

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: ACTS

ACTS

PREFACE

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Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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ACTS CHAPTER 1

1:1 *The former account-* Gk. *protos logos*. When John begins his Gospel with the idea of the *arche logos*, he is perhaps saying the same thing. The *logos* was the word or account of God's purpose in Jesus. Luke's Gospel was written for the purpose of preaching to Theophilus, who had already been 'catechized', taught by rote, one of the Gospels (probably Mark), but who wanted to have a more detailed and factual account (Lk. 1:3,4). Luke later describes his Gospel as his *logos*, his 'word' about all Jesus did (Acts 1:1 Gk.). The Lord seems to have foreseen this when He spoke of how "Whosoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, which this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Mt. 26:13). There is evident connection with Christ's prophecy of how the Gospel would be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15). He seems to have seen the 'Gospel' that would be preached as a re-telling of His life and incidents in it, such as the woman's anointing of Him. It is significant that her anointing is mentioned in all four Gospel records. In Mk. 14:9 we read that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done would be narrated in memory of her. So 'preaching the Gospel' is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry.

Regarding the initial intention of Luke-Acts, see on 21:19.

I made- This is the same Greek word used in the next clause, concerning all that Jesus began to make or "do". The work or doing of Jesus is continued through the written record of that work- that seems to be the idea.

O Theophilus- A case could be made that Luke's account in his Gospel and in the Acts actually emphasizes how wealthy and middle class people came to the Lord- e.g. Joanna wife of Chuza, Cornelius the Centurion; Dionysius; Sergius Paulus, governor of Cyprus. Perhaps a reason for this was that he dedicated his works to the "noble" [Gk. 'well born', 'wealthy'] Theophilus (Acts 1:1). Luke, it seems to me, was writing to Theophilus because he wanted to convert him. And so he gives other examples of wealthy people who had also converted. He was urging the middle class to allow the radical call of Christ to reach to them. Luke's address to "Most Excellent Theophilus" may be a reference to the Roman-imposed High Priest of Israel between AD 37 and AD 41, Theophilus ben Ananus.

Concerning all that Jesus began to do and to teach- Reading Luke and Acts through together, it becomes apparent that the author [Luke] saw the acts of the apostles as a continuation of those of the Lord Jesus. This is why he begins Acts by talking about his "former treatise" of all that Jesus had *begun* to do, implying that He had continued His doings through the doings of the apostles (cp. Heb. 2:3, Jesus "began" to speak the Gospel and we continue His work). See on Acts 2:6; 2:7; 8:40. Luke uses the same word translated 'preach' in both Luke and the Acts [although the other Gospels use it only once]. In Luke we find the word in 1:19; 2:10; 3:18; 4:18,43; 7:22; 8:1; 9:6; 16:16; 20:1; and in Acts, in 5:42; 8:4,12,25,35,40; 10:36; 11:20; 13:32; 14:7,15,21; 15:35; 16:10; 17:18. Luke clearly saw the early ecclesia as preaching the same message as Jesus and the apostles; they continued what was essentially a shared witness. This means that we too are to see in the Lord and the 12 as they walked around Galilee the basis for our witness; we are continuing their work, with just the same message and range of responses to it. Lk. 24:47 concludes the Gospel with the command to go and preach remission of sins, continuing the work of the Lord Himself, who began His ministry with the proclamation of remission (Lk. 4:18 cp. 1:77). Acts stresses that the believers did just this; they preached remission of sins [s.w.] in Jesus' Name, whose representatives they were: Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18.

"To do and to teach" alludes to how at the close of Luke, the two disciples call the Lord "a prophet mighty in deed and word" (Lk. 24:19). Here therefore we have a rebuke of their earlier position, that the Lord had wonderfully done and said so much. But He was now dead and gone, and this was mere history. We can in fact have the same attitude. But the point is that He is continuing to do and teach, both directly and through His body on earth.

On one hand, the fool begins and doesn't finish (Lk. 14:30 "This man began to build, and was not able to finish"). On the other hand, we are saved by grace even when we don't finish. Likewise the Lord has "begun a good work in us" and will complete it- if we let Him, for He will keep on trying to finish it ("Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will keep working at perfecting it, until the day of Jesus Christ" Phil. 1:6). The Galatians 'began in the Spirit' but left that path and tried to complete the work without the Spirit, "by the flesh", and failed (Gal. 3:3). The Lord 'began' doing and teaching in His ministry (Acts 1:1; 10:37 "that word began from Galilee") and continues. So many times the Lord's words are prefaced with the statement that He "began to say..." (Mt. 4:17; 11:7,20; Mk. 4:1; 6:2,34; 8:31; 10:32; 12:1; 13:5; Lk. 4:21; 7:24; 11:29; 12:1; 20:9; 24:27). This is all quite some theme. His words were intended to commence something in the hearers, although usually that intended process wasn't and isn't allowed to go forward to its intended end. When a man today hears the Lord's words, that process likewise begins; but men truncate it. Samson was intended to "begin" delivering Israel from the Philistines (Jud. 13:5), and so the Spirit of God "Began" [s.w.] to move him to do so (Jud. 13:25). But he didn't let that process progress as intended, becoming caught up on anger and sexual lust issues. We have the sense that God

began a work in and through Samson that wasn't completed as potentially possible- perhaps with the implication, that it should have been but wasn't. Not until David's time would Israel be free from the Philistines (2 Sam. 8:1). Yet despite only partially fulfilling his potential, Samson did make a beginning. And he will be saved, despite all that was unfinished and all the unrealized potential.

1:2 *Until the day in which he was received up, after that he had given commandments through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen-* The day the Lord was taken up, He gave one commandment to the apostles, related to their possession of the Holy Spirit: to go into all the world with the Gospel. But why does Luke speak in the plural, "commandments"? It could be that here we have one of many examples of Hebrew idiom being used by the Jewish writers of the New Testament, even though they wrote in Greek. There is in Hebrew an 'intensive plural', whereby something is put in the plural (e.g. "deaths" in Is. 53:9) to emphasize the greatness of the one thing (e.g., *the* death, of Messiah). Could it not be that here we have something similar? The one great commandment is to go into all the world with the Gospel. We are the light of this world. We, the candles, were lit so that we might give light to others. Our duty is not merely to inform others of our doctrinal position, but to gain, win or catch [as fishermen] our fellow men for Christ.

1:3 *To whom, after his suffering, he also showed by many convincing proofs-* Acts 1:3 says that the Lord showed Himself to be alive to the disciples "by many infallible proofs". The suggestion is that they simply didn't accept Him as He stood there before Him; they failed to grasp that He was for real. They gave Him food to eat to check Him out; and He again ate before them in Galilee on His initiative.

That he was alive, being seen by them for forty days, and speaking about the kingdom of God- The Greek is literally: 'Speaking about the things concerning the Kingdom of God'. And this is exactly how the content of the Apostolic preaching is described in Acts 8:12; 19:8; 28:31. Clearly what the Lord taught them became the basis of their teaching to others. They were a continuation of Him on earth, just as our witness should be likewise. It could even be that "the things concerning the Kingdom of God" became a technical term for a body of material which the Apostles taught, having heard it directly from the Lord during those 40 days.

1:4 *And, being assembled together with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem-* Rendered by AVmg. and RVmg. "eating together". We can note the association between eating and proof of resurrection; and also the idea of fellowship together. In the first century, to eat together was to fellowship together. It would seem that the command to remain in Jerusalem was given whilst 'eating together', in instruction at the breaking of bread meeting. That meeting continues to be the place where we receive instruction from our Lord, if we approach it in that spirit.

But to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, you heard from me- Presumably referring to the promise of the Comforter made in the Upper Room.

1:5 *For John indeed baptized with water, but soon you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit-* The implication is that they had all been baptized by John the Baptist; his work of preparing the way for the Lord succeeded with that small group, even if it failed nationally. The contrast is between *with* water and *in* Spirit. I suggest therefore that the baptism in the Spirit refers to something internal and psychological, the gift of the Spirit in human hearts promised as "the comforter" in Jn. 14-16, which in some cases in the first century was manifest by visible external signs.

1:6 *Therefore, when they had come together, they asked him-* The imperfect means they kept on asking.

Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?- Once the Gospel is preached world-wide, then the end will come (Mt. 24:14). And so the Lord replied to the question: 'When are you coming back?' by telling the questioners to go and preach the Gospel (Acts 1:6,8), as if the preaching of the word and the timing of the second coming are related. Likewise in the Olivet prophecy, the Lord gave them some signs of His return but told them that firstly, i.e. most importantly, the Gospel must be preached to all the world (Mk. 13:10)- implying that it is spreading the Gospel world-wide, not looking for the fulfilment of signs, that will bring about His return. Surely this would associate the exact timing of the Lord's return- for which He and the Father are ever eager- with the time when we have satisfactorily spread the Gospel far enough. When the harvest is ripe, then it is harvested. The Lord has to delay His coming because of the slowness and immaturity of our development; in these ways we limit Him. And it isn't enough to think that if we merely preach world-wide, therefore the Lord's coming will automatically be hastened. It is the bringing forth of fruit to His Name that is important to Him.

The disciples' request to know exactly when the Kingdom would be restored ('When will Ez. 21:25-27 be fulfilled?') was met with a promise that while they would never know the exact date, that was immaterial as they would possess the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit soon (Acts 1:7,8)- implying that what they would do with them would be a primary fulfilment of the Kingdom prophecies which they were enquiring about.

We note that they asked this question just prior to the Lord's ascension (:9). But He had been teaching them about the Kingdom for 40 days; and surely this topic had arisen before and this question would have already been asked. Because it was the obvious question for them to ask: 'And what next, what now?'. And still they did not 'get it'. Again we see how the apostles continually reference their own weakness- in a book about their "Acts" of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. They were patient with those slow to understand because they themselves had been so slow. And we see the lesson for ourselves.

1:7 *And he said to them: It is not for you to know times or seasons*- There is clearly a difference between them. *Chronos*, "times", is at times used to mean 'delay'; and *chairos*, "seasons", is also translated "opportunity". There would appear to be reference here to the variable nature of the Divine program; there are delays, extensions, and preconditions which must be fulfilled, and therefore opportunities for hastening or realizing the day of the Lord's coming. But by the same token, there is apparently no calendar date set for it.

Which the Father has set within his own authority- Or, power. The Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" he was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication he was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when Messiah would come in glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'. There are so many connections between the Olivet prophecy and Daniel that

perhaps it is legitimate to think that the Lord was alluding to the Angel's refusal to tell Daniel the time of Messiah's coming. That the Lord was primarily referring to the twelve when he spoke of them not knowing "when the time is" (Mk. 13:33) is confirmed if we appreciate that the Lord Jesus sometimes uses "the time" as a reference to the appointed time for his own death (Mt. 26:18; Mk. 14:35; Jn. 7:6,8). The disciples were fascinated with the time of his return, and the Lord was giving them the signs. But knowing his death was only days away, inevitably he had in mind "the time" of his passion. And he knew that as they didn't know the time of his return, so they didn't understand the time of his death. Having pointed out that they knew not "the time", in words surely reminiscent of his criticism of Jewry generally for not knowing "the time" of his coming and death (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44), the Lord went on to tell the story of the man (himself) who left his household (the disciples) and told them to watch, with warnings as to what would happen if they didn't. Every one of those warnings, and some other language in the Olivet prophecy, came true of the disciples in the next few days, in the context of "the time" being the time of Christ's death.

1:8 *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth-* When the watchman of Is. 21:11 calls out "What hour of the night [will it come]?" (RVmg.) the answer is "Turn ye" (RV). This is when it will come- when Israel turn again in repentance. This is alluded to in Acts 1:7,8 and Mk. 13:28-33, where the answer to the question 'When will Jesus return?' is basically: 'Preach to Israel; lead them to repentance. That's when the Lord Jesus will return'.

The Gospel was to be preached for a witness to all nations (Mt. 24:14); and yet "*you* are witnesses... *you* will be witnesses" (Lk. 24:27; Acts 1:8). The preacher of the Gospel *is* the Gospel; the man is the message, just as the very same word / message was made flesh in the Lord. Israel of old were taught this. They were to keep and do the commandments of God, and *this* would be the witness of their wisdom and understanding to the nations around them- who would thereby be brought to Israel's God (Dt. 4:6-8). The imparting of wisdom and understanding therefore didn't come so much through specific doctrinal exposition, as through living out those principles in daily life. But *marturion*, "witness", can simply be a legal term referring to testimony or witness in a prosecution. Perhaps the sense is that judgment will come upon all the world once the Gospel has been witnessed to them; it is their receipt of that information which gives them the knowledge which makes them responsible to Divine judgment. For once this witness has been made, then the end comes.

The possession of the Holy Spirit in the first century was possessing "the powers of the world to come" (Heb. 6:5), showing that at that time there was a foretaste of the coming Kingdom. Thus in answer to the question about whether He would then fully restore the Kingdom of God, our Lord basically said: 'When, exactly, you can't know. But you will receive Holy Spirit power coming upon you (Acts 1:8 AVmg.) and will spread the Gospel world-wide from Jerusalem; which is tantamount to saying that in a limited sense the Kingdom is coming right now, although when it will finally be fully established is not for you to know'. Further support for this is found in our suggestion elsewhere that Kingdom prophecies like Is.2 were fulfilled to some degree in the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem in the first century.

The record of the Acts is a continuation of all that Jesus *began* to do and teach as recorded in the Gospels (Acts 1:1). The preachers were witnesses *of Jesus* (Acts 1:8). The logical objection to their preaching of a risen Jesus of Nazareth was: 'But He's dead! We saw His body! Where is He? Show Him to us!'. And their response, as ours, was to say: 'I am the witness, so is my brother here, and my sister there. We are the witnesses that He is alive. If you see us, you see Him risen and living through us'. In this spirit, we beseech men in Christ's stead. Just as the Lord strangely said that His own witness to Himself was a valid

part of His overall witness, so our lives are our own witness to the credibility of what we are saying.

When we read of how we are to be "witnesses" to all the world, a look under the surface of the text shows that the Greek word 'martyr' is being used (Acts 1:8). We're all martyrs. Augustine said that "The cause, not the suffering, makes a genuine martyr". That needs some reflection and time spent processing that profound observation. In his play *Murder in the Cathedral*, T. S. Eliot defines a martyr as one "who has become an instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, not lost it but found it, for he has found freedom in submission to God. The martyr no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of martyrdom". We can all enter into the definition of witness / martyrdom in this sense, insofar as we are 'in' the suffering Christ, even if in practice we may never be called to take a single blow to our body as the result of our witnessing.

Samaria is perhaps mentioned specifically because of the earlier command not to preach there during the Lord's ministry (Mt. 10:5).

"To the remotest part of the earth" need not be a reference to the great commission. It could be that this prediction had a specific, one-time fulfilment at Pentecost, where the Gospel was witnessed to Jews from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to Jews from the very ends of the earth / land promised to Abraham. If we understand the "earth" in a literal, global sense, then the Apostles didn't achieve this. They were told that the coming gift of the Holy Spirit would enable them to make this witness, and the most comfortable fit for the fulfilment of this is to simply read on in Acts and learn how the gift of speaking in the languages of the Jewish diaspora was given to them. They indeed achieved the intended witness on the day of Pentecost to Jews from the very areas predicted here in 1:8.

1:9 *And when he had said these things, as they were watching, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight*—surely it was a cloud of Angels not water droplets. But so it looked to them standing on earth, and the record is written from that perspective. We find this so often in the Bible— the language of creation in Genesis 1 is an example, as are the references to 'demons'.

1:10 *And while they were looking earnestly into heaven as he went, two men stood by them in white clothing*— Of the 14 usages of the Greek word here used for "looking earnestly" in the NT, 12 are by Luke. This is what we would expect with Divine inspiration— the personality and word choice of an individual still comes through noticeably in the written word, the writers were not zombified; and yet the overall product also uses words chosen by the Spirit, and is the Spirit's work and infallible.

1:11 *Who also said: You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven?* - Why address them in this way? Surely we conclude that only the disciples were present. What was significant about them all being Galileans? We note that the Jewish audience of Acts 2:7 remarked likewise— "Look, are not all those who speak Galileans?", and Peter's Galilean accent could not be disguised in the courtyard. The records emphasize that the Lord was also considered a Galilean (Mt. 26:69; Lk. 23:6). Yet Galilee was despised. Perhaps the Angels were encouraging those men not to worry about their own inadequacy, lack of culture or erudition. Instead of just gaping at their vanishing Master, with thoughts of ethnic inadequacy arising in them, they were being encouraged to go out and make the witness which the Lord had asked of them. And the Angels were comforting them that their humble origins were full well known to God, and would not hinder them in their work for Him.

This same Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven— "This same..." is clearly alluded to in Paul's later assertion that Jesus Christ is "the same" yesterday, today and forever. Who He was in His mortal life is the same Jesus with whom we have to do now, and whom we shall meet at the day of judgment. He will not turn another face. The Jesus who bid

us come to Him because He was meek and lowly of heart... is the same Jesus who shall return and judge us. We note the bald reference to "Jesus", without any title, not even "Jesus Christ". This is unusual. The Lord is nearly always described as something more than plain "Jesus". Especially as "Jesus" was one of the most common male names in Palestine at the time, as common as 'Jose' in Mexico or 'Mohammed' in the Middle East. It's as if the Angels wished to emphasize that indeed it will be "this same Jesus" whom they had known in His humanity who would return. We see the Lord labouring the same point by addressing the disciples as "boys" or 'guys' after His resurrection; and calling God "My father.... your father... my God and your God". He stressed, thereby, the continuity between who He had been as a man and who He eternally is now He has Divine nature. "This same Jesus" is literally "This Jesus". It is the same Greek term as was written on the cross: "This is Jesus..." (Mt. 27:37). The Jesus who died on the cross was the One who ascended and who shall return- with the same love and desire to save. This is why the returned Lord is still described as a lamb, not solely as a lion. He returns with the 'wrath of the lamb', not the wrath of the lion. Perhaps Paul had some appreciation of this when we read that "the Christ [had to] suffer and rise from the dead, saying: This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ" (Acts 17:3). Paul spoke of "this Jesus" as if he were referring to a person actually present amongst them. Paul's preaching was totally Christ centered. "This Jesus" who was presented by Paul at that point as alive, let's say in around AD50... was the same Jesus who had suffered and resurrected in AD33.

Shall return in like manner as you saw him going into heaven- The same Jesus who went into Heaven will so come again *in like manner*. The record three times says the same thing. The "like manner" in which the Lord will return doesn't necessarily refer to the way He gradually ascended up in to the sky, in full view of the gazing disciples. He was to return in the "like manner" to what they had seen. Yet neither those disciples nor the majority of the Lord's people will literally see Him descending through the clouds at His return- for they will be dead. But we will 'see' Him at His return "in like manner" as He was when on earth. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. The Jesus who loved little children and wept over Jerusalem's self-righteous religious leaders, so desirous of their salvation, is the One who today mediates our prayers and tomorrow will confront us at judgment day.

1:12 *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near to Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey-* In obedience to the command to remain in Jerusalem until they were given the Spirit (:4). I suggested on Lk. 24:50 that the Lord's ascension was from Bethany, and that perhaps they had gone out to the nearby mountain to see if they could still see Him.

1:13 *And when they arrived, they went into the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James-* The definite article suggests this was a well-known, specific meeting place. We note how Peter is always placed first in the lists of disciples. He, the most unstable and apparently least qualified for leadership, was the one chosen by the Lord as the leader of the pack. And He works with the same style today.

1:14- see on Acts 2:42.

These all with one accord- There are a number of words and phrases which keep cropping up in Acts, especially in the early chapters, which are kind of hallmarks of that early ecclesia. "With one accord" is one such. We begin in Acts 1:14: "These all continued with *one accord* in prayer". Then 2:1: "When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all *with one accord* in *one place*". Now over to v.46: "Continuing daily *with one accord*... breaking bread... with... *singleness of heart*". And on to 4:24: "They lifted up their voice to God *with one accord*". Now to 5:12: "They were all *with one accord* in Solomon's porch". There is

another example in 15:25 too. So it's quite obvious, then, that the fact the early ecclesia was "with one accord" in those early, heady days is stamped as a hallmark over this record. But this phrase "with one accord" is also used in Acts about the united hatred of the world against those early brethren and sisters. The Jews ran upon Stephen "with one accord" (7:52), those of Tyre and Sidon were "with one accord" (12:20), "The Jews made insurrection against Paul with one accord" in Corinth (18:12), and at Ephesus the mob "rushed with one accord" against Paul (19:29). The same Greek word is used in all these cases (and it scarcely occurs outside Acts). It's quite obvious that we are intended to visualise that early ecclesia as being "with one accord". But we are also supposed to imagine the world around them "with one accord" being against them. The difference between them and the world was vast. The world was actively united against them, and thereby they came to be strongly united with each other.

Continued earnestly in prayer with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers- Mary is portrayed as somehow separate from the other ministering women. It would have been psychologically impossible, or at best very hard, for the mother of the Lord to hang around with them. The group dynamics would have been impossible. Likewise in Acts 1:14 we have "the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus", as if she is separate from them. She followed Him to Cana, uninvited, and also to Capernaum. Next she is at the cross risking her life, but she isn't among the women who went to the grave. Why not? It was surely natural that she would go there, and that the other women would go with her to comfort her. But she was a loner; either she went alone, as I think I would have tried to, or she just couldn't face contact with the others and simply hid away. And could it be that Jesus, in recognition of her unique perception of Him, appeared to her first privately, in a rightfully unrecorded meeting? But by Acts 1:14, she was in the upper room, as if His death led her to be more reconciled to her brethren, to seek to get along with them... although by nature, in her heart and soul, she was a loner, maybe almost reclusive. A struggler to understand. A meditator, a reflector, who just wanted to be alone, one of those who take their energy from themselves rather than from other people.

1:15 *And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons) and said-* Is that all the Lord's miracles and ministry in Jerusalem had converted? It was from that apparently slender response that Christianity was born. So paucity of response to our message should be no discouragement. The AV is more literally accurate here: "the number of names together were...". This phrase recalls the description of the numbering of Israel in the OT, especially in Numbers 1, where the phrase "the number of names" occurs many times. Here was a new Israel formed, and being numbered so that they could go forward and inherit the Kingdom. See on 3:7.

1:16 *Brothers-* The believers are addressed as "brothers" here and in Acts 15:13; and yet the same phrase is then used about an unbaptized crowd of people who were listening to the Gospel being preached (Acts 2:29; 3:17; 13:26,38). It is also used in addressing those who in no way believed the Gospel (Acts 7:2; 22:1; 23:1,5). We note that Paul was called "brother" by Ananias even before he was baptized (Acts 9:17; 22:13); and Paul's reasoning in 1 Cor. 8:7-13 seems to suggest that he saw "every man" as his "brother", and sought not to put a stumbling block in the way of any and every member of the general public, whom he also calls "brother". This was surely because the early brethren had learnt the lesson taught to Peter; that they were to see all men as potentially cleansed in Christ, seeing that Christ died for all, and individuals are to be invited by us to accept that cleansing- in Peter's case, through extending table fellowship to them. The simple picture is that the early church was not so hung up as we may be today regarding whom they addressed as brother.

It was necessary that the Scripture should be fulfilled- Peter is quoting here from the Lord's recent words in Lk. 24:44, that the Scriptures must [s.w. 'necessary'] be fulfilled about Him.

Which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David- A classic statement concerning the process of Divine inspiration of the Bible.

Concerning Judas, who was guide to those that took Jesus- The way Judas led the armed men to take or seize Jesus in Gethsemane was etched in Peter's memory; the shock of realizing Judas' betrayal would have been enormous.

1:17 *For he was numbered among us and received his part in this ministry-* Alluding to Is. 14:10 LXX, where the King of Babylon is described as a star which fell from the sky and is met by the kings of the earth, who comment that he was now "numbered with us". The disciples saw Judas as the "guide" or leader of those who killed Jesus (:16), and saw him as having left leadership amongst the Lord's people for a place of leadership amongst the people of His enemies. This helps us better understand how Judas is described as 'satan', the adversary, and how he is presented as personified evil.

1:18 *Now this man obtained a field with the reward of his iniquity, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out-* See on Mt. 27:7. The way Judas "burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out" (Acts 1:18) may not be only a description of a bungled suicide. "Bowels" is elsewhere *always* used figuratively. One wonders whether it doesn't also describe how he fell down headlong, as Saul did when he knew his condemnation, and burst asunder within him, and poured out his heart in desperation, in the very pathetic little field he had bought for the price of the Son of God. In an utterly terrible figure, Ezekiel describes the condemnation of Israel as them being a woman trying to pluck off her own breasts (Ez. 23:34). This was and will be the extent of self-hatred and desperation. She will be alienated from her lovers of this world, and God's mind will be alienated from her (Ez. 23:17,18,22). The utter aloneness of the condemned is impossible to plumb.

1:19 *And it became known to all the dwellers at Jerusalem, so much so that in their language that field was called Akeldama, that is, The field of blood-* "What will you give me...?" suggests that Judas' motive was partly financial. And all he could buy with it was a muddy clay field which became worthless, which nobody else wanted to own anyway. The suicide of Judas and the way he had bought or been given a field for his evil work became known to all. It was impossible for the Jews to disguise the fact that what they had done was known by all, and all their plotting had not been blessed but had come to an unpleasant and embarrassing end. They really had no option but to repent and accept the risen Lord; but their pride was too great. "Akeldama" has been linked to the name of the field where the young men of David and Saul died in their own blood when they tried to take the Kingdom immediately in the wrong way (2 Sam. 2:16). We note that the Aramaic "Akeldama" was the "proper tongue" of the Jerusalem dwellers. They would have claimed to be true Hebrews; but in truth they were part Gentile in God's eyes, hence their true language is called Aramaic. It was the "dwellers at Jerusalem" who later repented and were converted by Peter in chapter 2; their consciences began to be touched by hearing of the tragedy of Judas, and how deeply unbled was all connected with him.

1:20 *For it is written in the book of Psalms: Let his habitation be made desolate and let no one dwell therein, and his office let another take -* The condemnation of Jewry for crucifying Christ in Ps. 69:25 ("let *their* habitation be desolate") is quoted in the singular about Judas in Acts 1:20. What was true of Judas was also true of Israel in general; in the same way as the pronouns used about Judas merge from singular into plural in Ps. 55:13-15 ("a man mine equal... let death seize upon them"), as also in Ps. 109:3 cp. v.8.

Psalm 109 is a prophecy of Christ's betrayal and death (:8 = Acts 1:20). The satans ("adversaries") of the Lord Jesus which the Psalm speaks of (:4,20,29) were the Jews, and the specific 'Satan' of v. 6 was Judas. Psalm 55:13–15 foretells Judas' betrayal of Jesus. It speaks of Judas in the singular, but also talk of his work as being done by a group of people – the Jews, in practice: "It was you, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together... let death seize them (plural), and let *them* go down quickly into hell" (cp. Judas' end). Likewise the other prophecy of Judas' betrayal also connects him with the Jewish system: "My own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread (cp. Jesus passing the sop to Judas), has lifted up his heel against me. But You, O Lord, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them" (Ps. 41:9,10). Thus Judas is being associated with the Jews who wanted to kill Jesus, and therefore he, too, is called a Devil. Both Judas and the Jews were classic 'devils' due to their surrender to the flesh. This is further confirmed by a look at Psalm 69. Verse 22 is quoted in Romans 11:9,10 concerning the Jews: "Let their table become a snare before them... let their eyes be darkened". The passage continues in Psalm 69:25: "Let *their* habitation be desolate; let none dwell in *their* tents". This is quoted in Acts 1:16,20 as referring specifically to Judas, but the pronouns are changed accordingly: "This scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas... Let *his* [singular] habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and *his* bishopric let another take".

Ps. 109:8 is quoted in Acts 1:20 concerning Judas, suggesting that the preceding v.6 reveals Christ's thoughts about him: "Set Thou a wicked man over him: and let satan stand at his right hand", implying that Jesus prayed for the Jewish satan to help or co-operate with Judas (which is how the idiom of standing at the right hand is used in Ps. 109:31). This is tantamount to not praying that Judas would overcome the advances of the Jews which the Lord would have been aware they were making. But he could encourage Peter that he had prayed for him to resist these advances (Lk. 22:32). The whole of Ps. 109 is a prayer requesting the punishment of Judas, asking God to confirm him in his supreme apostasy: "Let his prayer become sin" (Ps. 109:7). The last section of the Psalm (109:22-29) describes Christ's sufferings on the cross in language that has many connections with Ps.22 and 69; and as with them there is a sudden breakthrough at the end into looking forward to praising God "among the multitude" (Ps. 109:30), as there is in Ps. 22:22. This may mean that it was on the cross that the enormity of Judas' sin was fully realized by Christ, although he had previously recognized it to some degree before the cross (Jn. 19:11; Mt. 26:24).

1:21 *Therefore, of the men that have been with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us-* Only two men fitted the requirement. But we hear nothing of either of them in the Gospel records. That demonstrates that when we read of "the twelve" experiencing various things, being in the boat with Jesus, the breaking of bread, the feeding miracles etc., there were at least these two men also present- and probably many others at various points of the ministry, although only these two individuals were consistently present all the time.

1:22 *Beginning from the baptism of John, to the day that he was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of his resurrection-* This means that Joseph and Matthias were also present at the last supper; this is one of many reasons for rejecting the idea that the supper was a closed table strictly for the twelve. Without wishing to be unduly critical of the disciples at this point, it is surely so that a witness of the resurrection was all the same a witness, whether or not they were confirmed as such. One is a witness of what they have seen, regardless of whether they are officially appointed as such. This is one of several reasons for having some unease at the path taken here and the drawing of lots, to the point that I feel we cannot reliably also draw lots to decide whom to appoint.

1:23 *And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus; and Matthias-* The problem with democracy and choices by lot is the selection of the candidates. "Put forward" is the word for "appointed". They decided on the candidates. Perhaps they were the only two who fitted the criteria of :22; but it seems it was the disciples themselves who chose those parameters for choice. The whole incident seemed unnecessary; we never hear of these brethren again in the record. We do note however that Peter is described as "standing up with the eleven" (2:14), suggesting they stood as a group of twelve and therefore the replacement disciple stood with them at that point.

1:24 *And they prayed, and said: Lord, you who knows the hearts of all men, show us which of these two is the one whom you have chosen-* It could be argued that giving God a binary choice like this was as it were forcing His hand, and therefore the result was invalid. And we don't hear any more about Matthias, with the term 'disciple' and 'apostle' being used about a far wider community than the original 'twelve', as if the significance of having been in the 'twelve' was somehow lessened as the ministry of the Spirit developed.

1:25 *To take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place-* The contrast is with his "place" in the ministry mentioned at the beginning of the verse. The rejected have their own individual condemnation, because so much of the plain of it will be because of their own personal reflection on "the place" they might have had, compared to "the place" of condemnation and rejection. But the allusion is clearly to the description of Balaam in Num. 24:25 "And Balaam returned to his own place". The motivation of Balaam for his apostasy was clearly money; and we are thereby steered towards understanding money as being a significant factor in Judas' motivation. Again and again, we marvel that men can do what they do for the sake of the hope of wealth in this brief life. "What will you give me...", the way he began betraying the Lord after the incident involving wealth at the anointing at Bethany, the note that he was a thief and stole what was in the common purse and the way he cast down the coins into the treasury all support that understanding of Judas.

1:26 *And they cast lots for them; and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles-* As noted on :21,22 and :23, the whole process here seems somewhat lacking in solid Biblical and procedural support, and would in my judgment be unsafe to use as justification for using lots.

ACTS CHAPTER 2

2:1 *And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place-* Literally, "was being fulfilled" (RVmg.). The Mosaic feast of Pentecost was a prophecy looking forward to what was now happening in the Christian dispensation. In commentary on 11:17, I discuss the possibility that the disciples were themselves baptized at this time and received the Spirit as a result of that. The mention of "one place" deepens the impression of their unity.

The events of the Lord's death fulfilled the Passover. It was at Pentecost that Moses came down Sinai with the law. Now, the Lord is coming down with the new covenant, the gift of the Spirit, which Jer. 31 and elsewhere understands as a heart to know Him. The descent of fire on the heads of the disciples may allude to what happened at Sinai, when God came down in fire (Ex. 19:17-20). Perhaps the dwelling of fire upon their heads was to represent how the Spirit came upon their minds. And that is the essence of the gift, which they then offered to the audience. And as Peter later recalls, they were given "the like gift which He have unto us". The essence of that gift was a rewiring of the human heart, the mind, the head, and not the ability to speak in languages of itself.

2:2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting- This seems to be intentionally contrasted with the fact they were sitting in the "upper room" of that house. Perhaps the idea is that the activity of God with the apostles was to be seen throughout the entire house / body of believers. Or maybe the allusion is to the glory of God filling the entire house of Solomon's temple. The body of Christ was now the temple, and God had accepted it by filling it with His Spirit.

The Greek for "rushing" carries the idea of carrying or driving along; the same word is used of a ship being driven by the wind. Whilst human freewill is never obviated by the Spirit's work, on the other hand, without God's carrying of us... we will never get there. This is therefore a feature of the wind / spirit of God in human life. The same word for "wind" is found in Jn. 3:8, where again we have the idea of the "sound of... wind" in the context of the birth of the Spirit: "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear its sound, but do not know from where it comes and where it goes. So is every one that is born of the Spirit". And so the stage is set for us to understand the gift of the Spirit as being essentially an internal matter, within the human heart / mind. We will now go on to learn that this Spirit hovered over the heads or minds of the believers. The external manifestation of this in the gift of languages at this time is incidental to the essence of the gift of the Spirit.

2:3 And there appeared to them tongues like fire, separating and resting upon each one of them personally- The tongues were not fire, but "like fire" because of the reddish colour of the human tongue. This was a visual reflection of how the gift of speaking in human languages was being given to each of those present. It is probably unwise to assume that this fulfils the prediction that the Lord would baptize with Spirit and fire- because the tongues were not of literal fire. See on Acts 2:45.

There is another take on John's prediction that those who came to him would be baptized by the Lord Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Mt. 3:11). The immediate context has the Lord speaking of "fire" in the context of the rejected chaff and wood being burnt with "fire" (Mt. 3:10,12). The Lord could be saying that those water baptized into Him would also be immersed into His Spirit, like going to live in another country in an immersion course- an immersion into another culture, language, history and way of being. But others would be baptized in the fire of condemnation. The difficulty is to connect this with the apparent fulfilment of it when the disciples experienced tongues of fire coming upon them before they received the Spirit and spoke in tongues / languages in Acts 2. Whenever fire comes upon a person from Heaven it is usually in condemnation, and fire is a common symbol of condemnation and judgment- rather than of 'being on fire for the Lord'. The secular usage of the term 'baptism of fire' has perhaps also misled English speaking readers. So I suggest that the appearance of tongues of fire upon the disciples was a reminder to them of the possibility of their condemnation- before they were empowered by the Spirit to do an amazing public work for the Lord. Just as the Lord upbraided them for their unbelief, and then empowered them to go and preach that unbelievers would be condemned.

2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them to speak- The imperfect means that the Spirit kept on giving them. Throughout the ministry of each one present, they were given multiple times the ability to speak forth the Gospel in languages different to their native tongue. Eph. 5:18 appeals to us all to be "filled with the Spirit". The essence of Pentecost is ongoing for us all, although the external confirmation through the gift of languages was only for that time.

2:5 Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem devout men, Jews from every nation under heaven- See on :9. The Greek means to live permanently. These were diaspora Jews who had retired to Jerusalem and would have been living there throughout the Lord's ministry and had probably encountered John the Baptist and perhaps some had been baptized by them. The "multitude" (singular in the Greek) of them who were gathered together (:6) therefore refers to this group of retirees, rather than to the general public. We can understand why Peter specifically accuses this group of having responsibility for the crucifixion of the Lord- because they as the 'elders' in age and authority had allowed it. The later appeal was to them and to their children [Jews still living in their family homes in the diaspora], and to all who were afar off- either the Gentiles, or all Jews in the diaspora, not just the children of the Jerusalem retirees.

If these Jews were permanent residents of Jerusalem, this means they had accepted the common Jewish idea that if one lived and died on Jerusalem, then their salvation was assured. These very people were baptized and then had to flee from Jerusalem and die in exile far away, many in modern Turkey. For Peter who converted them, then wrote his letters to them there. We see how what was their pet trust, namely that living and dying in Jerusalem would save them, was removed from them. They were taken from religion to personal spirituality and relationship with the Lord. They learnt that salvation is in Jesus and not in any particular place. We too experience this removal of the things of human strength that we trust in the most. Be it parents, partner, family, church, health... That we may trust solely in the the Lord Jesus.

2:6 And at this sound the crowds came together-

"At this sound" uses the same word as in Mt. 2:18 of the voice of lamentation being heard widely. AV 'noised abroad" could refer to miraculous amplification of their voices so that the entire city heard.

"The multitude". The Acts record repeatedly describes the converts as "the multitude of the disciples" (2:6; 4:32; 5:14,16; 6:2,5; 12:1,4; 15:12,30; 17:4; 19:9; 21:22), using the same word to describe the "multitude of the disciples" who followed the Lord during His ministry (Lk. 5:6; 19:37). There is no doubt that Luke intends us to see all converts as essentially continuing the witness of those men who walked around Palestine with the Lord between AD30 and AD33, stumbling and struggling through all their misunderstandings and pettiness, the ease with which they were distracted from the essential... to be workers together with Him. See on Acts 1:1.

And they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language- Gk. *dialektos*, meaning that the language was heard with perfect local pronunciation; and another evidence that the gift of speaking in languages ["tongues"] was intelligible human language and not the mumbo jumbo of Pentecostalism.

2:7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying: Look, are not all those who speak Galileans?- Luke describes the "amazement" at the preaching and person of Jesus (Lk. 2:47,48; 4:36; 5:26; 8:56; 24:22), and then uses the same word to describe the "amazement" at the apostles (Acts 2:7,12; 8:13; 9:21; 10:45; 12:16). See on Acts 1:1. Galileans were noted for their heavy accent and grammatical mistakes. Yet exactly those people, the least qualified as linguists, were chosen to perform the greatest linguistic miracle of all time.

2:8 And how is it each of us heard- The miracle was therefore in their hearing as well as in, or perhaps apart from, the words coming from the mouths of the speakers-in-tongues.

In his own native language- Gk. *dialektos*, see on :6.

2:9 *Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia-* The list of nations here seems to be designed to go around the compass from Jerusalem, giving the impression that people from the whole world had heard the Gospel. They were from "every nation under heaven" (:5). Paul surely alludes to this when he writes later that "the Gospel was preached to every creature which is under heaven" (Col. 1:23). I suggest he is referring here to Peter's work on Pentecost; and in commentary elsewhere, especially on chapter 20, I will suggest that Paul struggled not to be jealous of Peter's success at Pentecost. So how he writes in Col. 1:23 is giving full credit to Peter in a commendable way. The Old Testament predictions that the message of Messiah would go into all the world was thereby fulfilled, in a sense. But it didn't involve any missionary activity in the sense of travelling throughout the world. People from various nations were living permanently in Jerusalem, and the Gospel being preached to them was counted as the Gospel having been preached to every creature under heaven. In our day, we too have a commission to take the Gospel to every nation; but given then phenomena of international migration, we can witness to the Lord Jesus in cities like London, New York, Paris, Sydney... and thereby be counted as having taken the Gospel into the whole world. And in the same spirit, the Lord surely counts internet witness the same.

The list here in :9-11 includes Crete, Rome and Damascus. There were Christians here it seems before Paul came to them. So those who were converted and baptized in a day had deep roots for their simple faith, and took the basic Gospel with them to their homelands. And that basic message was again believed and people were baptized in response to it. So we see the power of the most simple statements of the Gospel.

2:10 *In Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes-* The fact proselytes were baptized is evidence that there were Gentiles baptized before Cornelius. The early believers were however terribly slow to grasp the simple truth that the Gospel should go to all nations. But the Lord kept nudging them towards realizing this, and the baptism of proselytes is an example. We experience the same kinds of nudges towards grasping those things which ought to be obvious to us if we respect the Lord's word.

2:11 *Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in our language-* The miracle was also in the hearing / perception of the listeners, as well as in the nature of the language proceeding from the mouths of the language speakers.

The mighty works of God- Only used elsewhere in Lk. 1:49 concerning the mighty things done by God in His Son.

2:12 *And they were all amazed and were perplexed, saying to each other: What does this mean?-* "Perplexed" is Gk. 'doubted'. Contrary to modern Pentecostal claims, the gift of tongues did not of itself inspire faith in the hearers; these still doubted, and others passed it off as alcohol freeing a person up to use talents [languages, in this case] which were normally dormant.

2:13 *But others mocking said: They are filled with new wine!-* Seeing the miracle was in their hearing as well as in the mouths of the apostles, this was no possible reason. But this is the length to which some will go to deny the Lord's action in human life. A reason, any reason, has to be given to explain it away.

2:14 *But Peter, standing with the eleven-* Peter stood up along with the eleven others; thus the record accepts that Mathias had been accepted and that the entity known as 'the twelve' had been reconstituted. We read of "the twelve" in Acts 6:2.

However we do not read further in Acts after 6:2 of "the twelve" so it would appear they played no official role in the later development of the church.

Lifted up his voice and addressed them: You men of Judea and all that dwell in Jerusalem, let this be understood by you, and listen to my words- It would have become public news in Jerusalem that the man who nearly killed Malchus had slipped in to the High Priest's yard, and just got out in time before they lynched him. And the fool he had made of himself would for sure have been exaggerated and gossiped all round. Jerusalem would have had the small town gossip syndrome, especially at Passover time. Every one of his oaths with which he had disowned his Lord would have been jokingly spread around in the three days while Jesus lay dead. But then Peter's preaching of the Gospel after the resurrection reached a pinnacle which probably no other disciple has reached, not even Paul. No one individual made such huge numbers of converts, purely on the basis of his words of preaching. Nobody else was so persuasive, could cut hardened men to the heart as he did, and motivate them to be baptized immediately. He brought men far more highly educated and cultured than himself to openly say from the heart: "What shall we do?", in the sense: 'Having done what we've done, whatever will become of us?'. And of course Peter had been in just that desperate position a month ago. He was just the man to persuade them. And yet on the other hand, there was no man more unlikely. The rules of social and spiritual appropriacy demanded that someone who had so publicly denied his Lord keep on the back burner for quite some time. And Peter of all men would have wished it this way. See on Acts 10:35,36.

2:15 *These-* See on 2:18 *My handmaids*.

Are not drunk as you suppose, seeing it is only the third hour of the day- See on 2 Pet. 2:13. Peter's speech of Acts 2 was made in response to a mocker's comment that the speaking in tongues was a result of alcohol abuse (Acts 2:13,14). We would likely have told those men not to be so blasphemous, or just walked away from them. But Peter responds to them with a speech so powerful that men turned around and repented and were baptized on the spot. Or it could be that the comment that they sounded drunk was made in jest, and Peter responds likewise tongue in cheek- for surely he must have known that men can be found drunk at 9 a.m. Is. 5:11 laments how some in Israel were drunk in the morning, so the possibility was not so obviously absurd as Peter might appear, at first blush, to be suggesting. This would then become an example of answering a fool according to his folly.

2:16 *But this is the fulfilment of that which has been spoken through the prophet Joel-* Many attempts to understand prophecy, not least the book of Revelation, have fallen into problems because of an insistent desire to see everything fulfilling in a linear chronological progression, whereas God's prophecies (Isaiah is the classic example) 'jump around' all over the place as far as chronological fulfilment is concerned. And this principle is not only seen in Bible prophecy. The historical records in the Old Testament tend to be thematically presented rather than chronologically (Joshua is a good example of this); and the Gospel records likewise. It especially needs to be recognized that in line with so much OT prophecy, neither the Olivet prophecy nor its extension in the Apocalypse can be read as strictly chronological. Thus Lk. 21:8-11 gives a catalogue of signs, and then v. 12 jumps back to the situation before them: "but before all these things..." (21:27,28; Mk. 13:10 are other examples). These principles are all brought together in the way Peter interprets Joel 2. The comments in brackets reflect the interpretation which Peter offers later in his address. He gives each part of it a fulfilment not in chronological sequence with what has gone before: "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel [i.e. you are

seeing a fulfilment of this prophecy before your eyes]: I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy [fulfilled by the apostles after Christ's ascension]... and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath [the miracles of the Lord Jesus during His ministry]... the sun shall be turned into darkness [the crucifixion], and the moon into blood [also referring to an unrecorded event at the crucifixion?], before that great and notable day of the Lord come [the second coming; or the resurrection?]: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved [fulfilled by the crowd accepting baptism on the day of Pentecost]" (Acts 2:16-21).

Typical of the NT writers, Peter doesn't quote from the Masoretic [Hebrew] text, but from the Septuagint, and in Joel 2 there are significant differences. And yet Peter adds and changes things even from the LXX. The inspired writers don't quote exactly, and often mix interpretation with quotation.

2:17 *And it shall be in the last days, says God-* The phrase doesn't have to necessarily refer to the last days before the Lord's second coming. It could equally refer to the last days of some other period- in this case, the Mosaic system. But the phrase is of course ambiguous- exactly because the Lord's second coming could have occurred then, but the various required preconditions were not met. The LXX also has as the Masoretic Text: "Afterward". "The last days" would appear to be Peter's inspired interpretation.

I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams- A prophecy apparently about "all" here has a specific fulfilment in a limited group. Other Biblical references to "all" must likewise be understood; from God's perspective, the believers are "all things" to Him.

2:18 *Yes, and in those days will I pour out My Spirit on My servants and on My handmaids, and they shall prophesy-* In order to see a fulfilment of this at that time of Pentecost, surely there were female believers who also began speaking in foreign languages- although that is not recorded. Often the NT quotes the OT selectively, omitting words and phrases which were not relevant to the fulfilment. The fact the "handmaids" and "daughters" (:17) are mentioned would surely mean that there were women also given the gifts at this time. The fact this is not specifically recorded is yet another example of how the records are so abbreviated. The fact women aren't recorded as publicly preaching at this time is no reason to think they did not. Likewise the fulfilment of the Joel prophecy meant that there were both old and young men preaching (:17). The "all" who were "together in one place" (2:1) were those who received the gifts, all within the house; not just the apostles. However, 2:7 records the impression that "all" who were speaking in foreign languages were from Galilee. The women / sisters in view were therefore presumably also from Galilee. Peter "and the eleven" stated that "these are not drunk" (:15)- rather than 'We are not drunk'. The use of "these" suggests that there were others apart from 'the twelve' who were preaching with the Spirit gifts. It was a shameful thing for a Jewish man to talk publicly to a woman, let alone for her to read the Torah, and for a woman to publicly preach God's word would have been nothing short of scandalous. In this we have a challenge to our own sense of inadequacy in witness; women, Galileans, the illiterate and poorly educated... were those used by God to make history's greatest and most effective public witness to Christ.

2:19 *And I will show wonders in the heaven above, and signs on the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapour of smoke-* Blood, fire and smoke columns suggest Mosaic sacrifices, in which the blood had to be poured out and then the carcass burnt.

God's judgments are described as Him having a sacrifice (Jer. 46:10), and here the AD70 judgment of Jerusalem is surely in view. This is the language of Mt. 24:5-7 about the same event.

Thomson (*Land and the Book*, vol. 2, p. 311) suggests the allusion in this passage is to the whirlwind sandstorms, which are appropriate figures of Divine judgment: "We have two kinds of sirocco, one accompanied with vehement wind, which fills the air with dust and fine sand. I have often seen the whole heavens veiled in gloom with this sort of sandcloud, through which the sun, shorn of his beams, looked like a globe of dull smouldering fire. It may have been this phenomenon which suggested that strong prophetic figure of Joel, quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost. Wonders in the heaven and in the earth; blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood. The pillars of smoke are probably those columns of sand and dust raised high in the air by local whirlwinds, which often accompany the sirocco. On the great desert of the Hauran I have seen a score of them marching with great rapidity over the plain, and they closely resemble <pillars of smoke.>"

2:20 *The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, that great and notable day-* Language clearly relevant to the day of the second coming. The conclusion is quite clear- that day could have come in the first century, but it didn't. What was potentially possible didn't happen because Israel didn't repent. And so it has been delayed until our 'last days'.

2:21 *And it shall be that whoever-* It seems that the early brethren chose to understand the Lord's universal commission as meaning going out to preach to Jews of all nations, and they saw the response of Acts 2 as proof of this. And yet "all nations" is used about the Gentiles in all its other occurrences in Matthew (4:15; 6:32; 10:5,18; 12:18,21; 20:19,25). Such intellectual failure had a moral basis- they subconsciously couldn't hack the idea of converting Gentiles into the Hope of Israel. They allowed themselves to assume they understood what the Lord meant, to assume they had their interpretation confirmed by the events of Acts 2... instead of baring themselves to the immense and personal import of the Lord's commission to take Him to literally all. We too can read Scripture and assume we understand it, and thereby skip over massive implications for us.

Shall call on the name of the Lord- Joel 2:32 seems to prophesy of multitudes calling upon the name of the Lord in the 'last days'. The preliminary fulfilment of this in Acts 2:21 must surely be repeated in the ultimate 'last days'. And it may be that it is multitudes of Diaspora Jews who respond, as it was in Acts 2... The description of "the remnant" being saved out of Jerusalem and mount Zion, the temple mount, may mean that they go into the temple area in the last days to seek safety as the Jews did in AD70, and this is where they are at the moment of the Lord's intervention. Joel 2:32 must have had its primary fulfilment in the redemption of this remnant, and it therefore has an application to the salvation of the latter-day Jewish remnant out of Arab-occupied Jerusalem: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord (i.e. truly pray for deliverance in faith, perhaps through calling upon themselves the Lord's name through baptism into Christ) shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem (cp. 2 Kings 19:30,31 for the mention of those two terms) shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said (through Isaiah and his prophets), and in the remnant...". This passage is quoted in a different context in Acts 2:21 and Rom. 10:13, but this does not preclude its application to the faithful remnant in Jerusalem in the last days. This New Testament usage is regarding how a convert should eagerly call upon himself the Lord's salvation/deliverance from sin in Christ. This should

therefore be done with the same sense of urgency and desperate intensity as the persecuted remnant of the last days will do, like their counterparts within Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time.

Shall be saved- The quotation from Joel has spoken of an outpouring of Spirit gifts, followed by a time of trouble in the land, and then the coming of the great day of the Lord. The immediate context of this offer of salvation was therefore regarding saving from the destruction which was to come upon Israel and Jerusalem specifically. Peter later appealed for people to believe in the Lord Jesus in order to save themselves from [the judgment to come upon] that wicked generation (:40).

When Peter was sinking, he was living out the picture we have of condemnation at the last day. When we read that he began to “sink” into the sea of Galilee, this is exactly the image we find in Mt. 18:6, where the Lord says, in response to the question ‘Who will be the greatest?’, that he who offends one of the little ones will be drowned [s.w. “sink”] in the midst of the sea, His audience would have immediately associated this with the midst of the sea of Galilee, just where the storm had occurred. Peter seems to have realized that this warning was pertinent to him, for it is he who then interrupts the Lord to ask how often he should forgive his brother (Mt. 18:21). Peter sinking into Galilee, giving up swimming but desperately throwing up his hand to the Lord [you don’t swim with a hand outstretched], is the position of each person who truly comes to Christ. This is the extent of our desperation; baptism, conversion to Him, is most definitely not a painless living out of parental expectations. Note how they were “tossed” or ‘tormented’ (Gk.) by the raging waves (Mt. 14:24)- the very same word is used about how the rejected will be “tormented” in condemnation (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). Peter’s salvation by the hand of the Lord was representative of us all. As he drowned there in the lake, he was effectively living out the condemnation of the last day. But he appealed urgently to the Lord: “Save me!”. Later, Peter was to use the same words in his preaching, when he appealed to his nation to “save [themselves]” by calling on the name of the Lord, just as he had done on the lake (Acts 2:40). He saw that those people were in just the position which he had been in on the lake.

2:22 You men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth was a man attested to you by God, by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in the midst of you- The crowd being addressed were Jews who were permanently living at Jerusalem; the crowd had all met the Lord Jesus and seen His miracles.

Even as you yourselves know- These Jerusalem residents had known in their conscience that Jesus was indeed “attested by God” as Messiah. Like Paul at this time, they were kicking against the goads.

2:23 Him, being delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God- Perhaps Peter is addressing the sense some of the Jews had that the Lord's death was according to God's will, and therefore they were the less guilty.

You by the hand of men outside the Law, did crucify and slay- Although it was Roman hands who crucified the Lord, Peter reminds the Jews that God judged it to have been effectively their hands. Their sin was not mitigated against by the fact that others had done it, when they planned it.

2:24 Whom God raised up, having loosened the pangs of death; because it was not possible that he should be held by it- Quoting Ps. 18:5 LXX. There are some passages which imply the Lord Jesus was somehow conscious during His three days in the grave. Evidently this was not the case. And yet the resurrection loosed the birth-pangs of death. Those three days are likened to labour, in the Lord's case bringing forth life through death. Yet He was dead and unconscious. But to the Father, He saw things simply differently. Sometimes God speaks from His timeless perspective, at

other times His words are accommodated to us. Likewise from the Father's perspective, the spirit of Christ went and preached to the people of Noah's day at the time of His death. Yet this didn't happen in real time in such a way.

2:25 For David said concerning him- David is one of the major OT types of the Lord Jesus. The words of David in Ps. 16 are quoted in Acts 2:25,29 concerning Jesus: "I have set the Lord always before me... he is at my right hand... thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption". These are words describing David's feelings about his own death and resurrection; and yet so identified was he with the Messiah, that they are quoted as being directly true of Jesus. But Acts 2:29 also quotes these words with a slightly different spin- in that David saw the Lord *Jesus* always before him, and it was this sense that stabilized him. This could only have been true in that David understood all his feelings and present and future experiences [e.g. resurrection, not being suffered to corrupt eternally] as being typical of the Lord Jesus. He so understood himself as a type of the One to come that he saw this person as ever with him. This is the extent of the typology. 1 Chron. 17:17 in Young's Literal has David saying: "Thou hast seen me as a type of the man on high" [i.e. Messiah]. David describes himself at ease with clearly Messianic titles such as 'the Christ', 'the man raised on high', and then goes on to speak of the Messiah who *is to come* on the "morning without clouds", admitting that "verily *my* house is not so with God" (2 Sam. 23:1-5). This is only really understandable if we accept that David consciously saw himself as a type of the future Messiah. The main reason why there is so much deep personal detail about David is because we are intended to come to know him as a person, to enter into his mind- so that we can have a clearer picture of the mind and personality of the Lord Jesus. This is why the thoughts of David, e.g. in Ps. 16:8-11, are quoted as being the very thoughts of Christ (Acts 2:27). So Christ-centred was David's mind that he "*foresaw* (not "saw" - disproof of the pre-existence) the Lord (Jesus) always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved" (Acts 2:25). David was obsessed, mentally dominated, by his imagination of Christ, so much so that his imagination of his future descendant gave him practical strength in the trials of daily life. Small wonder we are bidden know and enter into David's mind. Likewise the book of Genesis covers about 2000 years of history, but almost a quarter of the narrative concerns Joseph; surely because we are intended to enter into Joseph, and thereby into the mind of Christ.

I saw the Lord always before my face- With David we should be able to say that we see the Lord [the Lord Jesus] ever before our face, so that we will not be moved by anything. However, we could also interpret the quotation as David solely talking about the future feelings of Jesus; the "Lord" in view would therefore be the Lord God.

For he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved- The Lord Jesus felt God was at his right hand; but He is now on the Father's right hand. We see here a mutuality between Father and Son.

2:26 Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced, moreover my flesh also shall dwell in hope - Literally, to dwell in a tent. The idea is that death is merely setting up a tent to pass the night in, until the day of resurrection dawns. David said that just because "our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding", therefore he wanted to be as generous as possible in providing for the work of God's house (1 Chron. 29:14-16). So sure is the hope of resurrection that the Lord interpreted God being the God of Abraham as meaning that to Him, Abraham was living. Death is no barrier to God's continuing identity with His people. His faith in

the resurrection is so sure that He speaks of death as if it is not. And in our weakness, we seek to look beyond the apparent finality of death likewise. Because David firmly believed in a resurrection, "my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced; moreover also my flesh shall tabernacle in hope" (Acts 2:26 RV). His whole life 'tabernacled in hope' because of what he understood about resurrection. This was and is the power of basics. Yet we can become almost over-familiar with these wonderful ideas such as resurrection.

2:27 Because You will not leave my soul in the grave, neither will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption- The women's devotion to the Lord, coupled with Joseph and Nicodemus going to such extraordinary lengths to have the Lord speedily buried in a new tomb, with more spices than were used for the burial of the Caesars, ensured that the Lord's body did not corrupt after three days. We note that Martha assumed that after three days, a corpse had usually started to smell because corruption was so advanced. However, the lack of corruption of the Lord's corpse was not 'allowed' by God, even if He worked through the freewill devotions of the Lord's loving followers. Given the Jewish belief and experience that after three days a corpse has seriously decayed, perhaps the reason the Lord remained dead for three days in order to demonstrate that His resurrection was indeed a miracle and not some quick resuscitation.

2:28 You made known to me the ways of life, you shall make me full of gladness with Your countenance- "The Kingdom of God" was a title used of Jesus. He 'was' the Kingdom because He lived the Kingdom life. Who He would be, was who He was in His life. At the prospect of being made "full of joy" at the resurrection, "therefore did my heart rejoice" (Acts 2:26,28). His joy during His mortal life was related to the joy He now experiences in His immortal life. And this is just one of the many continuities between the mortal and the immortal Jesus.

Acts 2:28 quotes Psalm 16 concerning Christ's resurrection and ascension: "Thou shalt make me full of joy with Thy countenance". So Christ's fullness of joy was to see God's face, and He has left us His joy (John 15). This was "the joy set before Him", and it is ours too. This is our fullness of joy, to see God's face, spiritually in this life, and physically in the future. After asking us to let His Words abide in us, Jesus said He had told us that so that our joy might be full (Jn. 15:7,11). So the effect of the Word and of true repentance and turning to God is the same as seeing God's face- it should bring that same fullness of joy. Other passages make the same connection between the Word and God's face shining upon us- e.g. Ps. 119:135 "Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant, and teach me Thy statutes".

2:29 Brothers, I may say to you freely about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day- The Greek for "freely" means boldly, confidently, openly. This was a characteristic of Peter's public speaking (Acts 4:13,31), and it is used frequently in the New Testament of our boldness. We must ask ourselves whether we experience this; such a characteristic arises from trust that truly, we have been forgiven and will by grace live eternally. The Lord recognized the influence of the synagogue upon them when He said that He spoke to them in parables, and would later speak to them plainly (Jn. 16:25)- when He had earlier spoken to the Jewish world in parables rather than plainly, because they did not understand (Mk. 4:34). And yet they got there in the end. He spoke to them in the end "plain words" (*parresia*), and this word is the watchword of the disciples' own witness to the world (Acts 2:29; 4:13,29,31; 28:31). They spoke "plainly" (*parresia*) to the world, without parables, because they reflected to the world the nature of their understanding of their Lord. However, during His ministry, it would appear that the

Lord treated them as if they were still in the Jewish world. When they asked Him why He spoke to *the people* in parables, He replies by explaining why He spoke *to them* in parables; and He drives the point home that it is to those "outside" that He speaks in parables (Mk. 4:11).

2:30 *Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body he would set one upon his throne-* Some manuscripts add *according to the flesh*. This expression, *kata sarx*, is a very clear statement of the humanity of the Lord Jesus and His lack of personal pre-existence-seeing He was the fruit of David's body or, as the Greek literally says, his hip or creative power. Acts 2:30-33 says that our Lord's exaltation in Heaven fulfils, albeit primarily, the promise to David of Christ reigning on his throne. This is confirmed by 2 Sam.7:12 saying that God would "set up" David's seed to have an eternal Kingdom; and "set up" in the Septuagint is the same word as "resurrect", as if in some way the promise would be realized after Christ's resurrection.

2:31 *He foreseeing this, spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left in the grave, nor did his flesh see corruption-* This may mean that David foresaw and consciously spoke about the death and resurrection of his great descendant, Messiah. But inspired writers can also state things whereby they speak of and 'foresee' things which they themselves do not fully understand (1 Pet. 1:12). Therefore we need not read these words as having to mean that David personally understood all the things about the Christ of which he spoke / wrote.

2:32 *This Jesus did God raise up, of which we are all witnesses-* The "we" presumably refers to the group of 120 of Acts 1; the "we", including men and women, who were witnessing with the gift of languages.

2:33 *Therefore, being exalted by the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear-* John repeatedly records Christ's description of the cross as Him being "lifted up" (Jn. 3:14; 8:18; 12:32,34). But Peter uses the very same word to describe Christ's exaltation in resurrection and ascension (Acts 2:33; 5:31). Looking back, Peter saw the cross as a lifting up in glory, as the basis for the Lord's exaltation afterwards. At the time, it seemed the most humiliating thing to behold. It was anything but exaltation, and Peter would have given his life in the garden to get the Lord out of it. But now he saw its glory.

The Greek for "poured out" is often used about the shedding of the Lord's blood. It was on account of His sacrifice that the Holy Spirit was shed. That seems to be the connection. The miraculous dimension of the gifts, in this case the understanding of languages, was a specific thing at a specific time. But the power of spiritual regeneration, the spirit / power of holiness, continues to be poured out in the lives of believers. Paul speaks as if the outpouring was valid for all, not just those at the day of Pentecost: "The washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Tit. 3:5,6).

An appreciation of the Lord's exaltation will in itself provoke in us repentance and service (Acts 2:33-36). A vision of the exalted Lord Jesus was what gave Stephen such special inspiration in his final minutes (Acts 7:56).

2:34 *For David did not ascend into Heaven-* But it was Jesus who did; He, as David's 'lord', is sitting at God's right hand, and so it has to be Him and not David who is now in Heaven. This statement clearly disproves the idea of the faithful going to Heaven at death. Peter is tackling Judaism's tendency to think that whoever Messiah is or was or shall be, he is in any case inferior to the likes of Moses and David. Peter

reasons that the fact David spoke of his 'lord', i.e. Jesus, being at the right hand of Yahweh therefore meant that Jesus was in Heaven. For that is where God's throne is.

But he himself said: The Lord said to my Lord, sit on My right hand- Peter uses Scriptures like Ps. 110 and 118 in exactly the same way as he heard the Lord use them (Acts 2:34 = Mt. 22:44; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7 = Mt. 21:42). A list could be compiled for Peter's allusions to the Lord as I have for Paul's. It may be that Peter's difficult reference to the spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3:19) is a reference to Is. 61 in the same way as Christ used it in Lk. 4:18. This point is meaningless without an appreciation of the extent to which Christ's words featured in the writing and thought of Peter.

2:35 Until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet- The context is Peter's appeal for those who crucified the Lord to repent. They were His "enemies"; but once they became a footstool for His feet, then He would return. Therefore Peter appealed for their repentance, apparently understanding being 'a footstool for His feet' as meaning they would put themselves at His feet in obeisance. The Lord's footstool is the place where His worshippers come (Ps. 99:5; 132:7; Is. 66:1-3). The Father was willing to "make" His Son's enemies, those responsible for His death, into His worshippers. But they had to do their part, in repentance and acceptance of the activity of His Holy Spirit. Heb. 10:13 adds the detail that the Lord Jesus is eagerly looking for [AV "expecting"] His former enemies to become His footstool- and then He will return. This is why witness to Jewish people is so deeply significant in God's program.

2:36 Therefore, let all the house of Israel know for certain, that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified- Peter's growth of understanding of Jesus as 'Christ' grew. He declared Him as this during His ministry (Jn. 6:69), and also as 'Lord', but he preached Him as having been *made* Lord and Christ after the resurrection (Acts 2:36). He saw the Lord's status as having changed so much, even though he used the same words to describe it, and therefore he responded the more fully to Him. He so often refers to the Name of Christ, which had now been given Him (Acts 4:12 RV)- as if this new Name and the redemption in it was the motive power for his witness. Jesus had been born a Saviour, Christ the Lord (Lk. 2:11). But Peter uses each of these titles as if they had been given to the Lord anew, after His resurrection. And indeed they had been. They were no longer just appropriate lexical items for Peter to use; they were the epitome of all that the Lord was and had been and ever would be, all that He stood for and had enabled. And he preached them to men as the basis upon which salvation and forgiveness was now possible. See on Acts 5:31.

2:37- see on Acts 2:12.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart- The NT emphasizes the power of the cross, and the horrendous fact that we are really asked to share in His sufferings (e.g. Acts 9:16; 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 1:29; 3:10; 2 Tim. 2:3; 1 Pet. 4:1,13; Rev. 2:10). The Acts record seems to bring out how the Lord's people shared in the Lord's mortal experiences (e.g. Acts 4:7 = Mt. 21:23,24). The early converts were "pricked" (Acts 2:37), using the same word as in Jn. 19:34 for the piercing of the Lord's side. Paul speaks of how in his refusing of payment from Corinth, "I made myself servant unto all", just as the Lord was on the cross. In accommodating himself to his audience, "to the weak became I as weak", just as the Lord was crucified through weakness. In our preaching and in our ecclesial lives, we articulate elements of the Lord's cross in our attitude to others.

The figure of being pricked in the heart or mind implies this was done externally to the person pricked. The Lord pricked them in their minds. Paul was surely present

and was pricked by the Lord but refused to respond initially. The heart pricked people are then told to repent, to re think, and promised the gift of the Spirit if they do. That gift was essentially a confirmation of them in their mental attitudes. If we wish to re think, to repent, we will be psychologically spiritually strengthened. For faces with a call to repent, every man balks as to whether he can keep it up. And the gift of the Spirit meets man at his acutest need.

And said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: Brothers, what shall we do?- Luke is fond of using this Greek phrase in recording the response provoked by encounters with the Lord Jesus and the message about Him (Lk. 3:10,12,14; 6:11; 10:25; 12:17; 16:3,4; 18:18; 19:48; 23:34; Acts 4:16; 9:6; 10:6; 16:30; 22:10). This is therefore a most significant phrase for Luke. His preaching of the Gospel (for Luke-Acts are missionary documents) was to provoke this question in us too- what shall we do? Their question forms the context for Peter's answer in :38. They had a bad conscience, they just didn't know what to do with their sins, they felt condemned. The promise of the Spirit which follows meets that need- and it is of forgiveness and salvation. Miraculous gifts weren't the answer to their need. Forgiveness, salvation and the presence of the Lord Jesus were what they needed. And it was that need which was and is met in the promise of the Spirit. It's why Joel 2 is quoted- in the terrible "last days" for God's people, whoever would call on the name of the Lord would be saved. And this again is the context of other teaching about the promised gift of the Spirit: "the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14). It is not miraculous gifts that were promised to Abraham, but the blessing of forgiveness (Acts 3:24-26) and salvation.

2:38 And Peter said to them: Every one of you should- This might seem somewhat redundant, but remember that Peter was faced by a crowd of at least 3000 people. He sensed the tendency towards group action, being baptized because that was what the crowd was doing. And so he seeks to remind them that repentance is a very individual response to our own sins and God's salvation in Christ. And the same caveat needs to be sounded in communities which [quite rightly] raise their children in the Christian faith, surrounding them with those of similar background.

Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to the remission of your sins- This language is intentionally reminiscent of how Luke earlier described the work of John the Baptist four years ago, which would have been well known to these Jerusalem Jews: he preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Lk. 3:3). Perhaps they had been baptized by John- for "all Jerusalem" were baptized by John. But that was not Christian baptism, which was only instituted after the Lord's death and resurrection; and there was no subsequent gift of Holy Spirit made accessible by that baptism. So maybe the emphasis was upon "in the name of Jesus Christ". Those baptized by John were baptized into Jesus in Acts 19:1-5.

Repentance is a very complex and personal issue. There is no evidence that each of those people gave a theological statement of their understanding.

The appeal to "be baptized" is asking us to let something be done to us; and the ultimate doer of baptism is the Father and Son. Israel's crossing of the Red Sea was a prototype of Christian baptism; the people were baptized into Moses, as we are baptized into Christ (1 Cor. 10:2). "They were baptized" again suggests they were baptized by someone- God. If the idea was that they had of their own volition put themselves under water, the Greek [and English] would be different- something like 'They baptized themselves into Moses'.

And you shall receive the gift- Rom. 5:16 and 6:23 describe salvation as "*the gift*"- inviting comparison with "*the gift*" of the Spirit in Acts 2:38. The only other

time in the NT that we read of 'receiving' 'the gift' is in Rom. 5:17, where believers receive the gift of imputed righteousness and grace, i.e. salvation. And Acts 2:39 seems to be quoting Joel 2:32 concerning salvation as if this is what the gift of the Spirit was. Peter's reference to the promised gift being to those "afar off" alludes to Is. 57:19: "Peace (with God through forgiveness) to him that is far off". Eph. 2:8 also describes the gift as being salvation, saying that "by one Spirit (this gift) we all have access to the Father" (2:18). This is further validated by the fact that Eph. 2:13-17 is also alluding to Is. 57:19: "Ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace... (who) came and preached peace to you which were far off". Ps. 51:12,13 draws a parallel between possessing God's holy Spirit, and benefiting from His salvation.

Of the Holy Spirit- It is hard to interpret the genitive, "of". We can understand that the gift is the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit is the gift. Or as suggested above, we can see salvation and forgiveness as the gift from the Spirit. The repeated use of definite articles suggests that a clearly defined gift was in view. The promise of the Holy Spirit as a gift is surely referring to the promises of the Comforter in John 14-16. These promises contained the prospect of internal activity in the heart of believers, to the extent that they would as it were have the Lord Jesus literally present with them. Whilst the manifestation of the Spirit's presence was initially through visible phenomenon such as speaking in foreign languages, the essence of the gift is of internal strengthening to righteousness. And it is clearly alluded to in the later New Testament. "that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that you would be rooted and grounded in love, that you might be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, and to truly know and understand the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him that is able to do immeasurably above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever" (Eph. 3:16-21; see too Eph. 1:17-19). "Now he that establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the down payment of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:21,22). "In whom you also believed, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). "...So that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14). The idea of Spirit that was promised naturally connects with the promise of the Comforter, and with Peter's statement that baptism will receive the promised gift of the Spirit. These passages are all about the internal work of the Spirit- not miraculous gifts. The Comforter passages have a similar aspect to them: "The Father... shall give you another comforter, that he may be with you for ever [this sounds like something permanent, not only for two generations]- the Spirit of truth... he abides with you and *shall be in you*... I will come to you (Jn. 14:16-18)... But the comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and cause you to remember ['to put in the mind', Gk.] all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you (Jn. 14:26,27)... the Comforter, the spirit of truth (Jn. 15:26)... the Comforter... will convict (Jn. 16:7,8)... When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he shall guide you into all the truth... he shall declare to you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me; for he shall take what is mine and shall declare it to you" (Jn. 16:13,14). The Comforter, the Holy Spirit or "spirit of truth" is therefore associated with internal psychological processes in the mind of the believer. John's letters allude to the promise of the comforter, and speak as if it is being experienced by John's readership,

both then and now. This of itself means that the Comforter was not just referring to miraculous gifts given to the apostles; it has a far wider reference. The following are John's later commentary on the Comforter passages: "You have an anointing from the Holy One and you know all these things... the anointing which you received of him abides in you [cp. Jn. 14:17 "the Spirit of truth... he abides with you and *shall be in you*"]... even as it taught you, so you are to abide in him (1 Jn. 2:2,27)... hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He gave us (1 Jn. 3:24)... it is the Spirit that testifies, because the Spirit is the truth... He that believes in the Son of God has the witness within himself (1 Jn. 5:6,10)... the Son of God came, and has given us an understanding so that we truly know him that is true" (1 Jn. 5:20). All this activity of teaching us, giving us understanding, helping us abide in Christ- this is the work of the Comforter Spirit. All this desperately needed spiritual activity is the gift promised to those who are baptized.

2:39 *For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to him-* Peter's maiden speech on the day of Pentecost was a conscious undoing of his denials, and consciously motivated by the experience of forgiveness which he knew he had received. Having been converted, he was now strengthening his Jewish brethren. He went and stood literally a stone's throw from the High Priest's house, and stood up and declared to the world his belief that Jesus was and is Christ. Peter also preached in Solomon's Porch, the very place where the Lord had declared Himself to Israel as their Saviour (Jn. 10:33; Acts 5:12). Peter at the time of his denials had been "afar off" from the Lord Jesus (Mt. 26:58; Mk. 14:54; Lk. 22:54- all the synoptics emphasize this point). Peter's denials would've been the talk of the town in Jerusalem. So when in Acts 2:39 he says that there is a promised blessing for "all" that are far off... I think he's alluding back to himself, setting himself up as a pattern for all other sinners to find salvation. That's perhaps why he talks of "all" [those others] who are [also] "far off" [as he had been]. He could've just spoken of "they" or "those" who are far off. But the use of "all" may suggest he is hinting that the audience follow his pattern. This, in Peter's context, makes the more sense if we see *one* of the aspects of the promised Spirit blessing as that of forgiveness and salvation- as in Acts 3:25,26, the blessing was to be turned away from sins. See on Acts 3:26; 1 Pet. 2:25; Lk. 5:8.

As shown on :38 *The gift*, "afar off" alludes to Is. 57:19: "Peace (with God through forgiveness) to him that is far off". This is speaking of Gentiles; Peter was inspired to preach that the ministry of the Spirit was for the Jerusalem Jews, their children [who lived in the Gentile world, in the locations from which they had come to spend their retirement in Jerusalem, i.e. the Jewish diaspora]- and to the Gentiles. But it's clear from the Cornelius incident that Peter still failed to grasp the import of the words he was preaching- just like us.

Those "afar off" were the Gentiles (Eph. 2:13,17; Acts 22:21), but Peter later showed a marked reluctance to preach to them, as we see in his struggle to accept the command to eat the unclean animals of the vision in Acts 10. We have here a classic case of a man understanding truth on one level at one time, but not accepting it in practice and struggling against it. Truly the characters we meet in the Bible are all so psychologically credible.

"And to your children" need not mean the promise was only to them and the next generation. The audience were those who had supported the Lord's crucifixion, and they were repentant for this. It was they who had screamed for the Lord's blood to be laid on them *and their children*. They were the more distressed as they reflected that

they had brought the Lord's blood upon their children. And now they were assured that the gift of grace and forgiveness was extended to their children, whom they had effectively cursed. No wonder they accepted this good news with joy, and were baptized with joy (:41 AV). There is a clear allusion to Is. 44:3, "I will pour my Spirit on thy seed, and my blessing on thine offspring".

The promise is that of the Spirit. The Lord had told them that the Spirit was promised and they should wait in Jerusalem until it came (Lk. 24:49; Acts 1:4). It was promised in the Comforter passages, which concern His internal presence as real as if He were still physically, visibly with them. The fulfillment of the promise was not just to those then present, for Paul alludes here in writing of how we have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). The phrase "the promise" in the NT very often refers to the promise to Abraham, and to forgiveness and salvation. This is the promised gift, but it is in our heart in that the assurance of forgiveness and salvation is connected with the presence of the Lord Jesus in our hearts. To be unsure of our status with God is therefore to lack the Spirit. He is faithful that promised (Heb. 10:23). Those who accepted this promise were joyful, they joyfully received the word and continued praising God (:46,47), breaking bread daily to remember the basis for this great salvation, giving their own possessions away in response to what had been done for them. But the letter to these Hebrews had to remind them to hold firm that initial joy and confidence in grace, firm unto the end. James and Peter's letters likewise address the same converts to the same end.

2:40 *And with many other words he testified and encouraged them, saying: Save yourselves from this crooked generation-* "Lord, save me", Peter had cried when drowning. The words are significant because they are the words used by Peter in urging others to call upon the same Lord to be saved. He was such a compelling preacher- persuading 3000 people to be baptized instantly- exactly because he had called out these very words himself. It is only by knowing our own desperation that we will be compelling preachers. No amount of artistry, presentation or wordsmithing can produce anywhere near the same effect. He encouraged the crowds to likewise call upon the name of the Lord and be saved (Acts 2:39). He saw himself then and there, in all his weakness and yet sincere desperation, as the epitome of us all. But the parallels don't stop there. Peter had asked the Lord bid him 'Come unto me' (Mt. 14:28). Yet this is the very language of the Lord to all: 'Come unto me...'. Yet Peter went further; in the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others. When the Lord "caught" hold of Peter as he sunk in the waves (Mt. 14:31), a Greek word is used which occurs only once elsewhere: "He did not take hold [s.w. to catch] of Angels, but of the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). The Hebrew writer was surely alluding to the Lord's 'catching' of desperate Peter and pulling him to salvation- and saw in Peter a symbol of all those who will be saved by Christ.

"This crooked generation" is the term used of how John the Baptist's mission was to make that "crooked" generation "straight" (Lk. 3:5). His mission failed, although it

could have potentially succeeded. And so that generation were judged. God sees the world as actively evil: "this present evil world" (Gal. 1:4), under His condemnation (1 Cor. 11:32); he that is not with the Lord Jesus is seen as actively against Him, not just passively indifferent (Lk. 11:23). It is absolutely fundamental that our separation from this world is related to our salvation. The act of baptism is a saving of ourselves not only from our sins, but also from "this untoward generation" in which we once lived (Acts 2:40). But let us note that the essential demarcation 2000 years ago was between the believer and the world, not believer and believer.

John the Baptist's ministry was so that the 'crooked' nation of Israel should be 'made straight' and ready to accept Jesus as Messiah (Lk. 3:5). God's enabling power was present so that this might have happened; but the same word is used in Acts 2:40 and Phil. 2:15 to describe Israel as still being a 'crooked' nation. John's preaching, like ours, was potentially able to bring about the conversion of an entire nation. So instead of being discouraged by the lack of response to our witness, let's remember the enormous potential power which there is behind it. Every word, witness of any kind, tract left lying on a seat... has such huge potential conversion power lodged within it, a power from God Himself.

John's mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low*' the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ (Lk. 3:5). Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have its' effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13).

2:41 They that received his word were baptized-

AV "gladly received". There was joy because they had been beating themselves up about their perilous position, having brought the Lord's blood upon them and their children. And now they were assured that this was totally removed, through the gracious Spirit gift of forgiveness and sanctification.

Peter appealed to Israel: "Hear these words...", and then went on to quote a prophecy of how the Lord Jesus would be raised up [i.e. after His resurrection], "and him shall ye hear" Acts 2:22; 3:22,24). The record adds that the crowd received Peter's word and were baptized (Acts 2:41), whereas elsewhere in Acts men and women receive the word of the Lord Jesus. It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us.

And there were added in that day- Converts are described as being added to the church, and yet also added to Christ; the play on ideas seems deliberate (Acts 2:41,47 cp. 5:13,14; 11:24).

About three thousand people- Luke gives progress reports on the early Christian mission in quantitative terms, as if analysing the success of the work and possibly suggesting how it could be done even better (Acts 2:41,47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7; 9:31; 13:43; 14:1; 17:4,12; 18:10; 19:26; 21:20). The examples in Acts of preaching the Gospel and baptizing those who believed it are united in suggesting a very short period of time, and immediate baptism- the same hour of the night, in the case of the Philippian jailer, or the very same day, in the case of thousands on the day of Pentecost. The list is impressive: Acts 2:38-41; 8:12,13,36-38; 9:18; 10:47; 16:15,33; 18:8; 19:5.

2:42 *And they continued earnestly*- The same word is used of how *we* must “continue” in prayer (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2), i.e. follow the example of the early ecclesia in prayerfulness. The disciples had “continued” in prayer after the Lord’s ascension (Acts 1:14), and now their converts continued in prayer too. Note in passing that we continue in the pattern of those who convert us. Thus to start with, Simon “continued with Philip” (Acts 8:13). This means that who *we* are affects the spiritual quality of others. The same word is used several times in Acts (1:14; 2:42,46; 6:4; 8:13). The great concern of all missionary enterprises is that the converts will “continue”, and Luke is therefore at pains to record that the converts did indeed “continue”, initially at least.

In the apostles' teaching and fellowship in the breaking of bread and the prayers- Acts 2:42 speaks of the experience of *koinonia* in the breaking of bread, praying together, and the apostles' teaching about Christ. But these are not the only aspects of *koinonia*; and these things are all centred around the person of Jesus. In summary, *koinonia* means to share *in* and not simply *with*. At your leisure consider the usage of the word in this connection in Lk. 5:1; Heb. 2:14; 2 Pet. 1:4; Rom. 11:17; 2 Cor. 6:14; Rev. 18:4; Mt. 23:30. We are “in fellowship” with each other in the sense that we share in the same reality. So all who wish to share in that reality [Christ, in the Christian context] are “in fellowship” with each other. Paul often speaks of *koinonia* in giving- the sense being of giving to or participating in a project or entity outside of yourself. 1 Cor. 10:16-20 speaks of how sharing in a feast implies your sharing in the Lord you are celebrating- the emphasis is vertical rather than horizontal. The concern is whose feast you are attending or engaging in- which entity you are fellowshiping, Christ or an idol. With whom you do this, laterally, isn't in view here.

Phil. 2 exhorts believers to be of “one mind”, but that one mind is later defined in the chapter as being the mind of Christ on the cross. Again, the basis of unity between believers is their common share in Christ, especially in His death- there is never any implication that a theological statement of position is to be the basis of their unity. If this were the case, then we would expect to see this specifically stated. Instead, as in 1 Cor. 10, the unity between believers is on account of their individual participation in the mind and work of Christ.

Acts 2:42 in the AV has strongly influenced the thinking of many who uphold a closed table, due to reading back into a Bible verse the impression given by the AV and assuming it therefore supports a traditional approach to fellowship: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”. The impression is given by the AV that the duty of baptized believers is to continue believing the “doctrine” as in the theological positions of the apostles, and to only fellowship and break bread with those who believe the same. But on that basis it ought to be impossible to also pray together with those of different doctrinal persuasions- and that is not usually insisted upon by closed table theorists. However, the Greek text of Acts 2:42 is poorly translated by the AV. The *didache*, or “doctrine”, refers not to theological propositions but to the act of teaching by the apostles. The mass of 3000 newly baptized converts were taught further by the apostles, in line with how the great commission of Mt. 28:19,20 had commanded the apostles to go and teach the good news of Christ’s resurrection, baptize people into it, and then teach them further. We have in this section of Acts 2 the classic obedience to that commission. Indeed, the mention of people present from “all nations” encourages us to understand Acts 2 as Luke’s account of how the great commission was initially obeyed; and his version of it in Lk. 24:47 says that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, beginning at Jerusalem”. There are pointed

references in Acts 2 and 3 to repentance, remission of sins, baptism into the name, and all this beginning at Jerusalem with the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower the preachers (cp. Mk. 16:17). Clearly Luke is presenting the fulfilment of the great commission. The reference to the new converts hearing the teaching [AV “doctrine”] of the apostles after baptism is the direct fulfilment of the command of Mt. 28:20 for the apostles to further teach converts after baptism. Hence the CEV translates Acts 2:42: “They spent their time learning from the apostles, and they were like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together”.

2:43 And fear came upon everyone; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles- The “fear” was perhaps because people now realized that indeed, Israel had crucified their King. And society as a whole, each of them, had some responsibility in this. They perceived how they were faced with the ultimate issues of eternity. Only total capitulation to God’s way in His Son could lead them to serve God *without* fear, as envisaged by Zacharias, Simeon and others when they first encountered the Divine plan in His Son.

2:44 And all that believed were together and had all things common- 3:1 goes on to explain the summary of Acts 2:42. The new converts continued listening to the teaching [AV “doctrine”] of the apostles and continued in fellowshiping with them- not in the technical sense of being “in fellowship” as opposed to being “out of fellowship”; for this would require us to read into the text our usage of those terms. They continued “hanging out” with the apostles, continued in their presence and company, as eager students with their teachers. The Greek for “fellowship” is *koinonia*, and the root word *koine* occurs in Acts 2:44- they had all things “in common”. This is how they fellowshiped or common-ed together; they pooled their possessions and had them in common, or, as the AV will have it, in “fellowship”. In fact, the idea of *koinonia* or “fellowship” in the New Testament is most commonly used about the sharing of material resources rather than theological agreement (Rom. 12:13 “contribute”, Gal. 6:6 “share all good things”, Phil. 4:15 and throughout 2 Corinthians in the context of appealing for assistance or fellowship for the poor saints at Jerusalem). Acts 2:46 then speaks of how they attended the temple together, and broke bread in homes. This is the further explanation of how the new converts are described in Acts 2:42 as continuing in the apostles’ teaching [they went to the temple to hear it, as this was likely the only venue large enough to hold the crowd], and they continued in breaking of bread- by doing it in homes. For there was no church building available to do this as a group of 3000. And the nature of the “breaking of bread” is further defined in Acts 2:46- it involved a joyful eating together. The breaking of bread was therefore in the form of a collective meal, continuing the connection established by Jesus between His open table collective meals, and the “breaking of bread” in memory of Him. Acts 2:42 speaks of the new converts continuing together in “*the* prayers” (ESV and Gk.). Acts 3:1 goes on to define what this meant in practice- Peter and John went into the temple at the time of prayer. What they had in common was praying together in the Jewish temple prayers. But those prayers were attended by many Jews who didn’t believe in Jesus. What that goes to show is that you can perform a religious act of fellowship with unbelievers, but enjoy true Christian fellowship with God’s true people who are amongst them. From the very start, Christianity started with an “open” attitude to fellowship with the unbelieving Jews. If there really is some guilt by association principle to be operated in Christianity, surely we’d expect to see it outlined right at the start.

We can now summarize the above in tabular form:

Acts 2:42	How it worked out in practice
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And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine [teaching]	Having heard the basic Gospel and having been baptized, they continued hearing the apostles' teaching, as the apostles obeyed the great commission- to preach the basic Gospel, baptize, and then teach further (Mt. 28:19,20). Acts 2:46 therefore speaks of how they attended the temple together in order to learn more from the apostles' teaching
And fellowship (<i>koinonia</i>)	Acts 2:44- they had all things "in common", Gk. <i>koinē</i> .
The breaking of bread	Acts 2:46- this involved a joyful eating together in house groups
"The prayers" (ESV and Gk.).	Acts 3:1 defines what this meant in practice- Peter and John went into the temple at the time of prayer.

The unity between believers at the breaking of bread is brought out in Acts 2:42, where we read of the new converts continuing in:
the teaching of the apostles,
the fellowship
the breaking of bread
the prayers.

It could be that this is a description of the early order of service at the memorial meetings. They began with an exhortation by the apostles, then there was "the fellowship", called the *agape* in Jude 12, a meal together, and then the breaking of bread itself [following Jewish Passover tradition], concluded by "the prayers", which may have included the singing of Psalms. The performance of this feast was a sign of conversion and membership in the body of Christ. This is how important it is.

Some of the Roman leaders initially pushed the idea of Plato, that all land should be state owned and be given up by individuals to the state. Yet Acts 2:44; 4:32 use language which is directly taken from Plato's *Republic*: "All things common... no one called anything his own". The early church was seeking to set up an idealized alternative to the Roman empire!

2:45 *And they sold their possessions and goods, and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had need*- The Holy Spirit appeared to the apostles as "cloven / parted tongues" (Acts 2:3), giving to each man what each needed (Eph. 4:8-13). In response to this, we read that the apostles sold their possessions and "distributed [s.w. "cloven"] to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:45). Likewise Paul speaks of how God gave the Spirit gifts to every member of Christ's body, so that there was no part which "lacked" (1 Cor. 12:24). And he uses the same idea when telling the Corinthians to give their excess funds to provide grace / gifts for their brethren who "lacked" (2 Cor. 8:15). The simple picture, which even in different circumstances abides for us today, is that God's thoughtful and specific generosity to us, His giving us of unique gifts as we 'have need', should lead us to materially assisting those likewise who 'have need'.

Material giving to the Lord's cause was associated with the breaking of bread in the early church (Acts 2:42-46; 1 Cor. 16:1,2), after the pattern of how every male was

not to appear empty before Yahweh (Heb. 'to appear for no cause') at the Jewish feasts (Dt. 16:16). We cannot celebrate His grace / giving to us without response. Because Israel had been redeemed from Egypt, they were to be generous to their brethren, and generally open handed (Lev. 25:37,38). This is why the Acts record juxtaposes God's grace / giving, and the giving of the early believers in response (Acts 4:33 cp. 32,34-37). The bread and wine of the drink offerings were to accompany sacrifice; they were not the sacrifice itself. And likewise the spirit of sacrifice must be seen in us as those emblems are taken. The Laodiceans' materialism resulted in them not realizing their desperate spiritual need for the cross (Rev. 3:17,18); Lemuel knew that riches would make him ask "Who is Yahweh?"; he wouldn't even want to know the Name / character of the Lord God (Prov. 30:9). The Jews' experience of redemption from Haman *quite naturally* resulted in them giving gifts both to each other and to the poor around them (Es. 9:22). "You shall lend unto many nations" has often been misread as a prediction of Jewish involvement in financial institutions and banking (Dt. 28:12). But the context is simply that "The Lord shall open unto you *His* good treasure, the heaven to give the rain of your land... and *you* shall lend unto many nations". If God opens His treasure to us, we should open our treasures to others, even lending with a spirit of generosity, motivated by our experience of His generosity to *us*. Because Yahweh had redeemed Israel, they were not to be petty materialists, cheating others out of a few grams or centimetres in trading. The wealth and largeness of God's work for them should lead them to shun such petty desire for self-betterment.

Distribution as each "had need" may mean that people weren't given just because they asked, but according to their need, as judged by the elders.

2:46 *And day by day, continuing earnestly with one accord in the temple*- The way Jesus forewarned the disciples that the time would come when they would be cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2) surely implies He assumed they would maintain synagogue attendance until they were cast out, rather than removing themselves in obedience to Christ. By remaining as far as they could, they were the salt of their world; and we see in Paul's ministry how his synagogue attendance gave him many opportunities to witness to the Gospel. The Lord warned His disciples that they would be scourged in the synagogues (Mt. 10:17). But synagogues could only scourge those who were members. The Lord foresaw that His preachers would remain within the synagogue system rather than leave it totally. The fact Paul was scourged in synagogues (2 Cor. 11:25) shows that in being a Jew to the Jews, he opted to remain within the synagogue system. This fact shows that the Lord Jesus didn't intend His people to formally break with the synagogue system, even though it was apostate in doctrine and practice. This indicates that there was absolutely no sense within Him of 'guilt by association' nor a demand for His people to leave apostate systems- they were to remain there until they were cast out of the synagogues.

Even from within the New Testament we can soon perceive that first century Judaism was full of both theological and practical errors- the immortal soul, heaven going, ascending to "Abraham's bosom" after death, hell fire, a personal Satan, literal demons, a Kingdom of God based around the violent resistance of evil and military conquest of the Romans in the first century; and above all a serious misunderstanding of Jesus and the whole concept and nature of Israel's Messiah.

And breaking bread at home- Luke's writings (in his Gospel and in the Acts) give especial attention to meals and table talk. Societies tended to distinguish themselves by their meal practices. Who was allowed at the table, who was excluded- these things were fundamental to the self-understanding of persons within society. So when the

Lord Jesus ate with the lowest sinners, and Peter as a Jew ate with Gentiles... this was radical, counter-cultural behaviour. No wonder the breaking of bread together was such a witness, and the surrounding world watched it with incredulity (Acts 2:42,46; 4:32-35). Note too how Luke mentions that Paul ate food in the homes of Gentiles like Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:15,34).

Acts 2:42,46,47 speak as if it involved eating a communal meal together. If we can accept that the original "breaking of bread" was indeed a meal, it would seem almost axiomatic that access to the "bread and wine" as in the "emblems" would have been open. For would the early brethren really have said: "You're welcome to eat everything on the table except the unleavened bread"? Or would they really have invited those present to pray and worship with them before and after the meal, but not while they were praying for and taking the bread and wine? There is no hint even that this was the case.

The record of the body of Christ in the New Testament begins with descriptions of the Lord preaching in houses. The word 'house' occurs a huge number of times in the Gospels, especially in Luke's record. He seems to have been very sensitive to the way the Lord entered into homes and did things there. We can be sure that these homes became house churches after His resurrection. The establishment of the church began with the believers gathering in the temple, but breaking bread "from house to house" (Acts 2:46 Gk.). Fellowship in Christ is about this family sense of community. In practice, the early body of Christ was a fellowship of house churches. They preached and worshipped both in the temple and "in every house", i.e. every house church (Acts 5:42).

Acts 2:46 (NKJV) records how the early brethren broke bread with "simplicity of heart"; and we likewise, in our memorial meetings and in our lives, must unswervingly focus upon Him and the colossal import of His cross.

Almost every major New Testament description of the Lord's coming and what He will bring with Him is also given an application to our experience in this life: the Kingdom of God, eternal life, salvation, justification, sanctification, perfection, glorification... and of course, judgment. All these things shall come; but the essence of them is being worked out in the life of the believer now. All this is brought to our attention whenever we attend the breaking of bread. That "table" at which we sit is a picture of the future banquet and table in the coming Kingdom. The "gladness" which accompanied the breaking of bread (Acts 2:46) is the same word used about the "rejoicing" at the future marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:7) and the Lord's return (1 Pet. 4:13; Jude 24).

Throughout Scripture, the opposition between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God is highlighted. After the establishment of the first ecclesia in Jerusalem, the Acts record seems to emphasize the pointed conflict between the ecclesia and the world. Being "of one accord" was a hallmark of the early brethren (Acts 1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25); but the world was in "one accord" in their opposition to that united ecclesia (Acts 7:57; 12:20; 18:12; 19:29).

They took their food with gladness and singleness of heart- *Metalahein* literally means to "receive one's share in". In this context we read that "day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved". The repetition of "day by day" suggests a connection between the daily conversion of unbelievers and the daily breaking of bread meetings. And in extensive missionary experience I have observed that those who witness a breaking of bread meeting tend to find themselves drawn into the things of the Lord Jesus.

2:47 *Praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to them daily those who were being saved*- Those who heard the message wanted baptism immediately; they had been convicted by the preacher of a Christ-centred message, not just intellectually teased (Acts 8:36; 9:18). Lydia, the Philippian jailer, Paul, the Ethiopian eunuch, the crowds at Pentecost... were all baptized immediately. The Lord added *daily* to the church (2:27; 16:5)- they didn't tell candidates for baptism to wait even until the next Sunday, let alone for a few months 'to think it over'. They understood the first principle: baptism is essential for salvation. Believe or perish. They saw the absoluteness of the issues involved in the choice to accept or reject the Son of God. "Beware, therefore..." was their warning to their hearers (Acts 13:40). They made no apologies, they didn't wrap up the message. They taught the need for repentance more than seeking to prove that they were right and others wrong (although there is a place for this in our witness in the right contexts). They made it clear that they were out to convert others, not engage in philosophical debate or the preaching of doubtful interpretations.

ACTS CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Now Peter and John were going into the temple*- See on 2:46.

At the hour of prayer, at the ninth hour- The time of the evening sacrifice. Their presence for this indicates they were fairly serious in their connection with Judaism still.

3:2 *And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate, to ask alms of those entering the temple*- He had been daily laid there for around forty years (Acts 4:22). The Lord Jesus surely passed Him by, for He told the Jews that He had taught them daily in the temple; but He didn't heal him. Perhaps his faith hadn't grown to the required level; or maybe the Lord consciously left this work for His followers to do. For Acts is the account of all that the Lord *began* to do. The man apparently recognized Peter and John; because when he saw them, he asked them for assistance. They were known as Jesus-followers.

3:3 *Seeing Peter and John about to enter the temple, he asked for alms*- If he was daily laid at the temple gate, he presumably would have seen the Lord and His disciples many times as they entered the temple- which had been a frequent occurrence. There is no evidence that the man believed. And we note the Lord must have walked by him many times without healing him. His focus was not on simply meeting human need of the moment.

3:4 *And Peter, looking straight at him (as did John) said: Look at us*- See on Acts 14:9. The lame man responded, and the people were amazed at the subsequent miracle. But Peter then tells them: "You men of Israel, why do you marvel at this man? or *why do you fasten your eyes on us* [i.e., why do you 'look on us'], as though by our own power or godliness we had made him to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his Servant Jesus" (Acts 3:12,13). I wonder if Peter was here publicly acknowledging an inappropriate turn of phrase, when he had asked the lame man to 'Look on *us*'- and immediately, he humbly and publicly corrected himself, redirecting all glory and all eyes to the Father and Son.

The man fastened his eyes on them just as Luke has noticed men fastening their eyes on the Lord (s.w. Lk. 4:20; Acts 1:10). We too are led to situations where the experience of the Lord in the Gospels becomes ours. Because those in Him are Him to

their world. Peter and John were looking directly at the man, and they ask him to look directly at them. They wanted eye to eye contact- because they wanted him to see in them the face and the eyes of the Lord Jesus.

3:5 *And he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them-* His motivation was material. He is an example of how the Lord through His Spirit at times just comes into a person's life, taking all the initiative, rather than responding to their apparent seeking for Him.

3:6 *But Peter said: Silver and gold have I none, but what I have, that I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!*- Peter later alludes to this in a way that means he saw that man as typical of all his converts: "Knowing you were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life" (1 Pet. 1:18). Life before conversion for us all was as vain as the man sitting there lamely begging for silver and gold, in a temple structure unable to save him. See on 3:7.

Peter told the lame man: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk"; but the healing was because of *Peter's* faith in Christ's Name (Acts 3:6,16). The Jerusalem Bible makes this apparent: "It is the name of Jesus which, through our faith in it, has brought back the strength of this man". The RV has: "By faith in his name hath his name made this man strong"- as if the power of the name of Jesus is waiting to be activated by human faith.

Nazareth was despised (Jn. 1:46), but the title on the cross includes it (Jn. 19:46) and here too we see how "Nazareth" is stressed, as well as crucifixion. These were things which were the biggest shame in first century Palestinian ears. But this is the great paradox- that the one from such an obscure, bad background with such despised characteristics, was now exalted.

3:7 *And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankle-bones received strength-* The word is used of the strengthening of the early converts, also by the Spirit (Acts 16:5 "So the churches were strengthened in the faith"). Again the idea is that the man was representative of the wider ecclesia; see on 3:6. He was not saved by silver and gold, just as Peter says that none of us are (1 Pet. 1:18).

Luke has a favourite Greek word, often translated "forthwith... immediately" (Acts 3:7; 5:10; 9:18; 12:23; 13:11; 16:26,33). This is quite some emphasis; and Luke uses the very same word a lot in his Gospel, as if to show that the speed and power and achievement of the Lord's ministry is continued in that of His ministers now (Lk. 1:64; 4:39; 5:25; 8:44,47,55; 13:13; 18:43; 19:11; 22:60). The word is scarcely used outside Luke's writing, although using different words, Mark also notes the speed and immediacy of the Lord's ministry. And Luke uses many other words to stress the speed and urgency and fast moving nature of the Lord's work. They are worth highlighting in your Bible; for our ministry is a continuation of that of our early brethren (Acts 9:18-20,34; 10:33; 11:11; 12:10; 16:10; 17:10,14; 21:30,32; 22:29; 23:30).

Peter understood what it was to be in Christ. All that he did, all that he preached and taught by word and example, was a witness to the one in whom he lived and had his being. As he reached forth his right hand to lift up the cripple, he was manifesting how the right hand of God had lifted up (in resurrection) and exalted His Son and all those in Him (Acts 3:7). Likewise, he took Tabitha *by the hand* and then *lifted her up* and "presented her alive" (Acts 9:41), just as the Father had done to His Son. When Peter "stood up" after his conversion (Acts 1:15; 2:14), he was sharing the

resurrection experience of his Lord. And now he reflected this in his preaching to others. As God stretched forth His hand to heal through Christ (Acts 4:30), so Peter did (Acts 9:41). And he includes us all in the scope of this wondrous operation: for as God's hand exalted Christ, so it will exalt each of us who humble ourselves beneath it (1 Pet. 5:6).

3:8 *And leaping up, he stood and began to walk; and he entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping and praising God-* This reads like Dr. Luke's medical observation of the progressive steps of the recovery - leaped up, stood, walked, leaped. But it's also as if we are invited to play Bible television, focused up close on the man. The language is clearly appropriate for the eyewitness account which it is. The result of healing lame people in Acts 3:8; 14:10 was that they *leaped* (this is emphasized) and walked, praising God. This seems to be couched in the language of Is. 35:5,6 concerning lame people leaping and praising God; a prophecy we normally apply to the future Kingdom.

"He entered with them into the temple" even though he was likely in a state of ritual uncleanness due to his previous disability. He leaped into the holy place; the joy of conversion naturally overriding all legalistic considerations.

3:9 *And all the people saw him walking and praising God-* This is twice emphasized (:8). Luke has used the very same phrase four times in his Gospel, regarding praise of the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:13,20; 19:37; 24:53). Luke's Gospel was volume 1 compared to his volume 2, the Acts of the Apostles. But he develops the theme that the acts of the apostles are effectively the acts of the risen Lord Jesus (see on Acts 1:1). And so this kind of device is typical of Luke- things he ascribes to the Lord Jesus in his Gospel he applies to the work of the believers in Him in Acts. The man's response, "praising God", was exactly the response of people to the historical Jesus. It was as if through Peter's work, the Lord Jesus was manifested. See on 3:10 *Wonder* and 3:11 *The portico called Solomon's*.

3:10 *And they recognised him, that it was he that sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him-* Some commentators claim that next to this gate was a notice forbidding Gentiles and the unclean to go further. His location for forty years at the entrance to the temple (4:22) perhaps reflects Israel's being kept out of the promised land for the same period. He represented what could have happened to all Israel. The word for "wonder" is only used to describe the wonder at the miracles of the Lord Jesus; and it is used only by Luke (Lk. 4:36; 5:9). Again, Peter the healer is being presented as the manifestation of the Lord Jesus. The word for "amazed" is likewise used (Lk. 5:26). See on 3:9 *Praising God*.

3:11 *While he clung to Peter and John-* So often in this narrative, we see the essence of events of the Gospels now being repeated in the experience of the Lord's followers. In this case, the similarity is with how the healed man of Lk. 8:38 dreaded the idea of being parted from his healer, the Lord Jesus.

In the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus in the boat was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others. When the Lord "caught" hold of Peter

as he sunk in the waves (Mt. 14:31), a Greek word is used which occurs only once elsewhere: "He did not take hold [s.w. to catch] of Angels, but of the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). The Hebrew writer was surely alluding to the Lord's 'catching' of desperate Peter and pulling him to salvation- and saw in Peter a symbol of all those who will be saved by Christ.

All the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's, astounded- There was a crowd mentality here; everyone got involved in a stampede towards Peter. Their mentality and direction was dictated by a group psychology rather than individual faith. The word only occurs later in the New Testament in Peter's letter, where he writes of how Gentiles "think it strange that you do not *run with them* in the same flood of dissipation" (1 Pet. 4:4). The similarity was that Peter reflected how a crowd can stampede towards the symbols of Jesus, and yet stampede in the way of sin. But it's individual faith that the Lord searches for.

"The portico called Solomon's", Gk. 'which *is* called Solomon's'. This suggests that the Gospel of Luke was written whilst the temple was still standing; otherwise a past tense would have been used. This is one of many reasons for thinking that the Gospels were written early rather than later, certainly pre-AD70. The Gospel records and Acts are the transcripts of histories which were orally distributed to begin with, and then written down under Divine inspiration soon after they began circulating- and not many decades after the events, as the critics wrongly claim. The scene here is reminiscent of that in the Gospels, when a crowd of people gathered around the Lord Jesus in the same porch (Jn. 10:23). And again, we see Peter and John presented as the manifestations of Jesus on earth, just as we are; repeating in essence the situations encountered by the historical Jesus. See on 3:9 *Praising God*.

3:12- see on Acts 2:12.

And when Peter saw it, he addressed the people: You men of Israel, why do you marvel at this man? Or why fasten you your eyes on us, as though by our own power or reverence towards God we had made him walk?- AV "He answered and said". Although there was no previous statement nor question. As in Acts 5:8, where Peter *answered* Sapphira, although she had said nothing. This feature of the text gives us the impression of God's Spirit responding to man's unexpressed positions and responses.

"Marvel" implies some doubt. The men who marvelled and doubted whether Peter was anything more than a magic man were within a few hours believing and being baptized (Acts 3:12; 4:4). We noted on :11 that there was a group psychology operating here, but there is never any attempt to judge the sincerity of motivation in those apparently coming to Jesus. There is a speed and power and compulsion that pounds away in the narrative. The preaching of a God hurt by sin, passionately consumed in the death of His Son, feeling every sin, rejoicing over every repentance and baptism... this was something radically different in the 1st century world, just as it is in ours. And such a God imparted a sense of urgency to those who preached Him and His feelings and ways and being, a need for urgent response, a need to relate to Him, which was simply unknown in other religions. The urgency of man's position must be more up front in our witness. Christianity went wrong in the 2nd century AD because the church abstracted God and His being into nothingness, to the point that the urgent import of the true doctrines was lost in practice. May this not be the case amongst us.

Peter is urgent to explain that 'this isn't me- it's Jesus'. See on 3:10 *Wonder* and 3:9 *Praising God*. Peter knew that he was standing very close to where he had denied the Lord. And he knew that his audience knew. He felt he was not holy nor 'reverent'

to God as he should be. Peter repeatedly uses this word, translated "holiness" or "Godliness", in appealing for his converts to develop this very attribute (2 Pet. 1:3,6,7; 3:11). And yet he states here that he is not sufficiently 'holy' or 'Godly'. It is this humility and recognition of failure which gave Peter's preaching and pastoral appeals the power they had.

3:13 *The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus-* Yet Peter and John did the Lord's work with this man of their own volition. The healing of the man was the glorification of the Lord. His glorification was thereby dependent for its extent upon the efforts of His people in practice. And that principle is true today. Peter understood it well; hence he urges the people not to glorify him, but the Lord Jesus. He holds himself up as an example to his converts in that he alludes to this incident in 1 Pet. 2:12; 4:11,14, where he says that the good works of his converts can glorify God (s.w.).

Whom you delivered up- The word used for the betrayal of Judas. What he did was in essence what all Israel did; he was the epitome of Israel, influenced by the Jewish satan.

And rejected before the presence of Pilate- "Rejected" is the same word translated "denied" and is used repeatedly about the denials of Peter, in the presence of the Lord's trial and at the same time as the Jews rejected or denied their Messiah (Mt. 26:70,72). Peter was preaching this message a stone's throw from where he had denied / rejected his Lord. And he knew that they knew what had happened. Peter was therefore appealing to the Jews on the basis that he himself has very publicly done what they had done.

When he had determined to release him- Literally, "when he had given sentence to release him". Pilate had pronounced the Lord innocent (Jn. 19:4). The conflicted conscience of Pilate is a major theme, because it shows the power of the Lord Jesus to touch the hardest human conscience. *Krino* means to judge; he had judged to set Jesus free. This is exactly the situation which Paul found himself in later- he was judged by the Romans and judged that he should be set free, but he chose not to use that in order [as he perceived it anyway at the time] to spread the Gospel to the world [by appealing to a hearing in Rome]. Perhaps these words and form of expression of Peter became programmatic for Paul and led him to the decision he made, consciously seeking to follow his Lord's steps to the cross. I will develop the point later that Paul was very deeply influenced by Peter's words and ministry.

3:14 *But you denied-* The point is twice made (:13), just as it is twice recorded that Peter denied the Lord (Mt. 26:70,72) at the same time as they did. See on Acts 3:13 *Rejected...*

The holy and righteous one, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you- These words are elsewhere used about John the Baptist (Mk. 6:20), the Lord's forerunner; and also about the believers, who are to be likewise (Rev. 22:11), rather than simply admiring His holiness from a distance. He and all about Him is to be programmatic for us.

3:15 *And killed the prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses-* The blame is clearly placed by God on the Jews and not the Romans. Conspiracy to murder was counted by Him as the murder itself. Gk. 'the author' of life. The contrast is with Israel's desire for a murderer, a taker of life (:14).

3:16 *And by faith in his name-* Alluded to by Peter in 1 Pet. 1:21: "You who by Him do believe in God". The Lord Jesus is "the author and finisher of our faith". Faith comes from the Lord Jesus, from encounter with Him, rather than apologetics.

Gk. *the* faith, maybe hinting that it was 'the faith' of the Gospel which inculcated faith in the apostles. But whose faith was Peter referring to? The beggar appears to have just been opportunistically begging for money from Peter (Acts 3:3). It was surely by *Peter's* faith that the man was healed, and not by his own faith. For Peter didn't invite the beggar to have faith in anything. And Peter explains to the Jews that he had made the man to walk not through his own power (Acts 3:12). So here again we have an example of a third party being healed as a result of another man's faith (see on Mk. 2:5).

Trust or faith in God comes from not trusting upon human understanding, but upon the understanding [s.w. meaning, knowledge, wisdom] that is God's (Prov. 3:5). In this lies the importance of truth in Biblical interpretation. So understanding, correctly perceiving meaning, true wisdom... are related to having a real faith. The Proverbs go on to plead for correct understanding, because this will be the source of a Godly life of faith in practice. There is therefore a connection between "faith" in the sense of belief, and the fact the essential doctrines of Christianity are called "*the* faith"; the noun "the Faith" and the verb 'to believe / have faith' are related. This is because a true understanding of the one Faith will inevitably lead to true faith, and therefore works; for faith and works are inseparable. This relationship is brought out in Acts 3:16: "His name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong... yea, the faith which is in Him (Christ) hath given him (the healed man) this perfect soundness".

His name has made this man strong, whom you see and know- The same word used about the strengthening of the churches and all believers (Acts 16:5; 1 Pet. 5:9). The man is being presented as representative of all converts.

Yes, the faith which is through him, has given him this perfect soundness- The man appears to have been given ideal health throughout his body. Otherwise, he would have been unable to leap, after being forty years in that condition (4:22). Again, the man is set up as symbolic of the total change possible in the believer.

In the presence of you all- Just as Peter and John testified because they were witnesses of the Lord's resurrection, so the audience had also seen a 'standing upright' of a man well known to them; and they also ought to believe and testify. Peter is seeking to share his experience with his audience, building a bridge between him and them, inviting them to share his path- rather than baldly presenting theological truths to them and leaving them to respond as they wished.

3:17 *And now-* These are not just redundant words. The sense may be that although they crucified the Lord knowing full well what they were doing, *now*, by God's grace, that could be counted as having been done in relative ignorance. This is the amazing extent of imputed righteousness.

Brothers- Peter again is bridge building, having made the point that they had denied their Messiah just at the same time and place as he had done (see on Acts 3:14).

I know that in ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers-

There are various interpretations of this "ignorance". We note that Peter appeals for repentance on the basis of this sin of ignorance. A sin of ignorance was still a sin and required atonement, as Leviticus makes clear. Perhaps Peter is saying that despite part of their sin being consciously committed, they had failed to appreciate the enormity of what they had done in slaying their King, God's own Son. And it was this element of 'sin of ignorance' which he appeals for them to put right by repentance. No sacrifice was possible- but they were to identify themselves with the Lord's sacrifice for all kinds of sin, through baptism, sharing His Spirit, and living in Him.

It had been generous spirited of the Lord to pray on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". He may have meant they were relatively ignorant, or it may be that He felt they were so blinded now that the recognition of Him they once had had was now not operating. And Peter, who probably heard with amazement those words from the cross as he beheld the Lord's sufferings, found the same generous spirit to men whom naturally he would have despised: "In ignorance you did it" (Acts 3:17 cp. Lk. 23:34).

The generosity of the Father and Son to humanity is awesome- so eager are they for our repentance. God so pleads for Israel to return to Him in Hosea and Isaiah that He almost takes the blame onto Himself, cooing over His people as having been tossed and afflicted- when it was His own judgment of them that caused it. And I think this explains the difficulty of Acts 3:17-19, where Peter appeals to the Jews to repent, because they had murdered the Lord Jesus "in ignorance". The Lord's own parables explained that they did what they did with open eyes- "this is the heir, come let us kill him!". Yet in God's passionate desire for their repentance, He appears to view their awful sin in the most gracious possible light.

Paul uses the same word to reason that the Gentiles too had sinned in ignorance, but now must repent because of the Lord's resurrection (Acts 17:30). This is another example of Paul consciously modelling himself and his preaching on Peter. Considering that Peter was an illiterate fisherman, mocked by the Jerusalem intelligentsia as speaking without grammar... and Paul was the intellectual Jewish rabbi trained in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel... this indicates so much humility in Paul. Although I will later develop the possibility that Paul actually pretended to Peter to such an unhealthy extent that he failed to focus as he might on his ministry to the Gentiles, and sought rather to emulate Peter's to the Jews.

3:18 *But the things which God foretold*- It's as if Peter is trying to encourage them not to see their sin as too great to allow them to now come to the Lord Jesus. This is one reason why he appears to overstate their relative "ignorance" in :17. And here too, he seems to be presenting them with another window on their sin- that it was foretold by the prophets and had been necessary in God's plan of salvation, just as in the case of the sin of Joseph's brothers. We too encounter folks who truly feel that their sin presents too big a barrier between God and themselves. It's a fine balance, between preaching to convict people of sin [rather than socializing them into a social club], and on the other hand, encouraging them that that sin is not an insurmountable barrier.

By the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled- It was their spoken words which were inspired; but there is no specific guarantee that the written form and transmission of them was likewise inspired. Their mouths, and not the pens of every scribe who wrote the words, were inspired by God- even though it would be fair to say that the preservation and transmission of their written words was the work of 'providence', and the Spirit of God in some way also at work. Because the Bible is the only Divinely inspired book there is, this can lead us to seeing the book as some kind of icon; it is the only 'thing' we have in our experience which is directly from God. Realizing, however, that the original autographs alone were inspired can help us see the Bible we read for what it is- the living, albeit translated and passed down, word of God Himself.

3:19 *Therefore repent and be converted*- Not 'repent and convert'. The conversion, grammatically, is performed by another party. The repentance is what enables the process of conversion to be performed upon the repentant person who now wishes to change. Repentance is therefore a mental re-thinking, not a

rearrangement of human life to be without sin and failure. The parallel is with Peter's earlier preaching in Acts 2:38: "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to the remission of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". "Be converted" implies an action upon the heart of the repentant hearer of the Gospel; the parallel in 2:38 is to receive the gift of the Spirit, a holy spirit or mind being developed in the believer. I gave reasons on 2:38 to understand this gift to essentially refer to the internal work of the Lord on repentant hearts- or as Peter here puts it, being converted. The same word translated "converted" is found in the description of John the Baptist's work in Lk. 1:17 as being to turn or convert the hearts of people. This same work is now being done by the risen Lord, through His Spirit. Acts 11:21 speaks of this work of conversion as being done by the Lord's hand, and the Old Testament parallels God's hand with His Spirit; it is His instrumentality, and not man's: "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and were turned [s.w. 'converted'] to the Lord". Likewise Acts 28:27 parallels conversion with the act of the Lord healing hearts: "Be converted, and I should heal them". Conversion is the healing action of the Lord on human hearts who are open to it, rather than a steel-willed cracking of expository and theological riddles in the Bible text and vainly attempting to brutally conform one's own life to that text. Conversion is also a matter of the heart in 2 Cor. 3:16, parallel with the Lord removing a veil which He has placed over the Jewish mind.

And again, it was Peter, the preacher himself, who had sinned against his Lord and had been "converted" on his repentance, with the result that he was not strengthening the Lord's sheep (Lk. 22:32 "When you are converted...", s.w.). Truly, Peter's address is shot through with reference to his own failure, repentance and restoration by grace. He reminds his sheep of how they are now "returned" (s.w. 'converted') to the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 2:25), just as he had been. My point is that the 'conversion' was by another hand than his own steel will.

In the context of Israel's latter day repentance, we read some admittedly strange words: "(The Jews) have... not believed, that through your (Gentile believers) mercy, they also may obtain mercy" (Rom. 11:31). Could this not mean that Israel's reconciliation to God is partly dependent on our "mercy" in preaching the Gospel to them? And now consider Peter's words to Israel: "Repent... and be converted, that (firstly) your sins may be blotted out... and (secondly) he shall send Jesus Christ" at the second coming (Acts 3:19,20). Does this not suggest that Christ's eager desire for the second coming is limited by our preaching to Israel?

So that your sins may be blotted out- Applying the language of David's forgiveness for the murder of Uriah to all Israel (Ps. 51:1). David's forgiveness by grace is often set up as programmatic for the way all believers, and all Israel, can be treated (see Rom. 4:1-4).

So that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord- The second coming is clearly dependent upon Israel's repentance for crucifying the Lord. The seasons / times refer to those of Acts 1:7, the second coming. This is why the Lord said that there was no such defined 'time' for it, but rather they were to get on with converting Israel. There are preconditions, involving Israel's repentance in response to our preaching to them; but not a calendar date. "Times of refreshing" is the age of the Messianic Kingdom on earth, probably alluding to Is. 28:12: "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing...".

"From the presence of the Lord" is literally from His face. Luke is connecting with

what he recorded in Lk. 1:76; John the Baptist's ministry was to herald the presence / face of the Lord being revealed. But his ministry failed on a national level; the essence of John's appeal is however to be continued by Christian witness to the Jews in all ages, and when it finally succeeds, the Kingdom age shall come from the presence of the Lord. See on 3:21 *The time of the restoration*.

3:20 *And that He may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you, Jesus-* "That He may" shows that there is no calendar date set for the Lord's return; rather is the most significant condition for it that Israel repent. And this ought to be the focus of much of our ministry.

3:21 *Whom the heaven must receive until the time of the restoration of all things-* The reference is again to John the Baptist's ministry, which was intended to restore all things (Mt. 17:11 s.w.). By witnessing to Israel to repent we are continuing the essence of John's ministry and when complete, the restored Kingdom of God shall come on earth. See on 3:19 *From the presence of the Lord*. The Bible often alludes to popular literature and understandings of the time, in order to deconstruct it. Plato was popular in the first century, and his writings spoke of a final "time of the restoration"; it's as if this social dream was being alluded to, and reinterpreted as being the Kingdom of God on earth. The following reference to how the prophets have been since the beginning of the age may well be a deconstruction of the then fashionable way of quoting the ancient Plato as wisdom, as if he were effectively a prophet. For the Christian, it was the writings of the prophets and not Plato which were to be authoritative; and rather than Plato's 'restoration of all things', there was the hope of God's eternal Kingdom on earth.

It was quite possible that the full Messianic Kingdom could have been established in the first century, depending upon how the Jews responded to Christ's Gospel. All things were ready for the feast, representing the Kingdom, and the Jewish guests invited- but their rejection of the offer resulted in a 2,000 year delay while the invitations were pressed home on equally laid back Gentiles (Mt. 22:4). Similarly, Peter understood that the Lord must remain in Heaven "until the times of restitution of all things (cp. Mt. 22:4), which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began"; but he felt, under inspiration, that "all the prophets... as many as have spoken (note the emphasis; cp. "all His holy prophets"), have likewise foretold of these days" (Acts 3:21,24), i.e. the days of the first century.

Of which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, that have been since the world began- Luke uses the same sentence in Lk. 1:70. We have here an example of the language of pre-existence- and yet the prophets did not literally exist at the world's beginning. And neither did the Lord Jesus.

3:22 *Moses indeed said: A prophet like me shall the Lord God-* Peter had been reminded of the prophecy of Dt. 18:15 when he was told to "hear Him" at the transfiguration. But Peter had there fallen down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet here in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

Raise up for you- This 'raising up' is understood by Peter as referring to the Lord's resurrection (:26 "God, having raised up His servant..."). That hardly seems to be the context of the original Old Testament quotation. But the New Testament often quotes the Old without attention to context; just as Jewish midrash [interpretation] quotes Bible verses out of their context in order to explain other verses. Context is not always the key to Biblical interpretation; the Spirit which inspired the OT also inspired the NT, and therefore OT words and phrases are at times taken hold of in the NT and

given a new meaning which is not at all in harmony with the context surrounding the original OT text. However, whether *we* are justified in doing this is doubtful- for one could then make any text mean whatever we wish by taking it out of context. We are the readers and interpreters of the text and not the inspired authors. This is not to say that sometimes, indeed often, the surrounding context of the original text is irrelevant. Harry Whittaker excelled at demonstrating how a verse from a Psalm was applied to the Lord Jesus in the NT, and then returning to the original Psalm and showing how so much else there was also relevant to the Lord's experiences. But I'm saying that this is not always how the Spirit interprets the OT.

From among your brothers [like unto me]- A clear statement of the Lord's utter humanity, perhaps alluding to how the sacrificial Paschal lamb was to be taken out "from among" the flock.

You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you- An example of where prophecy is not merely prediction, but also a command. Insofar as obedience is a function of human freewill, prophecies like this are therefore open to some element of failure or having their fulfilment reframed by the extent of human obedience. Ezekiel's prophecies of a glorious temple to be built by the returning exiles would be a classic example. The words of the great commission allude to this well-known Messianic prophecy- the preachers were to go "teaching them to observe all things whatever I commanded you" (Mt. 28:20). The Lord thereby invited Israel to see Him as the prophet like unto Moses who was to be obeyed.

3:23 *And it shall be, that every soul that shall not listen to that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people-* Those who would not accept Jesus as Messiah were to be "destroyed from among the people", using a very similar phrase to the LXX of Gen. 17:14, where the uncircumcised man was to be "cut off from his people". Col. 2:11 speaks of circumcision as another type of baptism, in that only the circumcised were in covenant with God: "The uncircumcised... that soul shall be cut off from his people" (Gen. 17:14). We either "cut off" the flesh, or God will cut us off. The circumcision / baptism allusion was really saying 'Accept Christ or perish'. The language of destruction "from among the people" connects with how the Lord Jesus was also "from among the people" (:22). Exactly because of His humanity, He is our appropriate judge; or as John records it, He has authority to execute judgment exactly because He is the Son of Man (Jn. 5:27).

3:24 *Yes, and all the prophets-* According to Acts 3:21,24, *all* the prophets speak of Israel's latter day repentance and the subsequent return of Messiah.

From Samuel- Samuel was not the first person to act as a prophet, a forth-teller of God's word. Why single him out as the starting point for the ministry of the prophets? Perhaps in reflection of the Jewish saying that Samuel was chief of the prophets. The connection with Moses (:22) may intend us to understand 'The law and the prophets'. Or perhaps because his mother was the first to specifically predict the Messiah in so many words (1 Sam. 2:10,35). But see on 3:25 *You are the sons of the prophets*.

And those that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days- The reference could be to the "times of the restoration" of :21, which Peter believed to be breaking in upon them with the conversion of some Jews. He was disappointed in his expectation; for the conversions didn't continue, and many of the Jewish Christians fell away. And so the preconditions required for the full restitution of all things weren't met, and it was delayed until our days.

3:25 *You are the sons of the prophets-* This phrase refers to the schools of the prophets (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3; 4:1; 5:22; 6:1; Is. 8:18). Samuel was seen in Judaism as the *rabban* or founder of the schools of the prophets. This would explain

the choice of Samuel as the 'first' of the prophets in the preceding verse. The schools of the prophets were seen as for the elite within Judaism. But Peter is saying that now all who believe the prophetic words about Jesus as Lord and Messiah are no less the schools of the prophets; this was what the fledgling churches were to be likened to. Isaiah had spoken of his school of the prophets as he and his sons (Is. 8:18), but this is quoted in Heb. 2:13 about all in Christ.

And of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham: And in your descendant shall all the families of the earth be blessed- 'Sons of the covenant', *b'nai b'rith*, was and still is a reference to the elite within Israel, just like "sons of the prophets" referring to the schools of the prophets. So again, the distinction is being collapsed between the masses and the religious specialists. All believers are spoken of later in the New Testament as priests, even the High Priest, and now as the very elite of the prophets and "sons of the covenant". No longer could believers consider themselves one in a mass of attendees, one in an audience; but instead, each of us is of intense significance in God's prophetic program. But according to Gal. 3:27-29, even a Jew could only become a son of the covenant by baptism into Christ. But Peter speaks as if his audience were just this. He is assuming they will agree to believe and be baptized into Christ.

3:26 *To you first-* Along with the reference to all tribes / families of the earth being blessed as Abraham's seed (:25), the idea is clearly that Gentiles too can participate in this great Jewish salvation which is in the Jewish Messiah. But as is made clear in the Cornelius incident in Acts 10, Peter was far from understanding this at the time. The fact he made this hint here about Gentile salvation, if not a clear statement about it, is proof that he was speaking a Divinely inspired message and not just his own personal understanding. Perhaps this is why it is Peter who later makes the point that the inspired prophets spoke things which they did not themselves fully understand (1 Pet. 1:12); he had himself experienced such a thing with regard to the Gentiles.

God, having raised up His servant, sent him- Peter taught that "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him" to preach to the Jews (Acts 3:26). Yet the Lord Jesus personally resurrected and ascended to Heaven, having 'sent' His followers into the world. Yet because all in Him are so fully His personal witnesses, representative of Him as He is representative of them, in this way it's true to say that the Lord Jesus personally was "sent" into the world with the Gospel message after His resurrection. And by all means connect this with Peter's difficult words in 1 Pet. 3:19- that by the spirit of Christ, Christ 'went' after His resurrection to preach to those imprisoned. By our sharing His Spirit, we are Him 'going' and preaching. In this sense the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10). And because Peter was alluding to the 'sending' of the great commission, he goes on to say that the spiritually imprisoned to whom we preach are saved by the baptism we minister in fulfilment of the great commission, in the same way as the ark saved people in Noah's day.

After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus was *sent* to preach blessing and forgiveness to Israel. But after His resurrection, He sent His men to preach this message. His witness became expressed through, and therefore limited by, His preachers. When they wilfully misunderstood His commission as meaning preaching to Jews from all nations, rather than taking the message to the whole planet literally, His work was in that sense hindered and His intention delayed. Remember that the Rabbis taught that salvation was impossible for Gentiles: "For the heathen nations there will be no redemption", so reads the Targum on Ex. 21:30. Like us, the early Jewish converts were influenced by their backgrounds and their limited world views. Until the Lord

brought experiences to bear which, when responded to, taught them what is now the obvious meaning of His words- that we each have a duty to take the good news of Him to the whole planet.

To bless you- There is strong connection between forgiveness and blessing. Peter was speaking to the unspoken fears of his guilty audience. Forgiveness was possible in Christ.

In turning every one of you away from your sins- The promised blessing was not simply of forgiveness. It was of 'turning away' from sin. This is the equivalent of what Peter preached in Acts 2; he appealed for repentance and baptism, so that the gift of the Holy Spirit [or mind] could be experienced. Here, he appeals for repentance and belief [implying baptism], so that they would know the blessing of being turned away from sin. For what we really need is not simply forgiveness, but the power not to repeat the sin; a new psychology, a new mind, a force higher than ourselves to turn us away from sin. And this is exactly what is promised here. Rom. 11:26 likewise speaks of how the Lord Jesus would "turn away [s.w.] ungodliness from Jacob" when Israel enter the new covenant; but that new covenant is now made with all who are baptized into Jesus. Rom. 11:26 is quoting from Is. 59:20, but the next verse goes on to say that this shall be effected by Yahweh giving the covenant promise of His Spirit upon His people and their children (Is. 59:21). The gift of the Spirit is therefore a turning of us away from sin. I noted under 2:39 that the promise of the Spirit "to you and your children" is also alluding to this same passage. Israel in their hearts turned back to Egypt (Acts 7:26 s.w.); the arena of this 'turning' is within the human mind. And it is exactly there where we need the Lord's operation; and it is this which is included in the gift of the holy spirit or mind which is enabled by commitment to Christ.

When Peter speaks of how the Lord Jesus will 'turn away' sinners from their sins, he is using the very word of how the Lord Jesus told him to "put up again" his sword (Mt. 26:52), thereby turning Peter away from his sin. Peter's appeal for repentance and conversion was evidently allusive to his own experience of conversion (Lk. 22:32 cp. Acts 3:19; 9:35). In this he was following the pattern of David, who sung his 'Maschil' (teaching) psalms after his forgiveness in order to convert sinners unto Yahweh (Ps. 51:13). Like Peter, David did so with his sin ever before him, with a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:3,17). He invited them to seek forgiveness for their denial of their Lord, just as he had done. He dearly wished them to follow his pattern, and know the grace he now did. See on Acts 2:39.

We must remember that baptism means that we are *now* the seed of Abraham, and the blessings of forgiveness, of all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and God's turning us away from our sins are right now being fulfilled in us (Acts 3:27-29). Israel were multiplied as the sand on the sea shore (2 Sam. 17:11; 1 Kings 4:20), they possessed the gates of their enemies (Dt. 17:2; 18:6)- all in antitype of how Abraham's future seed would also receive the promised blessings in their mortal experience, as well as in the eternal blessedness of the future Kingdom.

ACTS CHAPTER 4

4:1 And as they spoke to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees- The basis of their work was that they were the equivalent of the Levites who kept guard at the gates of the temple, in order to prevent the unclean from entering. They were defining the Jewish Christians and their message of healing as that which was unclean.

Came upon them- This is a common word in Luke-Acts. The Jews had likewise 'come upon' the Lord also in the same temple (Lk. 20:1). Luke is developing his point that the Lord's experiences and sufferings are repeated in those of believers in Him, especially in their work of representing Him in their witness. That principle applies to this day, and is a bridge between Him there so many centuries ago, and us here today.

4:2 Being greatly annoyed because they taught the people- See on 5:21 *Taught*. Not only are there links between Acts and Luke, as if the preaching of the apostles continues the personal work of the Lord in whom they lived and moved, but often Acts records the preaching work in language lifted from the other Gospel records too (e.g. Acts 4:2; 5:12-16 = Mt. 4:23).

And proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead- By being "in Jesus", by baptism into Him, His resurrection becomes ours. And this was their message. The Sadducees who made the arrest denied resurrection, and it was endlessly irritating for them to see the growth of the Christian movement centred around faith in the resurrection both of Christ and ultimately of all believers in Him. The Gospels present the Pharisees as the great opponents of the Lord's work, but some of them converted to His cause. His criticism of them had related to matters of personal conduct, and some clearly accepted this and repented. But the Sadducees were under direct attack regarding a doctrinal matter, and it seems harder to repent of a theological wrong turning than of personal behaviour issues.

4:3 And they arrested them- Literally, 'they laid hands on them', as in 5:18. Exactly the same phrase is used about the arrest of the Lord (Mt. 26:50). Again, the experiences of the Lord's preachers are framed in terms of His experiences, especially at the time of His death. His cross therefore ceases to be something to be gazed at from a distance, but rather is the fullest and most complete reflection of our experiences; in that light, we can begin to attach meaning to event, which is the existential struggle of every human soul. Man's search for meaning comes to no higher moment than in seeing in our experiences those of God's beloved Son.

And jailed them until the next day; for it was now evening- 'Arrested them and jailed them' is repeated in Acts 5:18. Clearly their experiences now were intended to be learnt from and were consciously repeated again, just as a good teacher repeats lessons for students. This is why there is a sense of *deja vu* in our lives; it is the same Lord active in teaching us.

4:4- see on Acts 2:12.

But many of those that heard the word believed- Acceptable decisions to believe can therefore be made having only heard the word preached orally. The very same Greek sentence is to be found in Jn. 5:24: "He that hears My word and believes... has everlasting life". Yet again, the preachers of the Lord Jesus are presented as Jesus personally, preaching as He preached and thus continuing His witness in the world.

And the number of the men came to be about five thousand- In addition to the 3000 earlier baptized at Pentecost.

4:5 And it came to pass that the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem- This is how the Sanhedrin were referred to; they are specifically called the Sanhedrin in :15. Again we see the experience of the apostles being portrayed in terms of that of the Lord Jesus in His final sufferings. Such gatherings together to consider miracle workers were occasionally held, in the spirit of Dt. 13:1-5. The doctrine of the miracle worker was considered. Luke records three other times when the Sanhedrin met to consider the Christian preachers: Peter and the apostles (Acts 5:27), Stephen (Acts 6:12), and Paul (Acts 22:30). Each time they are presented as re-living what they did to the Lord Jesus. God was really knocking on the

door of their conscience. This was presumably their first Sanhedrin gathering after the condemnation of the Lord; the places of Joseph and Nicodemus would have been conspicuously empty, and perhaps others too.

There is evidence that after around AD30, the Sanhedrin stopped meeting in the temple and met in the city of Jerusalem. We note the accuracy of the record. Any uninspired writer would have either omitted such detail, or made some historical or locational blunders. But there are none in Acts and the critics only reveal their intellectual desperation in the false claims they make to the contrary. The gathering together of these people in Jerusalem sounds as if the Psalm 2 prophecy of the Lord's enemies being gathered together against Him was now again coming true- for His preachers were Him.

4:6 And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas- Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas. Caiaphas was the high priest, but Annas had been the high priest ten years beforehand and was the power behind Caiaphas. The inspired record recognizes that by calling him the high priest. Another alternative is that the Jews at the time considered that anyone who had been the high priest would always be called "high priest" as a title.

And John- Perhaps Johanan ben Zaccai; or the 'Jonathan' son of Annas who was briefly High Priest AD36/37. This latter would strengthen the impression given that this was a group of family friends and buddies.

And Alexander- Alexander Lysimachus, who according to Josephus "was one of the richest Jews of his time, who made great presents to the temple, and was highly esteemed by King Agrippa... He was brother to the famous Philo Judaeus, and father of Alexander Tiberius, who married Bernice, the daughter of Agrippa the elder, and was governor of Judea after Cuspius Fadus".

And as many as were of the family of the high priest- Note the lack of mention of Gamaliel by name. Luke is seeking to present the decision makers as a group of family and friends, "as many as were of the family of the high priest".

4:7 And when they had set them in their midst, they enquired- The apostles surely recalled watching how the Jews had placed a sinful woman in their midst, and then she had been vindicated by the Lord's judgment and wisdom (Jn. 8:3,9 s.w.).

By what power, or in what name, have you done this?- It was inconceivable for them, as it is for many legalistic religious thinkers today, to think that individuals could have an experience with the Lord and on their own initiative serve Him, empowered by Him in their ministry. The religious types expect any religious work to be done in the name or authority of some organization.

4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: You rulers of the people and elders- The mention of the Holy Spirit is surely to demonstrate how exactly were the Lord's words being fulfilled: "But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and in their synagogues they will scourge you. Yes and before governors and kings you shall be brought for my sake, for a testimony to them, and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not be anxious how or what you shall speak, for it shall be given to you at that time what to speak. For it is not you that speaks, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you" (Mt. 10:17-20).

4:9 If we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed- See on 4:5 *Their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together.* The same word for "good deed" is only in 1 Tim. 6:2; all believers are benefitted by the good deed done for us in Christ. Our good deeds are a response to the ultimate good done to us.

4:10- see on Acts 10:35,36.

Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel- This could mean far more than 'be informed'. It could be an appeal for the Sanhedrin to 'know' Christ. The ambition in preaching shown here is inspirational. Peter's hope was that the Sanhedrin who had recently condemned the Lord to death, and indeed all Israel, would know Christ. We see the same spirit in the Lord's desire to make a witness to the priests (Mt. 8:4); and in Paul's attempt at his similar judgment to persuade Agrippa to become a Christian (Acts 26:28). Indeed, this may be one of several examples of where Paul was inspired by Peter to the extent that he even consciously pretended to him, and this even went too far, in that he neglected his own ministry to the Gentiles in order to emulate Peter's to the Jews. Peter took seriously his previously stated belief that when Israel accepted Jesus as Christ, He would return, the Kingdom times of refreshing would come with the sending of the Lord Jesus. And so he realistically dreamt of converting all Israel. We could all do with this spirit of ambition in witness, rather than lamely informing people of our positions, certain nobody will be interested.

That in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, in him does this man stand here before you healed- He stood before them as if in the witness box.

4:11 *He is the stone that was rejected by you the builders-* Gk. 'set at nought'. The same word used by Luke of how the Lord was 'set at nought' by Herod (Lk. 23:11). But Peter says that the Jewish leaders had done this, just as He says that it was their hands, and not so much those of the Roman soldiers, who crucified the Lord. Repeatedly, the Lord's death was blamed on the Jews. Our arrangement of things is counted as having done it.

Which has become the cornerstone- There could be no evidence of this apart from if a temple was now standing upon that stone. And there was such a temple- comprised of a few thousand believers. The existence of the church, the body of Christ, was the witness to Christ which was before the eyes of the Jews in the first century. We, as the body of Christ, likewise are witnesses to the resurrected body of Christ.

4:12- see on Acts 2:36.

And in no other is there salvation; for- Gk. *the* salvation, the Messianic salvation and Kingdom of the Old Testament. This is another form of the word translated "made whole" in :9. His 'salvation' was representative of the salvation of all men.

Neither is there any other name- According to Acts 4:12, there is no salvation "in any other name"; this is the name "wherein we must be saved" (RV). And the early chapters of Acts stress this theme of being "*in Christ*" (Acts 4:2,7,9,10,12 RV); yet all these things that are possible for those "*in Him*" require us to be baptized *into Him*. See on 2 Cor. 5:20.

The message they preached had an exclusive nature to it- it was radical preaching: 'this is the truth, and nothing, nothing else on this earth'. Throughout the Roman empire, there was the concept of *religio*- the gods were thought to bless the empire if the empire worshipped them, and therefore everyone was expected to participate in the state religion. However, in addition, they were quite free to practice their own religions *as well*. But here, Christianity was intolerant. They preached that there was *no other name* apart from Jesus through which we might be saved- a direct and conscious attack upon the 'religio' concept. Christ had to be accepted as Lord in baptism, in contradistinction to 'Caesar is Lord'. A Christian could only serve one of two possible masters. He had to love one and hate the other. The whole idea of "the Kingdom of God" was revolutionary- there was to be no other Kingdom spoken of apart from Caesar's. But our brethren preached the Gospel of the Kingdom *of God*.

And those who openly accepted these principles were inevitably persecuted- expelled from the trade guilds, not worked with, socially shunned, their children discriminated against.

That is given among men under heaven- This is a persistent but unfortunate translation across many English versions. *En anthropos* is the same phrase in Lk. 12:8: "Everyone who shall confess me *before men*". The giving of the Name among or before men was in the form of the confession or witness made by the preachers who preached in His Name. Luke has earlier used the term about how the Gospel speaks of God's good will "before men" (Lk. 2:14); but that good news must be placed "before men" by the preachers in order for it to be realized in practice.

Wherein we must be saved- An appeal for baptism "into" Christ for salvation. 'Our' salvation was therefore prefigured in the making whole or saving [s.w.] of the crippled man (:9 s.w.).

4:13 *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they realised that they had been with Jesus-* The Jews looked at Peter and John "and they took knowledge of them [i.e. recognized them, as the girl had recognized Peter], that they [both!] had been with Jesus". This is the very language of those who accused Peter of having 'been with Jesus'. John learnt his lesson, and came out more publicly, at Peter's side, inspired by his equally repentant friend. It's an altogether lovely picture, of two men who both failed, one publicly and the other privately, together side by side in their witness, coming out for the Lord. They saw their "boldness", and realised they had been with Jesus; for the very same Greek word is used in description of the Lord's "boldness" in witness (Mk. 8:32; Jn. 7:26; 11:14; 16:25,29; 18:20), and on the cross (Col. 2:15). Peter was an uneducated fisherman. Who was he to appeal to Jerusalem's intelligentsia? He was mocked as speaking *a-grammatos*, without correct grammar and basic education even in his own language (Acts 4:13; AV "unlearned"). The way his two letters are so different in written style can only be because he wrote through a scribe (2 Peter is actually in quite sophisticated Greek). So most likely he couldn't write and could hardly read. So humanly speaking, he was hardly the man for the job of being the front man for the preaching of the new ecclesia. But not only did his Lord think differently, but his own depth of experience of God's grace and appreciation of the height of the Lord's exaltation became a motivating power to witness which could not be held in. We all know that the way God prefers to work in the conversion of men is through the personal witness of other believers. We may use adverts, leaflets, lectures etc. in areas where the Gospel has not yet taken root, with quite some success. But once a community of believers has been established, the Lord seems to stop working through these means and witness instead through the personal testimony of His people. We all know this, and yet for the most part would rather distribute 10,000 tracts than swing one conversation around to the Truth, or deliberately raise issues of the Gospel with an unbelieving family member. If we recognize this almost natural reticence which most of us have, it becomes imperative to find what will motivate us to witness as we ought, *a-grammatos* or not. The fact they spoke *a-grammatos* (Gk.), without proper grammar, the fact they weren't humanly speaking the right men for the job... all this meant nothing to them. The height of the Lord's exaltation and the salvation this enabled just had to be shared with others.

Peter's confidence in preaching to the wise of this world in his *a-grammatos* way is continued in the way his letters stress that the only true knowledge is that of Christ (2 Pet. 1:5,6; 3:18). He was writing in response to the Gnostic heresy that *gnosis*, knowledge, enlivens the eternal spark within man until a man's knowledge becomes

his 'immortal soul'. Peter didn't leave this for the more erudite to combat. Like an illiterate peasant farmer unashamedly challenging atheistic evolution, Peter powerfully made his point.

The credibility of a person depended not so much on them but upon their status and place in society- thus the witness of women, slaves, children and poor people was discounted. We see it happening in the way that the preaching of Peter and John was dismissed by the elders because they were of low social status (Acts 4:13). And yet these were the *very* types of people which the Lord Jesus used as His star and key witnesses in the very beginnings of Christianity!

There was something about Peter and his fellow fishermen which made even the most unsympathetic make a mental note ("took knowledge" AV) that they had been with Jesus of Nazareth. This was the fulfilment of Jn. 13:35, which using the same root word, teaches that the (Jewish) world would "know" the twelve as the Lord's men *if they reflected His love*. So there must have been something in the love that somehow shone between those men as they stood there before that court, which in a manner impossible to describe, revealed them as Christ's. This same, difficult-to-describe sense will exude from every one who is the Lord's, in whatever context we are in.

"Been with Jesus" recalls "You also shall bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning" (Jn. 15:27). It was exemplified in Acts 4:13, where it was apparent from the nature of the disciples' preaching that they "had been with Jesus". To be with the Lord, to have experience of Him, meant that one would witness to Him; such is the true experience of Him that it is axiomatic that it issues in witness. All who have truly known the Lord will witness to Him. And if we don't... do we know Him, have we "been with" Him...?

4:14 *And seeing the man that was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it-* The word is only elsewhere used, again by Luke, when recording the Lord's Olivet prophecy about the last days: "I will give you the words and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to *contradict*" (Lk. 21:15). The second coming could have been in the first century; but the various preconditions weren't met, and so it was delayed until our last days. But the record here is framed to indicate that in the arraignment of the apostles before the Jews, there was a fulfilment of the Olivet prophecy.

4:15 *But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they took advice with one another, saying-* How did Luke know the contents of this secret conversation? It could have been by a flash of direct Divine inspiration; and yet God always seems to prefer to work through some human mechanism. Perhaps some members of the Sanhedrin did indeed convert to Christ as Peter had hoped; and shared the account of what had happened with Luke who included it in his record, albeit under inspiration.

4:16 *What shall we do to these men?-* It is Luke (and not the other evangelists) who earlier records how the Jewish leadership held such councils and said the same words about the Lord Jesus (Lk. 6:11; 19:48). Again and again, he is making the point- that in our preaching of the Gospel, we find the situations and experiences of our Lord repeating in our lives. We are thereby in Him, and He in and with us.

For indeed a notable miracle has been done through them- True, legitimate Holy Spirit miracles cannot be denied even by the cynical critics of Christianity. The claims to perform them today sadly and pathetically fail this test; for the claimed miracles can easily be denied and are not admitted as "notable" even by those looking at them

with open minds. But this legitimate miracle could not be denied even by the critics, and they even admitted so themselves.

It is obvious to all- The Greek *phaneroo* is usually used in the sense of 'manifestation'. Paul uses the same words in saying that through his witness in prison, the Gospel had been made manifest to all (Phil. 1:13). This is one of many examples of where rabbi Paul saw himself as following the steps and leading of illiterate fisherman Peter.

All that dwell in Jerusalem- A specific reference to how 3000 of the 'dwellers in Jerusalem' had been baptized by Peter on Pentecost.

And we cannot deny it- See on *A notable miracle*. Miracles of themselves can be seen and recognized but will not inevitably persuade people to believe.

4:17 *But that it spread no further among the people, let us warn them, that from this time forward-* The Greek means to threaten. It's the same word used of how Saul / Paul threatened the Christians (Acts 9:1); seeing he was in Jerusalem at the time, it would seem likely that he played a part in these threats. Presumably the threats were quite scary. The disciples asked the Lord Jesus to "behold" those threats and to give them boldness to not be swayed by them (Acts 4:29).

They are not to speak to anyone in this name- The Jews later forbade Paul to speak to the Gentiles (1 Thess. 2:16). Yet it was Paul, it seems, who had been involved in forbidding these early disciples from speaking the Gospel. What he had done was done to him; not as punishment, but in order to help him grow spiritually himself, and also in relationship with his brethren. Those he had persecuted, and their families, would also notice that he had in fact suffered so much of what he had done to them, and this would in turn have eased their relationship with Paul and acceptance of him as a brother.

4:18 *And they called them, and ordered them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus-* This was only really of power and relevance if in fact Peter and John were still considered to be synagogue members. Likewise with Paul's beating with rods, which was a synagogue punishment (2 Cor. 11:25). Clearly the early believers remained within the apostate system of Judaism until they were thrown out of it; they were not required by the Lord to stop attendance in an apostate system as a condition of fellowship with Him. Forbidding them to teach sounds very much like forbidding them to stand up in the synagogue and give their opinion on Scripture- a right which was open to all synagogue members, and one which Paul so often used in order to introduce the Gospel to the Jews.

4:19 *But Peter and John answered and said to them: Whether it is right in the sight of God-* Luke has used this phrase earlier when saying that Zacharias and Elisabeth were 'right before God'. We too can focus upon Biblical characters and make them programmatic for our life decisions, wishing to emulate them in the decisions we face. The seven previous New Testament references to the presence / sight of God are all in Luke.

To listen to you rather than to God, you must judge- This is quite rightly the flagship proof text for the Christian refusal to obey Governments in ways which break God's commandments. "To listen" suggests that Peter saw God's word as living and speaking to him in an ongoing sense, just as much as those Jewish leaders were speaking to him. He had made the judgment to listen to God and not men, and he invites them to make a similar judgment.

In saying this, Peter is showing that he had learnt the lesson of the transfiguration, "hear Him". So he told the Jewish authorities that he had to hear God's word rather than theirs.

4:20 *For we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard*- The basis of the Lord's exaltation was the resurrection. When asked why he preached when it was forbidden, Peter didn't shrug and say 'Well Jesus told me too so I have to'. His response was: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard". It would have been like saying that, say, sneezing or blinking was a sin. These things are involuntary reactions; and likewise, preaching is the involuntary reaction to a real belief in the Lord's death and resurrection. His preaching was a 'hearkening unto God', not so much to the specific commission to preach but rather to the imperative to witness which the Father had placed in the resurrection of His Son. When arrested for preaching a second time, Peter says the same. I'd paraphrase the interview in Acts 5:29-31 like this: Q. 'Why do you keep preaching when it's forbidden?'. A. 'Jesus has been raised, and been exalted to be a Prince and Saviour, "for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins". We have to obey the wonderful imperative which God has placed in these things: to preach this wondrous message to those for whom so much has been made possible'. It's not that Peter was the most natural one to stand up and make the witness; he spoke *a-grammatos*, but it was somehow evident from his body language that he had "been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). In rebuking the false teachers, he likens himself to the dumb ass that spoke in rebuke of Balaam- i.e. he felt compelled to make the witness to God's word which he did, although naturally, without the imperatives we have discussed, he would be simply a dumb ass. He told the Sanhedrin that to make true Christians agree not to preach was simply an inappropriate suggestion, because "*we cannot but speak*" out- it was something which went part and parcel with the experience of the risen Lord Jesus. Peter was not just an illiterate fisherman; so many of his words and phrasing indicate a thorough familiarity with the Greek Old Testament. Here, he seems to have Num. 24:13 at the back of his mind; Balaam says that although Balak is forbidding him to speak, he cannot but speak what God has inspired him with, even if it is intensely unpopular with those around him. Of course, the Christian preacher is not inspired as Balaam was, but the principle is the same: it is impossible to keep quiet, because of the very nature of what we believe and who we are. John had the spirit of Peter when he wrote (in one of his many allusions to Peter's words) that what they had heard and seen, that they declared / witnessed (1 Jn. 1:1,3), as if hearing and seeing / experiencing Christ inevitably lead to witness. Peter also seems to allude to Am. 3:8: "The Lord Yahweh has spoken- who can but speak it forth?". The speaking of Yahweh was in the death and resurrection of His Son, and our hearing of these words puts us all in the same position as the Old Testament prophets. This is something which once heard simply has to be spoken forth. If we have really grasped the Gospel, there is no way we can hide it. We are immediately made a city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

"We saw and heard" is a phrase which occurs often in the Gospels. It was not simply a case of repeating words heard. Those words were backed up by experience, what they had seen and known in the Lord Jesus. He was the word of hearing made flesh, made actual and visible. So often, the content of preaching tends to be unbalanced- more on experience ['seeing'] than the word heard, or vice versa.

4:21 *And they, when they had threatened them further, let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people*- The same words used of how no cause of death was found in the Lord at His trial (Acts 13:28). Again, the experiences of the apostles, like our own, were arranged to enable them to enter into the experiences of the Lord. The phrase is only again used about how no cause of death was found in Paul (Acts 23:29). This is one of many examples of where the ministries of Peter and Paul are framed as being so similar. They were to take encouragement from each

other, thereby realizing that the same Heavenly Lord was working through both of them in their parallel ministries to Jews and Gentiles. Paul perceived this in Gal. 2:8: "For he that worked through Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, worked through me also to the Gentiles". Our lives are also structured in parallel with others, both in the Biblical record and contemporary to our times. This provides the basis for fellowship now; and also makes the Biblical record of past believers a living word to us, preparing us for eternal fellowship with them in God's Kingdom.

For all men glorified God for what was done- Luke uses this term of how the shepherds glorified God after seeing the baby Jesus (Lk. 2:20). But "saw and heard" in the previous verse :20 is also used by Luke of how the shepherds "saw and heard". Again Luke is demonstrating that the incidents of the Gospel records repeat in essence in the experiences of those who follow the Lord in later years.

4:22 *For the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing was done-* A strange way to put it, if simply referring to 'the healing'. The healing was a *semeion*, a sign, of healing. The man was representative of all Israel; hence the mention of his age. For effectively, Israel were 40 years in the wilderness, unable to enter the promised land without Joshua-Jesus. Just as the man was left lame at the entrance to the temple for the same period.

4:23 *And being let go, they came to their friends, and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them-* The ecclesia was a growing family; the apostles returned 'to their own' when they came out of court (Acts 4:23 Gk.). Each baptism was and is a birth into *our* family. Visiting brethren were *gladly* received, as one would receive a relative; it was the logical thing to seek out the believers in a town and stay with them (21:7,17; 27:3; 28:14; 3 Jn. 5).

4:24 *And they, when they heard it, lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said-* All the believers, hearing what the disciples had been told by the priests and elders, immediately each made the connection with Psalm 2, and all came out with it at once. This is an example of the spontaneous fellowship of the Spirit, based around both God's word and also common experience. Such fellowship experience is not based on documents or agreements.

O Lord, you that made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that are in them- Quoting from Ps. 146:6. The Psalm goes on to exult that "Yahweh frees the prisoners" (Ps. 146:7), which is what had just happened in that the apostles had been set free (:21 'Let... go'). Paul uses the same reference to Yahweh as creator of heaven, earth and sea and all that is in them (Acts 14:15)- another example of Peter's influence upon Paul. I have suggested elsewhere that Paul imitated Peter partly from respect, partly from perceiving that his ministry was parallel to Peter's; and partly from a desire to pretend to Peter's ministry to the Jews.

The prayer of Acts 4:24-31 speaks of the God who made heaven and earth and the sea and everything in it- a classic Jewish liturgy used in the temple prayers. The point being, such prayers didn't have to be made in the temple through the Jewish priests. Further, there is extra-Biblical evidence (from Tertullian, Origen and Cyprian) that the third, sixth and ninth hours were the times for prayer amongst the early Christians- but these were the very hours of prayer in the temple! One major obstacle for Jewish minds would have been their perception that prayer and worship were to be carried out in the Jerusalem temple. This would have been a particular barrier for the many Jews in Jerusalem who converted to Christ. Whilst initially it appears the believers did attend the temple services, it is also significant that Acts repeatedly brings out the parallels between prayers and worship performed in the *temple*, and

those performed in the ordinary homes of believers. Some passages about worship in the temple appear to be in parallel with others about such worship in homes. Luke seems to emphasize how important was the home as a place for prayer. Cornelius is presented as praying at home at the ninth hour, which was the hour of temple prayer (Acts 10:3,30). This would have been so hard to accept to the Jewish mind- that your own humble home [hence Luke stresses meetings and prayers *in homes* so much] was the house of God. It had been so drummed into the Jewish mind that the temple was "the house of prayer" (Is. 56:7; 60:7 LXX)- but now they were faced with the wonderful reality that their own home was that house of prayer. Only those brave enough to really reach out for a personal relationship with the God of Heaven would have risen up to this challenging idea. And yet the very height and thrill of the challenge inspired so many to do so.

4:25 *Who by the Holy Spirit*- A classic statement of the Divine inspiration of David's Psalms.

And by the mouth of our father David your servant, did say- Ps. 2:1,2, a prophecy about opposition to Jesus personally, is here appropriated to those who preach Him, because they are in Him.

Why did the Gentiles rage and the peoples imagine vain things?- It is a theme of the Apostolic preaching in early Acts that the Jews are paralleled with the Gentiles in their responsibility for the Lord's death. This was doubtless to counter the thought that the blame could be put upon the Romans. In order to bring about repentance and conversion, the Jews had to allow themselves to be fully convicted of their individual and national guilt. So often we as small people assume that the guilt for wrong behaviour is somehow on a group level. But we as individuals empower the group decisions, and this was never clearer than in the Lord's death. The Lord makes a similar allusion to Psalm 2 when He assures Paul that He will deliver Paul "from the people [of Israel] and the Gentiles" (Acts 26:17). This again is encouraging Paul to understand that his mission to the Gentiles was parallel to Peter's to the Jews, and the same deliverance would be given him, and Psalm 2 would be true for Paul as it had been for Peter here in Acts 4, and as it was ultimately for the Lord Himself. Yet it seems Paul didn't totally take the point, because he veered towards pretending to Peter's ministry to the Jews, rather than taking encouragement from it in his own ministry.

4:26- see on Acts 9:15.

The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ- The disciples understood this to refer to the Lord Jesus (:27) and yet they quote it about their experience before the assembled elders, who were also "gathered together" (:6, s.w.). Thus the early brethren appropriated prophecies of Jesus personally to themselves as they witnessed to Him (also in Acts 13:5,40). The same Greek words are also used in Luke and Acts about the work of Jesus and those of the apostles later; and also, the same original words are used concerning the deeds of the apostles in the ministry of Jesus, and their deeds in Acts. Thus an impression is given that the ecclesia's witness after the resurrection was and is a continuation of the witness of the 12 men who walked around Galilee with Jesus. He didn't come to start a formalised religion; as groups of believers grew, the Holy Spirit guided them to have systems of leadership and organization, but the essence is that we too are personally following the Lamb of God as He walked around Galilee, hearing His words, seeing His ways, and following afar off to Golgotha carrying His cross.

In arguing that both Jew and Gentile were gathered together against the Lord (God) and His Christ on the cross, Peter thus makes a connection between the Father and Son on the cross. Those who reproached Jesus there reproached the Father (Ps. 69:9).

The cross of Christ is the gathering point for His people (see on Jn. 12:32; 17:21). But it is also associated with the gathering together of all God's enemies (Acts 4:26). Even Herod and Pilate were made friends at that time (Luke 23:12). The cross divides men into two united camps; they are gathered together by it, either in the Lord's cause, or against Him. The crucifixion was the judgment seat for this world (Jn. 12:31). Likewise the day of judgment will be a gathering together, either against the Lord (Rev. 16:16; 19:19), unto condemnation (Jn. 15:6); or into the barn of His salvation (Mt. 13:30). And likewise, in anticipation of the judgment, the breaking of bread is a "gathering together" either to condemnation or salvation (1 Cor. 11).

4:27 For truly in this city- Mentioned because Psalm 2 suggests that the gathering together against the Lord would occur in Jerusalem.

There were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles- Herod claimed to be Jewish, so perhaps Peter sees in this the fulfilment of Jew and Gentile gathering together to destroy the Lord. We recall that Pilate was unwilling to crucify Him; but all the same, he did it, and Peter very much considers that to be Pilate's guilt. So arguing that we sinned but against our will, making excuses kilometres long, doesn't finally justify us.

And the people of Israel- Peter's appeals were for individuals to repent. But he emphasizes the collective guilt of all Israel. He was seeking to convict individuals of the serious sin of empowering a collective decision, helping them to see that a member of the crowd still shares the guilt of the collective crowd. And on this basis, individuals were indeed convicted of their sin and baptized into the One they had effectively crucified.

4:28 To do whatever Your hand and Your counsel foreordained to happen- The fact the Lord's death had been in some sense predetermined by God and was according to His will did not in any sense mitigate against personal guilt; see on :27 *The people of Israel.*

4:29 And now Lord, look upon their threats, and- They were surely inspired by the praying of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:16 using the same words. And these examples ought to specifically fire our prayer life, too. We can discern how their thinking developed; in :25 they perceived the relevance of Psalm 2 to the Lord's trials and to their own. But they then recalled the historical application of Psalm 2 to Hezekiah surrounded by the raging Assyrians within Jerusalem. Meditating upon him, they remembered his prayer- and that too became an inspiration and pattern for their prayer. This is how familiarity with the Bible text works in practice; this is what the mind of the Spirit is about.

Grant- They believed that psychological attitudes such as boldness could be given. It was and is a gift of the spirit / mind.

To your servants- They spoke of themselves as God's servants in the same breath as they speak of Jesus as being His Servant (Acts 4:29,30). They realized that all that was true of the Servant was true of them too.

To speak Your word with all boldness- This prayer for a spirit / attitude of mind, involving faith, disregard of consequences and confidence, was given- for in :31 we read that "when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered

together, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit; and they spoke the word of God with boldness". That holy spirit which was given them was surely more a spirit / attitude of mind. And such psychological strengthening of the human spirit is available and experienced today. The shaking of the place, presumably by an earthquake, was to reflect the movement or out surge of power / spirit which was going on. It was a reflection in visible terms of the internal empowering going on within their minds, in response to their sincere prayer.

4:30- see on Acts 3:7.

While You stretch out Your hand to heal- As the apostles preached (:29), in parallel the Lord would stretch out His hand in doing miracles. The miraculous gifts were to support the preaching of the word by the apostles- a specific thing at a specific time. The stretched out hand of God was a Hebraism speaking of God's covenant with men. The same phrase occurs in the LXX of Num. 14:30 and Neh. 9:15 "the land for which I stretched out My hand to establish you upon it" (see too Ps. 55:20). As the apostles presented God's outstretched hand through teaching the Gospel, so He Himself would stretch out His hand in appealing to Israel through doing miracles. Yet the majority of the 150 or so times in the LXX we read this phrase about God's hand stretched out, it is His hand stretched out to judge sin. Hence the significance of asking God to stretch out His hand *to heal*, when Israel deserved His hand stretched out yet again in judgment. The miracles were therefore to be seen as a special sign of God's grace to Israel at this time.

The stretching out of the Lord's hand to save is clearly allusive to what He had done to Peter as he sunk into the waves on Galilee that night. But now, Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others.

Peter felt that all the work he did by his own hand was effectively the Lord "stretching forth His hand to heal" (Acts 4:30). He realized that *his* hand was now the hand of Jesus, the same hand which had stretched forth [s.w. Acts 4:30] to save *him* on the lake that night. Our experience of salvation simply has to be re-enacted by us towards others. There is great emphasis in the Gospels upon the hands of Jesus- so often stretched out to heal, save and bless; the hands out of which no sheep can be taken, the hands into which all power has been given by the Father, the hands which were nailed through by men in their ignorance and rejection of God's salvation. And those hands are our hands. Think through this again- the Lord "stretched forth his hand" to save Peter (Mt. 14:31); and this is the very phrase used by Peter in Acts 4:30, speaking of how the Lord's hand is "stretched forth to heal". Peter saw himself on the lake as typical of all whom the Lord saves. Yet, it was *Peter*, not the Lord Himself, who stretched forth his hand to do the Lord's healing work on the lame man (Acts 3:7). Again, Peter is thinking back to the incident on the lake and perceiving that he is now Christ manifest as he had intended to be then. Thus it was the principle of God manifestation which inspired Peter to reach out of his comfort zone so dramatically; and properly appreciated, it can motivate us likewise.

That signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy servant Jesus- This is strictly speaking a just about legitimate translation of *pais*, but the word basically means 'a boy'. "Servant" would really be the translation of *doulos*, and this is the word used about the Lord in the 'servant' passage about Him in Phil. 2:7. The AV

is not far off with "holy child". Their image of Jesus had something in it which reflected that child-likeness about Him which still stuck in their memories. Jn. 5:19 gives a window into the Lord's self-perception here. He says that whatever He sees the Father / abba / daddy do, He does "in like manner". It is the language of a young child mimicking their father. And He speaks of Himself as an adult behaving just like this. There was a child-likeness about Him in this sense. And the disciples seem to have noticed this and perhaps reflect it in this otherwise rather strange title for the Lord.

4:31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together- Presumably by an earthquake. But they were unharmed. The same scenario is found when Paul was in trouble with the authorities in Philippi. In response to his midnight prayers, the place was shaken by an earthquake (Acts 16:26 s.w.). Paul was hereby confirmed in seeking to emulate Peter's ministry; for now something beyond his conscious imitation occurred, i.e. an earthquake after prayer, which reinforced his understanding of his ministry as being based upon Peter's. His willing taking humble Peter for his example was an essay in humility. See on 4:29 *To speak Your word with all boldness*.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit- The situation is intended to recall that in Acts 2. Here, they are gathered together in one place, presumably that same upper room. They prayed, and were filled with Holy Spirit. I suggested on 4:29 that this was more in the form of internal strengthening. But I think it was also in chapter 2, but there was visible manifestation for emphasis. In this case, the more physical manifestation of the Spirit was in the earthquake. We also observe that being filled with the Holy Spirit was an experience which had to be repeated; they had been filled with it in chapter 2, and were now filled with it again. It gave specific strength at specific times.

And they spoke the word of God with boldness- See on 4:29 *To speak Your word with all boldness*. When Paul is recorded as speaking the word with boldness (Acts 13:46) and praying that he would speak the word boldly as he ought to (Eph. 6:20), surely he was allowing himself to be inspired by Peter's example and consciously seeking to follow it. This huge respect for Peter by Paul is a powerful essay in humility. For they were from very differing social, cultural and educational backgrounds; in secular terms, Paul the Roman citizen was born far higher than Peter the Galilean fisherman.

4:32- see on Acts 2:44.

And the full number of those who believed were of one heart- Sitting there in Babylonian captivity, God offered His people a new covenant (Ez. 11:19,20,25 cp. Heb. 10:16); they could have one mind or heart between each other, and a heart of flesh. But Israel would not, and it was only accepted by those who turned to Jesus Christ in accepting the new covenant in Him. Their being of "one heart" after baptism was a direct result of their acceptance of this same new covenant which Judah had rejected. In the hearing of offer of the new covenant, we are essentially in the position of those of the captivity, hearing Ezekiel's words, and deciding whether or not to remain in cushy Babylon, or make a painful and humanly uncertain aliyah to Zion.

And soul- The phrase only occurs again in Phil. 1:27, where Paul writes that having "one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel" is an outcome of a way of life appropriate to "the gospel of Christ". Such unity, encompassing now around 5000 people, was a psychological phenomenon. It was only possible on account of joint belief in the Gospel. It is a lack of focus upon that basic Gospel and working together for it which allows all manner of issues to creep in which then cause disunity.

And not one of them said that anything of the things which he possessed was his own- As a result of this, many sold what superfluous things they had. But those who didn't, we later learn, had their possessions and lands stolen during the persecution of the Hebrew believers that soon followed (Acts 11:19 cp. Heb. 10:32-34). God took back what He had lent them, even before their death. Their realization that they owned nothing was not just a temporary height of enthusiasm; they appreciated a principle which was true before, then and now. That principle applies today just as much as it did then.

In the early church, "not one of them *said* that any of the things which he possessed was his own". I wonder- and maybe I'm clutching at straws and justifying us all- if the emphasis is upon the word "*said*". Their *attitude* was that they didn't personally possess anything. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we are to buy and sell and deal in this world, as if we didn't really buy anything or gain a thing, as if it's all somehow performed by us as in a disconnected dream. See on Lk. 14:33. This attitude that nothing is personally ours is a great freedom- from worry about what we have, about security, changes of values, and from coveting what we might be able to own.

4:33 *And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all-* This is paralleled with "great [s.w.] grace" being with them. *Charis*, "grace", means a gift, and is often used about the gifts of the Spirit. We may simply be learning that there were great gifts of Holy Spirit power to perform major miracles. But the parallel between "great power" and "great grace" may mean that the disciples appreciated very deeply God's grace given to them, and this gave a convicting power to their witness to it. John the Baptist had the grace of God "upon" him (Lk. 2:40 s.w.) but "John did no miracle". So this passage doesn't have to refer to miraculous support of their testimony. Our experience of grace will likewise give great power to our witness. This is why the most powerful preachers are often those who perceive the most deeply their experience of grace.

The early brethren had seen and known Jesus, despised, hated, dropping from exhaustion in the boat, slumping dehydrated at a well, covered in blood and spittle, mocked in naked shame. And now they knew that He had risen, that He had been exalted to God's right hand so as to make the salvation of men possible, and surely going to return. They spoke this out, because they knew Him. And yet through the Gospels and with the eye of faith, we know Him too. And this must be the basis for our witness.

4:34 *For neither were there among them any that lacked; for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold-* We note that this was not in response to any particular appeal for funds. The need was the call, and the experience of God's gift quite naturally elicited this response. The referent is to the great multitude of 5000 believers (:32); not just to the apostles, for the sellers put the money at the feet of the apostles. Whether 5000 people really did sell all their property in a relatively short period of time... is somewhat doubtful. Surely we are being presented with an idealized picture of the early church, just as inspiration at times presents a positive take on things, e.g. the early Kingdom of Solomon as recorded in 1 Kings.

"Sold them" is the same word translated "things which he possessed" in :32 is to be found in Lk. 12:33 "Sell that which you have and give alms". This verse was surely hammering in their conscience as they sold their goods. The implication is that they realized the capital quickly. But in the East, especially in the first century, no

commercial transaction was done quickly. They would have sold for low prices; reflecting their radical devaluing of possessions. There was no specific command given to them to sell their goods, or at least, the Acts record doesn't record it. Rather was their motivation 'just' one word from the Lord Jesus in Luke's Gospel. This should be the power to us of 'just' one recorded word from the Lord, now staring at us from a page of thin paper or a screen, the radical demands of 'only' one verse...

“Brought the proceeds” is Gk. 'carried the value'. As they apparently sold things quickly, payment was likely not only in coinage but in material goods, which they brought to the apostles.

4:35 *And laid them at the apostles' feet*- The same words in Greek used about how God would *make* (s.w. "laid down") His Son's enemies a stool for His feet. Peter has just been preaching this in Acts 2:35, and I commented there that being at the footstool meant worship and repentance. Peter quotes the passage in an appeal for Israel to repent and come to the stool of the Lord's feet. So it could be that following hard on from this idea being preached, the new converts saw the apostles as the manifestation of the Lord, and brought the symbols of their humanity to His feet. Such giving up of materialism is indeed part of repentance and truly coming on our knees to the Lord.

And distribution was made- The apostles had before them a huge and unexpected pile of precious metals, coins, garments and other items of value. And now they had to distribute them. The word occurs in describing how the Lord gave the loaves to the apostles and they distributed them to the crowds (Jn. 6:11). He led them, as He does us, through one experience in His service in order to prepare them for another.

Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet now, after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word here in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers.

To each- Welfare aid is best given directly to the needy person by the donor, rather than through their representatives.

According to anyone's need- Not according to what they were asked to give, but in response to need.

4:36 *And Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (we say Son of exhortation)*- An example of the Biblical record going along with the incorrect perceptions of faithful men is to be found in the way the apostles nicknamed Joseph as 'Barnabas' "under the impression, apparently, that it meant 'son of consolation'. On etymological grounds that has proved hard to justify, and the name is now generally recognized to... mean 'son of Nabu'". Yet the record 'goes along' with their misunderstanding. In addition to this, there is a huge imputation of righteousness to human beings, reflected right through Scripture. God sought them, the essence of their hearts, and was prepared to overlook much ignorance and misunderstanding along the way. Consider how good king Josiah is described as always doing what was right before God, not turning aside to the right nor left- even though it was not until the 18th year of his reign that he even discovered parts of God's law, which he had been ignorant of until then, because the scroll containing them had been temporarily lost (2 Kings 22:2,11).

A Levite, a man of Cyprus by race- Levites weren't supposed to own property; so they owned land outside the territory of Israel. He realized that this was just getting around God's intention. But how quickly he managed to sell it is remarkable. Perhaps he sold the title deeds for a knockdown price to someone in Jerusalem. Note that although Barnabas was Jewish, he is identified as "a man of Cyprus by race". This explains why there were devout Jews, Hebrew speakers, living in Jerusalem- who spoke of how they heard the Gospel in their own languages in which they were born.

4:37 Having a field, sold it; and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet- Perhaps he was motivated by how all Judas could buy for his pieces of silver was a field. He too had a field, held illegally before God. And he wanted to get rid of it quickly. He brought money [cash] for it to the apostles, whereas :34 speaks of others carrying the proceeds of what they sold [as if those proceeds weren't simply cash]. I would conclude from this that he sold the title deeds quickly, for a cheap price, to someone in Jerusalem. Otherwise we are to imagine him sailing to Cyprus, finding a buyer, and then returning- which at the speed business was done in the East, would've taken maybe a year. The field however may not have been in Cyprus.

We note from 1 Cor. 9:6 that Barnabas had "to work for a living". Perhaps if he had kept that land, or the proceeds from it, this wouldn't have been necessary. He was wealthy if he owned land on Cyprus. Barnabas was not one of the disciples nor even a candidate to replace Judas. Surely he was one of the religious Jews, from Cyprus, who had come to live in Jerusalem and had been converted by the sermon of Acts 2. He had retired early to his dream location, Jerusalem, living off his income from his field in Cyprus [probably rented out for a plantation]. And he gave all that up, thanks to the sermon from a working man [Peter] that so convicted him. This is the power of ideas, above all the word of the cross and forgiveness.

A gift to God means that you are now "minus". In his case, it meant he had to work for a living rather than enjoy a passive income from his property holdings overseas. We note that he, a wealthy man from the landed class, placed that money at the feet of the poor and perhaps landless apostles, amongst whom Peter and John could truly say that they had no "silver and gold" to give. It was clearly an act elicited only by direct conviction of God's gift to him. He was "son of encouragement", of the *parakletos*, the Comforter / Holy Spirit; he was the parade example of a man responding to the gift of the Spirit. Whilst many sold property and gave to the church, only Barnabas is mentioned by name as having done so- possibly because in his case, he really gave all he had, his source of wealth and guaranteed income. His total giving is contrasted with the partial giving of Ananias and Sapphira which we go on to read of in Acts 5.

ACTS CHAPTER 5

5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession- As others in the community did (the same words are used in Acts 4:34). Ananias and Sapphira wished to appear like them; for without doubt they would have been praised and commended by all for such selfless giving.

5:2 And with his wife's knowledge- The initiator of the act and doer of the deed was Ananias; he alone brought the money to the apostles, for his wife was not with him at that time. But Sapphira was likewise punished because the essence of the sin was pride, and she shared in this.

Kept back part of the proceeds, and brought only a part of it- Gk. 'to keep for oneself'. It is translated "petty thieving" in Tit. 2:10. But who was the theft from? All he had belonged to God. His sin was therefore in assuming that what he had was really his; and anything he gave to God was a gift, and the rest he could legitimately keep as his. But as Peter points out, the money remained 'his' in the sense that God had delegated those funds to him. His sin was therefore not so much in keeping a part for himself, but in giving the impression of greater devotion and sacrifice than was actually the case. This lie, or as the Greek means, 'deception', resulted in his death. It's a sober lesson- not in generosity, but in never giving the impression to our brethren of a greater level of sacrifice than in fact we have made. And we have all likely failed at this point at some time to some extent.

And laid it- This translates *tithemi*, which is the same word translated "conceived" in :4 "you have *conceived* this thing in your heart". I suggest the connection is in the way that Ananias and Sapphira imagined how they would lay down the money at the feet of the apostles, with others watching... the sober nodding in agreement, the kind words of approbation, the tears of gratitude from the poor, the body language of respect from the apostles... all these things were their motivation. They laid up in their heart that moment of laying down the money at the feet of the apostles. Their sin was not theft or fraud- but pride.

5:3 *And Peter said: Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart-* Peter could plead with men, both in and out of the Faith, with a credibility that lay in his ready acceptance of his failures, and his evident acceptance of his Lord's gracious forgiveness and teaching. Consider how he tells Ananias that Satan has filled his heart (Acts 5:3), alluding to what everyone full well knew: that Satan had desired to have him too, and in the denials he had pretty well capitulated (Lk. 22:31,32). Peter's disciplining of Ananias, so soon after his own deference to the pressures of Satan as opposed to those of the Lord, would have been done surely in subdued, saddened and introspective tones.

To lie to the Holy Spirit- Gk. 'to deceive'. See on 5:2 *Kept back*.

And to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?- To make the generosity look credible, the amount they kept was probably not that great. And yet people betray their Lord and throw away their eternal life for very small sums of money.

5:4 *While it remained, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your power?-* When they sold their property, the Holy Spirit's comment in Acts 5:4 was that the money was "their own" and "under their own power" [Gk. *exousia*]. They could have chosen to give all or part of that money to God. It was theirs and not God's, the implication was. This is a startling insight. What wealth we have has been genuinely entrusted to us by the Lord, and in that sense it is indeed 'ours', under our power. Yet we are to realize that of course as those under the sphere of God's rulership / Kingdom, we are under His 'exousia'. Absolutely *all* power of *exousia* in any part of Heaven or earth has now been given to the Lord Jesus (Mt. 28:18; Jn. 17:2; Col. 2:10). And yet He has given "authority" or *exousia* to us His servants, and will judge us on His return as to how we have used this (Mk. 13:34; Jn. 1:12). We need to make this connection- that although He has delegated to us wealth, and placed it under our power or *exousia*, if we are truly part of His Kingdom, we are to give back the *exousia* or power / authority over our wealth to Him.

How is it you have conceived this thing in your heart- Acts 5:3 provides an example of the connection between the Devil and our sins. Peter says to Ananias: "Why has Satan filled your heart?". Then in verse 4 Peter says "Why have you *conceived this thing in your heart?*". Conceiving something bad within our heart is

the same as Satan filling our heart. If we ourselves conceive something, e.g. a sinful plan, then it begins *inside us*. Note that when Peter speaks of how Ananias has “conceived this thing in your heart” he’s alluding to the LXX of Esther 7:5, where the wicked Haman is described as one “whose heart hath filled him” to abuse God’s people (see RV). Note in passing that the LXX of Esther 7:4 speaks of Haman as *ho diabolos* [with the definite article] – a mere man is called “the Satan”. It’s been suggested that ‘Satan filling the heart’ was a common phrase used in the first century to excuse human sin; and Peter is deconstructing it by using the phrase and then defining more precisely what it refers to – conceiving sin in our heart, our own heart filling itself with sin. But about “conceived”, see on 5:2 *Laid it*.

You have not lied to men, but to God- He had, of course, lied to men. We must read in an ellipsis here: ‘You have not [so much] lied to men, but [also] to God’.

5:5 And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down- Both Ananias and Sapphira fell down at the apostles’ feet (:10)- exactly the place where they had laid their money. Truly, they perished along with their money. Perhaps Peter reflected on this to the point that he told Simon Magus that his money would perish with him (Acts 8:20). What God wanted was them- not their appearance of giving money. With reflection I am personally convinced that Peter’s words to Simon were indeed a result of reflection upon how Ananias and Sapphira had fallen down at his feet, upon their money [or at least, Ananias did].

And breathed his last; and great fear came upon all that heard it- This apparently spread in the three hours after Ananias died. So we can assume it refers to the Christian community. “Great fear” is a phrase elsewhere used several times in the New Testament for fear of condemnation. If my analysis of the reasons for Ananias’ judgment is correct, then this is understandable- because we have all at some times and in some ways sought the approbation of our brethren, and given an appearance of spirituality and self-sacrifice which is beyond where we really stand. Ananias died for this. No wonder an appropriate fear spread amongst the believers, as it does in our hearts too when we think of the holiness of God and totality of His demands upon men. This of course lays the groundwork for a marvelling, grateful acceptance of God’s patient grace towards us.

5:6 And the young men arose and wrapped him up- Perhaps a technical term referring to a group of young men who did the practical things in the church. Paul refers to a similar group when he writes of “the messengers of the churches” (2 Cor. 8:23).

And they carried him out and buried him- A fairly rare word is used for “carried”, occurring only 7 times in the New Testament, three of them here in this incident (:6,9,10). It cannot surely be insignificant that the word is used again in such close proximity to this incident, in describing the result of it- the sick were “carried out” and placed at Peter’s feet (:15 s.w.), so close to him that the shadow cast by his body fell on them. Being carried to the feet of Peter might seem a risky undertaking, given what he had done. But here we behold both the goodness and severity of God. The harder side of God attracts; when His judgments are in the earth, then and thereby shall men come to Him. The judgment of Ananias and Sapphira at the hands of Peter did not drive people away; rather did it bring people closer to Peter and the Lord he represented. This is why “judgment to come” is part of the Gospel message; a vaguely defined message of a fuzzy love and candy for the kids will not of itself be attractive to people. There is another side to life, to God and to His Son; and every human being subconsciously knows that. And directly engaging with it, and finding that through all that, God is love... is what makes the Gospel so compelling, and what reached to the

very soul of even Felix and almost persuaded Agrippa to be a Christian (Acts 24:25; 26:28).

5:7 And it was about the space of three hours after when his wife, not knowing what had happened, came in- But in the three hours after her husband died, the news spread around (:5). We wonder therefore where exactly Sapphira had been. As she approached Peter, nobody apparently told her 'By the way, your husband just got slain by Peter because he lied about the money'. Indeed, it would appear from :6 that Ananias was buried immediately, for Peter tells her "Behold, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door; and they shall carry you out" (:9). Perhaps she went to Peter privately. But it's a good question for eager, imaginative Bible students: 'Where was Sapphira in the three hours after Ananias died?'.

5:8 And Peter said to her- Gk. 'Peter answered and said to her'. What he said to her was therefore a response. But there is no record of what she said. Perhaps she said nothing; but came in to the apostles giving the impression she had generously given to the Lord, seeking their approbation.

Tell me whether- We can only speculate as to the tone in Peter's voice. Was it the even tone of the prosecutor asking a question which he knew would decide the fate of the accused? Or was there in his tone some hint of pleading for her repentance, as if to say 'Did you *really* sell the land for that much?'. The question itself should have made Sapphira guess that something was up, and that they had been busted. In that split second, she had the choice between life and death; and it was her pride which made her choose death by lying.

You sold the land- You plural. Although Ananias sold it, it was counted as if she had too.

For so much. And she said: Yes, for so much- Pointing to the coins at his feet.

5:9 But Peter said to her: How is it you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?- I have suggested that pride was the key motive for the sin. But Peter's comment suggests another factor. Perhaps they doubted whether Peter truly had the Spirit, and so they had decided to test this. However, it could be that here we have a case of sin being described in terms of what it really is, even though how the sin is now described would be denied by the sinner. He wanted to show her what their pride and lying really amounted to- a putting of God's Spirit to the test. The language of testing God is replete with reference to Israel's failure in this. They tested God in the wilderness (Dt. 6:16; Ps. 78:18,41,56; 106:14); and this led to their exclusion from the promised land. In essence, Ananias and Sapphira had repeated Israel's sin. Despite all the evidence both to them and to Israel in the wilderness, that God's Spirit was indeed possessed by the leaders of His people- still they wanted to test whether it really was. But of course it all depends on motive- Gideon tested the Spirit, twice; Paul went against Spirit guidance in continuing his journey to Jerusalem. The same words are also used about how he tested going into Mysia, but the Spirit didn't allow him to (Acts 16:7). But what they did appears to have been a conscious, sceptical testing of whether the Lord was really amongst them or not.

Behold, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door; and they shall carry you out- This suggests that Peter suspected she would be impenitent. The young brothers were waiting in expectation of dealing with her corpse; or perhaps "the feet" suggests Peter had heard their footsteps returning from having buried Ananias. We also sense that she was alone with Peter, without the presence of others- as if to try to make the temptation to pride and maintenance of face and image somewhat less. She could have quietly confessed to Peter; but her pride was strong, unto death. We note how in the early church, there was the power of the Spirit to

smite with sickness, and also to heal from it; and here we see there was even the power to slay with death.

5:10 *And she fell down immediately at his feet and breathed her last; and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her next to her husband-* “At his feet”, where the money had been placed. See on 5:5 *Fell down*.

5:11 *And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things-* See on 5:5. The phrase “great fear” is nearly always used in a negative context by Luke, and usually with a commandment not to fear following it. Luke records how the message of the Lord Jesus was to empower God’s people to serve Him “without fear” (Lk. 1:74); and John writes that such fear should be “cast out” in the experience of those who have the Spirit (1 Jn. 4:18). We conclude therefore that this is a hint at weakness in the church.

5:12 *And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders done among the people-* It could be that they literally used their hands to do miracles, in obedience to the command on the great commission, that they would lay their hands on the sick (Mk. 16:18). But the phrase can equally mean 'by the instrumentality of...', as if to emphasize it was the Lord using them, rather than them doing anything of their own power.

And they were all gathering together in Solomon's porch- The point of mentioning this might be because the miracles were done there, at their public meetings. This public nature of these dramatic healing miracles is a far cry from the claims of healed headaches in backstreet church halls made by Pentecostalism. But why the specific mention of "Solomon's porch"? Perhaps because it was Stephen who would later point out that it was Solomon who built the temple, although that was not God's ideal intention; His desire was to dwell in the hearts of His people, not in buildings made with human hands. Solomon's porch was supposed to be the only original part of Solomon's temple which had survived. The porch was not large enough for the whole church, so the "they" who gathered there presumably refers to the apostles. However, Solomon's porch was open to Gentiles and the unclean too- and that was most likely the reason why they gathered there. The Lord was slowly working on Peter's conscience regarding including the Gentiles and the unclean; for Peter would have noticed how such folks were listening to his preaching there. The Lord likewise prods us through meetings and situations, and then makes His direct appeal to us, as happened with Peter in the matter of Cornelius.

5:13 *None of the rest dared join them, although the people held them in high esteem-* Who is this group of people? They are put in contrast with "the people", who respected the apostles and many of whom now believed (:14). Luke has spoken of such a group in describing how the women told the news of the Lord's resurrection "to the eleven and to all the rest" (Lk. 24:9 s.w.; also in Mk. 16:13 "They went and told it unto the rest, neither did they believe it"). Just recently in Acts, Luke has spoken of "the rest of the apostles" (Acts 2:37). I suggest this may be a technical term for the inner circle of believers who had followed the Lord before His death. Paul speaks of "the rest" as if they were a group which did not include Peter: "The rest of the apostles, the brethren of the Lord and Cephas" (1 Cor. 9:5). It could be that this group were scared by what had happened because they realized that they too had in some senses not been totally honest before the Spirit of God in whatever way; just as any sincere believer will read the account of Ananias and Sapphira and likewise have a sense of fear. This group are painted in distinction from the crowds generally, who

respected Peter even more and increasingly believed, as we read in the next verse. This is an essay in the humanity and weakness of the Lord's followers at the time.

Another possibility is raised by considering the meaning of 'join them'. The implication could be that Ananias and Sapphira were part of a group who wished to attain to the inner circle of leading apostles. But with their death, the rest of those like Ananias and Sapphira no longer pretended to joining with the leading apostles.

5:14 And many more believers- The harder side of the Father and the Lord Jesus actually serves as an attraction to the serious believer. The lifted up Jesus draws men unto Him. When Ananias and Sapphira were slain by the Lord, fear came upon "as many as heard these things". Many would have thought His attitude hard; this man and woman had sold their property and given some of it (a fair percentage, probably, to make it look realistic) to the Lord's cause. And then He slew them. But just afterwards, "believers were the more added to the Lord" (Acts 5:12,14). The Lord's harder side didn't turn men away from Him; rather did it bring them to Him. And so the demands and terror of the preaching of the cross did likewise. The balance between His utter grace, the way (e.g.) He marvelled at men's puny faith, and His harder side, is what makes His character so utterly magnetic and charismatic in the ultimate sense. Think of how He beheld the rich man and loved Him, and yet at the same time was purposefully demanding: He told Him to sell all He had and give it to beggars. Not to the work of the ministry, but to beggars, many of whom one would rightly be cynical of helping. It was a large demand, the Lord didn't make it to everyone, and He knew He was touching the man's weakest point. If the Lord had asked that the man's wealth be given to Him, he may have agreed. But to beggars... And yet the Lord made this heavy demand with a deep love for the man.

Were added to the Lord- The RVmg. speaks of them being added "to them", i.e. the believers who comprised the body of Jesus. Baptism is not only entry into covenant relationship with the Father and His Son; it is also baptism into the body of Christ, i.e. the body of believers (1 Cor. 12:13). This is where self-baptism shouldn't be used too liberally. Thus the record in Acts describes baptisms as believers being "added" to the body of believers (Acts 2:41,47); but also as them being "added" (s.w.) to the Lord Jesus (5:14; 11:24). It is therefore appropriate that there are other members of the body of Christ present at baptisms; baptism is entry into relationship with the community of believers, as well as into a personal relationship with Christ.

Note that the Lord Jesus added converts to the church (Acts 2:47), but here, they are added to the Lord Jesus (NEV, AV). In this we see the direct connection between the Lord Jesus and His church; as Paul expresses it, the church is the body of the Lord Jesus.

Crowds of men and women- Gk. "Both men and women". Religion in the first century was largely the domain of men; the inclusiveness towards women would have made Christianity almost unique amongst contemporary religions.

5:15 So much so- This is picking up from the end of :12. Verses 13 and 14 are a parenthesis, and some versions place them in brackets. What had been done by Peter in the temple area, they believed could be done outside it. Again the Lord was developing the thought in their minds that actually there was nothing so special about that temple, not even Solomon's portico, the part of the structure believed to date back to Solomon's time. What was achieved in the temple area could be achieved on the streets...

That they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that, as Peter came by- See on 5:6 *Carried him out*. The scene recalls that of

Mt. 14:35: "And when the men of that place recognised him, they sent word to all in that region and brought to him all who were sick". In the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him.

At the least his shadow- Perhaps in reference to how the mustard seed of the Gospel would become a tree under whose shadow unclean birds would come (Mk. 4:32 s.w.). The sick people were likely all ritually unclean, as were those who carried them. But it was exactly these types who were cured.

Might fall on some of them- Gk. 'overshadow'. As Peter had been overshadowed [s.w.] by the Lord's glory, so now he was called to reflect that same glory (Lk. 9:34). What we benefit from at the Lord's hands often becomes ours to share to others.

5:16 *And there also gathered crowds from the cities round about Jerusalem-* This is a phrase taken from the Old Testament, describing how these towns were the centres of idol worship (2 Kings 23:5) and therefore the specific target for Divine judgment (Jer. 1:5). Now, grace was being poured out upon them.

Bringing sick people and those that were vexed with unclean- This is word for word a sentence Luke used earlier about the Lord's healing ministry (Lk. 6:18). The point is being developed that the work of the believers in Christ is a continuation of His ministry as He walked around Palestine; and in essence, even if the form differs, that is what we are doing today. This is why the daily reading and reflection upon the Gospel records provides a key to attaching meaning to event and circumstance in our daily lives; for we are intended to be Him in this world.

And every one of them was healed- The scale of healing here is perhaps the greatest of any time in history. There seems nothing analogous in the Lord's ministry; He appears to have worked with 'an economy of miracle'. This healing outbreak was the fulfilment of the promise that when possessed of the Comforter, "greater works than these shall you do" (Jn. 14:12). "Greater" could mean more in number- and that was certainly the case here. "Every one" was healed- there were no failed healings, in marked contrast to the claims of Pentecostalism. This suggests that the healings were not dependent upon the faith of the individual, but were a pure outpouring of grace.

5:17 *But the high priest rose up-* Again, precisely the words used of how "the high priest rose up" and condemned the Lord to death (Mt. 26:62). The apostles did the miracles they did of their own freewill. They chose to identify with their Lord and continue His work. And now the same Lord responds by bringing about circumstances beyond their control which confirmed their identity with His death and sufferings. The same happens with us; we make freewill choices to identify with Him, and He on a larger scale arranges circumstance to confirm that identity, to make us know His sufferings and the power of new life in His resurrection.

And all they that were with him- Likewise the same word is used of how the whole multitude of the Sanhedrin 'rose up' and handed over the Lord to Roman punishment (Lk. 23:1). The 'rising up' may reflect a Hebraism meaning 'to rise up in giving sentence'. We note how the same word is used of how Gamaliel 'stood up' to give his opinion (:34).

Which is the sect of the Sadducees- We read that Gamaliel, a Pharisee, also "stood up" (s.w.) and urged a more lenient approach with the preachers (:34). Perhaps this was partly a reflection of the way the two groups loved to take opposing positions to each other.

And they were filled with jealousy- Jealousy of the receptive audience of others was what caused the Jews to so hate the Christian preachers. The same words are used of how the Jews were filled with jealousy when they saw the crowds responding to Paul (Acts 13:45), and this would seem to me to be an example of the Lord confirming Paul in seeing the similarities between his ministry and that of Peter. It was jealousy which led to the Lord's crucifixion (Mt. 27:18); and jealousy of others' success in preaching has likewise led many in the body of Christ to similar abuse of their own brethren.

5:18 *And arrested-* Literally, 'laid hands on'. See on 4:3 *They arrested them*.

The apostles and put them in prison- Gk. the public or "common" (AV) prison. That point is mentioned perhaps to draw out the similarities with the Lord's sufferings, in that the Jews handed Him over to the Roman authorities for punishment; and the Jews here did likewise, handing over the apostles to the Roman public prison.

5:19 *But an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said-* Exactly the same happened to Peter again in Acts 12. This experience in Acts 5, like many of ours, was to prepare Peter for a future, greater experience when he was released from prison in Acts 12. Peter thought he was dreaming, and only realized he was in reality when he "came to himself" (Acts 12:9,11). Perhaps he had been dreaming, or exploring in his subconscious, this previous release from prison. Again we see the verisimilitude of the Biblical record; it is all so psychologically credible. And again, Peter's experiences were repeated in Paul's life when the prison doors were shaken open by the earthquake at Philippi. This triple opening of prison doors recorded in Acts is of course allusive to the passage in Is. 61:1 which speaks of the Lord Jesus through the Gospel opening the prison doors to a humanity bound by sin. Those early preachers like Peter and Paul were being made to personally realize the radical, liberating power of the Gospel they were preaching.

5:20 *You go and stand and speak in the temple to the people-* A reiteration of the great preaching commission.

All the words of this life- It was Peter who had earlier used this phrase in confessing that the Lord Jesus had the words of eternal life (Jn. 6:68). Now Peter is being told to go and speak them forth, at whatever risk to himself, if he really believes what he has said about the words of life. This connection with Peter's statement in Jn. 6:68 would explain the otherwise odd phrase "*this* life". It's as if the Lord is reading Peter's mind and saying: 'Yes, you said that My words are the words of eternal life- so go and preach the words of *this* life'. And of course it was the Sadducees who denied eternal life and resurrection. Another approach is to understand "*this* life" as referring to this present mortal life; the only other usage of the phrase is in 1 Cor. 15:19 "If in *this* life only...". In this case, the Angel was asking them to go and tell people the meaning of *this* life.

5:21 *And when they heard this-* Demonstrating their immediate response to a difficult request.

In the morning they entered into the temple and taught- Because of their role as *teachers*, it is understandable that the anger of the first century priesthood was always associated with Christ and the apostles *teaching* the people (Acts 4:2), in the belief that they were a new priesthood: Mt. 21:33; Lk. 19:47; 20:1; Acts 5:21. The existing priests felt that their role was being challenged. The main priestly duty was to teach God's word to the people. A whole string of texts make this point: Dt. 24:8; 2 Kings 17:27; 2 Chron. 15:3; Neh. 8:9; Mic. 3:11. Note too the common partnership between priests and prophets.

But the High Priest came and they that were with him, and called the council together and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought- He “came” into the place of meeting of the Sanhedrin? Because :25 implies that they did not personally witness the apostles preaching and were not present with them. The senate was “of the children of Israel”, the wayward sons of Jacob, and not the assembly of Yahweh.

5:22 *But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported, saying-* The assistants to the Jewish leadership. It was probably the same men who arrested the Lord, bound and abused Him and who had been with Peter in the courtyard of the High Priest's house (Jn. 18:3,12,18,22). They would have been waiting there for instructions from the High Priest, and they were likewise at his disposal now. They may have been the very men who had heard Peter's fearful denial of his Lord. And now, they were the ones who saw his fearless witness. The source of the change in this man would have exercised their minds, and was surely part of the reason why the Lord told Peter to go back to the temple and continue preaching, knowing that these were the men who would be sent to arrest him or bring him out from the prison. Whereas we would have wished these men every curse for how they treated the Lord, His way was different. He sought to work in their consciences in order to bring them to recognize Him.

5:23 *We found the prison shut in all safety, and the keepers standing at the doors, but when we had them opened, we found no one within-* If nobody at all was in the 'prison', the 'prison' may therefore refer to a small arrest room. Or perhaps the language is like this to make the whole situation is so similar to the Lord's resurrection. For it was men from the same group of soldiers and officers, who were under the control of the Jewish leadership, who had guarded the Lord's tomb. And His body had all the same disappeared. They were being led to realize that the Lord's followers were like Him; they were as His body. And the Lord works in the lives of our contemporaries to potentially make them perceive the same about us.

5:24 *Now when the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the upshot of all this would be-* Surely the same captain of the temple who had negotiated with Judas about betraying the Lord (Lk. 22:4), and who had come to Gethsemane to arrest Him (Lk. 22:52). And note how it is only Luke of all the Gospel writers who uses this term. Luke is making the connection- the apostles were fellowshiping their Lord's sufferings. Then, they had run away from Him and saved their skins. Now, they were experiencing what He did whilst they had hidden somewhere. And it would seem it was the same man or men involved. Surely the Lord was knocking at the door of conscience. His multi-layered, patient work on the hearts of men is wonderful to discern, and that same Lord is just as active today.

5:25 *And there came someone that told them: Behold, the men whom you put in the prison are in the temple standing and teaching the people-* In exact obedience to the command to go and stand and teach in the temple (:20). It was usual for rabbis to *sit* and teach; the Lord Himself *sat* and taught in the temple (Jn. 8:2 cp. Lk. 5:3). But the Lord asks them to *stand* and teach. Perhaps He wanted them to show that they were not pretending to the rabbis; and that their teaching was radically different, with no pretension to any authority on the part of the teacher.

5:26 *Then went the captain with the officers and brought them, but without violence-* Implying they asked the apostles to come with them, and they did without protest; following the spirit of their Lord, whose final sufferings are constantly alluded to in the record here.

For they feared the people, lest they should be stoned- Luke twice uses this phrase about their experience in trying to liquidate the Lord (Lk. 20:19; 22:2). Popular opinion had swayed back the other way again. And a while later, it was to sway against the Christians again, when “there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1). This is the fickleness of human support.

5:27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying- Gk. 'stood' them, the same word used of how the apostles stood and taught; and they continued to stand and preach at their trial.

5:28 We strictly ordered you not to teach- The same words used of how the Lord strictly ordered Peter, James and John not to speak of the things they saw at the transfiguration until after He had resurrected (Lk. 9:21). Now that He had risen, that 'strict order' was from the Lord to teach... and so the 'strict order' from the High Priest sets him up as a kind of anti-Christ. And there was no way that the Lord's people could do anything else than speak forth their experiences of Him.

In this name- For them, authority was so important. Likewise the Lord had been asked by what authority He taught and cured. And it is likewise difficult for many today to see beyond mere religion and denominationalism, and realize that individuals who have experienced the Lord will therefore teach Him purely on their own private initiative.

And yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and- The reference in the next phrase to guilt for blood makes us think that they were alluding to the two references to how wicked Manasseh "filled Jerusalem with innocent blood" (2 Kings 21:16; 24:4). Condemning the righteous in Biblical terms and through out of context Scriptural allusion is therefore no new thing.

Intend to bring this man's blood upon us- Consider how the disciples responded to the High Priest rebuking them for preaching; he claimed that they intended to bring the blood of Jesus upon them. The obvious, logical debating point would have been to say: 'But *you* were the very ones who shouted out 'His blood be upon us!!' just a few weeks ago!'. But, Peter didn't say this. He didn't even allude to their obvious self-contradiction. Instead he positively went on to point out that a real forgiveness was possible because Jesus was now resurrected. And the point we can take from this is that true witness is not necessarily about pointing out to the other guy his self-contradictions, the logical weakness of his position... it's not about winning a debate, but rather about bringing people to meaningful repentance and transformation.

5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered and said: We must obey God rather than men- Something the Jews often said in excusing themselves from obeying various demands of the Roman empire. Peter is trying to reason with them in language they would understand and which had fallen from their own lips in other contexts. The specific obedience to God he had in mind was in preaching the Gospel. He uses the same word a few verses later in saying that the "Holy Spirit... God has given to those that *obey* Him" (:32). What he meant was that the Spirit had been given to those who obey His command to preach. Peter was alluding to the great commission, which promised the disciples the gifts of the Spirit in their preaching work which was their obedience to that commission.

5:30- see on Acts 4:20.

The God of our fathers- A common phrase in the Apostolic preaching (Acts 3:13,25; 7:2,45; 13:17; 26:6). They were not seeking to alienate their audience, but rather to bridge build with them, pointing out what they had in common and seeking to build further from that.

Raised up Jesus- His resurrection is an imperative to preach. When Peter is asked why he continues preaching when it is forbidden, he responds by saying that he is obeying God's command, in that Christ had been raised. There was no specific command from God to witness (although there was from Christ); from the structure of Peter's argument he is surely saying that the fact God raised Christ is *de facto* a command from God to witness to it which must be obeyed. The resurrection of Jesus is itself the command to preach.

Whom you slew, hanging him on a tree- But the Greek separates the slaying and the hanging on the tree. Earlier, Peter had thought that following Christ to the end could be achieved in a quick, dramatic burst of zeal- for surely his desire to "smite with the sword" in Gethsemane was almost suicidal, and yet by doing so he thought that he would fulfil his promise to lay down his life for Christ's sake. He learnt the lesson, that crucifixion is a way of life rather than just dramatic death; for he said that the Jews had slain Christ *and* hung Him on a tree (Acts 5:30; 10:39). This seems strange- that they should have killed Him and then hung Him on the tree. Peter has in mind the practice of hanging an already dead criminal on a tree as a warning (Dt. 21:23). Paul appears to make the same mistake in Gal. 3:13, where he too says that the lifting up of Christ on the cross was typified by the lifting up of the already dead body of a criminal. Christ was not dead when He was lifted up- physically. But first Peter and then Paul came to understand that His death was actually in His way of life- so that He was as good as dead when lifted up. He was the dead bronze snake of the wilderness; the flesh had been put to death by a daily life of crucifixion.

Perhaps the distinction implies the 'slaying' was an ongoing process in His ministry, crowned by the final hanging on the tree. Paul speaks similarly in Galatians; as if the body was already dead when it was lifted up on the tree; for he quotes the Mosaic law regarding the body of a dead criminal being displayed on a tree as if it was descriptive of the Lord's death (Gal. 3:13 cp. Dt. 21:23). The veil symbolized the flesh of the Lord; and yet in it was woven scarlet, a symbol of His blood and sacrifice (Ex. 27:16), which permeated His mortal life. The lesson is that the cross is a daily way of life. The Lord taught this when He asked us to take up the cross daily: to live each day in the exercise of the same principles which He lived and died by. Let's not see spiritual life as a survival of a few crises, as and when they present themselves. It's a way of life, and the principles which lead us to the little victories (when we scald ourselves with hot water, when we dirty a newly washed shirt...) will give us the greater ones also, when (e.g.) we stand before a tribunal, or face death in whatever form.

5:31- see on Acts 2:33; 10:35,36.

Him did God exalt- The same word is used about the lifting up of the Lord on the cross (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32). God sees time differently to us; He knew the lifting up of His dear son was the basis of His future exaltation. And so the same word is used about His lifting up and His exaltation.

With His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour- This could mean 'to His right hand'; for it is there that He is Prince and Saviour. These are ongoing jobs- for the Lord is indeed an active Lord, ruling and saving His people. He is a "Prince", the same word translated "author" in Heb. 12:2- He is the author and perfecter of our faith. He initiates faith, by giving not only forgiveness but repentance to people; and works out the whole process of their transformation and salvation.

To give repentance to Israel and remission of sins- Man cannot truly know God and be passive to that knowledge; he must somehow respond to the God he sees so abundantly revealed to him. And so it is with an appreciation of the height and nature

of the exaltation of the man Christ Jesus. This motivates to repentance and conversion, and therefore the man who has himself been converted by it will glory in it, and hold it up to others as the motive power of their salvation too. Acts 5:31 is a clear example. "We are witnesses of these things"- in the sense that Peter himself was a witness to the repentance and forgiveness brought about by God's resurrection and exaltation of His Son. Earlier Peter had preached Jesus of Nazareth as "made... both Lord and Christ", and when they heard *this*, when he reached this climax of his speech in declaring that Jesus was now made *kurios*, the Greek word that would be used to translate Yahweh, *then* they were pricked in their heart and repented and desired association with Him in baptism (Acts 2:36-38). Later he boldly declared: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men [i.e. no other name given to any man as this Name was given to Jesus], whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Peter had once struggled with the teaching of the Lord that whoever humbled himself would be exalted (Lk. 14:11). Now he joyfully preached the height of the Lord's exaltation, knowing that by so doing he was testifying to the depth of His humility in His life. Now he valued and appreciated that humility (his allusions to the Lord's washing of feet in his letters is further proof of this).

Notice that repentance, and not just forgiveness, was 'given' to Israel. A change of mind was given; and this surely is the gift of a holy spirit or mind. See on Acts 2:33; 10:35,36. But the recipient of the gift still had to respond. In Elijah's time, God turned Israel's heart back to Him, but they still had to return to Him (1 Kings 18:37). Jeremiah was an example of making good use of the gift of repentance: "Surely after that I was turned, I repented" (Jer. 31:19).

The early believers spoke constantly in their preaching of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:21,23; 3:13-15; 5:30,31). The logical objection to their preaching a risen Jesus of Nazareth was: 'But He's dead! We saw His body! Where is He? Show Him to us!'. And their response, as ours, was to say: 'I am the witness, so is my brother here, and my sister there. We are the witnesses that He is alive. If you see us, you see Him risen and living through us'. In this spirit, we beseech men in Christ's stead. Paul in Galatians 2:20 echoes this idea: "I have been crucified with Christ: the life I now live is not *my* life, but the life which *Christ lives* in me". The spirit of the risen Christ lived out in our lives is the witness of His resurrection. We are Him to this world. The cross too was something which *shone* out of their lives and words. They sought to convict men of their desperation, the urgency of their position before God, the compelling nature of the cross, that they were serious sinners; that a man cannot behold the cross and be unresponsive, but rather must appropriate that work and gift to himself through baptism. The urgent appeal for repentance was quite a feature of their witness (2:38; 5:31; 7:51; 11:18; 17:30; 18:18; 20:21; 26:20; Heb. 6:1). May I suggest there needs to be a greater stress on repentance in our preaching, 20 centuries later.

Our Lord ascended to Heaven *so that* opportunity of repentance might be given to Israel (Acts 5:31), and *so that* He might give the Holy Spirit gifts to men (Eph. 4:8-13 cp. John 14-16 explaining how Jesus departed *in order* to receive the Comforter). It follows that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were given largely in order to convince Israel of the Gospel; and so too around the period of the second coming?

Note that it was repentance that was given on account of the Lord's resurrection and ascension. Not simply forgiveness. The gift of the Holy Spirit that was given on His exaltation was a mental, internal power; it was and is the power to repent. Those

who do not repent are therefore stubbornly resisting God's powerful desire to see us change. See above on *With His right hand*.

5:32 *And we are witnesses of these things*- Reading carefully, Peter says that he is a witness not only of the resurrection, but of the fact that Jesus is now at God's right hand and from that position of power has enabled forgiveness. How could Peter be a witness to *that*? For he hadn't been up to Heaven to check. Quite simply, he knew the extent of his own forgiveness. And so he therefore knew that truly, Jesus had ascended and was there in a position of influence upon Almighty God, to enable forgiveness. His own cleansed conscience was the proof that his belief in the Lord's ascension was belief in something true. And yet we ask: does our belief that Christ ascended really have this effect upon us?

Luke concludes by recording how the Lord reminded His men that they were "witnesses" (24:48); and throughout Acts, they repeatedly describe themselves as witnesses to Him (Acts 1:8,22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39,41; 13:31; 22:15,20; 26:16). This is quite some emphasis. This Christ-centeredness should also fill our self-perception; that we are witnesses to the Lord out of our own personal experience of Him. They were witnesses that Christ *is* on God's right hand, that He really *is* a Saviour and source of forgiveness (5:32); because they were self-evidently results of that forgiveness and that salvation. They couldn't be 'witnesses' to those things in any legal, concrete way; for apart from them and their very beings, there was no literal evidence. They hadn't been to Heaven and seen Him; they had no document that said they were forgiven. They were the witnesses in themselves. This even went to the extent of the Acts record saying that converts were both added to the ecclesia, and also added to Christ. He *was* His ecclesia; they were, and we are, His body in this world.

We are "witnesses [on account of our being] in him" (Acts 5:32 RVmg.). We are His epistle to men and women; His words of expression consist in our lives and characters (2 Cor. 3:3).

And so is the Holy Spirit, which God has given to those that obey Him- See on 5:29 *We must obey God rather than men*.

5:33 *But they, when they heard this, were cut to the heart and decided to kill them*- They had been reminded that the Lord Jesus was now giving repentance to Israel; He was working in the hearts of Jewish people to bring them to repentance. And they were resisting. No wonder they were cut to the very bone of their conscience. The same word is used of how they were again "cut to the heart" by Stephen's appeal to them (Acts 7:54). And they responded the same way- they desired to liquidate the messenger, to destroy the channel of the message. But the message remained. To be twice "cut in half", as the Greek means, would have left them psychologically shattered. They either repented, or became murderous in their hatred of the preachers.

5:34 *But a Pharisee in the council*- See on :17 *The Sadducees*.

Named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honour by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while- Paul had been his student. Yet Paul differed from him regarding the Christians, for he was for persecuting and destroying them rather than following his teacher's advice of leaving them alone (:38). This difference with the respected Gamaliel was surely one of the many goads in Paul's conscience that was intended to lead him to accept Jesus as Christ.

5:35 *And he said to them: You men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men*- See on 5:39 *You might be found to be fighting against God*. There is a repeated theme of local authorities being nervous about punishing the Christians

(19:36; 22:26; Mt. 27:19). And this was in an age where conscience was not well developed, and there was little justice nor fear of prosecuting people on insufficient evidence. There was simply a sense that somehow God was in all this; and the insistent persecution of the Lord and His people was therefore carried out against all the pricks of conscience, with Saul of Tarsus being the parade example. There is often likewise an undefined sense in our contemporaries that we are somehow of God.

5:36 For before these days Theudas- The two examples chosen are of charismatic men who attracted followers. Gamaliel is saying that these men should be compared to Jesus of Nazareth, and their followers to His disciples who were now under trial. Gamaliel therefore perceived that the disciples were following a leader- it was that obvious. But the leader was nowhere to be seen. Gamaliel is therefore admitting the possibility that Jesus may have risen from the dead and therefore had attracted followers. The fact he did not close off that possibility completely, and even the Sadducees who denied a resurrection agreed with him (:40,17), is all evidence enough of how the consciences of them all were being pricked. We would rather expect the Sadducees to have responded: 'Well yes, those men were visible men here on earth who attracted a following, but these disciples of Jesus are following a man who doesn't exist, seeing we killed Him and the dead do not rise'. But even they whose advertised position was that there could be no resurrection of anyone... went along with the reasoning and did not make the logical comeback on it. Such was the pressure upon the consciences of these men. No wonder Paul and some of them gave in to it, in accepting that indeed, Jesus had risen.

Rose up- The same word used of the resurrection of the Lord. Again, note that Gamaliel is not closing off the possibility that Jesus of Nazareth had risen; he is saying that others 'rose up' but in time, came to nothing; and so as far as he was concerned, the jury was still out as to whether Jesus had risen or not. The force of his logic was enough to make the Sadducees, who denied any resurrection, agree with him (:40). And his loyal student Paul was provided with yet another goad in his conscience concerning Christ- for his respected teacher was telling him that it was best to not rule out the possibility that Jesus had risen.

Claiming to be somebody- Luke uses the same words in describing the accusation that the Lord claimed to be the Christ (Lk. 23:2). The similarities are clearly being drawn between the Lord, and these two false leaders.

And a number of men, about four hundred, joined him- This clearly echoes Acts 4:4: "The number of the men [the same Greek words are used] was about five thousand".

He was killed- Same word used about the slaying of the Lord Jesus.

And all who followed him - The language used of those persuaded by the cause of Jesus.

Were dispersed and came to nothing- In contrast to the stress in Acts upon the unity of the Christians.

5:37 After this man, there rose up- See on :36 *Rose up*.

Judas of Galilee, in the days of the census- Jesus of Galilee also 'appeared' in the days of the census, as only Luke records. Gamaliel is drawing similarities between these men and Jesus- and leaving the verdict open for the time being, as to whether He had really 'arisen' and whether following Him was the right thing to do.

And drew away some of the people after him- Exactly as the Jews claimed Jesus had done. The Greek translated "drew away" is used again by Gamaliel in the next verse: "Keep away from [s.w. "drew away"] these men". He may be implying that their interest in these men and their invisible Master was in fact leading them to

follow Him, to be drawn away after Him. This was an astute psychological observation; he perceived the process going on within his pupil Saul of Tarsus, and he was absolutely correct.

He also perished and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered abroad- This was exactly what happened to the rank and file followers (Acts 8:1,4; 11:19). But Acts 8:1 records that when Saul's persecution led to the 'scattering abroad' of the disciples, the apostles did *not* scatter. And it was the apostles who were under judgment and are the reference of Gamaliel at this point. Saul was desperately seeking to prove his teacher Gamaliel correct by consciously seeking to scatter the followers of Jesus; but he did not succeed in scattering the apostles. And Gamaliel had reasoned that if this did not happen, then this whole thing was likely of God. The way the apostles didn't scatter was therefore another goad in Saul's conscience.

5:38 *And now I say to you, Keep away from these men and leave them alone-* See on :37 *Drew away some of the people after him.*

For if this counsel or this work is of men- Gamaliel's reasoning made a deep impression on Paul; for years later he uses the same word in saying that he declared the "counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Gamaliel had reasoned that this "counsel" was either of God or man; and clearly it was of God. And Paul recognizes this by alluding to his teacher's words. The unusual position of Gamaliel, therefore, was surely a goad in Saul's conscience. Saul would have carefully noted and thought about his words. Luke has used the same idea in describing the "counsel and deed" of the Jewish Sanhedrin in condemning the Lord to death (Lk. 23:51). Gamaliel is now addressing the Sanhedrin... and so he may be suggesting that the 'counsel and work' of the Sanhedrin is being compared against the 'counsel and work' of the apostles, and only time will tell who is of God and who of man. Again, we must note that Gamaliel is open to persuasion that the Sanhedrin may be wrong; he does not condemn the apostles, rather does he urge leaving them alone and leaving time to judge. This very significant position would have irked and concerned Paul deeply, and developed his conscience for Christ. On the basis upon which Gamaliel reasons, I personally would consider it likely that he converted to Christianity. Whilst this appears impossible to prove, it is [incidentally] the position held within the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition, where he is revered as a saint. "According to Photius, he was baptized by Saint Peter and Saint John, together with his son Abibo (or Abibas, Abibus) and Nicodemus. The Clementine Literature suggested that he maintained secrecy about the conversion and continued to be a member of the Sanhedrin for the purpose of covertly assisting his fellow Christians".

It will fail- The same Greek word translated "overthrow" in :39. Gamaliel had surely heard the Lord's prediction of the overthrow [s.w.] of the temple and the Judaism of His day (Lk. 21:6). Again, Gamaliel is heightening the stakes- either Christianity will be overthrown, or the temple will indeed be overthrown as the Lord Jesus had predicted. This heightening of the stakes, and leaving the verdict open, was psychologically a path towards conversion to Christianity. And Paul was goaded down that path, as I suspect Gamaliel himself was.

5:39 *But if it is of God, you will not be able-* Gamaliel summarized the issue as being whether it was Judaism or Christianity which was of God or of men. I have mentioned already that Gamaliel is leaving the question open, rather than condemning the Christians; and that this was something which would have deeply exercised the conscience of his pupil Saul. The way Gamaliel's words deeply entered Paul's consciousness and conscience is reflected by the way in which he later alludes to those words. The choice between being of God or man is reflected in Rom. 2:29,

where Paul reasons that a true Jew has commendation "not of men but of God". This is framed in exactly the terms Gamaliel uses here. This phrase "of God" is very widely used by John in his Gospel and letters, e.g. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness" (1 Jn. 5:19). John of course was one of the apostles referred to by Gamaliel; and John too would have heard these words of Gamaliel, and was triumphing in the fact that things had worked out to show that indeed, Christianity was "of God".

To overthrow them- See on :38 It will fail.

You might be found to be fighting against God- Paul would have heard these words, and struggled with them, seeing they came from his respected teacher. He would have realized that indeed he was fighting with God- or as the Lord put it, kicking against the goads. The allusion is surely to Jacob, whose fighting with God in the form of an Angel is therefore read here in a negative light. These "men of Israel", descendants of Jacob / Israel, were not to be followers of Jacob in his negative aspects.

5:40 *They took his advice-* It was unusual for Sadducees to take advice from a Pharisee in this way. See on :17 *The Sadducees*. The sense that these men might in fact be of God was very strong. Again, the Lord was working on their consciences in an attempt to save even them.

And when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go- The same word used about the beating of the Lord, probably at the same hands (Lk. 22:63). Paul uses the same word about how he 'beat' the Christians "in every synagogue", and that surely included in Jerusalem (Acts 22:19). His anger at the attitude of his teacher Gamaliel would have been given full vent in beating the Christians. Perhaps Paul even whipped Peter at this time. For Paul was Gamaliel's former pupil and was present in Jerusalem at this time. This would explain his deep respect for Peter and what appears to be a desire to follow Peter's ministry, in witnessing to the Jews, rather than in developing his own ministry to the Gentiles as the Lord intended. See my comments throughout Acts 20 for more on this. It also makes the more wonderful Peter's reference to Paul as his "beloved brother" (2 Pet. 3:15).

5:41 *They therefore departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name-* We get the picture of them walking out from those sour faces ['presence'], singing and rejoicing. The Sanhedrin had commanded that they be beaten- so when we read of them departing from the Sanhedrin, this was in order to be beaten. And they went to that beating rejoicing. If indeed Saul was one of those who did the beating [see above], and his involvement in the stoning of Stephen makes it likely he was, then this would have been a sight which stayed with him for life. And it would exactly explain why when Paul was beaten at Philippi, he went to prison and sang hymns in the cell. He had probably seen the apostles going to their beating with joy and rejoicing. And he was determined to emulate those fine brethren, especially considering that he himself had been the one who frequently administered such beatings / floggings to Christians (22:19).

There are about 70 references to there being joy of faith amongst the early brethren. It was undoubtedly a characteristic of the community, despite the moral and doctrinal failures amongst them, the turning back to the world, the physical hardship of life, and direct persecution from the authorities. There was a joy of faith in conversion and in beholding it (Acts 2:41,46; 3:8; 5:41; 8:8; 13:52; 15:3; 1 Thess. 1:6). Letters to new converts like the Philippians reflect this theme of joy, even though it was written from prison. Paul and Silas could sing in prison. The earlier

brethren rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Jesus' sake (Acts 5:41). Paul rejoiced daily in the fact the Corinthians had been baptized (1 Cor. 15:31). Many a photo taken at baptism reflects this same joy amongst us today. Sower and reaper rejoice together (Jn. 4:36). To hold on to the Truth was described as holding on to the rejoicing of the hope unto the end (Heb. 3:6).

5:42- see on Acts 2:46.

And every day, in the temple and at home- The Sanhedrin were clearly powerless to stop them. But the question arises as to why they felt so powerless? They had twice rebuked them and threatened them... And we wonder whether their lack of power in this case was related to the strange power of conscience which they all had working within them- that in fact, these Christian men were right and they were wrong. Seriously wrong.

They did not cease to teach and to preach Jesus as the Christ- Perhaps the emphasis is on the word "not". They did not cease as they were asked to in :41.

ACTS CHAPTER 6

6:1 *Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose-* Luke records how the converts were repeatedly "multiplied" (6:1,7; 9:31; 12:24), using the very word for the 'multiplying' of Abraham's seed as the stars (7:17; Heb. 6:14; 11:12). Every baptism he saw as the triumphant fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, even though many of those who 'multiplied' later turned away. The same word is used again of the multiplying of the new Israel in 6:7, and Stephen surely alludes to this in saying that when Israel "multiplied" in Egypt (Acts 7:17 s.w.), then persecution arose. He is likening the Jewish leadership, with all their strict piety, to Pharaoh. And Saul noticed this point, and on repentance, makes the same point in Romans- that the hardening of the hearts of the Egyptians was as the hardening of Israel's hearts. Paul so often alludes to the reasoning of Stephen in his speech.

A murmuring amongst the Greek speaking Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were- This word is used in later appeals for believers not to murmur (e.g. 1 Cor. 10:10). It is murmuring between believers, quiet comments and negative insinuations, which so often stops the powerful advance of the Lord's cause. There were dirty politics in the church. The Greek speaking Jews and the Hebrew speaking Jews within the ecclesia started arguing over welfare payments in Acts 6. It was the old tension- the liberals against the orthodox, with the orthodox unwilling to give much of the welfare collection to those they perceived as more liberal. This squabble was tackled by Stephen, and the record then goes on to describe his murder, almost implying that it was Judaist Christians within the synagogues who set him up for this. After all, there was big money involved- Jews were used to paying 10 or 20% of their wealth to the temple, and if this was now going to the ecclesia, with thousands baptized, there could well have arisen a power struggle over who controlled it. It could well be that the division between Paul and John Mark was over this matter; after they had baptized the first Gentile in Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, John Mark went back to the Jerusalem ecclesia (Acts 13:13). Acts 15:38 RV speaks of how he "withdrew from them from Pamphylia", hinting at spiritual reasons for his withdrawal. It must also be remembered that Christianity was a new, unregistered religion in the Roman empire, increasingly subject to persecution and discrimination. Judaism was registered and tolerated. It was so much easier to remain under the

synagogue umbrella, to deny the radical demands of the Lord Jesus, and to accept Him half-heartedly, in Name but not in reality.

Neglected in- Acts 6:1 makes the point that aid to the poor widows was cut off or impaired, because the other believers were arguing amongst themselves. It would appear that the Hebrew Christians went to the temple daily (Acts 2:46), whereas the Greek widows wouldn't have done (Acts 7:48,49). So the common theological disagreement about how far the Jewish Law should influence Christian life- resulted in old and needy ladies in the ecclesia suffering. This discrimination would suggest that there was strong dislike of even a whiff of Gentile influence, even amongst the leaders of the church. To accept Gentiles was going to be a very radical thing for them.

The daily distribution- Acts 6:1; 2:44; 4:34 imply there were large numbers of very poor people in the church. The Jerusalem ecclesia is an example of how rich and poor were united together. There were clearly wealthy members- Simon of Cyrene owned a farm (Mk. 15:21). Barnabas sold lands (Acts 4:36). Ananias and Sapphira had land. And then there were the middle class. Mary owned a house in Jerusalem and had at least one servant (Acts 12:12-17). Levi was a tax collector wealthy enough to throw a large banquet, implying he had a large home (Mk. 2:13-17). James and John had a fishing business in Galilee that employed day labourers. And then there were the poor. The Lord Jesus and the apostles healed the beggars and diseased, who presumably became members of the church. James the Lord's brother was presumably a carpenter, poor like the Lord was. And yet he was the leader of the early church. Unlike many other religious movements, early Christianity drew its members from right across society; and one of the poorest was their leading light! This unity, as we have so often said, would have been their biggest single advertisement. And yet the Acts record artlessly says so little about social or economic class distinctions- precisely because they were not important. Any uninspired writer would have made great capital of this phenomenal feature of the early church.

6:2 And the twelve summoned- The appointment of a successor to Judas was therefore apparently acceptable. But it has to be noted that "the twelve" as a group play no further significant role in Luke's account of the early church.

The full number of the disciples to them- Literally, 'the multitude', a reference to how the converts had multiplied (:1 s.w.).

And said, It is not fitting that we should- The same Greek word translated "pleased" in :5. The attitude of the twelve matched that of the crowd of converts.

Forsake the teaching of the word- The Greek says just "the word of God", but from :4 it is clear that we are required to read in an ellipsis. God's word is here put for the teaching of it. If God has spoken, and we accept the Bible as His word, then we are thereby obligated to speak it forth (cp. Am. 3:8). The twelve were very sensitive to the way in which administrative issues and addressing petty divisions can hinder the proclamation of God's word; and time and again, this has sadly happened in communities since. But they refused to be side-tracked.

And instead handle finances- Gk. 'serve at tables'. The reference could be to literally serving food. But the Greek for 'tables' is also translated 'bank' with allusion to the tables of bankers. Whichever translation we prefer, the point is that they considered that their teaching of the word was far more important than any practical issue relating to welfare. So often, missions become so focused upon the provision of welfare that the teaching of the word is side-lined; the discussion and energy is all about how and what kind of food to provide in a soup kitchen, rather than teaching the

word to the folks who come along. The utter primacy of the teaching of God's word is here clearly established.

6:3 Therefore, brothers, choose from among you seven men- James 1:27 may allude here. James defines the essence of Christianity as 'visiting' the fatherless and widows. But the Greek word occurs also in Acts 6:3, translated 'to look / search out'. We are to actually search out others' needs, go to them, imagine what they might be in need of and supply it- rather than waiting to be confronted by those needs. It was of course exactly in this sense that God 'visited' us in the gift of His Son.

Of good repute- The qualifications here are alluded to later in the New Testament with regard to who should be appointed to serve in the churches. The early church was not therefore seen as a historical anomaly, a once off phenomenon, but rather a detailed role model for all future churches.

Full of the Spirit and of wisdom- Bezalel and his helpers who constructed the tabernacle are likewise described (Ex. 28:3; 31:3; 35:31,35). The allusion is intended to teach that it was the community of Christian believers, the people, who were now the new tabernacle or temple (cp. 1 Kings 7:14) which the Lord was now constructing. Stephen went to his death for upholding this belief.

Whom we will appoint to this duty- There were no democratic elections. The multitude, the mass of believers, were to somehow come up with seven candidates, and the apostles 'appointed' them, presumably by their Spirit gifts confirming the choices.

6:4 But we will continue earnestly in prayer- These are the very words used about the believers generally continuing in prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:42,46). This is true leadership- the style of prayer of the leadership was copied by their converts. We must ask whether our elders are setting such patterns in prayer life.

The early elders of the Christian church decided that they were spending too much time on practical matters with the result that they weren't finding enough time for prayer (:4). And so they made a major re-arrangement to enable them to devote more time to prayer. Let this point sink in: so important was prayer in the early community that the seven deacons had to make arrangements for the practical running of the ecclesia so that they could give themselves more time for prayer; prayerfulness was more important than petty administration. Husbands and wives abstained from sex for short periods so as to more powerfully pray individually (1 Cor. 7:5).

And in the service of the word- A phrase used in contemporary literature to describe how the synagogue minister made pupils memorize Scripture texts. See on Acts 20:35.

6:5 And the decision pleased the whole crowd; and they chose Stephen, a man- "Decision" is Gk. *logos*, translated "word" at the end of :4. The idea may be that the word preached and taught guided the multitude in choosing the seven.

Full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus a proselyte of Antioch- The Greek can equally mean 'filled by faith'. Faith to some extent is a gift from God. The amount of faith in Stephen seems related to the extent of the miracles he did (:8); which would suggest his fullness of faith was on his own account, and also shows that the doing of miracles was related to faith in those doing them.

These names are all Greek. But it was common for Jews to have both Hebrew and Greek names, so we shouldn't too quickly conclude that the appointed brethren were all Greek speakers; that would have hardly been wise in the resolving a dispute between Greek and Hebrew speaking Jewish believers.

6:6 *They set them before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands upon them-* See on :3 *We will appoint*. Laying on of hands speaks of the passing on of Spirit abilities or blessing from one who possesses them to another (8:17; 9:17; 13:3; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6; Num. 27:18; Dt. 34:9). The apostles who had Spirit gifts to do work they judged they had no time to do therefore passed them on to the deacons. But they prayed first. The idea is not that they had some power which they gave to others. They prayed- and God gave the power to the deacons. For the Father and Son are the source of such spiritual gifts. There is therefore no power in the believers of themselves; hence prayer occurs together with the idea of laying on hands in most of the references listed above.

6:7 *And the word of God increased-* Again, God's word is put for the preaching of it (:4); such is the imperative within His word to preach it. The apostles had given a conscious focus upon preaching God's word and giving this work utter supremacy over welfare and administrative issues (see on :2). Now this was rewarded. "Increased" is an allusion to the parables of the mustard seed and the sower, where the sown seed of the word 'increases' (Mt. 13:32; Mk. 4:8). This begs the question as to how that seed would grow further after this initial good response.

And the number of the disciples- These regular updates about numbers suggest that some kind of record was kept of the numbers baptized.

Multiplied greatly in Jerusalem- The large number of converts in Jerusalem laid the basis for the Jerusalem ecclesia, although they kept meeting in the temple initially. Nearly all these converts, being from Jerusalem, would have seen and heard the Lord preaching previously- and rejected Him. We must ever remember that those who hear our message and apparently reject it may very well respond later.

And a great many of the priests- This was a wonderful fruit to the Lord's endless efforts for these types. In the last six months, the Scribes and Pharisees repeatedly tried to trick the Lord. But He took the time to answer their questions, seeking to lead them to understanding and repentance- and His denunciations of them were probably softly and imploringly spoken, still seeking for the inevitability of future judgment to lead them to repentance. As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father's house, Jesus didn't have to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:26,27). He could have insisted that He didn't need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father's glory. And so He told Peter that "lest we should offend them", He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren't fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have. Even at the end of His ministry, He still sought to convert them. He reasoned with them, using carefully prepared Old Testament allusions in the hope they would understand them, when we would almost certainly either have given up, or would just be gritting our teeth, trying to be patient with them because we didn't want to sin...but He was full of a genuine, unpretended desire for their salvation. And earlier in His ministry, He had told the cured leper to tell no other man but go and offer for his cleansing, in order to make a witness to the priests. All three synoptics record this, as if it made a special impression on everyone (Mt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14). It could be that the Lord is using an idiom when He told the leper to tell nobody: 'Go and make a witness *first and foremost* to the priests as opposed to anybody else'. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true.

The Lord's example is to be ours; He spoke of not making the Orthodox Jews stumble by not paying the tribute; yet He goes on to say that one must beware lest we make the little ones who believe, to stumble (Mt. 17:27; 18:6). Is it not that He saw in Orthodox Jewry the beginnings of faith...a faith which was to come to fruition when a great company of priests were later obedient to the faith in Him? None of us would have had that sensitivity, that hopefulness, that seeking spirit. It is truly a challenge to us.

Were obedient to the faith- This is ambiguous- it could mean obedience as response to faith, in which case it may refer to baptism; or it could mean obedience to the set of propositions which define the one faith. Because doctrine and practice are linked, the Gospel is something to which man must be obedient- it isn't merely a set of academic propositions. It results in "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Probably the greatest temptation for all of us, in all stages of our spiritual career, is to be like Israel of old: to *know* the Faith, on an abstract, surface level, but not to really *believe* it in our hearts, and therefore not to act in the way God intends. Paul was aware of this difference; he spoke of us as those who believe *and* know the Truth (1 Tim. 4:3).

6:8 *And Stephen, full of grace and power-* Or, "Full of faith" (AV). See on :5 *Full of faith*. "Grace", *charis*, is so often associated with the gift of the Spirit. And this is the same "grace" in essence promised to all in Christ. Grace is a major New Testament theme, and it is deeply associated with the gift of the Spirit. This is a central part of the Christian experience which we cannot deny by simply assuming it refers solely to the miraculous manifestations of the Spirit experienced in the first century.

6:9 *Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen-* These were probably Jews [or their children] who had been taken to Rome as slaves and then been made free on the basis that they were Jews. They were therefore very sensitive to any possible problem with Rome and anything which meant that they were to cease identifying as Jews and identify instead as something else, in this case, the followers of the Lord Jesus and citizens of His invisible Kingdom. Opposition to the Gospel is often from those who perceive, even subconsciously, that they have something to lose, or that their historical positions will have to be rejected.

(Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen- Cilicia is where Paul was from. One wonders if he was involved in some way with these people.

6:10 *They were not able to withstand-* A clear fulfilment of the Lord's prediction in the Olivet prophecy: "I will give you the words and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to contradict" (Lk. 21:15). The preceding context of Lk. 21:12 is relevant to what had just happened to the disciples: "They shall lay their hands on you and shall persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for my name's sake". The Olivet prophecy of 'the last days' could therefore have come true in the first century- it didn't, because the preconditions for the Lord's return were not fulfilled, particularly with respect to Israel's repentance.

The wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke- This is one of a series of connections between the sufferings of Stephen and those of the Lord Jesus:

The Lord Jesus	Stephen
Acts 2:22	Acts 6:8
Luke 4:22	Acts 6:10
Mark 12:13	Acts 6:11

Luke 20:20	Acts 6:12
Matthew 26:59	Acts 6:13
Matthew 26:61	Acts 6:14
Matthew 26:65	Acts 6:11
Mark 15:20	Acts 7:57,58
Mark 14:62	Acts 7:56

They couldn't resist the spirit by which Stephen spoke (Acts 6:10), yet he says they resisted the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). This is the miserable position of all who refuse to the good news of the Kingdom. There was a similar situation at the time of the exile. God "poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel" (Ez. 39:28,29). The Spirit was poured out upon the dry bones, but they refused to come to life and stand up and return to Zion. They resisted the Holy Spirit. Salvation again 'came near' in the first century and again they refused. But they were resisting that which cannot be resisted.

6:11 *Then they secretly induced men to say-* The record of what they did is clearly alluding to how Jezebel set up men to falsely accuse Naboth of blasphemy (1 Kings 21:10,13). Later in the book of Revelation, Jezebel appears to be the basis for the description of the Jerusalem temple and its associated Judaism and apostate Jewish Christianity.

We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God- This is parallel with "blasphemous words against this holy place and the law" (:13). They had made 'God' equal the temple and the law. The external trappings of their religion, even the ultimately true religion, had become as a god to them. We can so easily do the same.

6:12 *And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes and came upon him and-* The first reference in Acts to the masses being poisoned against the Christians. Again we see how fickle people are.

Seized him, and brought him into the council- This again is the language of the Olivet prophecy about the situation in the 'last days' (same words used in Mk. 13:11; Lk. 21:12). The prediction there was that when they were "brought" to councils etc., they should not worry what they were to say, because the Spirit would teach them what to say. We can therefore view Stephen's speech in Acts 7 as not premeditated but directly inspired by the Spirit in response to his having been "brought" into the council.

6:13 *And set up false witnesses, who said: This man does not cease to speak-* Their case was based around the fact that the Christians had been asked to refrain / cease (Acts 5:28) but Stephen had ignored this. The continued case against the disciples was in defiance of Gamaliel's advice; and he was seen as one of Judaism's most revered ideologues, even during his lifetime. The council had initially agreed with his advice (5:40). This strange going against his advice after agreeing on it, to the point of one of Gamaliel's star pupils orchestrating the stoning to death of Stephen, was and is psychologically noteworthy. There was a power of irrational fear and anger at work, which was clearly rooted in a subconscious recognition that in fact, they were wrong and the Christians were correct. Saul was finally honest and owned up; but it would seem that many others of his peer group spent their rest of their miserable, bitter days kicking against the goads of their conscience. And so it can be today; the anger of religious people is never ameliorated in time, because it is rooted in a fundamental wrong turning in their thinking, and they lack the humility to admit it. And this accounts for the masses of bitter, self-righteous religious folks who go to their deathbeds upholding positions and truths over some curious quirk of thinking, or

regarding separation from some supposed false teacher, all because they cannot allow a Damascus road to happen; all because their pride is too great to let them admit that they were wrong.

Blasphemous words against this holy place and the law- See on :11. Paul was doubtless deeply involved in setting up Stephen's condemnation. And it is no mere coincidence that he was accused in the same city of Jerusalem of profaning "this holy place" (Acts 21:28 s.w.). This is not mere poetic justice, what goes around coming around. Rather was this one of many Divinely arranged echoes of Stephen's sufferings in the life of Paul- for Paul's education and spiritual maturity. For after all, he and Stephen shall live eternally together.

6:14 *For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place-* The same word used in the accusation against the Lord that He intended to destroy the temple (Mt. 26:61). The Lord's trial was only recent history; it should have been apparent to those men that they were repeating exactly the same pattern of events and accusations against Stephen as they had done against Jesus of Nazareth. And surely they must have feared, albeit unspokenly, that likewise their best efforts to silence the strange power behind these men would also come to nothing. The accusation in a sense was true, because the same word is used by the Lord in the Olivet prophecy, speaking of how the Jerusalem temple was to be 'destroyed' [AV "thrown down"]; and the commander of the armies of judgment was the Lord Jesus, according to other teachings.

And shall change the customs which Moses delivered to us- Paul was later accused of teaching Jews not to walk after the "customs" delivered to Moses (Acts 21:21 s.w.). Again, Paul was being led to fellowship with Stephen; just as we are brought to understand the feelings and positions of those whom we have hurt in previous years.

6:15 See on Acts 7:22.

And all that sat in the council, fastening their eyes on him- The same word is used of Stephen's eyes fastened upon his Lord in Heaven (Acts 7:55). When we too are the focus of others' hate, or even if that is how it feels or appears; we are to in turn focus upon the Lord above who sees and knows all.

Saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel- Within Judaism, seeing the face of an Angel was felt to be inappropriate for sinful man, and likely to lead to death. Hence Jud. 6:22: "Gideon saw that he was the angel of Yahweh, and Gideon said, Alas, Lord Yahweh! I have seen the angel of Yahweh face to face!". The implication may be that they felt most unworthy; and they had to drown that sense of guilt by an ever deeper obsession with legalism and casuistry. And their anger understandably grew the greater, even unto death, as they were in the presence of this manifestation of God's glory. The obvious image is of Moses, whose face shone with the glory of the Angel, before an Israel who condemned him. And so these men, the leaders of Israel, were as it were looking upon Moses and condemning him. For there is no reason to think that the glory just shone momentarily from the face of Stephen; rather is the implication that as those committee men sat there in their seats, they were beholding the glory shining from Stephen's face throughout. And hence he begins his defence by speaking of "the God of glory"- that same glory shining from him- and emphasizes Israel's rejection of Moses.

Saul, Paul and Stephen

As well as John the Baptist, it would seem that Stephen likewise had a deep impact upon Paul. Stephen's condemnation had been because he had reminded the Jews of the fact "Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool" and therefore the temple was

not ultimately relevant (Acts 7:48,49). Yet only a few brief years later, Paul was using the very same words and logic on Mars Hill in Athens. It has been observed that Hebrews particularly has enough conscious points of contact with Stephen's words that it would seem that the author was very familiar with Stephen's words:

Acts [Stephen]	Hebrews
7:2,55	1:1-3; 2:10
7:2-5	11:8
7:2	11:1-31
7:9-36	3:16; 11:21,22
7:38	11:1-29 cf. 4:1-3
7:46	9:11,24 cp. Is. 66:1,2
7:39-43,52	3:7-12
6:14	ch. 1-6

Stephen's speech (and perhaps other, unrecorded words of Stephen) became imprinted upon Paul's mind and consciousness. In writing to the brethren he had once persecuted, both consciously and unconsciously Paul was reflecting Stephen's words. A clear example is found in the way Stephen describes Israel as "thrusting" Moses away from them (Acts 7:39); and Paul is the only other person in the New Testament to use this same Greek word- to describe how although Israel thrust God away from them, yet God did not thrust [AV "cast away"] His people from Himself (Rom. 11:1,2). The even unconscious influence of Stephen upon Paul is reflected in the way he speaks of himself as "born... brought up... educated" (Acts 22:2,3)- using the very terms Stephen uses in Acts 7 about Moses. See on Acts 7:43.

ACTS CHAPTER 7

7:1 *And the high priest said: Are these things so?*- The "things" were the accusations of blasphemy against the temple and Mosaic law. Actually Stephen doesn't comment on those issues directly, although he does develop the theme that God has relationships with people in any place, and doesn't require a temple for that fellowship with man. Rather is Stephen's focus upon Israel's historical rejections of the Lord's prototypes; and it was this which led to the explosion of bad conscience anger which led to Stephen's death. But his murder was therefore not related to the "things" of which he was initially accused. It could be said that Stephen could have made a fair case that he in fact was innocent of what he was accused of. But he doesn't. Instead he purposefully appeals to their conscience regarding the Lord Jesus, and the bankruptcy of their conception of 'holy space'. And it was that witness which cost him his life, as it provoked the lynching which took place. He gave his life, therefore, in an attempt to save their eternal lives. And it worked, at least with Paul. But he achieved that by going on the spiritually offensive rather than being on the defensive to save his own skin. Thus in :42,43 he will quote Amos 5 concerning Israel's idolatry in the wilderness, and accuse the torah observant Jerusalem Jews of doing just the same. He clearly wanted their salvation, and knew that in the case of the hardened religiously self-righteous, shock tactics and direct, penetrating accusation were all that might work.

We note that Acts 4-7 contain three trials- with worsening outcomes [threats, then flogging, and now stoning to death]. This is then followed by Saul's persecutions- as if things got progressively worse for the church, and then Saul was converted.

7:2 *And he said: Brothers and fathers, listen-* Stephen did not consider the Jews to be somehow not his brethren. This open approach to fellowship with the Jews, despite their misunderstandings and misbelief and aggression, is surely a challenge to all who insist on rigid lines of fellowship demarcation.

The God of glory- See on 6:15. In his famous final speech, Stephen evidently had humming in his mind the theme of the glory of God. He begins by saying that "The God of glory appeared...". God heard that speech, and read his mind. And responded in an appropriate way- for to give Stephen final strength to face death, God made His glory appear to Stephen (Acts 7:55). And so it can be for us- although it all depends what we have humming in our hearts. The context of Stephen's speech is his defence against the accusation that he was blaspheming the temple. The Jews considered that God's glory was uniquely located within that building; even though there is no evidence that the shekinah glory was visible at that time. Stephen's response is that God's glory was apparent to Abraham in Gentile Mesopotamia, outside even the limits of the land promised to Abraham. There is the implication in the language of 'appearance' that Abraham had some kind of a vision of the cherubim glory of Yahweh, although Genesis is silent about that. Gen. 12:7 LXX says that "the Lord appeared to Abraham" but Stephen seems to understand this as a full manifestation of the "God of glory", a theophany which visibly displayed God's glory *outside* of the land of Israel and the temple. That's Stephen's point. This is all in answer to the accusation that Stephen along with "this Jesus" was planning to destroy the temple. They effectively equated God with His temple: "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God... This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law" (Acts 6:11,13). God was made equal to the external trappings of religion. And so many make this mistake. Stephen's response is to demonstrate that God works and fellowships outside of religion and 'sacred space'. The same religiosity is seen today in those who deny the possibility of being an 'out of church Christian', who fret about things like self baptism, taking communion alone etc.

Appeared to our father Abraham- Stephen was not merely witnessing against these men. He was appealing for their repentance, and does so by building bridges over what was common ground- in this case, having Abraham as their common father. See on 7:19 *Our race... our fathers* and 7:26 *Gentlemen...*

Before he dwelt in Haran- See on :4.

7:3 *And said to him, Leave your land and your kindred-* Pointedly omitting mention of "your father's house". Gen. 12:1 records that the Lord had told Abram to leave his country, kindred *and* his father's house, but goes on to say that "So Abram departed" from *Haran* "as the Lord had spoken unto him" (Gen. 12:4). The implication is that the command which he was given in Ur, was repeated to him in Haran, with the additional information that he must now also leave "your father's house". Stephen is making the point that Abraham's 'obedience' was counted to him by grace; righteousness was imputed to him, when he had a shaky start in his faithfulness. For he left because his father's family also left... not because he actually was obedient to the Divine call.

And go into- Gk. 'come here into'; as if God was already there in Canaan.

The land which I shall show you- According to Heb. 11:8, Abraham embarked on the journey not knowing or [Gk.] 'understanding' where he was going. Accurate knowledge of the literal details of the Kingdom whither we are headed is not therefore the issue here; rather is it simple faith in response to God's calling. This is what is required at the start of the journey; for Abraham is held up as the pattern for us all.

Only later was Abraham 'shown' the land. The same word is used of how the devil of the Lord's own thoughts / temptations 'showed' Him the future Kingdom of God on earth (Mt. 4:8). Revelation of Divine truth is therefore progressive; after some time leading the disciples, the Lord then 'shewed' them the details of His sufferings (Mt. 16:21 s.w.), and after His resurrection 'shewed' Peter more details (Acts 10:28 s.w.) and 'shewed' latter day events to His followers (Rev. 1:1; 4:1 s.w.). Indeed there are seven references in the visions of Revelation to believers being 'shewn' things. Even the Father's 'showing' of things to His Son was progressive (Jn. 5:20). We are not, therefore, to require of those just beginning their journey a comprehensive grasp of the things which have been 'shewn' to us who have been on the road of faith for some time already.

7:4 Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran- Stephen begins by pointing out that the father of Israel, Abraham, was himself weak in faith in response to the promises. He was asked to leave his family and homeland in Mesopotamia- but he didn't. His father took him and emigrated from Ur. And only when his father died did Abram move on further. According to Jewish tradition, Abraham was 23 years in Haran. "From thence... *God* removed him into (Canaan)" (Acts 7:4 R.V.). But if God had *forced* him to be "removed", Abram's response to the promises would not be held up for us as the great example of faith which it is. The call of Abram is an essay in partial response being confirmed by God. *God* removed him through repeating the promises to Abram in Haran, and the providential fact that Terah died there. The fact that Abram "dwelt" in Haran, despite his call to leave, with his kindred and father's house shows a slow reaction to the command to leave those things and go to the unknown land, which by now Abram must have guessed was Canaan- or at least, he would have realized that Canaan was en route to it.

And from there, when his father was dead- Instead of doing as he was told and breaking with his father and immediate family, Abraham was only obedient by default. His father died, and he moved on. And there is historical evidence that there was war at the time and many left Haran in any case due to push factors; rather than Abraham being obedient to the simple words of God. The weakness of Abraham is emphasized, as is that of the patriarchs and others amongst the founding fathers. The idea is that it is simply not the case that God's people dwell in His land and worship at His temple, and are therefore acceptable with Him. God's people are weak, and in desperate need of His grace and forgiveness- which is only to be found in the Lord Jesus. Thus Stephen focuses upon the weaker side of Moses in :23, saying that he fled Egypt from fear; whereas Heb. 11:27 says he fled *not* fearing the wrath of the king. Faith and fear can co-exist in a believer; but Stephen focuses upon the fear in Moses. Stephen really wanted to make this point; for he was answering the accusation that he had blasphemed Moses. Instead of denying this to save his own skin, and painting Moses in stellar terms- he instead shows how he wants the Jews to come to repentance. And so he emphasizes the human, weaker side of Moses- in the hope they will be humbled and thereby enabled to look honestly at their own weaknesses, and repent.

God sent him into this land, wherein you now dwell- The Greek word is only used once again in the New Testament, and again by Stephen, in speaking of how God 'carried away' apostate Israel into captivity (Acts 7:43). The connection may imply that Abraham was not at his strongest when God carried him away into Canaan. Whatever, the point is surely clear enough that Abraham did not go of his own freewill obedience to Canaan, in response to God's clear command to him. Rather did God's grace as it were pick him up and take him there. This was an Old Testament

example of God's Spirit working in the lives of His people to bring about their obedience; and it was that same gift of the Spirit which Peter offered to Israel at this time, speaking of how God would give them not only forgiveness but also even repentance itself- a mental attitude.

7:5 And He gave him no inheritance in it, no, not enough to set his foot on it, and He promised that He would give it to him in possession and to his seed after him, when he had no child- The Jews were therefore wrong in thinking that their dwelling in Palestine was some kind of fulfilment of the promises to Abraham. For God keeps His promises, and Abraham must therefore be resurrected to receive the inheritance in the Kingdom when it is established on earth at the Lord's return. He didn't get anything in this life, because he had to even buy a plot of land in which to bury Sarah.

7:6 And God spoke in this way- Because Stephen is changing the pronouns of the original quotation, and also summarizing the essence of what God was saying. Here we have an example of how extra words and verbal devices had to be used in the absence of anything like square brackets. But Stephen is also mixing quotation with interpretation, as was and is the Jewish way of using Scripture.

That his seed should live in a strange land, and that they would bring them into bondage and- Remember that Stephen is seeking to demonstrate that God's presence is independent of sacred spaces such as the temple or land of Israel. Heb. 11:9 surely alludes here by saying that Abraham "went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land" (ESV). These are the same Greek words translated "strange land". For Abraham, the land of Israel was as a foreign land. And here Stephen speaks of Egypt as a strange / foreign land. The confusion is because in a sense, whilst the land is inherited by Abraham, the whole earth is a foreign land to God's people- including the geographical territory of Israel.

Treat them badly- The same word as in :19. But this is the term which is used about how the Jews abused the Christian preachers (Acts 12:1; 14:2; 18:10). What the Jews were doing to Stephen put them in the position of the Gentile Egyptians, persecuting the true Israel of God.

Four hundred years- The idea is that it would be unreasonable to suggest that God had no fellowship with anyone amongst His people for such a long period as four hundred years. And yet they were away from the supposed sacred space of the land promised to Abraham.

7:7 And the nation to which they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God- This is added because Stephen appears to be summarizing the essence of God's word rather than making verbatim quotation.

And after that shall they come out and serve Me in this place- This is neither a quotation from the Hebrew [Masoretic] text nor from the standard version of the Septuagint. The text of Gen. 15:14 reads: "Afterward they will come out with great wealth". Apparently Stephen is alluding to Ex. 3:12: "When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain". Perhaps this is why the 'quotation' is introduced by the otherwise strange comment that "God spoke in this way" (:6). The essence of what Stephen understood God to say is quoted as if it is actual quotation. This kind of thing is common in Rabbinic exegesis. And yet why does Stephen change "this mountain", of Sinai, to "this place", a phrase commonly understood to refer to the temple? The point was that God could be served on a mountain, outside of Palestine, just as much as in the Jerusalem temple. For debate about the temple is the context of the whole speech.

7:8 And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begat Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob the twelve

patriarchs- Covenant relationship with God doesn't depend upon sacred space, temples, holy land etc.

7:9 *And the patriarchs, moved with jealousy against Joseph*- Stephen is clearly presenting Joseph as a type of the Lord. And Luke has recently used the same word to describe how it was jealousy which led the Sanhedrin and Jewish leadership to oppose the Christians (Acts 5:17).

Sold him- Just as the Lord was 'sold' for 30 pieces of silver.

Into Egypt- This is one of a number of aspersions that the Judaism of Stephen's day was no better than Gentile Egypt, the persecutor of God's true Israel. Or it could be that we are to see the brothers as representing the Jews, and the selling or 'handing over' of Joseph into Egypt speaks of how they handed the Lord over to the Gentiles.

But God was with him- God being *meta* Joseph is an echo of 'Emmanuel', God with [*meta*] us (Mt. 1:23 cp. Jn. 3:2).

7:10 *And delivered him out of all his afflictions*- The same word used of how the brothers experienced "affliction" during the famine (:11), which brought them eventually to repentance concerning Joseph. God likewise works in our lives, so that we realize first-hand the results of our actions against others. Those who shun and disfellowship and misuse others so often end up having the same done to them; not because God operates some measure-for-measure system of judgment, but rather because He seeks our spiritual growth and sensitivity towards others. What the Jews did to Jesus they were to experience themselves, in essence, in order that they might identify with Him and realize what they had done to Him by feeling it themselves- and repent. But sadly, the Jews of the first century did not respond, even in the afflictions of the Jewish war. Yet Stephen clearly saw Joseph as representative of himself; for he says that Joseph had been given "wisdom", just as Stephen had been. Stephen's hope was that his afflictions at the hands of the Jews would lead to their repentance, and his closing words reflect that hope for them. He had clearly learned deeply from his Lord's example on the cross.

And gave him favour and wisdom- The same words used by Luke about the Lord (Lk. 2:52). Stephen is clearly presenting Joseph as a type of Christ, and also seeing in Joseph a representation of himself, who was likewise given grace and wisdom. Perhaps this was how Stephen's thought process developed; seeing similarities between himself and Joseph, to whom wisdom was also given, and who was also abused by his brethren; and then realizing that Joseph was a type of the Lord's sufferings. And thereby Stephen was led to the realization that the Lord in His sufferings and death was truly his representative.

The idea is "grace and wisdom", alluding to Gen. 39:21 LXX where Joseph was given grace before the jailor; but that experience of grace prepared him for the grace of being made governor over Egypt.

Before Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt- The Lord is described with the same word, as "Governor" (Mt. 2:6). Joseph's exaltation was therefore typical of the Lord's.

And all his house- A term used about God's house in Heb. 3:2,5, which the Lord Jesus is now "over". The multiple similarities in phrasing between Hebrews and Stephen's speech have led some to suggest Stephen as the author of Hebrews, especially as it appears to be addressed to the Jerusalem ecclesia, or is perhaps a transcript of a sermon given there.

7:11 *Now there came a famine over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction; and our fathers found no sustenance*- Note the focus on these two areas. The entire region was affected, according to Genesis; for peoples from all surrounding nations

[not just Canaan] came to Egypt to buy corn. The intention may be to parallel Egypt and Canaan because of the theme Stephen is developing, that there is no holy land or place; and Israel is as Egypt. See on 7:6; 7:7 *After that shall they come out and serve Me in this place* and 7:9 *Into Egypt*.

7:12 *But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers the first time*- The laboured emphasis upon Joseph being recognized only the *second* time is to demonstrate that the Lord Jesus would be recognized by the children of Jacob / Israel the second time. We might be able to reason back from this type and conclude that the first time the brothers came to Egypt, they were intended to repent of their sin and recognize Joseph; but their lack of repentance meant that their eyes were as it were closed from perceiving him. The similarity with the Lord Jesus and Israel is of course acute.

7:13 *And at the second time*- The Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth is hard to explicitly prove from the Old Testament, without recourse to typology. Even Isaiah 53 describes the sufferings of Hezekiah, who was typical of Jesus. Thus Stephen's defence of his belief in the Messiahship of Jesus rests largely on typology – e.g. the fact that Joseph/Jesus was rejected by his brethren at first (Acts 7:13).

Joseph was made known to his brothers- Quoting Gen. 45:1 LXX.

And Joseph's race became manifest to Pharaoh- Joseph had first been introduced to Pharaoh as a Hebrew (Gen. 41:12). But what the term "Hebrew" meant to Egyptians isn't clear; it could mean just 'one from beyond'. The "race" of Joseph presumably refers to the fact he was one of Jacob's sons; and the Jacob family had already become famous as far as Egypt. Yet Joseph had concealed his connection to that family. It may have partly been because of shame at their behaviour, and their disavowal for all the Godly principles which Joseph believed in. Or it may be that because God had performed a psychological miracle on Joseph in making him 'forget his father's house' (Gen. 41:51), he simply did not identify himself as from the Jacob family. Stephen may be making the point that when Joseph, like the Lord Jesus, was recognized by his brethren, he was at the same time recognized by the Gentile world likewise for who he really was. And the same will be true at the latter day repentance of Israel; Rom. 11:15 comes to mind: "For if the casting away of them is the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?"

Perhaps this continues Stephen's theme of demonstrating that the fathers of Israel were themselves weak in faith. Two of the greatest types of the Lord's mediatory work are Esther and Joseph. Esther was perhaps ashamed to reveal that she was a Jewess because of her people's behaviour, but given their desperate need she did reveal it in order to plead with the King for their salvation. And only when Joseph really had to use his influence to save his brethren did "Joseph's race become manifest unto Pharaoh" (Acts 7:13 RV). Does the Lord experience the same sort of embarrassment mixed with an urgent sense of our desperation, in His present mediation for us?

7:14 *And Joseph sent and called to himself Jacob his father and all his extended family*- Stephen has been developing Joseph as a type of the Lord Jesus. He sees significance, therefore, in Joseph-Jesus 'sending', *apostello*, as it were, by the means of apostles; and thus calling Jacob and his brothers to himself. Even in the last minutes of his life, Stephen saw himself as part of this desperate appeal of Joseph-Jesus to the children of Israel. We all have a great example in Stephen's desire to 'call to Jesus' even his persecutors.

Seventy five people- The Hebrew text at Gen. 46:26; Ex. 1:5 and Dt. 10:22 has '70'. But the LXX has 75. The difference is because some extra sons of Joseph's children Ephraim and Manasseh are recorded in the LXX; they are listed in 1 Chron. 7:14-21: Ashriel, Machir, Zelophehad, Peresh, sons of Manasseh; and Shuthelah, son of Ephraim. Joseph's sons were all half Egyptian; his wife was the daughter of a pagan Egyptian priest. Stephen may be reminding the Jews that their fierce claims to ethnic purity were a nonsense; because the very early fathers of the Jewish people were not ethnically pure, but mixed with Gentile blood from the start. Another possibility is that we have 66 people recorded in Gen. 46:8-26; but if we include the wives of Jacob's sons, we have 75. I calculate nine wives on the basis that Joseph's wife was already in Egypt; and the wives of Judah and Simeon were dead. So we may have here an encouragement to see the value of women, as equally counted amongst the 'founding fathers'. Or the 66 people may need to have the nine sons of Joseph added to them; these are mentioned only in the LXX of Gen. 46:27 "And the sons of Joseph born in Egypt were nine souls".

7:15 And Jacob went down into Egypt- Stephen is developing the point that holy land or sacred space is not required for fellowship with God. Hence the Jewish obsession with the temple space was inappropriate.

And he died, he and our fathers- Acts 2:5 has recorded that there were large numbers of Jews from the diaspora who had come to live permanently at Jerusalem in order to die there; and many of them had been baptized. Stephen is making the point that the Jewish fathers themselves died outside the territory of the land promised to Abraham. Clearly those early Jewish Christians were still struggling with the idea that holy space was no longer to be seen so literally, but was now centred in the person and activity of the Lord Jesus.

7:16 And they were carried back to Shechem, and laid- The focus is very much upon their bodies, because the final fulfilment of the promises to Abraham involved a bodily resurrection of these men in order to eternally inherit the land promised to them.

In the tomb that Abraham bought for a price in silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem- The following possibilities have been suggested: "(1) Abraham bought a cave and field in which it stood (Genesis 23:17). (2) Abraham bought another sepulchre, but it is not stated that he bought the field in which it stood (Acts 7:15,16). (3) Years later, Jacob bought a parcel of ground (Joshua 24:32) or a parcel of a field (Genesis 33:19). This was, in all probability, the very field in which Abraham's second sepulchre stood, as this field once belonged to the same owners though they may have been miles apart". We note that despite the shameful behaviour of Jacob's sons to Hamor, God brought about some degree of reconciliation. This gives hope to all who feel stuck, perhaps by their own fault or that of their brethren and relatives, in situations where reconciliation appears impossible.

7:17 But as the time of the fulfilment of the promise which God made to Abraham drew near, the people grew- The Greek says simply "the time of the promise" drawing near- putting 'the promise' for 'the fulfilment of the promise', so sure are God's promises of fulfilment.

The promises to Abraham received their major primary fulfilment at the Exodus. Seeing that their ultimate fulfilment will be at the second coming, it follows that the deliverance of Israel from Egypt was typical of this. Or we can read this as meaning that the Abrahamic promises had their potential fulfilment at this time, involving a resurrection to eternal inheritance of the land- but Israel failed to meet the

preconditions, and so their fulfilment was reinterpreted and rescheduled, just as was to happen as a result of their rejection of the Lord Jesus.

And multiplied in Egypt- See on 6:1 *Multiplying*.

7:18 *Until there arose another king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph-* Just as the Jews did not know the Lord in crucifying Him (Lk. 23:34 s.w.).

7:19 *The same dealt craftily with our race-* Again Stephen is seeking to bridge build with his audience by stressing what they had in common; see on :2 *Our father Abraham*.

And ill-treated our fathers- In fulfilment of the prediction mentioned in :6, where the same Greek word is translated "treat them badly". Luke uses the word of how the Christians were persecuted by the Jews (Acts 12:1; 14:2; 18:10). Again the Jews are being likened to the pagan Egyptians.

Casting out their babies so that they might not live- As the Jews cast out the 'baby' Christian converts from the synagogues. But the command of Pharaoh was that the people themselves should cast their baby boys into the Nile; the abuse of the Hebrews was in that they were made to cast their own babies into the river; the Greek grammar here supports this. See on :21.

7:20 *At this time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair; and he was nourished three months in his father's house-* The word is only used in Heb. 11:23, also about Moses. It means just that- handsome, good. The idea that it means 'fair towards God' is speculation, and at best interpretation rather than translation. It seems a wilful twist of the Greek *asteios*, a word related to *astu*, a city, and meaning literally 'urbane'. Twisting *teos* ['God'] into *asteios* is just not permissible; and if we are to read 'fair to God' then quite simply the Greek would be different. It seems to be the equivalent of Ex. 2:2, where Jochebed noticed Moses was "a goodly child", the Hebrew *tob* meaning no more than 'good' or 'nice' and with no hint of 'to God'.

7:21 *And when he was cast out-* A related word to that used in :19 "casting out their babies so that they might not live"; see note there. The picture here presented is of Jochebed being technically obedient to the commandment to cast her baby into the river; by gently laying the child in an ark in the river. And it seems that no sooner had she done so, committing the baby to God's care, along walked Pharaoh's daughter and picked him up out of the water. Stephen describes the 'putting out' of Moses with the same word used in the LXX for what happened to Israel (Ez. 16:5; Ex. 2:3 LXX). Moses is set up as example and representative of his people Israel. Israel is likened in Ez. 16:5 to a child rejected at birth, but miraculously found and cared for, and brought up with every pampered blessing. Just as Moses was.

Pharaoh's daughter took him up- She called him 'Moses' because she had drawn him out of the water (Ex. 2:10). But the Hebrew *mashah*, 'drawn out', is used in the sense of deliverance. And this is from whence *Mosheh* ['Moses'; the same consonants are in both words]. Indeed, the idea of being drawn out of waters means just that (Ps. 18:16). So we are to imagine the baby about to drown, and the princess saving his life.

And nourished him as her own son- Moses would therefore have been next in line to the throne; and he gave up all that for the sake of trying to save a bunch of down and outs who didn't appreciate him anyway.

7:22 *And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians-* Moses and Daniel were in such a similar situation; Daniel appears to have slipped away into the shadows whenever he was promoted to greatness in Babylon, and surely he took inspiration from Moses. There are similarities intended to be discerned between our lives and those of others; and we are to respond. Paul says he was "*taught* according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" (Acts 22:3) by Gamaliel, receiving the

highest wisdom possible in the Jewish world; but he uses the same word as Stephen in Acts 7:22, describing how Moses was "*learned*" in all the wisdom of Egypt. Paul perceived his Jerusalem education as equivalent to that received by Moses in Egypt; he saw the very doyen of Judaism as no better than pagan Egypt. And Stephen [through his allusions] likewise had several times suggested that Judaism was no better than paganism. This speech had a huge effect on Paul, even though Stephen would not have noticed anything at the time.

"The wisdom" is Gk. *sophia*. The same word is used in the construction which is translated "dealt craftily" in :19; the wisdom of Egypt was to persecute the Hebrews.

And he was mighty in his words and works- The very phrase used by Luke about the Lord (Lk. 24:19). If Moses was indeed handsome (see on :20) and also mighty in words and works, he really would have been very eligible as the next Pharaoh, being the Pharaoh's adopted grandson. Moses really did despise so much worldly advantage for the sake of the far less glamorous calling of God. "Mighty in his words and works" is very much the language which has been used to describe Stephen himself in 6:8-10. Stephen took comfort from the rejection of Moses, and saw himself in Moses' experiences. This is how we too can make Biblical history a living word to us. Indeed, the Biblical examples which Stephen selects include Joseph who were rejected by the children of Israel despite his "wisdom" (:10), and Moses who also had "wisdom" [of the Egyptians] but was rejected by Israel- and wisdom was the great characteristic of Stephen (6:10). The way God made Stephen's face to shine as if he were an Angel (6:15) is effectively showing how God confirms Stephen in feeling as Moses; for the Angel's glory shone off the face of Moses too (Ex. 34:29).

"I am not eloquent (mg. a man of words) ... I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Ex. 4:10); this is how Moses felt he would be perceived, although actually he was formally quite fluent when in the court of Pharaoh (Acts 7:22). Paul would have remembered Stephen saying how Moses was formerly full of worldly *wisdom* and "mighty in words". Paul felt that he too had been through Moses' experience- once mighty in words as the rising star of the Jewish world, but now like Moses he had left all that behind in order to try to save a new Israel from Judaism and paganism.

7:23 *But when he was nearly forty years old*- It is worth trying to visualize the scene when Moses was "full forty years old" (AV). It would make a fine movie. The Greek phrase could refer to Moses' birthday, and one is tempted to speculate that it had been arranged that when Moses was 40, he would become Pharaoh. Heb. 11:24 says that he refused and chose- the Greek tense implying a one off choice- to suffer affliction with God's people. It is tempting to imagine Moses at the ceremony when he should have been declared as Pharaoh, the most powerful man in his world... standing up and saying, to a suddenly hushed audience, voice cracking with shame and stress and yet some sort of proud relief that he was doing the right thing: "I, whom you know in Egyptian as Meses, am Moshe, yes, Moshe the Jew; and I decline to be Pharaoh". Imagine his foster mother's pain and anger. And then in the end, the wonderful honour would have been given to another man, who became Pharaoh. Perhaps he or his son was the one to whom Moses was to come, 40 years later. After a nervous breakdown, stuttering, speaking with a thick accent, clearly having forgotten Egyptian... walking through the mansions of glory, along the corridors of power, to meet that man, to whom he had given the throne 40 years earlier.

It came into his heart- God clearly moved Moses to deliver Israel. We see here yet another example of how God can operate directly upon the hearts of men, giving ideas, motivation and even repentance.

To visit his brothers the children of Israel- 'Visit' is a Hebraism for identifying with, and also saving. It is through the Lord's representative sacrifice that God ultimately visited and saved His people. Ex. 4:31 is clear that *God* visited His people at this time; yet He was strongly manifested in Moses, so that what Moses did and desired to do was a manifestation of God. It is Luke who has recorded already how the work of the Lord Jesus was God's visiting of His people (Lk. 1:68,78; 7:16); and he later speaks of how God visited the Gentiles through the work of Peter (Acts 15:14). So often, the words of Stephen are alluded to later by Paul, who would have watched and listened with eagle intensity to Stephen's words here- and on his conversion, sought to live in the spirit and reasoning of the man he murdered. Paul uses Stephen's phrase here when he speaks of his decision to go 'visit his brothers' where he had previously preached and suffered (Acts 15:36). Such a decision was at great personal risk; for he had faced death and persecution in those cities. His brave desire to return was perhaps motivated by Moses' brave decision to visit his brothers, at the cost of losing all things in his secular life and endangering his life. But the thought of following Moses in this was first stimulated by Stephen talking about it. And this is how our lives also work out; we may hear a brother talking about a Bible character like Moses, and it later inspires us in a radical, significant life decision.

"When Moses *was grown*, he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens... when he was *full forty years old* it came into his heart to visit his brethren... by faith Moses, *when he was come to years*, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Ex. 2:11; Acts 7:23; Heb. 11:24). The implication seems to be that Moses reached a certain point of maturity, of readiness, and then he went to his brethren. "...[Moses] *refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh... *choosing* rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the *reproach of Christ* greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:24-28). Moses could have been the next Pharaoh; according to Josephus, he was the commander of the Egyptian army. But he walked away from the possibility of being the richest man on earth, he "refused" it, because he valued "the reproach of Christ" and the recompense of the Kingdom to be *greater* riches. Yet what did he know about the sufferings of Christ? Presumably he had worked out from the promises of the seed in Eden and to the fathers that the future Saviour must be reproached and rejected; and he saw that his own life experience could have a close association with that of this unknown future Saviour who would surely come. And therefore, it seems, Moses counted the honour and wonder of this greater than the riches of Egypt. Both Paul and Moses rejected mammon for things which are abstract and intellectual (in the strict sense): the *excellency* of the understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ and His cross, and the Kingdom this would enable. Living when we do, with perhaps a greater knowledge of the Lord's victory and excellency, our motivation ought to be even stronger.

7:24 *And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed-* It was God who delivered Israel from their Egyptian oppressors (1 Sam. 10:18); but He did so through Moses. Yet Israel would only be oppressed by Gentiles if they were disobedient to the covenant (Dt. 28:29,33, and the word is often used about their punishments at Gentile hands during the period of the judges). But despite that, the God of all grace through Moses avenged His people who were justly suffering for their sins. Stephen is seeking to remove from Israel any sense of national pride at their Exodus from Egypt, and instead see it as a parade example of God's pure grace through the raising up of a Saviour in Moses, who looked ahead to Messiah. And yet the profound truth was that it was through the 'oppression' of that Messianic

Suffering Servant on the cross that Israel's salvation would be enabled (Is. 53:7). And no wonder then that the brief summary of the Gospel in Acts 10:38 uses the word to summarize the work of the Lord Jesus as delivering the oppressed. Stephen, or the Lord speaking through Stephen, was appealing to the audience on all levels. There were many Rabbinic-trained minds there like Saul's, who thought constantly on the level of Scriptural allusion, type and antitype. And these words of Stephen, spoken in perhaps his last minutes of mortal life, succeeded in converting at least Saul.

Striking the Egyptian- The same word used of how the Jews 'smote' the Lord with death (Mt. 26:31). The point is being developed, as with the language of 'oppression', that it was through the Lord's smiting that He smote the oppressors of His people.

7:25 *And he supposed that his brothers understood*- "Supposed" translates *nomizo*, connected to the noun *nomos*, 'law'. The Law of Moses ought to have brought Israel to perceive the Lord Jesus as their Saviour; but for whatever reason, they failed to make that connection.

That God by his hand was giving them deliverance- Moses' hand. But God had told Moses at the bush: "I will stretch out *My hand*, and smite Egypt...." . Moses had yet to learn the meaning of God manifestation through men; Stephen is bringing out the weakness of the fathers, even Moses.

But they understood not- Another phrase of Stephen's that stuck in Paul's mind to the end of his days; for on arrival in Rome he lamented that the Jews "understood not" (Acts 28:26 s.w.). Stephen's speech is a superb example of powerful preaching that left ideas and words in the minds of his hearers that remained for decades afterwards. The Lord had many times lamented that Israel "understood not"; we can therefore infer that Israel could have accepted Moses' deliverance the first time. But they thrust him away from them, and there was a 40 year hiatus in the plan of Israel's redemption. This was reflected in Israel's rejection of the Lord Jesus and then the possibility arising around AD70 for them to accept Him again. It seems from the New Testament that the apostles clearly hoped for that; but again they refused the possibility, and another, longer hiatus has been interposed.

7:26 *And the following day he appeared to two of them* - God sent Moses to be their saviour, pointing forward to His sending of the Lord Jesus to redeem us. Moses came to Israel and "shewed (Greek '*optomai*') himself" to them (Acts 7:26). Yet '*optomai*' really means to gaze at, to watch a spectacle. He came to his people, and gazed at them as they fought among themselves, spiritually and emotionally destroyed by the oppression of Egypt. He invited them to likewise gaze upon him as their saviour. This surely prefigures our Lord's consideration of our sinful state. As he grew up in Nazareth he would have thought on this a lot. The same word for "appeared" is used of the Lord's appearances after His resurrection, specifically to the 'two' on the road to Emmaus. Luke has used the word in Acts 1:3 of how the Lord 'appeared' after His resurrection for 40 days. And it is the same word used of how the risen Lord appeared to Saul soon afterwards (Acts 9:17; 26:16; 1 Cor. 15:8). Surely Saul made the connection.

As they were fighting- 'Striving'. The same word is used of how the Jews strove amongst themselves over the issue of Jesus as Messiah (Jn. 6:52). The same striving was going on within the consciences of men like Saul and Gamaliel who were listening to Stephen.

And tried to reconcile them- Paul grasped the point, for in his later letters he writes much of how the Lord's work and the outcome of His death was fundamentally the ministry of reconciliation between persons. To glorify, create and perpetuate division between brethren is to miss the point of the Lord's work.

Saying, Gentlemen, you are brothers- Literally, 'men'. They were not to be mere men in their relationship with each other, they were to remember that they were brothers and act accordingly. See on :28. Several times Stephen has appealed to the fact that he and the Jews were brothers, with common ancestry; see on 7:2 *Our father Abraham*. But just as the point was lost on Israel at the time of Moses, so it was in Stephen's day; for they stoned him all the same.

Why do you injure each other?- The same word has just been used of how the Egyptian injured the Israelite (s.w. "suffer wrong"). By oppressing and injuring our brethren, we are acting as Egypt. This was a finely reasoned appeal to Stephen's brethren not to treat him likewise. And given the kind of minds listening to him, continually accustomed to such a way of reasoning from Biblical words and precedents, the appeal would have struck home. Especially with Saul.

7:27 But he that did his neighbour wrong- The same word as "injure" in :26; see note there.

Thrust him away- This incident was typical of Israel's attitude to Moses in the wilderness years (:39 s.w.). And again, the listening, angry Paul was deeply impressed by the logic. He got the point, that Moses was a type of the Lord Jesus; and he uses the same word in saying that Israel had thrust away the Gospel of Christ (Acts 13:46), although he also marvels at how although they had done this, God had not 'thrust away' His people Israel (Rom. 11:1,2). God has not treated them as they treated Him through their rejection of Moses and Jesus, who manifested Him.

Saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?- Again there was the question of authority. This was a big issue with the Jews of the first century in their criticisms of both the Lord and His preachers. Stephen is demonstrating that it was this concern with authority which had led Israel to initially reject Moses. The Lord Jesus of course is described with the same words, as the ultimate ruler (Rev. 1:5) and judge. Luke clearly connects with these words by being the only evangelist to record the Lord's comment: "Who made me a judge or a divider over you?" (Lk. 12:14). The answer was, 'God'. The parallels were clearly being developed by Stephen between Moses and the Lord Jesus, and they would not have been lost upon his audience.

7:28 Would you kill me- Moses had made no threat at all. He had come to save his brethren, not kill them. Later, Israel liked to suppose that Moses and God Himself were some kind of psychopaths who had led them out of Egypt intentionally to murder them in the desert. Legion feared the Lord had come to torment rather than save him (Mt. 8:29). The disciples feared that the Lord didn't care that they perished in the storm (Mk. 4:38). Here we have a psychological phenomenon; the saviour is feared to be a destroyer by those he seeks to save. This has been observed from various angles in many studies and observations. The reason is that the group to be saved do not believe that the saviour can save them; and they justify that disbelief by thinking that actually, they are correct in disbelieving him- because actually, he is a deceiver and wishes to kill them. This is why strong opposites of reaction are produced by the challenge to faith which there is in the person of Jesus and in the Gospel. It is why messengers of that Gospel and of Jesus are so strongly slandered by those who disbelieve that Gospel. It is why nobody can stand on some passive middle ground when they encounter the Lord. Here too is the explanation for Saul's manic reaction against the Lord, and then such a strong reaction the other way. The very way we are wired means that we respond to salvation either in trust, or in strong reaction the other way. In our witnessing to men and women, we often meet the claim that folks are undecided or indifferent. However politely stated, that is in fact an excuse for unbelief.

As you killed the Egyptian yesterday?- The Hebrew assumed that Moses was going to treat him too as he would an Egyptian. The Hebrew had failed to realize the unique identity of himself as a Hebrew and not as a mere man. See on :26 *Gentlemen, you are brothers.*

7:29 And Moses fled at this saying and went to live in the land of Midian- Ex. 2:14 says that "Moses was afraid, and said, Surely this thing is known". But Heb. 11:27 gives a different perspective: "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the anger of the king. For he endured...". See on Heb. 11:27. It seems that Moses had at best a mixture of motives, or motives that changed over time; yet God sees through his human fear, and discerns an element of calm faith within Moses as he left Egypt. Moses is described as having "endurance" at the time he fled from Egypt (Heb. 11:27), even though in the short term his faith failed him at the time and he fled in fear (Ex. 2:14,15). Yet God counted him as having that basic ability to endure, even to endure through his own failure and weakness. *This* is what God looks at, rather than our day-to-day acts of sin and righteousness. Stephen emphasizes the weakness of Moses to seek to lead his audience away from national pride and an idolizing of Moses; he wished them to see the prophet greater than Moses, Jesus the Messiah, as indeed greater than Moses. In Judaism, there was and still is a tendency to perceive Moses as the acme of spirituality, far greater than Messiah.

Where he begat two sons- Neither of whom did he circumcise; and their mother was a non-Israelite. Such a person would have been excluded from the synagogues by Moses' spiritual descendants. Again, Stephen is portraying the weaker side of Moses in order to lead his listeners to a position where they sought the greater than Moses.

7:30 And when forty years were fulfilled- The language of 'fulfilment' suggests that God planned the 40 years ahead of time. The suggestion seems to be that God gave them this period as a punishment- for not accepting Moses the first time. Stephen and the early apostles appear to have had the idea that likewise, a 40 year period was being given to Israel to repent after their rejection of the Lord. But even when that was fulfilled, they still refused to repent. The idea of years being fulfilled is using the words used in the LXX for the 70 years judgment upon Judah which was fulfilled (2 Chron. 36:21,22; Jer. 25:12). This confirms us in understanding this period as a judgment upon Israel; their sufferings in Egypt were prolonged by their refusal to accept Moses' deliverance.

An angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai- The point being once more that sacred space is not only in the temple nor only in the territory of the land of Israel. The wilderness where Moses kept sheep for 40 years was also the same area where he shepherded Israel for the next 40 years. 40 years is a long time; during it, Moses went from being a handsome young man, next in line for the throne, eloquent in words and works... to a man broken by 40 years of manual work in the cruel desert, stuttering, having forgotten Egyptian, needing a spokesman. And then, he was ready for God to use as the greatest leader of His people apart from the Lord. Monotonous experience over decades can be used by the Father to prepare us for another stage of life; whilst we cannot attach specific meaning to event at the time it happens, we can rest assured that there is meaning to event, even if it takes 40 years to realize it.

In a flame of fire- The appearance of the Spirit as flames of fire on the heads of the apostles thereby connected them to Moses; and the Jewish opposition to them made those learned religious men no better than the Egyptians.

In a bush- It is Luke who uses this word in recording how the Lord made the point that figs and grapes, the classic symbols of Israel under blessing, do not come from such thorny bushes (Lk. 6:44). But it was there, in that context and negative associations, that Yahweh revealed Himself as Israel's saviour through Moses. And He had done the same in the Lord Jesus whom Israel now likewise despised.

7:31 *And when Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight; and as he drew near to observe-* "Wondered" translates a Greek word which is often used in a negative sense concerning people lacking faith and insight when they should have had it. Another reference to Moses in weakness, preparing the way for presenting Jesus as Messiah as the greater than Moses.

There came the voice of the Lord- Actually of an Angel (:30). But the Angel was spoken of as if it were God, in that it was speaking God's voice. In this lies the basis for a correct understanding of the highly exalted nature of the Lord Jesus; not God Himself in a Trinitarian sense, but the supreme manifestation of Him.

7:32 *I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob-* The Angel spoke those words; and it would be fair to say that in reality, the patriarchs conceived of God in terms of His Angel. Jacob is quite clear about this in Gen. 48:15,16.

And Moses trembled and dared not look- This is in intentional contrast to the way in which he later spoke face to face with the Angel, as a man speaks with his friend (Ex. 33:11); and with how he had the ambition to ask to see God's own glory (Ex. 33:20). The point is that Moses grew spiritually in closeness to the Angel who manifested the Father. And it was such growth in relation to the Lord Jesus which Stephen was urging. See on :34 *Come*.

7:33 *And the Lord said to him, Take off the shoes from your feet-* Stephen says that this request came *after* God had introduced Himself as the God of Abraham etc. (:32). But the order is apparently different in Ex. 3:5,6: "Take your sandals off from your feet, for the place you are standing on is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". It could be that the "he said" is to be understood as 'He *had* said'. But another alternative is that Stephen was inspired to understand that God introduced Himself twice to Moses; and the first time Moses didn't comprehend it. This would fit with Stephen's point that Joseph was made known to his brethren the *second* time; and Moses likewise was accepted by Israel the second time he came to them. And now Stephen would be saying that Moses himself only grasped the manifestation of God in the Angel at the second time. All this of course was prodding the Jewish conscience about their rejection of their Messiah the first time; but at His second appearing, the 'second time'... they will accept Him.

For the place upon which you stand is holy ground- Literally, in the Greek, 'the holy land', the phrase beloved of Jews to describe Israel. Stephen was speaking in the context of arguing that the temple was no longer required for worship, house meetings were just as valid; and so he makes the point that a spot of scrubland in the Sinai desert was just as much the holy land as the territory of Palestine and the temple mount itself.

7:34 *I have surely seen the affliction of My people that is in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them; and now-* Their groaning was heard by God as a prayer; He sees situations as prayer. Otherwise, if prayer is simply words, then those who are better able to verbalize would have more powerful prayers. But ability to verbalize isn't the necessary thing in order for God to hear prayer.

Come, I will send you into Egypt- Gk. 'come here'. The Angel in the bush invited Moses to come closer to Him, whereas Moses "dared not look" (:32). It was his own intimacy to God which would be the basis of Israel's salvation; hence the paradox of "Come [here], I will send you [away] into Egypt". As noted on :32 *Moses trembled and dared not look*, Moses grew in relationship and intimacy with that Angel, just as he grew in ability to save Israel.

7:35 *This Moses-* Israel hated him, they thrust him from them (Acts 7:39); due to their provocation he failed to enter the land. He had done so much for them, yet they bitterly rejected him- "this Moses", as they called him (Ex. 32:1,23 cp. Acts 7:35). But when God wanted to destroy them and make of Moses a great nation, he pleaded for them with such intensity that he achieved what few prayerful men have: a change (not just a delay in outworking) in God's categorically stated intention.

Whom they refused, saying: Who made you a ruler and a judge?- The same word used of Israel's denial or refusing of the Lord Jesus (Acts 3:13,14). The loneliness of Moses as a type of Christ in showing this kind of love must surely represent that of our Lord. They went to a height which was generally beyond the appreciation of the men among whom they lived. The Spirit seems to highlight the loneliness of Moses by saying that at the same time as Moses *refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Israel *refused* him (the same Greek word is used; Heb. 11:24; Acts 7:35). He was rejected by both the world and God's people: for 40 long years. As Israel envied Moses for spiritual reasons (Ps. 106:16; Acts 7:9), so they did Christ (Mt. 27:18), after the pattern of the brothers' spiritual envy of Joseph (Gen. 37:11). Spiritual envy leading to persecution is quite a common feature in Biblical history (Job, Jeremiah, Paul...). And it isn't absent from the Christian experience either.

Him God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer, by the hand of the angel that appeared to him in the bush- "Ruler and judge" becomes "ruler and deliverer". God fundamentally and essentially wishes to deliver / save rather than to judge. Although Israel rejected Moses as their ruler and deliverer, "the same did God send *to be* a ruler and a deliverer". They didn't want to be saved from Egypt through Moses, and yet God did save them from Egypt through Moses. Israel at that time were exactly like us; while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, we were redeemed in prospect from a world we didn't want to leave. We were saved- and are saved- almost in spite of ourselves. That we were predestined to such great salvation is one of redemption's finest mysteries.

7:36 *This man led them out-* The grammar here might suggest that the completed 'leading out' was after the 40 years journey, and the AV reflects that. Our path in spiritual life is likewise a leading of us out of Egypt; it is not all achieved at the moment of crossing the Red Sea / baptism. The lead up to the Red Sea crossing was just as much a part of the leading out process. This is why separation from the world and unto the things of the Kingdom is an essential part of our salvation process. And it's why that process will involve progressive disillusion and bad experience with the world.

"He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs... in the wilderness forty years" (AV); yet Ex.12:41; 33:1 say that the bringing out of Israel was at the Red Sea. These two 'bringings out' of Egypt (the flesh) are experienced by us, firstly at baptism, and secondly in actually entering the Kingdom at the second coming. Our bringing out from the Kingdom of darkness into the sphere of God's rulership only occurs in prospect at baptism and must be confirmed at the end of our wilderness wandering.

Having done wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years- This confirms that the 'leading out' was both from Egypt and at the end of the wilderness journeys. The wonders done at the exodus were in essence done throughout the 40 years. Thus the cloud in which they were baptized at the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1) continued with them for 40 years. Their baptism in this sense was ongoing, and this idea is repeated in the discourse on baptism in Romans 6.

7:37 This is the Moses who said to the children of Israel- Implying 'Moses would have believed in Jesus as Messiah if he were here today'.

A prophet like me shall God raise up to you from among your brothers - A clear statement of the Lord's humanity. As the Passover lamb had to be taken out from among the flock, so the Messiah was taken out from amongst His brothers. And Stephen has just stressed that Moses was a man ("This man...", :36). Messiah was to like him. Yet there was an initial possible fulfilment of this prophecy in Aaron, whom Moses was told would be his prophet (Ex. 7:1), and who was literally one of Moses' brothers. Aaron could have been the Messiah figure, but failed. Again we are introduced to the idea of conditional prophecy; which was highly relevant to Israel at that time. If they accepted Jesus as Messiah, then prophecies would be fulfilled- but if they did not, then those prophecies would have another and more difficult [for Israel] outworking.

7:38 This is he that was in the congregation in the wilderness- The ecclesia, the church. We find Moses as a type of Christ also presented as representative of Israel, and therefore able to completely sympathise with them in their physical afflictions and spiritual weaknesses. Thus the Spirit says (in the context of presenting Moses as a type of Christ) that Moses was "*in* (not "*with*") the ecclesia in the wilderness", stressing the way in which he was in their midst rather than distanced from them. The Lord Jesus is portrayed in Acts as very much "*in*" the church, active and present just as much as Moses was. Paul's later reasoning in 1 Corinthians 10 about the church in the wilderness is yet another example of how the reasoning of Stephen remained with him over the years, and he developed the ideas.

With the angel- Acts 7:38 (especially the Diaglott translation) speaks as if the Angel was physically present with Moses on the journey, and was as much in the congregation as Moses was: "He (Moses) was in the church in the wilderness with the Angel which spake to him in the Mount Sina and with our fathers". In passing, this implies that it was the same Angel (Michael) who gave the promises to Abraham, who gave the Law, and who went with them through the wilderness. Truly He is the Angel connected with Israel! Stephen's point was that like the Angel in the wilderness, the Lord Jesus was no less '*in*' the early church although mostly invisible.

That spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers- But their '*fathers*' didn't want the Angel to speak with them directly, and wanted Moses alone to meet God on Sinai. This was the stock they were descended from; and it was no pedigree to be proud of. Stephen is implying that the descendants of those '*fathers*' were likewise not willing to listen to the voice of God; or as Hebrews puts it, they turned away from Him who spoke from Heaven (Heb. 12:25- Hebrews might have been written by Stephen).

Who received living words to give to us- God's word is unlike any human word; it has the ability to speak to subsequent generations directly in their context. In this sense, the words given to Moses were also given to Stephen's generation, and spoke to them of Jesus. Just as the record of Jacob's wrestling with the Angel is God speaking to us today (Hos. 12:4). Moses trembled and Sinai shook and the people fled when they heard God's word. "God's voice was heard at Sinai: the same voice spoke in the

Psalmist's words. But the appeal stands written in Scripture and therefore Paul can say that "Today" is a time with limits, but it was yet "today" when the Hebrews was written and Paul repeats the word of the Psalmist as God's voice to the Hebrews of his day. It is significant that Paul immediately adds that "the word of God is living and powerful". The words he quoted were no dead message but God's living voice... The exhortation "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord" was God speaking "unto you", says Paul to the Hebrews. Is it less so to sons of any generation?" [John Carter, *Delight In God's Law*, pp. 232,233]. Heb. 12:5 alludes to this idea of a living word by speaking of an Old Testament passage as 'reasoning' (R.V.) with us. The Lord Jesus spoke of how the spiritual man is to live by every word which proceeds (present tense) from the mouth of God (Mt. 4:4); as if He perceived God's words written in the book of Deuteronomy to be "proceeding" from God's very mouth in an ongoing sense. Moses speaks of how God says to each dying man "Return, you children of men" (Ps. 90:3)- as if Moses understood to speak the words of Gen. 3:19 to every man who dies. Likewise the Lord spoke as if the Jews of His day ought to be *hearing* Moses and the prophets speaking to them in urgent warning (Lk. 16:31); yet despite studying their words syllable by syllable, the Jews didn't in fact perceive it was a living word speaking to them directly and urgently. Abel, through the account of him in Scripture, "is yet spoken of" (Heb. 11:4 AVmg.). Isaiah was prophesying directly to the hypocrites of the first century, according to the Lord in Mk. 7:6 RV. There is an active quality to the words we read on the pages of our Bibles. The passage in the scrolls that said "I am the God of Abraham" was "spoken unto *you* by God", Jesus told first century Israel (Mt. 22:31). Note in passing how demanding He was- expecting them to figure from that statement and usage of the present tense that God considered Abraham effectively still alive, although he was dead, and would therefore resurrect him. Although God spoke to Moses alone in the mount, Moses stresses that actually God "spake unto *you* in the mount out of the midst of the fire". The word of God to His scribes really is, to the same gripping, terrifying degree, His direct word to us (Dt. 4:36; 5:45; 10:4). This explains why David repeatedly refers to the miracle at the Red Sea as if this had affected him personally, to the extent that he could ecstatically rejoice because of it. When Dt. 11:4 speaks of how "the Lord has destroyed [the Egyptians] unto this day", it sounds as if we are to understand each victory and achievement of God as somehow ongoing right down to our own day and our own lives and experience. Thus Ps. 114:5,6 RV describes the Red Sea as even now fleeing before God's people. And thus because of the records of God's past activities, we should be motivated in our decisions now.

7:39 *Our fathers would not be obedient to him*- The early church was "obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7 s.w.). Again Stephen is demonstrating the weakness of 'our fathers', whom the Jews were so proud of.

But thrust him from them and turned back in their hearts to Egypt- Stephen stresses the way in which Moses was rejected by Israel as a type of Christ. At age 40, Moses was "thrust away" by one of the Hebrews; and on the wilderness journey the Jews "thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt" (Acts 7:27,35,39). This suggests that there was far more antagonism between Moses and Israel than we gather from the Old Testament record- after the pattern of Israel's treatment of Jesus. It would seem from Acts 7:39 that after the golden calf incident, the majority of Israel cold shouldered Moses; their hearts, their thinking, was back in Egypt, reminiscing about Egyptian food... Once the point sank in that they were not going to enter the land, these feelings must have turned into bitter resentment. They were probably unaware of how Moses had been willing to offer his eternal destiny for

their salvation; they would not have entered into the intensity of Moses' prayers for their salvation. The record seems to place Moses and "the people" in juxtaposition around 100 times (e.g. Ex. 15:24; 17:2,3; 32:1 NIV; Num. 16:41 NIV; 20:2,3; 21:5). They accused Moses of being a cruel cult leader, bent on leading them out into the desert to kill them and steal their wealth from them (Num. 16:13,14)- when in fact Moses was delivering them from the house of bondage, and was willing to lay down his own salvation for theirs. The way Moses submerged his own pain is superb; both of their rejection of him and of God's rejection of him from entering the Kingdom.

"Turned back" suggests an anti 'conversion', which is how the word is elsewhere translated. We meet the word again in :42, where in response to this turning back, God in response likewise turned back from Israel. There is a mutuality in response between God and man, and yet overarching that there is also His grace and continued enthusiasm to save even those who turn away from His offer.

7:40 Saying unto Aaron- Their desire for the golden calf was part of their mental return to Egypt; it was surely an Egyptian idol deity.

Make us gods- They made a singular calf, but understood it as a plurality; a many-in-one god. This is classic paganism, and is reflected in the false doctrine of the Trinity to this day.

That shall go before us- The constant, visible presence of the cloud and fire leading them failed to register. Visible miracles seem to have little effect in bringing people to spirituality. They wanted to be led back to Egypt and needed a leader through the trackless waste to get back there. Yet they had leadership going before them through the desert towards the promised land. Clearly, people choose a form of leadership which they perceive will lead them to where they themselves want to go. If the Bible and the living word of the Lord Jesus are our chosen guides, then we are to follow wherever they lead, rather than choosing leadership which takes us where we ourselves would wish to go in the short term. So many struggles over church leadership today come simply back to this.

As for this Moses, who led us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him- Their concern was that the trackless desert required a guide. They wilfully chose to ignore the fire and cloud leading them, and chose instead to focus on the man who was their leader. This happens today; people excuse not following God's word and Spirit direction because of their issues with the human leadership. Luke may be making a connection with the way he uses the same word for 'led out' in speaking of how after His resurrection, the Lord led His people as far as Bethany and then ascended to Heaven, becoming their invisible leader (Lk. 24:50).

7:41 And they made a calf in those days- The days Moses was in the mount.

And brought a sacrifice to the idol and rejoiced in the works of their hands- A phrase used about idols several times; :43 stresses that they "made" the idols. Trust in our own works is therefore a form of idolatry; Stephen is saying that although the Jews were strictly against idols, their justification by works was a form of idolatry, just as it can be today. The doing of works becomes an addiction and a form of justification rather than simple faith in Christ. They "rejoiced" in what they had made, whereas earlier at the Exodus they had rejoiced in God's grace of salvation towards them.

7:42 But God turned and gave them up to serve the host of heaven- On their journey to Canaan, the Israelites worshipped idols. Because of this, "God turned, and gave them up (over) to worship the host of heaven... I gave them up to the hardness of their hearts" (Acts 7:42; Ps. 81:12 AVmg.). God reached a stage where He actually encouraged Israel to worship idols; He confirmed them in their rejection of Him. And

throughout their history, He encouraged them in their idolatry (Ez. 20:39; Am. 4:4). God will confirm us today in whichever way we chose to go. See on :39 *Turned back*.

“Gave them up to serve” implies that God held them back from worshipping the idols they had carried with them. But then He withdrew this psychological restraint. This is evidence enough that God is able to work in the hearts of men in order to hold them back from sinning, as He did even with gentile Abimelech. This is one of the many functions of His Holy Spirit; their behaviour is specifically described in :51 as resisting the Holy Spirit.

As it is written in the book of the prophets: Did you offer to me slain beasts and sacrifices for forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?- Stephen pointed out, by the inflection which he gave to his OT quotations, that Israel's service of God was meaningless because at the same time they worshipped their idols: *"Have you offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?"*. This was a rhetorical question. They offered the sacrifices, but actually they didn't. And what is the difference between "slain beasts" and “sacrifices”? Aren't sacrifices only slain beasts? The point is that the animals they gave were only slain beasts; nothing more, not real offerings, not real, acceptable sacrifice. *"They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat it; but the Lord accepteth it not"* (Hos. 8:13). And likewise we can dress up our devotions with the appearance of real sacrifice when there is nothing there at all.

7:43 You took up the tabernacle of Moloch- Ezekiel 20 describes how Israel took the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea; indeed, they lugged a whole pagan tabernacle system with them through the wilderness, in addition to the true tabernacle (:43,44). This of course is a warning to us who were as it were baptized also at the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1). Are we carrying two tabernacle systems with us [or more] on our wilderness journey?

And the star of the god Remphan, figures which you made to worship- See on :41 *The works of their hands*. These were in contrast to the "figure" of the tabernacle (:44). It was an anti-tabernacle which they carried, just as all false religion is a fake imitation of the true and just as the anti-Christ is not a person so much against Christ (although he is that), but a fake imitation of Him.

And I will carry you away- As they had carried their idols. There is a mutuality between God and man in how God responds to human sin.

Beyond Babylon- Paul's relationship with Stephen becomes even more acute when we reflect upon how Stephen says that Israel were taken into judgment to *Babylon*. He is quoting here from Amos 5:26, which in both the LXX and Masoretic text says that Israel were to go “to Damascus”. Why does Stephen purposefully change “Damascus” to “Babylon”? Was it not because he knew there were many Christians in Damascus, and he didn't want to speak of ‘going to Damascus’ as a figure for condemnation? And yet *straight afterwards* we are reading that Saul ‘went to *Damascus*’ to persecute and kill the Christians there. It's as if Saul was so infuriated by Stephen's subtle change that he wanted to prove him wrong; he would ‘go to Damascus’ and not be condemned, rather he would condemn the Christians there, and make it *their* place of judgment. This suggestion may seem farfetched. But we have to remember the Pharisaic way of reasoning and thinking. Every phrase of Scripture was so valuable to them, and major life decisions would be made over one nuance of the text or interpretation of it. No wonder that in later life, Paul alludes to his dear friend Stephen so much. What a joy it will be to see them meet up in the Kingdom.

7:44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of the testimony in the wilderness, even as He who spoke to Moses- The contrast is with the tabernacle of Moloch which they also carried with them. The "testimony" implies an evidence, a witness. There was no such witness in the false tabernacle. This is the word commonly used for the testimony or witness of the early preachers (Acts 4:33 and often in Paul's letters). This testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus was ignored by the Jews of Stephen's day just as Israel in the wilderness preferred the witness of Moloch's tabernacle which was in fact not a witness at all, for it was a silent assembly of materials and nothing more. The hint was that this was all the Jerusalem temple now amounted to, for the Lord had left that house desolate; the glory had departed from it. To draw a parallel between the Jerusalem temple and the tabernacle of Moloch was a radical thing to do. No wonder Saul and his colleagues were cut to the heart and beside themselves with anger.

Appointed- The tabernacle of Moloch was not "appointed" by God. Saul was paying attention to every word; for the Lord then appeared to him and "appointed" him to do the work of His tabernacle (Acts 22:10 s.w.). And by doing so the Lord was inviting Paul [and all of us] to see Moses not as an icon to be worshipped from a respectful distance, but as a realistic pattern for our own path.

That he should make it according to the figure that he had seen- See on :43 *Figures which you made.*

7:45 Which also our fathers, in their turn, brought into the land with Joshua- Joshua is the same Hebrew word as 'Jesus'. Joshua-Jesus and the "fathers" brought in the tabernacle into the place previously possessed by Gentiles. I suggest that the tabernacle now referred to people, God's dwelling place. The Lord used the same word, so Luke alone records, of how those previously excluded from the temple were to be 'brought in' by Him and His servants (Lk. 14:21). The 'fathers' therefore equate with the servants of Jesus; the tabernacle is the new system of worship. Paul was later accused of bringing in Gentiles to the temple (Acts 21:28,29 s.w.). As the "fathers" along with Joshua-Jesus brought the tabernacle into the holy space of the land of Israel, so the early Jewish Christians along with the active Lord Jesus were to bring Gentile converts into the new holy space- not a literal space, but the temple of God's invisible church and spiritual temple. It was all just too much for the listening Judaists. That those fishermen believers-in-Jesus could be equivalent to the "fathers", that the crucified Jesus was as the historical Joshua, that the Gentiles were as the ark, that holy space no longer counted... it was all too much. The intensity and depth of Stephen's allusions were increasing as he progressed in his apparently innocent recounting of Israel's history. And when men are spiritually and intellectually cornered, they descend to personal attacks, in this case to the extent of throwing Roman law to the winds and picking up stones to stone Stephen to death with.

When they received possession of the nations that God thrust out before the presence of our fathers- Stephen has just drawn a parallel between the early Jewish Christian preachers, many of them illiterate manual workers, and the "fathers" at the time of Joshua-Jesus. And now he says that the Gentiles were cast out before them; the implication was that the Judaist elders were no better than the Gentile inhabitants of Canaan, who were now being cast out of the holy space. The Lord had literally cast out such persons from the holy space of the temple. Saul's conscience was badly goaded at this point; but the point was not lost on him. For in the years of his repentance, he wrote of how just as Gentile Hagar was "cast out", so Judaism had been cast out from God's true family (Gal. 4:30).

To the days of David- At first blush, a strange detail to add; that the process of casting out the Gentile tribes from the land was only completed by David, many generations later. The "fathers" hadn't done the job; they were not the peerless elders Judaism liked to imagine. And it was David, a clear type of Messiah, whose "son" was to be Messiah, who actually completed the job. The Lord Jesus was likewise doing the same- completing the job of casting the Judaists out of God's holy space because He had redefined that holy space.

7:46 Who found favour in the sight of God- The grace he found was in that he was given the honour of being the 'father' of Messiah; the Messianic promises of 2 Sam. 7:12-14 were given to David. Luke forces the point home by using the very same words as to how Mary "found favour in the sight of God" (Lk. 1:30), and was chosen to be the woman through whom the Messianic promise to David came true.

And asked to find a habitation for the God of Jacob- David's desire to "find" a temple for God was matched by how he "found" (s.w.) grace with God. As we learn in 2 Sam. 7, God turned around that desire to 'find' something for Him by saying that He would 'find' something for David, namely the Son of God, the Jewish Messiah, being directly a "son of David". Stephen is setting up the position that all the argument about the temple as holy place was deeply and Biblically misplaced; because God wanted to give Israel His Son, rather than have a temple. And the Judaists were back in the initially mistaken mindset of David, focusing on the physical temple rather than the spiritual house centred in God's Son, the true temple. Stephen clearly read negatively Solomon's insistence on building a physical temple.

7:47 But it was Solomon who built Him a house- Stephen was accused by the Jews of blaspheming the temple. In reply, he gives a potted history of Israel, emphasizing how the faithful were constantly on the move rather than being settled in one physical place. He was subtly digging at the Jewish insistence that the temple was where God lived. In this context, he refers to Solomon's building of the temple in a negative light. He says that David tried to find a *tabernacle* for God, "*But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands*"; as says the prophet, Heaven is my throne... what house will you build me?". This cannot mean 'God no longer dwells in the temple as He used to before Christ's death', because the reason given is that the prophet Isaiah says that God cannot live in houses. This reason was true in Isaiah's time, before the time of Christ. It would seem that Stephen is politely saying: 'Solomon made this mistake of thinking that God can be limited to a physical building. You're making just the same mistake'. And he goes on to make a comment which could well allude to this: "You do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers (including Solomon) did, so do you" (Acts 7:51). Further evidence that Stephen saw Solomon's building of the temple in a negative light is provided by the link between Acts 7:41 and 48: "*They made a calf... and rejoiced in the works of their own hands... howbeit the Most High dwells not in temples made with hands*". The word "made" is stressed in the record of Solomon's building the temple (2 Chron. 3:8,10,14-16; 4:1,2,6-9,14,18,19,21). The work of the temple was very much produced by men's *hands* (2 Chron. 2:7,8). Things made with hands refers to idols in several Old Testament passages (e.g. Is. 2:8; 17:8; 31:7). Significantly, Solomon's temple is described as being made with hands in 1 Chron. 29:5. And it may be significant that the words of Is. 66:1,2 concerning God not living in temples are quoted by Paul with reference to pagan temples in Acts 17:24, and concerning the temple in Jerusalem by Stephen. The building of the temple became an idol to Solomon. Human motives get terribly mixed.

7:48 *However-* Stephen read Solomon's building of the temple negatively; see on :47. It was even an example of resisting the Holy Spirit (:51).

The most high dwells not in houses made with hands- Note that it was God's clearly expressed wish that He should *not* live in a physical house (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Acts 7:48; 17:24). Yet He accommodated Himself to human weakness in wanting a physical house in which to worship Him; He came and lived (in a sense) in just such a house. In the same way, He did not wish Israel to have a system of human kingship; but when they insisted upon it, He worked with them through it. Just as He does with our wrong decisions.

As said the prophet- Again the quotation from Is. 66:1,2 is not exact but a summary of God's intended sense, quotation mixed with interpretation, as was the habit of Jewish rabbinic interpreters. But the context of Isaiah 66 is of God's final message to Judah, telling them that now God is not interested in their rebuilding of Solomon's temple, because as the sun began to go down on the prophets, He was now going to focus upon relationship with individuals rather than a formal temple presence.

7:49 *The Heaven is My throne-* See on :48 *As said the prophet.*

And the earth a footstool for my feet- As noted on Acts 2:35, God's footstool is the place where He is to be worshipped. His worshippers on earth are therefore in view here, and not the literal planet earth in a geographical sense. God wanted hearts as His footstool, not anything physical.

What manner of house will you build Me? says the Lord; or what is the place of My rest?- This is a rhetorical question. The sense is not 'You cannot build Me a house'; rather is it a question- what kind of house do you think I want? And the answer was: A dwelling place in hearts who believe in God's Son. Likewise "what is the place of My rest?" is rhetorical. The *topos* or holy space is not the Jerusalem temple nor the land of Israel; it is in the hearts of believers in God's Son. Hebrews 4, whether written by Paul or Stephen, surely alludes to this point by using the same word for "rest" in describing how Christians are entering the "rest" but Judaism is as Israel fallen in the wilderness, who did not enter into the rest promised.

7:50 *Did not My hand make all these things?-* God lives in what He "makes", and not in temples made by human hands (:48). Through the agency of the Spirit, God was and is preparing human hearts to be His 'making'. Paul repeats this reasoning in Acts 17:24 and 2 Cor. 5:1; Stephen's very last words before his death struck home and reaped a great harvest in the heart of that angry man called Saul who was listening. And whoever wrote Hebrews, be it Paul or Stephen, says precisely the same (Heb. 9:11,24). The similarities between Hebrews and Stephen's speech are many, and they are not just verbal similarities. It's as if Stephen's thoughts have been developed further. I would therefore suggest that Hebrews is not Stephen's letter; it appears to be a further development of his last words. The appropriate author, although we cannot be dogmatic, would seem to me to be Saul / Paul. The verbal similarities have led some to assume it must be Stephen; but it makes more sense to me to realize that this was written by someone who had memorized and developed Stephen's speech throughout his life. And Paul is to me the compelling candidate.

7:51 *You stiffnecked-* The reference is to how God wished to destroy a "stiffnecked" Israel and make of Moses another people of God (Ex. 32:9; 33:3,5; 34:9). The message contained in that one word "stiffnecked" was lengthy and powerful. The only other time we read of being stiffnecked and uncircumcised in the same verse is in Dt. 10:16; and again there is the point made that circumcision is of the heart more than the flesh: "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be

no more stiff-necked". This was an appeal to Israel. Stephen's allusion shows that he was not merely imprecating against the Judaists who surrounded him. He was appealing to them to change, so that they might enter the land of God's Kingdom. His hopefulness, up to his last words in this world, is amazing. His passion to save at least some of those hard hearts paid off, with the conversion of the worst of them, Saul, to become one of the Lord's greatest servants. See on "hearts and ears" below.

"Stiffnecked" is formed from the word *sklero*, "hard". The Lord uses just that word in telling Saul that it is "hard" for him to kick against the goads. A stubborn ox is literally stiffnecked. The Lord saw that this whole reasoning about being stiffnecked and uncircumcised had struck home in Saul's heart. And so He continues the allusion in further appealing to him. He does the same likewise with us in life and the encounters with verses in His written word which He leads us to.

And uncircumcised- To call the circumcised Jews uncircumcised, when circumcision was for them the sign of Divine covenant, was just too much. Stephen is now making explicit what he has been saying earlier by way of allusion and implication- they were no more than Gentiles. And again, the listening, fuming Saul was deeply touched; for later he writes of how circumcision is a matter of the heart and not of the flesh; indeed, this is quite a theme with Paul (Rom. 2:28,29; Eph. 2:11; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11). Each time he thought and wrote about it, he would've remembered how the dying Stephen had made this point, and how furious he had been to hear it. We see in Paul's references to circumcision how he had not only taken note of Stephen's words, but had taken the reasoning further. Seeing Hebrews is so full of reference to Stephen's words *and developments of his reasoning*, it seems to me that Paul is the likely author; and the letter is addressed to Hebrews, perhaps to the Jerusalem ecclesia, who would have known Stephen.

In heart and ears- They "stopped their ears" (:57). They refused the appeal Stephen was making to circumcise their hearts and ears, even at that late stage. Circumcision was to be not only of the heart, but of the ears. Circumcision of ears may seem a strange idea, at first blush. Stephen is saying that the sign of covenant relationship with God is how we hear; as his Lord had taught, "Take heed how you hear" (Lk. 8:18; again, it is Luke who records this). The circumcised ear will hear God's word; and the relevance of this otherwise throw away word "ears" is in that Stephen has been appealing to the Jews from the basis of Israel's well known history. He was asking them to hear that familiar Scripture with circumcised ears; and they refused. At least, right then at that moment they did.

You do always- This could just mean 'earnestly, strongly'. But the idea of regular resistance to the Holy Spirit could refer to their refusal to hear the real Spirit of God's word as they regularly read it and encountered the incidents from Israel's history in their Bible study. For the Holy Spirit was the agency behind the writing of the Bible. See above on "hearts and ears".

Resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you- See on :42 *Gave them up to serve*. The allusion is to Is. 63:10 LXX: "But they disobeyed, and provoked his Holy Spirit: so he turned to be an enemy, he himself contended against them". This resistance of the Spirit as we read the word of the Spirit, refusing to see the points the Lord is making to us, can be our failure too. The Jews were so proud of being descendants of the "fathers". But as demonstrated throughout this commentary, Stephen has been pointing out the weakness of the Jewish fathers, and he appeals to them to now have a different Father- God.

7:52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?- Stephen here and in :51 speaks of "your fathers" whereas earlier in his address he spoke repeatedly of "*our*

fathers" (Acts 7:2,11,12,15,19,38,39,44,45). But having tried to build that bridge between himself and his audience, by speaking of their common ancestry, he now makes the appeal for radical change- to disown what those fathers *did*. Saul, who was intently listening, was guilty of persecuting the Christians (Acts 22:4 s.w.). And the Lord continues Stephen's appeal to him by asking him on the Damascus road: "Why do you persecute Me?" (Acts 9:4,5 s.w.). Note that every prophet was persecuted- even if we don't read about (e.g. Jonah- although maybe it was Jewish persecution which disinclined him to preach to Gentiles).

And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One- Peter had used the same word in Acts 3:28: "The things which God foretold [s.w.] by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled". Stephen may be taking this further in suggesting that the reason they killed such prophets was because the message of a suffering, dead Messiah was so deeply unacceptable to the Jews. Stephen is demonstrating that the Jews' implacable hatred of Jesus of Nazareth was therefore seamlessly in line with the attitude of an Israel whom God had rejected. The message of Christ crucified cannot be received dispassionately; it forces a reaction, either of humbled acceptance, or anger, even passive anger, but all the same anger- because the human conscience has been touched in a way nothing else can touch it. And that anger is directed at the one who brings the message, for he or she is the human face of Jesus to them. It is Luke alone who records how the Lord Jesus on the cross was "the just [one]" (Lk. 23:47 s.w.).

Of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers- Judas the singular betrayer was an embodiment of all the Jewish opposition. I suggest this is the key to understanding how the 'satan' or adversary of Jewish opposition entered into Judas. I develop this theme further in 'The Jewish Satan' in *The Real Devil*. The Jews doubtless rationalized the Lord's death by feeling that the Romans had done it. But the early preachers repeatedly lay the blame for it upon the Jews; hence Stephen says that they had each one murdered their Messiah; for he speaks of "murderers" in the plural. This demonstrates that 'going along' with a seriously wrong position can be counted by God as actually performing the crime.

7:53 You who received the law as it was ordained by angels- That Angels gave the Law is clear from Dt. 33:2 LXX; Ps. 68:17; Gal. 3:19 and Heb. 2:2. But why mention it? Perhaps because the listening Jews were seeing Stephen's face as if were an Angel (Acts 6:15). As Israel turned away from the law given by Angels, so they were turning away from the new covenant being presented to them by an Angel.

And did not keep it- That Jewish audience were convinced they were obedient to Torah. To be told they were not, because they didn't accept their own Messiah... was the last straw. For the argument here is that to reject Jesus as Messiah was to break the Mosaic law; for obedience to that law was intended to bring people to Messiah. Note that the Mosaic law was designed to bring people to Christ not so much through studying the various types of Christ it contains, but through practically seeking to obey it. That process would bring people to accept Jesus as the Christ; but the fact they didn't mean they had not properly kept it. Paul was influenced by these words of Stephen when he wrote that the circumcised do not keep the law [s.w., Gal. 6:13].

7:54 Now when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart- See on Acts 5:33 "Cut to the heart". The Greek is literally 'they were ripped through their hearts'. This is the power of the argument for Christ to touch human hearts. The same term is used for how the Sanhedrin were ripped in their hearts by Peter's defence (Acts 5:13).

And they ground their teeth at him- Such language must surely connect with the oft repeated description of the rejected gnashing their teeth at the judgment (Mt. 8:12;

13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30); as if those Jews acted out their own rejection by their attitude to the word in this life. Judgment is ongoing now, in its essence. As Stephen's enemies "gnashed on him with their teeth", his Biblical mind would therefore have raced to Job 16:9, describing the behaviour of the wicked towards the faithful: "He tears me in his wrath, who hates me: he gnashes upon me with his teeth". The context goes on: "Now, behold, my witness is in heaven and my record is on high" (v. 19). Surely Stephen had thought ahead to this, for as his enemies gnashed their teeth against him, "he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). He looked up to Heaven and saw His witness, faithful and true, standing there as he expected.

7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit- This is twice earlier stated of Stephen (Acts 6:3,5). Those passages suggest this was a permanent characteristic of Stephen (as Acts 11:24 "a good man and full of the Holy Spirit"). So whilst this phrase could mean that Stephen was given a special gift or revelation of the Holy Spirit in his time of final crisis and death, it could also mean that it was because of his Spirit filled life that he saw visibly what he had previously only seen by faith- his Lord Jesus standing at God's right hand in Heaven. Likewise if we live a spiritual life, hour by hour, then that same Spirit is powerfully available to us in our times of crises. The idea may be that they "resisted the Holy Spirit" (:51) insofar as the Spirit was in Stephen- and they resisted his argument. They were 'killing the prophets' in killing Stephen.

Looked up earnestly into heaven- See on 6:15 *Fastening their eyes on him*. Paul uses the same term for "looked up earnestly into..." in 2 Cor. 3:13: "Moses, who put a veil upon his face so the children of Israel could not gaze to see the outcome of that [glory] which was fading away". The Jewish elders could not see the glory which Stephen saw; and Paul had been standing amongst them. Time and again, he alludes to the events of Stephen's death to demonstrate that Stephen's witness had been effective and his prayer had been heard- at least for him.

And saw the glory of God- This made Stephen equal to the revered prophets like Elijah, Moses and Ezekiel who had seen such visions of the cherubim and beheld the shekinah glory. What was so desperately and obviously absent from the Jerusalem temple was just this- the shekinah glory. It was what the Jews so earnestly wished they could see there. But God's presence and fellowship was simply not with them. But Stephen now saw it- and not in the holy space of the temple's holy place either. Perhaps this was to connect with how Stephen claims that the God of glory appeared to Abraham (:2)- something stated only by Stephen. Stephen was thereby connected with Abraham, modelling the seed of Abraham in faith in Jesus and Hope of the Kingdom. The glory of God was shining from Stephen's face at this point, for he had the face of an Angel at this time. Just as it shone from the Lord's face when He was arrested to be slain.

And Jesus- It is normal in the New Testament to describe the risen Jesus with some title, such as "*the Lord Jesus*". The simple "Jesus" directs attention to His humanity; and Stephen reflects this by referring to Him as "the son of man" (:56). The Lord's humanity was a great encouragement for Stephen in his most desperate human need, just as it is for us. This is a powerful practical outcome of understanding that the Lord was of our human nature and not "very God". I have observed that whenever the humanity of the Lord is spoken of, His highly exalted status is often juxtaposed with it. So many proof texts misused by Trinitarians are located right next to the clearest statements of the Lord's humanity. And so the reference to "the son of man" is not merely a statement of His humanity, but is an allusion to the Daniel 7 vision of the

"son of man" coming in judgment in the clouds of Heaven (as Stephen saw Him in the "glory of God").

Standing on the right hand of God; and he said- In his time of dying, Stephen saw the Lord Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55). But about 13 times in the New Testament, the point is made that the Lord *sits* there, unlike the Mosaic priests who *stood* (Heb. 10:12). The Lord Jesus was passionately feeling for Stephen; and He just as emotionally and passionately feels for us in our struggles. This alone should lift us out of the mire of mediocrity. Prayer will have meaning and power. It won't just be the repetitious conscience-salver it can descend into. Many of those 13 NT references to the Lord being seated at the right hand of God are in Hebrews; and this again encourages us to see Hebrews as Paul's deeper reflections upon Stephen's speech. This would especially be the case if the Jews in the council actually saw something of what Stephen saw.

7:56- see on Acts 2:33-36.

Look, I see the heavens opened- The implication is that if they lifted their eyes, they too could see what Stephen was seeing. It was a desperate appeal for their repentance in his final seconds. He so wanted them to see the Lord Jesus as he saw Him. Stephen's passion for the conversion of his enemies is simply matchless. They refused- rather like the earlier elders of Israel were invited to witness the theophany of God coming down on Sinai, but refused; asking Moses to go alone and hear and see it.

And the Son of man- See on :59,60 and :55 *Jesus*. Perhaps this was the fulfilment of the Lord's words to the Sanhedrin in Mk. 14:62: "you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power".

Standing on the right hand of God- The allusion could be to a witness or judge standing. As the human judge condemned Stephen- presumably by standing up to condemn him as usually happened in law courts (Acts 7:56 cp. Is. 3:13)- the Lord Jesus stands up in the court of Heaven as intercessor for Stephen. And this happens time and again in our lives, as and when and if we suffer the abuse of human condemnation and misjudgement. Although condemned by an earthly court, he confidently makes his appeal before the court of Heaven (Acts 7:56). Doubtless he was further inspired by the basic truth that whoever confesses the Lord Jesus before men, He will confess him before the angels in the court of Heaven (Lk. 12:8).

Hebrews- and I have suggested this letter is Paul's extended reflections upon Stephen's speech- invites us to see Christ as *sitting* there in Heaven [this is mentioned about 13 times in Hebrews], unlike the nervous High Priests of old on their annual entry into the Holiest *standing*. The fact Stephen saw the Lord *standing* at God's right hand suggests that He arose from His usual position, caught up, as it were, in the passion of mediation for His suffering servant. Robert Roberts began his life of Christ in *Nazareth Revisited* with the simple statement that "Christ is real". Indeed He is real in our lives, actively passionate for us, just as He was for Stephen. And we must ask with the German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his final writings at the time of death in a Nazi prison: "Who is Christ for us today?".

Another possibility is that the "Son of man" in "Heaven" recalls the language of Dan. 7 of 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven', i.e. His second coming. The "son of man... coming in great glory" (Lk. 21:27) is what Stephen saw at this point. For he saw "the son of man" in "great glory". Stephen sees the Lord standing, not sitting, as if He is about to return. Because effectively for every believer, the moment of death is for us the time of the Lord's return. For death is unconsciousness, a sleep, and the next waking moment will be the Lord's return.

7:57 *But-* I suggest this means that they ignored Stephen's appeal to 'behold' the vision of the risen Lord which he was seeing. The power and reality of the Lord Jesus was subsumed beneath a wave of legalism and anger at injured positions and the desperate desire to deny that... they might just have been wrong. And so the real Christ has been obscured, it seems to me, to so many angry legalists, even Christian ones.

They cried out with a loud voice- Not, as we might expect grammatically, 'with loud voices' in the plural. They were united, and that unity is stated later in the verse- they "rushed upon him with one accord". Just as Pilate and Herod, and the warring Jewish factions, were united in the condemnation of the Lord Jesus. Their unity, and crying out with a loud voice as the Lord did on the cross, all makes them a kind of anti-Christ, a synagogue of satan. The very words are used of how Stephen "cried with a loud voice" (:60). They were no longer merely folks who held a different theological view; their conscious rejection of God's appeal in Christ made them an utterly false system which merited only complete destruction.

And stopped their ears- See on :51 *Heart and ears*. They were fulfilling Stephen's words, that they were "uncircumcised in ears" (:51). Putting their hands on their ears demonstrated this.

And rushed upon him with one accord- The very same words used of how the Jews did the same to Paul and his brethren, more than once (Acts 19:29). This means that what Saul and his then brethren did to Stephen, was done to Paul. He came to realize how it felt. And the Lord leads us to the same realization, not to punish us, but to lead us to self-understanding and eternal unity with our brethren whom we have hurt. It is so that we may understand each other, and understand ourselves within the context of others and the effect we have had upon them. This explains why Stephen's speech is so often alluded to by Paul; and why he opens his own defence speeches with allusion to how Stephen opened his.

The allusion is to the punishment of someone convicted of idolatry (Dt. 13:9,10), whereby "the hand of all the people" was to be upon the offender. And yet in :42,43, Stephen has accused *them* of idolatry. This is a classic case of psychological transference- they knew they were guilty of idolatry, and so they transferred that guilt onto Stephen, and punished him for it. Just like a church elder feeling guilty of having an affair then heavily punishes a church member for having an affair. This is more than hypocrisy; it arises because of the human tendency to transfer personal guilt, rather than humbly admit it and let the Lord Jesus deal with it.

7:58 *And they threw him out of the city and stoned him-* The very words used by Luke about the Lord's experience at the hands of His own brethren in Nazareth (Lk. 4:29) and of how the Son is thrown out of the vineyard and killed in Lk. 20:15. Baptism identifies us with the Lord's death, and thereby His sufferings become replicated in all of us who are in Him. Stephen quotes his Lord's dying words as his own dying words, reflecting his grasp of what was going on- he was indeed sharing his Lord's sufferings with which he had willingly identified throughout his life in Him. So the 'throwing out of the city' was arranged by God to stimulate Stephen to see the similarities between him and his Lord, just as such events are brought into our lives, clearly beyond our control. But then we must use our own freewill to develop that identification, and Stephen does this by quoting the Lord's dying words as he himself died. Although the stoning of Stephen was clearly done in hot blood and with no regard to local law nor to Biblical law, the Jews still wanted to show obedience to the principle of stoning the condemned outside the camp. I have repeatedly drawn attention to the similarities between Acts 7 and Hebrews, which I suggest is Paul's

reflection upon Stephen's words and example, and presented initially to the Jerusalem ecclesia. The appeal to go forth with the Lord Jesus "without the camp" (Heb. 13:13) surely continues this impression; we are to be followers of Stephen insofar as he was of the Lord Jesus. If indeed 'St. Stephen's gate' in Jerusalem is correctly located where Stephen was taken through to his death, he would have been dragged over the Kedron and through the garden of Gethsemane, thus encouraging his willing identification with his Lord's final sufferings. See on :60 *knelt down*.

All this happened at the behest of Saul. But he too was to be cast out of a city to be slain- and yet survived, or maybe was resurrected (Acts 14:29). This was to enable him to feel what he had done to Stephen. Not simply because 'what goes around comes around'; but to enable him to enter into Stephen's feelings, to prepare them for eternal fellowship in the Kingdom.

And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul- "At the feet" is a phrase elsewhere used in the context to imply that the people there are subservient to the person (Acts 4:35,37; 5:1). The implication is surely that Paul was responsible for the stoning, or facilitated it in practice. Paul later was stoned unto death (Acts 14:5), and through this he learnt how his actions to Stephen had actually felt. This was far more than a poetic justice for the sake of it; it was to enable Paul to understand himself and the meaning of his own positions and actions. The Lord works likewise in our education. There is another allusion from Hebrews here- we are surrounded by a great crowd of "witnesses" and should therefore 'lay down' everything that impedes us from doing the Lord's work (Heb. 12:1). These are the same Greek words as used here about the witnesses who laid down their clothes. Paul had been one of those witnesses. The laying aside of garments recalls Aaron's death on Mount Hor, and there may be the hint that they were now resigning their priesthood and spiritually dying, outside the promised land.

7:59 *And they stoned Stephen-* Stephen's death sentence was against Pharisaic principles; and it was a studied rejection of the more gentle, tolerant attitude taught by Gamaliel, Paul's early mentor ("though I distribute all my belonging to feed the poor..." in 1 Cor. 13:3 is Paul virtually quoting Gamaliel- he clearly was aware of his stance). People like Paul who come from strict, authoritarian backgrounds can have a tendency to anger, and yet in Paul there seems also to have operated an inferiority complex, a longing for power, and a repressed inner guilt.

As he called upon the Lord- The impact upon Saul must have been psychologically colossal, for he then goes out to kill and persecute all who called on the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:14,21 s.w.). The Lord Jesus was working with Saul's conscience; for when He confronts Saul on the Damascus Road, He uses the same words to invite Saul also to 'call upon himself the name of the Lord Jesus' (Acts 22:16).

Saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit- I have suggested in my commentary on Hebrews that Hebrews was originally a transcript of a sermon at the breaking of bread meeting at the Jerusalem church, turned into written form. That audience would have known Stephen well. Hebrews is full of allusions to Stephen's speech, and my suggestion is that it was not Stephen writing to his own church before his death, but rather Paul expanding upon Stephen's speech. As the bitterly angry Saul, keenly listening to Stephen and grasping his every allusion, he would have felt the goads of Scripture sticking into his conscience. He remembered every word, and after his conversion, he took Stephen's thoughts further. Hebrews, I suggest, is his development of Stephen's words and ideas. The historical characters mentioned by Stephen are also mentioned by Paul in Hebrews 11. Paul draws his sermon in

Hebrews towards a conclusion by speaking of how we as Christians have come into association with "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborns, who are enrolled in heaven; and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:22,23). It seems to me certain that Paul had Stephen in mind at this point, a clearly 'just man', who had asked the Lord Jesus in Heaven to receive his spirit, as one of "the spirits of just men made perfect", and whose name as a martyr was for sure "enrolled in Heaven".

Realizing, sensing how he was living out the sufferings of his Lord... all this really motivated Stephen; when he asked for forgiveness for his tormentors and asked for his spirit to be received (7:59,60), he was so evidently reflecting the words of the Lord in His time of final agony and spiritual and physical extension. It is Luke who brings out the similarity (Lk. 23:34,46). He died in prayer for his enemies, crying out with a loud voice, commending his spirit to Jesus as Jesus commended His to the Father... He saw the similarities between his sufferings and those of the Lord; and therefore he went ahead and let the spirit of the Lord Jesus live in him. In addressing the Lord Jesus as "Son of Man" (:56), Stephen is the only person outside the Gospels to use the phrase. Perhaps it was because in the time of his sufferings, Stephen felt especially keenly the comfort of the Lord's humanity and the representative nature of His sacrifice. He personalized those words of the Lord which he already well knew, and made them his own. This is the intended end point for each of us- to know the spirit of Christ in His time of dying. It's just that we each have different paths to lead us there.

7:60 *And he knelt down*-Luke uses these very words of how the Lord knelt and prayed in Gethsemane, a stone's throw distant (Lk. 22:41). Clearly he is making the connection between the Lord and Stephen, who was stoned to death and thereby a stone's throw distant. Stephen is consciously trying to imitate the Lord Jesus in His time of dying, hence his request for the sins of his murderers to be forgiven. I have suggested that Stephen was dragged through Gethsemane on his way to the stoning-see on 7:58 *They threw him out of the city*. The Lord brought this to Stephen's mind, and he did his part in responding by imitating his Lord there in Gethsemane. Kneeling down, literally 'bending the knee', is the language of worship. Stephen died in worship of his Lord, whose death and last sufferings he had now come to know and identify with. By kneeling down instead of lying in a self-protective position, he was giving his body maximum exposure to the stones. Like his Lord on the cross, His devotion resulted in his physical sufferings being shorter than otherwise would have been the case. I have explained elsewhere that the Lord's refusal to press back on the *sedile* of the crucifixion pole hastened His death. Almost all Stephen's sufferings and words have some issue in Paul's experiences; some similarities were brought about by the Lord's hand in his life, others were a result of him consciously imitating Stephen. Luke uses precisely the same Greek words to record how Paul knelt down and prayed in Acts 20:36. Consciously or unconsciously, Paul was again imitating his hero and entering his experiences which Paul had brought upon him.

And cried with a loud voice- See on :57 *cried with a loud voice*.

Lord, do not charge them with this sin- The sins of the wicked are written down against them, to be discussed with them at the judgment. "Charge them not with this sin" certainly sounds as if Stephen expected that individual actions of human sin will be raised with them at the day of judgment. And yet the wonder of it all, is that our prayers now for our enemies can result in their not being charged with those sins. We are in that sense called to do the work of the advocate, to reflect the saving

mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus in our prayer life right now. Our prayers for others really can have an effect upon what will be raised with them at the judgment- for that's what Stephen prayed for in his time of dying. And are we to think that his wonderful prayer went unanswered? He prayed with a loud voice so that they would all hear- for they were standing a stone's throw away from him, and there would've been much noise from their screaming and the thud of stones. He died in the hope that his obtaining of forgiveness for them would result in their repentance. And it worked wonderfully, at least in the case of Saul. As Saul wasn't throwing the stones nor gathering them, his attention would have naturally been fixed upon the person and words of Stephen. He was consciously modelling himself upon the Lord in *His* time of dying: "Father, forgive them..." (Lk. 23:43). Likewise "receive my spirit" (:59) is quoting another of the Lord's last sayings from the cross, in turn quoting from Ps. 31:5 LXX "Into your hand I commit my spirit". His kneeling to pray may likewise be consciously following the Lord's kneeling in Gethsemane in prayer before His death (Lk. 22:41). We note that his very last words were not concerned with his personal salvation; but rather with that of others. Indeed, of men who appeared absolutely opposed or disinterested in the Lord Jesus. We see here not simply his paramount love of others, but a tacit reflection of his own personal confidence in salvation. "Receive my spirit" perhaps equates to Nehemiah's "Remember me for good for all I have done"; a confident handing over of our lives to the Lord Jesus, who loves us beyond death and our own unconsciousness. It is normal for men in death situations to beg for personal forgiveness and acceptance from God; but Stephen is so secure in his personal relationship with the Father and Son that his last words were for others, not himself. It is also noteworthy that 1 Kings 8 had offered forgiveness to Israel if they prayed towards the temple- and the destruction and spiritual bankruptcy of the temple is in view here. Stephen shows them for all time that the temple is not the magic source of forgiveness- but rather faith in the Lord Jesus.

And when he had said this, he fell asleep- This suggests that he died as an act of the will; he said his last words and died. In this we see another striking similarity with the Lord's death; He too made His last sayings, begging for Israel's forgiveness, and breathed His last. The impression we get is that like the Lord, Stephen's total desire was for Israel's repentance. And he died with that desire, falling asleep when he knew he had done what he could.

There should be no chapter break- Acts 8:1 about Saul should follow straight on from here.

ACTS CHAPTER 8

8:1 *And Saul approved of his execution-* Paul warned the Romans that those who "have pleasure" in (Gk. 'to feel gratified with') sinful people will be punished just as much as those who commit the sins (Rom. 1:32). But he uses the very word used here for his own 'consenting' or 'approving' the death of Stephen; standing there in consent, although not throwing a stone (Acts 8:1; 22:20). He realized that only by grace had that major sin of his been forgiven; and in that spirit of humility and self-perception of himself, as a serious sinner saved by grace alone, did he appeal to his brethren to consider their ways. 'Feeling gratified with' such sins as are in this list is what the entertainment industry is so full of. We can't watch, read and listen to this kind of thing by choice without in some sense being vicariously involved in it- and this seems to be exactly what Paul has in mind when he warns that those who feel

gratified in those sins shall share in their judgment. This is a sober warning, relevant, powerful and cutting to our generation far more than any other. For given the internet and media, we can so easily feel gratified in others' sins.

And there arose on that day- Clear evidence that Stephen's speech was the psychological motivator for the anger now unleashed within Saul and his companions.

A great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem, and except the apostles, they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria- Luke uses the word for 'Diaspora' to describe how the brethren were "scattered abroad" (Acts 8:1,4; 11:19); he saw this persecution as turning them into the new Israel. The entire membership of the Jerusalem ecclesia was scattered; the way we read of them numbering thousands by the time of Acts 21:20 suggests that to avoid persecution those who remained reconciled themselves with the temple, becoming a sect of Judaism, presumably with the tithe and temple tax going to the temple rather than to the ecclesia. These "thousands" of Acts 21 were probably largely converted since the persecution that arose after the death of Stephen. The original Jerusalem ecclesia had gone and preached to the Gentiles (Acts 11:19,20), which wasn't what the later Jerusalem ecclesia supported. Indeed, Acts 11:22 goes straight on to record that the Jerusalem ecclesia sent representatives to find out what was going on. In order to escape further persecution, the Jerusalem ecclesia threw in their lot with the temple and orthodox Judaism. Finally Paul wrote to the Jerusalem ecclesia, as recorded in Hebrews. He sorrows that they fail to see the supremacy of Christ over Moses, and that despite initially enduring such persecution and loss of their goods (during the early persecutions), they had lost their real faith in Christ. The fact they weren't *then* being persecuted indicates they had reconciled with the temple. They needed to hold on, to keep the joy of faith they once had, rather than become hard hearted, judgmental, works-centred. But they didn't listen.

When the Romans began persecuting the early church, only the leaders were seized, while crowds of obvious Christians went unpunished. This was perhaps because paganism was utterly dependent on its elite, and most cults could easily be destroyed from the top. This explains a few Bible puzzles- why devout men could carry Stephen to burial and yet be unharmed; why the apostles could remain in Jerusalem [they were seen as unlearned and ignorant fishermen] whilst the others in the Jerusalem ecclesia had to flee (e.g. the great company of priests who became obedient to the faith). And yet Christianity spread yet further. Josephus (*Antiquities* 18.63-64) expresses surprise that the "tribe of Christians" [indicating their unity] had not disappeared after the death of their founder, "the [so-called] Christ". Unlike other religions, the faith of the followers was not in the leaders- if the organization and leaders were taken away, would our church continue? The early church did- and flourished. We must beware lest our system of elders and organizations doesn't take away our individual commitment to preach and personally care for people, and especially for the brotherhood. First century Christianity was a mass movement, rooted in a highly committed rank and file; and therefore it had the advantage of the best of all marketing techniques: person-to-person influence. This in the end is how we can preach far more effectively than through mass meetings or organized campaigns [not that I am saying not to hold these].

8:2 And devout men buried Stephen- A term only used of the "devout men" living in Jerusalem who were baptized by Peter and who formed the Jerusalem ecclesia (Acts 2:5; Lk. 2:25). These men had emigrated to live in Jerusalem in their retirement. To now have to flee was significant for them. Presumably some of them remained,

and it was of these "devout men" that some bravely identified with Stephen in order to claim and bury his corpse.

And made great lamentation over him- Luke uses the word about the lamentation made over the Lord at His death (Lk. 23:27). As demonstrated throughout the commentary on the end of chapter 7, Stephen's death was modelled consciously upon the Lord's death. And the mourners surely recognized that, therefore mourning for Stephen as they did for the Lord.

8:3- see on Acts 26:10,11.

But Saul treated the church shamefully, entering into every house- "The church" is paralleled with "every house" [church]: "Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house". That's a very significant parallel. Those house churches in sum were the church of Christ in Jerusalem; the ecclesia met in house churches but gathered together in the temple, the only place big enough to hold them all. The same thing happened at Rome and Corinth, where there seem to have been various house churches which met together occasionally for larger gatherings.

Dragging out men and women and putting them into prison- Paul was himself dragged to his death by the crowd (Acts 14:19 s.w.). He was being made to realize what he had done to others; and this is how the Lord seeks to educate us, not simply bring about 'measure for measure' in our lives for the sake of it.

8:4 *Therefore those who were scattered-* Gk. 'the diaspora'. They were diaspora Jews who had come back from their dispersion to live in Jerusalem. But now they were again a diaspora, but of the Jerusalem church.

Went about preaching the word- Acts 11:19 informs us that these brethren went as far as Phenice and Cyprus preaching the word. Most of the Jerusalem church were comprised of the 'devout men' from throughout the Roman world who had come to end their days at Jerusalem, and now had been baptized into Christ by Peter. It's logical to assume that Saul's persecution prompted them to return home- and thus the Gospel spread.

8:5 *And Philip went down-* This is how any journey from Jerusalem was described. Travellers went 'up' to Jerusalem and thence 'went down'.

To the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ- Defined in :12 as the things about His Name and His Father's Kingdom. This term 'preached Christ' is clearly parallel to the statement that they 'evangelized the *logos*' (:4). The essential word / *logos* of God was seen to be the Lord Jesus personally. This indeed is how John began his preaching of the Gospel, as transcribed in the gospel of John.

8:6 *And the crowds, when they heard and saw the signs which he did, gave heed-* The same word is twice used about how previously they had 'given heed' to Simon (:10,11). Illiterate people inevitably follow human teachers, and the record here is therefore psychologically credible. They had once had Simon as their teacher, but now they gave their minds and attention to Philip. We note that Lydia likewise 'gave heed' to the Gospel message, but her heart was opened by the Lord so that she did this (16:14). That mental desire to open the mind to the message is therefore ultimately given by the Lord and is part of His calling of people. The people had given attention to Simon because he apparently did miracles, but when they saw far more credible miracles done by Philip, they believed him. This was one reason why the power to perform miracles was given in the first century- they were necessary to grab the attention of illiterate people who previously had paid attention to whoever did the most compelling miracles. This was, after all, the only criteria for credibility which the illiterate masses had. There was no written word which could be read to them, for the New Testament was not written. See on :23. The miracles were therefore a

message; for they were heard as well as seen. The miraculous Spirit gifts and miracles were clearly a specific thing at a specific time- to back up the preaching of the Gospel in the first century.

With one accord to the things that were spoken by Philip- There was evidently a crowd mentality- every person in the crowd had the same mindset towards Philip's preaching at that moment. Now it seems to me that we would likely judge such momentary, mass response as mere passing emotion. But God is more positive- the record which He inspired counts it to them as real belief, just as the "crowd" who followed the Lord are credited with faith, even though soon afterwards they were doubting Him. That indicates to me not only the hopefulness of God for human response to His grace, but also His willingness to accept people.

8:7 For from many of those that had unclean spirits, the unclean spirits came out, crying with a loud voice- The Eastern (Aramaic) text reads: "Many who were mentally afflicted cried out". This is because, according to George Lamsa, "'Unclean spirits' is an Aramaic term used to describe lunatics". It should be noted that Lamsa was a native Aramaic speaker with a fine understanding of Aramaic terms. He grew up in a remote part of Kurdistan which had maintained the Aramaic language almost unchanged since the time of Jesus. It's significant that Lamsa's extensive writings indicate that he failed to see in the teachings of Jesus and Paul any support for the popular conception of the Devil and demons- he insisted that the Semitic and Aramaic terms used by them have been misunderstood by Western readers and misused in order to lend support for their conceptions of a personal Devil and demons. We need to ask *who* cried with a loud voice. The 'spirits', or the sick person? The person, surely. But the record says the 'spirits' cried. We are intended therefore to read 'spirits' as referring to the sick persons; just as John's invitation to 'test the spirits' (1 Jn. 4:1) means 'test what these teachers are teaching', rather than asking us to grab hold of 'spirits' out of the ether and test them.

And many that were paralyzed or lame were healed- This balances the first part of the verse, which speaks of 'unclean spirits' departing. The idea seems to be that there was major healing, of both mental and physical illness. The healing of such persons is described in the very language used of the Lord's healings of the same categories (Mt. 15:30; 21:14). As Luke begins Acts by saying, He began such work, and His representatives continued it; as we do in essence to this day.

8:8 And there was much joy in that city- One gets the impression from the second century writings that the joy dropped out of Christianity; and yet the joy of the converts, and the urgent need to retain that first joy of conversion, is a major theme in the NT (e.g. Acts 8:8; 13:52; 15:3). This strange joy must have been a major factor in confirming the Gospel as authentic. The very phrase "great joy" is used about the result of the Lord's resurrection (Mt. 28:8; Lk. 24:52); the miracles being done were enabled by His glorification, and were in essence *His* action in the world, performed through His followers. Whilst we do not possess the miraculous gifts today, He is in principle operating in the same way today, through we who are in Him.

8:9 But there was a certain man Simon by name, who previously used sorcery in that city- Exactly the same phrase is used in introducing Ananias in Acts 5:1. And the context is identical- after dramatic developments in the Lord's work, there was human failure from an individual. And so things are to this day in His work.

And amazed the people of Samaria- The same word used of how Simon himself was "amazed" (:13). He was made to realize how others had been made to feel by his *false* claims; just as Paul was made to realize and share the feelings of those whom he

had persecuted. This is all part of the Lord's education of those He seeks to save, and He works like that to this day.

Boasting that he himself was somebody great- Here we see the difference between the apostolic style of healing, and that of magicians. He claimed his powers were invested in himself, to the point that he gave the impression that "This man is the great power of God" (:10 AV). The apostles repeatedly claimed that what they were doing was not of themselves, but was the result of the risen Lord working through them. We too must be careful here; whatever truths we share with others, whatever we do for others, is all the Lord working through us; it is not of ourselves. Our aim is to be tools for His working and operation, rather than building up any personal respect or following for ourselves. And so much Christian leadership has miserably failed at this point.

8:10 *To him they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying-* See on 8:6 *Gave heed.*

This man has that power of God which is called Great- AV is better: "This man is the great power of God". See on :9.

8:11 *And they gave heed to him-* See on 8:6 *Gave heed.*

Because for a long time he had amazed them with his sorceries- Illiterate people are inevitably going to be impressed by the miraculous, and this was why the early preaching of the Gospel was backed up by visible miracles. But as Robert Roberts put it, there was "an economy of miracle". The Lord could have done far more than He did by way of miracles. But in this case in Samaria, all that was necessary was to budge the psychological stranglehold which Simon magus had over the people.

8:12 *But when they believed Philip as he was preaching-* It is helpful to read Luke and Acts following straight on. It is evident that Luke saw the apostles as continuing the work of preaching that Jesus personally performed. One of the most evident connections is the way in which Luke ten times uses the word *euangelizo* to describe the Lord's witness; it occurs only one other time in the other Gospels. And yet Luke uses the word 15 times in Acts to describe the witness of the apostles. He clearly saw them as continuing the *evangelion* of Jesus. As Jesus preached the Gospel of the Kingdom as He walked around Israel in the late 20s of the first century (Lk. 4:43; 8:1; 9:11; 16:16), so His men continued the very same witness (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31).

The things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ- "The kingdom of God's sake" (Lk. 18:29) is paralleled with the sake of the Name of Christ by the account in Mt. 19:29. The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

Both men and women were baptized- When the Samaritans believe the things Philip preached, they were immediately baptized. Baptism is seen as part and parcel of belief. The Lord's words that whoever believes-and-is-baptized shall be saved (Mk. 16:16) are surely being alluded to; for He too put baptism as part of initial belief in the news about Him. The impression is clearly given that baptism followed immediately upon belief and is part of believing. It therefore follows that once somebody confesses their faith in the Lord, they should immediately be baptized into Him. Any delay in this is due to an unspoken perception that *de facto* baptism is an entry rite into a human group, and all the club rules of that group must be learnt and adhered to first. But in the New Testament, baptism was the natural outcome of faith.

"Men and women" is noted because religion tended to be the preserve of men; the critics of early Christianity mocked the way that it was so attractive to women.

Yet the call of Christ was no hobby level religion; it was a radical offer of salvation to humanity, women included.

8:13- see on Acts 2:42.

And Simon also himself believed, and being baptized, he continued with Philip; and seeing signs and great miracles done, he was amazed- It was probably clear that Simon's motivation was less than sincere, but they still baptized him. Simon appears to have been an onlooker at the baptisms of Acts 8:12, and "himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip" (Acts 8:13). Here we see again how belief and baptism were so closely connected. We see here another fulfilment of the great commission of Mt. 28:19,20- the basic Gospel was to be preached, people baptized, and then they were taught further. This seems the sense of how the convert Simon "continued with Philip", for to 'continue with' someone was an idiom for being a student of them (Mt. 15:32; Jn. 8:31; Acts 2:42; 14:22; 15:35; 18:11; 19:10; Phil. 1:25; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:16; 2 Tim. 3:14; 1 Jn. 2:19). In Simon's case, one gets the feeling that his motives for baptism were likely almost visibly suspect from the start; he saw the opportunity for financial gain. But that was no reason to not baptize him. We can never know the motives of those who seek baptism. Over the course of a few thousand baptisms I have arrived at the simple conclusion that it's so often those who appear to be so well motivated, so brimming with knowledge and zeal, who don't stay the course. And it's those whose motivation would appear suspect- getting baptized because the boyfriend is baptized and from an established family of believers, or from the apparent motive of material benefit- who despite many traumas and difficulties in their lives, endure to the end. And it is endurance to the end which is of the essence. Simon's baptism should surely sink for all time the 'forbidding of water' to people because we doubt their motives. We barely know our own motives, so how can we pronounce with confidence upon the motives of other hearts, to the point of denying them baptism? For *Amazed* see on :9 *Amazed the people of Samaria*.

8:14 *Now when the apostles that were at Jerusalem-* According to 8:1 the majority of the Jerusalem church had scattered, and only the apostles remained there. It was therefore quite a sacrifice to send away Peter and John, who were surely amongst the leadership seeing they had been in the Lord's inner circle. But this was the importance they attached to missionary work and strengthening new converts.

Heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them- This is the same phrase as used in the parable of the sower, about the ground which receives the word but then ceases to respond well (Lk. 8:13). They so believed that parable that they sacrificed Peter and John to go and try to strengthen those who had responded, lest they fall away. They knew full well from the parable that those who initially respond are prone to fall away, and they took proactive initiative in order to try to stop this happening. Our reading of Scripture must not be left on a mere level of correctly interpreting it; we are thereby empowered and required to go out and do things in response.

8:15 *Who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit-* I have argued on :14 *Received the word of God* that the motive for the visit was in order to strengthen the new believers against falling away. What those converts desperately needed was internal strength against temptation, so that their receiving the word would result in bringing forth fruit rather than them becoming one of the types of bad ground in the sower parable. And this was exactly why the apostles made the effort they did to go there and pray for them, placing their hands upon them, so that the Holy Spirit would be given them. There was likely a visible, external evidence of the receipt of the Spirit, but this is not actually mentioned here. The receipt of the

Holy Spirit is described in :20 as "the gift of God". This is surely the same gift as referred to in Acts 2- the power of righteousness, of spiritual help and power. We note that the apostles had to make effort so that others could receive this gift, and they prayed for them to receive it. In this we see the power of third party prayer and efforts for others' spiritual strengthening. There is a power available to us all which in some cases is dependent upon the freewill efforts of our fellow brethren. This is the ultimate motivation to travel, worry about and pray for the spiritual strengthening of our brethren.

8:16 *For as yet it had not fallen upon them*- The idea of the Greek word translated 'fallen' is to seize; the language is surely more relevant to a mental seizure than anything physical. And this, I suggest, is the essence of the Holy Spirit gift- a mental, psychological invasion of the willingly opened mind of the believer.

These had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus- This continues the differentiation made in Jn. 3:3-5 between birth of water, and of the Spirit. Baptism alone will not save us; there must be spiritual regeneration afterwards. This was taken so seriously that Peter and John were sent to the new converts to help them towards achieving this. We must note the danger of perceiving baptism as an end in itself, the final point reached after mastering a set of doctrine. It is only a beginning, and the essence is of the Spirit.

8:17 *Then they laid their hands on them*- We must remember that very many times, 'laying hands on' is a Hebraism for seizing someone. Admittedly, the Greek word used for such violent seizure is different to that used for laying hands on someone for healing or blessing. But the idea is the same, and it seems that there developed this specific technical term in the early church for 'laying hands on' in order to bless. We have just read that the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen upon, or seized [Gk.] these new converts; and so the apostles 'laid their hands upon' them so that the Holy Spirit would seize them. Whilst the words are not the same, the idea clearly is. The laying on of hands was therefore a visible reflection of the Spirit's seizure of the willing recipient. I noted on :16 that this language and imagery of 'seizure' is more appropriate to the Spirit as a mental, psychological force. This, I suggest, is what is in view, more than the ability to perform miracles. Such miraculous manifestations were indeed seen, but these were to demonstrate the power of the mental energy of transformation that had now been made available to the convert.

And they received the Holy Spirit- They received God's word (:14), but not the Holy Spirit. The primitive equation of word and spirit made by some, speaking of the so-called 'spirit-word', is therefore unrealistic. We read of the Holy Spirit being 'given' by the ascended Lord (Jn. 7:39), but it appears that this gift was still mediated through the prayers and efforts of other believers, and the willingness of the recipient to receive it. For it is apparent that unless Peter and John had prayed, travelled to Samaria and laid hands on these believers, they would not have received the Spirit. It would seem that it was outside the scope of Philip's calling to do this. But *lambano*, 'receive', can imply that the converts had to themselves make a conscious decision to receive it, in the same way as the Spirit will not come into our hearts unless we are open to it. The Lord's request to the apostles 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (Jn. 20:22) can be read as a request for their openness, rather than just stating the obvious, as if to say, 'Well I'm giving you the Holy Spirit, here you are, receive it'. Rather I suggest the sense is 'Please, receive it, go on, take what I am offering you'. 2 Cor. 11:4 criticizes the Corinthians for not receiving the spirit of Jesus but rather "another spirit", implying that receipt of the Spirit requires freewill decision making on the part of the recipient. So often, *lambano* means to consciously decide to take or receive

something; it does not have to mean that the Spirit just comes upon the recipient in any case. Examples include Mt. 8:17; 10:38; 12:14; 21:35; 22:15; 26:52; Lk. 20:28.

8:18 *Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying-* The gift of the Spirit was surely the same as in Acts 2, which I have reasoned was a gift of internal spirituality. The same words for 'Spirit' and 'given' are to be found in other passages which clearly relate it to an internal power working within the human mind: "The love of God is shed abroad *in our hearts* by the *Holy Spirit* which is *given* unto us" (Rom. 5:5). "[He has] sealed us and *given* the earnest of the *Spirit* in our *hearts*" (2 Cor. 1:22). "He would *give* you, according to the riches of His glory, that you may be strengthened with power through His *Spirit* in the *inner man*" (Eph. 3:16). "God did not *give* us a *spirit* of fearfulness, but of... a disciplined *mind*" (2 Tim. 1:7). It's unclear whether or not that gift was accompanied by the reassurance of physical manifestations in this case. But the essence of it was just as it is today- the power of internal transformation, which is what every convert so desperately needs.

8:19 *Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit-* Simon didn't ask for the Holy Spirit himself, but rather the authority ["power"] to give it to others. He had been used to being perceived as the power of God (:10), and despite his new religious milieu as a Christian, he wanted that to continue. This kind of thing is observable amongst power hungry pastors today, who clearly do not see personal spirituality as significant, so drunk are they on power.

8:20 *But Peter said to him: May your silver perish with you-* The man was identified with his wealth, as so many are today. See on 5:5 *Fell down*. "Perish" translates a Greek word later to be often used by Peter, in the sense of the destruction of condemnation at judgment day (2 Pet. 2:1,2,3,7,16). When the Lord returns and judges this world, there will finally be left no silver, no wealth, and no people who identified with it. Although Peter was telling Simon that he would not at this point be saved but rather condemned along with his money, he urges him to repent and pray, knowing that the verdict of condemnation can be changed whilst we have life (:22). At his denials, Peter had himself experienced that status of being condemned; he had gone out from the Lord's presence and wept bitterly, just as the rejected will do at the last day. But he had repented. And so now he is sharing that experience with others. He would not, therefore, have said these words with any disinterested shrugging of the shoulders; he had personally been through this process of condemnation and salvation out of it. And he dearly wished Simon, his namesake, to do likewise.

Because you have thought to obtain the gift of God with money- The Greek can equally carry the sense, as in the AV, that he thought that God's gift could be purchased with money. In this case, Peter is seeing right through Simon's game plan. He wanted to have the power to pass on the gift, because he foresaw that he could then charge money for giving it to others.

8:21 *You have neither part nor share in this matter-* "Matter" is *logos*, usually translated "word", and used in the context about the word of the Lord which the Samaritans had responded to (8:4,14,25). "Part" is often used about a 'part' in an inheritance. Simon was not in line to share in the promised inheritance, which all true believers were experiencing and would experience. And neither was he any elder in this new community; for "share" or "lot" is a reference to the LXX of Num. 26:55 which speaks of the lot of the priests in service. Simon had no part in the work of the new priesthood / leadership, nor did he even have a part in the general inheritance of all believers. The Greek words for "part... share" are often used together in

Deuteronomy (LXX) concerning how the Levites had no part nor share in the inheritance of Canaan (Dt. 12:12; 14:27,29; 18:1). They are also used together in Col. 1:12, of *partaking* in the *inheritance* of the saints. Simon had no inheritance in the word of the Kingdom. Another possibility is that a "part" refers to what is purchased, and "share" or "lot" is what is distributed freely; as if to say that Simon had no part in the word / *logos* / intention of the Gospel, whether by purchasing it or by being given it freely.

Because your heart is not right before God- Quoting Ps. 78:37 LXX about Israel in the wilderness, whose heart was in Egypt, whatever appearance they gave of journeying with God. This quotation, along with the previous allusions in this verse to Simon not having his inheritance in Canaan, rather suggests that Simon was Jewish. He had a Jewish name, after all, and was acting like Israel of old. The conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10 is surely framed as "the conversion of the Gentiles", and it was this baptism which provoked the debate about the inclusion of the Gentiles. We can assume therefore that the Lord considered Samaritans as Jews; and the Samaritans practiced circumcision and considered themselves to be part of God's covenant people. My point is that these Old Testament allusions would not have been lost upon Simon, being a Jew.

"Before God" is literally 'in the face / presence of God'. Our innermost thoughts and subconscious motives, as in Simon's case, his fantasy of selling Holy Spirit to Christians, are directly before the face of God Almighty, which face we cannot currently come before in our own flesh.

8:22 *Therefore, repent-* Peter had used the same words earlier in addressing the crowd in Acts 3:19, appealing for them to "repent therefore and be converted"; in Acts 2:38 Peter had urged repentance in order to obtain forgiveness. Now he encourages the baptized Simon to repent and be forgiven. The call to repent and convert is as real both before and after baptism, for Simon had been baptized. Conversion, as Peter himself had learnt, is ongoing. This incident is proof enough that baptism alone will not save us; there is no such thing as 'once saved always saved'.

Of your wickedness- This is later defined as the thought of his heart. For the sake of thoughts, a man can be condemned. That is the message here, and the Lord made it equally clear. In this we see the supreme importance of being spiritually minded.

And pray to the Lord, that perhaps the thought of your heart shall be forgiven you- He had not just thought something, he had offered money in order to be able to pass on the Spirit gifts (:18,19). But the essence of his sin was a heart matter, what he was imagining, the likely future he envisaged, of him being given money in return for giving Spirit gifts. See on :20.

8:23 *For I see-* Perhaps Peter perceived the thought of Simon's heart by direct Spirit revelation; or maybe he himself perceived it. It's likely Peter's own perception was confirmed by the Spirit.

You are poisoned by bitterness- Simon's problem wasn't simply a love of money. He wanted the power of the Spirit gifts because of bitterness- the bitterness of envy (James 3:14). I suggest therefore that he was envious of the Christian preachers who had replaced him as the ones to whom people gave attention (see on :6 *Gave heed*). So his motivation was envy as well as greed. Bitterness is likened here to a snakebite- it spreads to influence every part of a person's thinking. We are surrounded by examples of this. Heb. 12:15 may carry the same idea, speaking of a root that bears bitterness in one person and thereby defiles many. Bitterness spreads like venom.

And held captive by iniquity- Literally, in the bonds of iniquity. The same word is used of how believers are likewise held in the bonds of peace and righteousness.

People are 'bonded' in sin or in righteousness. We are confirmed one way or the other, and 'held' in those positions- although it's possible to break out of them.

8:24 *And Simon answered and said: Pray for me to the Lord*- Peter had to pray for Simon as Christ had prayed for him (Acts 8:24 cp. Lk. 22:32). As with his preaching, Peter's pastoral work was shot through with an awareness of his own failure and taste of his Lord's grace. The lack of energy in our collective care for each other is surely reflective of a lack of awareness of our sinfulness, a shallow grasp of grace, and a subsequent lack of appreciation of the need to lay down our lives for the brethren, as the Lord did for us. Jesus Himself encouraged Peter to see things this way, in that He arranged circumstances so that Peter had to pray for Simon as Christ had prayed for him (Acts 8:24 cp. Lk. 22:32).

There is no record as to whether Peter did pray for Simon. This is one of those things which is purposefully left hanging in the Biblical record, in order to exercise us. Can we pray for others to be forgiven? To what extent can our prayer be a factor in their forgiveness? There is a degree to which this is indeed a factor (e.g. Mk. 2:5), but to what degree...?

That none of the things which you have spoken come upon me- Did Peter list various terrible judgments which the record doesn't state? Or are "the things" a reference to Peter's comment that Simon right then was "poisoned by bitterness and held captive by iniquity"? I suspect the latter. Because it is typical of those in that position that they will refuse to recognize that this is in fact how they are. They see this state as something which could happen to them, but they aren't there yet. All sin is addiction, to some extent; and this is the classic mindset of the addict or alcoholic.

8:25 *Therefore, when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord*- Perhaps this refers specifically to what they testified to Simon. But it would seem it has a wider reference. "Testified" is a legal term for a witness in court. Whenever someone hears the word of the Lord, they are as it were in the dock before Him; and their hearing of His word is the witness spoken by the preacher. The outcome of their case, in a sense, depends upon how they have responded to that testimony. The use of this language is a powerful example of how knowledge of the word brings responsibility.

They returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans- Presumably, in Samaritan villages surrounding Jerusalem. The parable of the good Samaritan suggests that there were Samaritans in the Jerusalem area. They had found such good response in the city of Samaria itself (:5) that they followed the Lord's leading, in realizing that all Samaritans were good ground for the Gospel. It's rather like preaching to Latvians in the UK after having a great response to the preaching of the word in Latvia. We are intended to use our initiative to follow where the Lord leads. Acts 10 presents the conversion of Cornelius as the first Gentile convert. The ethnicity of the Samaritans was a moot question; they were seen as half Jews. The Lord had spoken of the Samaritan leper He healed as a "stranger" or Gentile (Lk. 17:11,18; note it is Luke again who records this). The disciples should have grasped immediately from the great commission that they were to take the Gospel to the Gentiles; but they didn't. The Lord therefore led them gently to that conclusion, by giving them great response amongst the half-Jewish Samaritans. We too are led to the right conclusions and directions in our lives- if we correctly respond, stage by stage, to how the Lord patiently teaches us by the encounters and experiences He gives us in life.

8:26 *But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying: Arise and go toward the south*- A literal Angel? Or perhaps a messenger sent to Philip, to whom he faithfully responded. "Toward the south" is read by some manuscripts as "about noon" [also

translated this way in Acts 22:6]- the worst time to travel into a desert. But the calling to witness is counter instinctive and against all human wisdom. It was also about noon, "at the sixth hour", that Peter received his call from an Angel to accept the Gentiles (Acts 10:9). Both are told to "arise and go" to the Gentile seeker. As the Ethiopian asked who could "forbid" water baptism, so Peter says he could not forbid water baptism to Cornelius (Acts 10:47,48). The parallels between Peter and Philip are discussed on :27.

To the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza- This appears to echo the parable of the good Samaritan, which had been programmatic for the decision to preach to and accept Samaritans as recorded in the previous verses. For *Gaza*, see on :27 *Treasure*.

The same is desert- There is a theme in the New Testament that major response to preaching is often unexpected. The disciples were told to cast the net on the other side, when they were convinced there would be no response. Philip was told to go onto a road, probably in the heat of the day- when nobody was travelling. His willingness to go, to do at least something, resulted in an amazing response. This is exactly why predicting response to preaching is well-nigh impossible. It's why the geographical spread of the Gospel is so hard to explain when it is humanly analysed.

8:27 *And he arose and went-* In response to the command 'Arise and go' (:26). Luke so often uses this phrase. As Joseph and Mary arose and went immediately in response to a command, so did Philip. Immediacy of response was important to Luke; and he notes it in other terms in describing the immediacy of response to the Gospel and acceptance of baptism. Our flesh always seeks to delay our response, in the hope we may not have to fully make it in the end; whereas those whose hearts really perceive our call will respond immediately.

And a man- Gk. 'behold, a man'. We are invited to be with Philip, noticing the man from afar; and thereby sense his wonder at how faith had been rewarded. He had gone into the desert at midday in response to the Lord's strange request; and now, he saw why.

From Ethiopia- The disciples were being progressively opened up towards accepting that the Gospel must go to the Gentiles. They had been given great response amongst the Samaritans, who were at best half-Jews. And now a proselyte from Ethiopia was baptized. All this was leading up to the conversion of the totally Gentile Cornelius in Acts 10, which is presented as the opening of the door to the Gentiles. Of course, the disciples ought to have understood from the Lord's own teaching that the Gospel was now for all nations. But He worked with them in their slowness to understand that, accepting and gently working with their limited vision and cultural and historical resistances; just as we should with others, and exactly as the Lord does with us. Response from the leaders of Ethiopia was a feature of the Messianic Kingdom (Ps. 68:31; Is. 45:14; Zeph. 3:10). Although that Kingdom was not established in a literal sense upon the earth, it was being made clear to the disciples that the essence of it, with the lame walking and the blind seeing, was already with them. The same 'now but not yet' is seen in the Lord's work today just as clearly.

"Ethiopia" is often mentioned in the OT as being on the far edge of the world, and converts to Yahweh would come even from there (Ps. 68:31,32; Is. 45:14; Zeph. 3:9,10). We note from :26 that the road to this man came down from Jerusalem. Although he was not given a good reception by God's representatives in that city, it was from Jerusalem that the Gospel was to go out to the farthest parts of the known world. These considerations lead us to think that he was indeed a Gentile and not a Jew. The apparent opening of the doors to the Gentiles in Acts 10 with Cornelius was

only making more public a situation that already existed sub rosa- the door was already open to the Gentiles and Philip had been taught this in Acts 8, as Peter was in Acts 10. The Gospel's path was made clear in Acts 1:8- from Jerusalem to Samaria and "to the ends of the earth". Acts 8 tells us of the Gospel going from Jerusalem to Samaria, and now, to an Ethiopian- seen to be at the "ends of the earth". Philip is whisked away to Azotus and from there preaches to the towns along the coastal plain up to Caesarea. This included Gaza and Ashdod, former Philistine towns still largely populated by Gentiles. Peter is led to preach in this same area in Acts 9, preaching in Lydda and Joppa before coming to Caesaria. Indeed his work there may have been visiting the existing believers there whom Philip had converted. So we see the Lord's hand teaching both Philip and Peter in separate ways, gently leading them to understand the calling to include the Gentiles. We see the Lord working likewise today, to teach the same things to parallel believers.

A eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians- The spiritually perceptive amongst the disciples would have reflected that Jeremiah's faithful friend Ebedmelech was an Ethiopian (Jer. 38:7-12); and his name meant 'Servant of the king'. Here was another servant of the king / queen of Ethiopia. If Ebedmelech could have a place amongst the Old Testament faithful, why not Ethiopians of Philip's day? Again we see how the Lord was gently but quickly leading His people towards acceptance of the Gentiles. Those who refused that leadership and continual psychological nudging were refusing the movement of the Spirit in their lives by resisting the obvious conclusion: Gentiles could be accepted in the family of God just as well as Jews.

Dt. 23:1 was clear that whoever had crushed testicles or was castrated "shall not enter the assembly of Yahweh". The Ethiopian was cut off from Yahweh's people, apparently. But that didn't stop him coming to the Lord. Some Rabbis understood Lev. 21:20; 22:24 to mean that a castrated man was permanently unclean. Josephus wrote: "Shun eunuchs and flee all dealings with them... expel them" (*Antiquities*, 4.290,291). As a eunuch, he could not be circumcised, and so was seen as outside the realm of covenant relationship with God- under the old covenant. He desperately wanted a new covenant, and this is what he found in the Lord Jesus. The Ethiopian likely heard all these arguments on his visit to Jerusalem. And therefore was the more intrigued to read of the Lord's condition and situation in Isaiah 53, and felt the more identity with He who had likewise been rejected by the Jerusalem religious leaders. Isaiah 56 had foretold that the eunuchs would be welcomed into the new temple on Zion; clearly the views of Judaism were askance with that. Hence the Ethiopian was baptized on the road that led *away* from Jerusalem.

The parts of Isaiah 53 that he focuses upon are those which speak of the Lord's humiliation on the cross, and the lack of justice. He quotes from the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew text, suggesting he had purchased the Greek version as he wasn't fluent in Hebrew. He doesn't quote the whole section, just some verses which struck him as relevant to himself. We too focus on various aspects of the Lord's sufferings as pertinent to our own experience. He saw the lamb being led to slaughter as a picture of a humbled animal, now willing to accept whatever was done to it, be it shearing or death. He had been humiliated- racially, as a man, as a person. And he was struck by how the Lord's humiliation was the basis of His exaltation- note :33 Gk. "His life was taken up [exalted] from the earth". This may well be a reference to His resurrection and ascension rather than to His death. No wonder the Ethiopian so eagerly wanted immersion baptism, which speaks of this. This fits with Luke's great theme, shown by how he records Mary's words, that the high are brought down, and the humble lifted

up (Lk. 1:52). But the Ethiopian was a high one in his own circles. But he was willing to be brought down along with the Lord Jesus, and thus be lifted up.

Who was over all her treasure- "Treasure" translates a non-Greek word, *gaza*. It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It's a strange word choice, at first blush. Likewise when we encounter the same word as a proper noun in :26 to describe the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, we wonder why that description is given. For the Ethiopian was travelling from Jerusalem to Ethiopia, and defining the road as the part that lead to Gaza begs the question as to why that point along the journey is emphasized. The connection is clearly intentional. The man was burdened with the responsibility of managing great wealth, and he was now beginning his journey home, full of those thoughts one has on coming to the end of a vacation and realizing that it's now back to work. He was going back to his wealth, to his *gaza*, which he had been placed over. The idea of being placed over wealth is to be found in the Lord's parable of Mt. 25:21,23, where the same words are used as here; we are placed over the Lord's wealth. I think the allusion is teaching us that all the cares of this world regarding our employment and the management of wealth, be it great or small, is utterly eclipsed by our conversion to the Lord and the responsibilities we now have in *His* service. For we are servants of the King, the King of the cosmos, and are put in charge over *His* amazing wealth, which we are to manage for *Him*.

Had come to Jerusalem to worship- He was a proselyte, but as a eunuch and effectively a Gentile, would have been unable to enter the temple for "worship". His worship would therefore have been in his heart and outside the temple. He was a prime candidate for the Gospel, just as all God loving but excluded persons are.

8:28 *And he was returning, and sitting in his chariot-* A similar word to 'converting'. He had only just begun his journey back to Ethiopia; he had not yet reached even Gaza. He would have been full of thought and sadness as to how his physical condition and ethnicity disallowed his full worship. And likely he had felt keenly the proud superiority of the Jewish religious leaders, which left him feeling humiliated. But this being brought down by the rejection of others was all part of his 'converting' to the Lord in spirit and truth. And the Lord above saw his feelings and felt for him, just as He does with all such folk to this day.

Was reading the prophet Isaiah- Perhaps he had bought a copy of the scroll. Such scrolls were hard to come by, especially for a Gentile eunuch, and were very expensive. Perhaps he had just bought it on his visit. And he knew Hebrew. His desire to draw close to God was very serious. And God notices likewise today all who truly love and seek to understand His word.

8:29 *And the Spirit said to Philip-* A reference to the Lord Jesus, "the Lord the Spirit" of 2 Cor. 3:18? Or the Spirit as an Angel? Or an internal prompting? I would opt for an Angel, perhaps the Comforter Angel, which effectively was the Holy Spirit in the early church. See on 8:39 *The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip*.

Go near and join this chariot- The language of 'joining' is another prompt towards fellowshiping with Gentiles; the same term has been used for how believers 'joined themselves to' other believers (Acts 5:13; 9:26; 17:34). It became a lesson for Peter, who uses the term for how it was not seen as lawful for a Jew to 'keep company' or 'join himself to' Gentiles (Acts 10:28). Peter learnt from Philip's experience. For 'chariot' is put here for the entire entourage, who would have been Gentiles. Such a prominent man would not have travelled alone. His commanding the chariot to stop in :38 surely means he asked those driving the horses to stop. "Go near" translates the same word used by Peter in explaining that a Jew could not 'come unto' non-Jews (Acts 10:28). Philip was being led to the same experience as Peter by an Angel or "the

Spirit" telling him to 'come unto' non-Jews. Philip's experience would have been an example to Peter. We see how the Lord works in a parallel way in different lives, and we are to take lessons and inspiration from this. It is this feature of His working which is the basis for true Christian fellowship; our meetings together are not therefore to be to chatter about the state of the nation and lament the weather, but rather to share our experiences of the Lord's hand, so that we might take encouragement from the fact that He is at work according to a similar pattern in other lives. For man is not alone, even amongst our fellows there are parallel lives from which we are to take warning and encouragement. Her breast cancer, your broken leg, their bereavement... we perceive as the workings of the same Lord towards similar ends.

8:30 *And Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said-* Sensing the Lord was leading him, Philip was eager to respond. Running is a Hebraism for response to God's word (Hab. 2:2; Dan. 12:4). We too need to sense where we are being led and enthusiastically respond in order to be led further.

Do you understand what you read?- Our Bible reading can be so easily performed on a merely surface level, skimming over words without letting their real import be felt at all. Fred Barling truly observed: "Through long familiarity we have come to read [the Bible] with a phlegm and impassivity which are in sharp contrast to the amazement felt by those who came into actual contact with Jesus, and by those who first read these accounts". Philip realized this when he quizzed the eunuch, with a play on words in the Greek: "Do you understand what you read?" . *ginoskeis ha anaginoskeis?* 'Do you really understand, experientially, what you are understanding by reading?'.

8:31 *And he said: How can I-* This suggests, in the Greek, that "I am not able". And God recognized this, by sending Philip to explain. It would seem from this that it isn't possible, or is very unusual, for a person to understand the Gospel purely through their own Bible reading. The implication is that an existing believer is required to explain it, to embody the theory in practice. This reflects how God (who can teach or save anyone as He wishes, how He wishes) prefers to work through the mechanism of the body of Christ, the church, in order to do this. It is His intention that the message of Christ be spread by those who model Christ. We can wrongly assume that Bible study alone is required to reveal the Gospel to a person. It can do, but marooned on a desert island with only a Bible we would be unlikely to find Christ- unless someone revealed Him to us.

"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). This clearly states that (as a general rule) it is impossible to believe in Christ without a preacher. The Ethiopian eunuch was the classic case of this. It is perfectly possible that Rom. 10:4 alludes to this, implying that this man's case was typical [and notice the connections between Acts 8:37 and Rom. 10:9]. Likewise the Lord Jesus spoke of "them also which shall believe on me through *their* (the preachers') word" (Jn. 17:20)- not through their unguided Bible reading. If all we had been given was a Bible, most of us would simply not be where we are today, spiritually. If I had started reading from Genesis, I don't think I'd have got much beyond Leviticus before giving up on the Bible. Yet there are some who have made it through, from Genesis to Revelation. And their testimony is even more emphatic: "Without doubt I needed someone to guide me, I was just crying out for all the pieces to be put into place" , in the words of one such recent convert.

Unless someone guides me- The LXX frequently uses this word for the Divine guidance of Israel in the desert. And here was the eunuch also in a desert, but

wondering where the guidance would come from. He had God's word in the form of part of the Bible; but putting a Bible in a man's hand is not always enough. There is some other element required, and God in His wisdom has set things up like that so that our guidance is not a result of unaided intellectual effort, and requires fellowship with other believers at some level.

And he begged Philip- Another similarity with Peter's experiences, for we go on to read how Peter was 'begged' (s.w.) to go to Joppa and heal the half Gentile Dorcas (Acts 9:38).

To come up and sit with him- The wealthy, powerful man was 'sitting' in his chariot, at the centre of his entourage (:28 s.w.). We notice the new equality between the two men; Philip climbed up to him, and they sat together. This is the effect which the Gospel has upon people.

8:32 *Now the passage of the Scripture which he was reading was this: He was led-* This changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was led (this isn't in the Hebrew text). The impression given of His passivity is another indication that He was giving His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him. There is great emphasis on the Lord being led (Mt. 26:57; 27:2,31; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:13,28; 19:16). The eunuch felt he too was being led; Luke uses the word to speak of the convert to Christ being led to the inn by the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:34), and it is used of Peter being first led to Christ (Jn. 1:42), of the sheep being led to the Lord's fold (Jn. 10:16), of sinners being led to repentance (Rom. 2:4) and the many sons being led to glory (Heb. 2:10). So the eunuch saw striking similarities between himself and all that was written of the Messianic figure in Isaiah. We could say that he saw in the Christ his representative. But he needed to make some conscious act of identification with him, which is why the appeal for baptism into Him was so natural and was exactly what he needed to hear.

As a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb- Having been so recently in Jerusalem for worship, these images were fresh in the eunuch's mind. Those animals were representative of some greater reality- and now he was figuring that that person whom they represented was also in turn representative of himself.

Before his shearer is dumb, so he did not open his mouth- One simple reason the Lord was silent before His accusers was because He was utterly scared in the face of death. His silence wasn't merely because of an iron-willed biting of the tongue; it was also a result of the same humanity which sweated great drops in Gethsemane as He begged not to die. The sheep-Messiah was "dumb", literally, without a voice. Just as the eunuch was in Judaism. He too had been unable to "open his mouth" in the worship formalities because he was excluded from the temple on account of his physical condition and ethnicity.

The word "shearer" means literally 'one who cuts'. Perhaps the eunuch remembered his own castration before 'one who cuts', and thus eagerly wanted to know about this man with whom he could identify.

8:33 *In his humiliation-* The majority of references to humility in Scripture refer to humbling *oneself*; humility, hard as it is to define, is something consciously done, as an act of the will. Yet the Father confirms us in our efforts. The Lord *humbled Himself* to die on the cross (Phil. 2), and yet the cross *humbled Him* (Acts 8:33). I suggest the eunuch felt humbled by his visit to Jerusalem; but the word can also mean 'depressed'. He was depressed at the seeming impossibility of drawing close to God within the strictures of Judaism.

Justice was denied him- The eunuch's exclusion from the temple for reasons beyond his control seemed unjust. So he was both depressed and also frustrated at the

injustice. And now he was reading of another depressed man who was also denied justice.

Who can declare his generation?- The eunuch was likewise without children and impotent. What attracted him to this Messiah figure was the similarity he was between this saviour figure and himself. He too was humiliated / depressed, just as this saviour was. This is the compelling attraction of the representative nature of the Lord's sacrifice, that He as a man with our nature and experience gave Himself as the sacrifice which we can identify with. No wonder, then, that the conversation with Philip moved to baptism, and the eunuch wanted to make that necessary identification with the Lord Jesus in that way.

For his life is taken away from the earth- Perhaps the depression / humiliation of the eunuch was to such a degree that he felt suicidal, or at least, he despaired at the purpose of his life if he were to remain excluded from God. And now he was reading of another man whose life was taken away. In passing, the Lord makes the point that His life was not taken away from Him (Jn. 10:18- same words used), but rather He gave it of His own will. We see here how God is not a literalist when it comes to the use of words and ideas. The critic would cry 'Contradiction!'. But it's nothing of the sort. Instead we see here a truth stated- that His life was taken away. But the Lord saw deeper than that, and explained that His wilful giving of His life was to such an extent that in effect, the taking away of His life was not a taking away of life from Him. For He freely gave His life of His own volition.

8:34 *And the eunuch said to Philip: I beg you, of whom does the prophet speak?*- This urgency to understand whom the prophet spoke of was a reflection of the man's need to identify himself with that man. This is why baptism, as that act of identification, flowed on so naturally.

Of himself, or of somebody else?- The Greek translated "or" is very wide in meaning. The sense could equally be 'Of himself as much as about somebody else?', or 'Of himself and also somebody else?', or 'Of himself but also of somebody else?'. I have tried to demonstrate that all aspects of Messiah read by the eunuch were relevant to himself. So I would argue that the 'somebody else' he had in view was himself. His reasoning was not that the prophet was perhaps talking about himself but he was additionally a type of Messiah. That would be to read into these words the kind of thing *we* are accustomed to seeing in the Old Testament. The eunuch was a eunuch and was feeling strong connection with this figure he was reading about. So strong, that he asked whether he was correct in feeling that this prophecy was about the Messianic prophet figure and also about himself. We could wish for no clearer statement of the representative nature of the Lord's being and sacrifice.

8:35 *And Philip opened his mouth*- This surely must connect with the usage of the same phrase in :32 about the Lord Jesus, who in His time of death "did not open his mouth". It was as if Philip was manifesting the Lord Jesus; the eunuch had been reading of a figure like him who died, whereas now Philip represents that figure as alive. The desire for baptism at Philip's hands into that dead and resurrected figure was therefore quite natural.

And beginning from this Scripture- As He 'began' in the prophets and expounded "in all the scriptures the things *concerning himself*" (Lk. 24:27), so those in Him "*began* at this Scripture, and preached... *Jesus*".

Preached Jesus to him- Our early brethren preached a person, even a personality cult- based around the man Christ Jesus. They preached a Christ-centred Gospel, to the extent that the preaching of the entire Gospel is sometimes summarised as "preaching Christ" (Acts 8:35; 5:42; 28:31). They preached a Man, a more than man,

who has loved us more than we loved Him, and more than we ever can love Him. In this there is an imperative for response. It's not the same as demanding obedience merely for the sake of a good time to come.

8:36 *And as they went along the road, they came upon some water; and the eunuch said: Look, water!-* The preaching of "Jesus" involved the message about baptism. There was more content in 'preaching Jesus' than literally just saying 'believe in Jesus'. Or it could be argued that the message he had read of the death and resurrection of the human Lord Jesus, whose experiences were representative of his own, naturally led to a desire to identify with Him. And perhaps the eunuch had seen Jews being baptized into Jesus during his stay in Jerusalem; and perhaps the brethren had refused to baptize him because he was a Gentile. The initiative in requesting baptism was clearly from the candidate; infant sprinkling is therefore no way Christian baptism. The act of baptism is therefore a response to the message of the Lord's death and resurrection. For baptism by its nature is designed as an identification with those things, rather than a sign of assent to a theology we have heard and accepted. This is what the great commission envisaged- preaching the message of Christ's death and resurrection, baptizing people into that, and then subsequently teaching them "all things that I have commanded you".

What is stopping me from being baptized?- The Greek word is generally used in the context of forbidding people, Gentiles especially, from coming to Christ. Peter uses it in reasoning that baptismal water could not be forbidden for the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:47; 11:17). The Ethiopian may well have come up to the temple, searching for the God of Israel, and was now returning depressed at his rejection by Judaism. But now he finds acceptance in Christ. He is described as "a man from Ethiopia" (:27), and not a diaspora Jew. Luke has written of diaspora Jews in chapter 2, so it's rather surprising he doesn't mention the fact if the man indeed was one. However, the fact he was reading Hebrew could suggest he was a Jew, or at least, a very serious proselyte; and the conversion of Cornelius later, in Acts 10, is certainly set up as if it was the opening of the door to the Gentiles. But all the same, eunuchs weren't allowed into the temple; so even if this man was a Jew, he was an excluded one. The fact he was a senior minister in a gentile Government would also suggest he was not that devoted to Judaism externally, although in his heart he was, and had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and learnt to read Hebrew.

"What is to prevent me...?" is understandable once we appreciate the background of the man's experience at the hands of the Jerusalem Jews. They had found every reason to "prevent" him coming to God. But having understood the Lord Jesus, the Ethiopian is convinced that He operates no barriers. There is, surely, nothing to prevent him. And indeed there wasn't. Luke has previously noted that the disciples tried to "prevent" John the Baptist's disciples from witnessing, and were told not to prevent them (Lk. 9:49,50). And again they were warned not to prevent little children from coming to the Lord (Lk. 18:15-17). Those lawyers who prevent others coming to God were strongly condemned (Lk. 11:52; Mt. 23:13). The parallels with Peter (see on :27) continue when Peter is likewise led to understand that nobody could surely forbid water to those Gentiles who wanted to be baptized in Cornelius' home (Acts 10:47,48). We note that Luke ends his volume by noting that Paul preached the Gospel to the Gentiles with no man preventing / forbidding him (Acts 28:31). There are no bars on who can be baptized and we should rejoice in this.

8:37 *And Philip said: If you believe with all your heart-* Philip is putting the question back to the candidate. It was not for him to judge the state of the man's heart; only the eunuch knew his own heart. The decision regarding readiness for baptism

was therefore left with the candidate and not the baptizer. There is no example in the apostolic preaching of candidates being turned down by the preachers. We notice that the question as to whether the eunuch believed "with all [his] heart" was answered by the eunuch with no reference to his heart; rather simply, "I believe". He knew he believed, but rarely is faith 100%. And the eunuch had the humility to recognize that, and Philip accepted that. Belief is frequently stated to be in the heart, and the passages in the later New Testament which state that may well be alluding back to the eunuch as a model convert to be emulated by us all. Belief, therefore, was not mere attendance at the temple nor simply external acceptance of religion. It was deeply personal, in the heart which only the believer knows. This may sound obvious to us, but it was a radical concept amongst the religions of the day and also within Judaism.

You may- The Greek *exesti* occurs 32 times and is 28 times translated "lawful" in the context of arguments about the Mosaic law. Surely the eunuch had encountered the objection so many times whilst in Jerusalem: It is not lawful for you to come into the temple, or even, perhaps, to be baptized. Now Philip is being led to understand that the spirit of the Law did indeed encompass a personal like the eunuch, despite his physical condition and ethnicity. For if Philip simply meant 'Sure, you can...', other words would more comfortably have been chosen.

And he answered and said: I believe- The impression is given by the record that he really couldn't put the Scriptures together at all; his first comment to Philip was that he couldn't understand the Scriptures because he had no teacher (Acts 8:31). The way Philip opens his mouth "and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35) suggests the man had no prior understanding of "Jesus". Philip's message obviously included baptism, because the Ethiopian on his initiative asked to be baptized when he noticed some water on their journey. Philip did not refuse him, but said that he could do so if he believed with all his heart (Acts 8:37). The fact Philip requested the man to ask *himself* that question would imply that Philip did not know the state of the man's heart. He didn't say "Yes, Mr. Ethiopian, I can read your heart and I see you believe, so, yes, you can". The Ethiopian's confession that "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37) is clearly presented as sufficient for the man to be baptized. One excuse for not following the example of baptisms found in Acts is to argue that no extensive interview or theological teaching was necessary because the apostles knew the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit gifts. That of course is an argument from silence. Nowhere is that explicitly stated in the context of baptism. But the example of the Ethiopian rather suggests that Philip did not know the man's heart, rather did he leave the man to decide the state of his own heart.

That Jesus Christ is the Son of God- It would be hard to argue that anything much more is required to make a baptism valid. Belief in Jesus as God's Son becomes the quintessential statement of faith in Jn. 9:35; 20:31 and 1 Jn. 5:5. If acceptance of a detailed package of theology was essential for the validity of baptism, then surely the New Testament would be specific in giving examples of this. But the evidence is quite the opposite.

8:38 *And he commanded the chariot to stop-* See on :29 *Go near and join this chariot.*

And they both went down into the water- This along with the description of them coming "up out of the water" (:39) is sure evidence that baptism was by immersion. And it has been well observed that nobody crosses a desert without water bottles. They surely had some water, which would have sufficed if baptism were by sprinkling.

Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him- It is stressed twice that both of them went into the water. We see here the unity between preacher and convert, which we also noted on :31 *Sit with him*.

8:39 *And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip-* This would suggest that "the Spirit of the Lord" was not an internal prompting but the Spirit working through an Angel. The 'snatchings away' recorded in the Bible often imply the involvement of an Angel. The Alexandrian MS renders: "The Holy Spirit fell upon the eunuch, but an angel of the Lord snatched away Philip". This would parallel the Angel's work with that of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was equally active in work in both their lives. "Caught away" would have recalled how Ezekiel was snatched away from Jerusalem to Gentile Babylon (Ez. 3:14); and the Apocryphal story of the transportation of Habakkuk, who was supposedly like Ezekiel taken up by the hair of his head, and carried from Judea to Babylon. Again the suggestion is that Philip now went to preach to Gentiles.

And the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing- The temple centred Judaism of the time would have found it hard to get their head around how a person could go off and have a relationship with God with no access to holy space and without the further presence of their rabbi / teacher. It's likewise difficult for those who perceive the body of Christ to be limited by a particular church or attendance within a denomination. The idea that a person can be baptized and live in isolation with their Lord is hard for them to accept. There is fairly strongly documented evidence that there was a Christian movement in Ethiopia from the first century, so we can conclude that the eunuch preached there on his return.

8:40 *But Philip was found-* Elsewhere I have suggested that it's helpful to imagine the Biblical records as being filmed by some Divine cameraman who changes perspective and at times zooms in and zooms out, and changes angle. In this record we have seen Philip looking at the chariot, focusing upon the eunuch, running to the chariot entourage and joining himself to it, then climbing up into it and sitting with the eunuch. Now the word "found" suggests an almost aerial perspective, looking down upon Palestine and 'finding' Philip in Ashdod / Azotus.

At Azotus- Ashdod. It is given its Gentile name because the suggestion is that after the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip began preaching to Gentiles. He preached along the coastal strip from Ashdod to Caesarea, an area well known for the many Gentiles living there. Both he and Peter were led to the same conclusions by different routes. This impression is confirmed by the way that Cornelius was at Caesarea (Acts 10:1), and his conversion is presented as the opening of the doors to the Gentiles. Both Philip and Peter ended up open minded to Gentiles in Caesarea by different routes. We so often find this- believers are led to the same changed positions and the same truths by different paths but by the same Lord.

And passing through that area, he preached the gospel to all the towns, until he came to Caesarea - Luke describes the Lord and His followers as 'passing through' and teaching as He went (Lk. 2:15; 4:30; 5:15; 8:22; 9:6; 11:24; 17:11; 19:1,4); and employs the same word to describe the preaching of the apostles in Acts (8:4,40; 9:32,38; 10:38; 11:19,22; 12:10; 13:6,14; 14:24; 15:3,41; 16:6; 17:23; 18:23,27; 19:1,21; 20:2,25). See on Acts 1:1. His witness becomes that of all those in Him. We are Him to this world.

ACTS CHAPTER 9

9:1 *But Saul, yet breathing threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest-* Saul here is portrayed as a beast, perhaps the personal epitome of the beast system of Revelation which persecuted God's people during the first century. AV is incorrect in rendering "breathing out"; the Greek here means to inhale, not to exhale. The idea is that he breathed in a mental atmosphere of threats and murder. This is a helpful way of describing our mindset- we can breathe in our own words and wrong intentions, as Saul did here. The "yet" suggests that his fury at Stephen's arguments continued... but the depth of his hurt was really the depth to which his conscience had been prodded by the goads of the risen Christ.

The Damascus road experience surfaces time and again in Paul's writing and self-consciousness (Rom. 10:2-4; 1 Cor. 9:1,16,17; 15:8-10; 2 Cor. 3:4-4:6; 5:16; Eph. 3:1-13; Phil. 3:4-11; Col. 1:23-29). It is no mere pointless repetition that results in Luke recording Paul's conversion three times in Acts (Acts 9,22,26). Special attention is being paid to his conversion, because he is being set up as the model of all Christian conversion.

9:2- see on Acts 22:19.

And asked from him letters to Damascus, to the synagogues- The implication is that the Christians were to be found in the synagogues. This is yet further evidence that the Lord never required His followers to 'break fellowship' with the synagogue system, apostate as it was in doctrine and practice. He clearly had no concept of 'guilt by association'.

That if he found any that were of the Way - How the Christian community is described in 19:9; 22:4; 24:22. Yet "the way" is a title of the Lord Jesus personally. The community were so identified with Him personally that one of His personal titles became the name given to the community which manifested Him and was based around Him.

Whether men or women- This is emphasized three times (8:3; 9:2; 22:4).

He might bring them bound to Jerusalem- See on 9:14 *To bind*. It was specifically in Jerusalem that Saul had done so much evil to Christians (:13). Presumably the level of torture and death which Saul wanted to inflict couldn't so easily be done in Damascus, but he could get away with it in Jerusalem; hence he wanted to bring the Christians to Jerusalem. Paul later admitted he had murdered Christians during the period before the Damascus road incident: "And I persecuted this Way to the death [meaning, he murdered them], binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts 22:4). The way of getting the Christians into Roman prisons could only have been through false accusation. For the Jews didn't have their own prison system. Or perhaps we are to understand the Greek for "prisons" in 22:4 in its more literal sense of 'cages', in which Christians were sometimes burnt. The question, of course, is how Saul got away with doing this when the Lord's own trial and death had highlighted how the Jews themselves did not have the power to put people to death, and needed Roman agreement to do so. It could be that this changed after the death of the Lord Jesus; or it could be that a blind eye was turned, as the Christian converts were seen as anti-Roman in their beliefs and practices.

The binding and bringing of Christians from one city to another, along with other references to Saul's abuse of Christians (26:10,11), was predicted clearly in Mt. 23:33-36: "You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how shall you escape the judgment of Gehenna? Therefore, look, I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes. Some

of them you shall kill and crucify, and some of them you shall scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city. That upon you may fall the guilt for all the righteous blood shed on the land... all these things shall come upon this generation". This reads as a prediction of Saul's personal behaviour. And yet the apparently inevitable judgment for doing these things did not come upon Saul. Here again we see how judgment can be stated, without any conditions or mitigating factors being explained at the time [just as Nineveh was to be destroyed after 40 days]- and yet the judgment can still be altered. And in Saul's case, the Lord worked hard to avoid having to bring it upon him. We wonder how many others He likewise worked with, but they didn't respond... The scope of His activity amongst men is wonderful.

9:3- see on Acts 26:10,11.

And as he journeyed, it came to pass, that he drew near to Damascus; and suddenly there shone round about him- The idea is of flashing, and suggests this was a vision of the Cherubim, similar to what Ezekiel saw (Ez. 1:4). See below.

A light out of Heaven- Paul's conversion-commissioning experience on the Damascus road has many similarities with the commissioning of Ezekiel. Ezekiel saw a similar vision of glory, heard "a voice of one that spoke", fell to the ground, resisted the commission, received Divine assurance, rose up by Divine invitation and was prepared for his commission by signs and wonders. The difference was that Paul says he saw the glory of the risen Christ. Ezekiel saw the glory of Yahweh, as the Lord Jesus wasn't in physical existence and hadn't resurrected at his time. But essentially, it was the same glory- for the glory of the Father is now fully invested in the Son (Rom. 9:23; Phil. 4:19). Ezekiel saw at the head of the vision of glory "the likeness of a man". He calls this figure the *Kavod*, the glory of God (Ez. 1:29). Although Jesus was not in physical existence at Ezekiel's time, I suggest that Ezekiel saw a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory. John 12 says that Isaiah likewise saw the glory of the Lord Jesus when he saw a similar vision of glory in Isaiah 6. James 2:1 speaks of "our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory". Christ is "the Lord of glory", reflecting the glory of God (Col. 1:27; Heb. 1:3). When Paul writes of our being transformed into "the image of Christ" (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49) he seems to have in mind Ez. 1:28 LXX: "The appearance of the image of the glory of the Lord". "The glory" in Ezekiel is personified- it refers to a person, and I submit that person was a prophetic image of Jesus Christ. But Paul's big point is that we *each* with unveiled face have beheld the Lord's glory (2 Cor. 3:16- 4:6); just as he did on the Damascus road, and just as Ezekiel did. It follows, therefore, that not only is Paul our example, but our beholding of the Lord's glory propels us on our personal commission in the Lord's service, whatever it may be.

Theologians debate whether the Damascus road experience was Paul's conversion, programmatic for each of us, as he says in 1 Tim. 1:16 and 2 Cor. 4:6; or whether it is a specific, unique calling to be a preacher of the Gospel, and therefore is couched in terms of the call of Ezekiel and other Old Testament prophets. In Galatians 1, Paul clearly understood what happened as being his specific call to a preaching ministry. I would say that Saul's conversion was also a call to a preaching ministry; and that our conversion is also a calling to a ministry no less significant than that of the Old Testament prophets.

9:4 *And he fell upon the earth and heard a voice saying to him: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*- Clear evidence that the body of Christ is as it were the Lord Jesus personally. Whatever is done to us is done to Him. Nearly 10 times we read Paul saying that he had 'persecuted' Jesus; he was deeply aware of it. And he surely

had his past in view when he urged: "Bless them which persecute you; curse [them] not" (Rom. 12:14). He likely remembered those whom he had maimed and murdered blessing him and not cursing him, and he realized that he was reaping the blessings of their grace.

9:5- see on Acts 23:1.

And he said: Who are you, Lord? And he said: I am Jesus whom you persecute- Paul was told by Jesus that all those whom he had persecuted were in fact Jesus personally (Acts 9:5). And this idea of the believer being so totally bound up with his or her Lord continues with Paul throughout his life. Thus he takes a prophecy concerning how Christ personally would be the light of the whole world (Is. 49:6), and applies it to himself in explanation of why he was devoted to being a light to the whole world *himself* (Acts 13:47- although 26:23 applies it to Jesus personally).

The term "Lord" is usually used in Acts about the Lord Jesus. The way Paul calls Him "Lord" is surely a reflection of how subconsciously he already knew Jesus was Lord. Conversion is largely about coming to be honest with ourselves and to accept the truth of what we already know. And this is the task of the preacher- to elicit honesty and humility in a person, so that they realize that the content of our message is in fact what they intuitively, subconsciously knew all along.

It is hard for you to kick against the pricks- This is omitted in some manuscripts. It's easy to assume that this means that Saul earlier in his life had been as an animal kicking against the goads, causing him much pain; and thus we can read this as a comment from the Lord about the tortured conscience of Saul. And this may be a valid reading. Paul had grown up in Jerusalem and would have probably been amongst 'all Jerusalem' who heard John the Baptist; he would've surely met the Lord Jesus during His times in Jerusalem. He so often alludes to John the Baptist, as I demonstrated at length in *Paul and Peter*. His anger against the followers of Jesus was therefore psychologically understandable if in fact he was angry with himself for resisting his conscience about Jesus personally. In fact, his persecution of Christians was a classic case of transference; he transferred his anger against himself onto the symbols of what was the root of his anger- Jesus.

But on :3 I discussed the question of whether the Damascus road experience was a conversion or [additionally] a receipt of a preaching commission. If we look at it from the aspect of being a commission to a preaching ministry, then we could understand these words not so much as the Lord comment upon Saul's past life, but rather a word of guidance to him about his future ministry. He was taking on the yoke of Christ, and was to plough a straight furrow for Him; any kicking against the goads would be painful for him. In other words, the Lord is encouraging Saul to accept the ministry and not try to wriggle out of the direction the Lord is going to lead him in. However, the comment that it is hard to kick against the goads is made directly in the context of asking Saul why he was persecuting the Lord Jesus. It would appear part of the appeal for him to repent of what he was intending to do in Damascus.

We note there is no demand from the Lord that Saul repent, nor a request to put anything right. Stephen had prayed for Saul's forgiveness and we wonder whether that prayer had been so totally answered that there was no need for this.

9:6 *But rise and enter into the city, and you shall be told what you must do-* The obvious question is why the Lord didn't tell Saul immediately of the need for repentance, baptism and a life of service. Perhaps He did, but it's not recorded. But maybe it was [and continues to be] His preferred method of working to use a human mechanism in explaining His will. He had Ananias in view already for this work. And he wanted Saul to meet with one of those he intended to abuse, and learn the Lord's

requirements from him. If these were the only words of response which the Lord made, then Saul's obedience to the Lord's word would have been tested. On arrival at Straight Street, Damascus, he was presumably taken to a suitably hard-line Jewish Orthodox household. He must've wondered whether it was all for real; for no further instructions were given. Until Ananias bravely turned up on the door of a household he probably knew were bent on his destruction. The very same words for "[he shall] tell you what you must do" were used by the Angel in telling Cornelius that he must go to Peter and Peter would tell him what he must do (Acts 10:9). We see here the same Divine footprint; and again, we note the Lord's preference to work through human mechanisms in order to reveal His Truth to men. The Ethiopian eunuch correctly noted that he couldn't understand the Bible unless someone should guide him. Often the theoretical case has been presented of a man on a deserted island with only a Bible. Would he figure out the Gospel for himself by his Bible reading? Maybe. It would have to be theoretically possible. But my sense both from Biblical history and observed experience is that God would parachute someone onto the island to explain the Bible to the marooned man.

9:7 And the men that journeyed with him stood speechless- They stood, whilst Saul fell to the ground because of the light. The awesomeness was only felt by Saul, otherwise the others would have fallen to the ground too.

Hearing the voice but seeing no one- After Saul arose, he too saw no man (:8 AV). The implication is that Saul did see the Lord Jesus during this vision. Paul says this explicitly in 1 Cor. 15:8.

9:8- see on Acts 13:11.

And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened- We are to imagine the other men opening his eyelids, but not restoring his sight. Those men would have been hard-line orthodox Jews; and the message was clearly that Judaism could open eyes but not reveal the light of life and true spiritual vision.

He saw nothing, and they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus- AV "no man". See on :7 *Seeing no one*.

9:9 And he was three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink- To help him identify with the Lord's three days in the grave. He was thus prepared to make the formal step of identity with His death and resurrection through baptism. This was how the Lord worked with the Ethiopian eunuch, and with people today too- they are led to identify with the experiences of the risen Lord, and then baptism as identity with His sufferings and victory becomes the logical next step. Note that it is experience rather than doctrinal instruction alone which prepares for this act of identity.

9:10 Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him- 'Named' could imply that he had received the name 'Ananias' as his Christian name, in line with the practice attested in the New Testament of Christians taking another name on conversion. The name would literally be translatable as 'God's grace / gift', equivalent of the Hebrew 'Hannah'. He was addressed by his name, "Ananias", and he responds [in the Greek] "Behold, I". As if to say 'Yes, that's me- the one who is by God's grace'. His understanding of grace was now going to be tested- he was to go to the man who had come to abuse him, who was currently living in a household that were presumably agreeable to Saul's evil plans- and share God's grace with that man.

In a vision: Ananias. And he said: I am here, Lord- The active Lord Jesus likewise appeared to Saul in a vision at this time (:12). He is no less active today, working simultaneously in the lives of multiple people around the clock, worldwide.

9:11 *And the Lord said to him: Arise and go-* Just as Saul had been told to 'Arise and go' into Damascus (:6). This is no mere literary flourish, nor simply the stamp of the same human author. Just as similar experiences were shared by Peter and Cornelius, and similar language used about them both, so here too, Ananias and Saul are being worked with by the same Lord in the same way; and the similarities between them were in order to bind together the preacher and his convert (see also on :12). The same similar hand at work can be felt between believers today, and is one of the things which creates the bond of fellowship between them, knowing that the same Lord has left the same Divine footprint in working with both of them. This of course is only realisable if both believers share with each other their experience of the Lord- and don't merely meet at church to chat about the weather and the state of the nation. Both Paul and Ananias had the choice as to whether to 'arise and go', and they both responded. Luke so often uses this phrase. Yet there was an element of choice before both those men. One side could have let the ball drop. But they both responded, with magnificent result.

To the street which is called Straight- See on 13:10 *The right ways*.

And enquire in the house of Judas for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus. For he prays- This is the same word used for how the men of Cornelius came enquiring for Cornelius, who had also been praying (10:19,21). Again we see the same Lord operating in the lives of Saul and Cornelius, according to a similar pattern. Those same similarities of pattern can be seen between our lives and those of other believers, and it is on this basis that we can be a comfort to each other (2 Cor. 1:3-8). Presumably the household were supportive of Saul's abuse campaign against Christians. So the name Judas was appropriate, obviously recalling Judas Iscariot, and again presenting Judas Iscariot as the epitome of the Jewish system who crucified the Lord.

9:12 *And he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight-* Saul is spoken of as "one named Saul" (:11), another attempt to present Saul and Ananias in parallel; see on 9:11 *Arise and go*.

9:13 *But Ananias answered: Lord, I have heard from many of this man, how much evil he did-* In typical human style, Ananias assumes he knows the situation down here on earth better than the Lord, whom he perceived [as we do in our weakness] to be somewhat distant and ignorant. But we locals do not in fact see the full picture at all... and this is where faith comes in.

To your saints at Jerusalem- 'Saint' means a holy one, but holiness also carries the sense of separation *unto* as well as separation *from*. The Hebrew idea is of consecration. The believers there were consecrated by the Lord Jesus unto specific service. And it is in this sense that we are all saints- we all have a specific service which we are commissioned to perform in the Lord's service.

9:14 *And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind-* And to take them bound to Jerusalem (:2). Paul later uses the same words to describe how he is going "bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem" (20:22), and to prison, suffering and maybe death there. He realized that he was living out the same experience he had inflicted upon others, and it was "the Spirit" which was bringing this about. God's providential hand, the Spirit, the Lord Jesus, the Angels [call it what you will] works likewise with us, so that we appreciate the impact of our actions upon others. And yet Saul actually never took anyone bound from Damascus to prison, suffering and death in Jerusalem.

But he intended to. And so we can reflect that what we *intended* to do to others in essence happens to us; for the thought is counted as the action, and we are being led to understand the meaning and implications of our own thinking and intentions.

All that call upon your name- Saul was therefore asked to be baptized and also call upon himself the Lord's Name (22:16). His baptism was not merely an act of identity with the Lord Jesus, but with the body of Jesus whom he had been persecuting.

9:15 *But the Lord said to him: Go your way. For he is a chosen vessel to me-* The Lord spoke of Paul even before his conversion as "a chosen vessel unto me". The words "chosen" ['elect'] and "vessel" recur frequently in Paul's reasoning in Romans 9-11, where he argues that *we* are chosen vessels, elected / chosen by grace (Rom. 9:22,25). It's as if Paul is warning us not to see him as a special case, a piece of Divine artwork to be admired in passing; but as a very real example of how God is just as powerfully at work with *us*. Truly Paul 'bore' Christ to the world just as John 'bore' (s.w.) Christ's Gospel (Acts 9:15 = Mt. 3:11). But surely Paul had the Lord's words here in mind in 2 Cor. 4:7: "But we have this treasure in earthly vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves". And the preceding verses are also full of allusion to the Damascus road, speaking of God shining into our hearts with the knowledge of Jesus.

"A chosen vessel" refers to how "The Holy One of Israel... has chosen you [Messiah]" (Is. 49:7 RSV). This is one of a number of instances of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ.

To bear my name- Paul was to bear Christ's name to the world *in that he* would suffer great things for the sake of that Name (Acts 9:15,16). His sharing in the Lord's sufferings was the bearing of the Name before men. The Greek word for 'bear' in Acts 9:15 is the same used in Lk. 14:27 about bearing the cross. To bear His name to the world is to bear His cross. The record of the disciples' persecution for the sake of their witness is studded with references to their preaching being *in* the Name of Jesus (Acts 4:2,7,9,10,12 RV). Whoever heard them heard Jesus (Lk. 10:16). The prophecy of Psalm 2 concerning how "the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ" was appropriated by the preachers to themselves even though it is elsewhere applied to the crucifixion (Acts 4:26).

Before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel- Therefore the reference to Paul being the apostle to the Gentiles and Peter going to the Jews may not mean that they had such distinct roles. That may have described a local or temporary situation.

9:16 *For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake-* There seems no record of the Lord as it were informing Saul of the details of his life ahead of time. The idea may rather be that throughout the course of his life, he would come to realize the sufferings of Christ through sharing the sufferings he had brought upon the Christian believers. Ananias had just spoken of the believers as those who bore the Lord's name (:14), and so the idea here may be that Saul was to experience the sufferings he had brought upon those who bore the Lord's name.

Right at his baptism, Paul realized that the Lord Jesus intended to make Paul fellowship the spirit of his experience on the cross (Acts 9:16). Later, Paul speaks of how he is "filling up what is lacking" in the aim Christ had set him: to fellowship the crucified Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:10). As the sufferings of Christ (i.e. his ability to relate to

them) increasingly abounded in Paul (2 Cor. 1:5 Gk.), so did his comfort and certainty that he would be in the Kingdom; because he knew that if he suffered with Christ, he would share his glorious resurrection (2 Cor. 4:11,12). As we grow, therefore, our realization that we are progressively sharing the sufferings of Christ should increase; our understanding of the memorial meeting (which reminds us of this) will deepen, as we appreciate more what it means to take the cup of his pain. The need and simple beauty of the breaking of bread becomes more logical; taking those emblems becomes in a sense more difficult, yet more sobering and comforting. The point is that as we grow, the centre of our attention will increasingly be the Lord Jesus and his cross.

9:17 *And Ananias departed, and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him, said: Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road upon which you travelled, has sent me, that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit-* As with Cornelius, Saul received the Holy Spirit before baptism. This is one of a number of similarities between the two men and a parade example of how the Lord works in a similar way with different people.

9:18 *And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales-* A classic example of how doctor Luke uses first century medical language.

And he received his sight; and he arose and was baptized- The Greek text adds 'immediately'. To receive sight immediately is a phrase only used elsewhere by Luke, in describing the healing of the blind man near Jericho: "Immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God" (Lk. 18:43). This man was seen by Luke as representative of Saul. But that blind man asked the Lord to heal him. We wonder whether doctor Luke perceived that subconsciously, this is what Saul had been asking for; or perhaps during the three days blindness, this was indeed Saul's prayer. Or perhaps his idea is that Saul's conversion and healing was an act of grace; what was done to the blind beggar because the man asked for it, was done to Saul without him asking for it. Whatever, the proud young Pharisee Saul was spiritually no more than a blind, possibly Gentile, beggar by the roadside. The blind man encountered the Lord on a road- just as Saul had done on the road to Damascus (Lk. 18:35). And if the blind man was indeed Bartimaeus (Mk. 10:46), 'the son of the unclean', we see an inversion of Saul's proud sense of his genealogy (Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:5).

9:19 *And he took food and was strengthened, and was several days with the disciples that were at Damascus-* Saul was named after the historical King Saul, also being from the tribe of Benjamin. On Saul's last fateful night at Endor, having learnt of his unalterable condemnation, Saul likewise "took food and was strengthened" at the hands of the witch. Saul was being made to see the similarities- that he was as good as condemned, like Saul on his last night; but had been saved by Ananias, 'the grace of God'. The connection with the historical Saul accented the pure grace of God towards him.

9:20 *And immediately in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, that he is the Son of God-* No fewer than 15 times do we read of Paul "preaching Jesus". His message focused around a living person, more than over dry theology. Gal. 1:16 describes this as God being pleased to reveal His Son in Paul. Paul had the Son of God within he; he had the spirit / mind of Christ. And it was this which gave credibility and power to his preaching Jesus as the Son of God. And God eagerly manifested Himself and His Son through this.

9:21 *And all that heard him were amazed, and said: Is this not he that in Jerusalem made havoc of those that called on this name? And he had come here for this intent, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests-* The same word

translated "made havoc" or "destroyed" is found in Paul's reporting of these words in Gal. 1:23: "They only heard say: He that once persecuted us now preaches the faith of which he once made havoc!". They said that he made havoc of believers; and also that he made havoc of "the faith". This reflects how closely identified were Christians with their "faith". They were living embodiments of their statements of faith. There was no such in those days as cultural Christianity, living out an inherited position. You were your faith. And so it should be today.

9:22 *But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews that dwelt at Damascus-* But he repeatedly uses the same word, particularly in his later letters, to describe how *Christ* strengthened him (Phil. 4:13; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 2:1; 4:17).

Proving that this is the real Christ- This is a strange way to put it; it's as if Paul himself was standing there showing in his person, Christ Himself. The Greek for 'proving' means 'to put together'; it may be that what was being put together was not so much OT prophecies and Jesus, but rather Paul and Jesus. Preaching is a revealing to men of the Christ that is within us; this is what witnessing in Christ is really about, rather than pushing bills or placing press adverts or writing letters. Not that any of these things are to be decried, but the essence is that we from deep within ourselves reveal Christ to men. This is why those who witness to Him, as only those in Him can, testify to His especial presence in this work. The promise that "I am with you always" was in the context of being near the preacher as he or she witnesses.

9:23 *And when many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel together to kill him-* The very language used of the Jews' plans to kill the Lord. Paul was already starting to fellowship the sufferings of his Lord, just as we all must do. In this reality we find a bridge between Him there two millennia ago, and us today. He is now icon to be gazed upon, but rather a real individual whose sufferings and experiences are ours in essence. And this connection is what gives meaning and significance to the events in our human lives.

9:24 *But their plot became known to Saul-* The same word used of how the Jews later plotted against Paul (Acts 20:3,19; 23:30). Through this, he was going through his Lord's experiences at the hands of the Jews. We too are brought to fellowship aspects of the Lord's sufferings, day by day.

And they watched the gates day and night that they might kill him- 2 Cor. 11:33 says that Aretas the governor of Damascus did this. As with the Lord's death, the Jews persuaded Gentile rulers of the need to destroy God's people.

9:25 *But his disciples took him by night and lowered him down the wall in a basket-* He made converts very quickly- another indication that conversion can happen very soon after hearing the basic Gospel. This invites comparison with David escaping from king Saul's persecution in 1 Sam. 19:12. Saul had been named after king Saul, and like him, he had persecuted David-Jesus. Saul / Paul saw the similarity, and the Lord worked with him in this by putting him in a situation where he was replicating *David's* behaviour; and getting a taste of Saul's persecution. He was being helped to see his behaviour from outside of himself; and the Lord works with us likewise. Paul perhaps therefore recalls this incident as one of the most humbling he had ever experienced (2 Cor. 11:33). Further, we note that it was the disciples, whom he had intended to abuse and kill, who let him down over the wall. As they held the rope, he realized that his life was in the hands of those whom he had plotted to torture to death.

9:26 *And when he came to Jerusalem, he decided to attach himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple-* The similarities with the Cornelius and Peter situation continue, in that Peter explained

that it was not acceptable for a Jew to 'attach himself' to a Gentile (10:28). Saul the Jew was treated as a Gentile- and this, again, was used in the Lord's ecology and larger, wiser game plan in order to make Paul sympathetic to providing fellowship to Gentiles. For he had now learnt what it felt like to be excluded from fellowship with one's Jewish brethren.

9:27 *But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road and that he had spoken to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus-* The Greek suggests he physically took him by the arm or hand. The psychological likelihood of the record here is so very strong and imaginable. We are reading of events which truly happened.

9:28 *And he was with them-* The "them" with whom Paul was with refers to the apostles, the leadership (:27).

Going in and going out at Jerusalem- A Hebrew idiom for leadership.

9:29 *Preaching boldly in the name of the Lord; and he spoke and disputed against the Greek speaking Jews, and they that were seeking to kill him- Preaching... spoke... disputed-* These are all different preaching styles. Sometimes there was simple, joyful proclamation of the good news (*euaggelizein*), sometimes patient comparison of the OT Scriptures (*suzetein*, Acts 9:29, *paratithestai*, 17:3, *sumbibazein*, 9:22); at other times there was the utter defeat of the listener by argument (*sunchunein*, 9:22). This is a far cry from the blanket attitude to 'the world' which our preachers so often show. There *is* a place for intellectual argument; belief is a matter of the mind as well as the heart.

He "preached boldly" as he had done in Damascus. Bold preaching was a characteristic of Paul, and this particular Greek word which means 'bold preaching' is used so often to describe his style (Acts 9:27,29; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 26:26; 28:31; 2 Cor. 3:12; 7:4; Eph. 3:12; 1 Thess. 2:2). But this points up the deep significance of Paul's request that others join him in prayer that he may be bold in preaching (Eph. 6:19,20; Phil. 1:20 s.w.). He didn't find it easy, and his request for prayer that he might achieve imply that he wasn't a natural at this 'bold preaching'. We shouldn't assume that those who have the limelight in Gospel preaching are in fact confident extroverts, naturally brave and bold. Not all are; some only achieve that through prayerful struggle with their deep sense of inadequacy. And Paul was one of them.

"Disputed" is the very same word used for how this same group, Greek-speaking Jews, "disputed" with Stephen (Acts 6:1,9). Seeing it was Saul who had arranged the murder of Stephen, this cannot be coincidental. The Lord was again seeking to bring Saul to enter into the experience of another, whom he had effectively killed. But there is a slight difference- it was these Greek speakers who disputed with Stephen in Acts 6, whereas here it is Saul who apparently takes the initiative and disputes with them. Perhaps he consciously wanted to stand up for Stephen, or wilfully sought to enter into Stephen's experiences and life's struggles. This was and is repentance indeed- seeking to know the mind of the one you have hurt.

He was purposefully trying to convince those who wanted to kill him. Again, Saul was truly motivated by his own recent experience; those whom he had sought to kill were now his brethren, and he marvelled at the grace of men like Ananias, the epitome of 'God's grace' [as his name meant], and those brethren who let him down over the Damascus wall. And he wished to reflect that same grace that he had been shown. There are principles here for all time, meaning that this is no mere history for us. He tried to preach to and persuade those who wanted to kill him- rather than

keeping away from them. He knew so well that those *he* had wanted to kill had taken great risks in order to preach to and persuade *him*. And he was trying to do likewise.

9:30 *And when the brothers knew it, they brought him down to Caesarea-* As the brothers likewise took Saul and saved his life by letting him down over the wall of Damascus so that he might flee elsewhere. As he was let *down* over the wall, so the brothers took him *down* to Caesarea. The impression is created of Paul's human salvation being in the hands of those he had only recently sought to abuse and kill. Straight away we go on to read about Cornelius in Caesarea (10:1); and one wonders whether he met Paul and was one of his first converts. We have noted throughout these notes the points of contact between Paul and Cornelius.

And sent him to Tarsus- Literally, they 'apostle' him. He went where they sent him, so he was under their control. Perhaps they thought that just as the Lord Jesus consciously went to preach in the home towns of the disciples, so a convert ought to preach in his hometown. And so they sent him on a mission to Tarsus, his hometown. We know that his nephew was sympathetic to him, and one likes to think that he converted at least his sister and nephew.

9:31 *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up-* This was because Saul was no longer persecuting the church; the implication therefore is that he had actively persecuted the Christians throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. This means that the Samaritans baptized by Philip in Acts 8, and the groups in Galilee who remembered the Lord's time there... all were terrorized by Saul.

And walking in the fear of the Lord- They had been in fear of Saul's persecution (:26 s.w.). Now he wasn't persecuting them, instead they feared the Lord Jesus. They had been distracted from fearing Him by their fear of Saul.

And in the comfort of the Holy Spirit- A reference to the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, promised in John 14-16. One role of the Spirit is simply to comfort, and here we see clearly that it works on an internal, psychological level- i.e. in the human heart.

It multiplied- The connection is between the 'walking' of the church, focused now on the Lord rather than fear of Saul- and the growth of the church. Church growth is therefore made relative to the 'walk' of the church members.

9:32 *And it came to pass, as Peter went throughout all regions, he came also to the saints that dwelt at Lydda-* This suggests that Peter went on a pastoral circuit throughout all the areas where there were believers. This would have been in response to the Lord's command to him to tend His sheep and lambs.

9:33 *There he found...*- See on :35.

A certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, for he was paralyzed- What is the significance of this period? Depending on when we date Saul's conversion, it could be that it was eight years ago that the man had first begun to hear the Gospel from John the Baptist. He had been sick all that time, as he resisted the message.

9:34 *And Peter said to him: Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed. And immediately he rose-* But of course it was Peter standing there healing him. He was Christ-manifest in his witness, just as we should be. Peter had observed as Jesus made a lame man *arise*, take up his bed, and follow Him (Lk. 5:25). But here in Acts 9:34, we find Peter doing just the same to Aeneas, even taking him by the hand as he had seen Jesus do to Jairus' daughter. What Peter had seen and learnt of the Lord Jesus, he was now called to do. Not for nothing did he tell Aeneas that "Jesus Christ heals you", thereby recognizing the connection between him and his Lord.

9:35 *All that dwelt at Lydda and in Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord-* Another example of where "all" refers to all those in God's purpose rather than literally 'all men'. This incident is recorded as an exemplification of what we have just read in :31- that through the work of the Holy Spirit, the church was multiplied at this time. The Greek translated "turned" is indeed translated 'to convert', but also 'to turn back'. Perhaps the "all" refers to all the believers in those areas, who had somewhat fallen away as a result of fearing Saul rather than the Lord; but after that miracle, of curing Aeneas who was maybe one of the saints at Lydda (:32,33 "there he found"), they all turned back to the Lord. Note how fresh conversion to the Lord as a result of Peter's miracles is described differently in :42: "It became known throughout all Joppa; and many *believed* in the Lord".

Mass conversions to the Lord's flock at Sharon sounds like the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 65:10 "Sharon shall be a fold of flocks". The essence of the Kingdom was coming true in the preaching of the Gospel, as it is today; and we await the physical manifestation of all this in the literal return of Christ to establish God's Kingdom on earth.

9:36 *Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds-* She was therefore clearly well known to both Jews and Gentiles, hence she had the two names. Dealing with her was therefore an incident which prepared Peter for the challenge of chapter 10- to reject the Jewish idea that having Gentiles into your house was wrong. Note how the widows came into the house and spoke of the clothing which *Dorcas* [her Greek name] had made (:39). But Peter then goes to her corpse and addresses her by her Hebrew name, *Tabitha* (:40). So there were Jews and Gentiles in the same house; and the Holy Spirit worked through Peter to bind them all together in faith, joy and praise. This was clearly to prepare Peter for the challenge of going into the home of Cornelius. We note the obvious similarity with Cornelius, of whom the same was said as for Tabitha: "Full of good works and charitable deeds". See on :38. The Lord is very gentle, and leads us stage by stage towards deeper understandings. We should likewise be sensitive to the fact that the folk we mix with, in the world and also in the church, will not immediately 'get it' about things. As we have been gently led through Divinely controlled experienced from one understanding to another, so we must recognize that others are at different points in their journey. And we are to reflect them the same patience as the Lord has shown us.

9:37 *And it came to pass in those days, that she fell sick and died, and when they had washed her-* Why mention this detail? Was it to recall her baptism, which gave her the hope of bodily resurrection?

They laid her in an upper room- Luke brings out her identification with the church, the body of Christ, which was so associated with 'upper rooms' in its earliest days.

9:38 *And as Lydda was near to Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him: Come to us without delay-* This is so similar to what Peter was to experience with Cornelius; messengers sent to him, urging him to come without delay. These events were intended to prepare him for the Cornelius experience; see on :36.

9:39 *And Peter rose and went with them. And when he had arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood by him, weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas had made, while she was with them-* The widows would have likely been poor, and their clothes had been made by Dorcas. So they were showing their own clothes.

9:40 *But Peter sent them out, and kneeled down and prayed; and turning to the body, he said: Tabitha, rise. And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up-* When Peter resurrects Dorcas, he asked the weeping crowd to depart before he raised her- exactly repeating the Lord's procedure when He raised Jairus' daughter. Note how she is laid in a chamber, she is spoken to by Peter, she opens her eyes and sits up, and Peter presents her alive and asks for her to be given food. All this was evidently parallel to what Peter had been especially invited by Jesus to come and witness when He raised the girl during His ministry. The events Peter had been witnessed had been especially arranged so that when they repeated themselves in his future life, he was able to see the similarities and act as a true follower and mimicker of his Lord. The way he put everyone out of the room, turned to the body and said "Tabitha, arise", and she rose up, is exactly the way the Lord acted (Acts 9:40 cp. Lk. 8:54). Consciously or unconsciously, his very body language and words reflected those of the Lord.

9:41- see on Acts 3:7.

And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive- The very words used about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:3). Acts continually presents the life, sufferings, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus as being reflected in the experiences of His body on earth, the church.

9:42 *And it became known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord-* An exemplification of the introductory statement to this section in :31, that the activity of the Holy Spirit at this time led to the numerical growth of the church.

9:43 *And it came to pass, that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon a tanner-* Peter had been urgently called to Joppa whilst visiting Lydda (:38). The Joppa visit was apparently unplanned. He raises Tabitha, many are converted as a result- and so he stays there for some time in order to follow up on the new ecclesia. This reflects his openness to the movement of the Spirit and willingness to go wherever led. No wonder 1 Cor. 9:5 mentions how Peter 'took around' his wife.

ACTS CHAPTER 10

10:1 *Now there was a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Regiment-* Comprised of Italians and true Romans. The man could not have been more Gentile. He was part of the Roman army of occupation, of none less than "the Italian regiment", a Roman of the Romans. For him to be described as "devout" and a God fearer was a deep paradox and challenge to Jews. Caesarea had only a minority Jewish population; it was a new town built by Herod on the site of Strato's Tower, as the "model Greco-Roman city". Hence it was named 'Caesar City', Caesaria. Many Jews, even moderate ones, refused to accept Caesarea as part of Judah, dubbing it "the daughter of Edom". That a centurion in the army of occupation should be set up as the model Gentile convert, without apparently quitting his job, was a major challenge to Jewish Christians.

In this context, we note that the "Simon" with whom Peter stayed was a Jew who was a tanner, producing leather goods. The Roman military machine had a huge demand for leather- for tents, boots, bags, belts, helmet parts, sword and dagger sheaths, horse harnesses etc. "A legion required a minimum of 68,000 goatskins to make tents, and more than 3,000 cattle hides annually for boots alone". "Each tent required some 70 hides, so to put a *cohors quingenaria 'sub pellibus'* (auxiliary regiment 'under leather tent'— approximately 500 soldiers) would require the lives of

more than 4,200 goats, and a legion (approximately 5,000 soldiers) something in excess of 46,000". So without question, Simon was working for the occupying army. And Peter stayed with him; and Simon provided Peter with food and lodging. We note that the record says that Peter was hungry, and Simon's household were preparing food for Peter. Peter was therefore sharing table fellowship with a man whom most Jews would have seen as a traitor and not a faithful Jew. But this Simon the tanner is presented as a faithful supporter of Peter's missionary work. Acts 9:43 notes that "he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon a tanner". This was no passing stay for one night. Peter arrived as a Christian missionary and was supported by Simon, following the Lord's command for missionaries to remain in the first home that welcomed them- which, in terms of the social norms of the day, meant accepting the message of the messenger. No decent Jew would have stayed at Simon's home. But Peter did, perhaps because he was the first person he approached, or perhaps because he had no choice. Maybe nobody else who owned a home accepted his message. Tanners were despised by Jews; Lev. 11:39,40 pronounced unclean anyone who touched the carcasses of even a clean animal, so tanners were seen as unclean. The Rabbis allowed a woman to divorce her husband for any reason if he were a tanner. A tanner's yard could not be located within 50 cubits of any town- hence Simon lived by the seaside. A Jew should never even learn the trade of a tanner. We note in passing that Paul, Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers, which would have likewise have often rendered them ritually unclean, or at best, reminded them that the tanner was the but one step between them and ritual uncleanness. Indeed some texts offer "they were leatherworkers" at Acts 18:3 [NEV "by trade they were tentmakers"].

10:2 *A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much charity to the Jewish people and prayed to God always-* The point has often been well made that doing all these things was not enough. Faith in Christ and baptism into Him was what was required; and yet his good deeds were not ignored by God. They were responded to by sending Peter to him to teach him the Gospel. Note too that devotion to God was still possible despite being an army officer. There is a significant silence regarding Cornelius leaving his job after baptism. There is a purposeful silence here in the record, to provoke our reflections. Because such matters are indeed a matter of very personal conscience.

10:3 *About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God, who came to him and said: Cornelius-* In 10:3,22,25 an Angel 'comes in' to Cornelius and gives him hope of salvation, and then Peter 'comes in' to Cornelius and explains that hope in more concrete terms. Peter was acting out what his guardian Angel had prepared for him to do, just as Israel had to follow the leading of the guiding Angel in the wilderness. We too must as it were follow our Angel.

10:4 *And he, fastening his eyes upon him and being afraid, said: What is it, Lord? And he said to him: Your prayers and your charity have gone up as a memorial before God-* The allusion is to the offering of incense and sacrifice. And Cornelius didn't have to be a Jew in the temple to do this. He could do it in his own home and life situation. Note the parallel between prayer and charitable giving. Prayer is not simply words; God reads human actions as prayer, too. And mere words alone are not of themselves prayer, otherwise whoever is the better wordsmith has the greater access to God. And that is not the case; some people are wired better as regards words and verbalizing. We note too that an unbaptized person was still listened to by God, and his good deeds still registered with Him. The scale of God's observation and

sensitivity to humanity is so huge as to be beyond our comprehension. Cornelius had his generous gifts responded to in the same way as his prayers- in that Peter was sent to teach him the Gospel and baptize him. This suggests that our good deeds are seen as an expression of our essential self, and are treated as prayers. Yet those good deeds are not in themselves verbalized requests. It is also doubtful whether Cornelius was specifically praying for more knowledge and the opportunity of baptism. But this is how his prayers were interpreted by God, and this passive though unexpressed desire was interpreted and responded to. Prayer is likened to incense coming up before God. But so also is the almsgiving of Cornelius; his good deeds expressed a fine spirituality in his heart, and this was counted by God as prayer. Prayer is seen as an incense offering (Ps. 141:2); but the generosity of Mary (Jn. 12:3), the work of preaching (2 Cor. 2:16); living "a life of love" (Eph. 5:2 NIV); giving money to the needy (Phil. 4:18) are all seen as a fragrant incense offering. The act is the prayer. Mary's anointing was to be seen as a "memorial" (Mk. 14:9), but the only other times this word is used are in connection with the prayers of Cornelius (Acts 10:4, cp. the OT idea of prayerful people being God's 'rememberancers'). Likewise, prophecy does not have to refer to specific, lexical statements; it can refer to the spirit and implication behind the recorded words.

10:5 *And now send men to Joppa*- The sense of the physical presence of the Angel was shown in Peter's case in the matter of Cornelius. Acts 10:5 says that the Angel told Cornelius to send men to Joppa to ask for Peter, whilst the same Angel ("The spirit", v. 19) tells Peter in v. 20 that *He* has sent the men. This awareness of the Angel is perhaps continued when Peter says in :33 "we are all here present before God"- i. e. before the Angel which both he and Cornelius were conscious had led them together. See on Gen. 18:10.

And fetch one Simon, who is surnamed Peter- This is the same word used to describe how believers 'called upon [themselves] the name of the Lord'; they surnamed themselves by His Name. The Lord had given Simon a new name, and the idea of having a 'Christian name' was popular amongst the early Christians. We have been given a new identity, unique to ourselves, by the Lord who has called us; and will have the new name written upon us eternally at judgment day. We can conclude that our unique and new identity / personality is being forged in us throughout this brief life, and will be permanently stamped into our eternal nature at the last day. In this lies the eternal significance of character development- for who we become now, is who we shall eternally be.

10:6 *He lodges with someone called Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea side*- Peter later explains that it was not possible for a Jew to enter the house of a Gentile (:28). So we can safely assume this Simon was a Jew, but not a very observant one, seeing he worked daily with the skins of unclean animals and blood. Being there must have provoked Peter to wonder about whether the Law really had to be kept so strictly; and living by the beach, he would have wondered whether the Lord's work actually extended overseas, beyond Israel. All these things were gently arranged by the same loving Lord who guides our spiritual path too. Peter was being led along the road towards leaving law-keeping, rather like Elijah having to depend for his life upon meat brought by unclean ravens. "If a tanner married without mentioning his trade, his wife was permitted to get a divorce. The law of levirate marriage might be set aside if the brother-in-law of the childless widow was a tanner. A tanner's yard must be at least fifty cubits from any town" (Farrar, *Life and Work of St. Paul*).

The AV adds: "He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do". This phrase is much loved of Luke. Saul and the jailor said the same (Acts 9:6; 16:30), as did the crowds at

Pentecost. The point is that encounter with the Lord Jesus means that we can never again be passive; we are to do something.

10:7 *And when the angel that spoke to him had departed, he called two of his household servants-* Luke uses this term about Angels speaking to Moses and Philip (7:38; 8:26). Gentile Cornelius was no less a significant player in God's unfolding purpose.

And a devout soldier of them that served him continually- "Devout" means just that; the word has a religious overtone of piety. To place the word together with "soldier" may seem an oxymoron; it could seem inappropriate, at first blush, to imagine that a Roman soldier could be "devout". Here we have an intentional challenge of stereotype. Those we might consider to be in a status which precludes spirituality may indeed be spiritually devout. "Devout" is the Spirit's comment through Luke upon this man. Clearly Cornelius' search for the Lord had not been a private matter; he had spread it to those closest to him in his family and workplace. As the Gospel spreads to the secular and unchurched, such challenges to stereotype are frequent in our day.

10:8 *And having related all things to them, he sent them to Joppa-* His search for God was not conducted secretly, behind a computer screen or on a mobile device. He was quite open about it. Likewise notice how he called together his relatives and friends to hear Peter's message (:24).

We note the many parallels between Jonah and Peter. They were both at Joppa, Peter is 'son of Jonah' [bar Jonah, Mt. 16:17]. Both were hesitant to preach to the Gentiles; Jonah was persuaded by three days in the fish, Peter by three repeated visions. They were both told "arise and go" (Jonah 3:2; Acts 10:20). The Gentiles believed the message (Jonah 3:5; Acts 10:43). The men of Nineveh repented, quite unexpectedly, by Jewish standards of thought; Cornelius repented and was baptized, again, as noted on :1, quite against all Jewish expectation. The parallels are to show that resistance to taking the Gospel to those considered 'beneath us' is a common human trait. And God patiently struggles with it, ever seeking to broaden the parochial perspective of His people. Because to be parochial and judgmental is native to the natural man's mindset. The backdrop to the conversion of Cornelius and the Gentiles is the Jonah story; it is the scripture-scape behind the events recorded. The implication is therefore that those amongst God's people who refused to get on board with the idea of inclusivity would be left as Jonah is at the end of the book- sitting dejected, bitter and angry, shaking their fist at the God who is evidently love itself. For all their much avowed 'defence of the faith' and defence of [their own version of] God. Peter, we can infer, was initially resistant to the call to preach to the Gentiles, just as Jonah was. He was indeed son of Jonah. But it seems he repented sooner and was softer in God's hand than was Jonah. The vision Peter saw was nothing less than a nightmare for a Jew- to imagine God telling you to eat unclean animals, three times. Every halachah was broken, and apparently, God's own law was being changed by God Himself. Of course, all this had been implied in the Old Testament as well as the teachings of the Lord Jesus. But all the same, we must seek to enter into the degree to which it was all a nightmare shattering of paradigms for Peter. Just as an openness to others is for many traditions today. His response, especially when compared with Jonah's, is really humble and commendable.

10:9 *Now the next day, as they were on their journey, and drew near to the city, about the sixth hour-* Jesus removed prayer from being mere liturgy into being a part of real,

personal life with God. The way Peter prays at 12 noon (Acts 10:9), and how Paul urges us to pray *all the time* (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2) are therefore radical departures from the concept of praying at set times, three times / day.

Peter went upon the housetop to pray- He 'went up', and the same word is used of how the prayers of Cornelius 'went up' (:4). The parallels between Cornelius and Peter are extensive. They both prayed regularly, and during one of those regular prayer sessions, they received visions. The same Angel was at work with both of them. Thus a solidarity was developed between the preacher and the convert; and we see this so often in our own lives too. We of course fail to attach meaning to event, but we can rest assured that the events in our lives are all part of a wider plan and potential purpose, which may or may not work out or become clear to us in this life. Because we and / or others fail to respond as we might, sometimes things are as it were left hanging, in that event appears therefore not to have achieved its possible meaning or intention.

10:10 *And he became hungry and desired to eat, but while they made the food ready, he fell into a trance-* His hunger, like the Lord's hunger as He came to the fig tree, spoke of the Lord's desire to save and have fellowship with ['eat with'] the Gentiles. The Jews in Simon's home were preparing clean food for Peter [cp. preparing Jewish people to hear the Gospel], but then Peter's hunger was offered another method of satiation- in the eating of *unclean* food.

10:11 *And he saw the heaven open and a certain vessel descending-* The very same phrase occurs in Jn. 1:51, where the Lord predicted that the disciples would see "heaven open": "I say unto you [plural], Hereafter you [plural- all the disciples] shall see heaven open, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man". Whatever that enigmatic prediction meant, it surely was being given some application to the opening of 'heaven' to "all men", including Gentiles, thanks to Angelic work. And Peter saw Heaven open, and an Angel... and the equivalent of 'ascending and descending' was surely in the descent and ascent of the sheet containing unclean animals. The context of Jn. 1:51 is the Lord's observation that Nathanael was "an Israelite indeed" (Jn. 1:47). Maybe His intention was to teach the disciples that actually, 'heaven' was to be opened to non-Israelites too, and Jacob lying on Gentile ground that night with Angels ascending and descending upon him was some kind of foretaste of the body of Christ in future times. The opening of the 'heaven' of the Most Holy place at the Lord's death clearly gave the message that now the way into the holiest was open to all. Peter would also have recalled how the heavens were opened (same words used) at the Lord's baptism, and the dove / Holy Spirit 'descended'. Now he saw heaven opened, and was to see the Spirit descending upon Gentiles. They were, therefore, Jesus- the body of Christ, upon whom the Spirit first descended. Ezekiel likewise saw heaven opened and entered into a vision, whilst sitting with the captives in gentile Babylon (Ez. 1:1); thereby encouraging Peter that he was no less significant than the revered Old Testament prophets.

As it were a great sheet- The word strictly means a sail. Perhaps this was an echo from Peter's fisherman past, an image coming back in his dreams. And it was maybe an image recently impressed in his mind as living next to the beach, he would have seen boats at sea. Maybe this image was used to teach Peter that now the disciples should go overseas by boat to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles. If Sigmund Freud were amongst us, with his theories of dreams, he would likely have suggested that this aspect of the dream was an example of Peter's inner conscience and unexpressed awareness speaking to him- in this case, that the Gospel should indeed go to the

Gentiles. And yet the dream was given by God, ultimately- perhaps using all these images, from whatever sources, in order to deliver the message to Peter.

Let down by four corners upon the earth- Another example of Luke's medical language, as this was the term used for the ends of bandages. But a four cornered sheet is more likely suggesting a table cloth. Peter is seeing the animals as it were on the table in front of him, and is invited to eat them. The unclean animals clearly represent previously unclean Gentiles. And a big theme of Luke is of inclusive table fellowship. Peter was to accept at table the Gentiles. The true Christian church was to accept the Gentiles at what had previously been an exclusively Jewish table. We must give due weight to the interpretation given to Peter- that God considers all to be clean and fit for fellowship at His table. It is an assumption to think that the idea was that baptized, Christian Gentiles could now be accepted at the table. Rather is the idea that the table is open to all who wish to be there; an approach taken by the Lord, who went out of His way to eat with hardened sinners *so that* they might repent, rather than to celebrate their repentance.

10:12 *Wherein were all manner of fourfooted animals, and creeping things of the earth and birds of the sky-* This translation is misleading. The idea is that every kind of four-footed animals were there, looking forward to how "all men" were to be encompassed in God's saving purpose. The implication is that there were both clean and unclean animals- there were "all manner" of animals, every kind. And they were mixing together, as it were, and Peter is asked to eat all of them. This has huge implications. God through the cross has achieved the world's redemption and cleansing, so that the world is to be seen as potentially clean. But, they must be offered in sacrifice; and this of course connects with how Paul speaks of preaching to Gentiles in terms of "the offering up of the Gentiles might be made acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:16).

10:13 *And there came a voice to him: Rise, Peter. Kill and eat-* This could as well be understood as the language of sacrifice; the animals were killed and then the offerer ate part of them, to demonstrate his identity with the animal. Likewise see on :35 *Is acceptable*. Peter's killing and eating was obviously symbolic of the acceptance of the Gentile converts; Paul's words in Rom. 15:16 surely allude to this incident and use the same sacrificial language, as if to say that he shared Peter's mission: "That I should be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be made acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit". Peter's work with the Gentile Cornelius was sanctified by the Holy Spirit in that the Spirit descended upon them before their baptisms. If "kill and eat" indeed refers to sacrifice, Peter's shock is even more understandable; he was being asked to not merely eat unclean food, but to actually offer it as a sacrifice to God. Judaism would have argued that the clean animals were made unclean by their association with the unclean. But here for all time the idea of 'guilt by association' is shown to be actually the radical inverse of what is now the situation. Peter was taught that he should call nobody unclean- because even the unclean had been potentially cleansed in Christ (:15). "Yet to me God has shown that I should not call anyone common or unclean" means literally 'I should not make anyone unclean'. He had done this by assuming that the clean animals were made unclean by association with the unclean on the table sheet. They were all cleansed. "What God has cleansed" suggests that the cleansing was at one historical point- which was the cross. But it is over to us to as it were offer them up to God. That becomes the critical point in the vision. Not judging who is clean or unclean, for there is now totally no division between categories of persons; but bringing men to God in Christ, as the new priesthood. We must ask the

question, 'Why didn't Peter just choose a clean animal and offer it?'. He saw all the animals of creation, clean and unclean, and he was told to offer them. But he objects that "No". He can't offer any of them. Why did he say that, if there were also clean animals there? Why not respond 'I'll offer the clean ones, but not the unclean ones'? I suggest the answer is that he considered the clean to have been made unclean, in line with the Mosaic laws about uncleanness spreading. And he was told that quite opposite to what he thought, actually every one of those animals was now clean.

What we are seeing here is therefore the conversion of Peter to what Christianity is actually all about. And so Acts 10 is set up as parallel to the conversion of Saul in Acts 9- there are visions, and Ananias and Peter both are taught that the Gospel net has caught those whom they naturally object to being allowed "in". The parallels are many, e.g. Saul's "Who are you, Lord?" is matched by Cornelius' "What is it, Lord?".

10:14 *Peter said: Not so, Lord. For I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean-* The figure of 'eating' is being used in this incident to speak of fellowship. This confirms the impression we have throughout the New Testament- that eating together was seen as an act of fellowship. The open table manners of the Lord Jesus are therefore the more worthy of notice- eating with sinners and eating together in the feeding miracles with thousands of people, including some Gentiles. An example of relevant Old Testament quotation is shown when Christ asked Peter to kill and eat unclean animals. He replied by quoting from Ez. 4:14, where Ezekiel refuses to eat similar food when asked to by the Angel. Perhaps Peter saw himself as Ezekiel's antitype in his witnessing against Israel's rejection of the word of God in Christ (note how Ez. 4:16 is a prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction in AD70). 'In the same way as God made a concession to Ezekiel about this command to eat unclean food', Peter reasoned, 'so perhaps my Lord will do for me'. But the Lord was to teach him even greater things than Ezekiel.

10:15- see on Acts 10:35,36.

And a voice came to him again the second time: What God has cleansed- The unclean animals which Peter saw in the vision represented all the Gentile world (Acts 10:15,28). They had already all been potentially "cleansed" by the blood of Christ, but He was dead in vain, the cleansing achieved for nothing, unless the likes of Peter took the message to them. The more and the wider and the more powerfully we do this, the more we enable the cross of Christ to be victorious, to achieve its end, the more 'worthwhile' as it were was the Lord's sacrifice.

Do not call common- The fact we can be guilty of causing others to stumble means that we can limit God's gracious plan for them. By refusing to preach to the Gentiles, Peter was 'making common' what God had potentially cleansed (Acts 10:15 RV). We can spiritually *destroy* our brother, for whom Christ died (Rom. 14:15); we can undo the work of the cross for a brother who would otherwise be saved by it. We can make others sin (Ex. 23:33; 1 Sam. 2:24; 1 Kings 16:19).

Peter was told not to call or make common that which God had [potentially] cleansed; but the Greek is always elsewhere translated to defile or to make unclean. 'Don't make unclean what God's made clean' is the idea. By refusing table fellowship to people, we are proactively making them unclean- we are treating them as if the cleansing work of Christ has no possible connection to them. And so often, people end up acting and believing according to how others act toward them in such matters of spirituality. They simply walk away from the table from which they were excluded, and from all that is represented upon it... That is the observed reality in thousands of cases. David felt that being cast out of the community of Israel was effectively saying to him "Go, serve other gods" (1 Sam. 26:19). Nobody probably ever said those actual

words to him, but this verse captures well how people so often read rejection from the people of God- they do indeed tend to go off and serve other gods. It is those who cast them out who will have to answer for having caused their stumbling.

10:16 *And this was done three times; and immediately the vessel was received up into heaven-* This surely connects with the triple instruction to Peter to feed the Lord's sheep. He was being taught that in practice, this would mean offering Gentiles to the Lord. And yet although Peter was the one chosen to lead the way in accepting the Gentiles, he was given a ministry to the Jews whereas Paul was given the Gentile mission to oversee (Gal. 2:9). Why was this? Perhaps Peter's inner struggle with accepting Gentiles was recognized, and he was given an easier way of service which was more within his comfort zone? Or perhaps Peter was initially the apostle to the Gentiles, but the Lord changed over the roles of Paul and Peter for some reason? Or perhaps Gal. 2:9 speaks of a specific missionary endeavour at one time, for which Peter focused on the Jews and Paul on the Gentiles?

We note that the unclean animals, representing Gentile converts, were "received" in heaven.

10:17 *While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men that had been sent by Cornelius, having made enquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate-* On 10:9 Peter went upon I sought to demonstrate that the Lord's providential hand was creating a parallel between Peter and Cornelius, just as He does between brethren today. The language of these men of Cornelius 'standing before the gate' and earnestly knocking is precisely the same language as we find in the account of Peter knocking at the "door of the gate" after his release from prison: "He came to the house of Mary... there many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. And when she recognised Peter's voice, she did not open the gate, but in joy ran inside and told everyone that Peter stood before the gate" (Acts 12:12-14). As he stood there, Peter was being put into the shoes of those men who had stood before his gate and knocked. Providence does this in our lives many times, as the Spirit seeks to bind us together in one close-knit body. When the Jewish disciples initially wouldn't let Peter in... he must have seen the similarity with how things could have worked out, had he likewise left those Gentiles outside, holding to the Jewish tradition of not having Gentiles into your home.

10:18 *And called and asked whether Simon, who was surnamed Peter, were lodging there-* They carefully and obediently repeat the words of the Angel in :5.

10:19 *And while Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said to him: Look, three men seek you-* This seems typical of the Spirit's operation to this day. Those who think about their experience with the Lord are led to further revelation and paths of action. The same words are used of how whilst Joseph likewise "thought on these things" (s.w.), he had a vision directing him further (Mt. 1:20). "The Spirit" may well refer to the same Angel who was active with Cornelius. Acts 11:11 says that the men called for Peter "immediately" after the vision ended; but here in 10:19 we have the information that Peter thought on the vision after it ended, and only then did the men call for him. His 'thinking' on the vision was therefore brief, but as soon as he did, the answer came. *The Spirit-* An Angel, see on :5 *Send men.*

10:20 *So rise, and get downstairs-* Gk. 'go down'. This is the same word translated "descending" in :11. As God had 'come down' to Peter and to save the Gentiles, so Peter was in turn to 'come down'. Hence the word occurs again in :21, emphasizing Peter's obedience. We really can be part of God's program in saving others; as He comes down to the excluded, so we are to likewise.

Without doubting. For I have sent them- The phrase occurs only here (also in 11:12) and in James 1:6, where we are bidden to ask in faith "without doubting". This might imply that Peter was being encouraged to pray for the acceptance of the Gentiles and go forward in doing so "without doubting". As already outlined in these studies, there had been hints galore that such inclusion was what the Lord wanted. Even if the reference is not to prayer, the Lord recognized that Peter had doubts- and He urges Peter not to have them. His attitude was not that Peter should have accepted the plain statements of his Lord, that Gentiles worldwide were to be included in God's plan; nor that Peter should just accept the way he was being led. Instead the Lord tenderly appreciates Peter's doubts and prejudices, and urges him to overcome them. This should be our template in dealing with those who still 'don't get it' or 'won't get it' over various issues which are obvious to us.

"Doubting" translates *diakrino*. The same word is used about the Jewish brethren who then "contended" with Peter over his table fellowship behaviour (Acts 11:2-*diakrino* again). The repetition of the word like this in the record seems to rebuke those who contend with others about their table fellowship policy; for Peter had been told *not* to contend / judge in this matter, and yet those legalistic brethren did that very thing. "You can't break bread with us because you break bread with those we don't approve of, even though you are our brother in Christ..." seems to smack of just the same disobedience. But as always, the proof of the pudding is in the eating; open table fellowship brings people to Christ, as it did Cornelius, whereas closed table fellowship drives people away. At least initially, this was recognized by the brethren in Acts 11 and they too changed their closed table policy.

10:21 *And Peter went down to the men and said: I am the one you seek. Why have you come?*- This is full of allusion to the Lord in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:56; Jn. 18:4-6). There is perhaps no exact sense in the allusions; but they reflect the fact that the experience of the Lord's death and resurrection so indelibly impressed Peter that he reflected it both consciously and unconsciously. Likewise with us- even our body language should reflect our experience of such great salvation in so great a Saviour.

10:22 *And they said: Cornelius a centurion, a righteous man and one that fears God, and who is praised by all the nation of the Jews, was instructed by a holy angel of God to summon you to his house and to hear words from you-* Yet Peter didn't know what he was to say. When he arrived, he asked them: "I ask with what intent did you send for me?" (:29). So he went with the visitors, confident God was leading him, but with no set piece speech prepared to read to them. We likewise are to follow the Spirit's leading in the Gospel's work.

10:23 *So he called them in and lodged them. And the next day he arose and went with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him-* Just as Peter's 'coming down' reflected the 'coming down' of the Lord in the world's salvation (see on :20), so this 'calling them in' reflects the calling in of "as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). Peter had spoken those words, thinking of the wide range of Jews being called to salvation. But now he would have realized that the Lord's call was to all men and women; and he was the one being asked to 'call them in' to the house of the Jews.

10:24 *And the next day they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius was waiting for them, having called together his relatives and his near friends-* See on :8. The same words are used in Luke's record of the parables of the lost; in a home, friends and neighbours are "called together" (Lk. 15:6,9). Cornelius was the lost who was being found, but he was also reflecting the joy of the Lord in Heaven by calling together his friends and neighbours into his home.

10:25 *And when it happened that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet and did homage to him-* The Biblical examples of this kind of thing demonstrate the typical way that human beings tend to equate the message with the messenger. Cornelius so respected the message that he thought the messenger was wonderful and worthy of his respect. The reverse side of this equation is particularly destructive- the messenger is equated with the message. And therefore any disillusion with the messenger (or community of messengers) results in a corresponding collapse of faith in the message. Yet the message is the good news about God, the Lord Jesus and their Kingdom- not about the messenger. John the Baptist wisely described himself as merely a voice; and that is all we are. The truth and wonder of the message we pass on does not of itself mean that we are pure. Solomon made this mistake, assuming that his mere possession of wisdom made him somehow spiritually invincible, leading him to make concessions for himself which resulted in his final destruction.

10:26 *But Peter raised him up, saying: Stand up-* The occurrence together of the words "raised up" and "stand up" recalls incidents in the Gospels (Mk. 9:27; Lk. 6:8). Peter would have observed the Lord 'raising up' and then making 'stand up' the sick boy of Mk. 9:27; and he would have seen this as his pattern. We earlier observed how Peter's healing of Tabitha reflects the Lord's body movements and language. This sets us a challenge in our Christianity, our following and absorption of Him. It should be to the point that the actions and even body movements of the historical Jesus are so imprinted upon us that we are literally influenced by His Spirit.

I myself am also a man- These are the very same words on the lips of the Centurion in Mt. 8:9 and Lk. 7:8: "I am a man". One wonders whether this Centurion was in fact Cornelius or in some way connected with him. In this case, Peter would be quoting the words of Cornelius back to him, assuring him that he too was exactly who he was. We notice how the essence of this incident repeated in Paul's ministry, when in Acts 14:15 Paul has to assure the crowd that "We are men...". Again, Paul was being brought to understand Peter by going through similar experiences.

10:27 *And as he talked with him, he went in and found many gathered together-* There is a strange emphasis upon the idea that they were talking as Peter went in to Cornelius' home. It was that crossing of the threshold which was so significant; and the idea was that they did it whilst Peter was teaching the Gospel to the Gentile householder. The need to take Christ to others was what gave Peter strength to cross that significant boundary line. It was whilst doing that work of teaching that he found himself crossing the line, and thereby realized it was but a line in the sand. So many times, going out and teaching the Gospel, and then 'going with' the convert on their new journey, has been the means of radical change in the thinking of the preacher.

10:28 *And he said to them: You yourselves know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew-* If the 'law' in view was that of Moses, then Peter is sharing his struggle with the fact God had changed His law. Yet the idea of a Jew not sharing table fellowship with a Gentile nor entering his house was not Biblical; these were the 'laws' of the Jews rather than of God or Moses.

To join himself or come to- These are the very words used about Philip coming to and joining himself to the Ethiopian's chariot (Acts 8:29). The Lord worked in educating His followers using different means. Peter needed a vision; Philip was taken out into a desert away from peer pressure and simply told to connect with a Gentile. Yet both men ought to have figured that the Lord's work and teaching had ended the divide anyway. But they didn't, and He patiently worked with each of them

in personally tailored ways in order to bring them to the same truths. He works likewise today. The level and intensity of His activity is simply colossal.

One of another nation; and yet to me God has shown that I should not call anyone common or unclean- Gk. 'not purged'. It could be argued that Peter has in view here those purged in Christ. For not all men are 'clean' or 'purged'. Therefore I am inclined to think that Peter means 'If someone, anyone, including a Gentile, is cleansed by baptism into Christ- who am I to say they are not cleansed / purged?'.

10:29 *Therefore also I came without objection, when I was sent for-* Peter says he went with them because he had seen the vision, and then the messengers from Cornelius knocked on his door. He felt that was providential and an answer to the mysterious vision he had seen. But he describes this in 11:12 as "the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting / judging". Perhaps the Spirit did not give him a specific word, to the effect 'Yes, go with them!'; but rather the Spirit arranged circumstances so that it was not hard for Peter to figure 'Well I guess I am meant to go with these strangers'. Likewise when Luke says that the Spirit stopped Paul preaching in Bithynia (16:7), we are not to assume that he had a specific word from the Lord about it; probably circumstances worked out in such a way where he figured that 'This is not meant to be'. And the Spirit works no less actively in our own lives in these ways.

Therefore, I ask with what intent did you send for me- See on :22. "Intent" translates *logos*; we could translate: 'For what word / logos did you send for me?'. Luke has used this phrase before in recording how the people exclaimed at the teaching of the Lord: "What a word is this!" (Lk. 4:36).

10:30 *And Cornelius said: Four days ago, about this hour, I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in my house, and a man stood before me-* The Angelic vision to Cornelius is presented as a direct response to his fasting and prayer. But what was he praying for? Perhaps specifically for acceptance amongst God's people and closer relationship with Israel's resurrected Messiah? Or was it that his prayers were interpreted as being for these things in essence, even if there was no specific, verbalized request for them made? For this is how many of our 'prayers' are answered; the essence is perceived and answered.

In bright apparel- The idea is of a good robe, rather than the glistening garments of Angels; "a gorgeous robe" (Lk. 23:11; James 2:2,3). This person may have been the Lord Jesus rather than an Angel.

10:31 *And said: Cornelius, your prayer is heard and your charitable acts are held in remembrance-* It's doubtful Cornelius was specifically praying for a person to guide him to baptism into Christ and an understanding of the Christian Gospel. But the essence of his spirit was discerned and counted for prayer. Note that "prayer" is singular- his various requests and devotions amounted to one essential prayer. This is a great comfort to all who feel that in prayer, they cannot somehow get the words out right, or nicely enough. It is the deepest spirit of a person which is discerned by the Father and Son, and counted as prayer. See commentary on the resurrection of Lazarus in John 11.

In the sight of God- The same term is used in :33, to describe how they were all present "here in the presence of God". The generosity of Cornelius was noted in the very presence of God; and yet Cornelius realized that that presence of God was also here on earth. The repetition of the ideas demonstrates how the presence of God was no longer to be thought of as simply in the Jerusalem temple; the good deeds of a Gentile were in God's presence, and that same Divine presence was to be found in the home of a Gentile.

10:32 *Therefore*- The plan to bring Peter to baptize Cornelius was all part of a Divine response to the prayers and good works of Cornelius. It was not simply the sovereign movement of God towards Gentiles. It was a response to that man's prayer and spirituality. Note that good works, in this case, regular giving to the poor, had high significance and partly elicited the Lord's response to the man. Although we likewise note that good works alone cannot save; it was encounter with the Gospel and faith in Christ which was so essential.

Send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is surnamed Peter. He lodges in the house of Simon a tanner, by the sea side- This is military language, as if Peter was already part of the military household of Cornelius. This is the whole theme of the record- that fellow believers are in a new family relationship.

10:33 *So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Therefore, now we are all here in the presence of God, to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord to say*- Cornelius had just said that he had seen an Angel standing "before me" (:30, s.w. "in the presence of"). He had been in the presence of the Angel, and he felt that that had now happened again. He felt the literal presence of the Angel who had appeared to him. But "in the presence of God" is the same phrase as has been used to describe how the prayers and works of Cornelius had come into "the presence of God" (:4,31). It is as if God's presence had come to earth; the sheet had been let down from Heaven to earth.

10:34 *And Peter opened his mouth and said: Of a truth I perceive that God*- Peter was so powerful as a preacher, always alluding to his own weaknesses of behaviour and understanding. Consider this example here: "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that fears him and works righteousness, is accepted with him [Peter alludes here to Old Testament passages such as Dt. 1:17; 10:17; Prov. 24:23 and Is. 64:5]. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel... that word, you know" (Acts 10:34-37). Peter is saying that he only *now* perceives the truth of those well-known Old Testament passages. He is admitting that the truth of his Lord's criticism of him, that he had been so slow of heart to believe what the prophets had spoken. And yet Peter masterfully goes on to show solidarity with his readers- he tells them that they too had already heard "the word" and yet now they like him needed to believe the word which they already knew. In doing this, Peter is bridge building, between his own humanity and that of his hearers. And the wonder of it all is that it seems this happened quite naturally. He didn't psychologically plan it all out. His own recognition of sinfulness quite naturally lead him into it.

Is no respecter of persons- Later, Peter reminds his Jewish readers that their prayers ascend to a Father "who without respect of persons judges according to *every* man's work" (i.e. Jew or Gentile, 1 Pet. 1:17). He was asking them to learn what he had so slowly and falteringly come to accept. In this was the power of his pastoral appeal- for the things he teaches are all what he had himself come to accept after much failure and struggle.

10:35 *But in every nation*- Peter's grasp of the extent of Christ's Lordship was reflected in the scope of his preaching. He had known it before, but understood it only to a limited extent. It seems that he preferred to understand the commission to preach "remission of sins *among* all nations" as meaning to the Jewish diaspora scattered amongst all nations (Lk. 24:47)- notwithstanding the copious hints in the Lord's teaching that His salvation was for literally all men. He preached forgiveness (s.w. remission) *to Israel* because he understood that this was what the Lord's death had enabled (Acts 5:31). It was Israel who needed forgiveness, because they had crucified God's Son- this seems to have been his thinking. Peter applies the word "all" (as in

“to all nations”) to his Jewish audiences (Acts 2:14,36; 3:13; 4:10). But he was taught in the Cornelius incident that because Christ is “Lord of *all*”, therefore men from *every* (s.w. “all”) nation can receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:35,36). He makes the link back to the preaching commission in Acts 10:43: *all* in *every* nation who believe can receive remission of sins (s.w. Lk. 24:47)- as he was commanded to preach in the great commission. He came to see that the desperate need for reconciliation with God was just as strong for those who had not directly slain His Son; for, Peter may have mused, all men would have held him “condemned by heaven” if they had been Jerusalem Jews. And he realized that Christ was truly Lord of all, all men, everywhere, and not just of a few hundred thousand Jews. And with us too. The wider and the higher our vision and conception of the ascended Christ, the wider and more insistently powerful will be our appeal to literally all men. Yet Peter had heard the Lord’s words, when He had asked them to tell all nations, and when He had prophesied that His cross would draw all men unto Him. And his comment that “unto you *first* God, having raised up His Son, sent him to bless you” (Acts 3:26) suggests he suspected a wider benefit from the resurrection than just Israel. But all this knowledge lay passive within him; as with his understanding of the cross, he just couldn’t face up to the full implications of what he heard. But it was his recognition of the extent of Christ’s Lordship that motivated him to make the change, to convert the knowledge into practice, to throw off the shackles of traditional understanding that had held him from understanding the clear truth of words he had heard quite clearly. An example would be the words recorded in Mk. 7:19 RV: All meats were made clean by Christ. But Peter had to be told: “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15). He had to be taught to simply accept the word he loved, with all its implications. We too can skim over Bible phrases and verses, assuming our previous understanding of them is correct.

He that fears Him and works righteousness- A reference to Cornelius as a Gentile God-fearer who did good deeds.

Is acceptable to Him- Whoever truly works righteousness “*is* accepted” with God right now, as well as at the final judgment. Some faithful men experience condemnation for their sins now, with the result that they repent and therefore at the day of judgment will not receive that condemnation. The language of being ‘acceptable’ may be a continuation of the language of sacrifice which began with the invitation to “kill and eat” (see on :13). For the same Greek word for “acceptable” is found in Phil. 4:18: “A sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God”.

10:36 *The word-* The definition here of the word of the Gospel includes the basic facts of the Gospel story as recorded by the Gospel writers. Issues of finer theology are not directly part of that Gospel. Here, “word” translates *logos*. It is spoken of as the “message” [AV “word”], *rhema*, in :37. It could be argued that *logos* and *rhema* are therefore dynamically interchangeable in practice. Or it could be that we are to understand that God sent a *logos*, a message with an intention beneath its words... and the words of that message, the more literal *rhema*, was preached.

Which he sent- The idea of a word being sent from God to earth clearly isn’t literal. Likewise the language of the Lord Jesus, as the embodiment of that word being ‘sent’ doesn’t imply any personal pre-existence or literal passage from Heaven to earth.

To the children of Israel- The Gospel was initially intended for Israel, but that message was that Israel’s Messiah was “Lord of all”, Jews and Gentiles.

Preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he being Lord of all!)- The text is saying that God is the preacher; He was and is preaching, through His Son. Our

preaching is therefore an identification with Him. We are His representatives, and we have Him behind us in what we are doing.

10:37 *That message you yourselves know, which was published throughout all Judea-* Even Gentile soldiers on duty in Palestine knew the basic message of the Lord Jesus, so widespread was the message. If Peter could reason that the content of the Gospel was common knowledge in Palestine, we can hardly imagine the Gospel to be much more than the life and teaching of the historical Jesus. All theological matters could not then have been in view; and the definition and content of the Gospel surely didn't change after the time of Cornelius.

Beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached- There is a strong NT emphasis on the Galilean origins of the Lord, His message and the whole Christian movement. Yet Galilee was despised. The point is being laboured that the origins of Christianity were in that which was despised by men. Every Jew would expect a Messianic movement to begin *from Jerusalem*. But Christianity is presented as having its genesis in despised, half-Gentile Galilee.

10:38 *About Jesus of Nazareth. How God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the Devil. For God was with him-* The Lord was empowered to do miracles to demonstrate to illiterate folk that "God was with Him"; but He was Immanuel, God with *us*; in that God was with Him, and He is with us. The Lord Jesus did not heal every sick person in Palestine. The healing of "*all that were oppressed by the Devil*" therefore suggests that we understand "the devil" here as referring not simply to the source of illness which needed healing. The healing was of "*all*" who were under the power of sin and who wanted freedom from that. So again we see a connection between the devil and sin.

10:39- see on Acts 5:30.

And we are witnesses of all things which he did- The Lord therefore was never much out of the view or hearing of the disciples. This implies a significant lack of privacy for Him, making more acute His need to go away in prayer alone. Truly He 'came down' and in that sense 'dwelt amongst men'; and men of such limited perception and vision, so constantly out of step with His thinking, language and direction.

Both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. Whom also they slew, hanging him on a tree- Peter points out the difference between the disciples and "the Jews" generally. He clearly felt that difference, and reflecting upon it would've made the more logical and natural his sense of solidarity with Gentile believers in Jesus.

10:40 *Him God raised up on the third day, and gave him to be revealed-* God didn't parade His resurrected Son personally before the eyes of the world. But He resurrected Him in order that He should be openly revealed (Gk.). This is the connection between the resurrection and the imperative to preach the resurrected Lord; the great commission is therefore directly in the context of spreading the news that the Lord has risen. So in this sense, the Lord risen and alive was paraded before men- but in the form of His body, the church. The same word is used about Christian preaching in Rom. 10:20: "I was made manifest ['revealed']". This open revelation was through the witness of the church.

10:41 *Not to all the people-* As noted on :40, God's plan was that the open revelation of His Son was through the believers, rather than through some public parading of the resurrected body of Christ.

But to witnesses that were chosen before by God, to us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead- Table fellowship with the risen Lord thereby

empowered them to be witnesses that He is indeed alive. And the experience of breaking bread with Him now should lead to the same conviction- we know He is alive because we sat at table with Him, and thereby we are empowered to be witnesses of Him to the world. This explains the intended connection between the communion service and public witness; to turn it into a closed door private members club is to sadly miss the point.

10:42 *And he ordered us to preach to the people-* "Ordered" would be better translated 'commanded'. The reference is likely to the great commission. But Peter therefore misunderstood that as being a command to preach "to the people", i.e. the Jewish people. The great commission had commanded the disciples to preach; the fact Peter adds "to the people" suggests he is adding his interpretation to the Lord's actual words, until he assumes that that interpretation was part and parcel of the Lord's own words. Adam made the same mistake in Gen. 3:3, and all Bible readers and students are inclined to. Peter seems to be saying that the Lord had commanded him to preach to the people of Israel, but that he had been led to now preach to Gentile Cornelius. But actually Peter had yet to join the dots, and realize that actually the requirement to share the Gospel with the Gentiles had been hinted at throughout the Old Testament and was to be found plainly in the actual teaching of the Lord Jesus. It wasn't a change of plan by the Lord at the time of Cornelius; rather was it Peter [and the other disciples] being so slow to understand the basic meaning of simple words, just as they had failed to accept the Lord's clear predictions of His own death and resurrection.

And to testify that this is he who is ordained by God- Note the legal language. It's as if we have been given a subpoena; we have to testify that we have met Him. And the world is our judge. It is our duty to persuade them, sceptical as they are, of the utter truth of our case, and that life and death eternal depend upon judging it rightly. But the metaphor has a double twist; we are on trial, but we are testifying that actually this risen Jesus is "the judge of the living and the dead".

To be the judge of the living and the dead- This could mean that when He returns, the Lord Jesus will raise the responsible dead and judge them, along with "the living" who are alive at the time of His return. Or it could be saying that He is right now the judge of all living, and also of all who have died, seeing He has their records and has already formulated His judgment of them. This latter option would make better sense of the present tense used- *He is* the judge, rather than 'He shall be one day the judge...'.
10:43- see on Acts 10:35,36.

To him all the prophets bear witness- It is quite a challenge to find this message explicitly taught in all the Old Testament prophets. "The prophets" may be a reference to the section of the Old Testament scriptures known as "the prophets", as if to say that the essence of the message from that section was forgiveness for Israel in Messiah's Name. Or "the prophets" may refer to the New Testament prophets, the forth-tellers of the word of the Gospel. This would make better sense of the present tense- all the prophets were right then giving witness to this message.

That everyone who believes in him- Jews and Gentiles.

Receives forgiveness of sins through his name- The same word used of how they "received" the Holy Spirit (:47). Repentance, forgiveness and inner transformation is what the Spirit gift is all about. The visible manifestations sometimes noted were to demonstrate to observers that really, those who had converted to Christ really were legitimate.

10:44 *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit-* Whilst Peter spoke of receiving forgiveness (:43), the Holy Spirit came on them all. This suggests

that the gift of the Spirit is repentance and forgiveness; any external sign of it, such as speaking in tongues, was a mere external attestation of that internal change.

Fell- The same word used of how Peter fell into a Spirit vision (:10); the outpouring was to underline that these Gentiles were just as much within the realm of God's operation as Peter. Hence he observed that the Spirit had fallen on them as on the Jewish believers (11:15).

On all them that heard the word- The language of the parable of the sower for positive response to the word. The gift of the Spirit was not an arbitrary 'zapping' but in response to the hearing of faith.

10:45 *And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed-* Peter had just quoted Old Testament scripture regarding how all the prophets taught that "everyone", literally 'anyone', who believes in Messiah receives forgiveness. And that 'anyone' embraced Gentiles. But when "even... Gentiles" were given the Holy Spirit as a sign of their acceptance by God... the Jewish believers were utterly amazed. Again, we see how the meaning of the most basic and simple words in the Bible can be so hard to accept and therefore to understand- because we carry with us so much baggage of presupposition and assumed understanding.

Because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles- The pouring out of the Spirit elsewhere refers to an internal process of renewal (Tit. 3:5,6; Rom. 5:5; the same words are used for 'pouring out'). But in the context here, it was critical that Peter and the Jewish brethren were aware of this. And you can't usually know what's happening in the heart of another; therefore in this case, there was a visible manifestation of the Spirit's activity. The Greek for "poured out" is usually translated "shed" with reference to the shedding of the Lord's blood. One achievement of His death was the shedding of the Holy Spirit; His mind / Spirit, His breathing and thinking, became available to all who are in Him. For His death was His ultimate act of identification with us.

10:46 *For they heard them speak with tongues-* Probably in Hebrew, which would have been deeply impressive to the Jewish Christians present.

And magnify God. Then said Peter- The Greek means just that. We can make God greater, increase or magnify Him, in that He has delegated His work to us and it is over to us how far we extend it.

10:47 *Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these who have received the Holy Spirit just as we?-* The word means 'accepted'. Peter had been taught that God *accepted* whoever believed in Him, regardless of their race. But now Paul had to remind Peter that truly, God "*accepteth* no man's person" (Gal. 2:6). The same Greek word was a feature of the Cornelius incident: whoever believes *receives*, accepts, remission of sins (Acts 10:43), and they *received*, accepted, the Holy Spirit as well as the Jewish brethren (Acts 10:47). With his matchless humility, Peter accepted Paul's words. His perceptive mind picked up these references (and in so doing we have a working model of how to seek to correct our brethren, although the success of it will depend on their sensitivity to the word which we both quote and allude to). But so easily, a lifetime of spiritual learning could have been lost by the sophistry of legalistic brethren. It's a sober lesson.

The case of Cornelius (Acts 10:47) shows the urgency of baptism; Peter didn't report the case back to the elders, he went ahead immediately with it. Acts 10:36-43 usefully record "the word" of the Gospel which had been sent to Israel and which the Gentiles could now also believe: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in

the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name". This "word" of the Gospel has several allusions to the great commission- "we are witnesses" is Lk. 24:48, and Peter clearly felt he was fulfilling the great commission when he says that he is preaching because after the resurrection, Christ "commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God". Peter's comment that "to Him all the prophets bear witness" was doubtless said with his mind on how after His resurrection, the Lord had expounded where He was to be found in the prophetic writings. The Gospel which the great commission required to be taught and baptized into is therefore summarized in "this word" which is summarized here by Peter. It was a brief message about the person of Christ, His death and resurrection, His forthcoming return in judgment, and our need to repent and receive forgiveness by association with His Name.

"Can anyone withhold" is the same word used by the Lord to rebuke the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uppermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it, and who will not allow 'little ones' to the Lord's table.

10:48 *And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days-* Implying Peter himself didn't perform the baptisms, so that there would not arise any cult following of the baptizer.

ACTS CHAPTER 11

11:1 *Now the apostles and the brothers that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also had-* Does this mean that the conversion of Cornelius was understood as representative of the conversion of the Gentiles? Or were there a number of Gentile converts apart from Cornelius- e.g. Tabitha, the Ethiopian eunuch, and it was to these that "the Gentiles" refers to here?

Received the word of God- See on 8:14 *Received the word of God.*

11:2- see on Acts 10:20; 15:5.

And when Peter had arrived in Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision- This term seems to refer not simply to circumcised Jews, because the majority of the church was Jewish. Rather would it seem to refer to those within the church who thought that circumcision was essential for salvation.

Criticized him, saying- The Greek *diakrino* can equally mean to enter judgment with. It's as if they set themselves up as Peter's judges before a church which had turned into a court of law. This so easily happens to this day.

11:3 *You went in to men uncircumcised and ate with them!*- It's easy to assume that the arguments about "regulations about food" (Heb. 13:9) in the first century hinged about what *types* of food should be eaten, i.e. whether the Mosaic dietary laws should be observed or not. But the angst about "food" was more passionately about *with whom* you ate. Peter explains in Acts 11:3 how utterly radical it was for a Jew to eat with a Gentile. Bearing this in mind, the way Jew and Gentile Christians ate together at the Lord's supper would've been a breath-taking witness of unity to the watching world. And yet ultimately, Jew and Gentile parted company and the church divided, laying itself wide open to imbalance and every manner of practical and doctrinal corruption as a result. The problem was that the Jews understood 'eating together' as a sign of agreement, and a sign that you accepted those at your table as morally pure. The Lord's 'table manners' were of course purposefully the opposite of this approach. Justin Martyr (*Dialogue With Trypho* 47.2-3) mentions how the Jewish Christians would only eat with Gentile Christians on the basis that the Gentiles firstly adopted a Jewish way of life. And this is the nub of the problem- demanding that those at your table are like you, seeing eating together as a sign that the other has accepted your positions about everything. The similarities with parts of the modern church are uncanny.

To enter in to a house was itself a religious act; the word is used repeatedly about how Peter entered in to the home of Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:24,25,27 use the word three times); and Peter was accused by the legalistic brethren of having not only eaten with a Gentile but also of "entering in" to his home (Acts 11:3). Likewise Lydia felt that Paul could only enter in [s.w.] to her home if he had judged her to be faithful to the Lord (Acts 16:15,40). But the assumption is made in 1 Cor. 14:23,24 that the doors of the ecclesia should be open to even unbelievers who wished to "enter in", with all that implied. James 2:2 uses the same word twice in describing how both rich and poor strangers were 'coming in' to "your assembly", and being given different treatment by the assembled believers. The point is, they "came in"- there was no barrier to them. The church and its table was open.

Peter ate with the uncircumcised- and got into trouble with the Judaist brethren exactly because the Law had forbidden the uncircumcised from eating the first Passover (Acts 11:3). The Jews had put a [very large!] hedge around this law by forbidding Jews from eating with Gentiles period. Yet Peter was taught that this was wrong- and he ate with Gentiles, it seems even before they were baptized. But the point is, he had been taught by the vision that all the old Mosaic category distinctions of clean / unclean, circumcised / uncircumcised, had now been ended. It seems this was as large a challenge to the church in the 1st century as it is in the 21st. It was by eating with Gentiles that Peter openly demonstrated that God had accepted Gentiles (Acts 10,11). In first century Judaism "meals... were principal expressions within Judaism of what constituted purity. One ate what was acceptable with those people deemed acceptable" (Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (London: Doubleday, 2000) p. 473). Note too how Luke mentions that Paul ate food in the homes of Gentiles like Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:15,34).

Eventually Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentile brethren (Gal. 2:12). But he had learnt to eat with Gentile brethren in Acts 11:3; he had justified doing so to his brethren and persuaded them of its rightness, and had been taught and showed, so patiently, by his Lord that he should not make such distinctions. But now, all that

teaching was undone. There's a lesson here for many a slow-to-speak brother or sister- what you start by passively going along with in ecclesial life, against your better judgment, you may well end up by actively advocating. It can be fairly conclusively proven that Mark's Gospel is in fact Peter's.

11:4 *But Peter began to explain it all to them in order-* Peter didn't claim to be the rock upon which the church was built; he didn't demand respect for his position, but humbly recounted what had happened on a factual level. His humility here is impressive.

11:5 *I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descending, as it were a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners; and it came down even to me-* "Even to me" is a wonderful reflection of Peter's humility. He was under the strong impression of his denials, and how he felt he was the last who ought to have been chosen to receive this invitation to openly accept the Gentile converts. But this is how the Lord works; He chooses the humblest, the most humbled, through which to develop His work and to be at the frontiers of new movements of His Spirit.

11:6 *Looking at it closely, I saw the fourfooted beasts of the earth and wild beasts and creeping things and birds of the sky-* The very same word used of how the servant girl looked carefully at Peter on the night of the betrayals (Lk. 22:56). Only Luke uses this word. He is making the connection, and revealing how perhaps even subconsciously, the experience of his failures was ever present in Peter's speaking and thinking. And exactly because of this, Peter was the one used by the Lord in this major extension of His work.

11:7 *And I heard a voice saying to me-* The only other person recorded as saying this phrase in the NT is Paul, recounting how the same Lord had appeared to him on the Damascus road (Acts 22:7; 26:14). Paul took the humble Peter as his role model, just as we should.

Rise, Peter, kill and eat- This is sacrificial language. Rom. 15:16 speaks of the preacher as offering up his converts upon the altar; this uses the same image of 'offering up' sacrifices to describe preaching. And this connects with how Paul speaks in Rom. 12:1 of offering ourselves as living sacrifices in dedication. The aim of the preacher, therefore, is to provoke a sacrificial life in his or her converts, after the pattern of the Master whom they learn of.

11:8 *But I said: Not so, Lord-* Perhaps Peter sought to remind everyone that at the last Supper, he had likewise told the Lord not to wash his feet; and earlier, he had likewise disagreed with the Lord about His intention to go up to death in Jerusalem. Peter is emphasizing how he had been out of step with his Lord. And on this basis, he became one of the greatest pastoral figures ever to be seen in the body of God's people.

For nothing common or unclean has ever entered into my mouth- Comparing this with what he is recorded as saying at this juncture in Acts 10:14, it seems he twice stated his objection to the Lord's request. Hence the voice came twice to him.

11:9 *But a voice answered the second time out of heaven-* Perhaps it came twice because Peter twice stated his objection to obedience- see earlier on this verse.

What God has cleansed, do not make common- The idea seems to be that God had potentially cleansed Gentile individuals, making the cleansing sacrifice of His Son relevant to them; but by not preaching to them or accepting them, they would be made unclean by the sin of omission of the members of the Lord's body who refused to accept them. We see here how much has been delegated to us; and the deep significance of sins of omission in the lives of others. It's simply not the case that if

we do not accept or preach to someone, then God somehow will find another way. Rather has their salvation been placed in our hands, and if we mess up, then it won't happen.

11:10 *And this was done three times*- This could mean that each time, Peter twice resisted the command (see on :9). Which would mean a total of six refusals, really quite some resistance to the Lord's will. Peter's obedience was therefore as it were the seventh time around. He presents it this way in order to assure his audience that he absolutely can understand their resistance to the idea of accepting Gentiles.

And all were drawn up again into heaven- The word is only elsewhere used in the New Testament, again by Luke, in Lk. 14:5, speaking of how just as a donkey or ox would be 'pulled up' on the Sabbath, so the Lord was likewise willing to 'draw up' those in need of salvation. What's significant is that the donkey is an unclean animal and the ox is a clean animal. The Lord's subtle point in the example given was that the urgency of salvation eclipsed legal distinctions between clean and unclean. The 'drawing up' of the unclean into Heaven therefore spoke of God's saving acceptance of them; but this had to be operationalized here on earth by His representatives.

11:11 *And then three men stood before the house in which we were, having been sent from Caesarea to me*- Just as the Angel 'stood before' both Cornelius and Peter in his vision (10:30). Peter was to perceive that those Gentiles standing before him were effectively the Lord standing before him; to refuse them was to refuse his Lord. And that same principle must be applied to all cases where men and women stand before us, seeking our acceptance into the people of God.

11:12 *And the Spirit told me to go with them*- How the Spirit told Peter isn't clarified; it could have been through the circumstance of the vision he had just received; or a direct word from a Spirit-Angel; or an internal word of command. I'd go with the first option. "To go with them" renders a Greek word meaning 'to fellowship with'; and the point was, that the Spirit had told Peter to do this. Hence he explains that previously, it was not acceptable for a Jew to 'go with' Gentiles.

Making no distinction- The same word is used in Acts 15:9: "He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith". But this is also the same word used in 11:2 of how the Judaist Christians "debated with" Peter about his acceptance of Gentiles. Those Judaists made a distinction; but the Spirit did not. This is an age-old church situation- the Spirit leads some to accept a previously excluded group, and the conservatives will not accept them. Whilst it appears that the conservatives had no option but to accept the evidence of God's movement, the history of the early church, and the constant reference to the theme in Paul and Peter's letters, all indicate that in the end, the conservatives just couldn't accept this. And that Jew-Gentile, conservative-liberal tension was what led to the church dividing and becoming apostate. The same has been seen in my own denomination. It should be noted, however, that the command not to make a distinction is within the context of not refusing those whom God has accepted. This is not to say that we no longer can tell right from wrong, retreating to a position where everything is but a shade of grey. The same phrase 'making no distinction' is used as a criticism of some believers for failing to make a moral distinction when they should have done (1 Cor. 6:5; 11:29; Jude 22).

These six brothers also accompanied me- The picture is presented of Peter and the Jewish brethren travelling with the Gentiles, when such mingling with Gentiles was against Jewish practice. Yet he did so because the Spirit had bidden him do so.

And we entered the man's house- Strictly against Jewish practice (10:28).

11:13 *And he told us how he had seen the angel-* The definite article suggests a specific Angel; the same one who had been working with Peter. He is called a "man" in 10:30; Angels appear as men, and in this case, the Angel surely represented the man Christ Jesus.

Standing in his house and saying: Send to Joppa and fetch Simon, whose surname is Peter- The Jews were not supposed to enter into the houses of Gentiles (10:28). The fact the Angel entered into the house of Gentile Cornelius was therefore significant. If the Lord is fellowshiping with a person, then we also should be. This makes a nonsense of any fellowship position which recognizes a person as walking with the Lord, but refuses to fellowship them.

11:14 *Who shall speak to you words, whereby you shall be saved, you and all your household-* Belief is essential for salvation, and yet belief must have some intellectual basis; there must be some knowledge to be believed before faith can exist. Therefore it is utterly impossible to divorce understanding from ultimate acceptability. This is because the vital virtue of faith is rooted in understanding.

11:15 *And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit-* Acts 15:9 explains that the whole incident demonstrated that there was no distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers, in that the hearts of the Gentiles had also been purified as a result of their faith. But Peter couldn't see into the heart of those Gentiles. There was therefore a visible manifestation of the Spirit given, in order to demonstrate to him that indeed, the Spirit was active inside the minds and hearts of these Gentiles. The giving of miraculous manifestations of the Spirit was therefore for a specific purpose at a specific time, which is how the miraculous gifts of the Spirit had always been used previously. The point is, belief in Christ is followed by Divine response, in that the Spirit is then made available to purify the heart / mind of the believer. This is one strong reason to be baptized. Those who are baptized often openly testify of this sense of God's presence within them; but unless they make use of it, it truly becomes a case of 'use it or lose it'.

Fell on them- See on 8:16.

Even as on us at the beginning- The beginning of the Christian movement is here pinpointed as being at Pentecost. Hence the Cornelius incident can rightly be called the Pentecost of the Gentiles.

11:16 *And I remembered the word of the Lord-* The word recorded in Acts 1:5; the remembering of the Lord's word was an example of the promised work of the Comforter (Jn. 14:26). When dealing with this tricky ecclesial situation which arose over the admission of the Gentiles, Peter had truth and right on his side. But in his account of what happened to the elders, he constantly makes allusion to his own failures. "I remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said..." is an unmistakable reference to his remembering of the Lord's word all too late after his denials. It's as if he was saying: 'And there I was again, not remembering the Lord's word, not facing up to what it obviously implied, almost denying Him again by hesitating to accept these Gentiles'. He comments that the vision of the unclean animals came "even to me", as if he was the least worthy to have been involved with this work.

How he said that John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit- The "you" referred to the disciples; the fact Gentiles had now been baptized with the Spirit meant that they were no less, spiritually, than the first disciples who journeyed with Jesus in Galilee. The 'baptism with the Holy Spirit' in the context would seem to refer to an internal purifying of the believer by the Spirit

which was began around the time of their water baptism (Acts 15:9). They were to be given a holy 'spirit' or mind / thinking.

11:17 *If then God gave to these the same gift as He also gave to us*- I suggest the gift they all essentially received was that of the purification of their hearts by the Spirit (Acts 15:9). And this is the same promise of the Spirit which is available to us too. It is true that both the apostles and the Gentile converts spoke in tongues, but I suggest that this was the external manifestation of the more essential internal change which was being effected. This 'same gift as He also gave to us' parallels the *gift* of repentance unto life in :18. Repentance is itself a gift, although it must be responded to.

When we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ- This reading may not be correct. The AV is equally faithful to the Greek in omitting the idea of 'when...': "us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ". If the idea of 'when we believed...' is indeed correct, the suggestion would therefore be that the apostles only fully believed in the Lord Jesus at Pentecost. It could be argued that as Jesus was only made Lord and Christ at His ascension (Acts 2:36), and therefore the disciples could only believe in Him as Lord and Christ after that point. Pentecost was the time chosen for them to make public their faith; I would not be surprised if they were all baptized in water at Pentecost, and then the Spirit came upon them in their hearts, and was publicly manifested in terms of the miraculous gifts. If this were indeed the case, the power of Peter's appeal to be baptized and receive the Spirit would've been so much more powerful- if indeed the preachers had themselves just been baptized and received the Spirit. Receipt of the Spirit is connected with water baptism throughout the New Testament; it comes at the point of belief. And the disciples received it at Pentecost. The implication would therefore be that this was when they were baptized. But admittedly the record is strangely silent about their baptism. Remember that Christian baptism, into the Lord's death and resurrection, could only have been performed after His resurrection. Indeed, His command to be baptized was only given after His resurrection. So at some point after His resurrection, the disciples would have been baptized. Pentecost seems a reasonable option; otherwise, they would have been baptized but apparently not received the gift of the Spirit until Pentecost. The objection that their baptism isn't recorded is fair enough; but that problem remains, whichever view one takes of the timing of their baptism.

Growing appreciation of the excellency of the Lord Jesus was also a feature of Peter's spiritual growth; he was the first to coin the phrase "the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 11:17); although *never* did he call the Lord simply "Jesus" (indeed it seems that none of the disciples addressed and rarely spoke about Jesus without giving Him a title). Trace through the path of Peter's growth on appreciation of the Lord's greatness: Mt. 16:22 (*arguing* with Him!); Acts 2:36; 10:36; 11:17. When Peter realized he was looking at the risen Christ standing on the shore, he exclaimed, with evident appreciation: "It is *the Lord*" - not 'Jesus' (Jn. 21:7). And even though he had to swim to meet Him, Peter cast his fisher's coat about him to cover his bare arms and legs. He realized the greatness which attached to the Man from Nazareth on account of His resurrection. After the pattern of Peter, some of the early brethren likewise reached this appreciation of the Lord's excellence *and the importance of it* as the climax of their probations; for many were slain simply because they insisted on calling Jesus of Nazareth "Lord", when Nero had insisted that *he* be called 'Lord' (cp. Acts 25:26). Those brethren (and sisters) died with the confession of Jesus as *Lord* on their lips- and more importantly, deep in their hearts.

Who was I, that I could oppose God- Peter challenged the legalistic brethren of his day with the question: "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?" (Acts 10:47). The Greek word translated "forbid" presents a theme worth paying attention to. Peter uses the same word when he says later that if he had not baptized those Gentiles, then he would've been "withstanding" [s.w. "forbidding"] God Himself (Acts 11:17). This is serious. By forbidding people baptism we are forbidding God, because it is ultimately God through His Son who is the baptizer of people, thus inducting them into His people. This thought alone should make it very difficult for any of us to ever forbid baptism to someone who wants it. Great judgment is stored up for those who forbid others to preach the Gospel (1 Thess. 2:16). Diotrephes forbade brethren from fellowshiping with other brethren (3 Jn. 10)- and was roundly condemned for doing so. The disciples were rebuked for forbidding children to come to Jesus (Mt. 19:14)- this was 'much displeasing' to Jesus (Mk. 10:14, Gk. 'much much-grieved'); for forbidding the disciples of John the Baptist, with their alternative understandings of some things (Mk. 9:38); no man who works in Christ's Name should be forbidden, although the disciples evidently thought such a person should be forbidden (Mk. 9:39); the Jews are condemned for forbidding [s.w. "hindered"] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52; note that to make the way to entry hard and difficult, creating hoops which must be passed through, is effectively forbidding a man entry); the Eunuch's question as to what forbade him to be baptized was answered by Philip eliciting a simple confession of faith from him, that Jesus was the Son of God (Acts 8:36).

The grace of God is manifested to the world through the preaching of the ecclesia; and in this sense, God has allowed His ability to manifest this Grace to be limited according to our effort in witness. Peter could have chosen not to baptize Gentiles; and if he had done so, he would have withstood God, like the Pharisees he would have frustrated the counsel of God (Acts 11:17). As in the Song of Solomon (1:8), the bride [the church] follows the sheep [believers] to find the shepherd [Jesus]. The sheep lead others to the shepherd. God has "manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me" (Tit. 1:3).

11:18 *And when they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying-* This initial joy and humble acceptance of Gentile conversion didn't last. Natural prejudices soon arose, as soon happened later in this chapter. Men can come to a peak of spirituality which isn't maintained. We think of David forgiving Shimei, but then on his deathbed, asking Solomon to murder Shimei for what he had said against David. Corinth enthusiastically undertook to support the welfare fund- but didn't then come up with the cash. As emphasized in Jn. 15, the Lord Jesus seeks fruit that will abide- and not the flash peaks of emotional devotion which never carry through into permanent reality.

Then to the Gentiles also has God granted repentance to life- This shows that He is active in developing our desire to repent; "the goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Rom. 2:4). The same words were used by the apostles when teaching that God had "granted repentance to Israel" (Acts 5:31). That statement was not untrue, but now they recognized that they had only seen and preached a partial picture; for the gift of repentance was now rightly perceived as being to the Gentiles too. "Granted" means that repentance is a gift, and it clearly parallels the 'gift' of the Spirit in :17, which I suggest refers to the gift of God working by His Spirit within the human spirit, i.e. the gift of the Holy Spirit. 2 Tim. 2:25 makes it clear that there still has to be some human volition in the matter of salvation; but all the same, repentance

is a gift from God: "In meekness correcting those that contradict themselves, so that God may give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth". This is not to say that repentance is unnecessary because it is a gift from God. True repentance is critical in the salvation process. But true repentance in human strength is not easy. It cannot be like Saul, who had genuine emotions of self hate, sorrow and tears at his behaviour against David- but continued in it (1 Sam. 24:16-22; 26:21). God wants penitence, not penance. Repentance must be "toward God" and not man, and it must be totally free from fear of human consequences. And so, true repentance is a gift from God. By grace. By His working on the human heart.

God clearly works, potentially, on the hearts of people. In our moments of repentance, both at baptism and on the many subsequent occasions, it is hard to believe that in prospect God's enormous Spirit power has really prepared a way for us to be totally spiritual. Israel on Carmel with Elijah were in a similar position; thus Elijah prayed "Hear me, O Lord... that this people may know... that You have turned their heart back again" (1 Kings 18:37). He meant: 'They don't realize that you are so willing for them to repent, that in prospect you have touched their hearts and made them do it; answering my prayer dramatically may motivate them to make the necessary freewill response in repenting, so that the spiritual help you have made available in prospect, can be theirs in reality'. Even the frankest comparison of ourselves with that motley crew of hardened apostates should inspire afresh the belief within us that God is willing that all His people should continually come to repentance.

The road to eternal life involves repentance. Recognition of personal sin is utterly fundamental to salvation.

11:19 *Now those who were scattered-* The use of *diaspeiro* suggests that the scattered Christians were now the Israelite *diaspora*; they were the true Israel of God. The Greek literally means 'to be sown widely'; and indeed the seed of the Gospel was spread through this enforced migration.

Because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch- see on Acts 8:1.

Speaking the word to no one except Jews- They clearly assumed that the command to take the Gospel into all the world and to "every creature" referred to Jewish people worldwide. We too can read in an ellipsis into a section of God's word, so confident are we that our subconscious assumptions are the correct interpretation.

11:20 *But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they reached Antioch, spoke to the Gentiles also, preaching the Lord Jesus-* Why was it specifically here that the persecuted Jewish believers began to share the word with the Gentiles? The term used for "Gentiles" here can also mean 'Hellenists', i.e. Greek speaking Jews. Perhaps it was initially to them that they preached, but the ethnicity of these people in Antioch was unclear, and so it became impossible to divide full Gentiles from Greek speaking Jews- and thus the Gospel was spoken to the Gentiles. According to Plumptre, "It was a centre of vice, featuring the harlot-priestesses of Daphne and Apollo who on occasions engaged in public ceremonies "stripped of clothing". Heathenism in its most vulgar and debasing forms dominated the life of the people". One can assume therefore that there would have been Jews there who had intermarried with Gentiles; and yet in this immoral city, the Gospel took off. Antioch became as it were the Jerusalem of the Gentile church. But it's rather like a church being founded in some deeply immoral area of a modern city; again, the Lord's choice is strange at first blush. It would've been so hard for the Jewish conservative Christians to accept that there had been mass conversions of Gentiles in such a place.

Antioch was clearly set up as the model of an urban, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, immigrant and refugee / asylum seeker based church. The elders we know of — Barnabas [from Cyprus], Simeon "called Niger" [a Falasha Jew probably from North Africa], Lucius [from Cyrene in North Africa], Manaen [raised in Galilee with Herod Antipas], and Paul [from Tarsus]—were all from different cultures. None were locals from Antioch. At least one was known as a black man, and possibly Lucius was also. They possibly faced the same scpeticism as Africans face today when they do missionary work in Europe. Those elders would likely have all spoken different first languages. And they had been flooded with Christian Jewish refugees from Jerusalem after they had fled from there. They came to Antioch exactly because Judaism in that city was famed for being very liberal. Those refugees themselves had only come to dwell in Jerusalem "from every nation under heaven", according to the record of their conversion in Acts 2. And the population of Antioch [reckoned at 500,000] was itself multicultural and multiethnic. So it was all arranged by the Lord that they would become the first church to engage in missionary work to the Gentiles. Their experiences and environment were used by Him to help them make the break from the idea of a Jewish-only form of Christianity. The multiethnic ministry team produced a multiethnic church in a multiethnic city- that was clearly the Lord's intention. And it worked. Despite all the prejudices they all felt, as Jews of varying degrees of orthodoxy. And it is no surprise that the Antioch church became the departure point for three great missionary journeys (Acts 13:1-3; 14:35,36; 18:22,23).

Peter too was gently led to the challenge of preaching to Cornelius, through his experiences in Acts 9- healing a half Jewish woman [Dorcas-Tabitha], living with Simon the non-observant tanner, by the Joppa seaside exactly where Jonah had resisted the call to preach to the Gentiles. The [uninspired] *AntiMarcionite Prologue to Luke* claims that Luke was a Gentile from Antioch- which would explain his interest in Antioch and knowledge of the situation there.

11:21 *And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed-* The Lord's hand, His activity, resulted in people believing. Again we see that His outreach and grace towards men means that we are not left unaided as we face the choice between faith and unbelief. The Lord's hand works on the hearts of men, to give them faith and repentance (:18). Just as faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8); and as the Lord opened Lydia's heart so that she believed (Acts 16:14).

Believed and turned to the Lord- These are two separate things. The equivalent is maybe "The Corinthians believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). The turning to the Lord would then refer to water baptism. Or the reference may be to the psychological activity of the Lord in turning hearts and minds to Himself. In response to their belief, they were turned to the Lord. The same word is used in 3:19: "Repent... and be *converted*". After belief and baptism, there comes the process of conversion. It is something done to us by the Lord, as much as us seeking to make concrete changes ourselves. It is the duty of the preacher to turn people to the Lord (s.w. 26:18), and yet we must ever be aware that this is also His desire; and His spirit is at work seeking to turn our audience to Himself. "The hand of the Lord" seeks to do this; and any who remain unconverted, not turned to Him, have therefore resisted His hand, His operation in their lives and hearts. Only by wilfully closing the eyes and heart can someone disallow the Lord from converting / turning their heart to Him (28:27 s.w.). We must remember this when struggling with the problem of those who do not believe. Their unbelief is multifactorial, but one element of the equation is that the Lord has worked to try to win them.

11:22 - see on Acts 8:1.

And the report concerning them came to the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem- The metaphor of the body is used for the local church, rather than the global body of Christ. It seems Paul's extended usage of the metaphor has the same reference.

And they sent Barnabas as far as Antioch- The Jerusalem ecclesia told Barnabas to go only as far as Antioch; he didn't tell them how wrong they were to boss him around. He went beyond Antioch to Tarsus, took Paul, and then went down to Antioch (:22,25). In the end, whilst we must respect those who deserve it, we are personal servants of the Lord who died for us, and we must follow Him according to our personal conscience. The lesson from this is that we should seek to be as positive as possible in the midst of this tension between right and left- especially in the way we write or speak about the problems. We should seek to move the Gospel forward, whatever unhappy disagreements there are between those already baptized.

11:23 *Who, when he had arrived and had seen the grace of God-* The idea is not simply that Barnabas saw how kind God had been in accepting the Gentiles. The gift [*charis*, s.w. "grace"] of God would have referred to the gift of the Spirit. With Cornelius, the receipt of the Spirit gifts by him was proof enough to the Jewish brethren that his conversion was *bona fide*. And so it was the same in Antioch- when Barnabas saw the evidence of the *charis* of God, the work of the Spirit, then he was assured that the conversions were valid.

Was glad- There is a play on words here. *Chairo*, "glad", is similar to *charis*, "grace" or "gift". The joy of Barnabas was exactly because the Gentile converts had been given the gift of the Spirit, which was the proof of their legitimacy as converts. When those who have formally held a privileged position open the doors to others, it's a hard thing to be truly glad that you have lost your position of privilege. The joy of Barnabas and other Jewish brethren therefore indicates their utter humility and genuineness.

And he encouraged them all, that with purpose of heart they should cleave to the Lord- The Spirit gift of cleansing the heart must be responded to; 'use it or lose it' would be the appropriate slogan. Having seen evidence that they had received the gift of God, Barnabas urged them to do their part in maintaining that way of thinking / spirit.

11:24 *For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit-* He was the right person to exhort the new converts to retain the gift of the Spirit, because he had done so himself, and was full of it. We also see that being full of the Spirit involved some personal effort- his 'goodness' was related to his being full of the Spirit. The gift is given by grace- but must be retained by our wilful decision to abide with the Lord.

And many people were added to the Lord- Luke likes to use this word "added". In 2:41,47 we read of converts being added to the church; here, they are added to the Lord. He is His church. The word *prostithemi* means literally to lay beside; it is used in describing how David was buried, being laid beside his fathers (13:36). For a convert to be laid beside the Lord suggests baptism, with all its symbolism of death and burial together with the Lord.

11:25 *And he went to Tarsus to seek out Saul-* The implication is that Saul / Paul had retreated within himself, returning to obscurity in his home town. Barnabas knew that Saul had the potential to do far more than that, and went to try to find him. We too need to make such efforts to encourage others to live up to their callings. Perhaps Barnabas was motivated by the fact that the amazing spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles had arisen as a result of Saul's persecution of the Christians (:19). Perhaps Saul was consumed with "over much sorrow" for his sins, and Barnabas wanted him

to understand how wonderfully God had worked through them. Or perhaps Paul had been disappointed by the rejection by the Jerusalem church, who clearly scorned the mission to the Gentiles he had been given by the Lord. He felt that without human approval, he couldn't do his mission. Despite being "sent to the Gentiles", he simply went home and possibly sulked in disillusion and introversion. But he had earlier done missionary journeys to bring Gentiles to Judaism- that is one reading of his reference to his earlier 'preaching circumcision' (Gal. 5:11). That life experience still had to be used by the Lord, and Barnabas was perceptive enough to realize that he had to do the human part and encourage Paul to respond to the opportunity. It could be that Paul would not have fulfilled his ministry to the Gentiles had not Barnabas encouraged him. And we need to be like Barnabas in considering how we can help others realize their callings.

11:26 And when he had found him- Luke describes the work of Barnabas in terms of seeking (:25) and finding. It is Luke who records the parables of seeking and finding (Lk. 15:8). In those parables, it is the Lord Jesus who seeks and finds. But He works through His body on earth; in this case, Barnabas. Yet Barnabas used his own initiative in order to seek and find Saul. The allusion to the lost sheep parable ['seeking out' in :25, 'finding' and 'bringing' in :26] could imply that Paul's return home to Tarsus was a point of spiritual failure for him. And yet that prepared him for the great missionary work he was to begin in Antioch.

He brought him to Antioch- This suggests Saul's relative passivity, implying that it was the initiative of Barnabas which resulted in Saul coming to Antioch.

And it came to pass, that for a whole year they were gathered together with the church and taught many people- The "they" grammatically appears to refer to Saul and Barnabas, hence the GNB: "the two met with the people of the church and taught a large group". This establishment of the Gentile mission centre in Antioch was due to Barnabas taking the initiative and going to search out Saul and bring him to Antioch. "The church" and the "many people" appear to have been two separate groups- the two brethren engaged in both pastoral and outreach work. This would have been in response to the call of the great commission, to teach the simple Gospel, baptize people, and then teach them all the Lord had commanded.

And there in Antioch the disciples- All Christians are disciples, 'learners'; the twelve men who followed the Lamb of God around Galilee, with all their misunderstandings and lack of faith, were and are symbols of us all. The focus was upon Him, not each other. We are all learners of Christ, taught by He Himself (Eph. 4:20,21). And we are to make all men into disciples (Mt. 28:19 RV); to make them learners of Jesus too.

Were first called Christians- It has been suggested that this was initially a term of insult and mockery. They were Christ-centred, and so were mocked as being 'the Christ-folk'. However, the term is used as a self-designation of the community by Peter (1 Pet. 4:16 cp. Acts 26:28). Or it could be that we can read this as meaning that they first gave themselves this name of 'the Christ folk'. In this case, yet again we see that the early community was centred around Jesus as the Christ, around a living person, rather than around a set of theories and abstract interpretations. Another option is that it was Paul and Barnabas who first coined the term. The Codex Bezae reads: "And hearing that Saul was at Tarsus, he departed, seeking for him; and having found him, he besought him to come to Antioch; who, when they were come, assembled with the Church a whole year, and instructed a great number; and there they first called the disciples at Antioch Christians". "Called" translates a word which usually refers to a Divine call; so another option would be that there was direct Holy

Spirit revelation that the believers should brand themselves with the term 'Christian'. This needs to be given due weight by those who name the name of Christ but refuse to be called Christians. "Christian" is from the Greek word "Christ" and the Latin ending *-ianus*. It is significant that an initially Jewish church should coin a term which has no Hebrew in it. They had becoming so mission minded that they perceived that the future of Christianity was going to largely [although not exclusively] be with Gentile converts.

11:27 Now in these days there came down prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch- One of them predicted a famine which would affect "all the world" (:28); yet the Antioch brethren gathered funds to send to Jerusalem to relieve "the believers that lived in Judea" (:29). Inevitably one wonders whether these prophets asked for material support in view of the predicted famine. And yet if they were predicting a world-wide famine, which would affect Antioch as much as Jerusalem, why was support only sent for the brethren in Judea / Jerusalem? Perhaps it was in order to demonstrate unity with different brethren of a different culture and ethnicity, and was therefore done in absolute selflessness, seeing that Antioch was presumably going to suffer as well.

11:28 And one of them, named Agabus, stood up- The Greek form of the Hebrew 'Hagab', meaning 'locust'. Locusts were understood as bringers of famine; so certain was the prophetic word, that the person bringing it was seen as the fulfilment of it.

And foretold- Gk. 'signified'. It could be that Agabus didn't simply predict a famine, but gave a symbolic vision which was interpreted as meaning that a famine would come. One manuscript adds: "When we came together", implying that Luke was then in Antioch. As discussed on Col. 4:14, it seems Luke was a Gentile from Antioch.

By the Spirit that there would be a great famine- We have here a powerful example of what it means to believe the prophetic word. These brethren were so convinced that the prophecy would come true that they decided there and then, ahead of the predicted famine, to gather welfare for those who would be affected by it. There appears to be an allusion to Joseph, who so believed the dreams he interpreted about the seven years of famine that he arranged the gathering of welfare in order to cope with it. The coming of 'great famine' was a sign of the end of the age in the Olivet Prophecy (Lk. 21:11). We see how the stage was set for the Lord's coming in the first century; it was Israel's lack of repentance, and a paucity of evangelical zeal amongst the believers, which meant that His return was delayed. Until we learn the lesson.

Over all the world. This took place in the days of Claudius- This only came true in a limited sense. Perhaps the massive wider reference was to flag attention to the way that this famine could fulfil the prophetic requirement of famine in many strange places (Mt. 24:7). I suggest that the extent of this famine wasn't effected, because the human conditions weren't right to allow the Lord to return.

11:29 And the disciples, every man according to his ability- Paul uses the same words in appealing to the Corinthians to likewise contribute for the brethren in Judea "every man according to" his opportunity (2 Cor. 9:7). He was thereby appealing to Corinth to follow the pattern of the Antioch ecclesia. Patterns of generosity are to be observed and imitated; for we take strength and patterns in giving from the example of others. There is also a reference to the parable of the talents- each were given according to their ability, and were to trade them. Here, the talents given is applied to whatever material resources we have.

"Every man" may suggest every convert contributed. We must remember that ethnic groups never gave charitable help to other ethnic groups. What was done here was radically counter cultural, and a triumph for the spirit of unity which there is in Christ. The allusion is clearly to the Lord's parable of how "every man... according to his ability" was given talents with which to trade. We have each been given something- and are to trade this by giving away what we have for others. And "every man" was to do this, not reasoning that he had only one talent and therefore wasn't called to do anything. It is the "one talent" category who are perhaps at greatest risk of failing to enter into the ministry intended for them. In the same context of the temple and Jerusalem, there is surely also an allusion to Dt. 16:16,17: "Three times in a year must all your males appear before Yahweh your God in the place which He shall choose... They must not appear before Yahweh empty: every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of Yahweh your God which He has given you". The equivalent under the New Covenant was giving to the poor Christian believers in Jerusalem. Again we notice the stress upon "*all* your makes... every man shall give".

The Mosaic Law countered the idea that only the rich can be generous. The purification after childbirth and the cleansing of the leper allowed a lower grade of offering to be made by the very poor- to underline that *no one* is exempted from giving to the Lord, no matter how poor they are. Consider the emphasis: "Every man shall give *as he is able*... he shall offer *even such as he is able to get*... then the disciples (consciously motivated by these principles?) *every man according to his ability*, determined to send relief [one gets the picture of a convoy of brethren going to Jerusalem, carrying a little bit of meal from Sister Dorcas, a few coins from brother Titus...] ... let *every one of you* lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (Dt. 16:17; Lev. 14:30,31; Acts 11:29; 1 Cor. 16:2).

Decided to send relief to the believers that lived in Judea- First century people were relatively passive to disasters compared to Western people today. A famine was an act of God, of nature, and it had to be accepted; the idea of one ethnic group taking up a collection for another one in another place who were suffering from famine was a real paradigm breaker. And that's just what Paul engineered, in arranging for the Gentile converts to take up such a collection for the Jewish believers in Palestine who were suffering famine. Historians claim that Antioch was a wealthy city, and archaeological remains support that. It would be fair to assume that they not only funded the welfare for the Palestinian Christians, but also the following missionary journeys to the Gentiles which each began from Antioch.

11:30 *Which also they did*- This may appear redundant, until we realize that it is a common human tendency to 'decide' to be generous, but not actually do it. These brethren decided and also did it. And that is noted in the inspired record.

Sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul- This seems a wise pattern to follow in providing welfare relief.

ACTS CHAPTER 12

12:1 *About that time*- The time of chapter 11, when the brotherhood in Judea were threatened with famine, and the Gospel was spreading to the Gentiles. It seems the persecution of the Jerusalem leadership was used by the Lord to encourage the Gentiles to take responsibility- for the Jewish leadership of the early church was then straight away put under pressure. This is how intricately the Lord coordinates situations in our lives and collective experiences.

Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church- This Greek phrase is often used about the leadership laying hands on the Lord Jesus. The church were fellowshipping the sufferings of their Lord, just as we do in essence; hence the same language is used. This is also the phrase which is used in the Olivet prophecy, only in Luke's account of it, about how in the last days, hands would be laid on the believers (Lk. 21:12). Luke clearly saw this action of Herod as fulfilling that prophecy. All was set up for the Lord's coming in glory; the signs which depended upon God for fulfilment all came true. But Israel's lack of repentance and the lack of evangelical zeal to take the Gospel world-wide meant that the human preconditions weren't met, and so His coming has been delayed until our last days.

12:2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword- Several commentators claim that the phrase 'to kill with the sword' means beheading. James was the first recorded martyr for the faith; and again (see on :1), Luke is recording this framed to show that the Olivet prophecy was coming true. The Lord had predicted that James would drink of His cup (Mt. 20:22,23), and so it happened. It's worth noting that there is no record of anyone being raised up to replace James and to thereby maintain the number of the 12. This gives the lie to Catholic claims of an apostolic succession.

12:3 And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. And those were the days of unleavened bread- Luke uses the same word in recording how the Lord was 'seized', and "Peter followed afar off" (Lk. 22:54). Now, the implication is, after a period of following the Lord, it was Peter's turn to experience His sufferings more directly. There are many similarities with the Lord's sufferings- e.g. it was to "please the Jews" (:2). Hence the comment: "And those were the days of unleavened bread". It was Passover time- the very time of the Lord's sufferings. We too are led to fellowship with the Lord's sufferings, and our familiarity with the records of them will help us to perceive this more quickly.

12:4 And when he had taken him- A word repeatedly used about the Lord's being 'taken' by the Jewish opposition (Jn. 7:30,32,44; 8:20; 10:39; 11:57). Again, we see the development of the theme that the Lord's final sufferings were being replicated in Peter.

He put him in prison- Surely to test Peter's confident claim that he was ready to go to prison and death for his Lord (only recorded by Luke- Lk. 22:33). The Lord likewise has a way of testing our confident claims about our loyalty to Him. It's worth noting that Herod had earlier arrested John the Baptist and 'put him into prison' (the same words are used; Mt. 14:3), again in order to please another party- in that case, Herodias. That similarity would have led Peter to suspect that Herod would likewise behead him in prison as he had John. Our sufferings are so often in terms and tones similar to those of others, and this is because we are to take strength from them and to see that we are not alone.

And delivered him- A word so often used about the handing over of the Lord to death.

To four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover- The Greek for 'squad' refers to a group of four soldiers; four such squads meant 16 in all.

To bring him out to the people- The Greek word Luke uses about what was done to the Lord (Lk. 22:66).

12:5 Therefore Peter was kept in the prison; but earnest prayer was offered to God- The guarding of Peter in prison is placed in opposition to earnest prayer being offered; as if worldly forces were in struggle with spiritual ones, and the spiritual prevailed. "Earnest" is literally 'unceasing', and the word is only used elsewhere by

Peter, in appealing for unceasing love within the church (1 Pet. 4:8). He would have recalled how unceasing prayer had been offered for him- and he urged the church to show such love to others.

For him by the church- Huper, translated "for", is what Dorothee Sölle called "the preposition of representation" (Dorothee Sölle, *Christ The Representative* (London: S.C.M., 1967) p. 69). Our prayer for others is effectively our representation of them before the throne of Heaven and the Divine court. And this of course is exactly what the Lord Jesus has done and continues to do for us; mediating *huper* us, as our representative. What He has done for us, we are not to merely lamely accept; we are to do the same in essence for others. And the clearest way we reflect it is through prayer *huper* others, feeling with them and for them, and bringing those feelings before the Father in prayer for them.

12:6 *And when Herod was about to bring him out, that same night*- This reflects how the Jewish day began at sunset. That night was the day in which Herod intended to 'bring him out' to death. In this kind of careful congruence we see evidence of inspiration and every verisimilitude. The language of 'bringing him out' naturally recalls the trial of the Lord Jesus before His death.

Peter was sleeping- A great essay in faith and the peace which comes from it. For it seemed obvious that that night would be his last, and death awaited him in the morning.

Between two soldiers- Recalling the Lord's death between two thieves.

Bound with two chains- The record gives much detail about Peter's binding and guarding by the soldiers. We learn there were four squads of four soldiers guarding him (:4), there is the apparently unnecessary repetition of the fact he was guarded (:5), and now we learn that he slept with a separate chain connecting him to a separate soldier. All that was humanly possible had been done, to ensure there was no escape. All this sets the scene for the amazing deliverance wrought by the Lord that night. Significantly, the Lord overruled it that Paul was later likewise bound with two chains (Acts 21:33); encouraging Paul to see his ministry as parallel to that of Peter. However, as I have elsewhere suggested, Paul seems to have pretended to Peter's ministry to the Jews, rather than accepting that his ministry was to be parallel to Peter's, but not identical with it. See on 12:7 *And an angel of the Lord stood by him*. It's also noteworthy that Peter later chose to describe the essence of condemnation as being in chains, in darkness, awaiting judgment (2 Pet. 2:4). He surely wrote that with recollection of how he had been left in exactly the same position that night in prison- and been saved out of it.

And guards before the door were guarding the prison- Another example of apparently excessive detail about the guarding. See on *Bound with two chains*. It also recalls the guards guarding the Lord's tomb. This is the second time in Acts that the "guards before the door" have been rendered powerless (Acts 5:23 uses the same Greek words).

12:7 *And an angel of the Lord stood by him*- Exactly as happened to Paul (Acts 27:23); see on 12:6 *Bound with two chains*. Luke uses the same language as in Lk. 2:9, where the Angel of the Lord stands by the shepherds and again, the light shines. It's unclear what exact point Luke is trying to make by demonstrating the similarity. Perhaps it was that the Lord was demonstrating to Peter that the events of His life were being replicated in Peter's; just as they are in the experiences of all who are in Christ.

And a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying: Rise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands- Yet another similarity

with the Lord's crucifixion. The Greek verb translated 'strike' is usually used in the New Testament with the sense of striking with a fatal wound. This makes the next phrase so significant: "... and woke him", AV "raised him up". The similarities with the keepers / guards being stricken helpless at the resurrection and the glory of the Lord shining... all this was to help Peter to understand that the essence of the Lord's death and resurrection was being worked out in him. We note the subsequent disbelief of the male disciples as they fearfully prayed in a locked room, contrasted with the faith of a woman [Rhoda]; this was clearly looking back to the situation at the Lord's resurrection. His death and resurrection are being continually lived out in our experience too; baptism is a signal that we are prepared for that ongoing participation in His death and resurrection.

12:8 *And the angel said to him: Dress yourself and put on your sandals-* When the Angel told Peter this, he was alluding back to the Lord's words to Peter, that when he would be old, others would gird him and carry him to his death (Jn. 21:18). The Angel was therefore saying that the time of Peter's death had not yet come. The lesson is, that the amount of comfort and reassurance Peter took from the Angels' words would have been proportionate to the degree to which he had meditated on his Lord's prophecy. And so with us. See on :10 for another example.

And he did so. And he said to him: Wrap your cloak around you and follow me- "Follow me" is a phrase used 18 times elsewhere, and always about following the Lord Jesus. Peter struggled with this- he was told to stop trying to persuade the Lord against death on the cross, and instead to follow Him; and at the end of John's Gospel, Peter again has to be reminded of the need to follow his Lord. So here we are surely to perceive the Lord Jesus speaking through the Angel at this point; the call to follow Him comes to us in the most unusual circumstances.

12:9 *And he went out and followed-* This might imply that the following and the going out were separate things. Peter's willingness to get dressed and leave the cell was a test of his faith. The commands to dress were likewise not simply the Angel's thoughtfulness because of the cold of the night which Peter would experience. Rather was it all a test and development of Peter's faith and obedience.

And he did not perceive that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he was seeing a vision- This was precisely the position of the prayerful believers that same night (:15); and again, it was only after the opening of a door that they believed (:16). Peter was weak in believing that his prayers that night were being answered right before his eyes; and his awareness of his failure surely helped him to be patient with the failure of his own brethren that night. For at a prayer meeting, they received the answer to their prayers- and dismissed it as 'madness', as a mad woman seeing a vision. Which was precisely what Peter had done. So often, human weakness repeats between believers; and this is also under the hand of providence. It is intended, surely, to enable us to achieve patient forgiveness and fellowship with each other.

12:10 *And when they were past the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city-* There is huge variation in the amount of detail in the Biblical records. Many years of the lives of men like Peter aren't recorded; but here we have the finest details of a few moments of his life. This is to help us play Bible television with the material; so that we can attempt to reconstruct and relive this wonderful scene.

"The iron gate that leads into the city" was likely what was known as "the prison gate", and this gate is mentioned only one other time in the Bible. Neh. 12:39 records that it was at this gate that the celebrating Israelites met and sung praise to God when Jerusalem was finally revived under Nehemiah. As noted under 12:8 *Dress yourself*

and put on your sandals, Peter would have taken encouragement from this, as he doubtless felt full of praise himself, according to whether or not he picked up the allusion to the Nehemiah record. So many things in our lives likewise are nudges and hints towards Biblical accounts- but if we fail to perceive them, then those things remain in the large mass of apparently irrelevant and unexplained furniture in our lives.

This opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and passed on through one street; and immediately the angel departed from him- Whilst walking with the Angel, Peter must have thought that nothing possibly could go wrong for him; but the Angel continued with him, it was just not visible. The 'leaving' was therefore just from his earthly perspective.

"Passed on" implies literally 'to follow'; the situation is replete with reference to the Angel opening the iron gates of Egypt at Passover time and leading Israel out. Further, the idea in :11 that "the Lord has sent his angel and delivered me out of the hand of Herod and from all that the Jews were expecting" alludes clearly to the Lord sending an Angel to deliver Israel from Pharaoh [= Herod] and the Egyptians [= the Jews]. This all gives the impression that this was yet another level of conversion for Peter; again he was being 'converted', brought out of Egypt to light, just as we too have various levels of conversion, and the essence of baptism becomes an ongoing daily experience.

12:11 *And when Peter came to himself, he said: Now I know of a truth-* This Greek phrase, and the idea of 'knowing of a truth', is quite common in the Bible (Mt. 27:54; Mk. 15:39; Jn. 4:42; 6:14). The idea is that there are things we know, but experience brings us to know them of a truth. Job heard by the hearing of the ear, and then through his sufferings came to see it all for real as personal truth. This is why the knowledge of the Gospel learnt before baptism is merely knowledge; it is through the Lord's personal program for us in subsequent life, that that knowledge is known by us in truth. And we must be patient as others are led along that same path of converting mere ideas, theology, lines in a statement of faith, into personal truth. See on 12:12 *Considered*.

Now I know of a truth, that the Lord has sent his angel and delivered me out of the hand of Herod and from all that the Jews were expecting- Peter was delivered from prison as a result of the Angel being "sent forth"- from the court of Heaven, by the prayers of the other believers at their prayer meeting (Acts 12:11 RV). When those same believers commented: "It is his Angel" (:15) they were perhaps not mocking Rhoda; rather they were thanking God that Peter's guardian Angel had indeed been sent forth due to their prayers. See on :10 "Passed on".

12:12 *And when he had considered the thing-* The Greek doesn't mean this, but rather means 'to know'. We can pass through an experience, but now 'know' it until we have processed it with faith. See on 12:11 *Now I know of a truth*.

He came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark- Peter later refers to John Mark as his [spiritual] son (1 Pet. 5:13). We sense here therefore the deep family relationships forged by our experience in Christ.

There many were gathered together and were praying- Do we hold such all night prayer meetings? To pray all night requires quite some psychological stamina. However, note the difference between "gathered together" and "praying". They came together to be together in their thoughts about Peter, "and were praying" at that gathering, but not necessarily every minute of the night. The powerful lesson is that even these highly committed believers were of limited faith- for when the answer to their night of prayer knocked at the door, they laughed at anyone who thought such an

answer was possible. We too must ask whether we pray in the real hope of answer; or whether our praying is more for our benefit.

12:13 *And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer-* Probably a Gentile name, perhaps reflecting her origin from Rhodes. We have a hint here of how Gentiles were already amongst the inner circle of the early church; and how they had more faith than their senior Jewish brethren. In any case, we find another similarity with the Lord's resurrection- that it was a woman who first believed in His deliverance from the iron gates of death, whilst the senior apostles didn't believe and mocked her as mad, just as they did Mary Magdalene. In :15 we will read that "*she confidently affirmed that it was so*". The only other time this Greek word occurs is again in Luke's writing, when describing how the girl in the courtyard confidently affirmed that Peter was Peter (Lk. 22:59). For me, this clinches the identity of that girl with Rhoda. Her perception is contrasted with the lack of perception of the church elders. Rhoda appears here "at the door of the gate"; and the very same Greek term is used in Mt. 26:71 of how the servant girl "in the porch" recognized Peter. She knew Peter's voice, and although she hadn't seen him [because she didn't open the gate], on the strength of that recognition of his voice, she told the others that Peter had arrived. Yet at the time of Peter's denials, it was his distinctive voice with his Galilean accent which betrayed him. So again she recognizes his voice. And she "told everyone" that it was Peter- both times.

The connection is clear with Acts 10:17: "While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men that had been sent by Cornelius, having made enquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate". The language of the men of Cornelius 'standing before the gate' and earnestly knocking is precisely the same language as we find in the account of *Peter* knocking at the "door of the gate" after his release from prison: "He came to the house of Mary... there many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a maid named Rhoda came to answer. And when she recognised Peter's voice, she did not open the gate, but in joy ran inside and told everyone that Peter stood before the gate" (Acts 12:12-14). As he stood there, Peter was being put into the shoes of those men who had stood before his gate and knocked. Providence does this in our lives many times, as the Spirit seeks to bind us together in one close-knit body. When the Jewish disciples initially wouldn't let Peter in... he must have seen the similarity with how things could have worked out, had he likewise left those Gentiles outside, holding to the Jewish tradition of not having Gentiles into your home.

The theme of gates is apparent, each with a courtyard behind them. The gates of the prison swung open by the Lord's power. But soon Peter was standing outside another gate, that of the church. And those gates didn't open so quickly, despite a Gentile servant woman [Rhoda, 'the girl from Rhodes'] begging them to open. The contrast is intentional. The church within Mary's house were praying for Peter's release but were blind to the obvious- that he had been released and their prayers had been heard. Just like the disciples in Jerusalem, possibly also in Mary's house, refusing to believe the woman who testified that the Lord had risen. Likewise Gentiles had knocked at the door of Peter's house in Acts 10, and only with difficulty had he opened to them.

The Lord had told Peter that upon this rock, and Peter means 'rock', the church would be built- a clear reference to the mass conversions achieved by Peter at the start of Christianity. And, He had added, the gates of the grave would not overcome it- they would not succeed in keeping the "church" out, the gates of the grave would open before the church. Peter must have wondered what that meant. And the opening

of huge iron gates must have reminded him of that. The opening of the gates in life encourages us that the great and final gate shall be opened, the city of death shall surrender to the church. That is the idea of the gates of the grave not prevailing against the church. But the church had to open its gates to Gentiles, and they were slow to do that. We note that standing before the gates is the place of the beggar (Lk. 16:20 Lazarus at the gate of the rich man; Acts 3:10 the beggar at the Beautiful gate, and often in classical literature). Cornelius stood begging, as it were, before Peter's gate- and he responded. Peter then stands himself before the gate of the church- and eventually, he in turn is allowed in.

12:14 *And when she recognised Peter's voice-* The similarities with Peter's betrayal of the Lord are clear. Again, he is standing at a gate; and again, a servant girl recognizes his voice without clearly seeing him. And she "told everyone" that it was Peter. The parallels are such that we wonder whether Rhoda was in fact the servant girl who recognized Peter by his voice in the High Priest's courtyard. In this case, we have yet another wonderful example of how the Lord works through human weakness and betrayal of His Son; for through that whole shameful incident, that young woman was brought to faith in Christ, as she witnessed the amazing repentance of Peter. It was his weakness and the way he dealt with it which persuaded thousands on the day of Pentecost; and perhaps amongst them was a young Gentile servant girl called Rhoda.

There is clearly allusion to the parable of Jn. 10, where the Lord presents Himself as the good shepherd whose voice is recognized by the gatekeeper, who then opens the gate. Their acceptance of Peter was therefore reflecting their acceptance of the Lord Jesus. For Peter's smiting on the side, 'resurrection' and exit from the gates of death accompanied by Angels all looks ahead to the Lord's resurrection. Peter was representing the Lord Jesus.

She did not open the gate, but in joy ran inside- Another connection with how 'mad' Mary ran to the same disciples with joy that the Lord had been delivered. The similarities are such that we can conclude that this repetition of circumstance was in order to test the disciples; and again they failed, as we do so often.

And told everyone- The language of the great commission, about telling everyone the good news of the Lord's deliverance from the gates of death.

That Peter stood before the gate- The language of the risen Lord standing before the door, about to return, if His followers believed in Him enough (James 5:9).

12:15 *And they said to her: You are mad-* The believers gathered together to hold a prayer meeting for Peter's release. Their prayers were answered; he stood outside, knocking on the door. But they simply didn't believe it. They couldn't conceive their prayer was answered. They mocked poor Rhoda and told her to go back and watch the door and not disturb them any more while they prayed for Peter's release. And having mocked her, they got back on their knees and asked again for his release. We can pray, in faith apparently, but with no very deep faith that the answer in actual reality will happen or may already have been granted.

But she confidently affirmed that it was so- The only other time this Greek word occurs is again in Luke's writing, when describing how the girl in the courtyard confidently affirmed that Peter was Peter (Lk. 22:59). For me, this clinches the identity of that girl with Rhoda; see on :13 *Rhoda*.

And they said: It is his angel- The early church clearly believed in the [Biblical] concept of guardian Angels who represent us and can therefore be understood to appear as us before the court of Heaven.

12:16 *But Peter continued knocking-* Strikingly similar to the appeal to keep on knocking so that the door will be opened (Lk. 11:9,10). The figure of knocking is also used about the Lord Jesus knocking on the door of His church (Lk. 12:36; Rev. 3:20). And thus faithful Peter was to be understood as representative of the risen Lord Jesus, as we have pointed out earlier in this exposition.

And when they had opened, they saw him and were amazed- The strength of the Greek word reflects upon their lack of faith in the prayers they had just been offering. The word is translated "mad" in Mk. 3:21 and 2 Cor. 5:13. The obvious inversion of ideas is in the fact that they had just accused Rhoda of being mad (:15). It was they who were, as it were, mad. This so often happens. We are made to realize how it actually feels to be what we accuse others of. There is an African proverb, often told to warn children not to call each other bad names: "If you call another a cripple, you will become a cripple". This is not simply a case of what goes around coming around. Rather does God want us to enter into relationship with the person we thought badly of, to understand them, and to understand the real import of the words we use and think. And again, Luke is bringing out the similarities with the Lord's resurrection; for the same group of male disciples were "amazed" (s.w.) by the testimony of the women who had met the risen Lord (Lk. 24:22).

12:17 *But he, motioning with the hand to hold their peace, declared to them how* - Paul is twice recorded as doing the same (Acts 13:16; 21:40). Was this a reflection of how he had unconsciously absorbed the example of fisherman Peter and so sought to emulate it? Or was he consciously pretending to Peter's ministry to the Jews- rather than focusing upon being himself and focusing on the very different ministry the Lord had given him?

The Lord had brought him out of the prison- When the Angel 'brought Peter forth out of the prison', this is recorded as "the Lord" (Jesus) doing so. He worked through [one specific?] Angel.

And he said: Tell these things- The women were told by the risen Lord to "tell My brothers...". Here in Acts 12:17 the same Greek words are used by Peter: "Tell these things... to the brothers". Peter felt that his deliverance from prison was like the Lord's resurrection, and perhaps consciously he used the Lord's words to Mary Magdalene. Peter then went "to another place" just as the Lord did on saying those words. He saw that his life was a living out of fellowship with the Lord's mortal experiences, every bit as much as our lives are too. Peter specifically said: "Tell these things to James and to the brothers"- just as the Lord had told the women to go and tell *Peter*, and the brothers. Peter perhaps saw James in the same position as he had been in. From our own experience of faithlessness and weakness, we are able to appear to others.

To James and to the brothers- There seem to be a number of unconscious allusions by Peter back to his own failures- and this is an example. It was an allusion to the women being told to go and shew the news of the resurrection to the brethren *and Peter*, who was then in spiritual crisis. Those words, that fact, was ingrained upon Peter to the point that he unconsciously builds it in to his own words. Here the same Greek words are used by Peter as by the Lord: "Go shew these things... to the brothers". Peter felt that his deliverance from prison was like the Lord's resurrection.

And he departed and went to another place- The way Peter beckons to the disciples to hold their peace, declares how the Lord had brought him out of the prison and death, tells them to go and shew these things to the brethren and then goes "unto another place" is a reflection of the Lord's behaviour after His resurrection (cp. Mt. 28:19). Consciously and unconsciously, confirmed by providence, Peter was living

out the fact he was in Christ; he was showing the risen Lord to men and women by his words and actions.

12:18 *Now as soon as it was day, there was no small anxiety among the soldiers about what had become of Peter-* Again, a similarity with the Lord's resurrection.

12:19 *And when Herod had searched for him and not found him-* This sounds as if Herod personally searched, presumably going to the prison personally.

He examined the guards, and commanded that they should be put to death- This has echoes of the punishment of those entrusted with the murder of Daniel.

And he went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there- Herod had intended to kill Peter because he wanted to please the Jews (:3). But he invested so much in what originally was just a political move, that he became obsessed with it. And now it backfired, he took it so personally that he moved his residence out of Judaea to Caesarea. This is how our human minds degenerate; an insincere decision or policy adopted becomes a personal obsession, and then when we are shown to be fighting against the Lord's way, there is hurt pride which results in destruction.

12:20 *Now Herod was highly displeased with those at Tyre and Sidon-* "highly displeased" translates a Greek term which seems to mean 'to prepare war'. Hence they "asked for peace". The incident naturally recalls the Lord's parable of the mighty King who must be asked for peace, referring to how we must make peace with Him; and again we note that it is Luke who records this (Lk. 14:31). The connection may be to demonstrate that Herod was acting as God; and this is stated in so many words in :22. The way Blastus serves to reconcile Herod and these people would then look forward to the Lord's work between God and man.

They came with one accord to him and having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, they asked for peace- Throughout Scripture, the opposition between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God is highlighted. After the establishment of the first ecclesia in Jerusalem, the Acts record seems to emphasize the pointed conflict between the ecclesia and the world. Being "of one accord" was a hallmark of the early brethren (Acts 1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25); but the world were in "one accord" in their opposition to that united ecclesia (Acts 7:57; 12:20; 18:12; 19:29). The two women of Proverbs both have surface similarities; folly parodies wisdom. Thus the words of the adulteress drip honey and oil (Prov. 5:3), just as those of wisdom do (Prov. 16:24). Rabshakeh promised the Jews an Assyrian Kingdom where everyone sat under their own vine and fig tree- consciously parodying Micah's contemporary prophecies of God's future Kingdom (Is. 36:16 cp. Mic. 4:4). The Assyrian Kingdom was set up as a parody of Solomon's, which was the Kingdom of God (1 Kings 4:25; 2 Chron. 9:8). A glance through the descriptions of the beasts- the Kingdoms of this world- reveals that they are all set up in terms of the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom.

Because their country was fed from the king's country- Tyre and Sidon were city states belonging to Syria, with no agricultural land. They were therefore dependent upon food supplies from Herod's territory. Perhaps the famine of 11:28, or at least, the famines associated with the last days of AD70, led to tensions over food supplies.

12:21 *And upon a set day-* Perhaps a Jewish feast day, or a day of religious significance, upon which Herod wished to present himself as a Divine figure.

Herod dressed himself in Royal apparel- Literally, 'the clothing of the Kingdom'. He was wilfully playing God.

And sat on the throne and delivered an oration to them- In imitation of the Lord sitting on His judgment throne [*bema*] specifically refers to a judgment throne, and giving his verdict as if it were the Lord's.

12:22 *And the people shouted: The voice of a god and not of a man*- They clearly perceived that Herod wished himself to be perceived as Divine, and so they went along with his wish; for they desired peace with him. Roman emperors and leaders frequently presented themselves as Divine figures; and Revelation brings out the tension between accepting Jesus as Lord, and being part of the Roman empire with its cult of emperor worship. We may never go this far in brazen blasphemy, but we are all tempted to 'play God'. And we are also all in situations where at times, folks glorify *us* when the glory needs to go to God; and it is imperative that we remind others of our humanity. Paul and Peter were several times in such situations, and their eagerness to assure others of their humanity was perhaps partly in order to avoid the kind of condemnation which came upon Herod.

12:23 *And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give God the glory*- It would appear that he did not die immediately, because his death is described as through being "eaten by worms", presumably a reference to some kind of cancer. Perhaps this method of death was chosen rather than instant death in order to give him a chance of repentance.

And he was eaten by worms and breathed his last- Not literally. Rather is this the language of the day being used to describe illnesses such as cancer which were not then understood. There should be no surprise, therefore, that the language of the day for mental illness is also used in the Bible. This explains the usage of 'demon possession' in the Gospels.

12:24 *But the word of God grew and multiplied*- The number of converts to the word multiplied- for the same word is repeatedly used in this sense (Acts 6:1,7; 5:14; 9:31; 19:20). Thus "the word of God" is put by metonymy for 'the response to the word of God', as if the word will inevitably bring forth response. We must believe, really and truly, that the word will not return void, but it will accomplish what it is intended to achieve. We are not scattering seed with the vague hope that something might sprout up; we are planting, fully expecting to see a harvest. It's also possible to speculate that the multiplication of God's word might refer to a growth in the availability of the written, inspired word of God in the form of the Gospel records, which were likely starting to appear in written form about this time.

The contrast is surely with how the people had claimed that Herod's voice was the word of God and not of man (:22). Here we see God's extreme sensitivity to attitudes to His word. The point is being made that the mimic of God's word soon fell silent, whereas God's true word grew. Our attitude to God's word in the Bible should reflect His understandable sensitivity to His word; just as we too are sensitive if others pay no attention to what we are saying or our efforts to communicate with them.

12:25 *And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had completed their service*- The AV says that Paul 'fulfilled his ministry'; and he can use the same two words in telling Archippus to ensure that he too fulfils *his* ministry (Col. 4:17). Surely Paul is setting himself up as a pattern, and inviting his brother to follow it. The specific "service" in view was the taking of donations from Antioch to Jerusalem (11:30). Having done this once, it became Paul's desire to do it again, when he attempted to gather donations from Asia for a Jerusalem Poor Fund. The record may be making the point that Paul was in Jerusalem at the time of Peter's deliverance from prison; this experience was intended to cultivate his faith, ready for the times when he would be imprisoned.

Taking with them John whose surname was Mark- The cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). Some changed their Hebrew names into the Latin forms when they went on mission work into the Roman world: Silas became Silvanus, Saul became Paulus,

Joseph Barsabbas became Justus (Acts 1:23); and hence we read of “John, whose other [Latin] name was Mark” (:12,25). We have here an example of becoming all things to all men in our witness to the world.

ACTS CHAPTER 13

13:1 *Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers-* The prophets 'spoke forth' God's word under inspiration, and the teachers relayed, distributed and interpreted this.

Symeon that was called Niger- Perhaps the same person as Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross (Mt. 27:32). Simon is listed here next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd. Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, "called Niger", a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that all His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church.

And Lucius of Cyrene- Perhaps one of the men of Cyrene converted at Pentecost (Acts 2:10) who fled to Antioch from the persecution in Jerusalem.

And Manaen the foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul- The mention of Herod's title was perhaps to demonstrate how the Gospel had spread amongst the elite, and also within the circles of those who had been so bitterly opposed to it. This is a tacit reference to the immense power of the message.

13:2 - see on Acts 18:18.

And as they ministered to the Lord- All spiritual endeavour leads to the Lord inviting

us deeper into that endeavour; thus it was *as* Barnabas and Paul went about their ministering to the Lord that they were invited to go on a missionary journey (Acts 13:2). Likewise it was *as* the Levites were in process of collecting funds for repairing the temple, that they found the book of the law- perhaps because they needed more space in which to store the donations, and whilst making space they found the scroll (2 Chron. 34:14).

And fasted- Perhaps for guidance as to how to further progress the Lord's work. For the response to this fasting was to call Barnabas and Saul to go forth. Have you fasted for such guidance in your own ministry?

The Holy Spirit said: Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul- Paul uses the same word to describe how he had been 'set apart' for his missionary work from before creation (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15). Now the time had come for that ancient plan to be realized. But Paul had the freewill not to respond to it. He was not bound to go forth in his missionary work just because it had been planned from the beginning. There are for each of us good works prepared for us to execute in our lives (Eph. 4:10), but we do them by our own freewill. There are many such works, and many individuals, who do not respond. And in this must be the tragedy of God; that He has arranged the potential for us to perform or achieve much for Him, which is not performed because of our dysfunction or unbelief. We are never better than when we are fluently responding, open to God's intentions for us, and sensing His willing us forward in the service He intended for us.

For the work- Paul appropriates the words of Hab. 1:5 LXX to his work of preaching: "I *work a work* in your days, which ye will in no wise believe though *a man* declare it unto you". And so when we read of the *men* Barnabas and Saul being sent out on the *work* of the first missionary journey, we are to see an allusion back to Hab. 1:5 (Acts 13:2; 14:26). And yet that passage went on to say that the work would not be believed. Yet hoping against hope, they embarked on the missionary journey. Cyprus didn't respond, initially- as they had expected. But soon their positive spirit was rewarded, and converts were made, against all odds.

Unto which I have called them- In Acts 16:10, the same word is used of how Paul proved or concluded that he had been called to preach the Gospel to Gentiles. The implication could be that he somehow doubted his calling- he would far rather have been the apostle to the Jews. Later in this exposition I seek to demonstrate that Paul struggled with his calling as the apostle to the Gentiles, preferring rather to fill Peter's role. The parable of the talents suggests the Lord has specific hopes and callings for each of us, and man is never better than when he is working at those callings with the Lord's every support and blessing.

13:3 *Then, when they had fasted and prayed-* It was as they did those things that the Lord opened the way for Barnabas and Saul to depart on their missionary journey. Yet the process continued. This is the spirit in which we should live life in His service.

And laid their hands on them, they sent them away- The next verse says that they were "sent forth by the Holy Spirit" (:4), thus drawing a parallel between the "prophets and teachers" in Antioch and the Holy Spirit. Whilst we do not have the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, it is also so that we are to walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25), following the Lord's leading in His service. The laying hands upon the missionaries may therefore have been more than simply expressing unity with them, but could have been a granting of Holy Spirit to them, empowering them for the task ahead of them. In the Old Testament, hands were laid upon the sacrificial animals as a sign of identity, and we should not think that every 'laying on of hands' was in order

to impart a blessing of Holy Spirit power; it was also simply an act of identity with the person.

13:4 *So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit-* See on :3.

Went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus- Judaism spoke of going up to Jerusalem and going down from it. But that concept is now transferred to Antioch, the centre of the early Christian mission at this time. This is another hint that Jerusalem was no longer the 'mecca' of God's people.

From Seleucia, Cyprus would have been visible from there on a clear day. So far as we know, the Holy Spirit had stated that there was a specific work for Barnabas, Saul and John Mark to do; but it's unclear to what extent they had to work out the plans and itinerary on their own initiative. Seeing that Cyprus was visible from Seleucia, it might have seemed the obvious first destination in an attempt to take the Gospel over the seas. And Barnabas was from there; perhaps they concluded that this was the logical overseas destination for the Gospel.

13:5- see on Acts 4:24-30.

And when they were at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God- Literally, the *logos* of God, which is the Lord Jesus. "The word of God" was a common Old Testament term for the prophetic word spoken through the prophets, but that had now come to a climax in the word about Jesus.

In the synagogues of the Jews- The movement of the Spirit was clearly for Saul to go "far hence unto the Gentiles", but he immediately begins his missionary work on arrival at the capital, Salamis, as he sadly continued it- with a stubborn obsession with preaching to the Jews, when this was Peter's work.

They had also John to assist them- Gk. 'to be their minister'. There was typically a minister or assistant attached to the synagogues, and so the impression may be that Saul and Barnabas were effectively taking over as the rabbis of the synagogues, and John Mark was their minister. Or perhaps the idea is that Saul preached as a Rabbi, and John Mark was his minister.

13:6 *And when they had gone through the whole island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet-* Perhaps to point out that the predictions of Luke 21 about the scenario in the last days was being fulfilled. He claimed to be "Bar Jesus", literally 'son of Jesus'; perhaps he actually purported to be the returned Jesus. Such a false Christ and false prophet surely met the terms of the Olivet Prophecy; again we see that the conditions were ripe for the Lord's return, but He didn't come because the human factors failed. Israel didn't repent, and the church became divided and lacking the Spirit. We must ask whether our last days will be different.

A Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus- Again we sense the focus, if not obsession, with engaging with Jews; see on :5.

13:7 *Who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of understanding-* See on 13:12 *The proconsul... believed.*

The same summoned Barnabas and Saul, and sought to hear the word of God- We can speculate that through Sergius Paulus trying to get the preachers into trouble with the proconsul, the Gospel was preached on a high level and with success. For Elymas was "with" Sergius Paulus, as if he had influence over him; and therefore under this influence, Sergius Paulus summoned the missionaries. But the plan of Elymas badly backfired; encouragement that no weapon formed against the work of the Gospel will ultimately succeed.

13:8 *But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) opposed them-* The scene is reminiscent of Satan, the Arabic adversary of the Jews, standing before the Angel with Joshua-Jesus the priest standing on the other (Zech. 3:1,2). The

impression is given of the proconsul being preached to by Paul, whilst Elymas tried to persuade him otherwise. The similarity is appropriate because "Elymas" appears to be an Arabic word, from the Arabic *elim*, 'the wise', and he was likely an Arab. The scene also recalls the Egyptian magicians 'opposing' Moses before Pharaoh.

Seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith- The same Greek word is found in :10, where Elymas is accused of 'perverting' the "right ways of the Lord". The word seems to specifically mean to misinterpret; we have the impression that as Paul preached to the proconsul, Elymas stood there eagerly saying 'Ah, but what they really mean by that is *this*...'. These two verses state that both the listener [Sergius Paulus] and the message were 'perverted'. The listener is thus identified with the message; as in the parable of the sower, the Gospel takes lodgement within a person, and they become identified with it.

13:9 *But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fastened his eyes on him-* It can be no accident that Saul appears to have changed his name to 'Paul', "the little one", at the time of his first missionary journey. His preaching of the Gospel was thus related to his own realization of sinfulness, as reflected in his name change. And so it has ever been. Saul becomes Paul in so many lives. True self-abnegation, recognition of our moral bankruptcy, our desperation, and the extent of the grace we have received... these two paradoxical aspects, fused together within the very texture of human personality, are what will arrest the attention of others in this world and lead them to the Truth we can offer them.

Saul and Paul

Various expositors have noticed the links between Saul and Paul. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" was directly matched by 'Is Saul of Tarsus also among the Christians?'. The way Paul was let down through a window to escape persecution was surely to remind him of what King Saul had done to David (1 Sam. 19:12). They were both Benjamites, and perhaps his parents saw him as following in Saul's footsteps. And it seems Paul was aware of this. The implication is that by Acts 13:9 Paul consciously changed his name from Saul to Paul ('the little one'). It is difficult to avoid seeing the link with 1 Sam. 15:17: "When thou wast little (Heb. 'the littlest one') in thine own sight", God anointed Saul and made him the *rosh*, the chief, over Israel. Maybe Paul's parents intended him to be the *rosh* over Israel; and it seems he would have made it had he not been converted. I suggest that 1 Sam. 15:17 rung in Paul's mind. He saw how he had persecuted Christ, as Saul had David. He saw the self-will within him as it was in Saul. Yet he went on to see the tragedy, the utter tragedy, of that man. He saw how pride had destroyed a man who could have achieved so much for God. And he determined that he would learn the lesson from Saul's failure (as he determined to learn the lessons from those of John the Baptist and Peter). So he changed his name to Paul, the little one. What influence his sustained meditation on one Old Testament verse had upon him! It affected some basic decisions in his life; e.g. the decision to change his name. There was a time, according to the Hebrew text of 1 Sam. 15:17, when Saul felt he was 'the littlest one' (as demonstrated in 1 Sam. 9:21; 10:22). This was so, so pleasing to God. Saul at that moment, captured as it were in a snapshot, as the obvious, anointed King of Israel hid among the baggage, knowing in his heart he was no way suited to be the leader of God's Israel, was Paul's hero. And Paul alludes to it when he says he is less than the *least* of all saints, *least* of the apostles, chief of sinners (1 Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:15- note the progressive realisation of his sinfulness over time). He earnestly resolved to be like Saul was at the beginning. When he describes himself as "anointed" (2 Cor. 1:21) he surely had his eye on 1

Sam. 15:17 again; when Saul was little in his own eyes, he was anointed. Paul tried to learn the lessons from Saul, and re-apply Saul's characteristics in a righteous context. Thus Saul was jealous (1 Sam. 18:8; 19:1), and Paul perhaps had his eye on this when he describes himself as jealous for the purity of the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:2). "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19) is surely a reference back to Saul's *disobedience* (1 Sam. 15:22).

13:10 *And said, You son of the devil*- The Jewish religious leaders were "of your father the Devil" (Jn. 8:44). This would explain the Lord's description of Judas as a Devil (Jn. 6:70) because the Jewish Devil had entered him and conceived, making him a 'Devil' also. In the space of a few verses, we read the Lord Jesus saying that "the Devil" is a "liar" – and then stating that His Jewish opponents were "liars" (Jn. 8:44,55). These are the only places where the Lord uses the word "liar" – clearly enough He identified those Jews with "the Devil". If the Jews' father was the Devil, then 'the Devil' was a fitting description of them too. They were a "generation of (gendered by) vipers", alluding back to the serpent in Eden, which epitomized "the Devil"; "that old serpent, called (i.e. being similar to) the Devil and Satan" (Rev. 12:9). In the same way as Judas became a Devil, the "false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus" is called a "son of the Devil" (Acts 13:6,10), which description makes him an embodiment of the Jewish opposition to the Gospel.

"You son of the Devil" is implying he was a tare sown among the wheat (Mt. 13:38).

You enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and all villainy, will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?- Just as the preaching of the Gospel was to make straight paths for the Messiah to come (Lk. 3:4), so we are to make *our* paths straight (Heb. 12:13)- as if somehow we are the Lord Jesus; His revelation to this world at the second coming will in a sense be our revelation. Hence the final visions of Revelation speak of the Lord's second coming in terms which are applicable to the community of those in Him [e.g. a city of people coming down from Heaven to earth]. John's preaching was in order to make [s.w. 'to bring forth fruit'] His [the Lord's] paths straight- but the ways of the Lord are "right" [s.w. "straight"] anyway (Acts 13:10). So how could John's preaching make the Lord's ways straight / right, when they already are? God is so associated with His people that their straightness or crookedness reflects upon Him; for they are His witnesses in this world. His ways are their ways. This is the N.T. equivalent of the O.T. concept of keeping / walking in the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; 2 Kings 21:22). Perhaps this is the thought behind the exhortation of Heb. 12:13 to make straight paths for our own feet. We are to bring our ways into harmony with the Lord's ways; for He is to be us, His ways our ways. Thus Is. 40:3, which is being quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the Lord*", whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the people*". Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25).

"The right ways" is literally, the straight streets. The same word is used of the street called "Straight" where Paul was baptized (Acts 9:11). That street was chosen in order to demonstrate to Paul how his new life was to be walked along a straight way or street, towards the Kingdom; remembering how John the Baptist's mission had been to make straight [s.w.] the Lord's paths or roads (Mt. 3:3).

13:11 *And now, the hand of the Lord is upon you and you shall be blind*- This foreshadowed how the rejected will be sent to a mist of darkness (2 Pet. 2:17). Thick darkness is associated with God's judgment (Is. 8:22; Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15)- and recall how the judgment of darkness upon Egypt was so severe that human movement

required 'groping' (Ex. 10:21). Perhaps there will be a literal element to this in the experience of the rejected. Be that as it may, the utter *pointlessness* of life without God will be so bitterly apparent. And yet they would not face up to it in their day of opportunity.

Not seeing the sun for a time. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking someone to lead him by the hand- It is possible that this was so that he had to be led by the hand (Acts 13:11); it is all so reminiscent of Paul's own experience in 9:8 that it would seem he was consciously seeking to replicate his own conversion in the life of another man. And this is, indeed, the very essence of preaching from a grateful heart. He saw the power that worked in Him as working in all of us (Eph. 3:7,20). Paul wishes that the Colossians would be "filled with the knowledge of his will" (Col. 1:9), just as at his conversion he had been chosen so "that you should know his will" (Acts 22:14). He wanted them to share the radical nature of conversion which he had gone through; the sense of life turned around; of new direction.

13:12 *Then the proconsul, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord-* Paul's name change from Saul to Paul occurred whilst in Cyprus- where he met Sergius Paulus and preached the Gospel to him (Acts 13:7). It would seem that Paul took the name of this Gentile to represent how his work with the Gentiles had become so fundamentally a part of him. From there, Paul went to Antioch and preached there. Why did he do that? Bruce Chilton has pointed out that there is archaeological evidence in Antioch that Sergius Paulus of Cyprus was in fact from there and there are plaques and inscriptions recording how he had funded things in the town (Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Random House, 2005) p. 117). The guess is that this man became Paul's patron for a while, and sent him to preach the Gospel to his family in Antioch; hence, as the custom was, Saul of Tarsus took the name of his patron. And perhaps reflecting upon how this was all so providential in spreading the Gospel to the Gentiles, Saul kept that name. The providence of the situation becomes the more interesting when we reflect that as a Roman Governor, bound to perform pagan rituals and be loyal to Caesar, Sergius Paulus may never himself have accepted the faith. The way John Mark returned to Jerusalem at this point (Acts 13:13) may simply be because he considered that all this was too much- following what appeared to be a whim of chance and calling it God's hand. For Antioch [not Antioch on the Orontes] was in the backwoods of Asia Minor, and it would've seemed crazy to go into such a distant and insignificant area all because of a 'chance' meeting with a generous Roman Governor.

13:13- see on Acts 6:1.

Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John left them and returned to Jerusalem- John Mark was an example of one 'brought up in it' (almost) who made it real for himself in the very end. His mother Mary owned the home where the first ecclesia met in Jerusalem- he would have known all the leading lights, the doubts, the joys, the fears, the debates of the early church. Barnabas was his kindly uncle, who took him on the first missionary journey with Paul. Cyprus was OK, but once they landed at Perga, Paul insisted on leaving the coast road and going up the dangerous road to preach on the uplands; and Mark quit, scared perhaps to risk his life that far. And so he went back to his mum in Jerusalem, and the safety of the home ecclesia. And no doubt he was warmly welcomed home, as the Jerusalem ecclesia by then were beginning to consider Paul as apostate. But over

the months, things changed. John Mark wanted to go again, and his uncle Barnabas encouraged him. But Paul would have none of it. That rejection must have sorely hurt Mark; and we hear nothing more of him for about 15 years. Then, when Paul was in prison, he starts to get mentioned. He is called there Paul's "fellow-prisoner" (Col. 4:10), as if he too had been imprisoned for his bold preaching. To Philemon, Paul writes that Mark is his "fellow-worker"; and in his last days, he begs Mark to come and see him (2 Tim. 4:9-11). Peter also, probably writing likewise from Rome ["Babylon"] mentions Mark as his "son" (1 Pet. 5:13), and tradition has it that Mark wrote down Peter's Gospel. So the young brother who possibly had been made flabby by the nice background, eventually made it real for himself in the end.

13:14 *But they, passing through from Perga, came to Antioch of Pisidia; and they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day-* This again sounds as if this focus upon the Jews was customary for Paul. And yet the work to which he had been called by the Holy Spirit was specifically to the Gentiles (:2). But in tension with that, Paul's obsession with Israel comes out repeatedly. Maybe this has something to do with how this verse opens with "But...".

And sat down- The cameraman is as it were zoomed up close upon them. Or perhaps the significance of their 'sitting down' was that they sat down as if they were members of Judaism, exercising their rights.

13:15 *And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent for them, saying-* The synagogues read the Law and prophets according to a reading planner, rather like *The Bible Companion*. Paul's opening words refer to Dt. 1:31 LXX, which was the lesson for the 44th Sabbath in the year, around July / August; the corresponding second lesson from "the prophets" for that Sabbath was from Is. 1:1-27, from which Paul also quotes when he alludes to Is. 1:2 LXX.

Brothers- They treat Paul as if he is one of them. The invitation to give such a major discourse could have been because Paul purposefully gave the impression that he was still an orthodox thinking Jewish rabbi- see on *And sat down* (:14). Much of the Jewish anger with Paul was because he later turned out to not be Judaist any longer, despite giving that impression in order to get an audience with them. If he had focused on his Divinely given mission to the Gentiles, he wouldn't have got into all these kinds of problems.

If you have any word of encouragement for the people, speak- 'Barnabas' meant 'Son of encouragement', so it would seem likely that the synagogue elders knew of his presence and were kindly alluding to it. One wonders if [contrary to what I have just suggested above] these elders were in fact Messianic believers in Jesus, or at least sympathetic to that Way. That would explain the rather odd description of them 'sending' [*apostello*] to Paul and Barnabas to give a word of encouragement to the congregation. Perhaps there was a veiled allusion to the Lord Jesus being the consolation [s.w. 'encouragement'] of Israel (Lk. 2:25).

13:16 *And Paul stood up and beckoning with the hand, said-* The same words used about Peter (Acts 12:17). Luke seems to be developing the parallels between Paul and Peter; but it is also possible that Paul is emulating Peter.

You men of Israel and you that fear God- Referring to the 'God fearers', the Gentile proselytes. Paul's sensitivity to this group may be reflected in his opening reference to "this people" rather than 'our people'; we can imagine Paul saying this whilst looking at the benches where the Gentile proselytes were sitting. Paul also directs his words to the Jews, by speaking of "our fathers"; thus modelling for us an inclusive approach in our witness and teaching.

Listen- The idea of the Greek is an appeal to understand, to 'get it'. The early brethren preached looking for a response. They were preaching toward decision, for conversion. The Lord taught us that He will make His followers fishers of men; and fishers catch something, they aren't fishermen if they just offer a bait indifferently. Paul taught that his hearers should repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance (Acts 26:20). The address in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia has three parts, each marked by an appeal to the listeners. Clearly it has been planned in advance, and was an appeal for response (Acts 13:16,26,38). These preachers weren't shy in asking men and women to decide for or against the love of God in Jesus. They challenged men to do something about the message they had heard.

13:17 *The God of this people Israel chose our fathers-* Paul's entire speech is based upon Stephen's in Acts 7 [see commentary there]. It was that witness from Stephen which had converted Saul / Paul; and he reflects that fact by likewise witnessing to others.

And exalted the people when they sojourned in the land of Egypt, and with a high arm He led them out of it- The prophets are clear that Israel worshipped idols in Egypt, and were not very responsive to God's salvation plans for them. The reference to exalting them therefore draws attention to God's grace towards Israel.

13:18 *For about the time of forty years-* See on :19 *About four hundred and fifty years.*

As a nursing father He carried them in the wilderness- Another reading is 'He suffered their manners in the wilderness' [as AV]. This would again be drawing attention to God's patient grace towards His people. But the allusion to Dt. 1:31 LXX encourages us to follow the 'As a nursing father' option. The idea of a father carrying and feeding his baby child is one which creates sympathy for the father; and Paul may have this in mind. For he was going on to appeal to Israel to consider that they had slain God's only begotten Son.

13:19 *And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan-* There were ten nations in the land (Gen. 15:19-21), but seven of them were destroyed (Dt. 7:1). This combination of ten and seven is repeated throughout the descriptions of the latter day beast dominating the land of Israel with seven heads and ten horns (Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 17:3,7). I suggest that this means that not all of the ten horns will conflict with Israel; perhaps only seven of the ten nation confederacy dominating latter day Israel will be destroyed.

He gave them their land for an inheritance, for about four hundred and fifty years- There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1, which gives four hundred and eighty years, although the LXX there says 440- hence "about 450 years"). Sometimes the Bible is not precise. Under inspiration, the Hebrew writer seems to have forgotten the exact quotation, or to have been deliberately vague, when he speaks of "one in a certain place testified" (Heb. 2:6). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11); three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). And 1 Kings 7:23 gives the circumference of the laver as "thirty cubits", although it was ten cubits broad. Taking 'pi' to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, "thirty". Surely this is to show that God is God, not man. His word is not contradictory, but in ensuring this, God does not sink down to the level of a man who wanted to produce an apparently faultless book, carefully ensuring that every figure exactly tallied. He has a spiritual culture much higher than this. And this is

behind the many Bible paradoxes which we meet. The reading of the AV suggests judges were given for a period of about 450 years. Other readings are as in the NEV. Significantly, the period from the call of Abraham to the death of Joshua was likewise 450 years, suggesting that God works according to a plan and structures 'ages' according to a masterplan which climaxed in His Son (Heb. 1:1,2).

13:20 *And after these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet-* The judges all made the deliverances they did because they themselves made the effort to deliver Israel. But their freewill was worked through by God, who raised up or "gave them" these judges. Here again we see the perfect synthesis between Divine will and human freewill.

13:21 *And afterwards they asked for a king; and God gave to them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin-* God responds to human desire, even if the desire is wrong. He gives us our heart's desire. And all the desire of Israel was upon Saul (1 Sam. 9:20). This is something more than a deep respect for human freewill on God's part. The fact is that we are confirmed in our desires; those who love the things of God's Kingdom above all else shall surely be there. If a place in the Kingdom is truly "all our hope and desire", it shall be granted. "All them that love His appearing" and in their hearts long and wait for Him- shall not be disappointed. This feature of God's dealings with men means that spiritual mindedness is of uppermost importance. What we really desire in our heart of hearts, our dominant desire, shall be granted. And God gave them a King whom He foreknew and told Israel would be bad for them. But He respected their desire.

For the space of forty years- The OT doesn't mention how long Saul reigned. Paul inserts this detail perhaps to demonstrate how God had given Israel various periods of testing and opportunity- for in :18 he mentions that they were 40 years in the wilderness. The period is realistic because Saul's son was 40 when he was placed on the throne when Saul died (2 Sam. 2:10).

13:22 *And when He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, to whom also He bare witness and said: I have found David the son of Jesse-* The 'removal' was when God 'raised up' David. But that point was some time before Saul's death. God makes a plan, decrees a course of action, but there is often a gap until it is fulfilled. He thus describes Himself as both planning and fulfilling His plans. That gap is perhaps to enable repentance even at an apparently late stage.

A man after My own heart, who shall do all My will- Perhaps David was only after God's own heart at the time Samuel anointed him? David was, in God's opinion, a man after His own heart, who fulfilled all His will. Yet this is the God whose ways are not, and cannot be, ours. Yet this is how humble He is, and how positive His view of a faithful servant. We also note that not all men do [or "fulfil"] God's will. He searches for and 'finds' men who will. God's will is revealed in His word- which is why attention to the Bible is so important. The Lord Jesus is often described as the one who did the Father's will (the same Greek words are used- Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 9:31).

13:23 *Of this man's seed-* The false doctrine of the physical 'pre-existence' of Christ before birth makes a nonsense of the repeated promises that he would be the descendant of Eve, Abraham and David. The early preachers emphasized that Jesus was "of David's posterity" [Gk. *spermatis*- Acts 2:29-31; 13:23; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8]. If He were already existing up in heaven at the time of these promises, God would have been incorrect in promising these people a descendant who *would be* Messiah.

Has God according to His promise- The promise to David is not specifically cited here. What has just been quoted is God's comment upon David, that he would fulfil all His will, seeing he would have the mind of God. Perhaps Paul took this as meaning that as David was imperfect, therefore that comment was effectively a promise that a seed of David would fulfil the requirements of having the mind of God [which Paul says the Lord Jesus did, in Phil. 2] and fulfilling God's will- which the Lord did to an ultimate extent (the same Greek words are used about Him- Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 9:31). Ezekiel's prophecies about "David" ruling over God's people at the restoration clearly mean 'one of the seed of David', and Paul may be reasoning in the same way here.

Raised up to Israel a Saviour, Jesus- This 'raising up' of Jesus began at the end of John's ministry (:24) and therefore doesn't specifically refer to the Lord's resurrection, although there is clearly the hint of that too.

13:24 *After John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance-* Paul's mention of John in Acts 13:24,25 apparently adds nothing to his argument; it seems out of context. But it surely indicates the degree to which John was never far below the surface in Paul's thinking. Having been raised in Jerusalem, surely Paul as a young man would have heard John's preaching. It was the source of the goads against which he later kicked. Paul alluded to some parts of the Gospels much more than others, and an example of this is the way in which he alluded so extensively to the passages related to John the Baptist. I would suggest that the reason for this is that he saw John as somehow his hero, one for whom he had a deep respect. In doing so he was sharing the estimation of his Lord, who also saw John as one of the greatest believers. There are many 'unconscious' links between Paul's writings and the records of John, indicating how deeply the example and words of John were in Paul's mind (e.g. Mt. 3:7 = 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Jn. 3:31 = 1 Cor. 15:47). Or consider how John said that wicked Jewry would be "hewn down" (Mt. 3:10); Paul uses the very same word to describe how the Jewish branches had now been "cut off" (Rom. 11:22,24). Paul saw himself as being like the best man, who had betrothed the believers to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2,3)- just as John had described himself as the friend of the bridegroom (Jn. 3:28).

To all the people of Israel- This usage of "all" is hardly literal. If John's witness was counted as reaching "all Israel", we can understand the fulfilment of the great commission as likewise meaning that the Gospel must go to *people from* all nations, rather than to every individual.

As John preached repentance with a deep sense of his own unworthiness, so did Paul, with exactly that same sense (Acts 13:24,25 = 17:3; 20:21; 26:20).

13:25 *And as John was fulfilling his ministry, he said: Who do you suppose I am? I am not he! But look, there comes one after me-* It could be argued that John's ministry failed, in that people did not widely accept Jesus as Messiah but crucified Him. John's ministry was as children sitting in the marketplace appealing for Israel to mourn, but they would not. And yet John played the part he was called to play, and in this sense he fulfilled his ministry. Many ministries or lives may appear to have failed, but actually the believer played their part and fulfilled their ministry. The response of others, or success or failure of response to our message, doesn't of itself indicate whether we fulfilled our ministry or not.

The shoes of whose feet I am not worthy to untie- To untie another's sandals was an idiom for being his forerunner or herald. So John is not denying that he was the one who untied the Lord's sandals- but he is saying that he was not worthy to do the

work he did. This is exactly the kind of humility to be associated with all witness work.

13:26 *Brothers, children of the stock of Abraham, and those among you that fear God, to us-* Here, and several times in this sermon, Paul seems to be repeating Peter's style of 3:17. He was deeply impressed by Peter; the question is whether he followed his example out of humble deference, or partly because he pretended to Peter's chosen role as the apostle to the Jews.

Is the word of this salvation sent- 'The *logos* of this Jesus'. That the Lord Jesus personally is in view here is confirmed by the next verse talking of how the Jews "knew Him not" and 'condemned Him' (:27). The personal pronoun is usually used after the person has been defined. The 'he' in verse 27 clearly refers to Jesus; and so the reference to Him is surely here in :26 in the phrase "the word of this salvation". Acts 10:36 speaks of the Lord Jesus as the word sent from God.

13:27 Consider the intensity of allusion to the records of Christ's death and resurrection in Acts 13:27-38:

Acts	Gospels
13:27	Lk. 24:27
13:28	Mt. 27:72; Mk. 15:13
13:29	Mt. 27:59
13:30	Mt. 28:6
13:38	Lk. 24:47

Thus Paul's early recorded preaching was basically a commentary on the Gospel records of Christ's death and resurrection (as was Peter's).

For they that dwell in Jerusalem and their rulers- This phrase is used in Acts about those responsible for the Lord's death who then repented (Acts 1:19; 2:5,14; 4:16). This group are therefore being held up as an example to the Jews in the synagogue where Paul was preaching.

Because they knew Him not, nor the voices of the prophets- Jesus personally is paralleled with the word of the prophets; for as explained under :26 *The word of this salvation*, Jesus is being presented as the word of the Jewish prophets made flesh. Paul was preaching just after the reading of the prophets- and he was seeking to persuade his audience that the words just read had become flesh in the person of Jesus. He speaks of their "voices" rather than merely their words. They had heard the words, but not felt and perceived that these were the actual voices of men who being dead yet speak. They didn't *feel* the wonder of inspiration in their attitude to Bible study- even though they would have devoutly upheld the position that the Bible texts were inspired. And here we have a lesson for ourselves. See Rom. 9:27; Jn. 5:39.

Which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him- Paul was preaching at a time when the voices of the prophets had just been read in the synagogue- he was appealing to his audience to be different from the respected Jerusalem Jews, who had heard the same readings read, and yet condemned God's Son to death. Paul was ever quick to press home the similarities between his present audience and previous precedents.

13:28 *And though they found no cause of death in Him-* Saul / Paul would have taken intense legal interest in the trial. He was fully aware that in fact they did claim that there was a cause for death; He was "guilty of death" for blasphemy (Mt. 26:66), and on this legal basis they asked Pilate to execute Him: "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die" (Jn. 19:7). Paul says the opposite- that they found no cause of death in Him. Paul is not making any mistake here- rather is he correctly reading the hearts of the Jews. They knew there was no cause of death in Jesus- although they

said that there was. Paul is seeking to demonstrate that the voice of inner knowledge and conscience is so easily overridden by group think, by psychological obsession rooted in jealousy, by the power of conservatism, the terror of realizing we have been seriously wrong, the desperate clinging to pride... And he realized that the same subconscious psychological battle was going on in the minds of those listening to him. And he warns them through drawing attention to those who had likewise refused to accept Jesus as Messiah.

They asked Pilate to have him slain- The Greek means to earnestly beg. The only other three occurrences of this idea of 'begging Pilate' are all about Joseph begging Pilate for the Lord's body (Mt. 27:58; Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:52). Yet Joseph was a Sanhedrin counsellor, one of those who had condemned the Lord to death- for although he didn't agree with it, the Sanhedrin decision was unanimous (Mk. 14:64). So Joseph was one of those who on face value begged Pilate to crucify the Lord; and yet also begged Pilate for His body, something only done by closest family, and a sign of Joseph's public identification with Jesus and His cause. This continues the theme developed in commentary on the first half of this verse :28. A person can say or do something when in fact their inner convictions are otherwise. Both Joseph and the Jerusalem leadership knew in their hearts that Jesus was innocent and actually the Messiah. But they acted otherwise. Paul is speaking here to Jews assembled in synagogue. He knew there were many similarly struggling hearts before him in the audience, and his use of psychology and history in making his appeal is masterful.

13:29 *And when they had fulfilled all things that were written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb-* The "they" who did this amounts to Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, whom I have argued in commentary on :28 were in Paul's mind in his flow of thought at this point.

13:30 *But God raised him from the dead-* This is a bald statement of fact. Paul gives no evidence; and he is not recorded here as mentioning the obvious fact that he himself had met the risen Jesus on the Damascus road. This would be another example of where evidence is not required for faith; the simple facts of the Gospel are powerful of themselves to persuade the hearers.

13:31 *And he was seen for many days by those that came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people-* It is worth putting together two passages, both from Luke: "The women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after..." (Lk. 23:55); and Acts 13:30,31: "God raised him from the dead and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses". Surely Paul and Luke have in mind here the ministering women. They had followed from Galilee to Jerusalem, the risen Lord had appeared to a woman first of all, and now those women were witnessing to the people. Perhaps 1 Cor. 15:3-7 is relevant here, where we read that the Lord appeared after His resurrection to the twelve, and yet on another occasion to "all the apostles"- perhaps referring to the group that included the women. An empty tomb was no proof that Jesus of Nazareth had risen- unless there were witnesses there present at that empty tomb who could testify also that it was in that very tomb that Jesus had been laid. And only women, not men, were witnesses of this. The Greek world placed great emphasis upon sight- "Eyes are surer witnesses than ears", Heraclitus said. They related to the past visually; for a group of people to be eyewitnesses was considered conclusive. Hence the enormous significance of the way in which the Gospels repeatedly make the women the subjects of verbs of seeing (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:49,55). They were the eyewitnesses.

13:32 *We bring you good news*- The Gospel is stated to be in the promises made to the Jewish fathers, just as Paul states in Gal. 3:8. The good news, or Gospel, was strictly speaking in the fulfilment of the promises, through the resurrection of Christ. It is a knowledge of that reality, rather than of the wording of the ancient promises of it, which is the essence of the Gospel.

Of the promise made to the fathers- Paul saw a singular promise as having been made to all the Jewish fathers; and it had its fulfilment in the Lord's resurrection.

13:33 *That God has fulfilled the same*- There was a degree to which the promises to Abraham were fulfilled in the Lord's resurrection. This is not to say that they have no fuller realization in the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth in the future. But their fulfilment in the Lord's resurrection was surely in that the promised "blessing" to all peoples was actualized through that event; for the "blessing" is interpreted in Acts 3:25,26 and Galatians 3 as the spiritual blessing of forgiveness and grace. And here in :34 we have an explicit connection made between the Lord's resurrection and "blessings".

To our children- AV "To us their children". If the other textual reading is correct, are we to suppose that Paul had children?

In that He resurrected Jesus. As also it is written in the second Psalm: You are My Son, this day have I begotten you- This text has multiple fulfilments in the New Testament; proof enough that prophetic fulfilments are not singular. Bible prophecy can have multiple fulfilments.

13:34 *And as for the fact that He raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken in this way: I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David*- See on 13:33 *God has fulfilled the same*. The blessings associated with David are surely the blessings of grace and forgiveness; for he speaks of himself in reflecting "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity" (Ps. 32:1), and this is applied to all who believe in Christ in Romans 4. The quotation is from Is. 55:3, which offers the returning exiles a new covenant of forgiveness and radical, gracious acceptance- described as "the sure blessings [LXX] of David". That new covenant was spurned by Judah, and yet can be accepted by us today. It could be that Paul and Isaiah are using "David" in the way it is used in the restoration prophecies of Ezekiel and in Jer. 30:9, where it refers to David's promised Son, the Messiah. Or it could be that the blessings of David refer to the promise made to him of Messiah, whose eternal Kingdom on earth would only be possible through the extension of grace and mercy to those who would inhabit it. The 'setting up' of David's seed in resurrection was part of the blessings of David, and so these blessings can be said to have come true on account of the Lord's resurrection.

Not seeing corruption was humanly achieved by the huge amount of spices used in the burial of the Lord Jesus. Some have complained that the weight of spices was more than even used to bury the Caesars. This extravagant freewill outpouring of love and respect for the crucified Lord was therefore the way the Father used to fulfil His prophetic word.

13:35 *Because He said also in another Psalm: You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption*- Paul's reasoning and usage of Psalm 16 is identical to that of Peter in his Pentecost address in Acts 2:29-31. There is good reason to think that Paul heard that speech live; and it was one of the goads in his conscience which the Lord asked him to stop going against. Paul's humility is seen in the way that he learned from fisherman Peter, and had clearly reflected upon Peter's line of argument.

13:36 *For David, after he had in his own generation served the will of God, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers, and saw corruption*- The AV suggests that David

served his own generation, according to God's will. We wonder why Paul mentioned this. Perhaps the idea is as expressed in Hebrews- that the Lord Jesus serves not only one generation because of his mortality; rather, His resurrection to immortality makes Him the eternal "servant" of all generations. The Lord had had to remind the Jews that David was inferior to Messiah, because Judaism had a tendency to reason that Moses and David were in any case greater than the Messiah figure (Lk. 20:44). Paul does the same here, pointing out the inferiority of David to Messiah.

13:37 *But he whom God raised up saw no corruption-* As noted on :36, the superiority of Messiah over David had to be emphasized to a Jewish audience. The 'not seeing corruption' does not have to refer to the Lord's physical body being somehow preserved from corruption by embalming. He saw / experienced no corruption after His resurrection because He was immortalized. Psalm 16 expresses David's personal hope of resurrection out of the grave, where he envisaged "my flesh shall rest in hope" (Ps. 16:9). But he understands this as being possible because of what he writes in Ps. 16:10: "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, neither will You allow Your holy one to see corruption". "My soul" and the Messianic "holy one" are related, paralleled, but not identical. David would not remain in the grave because Yahweh's Holy One, Messiah, would not see corruption. David did "see corruption", as Paul and Peter state clearly. But David perceived that through identity with his great son, Messiah, he would be resurrected on account of Messiah's salvation from death. And we make that association through baptism into His death and resurrection. We too, as well as David, can therefore have remission of sins and resurrection proclaimed to us in the Gospel (:38).

13:38 *Therefore, be it known to you, brothers, that through this man is proclaimed to you the remission of sins-* The preaching of the man Paul was in effect the preaching of the man Christ Jesus. Because the Lord's resurrection enabled forgiveness of sins (1 Cor. 15:17), Peter therefore on this basis makes an appeal for repentance and appropriation of the Lord's work for men through baptism into His death and resurrection (Acts 2:31-38; 3:15,19 "therefore"). And Paul here likewise: "He, whom God raised again... through [on account of] this man [and His resurrection] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:37,38). Because of the Name the Lord has been given, salvation has been enabled (Acts 4:12 cp. Phil. 2:9). "God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26); "the God of our fathers raised up Jesus... exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give (i.e. inspire) repentance to Israel, and forgiveness" (Acts 5:30,31). The fact of the Lord's resurrection has obtained forgiveness of sins for all who will identify themselves with it through baptism into Him; and this is why it is thereby an imperative to preach it, if we believe in it. The disciples were told to go and preach of the resurrection of Christ, and *therefore* of the required responses this entails: repentance, acceptance of forgiveness and baptism (Lk. 24:46). Preaching is motivated by His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14). Baptism saves us "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:21 cp. Rom. 4:25; Col. 2:13).

13:39 *And through him, everyone that believes is declared righteous in all things in which the law of Moses could not declare you righteous-* Better, "in Him". This is exactly what Paul expounds at such depth to the Romans; in Christ we are counted as Him, His righteousness is imputed to us, and this covers all our sins and disobediences to any Divine law, including that given through Moses. This justification, counting as righteous by grace through faith, was not on offer within the

Mosaic structure. The force of "everyone..." is that it included Gentiles, which is what attracted them to this message (:42).

13:40 *Therefore beware, lest that which is spoken in the prophets comes upon you-* Prophecies of judgment can come true at any time if there is the required 'condition' of disbelief and disobedience. The prophecy didn't *have* to come true for them; but they should "beware" lest it did.

13:41 *Behold you despisers, wonder and perish. For I work a work in your days, a work which you shall in no way believe, even if someone declares it to you-* By rejecting justification by faith through grace, they were in effect despising God's grace, considering their own works were better, rather like the man in the parable who thought he didn't need the wedding garment provided because his own clothing was better. This prophecy stated that even when the Gospel was declared to some, they would not believe it. And yet Paul still declares it; knowing that God's purpose is open insofar as every person who hears the Gospel has genuine freewill.

The Hebrew text reads to the effect "Behold you Gentiles"; but this is quoted by Paul about the orthodox Jews. Paul is doing just what Stephen did in the speech of Acts 7 which so convicted Paul in his conscience; he demonstrates that the most nationalistic Hebrews were spiritually no better than the Gentiles whom they despised. The original context of the Habakkuk 1:5 quotation is the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians. Paul saw the parallels with the coming destruction of the temple by the Romans. But just as the threatened destruction of the temple could have been averted by Jewish repentance in the past, so it could have been in the first century. Hence :40 "Beware therefore lest...". Jewish repentance could have brought on the second coming; but they did not. Paul has asked them to repent in :38, and here he is implying that if they do not, then the Jewish system and temple cult were going to be permanently destroyed.

13:42 *And as they went out, they pleaded that these words might be spoken to them the next Sabbath-* The "words" included the stark warning of condemnation with which Paul concluded in :41. The harder side of God attracts; the reality of the issues before us, of eternal life and eternal death, attract attention in a way which a 'softer' approach cannot. And the Gentiles were attracted by the logic of the idea of righteousness imputed by grace through the faith of literally any human; see on :39.

13:43 *Now when the meeting of the synagogue was dismissed, many of the Jews and of the devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas; who, speaking to them, urged them-* The apostles weren't interested in just giving good advice, but rather good news. They were pressed in their spirit, that they *had* to appeal to men (Acts 13:43; 18:13; 26:28; 28:23; Gal. 1:10). They persuaded men, convinced and confounded the Jews, reasoned, testified and exhorted, disputed and converted (8:25; 18:13,19,28; 2:40). In short, they *so* spoke that multitudes believed (14:1).

To continue in the grace of God- Paul and Barnabas realized that the idea of grace is attractive at first encounter, but to continue believing it is demanding, and has to be consciously continued in. For if by grace we are indeed counted righteous and shall surely be saved- this demands every fibre of our being in response. And the later New Testament letters are full of examples of how believers failed to continue under grace but turned to various forms of legalism. We have to continue in His kindness / gentleness (Rom. 11:22 s.w.). And that is harder than it might seem, because to abide in that constant sense of sin forgiven and certain salvation demands so much of us, in that we cannot be passive to it, nor treat these things as a mere part of our religious hobby. The *charis*, grace / gift of God, often refers to the gift of the Spirit given to believers after baptism. The Corinthians received it, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor.

3:1); it could be received in vain if the believer denied the Spirit or refused to be led by it. So it could be that those who heard in the synagogue were baptized, and received the gift of God- and had to be encouraged to continue in it.

13:44 *And the next Sabbath almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the word of God-* This huge attendance was not because of miracles, carrots offered or the hope of personal benefit. It was because of the immense power of the ideas presented- justification, total righteousness, by grace through faith; for everyone, literally everyone. The Gentiles enthused about this to others, and it is by personal witness that people come along to meetings and are converted.

13:45 *But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy-* The success of other preachers can elicit the most powerful jealousy, as it does to this day. "The Jews" here refers surely to the Jewish leadership, as the term often does in Luke-Acts. The experience of such jealousy places us in the direct fellowship of the Lord Jesus. For it was jealousy about "the crowds" which led to His persecution unto death.

And contradicted the things which were spoken by Paul and blasphemed- Gk. 'cursed'. The Jews of Antioch in Pisidia cursed Paul and his message, drove him out of the city, and then travelled 180 km. to Lystra to oppose his preaching there. This is the behaviour of bad conscience, rather than secular people just irritated with religious evangelism. Not only did the Jews crucify God's Son, but the book of Acts makes it clear that it was Jewish opposition which was the main adversary to Paul's spreading of the Gospel and establishment of the early church (Acts 13:50,51; 14:2,5,6,19; 17:5-9,13,14; 18:6,12-17; 21:27-36; 23:12-25). Paul speaks of the Jewish opposition as having "killed both the Lord Jesus and the [first century Christian] prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins" (1 Thess. 2:13-16). These are strong words, and must be given their full weight in our assessment of the degree to which the Jews were indeed a great 'Satan' to the cause of Christ in the first century.

13:46 *And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, and said: It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing you thrust it from you-* See on Acts 7:27 *Thrust him away*. One phrase of Paul's in Acts 13:46 combines allusions to two verses in Matthew (Mt. 21:41; 22:8). Those verses are close to each other. As Paul thought about Mt. 21:41, he would have gone on to Mt. 22:8, and then brought them both together in his allusion- ultimately controlled by the Spirit, of course.

And judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the gentiles- Not only are we living out *our* judgment by how we preach; by presenting the Gospel to people we are effectively bringing the judgment to them. Paul commented how those who rejected his preaching judged / condemned themselves to be unworthy. The Jews by their attitude to the word "judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life"; and we too can anticipate the judgment seat by the same mistake. The preacher stands in the 'highways' (Mt. 22:9)- 'the place of two roads', the Greek means, i.e. the place where two roads divide. This is what our taking of the Gospel to people means. They are given their choice. We bring the crisis of the judgment seat right in front of them, and they make their choice.

13:47 *For so has the Lord commanded us: I have set you for a light of the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the uttermost part of the earth-* Isaiah's prophecies of Christ being a light to the Gentiles in the Kingdom were fulfilled in Paul (Is. 49:6 = Acts 13:47; and is Is. 49:4 also a prophecy of Paul's thoughts? "I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought... yet surely my judgment

is with the Lord"). Paul noticed the prophecy that Christ was to be the light of the whole world and saw in this a commandment to him to go and preach Christ world-wide. He read "...for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider" (Is. 52:15) as a prophecy which required him to fulfil it, by taking Christ to those who had not heard (Rom. 15:21). All that is prophesied of Christ is an imperative to us as His body to action. Paul was to bring others to the light just as John had (Lk. 1:77,79 = Acts 13:47; 26:18,23). Paul takes a prophecy concerning how Christ personally would be the light of the whole world (Is. 49:6), and applies it to himself in explanation of why he was devoted to being a light to the whole world *himself* (Acts 13:47- although 26:23 applies it to Jesus personally). Paul even says that this prophecy of Christ as the light of the world was a *commandment* to him; all that is true of the Lord Jesus likewise becomes binding upon us, because we are *in* Him. Note that Paul says that God has commanded *us* to witness; it wasn't that Paul was a special case, and God especially applied Isaiah's words concerning Christ as light of the Gentiles to Paul. They apply to *us*, to all who are in Christ. Because everything said about Christ is a commandment to all of us who are in Him. What would Jesus do, who would He be, if He lived in your street, did your job, was married to your partner, mixed with the guys *you* mix with? The answer to that is our mission. In this sense He has in this world no arms or legs or face than us.

Believers worked for the fulfilment of their prophecies. Thus Mary was blessed for believing, because therefore and thereby there would be a fulfilment of the things spoken to her (Lk. 1:45 RV). Without her faith, would those things have been fulfilled? She had to do her bit. And this is why she was called blessed. The Lord basically told the disciples to go into the world and preach in order that the prophecies of repentance being preached among all nations would come true (Lk. 24:48). Paul's preaching to the whole world was likewise driven by a desire to fulfil the prophecy that Christ would be a light to the Gentiles.

13:48 *And as the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God-* The Gentiles may refer specifically to those Gentiles who had been attending the synagogue (:43). To be taught that the Jewish Messiah was the light of all people, and justification was possible in Him and not through legal obedience, triggered real joy amongst them. Paul prayed for the word of the Lord to be glorified (2 Thess. 3:1 same phrase), and those prayers were heard here. We glorify God's word or *logos*, His essential purpose in Christ, by believing it.

And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed- This phrase was that used by Judaism regarding how all the faithful people of natural Israel were those "ordained to eternal life", comprising "everyone that is written to eternal life, in the book of life". But the phrase is as it were subverted here to refer to Gentiles who believed in the Lord Jesus. It is meant to be read as the opposition to the statement that the Jews had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life (:46). But whilst there is freewill as to whether we believe or abide in the Lord Jesus or reject Him as the Jews did, there is also an element of predestination, of having been "ordained" to believe. For "all men have not faith" (2 Thess. 3:2); faith "is the gift of God" and thereby a proof of how His grace saves us rather than our works (Eph. 2:8).

13:49 *And the word of the Lord was spread about throughout all the region-* The joyful response and wide publication of the Gospel is strongly emphasized in these verses. But we hear nothing more of the church in Pisidian Antioch; perhaps we are left to conclude that they were an exemplification of the parable of the sower, where there was zealous, joyful response initially which then quickly withered when

persecution arose (Lk. 8:13). The reference to persecution in :50 suggests that Luke may be making a conscious allusion to his record of the sower parable. The converts here were in the category of the seed sown upon the rock. This would explain why they were given especial warning to "continue" in their faith (:43).

13:50 *But the Jews incited the religious women of high standing and the leading men of the city-* These women may have been Jews, or at least Jewish proselytes. Josephus claims (*The Jewish War* 2.20.2) that "In large towns and cities in which Jews abounded, the wives of the men in high position among the heathen were much inclined to the Jewish religion"; this would explain the connection between them and the leading males of the city.

And stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district- This persecution was apparently successful in withering the faith of the once joyful believers who had responded so quickly and enthusiastically to the Gospel; see on :49. The collaboration here between the Jewish leaders and powerful Roman leaders was typical of how the 'satan' / adversary operated against the early Christians, just as it was such a joining of the forces of evil which led to the Lord's death. The expulsion from the district may refer to some formal ban on Paul ever re-entering, similar to what seems to have happened at Thessalonica (see on 1 Thess. 2:18).

13:51 *But they shook off the dust of their feet against them and came to Iconium-* The way Paul shook off the dust of his feet against those who rejected his preaching was surely an almost unconscious reflection of the attitude which the Lord had enjoined upon his men; but there is no evidence that Paul was given the same commission (Acts 13:51 cp. Mt. 10:14). Jews were supposed to shake off Gentile dust from their feet on returning to the promised land; again, Paul is treating these orthodox Jews as if they are Gentiles. The idiom of shaking out is used in Neh. 5:13 to mean a shaking out of covenant relationship with God; by refusing the new covenant, those Jews were effectively ending their relationship with God, despite their zeal to keep the old covenant.

13:52- see on Acts 8:8.

And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Spirit- The Ethiopic text reads "the apostles", as if Paul and Barnabas are in view. To be filled with implies external agency; the Lord filled them with joy, through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit therefore here refers to an internal psychological power, which in this case gave joy. The Spirit gift is given to each believer at baptism, but there are clearly specific moments when believers are filled with it further. The allusion here is clearly to the Lord's command to rejoice under persecution (Mt. 5:12); that is an attitude and action which has to be consciously adopted. But this is confirmed and encouraged by the action of the Spirit within us to give joy. The spirit is effectively our mind and attitude; the Spirit /mind of the Lord Jesus is therefore being replicated in our minds. As "Jesus was filled with joy by the Holy Spirit" (Lk. 10:21), so are we "fill[ed] with all joy and peace by means of... the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13). This is "the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:6); "For God's Kingdom is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of the righteousness, peace, and joy which the Holy Spirit gives" (Rom. 14:17).

ACTS CHAPTER 14

14:1 *Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue-* see on 17:1,2.

And spoke in such a way- Paul *so* spoke that men believed. Presentation is important. Yet, his speech was “rude... contemptible... not with wisdom of speech” (2 Cor. 10:10; 11:6; 1 Cor. 1:17 AVmg.). Yet it was because Paul *so* spoke that men believed. He spoke God’s Truth in his own words, with no pretensions, with no attention to a smooth presentation; and the more real, the more credible. Because he spoke things as they are, right between the eyes, without posing as anyone apart from the real, human guy Paul... therefore men believed. He came over as credible and convinced, and he inspired others to this end.

That a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed- This occurred within the synagogue, so presumably the "Greeks" were Gentile proselytes or Hellenic, Greek speaking Jews.

The record gives the impression that after just one synagogue address, many Jews and Gentiles who were present "believed", and belief and baptism are presented in Acts as part of the same process. This happened it seems after just one address. For there is no hint that there was any period of extended instruction here. This is the power and simplicity of the Gospel.

14:2 *But the unbelieving Jews-* Yet these Jews would have been far from atheists. But their unbelief in Jesus as Lord leaves them classified as unbelievers. Here we see proof enough that all religions, even Judaic ones, do not lead to salvation. We also see here a classic pattern in Paul's work- he immediately goes to the synagogue, irritates the Jews, although converting some of them, and those Jews then make trouble which damages his work with the Gentiles. Chapter 17 records the same pattern almost word for word. I suggest that if Paul had instead followed the Lord's command and left the Jewish ministry to Peter, and focused solely on the Gentiles- then his life would've been much easier, and his intended ministry to the Gentiles would have been far more fruitful. But this is how it so often is when we do not follow the path the Lord intends for us; even though He will work with us in the other, less ideal paths we choose.

Stirred up the Gentiles- The Greek word only occurs a few verses earlier, in the same context (Acts 13:50). As noted above, the impression is being created of a pattern of behaviour. Paul immediately targets the Jews in the synagogue on his arrival in a town, and those Jews there who reject his message stir up the Gentiles against Paul's mission, thus making his intended mission to the Gentiles so much harder to operate.

And poisoned their minds against the brothers- Gk. *kakoo psuche*, literally they evil spirited- providing proof enough that evil spirits are not radically free entities swanning around the cosmos, but refer to the internal human spirit.

14:3- see on Acts 17:34.

Therefore they stayed there for a long time speaking boldly in the Lord- Boldness is a repeated characteristic of the early preachers, but their boldness was "in the Lord", it was a true sense of being brethren-in-Christ which gave them that boldness.

Who bore witness to the word of his grace- This was the purpose of the miraculous gifts in the first century- to back up the verbal preaching of the Gospel at a time when

there was no written New Testament available.

Granting- Implying they asked for the miracles to be done? The gifts were not possessed continuously by the apostles, they were for specific things at specific times.

Signs and wonders to be done by their hands- The Lord Jesus was the doer of the works, but He worked through the hands of those in Him.

14:4 *But the crowd of the city was divided; part held with the Jews and part with the apostles-* This reflects how widespread was the Jewish slander campaign. Nobody in the town was left untouched by it.

14:5 *And when there was an attempt by the Gentiles and the Jews, with their rulers, to treat them shamefully and to stone them-* This clearly alludes to the parable of the wicked husbandmen; the same word is used (Mt. 22:6). And Luke uses the word about what was done to the Lord Jesus (Lk. 18:32). In the work of witness, we are as Christ to the world and share in His sufferings, that we might share in His life. There is nothing glamorous about missionary or evangelistic work; it is on one hand a sharing in the Lord's sufferings, seeing that the cross was itself the greatest preaching of all time. 1 Cor. 1:18 speaks of the preaching which is the cross (Gk.).

14:6 *They became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding region-* Carefully following the Lord's instruction to flee persecution rather than willfully be martyred (Mt. 10:23). Several times, Paul has to be bundled away from such persecution by the disciples; he had the Semitic fanaticism when it comes to religion, and was not against violent death for the Christian cause. But the Lord didn't want His followers to serve and die for Him from such impulses of religious fanaticism. The wisdom of the Lord's command is here demonstrated in that the Gospel now spread as a result of their 'fleeing'- to "the surrounding region".

14:7 *And there they preached the gospel-* The Acts record notes so often that after persecution, Paul continued preaching in fresh areas. This is no small testament to the spirit of 'keeping on keeping on' which is to characterize all Christian endeavour. But it also reflects another theme of Acts- that persecution only led to the geographical spread of the Gospel.

14:8 *Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled since birth and had never walked-* Again Luke is alluding to the Lord's words he has recorded in his volume 1, the Gospel according to Luke. This time, to Lk. 18:27: "The things which are impossible [s.w. "could not use"] with men are possible with God". The Lord's ministry in Palestine was being continued by those in Him, just as it is today. We too need to daily read the Gospels and perceive how in essence, the spirit of those incidents and teachings are continuing in our experience daily.

14:9 *The same listened to Paul speaking. Paul looked at him intently-* Why is this detail mentioned? Are we intended to think that Paul was seeking to emulate how Peter had done just the same before healing a man in a similar condition (Acts 3:4 s.w.)? Both men were lame from their mother's womb. Both stood up and leaped (Acts 3:8). Both cases include Paul / Peter looking intently at the man to be healed (Acts 3:4). Paul and Barnabas's denial that they themselves were anything special

clearly follows Peter's humble example: "You Israelites... why do you stare at us, as if by our own power and piety we had made him walk?" (Acts 3:12). They had also learnt Peter's example of humility before Cornelius: "Stand up, I am only a mortal man" (Acts 10:26). When addressed by the Philippian jailor "Sirs (kurion), what must I do to be saved?", Paul answers "Believe in the Lord (kurion) Jesus" (Acts 16:29,30). In this case, we have another piece of incidental evidence for thinking that Paul was trying to copy Peter, and this led to his obsession to get to Jerusalem for a Pentecost feast in order to preach to the Jews assembled there, hoping he would repeat Peter's conversion of 3000 people in one day. It was this desire to emulate Peter's ministry which somewhat derailed Paul from the focus the Lord wished him to have on the Gentiles rather than the Jews. The similarities set up by Luke in his record intentionally set us up to expect that Paul will now make a huge number of converts, as Peter did after such a healing. But that didn't happen; perhaps out of all the drama, "only" the healed man, Timothy and his mum and grandma and a few others... came to faith. Paul was being led to understand that his desire to emulate Peter's mass conversions was not to be because it was wrongly motivated.

And perceiving that he had faith to be made whole- Faith was not always required for miracles to be done. We think of the healing of Malchus' ear and other examples. But in this case Paul required faith, because he realized he was continuing the Lord's principle spoken of in Lk. 18:27 (see on :8). There, the Lord had taught that with faith, what is impossible, impotent, unable to be used by man- can be used. "Made whole" is the word for "saved". Paul saw the man had faith to be saved- and therefore he performs a healing miracle upon the man. This was not done for the simple sake of alleviating human suffering; but rather to make up what was lacking in the man's faith. Having experienced it, the man's faith would be strengthened to the point that he could be saved.

14:10- see on Acts 3:8.

Said with a loud voice: Stand upright on your feet! And he leaped up and walked- See on 14:9 *Paul looked at him intently*. The leaping and walking of the lame is expressed in terms of the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 35:6. The preaching of the Gospel was demonstrated to be a foretaste of the Kingdom of God which is to come upon earth; and our witness also has something of that about it.

14:11 *And when the crowd saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voice, saying in the language of Lycaonia: The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!*- The meaning is surely that Paul and Barnabas didn't understand this, but when they saw the garlands and sacrifices brought to them, then they realized- this is the force of the "but" in :14. The gift of languages was therefore not continually available to the apostles; indeed it could be argued that that gift enabled them to speak in those languages, or for the listeners to understand; but not necessarily for them to understand what was spoken to them. Hence in speaking of the practical usage of the gift of tongues in 1 Cor. 14, Paul says that the gift of interpreting tongues was also required. In any case, that was not available here, and so the point is established that the gifts were for highly specific purposes at specific times, and were not continually available for the usage of believers.

Note that the idea of gods coming to earth as men is a classic pagan belief; and yet it is seen mixed in to Trinitarian theology, with their belief in a pre-existent Christ and a literal 'coming down' of the Lord from Heaven to earth. Indeed, so common was the

idea, and so close to it is the language of 'coming down' in John's Gospel, that it could be argued that the NT language is consciously alluding to this wrong idea and showing that this is not the case with the Lord Jesus, but rather His 'coming down' from Heaven was in terms of His manifestation of God rather than anything more literal, as the pagans believed. Standard Christian belief in a physically pre-existent Jesus has therefore missed the point, and taken on board the very pagan ideas which the NT is arguing against.

There is an intended irony here, in that "atheist!" was the term for those like Jews and Christians who denied the existence of the gods. But now the people consider Paul and Barnabas to be gods. And perhaps the same point is made by Paul's comment that "you turned... from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). Although we see here man's penchant to believe in 'gods' coming out. Total atheism is unnatural and forced, man wants to believe; and we need to remember this when witnessing to those who appear hardened in their atheism. Underneath, they want to believe.

14:12 *And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercury, because he was the chief speaker-* This would suggest that Barnabas was the more personally imposing in appearance than Paul (cp. 2 Cor. 10:1,10). For this is how they (along with their Greek equivalents Zeus and Hermes) are presented. Hermes / Mercury was the mere messenger of the gods, and so Paul was called this. And here we have again how the Lord loves to work- to make His speaker, His messenger, the one who is not imposing in appearance, and for the imposing one to stand there silent and as it were, unused.

14:13 *And the priest of Jupiter, whose temple was before the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and would have done sacrifice with the crowds-* We see in this incident the basic human desire to worship and to turn men into gods. We see it theologically, in the desire to turn the human Jesus into "very God of very Gods" as the Trinity incorrectly states. We see it in secular folk idolizing sports stars and musicians as their gods. The correct channel for this religious instinct is through the Lord Jesus to the Father, guided by His word.

14:14 *But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their clothes and ran in among the crowd, crying out and saying-* A set of clothes was one of the most valuable things a person possessed at that time. To tear them was a sign of real and genuine grief and passion. This was how strongly Barnabas and Paul felt about any glory being given to them rather than to the Father and Son; and their strong position should be reflected in our attitudes. We are not to glorify ourselves.

14:15 *Sirs, why do you these things? We also are men of like passions with you-* Literally, of the same sufferings, as James 5:17, Elijah was of like passions to us. This is the basis of our appeal to men, and it is the basis of the Lord's appeal to us through having our nature. If Paul was indeed deformed in some way (as tradition claims), then the point would have been that they too were not of perfect health, they also suffered. We note the emphasis on how similar they were to their audience; they ran in *amongst the crowd*, and were of the same sufferings "with you". This is the basis of all preaching work- that we are one with our audience and not above them. Exactly because they were 'one of us', they could make the appeal of the Gospel. As the Lord Jesus was and is our representative, so we are His representative to men, whilst being 'one of them', 'one of us'. This is why we shouldn't be afraid to show chinks in our armour, to admit our humanity, and on that basis make appeal to men: that I, as one of

us, with all your humanity, your doubts and fears, am appealing to you to grasp that better way. When Paul wrote that if anyone was weak, he was weak, he seems to be saying that they could match their spiritual weakness by his own. This is why personal contact *must be* the intended way to witness.

And bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them- Literally, we evangelize to convert you. The aim of our preaching should be to convert, not simply to half-heartedly, lamely inform the public of the particular set of convictions held by our denomination or local church. Having a clear and defined aim is critical in interaction with others in order to evangelize them. The idea is the same as in 17:30; in the past, the Gentiles were [for the most part] allowed to do as they wish. But now, all the world is commanded to be obedient and repent, through the fulfilment of the great commission by the church.

We note the frequent contrast between the idols, the vain things, and a God who is real and alive. All else in life is relatively dead and vain. Paul here quotes Ex. 20:11 LXX "For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth, and the sea and all things in them". Peter had led the early church in praying these words in Acts 4:24: "O Lord, you that made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that are in them". We see here the influence of fisherman Peter upon rabbi Paul- it is to the credit of Paul's humility.

14:16 *Who in the generations gone by allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways-* This is another angle on God dealing mainly with the Jewish people during those past generations. Rather than seeing this as unfair, one could take the view that in fact God "allowed" the other nations to do what they wanted- which if asked, would have been their preferred option. They got what they would've wanted if asked by God. The question of 'Why didn't God call nations other than the Jews in Old Testament times?' was obviously going to arise with the Gentiles. Paul addresses this same issue in Acts 17:30, saying that "the times of this ignorance God winked at". He seems to be taking the approach that the Old Testament Gentiles generally need not fear judgment. The same approach may be helpful when we are asked concerning the fate of those who did not know the Gospel.

14:17 *And yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave you rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness-* AV "gave us rain...". I suggest that the "us" refers to Paul and Barnabas and faithful Israel. Paul is saying that *you* are in a position of worshipping idols, but *we* (Paul and Barnabas) are appealing to you to change, and believe in the true God- not in ourselves. What was God's witness to the Gentile world? An obedient Israel. That, at least, was His intention. That obedient Israel should have blessing of fruitful seasons, food and gladness. These are all terms taken from the Old Testament descriptions of how God would bless *Israel* (not the Gentile world) if *they* were obedient. Jupiter was the god of the air and responsible for rain; Mercury was responsible for food. But Lycaonia (14:6) was famous for droughts and famine- the references can be found in standard commentaries (Vine, Matthew Henry etc.). Jupiter and Mercury had *not* given those Gentiles these blessings. But Yahweh, the one true God, had given these things to faithful Israel. Thereby He was a witness to those Gentiles, that they should accept the God of Israel. Paul is saying 'God let you Gentiles live as you wished. But obedient Israel were intended to be His witness to you- *they* received rain, fruitful seasons, food and gladness from their God, Yahweh. But *you* didn't- your Jupiter and Mercury were unable to give those blessings to you. So don't treat *us* as gods, quit your idols, and turn to the one true God of Israel'.

This naturally raises the question: To what purpose then was that witness, seeing at that time His plan was with the Jews and not the Gentiles? Perhaps we can infer from this that if anyone really thought about creation, they would have perceived God's witness and come to Him. Ps. 19:1-4 appears to say the same: "The heavens declare the glory of God, the expanse above shows His handiwork. Day after day they pour forth speech, and night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their voice has gone out through all the earth, their words to the end of the world". This last verse is quoted in Rom. 10:18 in order to prove that "Whoever believes in him shall not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile" (Rom. 10:11,12). Paul interprets the "whoever" as meaning that both Jew and Gentile were witnessed to even in Old Testament times, and therefore there ought to be no barrier at all to taking the Gospel to Gentiles. Without access to the Bible or the witness of Israel and their religion, we can only conclude that God's level of acceptance of Old Testament Gentiles was quite low in terms of detailed knowledge. Admittedly there are few if any examples recorded of such Gentiles in Old Testament times coming to perceive the witness of creation and respond to it. But it would be a weak argument from silence to say there were no such cases. For the Old Testament is the history of God's old testament or covenant, which was with Israel.

14:18 *Even with these words the people were scarcely restrained from offering sacrifice to them-* The implication is that the people cut short Paul's sermon. He doesn't even get on to telling them about Jesus. They wanted to believe these men were gods, they wanted to worship them, they were impressed by the miracle to the extent that they merely said they agreed with the new message- without actually listening to that message in any detail. The words "crowd" and "people" are repeated; their position was a group position rather than an individual conviction. And so their new faith was very quickly swayed. This is typical of what happens in some forms of Christianity today.

We see here the immense strength of the human urge to sacrifice. We see it in the success of the televangelists who appeal for donations- and get them- on the flimsiest of foundations. God's insistence that all sacrifice be offered *to Him* is not Him as it were seeking to dominate us humans. Rather is He explaining how to channel that propensity to sacrifice which we have. In the modern world, it seems that the willingness to sacrifice has been submerged somewhat beneath the chronic egoism and hedonism of our age. Suicide bombers and the like are seen by many Westerners as utterly inexplicable beings; but the desire to sacrifice is in fact a strong part of us, and is more logically and comfortably accepted by other cultures. Our knowledge of the Father and Son provides us with the ultimate way to channel and express it; although we may well need to get in touch with this self-sacrificial part of ourselves first.

14:19 *But there came Jews from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds-* The same words used of how the Jews "persuaded the crowds" to crucify the Lord (Mt. 27:20). Again, we see circumstances being arranged so that Paul entered into the crucifixion sufferings of the Lord. The same goes on in the lives of all who have committed themselves to identity with Him. And we naturally wonder what Saul / Paul was doing at the Lord's crucifixion; seeing he was then living in Jerusalem as a student of Gamaliel, he very likely was one of the Jews involved in 'persuading the crowds'. The same word for "persuaded" has just been used about Paul's preaching (Acts 13:43), and continues to be used about it. We are given the impression that Paul

persuaded the crowds one way, and then the Jews persuaded them another way. Paul must have bitterly lamented the fickleness of the crowds; but in so doing he was sharing the experience of the Lord Jesus. For the crowd who shouted "Hosanna!" and wanted Him as their Messianic King were soon shouting "crucify Him!", due to their persuasion by the Jews. We likewise recall how the people of Malta flipped from thinking Paul was an evil criminal whom vengeance didn't suffer to live- to thinking he was a god (Acts 28:6). Clearly the people were so impressed by the miracle that they ignored the doctrinal teaching- that idols were "vain things" etc.. The miracles both of the Lord and Paul clearly had no lasting power in persuading the crowds. The ministry of miracles never really achieved much, and Pentecostalism ought to take due note of that. How Paul must have wished for mass literacy amongst the people, and for some written record of the Gospel readily available to his audience, which could be their abiding source of persuasion. And in our days we have just that, although human fickleness is no less.

They stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead- Supposing is Gk. *nomizo*. "This word, which occurs fifteen times, always means to conclude from custom, law, or evidence, never to imagine". We conclude that they were certain that he was dead and had checked this. Paul had been nearly stoned in the previous town but had escaped to Lystra. Now he is actually stoned, probably to death. But he was prepared for this by the near stoning experience in Iconium. They stoned Paul and then dragged him out of the city, implying they were disposing of his corpse. He was either really dead (and was resurrected), or extremely damaged and apparently lifeless. The Mosaic principles about the guilt of death within a city come to mind; they had blood on their hands before both God and the men of the Roman authorities. But Paul never seeks to prosecute them for their behaviour. Paul was stoned and dragged out of Lystra as dead- presumably they didn't want him to die within the city limits as they were under Roman jurisdiction. Yet, hobbling and bleeding, he returned into the city to witness. And it was here in Lystra that he made one of his greatest converts, Timothy (Acts 16:1). And when Paul asks us to follow him, he is speaking in the context of his life's work and preaching. He is our pattern, to be lived out in spirit within the confines within which God has placed us.

Paul's suffering outside the city gate is surely alluded to by him when he writes to the Hebrews that the Lord suffered "without the camp". In everything he saw bridges between his life experience and that of the Lord. And we can do the same. But in this lies the need to be familiar with the Gospel records of the Lord's life and words. Read them daily. We also note that this experience was one of the closest to death Paul ever came, indeed he may well have died and resurrected (:20). But he made few converts out of it all, seeing the "crowds" of converts soon turned away. There was possibly the healed man "who had faith" and the disciples who stood around him after he was left for dead- and Timothy who was from Lystra and is called a "disciple" (Acts 16:1) when Paul revisited Lystra. Timothy is written to by Paul as if he was still a young man, some 15 years later. So it's quite likely that Timothy at this point in Acts 14 was not much more than a child and it was his grandmother and mother who were converted at the time. But he was impressed by Paul even at that time. The "crowds" who had apparently believed were very soon turned away from faith. So it was the greatest suffering for the least visible result, if numbers of converts were the metric. And so it often is- but the point of it all is to bring us closer to the Lord Jesus. And the wonderful convert Timothy came out of all this.

14:20 *But as the disciples stood around him, he rose up-* *Anistemi* can be used of resurrection. The way he rises up and walks off, when he had been considered a lifeless corpse just minutes before, rather suggests that this was indeed a resurrection. The disciples stood around about him, rather than seeking to minister to his wounds or resuscitate him. This sounds like trying to hold some kind of funeral service. If indeed Paul died and was resurrected, then it is a reflection of his humility that he never seems to specifically refer to this in any later passages of self-justification. However it is the same word just used in :10 of the healed man rising or standing up. What Paul had done to that man, he now experienced himself. One dimension of all this was so that Paul could enter into the feelings of that man, and that is how we are often brought to feel through the Divinely designed experiences we have.

And entered into the city, and the next day he went with Barnabas to Derbe- If indeed Paul had been dragged out of the town to the rubbish dump where corpses were burnt, and then he returned alive and well into the city and spent a day there- this would have been a powerful witness to resurrection. And the Jews would have feared to touch him. He would clearly have been seen as "in Christ", whose death at the hands of the Jews and subsequent resurrection he had been preaching. His return into the city (rather than departing immediately) may have been for similar reasons as to why he did the same after release from prison at Philippi. The community he was leaving behind would have at least some mystique and respect attached to them which would save them from future persecution, at least for some time. We see here Paul's utter selflessness and constant concern for his converts. The way Paul returned to Lystra to confirm the disciples (:21), despite having been stoned and maybe killed there, speaks volumes about him.

14:21 *And when they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch-* This word is that used in Mt. 28:19 about the making of disciples in response to the great commission. Paul clearly saw the commission as applying to himself; this surely disproves the contention that the great commission was only given to the eleven disciples to whom it was originally spoken. For *Lystra*- see on :20.

14:22 *Confirming the souls of the disciples-* 'Confirming' might seem an activity more relevant to the spirit of disciples, to their minds, rather than their 'souls'. But often the words soul and spirit, *psuche* and *pneuma*, are used almost interchangeably. It is too simplistic to argue that the spirit refers to the human mind or spirit, and 'soul' refers to the material person or body. That distinction is at times valid, but not always. "Confirming" occurs only four times in the NT and always in Acts. Such follow up pastoral visits were clearly part of Paul's missionary strategy as they should be of ours. But it is a similar word to that used by the Lord in telling Peter to strengthen his brethren once he was converted. Again we see Paul being asked to see Peter as his model, rather than wanting to compete with him in achieving mass conversions.

Exhorting them- *Parakleo* means to beg, to strongly ask. But it also has the sense of 'comfort', although this is not the most common sense in which it is used in the 108 occurrences in the NT. The challenge, the asking to continue in the faith is actually a comfort; the height of the calling, the focus on the ideal, is itself a comfort.

To continue in the faith- Paul was a Jew, thinking in Hebrew terms, and steeped in the

Old Testament language. And many of his converts were either Jews or Proselytes. The other two NT occurrences of the word likewise reflect the Old Testament idea of continuing in the covenant. Israel did not continue in that covenant (Heb. 8:9), and that covenant cursed all who did not continue in all things written in the Mosaic law (Gal. 3:10- written by Paul to converts in this very area where he was urging them to continue "in the faith"). The contrast is therefore between continuing [or trying to continue] in obedience to Mosaic law, and continuing in the faith in God's saving grace in Christ.

And that through many tribulations- Paul is fond of allusion to the parable of the sower, and he clearly has in mind the need to continue as good soil, and not to be in the category of those who fall away from faith because of tribulations (Mt. 13:21). Those tribulations *must* come, he is saying. Christianity is no insurance policy against tribulation, but rather a way of attaching meaning to it. Perhaps he also had in mind the Lord's simple statement that "in the world you shall have tribulation" (Jn. 16:33); it is inevitable. Stephen had twice used the word in his speech (Acts 7:10,11), and consciously or unconsciously Paul was maybe recalling that. Paul himself had brought tribulation upon Christians (Acts 11:19; Heb. 10:33), so again he was experiencing what he had done to others (the word is also used of Paul's sufferings in Acts 20:23; 2 Cor. 1:8; 6:4; Col. 1:24)- just as we do. Paul may also have in mind the predictions in the Olivet prophecy that there was to be great tribulation just before entry into the Kingdom of God at the Lord's return. In this case, we have another hint that he expected the Lord's return imminently, and spoke and reasoned accordingly, as we should do.

We must have tribulation, either in the condemnation of the judgment (Rom. 2:9), or now- in order that we will enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). We must bear the burden either of our sins (Am. 2:13; Is. 58:6; Ps. 38:4) or of the Lord's cross (Gal. 6:4 etc.). We will experience either the spiritual warfare of the striving saint (Rom. 7:15-25), or the lusts of the flesh warring in our members, eating us up with the insatiability of sin (James 4:1; Ez. 16:28,29).

We must enter into the kingdom of God- The sense is that we are now entering into the Kingdom, but through tribulation. The Lord had spoken of entering the Kingdom through the narrow gate, and Paul is putting meaning into those words, explaining that the narrow gate means tribulation. His own experience of stoning and perhaps death at Lystra exemplified what he was getting at.

14:23 *So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting-* The Greek means literally to stretch the hand upon. It is only elsewhere used in 2 Cor. 8:19 of how the church chose Timothy to travel with Paul. Some argue that the hand stretching refers to voting, but this seems to me to be reading in modern principles of democracy; there is no evidence that democracy in the form of voting was what God ever used. Probably it means that they simply chose some elders, and there is no evidence that the Spirit guided them in this in any supernatural sense. But the point is that they didn't leave the new churches with no leadership structure- they created one. "Elders" literally means an older person; but all the believers were relatively young in the faith. Like many modern missionary situations, they did the best they could in terms of choosing wisely. But they didn't tell the new congregations that they were to just take everything in turns and muddle along; they appointed elders. Because like it or not, people need leadership. Given that they probably didn't know the candidates that well, and most were at the same stage of immaturity in faith, we can understand why they "prayed with fasting" about this. They took most

seriously the future wellbeing of these groups; they didn't just baptize them and leave them.

They committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed- Given the difficulties in choosing elders, we can understand why they just gave them over to the Lord Jesus as their good shepherd. For as passing missionaries there was little else practically they could do. Paul uses the same word in committing the elders to the Lord in Acts 20:32. Paul saw the Lord Jesus as a very real entity and personage to whom he could hand over [Gk.] these new converts. We might infer that Paul felt he had personal responsibility for them, but now he had to leave, he handed them over to the Lord Jesus.

14:24 *And they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia-* Perhaps the idea is that they travelled through Pisidia, spreading the message. They had visited the area before (13:13), so perhaps they were following up with contacts there.

14:25 *And when they had spoken the word in Perga-* They had passed through Perga before, but without apparently preaching there. We get the sense that Paul was eager to cover ground missed out in his previous pass, so driven was he by the idea of geographically distributing the word to all.

They went down to Attalia- Perga was a port, but up the river from Attalia, from where longer distance vessels would be departing. These details all add credibility to the record. If Acts is a forgery from an uninspired person, it would've had to be created early on in the 2nd century at least. And the chances of not making a major geographical or historical bloomer would be almost zero. Such small incidental true-to-reality local details confirm us in confidently accepting the Bible as Divinely inspired and therefore true.

14:26 *And from there they sailed to Antioch, from where they had been committed to the grace of God-* Paul "committed" the elders to the Lord in :23, but he himself had been committed by elders. All pastoral and preaching work is some reflection of our own experiences; it cannot therefore be solely prepared for by missionary training courses and the like. The Lord works to prepare people, and they are to reflect their own experiences in their work for Him. The same phrase "committed to the grace of God" is used about the sending of Paul and Silas on their later missionary journey (Acts 15:40). Perhaps as noted on :23 about the idea of 'committing', the brethren felt (as we often do) that we can do nothing more materially for others in a given situation; we pray for them and commit them to God's grace. As the missionaries sailed away on a dangerous mission, this sense of commitment of brethren to God's grace would have been natural. It's hard to specifically, neatly define what was understood by "the grace of God". We can only be guided here by how Luke used the term in his volume 1, the gospel according to Luke. "The grace of God" was upon Mary (Lk. 1:30) and John (Lk. 2:40), although he did no miracles. The term is used as if it means 'the general operation of God' in Acts 11:23, God's grace worked through Paul's working (1 Cor. 15:10; Eph. 3:7), and it was *epi* the Corinthians, it worked around them (2 Cor. 9:14). We can frustrate God's grace by not going the way He leads us (Gal. 2:21). God's grace appears to all men in that the sphere of His operation somehow affects all (Tit. 2:11). The Lord Jesus died by God's grace, i.e. according to His plan (Heb. 2:9 in context). It is indeed true that 'grace' refers to undeserved favour / gift and often refers to forgiveness and salvation; and the word meaning essentially a gift it is at times used in the context of specific gifts of God's Spirit. But it would

seem that the term has a wider sense of simply the realm of God's activity, which is of course motivated by His grace.

For the work which they had fulfilled- We read in Acts 12:25 likewise of Paul fulfilling a ministry; of John the Baptist fulfilling his race (Acts 13:25). The sense is that God gives a specific task to be done, and we are to fulfil it. The Lord Jesus ascended so that He might fill all things of the church here on earth (Eph. 4:10). The parable of the talents likewise teaches that each believer has been given specific things to do. We need to pray that we will perceive what these things are; because man is never better than when he has a distinctly defined aim and has the wind of the Spirit at his back helping him to fulfil them. Paul felt that his preaching work was a stewardship he had been given and by achieving it, he was fulfilling the word of God (Col. 1:25). The "word of God" in view there would then refer to a specific word of command from God to Paul to preach the Gospel to the Colossians. Hence the specific command to Archippus to take seriously his ministry and fulfil it (Col. 4:17).

14:27 *And when they had come and had gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done through them-* This is the consistent and commendable emphasis of Paul; that he was not working in his own strength but God was working through him. The language is identical to that in Acts 15:4; the apostles reported back on their activities rather than being free radicals in the world.

And that he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles- The language of God opening doors was familiar to Christians, as the Lord had taught that God opens doors to those who knock. But is there any reason to think that there were believers begging for the Gentiles to be included in the hope of the Gospel, and God responded to their prayers? There is hardly any. Peter and the other early brethren were shocked even at the idea of eating with Gentiles, let alone baptizing them. So we are to conclude that God by grace gave an answer to a prayer that had not been prayed. Or, as I prefer to think, the Father perceives our unspoken, un verbalized, not formalized desires, even our unconscious ones- as prayers. And responds to them.

Paul uses the metaphor of a door being opened in writing that a great door had been opened to him personally at Ephesus and Troas (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12); and he prayed for doors to be opened so that he could preach to people (Col. 4:3). So, to continue the metaphor, the door had been opened to the Gentiles, but Paul (the Jewish rabbi) felt so identified with his Gentile audience that he felt as if the door had been opened *to him* personally. This is what evangelism is all about- identity with our audience, and leading them in essence along the same path of faith which we have been led down by grace.

14:28 *And they stayed no little time with the disciples-* According to some chronologies, there was a five-year period between this time and the council of Jerusalem of chapter 15. Truly we only get a few incidents from the life of all Bible characters.

ACTS CHAPTER 15

15:1 *But some men came down from Judea and taught the brothers: Unless you are circumcised after the custom of Moses-* "Custom" is Gk. *ethos*. This is a major problem in missionary work: the existing believers tend to expect that converts will not only accept the Gospel but also the ethos and culture of their existing community. And this is where this ancient argument about circumcision has so much to teach modern missions.

You cannot be saved- The very same Greek phrase is used by Paul when he calls out in urgency during the storm: "Except these abide in the ship, *you* cannot be saved" (Acts 27:31). Surely Luke's record is making a connection; the legalists taught that it was time to quit the rest of the community unless they got their way, for the sake of their eternal future; and Paul responds by teaching that our salvation depends upon us pulling together against the desperate situation we find ourselves in. It's as if the salvation of Christ's body depends upon it staying together. As time went on in the first century, the gap between the Jewish and Gentile elements, the right and the left wing, the legalists and the libertines, got ever wider. The tension got stronger. But nobody won. The Jewish element returned to the Law, and forgot all about the saving grace of Jesus. The Gentile element mixed even more with the world and its philosophies, and forgot the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. They ended up formulating blasphemous doctrines like the trinity, which nobody with any awareness of the Jewish foundation of the Father and Son could possibly have entertained. And so the faith was lost, until it was revived again in those groups who again interpreted Christianity in terms of "the hope of Israel".

15:2 *And Paul and Barnabas argued and debated with them; consequently Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders to resolve this question-* "Argued" is far too mild a translation. The word is always used elsewhere about major riot, specifically of rioting caused by the Jews. This is how deeply held is the belief that converts must conform to the pre-existing ethos and culture of the existing Christian community. From our perspective and distance, the argument seems so unnecessary, and the Biblical evidence clear as daylight that circumcision is not required for entry to the new covenant. Many of our fiercely debated divisive issues are looked at in the same way by converts living far removed from our place and culture; and believers of other ages would look at them likewise.

15:3 *Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the believers-* Given our notes on :1, this is a true sign of spiritual maturity: to rejoice in the accession of others to our community of faith, when the newcomers are of a radically different ethos and culture to our own. "Great joy" is a phrase used four times by Luke; it was a characteristic of the early church.

15:4 *And when they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all things that God had done through them-* This is intentionally similar to the report about their arrival at the Antioch ecclesia in 14:27: "And when they had come and had gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done through them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles". The careful repetition of event and report in Acts 10 and 11 gives the impression that Peter likewise carefully reported to the elders. They were all under the deep sense that God was working through them; no preacher is to be praised for themselves. We are all instruments and being used by the Father. We are absolutely nothing of ourselves.

In Acts 15 the representatives of the ecclesias reported to the whole church at Jerusalem, not just the elders. There seems to have been a series of meetings: initially, the group from Antioch who raised the problems being discussed met with the elders, who met together in a second meeting to consider it all, involving "the whole assembly... the whole church" (:6,12,22). Then there was perhaps a third meeting where "the whole assembly" was also present. And this is why "the apostles and

elders *with the whole church*" (Acts 15:22) agreed a solution. It wasn't a top down decision imposed upon the congregation. They all participated. This parallel between elders and the assembly is even found in the Old Testament- e.g. "Let them exalt him also in the assembly of the people, And praise him in the assembly of the elders" (Ps. 107:32). The "assembly of the people" and that of the elders is paralleled.

15:5 *But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying: It is needful to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses-* One of the major themes of Acts is how right from the beginning, there was a struggle within the body of believers. And Paul's letters repeatedly address the problem. The Jewish believers polarised around the Jerusalem ecclesia, and tended towards a keeping of the Law of Moses. They couldn't really accept that Gentiles could be saved, and saw themselves as a sect of Judaism ("the sect of the Nazarenes"). They were called "the circumcision party" (Acts 11:2), and "the sect of the Pharisees-who-believe-in-Jesus" (15:5). The Lord had foretold that His true people would soon be thrown out of the synagogues and persecuted by the Jews, just as they had persecuted Him. But these brethren so accommodated themselves to Jewish thinking that this didn't happen. However we cannot but be impressed that some amongst the Lord's sworn enemies, the Pharisees, came to believe in Him. His hopefulness for them therefore paid off [we recall his hope that the cured leper could make a witness to the priests, Lk. 5:14]; whereas we would likely have given up with them as hopeless cases. There were very few Pharisees, relatively speaking; 5000 at the most and maybe as few as 1000. That a significant number became Christians therefore shows the power of the Lord's example, and reflects quite some humility amongst these men. So let's not think that their legalism about circumcision reflects total unspirituality amongst them.

Ironically, the Greek word for 'heresy' is the very word used to describe those divisions / 'sects' which should not be amongst us (see its usage in Acts 15:5; 24:5). To divide the Lord's body is itself a heresy; and yet it is so often done in order to protect His body, supposedly, from heresy. Yet the difference between the heresy and the heretic is often fudged. The person gets attacked rather than their beliefs. So often we've seen this happened. A brother may, e.g., have views of the interpretation of prophecy which are found obnoxious by some. Yet the criticism of him will tend to get personal; his character is besmirched, because it's felt that this is justified because he [supposedly] has 'heretical' views.

Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes (John the Baptist's followers) were all converted into Christianity (Acts 6:7; 15:5; 19:1-5). There is no specific statement that they dropped all their previous understandings; indeed Acts 15:5 shows that there were Christians who still called themselves "Pharisees". The uniting and defining feature was their common acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, baptism into Him and commitment to Him. The "one faith" referred to the believers' faith in one and the same person- the one Lord, Jesus (Eph. 4:4-6), rather than only one set of doctrinal propositions about Jesus being "the faith" and all else being apostate. Given the breadth of doctrinal belief within the synagogue system, it's highly significant that the Lord assumed His followers would remain within that system until they were cast out. He established no principle of leaving a community because one disagrees with some of their theological tenets. He in fact taught the opposite; that there is no guilt by association by such things, and His emphasis was on the heart and human behaviour being transformed. It seems to me a romanticizing of the New Testament evidence to suggest that the early church was totally doctrinally united, but was soon fractured by doctrinal declension from a specific set of doctrines and interpretations which were

set in stone by the apostles. Rather the amazing unity of the church was and is remarkable in that it was achieved *despite and in the face of* those differences. What split the church was fleshly behaviour, which in turn utilized doctrinal differences to justify the various divisions.

15:6 *And the apostles and the elders gathered together to consider this matter-* There is a distinction made between "the whole church" and "the apostles and the elders" (:22). The issues were of such a nature that they required mature discussion and decision making, but the outcome of the deliberations was shared with and agreed by "the whole church". There are some spiritual issues which it is not appropriate to as it were put to the decision of mass democracy. The resulting letter was signed by "the apostles and elders and brethren" (:23). The idea of a private meeting of the apostles and elders may fit Paul's account of the meeting in Gal. 2:2, where he says he put the matters "privately to them that were of reputation", and not publicly.

15:7 *And when there had been much debate-* Peter impetuously would have wanted to state his highly significant personal experience in this matter; but he wisely and humbly curbed himself. Although Peter had clearly been the leader of the very early church, he seems now to be eclipsed by James; and although he was "chosen" by God out of all the other apostles to introduce the Gospel to the Gentiles, yet those same 'senior brethren' are described as 'choosing' [the same Greek word] brethren other than Peter to be involved in this work of incorporating the Gentiles (:22,25). A lesser man than Peter would not have taken well to losing the leadership; he spent the rest of his life as a humble pastor, perhaps of a very small group, and according to the Lord's own prediction, died a violent death.

Peter rose up and said to them: Brothers, you know that a good while ago- But it was not so long ago. Perhaps he was trying to give the impression that the Gentile circumcision question had been settled far back in time and there was no need to be raising it. But that is a typical political tactic- and it's not the only example here. This is why the Council of Jerusalem ultimately failed, with Paul later writing advice quite contrary to the agreements reached. There simply wasn't total honesty about the positions held, and whilst on one hand the factions were united by a common acceptance of Jesus as Messiah, the issues added to that by the legalists were such that true unity was never going to be possible. And the same scenario has been worked out multiple times, even if the exact issues and contexts differ.

God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe- Again, the "by" reflects how Peter saw himself as merely an agent, an instrument in God's hands.

15:8- see on Acts 26:22.

And God, who knows the heart- The only other time these words occur is on the Lord's lips in Lk. 16:15, warning the Pharisees that God knows their hearts. And Peter is saying these words to Pharisees who now had believed in Jesus (15:5). He's reminding them, perhaps, of who they had been, of what corrupt hearts they had once had. The Lord had known all about that, but worked to accept them and draw them in to His fellowship. And the same Lord knew the hearts of sincere Gentiles, and was seeking to save them too.

Did bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as He did to us- This is legal language. It's as if God is being called as a witness, and the exhibit provided is the fact that He gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentile converts as a sign of their acceptance- before they were even baptized, and without requiring their circumcision. But who, then, was the judge? The brethren there present at that meeting. And the

whole question was therefore wisely presented by Peter as effectively judging God. And in fact that is what any of us are doing by questioning which believers in Christ are acceptable with God. We are relegating Him to a witness, and placing ourselves in His place as judges. This idea is continued in :10: "Why do you now put God to the test?", the Greek meaning to examine or scrutinize. This would then continue the legal metaphor- with the suggestion that it is quite inappropriate to examine the exhibit of God's acceptance of Gentiles in this way.

15:9 *And he made no distinction between us and them*- The same word was used when Peter was told to go with the Gentile visitors "without doubting" (10:20; 11:12), i.e. making no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

Cleansing their hearts by faith- This may be a comment upon their receipt of the Holy Spirit (:8). Whilst their speaking in languages was an outward sign of the Spirit's operation, the essence of the gift of the Holy Spirit refers to internal cleansing (see on 2:38). Their hearts were cleansed by the gift of the Spirit- on the basis of their *faith*, not their circumcision. Peter had been told that he was not to make any difference between clean and unclean as defined by Moses, because God had now cleansed the unclean (s.w. 10:15; 11:9). Clearly the unclean animals he had seen represented the Gentiles.

15:10 *Therefore, why do you now put God to the test*- There is the possible suggestion in Acts 15:10 that God was 'tempted' to re-enstate the law of Moses, or parts of it, in the first century, seeing that this was what so many of the early Christians desired to keep. That God is so eager to work with us should in itself be a great encouragement. Or the Greek can mean that they were testing or scrutinizing God inappropriately. See on :8 *Bare them witness*.

Putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?- The Lord Jesus came to place a light yoke upon His followers. Not only were the Judaist brethren acting in the place of the Lord Jesus by putting a yoke on others, rather than bearing it themselves; but the yoke they were placing was heavy and unbearable. A yoke makes the burden lighter by sharing it with others who are under the yoke. The fellowship requirement [in this case, circumcision] was therefore a yoke. The Lord's yoke was light in that His fellowship is and was open, and not based upon meeting legalistic requirements.

15:11 *But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as them*- Note that Peter cried out "Lord, save me!" when most men in that situation would have simply cried out "Save me!". But his grasp of the Lordship of the One he followed inspired faith. If He was truly Lord, He was capable of all things. "Lord, save me!" was a call uttered in a moment of weakness. His "sinking" (Mt. 14:30) is described with the same word used about condemnation at the last day (Mt. 18:6), and yet Peter in his preaching persuades condemned men to do just the same: to *call* on the *Lord* in order to be *saved* (Acts 2:21,40,47; 4:12; 11:14). He invited all men to enter into the weakness and desperation which he had known on the water of Galilee, and receive a like unmerited salvation. And when he tells his sheep that the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18) he surely writes with memories of that same gracious deliverance. And so now here in discussing ecclesial problems he points out that all of us have had a similar salvation, and should act with an appropriate inclusiveness of our brethren.

Grace, *charis*, basically means a gift. The gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles was the means of their salvation. The reference is not therefore to the visual

manifestations of that gift in miraculous terms; for those died out. But the gift / grace of the Lord was the basis of salvation. It is therefore not only available today, but deeply necessary for salvation; for without the spirit of Christ "we are none of His".

15:12 *And all the crowd kept silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul relating what signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them-* This could mean that the crowd were not so silent when listening to Peter. The miracles performed by the Lord through Barnabas and Paul were also "signs"- of His acceptance of the Gentiles. It is a common theme in Acts that the Spirit worked miracles in order to demonstrate the acceptance of the Gentiles.

15:13 *And after they finished speaking-* God seems to have recognized with pleasure the degree to which Paul modelled his life on John, in that Paul's experiences of life were over-ruled to have connections with those of John. These connections simply could not have been engineered by Paul; e.g. the way in which they both died in prison at the behest of a crazy, woman-influenced despot. The Spirit also seems to make connections between John and Paul in the manner in which it describes them (e.g. Lk. 1:14 = Acts 15:13; 13:52; Lk. 1:15 = Acts 9:17; 13:9; Lk. 3:18 = Acts 13:15-19; Jn. 1:7,8,15 = Acts 23:11; 26:22; Jn. 3:27 = 1 Cor. 2:8-16). And the Spirit in Acts 19:18 seems to portray Paul in the language of John: "they came (to Paul) and confessed, and shewed their deeds"- just as men had to John.

James replied, saying- A good case can be made that James was written as a follow up to the Council of Jerusalem- there are some marked similarities [James 2:5 = Acts 15:13; James 2:7 = Acts 15:17; James 1:27 = Acts 15:29]. See on 15:23 *Greeting.*

Brothers, listen to me- The AV and some manuscripts add "Men and brethren". This could refer to the addressing of both the entire church ("men"), and the elders ("brethren"). Throughout Acts 15 we are reminded that the decisions reached were taken by the church congregation *and* the elders- rather than elders imposing a position upon the congregation.

15:14 *Simeon has related how first God visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name-* The conversion of Cornelius was certainly understood as the sign that the Gentiles were to be accepted. This would imply that Cornelius was the first public Gentile conversion by the apostles, which would mean that the Ethiopian eunuch was either a Jew or a proselyte effectively counted as a Jew. After all, he was reading Isaiah in Hebrew, having visited Jerusalem on pilgrimage, when Philip preached Christ to him. It is Luke who three times records that the ministry of the Lord Jesus had been God visiting His people Israel (Lk. 1:68,78; 7:16 cp. Acts 7:23- God visited Israel to redeem them through Moses). No other evangelist records this. Now he is making the point that God was visiting the Gentiles. This did not remain with Paul as some mere theological nicety. The same word is used of how straight away, he decided to go and visit the Gentile converts (15:36). God's visitation of man in Christ quite simply means that we literally go visit others, in pastoral and preaching work. We have mentioned how the letter of James appears to be on one hand an extended commentary upon the Acts 15 decisions, which James had a major part in. His comment on 'visiting' is that we should "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). The "unspotted from the world" would then be his form of the agreement made that Gentiles could be accepted but they must keep "unspotted from the world" by avoiding the fornication

and idolatry of the world. James would therefore specifically have in mind 'visiting' *Gentile* widows; and we recall that the issue of discriminating against Greek speaking widows was one of the issues his church had faced in Acts 6:1. Again, God's visitation of men, seeking to take out a people for His Name, must be reflected in our reaching out to others in practice, both materially and spiritually.

15:15 *And to this agree the words of the prophets*- There was a 'symphony' [Gk.] between Biblical revelation and the position they were being led to adopt; and there is nothing more comforting and beautiful than to know that a position is solidly underpinned in Bible teaching and Biblical precedent.

As it is written- In Am. 9:11 LXX.

15:16 *After this things I will return*- This is hard to interpret; the idea seems to be that after the crucifixion, God 'departed' for a time but now was returning to men in calling the Gentiles.

And I will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen- Not the temple of Solomon, although the language of rebuilding is relevant to a temple rather than to a tent. "In that day (of the future Kingdom- v.14) will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen" (Amos 9:11)- a clear future Kingdom prophecy, but quoted about the building up of the first century church in Acts 15:14-16.

And I will build again the ruins of it- He is surely saying that because the house of David has been rebuilt, therefore it is now O.K. to help the Gentiles "seek after the Lord". James perceived that firstly the Gospel must go to the house of David, the Jews, and once they had responded, then it would go to the Gentiles. Perhaps the Lord had the same principle in mind when He bad His preachers to not [then] preach to Gentiles but instead [at that stage] concentrate on preaching to the house of Israel (Mt. 10:5). Yet the primary fulfilment of Amos 9 is clearly in the last days- then, after Israel have been sifted in the sieve of persecution amongst the Gentiles in the latter day holocaust, the tabernacle of David will again be 'rebuilt', the Gentiles will turn to the Lord, and then "the ploughman shall overtake the reaper... the mountains shall drop sweet wine... and I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel... and I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land" (Am. 9:13-15). Surely what we are being told is that there must be a repeat of what happened in the first century. What happened then, in the repentance of a minority in Israel, the spread of the Gospel to the world and then the Lord's 'coming' in AD70... this must all be repeated on a far greater scale. Thus some in Israel must repent in the last days, after the pattern of the 1st century. This will bring about the great latter day gathering in of the Gentiles at the establishment of the Kingdom, when the whole Gentile world will seek to come up to Zion (Is. 2:3; 19:23; 11:10; 51:4,5; 60:3,11; 66:20; Zech. 8:21).

And I will raise it up- An apparent reference to the resurrection of Jesus. He had spoken of His resurrection as a rebuilding of the temple (Jn. 2:19,20).

A note is perhaps necessary about *how* the NT writers quoted from the LXX. Because often it appears they don't quote exactly from the LXX text. The classic example would be the way Amos 9:11,2 is quoted in Acts 15:16-18. The argument of James actually hinges on the LXX reading as opposed to the Hebrew [Masoretic] text reading. 'All the nations' were to have God's Name called upon them, whereas Is. 63:19 describes the Gentiles as people upon whom God's Name had not [then] been called. Yet this 'quotation' is actually a merger of the Amos passage with several others (Is. 45:21; Jer. 12:15; Hos. 3:5). That's why James introduces the quotation

with the comment that he is quoting “the prophets” (plural). The quotation is more like an interpretation of the text- which was how the Jews were used to interpreting the OT texts. Their principle of exposition, called *gezera shawa*, linked together Bible texts which used the same language. One of the texts which James incorporates into his ‘quotation’ is Jer. 12:16 LXX, which speaks of how converted Gentiles will be “in the midst of my people”. Yet this very phrase occurs several times in Lev. 17 and 18, where we have the commands for how the Gentiles who lived amongst Israel should behave (Lev. 17:8,10,12,13; 18:26). They were told that there were four areas where their lifestyle had to conform to Jewish practice. And these are the very four areas, in the same order, which James asks the Gentile Christians to obey! Clearly, then, the decree of Acts 15, commanding the Gentile Christians to e.g. not eat blood, had as its context how Gentile Christians should live ‘in the midst of’ a Jewish Christian ecclesia. This is the limitation of the context. From this little exercise in exposition we learn how carefully and intricately the early brethren expounded the OT. Yes, they used the LXX, but they used it in such a way as to bring out practical points, searching always for Bible precedents for the situations they found themselves in. They set us quite some example, especially considering that James, the Lord’s brother, would have been a manual worker and artisan as the Lord was; perhaps he was scarcely literate. And yet he reached such heights of exposition and wisdom purely from a simple love of God’s word and attention to its detail. See on Jn. 13:18.

15:17 *So that the residue of mankind may seek after the Lord*- The remnant of men, a reference to the remnant of Israel who would accept Jesus. This group are distinguished from "And all the Gentiles".

And all the Gentiles who are called by My name- Those who called upon themselves His Name by baptism into it. The tense is chosen to maybe reflect how God already knows His people and had already called the Gentile converts by His Name. This was encouragement to the preachers to go out and fulfil His work with the Gentiles which He had already potentially enabled. This sense is confirmed by the comment in :18 that "[God] makes these things known from of old". He is now making them known ["makes"], but they had already been long planned. This encourages us to preach to the Gentiles “upon whom my name is [Amos says ‘has already been’] called”. The Name is called upon us by baptism; yet in prospect, in potential, the Name has already been called upon the whole world. But it is for us to go and convert them. This explains why Paul is spoken of as having been a convert before he actually was. Paul was as an ox bound to a yoke, kicking against the goads. But it was as if he was already bound into Christ’s light yoke. He wrote that he bore in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. He seems to be alluding to the practice of branding runaway slaves who had been caught with the letter F in their forehead, for *fugitivus*. His whole thinking was dominated by this awareness that like Jonah he had sought to run, and yet had by grace been received into his Master’s service. But the figure implies that he already was a slave of Jesus at the time of his ‘capture’ in conversion.

15:18 *Said the Lord, who makes these things known from of old*- See on :17. "Of old" is literally "From the beginning of the age". The idea was that God’s plan for the Gentiles was evident, reading between the lines, right from the beginning of His "age" of work with Israel.

15:19 *Therefore my judgment is that*- The legal language of a judge arising to give a verdict. This is in line with Peter’s earlier warning not to have God as the provider of witness and to judge Him wrongly; see on :8.

We do not trouble- But the Judaizer brethren did 'trouble' the Gentile believers (:24). Later references in the NT to the converts being "troubled" may well refer to the activities of these Judaizers (Acts 17:8; 2 Cor. 4:8; 7:5; Gal. 1:7; 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:7; 2:2; 1 Pet. 3:14).

Those from among the Gentiles that turn to God- Seeing there were few atheists in the first century, we wonder why he doesn't say 'turn to Christ'. He was speaking to Jews, and was using Judaism's language of a Gentile becoming a proselyte and 'turning to [Israel's] God'. But he is saying that becoming a proselyte now meant baptism into Christ, rather than attempting to keep Mosaic laws and visiting the temple in Jerusalem.

15:20 *But that we write to them, that they abstain-* The word is elsewhere used, probably in allusion to this agreement, about abstaining from idolatry, fleshly lusts and immorality (1 Thess. 4:3; 5:22; 1 Pet. 2:11). I suggest therefore that all the prohibitions were of a moral nature. To eat non-kosher food is not an issue of immorality; so my sense is that this must be understood as part of a prohibition here against involvement in idol worship. It's not right for a young unmarried couple to sleep with each other before marriage, but I don't think "fornication" as used here has that in view. Rather are all these things part of idol rituals- fornication would specifically referred to the use of temple prostitutes as part of the worship rituals. Fornication and the blood laws were therefore elaborations upon "the pollutions of idols". So we could read it as meaning: "Abstain from the pollutions of idols: [i.e.] from fornication, from what is strangled and from blood".

From the pollutions of idols- Only used in the LXX in Dan. 1:8 and Mal. 1:7 about ritually unclean food.

From fornication, from what is strangled and from blood- The Mosaic law required that animals be killed by their blood being poured out.

15:21 *For Moses from generations of old has in every city those that preach him, he being read in the synagogues every Sabbath-* At first blush this may seem rather a disconnected reason for the previous arrangements. The key is in the phrase "in every city". The Gentile converts were foreseen as coming from "every city". James foresaw that there would be Jews living in every place where Gentiles were baptized; and he sought not to give them any reason for stumbling. Note that the synagogue system is described as preaching Moses. They were creating a cult following around a man, rather than acting as a conduit to bring people to God and His Son.

15:22 *Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men out of their company and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leading men among the brothers-* The Bible doesn't teach the total equality of role amongst all believers. There are leaders- but they are still among their brethren.

15:23 *With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and the elders, brothers, to the brothers-* Although writing from a position of authority, they emphasized that they were brothers writing to brothers.

Who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia- The scope of the agreement was local to these areas. Judea is not mentioned, neither is there any general clause governing Gentile converts everywhere. This is maybe why Paul advised the Corinthians differently about issues relating to blood. It's also a reason why we should

not seek to obey the letter of the legislation here about blood. This agreement was for a limited time and geographical scope.

Greeting- See on :13 *James*.

15:24 *Forasmuch as we have heard that some who went out from us have disturbed you with words, subverting you, to whom we gave no commandment-* The phrase "who went out from us" is exactly that used by John concerning the Judaists in his context, and he uses the term to imply that by going out from the body of Christ they had left Christ (1 Jn. 2:19); and the allusion is to Judas going out from the disciples into the darkness and off to the Jewish leaders to betray the Lord. They "disturbed" the believers, and Paul uses the same word about "some that trouble you [s.w.] and would pervert the Gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:7; 5:10). This is all strong language. This is the severe danger of legalism. It seems that these brethren had falsely claimed the authority of the Jerusalem church, and their aim was to 'subvert you', to carry them away- back to the Jerusalem temple cult.

15:25 *It seemed good to us, having come to one accord-* The idea is that they were unanimous. It seems unlikely that they were, and subsequent NT history shows that the Judaizer group continued their work of 'troubling' the Gentiles with their demands. So this would seem another example of where the Council of Jerusalem is recorded very positively, differences were papered over, an impression of unanimity was given, and therefore the Council ultimately failed to solve the underlying issues.

To select men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul- Luke always mentions Paul first. But here Luke is recording the letter sent by the Jerusalem brethren, who would have known and respected Barnabas longer than Paul; and so I see here an incidental evidence that the Divinely inspired Luke is indeed accurately recording real events and written words.

15:26 *Men that have risked their lives-* The Greek can equally mean that they had handed over their lives.

For the name of our Lord Jesus Christ- Bearing the name of Christ is in itself an imperative to witness it. Thus "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" is used as a metonymy for 'the preaching of Christ' (Acts 15:26; 3 Jn. 7; Mt. 24:9 cp. 14). We are baptized into that Name and thereby it is axiomatic that we become witnesses to it.

15:27 *Therefore, we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves also shall tell you the same things by word of mouth-* Appropriate because many were illiterate and there may have been concerns as to whether what was being read from a scroll was in fact accurate.

15:28 *For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things-* There is such a thing as compromise in spiritual life. The compromise of Acts 15 about the demands placed upon the Gentile believers was an example. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write that the Mosaic food laws had no binding at all upon Christian converts; and yet "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit" to endorse the compromise reached in Acts 15:28. The laws agreed there as binding upon the Gentile converts in Acts 15:29 are in fact the so-called Noachic or Primeval Laws, considered by some orthodox Jews to be binding upon all the sons of Noah. That interpretation of what God said to Noah is itself stretched and hardly on a solid Biblical foundation- but God was willing to go along with it in order to make concessions required so that there would at least be some human chance of unity in the early church.

"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit" suggests that their conclusions were somehow confirmed by the Spirit. How exactly this happened isn't stated. But we note that in :32, Judas and Silas used the Spirit gift of prophecy to tell the Gentile converts

the same message. It could be of course that as with Nathan initially assuming that his message to David about the temple was inspired from God when it wasn't, so these brethren may have assumed their conclusions were supported by the Holy Spirit. The way that Paul later contradicts the ruling about food offered to idols might suggest that in fact, they were simply assuming [as too many folk do today] that their own process of reasoning was correct and was therefore confirmed by the Holy Spirit. At best we can observe that no mechanism for that confirmation is recorded here.

15:29 *That you abstain from things sacrificed to idols*- Out of the four forbidden things, this is the one which differs from what was originally agreed. In :20 they had agreed to write forbidding the Gentile converts "pollution of idols". But this changed to "thing sacrificed to idols" (although the word is only used in the LXX in Dan. 1:8 and Mal. 1:7 about ritually unclean food). What they agreed to write was not written- an interpretation of it was written. And it is exactly at this point that Paul's advice to the Corinthians differs appears to differ from that of the Jerusalem Council as here recorded. For he writes that there is nothing wrong of itself with eating things sacrificed to idols. Perhaps he considered that the decree of Jerusalem only affected limited geographical areas and wasn't binding on his mission [see on :23]; or that he considered the whole agreement to have failed to such an extent that it was null and void; or he perhaps considered that it was all dirty church politics and he was giving inspired advice which contradicted it.

From blood, from things strangled and from fornication. From which if you keep yourselves, it shall be well with you. Farewell- Note that the Western Text [Codex Bezae] of Acts omits "things strangled", leaving us with three basic laws about idolatry, fornication and bloodshed. In this case we would see an allusion to an uninspired passage in the Mishnah (*Aboth* 5) which taught that the captivity in Babylon came about "on account of idolatry, fornication and bloodshed". In this case we would see God willing to compromise and accept the terms which were familiar to the orthodox Jewish minds, rather than merely telling them that their Mishnah was uninspired and so often hopelessly incorrect.

15:30 *So they, when they were sent off*- This alludes to the custom of accompanying a person on the first stage of their journey as a sign of solidarity and acceptance of them. The delegation had the full support of the Jerusalem church.

Went to Antioch; and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter- There is a need for transparency in these things; and so the letter was delivered and read in front of everyone. Remember that many would have been illiterate. They did not "deliver the letter" until the congregation had been gathered together, in order to stop any chance of gossip after some had read the letter and others hadn't. These are the kinds of basic wisdom that are needed in pastoral and mission work.

15:31 *And when they had read it, they rejoiced for the encouragement*- The Judaist visitors had obviously worried the believers with the possibility that their salvation could be in question and actually impossible. Hence their joy when they learned that they were acceptable with God.

15:32 *And Judas and Silas, being themselves also prophets*- See on :28 *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit*.

Encouraged and strengthened the believers with many words- The idea is of confirmation. The context is confirming them that as Gentiles they really were OK with the Lord without circumcision. When we read of Paul and Silas going throughout Syria and Cilicia "strengthening the churches" (:41), the same word is used; and presumably the confirmation provided was again about this issue of Gentile

acceptability. We note that Syria and Cilicia are the two specific regions to whom the letter from Jerusalem was addressed (:23).

15:33 *And after they had spent some time there, they were sent off in peace by the brothers back to those that had sent them-* The 'sending off' was a custom demonstrating acceptance and blessing of the mission; see on :30.

15:34 *It seemed good to Silas to stay there-* Again we see the human element in the preaching decisions of the early brethren. Despite Holy Spirit guidance, they made decisions which "seemed good" to them. The same word is used in :22,25 and :28. This is a fair emphasis all within the same chapter. There could be the hint that the decisions of the Council were simply what seemed right to them at the time, although they claimed some unspecified Holy Spirit confirmation of their thinking. This would again explain why Paul's inspired guidance to the Corinthians about meat offered to idols seems to contradict the position of the Jerusalem elders.

15:35 *And Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also-* "Teaching" may refer to teaching the converts; and "preaching" to evangelism. "The Lord" in Luke-Acts usually refers to the Lord Jesus; the Gospel records would not have been widely distributed, and many people were illiterate. So the teaching and preaching of the Lord's word as recorded in the Gospels would have been vital.

15:36 *And after some days Paul said to Barnabas: Let us return now-* The Greek word used here is that usually translated 'to convert'. It could be that Paul was suggesting that they go and 'convert' their converts, understanding that there are levels of conversion, as the Lord had taught and exemplified in Peter (Lk. 22:32).

And visit the believers in every city wherein we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they fare- See on :14.

15:37 *And Barnabas wanted to take with them John also, who was called Mark-* The Greek really means 'to advise'. And Paul got mad and had a division about even the suggestion! This is not Paul at his best, but the incident is so typical of many divisions in the church.

15:38 - see on Acts 6:1.

But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia- The Greek word and position in the clause suggests '*that one*', reflecting Paul's contemptuous attitude. The Greek idea is of apostasy. But Paul speaks of apostasy from *him*, rather than from the Lord. This is not Paul at his best. Like many of his brethren to this day, he considered a personal departure from him as being apostasy. Likewise he laments how all in Asia had turned away *from him*; whereas the Lord Jesus wrote letters to those in Asia, clearly acceptant of them as His beloved brethren. Personal differences don't thereby declare a divided-from brother to be therefore and thereby no longer a brother of the Lord. It could be, however, that John Mark had separated from them for spiritual reasons, perhaps falling under the influence of the Judaizers.

Mark may have left them in Pamphylia for a number of reasons. We note that it was at that point in Acts 13 that Saul changes his name to Paul. The shift from a Hebrew to Roman name, and the increased emphasis on preaching to Gentiles, may have been too much for Mark. And we note that from that time on, we no longer read of "Barnabas and Paul" but rather "Paul and Barnabas", and we find phrases like "Paul and his company". Paul had been the protege of Barnabas, and whilst Barnabas coped with being clearly outshone by his own protege, perhaps his nephew felt that he ought to have been the protege. And he was being outshone by Paul. In addition to all this, it is quite possible that Saul / Paul had persecuted the family of John Mark, and

he found that hard to forgive. We note from Acts 12:12 that the church in Jerusalem met "in the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark". But this sounds very similar to the scenario of Acts 8:3: "Paul was ravaging the church by entering *house after house*; dragging off both men and *women*, he committed them to prison". We simply conclude that interpersonal fallout occurs for a variety of reasons.

And had not gone with them to the work- Paul's dislike of Mark was for deeper reasons than just surface irritation. This is quoting the Septuagint of 1 Sam. 30:22, where "all the wicked men and men of Belial, of those that went with David, said, Because they *went not with us*, we will not give them ought of the spoil". *Why* does the Spirit make this connection? Is it not suggesting that Paul, zealous soldier of David / Jesus as he was, was in those early days in some sense a man of Belial, bent on achieving his own glory in preaching, and unwilling to share it with anyone who wasn't spiritually or physically strong enough to do it as he was (cp. the weaker followers of David)? If this is the case, then this is a far, far cry from the Paul who wrote his letters some years later, begging Timothy to come to encourage him, and letters in which the care of all the churches weighs down his soul daily, coming upon him as he woke up each morning (2 Cor. 11:28); the Paul who repeatedly encourages the weak, treating weak and strong as all the same in many ways, until he eventually attains a level of selfless devotion to his weak brethren that is only surpassed by the Lord Himself.

Col. 4:11 could suggest that John Mark ended up in prison with Paul: "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)". Philemon 24 describes Mark as Paul's fellow worker in prison- working together for the Gospel, when Paul had earlier said that Mark did not go with him to the work. This would explain Barnabas wanting to take John Mark, as he was his nephew. Paul was expecting that Mark would be released from prison, and he urges others to accept him upon release- perhaps implying that Mark had sinned or fallen away, or Paul had signalled his disagreement with Mark. But prison together for the Lord had united them. So much so that after Mark was released, Paul was so close to him that he asked Timothy to bring him back to Rome to be with him in his final days (2 Tim. 4:11). In this case we see a total reconciliation between Paul and Mark; but not with Barnabas. As often happens, the collateral damage of interpersonal conflict can cause more damage than the actual conflict, and may never be resolved, even after the initial cause of conflict is resolved.

15:39- see on Acts 13:12,13.

They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus- The "contention" between Paul and Barnabas is described in a word which occurs only thrice elsewhere. In Heb. 10:24, a more mature Paul speaks of how we should consider one another to "*provoke* unto love and good works". Surely he wrote this with a sideways glance back at his earlier example of provoking unto bitterness and division. Likewise he told the Corinthians that he personally had stopped using the miraculous Spirit gifts so much, but instead concentrated on developing a character dominated by love, which was *not* easily provoked (1 Cor. 13:5). The Spirit seems to have recognized Paul's change, when Acts 17:16 records how Paul's spirit was "stirred" at the spiritual need of the masses, and thereby he was provoked to preach to them; rather, by implication, than being provoked by the irritations of weaker brethren.

This whole incident is so true to life, human nature and church experience. There had just been an apparently successful conference about church unity- and then Paul

and Barnabas divide. Personality factors will still in reality dictate division between persons, and only the spirit of Christ unites. We see that unity is never achieved by conferences and on-paper agreements. According to Gal. 2:13, Paul felt gutted that Barnabas had caved in to the pressure from Judaist brethren and had refused to break bread with Gentile brethren. Paul clearly felt Barnabas was wrong in that, and we sense his deep hurt and shock when he writes that "*even Barnabas* was led astray by their hypocrisy". The incident described in Gal. 2 was after the first missionary journey, but *before* the events of Acts 15. And so Paul was sensitive to any whiff of a repeated caving in to right wing conservative brethren. He was in no mood to give John Mark a second chance. And this is so true to life- giving others a second chance, falling out over attitudes to third parties... this is to this day the stuff of Christian division.

John Mark had "withdrawn from them" and returned to Jerusalem, home of the conservative brethren. Paul sensed in this a disagreement with himself personally and his policy of accepting the Gentiles, which the Jerusalem conservatives disagreed with. And so when Barnabas suggested taking John Mark, the associations in Paul's mind quickly led him to snap. This is so absolutely true to human nature and experience.

Barnabas was probably just trying to accept John Mark, just as he had accepted Saul. Saul had radically changed, and Barnabas had accepted that. But Paul, it seems, was not willing to accept that John Mark might have changed. He didn't reflect the same grace which Barnabas had shown to him. And yet Gal. 2:13 is clear that Barnabas had failed in going too far to accommodate the conservative Jewish brethren. As you analyze the situation, you can see legitimate and correct points in the position of each of those involved. Paul was right to stand up against the conservative brethren, and Barnabas was in the wrong in Gal. 2:13 in Antioch. But Barnabas was right to try to involve John Mark; and Paul was wrong to just allow associations of events and possible outcomes to lead him to divide from Barnabas. And so it is in the messy complex of human life and relationships within the church. There are elements of right and wrong, truth and error, flesh and spirit in all of us, and in all divisions and failures.

15:40 *But Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord-* The commendation of Paul's mission by the Antioch brethren could suggest that they took Paul's side in the dispute. But despite being seen as having done the right thing by conservative brethren, Paul's later allusions to the incident suggest he later realized that he had done wrong, and the approbation of his brethren didn't make it right before God.

There is no record that the brothers commended Barnabas and John Mark on their missionary journey to Cyprus, nor is there any account of the journey. But there is the record here that they did as it were legitimize Paul's journey with Silas, although it began under the cloud of personal division. We wonder whether this is a hint that Paul's concerns about John Mark were not totally groundless. Or is it that the focus of Acts is simply upon Paul and therefore the missionary journeys of others aren't mentioned. But we never read of Barnabas again- nor of any reconciliation between him and Paul. Perhaps we are to take comfort that even some of the finest believers have died with unresolved conflicts and relationship breakdown. And yet surely Paul would have tried to practice what he often wrote about our unity in Christ. So possibly Barnabas caved in even more to the Judaizer element, with whom he had grown up in Jerusalem- i.e., the lack of reconciliation was his fault. He would have joined the

many Jewish Christians who fell away to legalism and Judaism, caught up in the wave of Jewish nationalism that swept the Jewish world at the time, as lamented in Hebrews, James and the letters of Peter. In this case we see how a man may be gracious and truly inclusive, but still fall away to legalism. Grace has to be worked on and responded to consciously, all our days.

The sharpness of the disagreement seems to suggest that both sides were dogmatic and would not compromise. Barnabas comes over in the previous accounts of him as wonderfully gracious, and having a special care for Paul- we recall how he sought out Paul in Tarsus and roped him in to Gentile-focused missionary work in Antioch. Did he have another, harder side to him? Was he 'hard' over the need to include John Mark and not exclude him, despite his Jewish conservative background, just as Barnabas had worked to include Paul earlier? Or did Barnabas change into a harder person and continue to cave in to the pressures as he had done in Antioch (Gal. 2:13)? But *contra* that we have Paul's deathbed desire for reconciliation with John Mark which we read of in 2 Tim. 4? Why at that point did Paul not ask for Barnabas to come and see him? Had Barnabas died? Had he totally returned to Judaism? There are so many intentionally open ended issues here. And that is purposeful, so that we might explore the options- because interpersonal conflict between brethren over fellowship issues is probably one of the most common experiences of all believers.

15:41 *And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches-* See on :32 *strengthened the believers*. The Greek for "strengthening" is from the root for 'establishing'; the word is used both of the Lord establishing His people, and of the preachers and pastors establishing them. Any work we do to build up others has the Lord working through and with us.

ACTS CHAPTER 16

16:1 *And he went also to Derbe and to Lystra; and a certain disciple was there, named Timothy-* Being half Jewish and having a Gentile name, this was a typical case which would have been hard to legislate over given the legalistic mindset of the Judaizers which has just been brought before us in chapter 15. And 'Timothy' means 'Dear to God'; the Gentiles were equally beloved.

The son of a Jewess that believed; but his father was a Greek- Her name was Eunice, and his grandmother Lois also had believed before her (2 Tim. 1:5). Lois and Eunice are Gentile names, so we might conclude that they were not very observant Jews, indeed Eunice had married a Gentile which would have severed her from orthodox Judaism, neither had she circumcised her son; and yet from a child they had taught him the Old Testament Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15). They loved the word of God but were not seen as having made the grade in terms of their religion. So many of the Lord's people are like that.

16:2 *Well reported of by the believers that were at Lystra and Iconium-* This would imply Timothy was from Lystra (:1 is unclear whether he was from Derbe or Lystra).

16:3 *Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him-* Literally 'to go forth', the word used about missionary endeavour in fulfilment of the great commission to 'go forth' (Lk. 9:6; 3 Jn. 7).

And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek- Remember that this follows hard

on the decision made in chapter 15 not to demand circumcision. But an agreed position can still not be followed because of the higher principles of not causing others to stumble. There are several examples in the NT of where Paul could have taken a certain course of action, or insisted on acceptance of a certain doctrinal position, knowing that Truth was on his side. But he didn't. Thus the council of Jerusalem established that Gentiles didn't need to be circumcised, but straight afterwards Paul circumcised Timothy in Lystra out of consideration to the feelings of the Jewish believers (Acts 16:1-3). He could have stood on his rights, and on the clear spiritual principles involved. But he stepped down to the lower level of other believers (e.g. by keeping some of the redundant Jewish feasts), he made himself all things to all men that he might try to save some, and by so doing stepped up to the higher level in his own spirituality.

Timothy was from a non-standard background, as we will see both Lydia and the prison keeper were. His mother was a Jewess who had married out of the faith and not circumcised her child. But she and her mother had raised him reading the OT scriptures, as Paul reminds him in his letter to him. And they had become Christians. So like Lydia [see later] he was from a black sheep background. Just the type the Lord uses.

16:4 *And as they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which had been determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem-* Presumably just the four forbidden things related to idol worship. Or were there more?

16:5 *So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily-* Implying baptisms were being done daily, immediately a candidate was ready (not left to the weekend for convenience!). The same reference to daily increase is to be found earlier in Acts. The increase in number was related to the [temporary] resolution of the tensions within the community over the question of the Gentiles. Schism between believers is the greatest disadvantage for the Gospel, and contrariwise, as the Lord laboured in His prayer of John 17, our unity should be enough to convert the world.

16:6 *And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia-* Paul had just had the thrill of being given a green light to preach to the Gentiles in Acts 15. And so he assumed he could launch a preaching campaign in Asia. But then he was stopped. And after a while, given the call to Macedonia. We see this kind of thing often. A green light, followed by a red light, inexplicable and strange at the time; and then a road opens up somewhere else.

Paul writes to the Corinthians of how he had been given areas in which it was potentially possible for him to preach in (2 Cor. 10:13), and he didn't enter into those areas which had either already been preached in, or which were another brother's responsibility. This seems to suggest that God does indeed look down from Heaven and as it were divide up the world amongst those who could preach in it. This is why Paul perceived that he had been 'forbidden' from preaching in some areas [e.g. Macedonia] and yet a door was opened to him in Achaia. Likewise he felt he had been forbidden [s.w.] to preach to Rome until the time of Rom. 1:13. This language is allusive to the way in which the Lord forbade Israel to conquer certain areas on their way to the promised land (Dt. 2:37). The point is, between us, our preaching is a war of conquest for Jesus, pulling down strong holds and fortresses as Paul put it; or, as Jesus expressed it, taking the Kingdom by force, as storm troopers. How the Spirit achieved this 'forbidding' isn't clear, although the same word is used in 1 Thess. 2:16

about how Jewish opposition 'forbad' Paul preaching to Gentiles. But even this, for which the Jews were culpable, was used by the Spirit in the bigger picture of God's purpose.

16:7 *And when they came to the border of Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia-* The Greek really means to put to the test. Having been forbidden or hindered from preaching in Asia, they realized they were being led to some areas but not others. And so when they thought of preaching in Bithynia, they set up various tests to see if their way was to be made prosperous there or not. The spirit of Jesus, perhaps their own spiritual mindedness, didn't permit them to go there. Perhaps they learnt the lesson and therefore likewise purposefully didn't preach in Mysia (see on :8).

But the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them- Living according to the spirit / mind / example of Jesus will mean that we naturally find the answers to some of the practical dilemmas which may arise in our lives. Could it not be that the spirit of Jesus, a life lived after His pattern, compelled them to (let's imagine) go to visit a sick child and this meant they missed the transport leaving for Bithynia?

We note that later Paul did preach in Asia especially in Ephesus, in fact through Paul's later preaching, "all Asia" heard the Gospel, although initially he was given a red light there (Acts 18:23-19:41); and others preached in Bithynia (1 Pet. 1:1). It was a red light from the Spirit for that time. A red light doesn't mean "never". And it may mean someone else is for the job. Or we could observe that Paul presents in the records as somewhat impatient. Perhaps this was all simply to teach him patience.

16:8 *So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas-* They could not have avoided it, seeing it was impossible to get to Troas without passing through Mysia. Presumably the idea is that they did not preach there. Perhaps the Spirit forbade them, as in Bithynia (see on 16:7).

16:9 *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. There was a man of Macedonia standing-* Having been led away from two areas and realizing they should learn the lesson and leave a third one alone (see on :8), they were now directed to where the Lord wished them to work. He could have sent them there immediately, but He wanted them to work out and reflect upon His will and processes (see on :7 *attempted*); and once they had got through that, He gave them clear direction. This would explain the immediacy of their response once they finally received clear direction (:10). The same sort of thing happens in our lives if we allow ourselves to be led by Him and be in relationship with Him.

Men of Macedonia were stereotypically associated with mighty warriors, following on from all the images associated with Alexander of Macedon and his military descendants. But this warrior asks Paul to "Come... and help". Literally, 'come to my side'. "Come and help" was a term associated in classical Greece with a call for military help. Polybius (The Histories 10.41.1–6) uses the term several times in describing Philip V calling for military help, supplies and men, during the First Macedonian War- and then going on to victory. If these were indeed the associations which Paul would have picked up, then he had the impression of a mighty warrior [the Lord Jesus] 'needing' human boots on the ground in order to achieve a great victory. And Paul ran to Him with all speed. On one hand, "God requires not help from man". But He structures His purpose so that God is in a sense, in need of man. And men are criticized for not 'coming to help of the Lord' (Jud. 5:23). 'Come up and help [me]' is quoting the LXX of Josh. 10:3,4. where Adonibezek asks other kings to come and help him in a military sense against Joshua.

Urging him and saying: Come into Macedonia and help us!- *Parakleo* is literally 'to call near', AV 'praying him'. The man was standing- the position of begging and pleading in intercession (as the Lord Jesus for Stephen). "Help" is the same word used in Heb. 2:18 for the help provided by the Lord Jesus in prayer as our intercessor. The language is of prayer- and it's as if Paul and Timothy are in God's place being prayed to and begged by the Lord Jesus. In a sense, we manifest God in our preaching; we are Him to this world. And the need is the call; we too encounter such calls, if we are sensitive to them.

16:10 *And when he had seen the vision, immediately*- Paul and the apostles were urgent in their preaching. When Paul received the go ahead to preach in Macedonia, he "immediately endeavoured" to go there, even not waiting for Titus to join him, such was his urgency (Acts 16:10; 2 Cor. 2:12,13). And the response of people to these urgent preachers was therefore quick too. Men who began doubting and cynical were pricked in their heart, they realized their need, and were baptized within hours (Acts 2:12,37).

We sought to go into Macedonia- This could mean that Luke was now present with Paul; or it could be that he is including here the inspired diary of another companion of Paul.

Concluding that- The idea is of proving, putting together (s.w. Acts 9:22). By assessment of evidence and testing situations and hypotheses, Paul drew a conclusion. And we are likewise required to interpret God's actions in our lives, rather than expecting a bolt of revelation or specific calling. Although at times Paul did have this kind of thing, in his preaching work he was clearly left to join the dots himself in many ways. See on :7 *attempted* and :9 *A vision*.

God had called us to preach the gospel to them- Paul 'assuredly gathered' that "the Lord had called us for to preach the Gospel unto them" (Acts 16:10 AV). The Lord calling is usually used concerning His calling of men to understand and obey the Gospel. Perhaps Paul is saying that the reason why we are called is to preach, and in this context he realised that the people *he* was to preach to, were the Macedonians. He later reminisced: "As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak (i.e. preach)" (1 Thess. 2:4).

If we don't shine forth the light, both in the world and in the household, we are not fulfilling the purpose for which we were called. Perhaps this is the meaning of Acts 16:10, where Luke says that they preached in Macedonia because they perceived that "the Lord had called us *for* (in order that) to preach the gospel (in this case) unto (the Macedonians)". Whether such an interpretation appeals or not, there are many passages which teach that our salvation will be related to the extent to which we have held forth the word both to the world and to the household (Prov. 11:3; 24:11,12; Dan. 12:3; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 12:8; Rom. 10:9,10 cp. Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 1:20; 1 Pet. 4:6 Gk.).

We noted above the military allusions in the call to "Come and help us!". The military allusions continue. "To preach the Gospel" is literally 'to declare the good news', and is a term used of declaring a victory. Paul was to go to the Roman colony and declare the good news of victory and defeat of all that Rome stood for. It was a radical message. Plutarch (Pompey 66.3) uses the term about 'bringing news of victory' or 'declaring a victory' in battle, e.g. "many... sailed to Cornelia in Lesbos with the glad tidings that the war was ended".

16:11 *Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a straight course to Samothrace and the day following to Neapolis-* A nautical term for sailing before the wind. But wind is the same Hebrew idea as 'spirit'. They were as it were led directly by the Spirit on their journey, confirming the process of 'concluding' we discussed on :10. Recall too how they had been forbidden to preach in two or three places before this; now, everything is going so directly and clearly under the Lord's direction by the Spirit. The allusion may be to the way the cherubim of Ezekiel's vision moved in a straight manner. And the account of Saul's conversion is replete with reference to the commissioning of Ezekiel. The Spirit, working through Angels, cherubim and all manner of means, confirmed Paul in the direction he had worked out as being necessary to take.

16:12 *And from there to Philippi, which is a city of Macedonia, the first of the district, a Roman colony; and we stayed in this city for some days-* The teaching, conversion and baptism of the Philippians took only "some days"; the jailer would have at best only had a brief exposure to Paul's message before meeting him in prison. Likewise Paul was only in Thessalonica "two Sabbath days" and in that time he had to work night and day to support himself and his team. The impression is that the pre-baptismal teaching was brief. Colonies were "another Rome transferred to the soil of another country" (Vine). This explains some of the language in the letter to the Philippians, emphasizing that our citizenship is a heavenly one (Phil. 3:20), when Philippi had been established as a "colony" for Roman citizens.

16:13 *And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by a river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women that had gathered-* When Paul is described as going "forth without the gate" to preach in Philippi (RV), this is the very language of Heb. 13:12 about the Lord going forth without the gate, carrying the cross, and bidding us follow Him. For Paul, to preach was to carry the cross of Christ, and so it must be for us. A river was an attractive place for Jews to worship because of their need to perform ritual washing. Paul's message of baptism was therefore particularly appropriate. We get the impression all through of those on the edge hearing the Gospel. Lydia was not even from Philippi, a Gentile on the edge of the Jewish faith. And meeting "outside the gate". The "place of prayer" was maybe a booth of branches or some temporary meeting place by a river, as water was required for Jewish ceremonial washings. We see how this was to lead to the only true washing required, in baptism. See on :14 *hearing*.

16:14 *And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God-* Or, a Lydian. Perhaps she was a Jewess from Lydia, or a Gentile from Lydia who had become attracted to Judaism. Archaeological remains indicate a guild of dyers and purple traders there. She would have been accustomed to the use of *baptizo* in her work. Rather like her doing the ritual washings as a Gentile by the river, thinking towards baptism. And the jailer wanting to kill himself in offering to the gods, then washing Paul's wounds with water. All leading him to the idea of baptism in water into the Lord's death as his own self-sacrifice with Him.

Heard us- The imperfect, 'was hearing', could suggest she overheard the preaching rather than sat attentively purposefully listening to it. Otherwise we would expect the Greek word for 'listening' to be used here; but it isn't. The image of Lydia as the pious proselyte who had gone out to pray by the river with Jewish women is therefore probably incorrect. Rather she was by the riverside, as a small time trader woman

attending to her purple cloth business, who "worshipped God" in her own way but separate to the other Jewish women. And she overheard Paul preaching to the Jewish women who were praying there. And she believed. As discussed on :13, this is again the theme of those on the edge hearing the Gospel. This is typical of how the Lord works- through indirect means. Indeed some early Christian commentators claimed that Lydia was involved with producing purple garments for immoral pagan practices, as this was the common use of purple cloth. We recall how the whores of the Old Testament prophets and Revelation are dressed in purple. If "Lydia" means 'woman from Lydia', then we have to give due weight to the associations of 'women from Lydia' with prostitution. "Lydia" was not her personal name; she was from Thyatira, which was located in the province of Lydia, so she was just known as 'the Lydian'. Strabo claims that slaves often bore the names of their nations of origin (*Geography* 7.3.12). So she may have been a freed slavewoman, and again this connects with aspersions that slave women only became free because of involvement in sexual scandal. She presents as not immoral, but with many shady associations. And she is strongly associated with her city of origin; although the record says she worshipped God, perhaps a would be proselyte not accepted by the other Jewish women who were praying at the river, and in any case without a synagogue to be attached to. The description of her as a "seller", "hawker" or "merchant" likewise had shady associations; a woman from another city and province selling anything was seen askance. She is also an independent head of household, able to on her initiative invite Paul and his group to stay with her. We feel all this rather hinted at when she asks Paul to judge whether she is in fact "faithful to the Lord", as if she accepts she may not appear like that. Another stereotype is that Lydia was wealthy. That may not at all have been the case. Because Phil. 4:14-18 and 2 Cor. 8:1-5 are insistent that the church at Philippi was very poor. So we may well imagine her living in cheap accommodation, although head of that poor household.

Whose heart the Lord opened to give heed to the things which were spoken by Paul- This is clear enough evidence that the Lord works directly on the human heart / perception, quite above the power of His written word itself. The Old Testament has several similar examples of God 'opening eyes' of perception (Gen. 21:19; Num. 22:31; 2 Kings 6:17,20; Is. 42:7; 50:5), and David asks for his eyes to be open to behold wonderful things in God's word (Ps. 119:18). There would be no need for that prayer, nor for God to open eyes, if intellectual effort alone is required. This is why in our times, the Holy Spirit is provided to 'enlighten the eyes of your understanding' (Eph. 1:18 "God may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; so that you may have the eyes of your mind enlightened"). It's quite possible Paul there alludes to Lydia as a representative of us all. Her 'giving heed' to the Gospel was because the Lord had opened her heart. It's not as if the Lord faces off against man over an open Bible, leaving us the choice of responding to what we read / hear or not. He goes further than that, reaching across the table, and compelling some to have open hearts to His word. Luke has spoken earlier of how the Lord opened the hearts of the disciples / apostles to understand the word of God (Lk. 24:31,32,45). Indeed the parallels between the Emmaus disciples and Lydia are strong. All had their hearts opened by the Lord, and responded by opening their homes to the Lord or His people. That again is evidence enough that God's word is not simply self-explanatory; the eunuch rightly observed that he couldn't understand it unless a man guided him, and the Spirit operated by sending Philip to do this; the disciples had their hearts opened by the Lord to understand the Scriptures, and Lydia's heart was opened to give heed to the Gospel. This 'extra' factor is reflective of God's grace; without it, salvation

would simply be for those intellectually astute enough to correctly interpret the theology of the Bible. But the presence of that 'extra' factor (in the Lord opening hearts to the Gospel) is the mechanism by which He calls. And as Romans demonstrates, the fact He calls one but not another is a parade example of His grace, and how salvation is by grace and not by theological prowess.

The same word for "to give heed" is in Acts 8:6 about how people gave heed to the Gospel which Philip preached. Presumably it would be fair enough to conclude that the Lord likewise assisted their hearts to this end.

The language of opening and closing needs to be put together. The Lord Jesus knocks at the door, and if any man open, He enters and fellowships with that man (Rev. 3:20). But here the Lord as it were goes a stage further, and opens the heart, just as in the Song of Solomon, the lover seeks to open the door from the outside when the beloved delays to open. It is He who opens the door of faith (Acts 14:27), by giving repentance [not just forgiveness] (Acts 11:18). This huge initiative from the Divine side is strange for us. We are all used to a man reaping what he sows, what goes around comes around, *quid pro quo*, crime and punishment... and that is all more or less true to observed reality in this world. But God takes huge initiatives and seeks to almost force through His plan to save. And yet those who refuse these initiatives will themselves knock on His door at the last day, and find He refuses to open (Mt. 25:11). This is in contrast to the faithful, for whom the Lord's coming is again likened to a knock on the door which they open immediately (Lk. 12:36). Our response to His knocking now, in the events of daily life and our regular encounter with Him in the Gospels, will prepare us to perceive His knock when He returns. And our response now prepares us for our response then.

It is not therefore incidental that the 'opening' of Lydia's heart is described with the same word used twice of the amazing, dramatic 'opening' of the prison doors (Acts 16:26,27)- "and every one's bands were loosed", language appropriate to Luke's opening description of the Lord's mission as being to release the bands of the prisoners. That theme of Jubilee, of release, continues throughout Luke-Acts. This earthquake in human hearts is clearly from God. This is how much further He goes than simply knocking on a human heart. This is what love does- it takes the initiative, and keeps on pushing that initiative until it is clear that the person is refusing it. But it is for us to respond to it. And in reflecting that love, it is for us to likewise take the initiative in offering human salvation. Her response to her heart being opened was to open her home to Paul and the Christian preachers.

16:15 *And when she was baptized*- The conversion of Lydia is spoken of in a sub clause: "And when she was baptized...". There is no statement that she believed what Paul had spoken; merely that she listened with interest and was baptized. The implication is that belief and baptism are part and parcel of the same thing. There is certainly the impression that the period of Lydia's teaching was quick. To argue that she may have been instructed for several days is an argument from silence. The impression given by all the accounts of baptism is that it was the initial response made by people once they believed a basic outline of the Gospel.

And her household- The way of the world was that the whole household converted to the religion of the head of the house. And yet the call of Christ was to individuals. Therefore when we read of whole households converting (Acts 16:15, 31-34; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:11,16; 16:15 Rom. 16:10) we must assume that they had resisted the temptation to mass convert, and that Masters had the humility to *not* demand of their slaves and family members that they just blindly follow them. This request would have been axiomatic to their preaching of the Gospel; and yet it would have

been a radical departure from how family heads around them behaved. We note from :40 that the faith of her family members is spoken of as legitimate: "they entered into the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the believers, they comforted them".

She urged us, saying: If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay. So she persuaded us- Entering houses and eating together was seen as having a religious dimension to it, as Peter mentioned when accepting Cornelius' invitation. There were present at least Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke, as this is a 'we' passage. For a woman to invite a group of previously unknown men into her house was scandalous and would have begged all kinds of gossip. But the culture in Christ was and is at radical variance with that of the surrounding world.

Hospitality is pretty much presented as a fruit of the Spirit in the New Testament. It is a qualification for being an elder. To be hospitable to those of other ethnic groups, to welcome them into your home, was a radical thing to do. Strangers were considered sceptically and negatively in their society. And only those moved by the gift of the Spirit would act otherwise. This barrier breaking hospitality was of course a reflection of God's similar generous outreach to us, across all that separates God from man. We learn from the Peter and Cornelius story how freighted was the whole question of whom you showed hospitality to, entering someone's home, let alone staying there, was of huge social significance.

As noted above, Lydia had shady connections and would have appeared an unfaithful woman. But she was faithful to the Lord in her heart, and begged Paul to perceive that- which he did.

16:16 *And it came to pass, as we were going to the place of prayer, that a certain slave girl met us-* See on 16:15. We can imagine the gossip this provoked as Lydia, her family and the foreign men walked to the river. Note that after baptism, she continued to attend the religious meeting place she had attended previously. The Lord spoke of how the time would come when His followers would be cast out of the synagogues, but following Him did not immediately require ceasing attendance at synagogue, despite the terribly wrong theologies preached there.

Who had a spirit by which she predicted the future and who brought her masters much gain by fortune-telling- Acts 16:16–18 are the words of Luke, under inspiration: "a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of Python met us" (Gk.). As explained in the footnote in the Diaglott version, Python was the name of a false god believed in during the first century, possibly the same as the god Apollo. It was believed that the 'spirit' of Python took over the 'immortal soul' of the person being possessed. Seeing that the Bible strongly opposes the idea of an immortal soul, there is no way that a spirit of Python can possess anyone. So Python definitely did not exist, but Luke does not say the girl was 'possessed with a spirit of Python, who by the way, is a false god who does not really exist...'. In the same way the Gospels do not say that Jesus 'cast out demons which, by the way, do not really exist, it is just the language of the day for illnesses'. The demons cast out of Legion went "into the abyss" (Lk. 8:31 Gk.); the pagan concept of the abyss is a nonsense, yet if we believe that the record of Legion's cure teaches the existence of demons, then we must logically believe in 'the abyss' too.

Another take is that Python was thought to be the agent of Zeus "the most high god", responsible for communication to men. But the girl starts redefining the most high God, through the Holy Spirit, not Python. We can take it that this girl, along with Lydia and the jailor, were all converted by the initial work of the Holy Spirit upon them- which they responded to.

16:17 *The same following after Paul and us was crying out, saying: These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation!*- There was clearly a literal element to this, because Paul turns and addresses the girl (:18). But the language of following Paul is elsewhere used to mean that people accepted his teaching (Acts 13:43). It may be that we are intended to understand that she accepted the Gospel. There were so many gods, so her message of a "Most High God" was that of "one God". "Salvation" was a vague concept at their time. In a shame based society, religion was all about appearances in this life. Future, eternal salvation wasn't something much thought about. The jailor finally "believed in God" and asked what he had to do to be saved- and it would seem all he had heard was this garbled message from this mad slave girl. But the Gospel is dynamite, it may be an atom but has within it huge power. The whole story of Philippi is proof enough. And again we see that it was a woman totally on the periphery who was at the centre of God's method of spreading the Gospel.

16:18 *And this she did for many days. But Paul, being greatly disturbed by it, turned and said to the spirit: I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it came out that very moment-* Paul didn't allow himself to be irritated. The tragedy of mental illness grieved him; the tragedy of the way in which some people have an all too *partial* knowledge of God's truth. And his grieving for her didn't merely result in him preaching the Gospel to her; he did something concrete to help cure her.

16:19 *But when her masters saw that the hope of their gain was gone, they laid hold of Paul and Silas-* Circumstances repeat within our lives, as they did for Paul. Because exactly the same complaint was made at Ephesus, with the same persecution; and the same Greek words are used to describe it (Acts 19:24,25). Paul was intended to learn from the events at Philippi so he could cope with those at Ephesus.

And dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers- Paul was likewise 'dragged' in Jerusalem (Acts 21:30). Yet he had himself 'dragged' Christians out of their house churches, along the streets and into prison (Acts 8:3). He would have been enabled to feel for those he had thus treated. We too are brought to realize how others felt as a result of our actions, not so much as a punishment for us, but in order to lead us closer to the spirit of Christ and to His Kingdom.

16:20 *And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said: These men, being Jews, are disturbing our city-* This disrespect was rooted in the fact that these Jews had probably only recently arrived, as a result of Jews being cast out of Rome (Acts 18:2).

16:21 *And advocate customs which it is not lawful for us to receive, or to observe, being Romans-* In both Thessalonica and Philippi, strong opposition arose to the preaching of the Gospel because it was held that it was preaching another King, Jesus, in opposition to Caesar, and that the obligations of this new religion were at variance with the Imperial Cult (Acts 16:21; 17:7). In a sense, these allegations were true. Christianity taught that the convert became a member of a new, spiritual Israel. It was irrelevant whether he or she was a Jew, Roman or Gentile. And the convert had to act inclusively rather than exclusively towards other converts. It must have been hard for a Roman citizen to willingly become as it were a 'citizen' of 'spiritual Israel', a 'member' of the despised and conquered Jewish race. To not participate in the cult of emperor worship was serious indeed; Roman citizenship could be lost over this matter. Pliny wrote that Christians were therefore "unable by temperament or

unwilling by conviction to participate in the common activities of a group or community". They were seen as any true living Christian is: a bit weird, unsociable, aloof from worldly pleasure, and thereby a silent critic of those who indulge. "The Christian would not attend gladiatorial shows or games or plays. He would not read pagan literature. He would not enlist as a soldier, for then he would come under orders that might conflict with his standards and with his loyalty to Jesus Christ. He would not be a painter or sculptor, for that would be to acquiesce to idolatry. Nor would he be a schoolmaster, for then he would inevitably have to tell the immoral stories of the pagan gods. The Christian had better steer clear of business contracts, because they required the taking of oaths, which the Christian abjured. They had better keep out of administrative office because of the idolatry involved... and so on". The Romans considered anyone outside the Roman world or who rejected Roman manners and laws as being a barbarian; and yet the Gospel appealed to Roman citizens to reject these very manners and laws. Thus Ramsay comments: "To the Romans *genus humanum* meant not the human race in general but the Roman world, men who lived according to Roman manners and laws; the rest were enemies and barbarians. The Christians, then, were enemies to civilized man, and to the customs and laws which regulated civilized society... they introduced divisions into families and set children against their parents".

Jews were allowed to make proselytes of other nations, but not Roman citizens, who were not to be religiously preached to by any other group within the empire. Therefore the command to take the Gospel to literally all men, including Roman citizens, was hard to obey. This explains the double complaint that the Roman citizens were being asked to both receive *and* obey the message of Christ. Receiving them, being preached to, was also a matter of offence, as well as the content of the message.

"Being Romans" is the same Greek term used in :37, where it clearly means "being Roman citizens". Their view was that Roman citizenship meant that belief in the Gospel was impossible for them. Perhaps that is one reason why Paul tended not to immediately reveal his Roman citizenship. And quite simply, he despised it and wasn't at all proud of it. Just as we are to despise worldly advantage that may come our way. It also underscores his later teaching to the Philippians that our citizenship is of heaven, not of this earth. Philippi was a retirement place for Roman citizens and military officers, located on unusually flat land amongst the otherwise mountainous land of northern Greece, with a good climate, prosperous local economy, and located near the *Via Egnatia* it had great transport connections. Everyone dreamed of being a Roman citizen; and nobody wanted to lose it if they had it. This is all radically deconstructed in the Gospel message of citizenship of the Heavenly Kingdom of God and His Son.

16:22 *And the crowd rose up together against them; and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten-* The obvious question is why Paul didn't reveal his Roman citizenship at this stage in order to avoid the flogging. He does reveal it afterwards, but seeing flogging could be fatal, there must have been a major reason why Paul went through with it when he didn't need to. One can only speculate: he wanted to show solidarity with Silas [although the plural in :37 could imply he also was a Roman]; he wanted to put the authorities in a position where they were in his debt and would allow the fledgling ecclesia to meet unhindered; he was simply stubborn and angry and wished to embarrass his enemies.

16:23 *And when they had laid many stripes upon them-* This doesn't mean that they personally flogged them. They 'laid' in the sense of laying a penalty upon them. The actual flogging was likely done by the jailor; hence his desire to wash their

damaged bodies after his conversion, and his deep sense of fear before them afterwards. When we read that the jailor "having received this order" (:24) put them into the inner prison, the "order" was the sentence of flogging which he was ordered to inflict, and he may well have carried it out in the inner prison.

They threw them into prison- Exactly what Paul had done to Christians, after flogging them (Acts 26:10).

Ordering the jailor to guard them carefully- Especially securely. There seemed to be a fear that Paul would seek to escape; hence having received such a charge, the jailor put them in the inner prison, the most secure zone, probably underground with no access to the outside. Or it could be that the magistrates wanted these men to die in custody, and 'guard them extra carefully' could have been a nod to abuse them. See on :24 *Shackles*.

16:24 *Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in shackles-* The Greek is literally "the wood". This was an instrument of torture having five holes, four for the wrists and ankles and one for the neck. "The holes being pierced at different distances, the legs might be separated or divaricated to a great extent, which must produce extreme pain". The same word is used for the cross (Acts 5:30; 10:39; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24). Again we see how the experiences of believers in Acts, and Paul especially, were a sharing in the sufferings of their Lord. Just as ours are. Perhaps it was perceiving that connection with the crucified Jesus which led them to burst into praise. "The inner prison" was commonly known as 'the underworld'; dark, with no windows, no sense of day or night, filled with the smell of decaying humanity. It was as if they were sharing the Lord's death.

16:25 *But about midnight-* The stocks were an instrument of torture which would have made sleeping impossible. It could have been that they might have died that night in that dark cave... if the earthquake had not happened.

Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God- Literally, they were praying in singing hymns. Let's not forget that hymns are prayers being sung. The musical issues surrounding them can so easily distract from this realization.

And the prisoners were listening to them- The fact no prisoners ran away (:28) may mean that they were converted by that evening of witness. See on :26. The verb for "listening" is unusual and means to listen attentively. We will discuss on :26 and :27 how quite possibly these prisoners were converted to Christ- which would continue the theme in this chapter, of very quick conversion on the basis of a very slender understanding of the Gospel.

16:26 *And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's bonds were unfastened-* The work of the Lord Jesus is described in exactly these terms, of opening the prisons and releasing those who are bound (Lk. 13:16; Is. 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Zech. 9:11; 1 Pet. 3:19). The fact all the prisoners had their bonds unfastened would maybe suggest they were all converted, at least potentially they were given freedom in Christ; see on :25 *The prisoners*.

16:27 *And the jailor, being roused out of sleep and seeing the prison doors open-* More language appropriate to the saving work of Jesus in opening the prison doors. The fact he was sleeping means he didn't hear their singing and reciting scripture. His only prior contact with the Gospel would have been through the few words of the slave girl.

The 'opening' of Lydia's heart is described with the same word used twice of the amazing, dramatic 'opening' of the prison doors (Acts 16:26,27)- "and every one's

bands were loosed", language appropriate to Luke's opening description of the Lord's mission as being to release the bands of the prisoners. That theme of Jubilee, of release, continues throughout Luke-Acts. This earthquake in human hearts is clearly from God. This is how much further He goes than simply knocking on a human heart. This is what love does- it takes the initiative, and keeps on pushing that initiative until it is clear that the person is refusing it. But it is for us to respond to it. And in reflecting that love, it is for us to likewise take the initiative in offering human salvation. Her response to her heart being opened was to open her home to Paul and the Christian preachers. Lydia and the jailor are clearly paralleled- after the 'opening' experience they and their families were immediately baptized, and they then entertained Paul in their homes.

Drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped- If prisoners escaped during an earthquake, it wasn't a foregone conclusion that the jailor would therefore be executed for negligence of duty. He had a fair chance of survival. We are therefore left with the impression that this man was perhaps very proud, or committed to his job to the point that he was his career and his career was him, with his family meaning little to him; or perhaps just overly emotional; or maybe new to the job and reacting poorly in a crisis. We meet all these types of people in life, and tend to assume they would not be good candidates for the Gospel. But this man was. Or it could be that he was a very religious man, and saw in the earthquake the wrath of the gods. And so he wanted to die in order to placate the gods and save himself from some kind of eternal condemnation. Whatever, his pride, his religious beliefs, his career... all these things were replaced by the love of God and His salvation in the Lord.

16:28 *But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying: Do not harm yourself! For we are all here!*- Every other usage of the phrase 'to do harm' is always in a moral sense, of sinning (Rom. 7:19; 9:11; 13:4; 2 Cor. 5:10). We can therefore in this case conclude that suicide would have been a sin; although God's forgiveness of that sin is another issue. We naturally enquire why the prisoners didn't flee, grasping the apparent offer of salvation from their prison life. The answer is surely that they had become believers and experienced the spiritual freedom from prison and darkness, and so all other human possibilities in life became of less importance. Isaiah and the Psalms spoke of men in the darkest prison house and sitting in chains... being spiritually liberated. Surely Paul and Silas had sung these words; and those prisoners had been converted. They didn't run to physical freedom because they were so in awe of their experience- that they had spiritually liberated from their prison house chains. I find no other credible reason as to why they didn't run for it.

16:29 *And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear, he fell down before Paul and Silas-* At this point, he had believed. So his fear was of God. He had now no fear of judgment by his superiors nor by society. The prisoners hadn't escaped. So this was fear of Divine judgment. Just as "Felix trembled" when he considered judgment to come. Fear of his fate before God for having tortured His servants, and having all the same been shown such grace in that his prisoners hadn't run away.

16:30 *And brought them out and said: Sirs, what must I do to be saved?-*

The prison keeper is presented as knowing nothing about the Gospel prior to this point apart from what the slave girl had been shouting. He would have understood the earthquake as the wrath of the gods. And he felt he was being singled out for their wrath, as he now had to be executed, as he thought, for the prisoners' escaping. "What must I do?" probably had behind it the idea that he had to offer some sacrifice or do

some ritual in order to be saved by the god preached by Paul. He knew that his own belief systems had failed him. He also knew that these men were in prison because of healing the mad girl who had been screaming out: "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation!" (Acts 16:17). That is why he now asks what he can do to get that salvation. And Paul tells him the things about Yah-hoshua, Jesus, God's salvation. And he gets baptized into Him, Jesus, that salvation he so needed. Salvation from fear of shame, shame he had not performed in his job as required, salvation from fear of the afterlife's judgment, from fear of the angry gods. 'Salvation' in Greco-Roman thought was a very philosophical concept. Now he was faced with the need for salvation in hard reality; salvation from the fear of death and the sense that the gods were angry with him through the earthquake and how it had specifically affected him. Salvation from fear of an unknown future. And he remembered the words of the mad woman about salvation. Probably his only exposure to the Gospel had been the words of that mentally disturbed woman, rather than Paul's preaching. A very slender beginning and knowledge base for conversion. There is a marked contrast, therefore, in the command to simply believe. Not do any ritual works or give money or sacrifice to appease angry gods. He perhaps wanted to take his own life because he thought that sacrificing his life would result in his salvation in the after life. He was told he only had to believe. Baptism was a logical thing to do at that point, because it spoke of death with and for Jesus. Not suicide to a god who might or might not make things more bearable in the afterlife, but a life given to the one who had already died for him, and could save him by faith alone and not works. This theme of "salvation" continues in the letter to the Philippians, urging them to continue to "eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).

He doesn't ask for baptism, suggesting he was unaware of the need for it. This was a highly emotional situation; anyone at the very point of suicide is in a very unstable position. Many today would have told the man to calm down and consider the issue of baptism once things were a bit calmer in his life, urging him not to take such a decision on the cusp of emotion and perceived desperation. Let alone to baptize all his family when he himself was taking the decision under such psychological and circumstantial pressure. But the Biblical example here is quite the opposite to how many would judge today. "What must I do?" is a common phrase recorded by Luke [Acts 2:37; and the crowd ask John "What then shall we do", Lk. 3:10]. All encounter with the Lord Jesus and His message provokes this sense, that we can no longer be passive, but must *do* something in response. "Sirs" translates *kurios*, and maybe we are to perceive that Paul and Silas were manifesting the Lord Jesus to the jailor.

There is no record of his apology or desire for forgiveness from them for what he had done to them (see on :23). He rightly perceived that the essence of his sin was against God and he needed to be right before Him, knowing that what he had done required judgment, which he now realized he needed to be 'saved' from.

The jailer had feared for his physical life had the prisoners escaped. Being assured that he was now saved from that loss of life, it is psychologically credible that he thought of his eternal life. For faced with physical death, every man thinks of what happens after. And he had heard of the slave girl shouting in :17 "these men are the servants of the Most High God who have come to show a way of salvation!". God had nudged him with those words, then through the singing of Paul and Silas, then the earthquake and the prisoners not escaping. He would have been struck by the claim of a "Most High God", seeing the Greco-Roman world was full of gods for various things and there was no concept of a single "Most High God", even if the term was at

times used of Zeus who supposedly spoke through Python. The girl was thought to have the spirit of Python. But she is now proclaiming through the Holy Spirit the news of salvation from the true "Most High God". We note that the Lord speaking through the girl didn't seek to immediately debunk all their gods, but to present the one true God as "the most high". There was no god who saved from earthquakes [which were seen as Divine judgment] nor who saved eternally. But the Most High God could save from His own judgment. The man's need, which is every man's need, was met alone in Him. Perhaps his emphasis was upon the word "I". Paul, Silas and the prisoners had been saved- but how could "I" be saved? His joy is understandable- he had been freed from fear of death, from fear of the wrath of the gods.

Truly this is a case of a very hard, brutalized man being reached by the simple offer of salvation by grace. Philo said of jailers, who were effectively torturers, infamous for cruelty and therefore often alcoholics: "Everyone knows well how jailers are filled with inhumanity and savagery. For by nature they are unmerciful, and by practice they are trained daily toward fierceness, as to become wild beasts. They see, say, and do nothing good, not even by change, but instead the most violent and cruel things... Jailers, therefore, spend time with robbers, thieves, burglars, the wanton, the violent, corrupters, murderers, adulterers, and the sacrilegious. From each of these they draw and collect depravity, producing from that diverse blend a single mixture of thoroughly abominable evil" (Joseph. 81,84). He the man once in power now collapses at the feet of the Lord and His people whom he has abused. His tender washing of their stripes would be an image unheard of in the Greco-Roman world. This hard man had been humbled by the earthquake, the token of Divine wrath. And then by the grace shown him in that the prisoners didn't escape, he was talked out of suicide by a man he had tortured, and felt that salvation was being offered to him. This was no long term Bible student edging towards understanding the fullness of Christ, it was a desperate sinner and bad man brought to his knees by God's grace and converted in a flash. And his family likewise.

16:31 *And they said: Believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved-* We note the humility. When addressed by the Philippian jailor "Sirs (*kurion*), what must I do to be saved?", Paul answers "Believe in the Lord (*kurios*) Jesus".

In :34, he believed in God. A theme of Acts is that the work of the Father and Son are paralleled (e.g. 16:31 cp. 34; 15:12; 26:17 cp. 22). They are working *together* to achieve our final redemption. The concept is wondrous. The man asked what he must *do* and he is told to *believe*. As the Lord Himself explained, the work of God is to believe on Him.

You and your household- This focus on his family may have been to psychologically assist him to get over his suicidal thoughts. Although :32 is clear that the household heard the word of the Lord and were then baptized, the implication here is clearly that his faith could save his family. The salvation of others for the sake of a third party is clearly established in Mk. 2:5, where a man was forgiven because of the faith of his friends. In the OT we think of Rahab and Abigail saving their families by their faith. Healing was definitely given for the sake of the faith of third parties; the Centurion's servant and Jairus' daughter come to mind, and James' exhortation to pray for the sick that they may be both healed and forgiven.

16:32 *And they spoke the word of the Lord to him, and to all that were in his household-* The "household" would have included children, slaves and distant relatives. The man was wealthy. "The word of the Lord" was the message of the Lord Jesus; the kind of material eventually transcribed and published as the Gospels of the Lord Jesus. Paul clearly had in mind that his "household" could respond; for he

commands the jailer that if *he* believed, then he *and* his household could be saved. This makes us wonder whether this man and his household had been known to Paul previously. Or it could be that Paul perceived that because of the faith of one individual, a whole family could be saved- although they too had to respond to the Gospel. Hence he preached it to them. There is no indication the jailer had been a Bible student. Unlike the other prisoners, he hadn't been listening to Paul and Silas singing hymns. He had been fast asleep. His conversion shows the sheer transforming power of the Gospel when encountered after becoming aware of Divine judgment and grace.

16:33 *And at that hour of the night he took them-* The earthquake occurred at “midnight” (Acts 16:25); Paul and Silas spoke “the word of the Lord” to the jailer, and “that same hour” (Acts 16:33 AV) he washed their stripes and he and his family were baptized. The exact referent of “that same hour” is difficult to determine, but the grammar would seem to imply that within one hour the jailer heard the word of the Lord from Paul and Silas, washed them, and he and his family were baptized. All in the midst of the aftermath of a major earthquake. The record seems to be using “that same hour” to highlight the urgency of baptism [it should be done even in the midst of an earthquake, at night]; and the speed at which it could occur [“that same hour”]. After this, the jailer took Paul and Silas into his home and prepared a celebratory meal; and when day broke, the magistrates sent an urgent message requiring Paul and Silas to be released (Acts 16:34,35).

There is reason to think that the meal afterwards was effectively a "breaking of bread" communion meal. So from this very apparently shaky start, with faith apparently based on a very brief and slim experience, there grew the church at Philippi. Soon afterwards, Paul was to write to them and mention they had "bishops and deacons". A strong church, according to Paul's letter to them, began on this apparently slim basis. But that is the power of confrontation with Divine judgment and humble repentance and immediate baptism.

And washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized- The Greek *louo* specifically refers to complete washing of the body, rather than anointing just some parts of the body, for which the NT uses a different word. Literally, he washed them from their wounds, i.e. the blood and damage from the stripes was over their entire bodies. Their baptizing of him after this is another example in Acts of deep connection and mutuality between the convert and the converter. The hardened torturer now presents as tender and caring- a psychological transformation overnight, and one which was not just on the cusp of emotion but [it seems from the letter to the Philippians] continued.

16:34 *And he brought them into his house-* Therefore the teaching of the Gospel to his family in :32,33 was done outside the house; presumably in the ruins of their house and yard. The house they entered would have been severely damaged.

Set food before them, and rejoiced greatly with all his family- Literally, 'set a table'. As if there is a hint of it being a breaking of bread communion meal. From this slender beginning would develop a church with bishops and deacons, to whom Paul wrote so positively. The theme of "great joy" in the later letter to the Philippians shows that this joy was not merely on the cusp of circumstance, but was to be an abiding experience. Whole households were converted (Acts 10:2; 16:34; 18:8; Col. 4:15), and the earliest Christian meeting places unearthed were rooms in the homes of rich believers. And with us too, the success of our community depends upon God's

Truth first and foremost being the centre of family life, with the joy of faith permeating it. Household conversions were a major feature of the first century spread of the Gospel (e.g. Lydia- Acts 16:15; Crispus- Acts 18:8; Priscilla and Aquila- Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Nymphas- Col. 4:15; Onesiphorus- 2 Tim. 1:16; 4:19; Philemon- Philemon 2; “the elect lady”, 2 Jn. 10; the home at Troas- Acts 20:6-8). Clearly ‘house’ was used in the first century as a kind of shorthand for ‘house church’. They knew no other pattern of gathering. There was almost an assumption that if a man converted to Christ, his ‘house’ also would. Hence we read that Cornelius would be told words “whereby you and your house shalt be saved” (Acts 11:14). The same phrase was repeated to the jailor at Philippi (Acts 16:31). It’s emphasized four times in three verses that the Gospel was preached to his house, and his whole house responded (Acts 16:31-34). The Lord likewise rejoiced in Zacchaeus’ conversion, that salvation had come to that man’s house (Lk. 19:9). He assumed that Zacchaeus would quite naturally persuade his ‘house’.

Having believed in God- He was unlikely to have been an atheist [atheism wasn't very common in the 1st century]. But he grasped for the first time the real import of a real and relevant faith in the one true God as a personal being. See on Jn. 14:1. We probably need to read in an ellipsis here: He believed in God's grace and salvation, which is in His Son Jesus. His belief "in God" connects back to how the mentally disturbed slave girl had said that Paul and Silas were servants of the one true and highest God (:17).

16:35 *But when it was day, the magistrates sent their officers, saying: Let those men go-* Word may have got to them from Lydia or other converts, that Paul was a Roman citizen. But note :38 "they feared when they heard that they were Romans". So perhaps news of the strange security of the prisoners and conversion of the jailor had already reached them and they didn't wish to as it were get in trouble with God.

16:36 *And the jailor reported the words to Paul, saying: The magistrates have sent word to let you go. Therefore come out and go in peace-* After baptizing the jailor and eating at his home, Paul and Silas had returned to jail. The temptation to flee must have been very great, and in the aftermath of the earthquake they could well have got away. The fact they returned to the jail indicates Paul had another agenda here, and he doggedly stuck to it. His subsequent usage of the situation would confirm this- he allowed himself to suffer so much in order that the ecclesia there could get off to a good start in terms of being shielded from legal persecution. Our efforts for the newly converted are made in this same spirit.

16:37- see on Acts 22:25.

But Paul said to them: They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned men that are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison, and now they want to throw us out secretly? No!- Literally "men that are Romans". This was absolutely contrary to the initial accusation: “These men, being Jews...”. Silas also was a Roman citizen, and so we must note too his willing submission to suffering he could otherwise have avoided. We note too the absence of Timothy and Luke, who were apparently also in the area at the time; perhaps Paul allowed them to slip away, fully intending to use his citizenship to establish a situation in which the new converts would be left alone by the authorities. We may learn from that that needless suffering was avoided in such a case.

Being beaten uncondemned made them sharers in the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. One of multiple examples of how His people share the essence of His cross, and how He there shared the essence of all our experiences.

Let them come themselves and bring us out- This may have been said with a fleck of pride and annoyance; and yet the evidence provided above indicates that this was exactly according to Paul's game plan. He wanted to be flogged so that he could then pull out the card of his Roman citizenship. He almost did the same in Acts 22:29. And God confirmed him in that plan by bringing about the earthquake that very night, something which Paul in no way could have contrived. Likewise the conversion of the jailor was all a strengthening of that plan- to get the authorities relatively onside with the Christian movement. Or perhaps the jailor had earlier expressed interest in the Gospel and Paul was by all means seeking to witness to him, and again his plans were confirmed by the sending of the earthquake. In these things we learn how God operates with men to this day- we make plans in His service, and He confirms and enables them by sending situations [like the earthquake] which are well beyond any human contrivance.

16:38 *And the officers reported these words to the magistrates-* As the jailor reported words in :36. All this sending of verbal messages by the hand of messengers would mean that in accordance with Paul's intention, the word about the situation was spreading around.

And they feared when they heard that they were Romans- See on 16:35 *Let those men go.*

16:39 *And they came and pleaded with them, and when they had brought them out, they asked them to go away from the city-* Paul doesn't obey immediately; he goes to Lydia's house. This could be read as his native argumentative, awkward temperament shining through; or additionally, as also part of his game plan to demonstrate that the house church at Lydia's home was to be openly connected with the Christian movement, and now to be left well alone by the authorities, in case they made a formal complaint about the treatment of the men whom they had lodged.

16:40 *And they went out of the prison-* Luke, or the inspired companion, was not in the prison with them and may have bravely remained in Philippi to provide support to the fledgling ecclesia.

And entered into the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the believers- The New Testament speaks of households run by women: Mary (Acts 12:12), Lydia (Acts 16:14,40); Nympha (Col. 4:15) and Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11). These women were presumably wealthy widows or divorcees who hadn't remarried. We are left to speculate whether they were in some way the 'leaders' of the house churches which met in their homes. Women are described as ruling households in 1 Tim. 5:14; Tit. 2:4,5. The woman of Prov. 31 clearly had autonomy within the private sphere of the household, even though the husband was the public leader. Seeing Christianity was initially a house-church, household religion, we are left to wonder how much women actually led house churches, especially seeing that the majority of early Christian members appear to have been women. The wall paintings [frescoes] found in the Christian catacombs around Rome are highly significant for our present study. The significant ones for our purposes are the catacombs of Priscilla on the Salaria Nuova, Callixtus on the via Appia Antica, and that of Domitilla on the via Ardeatine. They feature in places scenes of female Christians raising cups, with the inscription *agape* over them. Some show a woman occupying the central place in the

meal, with a large cup in her hand, with the other women looking at it intently. Some of the frescoes [there are many of them] show women dressed as slaves doing this in what appears to be a wealthy home. These frescoes seem to me indicative of how groups of slave women formed house churches, and faithfully kept the breaking of bread. Some frescoes show the women sharing the bread and wine with children around the table; one shows a woman holding a scroll, as if she is reading Scripture to the others. One fresco features a woman holding a cup of wine inscribed *nobis*- 'for us'. Some frescoes show men in the group, but the woman in the centre, as if she is leading the meeting, or as the host of the household.

They comforted them and departed- We naturally think that it was Paul and Silas who were in need of comfort, with their lacerated backs and aching muscles after hours in the "stocks". But here we see Paul's spiritual greatness; *he* comforted *them*, probably not least over the material losses they had suffered as a result of the earthquake.

ACTS CHAPTER 17

17:1 *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica*- Having been seriously abused in Philippi, Paul continued. He recognizes this when later writing to the Thessalonians, commenting that despite the shame suffered there, he continued boldly preaching, and thus arose the ecclesia at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:2). Keeping on keeping on is a hallmark of not only the true preacher but of all spiritual endeavour.

Apollonia was in Illyricum, and Paul later comments that he preached there (Rom. 15:19), so we can assume he didn't merely pass through but witnessed to the Gospel there too.

Where there was a synagogue of the Jews- Gk. *the* synagogue. It has been claimed that there was no other synagogue in Macedonia, although there may have been smaller Jewish prayer houses or meeting places (as in 16:13). It has also been conjectured that there were no Jewish communities in Amphipolis and Apollonia. The impression is therefore given of Paul focusing upon preaching to the Jews, making a specific focus upon the largest concentration of Jews in Macedonia. Amphipolis was the capital of Macedonia, and Paul had been beckoned to preach in Macedonia; the city was the most strategic in Greece and would've been the logical place to concentrate upon in order to fulfil a mission to Gentile Macedonia. But he is presented as passing through this capital city, where the largest concentration of population was, and homing in on Thessalonica. See on 17:2 *As his custom was*.

17:2 *And Paul, as his custom was*- Paul was called to preach to the Gentiles, and yet he repeatedly focused upon the Jews. Many of his sufferings were as a result of this; if he had served as the Lord intended, many of these issues would likely have been avoided. But the Lord still worked with Paul; and that is a lesson for us. I have noted elsewhere that the travel details provided by Luke are not incidental; the wind / spirit was so often against Paul as he travelled to Jerusalem, and so often with him when he travelled towards the Gentiles.

Went in to them- Paul uses the same word in telling the Thessalonians that the testimony of other converts showed "what manner of entering in we had unto you" (1 Thess. 1:9; 2:1 AV). Clearly the 'going in' to the Thessalonian synagogue has more than some literal descriptive reference to Paul passing in through the doors of the

building. The word is used several times in Acts of Paul's 'entering in' to various homes, towns and synagogues. The Lord Himself 'entered in' to synagogues and taught (emphasized by Luke in his first volume, e.g. Lk. 6:6). Thus Paul was manifesting the person of the Lord Jesus in his preaching, just as we likewise are Him to this world; for the Lord Jesus 'enters in' to His people (Jn. 10:1,2; Rev. 3:20 s.w.). Our entering in to people and communities with the Gospel is a reflection of God's outgoing entering in to our lives in Christ. This is why there must be a sense of proactive, outgoing entering in to others in our witness, rather than a passive 'witness by example' alone.

For three Sabbath days and reasoned with them from the Scriptures- The simplicity of what Paul preached can be seen from reflecting how he was only three weekends in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), but in that time he converted and baptized pagans and turned them into an ecclesia. Given the long hours worked by people, his number of contact hours with the people would've been quite small. His letters to the Thessalonians make it clear that during that time, he himself was working "night and day" supporting himself and those with him, who were presumably unable to work or maybe in Timothy's case too weak to work. He then had to write to them in 1 Thessalonians, addressing basic questions which they had subsequently asked, such as 'What will happen to dead believers when Christ returns?', 'When will Christ return?'. The level of their instruction before baptism must have been *very* basic. It is rare today to see such focus upon the urgency of baptism. Yet I submit that if we have the spirit of the early church, we will be pushing baptism up front to all we meet. And this was one of the first century keys to success.

So Paul stayed a few weeks or months in cities like Lystra and Thessalonica, returning, in the case of Lystra, after 18 months, and then again a few years later. Here in Acts 17:2, he spent three consecutive Sabbaths in Thessalonica, baptized the converts, and then didn't come back to see them for about five and a half years (Acts 20:1,2). How were they kept strong? By the good shepherd, by the grace of God, by the Father and Son working with Paul. He seems to have drilled them with the basics of the Gospel and the life they needed to live, ordained immature elders who were literate and able to teach the word, and then left them what he repeatedly calls "the tradition", a document or set of teachings relating to practical life in Christ (1 Cor. 11:2,23; 2 Thess. 2:5; 3:6; 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2; 3:14; Tit. 1:9). It was perhaps the simplicity and brevity of the message that was its strength in the lives of the early converts. Their lives were based directly upon reflection upon the implications of the basic elements of the Gospel. It is today amazing how simple men and women remember and reflect upon the things taught them even verbally, and show an impressive appreciation of them when they are visited again after some months or years. Interestingly, Corinth had the most evident problems and immaturity, even though Paul spent 18 months there, whereas ecclesias like Philippi which he established far quicker seem to have been far sounder. It therefore follows that length of pastoral work is not necessarily related to spiritual strength

17:3- see on Acts 13:24,25.

Explaining and proving that it was necessary that the Christ suffer and rise from the dead- The idea of a suffering, murdered Messiah is hard for Jews to accept to this day. Paul sought to persuade them from the Old Testament that this was indeed a requirement for the true Messiah. Once that is established, it becomes easier to connect Jesus of Nazareth with the Biblical picture of Messiah. Jesus thus becomes the Christ.

AV "opening and alleging". 'Opening' translates a Greek word meaning just that. The idea may be that he opened their minds. "Proving" is literally 'to place alongside'; the idea may be that he as it were placed the experiences of the historical Jesus alongside the Old Testament prophecies. "This Jesus" suggests Paul painted a picture of Jesus who was alive and real amongst them; and he was "the Christ" of the ancient prophecies. Truly, the Jesus of history is the Christ of faith.

"It was necessary that the Christ suffer" is the very phrase used of how Paul was to be made to understand that it was necessary [AV "must"] that he too suffered for Christ's sake (Acts 9:16). Just as Christ had to ["must"] suffer, so Paul "must"; and so we must. Herein lies the myth of the prosperity Gospel. We are called to carry a cross, not be pampered with great health and wealth.

Saying, This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ- Paul could describe his own preaching as "this Jesus, whom I proclaim to you...", as if Jesus was right there before their eyes, witnessed through Paul. It was like screening a Jesus film, but in words. But it was more than words- Paul himself manifested the Lord Jesus, and was His face and body to his audience. As the Lord was Paul's representative, so Paul was Christ's. The idea of representation works both ways: we see in the Gospel records how the Lord experienced some things which only we have; and we show aspects of His character to the world which nobody else can manifest. Likewise Paul could tell the Galatians that in him they had seen Jesus Christ placarded forth, crucified before their own eyes (Gal. 3:1). Paul knew that when people looked at his life, they saw something of the crucifixion of the Lord. The Galatians therefore accepted him "even as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4:14).

17:4 *And some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas, as did many of the devout Greeks-* First of all there must be an intellectual understanding if there is to be conversion. Men were "persuaded", not just emotionally bullied (Acts 17:4; 18:4; 19:8,26; 28:23,24). The intellectual basis of appeal is made clear in the way we read of accepting 'truth' as well as accepting the person of Jesus. Thus converts believe the truth (2 Thess. 2:10-13), acknowledge truth (2 Tim. 2:25; Tit. 1:1), obey truth (Rom. 2:8; 1 Pet. 1:22 cp. Gal. 5:7), and 'come to know the truth' (Jn. 8:32; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 1 Jn. 2:21). Preaching itself is 'the open statement of the truth' (2 Cor. 4:2). And so it is perfectly in order to seek to intellectually persuade our contacts.

People heard Paul's preaching and joined or 'clave' unto *him*, as they did in :34 to other preachers (Acts 17:34; 5:13); but conversion is a cleaving unto *the Lord Jesus* (Acts 11:23; 1 Cor. 6:17 Gk.). Thus Paul "spoke boldly in the Lord [Jesus], which gave testimony unto the word of his grace" (Acts 14:3). To this extent does the preacher manifest his Lord. He was a living witness to Jesus, and those who joined themselves to Him thereby joined themselves to the risen Lord Jesus. And it is likewise to this day.

And not a few of the chief women- Paul had to later remind the Thessalonians that he isn't preaching because he wants to take money and have relationships with women (1 Thess. 2:3-12). There were some wealthy women in Thessalonica who accepted the Gospel (Acts 17:4 Western Text), and no doubt gossip spread from this.

17:5 *But the Jews, being moved with jealousy, taking along some wicked men from the market place and having assembled a mob, set the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the people-* Jealousy was the leading reason for the Jewish crucifixion of the Lord, and also of their persecution of Paul. The surrounding of a house by an inflamed mob and wanting to "bring them out

to the people" recalls the situation of the Angels in Lot's house in Sodom. Isaiah described the Jerusalem cult as Sodom, as does Rev. 11:8. The Jews were acting in a similar way. Why was there such anger against Paul, and why is there such similar response in those who reject Christ today? Surely because the very preaching of Him touches a nerve in every human conscience. He is the answer, which fills the hole in every human heart. But to accept Him requires our all and confession of sin, and human selfishness and egocentricity makes so many resist that. And so their contorted conscience responds in anger.

17:6 *And when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brothers before the rulers of the city, crying: These that have turned the world upside down have come here also-* This is a tacit recognition of the extent and power of Paul's ministry; he and his team had "turned the world upside down". They had hardly done so the Roman world, but they had indeed done so to the Jewish world. And in that observation we have a basic insight into human psychology; we tend to assume that 'our' world is the entire world. Time and again, the Roman authorities responded to the Jewish accusations that they could see no wrong in Paul. But for these bitter minded opponents, their immediate world was the whole world. The "rulers of the city" are called the *politarchs*; exactly the correct word, in comparison to the word used for the governors of Philippi which was a colony, whereas Thessalonica was a "free city".

17:7- see on Acts 16:21.

Jason has received them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus- Paul in the face of every discouragement could preach that "there is another king, Jesus"- in conscious defiance of the credo of the Roman empire, that "Caesar is lord" and the only, undisputed king. Our message is no less radically countercultural. This was the core of his message; not so much that there *will be* a coming King in Jerusalem, but that there *is* right now a King at God's right hand, who demands our total allegiance. The Acts record associates the height of Jesus with a call to repentance too. This is the message of Is. 55:6-9- *because* God's thoughts are so far higher than ours, *therefore* call upon the Lord whilst He is near, and let the wicked forsake his way. Because the Father and Son who are so high above us morally and physically are willing to deal with us, *therefore* we ought to seize upon their grace and repent.

17:8 *And they agitated the crowd and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things-* The rulers were agitated when they heard that this was a question of the destabilization of the Roman empire; Pilate was likewise agitated by the crowd in handing the Lord over to death. Time and again, Luke is emphasizing that the sufferings of the Lord are replicated in spirit in all who are in Him.

17:9 *And when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go-* Jason and the others had to pay a bond, guaranteeing their keeping of the peace. This is another indication that not all the early Christians were dirt poor. We recall how Felix often summoned Paul, hoping to get a bribe out of him (24:26). Jason had presumably also bound himself in his bond to not accommodate Paul and to get him to leave the city- hence the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away (:10).

17:10 *And the brothers immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night to Berea; who when they arrived there, went into the synagogue of the Jews-* The immediate sending away may have been a condition of the bail paid in :9. There were several times when brethren sent Paul away from danger- as if he himself would have remained. The way situations repeat in our lives is all evidence that the Lord's hand is

at work with us, and nothing is random event in our experiences. We note that Paul immediately enters the synagogue and preaches, when many would have been suffering post-traumatic stress and would have felt unable to face Jews in a synagogue let alone preach to them. But Paul's love was greater than that.

17:11 *Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that-*

"In that" has been added by the translators and reflects nothing in the original text. The context before and after this record about Berea is that noble / higher ranking individuals had accepted Paul's message in Thessalonica (:4) as the same class were to do in Athens (:34). So the reference may simply be to the same class who responded. Even these "more noble" had a predisposition to believe; the message made intuitive sense to them. And so it is with those we might otherwise consider too worldly to respond to the message.

They received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so- The "examining" probably speaks of daily visits to the synagogue where the Old Testament scrolls were kept, asking to examine them. Paul would have been preaching from the Old Testament, quoting from memory. And they would have wanted to check out his quotations and their context in the actual scrolls. It was "therefore" that they believed (:12), for faith comes by hearing the word of God. It was their attitude to God's word which meant that they received the word with such *prothumia*, 'a mindset in advance', "predisposition", to believe. Paul's message of Jesus as Christ meshed perfectly with the scriptures which they so respected. But it is also the case that the message of Christ crucified is in fact the truth which uniquely fills the hole in every human heart- if people are humble enough to accept it.

17:12 *Therefore, many of them believed, including Greek women of high standing and many Greek men-* Lydia in Philippi was a wealthy woman, trading in luxury garments ("purple"), and a female head of household. The attraction of the Gospel for wealthy women has been often commented upon in the historical literature. We are left to imagine wealthy sisters marrying poorer brethren, or remaining single, with all the scandal attached to it in the first century world, pining for children, comforted only by each other and the surpassing knowledge of Jesus their Lord.

It is worth noting that the NT does reflect the fact that a number of wealthy individuals came to the Truth too; and that these were bound together in fellowship with the poor. There were wealthy women amongst the earliest followers of Jesus (Lk. 8:3); and James and John came from a family who owned their own fishing boat and could employ servants (Mk. 1:19,20). Zacchaeus was wealthy- and note that he wasn't commanded to divest himself of all that wealth (Lk. 19:1-10). Consider the Philippi ecclesia- the wealthy lady from Lydia, the homeless slave girl, the middle class, respectable jailer, and the slaves of his and Lydia's household. There was nowhere else in the ancient world that all these classes could come together in such unity. Paul himself was not poor- "to be a citizen of Tarsus one had to pass the means test of owning property worth at least 500 drachmae". He was thought wealthy enough to be able to give a bribe (Acts 24:26). He assured Philemon that he personally would meet any debts arising from the situation with Onesimus. Consider the other wealthy converts: the Proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:12), Lydia, Jason who was wealthy enough to put down security for Paul, assisted by prominent women (Acts 17:4,9), Greek women of high standing at Berea (Acts 17:12), Dionysius and Damaris in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), Crispus the ruler of the Corinth synagogue (Acts 18:8 cp. 1 Cor. 1:14), Erastus the city treasurer (Rom. 16:23). Marta Sordi quotes

evidence for there being Christians amongst the Roman aristocracy even during the first half of the first century. These few wealthy converts would have bonded together with the mass of poor and slaves who had also come to Christ. It was a unique unity.

17:13 *But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there, likewise stirring up and inciting the crowds-* This is another indication of the organized Jewish opposition to Paul's mission. Paul's proclamation was of the Messiah according to the Old Testament scriptures- for the Bereans compared his message against the Old Testament scrolls (see on :11). If he had been teaching some Eastern philosophy, they wouldn't have bothered. But it was his supposed subversion of their sacred documents which was so infuriating to them.

17:14 *Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there-* This is exactly what happened in :10. This desire to send Paul away was not for his personal safety as much as for their own safety. And so there was only a very short period of contact time with Paul; and again, belief and the baptism which goes with New Testament belief all occurred after a very brief encounter with the message. Paul it seems would have stayed longer, so eager was he to proclaim the Gospel further and strengthen the converts. If he had done so, their faith may have become stronger; for we read nothing further of any ecclesia in Berea. Silas and Timothy therefore risked their lives by remaining, so important did they perceive the work of strengthening converts to be. And we also should give and risk all for the sake of strengthening such babes in Christ.

17:15 *But they that escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens, and after receiving instructions for Silas and Timothy (that they should come to him with all speed), they departed-* The escort was not only for Paul's safety, but perhaps to ensure that he really did leave Berea. "Escorted" is literally 'to bring to the spot'. We sense here the fear of the new converts. It seems that Paul only gave instruction for Silas and Timothy to join him after he had arrived in Athens. We could read this :15 as a summary of events, and then :16 explains why this situation came about. Paul was immediately struck by the idolatry, made a witness, which had some response- and he needed help. He was a man alone in Athens. And so he asked for Silas and Timothy to immediately come to him.

17:16- see on Acts 15:39.

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw the city full of idols- God can work directly within the mind of men, psychologically provoking them. He stirred up the spirit of Cyrus and the Jewish leadership to enable the restoration, and there are many other Old Testament examples (1 Chron. 5:26; 2 Chron. 21:16; Ezra 1:1,5; Jer. 51:11; Hag. 1:14). Some of these involve the provoking of the spirit of total unbelievers. How much more will God provoke the spirit of those who are open to His leading. Paul's own spirit was provoked by all the idol worship, for he had a heart that bled for human salvation. And God's Spirit works with our spirit, time and again. "Provoked" is literally pricked, and we recall how the Lord had observed that before conversion, Paul was kicking against the pricks of conscience. That conscience now worked again, as he saw the masses in darkness. We should have the same feeling, as we observe crowds of people rushing to and from work, to holidays, to shops... labouring in vain, when they could have the great hope. "Provoked" is the word Paul uses of how love is "not easily provoked". His spirit was "easily provoked" by the plight of men; rather than being easily provoked by the irritations of others. This is to be our pattern.

17:17 *So he reasoned in the synagogue with Jews and the religious persons, and in the marketplace every day with those that met him-* Paul says himself that he was not an eloquent speaker; and the Corinthians were acutely aware of this. And yet it was through his public speaking that many were converted in places like Athens. The lesson is clear- God uses us in our weaker points in order to witness powerfully for Him. Uneducated Peter was used as the vehicle with which to reach the intelligentsia of Jerusalem- and you and I likewise in and through our very points of weakness are likewise used to reach people.

17:18 *And some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also encountered him. And some said: What will this babbler say? Others: He seems to be a preacher of strange gods! Because he preached Jesus and the resurrection-* “A preacher” is Gk. 'a setter forth'. It is clear that we are to seek to relate to our audience in a way they can relate to. Using their terms, shewing our common binds with them. Paul did this when he was faced with the rather mocking comment that he was a “setter forth” of a strange God. He replied that he ‘set forth’ to them the One whom they ignorantly worshipped (Acts 17:18,23 RV). He seized upon something they all knew- the altar to the unknown God- and made his point to them from that. And he picked up the noun they used for him and turned it back to them as a verb.

17:19 *And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying: May we know what this new teaching is, which is spoken by you?-* There were many passing preachers who turned up in Athens and tried to get a hearing. But the audience physically dragged Paul off to the Areopagus to ensure he had the widest audience for his message. There was therefore something in his message, probably reflected in him as a person too, which was unique and powerfully compelling. Our message too must be fearlessly presented as the unique thing it is, rather than ever seeking to soften the edges so that it appears more acceptable to secular hearers. It is the baldness of the message which attracts, rather than any sophisticated packaging.

17:20 *For you bring certain strange things to our ears. Therefore, we would like to know what these things mean-* As noted on :19, there was about every possible philosophy and religion being pedalled in Athens. But there was something startlingly new and "strange" in Paul's message about the crucified, resurrected Jesus who now demands our total commitment, far beyond the realms of religious curiosity or hobby level theology. There is no hint that Paul used miracles to grab attention here; it was the power and nature of the Gospel message which struck such a deep chord with the hearts of the hearers.

17:21 *(Now all the Athenians and the strangers living there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing)-* As noted on :19 and :20, there was something radically gripping in the message of this Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and resurrected. The hearers were used to a diet of new things, they were not conservatives, they were wide open minded. Therefore the fact they were so gripped by this new message is all the more a testament to its power.

17:22 *And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said: You men of Athens, I perceive you are very religious in all things-* Although as mentioned on :19-21, Paul's message was a stark presentation of the Gospel in Christ, he still tried to bridge build with his audience. He appealed to their sense of being religious. He commends them for what they themselves were proud of- their religious interest. But his message then sought to take them on from that common starting point, in explaining that the

dead and now living Lord Jesus required a following far beyond such religious curiosity. The Greek for "very religious" could strictly mean 'too religious'. It was as if the pole of mere religion had eclipsed actual truth and spirituality; just as we see today.

17:23 *For as I walked along, I observed the objects of your worship; and I found an altar with this inscription: To the unknown god. Whom you worship in ignorance, Him I proclaim to you-* Paul's positivism is a wonderful thing to study. When he met people believing in "the unknown [Gk. *agnostos*] God", he didn't mock their agnosticism. He rejoiced that they were as it were half way there, and sought to take them further. His position regarding the Sabbath and observance of the Law is a prime example of his patient seeking to bring men onward. "Unknown" is the Greek *agnostos*, agnostic. And our world is full of agnostics. There are very few confirmed, hard core atheists. Paul takes a very generous approach to them; he argues that agnosticism is some kind of "worship" of the one true God, but instead of 'chancing it', they must totally commit to Him. Paul uses a related word in :30, when he says that God has overlooked the times of "ignorance" [*agnoia*], but *now* He commands men to repent. It would follow from this that agnosticism is ultimately inexcusable. The command to repent has been made evident in the Lord's resurrection and the appeal to "all men" made by His body, the church, on account of that resurrection. All who hear that appeal to repent cannot remain agnostic without being culpable to His judgment.

17:24 *The God that made the world and all things therein, He, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands-* Solomon's frequent emphasis on the fact that *he* built the house makes a telling connection with the principle that God does not live in houses *built* by men. Paul's speeches are studded with allusions to that of Stephen in Acts 7, and here we see again how Paul had fully mastered Stephen's argument. That speech converted Paul; and what an eternal fruit to his preaching will Stephen enjoy in the Kingdom, when he sees his murderer saved.

17:25 *Neither is He served by men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He gives to all life and breath and all things-* That God needs nothing is something very hard for the standard religious mindset to grasp. The whole psychology of works, of legalism rather than acceptance of grace, is rooted in this assumption that God is in need. Instead, He is a giver, a gifter, the very core idea of *charis*, "grace"; and He dearly wishes us to receive that gift. The reasoning used here was absolutely relevant to the Judaist mentality too. Note that God gives life and breath to all things- every breath taken by every organism is consciously out given by Him, rather than the assumption that somehow God wound the world up on clockwork and leaves it running without any conscious input from Him. "Needed" is really 'required'. In one sense, God requires nothing of man; and so religious systems are thereby declared irrelevant and inappropriate. He has done as He has done, in the world and in His Son. It is for us to believe it, or perish in unbelief. Whilst that faith will elicit a desire to serve Him in response, essentially He doesn't "require" anything.

17:26 *And He has made from one, every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined the times set for them and the bounds of their habitation-* "One blood", according to some manuscripts. This surely invites us to accept Adam as the first man, and Eve was the mother of all living human beings. The next verse indicates that God has given men a time and place to be born and an ethnicity which is optimal for their 'seeking and finding' God. We were born in a particular time and space, from a particular genetic pool. And that was not chance. It

was overruled so that we might seek after the one true God. As the parable of the vineyard teaches in Is. 5, we have each been given an optimal environment for spiritual fruitfulness. Even if we may struggle to perceive that, believing that if only we had this or that, or had been born elsewhere or at a different time, then we would "find God" so much easier.

17:27 That they should seek God; so that they might feel after Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us- How does geographical distribution etc. lead to men seeking the Lord? We must draw near to Him (Ps. 73:28); and yet He is already near, not far from every one of us (Acts 17:27). David often speaks of drawing near to God, and yet he invites God to draw near to him (Ps. 69:18). Yet David also recognizes that God "is" near already (Ps. 75:1). I take all this to mean that like us, David recognized that God "is" near, and yet wished God to make His presence real to him. Truly can we pray David's prayers. So often, prayer is described as coming near to God (Ps. 119:169 etc.)- and yet God "is" near already. Prayer, therefore, is a way of making us realize the presence of the God who is always present. In one sense, man is far from God; the same word is used of men being "far off" yet being made near by the blood of Jesus (Eph. 2:13; Acts 2:39 s.w.), just as the prodigal son was spotted by the Father from "far off" (Lk. 15:20). But even that distance is not so great; for the love of God in Christ is what means that He is not far from any man who will accept Christ. The distance is therefore a matter of human perception and refusal to accept God's nearness.

17:28 For in Him we live and move and have our being- as some even of your own poets have said: For we are also his offspring- Many New Testament quotations of the Old Testament- many of those in the early chapters of Matthew, for example- are picking up words and phrases from one context and applying them to another, often slightly changing them in order to fit the new context. Paul himself did this when he quoted the words of the poet Aratus "We are all the offspring of Zeus" about our all being the offspring of the one true God.

Paul quoted from Greek poets, famous for the amount of unbiblical nonsense they churned out, in order to confound those who believed what the poets taught (Tit. 1:12; Acts 17:28). What we are suggesting is epitomized by Paul's response to finding an altar dedicated to the worship of "The Unknown God", i.e. any pagan deity which might exist, but which the people of Athens had overlooked. Instead of rebuking them for their folly in believing in this, Paul took them from where they were to understand the one true God, who they did not know (Acts 17:22-23).

Paul sought by all means to close the gap which there inevitably is between the preacher and his audience. Thus in Athens and Lystra he mixes quotes from the Greek poets with clear allusions to God's word. His speeches in those places quote from Epimenides and Aratus, allude to the Epicurean belief that God needs nothing from men, refer to the Stoic belief that God is the source of all life... and also allude to a whole catena of OT passages: Ex. 20:11; Gen. 8:22; Ecc. 9:7; Jer. 5:24; 23:23; Is. 42:5; 55:6; Ps. 50:12; 145:18; 147:8; Dt. 32:8. This was all very skilfully done; surely Paul had sat down and planned what he was going to say. He tries to have as much common ground as possible with his audience whilst at the same time undermining their position. He wasn't baldly telling them their errors and insisting on his own possession of truth; even though this was the case. He didn't remove the essential scandal of the Gospel; instead Paul selected terms with which to present it which

enabled his hearers to realize and face the challenges which the scandal of the Gospel presented. And Paul's sensitive approach to the Jews is just the same. *If we are out to convert men and women, we will be ever making our message relevant. If we tell the world, both explicitly and implicitly, that we don't want to convert them, then we won't. If we want to convert them, if we earnestly seek to persuade them and vary our language and presentation accordingly, then we will.*

17:29 *Being then the offspring of God, we should not think that the Divine is like gold, or silver, or stone, something crafted by art and the imagination of man-* If we truly realize that we are made in God's image, then we will not worship any idol. Thinking this through, there is the implication not that humanity alone is made in God's image; *nothing* else is His image. Yet idolatry, in all its forms and guises throughout history, is based around the supposition that those idols are in fact an image of God and as such demand worship. God has revealed Himself through *people*, not through things which they have created.

17:30 *Therefore, the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands men that they should all everywhere repent-* Paul seems to have seen in Christ's prophecy that the Gospel would be fully known world-wide in the last as being a specific, personal command to him (Mt. 24:14 = 2 Tim. 4:17). He saw prophecy as command more than solely prediction; and this is why prophecy has a degree of variation in how and when it is fulfilled. The words of Mk. 16:15,16 are clear: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved". Commands to repent, all men, the Lord's resurrection... these ideas all recur in Acts 17:30, proving they are not solely relevant to those who first heard them; God now commands all men to repent, through our words. These words clearly don't apply to the first century only, for they are intended to be linked with Mt 24:14, which uses the same language about the preaching work of the very last days (even though the context may imply that as a community we will only be obedient to this command once egged on by major persecution). What all this means is that the great commission will be fulfilled in the last days. The connection with the great commission means that the Lord sent out the disciples in order to fulfil this aspect of the Olivet prophecy; but their failure to do the job fully meant that the prophecy had to be delayed and rescheduled in fulfilment. On account of the Lord's resurrection, God has commanded all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30,31)- again, a reference to the great commission. But God's command of men to repent is only through our preaching of that message. Matthew and Mark record how the apostles were *sent* to preach the Gospel and baptize, for the *forgiveness* of sins (cp. Acts 2:38). Luke records the Lord stating that the apostles knew that *forgiveness of sins* was to be preached from Jerusalem, and therefore they should be witnesses to this. As discussed on :23, the appeal to repent was predicated upon the Lord's resurrection, and therefore "ignorance", agnosticism, was inexcusable to all who now hear the appeal to repent. The Lord's resurrection is the appeal to repent in the sense that His resurrection is the basis of the great commission to all in Him, His body, to go into the world with a message of repentance.

17:31 *Inasmuch as He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained; of which He has given assurance to all men, in that He has raised him from the dead-*

The great commission was based upon the Lord's resurrection. His body are witnessing to His living body. In this sense, His resurrection is an appeal to repent and thereby those who hear the message are responsible to judgment. Otherwise, His resurrection would not be of itself an appeal to anyone in distant places and times.

The obedience to the great preaching commission is the means by which the appeal is made in practice.

Preaching is motivated by His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14). Baptism saves us "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:21 cp. Rom. 4:25; Col. 2:13). We who were dead in sins were "quickened together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5). If we believe in Christ's resurrection, we will therefore repent, confess our sins and know His forgiveness. Thus believing in His raising and making confession of sin are bracketed together in Rom. 10:9,10, as both being essential in gaining salvation. Because He rose, *therefore* we stop committing sin (1 Cor. 6:14). We can't wilfully sin if we believe in the forgiveness His resurrection has enabled. Men should repent not only because judgment day is coming, but because God has commended repentance to us, He has offered / inspired faith in His forgiveness *by the resurrection of Christ* (Acts 17:30,31 AV mg.). The empty tomb and all the Lord's glorification means for us should therefore inspire personal repentance; as well as of itself being an imperative to go and share this good news with a sinful world, appealing for them to repent and be baptized so that they too might share in the forgiveness enabled for them by the resurrection. Because the Lord was our representative, in His resurrection we see our own. We are therefore born again unto a living and abounding hope, by our identification with the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3).

The very fact that judgment day will surely come is therefore in itself a *command* to all men to repent (Acts 17:30,31)- and therefore it is a command to preach repentance. The resurrection of Jesus was to give assurance "to all men". But how? They hadn't seen Him. There was no Euclidean reason for them to believe in His resurrection. How is it an assurance to all men? Surely in that we are the risen Lord's representatives "to all men", and through us they see the evidence of Christ risen, and thereby have assurance of God's plan for them. In the same way, the wicked and adulterous generation to whom the Lord witnessed were given the sign of the prophet Jonah- that after three days, the Lord would re-appear. But that sign was only given to them through the preaching of the apostles- that generation didn't see the risen Lord Himself (Mt. 16:4). But the witness of the disciples was as good as- for in their witness, they represented the Lord.

Acts 17:31 reasons that the very existence of the future judgment seat and the Lord ordained as judge of living and dead is a command to repent. At the Lord's resurrection, a day was appointed for human judgment, and therefore a knowledge of the Lord's resurrection means we are accountable to that day, and must therefore repent and prepare. It is by this logic that Paul argues that the Lord's resurrection is a guarantee that judgment day will come. "For to this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that he might be Lord... [which involves that] we shall all [therefore] stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written... Every knee shall bow to me [as Lord and judge]..." (Rom. 14:9,10).

We will be judged by or in the man Christ Jesus (Acts 17:31 R.V. Mg.). This means that the very fact Jesus didn't pre-exist and was human makes Him our constant and insistent judge of all our human behaviour. And exactly because of this, Paul argues, we should right now repent. He is judge exactly because He is the Son of man.

17:32 *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said: We will hear you concerning this yet again-* It was particularly the message of future resurrection and judgment which put an end to their religious

fascination with Paul's message. The Lord's resurrection can be ours; He wishes to live in and through us, through His Spirit. And no man can have stood before the cross of the Lord and then walk away with a shrug, assuming he shall not have to stand judgment with eternal consequence for his response to the Man who hung there for him. When the audience started to get a whiff of the reality of these things, they pulled out of the dialogue, and didn't want to hear any more. Rather like Israel begging not to hear any more of God's words, as they were too demanding for them.

17:33 *Thus Paul went out from among them-* Paul's initial message had been so provocative that men had literally dragged him to the Areopagus in order to explain himself at more length and to a greater audience (:19). The comment that he "went out from among them" may mean that he was as it were released, once they were challenged with the personal implications of believing in and committing to a resurrected Jesus, whose Spirit living in His people demanded all of their living and thinking.

17:34 *But some people joined him and believed, among whom was Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them-* People heard Paul's preaching and joined or 'clave' unto *him*, as they did in :4 to other preachers (Acts 17:34; 5:13); but conversion is a cleaving unto *the Lord Jesus* (Acts 11:23; 1 Cor. 6:17 Gk.). Thus Paul "spoke boldly in the Lord [Jesus], which gave testimony unto the word of his grace" (Acts 14:3). To this extent does the preacher manifest his Lord. He was a living witness to Jesus, and those who joined themselves to Him thereby joined themselves to the risen Lord Jesus. And it is likewise to this day.

ACTS CHAPTER 18

18:1 *After these things he departed from Athens and went to Corinth-* He had become involved in Athens with intellectual and philosophical arguments, and now Paul turns away from that and goes to pagan, working class Corinth- the very opposite ground for the Gospel. Several times he asks the Corinthians to recall the way he first arrived in Corinth and determined to only preach Christ, the raw, crucified Christ, without philosophy and intellectual argumentation. He was led to that attitude by his experiences of long philosophical debates in Athens which produced relatively few converts.

The "these things" may refer to some unrecorded trauma Paul suffered. Because 1 Cor. 2:1-3 is clear: "I brothers, when I came to you, I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling". The "trembling" may refer to the shakes of malaria. But it more likely refers to his trembling with fear. His "weakness" uses a word which refers usually to physical illness; he uses it of how his co-workers were "weak" or sick, and he had to work to support not only himself but them too (Acts 20:34,35). He did that perhaps recalling how he too had been weak when he came to Corinth. Perhaps he left Athens because of illness and the climate at Corinth was more conducive. See on :9 *Fear not*.

18:2 *And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a man of Pontus by race, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla-* "A Jewish guild always keeps together, whether in street or synagogue. In Alexandria the different trades sat in the synagogue arranged into guilds; and St. Paul could have no difficulty in meeting, in the bazaar of his trade, with the like-minded Aquila and Priscilla" (Edersheim, *Jewish Social Life*).

Because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome; and he went to them- The 'Babylon' of Revelation in its first century reference had relevance to Rome and also to Judaism, as I have argued elsewhere. If we accept an early date for Revelation, then the command to come out from Babylon would have meant leaving Rome (Rev. 18:4); and the emperor's decree would have encouraged obedience to this. The situation was analogous to the historical command for Jews to leave Babylon; the decree of Cyrus encouraged their obedience. God can manipulate geopolitics to help His people to conform to His wishes for them.

18:3 And because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they worked together- The rabbis all had a trade. Hillel was a wood-cutter, and Shammai was a carpenter. That Paul had such a trade shows how he was indeed a rabbi before conversion. Paul reminded the Corinthians that as he had been amongst them, so he was at the time he wrote 1 Corinthians: "Even to this present hour we [as before when present with you in Corinth] both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling-place; we toil, working with our own hands" (1 Cor. 4:11,12). Accommodation for manual workers who are refugees has never been very stable; he continued then as when he was in Corinth to have no stable living place.

For by trade they were tentmakers- Reputed as a low paying and not respected trade. The way Paul used it to pay for his own expenses plus those of his companions (20:34) means he would have worked very long hours. The trade was despised amongst Jews because the tents were often made of goats hair, involving work with unclean animals. This would have prepared Paul for understanding that the Jewish laws of unclean animals were condemning him as unclean. Peter was prepared the same way, when he stayed for a while with Simon the tanner, who also worked with blood and unclean animal skins. Further, when a tent pole was lifted up and the canvass spread upon it, it was spoken of as a 'crucifixion'. So the Lord's hand was preparing Paul for his Christian conversion and work amongst the Gentiles; this would have been one of the prods of the goads in his conscience before accepting Christ in Damascus. And the same would have been true for Aquila and Priscilla. All this is a great encouragement for those in low paying and despised employment- the Lord works even through that in preparing us for His service.

Paul at times seems to have had money, enough for Felix to try to get him to pay a bribe, and to rent a house in Rome large enough to receive a large number of Jews. But at other times it seems he was living on the limits, needing to work to pay his way, and here he was driven to flat sharing with manual workers who were refugees / asylum seekers.

18:4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Gentiles- According to the Western text of Acts 18:4, Paul "inserted the name of the Lord Jesus" at the appropriate points in his public reading of the Old Testament prophecies. This was after the pattern of some of the Jewish targums (commentaries) on the prophets, which inserted the word "Messiah" at appropriate points in Isaiah's prophecies of the suffering servant (e.g. the Targum of Jonathan on the Prophets).

Acts 18:4,5 implies that when Paul first came to Corinth, he concentrated on his tent making business, and confined his preaching to arguing with the Jews at synagogue on the Sabbath. But when Silas and Timothy came, their presence made him "pressed in the spirit" to launch an all-out campaign. No longer was he the self-motivated

maverick. He needed the presence of others to stir up his mind and prod him onwards. He admitted to those he converted in Corinth as a result of this campaign that such preaching was against his will, he had had to consciously make himself do it (1 Cor. 9:17). Indeed, the Lord Jesus Himself had had to appear to Paul in a vision and encourage him not to suppress his preaching on account of his fear of persecution (Acts 18:9). Therefore he later told the Corinthians that he feared condemnation if he gave in to his temptation not to preach (1 Cor. 9:16). See on Acts 27:21.

18:5 *But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ-* Other manuscripts read "pressed in the spirit". The ambiguity may be because it was Paul's meditation on the word which pressed his spirit to realize that Bible study cannot just continue as a passive activity; it leads to the conviction that we must witness that word to others. And the arrival of his fellow workers emboldened him in this conviction.

18:6 *And when they opposed-* The same word used by Stephen, Paul's great exemplar and hero whom he so often alludes to, when he said that the Jews, including Paul at the time, were resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51) insofar as they were resisting the otherwise irresistible spirit of Stephen (Acts 6:10). Again, Paul was being made to enter into the feelings and situations of those he had earlier persecuted; not as punishment, but more in order to help his own spiritual growth, and to prepare him for eternal fellowship with them in the Kingdom. For now *he* knew what it felt like to have your audience resisting the Spirit through which one speaks.

And reviled him- This is the word otherwise translated 'to blaspheme'. Paul had made the Christians blaspheme the name of the Lord Jesus under torture; and now he was being taught what it feels like to be blasphemed / reviled, for it happened to him.

He shook out his garments- This is the language of Ezekiel doing the same to the apostate Jews of his day (Ez. 5:3), and sets up the allusion to Ezekiel as a watchman in the next phrase. But it is also precisely the language of Nehemiah in Neh 5:13: "I shook out my lap and said, So may God shake out every man from His house and from His work". This action here symbolized God's breaking of covenant with Judah; to have them under the wings / skirts of His garments spoke of acceptance into covenant relationship, and to shake them out of His garments spoke of the ending of that relationship. But we ask whether Paul had the right to declare the breach of God's covenant relationship with Israel, or at least, with those Jews in Corinth. I veer towards the thought that Paul took too much upon himself in making this allusion; it seems very much a hot blooded response, and he did not take seriously his vow at this time to turn away from the Jews in favour of his Gentile mission.

And said to them: Your blood is on your own heads! I am innocent- Blood being on their own heads rather than Paul's is straight out of Ez. 33:4, and his shaking of his garments was an allusion to what Ezekiel did in Ez. 5:3. The idea of being a watchman seems to have fired his preaching zeal, Ez. 3:18; 18:13 cp. Acts 18:6; 20:26. And yet this outburst seems to also be a flash of unspirituality. For later, Paul realizes that he may be condemned if he doesn't preach the Gospel; he realized that he perhaps *wasn't* free of his duty of preaching. Yet for all his "from henceforth I go unto the Gentiles" , Paul *still* preached to the Jews (Acts 18:8; 19:8); which would suggest these words were said in temper and perhaps unwisdom. He himself seems to recognize this when he wrote to Timothy at the very end of his life of how we must with meekness instruct those who oppose themselves (2 Tim. 2:25), whereas his own response to those who "opposed themselves" (Acts 18:6) had been to say, without meekness, that he was never going to 'instruct' Jews ever again.

From now on I will go to the Gentiles- But this was precisely what Paul had been commanded at the time of his conversion (Acts 22:21 "I will send you... unto the Gentiles"; see too Acts 26:17). Yet Paul doggedly insisted on going to the Jews, and I will argue in commentary throughout Acts 20 that Paul's refusal to fully accept his commission, and his dissatisfaction at leaving the Jewish ministry to Peter, resulted in much hardship for him. The Lord still worked through Paul's insistence on a different path to that the Lord intended, he remained within the Lord's game plan, but on as it were a plan B. Paul had earlier had another such moment, when he declared that now he turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46,47). And yet these were just temporary realizations of his intended mission and his mistake in focusing on the Jews; like us so often, in the moment of failure and having our plans exasperated, we realize our true calling; and yet like Paul, we slip back into our own preferred path rather than that ideally chosen for us by our Lord.

18:7 *And he departed from there, and went into the house of a certain man named Titus Justus, one that worshiped God, whose house was attached to the synagogue-* Paul's desire was clearly to still preach to the Jews, despite his outburst, and his temporary realization that indeed he had been sent not to Jews but to Gentiles. And yet the Lord worked through Paul's misplaced zeal; and He has much experience of doing that with His people to this day. Because straight after Paul's turning away from the Jews, he goes to stay in the house of Justus, presumably because he had fallen out with his previous place of accommodation because of his outburst; and previously he had been staying with Jewish Christians Aquilla and Priscilla. Maybe we can infer that they didn't agree with his outburst, and so he upped and left (although :18 notes they later were together again). But the lodging he found was with a man called Justus, who just happened to live in the house next door to the synagogue. And this meant him talking to the guy next door- who happened to be the ruler of the synagogue. And he was persuaded of Christ, which tied Paul in again to the work of ministering to the Jews. But this happened right after Paul's indignant declaration that he was quitting working with the Jews. He surely knew Crispus, the synagogue ruler, because Paul had been arguing in the synagogue every Sabbath for some time (:4). But the ruler of the synagogue turned the corner and came to faith in Jesus as Christ- right after Paul's outburst against working with the Jews. This was obviously intentional within the workings of the Spirit [or providence, as some prefer to say]. I have explained in commentary on chapter 20 that Paul was wrong to focus on the Jews, when he was intended to work with the Gentiles. But because he subconsciously wanted to continue this focus, despite his emotional outburst here to the contrary, therefore the Lord confirmed him in the ministry he himself chose, although that was very much the Lord's plan B for Paul. Each day, therefore, it's really a case of 'Where do you want to go today in My service?'; and we will be confirmed in the path chosen. The important thing is that quite simply we love God and want His glory and desire to serve Him with all we have all we are, with no self-seeking or jealousy issues. We will then come to the right paths of service and be propelled along them; but if in our weakness we choose less than ideal paths of service, we will all the same be confirmed in them. For man is not alone, neither are we ever rejected from the Lord's game plan with us for so long as we are alive in this world.

18:8 *And Crispus-* See on :7 *He departed from there...*

The ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his family- It was common for the household to follow the religion of the head of the family. But the call of Christ was to individuals, and Paul in 1 Cor. 7 speaks to situations where a

marriage was divided between believer and unbeliever. So the records of whole household baptisms, all at the same time, every member of the household, with not even one remaining in the previous religion, are hard to square with the idea of individual calling and each responding at their own time. Especially when there was a culture of a household following the religion of the family head. My conclusion would be that there was no compulsion or conscious pressure placed on the household members to be baptized into Christ; but they all chose to be. That said, their motives would inevitably have been mixed, and they would have been under psychological pressure to follow the rest of the group. Despite this, there is no evidence that the early preachers sought to investigate the detailed knowledge or motivation of baptismal candidates; they simply baptized anyone who desired it in such missionary contexts. It is true that there is reason to think that one of the Gospel records was learnt by some of the candidates, but this would not have been universally the case.

And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized- An exemplification of how faith came by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). It seems strongly likely that Paul wrote Romans from Corinth, so he would have had this example in mind when he wrote those words in Romans 10. But "the word of God" refers therefore not to the entire Bible but to the message of God in the Gospel of His Son.

18:9- see on Acts 18:4,5.

And during the night in a vision, the Lord said to Paul: Do not be afraid- Quoting the very words of the Lord Jesus to the disciples: "Fear not... you shall catch men" (Lk. 5:10). What the disciples feared was their inadequacy as preachers; and the same context is here with Paul. We see here a humility in Paul which his argumentative and emotional temperament may otherwise hide. His fear was also of physical harm, for the corresponding comfort was that nobody was going to hurt him (:10). Paul's fear of physical harm is again comforted by the Lord during the shipwreck (Acts 27:24). This fearful side of Paul makes the more impressive his continuation to Jerusalem, knowing that prison, beating and maybe death awaited him; it means his willing enduring beating at Philippi when he could have avoided it was the more gracious. He was not some macho fanatic who was genuinely fearless of death. In fact, it seems, quite the opposite. Paul spoke of his arrival in Corinth at this time as being "In weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). The trembling may have been connected to the "fear".

Paul says that he preached to Corinth in the first place in (spiritual) "weakness" (1 Cor. 2:3)- because it seems that when he first got to Corinth, he wasn't spiritually strong enough to grasp the nettle of witnessing to the city as he should have done (Acts 18:9,10). Having admitted to Corinth that he himself was weak, he can say that whenever one of them is weak, he feels weak too; in other words he's saying that he can totally empathize (not just sympathize) with a weak brother's feelings (2 Cor. 11:29).

But speak out and do not keep silent- Gk. 'be dumb'. We have noted so many conscious connections between the gospel of Luke, and this 'Volume 2' in Acts. Here, the connection is clearly with Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, whom Luke records as being told not to be afraid; and is then told that he will be dumb [s.w. "keep silent"] and not be able to "speak" [s.w. "speak out"] (Lk. 1:20). Paul's mind was soaked with the Gospel records; he alludes to them at least once in every three verses of his letters. So he would have grasped the point the Lord was making: If he would not preach, then he would be effectively faithless in the Lord's promise, as Zacharias had been.

18:10 *For I am with you-* A word for word quotation from the assurance given in the great commission (Mt. 28:20). The specific promise made in the commission that the preachers would take up snakes and remain unharmed was fulfilled in Paul on Malta beach. We see here that the Lord intended the great commission for Paul- and not merely, as some still claim, for the eleven apostles to whom He first addressed it. And we too are to see it as binding on us all. This is also one of a number of instances of where Old Testament Messianic Scriptures [here Is. 43:5] are applied to Paul in the context of his preaching Christ.

And no one shall attack or harm you- But we must square this with the fact that 18 months later, "the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat" (:12). Maybe the Lord meant that there would be no such behaviour until Paul had reached the Lord's "many people" in the city; perhaps that rising up against Paul was the sign for him to leave, and yet he stubbornly remained there after that "for many days" (:18). "No one shall attack" sounds like God's promise to Israel, that whilst they were busy in His service keeping the feasts, they would not be attacked (Ex. 34:24); it was for as long as Paul was doing the Lord's work with His people that the protection would last. So the attack on Paul and beating of Sosthenes (:17), who had become a Christian (1 Cor. 1:1), clearly was "harm"- and a sign, therefore, to leave. Yet just as Paul refused to accept Spirit direction in warning him not to go to Jerusalem, so it seems that here too he would not follow the Spirit's leading.

For I have many people in this city- This was only potentially true. If Paul had run away because of the opposition, they would not have become the Lord's people. Exactly because of this, the Lord tells him to endure. Likewise if the harvest is not gathered, it spoils- because the labourers have not done their work.

18:11 *And he lived there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them-* The *logos* of God is the Lord Jesus. This information comes after the accounts in the previous two chapters of Paul being quickly hounded out of towns by the Jewish opposition. Perhaps Paul assumed this would happen, hence the Lord's special encouragement to him that that history was not quite going to repeat itself so quickly (:12). The Corinthian letters indicate that there was indeed Judaist undermining of Paul's work there, but they failed to close him down immediately as they had in the other towns.

18:12 See on :10 *no one shall attack...*

But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat- See on :11. The "one accord" of Jewish opposition is presented by Luke as the opposite of the "one accord" which characterized the early Christian community. There is in fact no in between position; we are either united with the world, or with the Lord and His people. Gallio is mentioned in inscriptions as the brother of the famous philosopher Seneca, tutor of Nero. Luke's history is flawless, as we would expect from an inspired record.

18:13 *Saying: This man persuades men to worship God-* Time and again we see that what irked the Jews most of all was that Paul was successful in persuading others of his beliefs. The Jews were missionaries, eager to make proselytes and to gain followers amongst the Jews. Jealousy at another's apparent success in evangelizing their positions remains to this day an envy unto death. I have argued at times, especially in commentary upon chapter 20, that Paul too was partly driven by a jealousy complex against Peter's conversion of thousands of Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost. And as it were in response to that, the Jews are envious of Paul's successes and persecute and kill him because of it. This was not so much a punishment of Paul,

but rather a method through which Paul was intended to come to understand himself, to be more purely motivated in his witness, and to not envy Peter.

Contrary to the law- The law they had in mind was the law of Moses; for Gallio throws their case out of court because there is no question of infringement of Roman law, and tells them that they are arguing about infringement of "your own law" (:15). Paul was being treated as he and the Jews had treated the Christians- by seeking to get the Romans to judge and punish others for breaking their perception of the law of Moses.

18:14 *But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews: If indeed it were a matter of wrong or of criminal villainy, O you Jews, it would be logical that I should bear with you-* Gallio's judgment here that Paul had done nothing legally wrong was repeated by him later, especially when he first talks with the Jews in Rome. Paul spent some years in prison and was finally killed- when he had done nothing legally wrong. And that had been established in court cases such as these. Given Paul's logical mindset and tendency to legalism, this would have been so painful for him to come to terms with. The rules of justice and logic were not being followed- and he was being condemned wrongly. He uses many of these concepts in writing to the Romans, arguing that we are sinners who *have* done wrong and who therefore should rightly die, but the rules of justice, ethics and logic have all been turned upside down by God's grace in Christ- and we have been pardoned and blessed with the hope of eternity. Paul was therefore writing all this partly to himself. He likely developed those thoughts initially as a way to cope with his deep sense of injustice about how his case was treated. And the Holy Spirit developed his thinking further and led him to express those thoughts in written form under Spirit guidance.

18:15 *But if they are questions about words and names-* The disagreement with Paul was about "names", and surely the Name in view was that of the Lord Jesus, whose Name the apostles preached, baptized into and emphasized. But 'name' effectively means 'authority', and in whose authority they were preaching was a big item for the Jews. And it is with legalistic minds to this day. For some, it's a monstrosity to think that an individual on his own initiative can preach in the name of the Lord Jesus. But that is the spirit of individual response to the great commission.

And your own law, look to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these matters- The Old Testament frequently speaks of the law as God's law, and the feasts as His feasts. But in the New Testament we read of the feasts and law of the Jews. They had hijacked God's way on this earth and made it effectively their own petty religion; and the church has largely done the same today.

18:16 *He drove them from the judgment seat-* The account of Gallio driving the Jews away from his judgment seat is maybe to enable to us to imagine the scene at the last day. "Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the Lord chase them. Let their way be dark (cp. the rejected cast to outer darkness) and slippery: and let the angel of the Lord persecute them" (Ps. 35:5,6). "The ungodly are like the chaff which the wind (spirit- the Angels made spirits) driveth away" (Ps. 1:4; Job 21:18).

18:17 *And they all laid hold on Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of these things-* Perhaps another name for Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue whom Paul had recently converted (:8). Or perhaps Crispus had been forced to resign, and had been replaced by Sosthenes; or maybe there was more than one ruler of the synagogue in office at the same time. To do this job whilst being a Christian would have been very difficult if not impossible. Cornelius, Daniel and his friends, the soldiers John baptized and others found themselves in positions of employment or authority which were hard to

maintain in view of their spiritual beliefs. We do not read of them resigning, nor of resignation being demanded before accepting them as believers; but we simply notice that in due course, Daniel and his friends faded from the scene of authority, and Crispus likewise. This is surely a pattern for our pastoral response to folks who find themselves in these situations upon conversion. Sosthenes was a co-author of the later letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1), so he too converted; and even at this stage, was beaten for his identity with the Christian movement.

18:18 *And Paul, having stayed after this for many days, took his leave of the believers-* See on 18:10 *No one shall attack...*

And with Priscilla and Aquila- Mentioned because they appear to have had a temporary parting of the ways; see on 18:7 *He departed from there*. But see too on :19. Such things happened and still happen.

Sailed to Syria, having shorn his head in Cenchrea. For he had made a vow- Such vows were usually made in thankfulness for deliverance; or it could have been a Nazirite vow. These vows were typically ended in Jerusalem on a feast day. In commentary on chapter 20 I develop the idea that Paul was obsessed with going to Jerusalem because he dreamt of converting mass numbers of Jews there as Peter had done on Pentecost. I suggest that his obsession was misplaced, in that it was partly fuelled by jealousy of Peter, and was in disregard of the Lord's will that Paul focus on Gentiles and leave the Jews to Peter. So his voluntary vow, requiring a trip to Jerusalem at the end of it, may have been a device he developed to give him an excuse to be in Jerusalem at a feast. See on :21.

I suggest that the vow may well have been of Naziriteship. Paul was called to be a preacher of the Gospel, and yet he speaks of his work as a preacher as if it were a Nazarite vow- which was a totally voluntary commitment. Consider not only the reference to him shaving his head because of his vow (Acts 18:18; 21:24 cp. Num. 6:9-18), but also the many descriptions of his preaching work in terms of Naziriteship: Separated unto the Gospel's work (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15; Acts 13:2); "I am not yet consecrated / perfected" (Phil. 3:12)- he'd not yet finished his 'course', i.e. his preaching commission. He speaks of it here as if it were a Nazarite vow not yet ended. Note the reference to his 'consecration' in Acts 20:24. His undertaking not to drink wine lest he offend others (Rom. 14:21) is framed in the very words of Num. 6:3 LXX about the Nazarite. Likewise his being 'joined unto the Lord' (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 14:6,8) is the language of Num. 6:6 about the Nazarite being separated unto the Lord. The reference to having power / authority on the head (1 Cor. 11:10) is definitely some reference back to the LXX of Num. 6:7 about the Nazarite. What are we to make of all this? The point is perhaps that commitment to active missionary work is indeed a voluntary matter, as was the Nazarite vow. And that even although Paul was called to this, yet he responded to it by voluntarily binding himself to 'get the job done'. And the same is in essence true for us today in our various callings in the Lord's service.

18:19 *And they came to Ephesus; and he left them there, but he entered into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews-* I suggested on 18:7 and 18:18 that Aquilla and Priscilla had some tensions with Paul after his outburst against the Jews; he left living with them and went elsewhere to lodge. But they reconciled to the extent that they travelled together now towards Jerusalem. But now in Ephesus they again appear to differ. And the difference was over Paul's going into the synagogue and arguing with the Jews. Paul was slipping back from his vow to focus on the Gentile mission and once again giving way to his obsession with the Jews. Perhaps they felt that he was wrong in this, and so despite being Jews themselves, they didn't go to the

synagogue with Paul. I have suggested elsewhere that the Holy Spirit kept prodding Paul to focus on the Gentiles, and leave the Jewish mission to Peter; and he was wrong to insist on making the Jews a priority. Perhaps Aquilla and Priscilla had had Spirit revelation about this and were therefore in disagreement with the way Paul insisted on going against it.

I say this based on the force of the "but" or "for" in the next clause; he left them because he went into the synagogue. It can hardly mean that he left them in Ephesus and moved on elsewhere, because he left them and then went into the synagogue in the same town and preached. This tension between Paul and Aquilla and Priscilla is sadly typical of him; someone of Paul's temperament would have been "a difficult bloke" to get along with when he encountered those of his own level of ability. His closest and most loyal friends are described by him as the "weak" whom he had to work to support (Acts 20:34,35). This rather makes sense; those types would have found in him a tower of strength, and if he funded them then this would have reinforced their loyalty to him.

18:20 *And when they asked him to stay a longer time, he did not consent-* "Asked" translates a Greek word meaning to beg. He turned them down because of his obsession with getting to Jerusalem for Pentecost. I have elsewhere suggested that this was rooted in a fantasy to repeat Peter's mass conversion of Jews at that feast. Yet the situation is analogous to the time when the Lord was begged to remain longer in an area, but would not agree because He had to preach the word to other cities (Lk. 4:42,43). We note again that it is Luke who records this in volume 1 of his work. The experiences of Paul, like our own, were modelled around those of the historical Jesus. But we also see here the hint that Paul's desire to get to Jerusalem was in order to preach; and he had been specifically told that Jerusalem would not accept his preaching (Acts 22:18). He had been sent to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews; but still he insisted on going his way.

18:21 *But took his leave of them, saying: I will return again to you if God wills. He then set sail from Ephesus-* Some texts add: "Saying, I must by all means keep this feast that comes in Jerusalem". We sense here his obsession with getting to Jerusalem; see on :18. There is no evidence that Paul did in fact go up to Jerusalem as he planned at this stage. See on :22. His plans to go there were frustrated; it was the Lord's intention that Paul preach to the Gentiles and leave the Jews to Peter. And yet Paul still didn't get it; for he again pushes to go up to Jerusalem to keep a feast, Pentecost (19:21). The Holy Spirit warned him not to do this, but he still pushed ahead. The way his plans were frustrated at this earlier stage was surely a lesson he failed to heed.

18:22 *And when he had landed at Caesarea, he went and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch-* We read of how Paul went on from Ephesus to Caesarea, and then "he went [up] and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch". It could be argued that going up and coming down is how visits to Jerusalem are spoken of; but why the ambiguity? Why is not his arrival in Jerusalem mentioned? The more comfortable reading would be that he travelled nearly 1000 km. from Ephesus to Caesarea, on the coasts of Palestine, only 120 km. from Jerusalem; but then some unspecified situation arose which frustrated his plans, and he turned north and headed to Antioch up the coast road; or even sailed there. The silence about any visit to Jerusalem is significant, especially seeing that he refused to stay longer in Ephesus despite the need to- because he was so set on getting to Jerusalem for the feast. Some versions paraphrase as 'Went up to Jerusalem' but that is not in the original. It's hard

for interpreters to understand that Paul could have come all the way to Caesarea and not 'gone up' to Jerusalem as he planned. But I have explained that it was not the Lord's will that he went to Jerusalem to preach, and so the plan was frustrated. *Anabaino*, 'went [up]', doesn't have to mean 'to Jerusalem', although it is sometimes used like that. It is used of Joseph 'going up' to Bethlehem (Lk. 2:4), going up to a housetop, a tree or mountain (Lk. 5:19; 9:28; 19:4). Likewise *katabaino*, "went down", doesn't have to refer to a leaving Jerusalem. It is used about going down from other towns (Jn. 2:12; 4:51; Acts 7:15; 8:15; 14:25).

18:23 *And having spent some time there, he departed and went through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, in that order, strengthening all the disciples-* Perhaps the frustration of Paul's plans to visit Jerusalem at feast time (see on :22) led him to realize that indeed, the Lord had sent him to the Gentiles and not to the Jews. And so in repentance, Paul spent time strengthening the Gentile converts he had already made. There is no reference to him going into the synagogue in each town and arguing with the Jews, as was the pattern on his missionary trips. We just read that he did pastoral work with the converts. Paul twice 'turned to the Gentiles', which is what he was intended to have focused upon in his ministry; but each time we see him fall back into his obsession with Jerusalem and witnessing to the Jews. This weakness came to its full term in the way he refused repeated Spirit warnings against going up to Jerusalem, and suffers the consequences.

Paul is recorded as having passed through Galatia and Phrygia in Acts 16:6; presumably he made converts and established churches there. The fact this isn't recorded indicates how very abbreviated are the records we have. The incidents which are recorded are clearly for our learning. According to the note in the AV at the end of 1 Timothy, Paul wrote that letter from Laodicea in Phrygia. The converts in Phrygia may have been originally a result of Peter's work, for there were Jews from Phrygia baptized by him at the time of Acts 2:10. Given my comments elsewhere about Paul's feelings towards Peter's work, this would have been all intentionally arranged by the Spirit in an effort to re-direct Paul's focus towards the Gentiles. He was being made to understand that if he insisted on ministry to the Jews, then he was treading on Peter's ground and at best playing second fiddle to his ministry, rather than developing his own intended ministry with the Gentiles.

We read this word "strengthening" four times in the NT, all in Acts (Acts 14:22; 15:32,41; 18:23). Conscious programs of pastoral strengthening of the converts were an essential part of the church's missionary strategy, and it must be so today too.

18:24 *Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by race, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the scriptures-* The Greek suggests 'an orator'. Perhaps this was why some in Corinth preferred him to Paul, whom they found relatively unrefined in his style (1 Cor. 1:12; 2:4; 2 Cor. 10:10). The Acts of the Apostles focuses largely on Paul and Peter, and after chapter 15, exclusively on Paul. This brief mention of the work of Aquilla and Priscilla with Apollos is the only example of the focus moving away from Paul. I have argued that Paul's obsession with preaching to Jews, especially at Jerusalem, was not in line with the Lord's ideal intention for him- which was that he should preach to the Gentiles. He ought to have remained at Ephesus, given the level of interest there and the request for him to remain there. But he goes off towards Jerusalem; and then, Apollos comes on the scene. And it is Aquilla who converts him. We may imagine that Paul would have been on the same level as Apollos, fluent in the Scriptures and eloquent in dialogue. But Paul was being taught that although he maybe appeared on paper the ideal person

to convert Apollos- that was not the Lord's way. He uses human weakness rather than our ability. I suggest that Paul considered that he was far better qualified to operate the ministry to the Jews than illiterate Peter. He, surely, was more suited to the Gentiles, being from half Gentile Galilee, and mocked by the Jerusalem Jews as being without grammar when he spoke. But the Lord knew what He was doing when He directed Peter to go to the Jews, and Paul to the Gentiles. And through the conversion of the eloquent Apollos by Aquilla rather than Paul, He was seeking to teach Paul this. This kind of thing happens in our lives many times, and we likely also fail to perceive the teaching process or accept the lessons.

18:25 *This man had been instructed*- Literally, 'catechized'. Luke's community were instructed or learned by rote the Gospel of Luke (Lk. 1:4). This was how the Gospel was spread in the 1st century especially amongst the illiterate. The Gospel records were memorized. Perhaps the form of the Gospel record which Apollos had was incomplete, an early version; for "he knew only the baptism of John". That could mean however that he only recognized John's baptism and did not consider baptism into the Lord Jesus and receipt of His spirit to be necessary (see a similar case in 19:1-5).

In the way of the Lord- A nice description of the Gospel. It is all about the way of the Lord Jesus, the way He took and the way we are to follow in. This is also reflected in how the early Christian community is called "the way".

And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, although he knew only the baptism of John- Although his knowledge was lacking, he is commended for acting with integrity according to the knowledge he had. Cornelius would be another example. These cases show that God does indeed take notice of those who love but misunderstand His Son; but He rewards their diligence and integrity by revealing His fuller truth to them. The principle of Phil. 3:15 is important: "Let us therefore, as many as are mature, be thus decided; and if in anything you are otherwise decided, this also shall God reveal to you". Spiritual maturity involves tolerance of others whilst they too are on the same journey we were earlier on, and continue upon.

"Being fervent in spirit" is Gk. *the Spirit*. The idea of being fervent in the Spirit suggests a degree of freewill control on his part, rather than the Holy Spirit just as it were zapping Apollos. So the reference to *the Spirit* suggests the Holy Spirit, but his 'fervency' suggests his own human spirit; but God's Spirit confirms the human spirit. He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). The only other time this phrase "fervent in spirit" occurs is in Rom. 12:11, where Paul exhorts us all to be like this. Paul may mean: 'Emulate Apollos!'

18:26 *And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue*- It is surely intentional that we read of Paul doing this in that same synagogue in Ephesus, soon afterwards- "he [Paul] entered into the synagogue and spoke boldly" (Acts 19:8 s.w.). Was not Paul here consciously emulating Apollos, as he bid the Romans do (see on :25 *Being fervent*)? Apollos was an erudite Jew who knew the Scriptures well and could use them powerfully- just like Paul. But I wonder whether just as Paul sought to emulate Peter's mass conversion of Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost, so he seeks to copy Apollos. Apollos was a convert of John the Baptist, and soon afterwards, at the time of 19:1-5, Paul meets others in Ephesus who likewise were Jews converted by John but needed teaching the complete Christian message; and he baptizes them. Those men were most likely associates of Apollos; Apollos had planted, and Paul just did the last stage in baptizing them. But always, when it comes to preaching to the Jews,

Paul is left playing second fiddle and building on another man's foundation. And he would have resented that. The point was, he should have concentrated on the mission which the Lord had for him, which was to the Gentiles. We too can mis-focus our lives by seeking to emulate others in their ministries, rather than perceiving and focusing upon our own unique ministry.

But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately- Appropriate language to use, seeing the preparing of the Lord's way was a major part of John the Baptist's message.

18:27 *And when he decided to go into Achaia-* Where Corinth was. Apollos is mentioned as being at Corinth in 19:1.

The brothers encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he helped them who through grace had believed- He helped / inspired the other believers in that he publicly converted others; thus an upward spiral of converting was initiated. "Who through grace had believed" suggests that faith is a gift, for *charis*, grace, essentially means a gift, and is often associated with the work of the Holy Spirit. Likewise Lydia's heart was opened to believe the Gospel (Acts 16:14).

18:28 *For he powerfully refuted the Jews publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ-* Part of the 'help' which he gave the believers was by publicly vindicating their faith before those who opposed them.

ACTS CHAPTER 19

19:1 *And it came to pass, that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country, came to Ephesus and found some disciples-* Jn. 1:41,43,45 use the same words for how the Lord Jesus at the start of His ministry 'found disciples', who were likewise students of John the Baptist. We note that despite their misunderstandings and gaps in knowledge, they are still referred to as 'disciples'; they were committed to learning, which is the essence of the word 'disciple'. We also observe that Paul, like us, was manifesting the style and actions of the Lord's ministry in his own. The connection with the Lord's calling of the first disciples on the shores / coasts of the lake is strengthened by considering how Paul is described as having passed along the *meros*, translated "coasts" in the AV ["upper country"] to find those disciples.

19:2 *And he said to them: Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said to him: No. We have not even heard-* The aorist implies 'we did not hear', i.e. at the point of baptism. The connection with Apollos in :1 could hint that these people had been converted by Apollos, who knew only baptism of John (Acts 18:25).

That there is a Holy Spirit- As followers of Moses and John the Baptist, they were surely aware of the concept of Holy Spirit. We must fill in the ellipses surely required by the context- "there is [gift of] the Holy Spirit", remembering that the Spirit was not poured out until the Lord's glorification. Jn. 7:39 likewise says that "the Holy Spirit was not yet", i.e. the [outpouring of] Holy Spirit. Perhaps what they meant was that they were aware that John had spoken of an outpouring of the Spirit as a result of the Lord's work, but they had not heard whether this had yet happened. After all, they had encountered John some years ago in Palestine and were now in Ephesus, maybe cut off from news of the progress of Christianity. The Western text here has: "We have not even heard that anyone is receiving the Holy Spirit".

19:3 *And he said: Into what then were you baptized? And they said: Into John's baptism?*- The Acts record presupposes that baptism is part and parcel of belief. Paul has spoken of "When you believed" (:2) as if this was a one time specific event in the past, rather than a drift of interest towards Christianity. That one time point of "belief" was their baptism.

19:4 *And Paul said: John baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying to the people-* How could Paul so confidently quote John's words? Admittedly it could have been the result of a flash of Spirit inspiration. Or it could also have been that he had heard John preaching, which would have been the source of the goads sticking into his conscience... and he constantly alludes to John's words and personality throughout his letters.

That they should believe in him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus- On hearing this, they were baptized (:5); again we see baptism as being part and parcel of belief. Faith was not and is not a position we drift into; God in His wisdom introduced the rite of baptism so that there is a conscious, specific moment of accepting that faith as our own.

19:5 *And when they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus-*

These men had not been baptized with Christian baptism, which is into the death and resurrection of Christ. The command for baptism into His death and resurrection was given after Christ had risen from the dead. It could be argued therefore that this is not an example of adults once baptized [by immersion] into the Lord's death and resurrection being rebaptized. That approach would appear to be the correct line of interpretation once due weight is given to the fact that they had not received the Holy Spirit; surely there is an intended allusion to Jn. 7:39: "He spoke of the Spirit, which they that believed in him were to receive. For the Spirit had not yet been given, as Jesus had not yet been glorified". The Greek idea behind "not yet been given" is similar to the men's words in the Greek of Acts 19:2, where "We did not hear whether there *be* any Holy Spirit" carries the idea 'We didn't hear that the Holy Spirit is present / has been given'. The men had surely heard of "Holy Spirit", but they were unaware it had been given. The connection with Jn. 7:39 could suggest they were actually ignorant of the death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus- hence their need for Christian baptism. Their ignorance of the coming of the Spirit is painted, according to the connection with Jn. 7:39, as ignorance of the fact Christ had been glorified. If these men had been baptized by John but were now in Ephesus, it's quite possible they had left Palestine soon after their baptisms and were ignorant of what had subsequently happened to Jesus until Apollos had now told them. "Into [Gk. *ek*] what were you baptized?" (Acts 19:3) would therefore carry the implication that they had not been baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ; their answer comes across rather lamely: "Into John's baptism". The necessary answer was "Into Christ's death and resurrection", but they are forced to reply somewhat ungrammatically- that they had not been baptized *into* anything much at all, apart from into John. There could even be the implication that they had not been baptized by John himself, but "into John's baptism" by some disciple of John. Acts 19:5,6 sounds as if they were unaware that John had taught the people that they must believe [and be baptized] "into Christ"; and when they understood that this had been his message, then they were baptized into Christ. They had had the idea in their minds that they must make a

change, but it would seem they were ignorant of what John had actually taught about Jesus.

Again and again it must be remembered here that John's baptism wasn't Christian baptism; it was to prepare the way for Christ and baptism into Him. Paul explains that John's teaching was intended to lead men to believe "in" or "into" Christ [Gk. *ek* again- he stresses this twice in Acts 19:4]. When the men understood that, they were "baptized into [Gk. *ek*] the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:5). Baptism *into* Christ is here presented as part and parcel of belief *in* Him. Baptism is assumed in the New Testament as being part of belief. This incident leaves us with the clear impression from the use of the term *ek* , into, that they had been baptized into John and had been ignorant of Christ's death and glorification. Their immersion "into John's baptism" had not therefore been Christian baptism at all.

The connection between baptism and receipt of the Spirit also cries out to be understood within the context of Acts to the great opening example of baptism in Acts 2:38: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". I have elsewhere suggested that the "gift" in view there was that of forgiveness and spiritual blessing in Christ. The baptism [or, rebaptism] of Acts 19 did not of itself give the Holy Spirit gifts; these came as a result of Paul laying his hands upon the newly baptized people. This would've been a situation analogous to that in Acts 10, where the Gentiles who were baptized exercised miraculous Spirit gifts straight afterwards in order to demonstrate that the decision to baptize them had in fact been correct.

19:6 *And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied-* What foreign language did they speak? I have mentioned previously the possibility that the gift of languages was in order to cement unity between Jews and Gentiles by enabling them to speak in each other's languages. One therefore wonders if these men were in fact all full Jews, or whether the gift of languages in this case was the ability to converse in pure Hebrew.

19:7 *And they were in all about twelve men-* Being twelve of them, and called disciples, they could be presented as a kind of parallel brotherhood to the community of Christian disciples.

19:8- see on Acts 18:6.

And he entered into the synagogue and spoke boldly for the space of three months- "Boldly" is a common word in the New Testament. We are to be bold before the throne of grace, and our confident assurance of salvation means that we are bold in our witness to others about that good news.

Reasoning and persuading as to the things concerning the kingdom of God- We wonder why there is no mention of the things concerning the Lord Jesus, as these two elements seem to go together in the Acts account. Perhaps this group were already persuaded that Jesus was Messiah, but were ignorant of the things of the Kingdom. Those "things" were surely the same "things concerning the Kingdom" which the Lord Himself had taught; and those things were found in His parables of the Kingdom, which were about life now under God's kingship, rather than information about the physicalities of the Messianic Kingdom to be established on earth at His return.

19:9 The Western text here adds that Paul preached in Ephesus from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.- the siesta period. Whilst working with his own hands to support himself, he somehow persuaded men and women to break their usual sleep pattern to come and hear him. F.F. Bruce has commented that more Ephesians were awake at 1 a.m. than 1 p.m.

But when some were hardened and disobedient- Paul maybe recalled this case when he wrote to the Romans of how some Jews were hardened when they rejected the message of the Lord Jesus (Rom. 9:18 cp. Heb. 3:8,15).

Speaking evil of the Way before the crowd, he departed from them- This is typical of how when men cannot answer the truth of Christ presented to them, they then attack the messengers on a personal level. Paul's way of dealing with this slander campaign was to just remove the converts as far as he could from exposure to it.

And separated the disciples- The same ones as in :1?

Reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus- First century preaching wasn't merely bald statement of facts nor a pouty presentation of propositional Truth. A very wide range of words is used to describe the preaching of the Gospel. It included able intellectual argument, skilful, thoughtful use and study of the Scriptures by the public speakers, careful, closely reasoned and patient argument. Their preaching is recorded through words like *diamarturesthai*, to testify strenuously, *elegcho*, to show to be wrong, *peitho*, to win by words, *ekithemi*, to set forth, *diamar*, to bear full witness, *dianoigo*, to open what was previously closed, *parrhesia*, to speak with fearless candour, *katagellein*, to proclaim forcefully, *dialegesthai*, to argue, *diakatelenchein*, to confute powerfully. The intellectual energy of Paul powers through the narrative in passages like Acts 19: "Disputing and persuading... disputing daily... Paul purposed in the spirit... this Paul has persuaded and turned away much people".

19:10 *And this continued for the space of two years, so that all those who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Gentiles-* Because Ephesus was visited by many from the surrounding area and was a transport hub.

19:11 *And God did special miracles by the hands of Paul-* The idea is 'uncommon miracles'. All true miracles are "special" and far from common; so the idea would be that his miracles far outclassed any done by the idol cults, rather like the miracles performed by Aaron outclassed those of Pharaoh's magicians.

19:12 *So that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick-* Perhaps during the course of his work as a tentmaker, otherwise the choice of the word 'apron' is hard to understand. The point is perhaps that it was out of spirituality in his daily working life that blessing came to others. However the words are used of the clothing of orators in the philosophical schools, who wore belts / aprons and used handkerchiefs to wipe the sweat away from their brows, supposedly caused by their mental exertions. And this is the context of the preceding verses- that Paul was teaching the Gospel "in the school of Tyrannus". So the idea may be that it was the symbols associated with Paul's teaching which were used to cure people. The link is thus forged between the miracles and his teaching; for, as in the Gospels, miracles were used to back up the preaching of the Gospel. And so it seems is the case here.

And their diseases left them and their mental illnesses were cured- This reflects the language of the day, presumably shared even by doctor Luke, which held that disease was caused by some internal beings which could enter or leave the human body.

19:13 *Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had manic illnesses, saying: I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul proclaims-* It was common in the first century for there to be travelling preachers. Hence 2 John speaks of welcoming the itinerant Christian preachers if they shared the belief that the Lord “came in the flesh”. “Manic illnesses” suggests that it was mental illness in view; and it is these which were generally referred to as the work of demons in the first century, and therefore cure of mental illness came to be described in terms of spirits departing or being cast out. The incident demonstrates that simply the name “Jesus” is not powerful of itself (:15); it has come to be used as a kind of talisman in some Pentecostal circles. It is His power to heal hearts which is of the essence here. The form of pronunciation of a name is irrelevant.

19:14 *And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, a chief priest, who did this-* There is no historical record of any chief priest called Sceva, and it seems unlikely that his seven sons would all be itinerant exorcists, equivalent of modern day Roma in parts of Eastern Europe. Again, as with the language of evil spirits, things are being recorded from the perspective and understanding of people at the time, without correction.

19:15 *And the maniac answered and said to them: Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?-* The sick man on one level 'knew' Jesus and recognized Paul; on that level of personality, the man was a believer.

19:16 *Then the man who had the mania jumped on them and subdued and overpowered all of them, so they fled out of that house naked and wounded-* “Overpowered” is the same word used in :20 about how God's word, the Gospel, “grew in power”. This confirms the impression that the man was representative of believers who had identified themselves with the word of the Gospel.

19:17 *And this became known to all that dwelt at Ephesus, both Jews and Gentiles; and fear fell upon them all. And the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified-* The name of the Lord Jesus had been used by the exorcists, but it was lacking in power unless pronounced in faith by Paul. So humanly, it was more the case that Paul was magnified over the exorcists; they both used the same formula and name of Jesus. But it only 'worked' when Paul used it. But it is a major theme of Acts that all glory was given not to the preachers but to the Lord Jesus whom they served and were identified with.

19:18 *Many also of those that had believed came-* After seeing what happened to the sons of Sceva, it would appear that some who had ‘believed’ went up to a higher level of commitment. This would seem to imply that despite having ‘believed’, perhaps with the same level of shallow conviction as some ‘believed’ in the teaching of Jesus during His ministry, their faith wasn’t so deep. They were taken up to an altogether higher level of commitment, resulting in ‘confessing and declaring’, and quitting their involvement with magic. “Many that were now believers” there (RSV) “came and confessed and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men... so mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed” (Acts 19:18,19). The language here seems to be intended to connect with the description of baptism in Mt. 3:6, where converts confessed and shewed their deeds *at baptism*. The way the Ephesians made their statement “before

all men" again recalls the concept of baptism as a public declaration. Yet the Ephesians did all this *after* they had believed. It would seem that we are being invited to consider this as a re-conversion, a step up the ladder. The context is significant. Some who had pretended to be believers and to have the Holy Spirit are revealed for who they are: "they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all... dwelling at Ephesus. And fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified". The fact that the Lord Jesus is so essentially demanding, the way in which ultimately He will judge insincere profession of His Name- this motivated the new Ephesian converts to take their relationship with Him seriously (compare how the Lord's slaying of Ananias and Sapphira also inspired a great desire to associate with Him, Acts 5:11-14).

Confessing- There are many connections between Luke's Gospel and his second volume here in Acts. The reference here would be to the Lord's comment recorded only by Luke that whoever confesses [s.w.] Him before men will be confessed before the Father in Heaven (Lk. 12:8). Note that their confession was before all men (:19). Luke saw that confession as not simply at baptism; because these were believers who were now 'coming out' at a higher level of conversion. Here, they confess their sins; in Lk. 12:8 they confess 'Jesus'. To confess Him therefore involves confessing sin. Perhaps Paul had this incident in view when he later wrote of how confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:10).

And declaring their sinful deeds- God seems to have recognized with pleasure the degree to which Paul modelled his life on John, in that Paul's experiences of life were over-ruled to have connections with those of John. These connections simply could not have been engineered by Paul; e.g. the way in which they both died in prison at the behest of a crazy, woman-influenced despot. The Spirit also seems to make connections between John and Paul in the manner in which it describes them (e.g. Lk. 1:14 = Acts 15:13; 13:52; Lk. 1:15 = Acts 9:17; 13:9; Lk. 3:18 = Acts 13:15-19; Jn. 1:7,8,15 = Acts 23:11; 26:22; Jn. 3:27 = 1 Cor. 2:8-16). And the Spirit in Acts 19:18 seems to portray Paul in the language of John: "they came (to Paul) and confessed, and shewed their deeds" - just as men had to John.

19:19 *And not a few of those that practised magical arts-* Grammatically, the "those" would refer to those of :18 who were believers who now 'came out' in confession of sin after their conversion- perhaps two years after conversion (:10). It would therefore appear that some were baptized who still continued practicing magic, but now they were persuaded to break with it. We again see here the openness of the apostles towards baptizing people, even when their lifestyles were less than perfect.

Brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver- See on :18 *Confessed*. The Greek word here for "price" is elsewhere always translated 'to profit' (16 times). The loss was their profit, in spiritual terms.

19:20 *So the word of the Lord-* In contrast to the word of all the books they had just burnt.

Spread widely and grew in power- The same word used about the growth of the seed of the word on good ground (Mk. 4:8) and the growth of the tiny mustard seed of the Gospel (Lk. 13:19). This is Luke's way of signalling that there was good ground in Ephesus, and the burning of the expensive books was a sign of the fruit and power of the tiny seed of the Gospel in practice.

19:21 *When these things were accomplished*- Gk. 'fulfilled'. Perhaps we are intended to understand that these things had fulfilled the parables of the seed of the Gospel growing.

Paul purposed in the Spirit- This could mean that he in his own spirit decided to go to Rome via Jerusalem (although "*the Spirit*" is hard to interpret like this); and the Beza codex confirms this approach: "He resolved, or determined in himself". But it could be that he conceived the idea [that is a valid translation of the Greek], and the Spirit of God confirmed him in it. The intentional ambiguity of the text is perhaps to lead us to the conclusion that Paul's spirit and God's Spirit were in agreement over the idea Paul had conceived. And yet the Spirit likewise warned him in every city of the consequences of this course of action. We see here how God is prepared to confirm us in whichever course of action we ourselves choose. In our early days in Christ, we agonize over which decision to take. But so often, it's not the decision but the motives behind the choice which are important; and God can equally confirm us in the choices made, whatever they are. It could be argued that all the drama he had in his life as a result of appealing to Caesar could have been avoided if he had chosen the freedom made possible for him. But he appears to have become almost obsessed with the idea of getting to Rome to witness there. His desire to go via Jerusalem first was in order to take the collection money there for the Jews- money raised from collections amongst the Gentile churches. It would likewise seem from 2 Corinthians that this plan was obsessive with Paul, and it badly backfired in Corinth; and his plans for visiting Corinth had to be changed because they simply hadn't raised the funds (1 Cor. 16:5-9 cp. 2 Cor. 1:16,23). And yet God worked with all this, with the Lord Jesus assuring Paul that he would get to Rome (Acts 23:11); although Paul observes that his desire to "see Rome" had been frequently hindered (Rom. 10:13). Maybe this was God working to try to stop Paul, as the Spirit so often warned him not to go there. And so we see how the Spirit can work on two poles, as it were, in the lives of His servants; on one hand confirming us in the way we choose, on another, seeking to preserve us in a better way.

To go up to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying: After I have been there, I must also see Rome- But actually he had written to the Romans that he would drop in to see them on his way to Spain (Rom. 15:23). Spain was his real ambition, to preach the Gospel in "the regions beyond" (2 Cor. 10:16 and context)- not Rome. But Acts 19:21 gives the impression that Rome was the end of his vision.

19:22 *And having sent into Macedonia two of those that assisted him, Timothy and Erastus, he stayed in Asia for a while*- Perhaps to prepare the way for his coming there (:21). Or perhaps Paul sensed the terrible persecution which was to break out in Ephesus, and sent timid Timothy away from a situation which could have been unbearable for him. Perhaps this was the visit to Corinth by Timothy which Paul wrote about in 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10. In which case Paul's love for the Corinthians was such that he allowed himself to be without personal assistants in order for a pastoral trip to be made to them. Maybe he needed personal assistants ("that ministered unto him", AV) because of failing health.

19:23 *And about that time there arose no small stir concerning the Way*- "The way" was an accepted description for Christianity (9:2; 22:4; 24:14). The allusion was perhaps to "the way to the tree of life", which had been guarded by the Cherubim since Adam's expulsion from Eden. In this case, unlike many religions both ancient and modern, Christianity is not an end in itself. There is in Christianity the most

clearly articulated and emphasized end point, far more definitely stressed than in any other religion. The end of the Way is the tree of life, partaking of God's fullness for eternity, seeing good and evil with His eyes of love and grace. We already partake of these things, but the way stretches so much further ahead.

19:24 *For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no little business to the craftsmen-* These icons were bought by visitors and worshippers and placed in homes as good luck charms. The usage of icons in the Catholic and Orthodox churches is clearly the result of such paganism getting mixed with Christianity. I have explained on 1 Timothy that the Artemis / Diana cult came to influence the Christian church in Ephesus, and much of the language used there and the issues addressed must be understood in the Diana cult context.

19:25 *He gathered them together, with the workmen of similar occupation, and said: Sirs, you know that by this business we have our wealth-* He admitted that their religion was nothing less than a business. Those working in the shrine and icon business were a numerical minority within the city; but we see here how a disaffected minority can make huge trouble for the Lord's people. We see too how self-preservation and the basic love of wealth and stability of income can lead men to do deeply evil things.

19:26 *And you see and hear, that not only at Ephesus but throughout most of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and led astray many people, saying that they are no gods that are made with hands-* Note the irony, that they 'turned away' (2 Tim. 1:15) from the one who had 'turned them away' from idols (Acts 19:26). There is a tacit recognition here of the extent of Paul's witness. He was seen as the ringleader of the Christians (24:5), a man who had turned the world upside down (17:6); and here he is known as one who had persuaded people of the Lord Jesus "throughout most of Asia". The claim of the Roman Jews never to have heard of him was therefore untrue. Although Paul was empowered in his ministry by the Lord, he also on the human level still had to achieve it all by his own freewill. And he was in no way forced to do what he did. He chose to. "The power of one" in his case was remarkable. And we each have far greater potential than we like to admit.

19:27 *And not only is there a danger that this our trade will come into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana will be made of no account, and that she whom all Asia and the world worships should even be deposed from her magnificence-* Evidence of Diana worship has been found in Egypt and Eastern Europe; so the idea is that [people from all] "the world" worshipped her. Again, they admit that their religion is no more than "our trade". Religion was and is big business.

19:28 *And when they heard this, they were filled with anger and cried out, saying: Great is Diana of Ephesus!-* Because Paul's preaching 'despised' the goddess Diana, her worshippers perceived that she and they were somehow thereby shamed; and so they were angry. It's perhaps possible to understand the wrath of God in this way, too. For His wrath is upon those who break His commands; and by breaking them we shame God (Rom. 2:23); we *despise* his desire for our repentance (Rom. 2:4). We note how pagan gods were local in worship and supposed sphere of influence- Diana was "of Ephesus", and the Jews considered Yahweh the God of Israel alone, and the likes of Jonah even thought that His presence was limited outside the land of Israel.

The Christian message of a loving Father involved with “all men” as their saviour was therefore radical in its huge, global scope.

Their anger was related to shame [being 'despised', :27] that their god had been exposed as a fake. There's a definite link between shame and anger. Take a man whose mother yelled at him because as a toddler he ran out onto the balcony naked, and shamed him by her words. Years later on a hot Summer evening the man as an adult walks out on a balcony with just his underpants on. An old woman yells at him from the yard below that he should be ashamed of himself. And he's furiously angry with her- because of the shame given him by his mother in that incident 20 years ago. Shame and anger are clearly understood by God as being related, because His word several times connects them: "A fool's *anger* is immediately known; but a prudent man covers his *shame*" (Prov. 12:16); A king's *anger* is against a man who *shames* him (Prov. 14:35). Or consider 1 Sam. 20:34: "So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce *anger*, and did eat no meat the second day of the month... because his father had done him *shame*". Job's *anger* was related to the fact that he felt that ten times the friends had *shamed* him in their speeches (Job 19:3). Frequently the rejected are threatened with both shame and anger / gnashing of teeth; shame and anger are going to be connected in that awful experience. They will "curse [in anger]... and be ashamed" (Ps. 109:28). The final shame of the rejected is going to be so great that "they shall be greatly ashamed... their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten" (Jer. 20:11). Seeing they will be long dead and gone, it is us, the accepted, who by God's grace will recall the terrible shame of the rejected throughout our eternity. Their shame will be so terrible; and hence their anger will likewise be. And yet we have had all shame removed from us by the Lord's death. It is the rejected who will walk naked in shame, not us. And this is a big factor in removing anger from us; for the root of anger is in pride and shame. But the only ultimate shame is before God, and not before men; and that shame is now removed. Like Adam and Eve, we now are clothed through the slaying of the lamb, and no longer walk in shame. And so a significant root of anger is removed.

19:29 *And the city was filled with confusion; and they rushed with one accord into the theatre, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel-* The archaeological remains suggest it would have held up to 56,000 people.

19:30 *But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him-* Such a huge audience [up to 56,000- see on :29] was seen by Paul as a supreme opportunity for preaching. He did not count his life dear to himself, so that he might obey the ministry he had received, to preach to the Gentiles. The disciples blocking of his desire is to be read along with the various times the disciples bundled him away from a city where persecution had broken out, when he himself was clearly minded to remain. Their motivation was not simply because they wanted him to survive to fight again another day, but because they feared for their own safety if Paul continued to provoke things by his continued public witness.

19:31 *And some also of the Asiarchs, being his friends, sent word to him, pleading that he not venture into the theatre-* The Gospel had won friends in high places, even among the Asiarchs. The Lord Jesus is the representative of all men, and therefore appeals to all. This is why Christianity was and is unique in its appeal to people from all social strata and backgrounds. See commentary on the list of names in Romans 16.

In Paul's inspired thought, on the cross the Lord "gave himself" for us (Gal. 1:4; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 2:14). And yet he uses the same Greek words to describe how are to 'give ourselves' for our brethren (2 Thess. 3:9), to 'give ourselves' in financial generosity to their needs (2 Cor. 8:5), and in Acts 19:31 we meet the same phrase describing how Paul 'gave himself' into the theatre at Ephesus, filled with people bent on killing him, taking the conscious choice to risk his life in order to share the Gospel with others. In this I see a cameo of how the choice of preaching the Gospel is in fact a conscious living out of the Lord's example on the cross. Paul was discouraged from doing so by his friends and brethren; and yet surely he had his mind on the way the Lord 'gave himself' for us in His death, as a conscious choice, and so he brushed aside his reserve, that human desire to do what appears the sensible, safe option... in order to bring others to the cross of Christ. And day by day we have the same choice before us.

19:32 *Therefore, some cried one thing and some another. For the assembly was in confusion and most did not know why they had come together-* "Most" or "the majority" were shouting in passion but were unaware of the real issues behind it. Majorities are often like this; which is why democracy is not something advocated in the Bible [but rather good leadership].

19:33 *And they brought Alexander out of the crowd, the Jews putting him forward; and Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made a defence to the people-* Perhaps the coppersmith of 2 Tim 4:14 who later did Paul much evil by turning against him.

19:34 *But when they perceived that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out: Great is Diana of the Ephesians!*- One side of the theatre was steep rock, and this would have added a distinct audio effect to their voices, making them as it were one voice. There are many similarities between these events in Ephesus, and the riot in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 21:27-23:22. Paul is both times falsely accused of desecrating a temple, there is a riot, and the Roman authorities intervene and justify Paul. The words for the 'confusion' of the incensed crowds are used only in these two incidents (Acts 19:28,32 in Ephesus, Acts 21:27,31 in Jerusalem). The word for "riot" is the same (Acts 20:1 in Ephesus, Acts 24:18 in Jerusalem). And that Greek word is only used in these two places. "Some cried one thing and some another" (Acts 19.32) is what happened in Jerusalem: "Some shouted one thing and some another" (Acts 21.34); both times the crowd "lifted up their voice". In both riots, the same word for "crowd" is used three times (Acts (19:26,33,35; 21:27,34,35); in both Ephesus and Jerusalem, the crowd "rushed together" and "dragged" the accused (Acts 19:29; 21:30). In both cases, there was an attempt to make a "defence" to the rioting crowd which was shouted down (Acts 19:33; 22:1). In Ephesus, a call was made to the men of the city ["Men of Ephesus!"]; in Jerusalem likewise to the men of the city. "This man is teaching everyone everywhere..." is matched by "Not only in Ephesus but in all of Asia" Paul was leading people away from their religion. And there were Jews from "Asia", probably referring to Ephesus, who provoked the Jerusalem riot (Acts 19:26,27; 20:4; 21:29). The similarities are perhaps to again show us how circumstances repeat in the lives of God's people.

Event and circumstance is not random for us. All is under God's hand. Circumstances repeat because we are intended to learn from them, and then the lessons are repeated- either to reinforce the lessons learned, or, to give us a chance to learn lessons we failed to learn. We cannot attach meaning to event, but we can be assured that nothing is random in our lives. All is orchestrated by God towards our

spiritual growth. In Paul's case, he had orchestrated the murder of Stephen on the false grounds that Stephen had "spoken against this holy place... Jesus will destroy this place". And by doing so, he had whipped up Jewish sentiment to the point of murdering Stephen. And so he twice had to endure the same false accusation- of having desecrated a temple. This is not mere poetic justice. He was being taught how Stephen had felt. And whilst we are forgiven our sins against others, God does also work in our lives to help us understand how they felt. This prepares us to meet those people in God's Kingdom, as Paul will meet Stephen and eternally fellowship with him. And the experience strengthens our resolve not to ever sin in that way again, now that we know how it feels.

19:35 *And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: You men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple-keeper of the great Diana and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?*- Religion and locality were connected in the ancient world. The town clerk was arguing that all Ephesians were of course worshippers of Diana by reason of being Ephesians. The whole city kept Diana's temple. Hence he addresses them as [Gk.] "Ephesians!". Indeed, most people even today are born into a religious position. This is where the call of Christ is so radical, making all things new in the minds of those who break out of their natural, birth positioning on spiritual issues.

19:36 *Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash*- The town clerk was arguing, very cleverly and diplomatically, that the commotion was an indication that they were in doubt about their religion. He wanted them to calm down by all means, and hence argues that the relationship of Diana with the Ephesians cannot be sensibly denied and so they should stop getting so agitated as if it could be denied.

19:37 *For you have brought here these men, who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess*- Perhaps the talk on the street was that this was what Paul had done; especially as Jews had a reputation as temple robbers, justifying themselves with the thought that the gods didn't actually exist (see on Rom. 2:22). The town clerk wanted by all means to calm the situation and so he saw the need to make it clear that Paul had not robbed the Diana shrine. Paul had criticized "gods made with hands" (:26); but the clerk reminds them that their belief was that Diana had fallen down from Jupiter, and her image was therefore 'obviously' not made with hands. And so Paul was not blaspheming Diana.

19:38 *Therefore, if Demetrius and the craftsmen that are with him have a matter against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them accuse one another*- The court days were right then in session.

19:39 *But if you seek anything about other matters, it shall be settled in the regular assembly*- The clerk was eager to calm things by taking the sting out of the situation; so he suggests they raise the matters in the correct legal manner. The clerk acts with the sagacity we would expect of such a leading figure; and Luke's record reflects that. It really has the ring of truth to it; this is exactly how a smart town clerk might try to defuse such a situation.

19:40 *For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion*- The local authority was in fear that there could be questioning of what had happened, and so they wanted there to be peace- which meant, the new church being left alone. Likewise, Demetrius

was in danger for his life if the matter were investigated further- for raising a mob and making an illegal such gathering was a capital offence. So he too would drop the issues against the Christians. The same happened in Philippi- Paul manipulated the situation to mean that the local authorities would be worried about being charged with wrongly treating a Roman citizen, and therefore they just wanted the Christians to exist quietly and without persecution or fuss made about them. And that of course is what the Lord wants for us too.

19:41 *And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly-* The *ekklesia* could as well be translated "church". And *apoluo* ("dismissed") has a wide range of meaning; it is elsewhere translated to release or set at liberty. There may be the possibility of understanding this as meaning that as in Philippi, events worked out to mean that the ecclesia was at least initially not persecuted by the local authorities.

Wrestling Wild Beasts at Ephesus

In the context of talking about our hope of bodily resurrection at Christ's return, Paul says that this hope was what had given perspective to his wrestling with wild beasts at Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32). The context surely requires that we understand this as referring to how he had been in danger of losing his physical life because of this wrestling, but he endured it with a mindset which looked ahead to the resurrection of the body. The wrestling with wild beasts, therefore, appears to be a literal experience which he had, rather than using 'wrestling with wild beasts' in a figurative sense. There was at Ephesus an amphitheatre, and we also know that there were cases where convicted criminals were forced to fight wild animals; if they killed the animal, then they went free. It seems this is what happened to Paul. He speaks in 2 Cor. 1:8-10 of an acute crisis which he faced in Asia (and Ephesus was in Asia) which involved his having been given a death sentence, and yet being saved out of it by "the God who raises the dead". This emphasis on bodily resurrection is the same context we have in 1 Cor. 15:32. As he faced his death in 2 Tim. 4:17, Paul reminisced how the Lord had earlier saved him "out of the mouth of the lion"; and the context there is of literal language, and we are therefore inclined to consider that he was literally saved from a lion in the arena at Ephesus. This also helps us better understand his earlier reference in Corinthians to having been exhibited as a spectacle, as a gladiator at a show, "appointed unto death", in the presence of God and men (1 Cor. 4:9). Note that despite this traumatic experience, Paul chose to continue at Ephesus even after that, because he saw a door had been opened to him for the Gospel, despite "many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:8,9). We who are so shy to put a word in for the Lord in our encounters with people ought to take strength from Paul's dogged example in Ephesus.

But when Paul speaks in 2 Cor. 1:8-10 of his death sentence experience in Ephesus, he does so in the context of having reasoned in the previous verses of how whatever we experience, we experience so that we may comfort others: "[God] comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so in Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer". These verses are profound in their implication. Whatever we experience is according to God's plan, so that we might use that experience in order to strengthen others. We all share in Christ's afflictions, but "in Christ" we experience comfort, insofar as others within the body of Christ mediate His comfort to us.

However, the whole process only functions if we open ourselves up to others, understanding their experiences and sharing with them the strength which we received when we went through the same things in essence. No life is of course identical; few believers have experienced what Paul did in Ephesus. And yet he says that he wanted to use that experience in order to comfort those in Corinth who in essence were going through the same thing. We live in an age where mankind is in retreat, retreat back into himself. The online life tempts us to interact only as far as we wish and as often as we wish, and this has led many to retreat into themselves. Likewise interaction at meetings of the body of Christ can so often focus only around surface level issues. We don't expose ourselves, and others don't expose themselves to us. Within such a spirit of isolationism, we can never allow the body of Christ to function as God intends. We will fail to find ultimate meaning in our experiences; for Paul teaches clearly that they happen to us in order that we may share the fruits of them with others. This is why so many alcoholics and other addicts who do the 12 step courses tend to fail on the very last step- that they hereafter vow to spend the rest of their lives sharing what they have learnt with others. And so they retreat back into the mire of mediocrity and into the old patterns of existence and coping.

This line of thought explains why within Biblical history, it's apparent that circumstances repeated in essence within the experience of God's children. Ezekiel was asked to eat unclean food by God, and he found it so hard to get his legalistic head around it; Peter likewise. Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and was tempted there for 40 days to reveal what was in His heart- just as Israel had been for 40 years. It also explains why once and if we can dig beneath the facade of normality which we all tend to cover our faces with, we find there are others who have experienced amazingly similar experiences to ourselves. And the extraordinary similarity of experience is in fact designed by God; because these are meetings and connections made in Heaven. We are here for each other, and all we experience is in a sense for others. This opens another window onto the meaning of personal suffering; another take on the eternal question "Why?". There's an element to it which isn't for our benefit at all, but for others. Take Job. That man was "perfect" and solidly with the Lord at the start of the book, and he is the same at the end of the book. The purpose of his sufferings was perhaps not therefore simply for his own personal development; but for the conversion of the three friends. The palsied man was palsied and was healed so that others might learn that the Son of Man had power to forgive sins (Mt. 10:6-9).

We too easily assume that nobody else could ever understand our life path, the way we have taken. We too quickly consider that others have a charmed life. Some seem to have great health and family relationships, money, security and spirituality. But in fact beneath all that veneer there simply has to be in every life lived in Christ an awful co-suffering with Him. People in Christ go through the most awful, unspeakable agonies. Every one of us does. Nobody gets off light. It just seems to our limited vision that some do. We all wrestle with wild beasts at Ephesus, and are saved out of the mouth of the lion. Whatever the Corinthians were enduring, it was in essence "the same suffering" as Paul endured in that arena. And there should therefore have been a meeting of minds; the basis of our fellowship is largely intended to be our common *experience* in Christ. Ideas and theories tend to divide; experience unites. And what people need far more than anything else, than any smart expositions or mental gymnastics with Scripture, more than money, is the simple comfort of Christ's love.

We have each received that comfort ourselves in our life experiences; and we are to make the functioning of Christ's body effective by getting out there and sharing that comfort with others. For this is how, mechanically as it were, on the ground, in reality, "we [who] share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, in Christ share abundantly in comfort too".

ACTS CHAPTER 20

20:1 *And after the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them he said farewell and departed for Macedonia-* The same happened at Philippi; at a time when Paul would be the one needing the encouragement from the local brethren, he instead encourages *them*.

20:2 *And when he had gone through those regions-* This implies a prepared pastoral itinerary, just as Peter did in Acts 9:32.

And had given them much encouragement, he came into Greece- Gk. many words [logos]. The same phrase is used of how Judas and Silas gave 'many words' of prophetic encouragement, i.e. the gift of prophecy gave them words to say (15:32). And so here too, probably the Spirit gave Paul the words needed for each of the groups he visited.

20:3 *There he spent three months-* Paul had three periods of three months in his missionary work (19:8; 20:3; 28:11). Our lives work according to a Divine program, even if at the time it's hard to always discern this. We think of the three periods of 40 years in the life of Moses.

But as he was about to set sail for Syria- Such last minute changes of plan indicate that Paul had great autonomy in his travel choices. The red lines on maps showing his journeys rather disguise the freedom of choice which he had, and exercised.

He was informed that the Jews planned to ambush him, so he decided to return through Macedonia- Perhaps also related to the fact he was carrying the collection for the poor believers at Jerusalem.

20:4 *Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus from Berea, accompanied him-* These seven men who accompanied Paul and Luke were presumably also in order to provide some level of security seeing they were carrying the collection for the poor at Jerusalem. At no other point do we read of so many travelling with Paul. Seeing that all Asia turned away from Paul, these may have been his only close friends. He was by no means universally accepted in the early church.

And of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus- Aristarchus was a solid friend and co-worker, who enters the record at 19:29; supported Paul on the journey to Rome (27:2), laboured with him (Philemon :24), and ended up in prison with him in Rome (Col. 4:10,11). Tychicus was sent by Paul to confirm the Ephesians (Eph. 6:21,22), Colossians (Col. 4:7,8) and those in Crete (Tit. 3:12). Most people in the first century never travelled more than 50 km. from their birthplace, so this geographical mobility was unusual. Tychicus was perhaps one of Paul's most trusted and well used co-workers.

Paul had commanded Timothy to remain at Ephesus when he left for Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3). Presumably he had very few trusted brethren he could take with him, and he was desperate for men to be with him at this time, so he recalled Timothy to his

side. Again we see a change of plan, the kind of thing the Corinthians later mocked Paul for. Again we see the degree to which Paul's missionary plans were largely left to his own initiative, with God confirming him in them, rather than being told where and when to go.

Sopater was perhaps a relative of Paul (Rom. 16:21).

20:5 *These had gone ahead earlier, and were waiting for us at Troas-* The use of "us" shows that Luke has now rejoined Paul.

20:6 *And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread; and in five days came to those at Troas, where we stayed seven days-* It took them only two days previously (16:11,12), and I suggested there that this was because the wind of the Spirit was behind them. But the whole plan of going to Rome via Jerusalem was not ideally what God wanted; the Spirit witnessed against it in every town along the way, and the wind / spirit was against him right from the start. The wind was likewise against the journey to Malta; and the nautical details at 28:13 [see note there] show that even from there to Rome was against the wind.

20:7 *And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart the next day; and prolonged his speech until midnight-* Paul is presented as a man in a rush- to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost. He was using every hour of the night to deliver his teaching. And this led to Eutychus falling from the window. Yet again we get the impression that everything went wrong on this journey to Jerusalem and thence to Rome. It was not God's ideal plan for Paul, and yet he insisted upon it. And God went along with him. God is open to man; He may know the trillions of possible futures we face, and agonize over our poor decision making; but we are not out of His game plan altogether by making them. He will still work with us. But we shall "have trouble in the flesh" as a result; life doesn't go well, the blessings for obedience, the peace possible in Christ, is not realized on a human level. Frequently young believers come to me to discuss a plan to marry an unbeliever, e.g. a Moslem. I cannot say that they are out of God's game plan if they go ahead. But life will not go well, and the path to the Kingdom will be so much harder for them- even though God works with them through the Spirit on that path they chose to take. For He passionately wishes their salvation. When Paul sailed the same route before, it took him two days, with the wind of the Spirit behind him; he had a straight course, alluding to the straight path of the feet of the cherubim in Ezekiel 1. But now, it took him five days, with the wind against him. Finally Paul achieved his aim, with God's help; he survived at least one shipwreck on the journey, and probably the time he spent a day and night in the sea was also sometime on this journey to Jerusalem (2 Cor. 11:25). And there he was in Rome. But in prison. And he died there. Festus and Agrippa had truly commented that if it were not for his dogged insistence on appealing to Caesar, he could have been set free (Acts 26:32). His loss of freedom was terribly painful for him: "Apart from these chains..." (Acts 26:29). God of course used Paul's time in prison, and his prison letters are proof enough of that. And he did spread the Gospel throughout the Roman soldiers there and even into Caesar's palace: "The things which happened to me have turned out for the progress of the gospel; so that my bonds made Christ manifest throughout the whole Praetorian guard, and to all the rest; and further, most of the believers in the Lord, being made confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear" (Phil. 1:12-14). God will use our less than ideal choices; for without the saving action of God's Spirit, Paul's body would have been washed up on the shores of Malta, or he would have fallen down dead on the beach from the viper sting.

“Intending to depart the next day” is language reminiscent of Passover; awake all night, with lamps burning (:8), and ready to leave the next day, breaking bread together, re-living the first Passover. Seeing this was just after Passover time (:6), we wonder if Paul was re-enacting a Passover meal with these Gentile believers.

20:8 *And there were many lamps-* We note the public, open nature of their meeting. They were in accord with the Lord's teaching that we are lamps lit and visible to the world.

In the upper room where we were gathered together- Luke is surely purposefully connecting with the disciples at the first breaking of bread in an upper room (Lk. 22:12), and then being in the upper room gathered together after the Lord's resurrection (Acts 1:13). The point is made that the gathering together in breaking of bread, at any distance in time or space from those early gatherings, is a continuation of them in essence. The same point is made by Luke's preference in Acts for describing the believers as "the disciples", as if their [and our] walk in Christ is a continuation of the way the early disciples followed Him in person around the streets and lanes of first century Palestine.

20:9 *And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus-* Gk. 'well fated'. As with many Bible names, the name seems so appropriate to the person. It could be in his case that he was given this name in the community after his resurrection. And yet it could also be that God arranged the naming of such people in advance as a reflection of how He knows the destiny and future experiences of each of His people from birth.

Who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep, and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead- A cameo of Paul's attitude is presented when Eutychus falls down from the window; Paul likewise runs down afterwards and falls on him, on the blood and broken bones (:9,10). The language of Paul's descent and falling upon Eutychus and Eutychus' own fall from the window are so similar. Surely the point is, that Paul had a heart that bled for that man, that led him to identify with him.

Believe that you really will receive; avoid the temptation of asking for things as a child asks for Christmas presents, with the vague hope that something might turn up. Be like Paul, who fell upon the smashed body of Eutychus with the assurance: "Trouble not yourselves [alluding to his Lord's words' in another upper room]; for his life is in him" (Acts 20:10).

20:10 *But Paul went down and bent over him, and embracing him-* In conscious imitation of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:21; 2 Kings 4:34). "Bent over" is literally "fell on him" (AV) or 'stretched upon him'. Paul was clearly imitating Elisha's resurrection of the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:33-35)

Said: Don't be alarmed- Using the same word, in the same context, as the Lord Jesus in Mk. 5:39: "Why make you a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeps... immediately the girl got up and began walking... and they were immediately overcome with amazement". We see here how Paul had so absorbed the Gospel accounts into his very being, so that his actions were a reflection of the One recounted there, the One Paul so admired and sought to imitate. And in that we see a pattern for ourselves in our Christ-focused Christianity.

For his life is in him- The Greek in :9 means that he really was dead. So seeing there is no 'immortal soul', Paul presumably meant that the source of new life was within the dead man, i.e. because of his faith, Paul would raise him from the dead.

Paul's confident statement that "his life is in him" was presumably uttered in faith. We can only speculate whether the miracle

20:11 *Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten-* It's a hard job for those who wish to separate the open 'breakings of bread' performed by Jesus and Paul from the "breaking of bread" as in our Christian ritual of remembrance of Christ's death. They would have to argue that 'breaking bread' is used in different ways in the New Testament. Contrary to what their position requires, "Breaking of bread" was not a standard Jewish designation for a full meal, but only for the ritual act that initiated it" (John Koenig, *The Feast of the World's Redemption* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2000) p. 91. This is confirmed in Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) p. 131). The Emmaus disciples were particularly struck by the way in which Jesus blessed and broke the bread (Lk. 24:30-35), showing that 'breaking bread' isn't used to simply refer to any kind of eating. Note how Luke comments on Paul's "breaking bread" at Troas: "After he had broken bread *and eaten*" (Acts 20:11). 'Breaking bread' isn't equal to simply eating any old meal. Likewise the word *eucharistesas* is associated with the "giving thanks" for the bread and wine at the breaking of bread (Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25; Acts 2:46); but this isn't the usual word which would've been used to describe giving thanks for a meal. That would've been *eulogia*, equivalent to the Hebrew *berakah*. The word *eucharistesas* seems to have a specific ritual, religious sense (as in Rom. 14:5; Jubilees 22:5-9); some argue that it means to give thanks *over* something, in this case the bread, rather than to simply give thanks *for* e.g. a meal. It is therefore highly significant that this is the word also used for Christ's breaking of bread to the 5000 strangers, Gentiles and semi-believers in the desert, and Paul's breaking bread with the sailors on the doomed ship (Jn. 6:11,23; Acts 27:34-36). This strongly suggests that we are to see in those incidents a spiritual, ritual 'breaking of bread' rather than a mere sharing of food.

And talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed- "Talked" is a more informal word than the word translated "talked" in :7, which implies a more formal discourse. This subtle difference is again true to observed experience and confirms we are reading a genuine eyewitness account; for after an incident like that of Eutychus, everyone would have felt the more relaxed with each other and with Paul. It is in this sense that experience unites, and doctrine left at mere ideas tends to divide.

20:12 *And they brought the lad alive and were greatly comforted-* The chronology presented suggests that Paul preached, Eutychus fell, Paul ran down and resurrected him, Paul returned upstairs, continued preaching, and then they brought Eutychus up to him. This demonstrates how miracles and material assistance were utterly incidental to the essential focus of Paul and the apostles- which was the teaching of the Gospel. Sadly, so many branches of Christianity have maxed out on the material blessings and lost the focus there was and should be- on the teaching of the Lord's word and salvation in Him.

20:13 *But going ahead to the ship we set sail for Assos, there intending to pick up Paul. For so had he arranged, he intending to go-* Intending... arranged... intending- The repetition of the Greek word underlines how these brethren were left to use their own initiative in arranging things, with all the uncertainties of travel, especially given the limited information there was available for travellers.

By land- A distance of around 20 miles compared to 45 miles by sea. Why did Paul again split his party? Perhaps there was real danger of ambush because of the money they were carrying for the poor believers in Jerusalem. The splitting of the

group would have given a better chance of some of the funds getting through if the worst came to the worst.

20:14 *And when he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and came to Mitylene-* "We took him aboard" could suggest that Paul was weak and had to be helped aboard.

20:15 *And sailing from there, the following day we arrived off Kios, the next day we crossed over to Samos and the day after we came to Miletus-* Kios was the nearest to a 'resort island' in the ancient world; and we note that they did not stop there.

20:16 *For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, that he might not have to spend time in Asia. For he was in a hurry, hoping to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost-* Paul clearly tried to keep the Jewish feasts, as part of his being as a Jew to the Jews. But the Jewish feasts were also a unique opportunity to witness the Gospel to diaspora Jews from all over the empire who came there. But Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews. If Paul had left such witness to Peter, as the Lord surely intended, he wouldn't have needed to rush to Jerusalem, nor suffered all he did. Again we get the impression that Paul ran into some of his difficulties because of an obsession with involvement with Israel which was not God's intended path for him. It was all the same reckoned to him as service to the Lord, and the Lord worked with him in it- just as He does with us in our less than ideal choices in His service. But see on :24 *Finish my race.*

20:17 *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church-* Instead of going there himself, he gathered together the local elders in one place. Paul was trying to save every day, in order to be at Jerusalem for Pentecost. Again we see his pressing obsession with getting there in order to witness to the Jews gathered there. "Elders" is a term effectively equivalent to "bishops" here (:28).

20:18 *And when they had come to him, he said to them: You know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia-* But had all those elders been with Paul from his first day in Asia? Or is the idea that his reputation for sincerity was so solid that they therefore knew this? "Set foot in Asia" is alluding to Josh. 14:9 LXX: "Surely the land where you walked ['set foot'] shall be an inheritance to you and to your children forever, because you have wholly followed Yahweh my God". He saw the conquests he made for the Gospel as being part of his inheritance in the promised land; he would eternally enjoy it, and the more he took in this life, the more he would have eternally.

After what manner I was with you- The speech is clearly based upon Samuel's final address of 1 Sam. 12:3. The similarities suggest that Paul felt that his audience were likewise going to turn away from the true God and wish to become like the nations around them, with visible leadership. And the corruption of Christianity shows that his fears were well founded, for this is indeed what happened. True Christianity comprised with paganism and imported pagan ideas such as the trinity and immortality of the soul.

All the time- Codex Bezae adds here "for three years". AV "At all seasons". Paul wrote to Timothy at Ephesus, and his language in 2 Timothy has many allusions to his own behaviour whilst at Ephesus. He spoke at Ephesus of how he had preached the word "at all seasons" (Acts 20:18 AV)- and he tells Timothy to do likewise (2 Tim. 4:2); Paul had taught what was profitable to others (Acts 20:20); and this was to be Timothy's pattern (2 Tim. 3:16 RV). As he spoke to the Ephesians of the time of his departure, hard times to come and the need to use God's word to build us up (Acts 20:29,32), so he told Timothy (2 Tim. 4:3). Paul in writing to Timothy was consciously holding himself up as Timothy's example in the context of Ephesus.

20:19 *Serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind-* The idea is of bondage in slavery. Yet Paul also used this word when telling the Romans that although he did

indeed serve the Lord, this was *in his mind*, and he says here it was with "all lowliness of mind"; but in his flesh, he still served the law of sin (Rom. 7:25). His service "with lowliness of mind" was therefore on the basis that he realized that in reality, he still at times served the principles of sin. Paul uses the same term for "lowliness of mind" when he wrote to the Ephesians exhorting them to have such a mind (Eph. 4:2). So what he here told the Ephesian elders about himself, he later asked all the Ephesian believers to emulate.

Lowliness of mind is one of a number of allusions to Moses: "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly" (Acts 20:20)... Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things" (Acts 20:30). "The man Moses was very meek" (Num. 12:3). The humility / lowliness of Moses really fired Paul. As Moses likewise warned in his farewell speech that false prophets would *arise* - and should be shunned (Dt. 13:1).

John's mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low*' the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ (Lk. 3:5). Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19 "lowliness"; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have its' effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13).

And with tears and with trials which befell me- The tears of Paul were part of his service to the Lord; that is the force of the word "with". Those caught up in grieving processes need not think that this is all selfish; it can also be part of active serving the Lord.

By the plots of the Jews- The same word used about this in :3.

20:20 *You know how I did not hesitate*- The Greek word means to draw in, and is used about furling / taking in sails. Paul had arrived after a sea voyage, during which he would have observed this and heard the word multiple times. And so he uses it. This is exactly true to life in human language usage, and confirms we are reading words which were really said. The word is used in :27 about his lack of hesitation in revealing to them the whole advice of God; the implication is that he was tempted, as we are, to only tell people those aspects of God's revelation which we think they can cope with or which will be attractive to them.

To declare to you anything that was helpful- The Greek carries the idea of 'profitable' [as AV]. Paul is here addressing the elders from Ephesus, and the same word is used to describe how the converts in Ephesus had burnt their magic books of profit (19:19). Paul had shown them how to really profit, spiritually; and that had involved a loss of secular profit.

And taught you in public, and from house to house- Luke used the same phrase "house to house" in Acts 2:46 to describe house churches. Surely Paul was recalling how he had taught the Ephesian church both "publicly", when they were all gathered together, and also in their house churches. Aquila had a house church in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19), and so did Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:16,18; 4:19). Another indication of this structure within the Ephesian church is to be found in considering how Paul wrote to Timothy with advice, whilst Timothy was leading that church. Paul advises him not to permit sisters to wander about "from house [church] to house [church]" carrying ecclesial gossip (1 Tim. 5:13).

20:21- see on Acts 13:24,25.

Testifying- A legal term, implying that whenever a person encounters the call of the Gospel, they stand as it were right now before God's judgment seat. Paul develops this metaphor very strongly in Romans.

Both to Jews and to Gentiles repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ- Gk. *the repentance* [in some manuscripts]. Perhaps a technical term used amongst the Christians, showing the importance they attached to this step prior to baptism.

20:22 *And now I go bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem-* See on 9:14. Consider the following passages in the Spirit's biography of Paul: "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred within him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry" and therefore he preached to them (Acts 17:16). In Corinth, "Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:5). "Now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem" (Acts 20:22) is difficult to divorce from the previous passages. It may be that the Holy Spirit confirmed the desire of Paul's own spirit; but I am tempted to read this as yet one more example of where he felt overwhelmingly compelled to witness. "Paul purposed in the spirit... to go to Jerusalem, saying, after I have been there, I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21). It was as if his own conscience, developed within him by the word and his experience of the Lord Jesus, compelled him to take the Gospel right to the ends of his world. His ambition for Spain, at a time when most men scarcely travelled 100km. from their birthplace, is just superb (Rom. 15:24,28).

"Bound in the spirit" implies, grammatically at least, bound in his own spirit. There is therefore the intended contrast with the *Holy Spirit*, the spirit of *God*, in :22. The contrast could lead us to think that it was not God's intention that Paul go to suffering and death in Rome via Jerusalem. But Paul bound himself to do this, and his obsession with provoking the Jews resulted in this- when he was surely intended to leave the Jewish ministry to Peter, and focus on being the apostle to the Gentiles.

Not knowing the things that shall befall me there- But the Spirit clearly witnessed about the suffering awaiting him (:23). Maybe Paul meant that he was not recognizing them, and was going to go ahead anyway; or maybe he meant that he accepted the sufferings predicted would happen, but he was unsure what the final outcome would be beyond them. However, he speaks with confidence of taking the Gospel to Jerusalem and Rome, suffering notwithstanding; so I would tend to come down on the side of him reasoning that he doesn't know / recognize these predicted sufferings nor the implied message- that he should not attempt the journey.

20:23- see on Acts 21:4.

Except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city, saying that imprisonments and afflictions await me- Philip prophesied by the Holy Spirit about Paul: "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hand of the Gentiles". They "shall" do this, he said. And many other prophets said the same (Acts 20:23). "And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:11,12). Those brethren evidently understood the word of prophecy as conditional- its' fulfilment could be avoided by Paul not going to Jerusalem. Indeed, there were prophecies that said he should *not* go up to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4). Yet Paul went, knowing that if he died at Jerusalem then the will of God would be done (Acts 21:14). All this surely shows that prophecies are open to human interpretation; they can be seen as commandment (e.g. not to go to Jerusalem), but it all depends upon our perception of the wider picture.

This was quite some witness to Paul, and he chose to go against it. Two of the testimonies are recorded (21:4,11). God is open to us, He leads us one way, but in

some cases He is willing for us to go another, and works with us on that path too. Yet the same word has just been used by Paul, in saying that *he* witnessed / testified the Gospel to all men (:21). He is apparently making a play on ideas here, reflecting the tension between Spirit guidance to go to Jerusalem, and Spirit guidance not to. He is saying that the Spirit [of Jesus] testifies of the dangers, and he testifies to Jesus. The courtroom language again suggests a balancing of testimonies here. And the resolution, as in so many apparently difficult decisions, is that there is no right or wrong in a moral sense; rather does it all depend on our motives, and the Lord through His Spirit is waiting to confirm us, leaving us to choose the path between the guidances received.

The same word used for "afflictions" is used about the persecution and suffering Paul had inflicted upon Christians earlier (Acts 11:19). Again, we see Paul experiencing all he had done to his brethren; not to punish him, but to prepare him for eternal fellowship with them in the Kingdom, teaching him about himself and the result of his desires and actions. Paul uses the word often to describe his own "afflictions", and reasons that afflictions are inevitable, and should not be allowed to hinder our path towards salvation. So it may be that he reasoned that such afflictions were inevitable, whichever path he chose- to Jerusalem, or not.

20:24- see on Acts 18:18; 28:31.

If only I may finish my race- Paul has used this very phrase about the work of John the Baptist (13:25). Paul had likely heard John's preaching, as he had grown up in Jerusalem. He so often alludes to John, and sees his own ministry as parallel to John's, and he clearly too encouragement from this. Writing from Rome at the end of his life, Paul uses the same language: "I have finished my race" (2 Tim. 4:7). I have suggested that going to Rome was not necessarily what God had in mind for Paul, but he set himself that aim. He clearly envisaged starting an ecclesia there- but by the time he wrote to the Romans, he had learnt that there actually was already one there. But so when he knew he was going to die there, he felt he had achieved the race set before him- even though he partly set it before himself. It could be that "my race" and "the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel" are not parallel expressions. "My race" was what Paul had personally set before himself- to witness to diaspora Jews at Pentecost, and thence to go to Rome. Yet the whole plan went rather wrong; the wind was contrary to him to start with (:5), and this was how the whole thing went. The taking of Gentile money to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem was deeply problematic. And he ended up not making a great witness in Jerusalem. There is no evidence he made a great witness that Pentecost; and we suspect he simply wanted to emulate Peter, who had converted thousands at Pentecost. He shouldn't have had this desire to equal Peter; he should have left the ministry to the Jews to Peter. And the Spirit warned him against the whole mission in every town on the way. The whole journey to Rome was traumatic, compared to the ease with which Paul had sailed earlier when he was on a mission clearly intended by God. God brought Moses through it, but surely he must have seen himself in the captain who refused Paul's Spirit guided advice not to make the journey because "I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage" (Acts 27:10).

Paul spoke of his "departure" (Phil. 1:23), how he must finish his course with joy (Acts 20:24); and he knew his time had come; he could speak of having reached "the time of my *departure*" (2 Tim. 4:6). The level of self-knowledge he had as he faced the end is remarkable. Yet it really is possible for each of us; for his glorious race to the finish is our pattern. Despite his surface sadness and depression, Paul was finishing his course *with joy*.

And the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus- The Greek *lambano* translated "received" is not the most comfortable word choice if Paul intended us to understand that he had been given a ministry by the Lord Jesus. *Lambano* far more carries the idea of taking or even grasping; Paul took the ministry from the Lord. Again, we sense the interplay of ideas between Paul being led by the Lord's Spirit, and on the other pole, Paul's own spirit prodding him to decide the path of his own ministry. Paul's ministry was to be the apostle to the Gentiles ("I am the apostle of the Gentiles; I magnify my ministry [AV "office"]", Rom. 11:13). This did not therefore require him to go to Jerusalem and attempt to match Peter's preaching to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. But he forged ahead anyway... Perhaps by the time Paul wrote to the Romans, he had learnt something of his error; for he writes that if we have a ministry, then let us get on with that ministry (Rom. 12:7 "...or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry"). And from prison in Rome, when he finally got there, he writes to others and encourages them likewise to focus on *their* ministry (Col. 4:17; 2 Tim. 4:5). He should have focused on his given ministry, to the Gentiles, rather than getting so obsessed with doing Peter's work of ministering to the Jews. He always went directly to the synagogue to preach in almost every town he entered; and suffered because of it, for it was the Jews who formed the main opposition to his work. If he had ignored them, some of these problems may not have arisen. The collection for the Jewish brethren at Jerusalem had so many problems; he ended up having to go against his own principles and take wages from other churches in order to fulfil that "ministry" (2 Cor. 11:8). That could imply that in order to make up the funds which the Corinthians had promised but not donated, Paul had to take wages for his spiritual services from other churches. And there is no record of any enthusiastic acceptance of the gift in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:31 implies the Jewish brethren may have flatly refused to accept it), nor of Paul even making it on time to Jerusalem for Pentecost, nor of him converting anyone much in Jerusalem when he did get there.

To testify to the gospel of the grace of God- Paul therefore considered that his journey to Rome via Jerusalem at Pentecost, when the city would be filled with diaspora Jews, was necessary for the spreading of the Gospel. But of course the question is, whether that journey to Rome via Jerusalem was the particular way, or path of the race, which the Lord Jesus had commanded Paul. He seems to have decided that it was. But his ministry was to testify to the Gospel; how and where he did it was surely over to him. And the Lord Jesus clearly wanted Paul to focus on the Gentiles, and Peter on the Jews. So the path to Rome was due West; but Paul was obsessed with going to Jerusalem first. And it was that which caused him so much grief.

Some years later at the end of his life he could write that "I have finished my course" (2 Tim. 4:7). He didn't let anything distract him- and our age perhaps more than any other is so full of distractions. In his time of dying (at which he wrote 2 Timothy), John his hero was still in Paul's mind. Paul speaks of finishing his course (Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:7), using a word only used elsewhere concerning John finishing *his* course (Acts 13:25).

It could be argued that at his conversion, the Lord Jesus predicted the sufferings Paul would endure for the Gospel, but did not give him a set of specific commandments which he was to fulfil in his ministry. And Paul's conversion is typical of that of each of us. Paul's letter to the Romans is a literary fulfilment of a requirement "to testify to the gospel of the grace of God". Paul was inspired to write that letter; and it could be argued that there was therefore no need for him to literally go to Rome. He insisted on it, and the Lord led him there- but he was never free to

preach there, he was imprisoned. Note how this idea of testifying to the gospel of God's grace is maybe parallel to "proclaiming the kingdom of God" in :25. The good news of God's Kingdom, His Kingship, is the good news of His grace.

20:25 And now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom of God will see my face again- Did he know through a direct Holy Spirit revelation to himself? It was as if the Holy Spirit was telling him the consequences, but he still chose to go that path, and so the Spirit told him that therefore the consequences would really happen. But we must give due weight to the fact that Paul later wrote to Timothy at Ephesus that he hoped to shortly visit him there (1 Tim. 1:3; 3:14), and he planned on visiting Philemon at Colossae (Philemon 22); and that he did visit Miletus again, which was only 40 km. from Ephesus (2 Tim. 4:20). Paul was inspired to write those words to Timothy and Philemon; there was at least the possibility that he could visit Ephesus, despite here in Acts 20:25 saying that it was certain that he would not see the Ephesian elders again. Presumably he had been directed to that thought by the Spirit [unless it was purely presentiment, which he had wrong]. My suggested reconciliation of this would be that this kind of thing is perfectly in line with the working of the Lord's Spirit which we have noted throughout this chapter; in that the Lord's plans with a person can change, in accordance with their own freewill decisions and desires. One path opened up to Paul was that he would not see them again; but perhaps he repented of his obsession with preaching to Jews in Jerusalem, his pretending to Peter's role, and his desire to "see Rome" almost for the sake of it. And because of that repentance, it became possible for him to return to Ephesus, or at least to that region. This is not to be scoffed at as the Lord being somehow not serious, just as Nineveh's lack of destruction after 40 days is not to be mocked. Rather is this a profound reflection of God's sensitivity to human freewill, and His amazing respect of it.

20:26- see on Acts 18:6.

Therefore I testify to you this day- The language of testimony, especially regarding innocence from blood, continues the legal metaphor we noted earlier. He rightly perceived that the essence of judgment is going on right now. He felt that he was on trial for murder- the murder of all men. And he protests his innocence by saying he has truly witnessed to all men. This is a powerful lesson in the extent of sins of omission. If we omit to share the Gospel of life with men, then we have effectively caused their death, even by murder. That of course is the message of Ez. 33:6, which Paul is alluding to here. He felt as the Old Testament prophets; but his potential guilt was not just before Israel, but "all men", seeing the Gospel is intended for "all men" and the Lord's death is the potential salvation of every man.

That I am pure from the blood of all men- By preaching, they were freed from the blood of men; evidently alluding to how the watchman must die if he didn't warn the people of their impending fate (Ez. 3:18). In line with this, "*necessity* is laid upon me... woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). It could be argued that Paul felt so truly and absolutely forgiven that he could say that he was "pure from the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26). Yet as he said that, he must surely have had the blood of Stephen on his mind, trickling out along the Palestinian dust, as the clothes of the men who murdered Stephen lay at Paul's feet as a testimony that *he* was responsible for it. But he knew his forgiveness. He could confidently state that he was pure from that blood. Righteousness had been imputed, the sin covered- because he was in Christ. We are covered with His righteousness, and therefore have a share in His victory; and yet it also means that we must act as He did and does.

Paul was guilty of the murder of Christians. But his conscience was cleansed in Christ (Heb. 10:22), and he felt cleansed or pure from that blood. He had already stated that he was pure from the blood of the Jews, and therefore he turned to the Gentiles (Acts 18:6 s.w.). His insistence that he is now pure from the blood "of all men" could mean that he felt pure also from the blood of the Gentiles. And yet he continued by all means trying to preach to the Jews and Gentiles; his angry comment in 18:6 about turning from the Jews to the Gentiles was surely said in hot blood or perhaps temporary realization that his focus on the Jews was uncalled for; seeing he continued his focus on the Jews and his rushing to Jerusalem to be there for Pentecost. However, Paul's faith in his conscience being cleansed in Christ was, it seems, not total. For he speaks here and in 18:6 as if his preaching work was the cleansing of his conscience; and at the end of his life he feels that he has a "pure conscience" because he has "served" God (2 Tim. 1:3). So in psychological terms it could be argued that Paul's guilt over his past murders, the blood that was on his hands, led him to try to cleanse himself from it by a lifetime of works, in preaching the Gospel to others, both Jew and Gentile. Perhaps his dogged insistence on preaching to the Jews was because most if not all of the Christians he had murdered would have been Jews. It would also explain why immediately after his conversion, he begins manic preaching, willing to give his life for it; which explains why several times in his ministry, starting from Damascus, the brethren had to get hold of him and take him away from danger to his life. This happened enough times to give us the impression that he was as it were looking for a bullet. His insistence on making the Jerusalem-Rome journey, when the Spirit witnessed that he would suffer deeply if he did so, was perhaps something similar. See on 28:19 *I was compelled to appeal to Caesar*.

In the phrase "The blood of all", "Men" is added by the translators. The reference may be to the Lord's words which Luke had earlier recorded: "The blood of all the prophets shall be required of this generation" (Lk. 11:50). Again, Paul appears to be seeking to get out of condemnation for the blood of all the prophets by preaching to the Jews of that generation, rather than throwing himself upon the Lord's blood to cleanse his conscience.

20:27 *For I did not hesitate to declare to you the whole counsel of God*- The same word as in :20; see note there. Exactly as Moses completely revealed all God's counsel to Israel (Acts 7:33; Dt. 33:3). The reference is clearly again to Luke's first volume, where he records how the Jews "rejected the counsel of God against themselves" by refusing baptism from John (Lk. 7:30). The same Greek words are used. Maybe his addition of the word "whole" reflects the fact that John did not then preach the complete counsel of God because the Lord had not then died or resurrected. Having grown up in Jerusalem, Paul would have heard the preaching of John, and presumably refused baptism from him. He had rejected the counsel of God- and now he was declaring it to others as a basis for his own 'cleansing'. It could be argued that this was simply an appropriate response from Paul given his failure earlier. But psychologically, it could be seen as a way of dealing with his own abiding guilt- through preaching. And *when* this was fulfilled, as he saw it, by preaching on Pentecost in Jerusalem, replicating Peter's success, and preaching in Rome, capital of the known world... *then* he could speak of his cleansed conscience as he faced death (2 Tim. 1:3).

20:28 *Take heed to yourselves*- "Take heed unto yourselves" is repeated so many times in Deuteronomy (e.g. Dt. 2:4; 4:9,15,23; 11:16; 12:13,19,30; 24:8; 27:9)- further evidence Paul is being presented as some kind of Moses of the New Covenant

[without denying that the Lord Jesus fits this role pre-eminently]. "Take heed to yourselves; if thy brother trespass... forgive him" (Lk. 17:3) is being alluded to here, where Paul says we should *take heed* of the likelihood of false teachers. Surely what he's saying is 'Yes, take heed to forgive your brother personal offences, take heed because you'll be tempted *not* to forgive him; but have the same level of watchfulness for false teaching'.

And to all the flock- All pastoral work for others must begin with us personally first of all. The same word is used in Mt. 7:15: "Take heed of false prophets", especially Jewish ones: "Take heed of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Mt. 16:6,12; Lk. 12:1; 20:46 s.w.). Paul uses the phrase again about wariness about Jewish teachers (1 Tim. 1:4). Paul wrote to Timothy in Ephesus, from where these assembled elders were from, that some would give heed to false teachings (1 Tim. 4:1). And this is the further context here (:29). "Take heed to yourselves" is word for word what Luke alone twice records the Lord saying to the disciples in Lk. 17:3; 21:34. Again we see how the disciples in first century Palestine were not to be seen as historical icons, far away in space and time; but as living examples to be emulated.

Put two passages from Paul together in your minds. He tells the Ephesian elders to "take heed to yourselves" before adding "and to all the flock". To Timothy likewise: "Take heed to yourself, and to your teaching [of others]" (1 Tim. 4:16). Clearly enough, Paul saw that who we are is related to the effectiveness of our preaching. The preacher is some sort of reproduction of the Truth in a personal form; the word made flesh. The Truth must exist in us as a living experience, a glorious enthusiasm, an intense reality. For it is primarily *people* who communicate, not words or ideas. Personal authenticity is undoubtedly the strongest credential in our work of communicating the message.

In which- The elders are themselves part of the flock and not separate from it.

The Holy Spirit has made you bishops- It was Paul who ordained these elders in Ephesus, straight after their conversion. His choice of the men must have been simply on the basis of what appeared to him; for it's hard to really know the hearts of men and their ultimate suitability for eldership. Yet the Spirit apparently confirmed Paul's spirit, his own judgment. The fact they were "made" or given [*tithemi*] to be bishops didn't mean they were to make no human effort. They had to "take heed" to themselves and the flock, and feed the flock. Again we see how God's Spirit works with the human spirit. They were not turned into mere puppets. In this case, what they fed the flock, and how they fed them, was their choice and down to their initiative and effort, which they needed to be encouraged in.

To feed the church of God- Feeding is also a metaphor for ruling; eldership in the church was not simply on account of having been given an office, but in practice it is demonstrated and actualized through teaching / feeding the flock.

Which he purchased with his own blood- The motivation to care for others is because the Lord died for His flock. Our attitude to others is therefore to be an extension of His abiding and saving care for them. We aren't motivated simply by what He did for us, but by the fact He did so much for others and thereby seeks their salvation; and we are to play our part in achieving the work intended by His death. "Purchased" translates a word which means to literally go around doing; the idea is of a purchaser going around looking at items before buying one. Here we see the Lord in search of

man, just as God in Jeremiah likens Himself to Jeremiah running around the streets of a city looking for men who would hear His word. God is in search of man, through His Son; and men, some men, are in search of God. This explains the sense of spark and mutuality when we meet, with all the Angels rejoicing over one found person.

Whose blood is in view in "His blood"? There are several NT passages which make an explicit link between God and Jesus in the context of the salvation of men. Phrases such as "God our Saviour, Jesus..." are relatively common in the pastorals (1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; Tit. 1:3,4; 2:10 cp. 13 and see also Jude 24; 2 Pet. 1:1). Acts 20:28 even speaks in some versions as if God's blood was shed on the cross; through 'His' blood the church was purchased; and yet Paul told the very same Ephesian audience that it was through the blood of Jesus that the church was purchased (Eph. 1:6,7); such was the extent of God manifestation on the cross. These and many other passages quoted by Trinitarians evidently don't mean that 'Jesus = God' in the way they take them to mean. But what they *are* saying is that there was an intense unity between the Father and Son in the work of salvation achieved on the cross. The High Priest on the day of Atonement sprinkled the blood eastwards, on the mercy seat. He would therefore have had to walk around to God's side of the mercy seat and sprinkle the blood back the way he had come. This would have given the picture of the blood coming out from the presence of God Himself; as if *He* was the sacrifice.

This passage records Paul predicting the apostasy that was to come upon Ephesus; but he pleads with the elders to take heed and watch, so that his inspired words needn't come true. Here we again see the openness of God.

20:29 *I know*- By direct Spirit revelation, the Spirit gift of knowledge; because in 1 Tim. 4:1 Paul writes to Timothy in Ephesus, from where these elders were from, that there had been "express" Spirit revelation that some would 'take heed' to false teaching.

That after my departing- Paul warned the new Israel that after his death ("after my departing") there would be serious apostasy. This is the spirit of his very last words, in 2 Tim. 4. This is exactly the spirit of Moses' farewell speech throughout the book of Deuteronomy, and throughout his final song (Dt. 32). "After my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves" (Dt. 31:29). "Take heed unto yourselves" is repeated so many times in Deuteronomy (e.g. Dt. 2:4; 4:9,15,23; 11:16; 12:13,19,30; 24:8; 27:9). Exactly as Moses completely revealed all God's counsel to Israel (Acts 7:33; Dt. 33:3).

Fierce wolves- As noted on :28 *Take heed*, he likely had Jewish false teachers in view. It was consistently the Jews who are presented throughout Acts as coming and disrupting Paul's missionary work after he had made converts. It was Jewish wolves whom the Lord had in mind when He warned the first disciples to "take heed... of wolves" (Mt. 7:15; 10:16; Lk. 10:3).

Shall enter in among you and will not spare the flock- This sounds like a fifth column within the new churches, as if they actually became members and worked from within; those referred to in Gal. 2:4 as false brethren who had been smuggled in, or in Jude 4 as the "certain people who have crept in secretly".

20:30 *And from among you, men shall arise speaking twisted things*- The Greek can mean morally as well as simply doctrinally apostate. And this was the nature of the 1st century apostasy- teachings which appealed to the flesh, justifying immorality in the name of spirituality. The letters to the churches in Rev. 2 and 3, especially to Ephesus, are clearly tackling this problem.

To draw away the disciples after themselves- Hardly any false teacher or divisive person would admit (not even to themselves) that this is the motive for their heresy. But Paul here puts his finger on the real reason for division- people wanting a following and therefore inventing some curious teaching which they present as vitally important. 'Drawing away' suggests the disciples were drawn away from one person to another; and the One whom disciples should be following is the Lord Jesus, the disciple's Lord. The early disciples walked "after" Him (Mt. 4:19; 10:38; 16:24 and so often, s.w.). The danger of schism is that the flock are no longer Christ centred but following men and their teachings. Loss of personal focus on the Lord Jesus is the observable result of all division.

20:31 *Therefore be alert-* The apostasy which on one hand was predicted by the Spirit did not inevitably have to happen. The elders were being charged to stop it happening. It's rather like the statement that in 40 days, Nineveh would be destroyed. Although there were no conditions attached to the message, like much Old Testament prophecy, it was not a foregone conclusion. There were other possible futures which obedience could elicit and actualize. His prophecy, certain of fulfilment as it sounded, didn't 'have' to come true. Likewise the Lord categorically foretold Peter's denials; and yet tells him therefore to watch, and not fall into the temptation that was looming. Peter didn't *have* to fulfil the prophecy, and the Lord encouraged him to leave it as an unfulfilled, conditional prophecy. He warns him to pray "lest ye enter into temptation" (Mk. 14:38)- even though He had prophesied that Peter *would* fail under temptation.

And remember that for three years- This means that right from the beginning of Paul's preaching in the area, he had warned them that the whole thing was very prone to fall apart because of the wolves he could foresee entering the new flock. To warn new converts of this kind of thing always seems an anti-climax, a possible discouragement to them after the joy of conversion. But Paul's aim was not merely baptism but for converts to get to the Kingdom of God, and so he saw the need to warn them right away of the difficulties ahead.

I did not cease to warn every one- The Greek definitely means 'each of you', rather than a more general 'everyone', which would have been expressed quite differently in Greek. He presumably was referring to the assembled elders.

Night and day with tears- For literally three years, to each and every one of the assembled brethren? This sounds to me like a Semitic exaggeration, and is probably not to be read literally. But Paul's tears at the prospect of anyone turning away... are a great challenge. It's all too easy to shrug off the apostasy of others from the way as being their fault. But Paul had a clear sense of the future they would miss and the judgment to come. He wept for even the possibility of it happening to his beloved converts. Truly Paul served his Lord with many tears (:19); and 2 Cor. 2:4 pictures Paul weeping over his parchment and ink as he wrote to Corinth. The Biblical record contains a large number of references to the frequent tears of God's people, both in bleeding hearts for other people, and in recognition of their own sin. And as we have seen, these things are related. Consider:

- "My eye pours out tears to God" [i.e. in repentance?] (Job 16:20)
- Isaiah drenches Moab with tears (Is. 16:9)
- Jeremiah is a fountain of tears for his people (Jer. 9:1; Lam. 2:8)
- David's eyes shed streams of tears for his sins (Ps. 119:136; 6:6; 42:3)
- Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37)

- Blessed are those who weep (Lk. 6:21)
- Mary washed the Lord's feet with her tears (Lk. 7:36-50)
- Paul wept for the Ephesians daily (Acts 20:19,31).

We have to ask whether there are any tears, indeed any true emotion, in our walk with our Lord. Those who go through life with dry eyes are surely to be pitied. Surely, in the light of the above testimony, we are merely hiding behind a smokescreen if we excuse ourselves by thinking that we're not the emotional type. Nobody can truly go through life humming to themselves "I am a rock, I am an island... and an island never cries". The very emotional centre of our lives must be touched. The tragedy of our sin, the urgency of the world's salvation, the amazing potential provided and secured in the cross of Christ... surely we cannot be passive to these things. We live in a world where emotion and passion are decreasing. Being politically correct, looking right to others... these things are becoming of paramount importance in all levels of society. The passionless, postmodernist life can't be for us, who have been moved and touched at our very core by the work and call and love of Christ to us. For us there must still be what Walter Brueggemann called "the gift of amazement", that ability to feel and say "Wow!" to God's grace and plan of salvation for us.

20:32 *And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace*- Paul had elsewhere commended new converts and elders to the Lord Jesus (14:23 s.w.). So "the word [*logos*] of His grace" may be a reference to the Lord Jesus, rather than meaning 'the Bible'. The only other reference to the word of grace is also in Luke, and we should therefore be guided by this in interpretation, seeing that Acts follows on from the Gospel of Luke. The reference is in Lk. 4:22 where the words of the Lord Jesus are described as words of grace. In an illiterate society, the converts would only have the memory of the gospel records as their source of understanding of Christianity, apart from inspired utterances given by 'prophets'. The tendency would have been to memorize a Gospel record before baptism (as early church tradition says was required of converts)- but then to forget it. Paul is urging these brethren to continually recite those Gospel records, the words of grace which came from the lips of the Lord Jesus, as Luke himself had taught his own converts in his Gospel record. It was this which would shield them from errant ideas being propounded by false prophets claiming they were speaking from the Lord directly.

Which is able to build you up- Paul uses the same word in writing to these Ephesians later (Eph. 2:20), saying that they had been built up upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus, and His apostles and prophets, i.e. the inspired speakers forth of His words, men like Luke and the other inspired Gospel writers. This is why a daily reading or reflection upon the Gospel records remains to this day necessary for those who would be disciples indeed.

And to give you the inheritance among all those that are sanctified- This is very much the Old Testament language of Israel's conquest of Canaan and receiving the inheritance amongst their brethren. The Kingdom Paul preached was the same- the re-establishment of God's Kingdom on earth based upon Israel. Paul is quoting here from the words of the Lord Jesus to him at his conversion: "To the end they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:18). Paul very often speaks of his Gentile converts as "sanctified", and in doing so he surely had in mind the vision given to Peter, showing him that the Gentile converts were indeed sanctified. It was clearly necessary to continue to remind the Gentile converts that they really were sanctified, for the Jewish 'wolves' would be

telling them that they weren't. And Paul likely had to keep reminding himself of the wonder of Gentile acceptance.

The words of Jesus at the judgment, inviting the faithful into the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34), rung in Paul's mind: Acts 20:32; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:12; 3:24; Tit. 3:7.

20:33 *I coveted no one's silver, or gold, or apparel*- This is the spirit of Moses in Num. 16:15: "I have not taken one ass from them". Paul maybe also had these words in mind again in 2 Cor. 7:2: "We have wronged no man... we have defrauded no man". Coveting these three things was precisely the sin of Achan (Josh. 7:21). Perhaps the point of the allusion was to say that calamity was awaiting the new Israel; the great victory over Jericho would soon give way to defeat. This would be due to the 1st century equivalent of Achan- but Paul was not Achan. It would not be his fault.

Wealth in those days was reflected in clothing, hence the warnings about the power of moths to destroy such wealth (Mt. 6:19; James 5:2).

20:34 *You yourselves know that these hands*- Paul told those Ephesian elders, beset as they already were with the evident beginnings of apostasy: "*These hands* (showing them) have ministered unto my necessities... I have shewed you all things, how that *so labouring* you (too) ought to support the weak (implying Paul worked at tent making not only for his own needs but in order to give support to the spiritually (?) weak), *and to (also)* remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (:34,35). Paul seems to be unashamedly saying that those words of Jesus had motivated his own life of service, and he had shown the Ephesians, in his own life, how they ought to be lived out; and he placed himself before them as their pattern. The Lord Jesus recognized, years later, that the Ephesians [whom Paul was addressing] had followed Paul's example of labouring motivated by Christ as he had requested them to; but they had done so without *agape* love (Rev. 2:3,4).

Have provided for my necessities- See on 28:10 *Such things as we needed*. This could well have been said with a fleck of pride, which the events of 28:10 sought to remove from him.

And for those who were with me- Paul had a profession, as all trainee rabbis did. But his co-workers apparently didn't, or couldn't use it over the three years he was in the area. We might be able to infer from this that they were untrained men, who were therefore likely illiterate. Paul could so easily have reasoned that his talents were better used in preaching and pastoral work, than in working in order to support others. His ability to earn enough money to support a group of people, as well as doing all his ministry work, is a testament to his wise use of time, and also his strong dislike of a salaried ministry. We note a possible contrast with the attitude of the twelve in Acts 6:2: "It is not fitting that we should forsake the teaching of the word of God and instead serve tables".

20:35 *In all things I gave you an example, that so labouring you should help the weak*- "The weak" may refer to "those who were with me" (:34). Perhaps they could not work like he did because of physical or mental or spiritual weakness. The Greek for "weak" is particularly used of the physically weak; Timothy appears to have been like this, being frequently sick and weak (1 Tim. 5:23). Paul's co-workers were therefore weak, unable to support themselves, and those whom man might despise. The way they travelled alone such great distances in dangerous circumstances is therefore even more to their credit, and to the credit of Paul's patient belief and hope in them.

And to remember the words that the Lord Jesus spoke- Paul's attitude, working at manual work in order to support others, was motivated by continual reflection on the Lord's words. And he asks them to copy him in this. Note how he reminds the Ephesians to "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said..."; not, 'how it is written' (for the Gospels were in circulation by this time). He jogged their memory of one of the texts they ought to have memorized. I suggested above on :34 that they were likely illiterate. See on Acts 6:4.

Saying: It is more blessed to give than to receive- These words are unrecorded in the Gospels. But the same Greek words for giving and receiving are found in the Lord's advice to missionaries in Mt. 10:8,9: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. Acquire no gold, nor silver, nor brass for your purses...". Paul has just spoken of not coveting gold or silver. It may well be that the Lord added at this point: "It is more blessed to give than to receive". Paul saw his working in order to 'give' to the weak mission workers as being a form of missionary service in itself. Paul implies he repeated these words of the Lord time and again as his source of motivation, and he asks the Ephesians to do likewise... and we can take the appeal to ourselves.

20:36 *And when he had thus spoken-* The "thus" leads us to think that the prayer was therefore not asking to receive personally anything but glorifying God's giving and seeking for blessing on continued efforts to give of the Gospel. "He knelt down" translates Greek words meaning literally to give the knee. His 'giving' was therefore of praise, in this context, rather than begging to receive.

He knelt down and prayed with them all- They prayed as well as Paul.

20:37 *And they all wept freely, embraced Paul and kissed him-* Literally, 'fell on his neck and kissed him'. This is word for word the words Luke records as having come from the lips of Jesus in the parable of the father meeting the prodigal son (Lk. 15:20). But it appears out of context. I have discussed elsewhere how there are at times allusions and quotations from earlier Scriptures which appear out of context. But that is no necessary requirement within the Semitic usage of literature; Jewish midrash so often lifts Scripture out of context and applies it to another context, and the Bible writers at times do the same. It is an incidental evidence of the same mind at work in the Scriptures, and of how soaked were the minds of the early believers with the words of Jesus.

20:38 *Being sorrowful most of all because of his statement, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship-* It was a commonly reported practice for the brethren to go on the first stage of a journey with their fellow brethren; this Greek word is used only in this context, nine times (Acts 15:3; 20:38; 21:5; Rom. 15:24; 1 Cor. 16:6,11; 2 Cor. 1:16; Tit. 3:13).

ACTS CHAPTER 21

21:1 *And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara-* Luke so often mentions these details. Remember that the Hebrew words for 'spirit' and 'wind' were identical. I have argued that Paul's decision to go to Jerusalem and focus upon ministry to the Jews was not the Lord's ideal intention for him; that was Peter's task. But having decided to do it for the Lord, the Lord worked with him. Just as God did regarding a physical temple and system of human kingship.

21:2 *And having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail-* The idea is that they saw or noticed one. "We went aboard and set sail" could

imply it was just about to leave; they arrived just at the last minute. As noted on :1, the Lord was confirming Paul in the path he had chosen, whilst warning him that such a course was not ideal and would be problematic. Whatever choices we make, they are confirmed by the hand of providence; which is what gives intensity of meaning to all our choices.

21:3 When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria- The kind of eyewitness language and detail we would expect. The Bible is either inspired or a clever forgery, and if the latter, then these kinds of eyewitness details would have been hard to invent by a later hand. Especially bearing in mind that there was little experience of long distance travel.

And landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo- Nothing is chance in our lives. The seven days it took to unload and probably sell the cargo was used to visit the ecclesia there. This likewise [see on :1 and :2] was clearly meant to be, and reflects the higher hand that works in the lives of those who seek to serve the Lord.

21:4- see on Acts 20:23.

And having found the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and these said to Paul through the Spirit- It's not clear whether the Spirit directly said that Paul should not go to Jerusalem, or whether this was their interpretation of what was revealed to them. Reading the text as it stands, Paul's going to Jerusalem would have been rank disobedience. But it seems to me that he was being told of the consequences of his plan, and yet he continued in it, and the Lord worked with him in that choice. We encounter the same conundrum today when we are told 'The Bible says that...'. There's a need to make a differentiation between the specific text of the Bible, and human interpretation of it. It was 'they' who told Paul not to go to Jerusalem- not the Spirit directly.

That he should not set foot in Jerusalem- Paul was clearly told by the Spirit that he "should not go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:4 AV). Yet Paul chose to go up to Jerusalem, with the Holy Spirit warning him against it in every city he passed through (Acts 20:23; 21:11). What are we to make of this? Was a spiritual man like Paul simply out of step with the Spirit on this point? Maybe- in the light of all we've seen above. It's possible to get fixated on a certain project and ignore God's clear testimony. Or it could be that Paul knew the Lord well enough to realize that although God was telling him what would happen, he could still exercise his own love for his brethren to the maximum extent. For it was for love of his brethren and his dream of unity between Jew and Gentile that he personally took the offerings of the Gentiles to the poor saints in Jerusalem.

In Rom. 15:31 Paul asks the Romans to pray concerning his visit to Jerusalem "that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe". He was in struggle with God, wrestling God as Jacob did. On one hand, Spirit guidance was clear; but he believed that through prayer and human effort, a different outcome to that stated by the Spirit might be possible.

21:5 When our time was up, we departed and went on our way, and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, until we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed- The very same scene as at Troas. And Paul had stayed there seven days too (:4 cp. 20:6). The period of seven days in Tyre was because of the itinerary of the ship they were on (hence "when our time was up"). Clearly the Lord's providential hand was at work helping Paul to see that He was working with Paul according to a pattern. We too can perceive similarities between events within our lives; the meaning attached to those events may not be immediately clear, but all

the same we come away with the abiding impression that life is not random event but somehow, somewhere the Lord's hand is there with us.

21:6 *And we went on board the ship, and they returned home-* The pathos of the scene here has absolutely every mark of the eye witness account. We can almost imagine Luke as he was writing, remembering the last waves and hugs, the last sights of each other, as they walked away from the mooring, and Luke and Paul walked the entrance plank onto the ship.

21:7- see on Acts 4:23.

And when we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and we greeted the believers and stayed with them one day- The entire journey emphasizes how Paul looked up the believers in every town he visited, even though they were likely unknown to him personally. The bonds of Christian fellowship were and are strong.

21:8 *And the next day we departed, and went to Caesarea-* AV "We that were of Paul's company". This idea is found in 13:13 "Paul and his company" (AV). We should not therefore assume that only Luke accompanied Paul; there were other unrecorded brethren as well.

And entering into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him- The seven deacons of Acts 6:5 were appointed to minister practically to the poor in the Jerusalem church. But because of his ground breaking work with the Ethiopian eunuch, he was respected as "the evangelist". He clearly had more than one calling. We note he was now living at Caesarea, not Jerusalem, perhaps as a result of persecution in Jerusalem, or tensions within the Jerusalem ecclesia regarding Gentiles. Perhaps he had quit the church politics of the Jerusalem ecclesia and retired to Caesarea and focused upon raising his four daughters in his house church, and they had responded well to their upbringing.

21:9 *Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied-* This is surely intended to recall the prophecy of Joel, that this kind of thing would happen in the last days. The prophecy has already been quoted in Acts 2. Yet it speaks clearly of the last days. Again we see that from God's side, He had enabled the last days and establishment of the Kingdom on earth in the first century. But it was a lack of response by natural and spiritual Israel which led to the major delay until our last days.

Understanding Corinth ecclesia as a series of house churches explains Paul's comment to the Corinthians that he ordained his guidelines to be practiced in all the ecclesias (1 Cor. 7:17)- i.e. the house churches that comprised the body of Christ in Corinth. He gives some guidelines for behaviour that appear to contradict each other until we perceive the difference between the commands to house groups, and commands about the 'gathering together' for special breaking of bread services. The role of women is a classic example. 1 Cor. 14:34 says that women should keep silent 'in ecclesia' [AV "churches" is a mistranslation]- i.e. a sister shouldn't teach at those special breaking of bread meetings when the house churches 'came together' (1 Cor. 11:17,18,20). And yet within the house groups, it's apparent from other New Testament accounts and from what Paul himself writes, that sisters did teach there (1 Cor. 11:5). Thus in the house church of Philip, there were four women who 'prophesied', i.e. spoke forth the word of God to others (Acts 21:8,9). This to me is the only way to make sense of Corinthians- otherwise Paul appears to be contradicting himself.

21:10 *And as we stayed there some days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus-* Jews spoke of going up to Jerusalem, and coming down

from it. So this is not meant in a geographical sense. "Agabus" meaning locust or grasshopper, he may have been a wandering prophet, going around giving Divine messages as required; the type in view in 2 John, who was to be welcomed and supported by the Lord's people as he travelled around.

21:11- see on Acts 20:23; 21:4.

And coming to us and taking Paul's belt, he bound his own feet and hands, and said: Thus said the Holy Spirit: So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this belt, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles- The kind of acted parable beloved of Old Testament prophets (1 Kings 22:11; Is. 20:1-3; Jer. 13:1-7; Ez. 4:1-6). The Lord had predicted that Peter would meet his end by having his hands and feet bound (Jn. 21:18), and we wonder whether Paul again was consciously trying to emulate Peter by seeking the same end.

21:12 *And when we heard these things, both we and they of that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem-* Yet Luke stayed loyal to Paul and accompanied him to Rome, although he felt Paul was not taking the right course. We too can rightly stick with our brethren even if we feel it is plain that their path is less than ideal.

21:13 *Then Paul answered: What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready, not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus-* "Why make you this ado and weep?" (Mk. 5:39) is unconsciously alluded to by Paul here. If this is a conscious allusion, it seems out of context. But as an unconscious allusion, it makes sense.

21:14- see on Acts 20:23.

And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying: The will of the Lord be done- I don't take this as a mere passing comment of resignation. Rather did the brethren perceive that Paul was being shown the consequences of serving the Lord one way, but chose to do the Lord's will in another way- by going to Jerusalem and pursuing his mission to the Jews which the Lord preferred Peter to focus upon. They accepted Paul's choice and wished for the Lord's will to be further developed. Paul was not in that sense going against the Lord's will, but doing it. It would be "done" by the choice he made. We wonder whether Paul wrote to the Ephesians, using the same words, thinking of his own struggles to understand not only the Lord's will, but how he could best fulfil it: "understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). Luke and other early brethren seemed to have had the Gethsemane record in mind in their sufferings, as we can *also* do (Acts 21:14 = Mk. 14:36).

21:15 *And after these days we took up our baggage-* Paul took up his baggage at Ephesus and went on to Jerusalem (Acts 21:15 RV); the baggage would have been the bits and pieces raised by the donors to the Jerusalem Poor Fund. Those who couldn't send money had sent what little they could spare in kind- presumably clothes and even animals, or goods for re-sale in Jerusalem. However it seems that Luke omits reference to the fact that Paul's heavily invested in 'Jerusalem Poor Fund' didn't achieve its intention. There is no record of it being presented, nor of it impressing the Jerusalem Jews. Indeed, in the lead up to AD70, there was growing nationalism, religious extremism and xenophobia amongst the Jerusalem Jews. Josephus in *The Jewish War* is probably broadly reliable in his account of the feelings in Jerusalem at this time. A gift from Gentiles would not be well accepted; and Paul's mere presence in Jerusalem with Gentiles was enough to spark a riot.

And went up to Jerusalem- This must be understood in the context of how the "we" had repeatedly urged Paul *not* to go up to Jerusalem. They went with him from

loyalty to a friend and brother who had taken a path they did not consider wise; but still they travelled it with him. And we can take a lesson from that. The whole picture records the disciples loyally going up to Jerusalem with the Lord, despite their deep misgivings as to His wisdom in doing so.

21:16 *And there went with us also some of the disciples from Caesarea, bringing with them-* Some texts read 'brought us to', which makes sense if Mnason had a house in Jerusalem where he lodged the group.

One Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge- Perhaps this was as it were his Christian additional name, given as a sign of respect for how long he had held the faith. Such terms, like "the evangelist", reflect a culture of respect and "honour to whom honour" amongst the early believers, which we would do well to copy. Likewise perhaps the mention of the fact he was "from Cyprus" might be in respect of the fact that like many Jerusalem Levites, he had had land there, in order to 'get around' the legislation about Levites not owning land in Israel, and had sacrificed it for the Lord's sake. Given the brevity of the records, there can be surely no incidental, pointless addition of background material. Such details surely have meaning, even if we cannot in our age and at our distance immediately discern it.

21:17 *And when we arrived in Jerusalem-* Luke was a Gentile (so Col. 4:11 implies). Note how the other Gospel writers speak of the *sea* of Galilee, whereas the more widely travelled Luke refers to it only as a lake. While Paul was in prison in Caesarea for two years, Luke was a free man (Acts 21:17; 24:27). It seems that during that period, Luke may have spent the time travelling around the areas associated with Jesus, interviewing eye witnesses- especially Mary, the aged mother of Jesus, from whom he must have obtained much of the information about His birth and Mary's song. His preaching of the Gospel in Luke and Acts is made from his perspective- the fact that salvation is for all, not just Jews, is a major theme (Lk. 2:30-32; 3:6; 9:54,55; 10:25-34; Acts 1:8; 2:17).

The brothers received us gladly- This appears in contrast with the spirit of :18. So perhaps the "brothers" in view were those in Mnason's home; see on :16.

21:18 *And the following day Paul went with us to James; and all the elders were present-* Presumably there were now no other apostles present in Jerusalem or they would have been mentioned. They had either fled persecution, been cast out of the church over the Gentile issue [note Philip, one-time deacon of the Jerusalem church, was now running a house church in Caesarea], or were away on missionary work.

21:19 *And when he had greeted them, he related one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry-* Such an orderly presentation of missionary history was made with Luke present (:18 "us"). Surely here we have a hint as to the historical background to the book of Luke-Acts. Luke and Paul presented it as an explanation to the Jerusalem elders; hence Luke opens Volume 1 by saying that he is presenting an orderly chronological account of Gospel events. But as always, the emphasis is upon what God and His Son had done through them. This is a major theme of Luke in Acts [see on 1:1]- that the Lord was working through the ministries of His people. It would also explain why the focus of Acts is upon Paul when clearly there were other preachers also active. The book was initially an explanation and account to the Jerusalem elders of the work of Paul- for it was he whom they were so concerned about. Paul had no accountability to them- if at all, he would have been accountable to the Antioch ecclesia from whence he had initially departed to the mission field. But he graciously goes along with their concerns.

21:20- see on Acts 8:1.

And they, when they heard it, glorified God; and they said to him: You saw, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those that have believed; and they are all zealous for the law- Paul uses the same words in his defence, stating that he like them had been zealous for the law, but had been persuaded otherwise by the Lord Jesus (22:3; also in Gal. 1:14 about his former life in Judaism). The implication could be that the same crowds baying for his blood were in fact the crowds of the ecclesia of Jerusalem Jews who had accepted Christ. This was the degree to which the church slid back into Judaism; and is an essay in the power of legalism in the church. The Jerusalem Jewish Christians had initially been persecuted and many had fled into dispersion in Asia Minor, as Peter's letters make clear. Why was there now a Christian church in Jerusalem? They had clearly compromised with the synagogue system. And had succumbed to the rising wave of Jewish nationalism and xenophobia in Jerusalem. It can develop to fanatic extents, calling for the death of brethren of Paul's calibre. It may also be that by using this term about his former life, Paul was tacitly recognizing that his political compromise to those brethren had been wrong- see on :21 and :22. He had given the impression of being "zealous for the law", and now he plainly states that zeal for the law was the characteristic of his pre-Christian life, and he had changed as a result of encountering the Lord Jesus.

21:21 And they have been informed concerning you, that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses- Paul's intended mission was to the Gentiles and Peter's to the Jews. But here we have a fair summary of what Paul actually did; and it wasn't the Lord's ideal wish. If only he had followed the Lord's intention, then this whole situation with the Jerusalem ecclesia and the subsequent events which led to his arrest and imprisonment... simply wouldn't have happened. We too can save ourselves much grief by going the Lord's intended way for us.

Telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to our customs- Paul should have quietly pleaded guilty, because his letters show this was indeed his position. But in a desperate attempt to placate the legalists, he went along with them- resulting in a chain of events which led to his imprisonment. We too need to be honest with our brethren about our positions regarding fellowship issues and other hot topics of our times, even if we know they strongly disagree. Attempting to compromise and misrepresent our positions is not only dishonest but results in much grief all around. Brethren assume we have a position which we do not- and then get bitter with us when they realize we actually don't hold the position which we apparently espoused for the sake of political peace. Whilst a degree of pragmatism is required in all human relationships, we must learn the lesson from Paul at this point- for his pragmatism and resignation of principle led to a chain of events which was seriously damaging for him and the Lord's work. If he had not then gone into the temple to demonstrate his Jewish orthodoxy, the riot, arrest and subsequent imprisonment would never have occurred. See on :20 *Zealous for the law*.

21:22 What then? They will certainly hear you have come- The whole thing smacks of the kind of church politics which have blighted the body of Christ in our age. The elders feared the imagined reaction of others, and so they asked Paul to do something which was more a result of their fears than their genuine convictions; and Paul gave in, leading to serious damage to his ministry as he lay incarcerated for years as a result of the chain of events which then happened. And in the end, the Jerusalem church slid into the apostasy of legalism and returned to Judaism. Nothing good came out of all that fearful compromise.

21:23 Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow- The "therefore" reflects how urgently they felt the need to placate the Judaists. Paul

did what he was told, even although it was wrong and based around pleasing men. I sense he made this misjudgement not because he was browbeaten by these brethren, although he was pretty much alone before them; but because he like them was desperate at all costs to ingratiate himself to the Jerusalem church and reconcile and convert the temple cult. Those desires became such an obsession that they clouded his better judgment. The "vow" was apparently a Nazirite vow.

21:24- see on Acts 18:18.

These take and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses- Paul was clearly not poor at this time; or probably it was known that he was bringing funds to Jerusalem on behalf of the Gentile churches. See the note on "baggage" on :15. It was considered a work of piety to relieve needy Jews from the expenses connected with short term Nazirite vows, as Paul does here. Adam Clarke notes: "It was also customary for the richer sort to bestow their charity on the poorer sort for this purpose; for Josephus, *Ant. lib. xix. cap. 6, sec. 1*, observes that Agrippa, on his being advanced from a prison to a throne, by the Emperor Claudius, came to Jerusalem; and there, among other instances of his religious thankfulness shown in the temple, Ναζαραιων ξυρασθαι διεταξε μαλα συχνους, he ordered very many Nazarites to be shaven, he furnishing them with money for the expenses of that, and of the sacrifices necessarily attending it". The idea of the Jerusalem poor fund was that Paul would relieve needy believers who had been affected by recent famines. But we get the impression that this noble intention got caught up in church politics; the funds were spent on temple sacrifices to prove that poor Jewish Christians had achieved legal obedience in ending their vows, and Paul was publicly demonstrating his support of such legalism. Clearly the Jerusalem Jewish Christians knew Paul was loaded with the Jerusalem Poor Fund; and instead of seeing it used to relieve poverty, they wanted it used to demonstrate allegiance to Moses. Paul was surely wrong to go along with this.

That they may shave their heads; and all shall know that there is no truth in the things of which they have been informed concerning you, but you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law- Note how hurtful this must have been, since Paul was bringing funds for their ecclesia which he had collected at the cost of damaging his relationship with the likes of Corinth. He meekly obeyed, perhaps it was playing a part in the politics in the church, although he had written to the Colossians and others that there was no need for any to be circumcised nor keep the Law, indeed these things were a denial of faith in Jesus. Paul later uses the same word to describe how we are to 'walk' not according to the Law but the Spirit (Gal. 5:25; 6:16; Phil. 3:16); perhaps this was written from prison with a glance back at the fact that he was imprisoned exactly because he had attempted to impress others by how he walked according to the Law, which had led to the riot and his subsequent incarceration. He likewise uses the term 'keeping the law' in a negative sense in Rom. 2:26 and Gal. 6:13.

21:25 *But concerning the Gentiles that have believed, we wrote, giving judgment that they should keep themselves from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication-* The "we" could suggest that this was the same group of elders as at the time of the Acts 15 agreements. But that was now some years ago, and surely some of those brethren had died. So the Jerusalem elders were arguing from a position of inherited authority, claiming that they had effectively done what their predecessors had done. This is a dangerous attitude as it resigns personal responsibility and principle. Paul had written to the Corinthians that food sacrificed to idols could be eaten; so he should have now said up front that he no longer accepted that point, or at best, considered it to apply only to a limited circle of Gentile converts.

21:26 *Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple-* Paul's purification of himself may have been for different reasons than the four men under the Nazirite vow. It was customary for orthodox Jews returning to Jerusalem from Gentile lands to purify themselves in the way Paul does here. Again, given his understanding of uncleanness and the end of the Mosaic concepts of pure and impure, it was really a great denial of principle for him to do this. We must ask all through: 'What would have happened if Paul had been true to himself and his beliefs?'. He would not have entered the temple, recognizing that as Stephen had taught him in his last breaths, there is now no sacred space. The true temple is the church. He would not have bothered even trying to demonstrate obedience to the law. He would have told the Jerusalem brethren what he had written and taught to others about the law of Moses. He would have given them the funds for the poor- and continued on his way to the Gentiles, seeing he was called to witness to the Gentiles and not the Jews. But he insisted upon his obsession with pleasing and converting orthodox Judaism. And everything went so badly wrong as a result. He had already by this point written the letter to the Galatians [probably during his extended stay in Ephesus]. There he had rebuked Peter for caving in to pressure from the Jerusalem Jewish-Christian brethren. And now he does just the same.

He had written to the Galatians of how the law was "the weak and beggarly elements" and wrote with such invective against Judaizers. So now at this point we see Paul perhaps at his weakest point during his Christian race. He caves in on the very principles he had had revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. Just as the whole scene was reminiscent of that concerning Stephen, so it also recalled Peter's failure with the Jerusalem church, going along with things which were contrary to his own personal experience of revelation from the Lord. This is all so true to human experience. We see brethren cave in on the very principles they have fought so hard to uphold. And we also see brethren in later life going out on tangents, and ending their days "in Christ" but alienated and in very difficult personal situations. And this is what happened with Paul. The rest of his life was spent in prison, increasingly isolated, and failing to achieve his goals- of preaching successfully to both Jew and Gentile.

The lesson is, to be honest with our brethren. To be true to our Lord, and to ourselves. To state and live by the principles we know to be true, rather than falling into the very strong temptation to say and do what we know others expect from us. And this is particularly true over the vexed issue of fellowship, which was essentially the issue facing Paul at this point.

Declaring the fulfilment of the days of purification, until the offering was offered for every one of them- He 'kept going into the temple' (Gk.). "The days" were seven days (:27). Whilst the law did not stipulate a minimum term for a Nazirite vow, there is evidence that usually the minimum term was 30 days. So this vow was not being done for very genuine reasons but rather just to demonstrate Paul's loyalty to the law and Jerusalem temple cult. And Paul along with the four men made this vow ("himself along with them"). The whole thing smacks of tokenism rather than sincerity, and Paul suffered for it, in that the sequence of events triggered by it affected the rest of his life.

21:27 *And when the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the crowd-* Paul had only recently arrived from Asia; it could be that a group of Jews followed him not only from city to city in his missionary work, but had even followed him to Jerusalem. This was the extent of Jewish opposition against his ministry to them.

And laid hands on him- God has recorded Paul's life in Acts in such a way as to show the similarities between him and Christ; thus the Spirit records that men "laid hands on" Paul, just as it does concerning the Lord Jesus (Mt. 26:50).

21:28 *Crying out: Men of Israel, help! This is the man that teaches all men everywhere against the people and the law, and this place, and moreover he brought Gentiles also into the temple and has defiled this holy place-* We can read this as conscious slander. But see on :29 *They supposed*. I suggest they rehearsed their fears and [il]logical deductions in their minds to such a point that they became actually convinced this had happened. They saw him with one Gentile, and assume that Gentile had been brought into the temple; and that therefore the other three men seen with him in the temple were therefore also Gentiles. Josephus claims that Gentile entry into the temple was a capital offence. It would've been highly unlikely that Paul would even have got Gentiles beyond the Jewish temple guards. The whole conclusion was improbable in the extreme. But this is where legalistic quasi-logical deduction and supposition lead to.

The accusations they make against Paul are the very ones which were being made by the Jewish Christians in the Jerusalem ecclesia (:21). This is another reason for thinking that the crowds of Jerusalem Jews baying for Paul's blood included legalistic, Judaistic members of the Jerusalem church. If, as I currently believe, Paul wrote Hebrews from Italy (ponder Heb. 13:24), then we see his utter grace in even bothering to reason with them and urge them not to return to Judaism.

The scene and false accusations here are very similar to those made by Paul against Stephen (Acts 6:11-14: "Then they secretly induced men to say: We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God. And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and came upon him and seized him, and brought him into the council, and set up false witnesses, who said: This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law. For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and shall change the customs which Moses delivered"). The charges were identical; both Stephen and Paul made speeches in their defence which provoked the Jews to fury, to the point that they interrupted them with violence, and each time it is diaspora Jews who are provoking the situation. I think Paul perceived the connection, because he uses the same form of address as does Stephen: "Brothers and fathers" (Acts 7:2; 22:1). And he mentions the death of Stephen specifically in Acts 22:20. So often this happens. We experience what we have done to others. This is not merely poetic justice. The intention was perhaps that Paul needed to repent more deeply of what he had done to Stephen. This phenomena also occurs in order to help create unity between us and our brethren, including those who are now dead. Although they are unconscious, we are enabled to enter into their feelings, in preparation for the glorious unity of the Kingdom.

21:29 *For they had previously seen with him in the city Trophimus the Ephesian-* Seeing the Jews who made the problem were from Asia (:27), they perhaps were from Ephesus and knew Trophimus.

Whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple- "Supposed" is the verb *nomizo*, a form of the noun *nomos*, 'law'. Their legalistic reasoning led them to over interpret facts and draw endless apparently logical conclusions- but they came to a false conclusion as a result of their legalistic devotion to logical deduction. The same mentality is seen in legalists today, who seem highly prone to all manner of conspiracy theories and irrational deductions.

21:30 *And all the city was moved-* The same word used later in accusing Paul of creating dissension (24:5). A division caused by others about Paul was thus made

Paul's fault. People likewise falsely accuse the Lord Jesus, and His followers, of causing division when they are merely at the centre of division made by unbelievers.

And the people ran together, laid hold on Paul and dragged him out of the temple- The very same words used about what happened to Paul in Philippi (16:19). Circumstances repeated in his life, as they do in ours, reflecting the same Divine hand at work with us in different places and situations down the years, but always with the same hallmarks.

And immediately the doors were shut- Both into the court of the Gentiles, and also from there into the court of the Israelites, thus cutting off Paul from any help. The door into the temple would therefore likely have had to be broken down by the Gentile Romans to get to Paul- all full of symbolism! The Roman guard was stationed in the tower of Antonia on the North West of the temple area, and they would have seen what was going on in the court of the Gentiles from above.

21:31 *And as they were seeking to kill him-* Paul's physical sufferings over the course of his ministry were significant. They would already have inflicted major damage on his body before the soldiers saved him from death itself. And there would have been the psychological damage inflicted after each trauma.

News came to the chief captain of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar- In the tower of Antonia. See on :30 *The doors were shut.*

21:32 *And he took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them; and they, when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, stopped beating Paul-* From the tower of Antonia overlooking the court of the Gentiles. The details given here are all so internally cohesive that it's hard to doubt that this is the true word of God and no clever fabrication of a later hand.

21:33 *Then the chief captain came near, laid hold of him and commanded him to be bound with two chains, and inquired who he was and what he had done-* Fulfilling the prophecy of Agabus in 21:11. There is no other record of those words being fulfilled. The chains were therefore presumably on his hands and feet as Agabus had predicted, rather than to two soldiers as many suppose. Hence he was "carried" into the Antonia castle (:34). Again the internal cohesion of the record is nothing short of Divinely inspired.

21:34 *And some among the mob shouted one thing, some another; and when he could not know the certainty because of the uproar, he commanded him to be brought into the fortress of Antonia-* "Shouted" is the word used by Luke for the shouting for the Lord's crucifixion (Lk. 23:21). As with each of us, Paul was brought to know the essence of his Lord's sufferings.

21:35 *When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob-* This is religious legalism come to its full term. The mob was pushing forward the ones in front in a mad desire to kill Paul, regardless of his Roman protection.

21:36 *For the mob followed after, crying out: Away with him!-* Again, Paul like us was being taught the Lord's crucifixion experiences (Lk. 23:18; Jn. 19:15).

21:37 *And as Paul was about to be brought into the fortress, he said to the chief captain: May I say something to you? And he said: Do you know Greek?-* The soldier was so persuaded that his assumption about Paul being an Egyptian was correct that he was shocked. A theme of the whole incident is the dogmatism arrived at from false inference and illogical deduction and presupposition, by both Jews and Gentiles.

21:38 *Are you not that Egyptian, who some time ago stirred up sedition and led out into the wilderness four thousand men that were terrorists?-* Josephus mentions this incident and gives the figure of 30,000 (*Wars* 2.17, 6 and 13,5; *Antiquities* 20.

8,10). This is reason enough to accuse Josephus of gross exaggeration and to question his reliability.

21:39 *But Paul said: I am a Jew, of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I beg you, please let me speak to the people-* This seems rather proud, especially when we learn that Tarsus was famed for being a proud city. She inscribed upon her coins: “Tarsus, the Metropolis, First, Fairest and Best” (W. Barclay, *Ambassador For Christ* p. 25).

21:40 *And when he had given him leave, Paul, standing on the stairs, beckoned with the hand to the people; and when there was made a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying-* The silence may have been from surprise that Paul had been given this privilege of addressing the crowd. We sense Paul’s great zeal to use every and any opportunity to get the gospel over to the largest possible audiences. We would likely not have risked more exposure and provocation.

ACTS CHAPTER 22

22:1 *Brothers and fathers, hear the defence which I now make to you-* This was the very phrase used by Stephen in Acts 7:2, with Saul onlooking. As noted on Heb. 1:1 and throughout Acts 7, Stephen's speech converted Paul, and he alludes to it throughout his life. He saw that he was now fellowshiping Stephen's sufferings. But we note too his respect toward the Jews, who had done so much evil to him. He so wished to save them, and the desire to save others is rooted in a basic respect of them as persons. Another reading is possible, however. To address the Sanhedrin as “brethren” has been described as “almost recklessly defiant” (William Barclay, *Ambassador For Christ* p. 132). The usual address was: “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel”. But Paul instead treated them as his equals.

22:2 *And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they were even more quiet; and he said-* It might seem that it was impossible that Paul, having been beaten and in chains, guarded by soldiers, could make a hand gesture, say a few words in Hebrew, and quell a raging crowd (Acts 21:31-34; 22:2). Yet it was because he spoke to them in Hebrew, in their own language and in their own terms, that somehow the very power and realness of his personality had such an effect. It reminds us of how the Lord could send crowds away, make them sit down...because of His identity with them, His supreme bridge building.

22:3 *I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel-* It is quite possible that Paul heard most of the speeches recorded in the Gospels, and saw many of the miracles. The reason is as follows. Every faithful Jew would have been in Jerusalem to keep the feasts three times per year. Jesus and Paul were therefore together in Jerusalem three times / year, throughout Christ's ministry. It can be demonstrated that many of the miracles and speeches of Jesus occurred around the feast times, in Jerusalem. Therefore I estimate that at least 70% of the content of the Gospels (including John) Paul actually saw and heard 'live'. Another indirect reason for believing that Paul had met and heard Jesus preaching is from the fact that Paul describes himself as having been brought up as a Pharisee, because his father had been one (Acts 23:6). Martin Hengel has shown extensive evidence to believe that the Pharisees only really operated in Palestine, centred in Jerusalem, where Paul was “brought up” at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Hengel also shows that “brought up” refers to training from a young child. So whilst Paul was born in Tarsus, he was really a Jerusalem boy. Almost certainly he would have heard and known much about Jesus; his father may even have been amongst those who

persecuted the Lord. See Martin Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul* (London: S.C.M., 1991).

Instructed according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as you all are this day- Paul says he was "*taught* [NEV "*instructed*"] according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers" by Gamaliel, receiving the highest wisdom possible in the Jewish world; but he uses the same word as Stephen in Acts 7:22, describing how Moses was "*learned*" in all the wisdom of Egypt. Remember he heard Stephen's speech live. Paul felt that he too had been through Moses' experience- once mighty in words as the rising star of the Jewish world, but now like Moses he had left all that behind in order to try to save a new Israel from Judaism and paganism. As Moses *consciously* rejected the opportunity for leading the 'world' of Egypt, so Paul probably turned down the chance to be High Priest. God maybe confirmed both him and Moses in their desire for humility by giving them a speech impediment (the "thorn in the flesh" which Paul was "given", 2 Cor. 12:7?).

22:4- see on Acts 9:2 *Bring them bound to Jerusalem* and Acts 26:10,11.

And I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women- Paul is admitting here to murder, which would have been extrajudicial. He could surely have been prosecuted for this, but he makes the admission because he was so deeply convicted of his sins. And it was this which gave his witness such credibility, and made the audience know in their hearts that what he was saying was all true- hence their mad anger. He admits his actions were against women too... and the memories of the victims would have flooded his mind as he made the admission.

22:5 *As also the high priest does bear me witness, and all the council of the elders. From whom also I received letters to the brothers and journeyed to Damascus, to bring them also that were there to Jerusalem in bonds to be punished-* Paul was called "brother" even before his baptism, and even after his baptism, he refers to the Jews as his "brethren" (Acts 22:5,13). Of course, he knew all about the higher status and meaning of brotherhood in Christ; but he wasn't so pedantic as to not call the Jews his 'brethren'. He clearly didn't have any of the guilt-by-association paranoia, and the associated standoffishness it brings with it, which have so hamstrung our witness to the world.

22:6 *And it came to pass, that as I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me-* In the same way as Paul would've been trained to write and present an encomium (as he does in Gal. 1), so he would've been trained in the rhetoric of how to make a public defence speech. There was a set format for defending oneself, as there was for the encomium. And in his defence speeches recorded in Acts, Paul again follows the accepted order of defence speeches- but his *content* was absolutely radical for the first century mind. Quintilian in his *Instructions To Orators* laid down five sections for such a speech- and Paul follows that pattern exactly. There was to be the exordium [opening statement], a statement of facts (*narratio*), the proof (*probatio*), the refutation (*refutatio*) and the concluding peroration. The speeches were intended to repeatedly remind the judges of what in fact was the core issue- and Paul does this when he stresses that he is on trial (*krinomai*) for "the hope of the resurrection of the dead" (Acts 23:6; 24:21; 26:6,7,8). Yet as with his use of the encomium format, Paul makes some unusual twists in the whole presentation. It was crucial in the set piece defence speech to provide proof and authorized witness. Paul provides proof for the resurrection in himself; and insists that the invisible Jesus, a peasant from Galilee, had appeared to him and "appointed [him] to bear witness" (Acts 26:16; 22:15). That was

laughable in a court of law. Yet the erudite, cultured, educated Paul in all soberness made that claim. Aristotle had defined two types of proof- "necessary proof" (*tekmerion*), from which irrefutable, conclusive conclusions could be drawn; and "probable proof", i.e. circumstantial evidence (*eikota / semeia*). Paul's claim to have seen Jesus on the Damascus road was of course circumstantial evidence, so far as the legal system was concerned- it could not be proven. Yet Paul presents this as his *tekmerion*, quoting it as the irrefutable proof in his defence (Acts 22:6-12; 26:12-16). Luke elsewhere uses this word and its synonym *pistis* to describe the evidence for the Lord's resurrection (Acts 1:3; 17:31). Paul's point of course was that the personal transformation of himself was indeed *tekmerion*, irrefutable proof, that Christ had indeed risen from the dead. And so it should be in the witness which *our* lives make to an unbelieving world. Significantly, Paul speaks of the great light which his companions saw at his conversion, and his subsequent blindness, as *eikota*, the circumstantial evidence, rather than the irrefutable proof (Acts 22:6,9,11; 26:13). Now to the forensic mind, this was more likely his best, 'irrefutable' proof, rather than saying that the irrefutable proof was simply he himself. Yet he puts that all the other way around. Thus when it came to stating 'witnesses', Paul doesn't appeal to his travelling companions on the road to Damascus. These would've surely been the obvious primary witnesses. Instead, he claims that "all Judeans" and even his own accusers "if they are willing to testify", are in fact witnesses of his character transformation (Acts 22:5; 26:4,5). The point is of tremendous power to us who lamely follow after Paul... it is our personal witness which is *the* supreme testimony to the truth of Christ; not 'science proves the Bible', archaeology, the stones crying out, prophecy fulfilling etc. It is we ourselves who are ultimately the prime witnesses to God's truth on this earth. All this was foolishness in the judgmental eyes of first century society, just as it is today. Our preaching of the Gospel is likewise apparent foolishness to our hearers, like Paul it is not "in plausible words of wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:1-7), even though, again like Paul, many of us could easily try to make it humanly plausible. Paul's credibility as a preacher was in his very lack of human credibility- he was hungry and thirsty, poorly dressed, homeless, having to do manual work (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27); he was the powerless one, beaten, imprisoned and persecuted (1 Cor. 4:8-12; 2 Cor. 6:4,5). It's hard for us to imagine how unimpressive and repulsive this was in first century society. And yet it was exactly this which gave him power and credibility as a preacher of Christ's Gospel. And he sets before us a challenging pattern.

22:7 *And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*- Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39); as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being "buffeted" by Satan's servants, using the very word used of the Lord being "buffeted" straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

22:8 *And I answered: Who are you Lord? And he said to me: I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you persecute*- The fact Paul addressed Jesus as "Lord" suggests he knew the answer already, and had subconsciously recognized Jesus of Nazareth as Lord. For the presentation of Him as "Lord" had been a major part of the early

witness of Peter, which Paul would surely have heard. Paul was kicking against the pricks of conscience; he knew, therefore, that Jesus was Lord. And amongst the crowds of apparently disinterested sceptics we encounter in our witness, there are surely people who are in a similar position; hiding behind their blasphemy and inappropriate jokes about the Lord Jesus the fact that they have been convicted of Him as Lord in some deep part of their subconscious. See on :10.

22:9 *And they that were with me saw indeed the light, but they did not understand the voice of him that spoke to me-* They heard a voice (9:7), but didn't understand the content of the words spoken. The idea may be that it was in a language which Paul was empowered to understand, but they were not. But these men were like Paul, haters of the Christians. The same Greek phrase for "not understand" is used of how the Jews did "not understand" the message of the Lord because they chose not to (Mt. 13:13; Jn. 8:43,47; they did not understand Moses so they would not understand the risen Lord, Lk. 16:31; Nicodemus could not understand the voice of the Spirit, Jn. 3:8). And Paul's audience did likewise; they refused to hear or understand further and screamed for him to stop speaking the word to them (:22 s.w.). Perhaps they too could have potentially been converted, but they refused to understand.

22:10 *And I said: What shall I do Lord? And the Lord said to me: Arise and go into Damascus, and there you shall be told all things which are appointed for you to do-* The repetition of the word "Lord" suggests that Paul was convicted of Jesus as Lord already before His appearance to him; see on :8. And we note that Ananias also addressed Him as "Lord" (9:13). We wonder why the Lord did not immediately tell Paul what he was to do. The answer is as in many such questions- He prefers to work through some human mechanism wherever possible. The encounter with Ananias was all part of the required conversion process; for Ananias was a well-respected Jew who had also come to Jesus. And Paul needed to meet him and hear from such a person the need for baptism. In 9:12 we learn that Paul had seen a vision of Ananias restoring his sight; perhaps that vision was whilst with the Lord on the Damascus road.

22:11 *And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand by those that were with me, I came into Damascus-* I suggested on :9 that the men with Paul could also have been converted. They saw the same light (:9), but were not blinded by it. The implication is that Paul was more sensitive to it than they were. And they would later have reflected how it was they who effectively led Paul to Jesus by leading him to Damascus.

22:12 *And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt there-* Ananias was a committed Christian, but was carefully obedient to the law. His faith and understanding was therefore immature, but this did not mean the Lord didn't accept him as a significant believer and tool in His purpose. There were clearly Jews within Damascus who were collaborating with Paul; but even they had to respect Ananias. He was therefore just the right person to be used for Paul's conversion; see on :10. Or perhaps it was the case that all the Jews in Damascus were respectful of Jewish Christians like Ananias, and Paul and his group were imposing upon them an aggression which was not what they themselves were persuaded of.

22:13 *Came to me; and standing by me, he said to me: Brother Saul, receive your sight. And in that very moment I looked upon him-* Paul had received a vision of Ananias doing this (9:12). So when news came that Ananias had come to visit him, he knew this was all according to plan; hence he comments that "in that very moment"

the healing occurred. Perhaps Ananias was one of those Paul planned to murder or imprison.

22:14 *And he said: The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth-* Paul wishes that the Colossians would be “filled with the knowledge of his will” (Col. 1:9), just as at his conversion he had been chosen so “that you should know his will” (Acts 22:14). He wanted them to share the radical nature of conversion which he had gone through; the sense of life turned around; of new direction...

22:15 *For you shall be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard-* There was some content therefore to what Paul had “seen and heard”. Paul was jubilant that the prophecy was coming true right before their eyes and ears, as he now witnessed to so many of what he had seen and heard. “Witness” continues the reference to Stephen; for the word is used of him in :20. As noted on :1, Paul was fully aware that he was to follow in Stephen's footsteps. What a bond those two shall have in God's Kingdom!

22:16 *And now why do you delay?-* The urgent appeal for repentance was quite a feature of their witness (2:38; 5:31; 7:51; 11:18; 17:30; 18:18; 20:21; 26:20; Heb. 6:1). There needs to be a greater stress on repentance in our preaching, 20 centuries later. This is why baptism was up front in their witness, for it is for the forgiveness of sins; thus in 22:16 they appealed for repentance and baptism in the same breath.

Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name- The language of washing away of sins refers to God's forgiveness of us on account of our baptism into Christ. In some passages we are spoken of as washing away our sins by our faith and repentance (Acts 22:16; Rev. 7:14; Jer. 4:14; Is. 1:16); in others God is seen as the one who washes away our sins (Ez. 16:9; Ps. 51:2,7; 1 Cor. 6:11). This nicely shows how that if we do our part in being baptised, God will then wash away our sins.

22:17 *And it came to pass, that when I had returned to Jerusalem and while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance-* The whole argument was that Paul had brought Gentiles into the temple. He now says that he had frequented the temple, and whilst praying there he had received a vision telling him to preach to Gentiles (:21), although “far hence” from the Jerusalem temple. Whilst answering the false allegation that he had brought Gentiles into the temple, Paul was associating Gentiles with the temple. This could be read as an unnecessary provocation on his part. But he wanted them to see that the God whom they believed abode in the Jerusalem temple had a program of including Gentiles amongst His people. Psychologically, we would have maybe thought it was better to just avoid the connection between Gentiles and the temple. But we sense Paul is fearless and utterly prepared to follow Stephen to death; he did not count his life dear unto himself, as witnessed by all the times the brethren had to bundle him out of a town before he was lynched, knowing that of himself, he would have remained and endured it.

22:18 *And saw him saying to me: Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not welcome your testimony concerning me-* And yet Paul always appealed first of all to the Jews, despite his emotional turning unto the Gentiles at one stage. Even by Acts 28:17, he started preaching “to those that were of the Jews first” (RVmg.). The principle of “to the Jews first” was paramount and universal in the thinking of Paul. And despite the Holy Spirit repeatedly warning him not to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22,23; 21:11), he went there. He hoped against hope that even in

the light of the foreknowledge that Israel would reject the Gospel, somehow they might change.

22:19- see on Acts 26:10,11.

And I said: Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those that believed in you- Paul recounts in Acts 22:19-21 how first of all he felt so ashamed of his past that he gently resisted this command to preach: "I said, Lord... I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed... and he said unto me, Depart... unto the Gentiles". The stress on "every synagogue" (Acts 22:19; 26:11) must be connected with the fact that he chose to preach *in the synagogues*. He was sent to persecute every synagogue in Damascus, and yet he purposefully preached in every synagogue there (Acts 9:2,20). His motivation was rooted in his deep recognition of sinfulness. Likewise Peter preached a hundred metres or so from the very place where he denied the Lord.

22:20 *And when the blood of Stephen your witness was shed, I also was standing by and approved, and guarded the robes of those that slew him-* Consented. Paul warned the Romans that those who "have pleasure" in (Gk. 'to feel gratified with') sinful people will be punished just as much as those who commit the sins (Rom. 1:32). But he uses the very word used for his own 'consenting' unto the death of Stephen; standing there in consent, although not throwing a stone (Acts 8:1; 22:20). He realized that only by grace had that major sin of his been forgiven; and in that spirit of humility and self-perception of himself, as a serious sinner saved by grace alone, did he appeal to his brethren to consider their ways. 'Feeling gratified with' such sins as are in this list is what the entertainment industry is so full of. We can't watch, read and listen to this kind of thing by choice without in some sense being vicariously involved in it- and this seems to be exactly what Paul has in mind when he warns that those who feel gratified in those sins shall share in their judgment. This is a sober warning, relevant, powerful and cutting to our generation far more than any other. For given the internet and media, we can so easily feel gratified in others' sins.

22:21 *And he said to me: Depart! For I will send you far from here to the Gentiles-* As noted on :17, Paul is making the point that the God of the temple wanted Gentile inclusion; but he had been sent to achieve this "far from here"; he had not brought Gentiles into the literal temple, but into the symbolic, more essential one.

22:22 *And they listened until this word, and then they lifted up their voice and said: Away with such a fellow from the earth! For it is not fitting that he should live-* As noted on :17 and :21, the association of Gentiles with the temple was too much for them. "They" had a singular "voice"; they were united in hatred. This is why Luke likes to draw a parallel between how both the Christians and their enemies were of "one accord". We are caught up in a spirit of unity either for or against the Lord. The Jews had the power to ask for the death penalty for someone who desecrated the temple, and they perceived that Paul's comment here as ground upon which to demand that penalty; they correctly understood him to mean that he had been sent to the Gentiles to include them in a more figurative temple.

22:23 *And as they cried out and threw off their cloaks and threw dust into the air-* The throwing off of their cloaks was exactly what had happened when Stephen was stoned to death; and those cloaks were laid at Paul's feet (7:58). As noted on :1 and elsewhere, the Lord was arranging for Paul to go through in essence the situation with Stephen. Those old enough to remember Stephen's stoning would have later reflected at how a higher hand was replicating Stephen's experience in Paul's; and this would have been an appeal to them for their repentance.

22:24 *The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the fortress, bidding that he should be examined by scourging, that he might know for what cause they so shouted against him-* This indicated a hunch that Paul was not really telling the complete story, and there was some other agenda that he had not explained, given the extent of Jewish anger with him. Luke emphasizes how the Roman authorities were constantly nonplussed at the extent of Jewish opposition to Paul (e.g. 18:15; 25:19). But Paul had told the whole story; what the Romans were witnessing was the power of a bad conscience, and how the upsetting of traditionally held ideas unleashes irrational anger.

22:25 *And when they had tied him up with the thongs, Paul said to the centurion that stood by: Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?-* Paul seems to enjoy putting the wind up the soldiers by waiting until they had bound him for torture before asking, surely in a sarcastic way, whether it was lawful for them to beat a Roman citizen. The fact he asked the question when he knew full well the answer is surely indicative of his sarcasm. The chief captain commented, under his breath it would seem, that it had cost him a fortune in backhanders to get Roman citizenship. Paul picked up his words and commented, with head up, we can imagine: “But *I* was free born”- I was born a citizen, never needed to give a penny in backhanders to get it either. Surely there is an arrogance here which is unbecoming. And it was revealed at a time when he was in dire straits himself, and after already being in Christ some time. It may indicate that he was tempted to adopt a brazen, almost fatalistic aggression towards his captors and persecutors- what Steinbeck aptly described as “the terrible, protective dignity of the powerless”. One can well imagine how such a mindset would start to develop in Paul after suffering so much at the hands of men. Compare this incident with the way he demands the magistrates to come *personally* and release him from prison, because they have unfairly treated him (Acts 16:37).

22:26 *And when the centurion heard it, he went to the chief captain and told him, saying: What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman-* We read (almost in passing) that Paul five times was beaten with 39 stripes (2 Cor. 11:22-27). Yet from Acts 22:26 it is evident that Paul as a Roman citizen didn't need not have endured this. On each of those five occasions he could have played the card of his Roman citizenship to get him out of it; but he didn't. It wouldn't have been wrong to; but five times out of six, he chose the highest level. It may be that he chose not to mention his Roman citizenship so as to enable him access to the synagogues for preaching purposes. The one time Paul didn't play that card, perhaps he was using the principle of Jephthah's vow- that you can vow to your own hurt but chose a lower level and break it.

22:27 *And the chief captain came and said to him: Tell me, are you a Roman? And he said: Yes-* There was no tangible proof that a person was a Roman citizen in moments like this. Paul was being asked to affirm that he was, and he does.

22:28 *And the chief captain answered: With a great sum of money I obtained this citizenship. And Paul said: But I am Roman born-* The chief captain may be admitting that he paid a large bribe for citizenship, for it could not normally be bought for money. Paul's openness regarding his extrajudicial murdering of people (see on :4) elicited a similar openness from this captain. And our openness can likewise elicit the same from others, as we move towards authentic relationship with each other.

22:29 *Then those that were about to torture him withdrew from him immediately; and*

the chief captain also was afraid when he knew that he was a Roman, because he had bound him- The captain only "knew that he was a Roman" on the basis of Paul's verbal statement. There was obviously something about Paul and the whole situation that had an uncanny ring of truth to it.

22:30 But the next day, desiring to know with certainty why he was accused by the Jews, he released him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to come together, and brought Paul down and set him before them- As noted on :24, there was a struggle to understand how exactly religious ideas could elicit such a rage against a person, if there was truly no other aspect to the case. What the Romans were dealing with was the power of bad conscience; and it was made the worse by Paul admitting he had had such a bad conscience, but had resolved it by surrender to Christ. The gathering together of the chief priests and council was all reminiscent of the scene at the Lord's trial and condemnation. All the way through Paul's life, and our lives, we are being brought to fellowship the Lord's sufferings. Being "set before them" recalls what had been done not only to the Lord (Lk. 22:66) but also to Peter and John (Acts 4) and Stephen (6:12). In our fellowshiping of the Lord's sufferings, we are led also to understand other believers and to pass through in essence what they did. And this in practice becomes the basis of our fellowship with them.

ACTS CHAPTER 23

23:1 And Paul looked straight at the council, and said: Brothers- To address the Sanhedrin as "brothers" has been described as "almost recklessly defiant" (William Barclay, *Ambassador For Christ* p. 132). The usual address was: "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel". But Paul instead treated them as his equals.

I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day- The Lord Jesus Himself informs us that Paul kicked against the pricks of his own conscience (Acts 9:5). And in any case, Paul elsewhere says that his good conscience actually means very little, because it is God's justification, not self-justification through a clear conscience, which is ultimately important (1 Cor. 4:4 RSV). It seems Paul was aware of his weak side when he comments how despite his own clear conscience, God may see him otherwise (1 Cor. 4:4 RSV); and surely this was in his mind. So how true were Paul's words in Acts 23:1? It seems that he said them in bitter self-righteousness. Soon afterwards he changes his life story to say that he had always *tried* to have a good conscience (24:16).

The Greek word translated "conscience", *sun-eidesis*, means literally a co-perception. It implies that there are two types of perception within the believer- human perception, and spiritual self-perception. The conscience that is cleansed in Christ, that is at peace, will be a conscience that keeps those two perceptions, of the real self and of the persona, in harmony. What we know and perceive humanly, is in harmony with we spiritually perceive. Our conscience, our co-perception, our real self, makes sense of the human perceptions and interprets them in a spiritual way. So, a young man sees an attractive girl. His human perception signals certain things to his brain- to lust, covet, etc. But his co-perception, his conscience, his real self, handles all that, and sees the girl's beauty for just simply what it is- beauty. Job before his 'conversion' paralleled his eye and his ear: "Mine eye hath seen all this, mine ear hath heard and understood it" (Job 13:1). He was so sure that what he heard was what he saw; he was sure that his perceptions were operating correctly. But later, he comes to see a difference between his eye and his ear. He says that he had only heard of God by

the ear; but only now, he says, "mine eye seeth thee" (Job 42:5). He had heard words, but, he realized, he'd not properly 'seen' or perceived. Finally, he had a properly functioning 'conscience', a co-perception. What he saw, was what he really heard. Our conscience is not going to jump out of us and stand and judge us at the day of judgment. There is one thing that will judge us, the word of the Lord (Jn. 12:48), not how far we have lived according to our conscience. It's therefore unreliable (1 Cor. 4:4). And yet there is Bible teaching concerning the need to live in accordance with our 'conscience', and the joy which is possible for the believer who has a clear conscience (e.g. Acts 24:16; Rom. 14:18-22; 2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Jn. 3:21). This must mean, in the context, the conscience which God's word has developed in us- it cannot refer to 'conscience' in the sense of our natural, inbuilt sense of right and wrong; because according to the Bible, this is hopelessly flawed. The fact the "conscience" is "cleansed" by Christ's sacrifice (Heb. 9:14; 10:22) proves that the Biblical 'conscience' is not the natural sense of right and wrong within our nature; for our nature can never be 'purged' or 'cleansed', the believer will always have those promptings within him to do wrong. The cleansed, purged conscience refers to the new man that is created within the believer at baptism. This new 'conscience' is not just a sense of guilt which is invoked on account of not living an obedient life; it is also a conscience which positively compels us *to do* something, not just threatens us with a pang of guilt if we commit a sin.

23:2 *And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to strike him on the mouth-* The claim to a good conscience before God was seen as blasphemy. This provides a window onto understanding how radical were Paul's teachings to the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem that their conscience was washed and cleansed in Christ, and they could with boldness enter the Holiest. The idea that we can really be totally right with God in Christ is repellent to those who seek justification by works and legalism. This striking was another fellowshipping of the Lord's sufferings before the same kind of crowd (Jn. 18:22).

23:3 *Then Paul said to him: God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?-* Paul's words here were surely said in the heat of the moment. Yet even in hot blood, not carefully thinking through his words (for this doesn't seem the most appropriate thing to come out with!), Paul was still unconsciously referring to the Gospels (Mt. 23:27 in this case). Having started on the wrong footing by this statement, it was perhaps this arrogant mood which lead him to curse the High Priest as a "whited wall" (23:3-6). It seems to me that Paul realized his mistake, and wriggled out of it by saying that he hadn't seen that it was the High Priest because of his poor eyesight- even though Paul would have recognized his voice well enough. Another possibility is that "I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest" is to be read as Paul claiming that he didn't recognize this high priest, as Christ was his high priest, therefore his cursing was justified. But he thinks on his feet, and suggests that he is being persecuted only because of his belief in a resurrection- with the desired result ensuing, that there was a division between his accusers.

23:4 *And they that stood by said: Do you revile God's high priest?-* Those who stood by were presumably the Jewish temple guards, and they would have been moving towards physically beating him as they said those words.

23:5 *And Paul said: I did not recognize, brothers, that he was high priest. For it is written, you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people-* It was perhaps Paul's anger and arrogance which lead him to curse the High Priest as a "whited wall". It seems to me that Paul realized his mistake, and wriggled out of it by saying that he

hadn't seen that it was the High Priest because of his poor eyesight- even though Paul would have recognized his voice well enough. Another possibility is that Paul is claiming that he didn't recognize this high priest, as Christ was his high priest, therefore his cursing was justified. But he thinks on his feet, and suggests that he is being persecuted only because of his belief in a resurrection- with the desired result ensuing, that there was a division between his accusers. The quotation of "You shall not speak evil of a ruler" from Ex. 22:28 is parallel with the statement that God was not to be blasphemed. The Mosaic judges were judging on behalf of God. Clearly, Paul's judges were not doing anything of the sort. And yet Paul goes along with the misapplication of the verse in order to demonstrate his familiarity with the law.

23:6- see on Acts 22:3; Acts 22:6.

But when Paul noticed that one part was Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council- Paul had to cry out or "shriek" over the noise of anger at his having cursed the high priest.

I am a Pharisee, son of a Pharisee! Concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question- He says things like "I am a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6), not "I was a Pharisee and now repudiate their false doctrines". Paul's general attitude was akin to that of his Lord, in that he was not hyper careful to close off any opportunities to criticize him. This fear of and sensitivity to criticism is something which seems to have stymied parts of the body of Christ. Paul here was behaving very humanly; the Pharisees present did not believe the Lord had risen, but Paul expressed his faith in this fact in terms of his being a Pharisee. And of course Paul was now no longer a Pharisee. But in a few nanoseconds, his sharp mind thought up a way out of his problem by hinting that he was victim of a Sadducee plot because of his previous Pharisee connections. This was untrue, but Paul was desperate for a way out.

Paul saw himself as two people. Consider how this dualism is to be found in many places:

The Natural Paul

Paul could say:
 "I am a Pharisee...I am a man which am a Jew" (Acts 23:6; 21:13,39; 22:3; 2 Cor. 11:22) Circumcision and being Jewish has 'much advantage' (Rom. 3:1,2).
 "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel" (Phil. 3:5). He argues that all Jews are "the seed of Abraham",

The Spiritual Paul

But he also stresses that "they are not all Israel who are of Israel" because only "the children of the promise", those baptized into Christ, are counted as the seed (Gal. 3:16,27-29; Rom. 9:8). The spiritual Paul is neither Jew nor Gentile. The 'gain' of being personally Jewish Paul counted as loss (Phil. 3:3-7). His circumcision meant nothing (Rom. 2:29; 1 Cor. 7:19). "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit... and have no confidence in the flesh [i.e. the fact of literal circumcision, see context]" (Phil. 3:7)

including himself,
by birth (2 Cor.
11:22).

“We who are
Jews by nature and
not sinners of the
Gentiles” (Gal.
2:15)

I am carnal
(Rom. 7:14)

No flesh may
glory before God (1
Cor. 1:29)

“Not as though
I had already
attained, either were
already perfect”

This contrasts sharply with Paul’s whole message that in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, and both groups are all equally sinners (Rom. 3:9,23). He speaks of “theirs is the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship... theirs are the patriarchs” (Rom. 9:4,5). He clearly dissociates himself from Jewry. He had to *become like a Jew* in order to save them, although he was Jewish (2 Cor. 9:20). He carefully kept parts of the law (Acts 18:18; 21:26; 1 Cor. 8:13). To the Jew he became [again] as a Jew; and to the Gentiles he became as a Gentile (1 Cor. 9:20). He acted “To them that are without law, as without law...”. He was “dead to the law” (Gal. 2:19) He was a Jew but considered he had renounced it, but he became as a Jew to them to help them. He saw no difference between Jew and Gentile (Gal. 3:27-29) but he consciously acted in a Jewish or Gentile way to help those who still perceived themselves after the flesh. “...(being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ)” (1 Cor. 9:21).

But in Christ he was not carnal
(1 Cor. 3:1 s.w.)

Paul, in his spiritual man, as counted righteous before God, could glory (Rom. 15:17).

“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect...” (Phil. 3:12,15). In 1 Cor. 13:10, he considers he is ‘perfect’, and has put away the things of childhood. Thus he saw his spiritual maturity only on account of his being in Christ; for he himself was not “already perfect”, he admitted.

“I laboured
more abundantly
than they all...

God set the
apostles *first* in the
ecclesia (1 Cor.
12:28)

“I live...

“I am the
apostle of the
Gentiles, I magnify
mine office” (Rom.
11:13). He
considered himself
rightfully amongst
the very chiefest
apostles (2 Cor.
12:11).

... *yet not I*, but the grace of
God which was with me” (1 Cor.
15:10)

God set the apostles *last* in the
ecclesia (1 Cor. 4:9)

... *yet not I*, but Christ liveth in
me [the new ‘me’]... I [the old
‘me’] am crucified with Christ”
(Gal 2:20)

He “supposed”, the same word
translated “impute” as in ‘imputed
righteousness’, that he was
amongst the chiefest apostles (2
Cor. 11:5). He knew this was how
his Lord counted him. But he felt
himself as less than the least of all
saints (Eph. 3:8). “For I am the
least of the apostles, that am not
meet to be called an apostle,
because I persecuted the church of
God. But by the grace of God I am
what I am” (1 Cor. 15:9-10).

23:7 *And when he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided-* This was exactly as Paul had intended, in order to get him out of the rod he had made for his own back by cursing the high priest (see on :5).

23:8 *For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit; but the Pharisees believe in both-* Perhaps Paul had developed the idea of the Lord's resurrection by speaking of the appearance of Angels there, and of how the risen Lord is present through His Spirit in the lives of believers. Or perhaps he emphasized that he knew the Lord was risen because the Spirit had revealed this to him; and the Lord's appearance to him on the Damascus road had been perceived by some as the appearance of an Angel in glorious light (hence the words of the Pharisees in :9). All the speeches in Acts are abbreviated. Paul may have framed his words in ways which he knew would provoke the differences between the Sadducees and Pharisees.

23:9 *And there arose a great clamour; and some of the scribes of the Pharisees stood up and argued, saying: We find no evil in this man. What if a spirit has spoken to him, or an angel?-* As noted on :6 and :8, Paul expressed his faith in the Lord's resurrection in terms which made out that the whole problem was because he believed in resurrection, Angels and spirits. He had no belief in disembodied spirits, but he expressed his convictions in terms which suggested he did. This was Paul at his most human, desperate to get out of the problems caused by his anger and arrogance in cursing the high priest.

23:10 *And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take*

him by force from among them, and bring him into the fortress- The Pharisees were presumably physically protecting Paul from the Sadducees. Again we see the power of religious ideas, and the anger unleashed when traditional positions are questioned; see on 22:30. The trial may have been held in the hall within the temple precinct where Gentiles were not allowed to enter, but which was in full view of the Roman soldiers in the Antonia tower. Hence the watching soldiers rushed down into the holy space to rescue Paul. And thus Gentiles entered the temple as a result of Paul's witness. This very fact made the entire case against him (of having brought Gentiles into the temple) rather baseless.

23:11 *And the following night the Lord stood by him, and said: Take courage, for as you have testified concerning me in Jerusalem, so also you must testify in Rome-* Whilst Paul comes over as angry and fearless in cursing the high priest, after the event he was weak and fearful of what would become of him. To such an extent that the Lord appeared directly to him. The comment that Paul would also testify in court in Rome as he had in Jerusalem would have been reflected on by Paul. His appeal to Caesar was therefore his way of as it were forcing the fulfilment of these words.

23:12 *And when it was day, the Jews banded together and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul-* They had been up all night planning Paul's murder; and Paul had sensed that, for that same night the Lord had appeared to Paul to encourage him (:11).

23:13 *And more than forty persons participated in this conspiracy-* These men would have been motivated by the account given them by the Sadducees of the words said in court that day. Josephus mentions that ten Jews made a similar vow in attempting to murder Herod. But forty of them did so to kill Paul, such was the power of a bad conscience and religious fanaticism.

23:14 *And they came to the chief priests and the elders, and said: We have bound ourselves under a great curse, to taste nothing until we have killed Paul-* Such vows unto death could be lifted by the elders, according to the Talmud. They clearly intended to kill Paul quickly.

23:15 *Now then, you with the council petition the chief captain to bring him down to you, as though you would judge his case more exactly; and we, before he comes near, will be ready to slay him-* Knowing that he would be under guard, they were willing to give their lives to end Paul's life. This is how deeply the power of jealousy can work, especially when religious conscience has been touched. The fanaticism of some Christians today to eliminate false teachers [as they perceive them] is in the same spirit.

23:16 *But Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, and he went and entered into the fortress and told Paul-* The ambush plan was surely kept as secret as possible. We can therefore assume that this young man was close to the Pharisees, seeing Paul was from a Pharisee family. He would have been involved enough with them to be party to this top secret knowledge, so we can assume he was not a publicly committed Christian. But still he played a part in saving Paul's life. He was presumably known as Paul's relative seeing he was allowed access to Paul. Perhaps this boy like Paul had been sent from Tarsus to be schooled in Pharisaic Judaism in Jerusalem, and due to mixing in those extreme circles he had heard of the plot.

23:17 *And Paul summoned one of the centurions, and said: Take this young man to the chief captain; for he has something to tell him-* "Young man" is vague, but from the way the captain took his hand (:19) we could assume he was quite young, a boy. Paul had been assured that his life would be preserved (:11); but he still did what was humanly prudent to save his life at this point. We note again how the Lord works

through weak human mechanisms in order to work out His saving purpose; just as the boy who provided the loaves and fishes was necessary for the great miracle to be performed.

23:18 *So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said: Paul the prisoner summoned me, and asked me to bring this young man, who has something to say to you-* Perhaps the rather simplistic, almost childish title "Paul the prisoner" stuck in Paul's mind, for he uses about himself with pride in his later letters (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:8; Phil. 1:7).

23:19 *And the chief captain took him by the hand, and taking him aside asked him privately: What is it you have to tell me?-* As suggested on :17, the taking by the hand would suggest the young man was no more than a boy.

23:20 *He said: The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him-* We have read earlier in this chapter of how "the Jews" were bitterly divided over the case of Paul. Perhaps the idea is that they had now agreed amongst themselves, all convinced that for whatever reason and regardless of theological issues, Paul had to be killed.

23:21 *But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink until they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for your consent to their request-* The forty men who had made the oath had now grown to "more than forty". Extremism is contagious. We ought to harness that in a positive sense; for our commitment to the Lord and His principles is a form of extremism in our postmodern world. And it ought to influence our brethren likewise.

23:22 *So the chief captain let the young man go, ordering him: Tell no one you have told these things to me-* We get the impression that the captain really wanted to help Paul. Perhaps he was sorry for him, realizing that Paul was basically innocent but was being hounded to death by an irrational group of people who were simply jealous. Or it could be that he was another closet Christian, or with sympathies that way. We can construct a positive picture of Paul's persistently good treatment at the hands of many of his guards and prisoners, with the exception of the special case at Philippi. Somehow God worked through all the negatives in order to reveal His own gentleness and care for His suffering servant.

23:23 *And he summoned two of the centurions and said: Make ready two hundred soldiers to go as far as Caesarea, and seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen, at the third hour of the night-* At least 470 soldiers on horseback ("spearmen" = 'cavalry'), were needed to protect Paul from 40 bitter maniacs. It was the sudden movement at 9 PM that night which was effective in resolving the situation; for the Jews were awaiting a response in the morning regarding their request to have another meeting with Paul. They were not expecting him to be moved that evening.

23:24 *And provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Felix the governor-* By sending Paul to Felix, the captain was washing his own hands of the problem. Felix was renowned for brutality and according to Tacitus "governed with all the authority of a king, and the baseness and insolence of a slave".

23:25 *And he wrote a letter after this form-* We wonder from where Luke got the text of the letter. It could of course have been given to him by a flash of direct inspiration from God; but as conjectured earlier, it might have been that the captain was sympathetic to Paul and later shared a copy of the letter.

23:26 *Claudius Lysias to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings-* The letter was presumably written in Latin, but we read it here in Greek. "Claudius" was his

Roman name, taken on obtaining his citizenship; "Lysias" is a Greek name, so perhaps he was originally from Greece.

23:27 *This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, when I intervened with soldiers and rescued him, having learnt that he was a Roman-* Lysias omits to mention that he had almost scourged Paul. He only learnt that Paul was a Roman citizen after rescuing him; so we see Lysias wishing to portray himself as having behaved with an integrity which was not in fact the case. The motive for rescuing him was presumably because he didn't want a riot in Jerusalem which could easily arise after a lynching.

23:28 *And desiring to know the cause why they accused him, I brought him down to their council-* As noted on 22:30, Lysias was genuinely at a loss as to why the Jews were so vehemently against Paul. Lysias could have asked Paul's side of the story and left it at that, but he obviously thought that under examination by the Jews, some more reasons might emerge. But they didn't- it was the power of a bad conscience, people who subconsciously know that the greatest truth is on the side of another, and who therefore seek to persecute them with untellable rage because of it.

23:29 *I found him to be accused about questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or imprisonment-* The accusation was that he had brought Gentiles into the temple. This was a capital offence. But they had not specifically accused him of that before the Romans; and so Lysias wrote that he had not even been accused of anything that carried the death penalty. The questions of the Jewish law were questions of interpretation of it, with Paul arguing that it pointed forward to the Lord Jesus and the Jews forced to deny it... with their denial making the predictions of Messiah the more true.

23:30 *And when it was told that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you, ordering his accusers also to speak against him before you-* Lysias avoids saying that he personally was told, ever seeking to avoid responsibility.

23:31 *So the soldiers, as commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris-* The 35 mile journey from Jerusalem, if started at 9 or 10 p.m. (:23), would have taken all night by horseback.

23:32 *But the next day they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the fortress-* As noted on :31, they would have arrived at Antipatris in the morning. But Caesarea was another 26 miles from Antipatris, although the road was through flat plains, whereas from Jerusalem to Antipatris was through rocky territory ideal for an ambush.

23:33 *And they, when they came to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, presented Paul also before him-* The 26 mile journey from Antipatris to Caesarea would have taken several hours by horseback, and Paul had been travelling all the previous night on horseback. He may not have been accustomed to horseback travel and would have arrived sore and exhausted, in addition to the traumas he had suffered in recent days from those who had got close to killing him by beating.

23:34 *And when he had read it, he asked of what province he was; and when he understood that he was of Cilicia, he said-* "What province" could mean 'what kind of province', i.e. whether senatorial or imperial. Cilicia was an imperial province, attached to the province of Syria. So Felix realized that he had a duty to hear the case.

23:35 *I will hear you fully when your accusers also have come; and he commanded him to be kept in Herod's palace-* The Romans required the accusers to face the accused in person. The *praetorium* referred to the guardroom attached to Herod's palace.

ACTS CHAPTER 24

24:1 *And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus; and these gave evidence to the governor against Paul-* These strict Jews hired a Gentile orator to help make their case. We will note on :2 that he uses language and approaches which no Jew should use. But these Jews, who would not even eat with gentiles and condemned those who did, sacrificed their own religious principles for the sake of destroying someone who threatened those principles. The same contradictions can be seen in the behaviour of all manner of religious extremists [including Christians]. If principles are taught by God Himself and His word, then these are to be abided by; the end [of defending them] cannot justify breaking them.

24:2 *And when he was called, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: Seeing that by you we enjoy much peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight-* Tertullus follows the standard pattern of such a speech, beginning by praising the judge, as Paul does. The reference to peace was because Felix had succeeded in ending the fighting between Syrians and Jews in Caesarea, and had greatly reduced the brigand bands who roamed the countryside. "Foresight" is really "providence" (as AV); and alludes to how Caesar and his officials were seen as the source of providence within the imperial cult. Roman coins often carried the slogan *Providentia Caesar*. But God is the source of providence for His people. So to say this ought to have been unthinkable for a true Jew. But the Jews used Tertullus and were happy to give up their scruples for the sake of trying to get Roman power on their side in order to destroy Paul, Yahweh's servant. This is typical of how religious people can so easily forget and contradict the most elemental principles of their religion because of hate obsessions against those who have tweaked their consciences.

24:3 *We accept it in all ways and in all places, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness-* The historical records of Felix, especially those of Tacitus, portray him as very far from "excellent". Such flattery is tedious, and :4 is almost worded so as to give the impression that Tertullus himself knew he was being tedious.

24:4 *But, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us-* The Greek for "courtesy" means kindness / fairness / mildness. The historical Felix was anything but any of these. Paul also opens his speech with the traditional praise of the judge, but he is far more realistic and honest. And it was that which contributed to Paul making Felix tremble.

24:5 *For we have found this man to be a plague, and a mover of insurrections among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes-* Paul was known throughout the Roman world; so the claim of the Roman Jews to have not heard of him was either untrue or meant that they did not recognize Paul. "Sect" has connotations of division; they were accusing Paul of being a sociopathic destroyer of their religion because he was causing division. And every shade of politics, every dictator, every stamp collectors club and religious denomination... have had this reasoning. The most awful abuse of a person who differs is justified on the basis of maintaining unity. Anyone who thinks out of the box or is 'different' is painted as someone who is destroying the group through creating disunity. The great paradox is that those who seek to destroy such people are themselves the ones causing disunity and fragmenting their society.

24:6 *Who moreover tried to profane the temple. We laid hold on him, and we would have judged him according to our law-* Profaning the temple was a capital offence; the Jews could ask the Romans to apply the death penalty for such cases. The

Jews had raised riot against Paul by claiming that he had actually profaned the temple by bringing Gentiles into it. He had not done so; and now they reduce the charge to claiming that he had attempted to do so. Paul was falsely accused of profaning the temples in both Ephesus and Jerusalem. This was in order to help him enter into the feelings of Stephen, whom he had also falsely accused of profaning the temple by speaking "against this holy place". As Paul had whipped up Jewish sentiment against Stephen to the point of murdering him, so was done to him. This is far more than 'what goes around comes around', nor is it mere poetic justice. Situations repeat in our lives so that we may understand the feelings of those against whom we have sinned. This is to deepen our repentance, to ensure our repentance continues; and to prepare us for eternal fellowship with them in the Kingdom. See on :20.

24:7 *But the chief captain Lysias came and with great violence took him out of our hands-* The Jews were complaining that Lysias had over reacted, using violence against the Jews who had "laid hold" on Paul.

24:8 *Commanding his accusers to come before you. You will be able, by examining him yourself, to gain knowledge of all these things of which we accuse him-* The charge of profaning the temple was just one of a number of "things of which we accuse him".

24:9 *And the Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that these things were so-* "The charge" singular presumably refers to that of trying to profane the temple (:6). This was hard to prove to the degree required to get Paul the death sentence. Their whole case was extremely weak, and clearly motivated by chronic personal jealousy. It is the inspired record which speaks in the singular, "the charge", whereas the accusers speak in the plural ("all these things", :8). But they didn't boil down to any specific charge apart from that about the profaning of the temple.

24:10 *And when the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul answered: Inasmuch as I do know you have been for many years a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defence-* Speeches of this nature had a section devoted to praise of the judge. Tertullus spent a long time attempting to butter up Felix with vain praise. Paul is far more to the point, noting the qualification Felix actually had, rather than attempting to flatter the judge. All the way through we get the impression that Paul was more interested in using the trial in order to make a witness, rather than to just win his case.

24:11 *You can verify that it was no more than twelve days ago that I went up to Jerusalem to worship-* The accusations that Paul had been involved in long term agitation in Jerusalem and the temple could not have been true, since Paul had only arrived in Jerusalem 12 days previously. Paul still uses the Jewish idea of going 'up' to Jerusalem. And yet he elsewhere argues that sacred space is within the heart and of the Spirit, and is not now concerned with localities. But he seems to have had a great respect of the Jerusalem Jews and so wished to convert them; whereas the Lord had intended that his focus instead be upon the Gentiles.

24:12 *And neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city did they find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd-* Paul had only been in Jerusalem a few days anyway (:11). It was the Jews, and not him, who had disputed and stirred by crowds, both in Jerusalem and in other cities, as Luke has recorded in Acts. So the emphasis may be upon "me"; it was not Paul, but the Jews who had done these things.

24:13 *Neither can they prove to you the things of which they now accuse me-* There was no evidence that Paul had brought any Gentile into the temple, nor that he even intended to do so. Paul comes over as very convinced that he is right and cannot

be proven wrong; which was why his chain and time in prison was so frustrating for him, seeing he was so convinced of his innocence.

24:14 *But this I confess to you, that after the Way, which they call a sect, I serve the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets-* Paul can be sensed here almost panting after the chance to make a witness to the Gospel on a fairly high level, to both Jewish and Roman leaders. "The Way" was a term used to designate the Christian movement. Paul argues that it was not a divisive sect, because "the Way" involved belief of everything written in the law and prophets. Believing them does not of course mean 'obeying' them; for the issues of interpretation were so critical. People may insist that they "believe" the same source documents or God, but this does not mean that they are all going to be saved. For as demonstrated in this case, the critical issue is belief in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Belief in God alone will not save. Salvation is in Jesus, Yah's Salvation.

24:15 *Having hope toward God, which these people also look for, that there shall be a resurrection, both of the just and unjust-* Paul stops short of implying that his Jewish enemies would be saved; but he says that "these people" were looking for a resurrection at the last day. Bearing in mind the issue between Sadducees and Pharisees over this very issue, it would seem that those who were taking the active part in the prosecution of Paul were Pharisees and not Sadducees. And yet at his previous trial, it was the Pharisees who had stood up for Paul. We see how fickle people are; and how the fact Paul was a former Pharisee was what drove the Pharisees to hate him even more. Another possibility is that Paul was still trying to exploit the tension between Pharisees and Sadducees over the resurrection issue.

24:16 *Herein I also exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and men always-* see on Acts 23:1. "Herein" means that Paul lived under the perspective of knowing there will be a resurrection and a division of the just from the unjust. That understanding led him to exercise himself in his conscience. The implication is that his conscience was formed and dominated by an awareness that he was a man living under judgment, living in the light of the knowledge that he would be judged for the secret positions of his heart. And we are no different.

A personal focus upon the man Christ Jesus ought to lessen the degree to which our faith is focused upon the church, without making us out of church Christians. We need to toughen up, to realize more keenly the self-discipline and self-sacrifice which following the man Jesus requires of us. Paul "exercised" himself in his spiritual life (Acts 24:16), the Greek word *asko* being the source of the English word ascetic. It should not be that our Christianity gives us merely a headful of vital truths but a life unable to fend off sin. We must translate our doctrines into the practice of a transformed life. On-our-knees prayer, fasting, real sacrifice of time, money and human possibilities... this is what the life of Christ is about. This, too, is what forges real personality.

But Paul's efforts to make a conscience void of offence were not just in trying to obey the 'beep beep' of conscience. For in 1 Cor. 4:5,6 he observes that human conscience is not totally reliable ("I know nothing against myself, but I am not thereby justified"). Rather does he elsewhere write of how the conscience is cleansed in Christ. Our sin has been dealt with, and his 'exercising' was in keeping on believing this. Sin is dealt with for us. It is no longer a barrier. We are no longer offensive to God: "In the past he was patient and overlooked people's sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins, in order to demonstrate his righteousness. In this way God shows that he himself is righteous and that he puts right everyone who believes in

Jesus" (Rom. 3:25,26 GNB). Daniel 9 had prophesied that Messiah would quite simply "make an end of sin". The Greek for "conscience" means literally a co-perception. We are to perceive ourselves as God does- counted right before Him. In this sense Paul elsewhere writes of how the conscience is cleansed in Christ. And this itself will lead us to not give offence, leading into sin, neither to ourselves ["before God"], nor leading others into sin ["before man"]. The context here is of judgment to come (:15). We can make others stumble so that they are condemned at that day. We have far more power and influence than we imagine. Knowing that, we are to be 'ascetic', make great effort, to never cause anyone to stumble. This is all an outflow from our belief in judgment to come.

24:17 *Now after some years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation-* The Jerusalem Poor Fund had been a major preoccupation of Paul, as witnessed especially in 2 Corinthians. "After some years" could suggest he had not been in Jerusalem for "some years" and should not therefore be accused of a program of stirring up trouble there. Paul had reasoned with the Corinthians that he was careful to be 'whiter than white' in handling their contributions, and that others and not himself would bring them to Jerusalem. But here he chooses to argue that *he* brought the offerings- because that angle of truth was more convenient in his legal case. Perhaps it is left as hanging question as to whether he was right or wrong to handle truth in the way he does.

24:18 *Whilst doing this, they found me purified in the temple, with no crowd, nor with uproar; but there were certain Jews from Asia-* Paul emphasizes his legal obedience; he did not profane the temple, he was ritually clean ["purified"] in the temple. This sounds very much like a 'boast in the law', and confirms my earlier suggestion that his whole agreement to go through the purification rituals was a quite wrong tokenistic obedience to laws he had argued were obsolete. Once a political rather than spiritual approach is taken to issues, then a whole sequence of decision making is sparked off which makes it ever harder to pull out of the 'political' thinking and revert to spiritual perspectives.

24:19 *Who should have been here before you and to make the accusation, if they had something against me-* The "Jews from Asia" who had first made the false accusation were likely Jews who had followed Paul from Asia to Palestine in order to continue dogging and upsetting his ministry. What was done in Jerusalem is of exactly the same style to what the Jews of Asia had done in Asia- following Paul around, falsely accusing him, stirring up crowds against him, and pressurizing the Roman authorities to imprison or execute him.

24:20 *Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council-* Again, Paul's broad picture of total innocence is going too far. He says that he did nothing wrong during his trial "before the council" apart from shouting out that he was on trial because of his stance on resurrection. But of course he had shouted that out to deflect attention from the wrongdoing he had actually done "when I stood before the council"- which was to curse the judge. Given the religious implications, this was very serious contempt of court and was indeed "wrongdoing".

The word for "wrongdoing" is three times on Paul's lips in his defences (Acts 24:20; 25:10,11). And it was three times on the lips of Stephen as he made his defence (Acts 7:24,26,27 "seeing one of them *suffer wrong*... why do you *do wrong* to one another... he that *did wrong* to his neighbour"). And it is not a very common Greek word. Why was Stephen's defence in Paul's mind? I suggest this is an example of where we subconsciously use words which others have used, because they are in our mind. Thus a North American who has been thinking about an English or Australian

friend may find themselves using the word "bloke" rather than "guy" in conversation with another North American. Because they have in mind their friend, in another context. This is a major factor in our word choice. So, I suggest Paul has Stephen in view here. This is because he is going through what he put Stephen through- false accusation about desecrating the temple. We are made to go through what we put others through. Not as punishment, nor as mere poetic justice for the sake of it; but so that we might better understand the results of our own actions. See on :6. And in the context here, Paul talks of his conscience, and we will read that the conscience of Felix was touched and he "trembled". But for Paul, the ultimate goad to his conscience had been Stephen's speech. This perhaps is why it is the longest speech recorded in the New Testament. That speech has at least 23 Greek words which never occur elsewhere in the New Testament; and various unique phrases and stylistic features, which all imply it is indeed a verbatim transcript. If we enquire from where Luke the historian got the transcript- humanly speaking [as Divine inspiration could have just beamed it to him], it is likely he got it from the mouth of Paul, whose photographic memory had correctly remembered every word of it. There was likely no other human source of it. Lk. 1:1 seems to be saying that Luke's material delivered to Theophilus [i.e. Luke-Acts] was a compilation of eyewitness material, provided by those who knew Jesus from "the very first" (i.e. the material in the Gospel of Luke), and who had been "ministers of the word" (i.e. the material in Acts, volume 2 of Luke's work).

24:21- see on Acts 22:6.

Except it be for one statement that I cried standing among them: Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am called in question before you this day- There was actual wrongdoing by Paul in that courtroom; see on :20. His 'admission' of an 'error' in raising the resurrection issue is nothing less than a blind, distracting attention from the real issue about his contempt of court in cursing the judge.

24:22 *But Felix, having more accurate knowledge concerning the Way, adjourned the proceedings, saying: When Lysias the chief captain shall come, I will decide your case-* The "accurate knowledge" of Christianity had spread to high places; for Felix knew all about it. He seemed careful therefore not to judge this case with the brash haste for which Tacitus says he was famous. He delayed it until Lysias could come and testify. But Lysias was only a witness to the 'contempt of court' issue as Paul stood before the Jewish Council; and not to the original issue, which was that Paul had supposedly profaned the temple. That was the capital offence which the Jews were trying to push, and it should have been thrown out of court.

24:23 *Then he gave orders to the centurion, that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty; and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs-* Felix knew the Gospel, with "accurate knowledge" (:22). He had some conscience; and he therefore allowed Paul a very liberal regime in prison. There were clearly Christians in the area who were friendly towards Paul, who provided for his needs there- in contrast to how in 2 Tim. 4 we get the impression that the local church in Rome did not finally care for Paul in prison at the end of his life. Paul had boasted earlier that his "own hands" had "ministered unto my necessities [needs]" (20:34); and now he had to rely upon others to minister to his needs. This was all part of the same humbling process which we all pass through until we reach the acme of humility which the Lord has in view for us by the end of our lives. Felix is presented by Tacitus as being conscienceless; but the Gospel had power to reach even the most hardened heart, even if it is not positively responded to. Later, "Felix trembled" at the further challenge of the Gospel which Paul presented to him.

24:24 *But after some days, Felix came with Drusilla his wife, who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and listened to him speak about faith in Christ Jesus-* Harry Whittaker [*Studies in the Acts of the Apostles*] cites historical evidence to the effect that Felix had only recently married her, and she was only 17.

24:25 *And as he reasoned about righteousness, self control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid, and answered: Go away for now. When I have a convenient time I will call for you-* The very fact of judgment to come is in itself a demand for righteousness and temperance. Felix realized this and trembled, in anticipation of rejection at the judgment. As the Lord had explained in Jn. 5, when a man hears the word of the Gospel, he hears the call to go to judgment. And if he rejects it, he rejects himself from the Lord's presence in the future. Likewise Acts 17:31 reasons that the very existence of the future judgment seat and the Lord ordained as judge of living and dead is a command to repent. Felix had good knowledge of "the way" (:22). He was responsible to judgment. And yet Felix is presented in history as a conscienceless man. But such people, indeed every man, can be touched by our message. And "Felix trembled", with the *phobos* [Gk.] associated with the pictures of the rejected at that day. We too have foretastes of judgment, and are to act accordingly. We can feel condemnation now- and change the verdict. But not then. "Knowing therefore the terror [*phobos*] of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11); and here is an example of Paul doing just that. Talking of the terror / *phobos* of the rejected in that day. And ahead of time, Felix started trembling [s.w. *phobos*]. As we come to the cross, we realize that before Him there, "now is the judgment of this world" and our response is a foretaste of the outcome of judgment day.

24:26- see on Acts 17:12.

He hoped meanwhile that money would be given to him by Paul. Therefore, he sent for him more often and conversed with him- Clearly Paul at this stage was not without access to money. When he first arrived in Rome, he was able to rent a house. At other times in his ministry, he had to work night and day at Thessalonica in order to support himself. The same wide range of experience, in financial and other areas of life, is often seen in the lives of believers. It was all part of Paul being taught (along with us) to "know" how to live in plenty or in want, that we might be spiritually developed. Our range of experience in life as believers is therefore typically far wider, at least in psychological terms, than that experienced by unbelievers in whom the Spirit is not at work in this way.

24:27 *But after two years, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and desiring to gain favour with the Jews, Felix left Paul in prison-* Paul so often expresses frustration with his "chain", obviously thinking that he could have achieved far more for the Lord if he were free rather than imprisoned. We too chafe at the ties that bind in life. But in the bigger picture, all is for a purpose in our spiritual path. Unlike his time in Rome, we have no recorded letters written by Paul in these two years. He may have written some which are unrecorded; or it might be that during that time he was able to develop the ideas which he later expressed in his letters written from Rome. Tradition states that he and Luke spent this time composing the gospel of Luke and parts of Acts. Perhaps he needed that breather in his life's path. We may feel we need such breaks, but it is better to let the Lord give them to us than make the assumption that we can map out our own spiritual path.

ACTS CHAPTER 25

25:1 Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went to Jerusalem from Caesarea- Time is not really a healer. The bitterness felt against Paul and his work meant that the Jews immediately approached the new ruler concerning the case, just three days after he had assumed office.

25:2 And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews presented the charges against Paul; and they petitioned him- As noted on :1, time had not healed them of their bitterness. Indeed, time can only make bitterness and jealousy grow even worse. This is why the Lord urges us to immediately try to resolve issues with our offended brethren; the idea that time heals is really a justification of our native laziness and preference not to address issues.

25:3 Asking a favour against Paul, that he would summon him to Jerusalem; for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way- Two years previously, they had attempted the same kind of thing. Perhaps their previous plans and place of ambush were still in their minds; as noted on :1 and :2, time does not heal bitterness and jealousy, especially when it is religiously motivated. The "favour" they wanted was to sentence Paul, to pass judgment upon him (:15).

25:4 However Festus answered that Paul should be kept in custody at Caesarea, and that he intended to go there soon- As we see from :9, Festus was not against holding a trial for Paul in Jerusalem. His refusal was therefore related to his awareness of the planned ambush. The Greek behind "should be kept" really is a statement of existing fact; the response was that Paul had been imprisoned in Caesarea and that therefore was where the trial should be held.

25:5 Therefore, said he, let those that have authority among you come with me, and if there is anything amiss in the man, let them accuse him- Festus had only just taken on the job of governor. His willingness to deal with this case within the first weeks of his appointment indicates he sensed some urgency to deal with it. This is perhaps a testament to how passionate the Jews were regarding the question.

25:6 And when he had stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went to Caesarea; and the next day he sat on the judgment seat and commanded Paul to be brought- Given the precise nature of Luke's style, we wonder why the vague "eight or ten days"; perhaps Luke was relying on various sources for his information. Here we see the interface of Divine inspiration with human writing. Luke gathered his information sources, and the overall recording of it all is inspired. But in God's wisdom, this particular detail is left vague. Another possibility is that "eight to ten" meant 'eight full days', as Jews reckon part of a day as a day. The fact he immediately opened the case the day after arrival, when he was new to the job and must have had a mass of administrative issues to attend to, is again a reflection of how urgently he perceived Paul's case as needing attention. The two year delay had clearly irritated the Jews and Festus wished to demonstrate that he was proactive in dealing with issues.

25:7 And when he had arrived, the Jews that had come from Jerusalem stood round him, bringing against him many and grievous charges which they could not prove- The impression is that as soon as Paul entered the court room, the Jews started yelling accusations, and even standing around him in an intimidating manner. Courts then were rather different to the orderly and sober proceedings of today. This gives insight into the Lord's parable of the widow woman pleading with the judge for

attention to her case; she would have had to insistently shout her cause over the noise of others.

25:8 *While Paul said in his defence: Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar, have I sinned at all-* Paul was somewhat playing with words here. For his letters and teaching was full of language which was purposefully against the imperial cult, as was the Lord's language of the Kingdom of God; indeed, Paul did preach loyalty to another King and another Kingdom than Caesar's. And whilst he had not offended against the law of Moses, apart from in cursing the high priest, he had indeed offended against "the law of the Jews". He may of course still be referring to the law of Moses, but alluding to how it had been hijacked by the Jews. Similarly, the Old Testament "temple of Yahweh" and "feasts of Yahweh" are described as "the temple of the Jews" and "feasts of the Jews". They had hijacked Yahweh's laws and religion and turned it into their own religion, just as many have done today.

25:9 *But Festus, desiring to gain favour with the Jews, answered Paul and said: Will you go up to Jerusalem and there be judged of these things before me?-* Festus had sought to be proactive in dealing with Paul's case for the same reason. And he knew that they wanted to see Paul tried in their holy city. He didn't want any ambushes on the way (see on :4), but he was willing to agree to a Jerusalem trial.

25:10 *But Paul said: I am standing before Caesar's judgment seat, where I should be judged. To the Jews have I done no wrong, as you also very well know-* Paul's appeal to Caesar seems to have been quite unnecessary, and again it seems to have been the outcome of bitter exasperation and almost pride: "I ought to be judged", as a Roman citizen..."no man may deliver me...", "as thou very well knowest"; the response of Festus seems to be appropriate to Paul's arrogance: "Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar thou shalt go" (25:10-12). The word used to describe Paul's "appeal" is that usually translated "to call on (the name of the Lord)", perhaps suggesting that this was whom Paul should have called in, not Caesar. I have elsewhere suggested that Paul was obsessed with getting to Rome and making a witness there. He had also been told by the Lord that he would one day witness there, as was his desire. Having been two years in prison, it must have seemed an impossibility to ever get there, especially with increasing age and health issues. His appeal to Caesar was therefore calculated and not made in hot blood. And yet it was a path to further imprisonment and eventual death; when he could have been set free, as Festus comments later. But his entire journey to Jerusalem had been against the Lord's advice; and the train of events which transpired from it was not so much judgment / punishment as consequence of action.

25:11 *If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not object to dying, but if none of these things are true of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar-* Paul clearly understood that "the wages of sin is death" and that he was "chief of sinners". He had indeed committed many things worthy of death, not least extrajudicial murder of Christians. We get the sense therefore that he was speaking in hot blood, furiously angry with the Jews and with how Felix and Festus favoured them over him. His appeal to Caesar was not without forethought and correct motivation, but it was also mixed with anger and frustration. Human motivation is rarely pure.

25:12 *Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered: You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar shall you go-* This "council" was not the Sanhedrin, but rather the group of advisors called "assessors" who sat with the governor in such

trials. Festus could have quashed Paul's appeal to Caesar; he had the power to, especially as there was no clear case against Paul. Perhaps Festus saw in this appeal a nice way out for him; for it would be a lengthy process, and the Jews would have to make representation somehow in Rome. He had not condemned nor released Paul, so the Jews could have no reason to be angry with him.

25:13 *Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the King and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and greeted Festus-* The continued record of days passing, and in :14 of "many days", is perhaps to help us sense Paul's frustration at the constant waiting and delaying. Agrippa was the son of the Herod who had been smitten by God for his pride in 12:20-23. Bernice was the sister of Drusilla, the teenage wife of Felix; and also the sister of Agrippa. They were rumoured to be in an incestuous relationship. It is ironic that such immoral people were the judges of others' morals. And that is the weakness of all human systems of justice and judgment. We are not to judge simply because we actually *cannot* judge; in essential terms, we are not morally above those we judge.

25:14 *And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the King, saying: There is a certain man left as a prisoner by Felix-* As noted on :13, the endless passing of "many days" and apparently endless delays would have been deeply frustrating for Paul. We too can see life as an endless series of frustrations, assuming that normal life, better life, is around the corner. But the Spirit is working constantly in our lives, so that we can realize that every moment is being used just as much as any other moment.

25:15 *About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, asking for sentence against him-* The Bible is a highly abbreviated record of the history and words of God's people. We wonder why so much attention is given in this part of God's inspired word to repeating facts the record has already given us, especially when they might not appear to add anything to the teaching. That of course may just be appearance- in that we have not noticed various gems of understanding and spiritual insight. But it can also be that the long drawn out accounts here of Paul's judicial process may be to help us to enter into his sense of frustration.

25:16 *To whom I answered that it is not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone, before the accused has the accusers face to face, and has had opportunity to make his defence concerning the matter charged against him-* The 'giving up' refers to the death sentence. The Jews surely knew this, but seeing the Sadducees were the richest people in Jewish society, it could be that they had attempted to bribe Festus to try Paul in Jerusalem in his absence, seeing he was imprisoned in Caesarea. Here therefore he is explaining that he had upheld Roman tradition and justice.

25:17 *Therefore, when they gathered here, I did not delay, and the next day sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought-* Festus is emphasizing his proactive approach, in contrast to how Felix his predecessor had left the case on ice for two years.

25:18 *Concerning whom, when the accusers stood up, they brought no charge of such evil things as I supposed-* Surely Festus knew that the case against Paul was weak. And he had already met with the accusers in Jerusalem ahead of the trial in Caesarea, so he was surely aware that the accusations were weak. But he gives the impression to Agrippa that he was surprised. This kind of less than total honesty is seen throughout Paul's trials, and also in Paul's responses. Perhaps one purpose of the extended narratives of the trials is to leave us with this impression- that human justice

is flawed and is therefore not ultimate justice, and only God's justice is ultimate. Paul writes so much in Romans about justice and chapters 1-8 are so full of legal terminology that we wonder whether in fact Paul wrote Romans during his imprisonment in Caesarea.

25:19 *Rather they had certain questions against him of their own religion and of one Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive-* Festus perceived that the nub of the issue with Paul was not connected to the original case, i.e. that he had supposedly brought Gentiles into the temple. Rather did the whole Jewish anger with Paul revolve around his attitude to the Lord Jesus and the claim of His resurrection. This was and is utterly critical to any Christian life, and all other issues flow from that. Festus and any secular mind would be confused as to how the issue of a man being dead or alive could make such a huge argument arise. The fact it did make such a difference for the Jews is therefore a testament to their bad conscience; subconsciously, they sensed that the Lord had risen indeed, but their denial of it led them to untold anger with Paul who was living proof of His resurrection. It was Paul's transformed life, which they were all aware of, which was a great evidence that the Lord had risen and worked through His Spirit in the lives of His people; and they needed to destroy that evidence.

25:20 *And I, being perplexed how to inquire concerning these things, asked whether he would go to Jerusalem and there be judged of these matters-* As noted on :19, the secular man is indeed perplexed as to how the possible resurrection of a Palestinian Jew some years back could really be such a critical issue. By offering to hand Paul over to a Sanhedrin trial, Festus was tacitly saying that Paul had done nothing wrong by Roman law, and so his crimes were a matter of breaking Jewish ritual laws. By handing him over to Jewish jurisdiction, Festus was washing his hands of the case. The fact that he could legally hand him over to Jewish legal judgment is an admission that Paul allowed himself to be counted within the synagogue system. He mentions his five beatings by the Jews in 2 Cor. 11:24; but such synagogue discipline could only be administered to those within the synagogue system. This was the price Paul paid for seeking to be all things to all men, for identifying with his target audience in order to convert them. It could be argued that he was the apostle to the Gentiles, not the Jews (which was Peter's calling); and he could have avoided so much grief in his life if he had followed that calling and stopped endlessly seeking to convert Jews.

25:21 *But when Paul had appealed to be kept for the decision of the Emperor, I commanded him to be kept until I should send him to Caesar-* Festus may be suggesting Paul was deeply unwise here. For Festus could close the Roman side of the case, and leave Paul to accept some symbolic punishment at the hands of the Jewish court in Jerusalem. The fact Paul insisted on remaining within the Roman sphere of justice meant that he risked Roman judgment and a death penalty if found guilty. And so it worked out. His obsession to get to Rome and witness for Christ was what led, humanly speaking, to his further imprisonment and final demise. But the Lord was working through that, even if it were not His ideal intended path for Paul.

25:22 *And Agrippa said to Festus: I also would like to hear the man myself. Tomorrow, said he, you shall hear him-* The desire to speed things up is again apparent; the trial was set for the next day.

25:23 *So the next day, when Agrippa had arrived and Bernice, with great pomp, they entered into the place of hearing with the chief captains and principal men of the city; and at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in-* "Paul" is presented in contrast to

the great pomp and power of the men he stood to be judged by. The fearlessness and verve of Paul, his refusal to be cowed by the power and pomp of flesh, is a wonderful testimony to the power of the Spirit within Paul.

25:24 And Festus said: King Agrippa and all men who are here present with us, you see this man, about whom all the crowd of the Jews made appeal to me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying that he should not live any longer- "You see this man" recalls "Behold the man" at the Lord's trial. The idea was 'You see what a bedraggled specimen of humanity these Jews are making such a fuss about'. "The crowd of the Jews" is a term of disdain, especially bearing in mind that it was the Jewish leadership who were accusing Paul.

25:25 But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and as he appealed to the emperor, I decided to send him- A Roman citizen had the right to ask for his case to be heard by the emperor, but the local authorities had the power to veto that. It is therefore all the more significant that although Festus considered Paul had done nothing wrong, he still allowed the appeal to Caesar to stand. He obviously ran the risk of being accused of timewasting by sending a case to Rome for judgment which clearly should be thrown out of court. It was Paul's passionate desire to get to Rome, and to at last get out of confinement at Caesarea. The Lord too intended Paul to witness at Rome, knowing this was Paul's dominant desire. And so against all sense, Festus agrees to send him there. The only possibility is that he considered that doing this would be a neutral outcome for him; for anything less than Paul's dead body would not placate the Jews, and yet Festus had a conscience, as he knew the Gospel well, and didn't want to go down that path. So in this complex web of less than honest and ideal motivations by all concerned, Paul included, the Lord worked His will.

25:26 But I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore, I have brought him before you all, and especially before you King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write- Festus was hoping that Agrippa might observe some legal issue which would justify sending Paul to be tried at Rome; and hoping that having Agrippa's approval of the appeal to Rome would make his action seem more credible. I suggest the simple truth was that Festus wanted to send Paul there in order to salve his conscience. He did not want to kill Paul to placate the Jews because of that conscience, but he also didn't want to upset the Jews by releasing Paul or appearing to not be proactive. In all this we see the power of the Gospel in probing deepest conscience. If we preach the Gospel, we are touching the conscience of our hearers, for all their bravado of disinterest.

25:27 For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, without specifying the charges against him- As noted on :25 and :26, Festus did not have to send this prisoner to Rome. He had every right to turn down the appeal as mere timewasting, and hand the case over to the Jews to judge, whilst disallowing any death penalty. For the original charge of profaning the temple had now been dropped, and that was the only one of their charges which had the possibility of the death penalty. Agrippa must likewise have considered it strange that Festus was so insistent on sending the prisoner to Rome; and again, it was only his own piqued conscience which made him want to hear the man himself.

ACTS CHAPTER 26

26:1 *And Agrippa said to Paul: You are permitted to speak for yourself. Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defence-* "For yourself" may be a reference here to how Paul defended himself, and did not use any advocate or legal team. We recall how the Jews had made use of one, Tertullus, to make their case in an earlier trial. Paul was using these trials as an opportunity to witness to the Gospel and not just to defend himself. We can sense his eagerness as he makes his case for Christ.

26:2 *I think myself happy, king Agrippa, that I am to make my defence before you this day concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews-* Agrippa was Herod Agrippa the second. The whole Herod family had had the Gospel witnessed to them. Herod the Great was told of the birth of the Lord by the wise men and Jewish scribes; his son Antipas and granddaughter Herodias were witnessed to by John the Baptist; his son Agrippa the first had killed James and tried to kill Peter because their message had tweaked his conscience; and now his son Agrippa II was being witnessed to by Paul. This was a family the Lord surely tried to appeal to. Again we sense Paul's eager using of these trials as an opportunity to witness; as his appeal to Caesar had been accepted, he could have actually refused to testify in this trial. But he eagerly used the opportunity to witness by all means, and we need to take some of that spirit with us in our lives.

The codex Beza adds at this point: "taking courage, and receiving comfort by the Holy Spirit". In this case, Paul is directly alluding to his Lord's promise to provide the right words to say in times of public witness under persecution such as this (Mt. 10:18-20).

26:3 *Especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews. Therefore, I beg that you hear me patiently-* "Hear me patiently" is an allusion to the LXX of Prov. 25:15: "By long patience is a prince persuaded". Paul had the spiritual ambition to even try to convert Agrippa. We too need that ambition, never writing people off as unreachable by our witness. Agrippa "the prince" is perhaps framed in terms of this verse when he is recorded as replying using the same word as in Prov. 25:15: "You almost *persuade* me to be a Christian" (:28).

26:4 *My manner of life from my youth, which was from the beginning among my own nation and at Jerusalem, do all the Jews know-* The Jews who were accusing Paul had personally known him in his Pharisee days. They were personal witnesses of his transformation.

26:5 *Having knowledge of me from the first (if they are willing to admit it) that after the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee-* The Jews were unwilling to admit [Gk. 'be legal witnesses in court'] that they knew Paul's past. For it was his radical transformation which was in fact the great witness to the utter truth of Paul's case. By denying it, they were witnesses against themselves. They were in denial of his transformation, which was the proof of the things he taught about the Lord Jesus. And likewise, presentation of true theology alone in our age will convert very few. It is the truth of it seen in our lives which is the compelling witness.

26:6- see on Acts 22:6.

And now I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers- This is another statement to the effect that the Christian Gospel offered the same sure hope which the promise to Abraham and the fathers offered to Abraham and his singular seed. The Lord's death had opened the scope of that promise to whoever wished to associate with the seed. Paul is arguing that the accusations against

him are really all about the promise God made to the Jewish fathers. The Jews were therefore accusing God far more than himself.

26:7 *To which our twelve tribes earnestly serve night and day, hoping to attain the promises. And concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, O king!*- "Night and day" refers to the evening and morning synagogue services, where the promises to Abraham were alluded to or repeated. Paul goes on to explain that the hope of attaining the promises implied belief in a resurrection; for the promises of eternal inheritance, blessing etc. had clearly not been obtained and could only be obtained by immortalization. The Sadducees amongst his accusers would of course take issue with this, as they denied the resurrection and argued that the promises gave hope only in this life. Hence their manic materialism. But Paul doesn't appear to raise that point; his appeal at this point was to his judges, seeking to convert them, rather than seeking to expose the obvious lines of weakness in the position of his opponents. And this needs to be remembered in all our witness; that we are seeking to convert to Christ, rather than merely exposing logical error in those who are against us.

26:8 *Why would any of you think it incredible that God raises the dead?*- If we have really died and resurrected with the Lord, we will be dead unto the things of this world (Col. 2:20; 3:1). This is why Paul could imply that the greatest proof that Christ had risen from the dead was the change in character which had occurred within him (Acts 26:8 ff.). This was "the power of his resurrection"; and it works within us too. The death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth aren't just facts we know; if they are truly believed, there is within them the power of ultimate transformation.

"Any of you..." is an attempt to soften the force of Paul's repeated appeals to Agrippa personally as "you". Paul has so far said nothing specific about the resurrection. But he sees that Agrippa thinks or [Gk. *krino*] 'judges' that incredible, a bridge too far for his faith. But Paul implies that in fact, Agrippa is not judging Paul personally so much as judging within his own mind whether Christ rose from the dead. Which, Paul is implying, is what this court case is all about. Paul cuts to the essence- the whole issue was not about him personally and his alleged desecration of the temple. It was about whether men judged that Jesus had resurrected. That was the core of the case, psychologically and subconsciously; and this is why Paul goes on to unashamedly preach to Agrippa and seek his conversion. Just as God made huge personal efforts to convert men like Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar. At least we must take the lesson that we should seek to convert literally all men; for all have a conscience.

26:9 *I truly thought that I should do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*- The "thought" connects with the challenge of :8 as to why any should "think" resurrection to be incredible. Paul is saying that his changed thinking could be replicated in them also changing their thinking about the Lord Jesus. Paul remains on the psychological level, as discussed on :8. He sees that Agrippa is thinking to deny his own conscience, just as Paul had done. Just as Paul had imprisoned people because of his bad conscience (:10), so Agrippa would be doing if he left Paul in prison.

26:10 *And this I did in Jerusalem, and I shut up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death I gave my vote against them*- "This I did" shows that his "thought" of :9 became action; he is recognizing the truth of the Lord's teaching that thought is action. The repeated account of Paul's conversion in Acts, when the record is highly abbreviated otherwise, is because Paul is set up as the parade example of all conversions to Christ (1 Tim. 1:13-18).

26:11 *And in all the synagogues I often punished them-* I am convinced that a major reason for the success of the early church was that they weren't paranoid about issues of fellowship and guilt-by-association; they were simply radical preachers. They preached an exclusive message, but they wished to be inclusive rather than exclusive. The Lord Himself taught that the time would come when His followers would be disfellowshipped from the synagogues. But He doesn't teach them to leave the synagogues, even though first century Judaism was both doctrinally and morally corrupt. Acts 26:11 would seem to imply that there were Christians "in every synagogue".

Trying to force them to blaspheme- Gk. 'necessitated'. It could be claimed that it is never 'necessary' to blaspheme; for some died under torture, not accepting any way out, and thus shall receive a "better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). But Paul takes a more gracious view here; he recognized that the torture he had applied left the Christians with no other human choice but to blaspheme the name of Jesus, and he takes full blame for this. See on 1 Tim. 1:13.

And being furiously enraged at them, I persecuted them even in foreign cities- Paul's progressive appreciation of his own sinfulness is reflected in how he describes what he did in persecuting Christians in ever more terrible terms, the older he gets. He describes his victims as "men and women" whom he 'arrested' (Acts 8:3; 22:4), then he admits he threatened and murdered them (Acts 9:3), then he persecuted "the way" unto death (Acts 22:4); then he speaks of them as "those who believe" (Acts 22:19) and finally, in a crescendo of shame with himself, he speaks of how he furiously persecuted, like a wild animal, unto the death, "many of the saints", not only in Palestine but also "to foreign [Gentile] cities" (Acts 26:10,11). He came to appreciate his brethren the more, as he came to realize the more his own sinfulness. And this is surely a pattern for us all.

26:12- see on Acts 22:6.

Thus I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests- These were the very men who were accusing him, and he is now stating that they were involved as accessories to extrajudicial murder and torture. "Thus I journeyed" invites his audience to imagine the rabid thinking which dominated his mind; the psychological change in him could only have been achieved by external agency. And that agency was the spirit of the risen Lord.

26:13- see on Acts 22:6.

But at midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining around me and those that journeyed with me- The repeated "O King" is because Paul was specifically seeking to convert Agrippa. His spiritual ambition in attempting this is an encouragement to us all in our witness to those who seem so unreachable by the Gospel we preach. "Shining around me" suggests the light was not shone down from Heaven as in a beam; but that the Lord Himself stood near Paul, next to him. The word literally means 'to be a halo around'. Paul was in this sense sanctified, made a saint, through standing with the Lord. Those with him could have responded to this grace too, but chose not to. "And those that journeyed with me" would suggest that the Lord sought to bring them from darkness to light also, but they refused to understand the word spoken, although they heard it.

26:14 *And when we had all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the cattle prod-* The idea is that Paul understood the voice that was speaking; whereas the men with him heard the voice but chose not to understand. Perhaps Saul had been observing oxen ploughing along the road to Damascus, hence the usage of that

analogy. The Lord's question as to "why" Saul so persecuted the believers in the body of Christ was left unanswered. The answer was that Paul's bad conscience was leading him to denial, and that denial was expressing itself in unreasonable anger. And the Jews who were persecuting Paul were in just the same situation. They knew in their consciences that Jesus of Nazareth had been their Messiah; "this is the heir, come let us kill Him" was how the Lord's parable explained it. That guilty conscience meant a desire to eliminate those like Paul who had at first denied it and then accepted it. They were driven by the very same psychological factors which Paul was driven by.

26:15 And I said: Who are you, Lord? And the Lord said: I am Jesus whom you persecute- The question "Why?" was answered by Saul with the question "Who are you, Lord?". This may not have been a request for information. It is perhaps in the spirit of Jacob's meeting with Angel, wrestling God as Saul had done, and then asking the Angel's name as Jacob did (Gen. 32:29). As the Lord Jesus called Saul by name, so the Angel gave Jacob a new name, Israel. And it could be that although unrecorded, the Lord then changed Saul to Paul. To ask someone's name can be understood as a Hebraism for recognizing their greatness or superiority.

26:16 But arise, and stand upon your feet- This is a quotation from Ezekiel's experience, having seen the glory of God and being asked to go and witness it to an Israel who would not listen because they preferred Babylon (Ez. 2:1,2).

For to this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a servant and a witness both of the things in which you have seen me, and of the things which I will reveal to you- "A servant" is literally, a slave. The apostles in their letters usually open by reminding their readers that they are slaves of the Lord Jesus- this is how they saw themselves. Paul was called to be a slave of the Gospel (Acts 26:16; Gk. *hypereten*- a galley slave, rowing the boat chained to the oars). There were slaves who were made stewards or managers ['bishops'] of the Master's business, but essentially they themselves were still slaves.

26:17 Delivering you from the people of the Jews and from the Gentiles, to whom I send you- Paul was therefore confident that he could not be ultimately destroyed by the union of Jews and Gentiles now gathered against him. But we must factor in here that eventually, the Lord did not deliver him from Gentile power and he died under Nero's persecution. The promise of deliverance was therefore in order that he might conduct his intended ministry; but when that ministry was over, then he was in fact delivered to the power of Gentile persecution and execution.

26:18 To open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light- The Lord Jesus seems to have encouraged Paul to see Moses as his hero. Thus he asked him to go and live in Arabia before beginning his ministry, just as Moses did (Gal. 1:17). When he appeared to Paul on the Damascus road, he spoke in terms reminiscent of the Angel's commission to Moses at the burning bush: "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of those things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the (Jewish) people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to...turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance... Whereupon... I (Paul) was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:16-19). Moses was promised that he would be protected from Pharaoh so that he could bring out God's people from the darkness of Egyptian slavery ("the power of Satan"); going from darkness to light is used by Peter as an idiom to describe Israel's deliverance from Egypt, which the new Israel should emulate (1 Pet. 2:9). Moses led Israel out of Egypt so that they might be reconciled to

God, and be led by him to the promised inheritance of Canaan. As Moses was eventually obedient to that heavenly vision, so was Paul- although perhaps he too went through (unrecorded) struggles to be obedient to it, after the pattern of Moses being so reluctant.

Paul was to bring others to the light just as John had (Lk. 1:77,79 = Acts 13:47; 26:18,23).

God's manifestation of His word through preaching is limited by the amount of manifestation His preachers allow it. Through the first century preaching of the Gospel, men and women were "turned from darkness to light... *that* they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified" (Acts 26:18).

And from the power of Satan to God-

There are some clear contrasts drawn here:

To open their eyes	(They were blind).
To turn them from darkness	to light.
From the power of Satan (sin)	unto God (cp. 1 Jn. 1:5).
(Unforgiven)	receive forgiveness of sins.
(Gentiles without inheritance by faith in "the hope of Israel")	them (the Jews) that had access to sanctification by faith.

Ephesians 4:17–20 almost seems to directly allude back to this passage in Acts 26:18: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ...". Being under the power of Satan is therefore a result of having an empty, vain, fleshly mind (i.e. the Satan of evil desires in our mind having full power) and being ignorant, without understanding. Matthew 13:19 says that Satan (cp. Mk. 4:15) has power over a person because of their lack of understanding of the Word. Ephesians 4:17–20 is referring to the same thing as "the power of Satan" defined in Acts 26:18. "To open their eyes" implies to have the eyes of understanding opened (cp. Eph. 1:18).

Acts 26:18 implies that it was "the power of Satan" that stopped the Gentiles from sharing the inheritance of the Gospel which was preached to the Jews in the promises (Gal. 3:8; Jn. 4:22). "Satan" is often connected with the Law and the Jewish system. Maybe this is another example. Note too the allusions in this verse to Is. 42:6,7: "I... will... keep you, and give you 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". This equates the power of Satan with a prison house, and the Law is likened to a prison in Gal. 3:23 and 4:3.

There are allusions in Acts 26:18 to the Jews' crucifixion of Jesus: "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Lk. 22:53); "Satan" (the Jews) has desired to have you" (Lk. 22:31), Jesus warned the disciples at the last supper.

The previous verse (Acts 26:17) shows the Lord Jesus strengthening Paul to be brave in his mission to the Gentiles – “delivering you from the [Jewish] people, and from the Gentiles”. Jesus Himself was “delivered to the Gentiles” (Lk. 18:32–33) for crucifixion by the Jews, and Mk. 15:15 implies Jesus was delivered to “the people”, too. The phrase “the people” frequently occurs in the crucifixion records. It is as if Jesus is saying: ‘I was delivered to the Gentiles and (Jewish) people because of My preaching; I am now commissioning you to preach, facing the same battle against (the Jewish) Satan and man’s blindness to the Word of God, due to his love of the flesh, as I did; but I will deliver you from the Gentiles and Jewish people, rather than deliver you to them, as I was. You are going to spend your life going through the same experiences as I faced in My last hours’. Thus, in yet another way, we can understand how Paul could say “I am crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20).

To the end they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith in me- Salvation is *not* a purely personal matter. It is part of a shared experience, something we obtain a part in. Christ *is* His body. He doesn't exist separate from His body; for all existence in the Bible is bodily existence. And *we* are His body. He is us. Likewise we are the branches of the Christ-vine (Jn. 15). Because we are all in the one body of Christ, therefore we are intimately associated with the other parts of the body.

26:19- see on Acts 13:9.

Therefore, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision- "Disobedient" is literally 'not persuaded'. Paul is saying that he was not unpersuaded by the Lord's appearance. And this is the same word used by Agrippa in :28, when he says Paul has almost persuaded him to become a Christian. Paul was witnessing from his own experience of being persuaded by the Lord; and he wants to persuade others.

26:20- see on Acts 13:24,25.

But declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to their repentance- It seems likely that Paul went to hear John the Baptist preach; "there went out to him all the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem" (Mk. 1:5), and at this time Paul was living in Jerusalem. I believe Paul heard John and was convicted by him of Christ. John preached the need to "bring forth fruits meet unto repentance" (Mt. 3:8); and Paul here made those his own watchwords in his world-wide preaching.

Paul preached that men "should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:18-20). As with Mt. 21:28-31, this refers primarily to baptism. "Repent and turn to God" surely matches "Repent and be baptized" in Acts 2:38. Turning to God is associated with baptism in Acts 9:35; 11:21; 15:19; 1 Thess. 1:9. Following conversion, our works should match the profession of faith we have made. But there is no proof here for the equation 'Forgiveness = repentance + forsaking'. The "works" seem to refer to positive achievement rather than undoing the results of past failures. Works meet for repentance are fruits of repentance (Mt. 3:8 cp. Lk. 3:8). We have shown that there are different degrees of fruit/repentance which God accepts, and that this fruit is brought forth to *God*, and that its development takes time. We cannot therefore disfellowship a believer for not bringing forth fruit in one aspect of his life.

16:21 *For this cause the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me-* The "cause" was that they had been called upon to repent, and their refusal to do so was leading them to try to kill Paul. This is how conscience works. We seek to eliminate the persons or issues causing our guilt, and which summon us to repentance. The

opposition to Christian preaching is exactly because it is [or should be] a call to repentance.

26:22 *Therefore, having obtained the help that is from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should happen-* "The help that is from God" was the gift of the Spirit, both in cleansing Paul psychologically from his past, and in empowering him in his life's work of witness. Paul testified to the Lord Jesus (e.g. Acts 26:22; 1 Cor. 15:15 s.w.), and He in turn bore witness to the [preaching of] the word of his grace (Acts 15:8). In Paul's witness lay His witness. The reference to "small and great" is yet another hint that Paul is witnessing specifically at this time to "the great", his judges. And Paul insists that he is saying nothing radically new, and therefore Judaism ought to have no problem with him teaching what was in their own Scriptures.

26:23 *That the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles-* Elsewhere, Paul took a prophecy concerning how Christ personally would be the light of the whole world (Is. 49:6), and applies it to himself in explanation of why he was devoted to being a light to the whole world *himself* (Acts 13:47- although here in 26:23 he applies it to Jesus personally). Paul even says that this prophecy of Christ as the light of the world was a *commandment* to him; all that is true of the Lord Jesus likewise becomes binding upon us, because we are *in* Him. Note that Paul says that God has commanded *us* to witness; it wasn't that Paul was a special case, and God especially applied Isaiah's words concerning Christ as light of the Gentiles to Paul. They apply to *us*, to all who are in Christ. And when on trial, Paul explained *his* preaching to the Jews "and then to the Gentiles" as being related to the fact that he had to "shew" the Gospel to them because Christ rose from the dead to "shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:20,23). In other words, he saw his personal preaching as shewing forth the light of Jesus personally.

The RV offers another slant on this. The Lord Jesus was the light of the world on account of His resurrection: "He first by the resurrection from the dead should proclaim light both to the [Jewish] people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23 RV). If we are baptized into His death and resurrection, we too are the light of this world in that the light of His life breaks forth in us. And this is exactly why belief in His resurrection is an imperative to preach it. And it's why the great commission flows straight out of the resurrection narrative.

We have suggested elsewhere that Paul was first called to the Gospel by the preaching of John the Baptist. He initially refused to heed the call to "do works meet for repentance". But, fully aware of this, he preached this very same message to others (Mt. 3:8 cp. Acts 26:20).

26:24 *And as he thus made his defence, Festus said with a loud voice: Paul, you are mad. Your much learning is turning you mad-* The loudness of the voice was surely a statement of the depth of unease within his conscience. Again, we see a basic psychological lesson: the louder a person shouts down another, the louder is the internal voice of their own disquiet at the truth being presented. Luke uses the same term in describing how the Jews "with loud voices" demanded both the Lord's crucifixion and the death of Stephen, who had likewise touched their consciences (Lk. 23:23; Acts 7:57). The reference to "much learning", much reading of words, may be a reference to how Paul perhaps had begged for the scriptures to be brought to him in his confinement, and he spent his time for those many months poring over the parchments. We recall how he begged Timothy to bring him such scrolls when imprisoned in Rome.

26:25 *But Paul said: I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but speak words of truth and soberness-* Point blank disagreement with a powerful judge who is shouting at you isn't a smart thing to do. But Paul was there to witness, to seek to convert his judges, rather than to justify himself. If he were out for self-preservation, as are most men who stand in the dock, he would have let this accusation go unchallenged. But Paul is alluding to how he had been "exceedingly mad" before his conversion (:11); and now he was sane.

26:26 *For the king knows of these things, to whom also I speak freely. For I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him. For this has not been done in a corner-* Paul is really out to convert the king; he says that the king knows the truth of all he is saying, and appeals for him to be honest to his conscience and not kick against the goads. The king was of course apprised of the situation with Paul- everybody knew that. So "none of these things is hidden from him" more naturally refers to the truth of the appeal Paul is making to him.

Paul exhorts us to speak 'freely' in our preaching (2 Cor. 3:12), just as he himself "spoke freely" in his witness to Agrippa. He there is our pattern. Our salvation is through faith in God's absolute grace; but if it is *real* faith, we will preach it on the housetops, we simply can't keep the knowledge of *such* grace, such great salvation, to ourselves. "Having, then, such hope, we use much freedom of speech" in preaching (2 Cor. 3:12 YLT).

Despite this direct and emotional appeal, Paul still framed it in terms understandable by his audience; "this has not been done in a corner" is a quotation from Plato. According to Simon Kistemaker, it was a term "which philosophers pejoratively used for uneducated teachers". Paul seems to be saying that he is highly qualified as a teacher- but because of experience, rather than academic qualification.

26:27 *King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe-* This suggests that Paul in full flow, even shackled and in prison clothes, had a fleck of arrogance and aggression in his presentation. He was challenging the very conscience of his king and judge. He addresses Agrippa directly by the personal pronoun "you" (:2,3,7,19,27), and mentions his name, when usually a king was addressed by titles and not addressed as "you" in this way. This sets a pattern for our personal appeal to people in our preaching. To ask a personal question like that of your king-judge was just not to be done in court. It would be judged today as contempt of court. But Paul was not standing there in self-defence, but for witness, all out of persuade towards faith in Christ. And that is what our witness should be; not self-defending our theological positions, but earnestly seeking to persuade towards faith in our hearers. How did Paul know that Agrippa believed the prophets? Was there an awkward silence in response to his question? Or was Paul being purely rhetorical, hastening on to say that he knew or recognized that Agrippa claimed to believe the Jewish prophets. We can assume that Luke's highly abbreviated account of the trial has left out frequent quotation from the prophets by Paul, in order to demonstrate that the Lord had to die, rise again and be witnessed to by the members of His glorified body.

26:28 *And Agrippa said to Paul: You almost persuade me to become a Christian-* Paul was not against using persuasion; he didn't just 'preach the truth' and leave it for others to decide. Agrippa commented: "With but a little [more] persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that whether with

little [persuasion] or with much, not only thou but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am" (Acts 26:28,29 RV). Paul wasn't against using persuasion to bring men unto his Lord, and neither should we be. He didn't just make a lame witness to true propositions and leave it to his audience to believe or disbelieve it.

Agrippa's words "You almost persuade me to become a Christian" may have been muttered as an aside; and they may have been a total departure from how a king-judge is supposed to act in court. The power of Paul's testimony was such that even he had to admit the effect it was having upon him. We can be encouraged that the message we preach is of huge power in the consciences of others, regardless of all the apparent disinterest. If you stand on a street corner handing out fliers advertising a product, people will be mildly polite in covering their disinterest. But when they see it's about religion or Christianity... their body language often changes. And if they read further what is on the tract, their response is utterly unlike the response observable in a person reading a flier advertising a product for sale.

26:29 And Paul said: I will pray to God, that whether in a little time or a longer time, not you only, but also all that hear me this day might become as I am (apart from these chains)- This was Paul's whole intention. His ambition to make converts knew no bounds. He wasn't only going for Agrippa... he wished the entire audience, including the Jews, would follow his example and path of conversion. They too could stop kicking against the goads of their own consciences and be released into the wonderful freedom of the bondservants of the Lord Jesus. "Apart from these chains" is one of several times when Paul's deep frustration with his situation cannot help but come through. He wasn't appealing for release- for he had appealed to be heard by Caesar, knowing this meant yet more prison time. He made that appeal in order for the Gospel to spread; but he paid a great price for it, willingly. For his "chains" were a deep frustration to him. But he was willing to endure them longer, so that the Gospel could be spread on the very highest levels of the world in which he lived.

26:30 And the king rose up and the governor and Bernice and they that sat with them- The rising up of the judge was to signal that the proceedings were over. We are left with the impression that there was no summing up speech by the judge; just a hasty and abrupt end to the proceedings, with Paul having had the last word in :29, in appealing for conversion. The abrupt ending of the court proceedings is a powerful testimony to the power of Paul's witness. He had so touched the consciences of his judges that the trial was ended in a moment. Surely no other accused person has ever achieved anything like this in human history; bearing in mind that his judges were the most powerful political rulers in his area.

26:31 And when they had withdrawn, they spoke to each other, saying: This man does nothing worthy of death or of imprisonment- We can imagine them chatting things over later that evening, over coffee [or whatever], as it were. Again Luke is making the point that Paul chose to appeal to Caesar because he wanted to visit Rome in order to witness to the Gospel there, and perhaps he had some idea of getting Christianity legally recognized as a religion just as Judaism was. Perhaps we should give due weight to the present tense, "does nothing"; there obviously had to be some reason given in the documentation accompanying Paul's case, but the reasons given would have to result to alleged past behaviour rather than anything ongoing. The anti-Christian legislation of Nero was yet to come. Agrippa and Festus obviously didn't want their private chat with each other broadcast; and yet here it is, recorded publicly for all generations. Perhaps Luke initially got his information from Agrippa or a source close to him. Perhaps he became a secret believer. In 28:18 Paul speaks as if it

were common knowledge that Agrippa and Festus would have released him had he not appealed to Caesar. Or perhaps inspiration beamed this information into Luke. He is obviously drawing parallels with how the Roman powers found no fault in the Lord Jesus, but Jewish insistence all the same led to His death. It could be another way of emphasizing that Paul's imprisonment and final demise was ultimately the fault of the Jews and not the Romans. They truly were the great satan / adversary to the Lord's work in the first century- and are often referred to as such. The extended record of Paul's trials demonstrates that Claudius Lysias, Festus and Agrippa all concluded Paul was innocent; but it was Jewish envy and political machinations, therefore, which kept him imprisoned.

26:32 *And Agrippa said to Festus: This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed to Caesar-* See on :31. Again the connections are with the Lord's death; Pilate was determined to set the Lord at liberty (Acts 3:13 s.w.), but the Jews machinated so that Roman power was overridden. Surely Paul perceived the connections at the time, and would have taken great encouragement from realizing that his sufferings were those of his Lord. And we are to understand our life experience likewise. Paul was so frustrated by the "chain" of his imprisonment, and we are left to wonder whether he would have been better not to appeal to Caesar, not to force through the fulfilment of the Lord's words that he must bear witness in Rome, and allow the Lord's word of promise to come true in His own way and time. This may have allowed him a few more years of powerful ministry. Looking back at our own lives, we can see how the paths taken could have been so much more effective if we had not tried to force things through in our own strength.

ACTS CHAPTER 27

27:1 *And when it was determined that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Augustan Regiment-* The Beza codex adds that Paul was handed over to Julius the very next day after the trial before Agrippa. The theme of haste noted in chapter 26 continues. Luke uses the pronoun "we" very frequently in this chapter; the events clearly left a deep mark upon him. It is a fine testament to his loyalty to Paul that he continued with him through all this. Julius may well have been present at the trial before Agrippa; and none present there would have been unmoved by Paul's witness. Indeed, most of the centurions mentioned in the New Testament came to faith in Christ. The "other prisoners" may have been men condemned to death who were to die in sport as gladiators to entertain Caesar. Julius clearly realized Paul was different to them.

27:2 *And embarking in a ship from Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the places on the coast of Asia, we put to sea; Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us-* "Adramyttium" means 'the house of death'. We are set up to expect the account to be a parable of salvation- and we are not disappointed. Aristarchus had been with Paul throughout the two years of his imprisonment (20:4) and now went with Paul to Rome, where he was his "fellow prisoner" and co-worker still (Col. 4:10; Philemon 24). This kind of huge commitment between persons is only genuinely elicited by our relationship in the Lord Jesus. The huge interpersonal commitment of Christian marriage is another example.

27:3 *And the next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul kindly, and gave him leave to go to his friends and refresh himself-* "Refresh" translates Greek

which suggests he may have been ill. Perhaps Paul's weak health was one reason why Luke the physician travelled with him. This would have been Paul's first taste of freedom for over two years, having been imprisoned all that time in Caesarea. To get to Sidon in one day meant they had a very good wind- for it was 70 miles. The believers there may have been converted in the wake of the Lord's visit to that area in Mt. 15:21.

27:4 And putting to sea from there, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary- Luke repeatedly uses correct nautical terms in the account, presumably picked up by him from discussion with the sailors. The whole record has the ring of truth to it, as we would expect from the inspired word.

27:5 And when we had sailed across the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia- Some commentators suggest "Myra" is another name for Smyrna. According to the Lord's letter to them in Rev. 2:8, they were the only one of the seven churches to whom He had nothing negative to say. They were strong in the faith, although facing problems from the Jew who were of "the synagogue of satan". Paul's journey to Rome is characterized by meetings with other Christians all the way. Yet there is no mention of any such meeting here. Perhaps the situation with the Jew there was too explosive. Or perhaps he didn't know them personally, or for whatever reason, they didn't meet up; rather like Abraham and Melchizedek sharing the same faith but apparently not having much to do with each other in their lives although they were both genuine believers.

27:6 And there the centurion found a ship from Alexandria sailing for Italy; and he put us onboard- How would a ship from Alexandria be sailing to Italy via Myra? It could be that there had been a major storm which had blown it seriously off course; and this was a Divinely intended warning to the sailors not to tempt providence by risking storms further. We see here how God works; He warned the sailors through Paul as well as through this incident not to attempt the journey, and yet when they insisted, He still worked through their wrong choices- as He does in human life today. And we can add into this nexus Paul's prayer for a "prosperous journey" to Rome (Rom. 1:10). The essence of this prayer was heard ultimately, in that Paul arrived alive; but not in the sense that Paul had perhaps intended. And likewise with so many of our prayers. See on :10.

27:7 And when we had sailed slowly many days and had come with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone- The problems with severe winds ought to have been a warning that the wind of the Spirit was not blessing this voyage; but the sailors weren't perceptive to that. The continual information about the winds makes us think of how God makes His Angels winds / spirits (Ps. 104:4).

27:8 Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea- The fact Paul speaks to Titus with such authority regarding matters in Crete suggests he had been instrumental in starting the work there. For he is careful not to get involved in any pastoral work which was the responsibility of others, and he did not build upon others' foundations (2 Cor. 10:16; Rom. 15:20). His mission and vision was to begin the Lord's work afresh in each place- no bad policy for any true missionary. But when was Paul in Crete? The only time mentioned is during his journey to Rome, when they stayed for a short time near Lasea (Acts 27:7-9), but

because it was such a small place and not much fun to spend the Winter in, the sailors wished to sail further along Crete towards the larger port of Phenice (Acts 27:12). It was whilst trying to sail there that they got blown right off course and ended up on Malta. It would seem that during the stay near Lasea at the inlet known as Fair Havens, Paul preached in Crete. It would have been no more than a village. And from that work there arose churches throughout Crete, for Titus was to "appoint elders in every city". They were pushing towards Rome, and so they surely would not have spent long at Fair Havens. And yet there is a strange turn of phrase about their stay there in Acts 27:9: "Now when much time was spent...". The modern versions seek to avoid the difficulty by suggesting that much time had been spent on the journey overall; but the Greek really suggests that they had spent "much time" at Fair Havens. They hadn't, really. But it was a significant amount of time from God's viewpoint, because as a result of this witness, several churches developed. And the witness began in a remote village, a mere anchorage rather than a harbour, near Cape Leonda, from where they had to walk five miles to the nearest shops in Lasea, itself little more than a village by modern standards. And from that remote spot the Gospel spread throughout the island. This to me has the hallmark of the divine.

27:9 Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them- Pliny records that long distance sailing was supposed to finish on the Day of Atonement; and seeing that this was the only Jewish feast which involved fasting, it is likely that they set sail just after the day of Atonement (so the Greek implies). The Day of Atonement was on the 10th day of the seventh Jewish month. We can assume that they left Lasea (:8) on about the 12th day of the seventh month, just after the day of Atonement on the 10th, when navigation was supposed to cease. But three days later (:19), Paul and Luke were throwing overboard the loose tackling of the ship, in the midst of the storm. This would have been the fifteenth day of the seventh month; exactly when the feast of Tabernacles began. This feast lasted seven days (Ez. 45:25 styles it "the feast of the seven days"). During that period, Paul and Luke were probably fasting, and doubtless sharing in the fear which gripped that vessel. It was obviously impossible to keep the feast. The sensitive Jewish-Christian mind of the first century would immediately have picked up on this; and if he (or she) grasped the idea that these events were parabolic, they would have seen in this the powerful demonstration that in the ship of Christ it is impossible to go on keeping the Mosaic feasts.

27:10 And said to them: Gentlemen, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives- As noted on :6, God works with human prayer and decision making, even when it is less than ideal. The Lord had told Paul that there would be loss of life; but thanks to Paul's prayer, no life was lost (:24,44). Just as the destruction of Nineveh didn't happen, because God is so sensitive to human prayer and repentance.

27:11 But the centurion gave more heed to the master and to the owner of the ship, than to those things which were spoken by Paul- The owner was presumably being paid well for the journey and so was eager to get the contract; he therefore wanted to move on quickly, even if it was just down the coast a bit. "Gave heed" translates better as to believe or be persuaded by. Luke uses the phrase six times earlier, of how people believed or were persuaded by the things spoken by Paul. It could be that he is being presented as effectively disbelieving God's word as spoken by Paul. By the end of the journey, surely this centurion came to believe God's word and convert.

27:12 *And because the harbour was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbour of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and to winter there-* Verse 12 in the AV says that their temporary harbour "was not commodious" to stay in, so they left, "if by any means they might attain to Phenice". Given the parable of salvation being worked out here, I just don't think it's accidental, or irrelevant, that this very phrase was used by Paul a few years (or months?) later, once he got to Rome and sat down to write to the Philippians. He wrote of how he struggled to know the real spirit of Christ's self-crucifixion, having counted all the things of this life as dung, losing them all so that he might know the real mind of the crucified Christ, "*If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead*" (Phil. 3:11). The horrific memory of the shipwreck would have stayed with him all his days. Under the Spirit's guidance, he would have recalled the spirit in that ship, as they all set sail if by any means they might attain unto Phenice. That run down old town of 'Fair Havens', its name promising what it certainly wasn't, full of lonely old men sitting in cheap tavernas... it must have been some depressing place, to make the sailors take the risk of sailing further on in such unpredictable weather. We might be able to imagine or remember towns like that which we know. And that run down ghost-town, Paul said, was typical of how we should see our lives in the world, worth making any sacrifice to leave, if by any means we might attain to a better resting place.

27:13 *And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close inshore-* As noted on :11, the decision is painted in terms of refusing God's word as spoken by Paul, and instead seeing their own way in their own strength; they seized / forced [Gk.] *their* purpose or will, rather than God's. It could be argued that Luke perceived that Paul himself had rather failed in this area, and these sailors did likewise. The whole experience was to show the triumph of the grace of God's will over all human strength and device.

27:14 *But after a short time there beat down a tempestuous wind, which is called Euraquilo-* This record of Paul's shipwreck is written in a way which is not just a narrative of certain historical events. All through there are phrases and ideas which connect with other Scripture. If you look at this whole story from a macro perspective, as it were half shut your eyes and just see the general outline, some bells should start ringing. There were a group of sailors, with an immensely spiritual man in their midst, caught in a freak, unexpected storm which threatened their life, filled with panic and desperation. Then the spiritual man stands up in their midst and inspires them with his words, and on his account they are saved by God and miraculously reach land. Our minds go back to the storm on Galilee, with the Lord Jesus standing up in the midst of those terrified men. And when we analyse the record in detail, we find this similarity confirmed. "A tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon" 'beat' (Gk., AVmg.) against the ship (:14). The same Greek word for "beat" occurs in Mk.4:37, in the record of the Galilee storm. The disciples' comment must have been echoed by Paul's fellow passengers: "What manner of man is this...?" . Closer study of Mk. 4:37-41 reveals many links with Jonah's experience; and Acts 27 also has connections with this, admittedly different ones.

Euraquilo is also called Euroclydon, as AV. The Greek *clydon* is used in the Septuagint for the storm Jonah was in (Jonah 1:4).

27:15 *And when the ship was caught, and could not face the wind, we gave way to it, and were driven along-* As noted on :11 and :13, one feature of this account is the grace of God in saving people who have tried to force through their own path in

their own strength. They were rendered increasingly helpless, until they finally cut off the ropes of their lifeboat / skiff and surrendered themselves completely to God's grace, casting themselves into the water [cp. baptism, in this parable of salvation]. They had to give way to the wind and be driven by it; and remember the connection in Hebrew between wind and spirit. They were driven to salvation by the Spirit, thanks to the prayer and witness of Paul amongst them. "Caught" uses the same word used in 8:39 of how the Lord's Spirit caught away Philip. They "were driven along", just as the prophets were driven along by the Spirit (s.w. 2 Pet. 1:21). They could not turn their faces to fight against that wind / spirit. This is not to say that human freewill plays no part in the final equilibrium of our salvation. But on the other hand, unless God brings us to that salvation, we are too weak of ourselves to get there by a sequence of correct freewill decisions made from the steel of our own will. And in this case, salvation would be by works rather than grace.

27:16 *And running under the lee of a small island called Clauda, we were able, with difficulty, to secure the skiff-* The skiff / lifeboat was rowed parallel to the ship in order to ensure that it was not going to hit rocks; for the ship was hugging the coast as close as possible. "Secure" is literally 'to become masters of'. The whole account reflects the struggle of human strength for mastery being subsumed beneath the power of God's spirit, driving people to realize that human strength cannot save.

27:17 *And when they had hoisted it up, they used supports to undergird the ship; and fearing that they would be cast upon the Syrtis sandbar, they lowered the sail and so were driven by the wind-* "Driven" is the same word as used in :15; as noted there, the whole parable of salvation here speaks of being driven towards it, albeit through a terrifying journey at times. The theme of human strength and ingenuity failing them is repeated here- they had to hoist up the lifeboat. The supports or ropes used to undergird the ship were again their human strength and wisdom; finally, they did not save the ship from being broken up.

27:18 *The next day as we were being violently tossed by the storm, they began to jettison the cargo-* The record of Paul's shipwreck is described in language which clearly reflects the LXX description of Jonah's sea voyage (here, these words = Jonah 1:5); to suggest that like Jonah, Paul was also fellowshiping the cross. Paul made a supreme effort to fellowship the Lord Jesus, to absorb the spirit of Christ deeply into his own mind. God confirmed him in his efforts, by working in his life to give him circumstances which recalled the experiences of Christ, and which thereby encouraged him to do this even more successfully. The progressive lightening of the ship by throwing everything overboard (:18,38) is a clear link back to Jonah 1:5. On the Lord's own authority, we can interpret Jonah as a type of Christ, who saved the ship's crew (cp. the church) by jumping overboard to his three day death (cp. Christ). Thus the boat passengers in both Jonah and Acts 27 represent ourselves, and their physical rescue points forward to our spiritual salvation. See on :34 and :44.

27:19 *And the third day with their own hands they threw overboard the tackle of the ship-* "Tackle" is translated "great sheet" in 10:11; they were presumably using this in addition to the sail in order to try to get some control over their direction. And now they were without even that, and totally at the Lord's mercy as to their direction.

27:20 *And when neither sun nor stars shone upon us for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was now taken away-* One of the signs that they were nearing the end of their ordeal was that "neither sun nor stars in

many days appeared". Now this sounds very much like Lk. 21:25-27: "There shall be signs in the sun and in the... stars... the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear... then look up... then shall they see the Son of man coming". The parable of salvation is developed by all the references to "saved" (:31,34,43,44; 28:1,4).

27:21 *And after they had been without food for a long time-* On the voyage to Rome, it was only after much "abstinence" (AV) that Paul openly preached to the crew and other prisoners- as if he struggled against a shyness in public testifying. See on Acts 18:4,5. Yet as Paul stood on that cold, windswept deck, shouting above the noise of the wind, you get the picture of a man whose magnetism was fully effective on that rough crowd of seamen and prisoners. Such was his authority that a word from him resulted in them ditching the lifeboat; the only human chance of salvation. Once they did that, they were completely dependent on the spiritual vision of this extraordinary man Paul. See on :36.

Paul stood in the midst of them and said: Gentlemen, you should have listened to me, and not have set sail from Crete and gained this injury and loss- It is difficult for us to imagine what that fortnight in the storm was like. Verse 21 speaks of the "harm" [[NEV "injury"]] which they experienced, using a Greek word which is usually used about mental harm or damage. They were deeply perplexed in mind and body. Their helplessness amidst the fury of those winds is brought home by the Spirit: "We let (the ship) drive... and so (we) were driven... being exceedingly tossed with a tempest...no small tempest lay on us (i.e. smothered us)... we were driven up and down in Adria". Our brief life of probation is described in widely different terms by the Spirit. Here we get the idea that it is a totally horrific experience, full of fear, first of one thing (e.g. of grounding on quicksands), and then of another (being broken on rocks). In other places our experience of life now is likened to a plodding on through the wilderness, in others to a short sharp battle, in others to the monotonous tramping out of corn by an ox, the patient waiting of the farmer, or the lonely, dogged endurance of the long distance runner. And in yet other passages we are promised a life of "all (possible) joy and peace through believing", dashing on from victory to victory, more than conquerors, caught up with the ecstasy of the triumphant march in Christ, all our lives long. We must see our experience of spiritual life in holistic terms, we mustn't just emphasize one of these aspects. The way these different aspects all merge together in our spiritual experience is, to me, one of the most wonderful things about a balanced life in the Truth. An unbalanced approach will lead to us doggedly clinging on to the doctrines of the Truth, rejecting any suggestion that there should be an element of spiritual rapture and ecstasy in our lives. Or it may lead to an over emotional, watery sort of spirituality which reacts against any hint that we ought to be gritting our teeth and holding on to our faith, fearing the ferocious satan of our own evil natures.

27:22 *And now I encourage you to be of good courage. For there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship-* The way in which Paul twice encouraged them "be of good cheer" (:22,25) as they huddled together breaking bread is also quoting the very words of the Lord Jesus, in the same context (Jn. 16:33); and remember that Jesus also said those words when the disciples were struggling in another great storm (Mk. 6:50). See on :34,35.

27:23 *For this night there stood by me an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve-* "Whose I am" was understood by Paul to be on the basis that he had been

purchased for His service by the sacrifice of His Son (1 Cor. 6:19,20). He may well have explained that to them. His idea was that as a bound prisoner, he was still serving his God, and therefore that God would protect him, because he was on a mission for Him. Even within apparent constricture as a result of the ties that bind us in life situations, we are still on the Father's active service. We wonder why an angel appeared, when at 23:11 it was the Lord Jesus Himself who appeared to Paul and encouraged him that he would surely bear witness at Rome. Perhaps the pagan mariners were more likely to accept the idea of an angel appearing, as a messenger of the gods, than to accept the direct appearance of the Lord Jesus to Paul. The focus here upon God rather than the Lord Jesus was perhaps in order to witness to the pagans in terms they could more easily relate to- which were to God rather than His Son. Paul's words here are surely alluding to those of Jonah in a similar situation (Jonah 1:9). There are plenty of other Jonah allusions in the chapter. Paul realized that this storm was in a sense for his sake; even though it could be argued from a more human viewpoint that it was the fault of the misjudgement of the crew and owner. We too at times may wonder whether a certain situation is our fault, or debate whose fault it is. The answers are never clear; the question is too nuanced. Especially when God's hand is involved. And so here too, the storm was in a sense for Paul's sake, but also for the potential salvation of all on the boat.

27:24 Saying: Fear not Paul. You must stand before Caesar- The Angel was repeating the Lord's words to Paul of 23:11. We are left to imagine the Lord Jesus in heaven itself with the Angels around Him, aware of His words and visitation of Paul; and now repeating their Lord's words. I have argued earlier that Paul was obsessed with getting to Rome to witness to Christianity. And the Lord took on board that wish, and although the path taken by Paul to achieve it [through appealing to a hearing by Caesar] was not ideal, He still went along with Paul and would enable it, through all the trauma of the shipwreck.

And God has granted you the lives of all those who sail with you- As God gave Paul all the men who sailed with him, so we have been given to the Lord Jesus. Of those whom God gave the Lord Jesus, He lost none (Jn. 17:12). This verse is clear evidence of salvation for the sake of third parties (as Mk. 2:5 and often).

27:25 Therefore gentlemen, be of good courage. For I believe God, that it shall be even as it has been spoken to me- Mary was an inspiration to Paul in this (Lk. 1:45 = Acts 27:25). The Angel spoke on God's behalf and Paul reflected on the memory of the words spoken that night, and believed. Perhaps the implication was "I believe God's word- and I am now asking you to do so also". Faith means believing in the Divine word of promise; if they could believe this word, then they should then believe His word of promise in His Son.

27:26 But we must be cast upon a certain island- The Lord's partial revelation of truth is not Him playing hard to get, as it were. He didn't tell Paul that the island was called Malta. He led Paul, as He led Abraham and ourselves, in baby steps. And this withholding of information wasn't because the sailors had never heard of Malta. Some of them would have done, for Valetta was a known harbour in the Roman world (as is evident from the fact that a ship called in there next shipping season, 28:11). It was the part of Malta they arrived at which was unknown to the sailors.

27:27 But when the fourteenth night had arrived, as we were driven to and fro in the sea of Adria, about midnight, the sailors sensed that they were drawing near to some land- The "But" shows that faith in the promise of Divine deliverance was being

sorely tested; two weeks went by with no answer. The assurance of salvation wasn't given the night before they came near to Malta; it was given two weeks beforehand, to test their faith in the word of promise. And in essence that is how God operates with us; for His salvation is articulated to us through the words of promise to Abraham which were confirmed in the new covenant. The mention of "the fourteenth night" and "midnight" all recall the language of the Passover deliverance; hence Paul's invitation to them to partake in a breaking of bread meeting, in imitation of the Passover meal (:35).

27:28 And they sounded and found thirty meters; and after a little space, they sounded again and found twenty five meters- This is exactly the progressive depth of St. Paul's Bay in Malta to this day; an impressive evidence of the accuracy of the Biblical record.

27:29 And fearing that we should run aground on the rocks, they let go four anchors from the stern and wished for daylight- Given the strength of the storm, it might seem unlikely that four anchors could hold the ship. But St. Paul's Bay in Malta is characterized by clay and not sand. The account has every whiff of credibility. "Wished for daylight" could be translated "prayed for the day to come"- replete with latter day references. But the immediate reference is surely to their prayer [inspired by Paul's example, and praying presumably to the God Paul had taught them of] that the boat would not break apart that night, until the daylight came and they could see how they could best get ashore.

On that last night, the sailors prayed for the day to dawn (v.29 Gk., RVmg.). "The day" is an idiom for the Kingdom in Rom. 13:12. This fits in alongside the many other connections between intense prayer and the second coming. If we *know* Christ, then we will long to share his glory, we will long to see his beauty with our own eyes. So *are we* praying earnestly for the day to dawn? Or are we just content with the knowledge that it will come, like a slow train coming? Those men prayed for the dawn so intently because they knew that if the winds blew for much longer, they just couldn't hold on, they would be swept away. They feared "lest we should be cast on rocky ground" (Acts 27:29 RV)- replete with reference to the parable of the sower. There are many indications that the body of Christ will be weak and sickly when he returns.

27:30 And as the sailors were seeking to abandon the ship and had lowered the skiff into the sea, under pretence that they would lay out anchors from the foreship- It was on the very last, fourteenth night, that some in the ship lost their faith in Paul. They tried to get away from the ship in the lifeboat, "under colour as though they would have cast (more) anchors out" (v.30 AV). The Greek for "under colour as though" is always used elsewhere in the context of spiritual pretence, especially in prayer (Mk. 12:40; Mt. 23:14; Lk. 20:47). Under the appearance of trying to make the salvation of the others more certain (by casting more anchors), these men were trying to leave the ship because they honestly thought that the rest of them stood no chance. Is there here some prophecy of how just prior to the Lord's return, some will try to leave the body of Christ, under the appearance of spiritually strengthening the rest of us? But the watchful Paul spotted what was going on, and somehow got them to abandon it.

27:31- see on Acts 15:1.

Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers: Except these stay in the ship, you cannot be saved- This sounds like the Lord's words of Jn. 15:6: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth..." . But there is a twist here in :31; as if our all remaining together in the Christ-ship is somehow related to our collective salvation. We see here the evil and collective damage of division, of trying to go our separate ways to salvation, thinking only of ourselves.

27:32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off- As noted earlier, salvation was achieved for these men after all human hope was abandoned. As they saw the skiff drifting away from them, disappearing beneath the waves, they would have realized their only hope was in Paul's God and in His word of promise. We likewise are led in our lives to the point where all human strength fails, and we cast ourselves upon the Lord's salvation promise with total faith and trust. The record has much to say about this skiff, which functioned also as a lifeboat. They had trusted in it to keep them from hitting rocks as they hugged the coast at the start of their voyage; and now it appeared their only hope of escape. But they now cut off the ropes and let it drift away. There was no discernible practical reason for doing this; it was done in response to Paul's command that salvation was only to be had in the ship and not in the lifeboat (:31).

27:33 And while the day was dawning, Paul pleaded with them all to take some food, saying: This day is the fourteenth day that you wait and continue fasting, having eaten nothing- As noted on :27, the emphasis on "the fourteenth day" was to draw connections with the Passover deliverance, on account of Moses (cp. Paul- Heb. 11:28) and the blood of the lamb. Paul was presenting himself as Moses and the meal he offered them was like the Passover meal. But he wanted them to perceive the power of the invisible slain lamb. The fact they had been fasting may have been because they were all desperately praying to their various gods, just as the sailors with Jonah did. The challenge to stop fasting to those gods and take the Passover was therefore a religious challenge to them.

27:34 Therefore, I beg you to take some food. For this is for your health- When Paul tells them to eat food "for your health", he uses the Greek word normally translated "salvation". The whole incident is a parable of salvation. See on :44. The gods they were fasting to (see on :33) could not save.

For not a hair shall perish from the head of any of you- I get the feeling that there are times when Paul consciously alludes to Christ's words, and appropriates them to himself. For example, here we read of how he promised them that "not an hair (would) fall from the head" of any of them, just as the Lord promised His disciples (Lk. 21:18); see on :22.

27:35 And when he had said this and had taken bread, he gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat- The uncanny appeal and authority of Paul is brought out when we consider the implication of this: Paul prayed in the presence of them *all*, all 275 of them, presumably mustered on the deck, and then solemnly ate in front of them, passing the food on to them. See on :43.

Paul's 'breaking of bread' on the doomed ship in Acts 27 is described in terms evidently designed to recall the "breaking of bread" service. On the 14th night (cp. the 14th Nissan), Paul took, blessed, broke and shared the bread- all terms associated with the "breaking of bread" in a religious sense. Further, the word *eucharistesen* is used here in :35 to describe Paul's giving of thanks, and this is the word elsewhere used about the breaking of bread service. This is not the usual word used for simply giving

thanks for a meal, but has religious overtones. "I urge you to take some food" uses *metalabein* which literally means not to just "take" but to "receive one's share in"- the same express used by Luke in describing the early breaking of bread meetings in Acts 2:46. We can immediately perceive a witness element to this "breaking of bread". Paul was surrounded by people who were despairing of their lives, who had not eaten for some time either because of seasickness or from fasting to various gods for safety. And in the midst of those people he proclaims Christ to them through the breaking of bread, urging their participation, and thereby using the breaking of bread just as the Lord Jesus did- to draw people further into God's plan of salvation.

The same Greek words for "break bread" are used in the healing miracles, where Jesus broke bread and gave it to the crowds (Mt. 14:19; 15:36), and for how Jesus took bread and broke it at a meal with the Emmaus disciples (Lk. 24:30); those two words are also used to describe how Paul 'broke bread' with the passengers and crew onboard ship (Acts 27:35). So the evidence would seem to be that the meals of Jesus [which were open to all, sinners included] were of the same category and nature as the memorial meal known as "the breaking of bread"- for the same phrase 'breaking bread' is used (Mt. 26:26; Acts 2:46; 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24). The same rubric of taking bread, blessing and giving to the disciples is found in the feeding miracles as in the Last Supper, and in the Lord's post-resurrectional eating with the couple in Emmaus- as well as in Paul's exposition of the Christian "breaking of bread" which we have in 1 Cor. 11. Mark's Gospel seeks to draw a parallel between the Lord's feeding miracles and the last supper "breaking of bread". In each account, there is the same action recorded: Taking, blessing, dividing and giving out (Mk. 6:41-44 cp. Mk. 14:22-25). That same four fold theme is to be found in the "breaking of bread" which Paul shared on the stricken ship in Acts 27:33-37, where we note that how he "gave thanks" is described using the verb *eucharisteo*.

27:36 *Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves*- His repeated exhortation "Be of good cheer... be of good cheer" (:22,25) was taken to heart by them: "Then were they all of good cheer" (AV). And like a father with sick children, Paul got them, against their will initially, to sit down to a good wholesome meal.

27:37 *And in all we were two hundred and seventy six persons on the ship*- This may be a reference to some taking of an inventory of all on ship, so that they could work out who if any had perished once they got to land. Such a head count would have been the responsible thing to do knowing that they were soon going to have to issue an "abandon ship" order. But it could be argued that this was a lack of full faith in the Lord's word of salvation which Paul had shared with them.

The significance of 276 isn't immediately apparent. It is a triangular number, triangle of 23. And many of the numbers in the New Testament are also triangle numbers. But I have constantly drawn attention to the fact that this is a parable of salvation, and those in the ship represent the redeemed. I am therefore inclined to go with the alternative reading of 70 provided by the Western Text; for 70 is the number of the Gentile nations in Gen. 10 and the number of bullocks offered for the ingathering ritual. Joseph A. Fitzmyer explains: "The Western Text, MS B, the Sahidic version, and Epiphanius [310-403] read rather: "we were about seventy persons." This Western Text reading seems to have risen from a dittography of the *omega* on the dative *ploiō*, "ship," after which the cipher for 76 was written so that it was combined with *s* (= *diakosiai*, "two hundred") and taken as the adverb *hōs*. Other readings: MS A reads "275," and MS 69, "270." (*The Acts of the Apostles (Anchor Bible)*, p. 779). This also solves the problem of such a large number of people on the

boat, which was carrying grain rather than masses of passengers. 70 people is a more realistic number of people for Paul to address and break bread on a deck in the midst of a storm. For they "all" heard him. There would have been logistical problems for him to simultaneously address 276.

27:38 *And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship by throwing the wheat into the sea-* They were now throwing away their last food, and the wealth they had. For the owner of the ship was onboard, and to lose the ship and cargo was his ruin. But this too is part of our path towards final salvation- to abandon absolutely everything, left with not even anything to eat, no wealth, just us, and barely with the clothes they stood up in as they crawled up the Malta beach. "Eaten enough" recalls the Lord's feeding of the crowds, also a form of a breaking of bread service. The hint could be that they were fed to the full; and we hope that they continued their faith experience unto salvation at the last day.

27:39 *And when it was day, they did not recognise the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, and they took counsel whether they could drive the ship upon it-* The description of Malta as a "land which they knew not" (Acts 27:39 AV) is evidently similar to the account of Abraham going to a land which he knew not (Heb. 11:8,9). The land was a strange land, just as Malta was perceived as a "barbarous", i.e. pagan, land (Acts 28:2). As soon as it was day, we read in v.39, they grounded the ship and swam to land, reaching their salvation at daybreak. This fits in to place alongside the many links between the second coming and daybreak. The men somehow sensed ("deemed", :27) that they were approaching land. It is quite likely that the spiritually aware will have a sense of the nearness of Christ's return. Christ too referred to this when he spoke of how in the Spring we have an innate sense that Summer is coming; so, He reasoned, you will be able to sense my return. Now if we really *know* Christ, have a real two-way, ongoing relationship with him, as a pupil-disciple to his teacher-master, then we will surely have this sense. "They *drew near* to some country" really implies that they were being drawn near; the Greek word is always used elsewhere about the believer drawing close to the Lord. 1 Pet. 3:18 is the best example: "Christ also hath once suffered for sins... that he might *bring us* (same word) to God". Now in our typology that would suggest that in some way Christ guides us into the Kingdom, helps us through the last lap. Watch out for other types and hints that this is the case. And talk about it to some dear old brother in his late eighties who's known the Lord all his days.

And so finally, there they were, crawling up the shore on Malta, the waves breaking over their heads, the backwash pulling them back, but struggling on up the beach in the early hours of that morning, cold and soaked, perhaps with hypothermia setting in, but brimming over with the joy of their miraculous salvation. Now that is the picture, in this type, of our salvation. As we enter the Kingdom, we will be at our most bedraggled, the weakness of our natures will then be made fully apparent to us. "They knew not the land", only once they were saved did they know the name of it (27:39; 28:1). As Abraham went forth into a land which he knew not, so in many ways we do not know much about the Kingdom, our salvation.

The sailors [=us] even at the very end disbelieved the prophecy that the ship would be destroyed- for they sought to "bring the ship safe to shore" (Acts 27:22,39 RVmg.). Even for the wise virgins, the coming of Christ awakes them from their spiritual slumber. Unless the days are shortened, even the elect will be carried away with the ways of the world (Mt. 24:22). If we can really see the spiritual dangers of the last days, if we can sense our real spiritual state, we will realize that we urgently

need the coming of Christ, for the simple reason that we are all so weak spiritually that we will effectively lose our faith unless he's back soon. And in response to the elect's prayers, the days will be shortened. The Lord will help us through the final lap.

27:40 And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea, at the same time loosing the bands of the rudders; and hoisting up the foresail to the wind, they made for the beach- The progressive abandonment of all human strength and hope of salvation continues. They had cut off the lifeboat, given up their last food [the wheat] and now they loosed the bands which they had earlier girded the ship with, abandoned their anchors, and were now left totally at God's mercy unto their salvation. This is all a parable of the Lord's ongoing work in our salvation.

We note the comment "To the wind". The records of Paul's journey to Jerusalem and thence to Rome contains many references to winds being contrary. But at the very last part of the voyage to Malta, the wind saved them. It blew behind them. All the information about the wind must be understood in the context of the fact that the Hebrew and Greek words for wind and spirit are the same. The Spirit of God withstood Paul's plans; but still He saved Paul, and now the wind blew behind Paul to achieve God's way of saving Paul, even though his chosen path was not the ideal. The Spirit still enabled him.

27:41 But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground- The desperate situation of Paul and those with him therefore points forward to an awful time of tribulation for the believers just prior to being 'saved' into the Kingdom. This climaxes in coming to the place where two seas meet (Acts 27:41)- surely a reference to the judgment seat. There, it becomes apparent what is to 'remain unmoveable' and what is to be 'broken' or dissolved. These very same Greek words occur in 2 Pet. 3:10-12, about the breaking up or dissolving of all things at the Lord's return; and of the unmoveable quality of the Kingdom which we shall receive, when all other things have been shaken to their destruction and dissolution (Heb. 12:27,28).

And the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves- Several times we read about them using the anchors. Then in :41 we read of the forepart sticking fast and remaining "unmoveable" . There are connections here with Hebrews 6:19, which speaks of the hope of the Gospel as "an anchor of the soul... which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus" . The idea of Christ as a forerunner, the firstfruits, is surely to be connected with "the forepart" of the vessel remaining unmoveable. As they crawled up the shore on Malta, Paul and the others would have looked back to that unmoveable bow of the ship; perhaps they went to see it the next morning, as it stood proudly amid the calmed waters. That sight would have stayed with Paul; perhaps the Spirit used that memory when it inspired Paul to use the same Greek word (the only other occurrence in the NT) in Heb. 12:28: "We receiving a Kingdom which *cannot be moved*, let us *hold fast* " (AVmg.), as the bow of the ship "stuck fast" . This is all further proof that we should see the incidents of Acts 27 as parabolic of deeper spiritual things.

27:42 And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape- The soldiers had still not come to full faith. Paul had told them that God's will was that he should get to Rome; killing him at that stage was going against God's declared will. Even in the face of every evidence that Paul was God's man, they thought only of their immediate problems and fear of answerability to those above them if the prisoners escaped. The word translated "plan" is used by Luke of the plan /

will to murder the Lord Jesus. But God's will was to again triumph over human will, as this whole account of the shipwreck demonstrates so often.

27:43 *But the centurion, desiring to save Paul, stopped them from their purpose, and commanded that they who could swim should throw themselves overboard first and get to land-* According to 2 Cor. 11:25, Paul was in the 'swimmers' category.

Paul's magnetism [which represents that of the Lord, whom he represented in this parable of salvation] is most clearly shown by the Centurion being willing to allow all the prisoners to make their own way to land, rather than allow Paul to be killed. Of course our mind goes back to how the jailor at Philippi was literally on the verge of suicide because he just *thought* that his prisoners had escaped (actually, none of them had). Yet among those 275 desperate men, there must have been some who secretly despised Paul. The Centurion "kept them from *their purpose*" of killing Paul. This may suggest that even in their personal desperation, some of the men on that ship were prepared to kill Paul, due to their own sense of inadequacy, and jealousy of his spirituality.

27:44 *And then the rest, some on planks and some on other things from the ship. And so it came to pass, that they all escaped safely to land-* Young's Literal Translation brings out the correct sense of Acts 28:1: "They, having been saved...". They escaped safely to "*the land*" (:44 Gk.), symbolic of the Kingdom. As noted often throughout this chapter, the whole incident is a parable of salvation. "All escaped" suggests that there was a roll call, and the figure of 276 was found (but see on :37). Salvation by clinging on to planks and the tree trunks used to construct the boat obviously connects with salvation through the tree / cross of the Lord. The casting into the sea may look forward to baptism, through which final salvation is arrived at. Through so much trauma in our lives, much of our own making.

ACTS CHAPTER 28

28:1 *And when we had escaped-* Luke was on the ship. "Escaped" translates the Greek word usually used for salvation; there is clearly a sense in which the entire account of the shipwreck was seen as parabolic of the journey to salvation.

Then we knew that the island was called Malta- 'Land of honey'. In this case, the parabolic aspect of the shipwreck continues, with Malta becoming symbolic of Canaan.

28:2 *And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome-* Reflecting Luke's adoption of the common Roman idea that 'natives', non-Greeks who had not been brought into the Roman empire, were typically unkind and aggressive to strangers. Likewise the beliefs of the Gospel writers about demons and mental illnesses are reflected in the record without immediate, direct correction.

Because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold- The record holds together internally in a way that only a Divinely inspired account could. For it was because of the cold, as it was Winter, that the viper had hibernated and was mistaken in its frozen form for a stick; and it came to life near the heat of the fire.

28:3 *But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself onto his hand-* An old man, probably with sight problems and / or various other 'thorns in the flesh', it was not for

him to run around gathering sticks for the fire. And in their culture, gathering of firewood was the work of women and children. But we see so much about his personality from the fact he did so.

Before a fire (at the burning bush), Moses experienced a rod becoming a snake and a snake becoming a rod. The similarities are intentional, confirming Paul that he, a shivering old man with no dry clothes to his name, was in fact seen by God as being as significant as Moses. Paul's letters reveal that he keenly perceived the similarities between himself and Moses- especially in his letter to the Romans. He was now on his way to Rome; and the Lord is confirming Paul in that perception.

28:4 *And when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to each other: No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped from the sea-* The fact was, Paul was indeed a murderer, of Christians. The whole incident then becomes a testament to God's grace; he should have died then, justice would not permit him to live, he was in the grip of the snake of sin- but was saved by grace. This living parable was exactly what Paul had written to the Romans about grace in his relatively recent letter to them. We see here the Lord's providential action to help Paul perceive the living truth of what he had expounded in theory. 'Justice' translates *dike*, rightness, which is a major theme of Romans. Likewise the Lord works with us, to help us appreciate in reality the things we are taught in theory.

Yet Justice has not permitted to live- Acts 28:3–6 describes how a lethal snake attacked Paul, fastening onto his arm. The surrounding people decided Paul was a murderer, whom “vengeance suffers not to live”. Their reading of the situation was totally wrong. But Paul did not explain this to them in detail; instead, he did a miracle – he shook the snake off without it biting him. The Lord Jesus did just the same in relation to the commonly held ideas about demons.

28:5 *However he shook off the creature into the fire and was unharmed-* Paul's calmness is wonderful. He truly believed the assurance of 27:24 that he would reach Rome. Paul's calmness may also have been on account of his belief in the promise of the great commission, that in discharging this, the Lord's people would be unharmed by poisonous snakes and would be able to take them up, just as Paul did here (Mk. 16:18).

28:6 *But they expected that he would have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly; but when they had waited a long time in expectation and saw nothing amiss came to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god-* We see again the fickleness of people; one moment, Paul was a murderer who deserved to die, minutes later he was a god, in their eyes.

28:7 *Now in the neighbourhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days-* Inscriptions with this title have been unearthed on Malta.

28:8 *And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. Paul came in to him and prayed, and laying his hands on him, healed him-* Word for word, Luke is repeating the descriptions of Ananias coming in to Paul, praying, laying his hands on him, and healing him (Acts 9:12,17). Paul is consciously reflecting the grace shown to him at the time of his conversion, many years ago. We too need to abide under the impression of the grace shown to us- and reflect it to others all our lives long. The beauty of this incident is that it would seem to me that this reflection of God's grace was made artlessly and unconsciously by Paul. See on 28:10 *They put on board.*

28:9 *And when this was done, the rest also that had diseases in the island came and were cured-* Note Luke's humility as a doctor. He would have been far better qualified than anyone on the island, and he likely rolled his eyes at the hygiene levels and nonsense medical theories entertained by the folks on that undeveloped island. But he was left ignored- the folk came to Paul, and were healed better than Luke could ever have healed them. Yet his focus is all upon the Lord's operations through another man, Paul. Luke the professional doctor is left merely noting it all down, playing no recorded part in the whole scene. And his record never betrays a single hint of hurt pride at his exclusion.

28:10 *They also honoured us with many honours; and when we sailed away, they put on board-* Gk. 'they laid upon'. It's the same word used for how Paul had laid his hands upon the father of Publius (:8). I explained there that Paul in turn had been copying what Ananias had done to him. And now, the people reflect the grace Paul had shown to them. This is the ripple effect of grace; the grace of Ananias [meaning 'the grace of God'] to Paul was reflected by Paul to the local people of Malta; and those people then reflected that grace to Paul and those with him.

Such things as we needed- The same word is used by Paul in boasting that his own hands had provided for things he needed, his "necessities", and also the needs of those with him (20:34). But now Paul is being humbled; as a prisoner, he can no longer provide for his necessities nor those of the people with him; they are provided by God by the grace of the wild pagans.

28:11 *And after three months we set sail in a ship of Alexandria which had wintered on the island, whose sign was Castor and Pollux-* Their original ship was originally from Alexandria, so it is likely that the sailors knew Malta. It was only the area they approached which was unknown to them. As noted on 27:26, they were specifically not told what the name of the island was- in order to elicit faith. From Malta to Italy is not so far, but these other sailors wouldn't risk it over the Winter season; highlighting the folly of the sailors in attempting to reach Italy all the way from Palestine at that time. The twin brothers Castor and Pollux were the patron deities of sailors. Perhaps the fact is mentioned to highlight how the gods were unable to save after what they had all experienced. It was likely that images to them had featured on the original vessel that was lost; the spiritually perceptive would have realized that they really could not save.

28:12 *And landing at Syracuse, we stayed there three days-* There is historical evidence of Christian churches in Sicily from the late first century, and we can assume that they arose from Paul's witness there during this brief visit.

28:13 *And from there, we circled round and arrived at Rhegium; and after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli-* This is all evidence that the journey encountered yet more problems. Syracuse to Rhegium is a straight journey; but they circled around to get there. The same word is translated to wander. From Rhegium, they had to sail north to Puteoli; but a *south* wind blew, meaning they were sailing against the wind. As explained on 20:6, Paul's journey to Rome was against the wind / spirit all the way through. God went along with his desire to serve Him in this way, but Paul made the way hard for himself and encountered consistent opposition, in one sense, from God's Spirit / wind.

28:14 *There we found believers and were encouraged to stay with them seven days. And so we came towards Rome-* This is what true fellowship in Christ is about. Given the uncertainties of travel, they weren't expecting Paul; but he sniffed them out, and he stayed with them. We see the same spirit in :15.

28:15 *And from there the brothers, when they heard of us, came to meet us as far as The Market of Appius and The Three Taverns. Whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage-* When some members of the Rome ecclesia (who were rather weak, 2 Tim. 4:16) came to meet him at Appii, Paul took courage at the very sight of them; one gets the picture (from the Greek) of him seeing them, recognizing who they were, and feeling a thrill of courage go through his soul (Acts 28:15; note how Luke says "he" rather than "we", as if emphasizing that Paul was more encouraged than he was by these unknown brethren showing up). Here was no self-motivated old brother, indifferent to what his younger and weaker brethren could do for him by way of encouragement.

28:16 *And when we entered into Rome, Paul was permitted to live by himself, with the soldier that guarded him-* The same word in :3 for how once again, Paul was allowed as much freedom as possible, so that he could continue his mission as best he could.

28:17 *And it came to pass, that after three days he called together those that were the leaders of the Jews; and when they came together, he said to them-* One can only be impressed by the way that within only three days of arriving in Rome after an awesome journey, Paul began preaching by inviting the local Jews to come to him. He would have had so much else to attend to surely, quite apart from getting over the trauma of the journey. However, the speed with which he invites the Jews to him could also be judged to be reflective of the unhealthy obsession he had been nursing for some years to preach to the Jews in Rome. See on :20.

Brothers, though I had done nothing against the people, or the customs of our fathers- This appears to be presenting things in a way in which the Jews might be impressed. The fact is, Paul had taught against the customs [Gk. *ethos*] of the fathers. And that was why the Jews were mad with him. But Paul appears to come over wide eyed and innocent... and he may have overstated his case. Because circumcision was after the *ethos* of Moses and Paul taught this was not required for Gentile converts (Acts 15:1); the Jerusalem Jews had specifically complained that Paul taught Jews not to 'walk after the customs' (Acts 21:21).

I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans- We have to read in an ellipsis here; from [the hands of] Jerusalem [i.e. the Jerusalem, temple leadership] into the hands of the Romans.

28:18 *Who, when they had examined me, desired to set me free-* This may have been an exaggeration, in harmony with his exaggerated statement of innocence regarding the Jews in :17. Felix left Paul in prison in order to please the Jews (Acts 24:27) rather than trying to free him. If it were not an exaggeration, then Paul's insistence on going to Rome seems to reflect an obsession on his part, as often discussed in commentary on chapter 20.

Because there was no cause for putting me to death- The fact Paul died at Rome was therefore the more tragic, and suggests his insistence on going to Rome, despite the Spirit urging him not to, led to an earlier end to his ministry than perhaps was intended by the Lord.

28:19 *But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar. Not that I had something of which to accuse my nation-* This internal compulsion was from *his* spirit, and not the Lord's Spirit. It is the same word used about how he compelled Christians to blaspheme and murdered those who refused (26:11). The obsessive compulsion he felt about going to suffering and death at Rome via Jerusalem was therefore psychologically a reflection of his guilt over compelling the

Christians to blaspheme. More psychoanalysis of the situation within Paul on 20:26 *I am pure*.

28:20 *Therefore, for this reason did I request you see me*- The word translated "reason" as that translated "cause [of death]" in :18. Paul may mean that the whole reason he had appealed to Caesar was in order to get to Rome and preach to the Jews there, which is why as soon as he could on arrival in Rome he called for them. If only he had focused on his ministry to the Gentiles, and left the Jewish ministry to Peter, so much grief would have been avoided. He set himself the goal of preaching to Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost and Jews in Rome, capital of the world. And yet there were few Jews left in Rome- because Claudius had recently expelled Jews from Rome (18:2). So again, as explained in detail in comments on chapter 20, Paul's whole mission to Rome via Jerusalem just didn't work out. The money he collected for the Jews in Jerusalem caused huge problems and may never have been accepted by them; the wind was against his sailing all the way; there is no record of any successful witness by him in Jerusalem and maybe he missed the Pentecost feast; and here he admits his reason for appealing to Caesar was in order to preach to Jews in Rome. But they had been chased out of Rome, for the most part. And according to 28:28, Paul is disappointed at the response of the Jews and tells them it is better to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Which is what he was intended to do anyway.

And speak with me- Paul realized the methodology we use with people can affect their conversion. And he knew that personal contact was by far the best. "For this cause therefore did I entreat you to *see* AND to speak with me" (Acts 28:20 RV). He called men to have a personal meeting with him, rather than just to hear the theory. Not just to hear him, but to *see* him... for we are the essential witnesses. Paul could have written to the Jews in Rome from prison, but he realized that true witness involves personal contact wherever possible.

For because of the hope of Israel- Or, "him for whom the people of Israel hope" (GNB). Messiah is certainly the Old Testament fulfilment of passages which speak of Israel's hope. Israel / Jacob's hope of Messiah was the hope of his life; "I have waited for Your salvation", 'Your Jesus', he commented (Gen. 49:18). Jacob describes the Christ as "the stone of Jacob / Israel" (Gen. 49:24); Jacob's physical stone had been overturned, rested upon, set up and anointed (Gen. 28:13-15); perhaps at the end of his life, Jacob thought back to that incident and saw in that stone a prophecy of the death and resurrection of the Lord. Perhaps he even saw that the anointing, the 'Christ-ing' of the Stone would be after its raising up; he foresaw that the Lord Jesus would be made the Christ, the anointed, in the fullest sense by the resurrection (Acts 2:36). "The hope of Israel", or "he for whom Israel / Jacob hopes", is another title of Christ (Acts 28:20 cp. Jer. 14:8; 17:13; Joel 3:16); he was the one for whom Jacob / Israel hoped. And his hope is the hallmark of all the Israel of God. It may be that Paul used the phrase with reference to Jacob's Messianic expectations, seeing that in the essentially parallel Acts 26:6 Paul speaks of the hope of the promise made to the fathers. Thus Paul saw "the hope of the promise" as being "the one for whom Israel / Jacob hopes" , i.e. Messiah (Jer. 17:13; Joel 3:16). Like Jacob, Paul saw the promises as essentially concerning the spiritual blessings achieved in Christ, rather than merely 'eternal life in the land of Israel'. His exposition of the promises in Gal. 3 follows the same pattern.

I am bound with this chain- As in 26:29, Paul's resentment about his limited freedom comes through.

28:21 *And they said to him: We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor did any of the brothers come here and report or speak any evil of you*- This

total silence about Paul may have been because a person disfellowshipped from the synagogue ceased to exist, and was as it were dead and non-existent. But if they admitted that the sect of Christianity was well known (:22), then surely the name of Paul also was well known? They may however be responding in kind to Paul's rather untrue claim that he had done nothing wrong by Jewish customs (:17). It was surely axiomatic that if he had really done nothing to offend the Jews, then he would not have been delivered by them to the Romans.

28:22 *But we desire to hear of you what you think. For as concerning this sect, it is known to us that everywhere it is spoken against-* If the sect of 'Christianity' was known empire-wide but we take on face value what the Jews say about Paul, that he was unheard of, then a rather different picture of Paul emerges than what many now hold. Today, the words 'Paul' and 'Christianity' go together, and he is perceived as the world's best known Christian. But we must not read back our current perceptions of him into the historical Paul. If indeed [and see on :21] what the Jews say about Paul is true on face value, then we are left with the conclusion that Paul was just a small cog in the large entity of 'Christianity'. The New Testament focuses upon him and the relatively few churches he founded, and records his letters to them. But Christianity was apparently an Empire wide force, according to the comment by the Jews of Rome recorded here in Acts 28:22. Yet Paul was unheard of in Rome. Paul would therefore appear to be one of many missionaries, but the Spirit chose to record so much about him because he was set up as a model for all believers. However, there are good reasons for thinking that the total number of Christians at the time of Paul's death was not much more than 20,000. Paul therefore would indeed have been a significant figure within the community, and the blank response of the Roman Jews was therefore reflective of their view of Paul rather than of actual reality. Or it could be [and I am just discussing possibilities in this entire comment] that the actual words of the Jews are not specifically denying knowledge of Paul, but denying that the Jewish leadership had any issue with Paul.

"Spoken against" is the word used about Jews speaking against Christians; Paul has just used the word in this context (28:19) and it is used elsewhere about them (Acts 13:45; Rom. 10:21). So the Roman Jews surely meant that although the leadership had not informed them about Paul, they were aware that Jews everywhere spoke against Christianity. Luke is now ending Acts, and by saying that the church was "spoken against" he is connecting with how he started volume 1 of his work, by recording that the Lord Jesus personally would be "spoken against" (Lk. 2:34 s.w.). All that is said against the church is said and done against the Lord. The Lord Jesus is His church; that is a major theme of Luke-Acts.

28:23 *And when they had appointed him a day, they came to him into his lodging in great number. To whom he expounded the matter, testifying of the kingdom of God-* Paul must have been blessed with quite a large house to accommodate so many guests. Or it could be that the record is written from Paul's perspective; relatively "many" came. Bear in mind that all Jews had been expelled from Rome not long previously.

And persuading them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets, from morning until evening- Literally, 'the things around Jesus'. And thus we have again "the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus".

28:24 *And some believed the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved-* But this is not the usual word used for faith. It more suggests an acceptance. There is no record here of any baptisms, and Paul hardly seemed to be encouraged by the

response because he then quotes Isaiah's condemnation of Israel and turns to the Gentiles.

28:25 *So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed-* The impression is given that they walked out of the meeting arguing amongst themselves, rather than some of them rejoicing in any newfound faith. The picture is repeated in :29- they left, arguing amongst themselves.

After Paul had made this final statement: The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying- A classic explanation of the process of Divine inspiration of the Bible.

28:26 *Go to this people and say-* Paul quotes Isaiah 6:9, which his Lord had also quoted about Jewish blindness; and he quotes it in the same way as the Lord Jesus did (Lk. 8:10). Thereby Paul reflects the degree to which he had thought through the Lord's reasoning and made it his own- an example to we who read the Gospels in this age. This is the art of Christ-centred life; to see that the situations we find ourselves in recall in essence those which the Lord faced, and to respond as He did.

By hearing you shall hear and shall in no way understand, and seeing you shall see and shall in no way perceive- It was and is the whole process of engaging with Scripture which confuses those who do not want to understand it. This is why the Bible is so confusing to so many- it is written in such a way as to confuse those who do not come to it with a desire to understand and respond. Think too of the tone of voice in which Paul said this; he was willing to sacrifice his salvation for Israel's, and his heart's desire was that the Roman Jews to whom he wrote Rom. 9:2 and Rom. 10:1 would be saved. And now he finally encounters them- what disappointment and sadness he would have had, and not angry frustration at their refusal to 'get it'.

28:27 *For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart; and should repent, and I should heal them-* Paul alludes to the parable of the sower more than to most of the Lord's parables, and here he clearly has in mind the Lord's quotation of the same scripture in Mt. 13:15. We have an insight into how Paul's mind took the Lord's words and the way he used Old Testament scriptures, assimilated it into himself, and met situations with the same approach.

28:28 *Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles-* See on 28:20 *Therefore, for this reason did I request you see me.* Paul had earlier turned unto the Gentiles and given up with a mission to the Jews (Acts 13:46). This was as God intended- Paul was to preach to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews. But Paul had slipped back, and continued going to the Jews. And now in Rome, with his dream of witnessing to Jews in Rome fulfilled, he saw how wrong he had been. The Jews there were generally disinterested, and he realized again the wisdom of God's intention for him- to preach to Gentiles. And yet God still worked with Paul, for a few Jews apparently did believe due to his presence there. But the letter to the Romans reflects the fact that there were already Jewish Christians in Rome... Paul's desire to go and preach to Jews there appears even more on the side of the stubborn and the obsessive than anything really necessary in the Lord's service. "Sent to the Gentiles" uses the same words which Paul admits were said to him by the Lord at his conversion: "The Gentiles, to whom I send you" (Acts 26:17). Surely Paul must have been reflecting that although he had now achieved his obsessive desire to get to Rome to preach to the Jews... actually the Lord had been right at the beginning of his whole ministry. He was intended to go to the Gentiles. And instead he had sought to emulate Peter and go to the Jews. It was too much for rabbi Paul to accept that illiterate

fisherman Peter could convert thousands of orthodox Jews at Pentecost; Paul yearned to do the same and even outdo Peter. He so wanted to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost and then go on to the Jews in Rome. Now he realized that the Jews there were not that responsive, and that his mission really must be to the Gentiles. It was a shame that like us, he spent a lot of grief on things he could have avoided if he had followed his Lord's preferred ministry path for him.

And they will hear- The same words used about how the Gentiles 'heard' the Gospel in accepting it (Acts 13:48); it was at that time that Paul had said he would turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). It seems that he repented of his focus upon the Jews; but soon he was back to his obsession with them. That was but a temporary realization. The idea of the Gentiles 'hearing' is used of how the Gentiles 'heard' the word through Peter's preaching of it (Acts 15:7 s.w.). And it was this jealousy issue with Peter which seems to have been at the root of much of Paul's dysfunction. At the very end of his life, perhaps in his last few days, Paul writes of how at his trial he was able to make a witness that meant "that through me the message might be fully proclaimed; and so all the Gentiles might hear" (2 Tim. 4:17). This is the same word for "hear". So it seems that Paul went to his death believing that although he had been mistaken in focusing upon the Jews, the Lord was merciful to him, and he died accomplishing the mission the Lord had originally intended for him at his conversion-witnessing to the Gentiles, and them 'hearing'.

28:29 *When he had said these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves-* This is the same picture presented as in :25. Paul at great length to earnestly persuade them of Christ, but they argue amongst themselves and walk out of the door disputing with each other, thereby side-lining Paul.

28:30 *And he stayed two whole years in his own hired dwelling-* Paul, like many Bible characters, had access to wealth. Recall how Felix hoped to get money from Paul (24:26).

And welcomed all that visited him- That may sound rather unnecessary to record, until we observe that nearly every time the Greek word is used, it speaks of receiving people on a spiritual level. Paul practiced open table fellowship, welcoming all; at a time when it was obnoxious for Jews and Gentiles to be together in homes. This, for Paul and for so many others, is the sign of spiritual maturity- genuine spiritual openness to others instead of defending the exclusive island of one's own territory and interpretations.

"That visited him" is Gk. 'came in unto him'. The same word is used of how Paul had gone in unto the houses of Christians to torture and kill them (Acts 8:3). Now the whole story was reversed, by grace.

28:31 *Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ-* But his letter to the Romans places the emphasis upon the reign of grace. He speaks of how grace "reigns", as if grace is the dominating, ruling principle in the lives of those who have now sided with the Kingdom of God rather than that of this world. Testifying the Gospel of God's grace is paralleled by Paul with testifying about the Kingdom- and he says this again in a Roman context (Acts 20:24,25).

With all boldness- Paul saw the Lord's "boldness" as an imperative to him to likewise be "bold" in preaching (Eph. 6:19). We all find it hard to be bold in witness, and yet in this as in all spiritual endeavour, 'thy fellowship shall make me strong'. A deeper sense of the presence of Jesus, a feeling for who He was and is, a being with Him, will make us bold too. Even Paul found it hard; he asked others to pray for him, that he would preach "boldly" [s.w.] as he ought to (Eph. 6:19); and their prayers were heard, for in his imprisonment during which he wrote Ephesians, he preached

boldly (Acts 28:31 s.w.); indeed, boldness characterised his whole life (Phil. 1:20 s.w.). In passing, we note how Paul felt spiritually weaker than he was; he felt not bold, when he was bold; and we see how the admission of weakness to others and their prayers for it can grant us the victory we seek.

No one forbidding him- Paul uses the same word to speak of how the Jews forbade or hindered his preaching to the Gentiles (1 Thess. 2:16). His entire ministry had been characterized by Jewish opposition and hindrance to his work. This period was the only one where he could preach without any hindrance; and it was because he was at last doing what the Lord had intended for him from the start, witnessing to the Gentiles, rather than arguing with the Jews and giving free reign to his various psychological issues relating to them.