.

The apostle's rhetoric and development of argument could hardly have been more different from what he would have used before a crowd of synagogue Jews. His approach had to be different, for where was the point in quoting Holy Scripture to these who were so utterly unfamiliar with the Book and would in any case have no respect for its authority?

Today a Christadelphian turned loose on a collection of atheistic Marxists would no doubt fall back on the argument from Bible prophecy. Paul could have done that in Athens, but didn't. One wonders why he didn't.

Careful beginning

He began on a conciliatory note: "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious." The familiar AV words sound anything but conciliatory, but in fact the apostle cleverly chose a double–meaning word which in *his* mind had precisely this AV flavour, but which his hearers would naturally take to mean: 'I note that, according to all the indications, you are much given to religious observance.'

The Athenians would take this as a compliment. Josephus used the same phraseology without any intention of criticism.

'I am only passing through,' Paul added. Thus he disarmed them. He was not there to lead a sustained campaign.

There was no intention to seek recognition as an official teacher in the university.

The Unknown God

'I observed your devotions' – that is, not *how* they worshipped, but *what.* Since there were such diverse religions represented in that city, he naturally looked to see if his own people's faith was included. His eye lighted on an altar with the remarkable inscription: "To the Unknown God."

All kinds of guesses have been made regarding this: Afraid that they might incur the wrath of some deity who had been left out and felt slighted, the Athenians had taken out an insurance policy. There is also a rather childish story of how in time of plague Epimenides (whom Paul quotes in Tit. 1:12) let loose a flock of black and white sheep from Areopagus, bidding the Athenians offer sacrifice to whatever unknown god they deemed suitable on the very spot where any of these animals lay down.

But it is far more likely that by "The Unknown God" was meant The God of Israel, the God with the Name that was never pronounced or understood. One of their writers speaks of Judaea as "devoted to the worship of an unknown god." Justin Martyr says that men referred to Jehovah as "the completely hidden One." And certainly in the development of his argument Paul did proceed to stress the purpose of a God "which is, and was, and is to come" (Rev. 1:8; v.24, 25, 31). By this approach the apostle was able to proclaim the God of Israel without appearing to despise the gods of Athens.

"Whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you," Paul boldly announced. To a Jewish audience, schooled in the LXX (and cp. 3:17), that ; word "ignorantly" would have definitely ; implied blame, but in Athens it was innocuous enough. By this categorical assertion Paul told them, 'I am no *sper–mologos* (v. 18), but an accredited messenger of heaven.'

The Lord of creation

With that exordium he took them back to the philosophical problem of Creation. By a single phrase – "God that made the world" – he discarded the Epicurean theory of evolution from a meaningless chaos, which totally commands the ready assent of all who like the idea of getting away from personal responsibility to an Almighty Creator.

From the very beginning (even from the time when there was nothing but a vast random collection of atoms) Paul's omnipotent Lord was the Master of all heaven and earth.

This concept, so supremely satisfying to a well–balanced contemplative mind, swept away every notion of a man–made temple being the dwelling–place of such a Creator. Nor, if they would think about it, could they go on believing that the superb sculptures gracing their streets were actual deities. How could they be –devised and fashioned by men who then had to lift them about, set them in position, and make them secure. Could an intelligent man – a philosopher! – actually believe that everything in human life was under the control of such "gods" as these?

Reacting away from this impossible notion, the Stoics had wedded themselves to the concept of a blind fate exercising iron control alike over the big and the little things of life. Instead of this equally difficult theory, Paul led them to a belief, both rational and revealed, of an all–wise, all–powerful Lord who is so great that He *needs* nothing from anybody. With what was near to being a touch of humour the apostle's Greek may have implied 'the true God doesn't even need Epicureans' – and how these listening Stoics would approve! This unconventional orator seemed to be more for them than for the others.

How skilfully Paul lifted the entire subject on to a higher level than men of his day normally dreamed of contemplating! In every temple there were priests galore, intent on maintaining the impressiveness of the god by polishing and furbishing. Does a *true* God need this? Certainly Paul's "Unknown God" did not need to be cared for by men's hands. How could He, since He Himself is the source of "life and breath and all things"?

All men made... to seek the Lord

Also, let them learn this – that this Almighty One had chosen to "make of one all nations of men." There is a textual problem here. "Made of one blood" (as AV and many MSS)? or "made of one man"? or "of one nature" (as certain other important MSS suggest)? Which is it?

Basically, the apostle's intention seems to have been, either way, essentially the same. Let these proud university men realise that they were in no position to preen themselves regarding their race or intellect or culture or political status. Just as, in the sight of a man, all ants are ants, so also to the God who made all, the Greek philosopher is as small as the uncouth barbarian, the spiritual snobbery of a Jew is as paltry as the ignorance of a superstitious Gentile.

God designed all of these to live in their appointed habitations and at their appointed epochs *"that they should seek the Lord."* It was for *this* purpose that the Creator had framed the entire race. Neither dead–pan Stoic reaction to hard circumstance nor soft Epicurean self–indulgence, neither the intellectual pride of the Greek thinker nor the boastful self–confidence of a Roman conqueror, came within a thousand miles of fulfilling the true purpose which their Maker had with every man jack of them: *"that they should seek the Lord."*

But how could they? If God is an Unknown God, the search is a failure from the start, surely. By all means let them "feel after him" as a blind man gropes his way, making mistakes but also slowly making progress, for the great God is not a God afar off, but One nigh at hand with revelation of Himself both in the world of nature and through prophets who are His spokesmen.

By this allusion to blindness and also by the assertion that God had designed *"all* the face of the earth" for man's habitation Paul shook his hearers with the truth that they were all members of a fallen race, needing redemption; and that the world they lived in was under a curse, for was it not familiar knowledge that large areas of the earth were not habitable? So something must have gone wrong with the world which the Omnipotent had made.

Paul's phrase: "He was originally not far from every one of us, "likewise underlined the unpalatable fact that an estrangement had somehow come in, so that now, they mostly "feel after him" in vain.

And if "all nations were made of one," why so much mutual rivalry and hostility between race and race? So – God may be in His heaven, but all is not right with His world!

The source of all life

Nevertheless He continues to be the source and spring of all existence. In Him a tree lives. In Him an animal lives and moves. In Him (and not in himself) a man lives and moves and has his conscious being!

By this time Paul had left the gods of Athens a long long way behind. He felt now the need for reinforcement in leading his hearers so far away from their traditional thinking. Here many an authoritative Scripture would have come to his aid, but what use were they to influence the minds of clever men grossly ignorant of heaven's revelation?

So he fell back on their own "prophets" – poets and authors of repute. Aratus of Cilicia (perhaps of Tarsus) and Cleanthes had both penned almost identical lines: "For we are also His offspring." *They* wrote with reference to Zeus, the chief of the gods, and of course Paul knew that, but without hesitating he applied the words to his Unknown God, a thing he would not have dared to do if there had been a handful of Jews in his audience.

The only difference between these two quotes lay in Aratus's word "also", and this was the very point Paul wanted to make, that although already men live and move and have their being in God there is further progress still to be made by aspiring to be also "His offspring". Paul knew that in the beginning God had intended man to be not only *"in* His image," but also *"after* His (spiritual) likeness." So he bade them "feel *after Him* and find Him," and thus become, as their own poets put it: "His offspring."

"Being then originally (before the Fall) the offspring of God, we ought not to think that Deity is like unto "any offspring of man's cleverness and devising," white men making Him white and black men making Him black. All such spiritual immaturity should now be put away. Hitherto God had put up with it, being primarily concerned with the spiritual education of Jewry. But now, through their Unknown God, Jews had diffused knowledge of this basic truth through all the known world.

An imperative "Repent"

So the times of blameworthy ignorance (so LXX and 3:17; 13:27) were now ended with a wider and more explicit revelation.

Ignorance! what a charge (cp. v.23) to level against these learned Athenians! And here now, making that charge was no timid foreign *spermologos,* but one who spoke with all the authority of heaven: "Now (today, through me) God commandeth all men everywhere to repent." No more of this dabbling in theories, no more of this deferring to human teachers, no more of this pride in the powers of human intellect! Here was a *command* to adopt new

thinking *(metanoia),* a new religion, a new way of life.

No longer was this court a condescending investigation into the claims and abilities of a new philosopher. The august judges of Areopagus were themselves on trial and found wanting – not condemned as yet, but certainly proved inadequate.

Even so, this call to repentance would find little acceptance with either Stoics or Epicureans. The former were too proud of the superior way in which they lived their lives. The latter deemed their lives to be their own to be used just as they saw fit.

The urgency of the message was now underlined. There is to be a day of righteous judgement. One day God will call men to account. No man is at liberty to live his life as he thinks best. The world is God's and those to whom He gives "life, and breath and all things" are answerable to the God–Man whom He has appointed to be Judge and Lord of all.

The deification of man was no new idea to these Greeks. But when Paul went on to declare that this Man had been *raised from the dead* and that thus God had brought forth evidence on which men could base their faith (so the Greek text implies), then the orator lost his audience. Let him propound afresh a doctrine of a disembodied immortality of the human soul, and the Stoics, at least, would be with him. But to them the idea of even one dead body coming to life again was little short of hilarious. No sensible philosopher would have any truck with it.

Reception of the message

Against all the rules, they interrupted the proceedings with sustained self–confident ridicule and sarcasm. Paul could go on no further. Nor, in the face of this, had he any wish to. Others, more impressed by his message and by his call to repentance, yet unwilling to face the scorn of their colleagues, said: 'Without these mockers we will hear thee again of this Man.' But after sleeping on it, very few of them still had that good intention. The rest were like Felix (24:25), fobbing off the message with a milk–and–watery half–promise. In them the world and the flesh (which between them are the very Devil) harnessed too many prejudices and personal inclinations.

"Thus – as an object of scorn, and as a creator of division, and with little positive success – *thus* Paul went out from the midst of them." However, there was a Greek Joseph of Arimathea. But besides Dionysius, one of the judges on Areopagus, only a handful of these men of consequence believed. The record does not say that they joined Paul, but that they were joined (passive voice) to him, the implication being that as on other occasions God was at work (2:47; 13:48; 16:14), or Paul had testified in vain.

But (so it is possible to infer from 1 Cor. 16:15; 1:16) the very first of the few converts made in Athens was Stephanas, a visitor from Corinth. Contrary to his normal practice, Paul baptized him personally–had to, because Silas and Timothy were not yet come from Macedonia; and when they did come, so great was Paul's concern for his new ecclesias, they were promptly sent back again, one to Thessalonica and the other to Berea or Philippi (1 Th. 3:1,2).

Another convert was Damaris, who may have been Dionysius' wife, though –very differently– some have guessed that 'Damaris' was a more respectable form of Damalis, which means "heifer", which means (they opine) she was a harlot. Maybe!

Is that why she is specially mentioned, or is it because Paul, still fighting ill–health, needed nursing attention, and got it from one whom he in turn brought to spiritual health?

Why failure?

It is often said that the relative failure of Paul's preaching at Athens was due to his attempt to bandy philosophy with philosophers and that by the time he got to Corinth he had recognized the blunder and determined to rectify it. Hence his words to the brethren there: "When I came to you, I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom ... for I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified ... And my speech and my

preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom ..." (1 Cor. 2:1,2,4).

The idea is very plausible, but quite mistaken, as four considerations readily show:

a. "When they shall...deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 13:11). Would not a promise such as this apply to Paul on Mars' Hill?
b. The record says explicitly that "he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection" (v. 18,31). How could he proclaim these truths without also telling them that Jesus was "him that was crucified," and why he was crucified?
c. It is demonstrable (see next chapter) that even though the quoting of Holy Scripture to the Athenians would leave them unimpressed because of their Biblical ignorance, from beginning to end Paul was steered by the principles which the Word taught him. It is an aspect of his speech at Athens which has gone either unnoticed or unappreciated.
d. Paul also wrote to the Corinth ecclesia 1 Cor. 9:20–22.

Notes: 17:22–34

22. Note that in 24:10 and 26:2,3 Paul likewise begins with an unforced compliment.
23. *This inscription.* So Paul was not half–blind as some choose to think. The Greek pluperfect: "in which had been inscribed," courteously implies: 'I'm not blaming *you,* but an earlier generation.'
    Unknown God. There are apparently plenty of Greek literary allusions to 'unknown gods,' but no parallel to this singular.
25. With this verse, cp. 1 Chr. 29:14.
    Worship. Hardly the right translation. Classically: *do service;* NT: *heal.* The translation *care for* covers both ideas. Here the picture is of priests assiduously dusting and polishing the idol.
    Life and breath, the second term emphasizing the continuance of the life given.
26. *Of one blood.* If this AV reading is correct (the textual evidence is about 50/50), then Paul may have intended a double meaning, with reference to the death of Christ. But if RV, then the allusion (without direct quotation of Genesis) is to Adam. AV also may have this meaning.
    All nations... all the face of the earth. Very effectively the word "all" comes no less than nine times in this speech.
    Determined, that is by Paul's Unknown God, not by Mars, the god of war.
27. *Seek after him.* There was, and is, need for this because, although He is near, men have withdrawn from Him. There is a hit here at Stoic self–sufficiency.
    If haply. A rather sardonic disparaging phrase.
    Not far. Pointed understatement! Jer. 23:23.
28. *Live, move, have our being.* Alternatively this sequence refers to birth, growth, maturity; and in that case, "his offspring" suggests perhaps a *new* birth.
    Certain of your own poets. In 1 Cor. 15:33 Paul quotes from Menander, making the slightest possible alteration so as to suggest "corrupt Christ manners." And in Tit. 1:12 the quotation is from Epimenides.
    Have said. In practically every other place this Greek word implies inspiration. Here also?
    His offspring. The original (in both Aratus and Cleanthes) actually refers to Zeus, the chief of the gods. Near enough for Paul's purpose.
29. Why does Paul say *"we* ought not ..."? Was *he* in any danger of making this mistake?
30. *This ignorance.* Although Gk. has *the ignorance,* AV is right; for the definite article is often used with demonstrative force.
31. *Because* is, more accurately, "accordingly"; i.e. in harmony with this call to repentance.
    Will is to be read either as meaning "he is about to" or else: "he intends to, he has decided." The first is the normal meaning.
    Judge. Including Paul's judges; cp. 24:25.
    By that man. Greek: not an ordinary man, but a man of distinction.

32. *Heard* Here aorist implies: "as soon as they heard." Cp. 22:21, 22.
34. *Dionysius.* Was it he or Paul who supplied Luke with this amazingly impressive summary. On the lowest level v.21–34 represent a work of genius. .
Why did Paul fail at Athens? Not because of a wrong approach but because all universities put confidence in human intellect. For them that is the supreme authority.

77. The Old Testament on Mars' Hill

It would appear that Paul, far from attempting to turn himself into a philosopher for the sake of acceptance by philosophers, based his discourse at Athens solidly on Isaiah 45, and then laced it with a wide range of other Scripture.

Acts 17	**Isaiah 45**
23. The Unknown God.	5. I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me. 15. Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.
23. Him declare I unto you.	6. That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me.
24. Lord of heaven and earth.	12. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: my hands have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded.
25. As though he needed anything.	13. ... not for price, nor for reward, saith the Lord of hosts.
26. Made of one all nations ... that they should seek the Lord.	14. Egypt... Ethiopia .. . Sabeans. 22. Look unto me, and by ye saved, all the ends of the earth.
26. The times before appointed.	21. Who hath declared this from ancient time? Who hath told it from that time? have not I the Lord?
26. The bounds of their habitation.	18. God himself that formed the earth ... he formed it to be inhabited.
27. That they should seek after the Lord.	19. I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain.
28. We are his offspring.	11. Ask me of things to come concerning my sons.
29. The Godhead not like unto silver or gold, graven by art and man's device.	46:6. They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith: and he maketh it a god
29. The offspring of God.	46:3. ...which are borne by Me from the belly, which are carried from the womb.
30. This ignorance.	20. They have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image.
30. Commandeth all men everywhere to repent.	22. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth. 46.:8,9 LXX. Repent, ye that have gone astray, return in heart ... for I am God, and there is none other beside Me.
31. He will judge the world in righteousness.	23. The word is gone out of my mouth – righteousness... unto Me (Him) every knee shall bow.
31. He hath raised him from the dead. (Philosophy condemned.)	13. I have raised him up in righteousness. 9. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!... shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?

There are also other significant Isaiah contacts; e.g. "As though he needeth anything" surely finds its earlier expression in 40:13,14: "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him ... and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?"

Again, Isaiah 55:4–7 provides a sequence of ideas marvellously like Paul's in his Athens speech: "I have appointed him ... A leader and commander to the people (that man whom he hath ordained) ... nations (all men everywhere) that knew not thee (the Unknown God) shall run unto thee ... Seek ye the Lord while he may be found (that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him): call ye upon him while he is near (though he be not far from every one of us). Let the wicked forsake his way (now commandeth all men everywhere to repent)."

So also Isaiah 42:4–9: "Judgment in the earth (judge the earth in righteousness) ... he that created the heavens ... that spread forth the earth (Lord of heaven and earth) ... he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein (seeing he giveth to all life and breath and all things)... a light of the Gentiles (all nations of men) ... to open the blind eyes (that they should feel after him, and find him; compare also 59:10) ... my praise I will not give to graven images (we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone) who will declare to you things from the beginning? (hath determined – the times before appointed)". Several of the Psalms also seem to have been in Paul's mind as he reasoned on Mars' Hill. "Thou hast set all the borders of the earth" (74:17) is echoed in "He hath determined the bounds of their habitation" (but compare also Dt. 32:8). And in Psalm 96 phrase after phrase anticipates Paul's discourse: "Declare... his wonders among all people ... he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are (mere) idols: but the Lord made the heavens .. . fear before him, all the earth ... he shall judge the world with righteousness."

One other intriguing similarity is nearly point–blank quotation, and most apt too: "He hath made of one (family?) all nations of men *for to dwell on all the face of the earth"* clearly looks back to Genesis 11:8 – the scattering of the one family, now idolatrous, into a diversity of nations all over the earth.

There is also a specially interesting quotation from Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin, an oration that Paul had heard with chagrin but which he now used with gusto: "The most High dwelleth not in temples made–with–hands" (7:48), the Greek word for that last phrase being a common LXX word for an idol.

In the light of the foregoing how can it be maintained that at Athens Paul sought to convert by turning himself into a purveyor of philosophy? It is an idea that ought never to have been thought of and that now deserves decent interment.

78. At Corinth (18:1–11)

When Luke wrote, simply, that "Paul departed from Athens," it is possible to infer (from the form of that word "depart", s.w. verse 2) that he meant to imply that the apostle was told to leave. The great university wanted to hear no more of the highly unphilosophical thesis of this strange Jew.

And it may be assumed with fair probability that Paul was not loth to go. By this time he must have learned that there was "more hope of raging Jews, more hope of ignorant barbarians, more hope of degraded slaves, than of those who had become fools because in their conceit they were exceptionally wise." In Athens Paul must have felt like a fish out of water. But how could he return to Macedonia? Active Jewish hostility there was too intense. Yet what encouragement could he look for in the next big city he came to? The distance from Athens to Corinth is almost exactly the distance from Oxford to London, and the change in character was just about as dramatic.

The character of Corinth

Rome itself was not more cosmopolitan than Corinth. Its key position on the isthmus so facilitated east–west transportation of both goods and people as to make the city a thriving hub of industry and commerce, with all the ethnic types of the empire thronging its streets.

But "this mass of Jews, ex–soldiers, philosophers, merchants, sailors, freed–men, slaves, tradespeople, hucksters, and agents of every form of vice" guaranteed that there was not only every kind of religion represented in Corinth but also every evil. Was Paul willing to take on such a challenge armed only with the simplicity of the gospel?

Later he was to write to the young ecclesia there: "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. *And such were some of you!"* (1 Cor. 6:9–11).

Well might the apostle write in such downright fashion. There was one temple in Corinth which encouraged the piety of its worshippers by having in its sacred courts no less than a thousand prostitutes – temple "virgins" – all of them blessed by the approving smile of Aphrodite.

Aquila and Priscilla

However, Corinth also offered Paul big encouragement, for no sooner was he arrived there than he fell in with Aquila and Priscilla. It is not difficult to surmise how they came to meet. In some provincial synagogues (e.g. Alexandria – so says Edersheim) Jews sat according to their trade guilds. So it is not unlikely that on Paul's first sabbath in Corinth the two tent–makers got to know each other. It is even possible that before ever they met they already knew of each other, for even in those far–off days the ecclesial grapevine functioned wondrous well.

Aquila and Priscilla had had to leave the metropolis because of a recent decree by Claudius that *all* Jews leave Rome forthwith. The capital had been plagued by Jewish riots concerning "a certain Chrestus" – a historical detail which has been very widely interpreted with reference to violent Jewish opposition to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

With a superbly unstatesmanlike gesture Claudius decreed that all Jews be banned from the city. Some years earlier Tiberius had rounded up four thousand Jews and deported them to Sardinia, hoping that there the malaria would kill them all off. But that was a trivial business

compared with this latest measure which it was impossible to enforce, for any Jew who chose could conveniently "get lost" in the labyrinth of congested Rome. Claudius would soon realise this, and probably contented himself with the deportation of such leaders as he could lay hands on. This law soon became a dead letter (as 28:17 and Rom. 16:3 clearly show). It is almost certain that Aquila and Priscilla were already Christians, for it is hardly credible that an unbelieving Jew would work with Paul at tent–making. In Rome Aquila, well supported by so able a wife, had probably come to prominence among the brethren, and now the two paid for their zeal by being uprooted from Rome. So they came to Corinth, and set up in business there. It is even possible that they were newly–weds, for Luke uses the very unusual word *prosphatōs* regarding them, thus perhaps putting in a subtle allusion to the Mosaic rule about a man with a new wife (Dt. 24:5 s.w.). In that case they were a fairly young couple. But see notes.

Very soon Paul was in full partnership with them. He lived with them, he worked with them, and he preached with them.

The happy association with Aquila and Priscilla begun here doubtless explains the apostle's growing aspiration to visit Rome, to further the cause of Christ there; see ch. 81 (10).

Limited witness

At first the preaching in Corinth was on a rather modest scale, perhaps because Paul still hoped for word from Thessalonica or Berea that the way was open for him to return there (1 Th. 3 10; cp. the return in Acts 14:21). So meantime he contented himself with a not–too–vigorous participation in synagogue discussions, in the course of which "he inserted the name of the Lord Jesus" (Bezan text). Here the implication seems to be that the apostle was now experimenting in a kind of "indirect method" of instruction – talking in a way that would be construed as orthodox Judaism, but flavouring it now and then with Christian Truth. There is no indication that he made much progress either with the Jews themselves or with the God–fearing Gentiles.

The site of this synagogue has been identified by the archaeologists, and the inscription over its door has been found: "Synagogue of the Hebrews," a title which might suggest that the congregation consisted mainly of Jews from the Holy Land, who could therefore be counted on to be extremely conservative in their reaction to Paul's "new ideas".

Change of method

The arrival of Silas and Timothy once again (1 Th. 3:2; Acts 18:5) from Macedonia made a big two–fold difference to Paul's attitude to his Corinthian mission. In the first instance, they brought with them a substantial sum of money, sent by the generous Philippian brethren (and possibly by the other Macedonian ecclesias also). This meant that he no longer needed to spend a large part of his time earning his own living. Once again he could be a full–time missionary.

Also, at this time he was "pressed in spirit" (v.5: AV). There is double difficulty here, for there is ambiguity about the meaning of the word "pressed," and in place of "spirit," many texts read "word." In fact, the alternatives multiply:

a. Pressed in spirit.
b. Pressed by the Spirit.
c. Fully occupied in the Word.
d. Pressed (constrained) by the Word.

In the New Testament the Greek word for "pressed" most often means "shut in" (e.g. Lk. 19:43; 22:63; Phil. 1:23), frequently in the sense of "shut in from normal activity by reason of sickness (e.g. Lk. 4:38; Acts 28:8) Yet the context: "and he testified to the Jews seems to suggest the idea: "shut up to nothing but preaching activity" (by contrast with his earlier part–time devotion to it).

Whatever the precise meaning, there seems to be little doubt that about this time Paul changed his tactics. Hitherto he had been "reasoning in the synagogue," attempting to teach by discussion and the thrust and parry of argument. Now he "testified," an expression which – so the context suggests – meant open and direct teaching of Christian Truth through the medium of lectures and systematic instruction: "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him a crucified Christ" (1 Cor. 2:2). No longer the indirect method of talking Judaism in friendly fashion to Jews, hoping to profit by the occasional opportunity to insert some positive teaching concerning Jesus. Instead, he now went all out to expound in fullest possible detail the Old Testament gospel pointing to Jesus as the Messiah. "There was much speaking and interpreting of Scripture" (Bezan text).

Persecution

The reaction to this change of front was immediate and drastic: "They opposed themselves, and blasphemed." This was too much for Paul. He could stand any amount of opposition and denunciation, but coarse blasphemy against his Lord was more than he could stomach. So, shaking his raiment in solemn disapproval (v.6; 20:26), he left the synagogue, uttering weighty warnings against their spite and unbelief. How could any man say: "Jesus is anathema" (1 Cor. 12:3), and not store up judgement for himself?

Centuries before this, Nehemiah "shook out his lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house .. . that performeth not this promise" (Neh. 5:13). And now, by a comparable action, Paul meant the same thing. But doubtless these Jews laughed him to scorn, for the effect of their blasphemy was to shake him out of their House of the Law.

But Paul did not shake the dust off his feet, as Jesus had commanded (Mt. 10:14) because at this time he had no intention of giving up Corinth as hopeless: "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles (in Corinth)."

When he uttered these ominous words, did he have in mind the grim retribution David brought on the Amalekite for turning against "the Lord's anointed" (2 Sam. 1:16)? Or was it God's grim message through Ezekiel: "Whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning ... his blood shall be upon him" (33:4)?

The Jewish opposition now aroused must have been intensely rancorous and full of threat against Paul's life, for this situation turned into one of the very few occasions (perhaps the only one) when persecution filled Paul with fear. So much so, that it needed a special manifestation of the Lord himself (cp. 23:11) to rally his failing spirit: "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace." The emphasis of that pleonasm shows how near the apostle had come to crumpling up completely.

It was not only Jewish hostility which brought him to this pass: "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). That word for "weakness" normally describes sickness; "much trembling" surely identifies the apostle's illness as being the ague of malaria.

In these circumstances it is easy to understand that in face of persecution Paul was reduced to tearfulness. To a man in low physical condition even molehills become mountains.

A vigorous campaign

So, helped by the exhortation of his Lord and by the encouragement of his fellow–workers, Paul started afresh. Adjoining the synagogue was the commodious house of a "proselyte of the gate" called Justus. He was one of Paul's chief supporters and readily put his home at the apostle's service as a lecture room. Paul was now able to continue living with Aquila and Priscilla and to make his challenge to Judaism by preaching Christ almost within earshot of the synagogue's congregation.

A policy as tactless and militant as this appears to need some explaining. Surely by such a confrontation he was asking for trouble. That Paul, normally so careful of people's feelings (for the gospel's sake), should swing to such an extreme of provocation can only be taken as a measure of how intensely his spirit had been stirred by the crudity of Jewish blasphemy.

But also his Lord had given him emphatic reassurance: "I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee" (cp. 27:24). It was the experience of diffident Jeremiah over again: "Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee" (Jer. 1:7,8).

That there was real danger in Corinth may be inferred also from what Paul had himself lately written to his beloved Thessalonians: "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified … and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men" (2 Th. 3:1,2) – "for (he added with breath–catching understatement) all men have not faith."

Jewish malignity continued unabated. When, in the course of his third journey, Paul was leaving Corinth, there was a plan to assassinate him (20:3; ch.87).

But now the Lord added firm encouragement: "I have much people in this city." It seemed impossible that it should be so, but Paul took the Master at his word, and girded up his loins. The Lord's word for "people" was that which was commonly used (in both OT. and NT.) with reference to Israel. Then did Jesus mean "many more Jewish converts," or "many Gentiles to be brought into the New Israel"? The latter, most probably.

The Lord might have added: "and in all Achaia," for as the gospel took firm hold in Corinth, it also spread through all the surrounding region (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1).

There came further encouragement with the conversion of Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue. And because of the special significance of such an unexpected gospel success, Paul broke his usual rule and himself officiated at Crispus's baptism (1 Cor. 1:14). Along with Crispus there was also the baptism of one Gaius who was evidently a prominent and wealthy man, for in the course of his next missionary journey Paul was to describe him as "mine host, and of the whole church" (Rom. 16:23).

Two other noteworthy converts were "Erastus the chamberlain (RV: treasurer) of the city, and Quartus" (Rom. 16:23). The latter is described rather oddly as "a brother." But the Greek text reads: "the brother." This is even more strange, until it is recognized that this is a common New Testament idiom for "his brother" (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:1; 5:1Gk.; 16:12; Mt. 9:10; 13:25Gk.; Lk. 16:8a etc.), that is, the brother of Erastus. The previous verse in Romans 16 mentions Tertius as Paul's amanuensis; and there is also a Secundus (Acts 20:4). It seems highly likely that these three, called "Second, Third, Fourth" were brothers, and that "First" was Erastus. More is known about him, for near the agora of Corinth there has been found a stone with this first–century inscription: "Erastus, the procurator of public buildings, laid this pavement at his own expense." A man as public–spirited as that would easily rise to yet higher status. And his wealth and spirit of service re–directed towards the well–being of the ecclesia would prove invaluable.

Evidently Crispus, whose household also to a man gave obedience to the Faith, resigned from his office in the synagogue or was peremptorily sacked, for within a short while his place was filled by one Sosthenes (v.17), and when the persuasion of the gospel was turned on him, in due time he too forsook the synagogue for the ecclesia, (1 Cor. 1:1), but not

before facing the music for his Christian sympathies.

There are clear indications (e.g. 1 Cor. 14:23) that the growing ecclesia had one main assembly point, and presumably this continued to be the house of Titus Justus (v.7 RV). The idea of synagogue worshippers and Christian believers meeting, so to speak, cheek by jowl is one which intrigues or even titillates the imagination.

Paul's ministry at Corinth now showed no sign of flagging. He "sat" (Gk.) as a fully recognized rabbi, and "many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized," precisely as the Lord Jesus had promised. They came from all ranks of society. Prominent Jews and distinguished Gentile citizens joined fellowship with many others from the lowest strata of the city's polyglot populace (1 Cor. 6:9–11; 1:26).

In all this Paul was aided by a renewed endowment of Holy Spirit power, by which, with many "signs and wonders," he demonstrated "the signs of an apostle" (1 Cor. 2:4; 2 Cor. 12:12; Rom 15:18,19).

This satisfying work continued for "a year and six months" – and since the Greek word here is commonly used for the holy year, this suggests a period stretching from Passover to the second Day of Atonement, or from Day of Atonement to the second Passover. Which of these?

The similarity between the Lord's exhortation to Paul: "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace," and Isaiah's Day of Atonement prophecy: "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet," (58:1) points to the second alternative. And this is supported by the fact that some time after this Paul sailed to Ephesus, and thence to the Holy Land. But long–voyage sailing ended in October (27:9), so it must have been in the summer months after Passover that Paul did this travelling.

Notes: 18:1 11

2. *Aquila ... Priscilla.* More about them in chapter 81.
   Found seems to imply that Paul knew about these two, and was looking for them. The Bezan text adds: "Now Paul was known to Aquila." When, where, how did such an acquaintance begin?
   Lately come. This adverb originally meant "newly killed in sacrifice," a meaning which Luke may have had his eye on in view of the persecution in Rome. The shape of the sentence seems to imply that Priscilla was not a Jewess.
3. *Wrought.* See the strong emphasis on this in Paul's speech and writing at this period: 20:34; 1 Cor. 4:12; 9:12,15; 2Cor. 11:9;12:13;1 Th. 2:9; 2 Th. 3:8.
   They surely means that both man and wife were involved in the tent–making business.
5. *Pressed in spirit.* RV: *constrained by the word* might mean that the news brought from Macedonia about Jewish hostility there stirred Paul to indignant activity (Rom. 11:11–14). 1 Th. 3:7,8 suggests distress of some kind at this time.
   Silas and Timothy. After this the only other allusions to Silas are 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Pet. 5:12 (which was written much later). What happened to him meantime?
6. *Opposed.* Classically this word was used to describe hostile armies ranged against each other.
7. *Justus, one that worshipped God.* The home of this devout Gentile would be acceptable to Jews and Gentiles alike. Identification of Justus with Gaius has been suggested; not Rom. 16:23.
8. Crispus might be a Latinized form of a Hebrew name meaning "like the lightning (of the Lord)".
   9,10 This sequence seems all wrong after v.8. Then did Luke insert these verses as *explanation* of how the success of v.7,8 came about?
9. *Be not afraid, but speak.* In Is. 57:18–58:1, phrase after phrase is apposite: "I will heal him (Paul's malaria?)... and will comfort (parakaleo) him, and will give him true comfort *(paraklesis* – signs and wonders by the Holy Spirit?) ... Peace, peace, to him that is far off (the gospel to the Gentiles), and to him that is near (the Jews)... But the wicked are like the troubled sea (Jewish opposition) ... whose waters cast up mire and dirt (their blasphemy). There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked ('Your blood be upon your own heads'). Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet." Compare also Jer. 15:19–21. This vision of Christ is mentioned here no doubt to vindicate Paul's apostleship which was more questioned at Corinth than anywhere; 1 Cor. 9:1,2; 2 Cor. 12:22).

10. *Much people in this city.* All told, 18 Corinthian names are known, but in this account Luke mentions only 3, an indication of how compressed this part of the narrative is. Note also: 1 Cor. 1:11–15; Rom. 16:5? 21 –23. (compare also Elijah's situation: 1 Kgs. 19:18).
11. Nearly all the next five years were spent at Ephesus and Corinth. The moral character of the ecclesia at Corinth comes out clearly in 1 Cor. 5 ; 6:9–20; 7:2,5,9; 10:8; 15:33,34; 2 Cor. 6:14; 7:1.

79. Gallio (18:12–17)

In the Roman empire the usual day for provincial governors to take up office was July 1st. So the dramatic development centring round Gallio, the new proconsul, must have blown up nearly a year before the end of the year and a half of steady progress in the gospel work indicated by Luke (note the phrase: "tarried there yet a good while;" v.18).

The reference to Gallio as the new proconsul illustrates once again Luke's dependability in details of this sort. For since the Romans destroyed and then re–built Corinth, the form of government there, as the chief city of Achaia, had undergone several changes. It was only comparatively recently that Claudius had agreed to put Achaia under the rule of the senate by proconsuls.

The new governor

Gallio, the new appointee, was brother to the famous Stoic Seneca who was tutor to Nero and doubtless responsible for much of the excellent government in the early days of that infamous creature. Later Nero was to force Seneca and Gallio and another brother to commit suicide, possibly through the malign influence of the royal courtesan Poppaea who was a proselyte to Judaism.

Gallio was a very gentlemanly and amiable character whom it was impossible not to like. Because of ill–health he ruled Achaia for only a few years. It may be that when the uproar arose about Paul he was already a sick man, and that his low physical condition may have helped to decide his attitude to the problem.

Concerted action

The Jews in Corinth, now becoming more exasperated at the evident progress of the new Faith not only in their own ranks but also specially among the Gentiles, decided that they could presume on Gallio's known mildness of character and inexperience of government to attempt bullying tactics. Some years later the Jews of Jerusalem went into action in similar though less drastic fashion when Festus appeared as new governor in Judaea (25:1,2).

After "much talking among themselves against Paul" (Codex Beza), they made a riotous assembly, grabbing Paul and hustling him into the agora where Gallio was sitting in judgement (the actual site of his judgement–seat has been identified). Did Paul wonder in bewildered fashion how this rough experience was to be reconciled with his Lord's assurance: "I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee?" It seemed impossible that he should now go unharmed, yet in fact that is what happened.

Why did the Jews not adopt the successful tactics used against Paul at Lystra and Thessalonica? Violent mob tactics and an accusation of inciting men to disloyalty to Rome would have to be taken notice of. The later hint that the Jews were in high disfavour with the rest of the populace may have meant that they themselves were regarded as disloyal citizens.

An unlawful religion!

So instead the gravamen of their charge before Gallio was this:

'We Jews have the special privilege throughout the empire of following the practices of our own religion *(religio licita).* This Paul teaches beliefs and a way of religious life contrary to our Law. Therefore he and his fellows are not covered by the special sanction accorded to Jews. Therefore his religious teaching is contrary to Roman law which proscribes any proselytizing from the religions already established.'

It was a calculated attempt to rush Gallio into a decision that Faith in Christ was not to be regarded as covered by the special privileges accorded to Jews. It may be that these Jews hoped that just as "Chrestus" riots in Rome had led to expulsions, so now Gallio would decree

that Paul and all others who espoused the cause of this "Chrestus" should be thrust out of Achaia. But if so, they were surely skating on thin ice.

An abrupt decision

This may have been the first time that Paul came up against what was to become one of the major problems of his later years – a calculated unscrupulous Jewish campaign to get preaching of the gospel about Jesus completely forbidden throughout the entire Roman empire.

He stepped forward, ready to speak in his own defence, and, very probably, intending there and then to appeal unto Caesar so that this important issue – the status of the Christian faith – might be officially clarified once and for all. But he was cut short by the proconsul who had already "done his homework" regarding such problems.

'Bring me a case involving wrongdoing or wicked villainy (i.e. infringement of civil or criminal law), and I'll put up with you Jews. But I am resolved to have nothing to do with your private religious squabbles involving your holy Book or your Law or this Chrestus. These petty matters I will not touch.'

And with that, he ordered the court to be cleared, leaving both Paul and his Jewish adversaries bitterly disappointed.

Mob violence

The Gentile section of the court crowd saw at once that Gallio shared their own contempt for the Jewish community. So with great gusto they seized Sosthenes, the successor to Crispus as president of the synagogue, and gave him a good beating there before the judgement seat, perhaps hoping that the disturbance they were creating might lead to banishment of Jews from Corinth by Gallio, as from Rome by Claudius. (But see notes). Gallio saw them at it, and neither said a word nor lifted a finger to restrain them (Bezan text). Doubtless he was saying to himself: 'This will keep the Jews of Corinth quiet for a good while to come, and thus will make my job easier.'

Thus "Gallio cared for none of these things." For centuries the words have been misread, to Gallio's detriment. They have become proverbial to describe the worldly man devoid of all religious instinct. But what is actually meant is that Gallio was not worried about the rough treatment meted out to Sosthenes. It is possible that Luke meant: "Gallio cared for none of these people" – neither clamant Jews nor violent Greeks nor preacher Paul; they were all beneath him. Yet how remarkable that one of the most cultured, eminent, popular, kindly men of that era should be known to succeeding generations by this simple line of Holy Scripture. And what a contrast with Pilate's "wish to content the people" (Mk. 15:15)!

Sosthenes

Should there be sympathy with Sosthenes in all this? That depends on whether or not he is to be identified with the Sosthenes, clearly a Corinthian brother, who was with Paul in Ephesus when 1 Corinthians was written (1:1).

If he is the same, then it is to be assumed that he suffered at the hands of the Greeks unworthily. The probability is that, through the influence of his demoted predecessor Crispus, he was already inclined to the gospel; and if, knowing something of this, his fellow Jews were unsympathetic to his suffering, this would accelerate his conversion. But it would also make his membership of the synagogue in Corinth impossible, so that when, soon after this, Paul left for Ephesus (v.18,19), Sosthenes would be glad to accompany him. His name, meaning "the man who was saved," only took on its real significance after that day in the agora.

Notes: 18:12–17

12. *With one accord.* In Greek a very expressive word, evidently a favourite of Luke's. Compare its use in 7:57; 19:29; and contrast 1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12; 12:20; 15:25; and Rom. 15:6, the only other NT. occurrence. Impressive LXX examples: Ex. 19:8; Jer. 5:5.
13. *Persuadeth;* s.w. Jer. 29:8 LXX only. Possibly this phrase should read: "persuadeth the men (of Corinth) to worship the God" (representing 'Chrestus' as a new god in the pantheon).
14. *O Jews.* In the N.T. this mode of address is always emotional – here, in contempt or anger?
15. *Look ye to it.* So also Pilate: Jn. 18:31. Contrast the intense interest of Sergius Paulus in these matters: 13:7.
16. *Drave them.* Cp. Pr. 25:5 which, in two Old Testament versions, has the same word.
17. RV follows a different group of manuscripts in reading: *They all laid hold on Sosthenes,* with no reference to Greeks. This reading is doubtful; but if correct it means that the Jews, flouting Gallio's judgement and exasperated with Sosthenes (perhaps because of his unwillingness to testify against Paul), took it out of him by a public beating. If so, this would greatly hasten his conversion – and emigration.
    Took. A rough word.

80. To Jerusalem and Antioch (18:18–23)

After the excitement before Gallio's judgement–seat Paul was in no hurry to leave Corinth, even though he was set on being in Jerusalem for the Day of Atonement. It wouldn't do to give either the Jews or the authorities in Corinth the impression that because of opposition he was glad to clear out.

But after a while he made preparation to leave. He said his farewell to the brethren, presumably at a specially–called assembly, and then did the short journey of nine miles or so to Cenchrea, the port of Corinth.

Sickness at Cenchrea

There his plans were rudely interrupted by a fresh onset of illness – at least, this seems to be the hypothesis which best harmonizes certain significant details:

a. It was in Cenchrea where he cut his hair in token of a Nazirite vow. It has been suggested that this vow was in thanks to God for deliverance from danger in Corinth. But in that case, why wait until getting to Cenchrea before polling his head? On the other hand it is known (e.g. Jos. B.J.2.15.1) that Jews often made a thirty–day Nazarite vow in thanksgiving for recovery from sickness.
b. "Phoebe our sister ... a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea ... hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also" (Rom. 16:1,2). Would not the most likely fulfilment of such a noble role be by nursing them back to health? Indeed, the word translated "succourer" was used in Athens of one who not only offered hospitality but also took on personal responsibility for the comfort and well–being of the guests.

It seems fairly likely that Paul had one of his recurrent attacks of malaria– "weakness and much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3; compare Acts 27:3 RV). This fight against ill–health makes all the more admirable the dedicated efforts of the apostle in his zealous propagation of the gospel.

Ephesus — a brief visit

On board ship Paul was accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila and, very probably, other brethren such as Timothy and Sosthenes. Aquila and his wife travelled only as far as Ephesus. Had they already concocted with Paul a plan for preaching the gospel in the province of Asia?

In Ephesus the Jews were a very important and influential community to whom significant civil privileges had been granted. When Paul put in an appearance at their synagogue he was well received, in the first instance doubtless because of his Nazarite vow. Indeed, when it was learned that his Biblical discussions could not be continued because of the planned journey to Jerusalem, there was much disappointment. That vow, which must necessarily be discharged at the temple, now saved Paul from much emotional tension, for, but for that obligation, how could he hope to resist the temptation to settle down in Ephesus to satisfy the eagerness there for his Biblical expositions and Messianic message? Instead, then, these Ephesian Jews had to be content with his firm promise to return as soon as he could.

After all the violent Jewish opposition experienced at Thessalonica and Berea, and also on the first journey at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, to Paul this encouragement in the synagogue at Ephesus must have been as heady as champagne. But, so the Greek text seems to imply, he shook his head vigorously in response to repeated attempts to persuade him to stay. It is not difficult to imagine how, as he went on board ship again, he would be estimating what might be the earliest date at which he could return to this promising field of endeavour.

Yet, earlier on his second journey, when he and his party had headed towards Ephesus, they had been "forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia" (16:6). Now, apparently, circumstances were changed, and although the Providence of God still operated (through this vow) to make him leave Ephesus almost as soon as he had got there, he had now been given a green light to plan a big campaign in the near future.

To Jerusalem — Why?

There is no indication as to why Paul was so specially anxious to be at Jerusalem for the oncoming feast – the Day of Atonement, presumably. It seems fairly likely that the news of his vigorous preaching of the gospel to Gentiles had been so unsympathetically reported back in Jerusalem as to make the brethren there conclude that he had forsaken Judaism altogether (compare 21:21). An appearance in the temple in fulfilment of a Nazarite vow, and on one of the great holy days, would surely do much to settle such false rumours. As it turned out, Paul's hopes in this direction were not all realised.

That long slow sea voyage at the best time of the year would do Paul a lot of good. When at last he landed at Caesarea he was a fit man again. At this seaport there was not only Philip to welcome him, but also Cornelius and his Christian household and a good many more Roman converts to the Faith. But with little loss of time Paul did the sixty or more miles to Jerusalem.

This visit to the holy city must surely have been a big disappointment to him, for Jerusalem is not even mentioned by name; and the only detail given is that "he saluted the church." Yet, almost certainly, there would be conferences with the apostles, and detailed reports on the remarkable achievements of the past three years or so. And would he not be present at every possible meeting of the ecclesia whilst he was there?

The total absence of comment in this part of Luke's record either means that Luke had no access to information as to what happened in the course of that visit, or by his silence he expresses his disapproval of the marked non–enthusiasm there for the successes Paul had achieved.

Soon the apostle was on the road to Antioch where he doubtless felt much more at home. Nevertheless he was anxious to return to Jerusalem, perhaps hoping to persuade the brethren there to a better attitude towards his Gentile missions, perhaps with the intention of enlisting apostolic action against the steadily growing Judaist trend which was already doing so much to undermine his work overseas.

A puzzling reading

However, the Bezan text at Acts 19:1 has a remarkable addition which reads "Now when Paul was wishing, according to his own decision, to go to Jerusalem, the Spirit bade him return into Asia."

This can be read in either of two ways. It may mean that when Paul went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea (where Philip had four daughters who were prophetesses; 21:9), he received a revelation which cut down his time in the holy city to a minimum and sent him forthwith back to Ephesus. Or else – and more likely – some prophet of the Lord in Antioch bade him abandon his intention of returning yet again to Jerusalem and instead sent him back to the work he had not long ago left in Asia and the West.

So since all long–distance sailing came to an end in October, he braved the crossing of the Taurus mountains via the Cilician Gates, possibly before the really hard weather came on in that region, or, after wintering in Antioch and Tarsus, in the next Spring as soon as the early thaw made travel practicable.

Galatia again

This route gave opportunity to re–visit the ecclesias founded in the course of the first journey, "strengthening *all* the disciples." There was not one of them who would not find Paul's visit a tonic. And the force of that earlier nefarious inroad of the Judaist brethren had now been nullified.

It was in the course of this journey that Paul first began to put big emphasis on his great practical scheme for welding Jewish and Gentile brethren into a harmonious Body of Christ. Nearly all the Gentile ecclesias were markedly better off than their poverty–stricken brethren in Judaea. Then since they had profited so largely from the spiritual blessings flowing to them from Jewry, was it not a small thing that they reciprocate by donating a share of their material prosperity?

So Paul appointed (1 Cor. 16:1: "gave order" is a bit too strong) that there should be weekly collections for this purpose at the Breaking of Bread service. And apparently, with the one exception of dilatory Corinth (2 Cor. 9:1–4), this worthy idea was put in train with diligence and enthusiasm.

At last Paul came to Ephesus again, having travelled some fifteen hundred miles on foot as the first part of his third missionary journey! Rackham insists that it is more correct to regard this third journey as beginning from Paul's first visit to Ephesus (18:19) – the visit to Jerusalem and all else that Paul accomplished in the course of this long travel being of subsidiary importance compared with what was now to flourish in the province of Asia. Certainly Luke's meagre reporting (18:22,23) suggests this kind of assessment.

Notes 18:18–23

18. *Into Syria.* So Paul's ship was almost certainly making for Antioch. But because of his vow and the Feast he meant to attend, the apostle did not stay there, but forthwith took a coasting vessel to Caesarea.
    A vow. The Nazarite vow proscribed wine and strong drink. What would Paul do about taking the Wine at the weekly Agape? From now on there is no lack of indication that by observance of the Law Paul was set on proving to his fellow–Jews that he was still a Jew: 20:16,16;21:26;27:9;1 Cor.9:20. Grammatically the sentence reads as though it was Aquila who made the vow, But there is no hint of a reason why he should. And if he did, then why did not *he* go to Jerusalem?
19. It would be absurd to read into this verse a hint of a cleavage between Paul and these fine friends of his. Of course they too "entered into the synagogue," but Paul did this as a preacher intent on using even a passing opportunity. The "well–beloved Epaenetus" was probably the first convert made in Ephesus soon after Paul left. (Rom. 16:5 RV).
    Reasoned. Gk. aorist suggests a one–off effort, sounding the prospects in Ephesus.
21. *Sailed from Ephesus.* This Greek passive may indicate a further directive by the Spirit that he was not to change his plan, however much tempted to do so, of going direct to Jerusalem.
22. *Landed.* Literally: "came down" (out of the ship), followed by *he went up* (RV) might suggest that the writer of these words put them on paper at Caesarea; in other words, Luke wrote this part of his narrative when in Caesarea with Paul (24:27; 27:1 – we).

81. Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos (18:24–28)

Whilst Paul was journeying to Jerusalem and returning, the two good friends he had left at Ephesus were busy establishing a new ecclesia there. The travels and usefulness of this remarkable couple, only very briefly touched on in Acts and Epistles, are worth reviewing.

1. Aquila was a Jew from the remote north–eastern province of Pontus, and, like Paul, a tent–maker.
2. Priscilla is the rather affectionate diminutive form of the name Prisca which strongly suggests that she was a member of the high Roman family of the Prisci. This might account for the unexpected order of their names, for, three times out of six, the wife is named before her husband. The alternative is to see in this a suggestion of superior ability on her part.
3. How did two individuals so different in origin and social status come to marry? Probably – though it is only a guess – business took Aquila to Rome, where he not only learned Faith in Christ but also met a fellow–convert with whom he fell in love.
4. The decree of Claudius (18:2) chased these two out of Rome. Probably they were singled out for expulsion because of their prominence in the "Chrestus" controversies. There is a possible hint that they came to Corinth as newly–weds (see ch.78).
5. In Corinth they teamed up with Paul and were a great reinforcement to his campaign there (18:2,3).
6. Two years or so later, along with Paul, they crossed over to Ephesus, and stayed on there when Paul took ship for Judaea (18:18,19).
7. In Paul's absence the work went forward at Ephesus, the first of their converts being Epaenetus (Rom. 16:5RV). But affection for their brethren lately brought to the Faith in Corinth never flagged. "Aquila and Priscilla salute you *much* in the Lord, with the church that is in their house" 1 Cor. 16:19).
8. Then came Apollos, and with what ability and eagerness did they show him a better Faith than he knew (18:24–28).
9. Before long they were back in Rome (Rom. 16:3), Paul on his third journey sending them his greetings and affectionate remembrances. Why the return to Rome? Possibly because of danger threatening from Ephesian riots which had Paul and his faithful helpers at the centre of the vortex.
10. It is very likely (see: "Why Paul wrote Romans," by H.A.W.) that it was both human incentive and Holy Spirit guidance in Aquila and Priscilla which goaded Paul to write his greatest epistle – to an ecclesia which at that time he had not yet visited.
11. The last direct New Testament mention of these two (2 Tim. 4:19) is Paul's farewell greeting to them shortly before he died in the Nero persecution. At the time he wrote they were back in Ephesus, driven there doubtless by the savage persecution by Nero which swept away not only Paul and Peter but also many of their brethren.
12. There is a fair likelihood that these two were the joint authors of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The evidence for this is at least as good as that for Pauline authorship.
13. A not too secure early church tradition says that Aquila and Priscilla had a son called Pudens (definitely not the Pudens of 2 Tim. 4:21).
14. One of the best Greek versions of the Old Testament was done round about the end of the first century by a certain Aquila of Pontus. The same?
15. A very ancient catacomb in Rome has always borne the name: The cemetery of Priscilla.

The character of Apollos

Paul may have been still on his way to Jerusalem when there appeared in the synagogue at Ephesus a certain Apollonius (so, Codex Beza) from Alexandria. This brilliant Jew was what Luke calls a *logios* man. In translating this the experts swither between "learned" and "eloquent," but from New Testament usage it seems equally possible that this was Luke's way of saying that he was "a Bible man."

It is impossible even to guess at what brought Apollos to Ephesus. Can he have been a missionary full of zeal for the good news he has been taught (by catechism) concerning the message of John the Baptist? Unlike those disciples of John (19:1–6) whom Paul encountered later on (see next chapter), Apollos had been very well and accurately instructed, and now he was intent on disseminating this prophetic message with all the fluency and force at his command.

In describing the work of Apollos Luke uses more emphatic language than he ever employs to describe the preaching of Paul, so there must surely have been something quite extraordinary about his personality and evangelism. He was "mighty in the Scriptures" and he "mightily convinced" the Jews whom he took on in debate.

But although so "boiling in spirit", Apollos knew only "the baptism of John." He had faithfully and accurately learned the gospel of repentance taught by John: 'Messiah is coming soon. Therefore prepare the way of the Lord.' In itself this was a good message, but how much better it would be now to be able to tell men: That Messiah John proclaimed has now come. He has bequeathed to us matchless teaching. He has suffered and died as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. He has risen from the dead and has ascended into heaven to minister there a new and better priesthood than men have yet known. One day he will come again as King and Judge of all, the Messiah to whom John pointed.'

How had the word concerning Jesus of Nazareth by–passed Apollos? It is difficult to surmise. But as Priscilla and Aquila listened with pleasure to his eloquent and wholesome discourses in the synagogue, their delight in his powerful handling of the Scriptures was marred by the realisation of the existence of a large black hole in his religious knowledge.

So these two invited him to their home. There they capably filled in the blanks in his understanding concerning Jesus, showing him "the Way of God" more perfectly. What an experience it must have been for him to move swiftly and easily into the light and warmth of the fuller message now imparted. And what a delightful task it must have been to his two new friends to have such an alert, well–equipped and enthusiastic pupil!

In his preaching John had made great use of the prophecy in Isaiah 40: "Prepare ye the Way of the Lord; make his paths straight." This theme – the Way of the Lord – Aquila and Priscilla now took up with thoroughness for Apollos's benefit. It is not difficult to imagine them ranging through that remarkable catena of Messianic prophecies in Isaiah, all of them about The Way (40:3,14; 35:8; 30:21; 57:14; 62:10; 42:16,24), and then going on to the other Scriptures John had made such powerful use of (Isaiah 53; Malachi 3).

And the fine quality in the character of Apollos came out in the way in which he, already a man of learning and reputation, accustomed to be "a guide of the blind, a teacher of babes," now sat at the feet of these two and suffered himself to be taught a better way, a fuller knowledge. There is no mention of his baptism, for the baptism he had already received was valid (see "Studies in the Gospels," ch. 16). Now he was equipped to undertake, even more enthusiastically, an evangelism far surpassing any he had proclaimed so far.

Preaching in Corinth

At this moment (according to the Bezan text) there were in the new ecclesia certain brethren from Corinth who saw in Apollos great possibilities of reinforcement for their ecclesia back home. So they set about persuading him to make Corinth his next centre of activity. At last he agreed, and travelled thither equipped with a letter of recommendation from the brethren.

So when at last Paul got back to Ephesus, Apollos was already in the thick of a strenuous campaign amongst the Jews of Corinth. Going all out (Gk. at full strength), he "kept on vigorously arguing down" the Jews who opposed his message that Messiah had indeed come and was none other than Jesus of Nazareth.

Thus the ecclesia in Corinth was fortified and increased yet more in numbers through the eloquent witness made by this fine new protagonist for the gospel. These must have been exciting days.

Notes: 18:24–28

24. *Apollos.* It has been suggested that this short account was included in Luke's "Acts of Paul" in order to explain the allusions in 1 Cor. 1–4. It also helps to account for the phenomenal growth of the Truth in Ephesus, for the work of Apollos would be very effective in breaking the ice for Paul's campaign there immediately afterwards.
25. *Mighty.* In all the record concerning Ephesus there is a great piling–up of words for *power:* 18:28; 19:8,11,16, 17,20, 27, 28, 34, 35; Eph. 1:19 (2), 21; 2:2; 3:7,20; 6:10. Compare also this description of Apollos with 7:22.
    Fervent. Boiling, and yet refreshing; 1 Cor. 3:6.
    In the spirit. Not Holy Spirit (for at this time he knew only the baptism of John). Therefore, "fervent in disposition." RV: *the things concerning Jesus.* If this reading can be received (which is doubtful), then it means that Apollos was expounding truth concerning Jesus from the Old Testament without realising *who* he was talking about.
26. This verse is perhaps Luke's quiet rebuke of 1 Cor. 3:3–6.
27. Note here the distinction made between *brethren* (the elders?) and *disciples (the new converts made by Priscilla and Aquila?.*
    Them ... which had believed through grace. Here, most probably, *grace* means the Holy Spirit (in Paul); other examples of this meaning: Eph. 4:7; 3:8; Gal. 2:9; Rom. 1:5; 12:3,6; Lk. 4:22.
28. *Mightily.* In the New Testament the same word comes only in Lk. 23:10. In LXX see Josh. 6:8; Ecc. 7:7. The humility of the character of Apollos comes out very beautifully in the way in which, when his popularity among the brethren at Corinth grew to dangerous proportions, he withdrew to Ephesus, and would not readily give way to Paul's persuasions that he return to Corinth (1 Cor. 16:12).

82. Disciples of John (19:1–7)

At some time after Apollos's departure for Corinth. Paul arrived in Ephesus, having spent a good while with the Galatian churches and wherever he knew of believers in the high hinterland.

Luke implies that, soon after his arrival, he encountered a group of Jews who were happy to call themselves disciples of John the Baptist. It may seem strange that neither Aquila nor Apollos had come across them. But it is to be remembered that Ephesus was a big city and that very probably these Baptists had formed their own small exclusive synagogue (hence the mention of "twelve", for over long centuries the recognized minimum for a synagogue has been ten men; Zech. 8:23). It is not unlikely that groups of John's followers now existed in a fair number of cities throughout the empire, and it may be that when Apollos first came to Ephesus he had been sent on a mission aimed at co–ordinating all such.

The incident now described in Acts 19 has been subject to such diverse interpretations that it becomes desirable before proceeding with other details, to establish just what was the meaning and purpose of the baptism John instituted.

Because the text uses the phrase: "baptism of repentance" (genitive of origin!), it has often been assumed that this rite was simply an outward sign of a personal resolve to turn over a new leaf. This, as will now be shown, is a most inadequate interpretation.

Rather, John's baptism is to be seen as essentially Christian baptism, with all the meaning that the New Testament gives to Christian baptism. In fact, there is only one distinction between the two, and that a relatively unimportant one, namely, that whereas since Pentecost Christian baptism has looked back to the death and resurrection of the Lord, John's baptism necessarily looked forward to it. The earliest Christian baptisms (Jn. 3:22; 4:1,2) must similarly have had this element of anticipation in their significance.

The fairly copious relevant evidence can now be set out:

1. The Pharisees asked John: "Why baptizest thou then ...?" That is, what right have you to institute a new religious ordinance? This point answers categorically the assertion often made (without evidence) that John was copying a Pharisaic rite already administered to new converts. This baptism, quite distinct from religious washing (as at Khumran), was a completely new thing.
2. John's baptism was "for the remission (i.e. forgiveness) of sins" (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3). It is the very phrase used for baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38) and with reference to the Breaking of Bread service (Mt. 26:28). But there is *no* forgiveness possible apart from faith in Christ. So the two baptisms must be essentially the same. This point by itself may be regarded as decisive. But there is a good deal more.
3. The puzzle presented by that strange plural: " the doctrine of baptisms" (Heb. 6:2) is now elucidated. Two baptisms which are really one and the same. Of the Hebrews receiving this epistle, some would have received the one rite (from John) and some the other (from Jesus or an apostle). It was immaterial.
4. It has been suggested that in the early part of his ministry John had used a baptismal formula something like this: "I baptize you into the promised Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" (Is. 55:6,7). Then, when Jesus began his ministry and had been identified to John by the Spirit at his baptism (Jn. 1:32,33), the Baptist had only to say: "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," and the baptism which was already meaningful now became yet more eloquent.

5. The beginning of Mark's gospel is very significant: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ," and then the next seven verses are all about John's preaching and specially about the baptism people received from him.
6. When John declared: "But that he should be manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (Jn. 1:31), did he mean: Unless I teach Israel to repent there will be no Messiah manifest to the nation? If so, why did he say: "I am come baptizing with water," and not: "I am come requiring national repentance"? Then it is possible that he meant: "I am making Messiah manifest to you in the baptism which you learn and receive from me?"
7. "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached..." (Lk. 16:16). So John belonged to the New Dispensation, not the Old – in token of which he was a priest who had nothing to do with the temple. But if repentance only was the gist of his teaching, in what respect was he better than the Old Testament prophets who just as trenchantly taught the same? But this baptism added a new dimension.
8. The inspired prophecy of Zacharias surely means what it says: "Thou, child, shall be called the prophet of the Highest... to give *knowledge of salvation* unto his people in *the remission of sins"* (Lk. 1:76,77).
9. The two baptisms are mentioned in adjoining verses (Jn. 3:22,23), not for the sake of contrast – how could they be that? – but to equate the two in meaning. The context supports this view: John is "the friend of the bridegroom rejoicing greatly because of the bridegroom's voice." This also explains why Jesus said to Nicodemus: "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen" (3:11).That pronoun is not an editorial or regal "we". Nor can it mean Jesus and his disciples, for up to this time the apostles had neither "seen" nor "testified" at all. Jesus must have meant himself and John.
10. "Thus (by my baptism) it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Mt. 3:15). Did Jesus need a baptism of *repentance. ?* Clearly, no! But having come "in the flesh," he needed the benefit of his own sacrifice here foreshadowed by burial in and resurrection from water. And it was a baptism administered by *John.*
11. There is no hint anywhere of the Twelve, of whom at least some were first of all disciples of John, being re–baptized. Yet Jesus spoke of them as already "bathed" (Jn. 13:10), "already clean" (15:3). And in the episode of the tribute money he spoke of the Twelve as "children" of his Father, by contrast with the nation who were "strangers" (Mt. 17:26).

These copious indications build up into a fairly strong case, made all the stronger by complete lack of evidence for any alternative.

There is no indication as to how Paul first met the little group of John's followers at Ephesus. But from the outset, in harmony with the foregoing, they are referred to as "disciples" and "believers" (Gk.), neither of which terms is ever applied to any except true followers of Christ.
Paul's enquiry as to their lack of Holy Spirit experience may have sprung from doubts regarding their contact with an apostle with authority to impart the gift to them. His surprise must have been considerable on hearing their rejoinder: 'Holy Spirit? we heard nothing about it' (that is, when instructed for baptism – so the Greek text implies).

Yet John had certainly emphasized in his teaching the certainly of a Messianic outpouring of Holy Spirit power (Lk. 3:16.) So the conclusion seems inescapable that these men had not learned their faith from John at first–hand, but had actually been imperfectly instructed by someone else. Then, if baptism is an "obeying from the heart that form of doctrine delivered you" (Rom. 6:17), what was their baptism worth?

So, very tactfully, Paul proceeded to intimate that a true union with the Messiah must depend on a proper knowledge of him and his teaching.

This they humbly recognized, and so, after further instruction, they all received a new and now thoroughly adequate baptism.

Then followed an apostolic laying–on of hands (as in 8:17), and Ephesus now experienced its own Pentecost as their newly–received charismata bore witness to their fellow–Jews in the city (1 Cor. 14:21,22).

Why should Luke, usually so precise in details of this sort, now lapse into approximation: "all the men were about twelve (in number)"?

The "twelve" is surely intended to underline that these were now part of the New Israel. But whereas in their conventicle synagogue only the numbers of *men* reckoned, now in Christ their women and also their servants and older children had a like status – "all one in Christ Jesus."

It is noteworthy that in the earlier account of Apollos "knowing only the baptism of John" there is no hint of re–baptism being insisted on. The reason for this difference is supplied indirectly: already "he spake and taught *accurately* the things of the Lord." All Apollos needed was to understand that the Messiah about whom he had learned through John was Jesus of Nazareth, risen from the dead. This knowledge validated completely the baptism he had already received. Nor is there any mention of him receiving the gift of the Spirit, for Aquila (himself doubtless enjoying the gift) was not an apostle, and before Paul came to Ephesus, Apollos had already moved on to Corinth.

83. Diligent Progress at Ephesus(19:8–10)

Paul, as was his wont, made his first big effort at Ephesus in the synagogue. Here there was no attempt to employ the softly–softly technique first tried out at Corinth (18:4, Bezan text). Now, from the outset, emphasis was strongly on the Messianic kingdom with Jesus as its king. On the theme of the kingdom he could always count on a hearing from Jews, even though the identification of the Messiah with Jesus was usually resented.

The phrase: "reasoning and persuading" (Bezan text: "with great power") sums up the method employed. This significant word "reasoning" (out of the Scriptures) comes no less than eight times in chapters 17–21. There is no mistaking the present emphasis on this method in Paul's preaching: free Biblical discussion – and the result: a steady stream of conversions.

These Jews in Ephesus were better material than Paul had encountered in most other cities. At Antioch he had abandoned them as hopeless after the second sabbath (13:44). At Thessalonica his effort with the Jews lasted only three weeks (17:2). But here in Ephesus it was a full three months before Jewish opposition crystallized out.

More Jewish opposition

The hardening of opinion against the gospel was confined to a minority section of the synagogue congregation. There was no general move to exclude Paul because of his current activities. So the opposition adopted the tactics Paul had endured at other places. There were plots against him (20:19RV), presumably to seize and beat him; and to further these amiable intentions Gentile roughs were made use of (so says the Bezan text).

With the majority of the Jews still tolerant of his preaching, Paul was not the man to be put off by calumny and threats.

So it may be presumed that the apostle's abandonment of the synagogue and withdrawing his disciples to a separate meeting hall was primarily for the benefit of these new converts and possibly on their strong insistence, so that their spiritual re–education might proceed un-hindered by controversial clashes or the atmosphere of hostility and horrid blasphemy generated by some.

The school of Tyrannus

Paul's new "synagogue" was the school of Tyrannus, about whom nothing is known. He may have been a convert or sympathizer, or – as has been suggested – he was the original founder of this place of assembly, and the name had stuck.

The Greek word *scholē* originally meant "leisure," then it came to be applied to "leisure activities," and because of the Greek fondness for listening to oratory the word was used also for "a lecture room" as the place in which to spend one's leisure, listening to oratory. It is known that there were five such gymnasia in Ephesus. Codex Beza says specifically that in this "meeting room" Paul taught "from the fifth to the tenth hour," that is, most probably, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. This was during the heat of the day when the lecture room was not wanted for other purposes and when those who were eager enough to bestir themselves during siesta time were also free to attend.

This new departure was not without its advantages, for whereas at the synagogue there was an "open door" only three times in the week, Paul could now proclaim the truth in Christ every day.

Dedicated effort

When not so occupied, this man of unflagging drive and inexhaustible energy was also busy "teaching you (the brethren). .. from house to house, continuing to testify (even to his converts!) repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (20:20,21).

Also, he found time to work at his tent–making, no doubt once again in partnership with Aquila: "These hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak" (20:34,35). Paul was no mere academic Christian.

This strenuous work went on for two full years. Indeed, with the three months of synagogue activity now behind him (v.8) and the further "season" (v.22) of preaching before the great riot blew in like a hurricane, Paul's campaign in Ephesus went on continuously for nearly three years (20:31).

During most of this period the apostle had a worthy team of helpers to reinforce his efforts. The list of names traceable of those associated with the Ephesian campaign is impressive: Timothy, Titus, Erastus, Tychicus, Trophimus, Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos (1 Cor. 16:12), Epaenetus, Onesiphorus, and a team of "elders" (20:17). Very probably, also, there were such individuals on the scene as Hymenaeus, Alexander, Phygellus, Hermogenes – ominous names!

No wonder Luke is able to sum up (with what tantalising brevity) that "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." There was no gainsaying the truly catholic character of the preaching. This was a message of salvation for all men without distinction of race or social status.

The wide diversity of humanity now being gathered in by the gospel net made it desirable, and perhaps necessary, that in his later encyclical epistle (now called "Ephesians") Paul should emphasize the lovely "unity" themes of the One Body, Christ and his Bride, and the Temple of God with its Fulness of Glory.

It would be during this period that the seven churches of Asia came to be established. Hierapolis, Troas, and Colosse can also be added to the list, this last largely as a result of Timothy's efforts? (Col. 1:1). It is often assumed (from Col. 2:1) that Paul never visited Colosse in person; but this seems to be an incredible as well as illogical conclusion, for the tone of the two epistles sent there suggests both intimate knowledge and a degree of authority Paul would be hardly likely to assume in addressing an ecclesia he had not fathered. There is no evading the truth, so strongly underlined at this time, that away from Judaea the biggest successes in the preaching work came after Paul made a break with the local synagogue (cp. 13:44–48; 18:7–10; 28:23–28; 1 Cor. 16:9; and the implications behind 14:6,7; 1 Th. 1:8; 2 Cor. 1:1).

It was probably during this period that the apostle wrote his First Letter to the Corinthians. But there is room for uncertainty whether, after writing it, he found time also for a quick trip across the Aegean to re–visit that ecclesia in person. Certain details in 2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1) can be read as implying that he did, but it may be a more correct inference (from 1:15–17) that although he planned and actually intimated his intention to make this second visit, he was prevented from doing so, only to find himself the butt of unworthy sneers about being a weathercock.

It is interesting to observe that in his preaching at Ephesus, Paul seems to have eschewed denunciation of Ephesian magic and idolatry, even though this restraint called for a good deal of iron self–control on his part. He and his colleagues were described as "neither robbers of temples, nor yet blasphemers of our goddess" (19:37). Indeed, Paul seems to have been highly esteemed by the local authorities (19:31). This policy at Ephesus contrasts markedly with his readiness elsewhere to expose the futility of all idol–worship (14:15; 17:29).

Peril

Even so, for whatever reason, no little opposition and hardship came his way, as several passages testify:

"If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus .. ." (1 Cor. 15:32) may be a figurative allusion to hostility from the mob on some earlier occasion than the big riot.

"A great door and effectual is opened unto me and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9).

"Priscilla and Aquila ... for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles (for saving their beloved apostle)" (Rom. 16:3,4). Here is another tantalising allusion which cannot be filled out. Was it that this wonderful couple went bail for Paul when he was hauled up before the authorities, or was there some signal joint act of bravery which rescued him from a bad situation? Paul may have felt constrained to be so brief, but why, Luke, did you?

"We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength (NIV: far beyond our ability to endure), insomuch that we despaired even of life" (2 Cor. 1:8). This is grim language.

Probably some of the dire phraseology of 2 Cor. 11 belongs to this period: "in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure ... in deaths oft. .. perils in the city..."

Notes:19:8–10

8. Luke's interest in precise numbers shows up clearly in this chapter: v.7, 8, 10, 14, 19. In a detailed analysis of this and succeeding chapters Rackham traces: a. copious Hebraisms, b. much characteristic Pauline phraseology.
9. *Hardened,* The relevance of Pr. 21:29 is worth considering; and also Ps.95: "our Saviour... a great king over all gods (inc. Diana of the Ephesians)... the ends of the Land (Israel) are in his hand, and the heights of the mountains (Jerusalem) are his ... *harden* not your hearts ... saw my works (special miracles by the hands of Paul)... forty years (A.D. 30–70) was I grieved with this generation ..."
   The Way. The recurrence of this earlier name for The Truth is interesting. See 9:2 etc. It is the Jewish equivalent of Halachah, the "how to walk" (1 Th.4:1).
   Separated. The word used about sheep and goats (Mt. 25:32). Compare the shepherd theme in Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11.
   The disciples. Up to this point they had continued their adherence to the synagogue! Cp. 10:26. *The school of Tyrannus.* This may have been an actual school, for usually school hours ran from sun–rise to 11 o'clock. In that case Tyrannus may have been the nickname given to their mentor by the boys!
10. *All in Asia.* What a contrast with 2 Tim. 1:15!

84. Miracles and Magic at Ephesus (19:11–20)

One of the most thriving industries in the first century Roman Empire was magic and sorcery. In this field Ephesus was unsurpassed. Wonder–working was, of course, a main element in this quackery. So the Holy Spirit went into competition with the battalions of unscrupulous rogues who battened on the superstition of the public: "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul." These were "no ordinary miracles" (RV). In Ephesus, the ordinary variety were fakes, every one of them. The continuous stream of wonders now worked through Paul was not at all in that category, and soon the entire city knew this.

Remarkable healings

One of the results of this growing fame was an inevitable surge of superstition which attached not only sanctity but also divine power to anything associated with the apostle. As events were soon to show (v.18,19), in this superstition–ridden city a fair number of those who had already come to faith in Christ had not yet succeeded in shrugging off completely the ignorant thinking of former days. Sweat rags and work aprons used by the apostle in his tent–making were now and then quietly filched away and taken to the bedside of sick folk, with the amazing result that a wide diversity of healings took place. Whether these were merely subjective, or whether the Holy Spirit was using such occasions to nurture a dim imperfect faith into the real thing, it is hard to say. When superstition begins to focus on God and His work the transformation to real faith has begun. These sick people could not come to Paul, so (the intermediaries doubtless reasoned) why should not he come to them by such means as these? It may be that the disciples who gave encouragement to these extraordinary activities found themselves dwelling on the treasured accounts of how a woman came in the crowd to touch the hem of Christ's garment (Mt. 9:20), and of how it needed the faith of four friends to bring to the Lord one who otherwise would never have had access to his healing power (Mk. 2:3).

The Miracles of Peter and Paul

The resemblance between these happenings and the healing of the sick by the shadow of Peter (5:15) has often been remarked upon. But this is only one detail in an extended parallel between the experiences of the two great apostles:

	Peter	Paul
A lame man	3:2	14:8
Demons	5:16	16:18
Imprisonment and dramatic release	12:7	16:25
Imparting the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands	8:17	19:6
Healing by unusual means	5:15	19:12
followed by great fear	5:5,11	19:17
Healing of a well–known Gentile	9:33	28:8
The dead raised	9:36	20:9
A heavenly vision	10:11	9:3
The exercise of divine judgement against evil	5:11	13:8
Conversion	10:1ff	9:1ff
Blamed by Judaists	11:1ff	15:1ff
Apostle to the Gentiles	10:45	11:18
Given a sign of martyrdom	Jn. 21:18	21:10,11

It is easy to see that the similarity extends to a good deal more than the working of miracles. Nor can there be much doubt that Luke framed his narrative so that the reader would be repeatedly reminded how closely alike the two men were in their work for the Lord.

A very sensational happening now took place at Ephesus so as to leave the entire population awe–struck.

The sons of Sceva

Exorcism of "evil spirits" was a normal activity in the money–making routine of the wonder

workers battening on the superstition of this benighted city. This kind of thing, so Josephus relates, was a practice which had been taken up amongst the Jews – with great enthusiasm on the one hand, and great duplicity on the other, so Ephesus had its own special Jewish coterie of experts in the art of casting out devils. These mountebanks were not above indulging in a little blasphemy if it would make their show so much more impressive. Indeed the Talmud has given encouragement to this kind of fraudulence by telling how Moses slew the Egyptian and Elisha brought destruction to the young men of Bethel by using the Covenant Name of God (as though the power lay in the utterance of that "ineffable" Name). And there has come to light at least one magical papyrus which includes the words: "I adjure thee by the God of the Hebrew Jesus."

So the unprincipled Jewish rogues busy in this field at Ephesus harnessed the now reputable name of Jesus to their nefarious ploy. In particular there was a certain Sceva, a chief priest, that is, probably the leader of one of the temple's twenty–four courses of priests – who had seven sons prominently active in this dirty work. These were already highly respected because they were Jews (and therefore experts at the trade), because of their distinguished father, and because there were seven of them (was not this the perfect holy number?). Now they sought to snatch yet more spiritual kudos by adding the illustrious names of Jesus and Paul to their catalogue of invocations. Two of them (v.16RV) went in to a local lunatic (possessed with "an evil spirit"), making an impressive adjuration in the name of "Jesus whom Paul preacheth." Perhaps the man flew into an uncontrollable rage because he knew that he was being imposed on. Certainly, thanks perhaps to earlier experience when he was more sane, he seems to have realised that these knaves really had nothing to do with Paul, for he roared at them: "Jesus I recognize (as having control over demons), and Paul I know (as his accredited representative); but who are ye?" With that, he leapt at them, clawing savagely at their fine impressive robes. Before they could get away, he gave both of them such a beating that, when at last they did escape, their garments were in shreds and themselves battered and bleeding as they staggered away to safety. Luke doesn't even trouble to add that the demoniac was then cured of his disability by the power of Christ. But of course he was. The situation surely required this conclusion.

Impact on others

In very little time the whole of the city heard the story, and the masses, awestruck, talked in tones of heightened respect of Jesus the Jew whose power could be manifest in such a diversity of ways. And those who had already been impressed by the gospel Paul was teaching now magnified the name of Christ yet more by yielding obedience and loyalty to his service.

There was also a most unlooked–for effect on those who had already become disciples. Many of these had learned the way of salvation (see Gk. text) and yet remained strongly influenced by the ingrained superstitious outlook which had dominated their thinking all their lives.

They now realised how great was the power of the Christ in whom they had believed, and, trembling lest they should come under judgement for their weak: covert failure to "put off the old man with his deeds," they came to Paul – a steady stream of them – confessing their hidden loyalty to the former evil way of life and declaring a strong resolve to live a true Christ–life from now on. The new Ephesus ecclesia had needed a reformation, and this was it.

Superstition —

One extraordinary effect of these remarkable happenings was an open renunciation of magic. "Ephesian letters," documents based on the mystic inscriptions on the image of "Diana of the Ephesians," were in popular use all over the empire. There were even learned commentaries written about them. The trade in spells, incantations, conjuration of spirits and every kind of lore that superstitious and evil men could think up was enormous.

Now, many – both in the ecclesia and outside it – renounced all such mumbojumbo, and a great bonfire was made of all the accursed material associated with that way of life. One armful of papyri after another was thrown into the flames, and someone standing by and making (for whatever motive) a reckoning of the market–value of this destruction, came up with an estimate which, in modern inflationary figures, comes to either half–a–million pounds or two million pounds, according to how the text is read (cp. 4:32–35). "Such books would certainly fetch a fancy price" (Knowling). And there would be also the loss of profit which came from the use of them.

— and Truth

With the literary skill so characteristic of him, Luke sets alongside this picture the telling comment: "So, mightily, grew the Word of God, and prevailed." In this context the reference is surely not merely to the demonstrated superiority of the gospel, but also to the actual multiplying of copies of good books of Scripture supplanting the bad books of Ephesian magic. The number of NT. writings which are, in one way or another, associated with Ephesus is remarkable: Ephesians, 1,2 Corinthians, 1,2 Timothy (see also 2 Tim. 4:13), and all the writings of John, especially the first of the letters to the seven churches.

An acted parable

In concluding this section it is worthwhile to make further enquiry into the remarkable fact that (in the episode of the demoniac and the sons of Sceva) the New Testament uses the term *"evil* spirit" *only* here and in the Lord's rather ghoulish parable of the seven evil spirits who returned into the house (the man) from which one "evil spirit" had been cast out (Lk. 11:26 and its parallel in Mt. 12:45). The meaning of that parable is indicated by the words: "Even so also shall it be unto this wicked generation". John the Baptist's mission exorcized the "evil spirit" in Israel; but then, instead of taking in Jesus as the rightful occupant of the house, the nation refused to have him. So the parable prophesied invasion by seven other "evil spirits," so that the last state of the nation must inevitably be much worse than the first.

This happened. The next forty years after Jesus told this parable saw such a drastic moral decline in Jewry that national overthrow became inevitable. The use in this parable of "evil spirit" (as against "unclean spirit" everywhere else) is thus explained. The phrase puts emphasis on the meaning of the parable (or type, in Acts 19).

It is noteworthy that Luke 11 omits the interpretative phrase quoted above. Is that because Luke has underlined the point of it by another parable at Ephesus? The sequence of significant details is certainly remarkable:

a. Sceva means "a prepared vessel" –a vessel fitted for destruction!! (Rom. 9:22; and contrast Acts 9:15).
b. a chief priest.
c. Jesus and Paul approved by the Gentile hitherto under the domination of an *"evil* spirit."
d. The representatives of temple Jewry, devotees of an ungodly cult, *flee – out of the House – naked –wounded.* "Now is the prince of this world cast out" (Jn. 12:31).
e. In particular, two of them (like Jannes and Jambres) who associate themselves with the name of Jesus (like the subversive Judaists in the early church) are exposed as impostors; and of course the other *five* lose all influence.
f. Holy books, worth *"five* myriads of pieces of silver" are discarded in favour of the books of the gospel.

g. The remarkable expression with which this remarkable incident is rounded off strongly suggests an interpretation of the kind indicated here: "after these things were *fulfilled"* (v.21) – as though what is recorded is to be read as a kind of prophecy.

Is this what Luke was getting at when he set down such an uncharacteristic part of his narrative?

Notes: 19:11–20

11. The Greek particle *te* makes a pointed identification of the miracles now described with the preaching in v.8–10.
    Special miracles. Literally: "no ordinary miracles" (cp. 28:2). Is this meant to imply:
    a. that normally Paul did not work miracles?
    b. that the ordinary miracles are those in v. 13,19?
    c. that, since the Greek word may mean "one met by chance," what are now described are not to be read as in any way fluky?

12, 13. begin with *kai... kai,* as though linking together two remarkable results in the world of Ephesian superstition.

12. 2 Kgs. 4:29 is not quite a parallel case, for there the prophet explicitly gave authority, yet through the unworthiness of the human instrument it didn't work.
    Departed. One of Luke's many medical terms; s.w. Heb. 2:15; Lk. 12:58.
    Evil spirits. See "Demons," in "Studies in the Gospels," ch. 30.

13. *Vagabond.* Like modern virtuosi, they went on tour; s.w. Gen. 4:12,14 LXX, where the type closely resembles this one. This story makes prompt correction of any false conclusions from v.12.

14. *A chief of the priests.* Well away from Jerusalem, it may have been an assumed title.
    Seven sons. Is it possible that this should be read as meaning seven disciples, as in Mt. 12:27; 13:38.

16. RV: *both of them* (Bezan text) is surely correct, for even a raging maniac could hardly demoralise and damage *seven* grown men.
    Fled naked and wounded. Cp. Ex. 7:12;8:18,19.

18. *Confessed and showed.* This would take some doing! Is it possible that the meaning is: Certain of the believers exposed openly the evil practices of the superstition–mongers? The Gk. doesn't read easily this way.
    Deeds, and also *curious* (v. 19) appear to have been technical terms in some of the exorcism papyri which have been found.

19. This verse may be one of Luke's "rubrics;" see on 2:47.

85. Problems in Corinth (19:21,22)

The reader who neglects to include a careful study of the incidental details in Paul's epistles can easily get a mistaken impression that the three years he spent in Ephesus was a long crescendo of success for the gospel, a period of sustained encouragement for the apostle and his team of helpers.

Certainly, in Asia this was largely true – until there came that mighty explosion of indignation from the devotees of "Diana of the Ephesians." But it is not to be forgotten that always, and especially at this time, Paul carried on his shoulders the burden of "the care of all the churches." The Greek text of verse 22 – not "in Asia," but "into Asia" – supplies a hint of a mission in the hinterland of Ephesus.

Many commentators think that this was the period of the Judaist inroads into the churches of Galatia and that it was from Ephesus that Paul wrote his highly–indignant remonstration in the Epistle to the Galatians (the point is discussed later in this chapter).

But there can be no manner of doubt that this was the period of Paul's big Corinthian headache, about which there is no hint whatever in Luke's record. Did he choose to omit this part of the story because he could not have presented it in a well–balanced way without giving prominence to the sterling work done by his own brother Titus? (2 Cor. 7:6, 7, 13–15; 8:6, 16, 17, 23; 12:18).

The Corinthian epistles

The picture of Paul's dealings with the ecclesia at Corinth at this time is by no means easy to piece together. So many of the hints scattered through the two Corinthian epistles are capable of more than one interpretation. A full analysis of these problems does not strictly belong to a study of the Book of Acts. So this chapter will content itself with a summary of what seems to be the most likely re–construction.

It is clear that the Corinthians received a letter from Paul earlier than that now known as his first epistle to Corinth: "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators" (1 Cor. 5:9). Embedded in 2 Corinthians (6:14–7:1) is a short section which gives the impression of being out of place. Certainly, 2 Cor. 6:11–13 runs on very well at 7:2; and the exhortation: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," looking back to that apostasy of Israel's Baal–peor fornicators (Num. 25:3), answers tolerably well to what Paul says about his earlier letter, though it is hard to believe that those five verses (6:14–7:1) are all that he had to say in it.

In answer to that lost letter, or crossing it in transit, came a letter from Corinth, probably brought by Erastus. But at this time there was evidently a fair amount of to–ing and fro–ing between Ephesus and Corinth, so that Paul had also the reports of Apollos and Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, and "them of the household of Chloe" (1 Cor. 16:12,17; 1:11) to fill in his mental picture of Corinthian affairs.

This letter from Corinth sought the apostle's advice regarding various problems. These included:

a. Marriage difficulties (ch.7).
b. What changes in personal life conversion should bring – for the Jew observant of the Law of Moses, and for the slave in bondage (7:17–24).
c. Meat offered in sacrifice to idols (ch.8).

In his reply to their enquiries Paul settled down to deal very bluntly with various abuses which had grown up in that somewhat unruly ecclesia, all of them calling for prompt and drastic action:

a. The tendency to split the ecclesia into groups, each claiming the special leadership of this

brother or that (1:10–16; 3:4–6).
b. Their inclination to set too high an esteem on worldly wisdom (1:27 –2:16).
c. A bad case of immorality (ch.5).
d. A wider trend towards licentiousness (6:9–20).
e. Law–suits between members of the ecclesia (6:1–8).
f. The deportment of women in the ecclesial services (11:3–10; 14:34–40).
g. The poor tone of their Lord's Supper observance (11:20–34).
h. Spirit gifts, especially the gift of tongues (ch. 12–14).
i. Uncertainties about the doctrine of the resurrection (ch. 15).

In lieu of this letter Paul would have liked to go across to Corinth to deal with the problems in person, but the work in Asia still detained him (v.22). Luke's use of "Asia" here, and not "Ephesus," suggests that Paul was giving a good deal of personal attention to the new ecclesias in that area, those later known as the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1–3).

Some commentators argue that, soon after writing 1 Corinthians, Paul did follow it with a flying visit. The basis for this idea is the apostle's allusion (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14,21; 13:1) to a "third visit" which he was planning to make. But it may be that the implied "second visit" was purposed but prevented by adverse circumstances.

Galatians?
Again, according to one view (not followed in the earlier chapters of this study), it was at this time that the Judaist subversion of Galatia took place, thus making imperative the writings of the almost distraught Epistle to the Galatians.

In favour of this view, the following evidence is advanced:

a. The later chapters of 2 Corinthians, written at most two or three months after Paul left Ephesus, are full of concern about the Judaist subverters.
b. When he left Ephesus, he did so in a state of deep depression because of the many discouraging problems (2 Cor. 1:8–11;2:12,13).
c. The defection of the Galatians was sudden (Gal. 1:6). Yet only two years or so earlier, Paul had "strengthened all the disciples (18:23) in that area.
d. "All the brethren who are with me" (Gal. 1:2) might describe the company of vigorous helpers Paul had with him at Ephesus.
e. "The working of the Spirit" (Gal. 3:5) suggests the impressive miracle–working done by Paul at Ephesus.
f. The allusions to witchcraft (Gal. 3:1; 5:20) fit an Ephesus background.
g. "From henceforth let no man trouble me" (Gal. 6:17) implies that the writer is a man too preoccupied with the other duties even to contemplate giving much personal attention to Galatia.

It is doubtful whether arguments of this character can be regarded as decisive.

Erastus and Timothy

At this time Paul was becoming increasingly concerned about the assembling of the moneys which the Gentile ecclesias had undertaken to contribute for the well–being of their poor brethren in Judaea. Presumably it was in connection with this that he now sent two of his helpers, Erastus and Timothy, to visit the Macedonian churches. The former was "chamberlain" of the city of Corinth (Rom. 16:23), a man of some consequence. It is not difficult to imagine him getting leave of absence, and using his holiday for a trip to Ephesus to see Paul. The visit to Macedonia with Timothy would be rounded off with a coasting voyage back home. Paul envisaged the possibility that Timothy might go all the way back with him, and accordingly he warned the Corinthians, some of whom were rather abrasive and overbearing: "If Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear; for he worketh the work of the Lord as I also do" (1 Cor. 16:10).

Paul's anxiety

Some have inferred that soon after dispatching 1 Corinthians, Paul, receiving more bad news of disturbance and disloyalty there, was constrained to write another epistle, grievous both to him and to them. Two allusions might support this view: "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears, not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you" (2 Cor. 2:4).

"For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance" (2 Cor. 7:8,9).

The letter referred to is either 1 Corinthians or one which has sunk without trace, probably (but not certainly) the former.

It was chiefly a question as to whether these Corinthians were prepared to accept the reproofs which Paul, out of concern for them, had felt bound to administer. For the apostle it was hardly possible to envisage a greater disaster than to have one of the ecclesias he had founded turn its back on him. So at Troas, the rendezvous previously decided on, he waited with restless and anxious spirit for the return of Titus whom he had sent to Corinth.

Happily, in this place where in the second journey circumstances and the Holy Spirit had hustled him on to Macedonia (16:11), there was now "an open door" (2 Cor. 2:12), so that over against the growing anxiety of how things were going in Corinth, Paul had here the satisfaction and encouragement of being able to found yet another ecclesia.

Even so, after a while he could stay no longer: "I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother" so, "taking leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia" (2:13). In doing this, Paul was taking a risk. Suppose he and Titus were to miss each other, travelling opposite ways between Troas and Philippi? But the restless anxious apostle could not wait uninformed any longer.

At Philippi there was still no Titus. So, unable to possess his soul in patience, he began another epistle to the Corinthians (2 Cor.). He had got as far as 7:3 (probably) when Titus arrived, loaded with good news.

In Corinth all was well; they had accepted Paul's rebukes; their loyalty to him had been strongly re–affirmed; and Titus himself had been most warmly received and heeded in all that he had had to say on Paul's behalf.

The relief of Paul overflowed in a chapter of great happiness. But he was still uneasy about Corinthian casualness, as it seemed, towards the Judaean benevolent fund he was so keen on. So next followed two chapters (8,9) full of irresistible persuasion.

The Judaist campaign

At this point there came more ill tidings from Corinth. Apparently Titus had hardly left the ecclesia when there came certain itinerant "apostles" from the extreme Judaist section of the Jerusalem ecclesia. The plot to undermine the preaching of Paul to the Gentiles was going ahead in a highly efficient and utterly ruthless fashion. The un–named organizer of this movement (there is only one small hint as to who he was), a man practically of apostolic stature, was following a similar policy to that which had had sudden and drastic, though short–lived, success in Galatia; only , in Corinth, the emphasis was not so much on: "You Gentiles believing in Christ cannot hope for salvation unless you also keep the Law of

Moses", as on the utter worthlessness of Paul as a spiritual guide. In every way that could be thought up, the character and motives of the apostle were denigrated. If only they could shatter all confidence in him, the more specially Judaist part of their programme could then be propagated with every expectation of success.

Almost over–wrought, Paul proceeded to add four vivid invaluable chapters (10–13), exposing the methods of these false brethren and vindicating himself with such a catalogue of his work and experience in the cause of Christ as to leave his readers aghast with astonishment from that day to this.

Paul could have gone hot–foot in person to Corinth to plead his own case before them, but he knew how much wiser it would be to leave such an appeal to others – apart from anything else, so much less damaging to the Corinthians themselves (2 Cor. 1:23).

So he rounded off his epistle and sent Titus back to Corinth with it, this time not alone but accompanied by "the brother (i.e. his brother; cp. Gk. text of 1 Cor. 1:1; 5:1; Acts 7:25; Mt. 13:25) whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches" (8:18). There can be little doubt that this is Luke, who was at Philippi with Paul just then, and whose "Gospel according to Luke" had lately been published – in 1 Tim. 5:18 Paul could already allude to that gospel as "Scripture"!

Meantime, the apostle bestirred himself to make a shepherd's visitation to all the Macedonian ecclesias (20:2). Then he extended his tour a considerable distance to the west, so that some little time later, he was able to mention in his epistle to the Romans how that "round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ" (15:19).

During this period there was doubtless also a good deal of organization work regarding the benevolent fund, for in a few months' time those contributions were to be transmitted to Jerusalem.

The situation saved

At last, reassured probably by Luke's return, he ventured south to spend three months in that area and especially at Corinth (20:2,3). It may be that Luke omits a specific mention of Corinth as a hint of his own personal disapproval of the earlier attitude of the Corinthians. However, there was a renewed wave of loyalty to Paul, and contrition that they should have caused the apostle – their apostle! – so much pain.

In Corinth, Paul was no longer permitted to earn his own living (as in 18:3). Instead he was looked after by one of the wealthy brethren: "Gaius mine host (not Gaius of Derbe; Acts 20:4) and of the whole church, saluteth you" (Rom. 16:23).

This visit to Corinth dissipated all the headaches Paul had experienced regarding that ecclesia. The Judaists (perhaps hearing from Luke and Titus that Paul was coming in person) had cleared out, and even before the apostle arrived he was fully rehabilitated in Corinthian esteem and affection.

The Epistle to the Romans

It was during this time there that he wrote and dispatched what is generally esteemed to be his most profound epistle. Soon after the uproar and danger at Ephesus which had involved Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3,4), that matchless couple had returned to Rome. There they found in a particularly extreme form a problem which was growing up in many of the new ecclesias. Inevitably the brethren in Rome fell into two markedly contrasting groups. There were Jews who *knew* themselves to be the Chosen Race and who had learned from childhood to think of all Gentiles as utterly inferior creatures, no better than dogs. There were also many Romans, not a few of them highborn aristocrats (as may be inferred from Romans 16). Naturally, these Romans had grown up thinking of themselves as the master–race, holding all the civilised world in thrall.

These two vastly divergent groups were all of them brethren in Christ. Yet teaching them true fellowship with one another was an almost impossible task. But somehow it must be done. Aquila and Priscilla were themselves a microcosm of this very problem. Aquila was a Jew steeped in the tradition of Israel. Priscilla had been born into an aristocratic Roman family. They had solved the problem for themselves, but how to achieve a solution for the rest of the ecclesia?

Obviously Paul was the man best qualified to cope with the situation. A Pharisee of the Pharisees trained by Gamaliel, and a former member of the Sanhedrin, he was sure to command the respect of the Jewish brethren. And as a free–born Roman citizen he would be listened to by the most high–born Roman in the ecclesia.

It may be taken as fairly certain that it was a letter from Priscilla and Aquila, inciting him to give all diligence in resolving the Roman problem, which made Paul willing to consider addressing such an impressive epistle to an ecclesia he had never visited.

Accordingly, whilst in Corinth, he gave himself to this challenging task. A careful study of Romans from this point of view reveals that, from beginning to end, there is hardly a paragraph which does not have this theme as its *raison d'etre.* He aimed at reconciling Jews to Romans and Romans to Jews, and who shall say that the work could have been better done?

God at work

Paul was now able to round off his work in Macedonia and Achaia and get back to Jerusalem. The plan to break off all his multifarious activities in this part of the world was not adopted lightly. The apostle was loathe to leave the ecclesias he had scattered like jewels all round the Aegean Sea. But in this he was constrained by a divine imperative (v.21). It is impressive to note how all the big developments in Paul's preaching work were instigated and controlled by the Holy Spirit.

a. "The Holy Spirit said, Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (13:2).
b. "They were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia — they assayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not — we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them" (16:6,7,10).
c. "The Spirit said unto him that he return to Asia" (19:1 Codex Beza).
d. "Paul purposed by the Spirit—to go unto Jerusalem" (19:21).
e. "I go bound by the Spirit unto Jerusalem" (20:22).
f. The Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also in Rome" (23:11).

Rome — and beyond

It is plainly with reference to this over–ruling guidance of the Spirit that he insisted: "After I have been there (i.e. to Jerusalem), it is *necessary* that I also see Rome" (v.21). Doubtless he had long had it in mind to include the metropolis in his travels when circumstances allowed. But now, with a directive from the Holy Spirit (through an inspired member of his entourage?), he must be willing to push all other preoccupations into second place. After another quick visit to Jerusalem, the next target was Rome.

But not only Rome. His word to the Corinthians was: "that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go" (1 Cor. 16:6). One of the best routes to Rome was via Corinth.

And it was from Corinth that he wrote to the Rome ecclesia: "But now, having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you, whenever I take my journey into *Spain,* I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you" (Rom 15:23,24).

It is noted that, as in this passage, so also in Luke's record (19:21), there is emphasis on *seeing* Rome – as though that great city was not to be regarded as the end of the projected journey. Paul's ambitions for the gospel were without limit.

86. Riot at Ephesus (19:23–41)

One of the most widespread superstitions in the Roman empire was the worship of Artemis (latinised to Diana) in Ephesus. It is known that in no less than thirty–three other cities this was the dominant devotion.

The temple outside the city, one of the seven wonders of the world, was an enormous erection, 416 feet by 239, with something like 100 pillars, each 56 feet high and 6 feet in diameter. The altar was 20 feet by 20. The priests, "virgins," eunuchs, and others needed to keep the temple's organization going and to satisfy the devotion of the multitudes who came from far and wide ran into thousands. This splendid religion was the chief contributor to the prosperity of Ephesus which was certainly one of the wealthiest cities in the empire.

"The great goddess"

Artemis bore the name of one of the Greek goddesses, the sister of Apollo, but in fact this was really an eastern fertility cult in disguise, the worship of Ishtar under another name and somewhat modified in form. The goddess herself was represented as a magnificent many–breasted woman. Her image was built on a rather shapeless block of stone which was probably an unusually large meteorite, for part of the legend was that she had "fallen down from the clear sky" (v.35). She was usually represented as flanked by lions, a familiar detail which may have led Paul to write that he had "fought with wild beasts at Ephesus" (1 Cor. 15:32). Each Spring the whole of the month of May was given over to the Artemisia, the games and sustained rites of worship of the goddess. There are several hints in Luke's record that it was at this time of the year when a frightening tornado of hostility to the gospel suddenly blew up and became a serious threat not only to Paul but to the entire ecclesia.

Ramsay's sardonic comment that "the most sensitive part of civilised man is his pocket" had proved true at Philippi when Paul converted the slave girl who was such a money–spinner in the Apollo religion there. And now the multitude of conversions in Ephesus was having a like effect. Gentiles burst out in indignation against the gospel only when it interfered with their vested interests.

An important element in the prosperity fostered by the worship of Artemis, was the local industry which satisfied the piety of devotees with the manufacture of small silver replicas of the goddess and her shrine, just as today tourists buy book marks and picture postcards after wandering round a cathedral. At the end of the Artemisia it was the uplifting custom of the priests to put out larger versions of these silver images on the temple steps to be reverently kissed by the departing worshippers.

It is evident that in his preaching Paul did not go out of his way to denounce the local religion as a futile superstition (v.37; 17:23), but inevitably as he taught the Truth in Christ and the witness of the prophets, it would become immediately obvious to the meanest intellect that the Artemis religion was a bogus business from beginning to end: "The workman made it; therefore it is not God" (Hos. 8:6; cp. Is. 40:20; Jer. 10:3,9). So the impact of the gospel, not only in the city itself but throughout the whole region, was beginning to interfere seriously with the religion of Artemis and, more importantly, with the money–making that she graciously facilitated. An inscription of this very period mentions a marked fall–off in enthusiasm for the worship Artemis.

Incitement

So Demetrius, the pope of that most honourable and worshipful company silversmiths, called a special mass–meeting not only of the skilled craftsmen but also of all other subsidiary workers who made a comfortable living out of the mysteries of the Mother of Heaven. In his speech to them there was no beating about the bush:

'You all know well enough where our living comes from. Yet, for some time now, this fellow Paul has been teaching another religion, not only here but all through the province. All who listen to him learn that a god that is made is no god at all. So trade shrinks, and we are all being brought to poverty. And besides that (this came in as an afterthought), can we stand by and do nothing whilst our great goddess is discredited and her magnificence "talked into nothing"?'

The prophet Demetrius did not know that in that last phrase he was quoting from the prophet Isaiah's tirade against idol–worship (40:17; and cp. 1 Cor. 8:4)! It was a further irony that so mighty a goddess should apparently be at the mercy of a despised Jew.

The inflammatory speech did its work. Ablaze with indignation, the whole crowd of them rushed out into the street (codex Beza), shouting the city's slogan: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" In quick time this roused the whole populace. Some of the silver workers went off to lay hands on Paul; but, not finding him, they grabbed Gaius and Aristarchus, two of the apostle's Macedonian helpers, and with them they rushed like a herd of Gadarene swine (s.w. Mk. 5:13) into the open–air theatre outside the city.

This theatre, now excavated, was an enormous place nearly 500 feet in diameter and capable of taking a crowd variously estimated at 24,000 or even 50,000. Having got there, the excited populace didn't know what to do next. Indeed most of them had no idea what this noisy assembly was all about. So the shouting went on to no purpose.

Paul dissuaded

Back in the city, as soon as Paul realised how serious the situation was and that two of his fellow–workers were in danger, he determined to go into the theatre and address the crowd. He was convinced that he could reason the mob into sobriety. But with more worldly wisdom, and better knowledge of the local temperament, the brethren refused to let him take the risk. When Paul insisted, they were yet more insistent. The situations at Damascus, Jerusalem, Thessalonica and Berea were being enacted over again (9:25,30; 17:10,14).

A further discussion was brought to bear, and turned the scale. The Asiarchs, dignitaries from the chief cities of Asia, were meeting in Ephesus – as they did every five years. These influential men managed the games during the Artemisia and were responsible for the temples where Caesar was worshipped. Certain of them had taken to Paul – whether because of his religion or his personality is not clear – and, learning about the explosive situation in the city, they sent a messenger who added repeated strong warning against the risk he proposed to run.

That problem was now resolved by yet another development.

The local Jews, so often scapegoats in any bad situation, were anxious that the blame now being so emphatically laid on the shoulders of Paul the Jew should not rub off on to themselves. So one of their number, Alexander – probably the same as "the coppersmith which did me much evil" (2 Tim. 4:14) – was schooled as their spokesman and apologist. Some in the crowd thrust him forward on to the platform. He stood there trying, by means of a vigorous downward motion of the hand to get a hearing. But as soon as the mob recognized him as a Jew, (by face or dress?), they thought only of the notorious Jewish sneers against all idol–worship, and they howled him down.

Again the city's catchphrase was taken up, and soon the entire mob was mindlessly bawling: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" – doubtless to the great satisfaction of the priests in the temple close by. The bedlam now let loose went on unrestrained for two hours, each section of the crowd being determined to prove itself more loyal to their goddess than the rest. How like the caterwaulings of the priests of Baal on mount Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:26)!

The clerk of Ephesus

At last, the clerk of the city – probably the most important man in Ephesus, next to the Roman governor – decided that the time was ripe for taking some of the steam out of the situation. Stepping forward, a veritable Gamaliel come to judgement, this brave man addressed the multitude in a somewhat superior condescending tone, and with well–reasoned argument loaded with impressive legal technicalities.

First: 'All this protest is utterly unnecessary. The whole world knows what a great goddess you worship. And is not Ephesus proving in this month of holy celebration that our city is the *temple–sweeper of* the divine Artemis?' That expression of pious humility had been appropriated with pride by this first city of Asia.

Secondly: 'All this fuss you are creating, being quite unnecessary, is also undignified. You should have known from the start not to behave like this.'

Thirdly: 'You don't have a case against these men anyway, for what real accusation can you bring? You know they are not temple–robbers.' The inner temple was used by both state and wealthy individuals as a safe–deposit bank for treasure. It may be, too, that the clerk was attempting a sly joke, for amongst the Greeks "temple robber" was a well–recognized pun on "Jerusalem". 'Nor (he went on) are they blasphemers of your goddess.' But wasn't this the essence of the whole situation? How could he say this and hope to get away with it? There must surely have been some such accusation brought against Paul on an earlier occasion, and dismissed as not proven. Indeed, the clerk seems to have gone out of his way, and at some risk, to speak as a witness to the well–known good character of the Christians.

Fourthly: 'If you really want to press a case against the man you have in mind (Paul, of course), then go about it in proper fashion. The courts are sitting right now, and (rather sardonically again) we do have pro–consuls (the highest Roman authorities). It might even be (so he now implied) that these Christians might want to take *you* to court!'

Lastly: 'If you want to lay some other charge that I haven't heard about, then go about it in a lawful fashion. Don't we also hold three democratic assemblies *(ekklesiai)* each month? Remember that our Roman masters are very touchy about disorders of any sort. If they turn awkward, how are we to explain this irregularity?' In very subtle fashion he used there a word meaning not only "concourse" but also "conspiracy" (s.w. 22:13), as though hinting to them: 'I know that this thing is a put–up job.'

Thereupon, having talked long enough for the mob to cool down, the clerk curtly pronounced dismissal of the assembly. And they went quietly enough.

More persecution

But for Paul, that was not the end of the trouble. There are indications that he personally came into even worse affliction before he left Ephesus, but there is no specific detail:

"There are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9). And soon after this he wrote of "our trouble which came on us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life. But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver" (2 Cor. 1:8–10). This is very strong language. One can only conclude that Luke was guided to omit from his history (for whatever reason) an even greater crisis than that which he has so impressively recorded.

There is a brief allusion (in Rom. 16:4) to Priscilla and Aquila "who for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles (for saving Paul)." This must refer to some exciting experience at Ephesus, when, thanks to these two, the apostle came through with
the skin of his teeth. One popular suggestion, that they stood bail for Paul in a local court, seems altogether too mild. The language calls for something much more dramatic – as for example, both man and wife facing bloodthirsty adversaries to prevent them getting at Paul. But this is guesswork. Nobody really knows.

Notes: 19:23–41

24. *Brought... gain.* Exactly as in 16:16.
25. *Called together;* this word normally describes a muster of soldiers. Not inappropriate here!
    Ye know. The tense implies: You must be observing, right now.
    Craft. Writing to the Ephesians (4:19), Paul used the same word in a rather sinister context.
26. *Ye see.* This word often implies an official investigation.
    This Paul. Contemptuous, as in 6:14.
    Turned away. LXX has the same word, used oppositely, in Dt. 30:17; Josh. 14:8. Thirty years later Pliny was complaining to Caesar about the same effect on temple worship in Bithynia.
    No gods. Cp. Is. 44:9–17.
27. *Our craft.* Here *meros,* our branch of the trade.
    Is (in danger). Here *mellein* means either: (a) is about to be; or (b) is intended to be (i.e. this is what the Christians purpose).
    Set at nought. s.w. Ps. 119:118.
29. *Rushed with one accord.* The same phrase as in 7:57. A hundred years later a similar scene in Smyrna led to the death of Polycarp.
    Companions in travel. This implies that Paul was just back from a tour of the province, or that he was making preparations to go off to Macedonia.
    Aristarchus. The facts known about him are these: 1. A native of Thessalonica, and evidently a keen evangelist, willing to help Paul in his preaching work in Asia. 2. He travelled with Paul to Jerusalem at the end of the third journey (20:4), probably being personally responsible for Thessalonica's contribution to the benevolent fund (this means that he must have first travelled back to Thessalonica when Paul went to Macedonia; see ch.85). 3. He was with Paul on the dangerous journey to Rome (27:2), probably travelling as his personal servant. 4. Along with Epaphras he shared Paul's first imprisonment in Rome (Col. 4:10; Philem. 23).
31. *Adventure himself;* literally, "give himself", the same phrase as in Gal. 1:4; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14.
33. *Drew Alexander; s.w. Mt. 14:8; Ex. 35:34; Dt. 6:7. Defence.* A legalism; 24:10;25:8;26:1,2.
34. *A Jew.* Aristarchus also was a Jew; Col. 4:10,11. This outburst proved that the disciples had done right to stop Paul. *Cried out.* Contrast the silence in 21:40. Would Paul have succeeded so well here?
35. *Worshipper.* Perhaps there is a veiled sneer here, for "temple *sweeper"* also means "sweep clean" in the sense of "plunder."
    That phrase: *she fell down from Jupiter* has a touch of irony or even contempt about it. This able town clerk was an old cynic about his city's established religion. Note also *"your* goddess" (v.37).
37. *Robbers of temples.* It may have been an accusation of the Jews against Paul that his encouraging of Jewish converts to send contributions to the poor believers in Judaea was diverting money from the temple at Jerusalem. There was an Ephesian statute that Jews sending money to Jerusalem were not to be accused of being Ephesian temple–robbers.
38. *There are deputies.* This vagueness may have been deliberate because Agrippina, the mother of Nero (now in the first year of his reign) had had Ephesian proconsul Junius Silanas poisoned, because of his royal blood and possible rivalry to Nero, and his successor was probably not yet on the scene. Indeed, his two poisoners may have been appointed acting pro–consuls.
40. *No cause* could read equally well: *no guilty person* – an indirect way of saying: I know that this man Paul is not guilty.

87. From Corinth to Miletus (20:1–6,13–16)

When Paul had left Ephesus, his farewell to the ecclesia there had been specially affectionate, not only because he had been so long amongst them but also because he knew, apparently, that this might be the last time he would see them. It is not unlikely that, after all the disturbances there, the Roman authorities had bidden him leave the city within a set time and not show his face there again for a number of years.

In Macedonia also, expecting not to see the brethren again before his planned journey to Jerusalem and then to Rome, the apostle had "given them much exhortation" (v.2). Since it was whilst Paul was at Philippi that he heard of the shady tactics of the Judaists at Corinth, he would certainly infer their intention to follow the same disreputable methods in Macedonia also; so most probably it was specially with reference to this anti–Paul campaign that he warned the brethren.

Yet another Jewish plot

After spending the three winter months in Corinth and vicinity, he booked a passage in a ship that was sailing, probably via Asia, to one of the Syrian ports. But at the last minute (so the Greek text seems to imply) he learned of a plot against his life. The reader is left wondering how he came by this knowledge!

Most likely the scheme to assassinate Paul was, quite simply, for some Jewish fellow–travellers or some well–bribed sailors to tip him overboard one dark night. There was immediate change of plan. Some Spirit–guided brother with Paul (so Codex Beza suggests) bade him go through Macedonia instead, probably by a different ship up the coast.

Paul's companion on this leg of the journey was Sopater of Berea, who travelled with him as far as Troas. Passover was celebrated at Philippi with the handful of Jewish brethren there. For them and for the rest of the ecclesia it was also Easter, already becoming a much valued celebration in the early church.

Paul's party

Luke joined the travellers at Philippi (here the last long "we" section of Acts begins), and together they made a slow journey of five days to Troas – the reverse journey had once taken them only two days (16:11,12).

There at Troas, by prior arrangement, the rest of Paul's travel party were already assembled. They were journeying with him to Jerusalem as representatives of the churches in various areas. Each of them was responsible for the generous contributions which had been assembled for the needy believers in Judaea. Evidently the method being followed was on the pattern of Jewish synagogue contributions to the temple. These too were transported by specially appointed messengers.

It is perhaps not inappropriate here to review what is known about Paul's companions in this final leg of his third journey.

Aristarchus of Thessalonica had already featured in this narrative as one of those who were caught, in lieu of Paul, by the mob at Ephesus, and probably beaten up (19:29). This did nothing to dim his loyalty to Paul. He not only went with him to Jerusalem but also travelled with him to Rome (27:2), probably adopting the status of personal servant in order to stay with him. And during the two years' restraint in Rome, he was Paul's "fellow–prisoner" (Col. 4:10).

Secundus (Number Two) is one of a group of Paul's helpers Who all bore unusual names. There is also Tertius (Number Three; Rom. 16:22) who was Paul's secretary in the writing of the Epistle to Rome. And there was Quartus (Number Four; Rom. 16:23). Then who was Number One?

In some of the best texts Sopater of Berea is called "the son of Pyrrhus," and since Pyrrhus himself does not come into the narrative this should probably be read as an indication of aristocratic connections. He is almost certainly the same as Sosipater (Rom. 16:21), where "my kinsman" must be taken to mean kinsman of Tertius the scribe. Thus Lucius, Jason and Sosipater (married to the sister of these fine four?) were kinsmen to the splendidly useful brothers who have already been mentioned. Evidently faith in Christ had spread through that family with the speed of an infectious disease.

Gaius of Derbe was probably in charge of the benevolent fund from Galatia. It is not possible to identify him with the Gaius who was Paul's host in Corinth (Rom. 16:23) or with the Gaius to whom the apostle John addressed his Third Epistle (note v.3,4 there).

Tychicus, bearing contributions from the Asian churches (?), was another who seems to have been constantly fetching and carrying for Paul. "A beloved brother and faithful minister" (Eph. 6:21), he was (several years later) the messenger who, accompanied by Onesimus (Col. 4:7), delivered Paul's epistles to Ephesus and Colosse and also to Philemon. Again, the description of Onesimus, the converted run–away slave, as "the faithful and beloved brother" must be taken to mean '*his* brother", that is, brother of Tychicus. This explains why, when Onesimus ran off, he went to Rome and not to one of the great cities of Asia where it would be just as easy to "get lost". He had a brother in Rome who promptly introduced him to Paul the prisoner, who in turn promptly introduced him to the Lord Jesus, thus in quick time turning him into Onesimus, brother in Christ.

Perhaps on the return journey from Colosse Tychicus travelled via Crete to get Titus to accompany him to Nicopolis to meet Paul there (Tit. 3:12).

A year or two later Tychicus was probably the bearer of Paul's second letter to Timothy at Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:12).

Trophimus, bearing the donations of the Ephesus ecclesia, little realised how great a disturbance his appearance in Jerusalem was going to create. For, recognized there by Jews from his home city, the scare was promptly manufactured that he, a Greek, had been taken by Paul beyond the middle wall of partition in the temple (21:29). The tidal wave of fury that ensued was to sweep Paul out of Jerusalem and all the way to Rome.

It would seem that in the last year of Paul's life, when the apostle was arrested in Asia, Trophimus was with him and would have accompanied him (as Aristarchus, on an earlier occasion) to Rome. But falling sick he had to be left at Miletus to recover (2 Tim. 4:20).

Titus?

When the group assembled at Troas, where was the faithful Titus? Last heard of in Corinth (2 Cor. 8:23), he had almost certainly stayed on there, awaiting Paul. And when Paul returned to Macedonia en route for Jerusalem, would he not go with him, that is, if he had not already returned to Philippi with his brother Luke? Either way it is difficult to believe that, when Paul left Philippi accompanied by Luke and Sopater, he did not have Titus in his party as well. To be sure, there is no mention of Titus in the list in Acts 20:4. But that means nothing, for right through this record Luke sees to it that the name of neither himself nor his brother shall creep into the text. But it is noteworthy that in several places (20:14; 21:12, 14, 18) the pronoun "we" definitely excludes Paul. Then who does it include besides Luke? To this enquiry there can be only two possible answers –either just Titus, or the entire party of those who travelled with Paul. If the former, then there seems to be an implication that Luke and Titus were co–authors of Acts. Hints of this possibility have already been met with.

There is no specific mention in this list of a Corinthian representative, yet few inferences are more certain than that (after 1 Cor. 16:1–3; 2 Cor. 8,9) a substantial contribution to the fund was being carried from them to Jerusalem. So either that ecclesia had insisted on entrusting Paul himself with the money, or else Titus was to be their representative – another expression of the wholesome influence he had not long since exerted among them (2 Cor. 7:6, 7, 15).

Travel by hired coaster

After the momentous events at Troas, Paul and his party set off south – but separately. The apostle decided to walk it to Assos by the fine Roman road which went straight as an arrow – total distance: twenty miles. The others going by sea had before them a voyage of forty miles or so round a promontory.

There are indications that the ship they sailed in was specially chartered to take them to Miletus. Any ordinary coasting vessel would certainly put in at Ephesus, but this one sailed straight past. Also, *"Paul* determined to sail past Ephesus." But who was he to make such a decision for the ship–master unless he had already paid for the right to do so?

It may be inferred that Paul's companions demurred strongly from his decision to walk it to Assos, and that after a sleepless night too. Doubtless he was accompanied by Titus or one of the others. But even so the idea seemed ridiculous. However, Paul "appointed" (the word means "commanded") that this should be so. So it was.

Why the apostle was so set on this strange arrangement is not explained. A device to get another hour or two in Troas? The need for peace and quiet? A strong wish to visit some old friends on the way? Another attempt to throw Jewish enemies off the scent? All kinds of guesses have been made, without anything in the text to support any of them.

At Assos (whence some of the finest Greek sculptures extant have been plundered by the French), they took him on board, and so sailed on to Mitylene. Then, in three well–marked stretches of sea, each taking a day, they reached a point on the mainland over against Chios, then struck across to Samos (here sailing right past Ephesus), then overnighted, becalmed in Trogyllium, and so came into the port of Miletus. Those who know that coast say that in the Spring the days are marked by a steady northerly breeze and the nights are flat calm. The voyage fits this weather picture perfectly.

Paul's haste

Paul's insistence on by–passing Ephesus may have been because he feared trouble there and because he would be sure to be delayed by the many many people who would wish to greet him and because the long inlet (and tricky harbour at the head of it) would mean much loss of time. Just now all the apostle's plans were dominated by an intense eagerness to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost, and he had less than four weeks in which to do the journey.

To him Pentecost was specially important not just because it was the most crowded of the great Jewish feasts but also because it was the day of the big Christian Fraternal Gathering in celebration of the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Paul wanted to get over to as many of the Palestinian brethren as possible the high importance of the expansion of the family of Christ to include also believing Gentiles in the New Israel of God. And how could this be

better done than by having on show, as it were, these representative brethren from five thriving Gentile ecclesias which had each sent its munificent contribution of cash as a gesture of solidarity and fellowship with the brethren at Jerusalem?

At this point in the journey (20:16) there was serious doubt whether Paul and his party were going to reach Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. However, as it turned out, travelling conditions proved so exceptionally favourable that, in fact, they had time well in hand.

Notes: 20:1–6, 13–16

1. *The uproar.* In these difficult days Paul must have feared the total collapse of his work in Ephesus; 2 Cor. 1:8,9.
2. *Gone over.* Again, the word for missionary visitation.
3. *The Jews laid wait for him.* Not the Judaist brethren who were to be such a headache in Corinth, but the synagogue zealots; compare 14:5,6.
   He purposed. Codex Beza suggests that this decision was by a prompting of the Holy Spirit. The same word seems to be used in the same way in 1 Cor. 7:25,40; 2 Cor. 8:18, and possibly 1 Cor. 1:10.
4. *Accompanied* This verb is singular, and therefore cannot be pressed to cover more than Sopater. Note the parallel between this verse and 6:5.
6. *Abode.* Probably with Carpus; 2 Tim. 4 ;13. This word seems to imply a test of patience — because of v. 16. Then why hang on for seven days? Presumably because their arrival at Troas had been just too late for the Breaking of Bread service. But Paul evidently held the Troas brethren in such affection that he was prepared to lose a week of precious time in order to be with them on the next Sunday at the Lord's table.
13. *Appointed;* s.w. Mark 6:45.
    To take in Paul; s.w. 2 Tim. 4:11: "pick him up on the way."
14. *He met us. The* continuous form of this verb seems to suggest that from the ship they could see Paul approaching Assos and coming down the hill to the harbour.
15. *Chios.* Here the channel is only five miles wide.
16. *He hasted.* The continuous tense of this verb covers the entire journey.
    If it were possible. This Greek word is used a good deal for events under divine control: e.g. 2:24;7:22; Rom. 4:21; 9:22; 11:23, and many more.

88. Eutychus (20:7–12)

Paul's week at Troas came to an astonishing climax. He had held on there so as to be with the full ecclesia in fellowship at the Lord's Table on the first day of the week. This Saturday–night–Sunday–morning gathering to remember Christ was now well–established (compare 1 Cor. 16:2). Indeed, the name Sunday was very early adopted, not because of current pagan practice but in memory of the rising of the Sun of Righteousness on the first day of the week.

The Love Feast

The phrase about "breaking bread" (v.7,11) should certainly be read with reference to the Sacrament and not as though telling of an ordinary meal. Would such a writer as Luke take the trouble to mention such an ordinary detail unless it had a significance quite out of the ordinary?

First, then, the crowded gathering partook of the Love Feast, the early Christian counterpart to the supper the Lord Jesus had with his disciples in the upper room. It was a time devoted also to holy conversation, with Paul, naturally enough, at the hub of it all.

Then came the formal discourse, corresponding to the word of exhortation in a modern ecclesia. Paul still had a great deal to say to them. At midnight he was still talking.

Drowsy listener

Sitting on a ledge at a window (the only window? v.9 Gk.) was a youth, who may well have been a slave (v.12 Gk.), called Eutychus. The fatigue of his activities that day, together with the fact that the room was becoming steadily hotter thanks to the many lights, and the number of people using up the oxygen, gradually became too much for him. Luke's text paints such a picture of him struggling in vain against overpowering tiredness, that one writer has gone so far as to suggest that Luke sitting in another part of the room, was able to observe all the details of this fight to keep awake and yet because of the throng could do nothing to help him shake off his drowsiness.

At last, sleep won. The boy lolled over into oblivion, but unhappily he slumped the wrong way. A moment later he was falling unimpeded from that second–storey window (third floor, American style). There was a sickening thud as he hit the ground, and a clamour of consternation from those who realised what had happened.

Resurrection

Soon the entire congregation was gathered round the body. Naturally Luke the physician had immediate opportunity to examine the boy and assess his injuries. This took very little time. Luke knew that there was no hope at all: 'I can do nothing here. He's dead!'

Now Paul took charge of the situation. 'Stop your noise!' he rather abruptly commanded the excited throng. And, gathering the limp form of Eutychus in his arms, he declared very firmly: "His life is in him (once again)."

And, sure enough, the pallor of death changed to a healthy colour, the boy opened his eyes, and forthwith scrambled to his feet, to an accompaniment of gasps of astonishment and fervent ejaculations of thankfulness to God.

What a contrast with Ahaziah, king in Samaria, who likewise fell through a lattice and, when he came round, sent for reassurance to the priests of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron! To him there came from the man of God the grim message: "Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shall surely die" (2 Kgs. 1:2,4).

Instead, for Eutychus there was marked similarity of experience to great miracles wrought by both Elijah and Elisha, only with an intriguing difference.

Elijah restored the widow's son by "stretching himself upon the child *three* times" (1 Kgs. 17:21). Elisha similarly restored the Shunamite's dead son, but he embraced the child *twice* (2 Kgs. 4:34,35). So also Paul with Eutychus, but only *once.* The Lord Jesus gave life to the son of the widow of Nain with just a word and a touch (Lk. 7:14).

There must be significance in a progression of this kind. But what?

Breaking of Bread

Eutychus was evidently, and understandably, taken off home. Perhaps he was not a baptized believer. The rest resumed their places in the upper room, and proceeded to round off their Love Feast with a Breaking of Bread in remembrance of Christ. The text seems to imply that, just as Jesus gave the Bread to his disciples in the course of the meal –"as they were eating..." (Mt. 26:26)–so also in the observance at Troas. On this occasion the Memorials were more than ever a thanksgiving for resurrection.

After this, conversation continued until dawn. The brethren in Troas were intent on making the most of Paul's presence among them. This was his only visit since the founding of the ecclesia, and the next would be his last (2 Tim. 4:13).

As they were saying farewell (so Codex Beza), "they brought the lad alive, and were not a little comforted." God gave not the Spirit by measure to Paul, nor comfort by measure to the boy's family and friends.

Notes: 20:7–12

7. *The first day of the week.* The same unusual phrase as in Jn. 20:1, and for a fairly obvious reason.
   RV: gathered together. Cp. Heb. 10 .25.
   Midnight. "At midnight I (Eutychus) will *rise* to give thanks unto thee" (Ps. 119:62). Cp. also 16:25.
8. *Many lights.* Some suggest that this was deliberate so as to avoid any breath of scandal about a mixed assembly of this sort. But Codex D modifies the word to suggest dim lights – burning with a smoky flame, and so fouling the air?
9. *Long preaching.* Cp. v.7,11; and this after Paul had been in their midst for a week! There was so much to say, both of exhortation and instruction.
11. *Talked a long while.* Cp. Jesus at and after the Last Supper; and contrast modern practice.

89. Paul's Farewell at Miletus (20:17–38)

As soon as the ship tied up at Miletus, a messenger went off to Ephesus to summon the elders of the ecclesia to come to Paul without delay. The distance was nigh on thirty miles each way, so it would be, at the earliest, the end of the second day before they came to the apostle. According to the travel details of the voyage from Troas, it was probably once again the first day of the week. Paul would be specially glad to be at the Lord's Table with these brethren he loved so much.

The gist of his word of exhortation to them was not greatly dissimilar from what he had written to the Corinthians:

Verses 18–27: Self–vindication.
28–31: A solemn charge and warning.
32–35: Farewell.

'Do I have to remind you what kind of life I lived among you from the very first time I set foot in Ephesus? Is it not true that all the time and in all circumstances I devoted myself utterly and completely to the service of Christ? Not only did I live a humble life among you, but I set you an example of humility of mind. It was in no spirit of dictatorship or self–assertion that I preached the gospel to you. The testing experiences I have faced from the plots of Jewish adversaries are still fresh in your mind. The problems these presented in my own life and that of the ecclesia often brought me to tears.'

A faithful witness

'Nevertheless my efforts to instruct you all faithfully in the gospel never flagged. You recall, do you not, those instruction classes in the lecture room of Tyrannus? Day after day that work went on. And, besides that, there were numerous private gatherings in your homes.'

'In all this activity you never found me sheering away from possible difficulties.

Coming down the coast our shipmaster trimmed his sails at the first sight of rocks no matter how distant they were, But you never knew me to trim my sails for the sake of my own comfort. The message was spoken out plainly and boldly regardless of consequences or personal reactions. You who are Jews were bidden learn faith in our Lord Jesus as the Christ; and you Greeks heard the call to repentance and service of the true God as bluntly as if I were John the Baptist.'

'And now I have to bid every one of you come to terms with the plain fact that the Lord wants me to say farewell to the work in these parts. Time after time (v.3. Bez.,23) there has been undeniable leading from Spirit–guided brethren that I must return to Jerusalem. My own spirit of prophecy tells me nothing of what to expect there, but in one ecclesia after another these brethren bid me to be prepared for bonds and afflictions.'

"No more"

'Well, what of it? Is my life as important as all that? The main thing is that, like a faithful Old Testament prophet, I run steadfastly, taking the message of the Lord to those who need to hear the good news of the forgiveness of sins. One thing seems clear – you brethren in the ecclesias of Ephesus and round about are seeing me for the last time. No more shall I be the spokesman of the kingdom among you.'

The phrase of Paul's: "Ye shall see my face no more," presents a problem, for near the end of his first imprisonment in Rome he certainly expressed the intention of travelling to the east again: "I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly" (Phil. 2:24; compare Philemon 22). And later, to Timothy: "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia ..." (1 Tim. 1:3). "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly" (3:14; compare 4:13). And it is clear that at the end of his days Paul had been very near to

Ephesus – at Troas and Miletus (2 Tim. 4:13,20), and therefore almost certainly to Ephesus itself.

Several explanation are available, and it is difficult to know which is the true one:

(a) Most of those now listening to the apostle would be dead at the time of his next visit, nearly ten(?) years later.
(b) "No more" was used, as in various other passages, as meaning not "no more at all" but "no more for a long time" (e.g. Jn. 14:19,20; 21:6; Mk. 15:5;2 Sam. 2:28 LXX etc).
(c) Because of Jewish attitudes, not only in Jerusalem but also in other areas, there was a change in God's plan for Paul (for examples of this principle at work, see "Revelation", by H.A.W. p. 259ff).

Whatever the correct explanation, these arresting words would certainly make his hearers listen more attentively than ever.

One interesting inference seems to follow: unless Luke wrote Acts before Paul's return, he would hardly have included these words without some explanatory comment.

Paul continued:

'If any of you become castaways from salvation in Christ, you know – you must know – that in no wise can that be laid at my door. I have learned from God's admonition to the prophet Ezekiel that it is the duty of the Lord's watchman to warn those in spiritual danger, or "their blood will I require at thine hand" (Ez. 3:17–20).'

There is something rather unexpected about Paul's phrase: "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." Is there here an implication that he had been tempted to side–step some aspects of the gospel which might be unpalatable to certain of his protégés at Ephesus? And if so, what? So far as his Jewish hearers were concerned, there was the astringent truth that none of them were acceptable to God simply because they had the blood of Abraham in their veins or because they were zealously observant of the Law of Moses. Also, Paul would feel it a duty to prepare their minds for the impending desolation of Jerusalem and its temple (cp. Jer. 26:2;Jn. 15:15).

The flock of God

Dwelling on these things, the apostle's tone became very sombre. As elders they had a duty to do all in their power to keep the ecclesia spiritually healthy. The familiar figure of shepherds and sheep was developed in one allusion after another:

a. The flock (v.28,29).
b. Overseers.
c. Feed (literally: shepherd) the ecclesia.
d. Purchased. This is Ps. 74:1,2: "the sheep of thy pasture ... which thou hast purchased of old."
e. Wolves.
f. Draw away.
g. Watch.
h. Kneeled down (v.36). This is Ps. 95:6,7: "Let us kneel before the Lord our maker ... we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand."

The term "overseers" used by Paul is really "bishops," and is inescapably the exact equivalent of "elders, presbyters" (v.17). The latter was an easy inheritance from Jewish terminology. The former is probably the Gentile equivalent, for the Greek city Ekklesia (19:39), a kind of local parliament, certainly had its Gerousia (Council of Elders).

It was early in the second century, and thanks to the deleterious influence of Ignatius, bishop of Smyrna, that the *episkopoi* climbed to such heights of power over the assemblies of the brethren.

"His own blood"

Long and complex arguments have raged over Paul's exhortation to "Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." If this AV reading is correct, then a Trinitarian meaning can be evaded only by means of an interpretation as devious as the doctrine of the Trinity itself. Consequently, this passage is much set by in the writings of orthodox theologians.

But should the text read "church of God" or "ecclesia of the Lord"?

The fact is that there is remarkably good textual support for both readings, with greater weight for "the Lord." But it will not do just to plump for this and quietly ignore the other. Is it possible to explain how the reading "church of God" came to be so widely accepted? The fierce and often unscrupulous polemics waged between the supporters of Athanasius and Arius early in the fourth century are more than sufficient to explain how men might be tempted to apply "corrections" to the text.

But indeed this very consideration is two–edged. Suppose it was the anti–trinitarians who yielded to the temptation to make textual facts fit their theory? Just as possible! Who is to know where the fault lies?

The trinitarians confidently point out that "church of God" is a common Pauline phrase, whereas "church of the Lord" has no parallel whatever in the New Testament. But how strong is this argument? for whereas Paul frequently refers to "the day of the Lord," in writing to the Philippians he suddenly switches to "the day of Christ." So this Acts 20:28 could be a parallel case.

The fact is that, even if it were to be conceded that "church of God" is correct here, the following phrase: "purchased with his own blood," will have to be recognized as an inaccurate translation. Careful attention to the order of words makes clear that this should read: "the blood of his own," for in such phrases as "his own power," "their own tongue," "his own generation," "his own hired house" etc. (eight examples in Acts), the word order is pointedly different from the example under consideration.

So the only alternatives are: "the church of God (or, the Lord – meaning God) which he purchased with the blood of His own (Son)."

Enemies within and without

Paul went on to stress the reason for his solemn warning about the need for vigilant pastoral care in the ecclesia:

"For I know that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock."

There are two strange features here in Paul's phraseology – the words "departing" and "grievous", which more accurately mean "arrival" and "heavy, weighty." It is only when the apostle is seen to be making allusion to the systematic Judaist campaign against himself and his work that these words really make sense. The trouble makers, he is saying, will be men of "weight," of importance, impressive in their person and qualifications (compare 2 Cor. 11:13, 14, 22). Indeed, it may be that Paul chose the word "weighty" in order to hint at Judaist influence, for in Hebrew it also means "of honour, reputation, glory."

And the seemingly quixotic use of "arrival" *(aphixia)* may mean: As soon as I arrive in Jerusalem, my adversaries there will send out their emissaries seeking to undo my good work here amongst you, as they did with the Galatian brethren; or – alternatively – wherever I arrive with the message of the gospel, whether here in Asia or in Macedonia, Galatia, or Achaia, at the first opportunity these men get to work behind my back.

No wonder Paul could speak of "warning every one night and day with tears." Neither his tears nor his language in farewell were a display of histrionics. He was grieved beyond measure to have to contemplate his preaching work being deliberately brought to ruin. It was a tragedy which other apostles also had to face (e.g. 2 Peter 2, Jude 4, 8–13; 1 Jn. 2:18, 19; 4:1–5). Here was a desperate situation' the seriousness of which is rarely recognized by modern students of the New Testament.

The Lord Jesus had warned against false prophets, ravening wolves in sheep's clothing (Mt. 7:15; Jn 10:12). And now the apostle bade them beware also of false teachers who would arise "from among your own selves, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them," that is, seeking to make converts of their own not from among the unbelievers but from those already converted. It was a dramatic moment, for some of those included in Paul's dire prophecy were even then listening to him – men like Philetus, Hymenaeus, Alexander, Phygellus, Hermogenes.

Be warned!

Alas, it was a true prophecy, well on its way to fulfilment within the next ten years. In spite of warnings and appeals, in spite of strong emphasis on the unity of the Body (Eph. 2:14–18; 4:1–16), Ephesus left its first love (Rev. 2:4,5) –the apostle himself. In his last letter the wretched truth had to be faced that "all they in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Tim. 1:15); loyalty to their spiritual father had been eroded away by a campaign of personal denigration.
"Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years (i.e. from his very earliest work in Ephesus) I ceased not to warn every one of you night and day with tears." Well he might! There was reason enough for tears.

And Paul knew that there was little *he* could do to arrest decline and decay. So he commended these, his spiritual children, to God and to the Word of his grace. This last phrase is so commonly and readily taken to be an exhortation to read the Bible that it seems almost an impertinence to suggest a different reference – to Jesus, the Word of God, and to forgiveness of sins which comes only through him. It is not commonly realised that "the Word" is a title for the Lord Jesus not only in John's writings (Jn. 1:1, 14; 1 Jn. 1:1, 2; Rev. 19:13) but also in quite a few other places; e.g. Heb 4:12,13 (allusion to Rev. 19:13, 12a); Acts 10:36,37; Lk. 1:2 Gk.; 1 Pet. 1:23, 25; Rev. 6:9, and others). (see "Studies in the Gospels", p.2,49).

It is Christ, rather than the printed page, "who is able to build up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (not that this in anyway belittles the power of Holy Scripture, without which almost nothing would be known about Christ).

This reference to the Lord Jesus is also supported by the way Paul continued: "... able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified," for this is a verbatim quotation of Christ's own words to Paul himself at the very beginning on the Damascus road (26:18), a charge which had the significant addition: "through faith in me."

This short farewell section of a most moving appeal now concluded with a quite passionate self–vindication for which there could have been no reason at all if the warning about "grievous wolves ... drawing away the disciples after them" had not carried the sinister implication: drawing them away from me, by vilification of my character and methods!

"Better to give than to receive"

'It is true that I have constantly urged you to give generously in your ecclesial collections, but not a penny of it has been for myself; all of it is now being taken to Jerusalem to help the poor brethren there. My own contribution in this field has not been negligible, for throughout all my preaching and ministering of the Word I have earned my own living. Nor did I spend on myself, for apart from the bare necessities of a frugal life my earnings have gone to the support of those doing the Lord's work along with me. These hands of mine (and he held them up as reminders) are not the hands of one living in luxury or idleness. You know that well enough. There is the answer to those who would slander my character and misrepresent my motives.'

'In all this I have sought to set you, the elders of large thriving ecclesias, an example of unselfish care of the flock, not only in spiritual things but also in the practical expression of Christian love. The poor and the physically weak of the ecclesia are your special responsibility. Give yourselves to this activity, besides the other, and you will be the more abundantly blessed, for did not our Lord himself say: It is more blessed to give than to receive? This word you are to keep constantly in mind.'

When did Jesus say that? Nobody knows. It is the only saying of the Lord (in the days of his flesh) preserved in the New Testament outside the pages of the gospels. But Paul's admonition to "remember" seems to imply that it was already familiar to his hearers.

There is evidence of the existence of thirty or forty other reputed sayings of our Lord or additional facts relating to the gospels. These crop up in some of the apocryphal gospels or in incidental quotation by various early Fathers. A few of them have an authentic ring. Some are garbled versions of sayings out of the canonical gospels. Some were probably just made up. And the meaning of nearly all of them is made more difficult through lack of context. (See Notes).

Emotional goodbye

The apostle's address now concluded, he set the example by kneeling for prayer, and of course in this they all joined him. It is interesting to speculate that perhaps Paul repeated that prayer in Ephesians 3:14–21.

It was an intensely emotional moment. All were in tears. One by one they embraced their beloved teacher. The word used to describe this – "they kissed him much" – is precisely that used for the kiss of Judas, perhaps to imply that amongst them were those who would yet prove to be traitors to the Truth of Christ (v.30; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:17; 3:8,13;4:16;1 Jn. 2:19).

Is it significant that they sorrowed more over Paul's departure than for his prophecy and warning (v.29–31) of declension from the Faith?

Notes: 20:17–38

17. *Called the elders.* So much time could have been saved if Paul had gone to Ephesus; and he in a hurry (v. 16). Why didn't he? He must surely have been forbidden to return (for several years?) because of the riots.
    Elders and bishops are the same; cp. v.28 RV; 1 Pet. 5:1,2 (Gk.); Tit. 1:5,7. "Among the ancients bishops and presbyters (elders) are the same" (Jerome, 4th century).
18. *Ye know.* Verse 25 implies representatives of other ecclesias besides Ephesus.
    Came into Asia is usually translated: "set foot in Asia." Yet usage in Acts (21 ;2,6; 27:2) suggests "sailed for Asia." Paul refers back to 18:19.
19. *Lying in wait* is plural; i.e. several plots like that of v.3. *All comes* seven times in this speech.
    Lowliness of mind was a term of contempt until Paul taught Gentiles to see it as one of the finest of Christian virtues.
20. *Kept back This* Gk. word was used to describe a ship shortening sail.
21. *Jews... Greeks... repentance... faith.* An obvious a–b–b–a structure. There is another in v.20.
22. *Bound in (or, by) the Spirit.* Cp. 19:21; 20:3 Beza.
23. *The Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city;* e.g. 21:4,11. All the way from Corinth, and earlier; 2 Cor. 4:8–16. *Bonds and afflictions.* Rom. 15:30,31.
24. *With joy.* A tricky textual problem. Four leading uncial MSS omit, but one uncial and all the rest include.
    Ministry. 1:17.
25. *I know.* Contrast what he did not know; v.22.
    The kingdom of God. Is this the same as "the gospel of the grace of God" (v.24)?
26. *This day.* A very emphatic phrase. Cp. Moses' frequent use of this emphasis in Dt.
28. *The Holy Spirit made you overseers.* (a) Selection by Holy Spirit guidance; 1 Tim. 4:14; Acts 13:2. (b) The Holy Spirit itself a qualification for office.
    His own blood. Ignatius has the impossible phrase: "the blood of God." His influence may have led to the textual changes here. .
    Purchased. The Gk. word comes in Is. 43:21 (a paragraph – v. 18–28 – which has many relevant phrases). 29. *Grievous wolves.* Mt. 7:15 has the same figure. Is Rev. 2:2 an indication that the warning was heeded?

90. Miletus to Caesarea (21:1-14)

The final farewells to the Asian brethren were, for Paul and his party, a deeply emotional experience. Two details in the Greek text underline this. NIV graphically translates: "After we had torn ourselves away from them ..." And so it must have been for Paul at every place after leaving Corinth.

From Miletus their voyaging was exceptionally quick and easy. A day's run took them to the island of Cos, where doubtless Luke would have liked to linger, for it had a famous medical school.

A quick passage

The next day brought them to Rhodes, where all that they could see of the mighty brazen colossus was its two legs, for an earthquake had brought the bulk of that Asian Dagon crashing down, to lie around in fragments for twelve centuries before being salvaged as scrap metal by an enterprising Jew.

With another short run they made Patara, "a great city, with a harbour and many temples." Here enquiry revealed that a Phoenician ship was about to sail direct for Tyre. So their hired vessel was now dismissed, and without any delay they were en route for the Holy Land.

The Bezan text hints at a run along the coast until opposite Myra and then a straight course for the south-western tip of Cyprus. When its mountains "showed up" (Gk.) on the horizon, they skirted the island and set a straight course for Tyre. In reasonably good conditions this part of the voyage would take three or four days.

Although the ship's home port was Ptolemais, the main cargo was meant for Tyre. Unloading there would take some time. So, since Paul had friends in the small ecclesia there, these were diligently sought out (Gk.) and again - as at Troas - they were located on the day after the Breaking of Bread service had been held. So, to be able to stay on till the Sunday, Paul evidently persuaded the shipmaster to allow a longer stay at Tyre. By now, time was well in hand, so that arrival at Jerusalem for Pentecost would be easy. There was therefore no point in leaving Tyre earlier to do the laborious journey to Jerusalem by road.

Tyre

There at Tyre (as on earlier occasions; 20:23) Spirit-guided brethren kept on warning Paul of dire trouble in the holy city, and to these predictions they added their own personal pleading to persuade the apostle to abandon his intention. Could not the brethren go on without him and convey the contributions and good wishes of the Gentile ecclesias? Did he have to put his head into the jaws of a lion?

But the Holy Spirit's guidance in Paul himself presented this visit to Jerusalem as an imperative (19:21; 20:22), and forebodings of evil did not appal him as they did these others. So their importunities were quite without effect.

At re-embarkation time, when their ship was fitted out again (see Gk.) the entire ecclesia, together with women and children, accompanied the party first to one of the near-by beaches. There they kneeled together in fervent prayer, and then sorrowfully the travellers joined the ship in the harbour and waved goodbye to the grief-stricken believers now going back to their homes.

A quick run down the coast, and the ship's voyage ended at Ptolemais which under its name Acre was so important centuries later in the Crusades and the Napoleonic wars.

Here Paul and his friends spent a day with the local ecclesia. There is a hint that they were not known to Paul as the Tyrian brethren had been.

It was easy next day to pick up a coasting vessel to Caesarea, and there next they were warmly and hospitably received at the home of Philip the preacher.

Philip the evangelist

Philip had four daughters dedicated to a single life in the Lord's service (1 Cor. 7:32). Each of them was blessed from time to time with the Holy Spirit's gift of prophecy which was doubtless of real value in the local assemblies (or were they instructed to exercise it in Sunday School or sisters' knitting groups?). It would be surprising if Paul was not again warned, through the ministry of these young sisters, of the dangers awaiting him in Jerusalem. But how markedly this would be mitigated (or reinforced?) by their ready ministration to his creature comforts!

Philip, it will be remembered, was formerly one of the seven brethren who had been elected to administer the ecclesia's benevolent fund in earlier days (6:1-6). So doubtless Paul had long discussions with him on the best use for the considerable sums his party was now taking to Jerusalem.

More than this, Eusebius quotes authorities as saying that this Philip and two of his daughters died and were buried at Hierapolis, and another of the four at Ephesus. So it would seem that at some time the family, after their long stay in Caesarea, moved to Asia. Was this perhaps the result of Paul's persuasions, because of the impending troubles in that province (20:29-31)?

The prophet Agabus

By this time the brethren in Jerusalem were fully aware of the intense Jewish animus against Paul. They all knew well enough that almost the whole of Jewry now regarded him as Public Enemy No. 1. The prophet Agabus, who earlier (11:28) had warned the brethren of threatening food scarcities in the reign of Claudius, was now led to make the journey to Caesarea to meet Paul - for by this time the news of the apostle's coming had gone ahead of him.

Now with all the character and style of an Old Testament prophet (e.g. Is. 20:2; Jer. 13:1; Ez. 5:1)he deliberately unfastened Paul's girdle and proceeded to tie it first round his own ankles and then round his own wrists. Then, very solemnly:

"Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews of Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." That last phrase was a direct quotation of the words of Jesus when forewarning his disciples of his own death (Lk. 9:44; 24:7).

This prophecy of Agabus, made at Caesarea, was later seen by the brethren to be fulfilled at Caesarea (26:29).

This additional explicit prophecy provoked an immediate renewal of clamant importunity to persuade the apostle to change his plans. It wasn't *necessary* for him to go to Jerusalem. The brethren in his party could act for him, they could pass on his recommendations and report on his behalf about the great work already achieved amongst the Gentiles.

All persuasions rejected

So Paul was beset with incessant grief-stricken pleading, to which Luke and Titus and the rest of their party now joined their own intercession. Grown men wept like over-wrought women. It was an intensely emotional situation. Paul loved dearly all these who now, one after another, and all together, made their fervent appeals to him. How he wanted to accede to their pleas! But to do so would only turn his conscience into an enemy.

So he stayed adamant: 'Why will you seek to break down my will with your tears? What does imprisonment matter? I have known it before. My Lord was bound at Jerusalem and died

there. And I am ready for that too!'

So firmly did he speak, even though near to tears himself, that at last they desisted, and - remembering his Master in Gethsemane - they sought comfort in the same words: "The will of the Lord be done."

Like the discordance between the personal judgement expressed by Nathan the prophet and the direct inspiration which told him differently (2 Sam. 7:3-5), and like the marked reluctance on the part of prophets Moses (Ex. 3,4) and Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:4, 13-15) and Jonah (1:2,3) and Ezekiel (3:14) and Jeremiah (20:7-10), so now the disciples were only prepared to say "the will of the Lord be done" when they found themselves up against the unbudgeable and wholly correct decision of the apostle. There have been, and there are, notable modern instances of the same conflict between the will of God and the inclination of believers.

It was a group of very depressed, apprehensive, solemn-faced men who by and by set off for Jerusalem.

Approximate Timetable of the Journey to Jerusalem

Tue.	Passover	Philippi
Sun.	Breaking of Bread	
Mon.	7th day of Unleavened Bread	
Tue.		leave Philippi
Wed.		leave Neapolis
Sun.	Just missed Breaking of Bread	arrive Troas
Sat eve.	Breaking of Bread	at Troas
Sun.		
Sun.		arrive Mitylene
Mon.		Chios
Tues.		Samos, Trogyllium
Wed.		arrive Miletus
Sat.	Elders meet Paul	
Sun.	Breaking of Bread	leave Miletus arrive Chios
Mon.		Rhodes
Tue.		arrive Patara
Wed.		leave Patara
Sun.		arrive Tyre
Sun.	Breaking of Bread	leave Tyre arrive Ptolemais
Tue.		leave Ptolemais arrive Caesarea
Sun.	Breaking of Bread	at Caesarea
Thu.		leave Caesarea
Fri.		arrive Jerusalem
Sun.	Breaking of Bread	at Jerusalem
Mon.	Meeting with James	at Jerusalem
Tue.	Pentecost	at Jerusalem

Notes: 21:1-14

4. *RV: the disciples.* This definite article implies that they were known to be there.
10. *Many days.* Literally: *more;* a vague expression: "a good number of days."
11. *A certain prophet named Agabus.* One commentator after another remarks on this mention as though Agabus now entered the story for the first time. The earlier suggestion that Titus was a main source for the early part of Acts explains this. Agabus is now introduced as new to Luke, one of those with Paul on this journey.
11. *Bind.* Another parallel with Peter; See Jn. 21:18.
His own hands and feet. How did Agabus manage to bind his own hands? From every point of view, the binding of Paul's hands and feet makes more sense, but the Greek just doesn't seem to allow of this.
14. *Persuaded.* Continuous form of the verb. They did not readily desist.
We ceased. This "we" excludes Paul, of course; it covers Luke (and Titus) and the others with them. This word "ceased" was often used of rest from war. Thus it measures the intensity of the emotional struggle going on.

91. With the Elders at Jerusalem (21:15-26)

The arrival at Jerusalem of Paul and his party was carefully timed to coincide with the eve of Pentecost (24:11). The phrase describing their departure from Caesarea is doubly ambiguous: "They took up their carriages." First, there is the change of meaning (since the days of King James) of "carriage" from that which is carried to that which transports the traveller. But there has been also a failure to recognize the specialised meaning of the Greek word with reference to repair or restoration of a building (2 Chr. 29:3; 34:10 LXX). Here the allusion is to the benevolent contributions which they were bringing as a restorative for the spiritual house of God in Jerusalem.

The Bezan text makes it clear that this last leg of their long journey was not attempted in one day. They stayed overnight "at a certain village," at the house of Mnason of Cyprus, "an old disciple" not in the sense of being aged but one who had been a believer from the earliest days -almost certainly since that first Pentecost, but very probably from the ministry of the Lord himself. Being of Cyprus, he was probably a personal friend of Barnabas who also had known the Lord Jesus in the days of his flesh. ("Studies in the Gospels", H.A.W., ch. 148). The Gentile brethren with Paul would find it a great thrill to be able to converse with one who knew so intimately how the Faith had begun.

Next day, to Jerusalem, where a warm welcome awaited them. Indeed, Luke's word means: "with delight." Apart from other considerations, the substantial sums of money brought from Gentile ecclesias would lift the spirits of the poor brethren.

This was probably Paul's fifth visit to Jerusalem since his conversion:

1. On the first occasion he had found himself shunned by the brethren (9:26).
2. Along with Barnabas he had taken relief for the Jerusalem poor when famine was impending (11:30).
3. After the First Journey there was the special visit because of the council needing to settle the Judaist contention (15:2).
4. Then, once again, after the Second Journey (18:22).
5. This present visit was to be his last this side of the Kingdom of God.

Next day - Pentecost - there was a formal meeting with James and the ecclesial elders. Apparently the apostles were all away from Jerusalem at this time. Each of the brethren with Paul in turn handed over the substantial contributions which had been brought as an expression of the goodwill of believers many miles away. The commission given to the apostle by James and Peter and John to "remember the poor" had been and was worthily fulfilled.

Then Paul told "in full detail" all that had transpired since he was last with them. The rapid spread of the gospel all round the Aegean Sea, the ecclesial problems that had to be coped with, opposition and persecution from both Jews and Gentiles, the ominous threat posed by the mischievous campaign of the Judaists, who must have been every one of them known to the brethren now present - all this, and much more, was detailed by the apostle.

He had come to Jerusalem somewhat apprehensive as to the reception he would get. But these leaders were well satisfied with what he told them about the gospel which he proclaimed amongst the Gentiles and were very happy at the remarkable response it had evoked. So "they glorified the Lord." Luke's continuous tense there tells of sustained thankfulness for all that had been achieved.

False reports

But there was one considerable problem. The Judaists had been just as active, and in as unprincipled a fashion, in the holy city itself. Not only did orthodox Jewry there hate the very name of Saul of Tarsus but the Judaist adversaries in the ecclesia had traded on their own high standing as teachers to din into the not unreceptive minds of the multitude of believers a number of downright lies about Paul and his work.

'Everywhere throughout the Dispersion he teaches our Jewish brethren that it is their duty to forsake observance of Moses' Law! He tells them that they ought not to circumcise their children, and bids them ignore Halachah, the rabbinic rules which have always governed our daily living.'

Nor were these the only lies disseminated about him: 'He teaches: 'Of course you may do evil that good may come! See how the grace of Christ will abound, to his glory, in the forgiveness of your sins!' (Rom. 3:8). 'Makes a lot of converts? To be sure he does. But he wouldn't if it were not for the shifty underhand methods he uses' (2 Cor. 12:16). And those who had read certain passages in his epistles (e.g. Gal. 1:6-9; 2:1 4,1 6,1 8; 5:12; Rom. 3:20) would be ready enough to label his life as a practising Jew as just so much hypocrisy.

No wonder the apostle bade his friends strive in prayer for the success of his visit to an ecclesia which seemed disposed to think the worst of him (Rom. 15:31). Regarding his gospel to the Gentiles there were no complaints. The agreement made at the earlier council in Jerusalem was working.

But since Jerusalem Jews were all "zealots for the Law," these gross misrepresentations were readily believed, with the result that un-Christian prejudice against Paul and his work had mounted to serious proportions. How familiar do twentieth century readers of the record find this situation!

These distortions of what Paul actually taught were readily achieved. It was true that he did teach that a man could not hope for salvation through any amount of Mosaic observance; he did insist that no Jew should set store by his circumcision as a spiritual qualification; and he did treat as things indifferent all the punctilios of outward form foisted on the nation by accumulated tradition. But even so he was content to see his Jewish brethren continue in this elaborate and well-loved inherited way of life so long as they did not see these things as essentials for salvation. On a former visit he had concluded a month-long Nazirite vow (18:18,21), thus bearing public witness to his own respect for the careful religious life in which he had been reared. "To the Jews he became as a Jew" (1 Cor. 9:19).

A public gesture

The elders, fearing a serious upheaval at an assembly of the ecclesia, now desired him to lose no time in making clear once again not just by word but by overt personal act that he did not despise Moses. They asked for a public gesture which at a stroke would cancel out all the malevolent misrepresentation which had been poured into the minds of the brethren. For there were now thousands of disciples in the city and to a man they were all zealots for the Law. Living within sight of the temple how could they be otherwise? In any case, was not the Law of Moses the law of the land in Judaea? It was this Judaist characteristic of the Jerusalem ecclesia, and nothing else, which gave them toleration there as a sect of Jewry. James (so wrote Hegesippus) was himself a life-long Nazirite.

Four of the believers had each sworn a Nazirite vow, and the time was come for these vows to be terminated. So the elders asked: Would Paul take on himself the expense of covering the by no means inconsiderable cost of the sacrifices which the purification ceremonies for

these four involved according to the Law (Num. 6:13-21)? To make a generous gesture of this sort was currently regarded as an outstanding act of piety, one which was bound to be attended with a fair degree of publicity because of open proclamation in the temple court and the spectacle of shaven men burning their hair at the altar. If Paul were publicly declared to be the sponsor of such holy actions, and if at the same time he personally began a seven-day vow, would not that give the lie to all the slanders so assiduously circulated?

A man of means?

Paul readily agreed. It may be taken as fairly certain that one of the reasons which had made him so adamant about coming to Jerusalem was an intention to expose the Judaist slanders concerning himself and the gospel he preached.

Although every indication in his letters, speeches, and way of life had hitherto proclaimed him a stranger to prosperity, it is evident that about the time of his journey to Jerusalem he suddenly became a man of wealth. Not only could he without hesitation pay for costly Nazirite sacrifices but he was undaunted by the big expense of an appeal to Caesar, he could defray the cost of a voyage to Rome for several friends (27:2), he could rent a house in the metropolis for two whole years (28:30), and he could command the respect of high Roman officials, a thing impossible for one near to poverty. Indeed Felix the governor, on the look-out for a substantial bribe, deemed Paul well able to buy his way to freedom (24:26).

Implementing the plan

How this change of circumstances had come about is not known. Probably it was through reconciliation with his family (23:16).

The proposed plan was put into operation next day. He appeared in the temple, being publicly proclaimed as sponsor of the four Nazirites. Also, at the end of the week, when the vows of the others were finally discharged, his own vow also would be publicly terminated (24:17) as an act of thanksgiving for an encouraging reception by the elders and for the safe transit of his party and the money they brought; he seems to have seen this Gentile benevolent fund as a kind of temple sacrifice (Rom. 15:16, 27, 31, *leitourgeō),* with himself as ministering priest.

It is not improbable that the four Nazirite vows terminated on different days; if so, this would mean Paul's public appearance in the temple court four, or even five, separate times in connection with the vow ceremonies. Thus there would be clear and repeated witness that he was no disparager of Moses.

In persuading Paul to adopt this politic suggestion, the elders little realised that, in an attempt to soothe the feelings of their own anti-Paul faction, they were putting a match to a much more explosive situation. But this is how the Ways of God's Providence operate.

Notes: 21:15-26

18. *Went in.* Other occurrences of this Greek verb all describe entry to the temple; v.26; 3:3; Heb. 9:6. Here was an occasion equally solemn.
    All the elders. So none of the leaders were against Paul.
19. *What God had wrought.* This is the right emphasis: cp. Rom. 15:18,19; Luke 19:16. Because he was one of the participants in this solemn occasion. Luke does not mention the actual handing over of the money. This comes in incidentally at 24:17.
    Declared particularly; s.w. Lk. 24:35
    His ministry. Again a quiet emphasis on his apostleship; s.w. 1 ;17.
20. *Thou seest.* Had there been a quick visit to the synagogues frequented by the disciples? How many thousands; s.w, Nu.. 10:36. Here is a New Israel.
21. *Informed.* This Greek word supplies the English "catechism." It means: to grind into the mind by repetition; s.w. Rom. 2:18: Gal. 6:6; Lk. 1:4; Acts 18:25. Who had been responsible for this deliberate campaign?
22. *Multitude.* From the context this seems to mean an excited concourse of the brethren.
24. *Purify thyself.* This is the LXX phrase for a Nazirite vow, but it probably covered other vows as well.
    Thou thyself also, like the Jerusalem believers. This must be seen as one of the main purposes of Paul's visit.

92. Temple Riot (21:27-40)

There is no definite information available from Talmud or Law of Moses about a seven-day period associated with a vow, but there must have been some practice of this kind, for Luke's record refers to "the seven days" (R.V.) of Paul's vow. During this time his several appearances in the temple associated with his Nazirites would be noted with satisfaction by the believers whose minds had been sown with doubts about him.

What was not realised was that the apostle's enemies also took note of what was happening. The full week of Mosaic ceremony gave them the opportunity to lay their plans for his discomfiture. The riot that blew up was too violent and sudden and efficient to be explained as a spontaneous eruption of misguided and ill-informed religious indignation. Several details in the Greek text seem to suggest this.

Certain Jews from Asia - from Ephesus, actually - had already seen Paul in the city in the company of Trophimus, one of the Greek brethren whom they knew by sight. This was their pathetically inadequate cover for the lawlessness which they now let loose.

Holiness — and violence

The Nazirite vows were being discharged according to normal procedure in a chamber in the south-eastern corner of "The Court of the Women" when the storm broke. A few of these men grabbed Paul, shouting out: 'Men of Israel, help quick! Here's a man who is against Moses and our temple. He has defiled it by bringing his Gentile friends past the forbidden boundary!'

Very probably these unprincipled zealots, using exactly the methods employed in modern Jerusalem by ultra-orthodox Jews, had already planted some of their hooligan colleagues not far away.

These, within seconds, rushed to join in the hullabaloo. The row quickly brought others from the near-by courts, and within a minute that part of the temple was a volcano of violence, with a helpless Paul at the centre of it. Strange that these fanatics gave no thought to the defilement of the temple created by the godless pandemonium and upsurge of hatred which they so enthusiastically stirred up.

Non-Jews were, of course, restricted to the outer Court of the Gentiles. There was a low "middle wall of partition" (Eph. 2:14) surmounted by a row of pillars, and notices in Greek and Latin, stating that "No alien is to pass within the fence and enclosure round the temple. Whosoever shall be taken shall be responsible to himself alone for the death which will ensue."

A stone with one of these inscriptions was found built into the wall of an old Muslim mosque in Jerusalem. And recent excavations adjoining the temple area have brought a replica of it to light.

Seized by wrists or ankles the helpless Paul was now dragged a considerable distance to the nearest temple gate so that outside it he could be battered to death without any religious compunction. The Levitical guard on duty promptly slammed the big gates, their only concern being that there ensue no further defilement of their temple.

Roman intervention

Meantime someone - almost certainly one of the brethren - ran across to the opposite corner of the temple area to raise an alarm with the Roman guard on duty in the fortress of Antonia overlooking the sacred courts. The officers, well-practised in dealing with sudden outbursts of mob violence or terrorism, speedily had their men - more than two hundred of them -round to the south side of the temple to quell the turmoil.

As soon as they appeared, the mob ceased their Paul-bashing but not the din. That still intensified. The captain, realising that Paul was the cause of all the excitement, soon had him fastened by chains to each of two soldiers.

An immediate enquiry from those at the centre of the vortex as to who this man was and what he had done proved utterly futile, for the noise was almost deafening, and most of the shouting, being in Aramaic, was unintelligible.

So the captain was content to withdraw with his prisoner, congratulating himself that by a stroke of luck he had laid hands on an Egyptian Jew who not long before had been the centre of a great upheaval in Jerusalem. Josephus tells how this fellow, apparently pretending to be a kind of re-incarnation of Joshua, led a great multitude of his supporters - the Assassins, the Dagger-men - out into the wilderness and then back to the summit of the Mount of Olives, there to await the complete collapse of city and temple, after the pattern of Joshua and Jericho. Instead, the governor Felix, fairly new in office, sent a considerable force of men against these rebels and with great bloodshed routed them. But their leader had got away.

Now the captain Claudius Lysias, hearing perhaps shouts of "He wants to bring down the wall of partition" or "He means to do away with the temple" - good enough half-truths! - assumed that the Egyptian was back again and that another faction had turned against him. Possibly also Paul had an unusually swarthy skin, and this too suggested the identification.

As the soldiers retreated to the foot of the stairs up to Antonia the crowd made a violent rush. So at an order from the officer Paul, scarcely conscious after all the welter of blows he had sustained, was unceremoniously hoisted above the soldiers' heads and passed back out of harm's way, the mob all this while shrieking for his execution.

The captain's surprise

Then the apostle came to and, deliberately expressing himself in his most elegant Greek, he asked a favour of the captain. Probably he explained also that he was in no way responsible for the riot but that, given an opportunity, he could quieten the upheaval. The officer was greatly surprised:

'Can you talk Greek so well? Then you are not that Egyptian thug I took you for?'

'Indeed, no', answered Paul, 'I'm a Jew of Tarsus, a self-governing metropolis, one of the finest Greek cities in the empire. So, I beg of you, let me speak to them. You will see the effect immediately.'

Impressed, Claudius Lysias agreed, and Paul stepped forward to the head of the staircase. Bruised and tousled and with torn robes, he made an odd spectacle. And a great roar of hatred came up to meet him. With a look he asked for his hands to be unshackled. Then, as he made a strong gesture for quiet, his powerful voice, well-used to open-air crowds, carried to the outermost limit of the throng:

"Men, brethren, and fathers" he shouted in Aramaic. The appeal in his words and the patois he fell into captured them immediately, and in a second or two there was, as modern journalese would put it, a deafening silence.

Notes: 21:27-40

27. *Seven Days.* This may have been a rabbinic inference for lesser vows, from Num. 6:9,10).
    Saw him. This Greek word is not infrequently used for a deliberate or formal inspection.
28. Compare this accusation with 6:11-14 when Paul himself was an accuser.
    This is the man. The phrase implies that already, before this crisis blew up, evil rumours had been put round Jerusalem about Paul. "This is the man you've heard about!"
    Against the law. Strange irony! He was actually being prevented from keeping the Law.
    Greeks . . . into the temple. Facts made to fit the need. Trophimus becomes Greeks, and a street of Jerusalem becomes the temple! Of course, in another sense (Eph. 2:14) this is precisely what Paul was doing - bringing Greeks into the Lord's New Temple!

29. *Seen before.* The preposition here might imply anticipation: 'He has a Gentile with him in Jerusalem; therefore he means to bring him into the temple!'
    RV: *The Ephesian,* i.e. the only Ephesian in the party.
30. *All the city.* An effective hyperbole for an immense crowd.
    RV. *dragged him.* The verb is continuous.
31. RV: *tidings came up; and cp. v.32; ran down.* Literally correct, for Antonia was built to overlook the temple.
32. Cp. 23:27;24:7-three different reportings!
33. *Bound.* The prophecies made to Paul begin to be fulfilled. For the next five years he was a prisoner. See 20:23; 21:11; 26:19; Eph. 3:1; 4:1; Ph. 1:13; Col. 4:3,18; Philem. 1.
34. *Could not know.* The Greek neatly implies that he had no clear idea who Paul was, but was quite sure he was a criminal of some sort.
35. *The Stairs; s.w. LXX for Songs of Degrees.* Consider the special relevance of Ps. 120,121.
    Borne of the soldiers. How undignified, Paul!
    Violence: s.w. 27:41.
36. *Followed after* implies an insistent pressing to get at Paul.
    Away with him. Cp. Lk. 23:18. The phrase might be a close equivalent to String him up!'
37. *Canst thou speak Greek?* But of course in those days nearly everybody could speak Greek, especially among the Jewish Egyptian community. So it must have been the quality of Paul's Greek that was referred to.
38. *That Egyptian.* In one place Josephus says this desperado had 30,000 behind him. Yet in another, 200-400 slain. Josephus is notoriously undependable regarding numbers. Perhaps the 4,000 mentioned here were his immediate disciples.

93. Paul's speech to the temple crowd (22:1-21)

The great crowd, the more impressed that Paul in his present ragged and battered condition should address them in their local tongue, had fallen completely silent. Curiosity also played no small part in this willingness to give him a hearing, although their violent indignation against him was in no way assuaged.

The apostle knew that he faced bitter charges of being "against the people (of Israel), against the Law, against the temple" (21:28). So in a most conciliatory tone he began: "Men, brethren, and fathers." Thus he proclaimed that he was one of them. He noted that the crowd had made room for certain members of the Sanhedrin, including Caiaphas, now ex-high-priest; so he acknowledged their presence with the word "fathers."

Rapidly he sketched out the story of his early days. Not a Jerusalem Jew, agreed! but compensating for that by being tutored ("nourished") by the great Gamaliel. This part of his speech was not just self-testimonial. The point he wanted them to infer was that, knowing the Law as well as any man in Jerusalem, ("exactly, accurately"; v.3), he had found it insufficient.

His campaign of persecution

There followed the story of his rampage of persecution against this sect of the Nazarenes (on this, see chapter 30). If he, more inflexible and violent against the believers than even they were, should switch to being a convert, then let them ask themselves how strong was the force which had wrought such a change in him. 'You find this difficult to accept? There are those here who witnessed and remember it!'

Then in great detail he told how he, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, enjoying the full confidence of the rulers, became a dedicated disciple of the execrated Jesus.

The facts of that appearance of a living Lord were not to be gainsaid. The men who had been with him on the Damascus road could testify to a quite extraordinary appearance. These were hard facts of seeing and hearing which no gainsayer could explain away.

With special purpose also he dwelt on the character of the one who had received him, by divine direction, into the Faith: "Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there." Paul wanted them to realise that it was not a spirit of perverse rebellion which turned men into disciples of the Nazarene.

Conversion

Coming to him, this Ananias had spoken with authority in the name of "the God of our fathers." Were these the words of a man who was turning away from the traditional faith of Jewry? For through this highly respected Jew had come first a startling and meaningful miracle of sight restored: and then a commission now associated with the name of Paul in every Jewish mind, to witness concerning Jesus to "all men," that is, to all kinds of men - the reprobated word "Gentiles" was being carefully avoided, thus allowing them to assume that he meant "all Jews, everywhere." And it meant for them, as it had done for him, the forgiveness of sins, even the hatred and oppressive violence he - and they also - had shown against the Name of Christ.

Even in these circumstances, nothing could restrain Paul from seeking to convert these haters of the Faith.

He told how, back in Jerusalem, when he was praying in the temple, there was another personal appearance of his new Leader. Would a man full of contempt for the temple and its services pursue his devotions there? And if Jesus chose to make revelations in those sacred courts, what were they to infer from that? Very cleverly, without thrusting the point home too vigorously, he was insinuating into his story time and again the *fact* that the Jesus he now served was risen from the dead!

A mission to — Gentiles

The commission now given him to take the message far afield had been resisted: 'Lord, they know how bitterly and savagely I persecuted the Faith. Then, when they see and hear me witnessing on your behalf, here in Jerusalem, they are sure to believe!'

No! they would do nothing of the sort (thus Paul reminded them of their own obduracy): "Depart (Jesus had said), for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles."

That last word, to which Paul had certainly been guided by the inspiration that was in him (Mt. 10:19), was the match to the powder keg, and forthwith there was a mighty explosion, heard all over Jerusalem.

Notes: 22:1-21

3. *The perfect manner of the law of the fathers.* Cp. Gal. 1:14.
   As ye all are this day. 'I'm not blaming you, for you are doing just what I did.' Thus he used their zeal and violence to convey some idea of his own. 6,9. Cp. Dan. 10:6-9.
17. *Came again to Jerusalem.* See 9:26-29.
18. *Get thee out.* The Greek (= come forth) *might* imply that Christ himself was forsaking the temple also; but it need not carry this meaning.
19. RV: *they themselves know,* implying 'So they *must* believe what I tell them! Was Paul being rather ingenuous here?
21. *Gentiles.* Does the use of this hated word suggest that Paul thought he had captured the crowd, and that they would now tolerate what he had to say about acceptance of the Gentiles: He had to come to this point sooner or later, because of the lie disseminated about Trophimus.

94. A Roman Citizen (22:22-30)

"Gentiles!" As soon as Paul dared to mention a preaching mission to despised and hated outsiders, the worst prejudices in the minds of this Jewish crowd erupted uncontrollably. 'So all the rest that he said to us just now was so much eyewash! He's been talking with his tongue in his cheek!' And a roar of rage boiled up and swept over the speaker like a tidal wave.

Not one of them recalled the prophecy of their great Moses that "God will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; he will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation" (Dt. 32:21). Paul saw his own mission as a fulfilment of those words: "If by any means I may provoke unto emulation (RV: jealousy) them which are my flesh, and might save some" (Rom. 11:14).

It may be that, here and there in that vast shouting multitude, there were a few who had been impressed with the witness they had just heard, but if so they were few indeed, and too apprehensive to show their sympathies.

Did Paul have to venture on to what he must have known to be very thin ice? It is interesting to speculate on how he had hoped to develop his appeal that day. On these lines?: 'Remember! my commission to preach to Gentiles was given me here in this temple. You must know that God intends this holy place to be a temple for all nations (Is. 56:7). So either we Jews must use our higher privileges to bring Gentiles to God through Christ, or God will use Gentiles to destroy this temple which is now kept for Jews only. Instead He will build a new and different temple in which Jews and Gentiles can worship together.'

The spite of the mob

Whether that was his intention or not, here all at once was a sudden end. It was Jerusalem's last chance, now being indignantly and fiercely thrust away. "They lifted up their voice" (RV) as one man, and howled their hatred like a pack of dogs. Were they any better than the mindless pagan rabble that shouted for Diana of Ephesians? Many of them peeled off their outer garments as an extravagant gesture against blasphemy (as they deemed it; 18:6), or in preparation for a stoning (7:58). Many of them gathered handfuls of gravel, and emulating Shimei the Benjamite when he cursed David (2 Sam. 16:13), they cast it and their own curses at the speaker in contempt:

"Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live." Their mode of phrase implied: 'He should have been arrested long ago!'

The Roman captain was utterly bewildered by this situation, because his Latin and Greek helped him not at all in this Aramaic bedlam. The obvious hostility baffled him. If Paul was a rebel, like that Egyptian, why was he not popular with this crowd? The captain had Paul hauled back into the fortress of Antonia, and gave curt order that he be scourged. Possibly under this persuasion he would make some confession of crime which his speech had so far kept hidden; or, more probably, after the beating he had already had from the Jewish mob, he would collapse under the scourging, and then it could be announced that he had been flogged to death. The crowd, satisfied, would then disperse - and this, after all, was what the captain wanted more than anything.

Flogging?

So, with little delay, Paul found himself stripped and tied up with leather thongs in what was probably the same place where his Lord had suffered scourging from another Roman squad (Jn. 19:1). This was not the first time the apostle had found himself about to endure such

torture: "Of the Jews five times received I forty-stripes-save-one. Thrice was I beaten (by the Romans) with rods" (2 Cor. 11:24, 25).

Bonds and imprisonment had been foretold for him, and to these he was resigned. But the horror of scourging now to begin might permanently impair his witness. So he spoke quietly to the centurion in charge of the operation: 'Do you have any right to scourge a Roman citizen? - and one untried, uncondemned, too!'

Apprehension

With a startled look on his face, the centurion turned on his heel and came briskly to his commanding officer: 'Have a care, sir. This man is a Roman citizen. Did you know?'

Within seconds the captain was on the spot himself. 'Is this true?' he asked, with both astonishment and trepidation in his voice. 'Are you really a Roman citizen?' This prisoner did not look like a man of consequence.

'Indeed I am', Paul replied.

'But how, how? This privilege cost me an awful lot of money, as I well remember.'

Paul explained: 'I am not only a Jew by birth, I am also a free-born Roman.'

On hearing this the soldiers apparently did not wait for an order but loosed the apostle's bonds at once. Captain, centurion, and men were all very uneasy, for they all knew that in two respects the law had been overstepped - a Roman citizen had been bound, and an order given to scourge him.

There was now no more threat of violence. Nothing more than light arrest. The captain made up his mind to two things. First, a messenger instructed by Paul would go to his friends in the city to verify this remarkable claim to Roman citizenship, for if it were false the penalty would be summary execution. Second, there was an instruction to the chief priest to summon a full meeting of the Sanhedrin for next morning. The mystery surrounding this Jewish Roman must be cleared up.

Notes: 22:22-30

23. *Cried out:* s.w. Jn. 18:40; 19:6,12,15.
    Cast off their clothes, as some of them had done at the Lord's Triumphal Entry! 25. *Lawful for you.* The pronoun is plural. All were likely to be in trouble, from the captain downwards. Why did not Paul make a similar appeal when beaten at Philippi? It has been speculated that Paul's cry: "I am a Roman," was drowned in the noise of the crowd (16:22,23).
    With thongs, or - as RVm - *for the thongs,* the leather scourges. Perhaps unlikely, for normally a different word *mastix* was used for these.
28. *With a great sum.* Most probably a bribe to one of Caesar's officials. There was a lot of this.
29. *The chief captain also,* implying that his men were fearful too.
    Because he had bound him; v.25, not21:33. Bezan text adds: and straightway he loosed him.

95. Before the Sanhedrin (23:1-11)

Next morning, then Paul was put in the charge of some of the temple guard - Jewish police - and led into the Hall of Hewn Stone in the temple area. This judgement hall was remarkable in that it was built half in the sacred temple area and half outside it on profane ground, thus allowing of a Gentile presence when a case was of special concern to the Romans. There a full assembly of the Council was to inquire what degree of blame lay on Paul for the previous day's uproar.

The apostle stood there, looking intently from face to face. It was more than twenty years since he had been a member of that august assembly, but there were still a fair number of faces that he could recognize. Later on (26:5) he was to appeal to their personal knowledge concerning him.

What a sequence of Christian witnesses that Sanhedrin had had before it! -first, Jesus himself; then the apostles (Acts 5); then Stephen; and now it was Paul's own turn to testify bravely and forcefully to the Truth of Christ.

So he began: "Men and brethren!" In his address to them, there was a studied omission of "Fathers" - a reminder that he spoke to them on equal terms. And as an intimation that he was there not to be tried but to explain, he went on: "I have lived *(pepoliteumai)* in all good conscience before God until this day." The apostle's choice of an unusual word may have referred to his life as a fully-committed member of the polity of Israel (Phil. 1:27 s.w; cp. Eph. 2:12) - he was no renegade. But there may also have been allusion to the way in which he had lately made use of his Roman citizenship (22:25,28; cp. Phil. 3:20).

Ananias the high priest

Perhaps the high priest took his assertion in this sense, and since he himself followed a strong pro-Roman policy, he felt it necessary to dissociate himself from Paul; so he roughly bade one of his minions smite Paul across the mouth that could say such offensive things. Or, it may be that he resented Paul's assumption of equal status with those he now addressed. Or, perhaps recalling the fiery persecution Paul had, years before, let loose on the disciples, he felt this positive claim to "a good conscience" a piece of arrant hypocrisy.

This Ananias was an evil man, one of the worst of a sequence of high priestly rascals - "a bold man in his temper, and very insolent," Josephus wrote concerning him. He had been in trouble with the Romans for his rough treatment of the Samaritans, and had had to face trial in Rome because of it. Acquitted, he held on to his high office until A.D.58. Another of his evil deeds was to sequester the tithe of corn that should have gone to the subsistence of the poor priests.

Now it seemed that Paul was to share the experience of Micaiah, smitten across the face by Zedekiah the false prophet (1 Kgs. 22:24), and Jeremiah ill-treated by his enemy Passhur (Jer. 20:2), and the Lord Jesus similarly smitten before Annas the high priest (Jn. 18:22).

But now, before the blow could be struck, Paul exposed the illegality of it with a sharp retort: "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" (cp. Jn. 7:51).

Some assert that in this hard response Paul fell a long way below the example of his Lord who had quietly rebuked the one who humiliated him so: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" (cp. 1 Pet. 2:23). But on other occasions, Jesus himself had exposed his adversaries' hypocrisy in blistering fashion. "Whited sepulchres," he had called them, "full of dead men's bones and all uncleaness." Paul's figure, taken from one of two Old Testament Scriptures, was - somewhat similarly -that of a mud wall well white-washed to make it look much better that it really was.

Ezekiel had exposed the perversions of the false prophets of his day as "a wall... daubed with untempered mortar" (13:10). And the LXX version had given an unfamiliar twist to a familiar and graphic proverb: "It is better to dwell in a corner in the open-air than in plastered (white-washed) rooms with unrighteousness and in a common (i.e. unclean) house" (Pr. 21:9). Was Paul now thinking of the temple as an unclean House?

Now, like an austere Old Testament prophet he denounced judgement on one who had earned it ten times over. Two apparently irreconcilable stories have been handed down as to the fate of Ananias. The Talmud says that soon after being deposed from the high-priesthood in A.D.58 he was killed by the son of Gamaliel. But according to Josephus it was not until A.D.66, as the Roman war was boiling up, that because of his Roman sympathies he was hunted by the Dagger Men, desperadoes whom formerly he had been glad to make use of. These now assassinated him when he was seeking refuge in a sewer.

In response to Paul's invective some of the high priest's minions who stood by took Paul to task for his fiery reply: 'Who are you to talk about "according to the law" and "contrary to the law"? Reviling God's high priest, you are no better!'

And, indeed, ever since that day there has been no lack of Paul enthusiasts ready enough to denounce Paul for what he said. Which thing can only be done by those ignorant of the Lord's own very plain assurance:

"When they shall deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your heavenly Father which speaketh in you" (Mt. 10:19,20). So there need be neither criticism of nor apology for Paul in this incident.

Paul explains

Nor in what followed - for the apostle's rejoinder has added problem to problem:

"I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people" (Ex. 22:28).

Why didn't Paul know that this angry man was none other than high priest?

Says one: Ever since his blindness and conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul's eyesight had been poor. This is a purblind "explanation" for it assumes that Jesus, the Lord of Glory, had the power to take away Paul's sight in an instant, but had not both the power and the will to do more than partially restore it! A strange notion, surely. (There seems to be implied also - in 22:1,6 - that Paul was able to recognize individuals in the crowd before him).

Says another: Ananias may not have been wearing his high-priestly robes, but instead may have been clad in plain white (hence "whited wall"?), and thus recognition was not easy. The point is also added that Paul had been so long away from Jerusalem that the high priest would be quite unknown to him.

Others take a different line - that Ananias was in effect a usurper, his appointment to office having been contrived by one of the Herods; and thus Paul's: "I knew not. . ." was really a blunt refusal, for that reason, to recognize him as high priest. The idiom is comparable to the decision of the Judge of all in the Last Day: "Depart from me: I never knew you" (Mt. 25:12;7:23).

Another suggestion is that Paul spoke with biting irony, as who should say: 'What! *that* character God's high priest? Impossible!'

Or it may be that, without irony, the apostle meant: 'The only true high priest is Jesus whom I serve. Since his resurrection all other priesthood is nugatory.'

Whichever is the true explanation, Paul certainly disarmed further criticism by his ready quotation from Exodus against the reviling of any ruler in Israel. That would surely show the Council how untrue was the scandalous report that he was against Israel and the Law (21:28).

So the investigation proceeded. There was probably a formal statement of charges asserted against Paul (e.g. defiling the temple), and apparently witnesses were called (25:11). Then Paul had an opportunity to clear himself.

It may be inferred (especially from v.6,9), that once again his main line of defence was to re-tell, as on the previous day, the gripping story of his early life and how he came to be transformed from virulent persecutor to confident preacher of a gospel centring in Jesus, a Messiah risen from the dead. In view of the two accounts already included in Acts (ch.9,22) and the need for a further re-statement in even more dramatic form later on (ch.26), Luke could well afford to leave it out here.

Divider's cry or sincere appeal?

By far the most common interpretation of what ensued is that Paul fell into the temptation to employ a certain Machiavellian astuteness by throwing an apple of discord into the assembly. It is assumed that he saw the long-standing controversy between Sadducees and Pharisees as a glorious opportunity to "divide and rule" -Pharisee means Separatist. Sadducee originally signified The Righteous, but by this time had probably been popularly corrupted to mean Destroyers (of righteousness). See also "Studies in the Gospels", ch. 102.

If indeed this was Paul's intention and method, then there is no reason why he should be defended for so doing. But those who really know the apostle will realise how completely foreign to his nature such an unworthy device would be. In any case, was not this speech, and the appeal in which it culminated, part of that inspiration which the Lord had promised to his apostles when making their witness for the Faith? (Mt. 10:19,20).

So if there is a less discreditable interpretation of Paul's words and actions, it is more likely to be correct.

He knew that there already existed in the assembly before him a very acute division regarding certain basic principles of Christian faith. Sadducee belief about life after death was almost wholly negative. They accepted neither the idea of survival nor of revival. The best they could offer was the notion that a man lives on in the succeeding generations of his family. "The faith of the Sadducees is well described by negatives!"

By contrast the Pharisees somehow managed to believe in both the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. They had also a most elaborate system of belief in angels of good and angels of evil. In the Sanhedrin the Pharisees were definitely in the majority. Al ready not a few of their sect had come to faith in Christ (e.g. 15:5). And those who hadn't certainly looked for a Messiah, and certainly believed in resurrection at the Last Day. If only Paul could persuade them that Jesus was that Messiah and that his resurrection was the first-fruits of their looked-for resurrection!

So, dominated now as always by an intense eagerness to make a worthy witness for Christ, he decided that, since it was hopeless to think of making much impression on the Sadducees, he may as well go all out to get the gospel over to the Pharisees now sitting before him.

Turning specially to them, he pointedly reminded them of his origins: "I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees." Whether he meant 'descended from a long line of Pharisees' or, idiomatically, 'educated by Pharisee teachers,' is not clear. But either way he now had them on his side.

The resurrection - a crucial issue

So next came his great challenge: "Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in

question." This may have been a hendiadys for 'the hope of being raised from the dead' (cp. 24:15), or an ellipsis for 'the Hope of Israel which will be consummated in the resurrection' (cp. 26:6,7; 28:20).

It is noteworthy that in this period of his witness Paul seems to have decided that the most hopeful way of making an impression on Jewish minds was by hammering away at the Promises and the Old Testament doctrine of resurrection, so that the message of the resurrection of Jesus would then find a logical place alongside these noble ideas.

Paul's declaration of faith created immediate uproar - not only sustained shouting but also after a while hand-to-hand fighting, so great was the animosity between the rival parties. Presumably certain of the Sadducees made a grab at Paul with the intention of silencing him, only to have him equally strongly defended by Pharisees, so that there were real fears that the apostle might be pulled in two.

"We find no evil in this man," shouted the Pharisees. It was their "Not Guilty," a judgement to be repeated in the next few years at Caesarea and in Rome (23:29; 25:25; 26:31). Hearing Paul's account of the Lord's appearances to him, without necessarily committing themselves to belief in the resurrection of Jesus, they were prepared to believe that some' 'spirit or angel has spoken to him." Accepting the gist of Paul's story, they reinforced their defence of the apostle by quoting the good counsel of Gamaliel at the trial of the Twelve: "Let us not fight against God" (5:39).

As the situation deteriorated and the chief captain became aware of the disturbance the temple guard was sent into action to rescue Paul from the warring factions. The attempt at a Sanhedrin enquiry had proved a total failure.

Despondency

So Paul found himself back in Antonia, a prisoner without hardship, but with no better prospect of release. That night, in low spirits because all his well-intentioned efforts in Jerusalem seemed to be brought to nought, he prayed for wisdom and help and very probably for deliverance.

Then, all at once, the Lord Jesus himself stood by him:

"Be of good cheer, Paul." It is a warm encouragement which comes eight times in the New Testament, and always spoken by the Lord Jesus.

"Thou hast fully testified of me in Jerusalem" - if neither people nor leaders would give heed, he must not distress himself on that account. Nor need he worry that getting to Rome (19:21) should seem so completely out of question:

"It is *necessary* that thou bear witness also at Rome." With this reassurance - an invaluable promise! - Paul rested content.

Notes: 23:1-11

1. *Men and brethren.* Note 4:8; 7:2.
   Good conscience. He meant, of course, in the service of Christ (2 Cor. 4:2), not the earlier days of persecution, long reprobated.
5. *The ruler of thy people.* A two-edged quote. What about Jesus, now designated the true ruler of Israel?
6. *The other.* Gk:heteros, different; not *alios,* another of the same sort.
   Cried out. The verb is continuous. It seems to suggest that there was so much interruption and hubbub that Paul had to shout out over and over again.
7. *The multitude.* Was Luke intending to suggest by this word a certain contempt for their behaviour?
9. *Let us not fight against God.* Textually there is good evidence for both inclusion and exclusion of these words. If the latter, then (as RV) a broken sentence; or, as in 1:6 Gk., an interrogative: "But did an angel speak to him?"

10. *The chief captain* was probably in Antonia at the top of the stairs, and informed by messenger of the developing situation.
    Fearing. The Greek word means either piety, fear of God, or- as in this case - fear of a higher authority. Paul's Roman citizenship had certainly left its mark on this officer's mind.
    Go down . . . bring him. These verbs describe the situation very accurately. "Bring" seems to imply that even the Roman officer dare not risk entering the temple area himself.
11. *The night following.* Cp. visions by night in 18:9; 27:23,24. Thou must bear witness also in Rome. How the Roman Catholic Church must wish that this had been said to Peter!

96. Plot and Escape (23:12-35)

Just as Pilate and Herod, opposite extremes, were made friends together through a mutual reluctance to destroy Jesus, so now Sadducees and the ultra-orthodox (as they would be called in modern Israel) were well content to plot together to get rid of Paul.

The dagger men

The outcome of the Sanhedrin riot pleased neither of these groups. So, that night, whilst Paul's spirits were being revived by encouragement from the Lord Jesus, others were finding comfort in their own "divine right of assassination." About forty of Paul's enemies - most probably, suggests Edersheim, members of a Chaburah, a religious fraternity or club - now laid their plans how best to finish off this pestilent preacher.

In the morning their leaders went to the chief priests with a proposition which left these holy autocrats free of all risk. Let them persuade the chief captain, if need be by bribery, to re-convene next day that abortive Sanhedrin enquiry, promising good behaviour and full co-operation from all parties. The ostensible purpose would be, of course, to clear up one or two ambiguities about Paul's religious attitude. Then whilst the prisoner was being escorted by a handful of temple police -also to be bribed? - it would be a relatively easy matter for their squad of forty Dagger Men to burst through and finish Paul off.

The men of the temple should, of course, have been the first to prevent this plot from materialising. Instead they smiled benevolently on the project. The inflexible resolution of these thugs pleased them not a little.

Their oath

So utterly determined were these forty zealots that they had bound themselves by an oath to carry the scheme through.

Until the corpse of Paul had been riddled with stab wounds, all were resolved neither to eat nor drink. It may be that this oath had special reference to holy food, the partaking of any peace-offering in the temple court. And the curse which they invoked on themselves in the event of failure had something of the same flavour, for in contemporary Jewry *anathema* meant excommunication from temple and synagogue (Ezr. 10:8; cp. Rom. 9:3; 1 Cor. 16:22; Gal. 1:8,9 - and Mk. 14:71?).

But doubtless they were all reassuring themselves that if their terrorist scheme came to nought the rabbis would find some casuistic wangle to absolve them from any undesirable consequences. The Jerusalem Talmud has a paragraph which might well be a commentary on this very situation: "If a man makes a vow to abstain from food, woe to him if he eateth, and, woe to him if he does not eat! If he eateth, he sinneth against his vow; if he does not eat, he sins against his life. What then must he do? Let him go before the sages, and they will absolve him from his vow."

The plot divulged

It is near impossible for forty men to keep a secret. And in any case the plotters would feel pretty confident that there was no risk at all of Paul or the chief captain hearing of their intention.

But the son of Paul's sister, who apparently was associated by inclination and temperament with the extremist party, overheard the plotting and resolved to give warning. It would seem that, during this visit to Jerusalem, or maybe earlier, Paul had become reconciled with his family from which his faith had estranged him.

A visit to the apostle in Antonia was easy, for he was held under the lightest possible form of restraint. As soon as Paul heard from his nephew what was afoot, he asked one of the

centurions to take the young man to the captain. The youth was very courteously received, for 'Who knows?' the captain probably said to himself, 'this may well be another freeborn Roman citizen!'

Elaborate precautions

As soon as the story was told, Claudius Lysias' mind was made up. 'Thanks for telling me this. Now, don't breathe a word about it to another soul!' And forthwith he proceeded to issue detailed instructions to his two best centurions. Infantry, cavalry, and spearmen (if indeed that is what the Greek word means) - nearly five hundred of them all told - were to act as Paul's escort to Caesarea, away from the threat of the IRA in Jerusalem. The captain's error of judgement before hearing mention of that magic phrase "Roman citizen" was now being atoned for in every way possible. And it may be taken as fairly certain that he would have assurance from Paul that no complaint would be made to the governor about his treatment in Antonia. Certain early texts add as explanation of this great concern for Paul that "he (the chief captain) feared that the Jews, snatching him away, would kill him, and himself afterwards be accused as one having received money (i.e. taken a bribe to facilitate the assassination)."

The captain's instructions to his centurions included the provision of "beasts, to set Paul on." That plural seems to imply that others were to accompany the apostle, and since Luke and Aristarchus are known to have shared his journey to Rome (27:1,2 and Titus also, maybe), it is not unlikely that permission was given for these faithful brethren to travel as Paul's "servants".

Departure time was set for nine o'clock that night. There was a full moon, so the night march would be easy and also more comfortable than in the mid-day heat.

But before sunset there would come the bland request from the chief priests for a re-convening of the enquiry about Paul - readily agreed to, with tongue in cheek. Then next morning the general disappointment and exasperation would be shrugged off with a second-thoughts explanation: The governor would be sure to want to handle so important a matter himself, so the sooner the accusers could present themselves in Caesarea, the sooner the matter could be sorted out to everyone's satisfaction.

The night ride brought Paul and his guard thirty-five miles on the way as far as Antipatris. Paul was now well out of danger, so after a few hours' rest most of the detachment returned to Jerusalem, and the next night the rest took the apostle the remaining twenty-five miles, and delivered him next morning, with an explanatory letter from Claudius Lysias, to the governor Felix.

Claudius Lysias and Felix

The letter told the bare essentials about Paul's case, at the same time being subtly slanted to present the writer of it in a favourable light. For example, the Greek has a deliberate ambiguity allowing Felix to read into it that the captain had taken strong action in the first place *because* he knew Paul to be a Roman citizen. There is also a hint that the captain had an efficient underground information service. And (at the end of v.29) the Bezan text has a short addition: "and I scarcely brought him forth (from the Sanhedrin) with force," as though implying heroic efforts by the captain and his men. The intimation that the accusers had been told to follow up their case before the governor was not strictly true, for they were only told this after the letter had been sent.

Rather surprisingly, the letter also included a personal expression of opinion that Paul had "nothing laid to his charge worthy of death" (cp. 18:14,15). Luke is already set on working into his narrative every possible indication that his friend was not guilty (cp. 25:25; 26:31).

Felix (more about him later!) briefly asked Paul "what kind of province" he came from. If peradventure he was from one of those administered by the Herods, it would then be easy for

Felix to "pass the buck" in characteristic civil service fashion (cp. Lk. 23:8). Or if from some other near-by province, then there might be opportunity to have enquiries made about the apostle's personal history, But Tarsus in Cilicia was too remote for that. 'I'll hear the whole story when they come from Jerusalem,' the governor said curtly. So Paul was led away to be kept as a prisoner of privilege.

Philip and the brethren in Caesarea would soon hear about Paul and doubtless have ready access to him. It had taken only ten days or so for the fulfilment of the prophecy which had been made in their hearing (21:11).

Notes: 23:12-35

12. *Certain of the Jews banded together.* Farrar quotes 12:5, and contrasts that with complete absence of any hint of the same on Paul's behalf! Josephus, in his Antiquities 20.8.5, has an eloquent paragraph about the methods of these Dagger Men and their willingness to attempt any villainy in return for a bribe. "Terrorism" is not a twentieth-century invention.
14. *A curse.* Ironically Dt. 20:17 has the identical phraseology, but here in the sense of utter destruction for those unfit to live in the Holy Land. Note also Lev. 5:4.
16. *Told Paul,* as in 14:6.
17. The unusual detail in this narrative surely suggests that Luke himself was present at the time - as a friend of Paul visiting him in prison? Or was he the "Gentile" trespasser in the temple, who had sparked off the great row? In that case, he must have suffered buffetting and arrest along with Paul. But it is like him to leave his own part in the affair unmentioned.
20. *To ask thee.* The Greek word normally describes a request to one of equal status. Luke's use of language is very exact.
23. *Spearmen.* This translation is a guess.
    The third hour. Full moon may be deduced from the fact that this was a week after Pentecost, which itself was seven weeks after Passover which is always at full moon.
25. *After this manner,* i.e. not verbatim. Not improbably the captain read the letter to Paul before sending it.
27. *This man.* The Greek uses a more dignified word than in 22:26.
    Came. The word implies sudden brisk action. Compare the way in which other men of the world dress up their actions in the best possible light: 25:9,20; Dan. 2:25.
35. *Herod's judgement hall.* RV: palace-taken over by the Roman administration.

97. Tertullus (24:1-9)

Roman judges were instructed, in normal conditions, to try a case within three days of receiving the documents relating to it. Aware of this, the elders in Jerusalem knew that, because of the two-day journey to Caesarea, they must be ready to make their case before Felix within five days (v.1) of Paul's transfer from Antonia. This meant no small amount of upheaval in their affairs. But so great was their rancour against the Lord's apostle, especially on the part of that "whited wall" Ananias, that they were willing to put up with any trouble or discomfort.

Orator and lawyer

It seems very probable that, because of their constant dealings with the Roman authorities, the Sanhedrin had their own Jewish Rome-trained legal expert who would be able to advise on niceties of Roman law and also sort out possible conflicts of principle vis-a-vis their own legal system. Such a one was Tertullus, who throughout talked as a Jew representing Jews - "we have found ... him we took ... our law ... we accuse him" -but whose oration (so the linguistic experts say) shows every sign of having been delivered to the governor in the most elegant Latin.

Felix

Thanks to Josephus and Roman historians a fair amount is known about Felix who was now to hear the case. He was the younger brother of Claudius Caesar's top favourite, a freed slave who succeeded in making a thorough mess of the Roman rule of Judaea. Apart from the fact that in the early years of his administration he suppressed various robber bands and put down at least one insurrection (21:38), all that is known about him is bad. "The dubious light in which the character of Felix appears in the New Testament narrative is bright compared with that shed upon it by the other histories of the time" (HDB-"Felix").

When the Sicarii, the Dagger-Men arose, Felix was even willing to use them for his own ends and to share their plunder. He had them assassinate Jonathan, the only decent high-priest for years. His methods provoked more and more violence in Judaea, so that "under him rebellion became permanent." At last (v.27) he was recalled to Rome and only saved from indictment before the new Caesar by the back-stairs manoeuvres of his brother. In a famous quotation Tacitus summed him up thus: "He exercised the prerogative of a king, with all cruelty and lust, in the spirit of a slave."

Such was the man who now had in his power the life or death of one who in ability, character and virtue was immeasurably superior to himself.

A fulsome speech

After the formal preliminaries (the language here has a distinctly legal flavour), Tertullus began an elaborate oration. Obviously Luke's version of it is not verbatim, but a summary. The speech could not possibly have been so short - a mere seven verses.

The advocate made a brave start, but finished off (v.8) somewhat lamely. To a man the commentators fall back on the word "fulsome." There could be no bigger contrast with Paul's plain-spoken approach (v.10). The smarminess of this speech suggests that Tertullus was conscious of having to make the best of a poor case.

First, then, he lauded the "great quietness" the nation had enjoyed (but only for about the first two years!) under Felix. This was the way to the heart of any Roman governor, for it was this reputation more than any which they all coveted. 'All the time and everywhere, thanks to your foresight and planning, there are improvements and reforms.' This was a great lie, but what did Tertullus care? He even slipped in a word which very frequently meant "divine providence."

'We welcome this, your excellency, with gratitude and enthusiasm. But (much as I should like) I must not go on in this strain or I shall hold you up from pursuing your other worthy activities' - so he implied.

'Let me then impose on your sweetly-reasonable yieldingness whilst outlining in only a condensed form the case against this Paul of Tarsus'

'There is a three-fold charge against him, one of them political and two religious. He is constantly stirring up unrest and provoking riots in lots of places. Time after time this has happened. He is a pestilence, infecting multitudes with the same evil spirit. In Jewry he is a leading character in the hateful sect of the Nazarenes. And, most specifically, he has shown an intention to defile the holy temple in Jerusalem.'

Was Tertullus aware that the charges he was now preferring were almost exactly those brought against Jesus in his trial? (Lk. 23:5; Mt. 26:61). But he must have been conscious of presenting a very thin case.

The first charge was an unprincipled distortion. True, in many a city - Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus (to name only some) -there had been riots and disturbances. But were they stirred up or led by Paul? This is precisely the argument of the modern demagogue: 'You will not accede to our selfish demands. So of course you are to blame for the violence which ensues.' But the referral from Claudius Lysias certainly suggested that there was another side to the story.

The reference to "the sect of the Nazarenes" would alert Felix's attention, for he had been resolute in his suppression of false Messiahs.

The third charge - defiling the temple - was a smear which Tertullus knew could not be sustained in either Roman or Jewish law, but it would serve to bolster up the other accusations.

At this point there comes in one of the most tricky textual problems in the Book of Acts, for verses 6b,7,8a are omitted by six of the best uncial manuscripts, with a few other supporting authorities; whilst the Received Text has only two uncials but also a great mass of other later manuscripts on its side.

If the passage concerned is bogus, it is difficult to see why something so circumstantial but otherwise of no serious importance should have been invented. On the other hand if it is genuine, it is extremely difficult to see why it should ever have come to be omitted by so many of the best manuscripts. Perhaps, although ancient, they are not necessarily the best.

The words, accepted here as valid, contain just the kind of distortion of fact -"whom we seized" - as could be expected in advocacy of this sort. There is also a bitter (and tactless?) complaint against Claudius Lysias - "with great violence (true?) he took him away out of our hands" - and also an insinuation that if only the captain had not meddled, the whole thing would have been swiftly and correctly dealt with by their highest Jewish court; the most excellent Felix was being troubled needlessly.

Feeble conclusion

Tertullus rounded off lamely with a recommendation that if "he" - Paul or the captain, the latter probably - be examined, full confirmation of their accusations would be forthcoming. If he meant Paul, the "examination" suggested would be by flogging or torture. But if Claudius Lysias, wasn't the advocate asking for deferment of the case until the captain himself were present?

Felix was not much impressed with the assertion: 'We have a fine witness, but he is sixty miles away'? Even a long sequence of Jewish notables "joining in the attack" on Paul did not mask the main fact that Claudius Lysia was essential in this trial. So Felix called their bluff by saying: 'Very well, we'll wait till Lysias is here.' But first, with a nod in Paul's direction, he gave

him leave to tell his side of the story.

Notes: 24:1-9

2. *Very worthy deeds;* s.w. Jer. 7:3,5
3. *Always and in all places.* This comes in better at the end of v.2 and balances "great" (much) at the beginning of that sentence.
   Accept; i.e. welcome, as in 2:41; Lk. 8:40.
   Most noble Felix. An official mode of address. What hypocrisy! But not in Lk. 1:3.
4. *Clemency.* It was Paul who got the clemency; v.23.
5. *Pestilent fellow.* Man of Belial; 1 Sam. 25:25.
   The Nazarenes. Cp. Jn. 7:41,42; 1:46.
6. *Hath gone about to profane* means; He made an attempt ... Tertullus knew that the cry of 21:28 could not be sustained.
   Profane the temple. 21:28 modified. Later Paul answers these charges systematically.
   Would have judged. The captain had asked them for an enquiry, not a trial.
7. *Came.* This word might imply: He left his proper duty in order to interfere.

98. Before Felix (24:10-21)

With three charges laid against him, Paul now had opportunity to lay out his defence before the governor. The charges were these:

A. Creating civil disturbance and insurrection amongst Jews in Jerusalem and throughout the empire.
B. "A ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."
C. Defiling the temple.

There was no "most noble Felix" in Paul's address to the crude careerist now trying his case. The apostle was too honest for that. But what he said, he meant:

A detailed defence

'I know that for a long time (at least six years) you have been an official in this province, and that you have had full opportunity to acquaint yourself with Jewish religion and outlook (an indirect allusion here, surely to Felix's Jewish wife). So in presenting my case I have no misgivings about being misunderstood.'

His first point was a simple one. From his arrival in Jerusalem to the present moment it was a mere twelve days, as Felix could easily verify:

1. Arrival
2. With James, on the Day of Pentecost.
2-7. Vows in the temple. Arrest.
8. Before the Sanhedrin.
9. The plot revealed. 10,11 To Caesarea.
11. In custody there.
12. Before Felix

In so short a time what could he achieve in the way of riot and uprising (A) in a city where he was now a comparative stranger for it was now many years (v. 17) since he had spent any appreciable time in Jerusalem? In any case, the manifest reason for his visit was worship and charity, not insurrection.

True, he had spent a fair amount of time in the temple (C) but this was for discharge of holy vows (B). Was there any evidence at all that he had made efforts either in the temple or the synagogues or the city to stir up the people to civil disobedience (A) by his oratory or disputations? Members of the Sanhedrin had made assertions against him, but they were not personal witnesses of any such misbehaviour, nor had any such witness been called. Wasn't it strange that there was no-one to testify from personal knowledge of any kind of illegality?

Paul could have rested his defence there. There was no case to answer. He knew well enough that the Roman governor, like Gallio in Corinth, was not concerned to interfere in Jewish religious disputations.

Advocacy for the Faith

Then why did he go on, and at some length? In the first instance, he could not resist this further opportunity to witness to faith in Christ. But even more importantly, he wanted the Faith legally validated by as high a tribunal as possible. Until this was achieved there would be ceaseless collisions with Jewish prejudice and hostility, and recurring suspicion on the part of Roman administrators. The standing of the Christian Faith as *religio licita,* a permitted religion, needed to be established once and for all, and who better qualified to achieve this than Paul who was both highly educated Jew and Roman citizen? So he soldiered on, intent on making his own trial a test case for all time.

"They call my Faith a heresy, (that is, not a false religion - the modern meaning of the word -

but a segment of Judaism with its own particular emphasis, like Pharisees or Essenes). It isn't that at all. It is The Way, the true faith of Israel, the fulfilment of all that Jews have received from ancient days in the divine promises to the Fathers, in the Law of Moses and the writings of the prophets '(B)'.

Paul knew that he could talk thus to a governor who had "more perfect knowledge" (v.22) of Jewish religion.

'The culmination of all true Jewish hope rests in the resurrection of the dead, not only of the just but - note well, Felix! -of the unjust also! This is part of the settled purpose of God, as many Jews besides Nazarenes firmly believe. Even so those who have been testifying against me today believe this as much as I do (B). Indeed, it is an event they expect, as being not far away.'

The apostle resisted the temptation to expatiate on the Messianic kingdom. That would have been tactless, being liable to create suspicion of a will to undermine Roman authority.

Instead he emphasized the moral obligation of the Faith, such as forbad any nefarious intentions against Rome or Jerusalem:

'Meanwhile, until that great Day of God (a far more important tribunal than this in Caesarea), I ceaselessly exercise myself, like an athlete keeping himself in training, to be conscience-clear both God-ward and to my fellow men, both Jews and Romans. In token of this let me tell you what I actually did in Jerusalem. One of the main purposes of my visit was to bring a considerable charity fund collected in Roman cities for the benefit of poor Jews here (B). Also I spent a considerable time in the temple sponsoring the discharge of holy vows and making special thank-offerings of my own (C). It was, alas, this very thing which gave rise to all the present fuss. That riot in the temple area was created entirely by others - by certain strongly prejudiced Jews from Asia - against a man pronounced purified (B) by the priests of the temple! (C).'

Witnesses

'Furthermore, I have here with me dependable men who can bear witness to the truth of all that I say. If, indeed, there is any serious accusation against me, those Asian Jews should be here now, testifying against me, for the trouble only blew up when they got excited. Their witness is absolutely necessary in this case - but where are they? Why are they not here? - why indeed?'

'Well, you do have here members of the Sanhedrin who heard my testimony the next day, and they can bear witness that no fault was found in me then. What upset the Council then was my declaration of faith, exactly as the majority of them believe it, in the resurrection of the dead (B). So how serious a crime is it that I am accused of?'

If Felix had been anything but the man he was, he would have contemptuously dismissed the case forthwith. But, characteristically, he saw the possibility of making capital out of this situation.

So instead: 'The man who knows most about this business, and who will certainly be my most trustworthy witness, is Claudius Lysias. We must have him here. (Felix had the captain's witness already in his letter!). Until he comes from Jerusalem, the prisoner is to be kept under light arrest.'

Notes: 24:10-21

13. *Believing.* This emphasis on Faith is followed in v. 15 with Hope, and in v. 17 with Love.
15. *Which they themselves also allow.* RV: *look for.* The present continuous tense seems to imply expectation of early fulfilment.
16. RV: *Herein do I also* suggests either (a) as they do; or (b) besides believing; i.e. morals as well as faith - The Way requires both.
    A conscience void of offence. Contrast Ananias and Felix! Perhaps Paul implies: I have to face a more searching tribunal than this.

17. *Came.* The Greek word might carry the idea: This was aside from the main activity of my life.
18. *Not with multitude, nor with tumult.* They - the Jews from Asia - created that upset. The text implies an ellipsis repeating these words: "with multitude, and with tumult." Paul evidently stopped short, realising that to utter such words would prefer a counter-charge and he was loathe to do that.
19. *If they had.* This very unusual optative surely implies: "They would have, if they could."
20. *Let these say.* Greek aorist: Let them say it right now!
21. *Except it be* — Paul is very sardonic here.
    I cried out among them. Not before them, *or against* them. The implication is that Paul and they, the Sanhedrin, were at one on this.

99. A Prisoner at Caesarea (24:22-27)

Paul should have walked out of that court a free man. Felix knew this perfectly well, for his years of diversified service in that area combined with his more recent acquisition of a Jewish wife to make him unusually well-versed in all things Jewish and also with The Way which Paul had just proclaimed and defended.

But relations with the Jewish leaders were already strained, and to give the prisoner his freedom would only make matters worse. So instead of "Case dismissed", Felix declared the case deferred until the unspecified time when Claudius Lysias could be heard in person regarding Paul.

It is interesting to speculate how the governor had become so well informed about "the sect of the Nazarenes". Philip and also Cornelius and his wide circle of Roman friends (10:24; 21:8) lived in Caesarea, so the Faith was not practised there in obscurity.

Light imprisonment

The Jewish leaders shrewdly read between the lines of Felix's decision, and as good as abandoned the prosecution. However, to have Paul a long-term untried prisoner was perhaps the next best thing, and with that they had to be content. They could hardly expect more, for the governor's pronouncement: "When Lysias the chief captain is come down (from Jerusalem), I will get to know the ins and outs of *your* matter," fairly clearly implied that he was satisfied with the straight story he had heard from Paul but doubted the accuracy of the case they had presented.

So Paul was without his freedom, but with a minimum of discomfort. His friends had ready access to him, and he was free to occupy himself very much as he pleased. Some months earlier, when writing to the brethren in Rome, he had mentioned his prayers that, coming to Rome, he might "together with you find rest" (15:32RV). He was a man desperately in need of a holiday. Now, at last, in Caesarea his prayer was answered in a somewhat unlooked-for way.

Drusilla

At this time Felix was very much away from Caesarea, being less concerned with the government of the country than with his overpowering love-affair with the wife of the king of Emesa in Syria.

Drusilla, a matchless beauty of seventeen, was a daughter of Herod Agrippa I who had died in agony "eaten of worms" after his persecution of James and Peter (Acts 12). Married at fourteen to a much older man she had no interest in, she had not been unwilling to be lured away when Felix employed the persuasions of a mountebank magician, a Cypriot Jew. Somewhere about the time of Paul's trial, Drusilla's husband had conveniently died. So after a little while Felix was able to return to Caesarea having with him "his own wife" (Luke's phrase). His wife-stealing had now been regularised.

Drusilla probably knew about the interpretation the disciples had put on the death of her father, and in any case, like her brother Agrippa II (25:13), although of Edomite blood she had been reared in the Jewish religion, and was interested in, but strongly prejudiced against, "the sect of the Nazarenes."

Some early manuscripts suggest that she asked to see Paul and hear him discourse on the Faith; so of course the infatuated Felix readily agreed. Thus Paul had repeated opportunity to witness for Christ before two of the most unlikely people. Even with such he did not despair of "the faith *into* Christ" making a powerful impression. So, time after time (like John the Baptist before Herod Antipas!) the apostle unflinchingly testified to these two concerning the righteousness imputed to a man through his baptism into Christ, and the life of self-control which life in Christ calls for, and the inescapable day of judgement for those answerable to

Christ for their mis-pent lives.

It needed much courage to talk bluntly to such a man as this Roman governor "appropriately to his great lust and future doom." But Paul did not wrap things up, with the result that Felix became really fearful.

Paul's reasoning from Scripture

One is tempted to see in the text of Psalms 1 and 2 the main ground for Paul's discourse on at least one of these occasions. The parallelism of phrasing and idea is intriguing:

Acts 24	**Psalms 1,2**		
Felix (= happy, blessed). Drusilla (= "she who enquired" -she sent for Paul)	Blessed is the man —	Porcius Festus in place of Felix	The chaff which the wind driveth away – the way of the ungodly shall perish
Heard him concerning *faith in* Christ	Not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor in the way of sinners, nor in the seat of the scornful.	and also: The Sanhedrin	The rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against His Christ-
Judgement to come	The ungodly shall not stand in the judgement — when his wrath is kindled but a little.	I stood before the council	The ungodly shall not stand in the judgement.
Felix trembled	Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.	More perfect knowledge of the Way	The way of the righteous.

Case-hardened

However, Felix shrugged off the immediate challenge of the gospel. His old outlook was too strong for him to contemplate seriously the drastic change which loyalty to Christ (instead of Caesar and self) demanded.

So decision was deferred. But still, from time to time, these colloquies went on. Felix's hard conscience was taking a hammering, but the materialistic motive always prevailed - the possibility that Paul would tire of restraint and would be glad to bribe his way to freedom. That mention of alms brought to Jerusalem (v. 17) had made Felix suspect that Paul had access to substantial wealth, especially too since there was no sign of poverty about the way he lived in prison. So Felix held on in hopes of a substantial "persuader." One Roman governor is known to have allowed the criminals in Judean prisons to buy their way to freedom. Thus he filled his pockets, and also filled the country with vice and violence.

Paul's "holiday"

But Paul was not given to bribery, so for two long years his restless energetic spirit was tried by the constraints of his imprisonment. Luke gives no indication of how he occupied himself in these circumstances. Doubtless there was a lot of Bible study, and letters galore (none of which have been preserved) went forth from Caesarea to the wide range of ecclesias which Paul's labours had brought into existence. It is thought by some that Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon belong to this period, but there is really little positive evidence pro or con.

Also, it is not difficult to infer from Paul's epistles that by this time he had organized a team of able and willing young men who gladly consolidated and extended Paul's evangelism in the various provinces where the apostle had laboured. For them Paul, the prisoner in Caesarea, was the spider at the centre of the web, imparting wisdom and inspiration to worthy efforts he himself could no longer take part in.

Also, since Luke was constantly at his side, there would be a good deal of collaboration in the matchless history which that worthy disciple was busy with. Within the past two years Luke's gospel had been published far and wide in the ecclesias (2 Cor. 8:18), and already he was busy on a second volume: "The Gospel of the Holy Spirit", which within a few years would come to be known everywhere as "The Acts of the Apostles."

So, in spite of restraint, life for Paul was not dull during these two years.

Felix fired

Meantime Felix's administration went from bad to worse. At length a crisis in his dealings with the influential Jewish community in Caesarea led to vigorous complaints against him in Rome, so the new Caesar, Nero, recalled him in anger and sent Festus in his place.

Felix should have tidied up Paul's case before leaving Caesarea, but instead, seeing here a chance to soothe exacerbated Jewish spirit and knowing how much store they set on having Paul out of circulation, he deliberately left the apostle a prisoner. Let Festus cope with that headache when he came.

Thus Felix returned to Rome trembling more about his arraignment there than about the inevitable judgement to be pronounced by one greater than Nero. As it turned out, but for his brother Pallas in high office at Caesar's court, that would have been the end of Felix. His real and unenviable end lies yet in the future.

Notes: 24:22-27

22. *Deferred.* LXX Ps. 78:21; 89:38 suggests impatience.
24. *Felix came* clearly implies a period away from Caesarea.
25. *Temperance* is best explained by its opposite in 1 Cor. 7:5. The sequence of ideas in this verse is similar to that in 1 Cor. 1:30.
    Wisdom - the knowledge of the gospel of Christ.
    Righteousness - through baptism into Christ.
    Sanctification - the developing life in Christ.
    Redemption - ultimate salvation in Christ.
    When I have opportunity. Here, by a remarkable irony, Felix almost quotes Ps. 75:2 LXX. "When I have opportunity (or, take a set time), I will judge righteously"! But his word for "have" is one often associated with eating a meal: "When I have an appetite for this -."
26. Money: i.e. a lot of money; s.w. Mk. 10:23,24; 2 Chr. 1:11,12; Dan. 11:13,24,28.
27. *Into Felix' room.* LXX usage suggests not "instead of Felix" but "instead of Caesar, with his authority."
    Willing to shew the Jews a pleasure. The word means, strictly, "to store up gratitude," i.e. to put them under an obligation to him. Some texts also add:' 'and for the sake of Drusilla" - in other words, *she* wanted Paul left a prisoner.

100. Before Festus (25:1-12)

The new Roman governor was almost certainly some improvement on his unprincipled predecessor, though indeed apart from these chapters in Acts and a couple of mentions by Josephus, nothing whatever is known about him. Apparently he took strong measures against the brigands infesting the country, and when Herod Agrippa II had a quarrel with the Jewish leaders about building in the holy city, he gave decision in the king's favour.

His procuratorship lasted only a short while, and throughout it he was probably a very sick man, for he died in office.

However, he was a man of prompt action, for on arrival in Caesarea, after only one day to get used to his new headquarters, he made the journey to Jerusalem, there to meet all the Jewish notables. Evidently he was anxious to make a good impression on them as a man of dispatch, willing to co-operate.

The new high priest, Ishmael, and the entire Sanhedrin (v.15) were there at Jerusalem to meet him. They adopted precisely the tactics that had been tried against Paul at Corinth (18:12). The new governor was forthwith bombarded with clamorous requests (v.24) that action be taken against this hated Nazarene. Realising that Festus was a bit unsure of himself and not physically strong, they hoped to wear him down by their unanimity against Paul. It is a measure of the unquenchable rancour these leaders cherished against the apostle that, after two years during which it had not been possible to do a thing against him, their animosity was as bitter as ever. Even now Paul was Number One on their agenda with the new governor!

Scheming

Already these evil men had their plans laid. They would persuade an ill-informed Festus to transfer the case to Jerusalem for decision by the Sanhedrin. Thus they had two strings to their bow. It would be easy enough to have a hired band of brigands attack his escort on the road into the hills, and of course Paul would be one of the incidental casualties in the encounter. In his ignorance Festus would be highly unlikely to have Paul guarded by five hundred soldiers, as Lysias had been careful to do.

Failing success in that laudable endeavour, a framed Sanhedrin could be depended on to bring in a capital sentence against Paul, which sentence a well-bribed governor would then probably confirm - or, at the very least, they could count on life-imprisonment. They hoped that it would be the case of Jesus of Nazareth all over again.

Since this new governor was obviously anxious to be on good terms with them, the men of influence, they felt sure that he would oblige them. They even went further, suggesting to him that it would be a friendly gesture if he were to pronounce judgement against Paul there and then (v.15). If he were to do this what a lot of time-wasting and trouble it would save both him and them!

Non—co-operation

To their surprise, however, Festus did not seem at all eager to oblige:

"In Roman law the court doesn't go to the plaintiff, but the plaintiff to the court. This is one of my cases, and my court sits in Caesarea. I'm returning there now for this very purpose, so you'd better go there too. Troublesome travel, you say? Well, I've made the journey. Surely there are some among you who are equal to it. And if you've got a case against this Paul (which I doubt), I'll listen to it."

Thus he showed at the outset that he had made a shrewd assessment of their unscrupulous quality.

The governor stayed eight full days in Jerusalem (the Feast of Tabernacles?), and then

returned to headquarters. Since Paul's hearing began the day after arrival back in Caesarea, Festus and the Jewish leaders must have travelled together. It may be inferred with a fair degree of probability that private discussions about Paul were held, and it is not unlikely that some kind of "persuasion" was applied to Festus, as it had been to Pilate; Mic. 7:3; Ps. 26:10 (cp. "Who moved the stone", ch. 4, by Morison).

The hearing before Festus

Back in Caesarea, no time was lost in re-hearing the case against Paul. The Jews of Caesarea, a most influential community, united their clamour (v.24) against Paul, and in the re-trial one charge was piled on another to impress Festus afresh with the fact that this was a case of major importance. In their eyes Paul was no ordinary offender.

In reply the apostle could only repeat the defence he had already made. Known facts showed that he did not despise the Law of Moses. Nor had he shown any contempt for the temple. And the charge of sedition or insurrection, completely unsupported by evidence, was too absurd to be taken seriously, as Festus could readily discern. Most probably the accusation of disloyalty to Caesar was stressed in the hope that just as they had blackmailed Pilate, so also they would frighten Festus into granting the decision they meant to have.

In all conscience the governor could not say: "On this last charge the prisoner is guilty." So, to satisfy these bullies he suggested to Paul:

The case against you is really religious and not political or civil. As you must see, the proper tribunal is the Sanhedrin. Suppose, then, that I remit this matter to the Jewish court in Jerusalem? You can depend on me to keep an eye on the case in all its details.'

How could Festus say this except with tongue in cheek? Hadn't the virulence of the Jewish elders (v.7,24) already made it perfectly plain that Paul could expect no even-handed justice from them? By this time the governor was concerned only for his own comfort and reputation in his new province.

Paul saw through the manoeuvre immediately. In the first place, was it likely that he would arrive in Jerusalem in safety? And if he did, how could Festus hope to exercise remote control over the trial? In any case, what Paul sought was a decision that the Christian Faith was a permitted religion under Roman law, and how could the Sanhedrin make such a ruling, even if it had the slightest inclination to do so?

"Caesarem appello"

The apostle realised that all hope of fair treatment from Festus was now gone. The personal decision he had feared might be necessary was now being forced upon him. So he spoke up in bold rebuke of the underhand manoeuvrings which he felt sure had been going on:

'My case was earlier (under Felix) allotted for decision by Roman and not Jewish jurisdiction. The trial was brought here, and here is where I ought to be tried. If there is a proven case against me -which there isn't, as you, Festus, can plainly see - then let me face the full penalty of my offence. But if, as I fear, there is behind this suggestion a policy of men-pleasing, I must protest strongly against it. / *appeal unto Caesar!* Let my case be heard in Rome.'

The atmosphere in the court must have been electric. Paul had expressed a vote of no-confidence in his judge. From the moment he used his privilege as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar, neither Jews nor Festus had any right to go a step further with this legal process.

In the intensity of their animosity, the Jews had over-reached themselves by seeking to add a civil charge against Paul to the various religious accusations which now had Festus bewildered. If there had been no charge of being "against Caesar — a mover of sedition amongst all the Jews" (v.8; 24:5), Paul would have had no ground for making his appeal to Caesar. But now the present situation chimed in with the assurance given him by his Lord that

he "must bear witness also in Rome" (23:11; cp. 19:21: "must").

The governor piqued

Festus was thoroughly rattled by this unlooked-for development. This was his very first case in Judea, and he was being appealed against as though the prisoner had no confidence in his impartiality or powers of judgement!

He turned to the legal advisers present with him in the court, no doubt to check that Paul's Roman citizenship was authentic and that there was no ground on which to refuse his appeal.

Then in piqued tones: "Thou hast appealed unto Caesar. Unto Caesar shalt thou go!" - as who should say: "And see if you fare any better there!"

The Caesar to whom Paul had appealed was Nero, newly on the throne. There was nothing to worry about in this, for during his first five years, thanks to the strong and wise influence of Seneca, brother of Gallio, the empire had a model administration. The chief disadvantages for Paul would be considerable expense, wearisome travel, and continued long restraint. For the time being at any rate the eagle's wings were clipped. Those evil men of Jerusalem had at least that satisfaction.

Notes: 25:1-12

4. Were Jewish insistence and the clamour of the mob (v.24) getting on Festus's nerves?
5. *Able.* There is some evidence from Josephus that this might read: "influential". But in this context would Festus use the word with that meaning? Contrast his attitude to them in v.9. Something happened between v.5,9.
6. *More than ten days.* The two possible readings are:
   (a) Not more than ten days;
   (b) Eight or ten days.
   The latter, well-supported by a group of ancient manuscripts, is silly, unless Luke is seeking to combine the inclusive and exclusive methods of signifying a period of time; cp. Lk. 9:28 with Mt. 17:1.
   Next day. Promptitude was evidently a Festus characteristic; v. 1,6,17.
7. *Many. . . complaints.* But they evidently boiled down to the original three: v.8; 21:28; 24:5.
9. *Do the Jews a pleasure;* s.w. in v.11. The meaning, more exactly, is: Grant Paul as a gift in order to court favour; s.w. 3:14. But note how Festus excuses himself in v.20. The word plainly implies an abandonment of all sound principle or impartiality in this judgement.
   Before me. The Greek phrase implies "depending on me" (i.e. to see that justice is done) - an empty promise, for Festus knew almost nothing about Jewish law and religion.
10. *Where I ought to be judged.* A rebuke and blunt reminder that Festus was not showing much impartiality now.
    As thou very well knowest. Literally: as also thou art perceiving better. This might have a possible implication: "better than you choose to say before this court." Note in v.18,25 what Festus - no fool - did perceive.
11. For Paul to appeal to Caesar on what the Jews regarded as essentially a point of religion would be interpreted by them (and by the brethren in Jerusalem?) as apostasy. Hence 28:19b.

101. Festus and Agrippa (25:13-17)

Once Paul had appealed to Caesar, his case should have been remitted to Rome forthwith. Yet the phrases: "after certain days - many days" (v.13,14) seem in sharp contrast with the promptitude with which Festus usually operated (as in v.1, 6,17, 23). Perhaps it was now midwinter when all long-distance shipping was suspended in the Mediterranean. Or it may be that Festus was a sick man and as much business as possible was suspended awaiting his recovery. Certainly in this narrative he appears as a somewhat indecisive, not very self-assertive, character.

The royal pair

Apparently, Herod Agrippa II, now king of most of Palestine but not of Judea, had earlier sent a warm welcoming greeting to Festus, and now he and his sister Bernice made a state visit to the governor.

Agrippa, correctly called "king" in Luke's narrative, but not "king of the Jews" (contrast Lk. 1:5), was now about thirty-one. Like all the Herods, from his earliest days he had kept on the friendliest terms with the Caesars in Rome. His father, assiduous to cultivate Jewish good opinion, had raised him in the Jewish religion; and indeed the Jews never had a ruler who understood their outlook so well. For this reason, and out of personal friendship, Claudius had given Agrippa control of the temple and the high-priesthood, so that, some years later (in AD 66), he deposed the high-priest for countenancing the murder of James, the Lord's brother.

Bernice was the older sister of Drusilla, and like her a famous beauty. But she was an even more depraved character than her sister. When only fourteen she was married to her uncle; then, briefly, to the king of Cilicia; at the present time she was her own brother's mistress; in later days the emperor Vespasian took an interest in her; and she ended up as Titus's con-cubine. Yet, following the family policy of toadying up to Jewish good-will, at one time she actually took a Nazirite vow! On another occasion she did her utmost to stop a massacre in Jerusalem by the Romans, but failed. A colourful character, truly!

Festus seeks help

The visit of this royal pair had lasted some time before at length Festus submitted Paul's case to Agrippa:

'I've got a problem on my hands, left me by Felix when he got the sack. With your Jewish expertise, you are just the man to help me. When I arrived here, the leaders of the nation bombarded me with demands for drastic action against this Paul, a prisoner of some quality. They wanted him sentenced there and then. But of course I told them that that is not the Roman way of dispensing justice. The man must have opportunity to answer the charges being made. I couldn't just hand him over to them.'

Reading between the lines it is not difficult to see how Festus was representing himself as a fine impartial judge. Grant them Paul as a gift? Not likely! Yet this was the very thing which Festus had made a subtle effort to do (v.9).

He went on: 'I lost no time in arranging a fair trial. There were lots of charges against Paul, but they all seemed to involve complicated questions about their religion about which I know little. They had me quite lost. There were wild assertions about a certain Jesus, crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate, whom this Paul alleges to be alive again (but, of course, you and I know that he isn't).'

'The obvious thing (Festus went on) was to have a case like this tried by the religious court in Jerusalem. I pressed for this repeatedly, but he stuck his toes in, insisting on a Roman trial, and being a Roman citizen he ended up by appealing to Caesar - the troublesome fellow! This case is a real nuisance.'

Agrippa had the same sort of curiosity that an earlier Herod had shown regarding Jesus (Lk. 23:8): 'I've heard about this Paul, have been interested in him for some time. I wouldn't mind hearing what he's got to say.'

'You shall' replied Festus, 'tomorrow'. He had got from Agrippa just the reaction he was hoping for.

A royal occasion

Accordingly, next day, with any amount of pomp and circumstance (such as the Herods gloried in; 12:21), these rulers came together, probably in the same auditorium where Agrippa's father had made his great oration and then been struck down by the angel of the Lord. Present also were the top Roman officials and the leading men of the Jewish and Syrian communities in Caesarea.

Paul was led in, still with a chain on his wrist (26:29). Then, matching the show and splendour of the occasion with his own style, Festus began an elaborate formal oration, primarily with the intention of emphasizing to all present how important and honourable Agrippa was. It was a studied compliment, a carefully contrived act of statemanship. It is noteworthy - and somewhat surprising - that, throughout, Agrippa seems to have been accorded precedence. He took charge of the hearing. And it was he who summed up at the end. It was he who first "rose up" to declare the session concluded (26:1,30,32).

'Have a good look at this man' declared Festus. 'In Jerusalem and also here in Caesarea I have been beset with pleas and intercessions from the Jews about him. They say his offences are so serious that it is absolutely necessary that he be put to death. My examination of him has brought no serious crime to light. Yet, without any encouragement from me or anybody else, the perverse fellow has appealed to Caesar. So of course I must send him to Rome. But a summary of the pro's and con's of the case must go with him. Here then is the reason for this assembly, to hear what he has got to say for himself. Your expert help, in this, king Agrippa, will be specially valuable and much appreciated.'

Festus had implied that he expected the king to initiate an interrogation of the prisoner. But Agrippa knew better than to risk making a fool of himself in discussion with a man who in earlier days had had the reputation of being one of the nimblest minds in the Sanhedrin. So he was content to say:

"Thou are permitted to speak for thyself."

Notes: 25:13-17

14. *Declared.* The Greek word suggests laying before a higher authority; cp. LK. 23:7,15, which has a different word but the same sort of implication.
14-21. What would be Luke's source of information for this long repetition?
15. *Desiring judgement against him.* "Demanding that he be sentenced" is the idea.
18. *Brought.* "Did not cease from bringing" is implied.
As I supposed, i.e. judging from the hostility and bitterness of the accusations.
19. *Their own superstition.* RV: religion. Festus would not use the word offensively, since Agrippa was nominally a Jew. But "their" might insinuate (between two worldly men who understood each other) that Agrippa's Jewishness was, like his father's, mostly put on.
Was dead. Greek perfect tense suggests: And of course he's still dead. *Affirmed* is a word implying the same thing; s.w. Rev. 2:2; Rom. 1:22.
20. *I doubted.* At a loss; perplexed. He conceals what had been his real motive; v.9.
22. *The man.* Knowing Paul to be a Roman citizen, Festus (v.14) had used a more dignified term. But not so Agrippa.
23. The most impressive assembly of Gentiles Paul had yet addressed; 9:15.
24. *The multitude of the Jews.* Organized riots to overawe Festus?
Dealt with me. In other places, "made intercession," Rom. 8:27,34; 11:2; Heb. 7:25. *Crying.* Continuously shouting out.
26. *My Lord.* A title appropriated by the later Caesars. The use of it here was neatly rebuked by Paul; 26:15. This speech by Festus, a rather woolly affair, is a remarkable confession to be made before all these people.

102. Before Agrippa (26:1-18)

One Herod after another was called upon to meet the challenge of men of God. Herod the Great's reaction to the birth of Jesus is known to everybody. His son Antipas and his grand-daughter Herodias knew well the message of John the Baptist, but between them brought him to a tragic end. It was this Herod, too, who could have had the deciding of the case of Jesus but who adroitly slid away from the responsibility (one John the Baptist was enough!). The next King Herod, Agrippa I, beheaded James and blithely decided on Peter as his next victim, but instead paid the penalty for his crime. His son, Agrippa II, himself not too admirable a character but definitely the pick of an evil bunch, was now to have his conscience uncomfortably alerted by the burning oratory of Paul.

Paul the rhetorician

On no other occasion is the apostle known to have achieved such powerful rhetorical effect as in his speech before the king. His Greek style was much more elaborate than usual; he brought in a considerable number of unusual words; there were not a few personal appeals and emotional phrases; once or twice he broke off into abrupt parentheses; constantly he abandoned all idea of defence in order most unashamedly to preach the gospel to this distinguished audience; and in two places he indulged in effective emphasis by repetition of simple words ("all-many").

Not that Paul needed to go all out to defend himself on this occasion. He had made his appeal to Caesar, and therefore need not have said a single word before Festus and Agrippa. But here was too good an opportunity to be missed for witness to Christ. Had not the Lord Jesus said that he was to "bear my name before Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (9:15)? When had he had such a representative audience as this now gathered before him (25:23)?

So, "taking courage, and receiving comfort by the Holy Spirit" (Bezan text; cp. v.25), that is, depending on the Lord's promise of all needful inspiration (Mt. 10:18-20), he spoke up boldly. "I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed."

It was to be a witness which bore valuable fruit some ten years later when disciples of the Lord, heedful of the Olivet warning (Mt. 24:15,16) used their opportunity to flee from the Roman onslaught against Jerusalem, seeking safety in Pella, the nearest place in Agrippa's administration - they knew that they would be received in kindly fashion there.

With chained hand outstretched (v.29), Paul first fell in with the recognized style of the times (rather like beginning a letter: "Dear Sir"); he opened with a restrained and dignified eulogy of the king:

'I know right well, king Agrippa, that you have been well-trained and are most knowledgeable in everything to do with the Jewish religion. Do you not yourself live the life of a practising Jew? So I am the more happy to have this opportunity to witness before you concerning the Faith I hold and the charges lavishly made against me. So hear me, please, with patience.'

In that last word, Paul was probably making allusion to the Book of Proverbs: "By long *forbearing* (s.w. LXX) is a *prince persuaded"* (25:15). Evidently Agrippa caught the allusion, as his later rejoinder seems to imply: "Almost thou *persuadest* me to be a Christian" (v.28).

His early days

The apostle now launched into a recapitulation of his early days and startling conversion. Much of this was already known to many of his hearers, with dubious variations, doubtless, so here was a good opportunity to set the record straight.

He told of his early training at Jerusalem, sitting at the feet of the great Gamaliel. Setting aside modesty, he mentioned how from the very first he had attracted the serious attention of the rabbis and had been marked out for promotion. His almost fanatical observance of strict Pharisaic practice had brought him special approval. Indeed there were still some members of the Sanhedrin who could have borne witness to all this, but rather than reinforce his defence they kept unworthily quiet about it.

At this point in the speech there was a parenthetic opportunity, too good to miss, to testify to the Truth of Christ.

Early hostility and conversion

'Consider this strange fact (he declared) that the very things I believed as a Pharisee - Israel's Messianic hope and an expectation of the resurrection of the Fathers - should now become the ground for slander and unremitting hostility against me. Night and day, at evening and morning service, with earnest prayer these truths are emphasized afresh in the temple service; and so it has been for generations. Yet it is concerning such a Faith that I am now bitterly accused - and by Jews, of all people! If God purposes to raise the dead, as the Promises firmly require, why is my conviction about the resurrection of Jesus written off as utterly incredible? - and by such as yourself, king Agrippa, and you learned Jews of Caesarea (25:19)!'

'Listen, then, to the plain evidence that I lay before you-' - and thus he returned to a more direct apologia pro vita sua. The vivid story, already included twice in Luke's narrative, was now told (and recorded) yet again, how savagely he had persecuted the early believers until that vivid unchallengeable appearance near Damascus had transformed him into the Lord's most fervent witness (for details, see Chapter 35).

Commissioned to preach

The apostle now dwelt at some length on the commission given to him by this Lord of Glory.

"Arise (as though from the dead), and stand upon thy feet." It was the divine command given to Ezekiel, stubborn and bitter of spirit, when he beheld the vision of the Shekinah Glory (Ez. 2:1,2). And the commission was similar in character - to be "a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou didst see me (in the past), and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee."

No lip curled as Paul narrated these things. His manifest ability and burning sincerity stifled every inclination to mockery.

The Lord had given him an explicit promise of deliverance from all Jewish and Gentile opposition. It was almost as though Paul was now blithely saying: 'So you see, king Agrippa and most noble Festus, all will yet turn out well for me. I am not going to be condemned either by you or by Caesar.' Opposition, hatred and strife there would be in plenty, as similarly they had been promised to poor Jeremiah (1:5, 8, 10, 18, 19; 15:10), but nevertheless the Lord's testimony would not be quenched.

To Jews and also to Gentiles

The piling up of phrases in the Lord's commission is most impressive, especially in the way in which they oscillate between reference to Jews and to Gentiles; "-the people (Israel) and the Gentiles, unto whom (plural pronoun - Gentiles) now I send thee *(apostello,* as an apostle)." At this point a wholly Jewish audience would have erupted in uncontrollable indignation, but in

this environment the Jewish leaders present had to restrain themselves.

"To open (Jewish) eyes, and to turn them (the Gentiles) from darkness to light," precisely as had happened to Paul himself after that first experience of the heavenly Glory. There can be little doubt that at this point Paul called to his aid the winsome prophecies of Isaiah about the gospel, but just which it is not easy to say:

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (60:1-3). There is hardly a phrase here that is not relevant either to Paul's conversion or to the witness he was now making.

"Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength ... I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth ... Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship ..." (49:5-7).

"I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people (Israel), for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house ... Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant (Israel, Saul of Tarsus)? or deaf, as my messenger that I send? who is blind as he that is perfect?" (42:6, 7,18,19).

"Behold, your God will come, raised up ... Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped-" (35:4,5).

Paul went on:" ... to turn them (the Gentiles) from the power of Satan (false worship, idols) unto God, that they (Israel) may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance (a divine lot, for Gentiles) among them (the New Israel) that are sanctified."

This comprehensive survey of the present purpose of God in Christ is all of it governed by a tremendous significant concluding phrase: "by *faith* which (brings a man) into me." It was impossible that Paul should leave out this message concerning personal decision and baptism.

There he paused, but only, as it were, to draw breath.

Notes: 26:1-18

3. *Expert.* More correctly: knowledgeable. Paul would not have been happy about this if he had known himself guilty! The word also means (in LXX): "a familiar friend" (of the Jews); Ps. 55:18; 2Kgs. 10:11. A nice double meaning.
4. *My youth.* Not necessarily 12+. This word is used about Timothy in his early 30s (1 Tim. 4:12).
5. *Knew me.* In NT. this always means foreknowledge.
   From the beginning. Gk. *anōthen* normally means "from above."
   Thus, the phrasing here seems to imply that from the first (v.4), the "top brass" earmarked Saul of Tarsus for promotion.
   Sect. Gk: *ha tresis,* not heresy, but faction, party.
   Religion. Gk: *thrēskia* means the outward form of religion rather than the inner spirit. Very apt here!
6. *For the hope.* Rather: depending on, resting on the hope of —
   (a) fulfilment of the Promises; 28:20; Rom. 4:18.
   (b) resurrection; 2:26; 23:6; 1 Th. 4:13; 1 Pet. 1:3. Of course the two go together.
7. *Instantly.* Literally: stretched out; 12:5; Lk. 22:44.
   Night and day. Ex. 30:7,8; 1 Kgs. 15:4.
8. *Incredible,* i.e. that Jesus is the Messiah.
   RV: If *God doth raise the dead.* The last word is plural, as in 1 Cor. 15:12,13. So the reference is not to Jesus specifically, but to God's Promises to the Fathers (see on v.6).
   (Other notes at the end of Chapter 35).

103. Not Guilty! (26:19-32)

It may readily be imagined that Paul's distinguished audience listened to him, utterly fascinated as he unfolded the story of his conversion.

Paul's oration intensifies

' I did not try to persuade myself that this experience was all a delusion. Jesus of Nazareth did not find me disobedient to the charge laid upon me. Without the slightest delay I set about the preaching programme assigned to me. First, Damascus; then, back at Jerusalem; and, whenever I could, throughout the cities and villages of Judaea. Next, came opportunity to take the message concerning Jesus to Gentiles also, especially in Antioch. Then, a direct revelation sent me and chosen colleagues with me through the Gentile cities in Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia. In all these places my message was that Jews should repent and be more worthy of their calling as the chosen people, and that Gentiles should leave their idols and turn to the God of Israel. To all, both Jews and Gentiles, I never ceased to repeat the solemn exhortation which was first heard on the lips of the great prophet John the Baptist, whom thy predecessor, King Agrippa, knew very well but did not heed. That exhortation urged the duty to prove the sincerity of their repentance by the steadfast holiness of their lives.'

'Because I preached to Gentiles, and because I never ceased to insist that even Jews need repentance as much as anyone else, my own people turned against me. When I was worshipping in the temple at Jerusalem some of them grabbed me, seeking to fulfil a longstanding intention to deal drastically with me.'

'But God was with me, and military help - some of Rome's best legionaries, O Festus - came in the nick of time. Since then - more than two years ago - I have continued to make use of every opportunity not only to establish that I am without blame but also to demonstrate fully from Holy Scripture the truth of my message.'

'The main questions have been these: First, according to the Scriptures, is the promised Messiah one who would suffer for the sins of men before becoming a glorious ruler over the kingdom of God? Second, by his resurrection from the dead is he to show to others the way to everlasting life? And third, this life and immortality he brings to light-is it to be for Jews only, or for Gentiles also?'

Festus protests

Paul's eloquence was now in full spate. Not content to witness to the truth of his Lord's resurrection he was now intent on making the gospel appeal as persuasively as he knew how. For the sake of the Christian ecclesias up and down that land he meant to leave a strong and favourable impression on the Roman governor and his team of administrators assembled there. But more important still was his all out effort to convert Agrippa and the distinguished citizens of Caesarea, both Jews and Syrians, who had been invited to hear this unusual case. It may be taken as certain that for this second purpose the apostle made copious quotation, from memory of course, of a considerable range of Old Testament passages.

Festus sensed that Paul had now moved on from his own personal defence into the field of vigorous propaganda, much of which was clean beyond him because of his utter ignorance of the Jewish Scriptures. So, perhaps sensing a growing uneasiness on the part of Agrippa, he didn't scruple to interrupt Paul's speech in the middle of a sentence.

Indeed, he must have been himself much affected by what he heard, for it was with what was almost a shout that he broke in:

'Paul, you are mad, quite crazy! You told us as much yourself a little while ago (v.11). Do you expect us to believe that a Jew has come back from the grave and is now promising to show heaven's Glory to us Romans who rule all known civilisation? You've had your head turned by all the academic learning (s.w. Jn. 7:15) you've got and by all the holy writings you are

constantly studying.'

It is not unlikely that there was also a political purpose behind this interruption. Festus was anxious to make clear to the influential Jews present that he was in no way prejudiced in Paul's favour.

Paul unflustered

Not at all put out by this interposition, the apostle answered with quiet reasonableness and studied courtesy:

'Mad, your excellency? I was, truly, before that journey to Damascus. But not now. Everything I have said to you has been simple truth from our Scriptures. And if I have spoken with enthusiasm, this is the effect of the divine Spirit which guides me. There is nothing in my speech of fantasy or frenzy.'

'I know I can speak boldly before king Agrippa concerning these things, for he is thoroughly familiar with all this. I expect my speech to mystify *you,* a Roman little acquainted with Jewish religion or with events here thirty years ago, but the king knows it all, and is interested in it.'

Agrippa's response

Then, turning from one ruler to the other, Paul made a most earnest appeal:

"King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest."

Quite apart from Agrippa's reputation in Jewry, it had been evident to Paul from the way his discourse had been followed that the king was on the way to being convinced.

The brief reply to this point-blank challenge has been interpreted in a wide variety of ways. Certainly it was not a hostile comment, for the king avoided the opprobrious name "Nazarene" and instead used the God-given title: "Christian." But what was he implying by: "In a little thou art persuading me to become a Christian"? Here are some of the possibilities:

a. 'You have almost completely convinced me.'
b. 'You want to convert me as fast as you yourself were converted' (s.w Eph. 3:3).
c. ' I go with you some of the way, but not entirely.'
d. A good-tempered irony, implying: 'I'm not taking you on in argument, not one as clever as you are.'

Whatever meaning was intended, it may be taken as more than probable that Agrippa was being evasive, for it simply would not do to show any kind of sympathy for Paul's faith in the presence of the Jews who were eagerly following every word.

It is even possible that to ease the tenseness of the situation and to help Festus relax, Agrippa deliberately framed a simple pun in Latin: *"In paullo,* by a little (talk) art thou persuading me . . ."

The appeal renewed

But Paul was not relaxing the intensity of his appeal. Neatly continuing the king's play on words, he replied:

'I would to God that both by the little one (myself) and by the Great One (Christ) not only thou but also all those hearing me might today become just such as I am -that is (he added, doubtless with a wry smile), except for these bonds.' And as he spoke he held up the chains fastened to his wrists.

Agrippa felt that it was time to discontinue the proceedings. "Thou art permitted to speak for thyself," he had graciously said to Paul. But now the prisoner was not in the least concerned

with his own personal *apologia.* He was intent on converting to Christ as many as possible of the distinguished audience assembled before him, and specially this last king of the Jews. Agrippa also sensed rising irritation in the mind of Festus.

"Not Guilty!"

So, rising to his feet, with a wave of the hand he declared the session closed. Relaxing in another part of the palace, he and Festus and Bernice and their more distinguished guests talked at length among themselves about this extraordinary man and the even more extraordinary oration they had heard from him. It was generally agreed that there was no reason at all why he should ever have been made, or kept, prisoner. Religious crank he may be, but his way of life was harmless enough. It is not unlikely that Festus contemplated an attempt at persuading Paul to retract his appeal to Caesar. But by this time all Jewry knew what the situation was, and following such a course might well lead to serious disturbance and even to Paul's assassination. Besides which it is fairly certain that such retraction, if hinted at, would be abhorrent to Paul. In accordance with his Lord's own word (23:11), he was set on going to Rome. Whatever else, through himself as a test case the Faith in Christ must acquire a recognized status as *religio licita,* so that there would be freedom to preach Christ throughout the empire, and especially in Jewry.

This latest defence by Paul as good as settled the judicial decision to be made in Rome some two and a half years or so later. For almost certainly a rescript of the opinions reached this day would be forwarded to Caesar. In effect, Lysias, Festus, and Agrippa had all said "Not Guilty" (23:29; 25:25; 26:32; cp. Lk. 23 4, 14, 22). Settled conclusions by such men would surely be taken into account. But with such adversaries as the wily, unscrupulous, powerful Jewish leaders, who could be sure?

Notes: 26:19-32

19. *Not disobedient.* Characteristic understatement; cp. Gal. 1:16.Forotherexamples,seeRom. 1:13,15,16.
20. *And. . . and.. . and.* The careful discrimination in the Greek is interesting. And so also in v.30.
    All the coasts (country) of Judaea. 9:26-30, Gal. 1:22 hardly seem to allow of this. But perhaps 22:30; 12:25 do.
21. *These causes.* Or, these people (the Gentiles); 22:21,22.
    Kill me; s.w. 5 ;30. Did Paul choose this Greek word as perhaps hinting at getting him *crucified* like his Lord?
22. *Obtained,* as a matter of commonplace experience. To Paul that is what the help of God was.
    Help. The Greek word is military (21:32) linking with a word for "young soldiers." Paul was probably thinking also of angelic aid.
23. It has been suggested that, like the "Faithful Sayings" in 1,2 Tim., Tit., there were early Christian collections of "Testimonies" (proof texts): (a) Whether the Christ is to suffer, (b) Whether the Christ is to rise from the dead.: (c) Whether the Christ is to show light to the Gentiles.
    Rise from the dead. Elsewhere (e.g. Rom. 1:4) the next step from this is: Therefore he is the Son of God. Why not here?
    Light to the Gentiles. See on v.18, in previous chapter.
24. For similar interruptions, see 4:1; 10:44.
    Mad. Those who talk about resurrection are reckoned by worldly men to be mad: Mk. 3:21; Jn. 10:20; Acts 12:15. So also prophets speaking the word of the Lord: Jer. 29:26;2 Kgs. 9:1,4,11;2Cor. 5:11,13. Since this word was normally associated with some kind of frenzy, it surely implies a great enthusiasm with which Paul was now speaking.
    Much learning. Allusion to his many scrolls of Scripture and his copious writing of epistles?
25. *Speak forth* nearly always implies divine inspiration; e.g. 2:4,14; Dt. 32:2;Ez. 13:9,19;1 Chr. 25:1 (the only clear exception is Ps. 59:7). For Paul's claims to speak by inspiration, consider 1 Cor. 2:13;7:10 (dokeo);14:37; 2. Cor. 2:17; 7:12 with 1 Cor. 5:4); Gal. 1:20 (?) 1 Th. 4:15.

26. *Freely is really,* "boldly"; indeed yes: v.27,29; 23:11.
    Done in a corner. Some claim that this is a deliberate quote from Plato.
27. *Thou believest-* but art not prepared to confess it. In A.D.70 Christians fleeing from Jerusalem sought refuge in Pella, the nearest city in territory then administered by Agrippa. The line of Herod ended in him and his sisters.
28. *Christian.* Was Agrippa attempting another pun? 'I am an anointed king *(echristhen)* already!'
29. *I would to God.* Was Paul implying: It is not I but God who is at work, seeking to convert you?'
32. How did this general opinion come to be known by Luke? Was there a Paul sympathizer in that group? Or did Festus have a public announcement made?
33. *Silver or gold.* Cp. Samuel; 2 Sam. 12:3. Note the force of Paul's word - he had not taken, he had not even coveted
34. *These hands.* 1 Cor. 4:12; 9:3-18; 1 Th. 2:5,6,9; 2 Th. 3:7-10; Gal. 6:2; Eph. 4:28.
    Ministered. There is possibly here an implication that Paul had been their chief means of support.
35. Ye *ought.* Literally: It is necessary (as an example).
    To help the weak. The Gk. word pictures one helping along with another (the other being the Lord?). Contrast 6:2, 4.
    why the contrast? Remember. . . give. Both verbs are continuous in their emphasis. Contrast the wordly sentiment'
    "Givers are fools. Receivers only are blest."
    A few examples of these uncanonical sayings of the Lord:
    Remember... give. Both verbs are continuous in their emphasis. Contrast the worldly sentiment: "Givers are fools Receivers only are blest."
    A few examples of these uncanonical sayings of the Lord:
    a. On the same day (after Lk. 6:4) having seen one working on the sabbath, he said to him, O man, if indeed thou knowest what thou doest, thou art blessed; but if thou knowest not, thou art cursed, and art a transgressor of the law.
    b. Shew yourselves tried money-changers.
    c. In whatsoever I may find you, in this will I also judge you.
    d. He who is near me is near the fire; he who is far from me is far from the kingdom.
37. *Tears.* Verses 19.31 also. A pointed rebuke of the stiff upper-lip of modern believers?
38. *Spake.* The Gk word implies inspiration. Other Biblical farewells: Gen. 50:1; Ruth 1:9,16; 1 Sam, 20:41; 1 Kgs. 19:20.

104. From Caesarea to Crete. (27:1-12)

It has already been seen that Festus was a man not given to letting the grass grow under his feet (25:1, 17, 23). Now that he had had the religious expertise of Agrippa to guide him in the writing of the case-history which must accompany the prisoner, he lost no time in dispatching Paul to Rome. Indeed, according to the Bezan text, it was the very next day when arrangements for the journey were completed.

There were also other prisoners, of a very different quality, to be sent along with Paul. It has been surmised that these were men condemned to death who were intended to provide entertainment for bloodthirsty Roman crowds by fighting wild beasts in the arena. Several details in the narrative make it plain that Paul was regarded as in a very different category from these others. Indeed, something like friendship seems to have sprung up between himself and the Roman centurion Julius who was in charge of the party of prisoners and guards. It is very likely that when Paul made his eloquent appeal and defence before the king and governor, Julius himself was present and had been greatly impressed (25 *23).* The point has often been made that every centurion mentioned in the New Testament appears in a remarkably good light. These officers of the Roman army must have been an exceptionally fine set of men.

Luke's record implies that the governor appointed that Paul should be accompanied by Luke and Aristarchus (the "we" pronouns become very prominent in the story of this voyage). As in all generations a medical man would be welcome on board as ship's doctor; and it may be surmised that Roman citizen Paul was allowed to take Aristarchus as his personal attendant. Apparently Paul's oratorical effort before Agrippa took too much out of him - or did he perhaps have another sudden attack of fever? The record plainly hints (v.4 RVm.) at sickness, so the need for attention from "the beloved physician" would be all the greater.

Since the ship they sailed in was bound for Adramyttium, just south of Troas, it has been suggested that Aristarchus intended to stay with Paul until he could conveniently diverge homeward to Thessalonica. But this can hardly be correct, for Aristarchus had already been with the apostle for well over two years (20:4), and twice during the next two years Paul, writing from Rome, makes appreciative reference to "Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner, my fellow-labourer" (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24). What sort of a man was Paul that he could inspire such devotion in those around him? And what sort of disciple was Aristarchus that he should give his years so readily to the service of Paul and Paul's Lord?

An interesting question arises as to why Aristarchus should be alluded to here as though quite new to the story when in fact there have already been two mentions of him (19:29; 20:4). Perhaps the explanation is that both the earlier allusions belong to a section of the narrative details of which had been supplied by Titus, Luke's brother (there is a sudden recurrence of the plural pronoun just after 20:4).

An easy day's sailing took the ship to Zidon, and whilst cargo was being taken in, the apostle, on parole presumably, was given leave to visit friends in the city and "receive attention." This break, or the long rest on board ship during the next few weeks, apparently did him a lot of good, for through the long and hazardous voyage now begun there is no further hint of disability.

A slow journey

The next leg of the journey proved to be a tedious business. The north-westerly winds which usually die down towards the end of August persisted. A direct course to the Aegean was out of question. The only alternative was to make use of a steady westerly current and occasional land breezes round the east of Cyprus and then to hug the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia. Even so, beating against the wind meant slow slow progress.

At the very important and busy port of Myra, reached fifteen days later (Bezan text), there was a big government corn ship from Egypt. It is highly unlikely that the ship's considerable

divergence to call at Myra was by design. Most probably it had been blown seriously off course.

Here was alternative travel which very much appealed to centurion Julius. The big ship (v.37) offered a higher degree of comfort. But not only so either of the previous alternatives - via Cnidus and the Corinthian isthmus, or via Neapolis and overland on the Egnatian Way - meant transhipment or tedious and tiring marching geared to the slowest of the prisoners.

So with enthusiasm Julius got all his party on board the corn ship and blithely looked to be in Rome within a week or two.

What a rough disappointment was in store for him! It took "many days" of exasperatingly slow travel to work along the coast for 130 miles to Cnidus, but there the wind was strong and so adverse that it was impossible to make harbour. So the only alternative was to turn south-south-west for the western end of Crete so as to gain and use the shelter of that mountainous island.

Still the winds were difficult, and more time was lost making slow progress half-way along the island to Fair Havens, where the coast has several indentations (hence the plural). For some unspecified reason a fairly lengthy stay at Fair Havens was necessary, and it seems not unlikely that Paul used the opportunity to preach the Word in the near-by city of Lasea; otherwise there would be little point in Luke's mention of the place.

The season was now getting late (early or mid-October?). Paul and his friends had observed the Fast of the Day or Atonement, and in this part of the Mediterranean about that time all sailing finished until the Spring. But with strong easterly winds expected, Fair Havens was not deemed as fair an anchorage as all that. So a ship's committee was called to discuss whether or not it would be wise to attempt sailing to the next port, called Phoenix, which offered much better shelter from the winter storms, and more pleasing facilities for a protracted stay.

A good deal of debate has gone on regarding the location of Phoenix, mainly due to a certain ambiguity in the Greek text. But, as it turned out, the point is academic, for the good ship never got there.

Unheeded warning

Julius desired Paul to join in the discussion with the captain and pilot, either out of respect for the judgement of so widely-travelled a passenger (note 2 Cor. 11:25), or because his increasing friendship for Paul had stamped on his mind a conviction that there was a divine guidance in the life of this man that was not to be despised.

So far as can be judged, all the arguments for moving on to Phoenix were on the side of the professionals, and yet Paul insisted that it would be folly to leave Fair Havens: "Sirs, I perceive (literally: I behold) that if you leave this anchorage this voyage will be with hurt and much damage to the ship." How did he "perceive" this? - by particularly shrewd judgement? or through revelation?

The apostle's warning was over-ruled. Besides other advantages, Phoenix offered a better facility for re-fitting the ship.

What finally turned the scale was a sudden change of weather. "The south wind blew softly." A day's sailing in these almost ideal conditions would get them to Phoenix. So in a spirit of confidence the ship was worked out of harbour. Only a very short and terrifying life now remained to this ship of doom.

The role of Paul

Rackham has a very fine paragraph in which he forcefully presents the influence of Paul in the course of this voyage.

"Paul is the main subject throughout (this record). The narrative begins with his own physical weakness. Then he appears as a counsellor and a prophet, with his warnings and foresight of danger. In the crisis, like the rest he too falls into the deep of despair (though for others rather than himself), but as an intercessor he has recourse to prayer. Strengthened by a heavenly vision, he rises up to inspire his companions with courage. In the hour of danger he commands like a captain, like a priest he offers thanks to God, and like a deliverer brings them into a haven of safety" (Acts of the Apostles, page 476).

The parallel between Paul and Jonah is readily perceptible in this narrative:

Commissioned to preach to Gentiles, the man of God is involved in violent storm and shipwreck. By his wise recommendation the entire ship's company is saved, but only through his going into the abyss and being saved out of it. And the outcome of a terrifying experience is an opportunity to testify to the truth of God in the greatest city in the world. It is difficult in places to sort out this parallel from the parallel between Paul and Christ (ch. 109) and also that between Jonah and Christ.

Notes: 27:1-12

1. *We.* The text seems to imply that the proposition about Luke and Aristarchus was put to the governor, and approved by him. The Bezan text says Secundus travelled also.
   Sail. This chapter has an astonishing diversity of Greek words for "sail" and also for "damage, loss." *Other prisoners. Greek heteroi certainly* implies "of a different sort"; cp. Lk. 23:32;Gal. 1:7 (many more examples).
   Augustus' band. Variously identified as (a) a commissariat corps; (b) a diplomatic corps; (c) a unit from Sebaste (see Gk.), the chief town in Samaria.
2. *A ship of Adramyttium.* The usual route to Rome was via Alexandria. "A prosperous journey"? (Rom. 1:10).
   With us. A more emphatic preposition than in v.24.
3. *Friends.* Personal friends, surely, or wouldn't Luke have said "brethren" or "disciples"?
4. *Under Cyprus.* By contrast with the direct course (21:5) followed with favourable winds when going to Jerusalem.
8. *Lasea.* A corruption of *thalassa* (sea)? It has been fairly definitely identified as being 4 miles east of Lutro.
10. *I perceive.* Is it possible that Paul had been studying the very relevant Ps. 107:23-31, equating "their desired haven" with Fair Havens (s.w. in LXX), and therefore he judged it a flouting of the providence of God who had brought them safely so far?
    Hurt. Used legally for violent personal damage.
    Damage. The word means a fine, penalty, or tribute, (s.w. 2 Kgs. 23:33). Is Paul saying: "Move on from here, and you will pay for it'?
    Also of our lives. By Paul's intercession this did not befall (v.24,44).
11. *Believed.* Rather: being persuaded.
    Spoken. A continuous verb. Paul kept on saying it.
12. *Phoenix;* cp. Phoenicians. The sailors, being almost certainly Phoenicians, would have a superstitious prejudice for this harbour.

105. "All hope taken away" (27:13-26)

The sudden change of wind and weather brought an equally sudden change in the spirit of the ship's company. With a neat double emphasis Luke's phrasing implies: "We're as good as there!"

But there was one immediate problem. For the first mile or two after leaving Fair Havens the ship was edging its way along a lee shore. After that the coast turned north, and there would then be no difficulty, for, once round the point, Phoenix lay north-west. So the ship's boat, (v.16) manned by lusty oarsmen, was given the task of keeping the big ship away from the rocks. In this they were only just successful. It was touch and go. For a while they were "really close," within speaking distance of the shore.

Euroclydon

Then, all at once, there came another even more dramatic change of weather. A fierce gusty north-easter suddenly roared down on them from Crete's seven-thousand foot ridge of mountains. In less than a minute all was out of control. There was no time to get the boat in. And the pilot's instinctive manoeuvre to get the ship's bow round into the wind was frustrated from the start.

There was nothing else for it but to reef the cumbersome mainsail and, keeping only a foresail to aid control of the ship's steering, to "let her drive."

This mighty wind was known to the sailors by a special name-Euroclydon or, according to some manuscripts, Euraquilo. The textual critics have had their usual field-day over this divergence, and in the excitement seem to have overlooked that "-clydon" is the very word used in the Septuagint version for Jonah's storm (1:4). Since there are two other verbal contacts here with that record, this one can hardly be written off as fortuitous. Thus it may be taken as very likely that the familiar AV reading is correct.

Twenty-three miles from the coast of Crete, by dint of careful handling the ungainly vessel came in the lee of the small island of Cauda, today known as Kaudhos. Here there was not such a turbulent sea running, so at last it was possible to rescue the ship's boat and the poor wretches in it. Pulled in under the thwart of the parent ship, they had survived only by dint of frantic bailing.

Safety measures

Another even more tricky operation had become urgently necessary. Before ever the great mainsail could be reefed, the initial effect of the mighty blast had been to create such terrific strains that the ship's timbers had started, and she was now taking water at a frightening rate. So in quieter waters strong ropes were passed under the ship's bow and worked into position near amidships. Then by means of a kind of outsize tourniquet they were tightened up to help hold the timbers together.

Then, as they drifted away from Cauda, there was exposure once again to the full fury of wind and sea. Now there was another great anxiety. The ship was drifting, as good as out of control, at a fearful rate. If the storm continued for two or three days there would be the frightening hazard of the Syrtis sandbanks, some three hundred miles to the south-west. So the device, known to all yachtsmen, of using a drogue, was now brought into use. With the wind driving south-west the ship now drifted barely under control on a course that was roughly westerly.

Taking in more and more water, the stricken vessel was steadily losing buoyancy. How long before she would founder with all hands?

All that night the ship tossed and plunged. It was unmitigated misery for all on board. Next morning it was decided to attempt to lighten the ship by throwing the sodden cargo of wheat

overboard. Through long hours a chain of the more able-bodied laboured at the task, with little perceptible result.

Next day all heavy equipment on board was likewise thrown over the side. Paul and his friends joined in this futile task. And still the gale roared past, sweeping them on into the unknown.

Day after day this misery continued and the danger intensified. It was wretchedness such as they had never known. Most of the food on board was ruined or washed away. And fire for cooking was an utter impossibility. The ship's officers had no idea where they were, for in those early days the compass had not been invented, and under that heavy sky no glimpse of sun or stars or moon (in its last quarter) was to be had.

Prayer and its answer

As the ship leaked more and more, and became less and less manageable, hope gradually disappeared. Even Paul's robust confidence seemed to have evaporated. It need hardly be said that in these circumstances the apostle gave himself to intensely fervent prayer, not just for himself and for his friends, but also for all on board with them.

At last there came an answer from God, so explicit and reassuring as to change the outlook dramatically. An angel spoke to the apostle promising the personal safety of the entire company, 'for, Paul, you are not to forget that you must yet be a witness for the Lord Jesus before Caesar himself; your prayers have not gone ignored; God has granted you the life of every single person on board - as you shall see in a vision.' And thereupon Paul had a vivid revelation in which he saw a wild island coast, and the ship shattered on it.

Could any message be more heartening? So when there came a slight easing in the intensity of the gale, Paul gathered sailors and soldiers and passengers together in the most sheltered part of the deck, and told them about his prayers and their outcome.

'My advice when we were in that Cretan harbour was not heeded - and now this dire situation! If I was right then, perhaps you will believe me to be telling you the truth now.'

There was no scepticism or mockery. Every soul on board was happy to be offered some ray of hope. And there was no doubt about the impression Paul's vigorous character had made on the mind of everyone.

"Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." And as Paul believed, so did they, and with lighter hearts and a more steadfast spirit of endurance they went to their tasks or to their patient enduring of cold and wretchedness.

Notes: 27:13-26

13. *South wind blew softly.* The suddenness of the change is indicated by the Greek aorist.
    Supposing. Greek *dokeō* is much more emphatic than this.
    Obtained. Perfect tense implies: It is in our grasp.
    Loosing means either (a) pulling up anchor, or (b) towing, taking in hand. 14. *A tempestuous wind.* From this Greek word comes "typhoon."
    Euroclydon. Besides the link, already mentioned, with Jonah, there is (a) "God, whose I am, and whom I serve" (v.23 = Jon. 1:9);(b) "God hath granted thee. . ," (v.24 = 1:6); (c) v. 38 "lightened the ship" = 1:15; (d) v.44 = 2:10; (e) v.43 = 1:15.
19. *The tackling.* This is hardly the right idea; s.w. 10:11: "great sheet." Presumably the drogue was a tough piece of sailcloth kept open by a wooden framework and towed behind the ship.
20. *Saved.* This or its equivalent comes eight times in this narrative: v.20, 31, 34, 43, 44; 28:1,4. And words for "loss, damage, kill" come 12 times.

21. *O sirs* (Gk.) In Acts this kind of apostrophe always comes in a situation charged with emotion.
    Ye should have hearkened unto me. Not a deliberately unkind reminder, but to urge them to take notice now.
    Gained. A very effective irony.
    Harm and loss actually quotes his own words (v. 10).
22. No loss; v.24,34,44.
23. After 26:13 the centurion at any rate would readily believe this.
24. *God hath given thee.* Cp. Gen. 18:25-33.
25. A wonderful text of Scripture, very far-reaching in its power.
26. *We must.* For Malta's sake? or because this was the *only* way deliverance could be assured?
    A certain island. The sailors would immediately begin working out which it might be.

106. "All safe to land" (27:27-44)

Day after day and night after night, for two full weeks that gale continued to blow. This, surely, was not just a climatic freak, but a designed test of the human spirit by a God who "maketh his angels winds."

It may be taken as fairly certain that those wretched souls on board never ceased to offer devout prayer - but, as two long weeks dragged their miserable course, they turned less and less to the gods of Egypt, Phoenicia, Greece, and Rome, and more and more to the God of Israel about whom Paul continued to talk with such assurance.

Misery

But yet, in spite of the buoyant confidence of the apostle, no alleviation of their misery was in sight. The ship was steadily settling lower in the water. None had the slightest idea where they were. All were beset with varying degrees of wretchedness according to individual physique and temperament. All were soaking wet and chilled to their marrow-bones. There was no kind of comfort, nor easing of their ordeal. Each endless night, with sleep virtually impossible, they "prayed for day" in the hope that salvation would then be in sight. And each grim grey morning there was still a wilderness of wild waves and the fiendish howl of a gusty wind.

All this time their water-logged vessel drifted and tossed sluggishly, making 35 to 40 miles a day westward - but for a long time they were not even to know that.

Near to land

At length the sailors, with their uncanny sixth sense, began to read signs that "some country was approaching them" (so the Greek text reads). Sure enough, from away over on the port bow came the sound of angry waves pounding an unseen shore. Actually it was Point Khoura, the nearest headland on the island of Malta. But for the intense darkness they would have seen it clearly, for it was only half a mile away.

The obvious thing was to take soundings. Twenty fathoms! And before long, fifteen fathoms! Then how long before their creaking ship grounded in shallows or disintegrated on rocks? In haste no less than four anchors were flung out from the stern, thus keeping the ship in the line of the wind. Many a sea bottom would not have held those anchors, but it so happened that the entrance to what is now St. Paul's Bay has a clay bottom. So, with the ship hove to, all on board anxiously awaited the dawn and its revelation of impending deliverance or destruction.

Saving the sailors

The sailors, thinking to ensure their own safety at the expense of all the rest, hit on the device of pretending that the ship would be more secure if also more anchors were lowered at a cable's length from the bow. To fulfil this phoney intention the ship's boat was lowered, and the men were about to clamber into it when Paul, seeing through their selfish deception, intervened.

'There is no safety for the rest of you' he said to the centurion in the hearing of the soldiers, 'unless these men stay on board.'

Not that the boat was going to be much use for the saving of nearly three hundred people. But when it came to handling the ship in the last vital hour or two, perhaps the nautical know-how of the sailors would be all-important (v.38,40).

In comprehension of this situation the centurion was only a step behind Paul. It needed, then, only a nod from him, and some of his men drew their swords and slashed through the falls so that within seconds the boat was swept away into the darkness.

Although those seamen did not at all realise the fact, Paul had actually saved their lives, for had not the angel of the Lord said to him: "God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee." Their separate effort at gaining safety would infallibly have meant the destruction of all who tried to get away in the boat.

Breaking Bread — Salvation

Then, with daylight still an hour or two away, Paul set about the task of raising the morale of all on board.

'Consider,' he said to the whole company, 'you have now gone two full weeks with only an occasional improvised bite of food. Now is your last opportunity to get some nourishment. I've told you already, and now I say it again - there is no ground for fear at all! We shall every one of us come through unscathed. I have the word of the God of Israel for this. So let go your anxiety, and eat some food.'

In the spirit of his own exhortation, he forthwith took some of the dry ship's biscuit, and before them all he gave thanks to God for it; then solemnly breaking it, he handed portions to his brethren standing by (Bezan text). It was a deliberate imitation of the Last Supper, and expression of faith that through one all were to be saved (v.24, 43). Who outside Paul's own coterie saw it in that light? But that was how the memory stuck in Luke's mind. And it may be taken as certain that a great many out of that considerable number said their Amen of personal thanks to the God who had so graciously promised them a seemingly impossible salvation.

The ship's purser knew that there were 276 people on board - nowhere near the 600 on the big ship which foundered under Josephus when he travelled to Rome. Now a roll-call was taken to make sure that no one had already been lost overboard. This would facilitate a further check when, in accordance with Paul's firm assurance, they came through to land.

The last hour of night was taken up with dumping the rest of the wheat cargo. It was important to lighten the ship in the hope of running her as close to shore as possible.

Dawn and desperate measures

In the first dim light of dawn, the coast ahead was eagerly and repeatedly scanned for some recognizable landmark, but all in vain. Some of the seamen on board must have been to Malta before this, for Valetta harbour was a well-used port in those days (e.g. 28:11). But that was seven miles away, and this particular stretch of coast was utterly unfamiliar.

However, straight ahead was what looked like a welcoming creek where quiet water and a sandy beach could be expected. It was determined to attempt a landing there. In actual fact it was a channel between a small off-shore island and the mainland.

There were two great paddles in the stern by which some degree of steering was normally effected. Useless in the storm, these had been lashed on board in a horizontal position, their fastenings were now cut in the hope that on this last half-mile or so of a ghastly voyage they might afford a modicum of control. Yet more control was hoped for from the hoisting of a foresail.

Then, as soon as the anchors were cut loose, the ship gathered way and lumbered forward to its death.

Disappointed when the hoped-for creek turned out to be a mill-race of stormy waters, the captain decided on the best alternative available - a tiny inlet on the port bow.

Still some distance from shore, the ship grounded with its bow unbudgeable in the clay bottom. There was now no time to be lost in getting all the personnel to land, for already the battered stem was beginning to disintegrate. How long before the rest of the ship fell apart?

Double danger

In these circumstances the professional instinct of the soldiers was to kill all the prisoners rather than lose them to freedom, for if some escaped the wreck and got away, would not they - the soldiers -be answerable with their own lives? But the centurion would have none of this, for by this time he respected Paul not only as a fine Roman citizen but also as a valued personal friend. So, specially to save Paul, he curtly forbade the drastic action. Now, without loss of time, the order was given that all who could swim (Paul included? 2 Cor. 11:25) should take to the water and do their best to reach the shore. The rest, equipped with boards and planks from the ship (now fast breaking up), did the best they could for themselves, and so, by the promised Providence of God, within the hour all were safe ashore. Weak and shivering from the cold and wind, but thankful to be alive and on terra firma, they huddled together whilst a quick count of heads was taken.

Two hundred and seventy-six! Not a soul lost! And, after their fashion, they uttered their thanks to the God Paul had declared unto them.

Notes: 27:27-44

27. *Driven up and down.* Most translate it this way. But N.T. use of this verb suggests "driven through." Isn't it more likely that the storm blew steadily from E.N.E?
    Adria. This name was used in that period for (a) the Adriatic Sea; (b) the Mediterranean between Sicily and Greece.
    Here, this latter, surely.
    Some country. Point Khoura seems to have taken its name from the Greek word used here; cp. the naming of St. Paul's Bay.
28. *Twenty. . . fifteen fathoms.* These soundings have been proved to be absolutely accurate for the entrance to St. Paul's Bay. Thus it is possible to establish fairly accurately just where the ship anchored.
29. *Rocks.* The Greek looks like an allusion to Is. 40:4 LXX.
30. *Prayed for day;* i.e. that the ship would hold together until dawn.
31. *These*... ye. Paul's confidence makes inclusion of himself unnecessary.
    Except these abide in the ship. There is a profound lesson to be learned here. But the ship of Christ in the 20th century has missed it almost completely.
33. *Fasting,* i.e. not taking a regular meal. This is not the usual word for 'fasting'.
37. Why Luke's care to specify precisely the number of persons? Would not "nearly three hundred" have done as well? It transpires that 276 is a triangular number; that is Δ 23 = 1 +2+3+ … +23 = 276. It cannot be coincidence that most other NT. numbers are also triangular numbers:
    153 (Jn. 21:11) = Δ17
    666 (Rev. 13:18) = Δ36 = ΔΔ8
    120 (Acts 1:15) = Δ15 = ΔΔ5
    28 (2 Cor. 6:4-10 = Δ7
    78 (Lk. 3:23-28 + Ps. 22:30?) = Δ12
    42 (Mt. 1:2-16 + Ps. 22:30) = 2 Δ 6
    NT. multitudes (5000 + 4000 + 3000 + 2000 + (?) 1000)
    =1000 Δ 5
    Feast of Tabernacles (Num. 29:13ff)
    = 13 + 12 + 11 + ... 7 (as the moon shrinks during its third quarter)
    = 70, the symbol of Gentiles.
40. *Mainsail.* There is real doubt about this meaning. In these circumstances, the foresail (smaller and more manageable) is more likely.
44. The Greek could read: 'upon certain others of the ship,' i.e. aided by some of the swimmers.
    All safe. The name Melita is undoubtedly derived (via Phoenician) from the Hebrew word for "escape." This was not the first time that a ship's crew had found safety on this island.

107. From Melita to Rome (28:1 -16)

Once ashore, the castaways soon discovered where they were, for of course at first light their stricken ship had been observed by the inhabitants of the island and when the survivors came ashore they quickly encountered some of them. But Malta had been settled by the Phoenicians, and there is contemporary evidence that their language was Punic. Luke calls them "barbarians." Today this would mean "uncivilised;" but again there is evidence that this was far from being the case. In those days a barbarian was one without facility in Latin or Greek, the two dominant languages.

But Phoenician is closely akin to Hebrew, so very quickly Paul would find communication relatively easy. It would be through him that the name of the island was first known.

Although in nearly all countries and all generations the wreck of a ship has been regarded as an opportunity for plunder rather than rescue, these people of Malta proved to be an honourable exception. Since there were too many survivors for the few homes in the locality to accommodate, the drenched and worn-out travellers were gathered into a sheltered spot, and very quickly a fire was kindled. This became all the more necessary when driving rain set in. Some of the more able-bodied scattered to collect brushwood.

Bitten by a viper

Paul lent a hand in this activity. As he was adding his armful of sticks to the fire, a viper hitherto made torpid by the cold now darted away from the heat and fastened on Paul's hand. Men stared horrified at the sight of the venomous creature hanging from his arm. Nothing could now save him. It was sure to be only a matter of moments and he would drop dead. But of this there was no sign at all. Nonchalantly Paul shook the creature off into the flames and stood for a while appreciating the warmth of the fire. He had already been identified as being one of the prisoners, so now these Maltese were convinced that this snake-bite was an evident token of divine justice - Paul must be a murderer who was not going to escape retribution even though he had survived the horrors of sea and storm. They kept on staring at him, unflagging in their confident expectation that death was inevitable. Yet still nothing untoward transpired. So the only alternative conclusion was that he was a god! It was Paul's experience at Lystra all over again (14:11,19), only in reverse, for there the populace had begun by revering the apostle as a god, and ended up by treating him as a criminal.

Centuries before, men of Israel had been saved from deadly snake-bite by looking in faith to a serpent on a pole. But Paul's faith was entirely in the One who was lifted up on a pole to bring a greater healing than ancient Israel had known (Num.21:6-9;Jn. 3:14).

Jesus had promised that his men would "take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them" (Mk. 16:18). Luke aware of that saying of the Lord, doubtless found great satisfaction in chronicling this unique instance of the truth of it.

The islanders showed all possible kindness to this multitude of shipwrecked folk, and to Paul and his friends the chief man of the island was specially hospitable. The viper episode had evidently made its mark on his mind too when he heard about it.

That three-days stay at the home of Publius led to another remarkable incident.

Malta fever cured

Their host's father was a very sick man, suffering from dysentery and recurrent fever (Malta fever, caused by a germ in their goats' milk?). Paul asked to see him.

Instead of muttering incantations or prescribing outlandish potions, the apostle prayed at the sick man's bedside, and then laid his hands on him. Then, a word of authority, and the old man was fully restored.

Word about this remarkable healing, added to the sensational story about Paul and the viper, went round the island in no time at all, with the result that all the sick people (Greek: the rest, which had diseases) came or were brought, and all went away cured, and doubtless glorifying the God of Israel - for it is difficult to believe that Paul merely healed without offering also the more important word of healing which the gospel of Christ could impart. The text seems to imply that Luke also was involved in this splendid work, though whether it was by his skill as a doctor or because he too had a healing gift of the Spirit is not clear.

In spite of the apostle's unwillingness to make the smallest personal profit out of this beneficence, the people insisted on giving him very substantial gifts of money and clothing, for it was obvious to everybody that he and his friends were now in real need of both.

More symbolism

In very noticeable fashion Luke has loaded this short section of his narrative with an unusual sequence of "threes" -v.7,11,12, (13), 15,17 - nearly every one of which is in itself of minor importance, so that the reader is led to enquire why this particular emphasis. It seems not unlikely that here there is an extension of the ideas brought together in Chapter 109, for it was on the third day that Paul's Lord rose from the dead. Then, by these three's is the reader being encouraged to grope after the same feature in Paul's survival from certain death (as it seemed)? And, immediately after that "resurrection", the promised signs of healing and poison-survival are wrought through him!

Wintering in the main harbour of the island was another big corn carrier bound from Alexandria to Rome - the good ship "Castor and Pollux." Of all the ships Paul travelled in, this is the only one which is named in the record. Thus Luke bids his readers dwell on the significance of this detail.

The pale blue discharge of static electricity - St. Elmo's fire - not infrequently seen on the masts of ships was commonly (and rightly?) regarded as a sign of the ship's safety. In ancient days this was attributed to the sons of Zeus. Thus, perhaps, Luke was hinting at the contrast between the ill-fated vessel smashed to pieces in St. Paul's Bay and the safe passage now ensured, under God. Or is it that here, rounding off the parallel between Christ and Paul, the two are put together, with the implied reminder that one of the two stars is perceptibly brighter than the other? It is difficult to know how far to take symbolism of this sort.

The three months of winter in Malta now gave place to signs of spring, and the ship called "The Two Sons of God," now much over-crowded with its considerable complement of extra passengers, sailed for Syracuse in Sicily.

Fast sailing

There, for three days, the winds were unfavourable. And when at last the next stage of the voyage was attempted, a good deal of tacking was necessary to reach Rhegium, a port in the toe of Italy. But then a strong southerly breeze gave a fast passage to Puteoli, the big ships' best port for Rome.

Disembarking, Paul and his friends made enquiry for believers and were greatly pleased to find an ecclesia that they hadn't known to exist. Thereupon the centurion encouraged Paul to spend the next week on parole in their company, thus giving him opportunity for fellowship at their Breaking of Bread. This delay is somewhat mysterious for surely the officer of Bread. This delay is somewhat mysterious for surely the officer would not wish to lose yet another week in getting his party of prisoners to Rome.

"Well met, Brother Paul!"

The journey resumed, Paul's heart was warmed (Pr.27:17) by the sight of welcoming parties of brethren at Appii Forum and again at the Three Taverns, ten miles further on. Presumably these were Jewish and Gentile brethren travelling separately. The apostle may have had misgivings that they did not unite to greet him, but he was nevertheless much encouraged that both sections of the ecclesia were glad to see him. His "Epistle to the Romans," aimed primarily at commending Jewish and Gentile believers to a better understanding and tolerance of one another, at any rate, had not created a spirit of estrangement in either group. Doubtless among the brethren now welcoming Paul were a fair number of those to whom he had sent greetings at the end of his epistle. And certainly his fine friends and colleagues Aquila and Priscilla would be there.

Rome, at last!

On arrival in Rome the prisoners were duly handed over to Burrus, the captain of the Praetorian Guard. But again – such was Paul's standing by this time - the apostle was allowed to occupy a lodging of his own (v.16, 23, 31) within the Praetorian area, under the guard of a quaternion of soldiers who took it in turn to be responsible for him. Never did legionaries have such a light task - or more uplifting, for it is difficult to believe that the apostle did not use the recurring opportunity to educate these men in the Truth of the Gospel.

At last the long-formed intention to get to Rome was come to fulfilment.

It began (16:37) with an assertion at Philippi of his Roman citizenship. At Corinth (18:2) there came encouragement Romeward from Aquila and Priscilla. Big preaching success in the Roman cities of Asia lifted his eyes to the metropolis (19:21). Soon, in Jerusalem, it was necessary to claim the privileges of his Roman citizenship (22:25). Then came his Lord's firm assurance that "thou must bear witness in Rome also" (23:11). His appeal to Caesar (25:11) crowned the sequence, and made his journey to Rome certain. How would God bless his work here?

Notes: 28:1-16

2. *Kindness.* The use of this word *philanthropia* here helps to add meaning to its use in Tit. 3:4. Luke's delightful understatement reads: "no ordinary kindness." Contrast the rancour and hostility Paul encountered everywhere from *Jews.*
3. *Sticks.* Gorse still grows in that part of the island.
4. *Suffereth not to live.* But the Greek is past tense: did not suffer. They regarded Paul as already dead, as good as. For this solution to the problem of evil, see also Gen. 41:21; Lk. 13:1 -3: Job 4:7; Jn. 9:2. But of course it isn't the only answer.
6. *They changed their minds etc.* Very sardonic. What a splendid literary effect!
7. *The chief man.* Literally: "the first one." Again, Luke's accuracy in the matter of titles is vindicated. A Maltese inscription has come to light illustrating precisely this usage.
8. *Healed.* Phil. 2:25-27:1 Tim. 5:23 suggest that Paul did not always have these powers at his command. Every phrase of Is. 42:10 seems marvellously appropriate to this situation.
12. *Syracuse.* 80 miles in one day.
13. *Fetched a compass.* A classic example of how the language of King James's men has changed meaning from: "came by an indirect course."
    Puteoli. 180 miles from Rhegium, at the north end of the Bay of Naples. An average of approximately 7 knots was not bad going!

14. *We found brethren.* It is known that there were Christians in near-by Pompeii some time before A.D. 70.
15. *To meet us.* The word means a formal official meeting. Even in those days the grapevine was efficient.
    Appii Forum. Named after the builder of the Appian Way, which road still exists. This place was 40 miles on. The Roman brethren would not come further because from Puteoli to Appii Forum there were two routes - by road and by canal. Unlucky in choice of route, they would miss Paul.
    Took courage. Quoting Job 17:9 LXX?: "Let the faithful hold on his own way, and let him that is pure of hands take courage."
16. *Captain of the guard.* This was Burrus, a very fine character. At this time, and for a few years only, there was only one such captain of the guard. Before and later, two officers shared this responsibility.

108. In Rome (28:17-31)

The edict of Claudius banishing Jews from Rome had long ago become a dead letter. Multitudes of them were already back in the metropolis. It is known that about this time there were no less than eight synagogues in the city. Nero, influenced by his concubine Poppaea, was favourably disposed to the Jews. Indeed, this early part of his reign, whilst he was still under the guidance of his tutor, the experienced and kindly Seneca, was one of the finest periods in Roman history for wise government. Even so, there were already signs of a dramatic change for the worse.

Appeal to the Roman Jews

As soon as Paul was settled in lodgings in the city, he sought contact with the leaders of the Jewish community. He could not go to them, for always there was a chain round his wrist, so by messenger he invited the synagogues to send representatives to come and meet him.

By this time the name of Paul, and what he stood for, was known wherever there was a synagogue. So, if only out of curiosity, delegates came from every segment of Roman Jewry.

First of all, Paul was concerned to vindicate himself before them. There was no hope at all that they would listen sympathetically to his message concerning Christ if they were full to the top with prejudice against the speaker.

He explained as briefly as possible how he came to be a prisoner in Rome. Sanhedrin, Felix, Festus, Agrippa had all recognized that there was really no case against him. Then why had he appealed to Caesar, thus appearing to pass a vote of no confidence in his own people? Simply because of the hatred and excess stirred up against him by a small implacable minority - "that I might deliver my soul from death" (Bezan text).

But, the apostle was careful to stress, he had in no wise turned against his nation because of this. Why, had not his imprisonment during the past two years and more stemmed from his fervent declaration before the Sanhedrin that he clung tenaciously to "the hope of Israel .. .the hope and resurrection of the dead" (23:6)? Because they had heard that he had a message for Gentiles they must not assume that he had lost any of his Jewishness. "It is for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."

The response of his hearers was very guarded. It had to be, for if Paul had been the centre of disturbance and tumult in Judaea, the same could happen in Rome, and the edict of Claudius and the riots which caused it were too recent a memory for comfort. They knew well enough about the Christians as one of the many religious parties into which Jewry was divided, and they knew also that these Jewish Christians were execrated by all the rest. But concerning Paul himself there had been no official representations sent them from Jerusalem, either by letter or by official delegate. So until they had heard Paul more fully they thought it best to suspend judgement.

Sanhedrin case abandoned

This fact that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had not already taken steps to get the synagogues in Rome on their side against Paul calls for explanation. It is hardly adequate to say that the storms which had made Paul's journey to Rome so long and trying must also have delayed any delegates sent from the Sanhedrin, for letters could have been sent by the overland route, and posts along the Roman roads were very efficient and speedy. Also, the fact that two years were to elapse and still no trial strongly suggests that the rulers had recognized that they had no case against the apostle, and therefore were content with the next best thing - to have him kept under restraint for as long as possible; and here doubtless

the Jewish sympathies of Poppaea would be made use of.

On the day fixed for a resumption of discussion with Paul a greater number came together. By this time Jewish Christians in Rome had contributed not a little to the interest taken in the apostle. Probably the talks took place in an open courtyard.

Division

It was a long session, lasting all through the hours of daylight. Paul expounded at length his faith in Jesus. Did those men now listening to him realise what a rich experience it was for them to hear their Scriptures handled so capably and clearly and convincingly? What a contrast with the aridity of rabbinic tradition!

But prejudice dies hard. The Greek verbs imply that in some of them faith was crystallizing out by degrees, but in others (most?) the trend was the other way. Thus discord set in, and since Jesus had already warned that a house divided against itself cannot stand, there was here a foreshadowing of the end of the nation as a coherent organism.

After a while the indignant ones began to leave, voting against Paul's gospel with their feet.

However, before the meeting broke up Paul made one specially solemn pronouncement: "Well spake the Holy Spirit through Isaiah unto *your* fathers ...". Thus he put these stubborn contemporaries of his in the same category with the reprobates of Isaiah's day.

Isaiah's prophecy of rejection

He went on to quote the searing words of rejection from Isaiah 6:9,10 LXX, a passage which (in Mt., Mk., Lk.) Jesus had first applied to his adversaries, which John had used to round off his account of the Lord's ministry, and which in Romans Paul had already woven into his analysis of Jewry's attitude to the gospel.

The sequence of ideas in Isaiah 6 is marvellously appropriate to Paul's present witness to Jewry and the situation he was now attempting to cope with:

Verse	
1. The Lord high and lifted up	This is the language describing the Suffering Servant (52:13). And lifted up has the double meaning of "crucified" (Jn. 12:32-34) and "made glorious.
2. The vision of the Cherubim.	Suggests Israel forsaken, as in Ezekiel 1.
3. The fulness of the whole earth is his glory.	The Gospel for the whole world, and not just for Israel.
4. The posts of the door moved; the House filled with smoke.	The first signs of divine judgement on Israel.
5. A man of unclean lips ... a nation of unclean lips.	Saul the persecutor made contrite. Israel unclean and unrepentant.
6. A live coal from the altar.	Paul cleansed of his unworthiness.
8. Send me!	Paul's special mission to take the gospel to his nation everywhere and to the Gentiles.
9. The appeal to Israel rejected	The mass of the nation turning against the gospel.
10. A retributive hardening of heart.	Therefore they *could not* believe (Jn. 12:39).
11. Cities wasted, without inhabitant.	The Holy Land to be desolated.
12. Men removed far away.	The scattering of the nation.
13. But yet in it a tenth.	Only a remnant of Israel accepting the gospel of Christ (in the last days?).

This "last word" of Paul's could hardly have been more ominous. It was a repetition of his synagogue experiences at Antioch in Pisidia, and Corinth, and Ephesus.

Apart from individuals who sought him out, and were welcomed, this was the end of the apostle's evangelism among the Jews of Rome.

At this place Rackham has the level-headed comment: "In his Epistle to the Romans the apostle in seeking to vindicate the ways of God to man sees how... the rejection of the Jews led to the conversion of the Gentiles. But these thoughts are no explanation of the ultimate mystery - why does one individual believe and another disbelieve? If we answer that the one believes through the grace of God, this only drives the problem further back - why is divine grace to one and not to another? This question must remain insoluble to finite intelligence" (p. 504).

Acquitted

For two full years Paul continued a prisoner, though under very light restraint. Presumably the Jews of Judaea did nothing further about the case for the prosecution. It would have meant tracking down witnesses from Ephesus (24:19) and Jerusalem and transporting them to Rome - a tedious and highly expensive business, even if it were practicable. So again, presumably, Paul's case at last came up and he was acquitted by default and on the recommendation which eventually reached Rome from Festus's officials (Festus himself was dying or dead by this time).

Paul's prison friends

Helped financially by contributions from Philippi (4:10, 14, 18) and probably from aristocratic brethren in Rome, Paul, even though constantly under guard, was able to enjoy liberty of a sort in his own hired house. But he didn't live there alone. Besides members of the Rome ecclesia, both Jews and Gentiles, not a few others came to him from further afield - Timothy, Luke, Aristarchus, Tychicus, Onesimus, Epaphras, Epaphroditus, Mark, Demas, Jesus Justus are all referred to as being with him at this time. A very worthwhile volume could be written about these and other friends of Paul.

A detail of special interest illuminates the allusions to Epaphras and Aristarchus who are both referred to as the apostle's fellow-servants and fellow-prisoners (Col. 1:7; 4:10; Philem. 23, 24). It looks as though these two took it in turns to minister to Paul, one being with him in the house - his fellow-prisoner - whilst the other acted as his liaison officer with the ecclesia and the synagogue and Roman authorities. Interchange of these duties from time to time would make these periods of service less burdensome to both.

That Luke, "the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14), should continue with Paul a while longer suggests health problems, or Luke would surely have gone back to the ecclesia he so much loved at Philippi. The gifts of money sent thence to Paul were probably inspired by a gentle hint in a letter from Luke to Philippi.

That money was brought by Epaphroditus, who may well have been the Philippian jailor Paul converted. In Rome Epaphroditus fell desperately ill, and for a while it was touch and go with him (Phil. 2:25-30). As soon as he was fit to travel, Paul sent him off back to Philippi so as to alleviate the ill tidings they had had about their faithful brother.

Paul delighted specially in the company of Timothy. "I have no man like-minded, who will as a born son care for your state" (Phil. 2:20). What better thing could Paul have written about him?

John Mark, who earlier had been the centre of such strong disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, also came to help. He was now completely reconciled to the apostle and his preaching policy. R.O.P. Taylor has made a good case for the idea that Mark's special forte

was the formal instruction of new converts, both before and after baptism. In that capacity he would be of considerable use to Paul whose efforts in the gospel were unflagging with all who came or were brought to him.

The Bezan text adds here a summary of Paul's teaching during these two years: "Saying that this Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, through whom the whole world is about to be judged."

Prison epistles

It seems highly probable (and is indeed taken as definite by a great many commentators) that four of Paul's epistles belong to this period - though it may be taken as certain that he wrote a lot more letters than these!

Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were all written at the same time. Tychicus, "a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord," was Paul's messenger in the delivery of them. With him went Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave, whom Paul had taught the Truth in Christ when he turned up in Rome looking for his brother Tychicus.

Ephesians and Colossians reckon as two of the most mature, profound, and compressed epistles written by the apostle. The former of these seems to have been intended for wider circulation than in the Ephesian ecclesia only.

Philippians was written, and sent by the hand of Epaphroditus, at a time when Paul expected very shortly to hear the decision about his appeal to Caesar. In a passage (1:20-26) which has been much misunderstood he thought aloud about the prospects:

"With all boldness, as always, now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life (i.e. acquittal, and freedom to serve the Lord more), or by death (i.e. being condemned). For to me, to live is Christ (his personal experience of service and visions and revelations of the Lord), and to die is gain (even thus his martyrdom would magnify the cause of Christ). But if to live in the flesh (i.e. be acquitted), if this is the fruit of my labour (the outcome of my trial), then what I shall choose I wot not. But (with the prospect of freedom) I am in a strait betwixt two (possible policies), having a desire to depart and be with Christ (that is, retirement from the strenuous work of preaching to be able to enjoy the visions and revelations from the Lord which he gloried in): nevertheless to abide in the flesh (i.e. to continue active ministry in the ecclesias, as the next verse intimates) is more needful for you. And having this confidence (of impending acquittal), I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith." And so it turned out.

An unfinished story

But why did Luke not round off the Book of Acts by telling of Paul's release and renewed activity? Either he concluded the book before Paul was acquitted (but in that case why not wait to get the proper end to the story?), or he stopped there deliberately with the intention of resuming the history in "Volume Three."

Of these suggestions, the latter is by far the more likely - for two good reasons:

a. Verses 25-31 carry all the marks of a formal conclusion. In his "Acts of the Apostles" Page has a good section on this.
b. In 1:1, "the former treatise" uses a word implying the first of more than two, thus suggesting Luke's intention to add at least one other book after Acts.

In that case was the "Further Acts of Paul" never written, or being written did if fail to survive? It is known that Luke was still alive four years or so later (2 Tim. 4:11), and again in Paul's company shortly before the apostle died in the Nero persecution. So it seems fairly likely that "Volume Three" never got written. Luke probably died a martyr alongside his old friend. It is difficult to believe that that third history was written and yet was allowed to perish, for as soon as it was available (if it ever was) copies would very quickly multiply. Rome especially

had very efficient copying systems in those days.

Notes: 28:17-31

19. *My nation.* Paul generously exculpates his people, but by switching from the usual *laos* (v. 17) to *ethnos* he hints at estrangement.
20. *For the hope of Israel;* and for bringing Gentiles into the hope of Israel, Eph. 3:1.
    This chain. How it galled this restless energetic man! 26:29; Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Philem. 10,13 (2 Tim. 1:16; 2:9).
22. *Everywhere spoken against;* i.e. everywhere in Jewry.
    This sect. As though the Christians formed an exclusive club!
23. *There came.* This less common word normally means (in NT.) an act brought about by God.
25. *They departed.* Greek M.V. might imply to save themselves from being worsted in argument.
    Well. So also Jesus, in a like spirit; Mk. 7:6,9.
30. *Two whole years.* And all this time shackled! Phil. 1:13.
31. *Preaching.* And he a *prisoner,* and in *Rome! A* clear testimony to the legality of Christianity.

109. Paul and the Sufferings of Christ

In the last few chapters of Acts resemblances between Paul and Christ, both in experience and in phraseology, continue to accumulate. These are so detailed that it is quite impossible to believe that they are fortuitous. Paul himself was surely aware of this extended parallel, and gloried in it:

a. "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus - that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:10,11).
b. "That I may know ... the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:10).
c. "I fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:24).

Now consider these details:

20:23	Three prophecies of suffering	Luke 9:22, 44; 18:31
21:13	Must go to Jerusalem	Luke 9:51
21:5	"When the days were accomplished."	Luke 9:51 RV
20:8, 11	A Breaking of Bread in an upper room A final warning and exhortation to the disciples.	Luke 22:12-20 Matthew24; John 14-16.
20:28, 31.	"Watch!"	Matthew 24: 42-46.
20:19	"My temptations"	Luke 22:28
21:1	"Torn away" from his friends	Luke 22:41 s.w.
21:13	"Break my heart."	Matthew 26: 37; Psalm 69:20.
20:36; 21:5	Kneeled and prayed.	Luke 22:41.
21:14	"The will of the Lord be done."	Matthew 26:39
21:11	Bound	John 18:12
23:1	Before the Sanhedrin.	Matthew 26:57
23:2	Smitten on the face	John 18:22
21:11	Delivered into the hands of Gentiles	John 18:28
24:25	Before the Roman governor	Matthew 27:2
25:22	Herod Agrippa wanting to see and hear him	Luke 23:18
24:1	His accusers the chief priests The same charges:	Matthew 27:12
24:5	(a) Political-against Caesar	Luke 23:2
24:5	(b) Religious-blasphemy	Matthew 26:65
24:5,6	(c) Against the temple	Matthew 26:61
25:24	Vehement accusation	Luke 23:10
25:25	"Nothing worthy of death"	Luke 23:14 etc.
26:31	(declared 4 times)	
23:9, 29		
25:9	Left bound to please the Jews	John 19:16
24:27		
25:22	Governor and Herod made friends.	Luke 23:12
22:22	"Away with him!"	Matthew 27:22,23
23:12	Enemies call down a curse on themselves	Matthew 27:25
22:24	Scourging — and in the same place?	John 19:1
23:24,31	"Suffered without the gate," in weakness;	Luke 23:26

27:24,44	Went down into the abyss and yet survived	
27:34,35	Brought reassurance to others by eating food in their presence	Luke 24:41-43
27:44	Was the means of salvation to all who trusted in his lead	
28	Went away into a far country.	Luke 24:51

One comment on the foregoing:

It will be noted that in certain respects Paul's imitation of Christ is complete but, now and then, is somewhat distorted. This is to be expected. The servant is not greater than, is nowhere near as great as, his Master. Similarly, none of the Lord's parables give a complete picture of Truth. Each one concentrates on certain important facets.

The same characteristic of symbolic incompleteness is to be found in the details about the Tabernacle.

The veil of blue, purple, scarlet, and fine-twined linen was adorned with cherubim (Ex. 26:31). These were "of cunning work," that is, almost certainly, showing a true pattern of "needlework on both sides" (Jud. 5:30). Thus Christ, whether seen by God or by man, displayed the Glory of God.

But the hanging for the door of the Tent, whilst likewise of blue, purple, scarlet, and fine-twined linen, had a pattern which was "the work of the embroiderer." This represents the life of the saints, and accordingly cherubim are not mentioned, for in the life of every disciple the Glory of God is distorted. Nor is this inwrought. It is "embroidered" on (Ps. 45:14).

This perhaps helps to an understanding of why even in Paul the actual imitation of Christ is at times not as clear-cut as it might be.

Yet another impressive parallel is between Paul and Ezekiel.

Acts		**Ezekiel**
20:22	Bound in the Spirit	3:14
20:6; 21:4, 27	Seven days.	3:15
20:26; 18:6	Clean from the blood of all men	3:18,19
20:29	Grievous wolves	34:25; 22:27; 13:4
20:31	Therefore watch and warn.	3:17
21:24	Nazirite vow	5:1 8:3
20:4	Six men and Paul	9:2
22:6	The Glory out of the north.	1:4
20:32	Build you up... an inheritance among them that are sanctified.	Ch. 40-48 (Temple)
20:28	Feed the flock	34:14, 15
20:35	Support the weak.	34:4 LXX

23:1	Before the Council	8:11
23:3	Whited wall	13:10
23:31	Go forth at even into captivity	12:4
25:27	Bound two years	3:25
26:13,	The Glory.	Ch. 1
26:16	Stand up upon thy feet	2:1
9:15	I send thee to the children of Israel	2:3
28:20	Bound with this chain.	7:23
28:17, 23	Chief of the Jews came to Him	8:1
28:27	A hard-hearted people	3:7
28:28	The Gentiles will hear.	3:6
28:30	His own hired house	3:24

110. Luke himself

A study of Acts would be seriously incomplete without an attempt to bring its author to life. In the introduction (ch. 1) a few facts and probabilities about him were brought together - his medical language; the early publication and general acceptance of his gospel; the date of publication of Acts, and why the expected Volume 3 is not now available. An effort must now be made to fill out the portrait.

There are hints that from time to time Paul was a sick man. It may be taken as fairly certain that Luke added professional interest to his abiding friendship for Paul. So it is not to be wondered at that the apostle should call him "the beloved healer" (Col. 4:14).

From the "we" passages (16:10-17; 20:5-21 :18; 27:1-28:16) it is possible to infer that Luke and Paul were together on the Second Journey from Troas to and at Philippi, on the Third Journey from Philippi back to Jerusalem, and from Caesarea throughout the voyage to Rome. As a physician Luke was almost certainly a scholarly man. Indeed, that he was is evident also from the quality of his literary composition. The most elegant stylistic Greek in the New Testament is to be found in his writings, especially in the introduction to his gospel and in certain parts of Acts.

Second and third century writers refer to Luke as a citizen of Antioch in Syria, but this could be a false inference from the mention of Lucius in Acts 13:1. It would be a mistake easily made. But Luke's full name would be Lucanus, not Lucius.

A much more likely guess is that Luke was a Samaritan. Is it not remarkable that, with only one exception (Jn. 4), every New Testament reference to Samaria and Samaritans comes in Luke and Acts? This identification would readily explain two phenomena in his writings which on the alternative assumption, that he was a Gentile convert, are very difficult to make sense of.

One is that Luke shows a very marked familiarity with the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament. This comes out in his Old Testament allusions in scores of places. Also, the textual analysts have estimated that no less than 471 Greek words in the New Testament are used by Luke and by no other New Testament writer, and of these approximately three-quarters are Septuagint words. If he were a Samaritan, and well-educated at that, Luke would certainly be familiar with the Septuagint. But if he were a convert from heathenism, what likelihood of that?

But another feature of his writing style is his ready use of Hebraistic idioms and turns of speech. Again, this now presents no difficulty. But if he were of Gentile origin such a characteristic would be quite bewildering.

This Samaritan speculation may perhaps be carried a bit further. All the other gospel writers leave their signature on their writings somewhere. Mark tells about the young man in Gethsemane with a linen garment; Matthew is the only one who tells explicitly that Levi the publican was himself; John never refers to himself by name, but tells about "the disciple whom Jesus loved." In an attempt to trace Luke's signature, guesses have been made that he was one of the two who gave hospitality to the risen Jesus at Emmaus. But there are big improbabilities about this.

An attractive alternative is to look for him in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which lovely story comes only in Luke. This Samaritan, it is implied, was a medico, for he came to the stricken man and "bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine." Would a traveller normally be equipped to deal with a situation of this kind? The idea of Jesus building one of his most moving parables round Luke is very appealing, and it becomes the more so when it is realised that this travelling Samaritan is, in interpretation, a picture of the Saviour himself. It is a pity this suggestion lacks fuller verification.

It has already been suggested that Luke and Titus were brothers (chapter 59) and that the encounter with Luke at Troas came about in the first instance because Titus, accompanying Paul, was also in touch with his brother who evidently had earlier settled down to a professional life at Philippi.

Thus the "man of Macedonia" seen by Paul in a dream at Troas was (as Ramsay first suggested) Luke who had joined the party only the day before (see chapter 65). Not a few details fall into place when helped by this hypothesis.

When Paul and Silas and Timothy were constrained to move on from Philippi, Luke stayed there for something like five years. The healthy condition of the ecclesia there, as may be readily inferred from Paul's Philippian epistle, was almost certainly due in the main to Luke's fine influence.

Even though he fails to mention himself (or his brother) explicitly in Acts or Gospel, a distinct impression comes through to the careful reader of a gracious kindly dedicated Christian gentleman. He was an evident enthusiast for the particular emphasis which is so perceptible in Paul's preaching of the gospel: - justification by faith, the forgiveness of sins, and the fulness of divine grace and providence in the life of the believer. It is noticeable that women find greater prominence in his gospel than in the others. And prayer is another aspect of the life in Christ which he loves to emphasize.

It would seem that, when word got round that Paul had been arrested once again during the Nero persecution, Luke lost no time in joining Paul in Rome, even though it meant sharing imprisonment with him. "Only Luke is with me," the apostle wrote in the very last thing that came to the brethren from his pen. At that time to be near to Paul was to be near to danger, so others who might have been expected to rally to his aid kept away.

Later traditions (how dependable?) say that Luke died at the age of 74 (or 84). But it seems more likely that when Paul was put to death, Luke died also; what difference would one Christian more or less make to Nero? Anyway, this would readily explain why Luke's Volume 3 was never finished.

Appendix 1

Paul's Journeys after his first trial

1. To Spain,

    a. Clement of Rome:
    b. "Paul came to the limit of the west."
    c. Muratorian Fragment and Ignatius (both 2nd Century) and Jerome say Paul preached in Spain.
    d. Inscription found in Spain (reign of Nero): "The government eliminated robbers and those who sought to instil a new superstition in the minds of the people."

But:

Phil. 1:23-25, Philem. 22 seem to imply an intention to concentrate on consolidation of existing ecclesias and on countering Judaist propaganda.

2. The following order is uncertain:

    a. Crete, with Titus (Tit. 1:3)
    b. Corinth (probably)
    c. Nicopolis (Tit. 3:12)
    d. Dalmatia (probably)
    e. Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3)
    f. Bithynia (1 Pet. 1:1;2 Pet. 3:15)
    g. Ephesus (2 Tim. 1:4)
    h. Colosse (Philem. 22)
    i. Asian circuit, ending at Troas.
    j. Arrested at Troas (2 Tim. 4:13, 14) not long after the Fire of Rome, 19th July, A.D. 67(?).
    k. Miletum (2 Tim.4:20)
    l. Rome: trial and execution.

Appendix 2

The Gift of Tongues

One of the most mysterious of all phenomena associated with the early church was the power of speaking with tongues, the first of all the gifts which came to those endued with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and which later was found to be manifested also at Caesarea (Acts 10:44-48), Corinth (1 Cor. 14), Ephesus (Acts 19:6), and maybe also at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5:19-22). What precisely was this strange power which vanished along with all the other charismata of the Holy Spirit in the first century?

Two drastically differing points of view are commonly held with regard to this problem. One, that it was an actual endowment with the ability to speak a variety of foreign languages, not for preaching, but simply as a marvellous, sensational advertisement. The other, that 'tongues' was an expression of spiritual excitement in the form of a torrent of ecstatic meaningless ejaculations bearing no relation to any known language. The proviso is usually added to this second view that at Pentecost, though probably not on later occasions, a number of foreign phrases must have been included, to be recognised as such by the assembled multitude.

Ground for this second view is usually found in the promise: "They shall speak with *new* tongues" (Mk. 16:17), though this might merely mean 'new' to those thus gifted.

"They began to speak with *other* tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). The Greek word *(heteros)* used here for 'other' requires, it is suggested, a *different* kind of speech, and not just another language of the kind they normally used.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and *of angels"* (1 Cor. 13:1). The words are interpreted as having reference to a mode of speech which is quite unearthly.

"For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful" (1 Cor. 14:14).

"For he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God; for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries." (1 Cor. 14:2).

The same phenomenon in all places

In addition, an attempt is sometimes made to separate off the marvellous happenings at Pentecost from the later manifestation of tongues, as though it were an altogether distinct phenomenon. But this must be strenuously resisted for the following reason:

The sequence of events on the Day of Pentecost was (a) the outpouring of the Spirit, (b) speaking with tongues, (c.) praise and prophecy. Now in the case of Cornelius and his household, and also at Ephesus (Acts 10:45, 46; 19:6) precisely the same sequence is specifically mentioned: "On the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God." "The Holy Spirit came on them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied." This identity with the original manifestation is explicitly mentioned by Peter: "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, *as on us at the beginning"* (11:15).

Hence the gift of tongues at Pentecost differed in no essential feature from its later manifestation at Caesarea and at Ephesus. This was evidently the normal experience, and it may safely be concluded that there was no fundamental divergence at Corinth, concerning which ecclesia most is known (1 Cor. 14). Where this question is concerned, Jerusalem and Corinth cannot be treated separately.

Not gibberish

Next, it can be demonstrated that speaking with tongues was not unintelligible gibberish but, on the contrary, was capable of being understood: "We do hear them speak in our tongues *the wonderful works of God ...* Every man heard them speak in his own language... how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born" (Acts 2:6, 8, 11).

Speaking with tongues also involved prophesying, for Peter explains the one by a quotation from Joel about the other: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (v. 17 and again in v. 18). Comparison should also be made with the passages cited earlier concerning Cornelius and the Ephesians. Their speaking with tongues is said to have involved prophesying and magnifying God. It is difficult to see how these could find expression in what was meaningless incoherence.

Several passages in 1 Cor. 14, the outstanding chapter dealing with this topic, require the same conclusion: v.4: "He that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself." But how, if his utterance was nought but an outburst of emotional inexplicable frenzy? v.14: "For if I *pray* in a tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful." From this, even though the last phrase may at the moment occasion difficulty, it is clear that speaking in a tongue might involve definite prayer.

v.16, 17 are even more emphatic: "Else when thou shalt *bless* with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy *giving of thanks,* seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For verily thou *givest thanks well,* but the other is not edified."

Yet another factor of importance in this question is Paul's evident inability to understand the speech of Lycaonia (Acts 14:11-14), although some years later he is able to assert: "I speak with tongues more than ye all."

Summary

Summing up thus far, the following contradictory conclusions have been achieved:

(a) The gifts of tongues mentioned in various different passages are all of a kind.
(b) The gift included speech in known languages.
(c) It did not impart knowledge of current dialects.
(d) Its results were intelligible, but yet involved a considerable element of incomprehensibility.

Any solution must be adequate to cope with all these different aspects of the problem. It is suggested that such a solution is available.

At the time when the gospel was being preached by the apostles, Hebrew had almost become a dead language, as Latin and Greek are today. As a language it was spoken by hardly any, yet the study and use of it were very much alive because of the fact that the Old Testament scriptures were written in Hebrew. Also, the temple services were conducted almost entirely in that language. The Dead Sea documents have also revealed that Bar Kochbah, the last of the pseudo-Messiahs, insisted on official documents being in Hebrew - a typical nationalistic gesture.

When the first promise of the Holy Spirit was made, Jesus added: "He shall teach you all things, and *bring all things to your remembrance"* (John 14:26). There can be no doubt that the remarkable detail and reliability of the gospel narratives are due to their having been written by men with divinely activated memories. This special gift of memory was added often to people whose Jewish education and training had already developed the powers of memory considerably more than is normal in these days.

A suggested explanation

Consequently it becomes not only feasible but probable that *those with the gift of tongues*

were divinely inspired to remember and repeat portions of Hebrew Scripture and synagogue or temple liturgy which they had heard in the course of religious training over the past years. Such a hypothesis would immediately and easily explain the various outstanding difficulties enumerated above.

This suggestion springs in the first instance from the occurrence of a most unusual word in Acts 2:4 "As the Spirit gave them *utterance."* It is identical with the word used in 1 Chron. 25:1 LXX:". . . the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, son of Jeduthun, who should *prophesy* with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals .. ." Just as these priests recited psalms and prayers in the Temple, so also (it is suggested) the apostles and others were inspired to remember and repeat the same kind of thing.

Such excited repetition would be unintelligible to the majority, and at the same time intelligible to the well-educated few. Nor would the meaning be utterly wasted (even though only imperfectly understood) on the one who made such an utterance.

The problems evaporate

The most obvious objection to this suggestion is this: How would an inspired repetition in Hebrew of Holy Scripture or temple prayers satisfy the details of Acts: "other tongues ... we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God ... every man in his own language"?

To this reasonable demur there is a simple answer available. In those days Jerusalem was full of synagogues, each one devoted to the special interests of Jews visiting or now residing in the city from various parts of the Dispersion; e.g. "the synagogue of the Libertines and Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and Asia" (6:9). In these assemblies much of the service would be in Greek, the international language of that period, but also much of it in the language of one particular Jewish community or another from some remote part of the empire. The present writer has heard church services in N.W. Scotland, partly in English and partly in Gaelic. The same bilingual method is followed in not a few churches in Wales? It has been known in at least one Italian ecclesia in America.

Thus it would come about that amongst the Jerusalem disciples there would certainly be some who at some time or another had heard prayers and the praise of God in a variety of different tongues, so it seems not unlikely that the Holy Spirit "brought all things to their remembrance", so that they were enabled to recall and repeat accurately parts of synagogue services which they had at some time heard in languages unfamiliar to them.

A re-examination of the relevant passages is now called for, to see if the hypothesis fits the facts.

"Every man heard them speak in his own language ... And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born" (2:6, 8; see also v. 14, 22). It has to be borne in mind that, contrary to usual assumption, the people thus spoken of were not *visitors* to Jerusalem who had come for the feast: they were residents, devout men who had made their homes in the Holy City: "There were *dwelling* at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven." These enthusiasts for the temple and its service would naturally be better equipped than the average member of the crowd to discern the true character of the excited utterance of the apostles. Others - unlearned and unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:23) - naturally reacted differently. To them it was gibberish: "These men are full of new wine." But not so the others: "We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God."

There is now no difficulty about the amazed enquiry: "Are not all these which speak Galileans?" If indeed it was their speech (Mt. 26:73) and not their dress which identified the apostles as Galileans, the ejaculation of surprise can well be understood. Here were rough untutored men speaking in public with all the authority and eloquence and also the linguistic *learning* of fully qualified rabbis.

Other passages likewise fall into place and confirm the conclusion arrived at.

"He that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not to men, but *to God:* for no man understandeth him: howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries" (1 Cor. 14:2). It is not unlikely that the enthusiasts endowed with tongues at Corinth would be mostly Jewish Christians with some background of Hebrew or foreign synagogue liturgy. Their repetition of imperfectly understood prayers and psalms would answer precisely to this description.

The words of 1 Cor. 14:5 are now relieved of all difficulty: "Greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying." There is a resemblance to the time of Nehemiah when the people returned from Babylon ignorant of the language of their Holy Scriptures: "So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly (RV margin: with interpretation), and they gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (Neh. 8:8).

"I thank my God," says Paul, "I speak with tongues more than ye all." How naturally these words come from Gamaliel's most distinguished and greatly travelled pupil, and how easy to reconcile with his inability to understand the speech of Lycaonia, if his gift of tongues was an intensifying of his longstanding familiarity with the ancient speech of his fathers and with Jewish worship as expressed in diverse languages in a variety of synagogues.

Difficulty also evaporates from the words: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels." The tongue of angels surely was the ancient Hebrew by which the law was communicated to Moses (Heb. 2:2). Every angel mentioned in the Old Testament appears to have spoken in Hebrew.

The reference to prayers and giving of thanks in an unknown tongue are now readily seen to be allusions to standard Hebrew prayers, the *details* of which might not be understood by the one who uttered them and not at all by those who heard, but the *gist* of which would certainly be known to the speaker. A similar meaning can also be read into the words of 1 Cor. 14:14, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prayeth but my understanding is unfruitful" - words which if they have reference to the utterance of gibberish, are themselves near to being gibberish.

The reference to the gift of tongues at Caesarea and Ephesus now presents little difficulty. The new disciples at Ephesus had been disciples of John the Baptist, and were therefore Jews; and Cornelius, though a Gentile, had obviously strong Jewish associations; he was a "proselyte of the gate" and already knew much about the teaching and work of Jesus (Acts 10:37). There would therefore be no more difficulty (humanly speaking) about these men being given superhuman recollection of the languages of the Old Testament or the synagogues, than was the case of the apostles. Indeed, if those "of the circumcision" who accompanied Peter heard the Gentile Cornelius speaking in the holy tongue of their sacred Scriptures their instinctive opposition to the acceptance of Gentiles into the church could have no finer antidote.

Last of all, consideration has to be given to the Biblical argument in 1 Cor. 14:21. There Paul claims that the gift of tongues is a direct fulfilment of Isaiah 28:11; "Nay, but with men of strange lips and with another tongue will he speak unto this people" (RV).

Modern exposition of these words is usually on these lines: The people of Isaiah's time were so given to self-indulgence and to despising of divine instruction, that God was promising them (with sardonic force) a different set of teachers - the fierce, ravaging Assyrian forces under Sennacherib. But this view is altogether mistaken, as will now be shown.

In the time of Hezekiah the worship of the Lord had become sadly perverted:

"The priest and the prophet have erred . . . they err in vision, they stumble in judgment." The jibe of the drunkards was turned by Isaiah the prophet into the enunciation of a stern and sober truth: "Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine: them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept: line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little." The incurable apostasy of those who were themselves the appointed religious leaders of Israel created a hard necessity to start afresh with a new generation of childlike learners. "With another tongue" God was going to speak unto this people.

Thus it came about. Hezekiah's reformation brought to Jerusalem a great crowd of Galileans, "men of strange lips and with another tongue", all intent on a zealous return to the Lord their God and the celebration of His Passover. These men with their country ignorance and uncouth northern dialect, became the instructors in godliness of "the scornful men that rule this people which is in Jerusalem."

But the more important fulfilment of the Scripture came in the time of the apostles. The scornful men in Jerusalem gave no heed to the appeals of the Son of God: they erred in vision and stumbled in judgement. So Jesus turned to those who would receive the Word of God as little children (Lk. 10:21). These he patiently instructed and duly appointed to be the new generation of teachers in Israel. These despised provincials - "Are not all these which speak Galileans?" - were given credentials: an inspired remembrance of the tongue of ancient learning and of the variegated languages of the Diaspora synagogue services. "Wherefore", Paul concludes with great cogency, "tongues are for a sign not to them that believe, but to them (Jews) that believe not."

Thus the proper understanding of the Biblical basis for the gift of tongues requires that this strange phenomenon should be associated first and foremost with the holy language of Israel. It is a pity that loose ideas about the appositeness of New Testament citations of the Old should have blinded so many students of Scripture to the force and instruction latent in this passage which Paul culled from Isaiah.

Paul's argument, then, required that the witness of the gift of tongues be to unbelieving Israel. Accordingly the first outpouring of the Spirit was in Jerusalem, exactly as Joel had foretold (2:28-32, especially 32). This was why the Lord Jesus commanded the disciples "that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4).

But Joel 2 will certainly be fulfilled again. It requires an outpouring of the Spirit in the Last Days, with another sensational demonstration of the gift of tongues. And as on the former occasion, so again Joel will be fulfilled *first of all* in *Jerusalem* - "a sign not to them that believe, but to them (Israel) that believe not."

Behold, then, the astonishing phenomenon in this twentieth century - in scores of cities round the world confident claims are being made of a pentecostal power to speak with tongues, but *not yet at Jerusalem!*

One has yet to hear an adequate pentecostal answer to this argument.

Appendix 3

THE JEWISH PLOT

WHEN the leaders of the Jews sought to at least contain the new movement led by Jesus of Nazareth, they brought to bear every subtle form of attack and denigration they were capable of. And when these failed, as they must when dealing with a man such as Jesus, they had to fall back on crude "thud and blunder" methods which involved using all the organized powers of religion and state to get him crucified.

With Jesus himself out of the way they next found that the hard facts of his resurrection and of the transformation and inspiration of his apostles shewed their problem to be still unsolved. Now open persecution only seemed to make the movement prosper more than ever. The blood of the martyrs was already becoming the seed of the Ecclesia. But the old resources of craft and cunning were not atrophied. *A deliberate attempt was made to wreck the new "sect" from within.* Nowhere is this stated categorically in the New Testament, but the build-up of passages pointing to such a conclusion, and the flowering of others taking on bigger meaning in the light of this idea, is very persuasive.

The Judaist "underground"

In Galatians 2:4, 5 Paul has a reminiscence of "false brethren unawares brought in, who came in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour." These words can mean only one thing, that agents were being planted in the early church with instructions to conform in all outward seeming to the standard pattern of Christian discipleship, but to work over a period of years towards either steering the ecclesias back to loyalty to the Law or creating such internal dissensions as could only have a serious deleterious effect on the community generally.

These *agents provocateurs* would necessarily have to be exceptionally clever men who were also marvellously able in hypocritically covering up their true character. There was no lack of excellent material in the ranks of the Pharisees and the priests. So when "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7), it would be a comparatively easy matter to get one or two of these spies accepted among them.

It is understandable that since the big majority of the early disciples were relatively lowly people, in wealth, social standing and education, these accessions to the ecclesia from the upper echelons of Jewish society would climb fast in the esteem of their brethren and in the opportunities accorded to them as teachers and leaders (footnote).

Consequently at a fairly early date it was possible for these men, working with all the dedicated fervour and persistence of a Communist cell, to exercise an almost unbelievable degree of influence.

They first shewed their strength at Antioch, where their words were evidently so emphatic and persuasive as to sway Peter himself. The details of this encounter have been analysed in chapter 57, which see.

Footnote: *(even though Jesus had warned against this very thing; Luke 14:7-11).

Paul the obstacle

From this incident these men of evil intention saw clearly that they could expect no real success in their project whilst Paul stood in the way. In intellectual grasp of the issues at stake, in ability to get at the crux of a problem, in moral fibre and toughness of character, they were no match for him. And he had the status of Apostle, which none of them could claim. So from now on, it was on him and his work that they must concentrate.

Galatia

Their next campaign again brought quick encouraging victories. When news got back to Judaea of the big success of the missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas in converting Galatian Gentiles to the Faith, they (or, more probably, others working in concert with them) promptly followed the same route, visiting each newly-founded ecclesia. They assumed to themselves, and were accorded, the highest possible degree of holiness and authority. Were they not men of great education, learned in the Law and members of the apostles' own ecclesia in Jerusalem?

In the hands of such men these spiritually unsophisticated Galatians were an instrument to play whatever tune they chose. The greatness of Moses' Law (which Paul himself had, no doubt, often talked about!) would be skilfully stressed in their teaching. To be sure, Christ was to be accepted without any reservation, but Moses also. Look at the Biblical mandates for circumcision. There must be baptism truly - but also circumcision. And the Sabbath dated from Creation. Was it now to be lightly cast aside?

Then the cleverest trick of all. As things are, you and we cannot have true religious fellowship together because we follow different food laws. Accept the prohibitions Moses laid on unclean foods, and we are truly your brethren -but not until!" "They seek you in no good way"; wrote Paul regarding this part of their campaign, "nay, they desire to shut you out, that ye may seek them" (4:17 RV). Here then was not only subtle persuasion, but the iron hand in the velvet glove - the blackmail of disfellowship, hinted at just sufficiently to frighten men feeling unsure of themselves. The same disreputable tactics have even been known in the twentieth century. It was a resounding success from the start. The battle was won with hardly a blow. And these bewildered Galatians settled down to learn how to be good Jews in order to be Christians.

When news of this reached Paul, be blazed. White-hot with anger and bitter disappointment he dashed off his great Letter to the Galatians in which every emotion jostled with quick-fire argument, exhortation and appeal. At the time this was the best response he could muster. The obvious course of action to follow was to return hot-foot to Galatia to straighten the problem out in person. But this was not possible for him because the same sort of controversy had erupted in Antioch and Jerusalem, and Paul was needed for the Council which was to be held in order to reach some authoritative decision about it for all the ecclesias.

The charitable compromise reached at the Council in Jerusalem made concessions of a practical character to the life-long deep-rooted prejudices of the brethren who had spent all their lives honouring the Law of Moses; it also brought the way of life of Jewish and Gentile Christians close enough together to make fellowship and closer social contact a more real thing.

Meantime Paul's letter to Galatia had done its job. The new brethren were back on course. "I would they were even cut off which trouble you," Paul had written. And if the trouble-makers, doubtless feeling well-pleased with themselves, had not already gone away before his letter was received, there need be little doubt that is what would have happened to them!

Thessalonica

Other ecclesias similarly came under the wiles of these unrelenting faceless adversaries. Hardly had Paul left the new ecclesia at Thessalonica (second journey), when a forged letter was received purporting to be written by Paul himself. Is any other meaning possible to these words?: 'Now we beseech you, brethren ... that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, *nor by letter as from us,* as that the day of Christ is at hand" (2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2).

For what conceivable reason could anyone wish to foist a pseudo-Pauline letter on this new ecclesia, if it be not with the express intention of creating as much confusion as possible? Paul's enemies were so up-to-the-minute in their spying on his work, that within a few months at most they were aware of the situation at Thessalonica and were quick to devise some means, harmless to themselves, by which to set both preacher and converts by the ears.

The words "neither by spirit" also call for special scrutiny. This means "neither by one claiming to be endowed with Holy Spirit authority" (1 John 4:1-3 and 1 Timothy 4:1 - two occurrences in one verse - are good examples of this usage). So evidently this was another danger at Thessalonica.

Paul did his best to set up safeguards: "The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write" (3:17). But this could do nothing to counteract the lies of men who came in person claiming to be vested with the authority of the Holy Spirit. (The "Man of Sin" prophecy -2 Th. 2 - heads to be studied from thin angle.)

Corinth

This is actually what happened in Corinth. A careful study of 2 Corinthians 10,11 revel as a series of references to a small group of Jewish visitors to that ecclesia, one of them obviously the leader and master-mind, for the express purpose of weaning the ecclesia away from loyalty to Paul, their first teacher.

They ran him down in nasty personal remarks: "his letters are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible (he talks Greek as a Yorkshireman talks English!!) ... he terrifies you with his letters ... he is rude in speech" (10:9, 10; 11:6).

By contrast, this "Satan" contrived to dress up impressively his own personal qualifications for assuming authority over them (11:22, 23).

It succeeded wonderfully. Reports from Corinth reached Paul at Ephesus of this amazing swing away from loyalty to himself and the wholesome ecclesial traditions he had instilled. Frantic with anxiety, he set Titus by ship, and also himself set out by the land route. "Our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears" (7:5).

At last Titus came to meet him with good news. The Corinthians knew they had behaved badly, and had the grace to be ashamed of themselves. A letter from Paul, and the appearance in their midst of an unquenchable Titus had soon restored the status quo. And how they sought to make amends (7:8-11)! So the "Satan", still unnamed, had to stand by and swallow his chagrin. Corinth had now no use for him, nor he for Corinth.

Even so, Paul felt constrained, in the later chapters of this epistle, to rise up in self-defence, penning a long purple passage the like of which is not to be found anywhere else in his writings or speeches (11:13-12:12).

There is also Peter's remarkable vindication of the authority of Paul (2 Peter 3:15, 16), written probably after the martyrdom of his great colleague.

All this would have been quite unnecessary had it not been for the sustained campaign of character assassination against the Lord's most dedicated servant.

Jerusalem

What could Paul do to muster active sympathy and support back in Jerusalem against the malicious work of these evil men? When he visited the Holy City for the last time, here were teeming thousands of Jewish brethren who had kept the Law of Moses all their lives and

among whom were only a few who were likely to achieve sufficient spiritual maturity to grasp the essential fact that now the Law was of no use to them. Of course they would go on observing the Law. How else could they *live* in Jerusalem at all? Even James the Lord's brother did the same, and died a martyr to Jewish hatred, but with one of the greatest reputations for piety under the Law of any man in that century.

So there was nothing here to hurt or surprise Paul. But how he must have winced when his fellow apostles said to him: "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law; *and they are informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses* (literally, apostasy from Moses), *saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs"* (Acts 21:20, 21).

Here was a tissue of lies believed by every Christian disciple in Jerusalem, including perhaps the apostles themselves. Paul was a fine fellow, no doubt, but why must he be so unconventional in some of his attitudes?

It was not true in a single particular. Yet only a slight twist had been given to the facts. He did teach his Jewish converts to abandon all *dependence* on Law observance. And the logic of his gospel was that henceforth no Jewish child was spiritually one whit better for being circumcised.

Nevertheless these erroneous convictions about himself were firmly rooted in the minds of thousands of his brethren in Christ. "They are informed of thee" is really "it has been dinned into them by repetition concerning thee" (the Greek word describes the Rabbinic method of instruction, and has given birth to the English word "catechize"). The faceless men had been diligently at work over recent years making sure that his wonderful plausible, *nearly* accurate picture of Paul was well established in all minds in Jerusalem before he shewed his face there. It could not have been his open enemies among Sadducees and Pharisees who told these specious lies, for *their* story would have been immediately discounted. They were known to be Paul's bitter foes. But when spoken by his brethren who told in the next breath of his almost superhuman achievements as a missionary, who could disbelieve this whispering campaign?

Rome

The problem accompanied Paul to Rome. During his detention there "for two whole years" his presence proved to be a great inspiration to some of the brethren in their preaching. But not to all. "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of goodwill: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love" (Philippians 1:15-17). Not enough is known here about the circumstances for confident conclusions. But at least it is clear that certain persons were taking a malicious pleasure in preaching the gospel - with some special emphasis, presumably - because their doing so would only be an added source of worry and vexation to Paul. A gospel with a Judaistic emphasis would answer the case tolerably well, those hearing the Truth being taught also to seek justification by works.

This would be just the kind of situation in which prisoner Paul would shrug his shoulders, saying: "What then? notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and rejoice" (v. 18). Presumably his hope would be that even if these misguided converts received the Truth in Christ with distortions, there would be a reasonable hope that as time went on they would be able to grow nearer to the real Truth of the gospel.

The problem was probably in Rome even before Paul got there, for in his epistle to that ecclesia he found it needful to issue this warning: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark (keep your eye on) them which cause divisions and occasions of stumbling contrary to the doctrine which ye learned; and avoid them. For they that be such serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:17, 18). The description is that of the serpent in Eden (as the next verse

proceeds to demonstrate very clearly). It is the figure of speech used by Paul about the plausible "Satan" who had nearly brought the Corinthian ecclesia to ruin (2 Corinthians 11:3). Here again were "good words and fair speeches", and the aim - divisions, separating off brethren from brethren, exactly what had been attempted and achieved, though with only temporary success, in Antioch, Galatia, Thessalonica, Corinth. Truly, the price of their liberty in Christ was Paul's eternal vigilance.

Ephesus and Colosse

There are phrases in Paul's letters to Ephesus and Colosse which seem to hint at fears that the believers there might be "got at". His exhortation that they use all possible God-provided helps to come to a higher degree of spiritual maturity has this warning also: "that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, *by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive …*" (4:14).

The brief equivalent in Colossians is: "And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words" (2:4). Here the allusion to the serpent in Eden is readily discernible. It is there also in Ephesians, though not so easy to pick out in the Common Version.

Yet again this is the figure of speech used by Paul to describe the cunning un-named adversary at Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:3). And certainly some of Paul's phrases seem to be rather highly-coloured, unless he had specific evil-intentioned men in mind. "Children tossed to and fro" - precisely this had happened to his new converts in Galatia, Thessalonica, Corinth. "By the sleight of men" - contemporaries used the words to describe deliberate trickery with dice. "Whereby they lie in wait to deceive" -the original here is ill-turned; the Greek phrase has a word which implies *systematic* deception. So, although it cannot be said with any certainty that Paul was warning Ephesus and Colosse against his faceless enemies, quite a few details chime in with the idea.

Only a few years later, just before he died, he had to write the sickening words: "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Timothy 1:15). The churches of Asia included Ephesus and Colosse. Now they had turned away, not from following Christ, but from accepting the authority of Paul, their apostle, teacher, founder and guide. What evil circumstances, what evil people, could have brought about such a sad state of affairs?

Those who accept the (well-proven) early date of the Book of Revelation (c. A.D.66) will now see special meaning in the Lord's reproach of Ephesus: "I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love" (2:4) - loyalty to the apostle Paul.

Warnings to Timothy and Titus

It is almost to be expected that Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, whom he had thrust into positions of high responsibility in the ecclesias, would include warnings against the nefarious activities of this group of men who had worked against him systematically over the years.

Titus was in Crete when Paul wrote to him. He was to warn these rather crude Cretan brethren "not to give heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn away from

the truth" (1:14). But what danger was there that these relatively new converts might wish to do anything of the sort? It could only come about if Jews crossed the sea to Crete in order to sow such notions in the uncritical minds of the new brethren. Titus and the elders who served with him were each commanded to "hold fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the *gainsayers.* For there are many unruly and vain talkers and *deceivers,* specially they *out of the* circumcision" (1:9, 10). One cannot be certain that this is another allusion to Paul's longstanding enemies, but the conclusion does not seem unlikely.

There were similar warnings to Timothy: "Now the Spirit (in Paul?) speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits (i.e. men not only claiming to have the Holy Spirit but also using that claim to lead men astray), and doctrines of devils (teachings put out by those who are false accusers!); speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:1, 2). The reference to Paul's adversaries is not difficult to pick up (whilst, on the other hand, it is decidedly difficult to see why Timothy should be warned against Catholic priests of many centuries later!).

"Of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins" (2 Timothy 3:6). Here, then, was another of the "techniques" by which Paul's authority was to be under-minded. But also, "as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth; men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall drive forward no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was" (3:8, 9).

Jannes and Jambres were not Egyptian magicians, for the names are Jewish. They were Israelites who leaned more strongly towards Egypt than they did towards Moses the Redeemer. It gave them pleasure to see the signs of Moses matched by those of the magicians. But the time came when even the magicians confessed: "This is the finger of God."

Similarly, Paul argued, these Jewish Christians who are glad to see the Lord's faithful servants slandered, will yet be stopped dead in their tracks by an event which all will recognize as "the finger of God." This happened in A.D. 70, when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. In this way "their folly (in giving loyalty to a Mosaic system doomed to be swept away) shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was."

The Letters to the Churches pick up the theme by including warning about "the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie" (2:9; 3:9).

So also the Epistle to the Hebrews. Whether by Paul or not, its fine intellectual arguments and moving appeals to faithfulness all had one intention - to stem a strong drift back to the synagogue. Paul's adversaries had done their work efficiently among the Jewish believers.
It is time to sum up. On the basis of the fore-going synthesis of relevant passages (about sixteen of them) it is submitted that an important strand in first-century church history is the systematic antagonism to the work of Paul by men who hypocritically claimed to be brethren in Christ, and that in spite of all Paul's vigilance and care their campaign was ultimately successful. The outcome was accelerated apostacy due to the weakening of loyalty to the great apostle. Here is explained also why there is so much concern it expressed regarding the impact of Jewish ideas and enthusiasms (e.g. 1 Timothy 1:4-10; Titus 3:9,10; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16). Here also is the explanation of Paul's ceaseless repetition of his qualifications as an apostle (in at least 23 places). Perhaps the most surprising one of all is 1 Timothy 2:7.

The Lord's prophecies

There remains to mention here, but only briefly, the copious evidence in other parts of the New Testament of the seriousness of this Jewish counter-reformation.

Jesus foresaw its inevitability, and warned against it. His parable of the tares (Mt. 13:24ff) tells of an enemy who furtively and deliberately sows tares among the wheat, the intention clearly being to ruin the good crop. To equate these details with the slow imperceptible drift of the

early church into apostasy is to distort the evident intention of the parable. What it describes is purposeful wickedness.

Again, in the parable of the Good Shepherd there is strong language which seems never to have been given its full value: "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers ... He that is an hireling seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep" (Jn. 10:5, 12). Paul referred to this parable in his warning to the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:28-31).

For completeness sake attention needs also to be steered to the participation of the other apostles in the very needful effort to roll back the Judaist tide.

Peter and Jude

Peter warned against "false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). He pointed to "scoffers" who would cynically ask: "Where is the promise of his coming?" And he urged the brethren to "beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness" (3:3, 4, 17).

Jude, a great watchdog, followed up Peter's warning with an even more vigorous tirade. "These are they ...!" He trounced mercilessly their corruption of the Faith from within. (For full details, see "The Epistle of Jude", H.A.W.).

John

In less direct fashion the apostle John also joined in the campaign of warning against the corroding influence of these false teachers. When he wrote Gnosticism had not been heard of. It was Judaism which he combated in a few passages of plain admonition and concern (1 Ep. 2:18, 19; 4:1-6; 2 Ep. 7-11). And in not a few other places the trend of his thought is in the same direction.

There is here, in the foregoing inadequate summary, one of the most portentous themes of the New Testament. It has gone too much ignored, and exposition of truth has suffered accordingly.

Appendix 4

Parallels between Paul's Farewell and his Epistle to the Ephesians

Acts 20		Ephesians			
19.	Humility of mind	4:2	29.	Sheep	4:11
21.	Gentiles fellow-heirs	3:6	30.	Draw away Disciples	4:14
22, 23.	Binding, bonds	3:1	31.	Watch	6:18
23.	Afflictions	3:13	32.	Build you up	2:19-22
24.	The ministry which I received	3:7		An inheritance among the sanctified	1:18
	The grace of God	3:2,7	35.	These hands so labouring	4:28
	To the Greeks	3:8		My necessities and those with me	4:28
25.	The kingdom of God	5:5		Remember	2:11
27.	The counsel of God	1:11			
28.	Made overseers by the Holy Spirit	1:13			
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	The blood of His own	2:13			

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