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Geoffrey C Bingham

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# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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**GEOFFREY C. BINGHAM**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- Barrett *Luke the Historian in Recent Study*, by C.K. Barrett–A.S. Peake Memorial Lecture (London: 1961).
- Blaiklock *Acts, an Introduction & Commentary*, by E.M. Blaiklock (London: Tyndale, IVP, 1959).
- Bruce *The Acts of the Apostles*, by F.F. Bruce (London: IVP, 1951).
- Bruce F.F. *The New Bible Dictionary*, (London: IVP, 1962).
- Cole *The New Temple*, by R.A. Cole (no details available).
- — — *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951).
- Guthrie *The Apostles*, by D. Guthrie, (London: Picketing & Inglis, 1975).
- Hull *The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles*, by J.H.E. Hull (London: Lutterworth, 1967).
- Knox *The Acts of the Apostles*, by W.L. Knox (London: Cambridge, 1948).
- Lampe *The Seal of the Spirit*, by G.W.H. Lampe (London: SPCK, 1967).
- Lenski *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, by R.C.H. Lenski (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1934).
- Rackham *The Acts of the Apostles*, by R.B. Rackham, Westminster Commentaries (Edinburgh: 1902).
- Rendle Short *The Bible & Modern Medicine*, by A. Rendle Short (GB: Paternoster, 1964).
- Williams *The Acts of the Apostles*, by C.S.C. Williams (London: Black, 1964).

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### To 'New Creation' Commentary Series

The Commentaries which have been prepared, and which are in preparation for this series, are intended to be modest both in their material and format. There are reasons for this kind of production.

Although the first consideration is not that of cost, we will, nevertheless, say that it is an important reason. Many books are made to be attractive, and welcome as this is, it adds to the cost. We have tried to keep the price within that range which makes it easy to purchase the volumes as they appear. Secondly, we make no claim to have produced a work of either great scholarship, or one for the meticulous exegete. It is for those whose time is limited in looking up many commentaries. We have done this work for them, and in that sense the Commentaries are the result of the fruits of other men's labours, with a modest addition by the writers, who themselves gather impressions by the way and often even have helpful insights.

Those who use these Commentaries will not find them inspirational, for that was not their intention. They simply present valuable material and insights on the books with which they deal. Is it too high a claim to say that the material presented is worthy of trust, and should prove valuable to those who teach classes, groups, and who preach from pulpits and other places? We think they can be valuable, it not, always, wholly sufficient.

*The Editors.*

## INTRODUCTION

### Note on Introductions, Commentaries and Works on the 'Acts'

*Expanded introductions* can be found in the various N . T . Introductions such as those of Everett Elarrison, D. Guthrie, Merrill Tenney, B. Clogg and the commentaries nominated here. A good range of *commentaries* may be found under the following authors: F.F. Bruce (English: M.M. & Scott; Greek text: Tyndale Press); E.M. BlaiRlock (Tyndale); C.S.C. Williams (A.& C. Black), W.L. Knox, and somewhat older commentaries such as R.B. Rackham and R . C . H . 1,enski. Works on Acts are many and only a few useful ones are here nominated. some of them dealing with the *themes of Acts* such as the lioly Spirit: *The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles*, J.H.E. Elull (Lutterworth); G.W.H. Lampe, *The Seal of the Spirit; The Beginnings of Christianity*, by Kirsopp Lake and F.J. Foakes Jackson; J.C. O'Neill. *The Theology of Acts in its Historical Setting*; N.B. tonehouse . *The A reopagu s A dare ss* ( T yndale ); F.F. Bruce, *The Speeches in the Acts of the Apostles* ( Tyndale) .

## AUTHORSHIP

### (A) EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

*The anti-Marcionite prologue to Luke* (late second century) speaks of Luke, a Syrian of Antioch, a doctor, a disciple of the apostles and a companion of Paul, who fell asleep at the age of 84 in Boeotia full of the Holy Spirit, 'and indeed...the same Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles while later John the Apostle... wrote the Apocalypse...' The *Muratorian Canon*

(c. AD 180–200) says, 'But the Acts of all the Apostles were written in one volume. Luke compiled for the 'most excellent Theophilus' what things were done in his presence as he plainly shows by omitting the death of Peter and also the departure of Paul from the city when he departed for Spain.' Irenaeus (c. AD 180), Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Origen (c. 200 and 230) show that Luke's authorship was accepted. A sixth or seventh century Coptic inscription in a chapel on Mount Assuit in Egypt has 'As for Luke the physician, he was a disciple of the Apostles until he followed Paul. He lived eighty-four years. He wrote this Gospel in Achaia. Then he wrote Acts. '

### (B) INTERNAL EVIDENCE

It is well received that the author of Luke's Gospel and of the 'Acts' are the one (cf. Luke 1: 1–4, Acts 1: 1–2). If the author of the Gospel of Luke is really Luke then there is little doubt that Luke is the author of Acts. However, neither the Gospel nor the Acts have a mention of Luke's name. There are also problems to accepting Luke's authorship in that if Luke was a companion of Paul, how did he come to omit such important biographical details such as are recorded in II Corinthians 11: 23–27, as also some of his dealings with the Church at Corinth, and why does he omit all references to Paul's letters and the matters dealt with in them? There are seeming disparities in some of Luke's accounts and those of Paul, eg. the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) and Paul's visit to Jerusalem of Galatians 2:1f. However, seeming incompatibility of accounts does not cancel Lukan authorship seeing their *purposes* of writing were different, and in any case it is disputed that in the case of Acts 15 and Galatians 2:1f., the two writers are, in fact, describing the same event, Nor is it necessary that Paul and Luke should be identical in their interests and (so) emphasis –eg. Paul makes a great emphasis on a collection for the poor at Jerusalem (see

I Cor. 16:1f., 8:1ff., Gal. 2:10, etc). Yet Luke includes it only in Acts 24:17 – almost incidentally.

The fact is that the author of Acts has certain points which he seeks to delineate strongly and these do not generally require that he should describe in detail Paul's reactions, reflections, etc., such as Paul often describes in his letters.

The four 'we' sections of 16:9–18, 20:5–15 (16–end?), 21: 1–18, 27:1– 28:16 at least indicate some of the account is written in the first person (plural). A process of eliminating all mentioned in the third person such as Silas, Timothy, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus and Trophimus, leaves us with a small number of possibilities and C.S.C. Williams (pp.3–4) reduces the possibilities of others mentioned in Epistles to Luke himself. Some have suggested the 'we' passages are Lukan and the other sections added from other sources by another writer or compiler. On literary and linguistic grounds, however, it has been argued that the whole account is level and consistent. Actually in both the Gospel and the Acts the (Greek) vocabulary is quite limited. Some writers claim that both are written with an interest in medical terms or details.

The *sources* that the author could use would have been many. His times at Jerusalem, Caesarea, Rome, Antioch, as well as in Asia Minor and Macedonia, would have brought him into contact with many who had been involved in the events of the Gospel as also those of the Acts, for example Philip and his daughters at Caesarea, Manson (21: 16, 'an old disciple') and others. The fact that Colossians 4: 14, Philemon 24, II Timothy 4:11 indicate Luke (in addition to the 'we' passages) to be a fellow-traveller of Paul lends weight to the traditional belief that Luke is the author of the Acts.

## PURPOSE OF WRITING

The preface makes the general purpose clear – it

was to inform Theophilus (and presumably others also, seeing a detailed account could scarcely be expected to be made for the eyes and thinking of only one man) concerning Christianity, that is a reliable and consecutive account – in the spirit of the matter as well as its details – of the rise and growth of Christianity. Luke 1:4 'that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed'. Nor would this purpose be simply of the objective happenings but of the whole import and thrust of them.

Guthrie sees five elements in the purpose of writing the Acts (op.cit. pp. 316–321). They are (a) *A narrative of history*. Not dryly historical, but significantly so. The events as he sets out to describe them (see prefaces to Luke and Acts) are not simply interesting in themselves, 'but' rather their significance is why they are recorded. Luke rates highly as an historian, a fact demonstrated by Sir William Ramsay in his writings on St. Paul. Undoubtedly facts were at the disposal of Christians of his time, but to record them and to do so chronologically would be valuable, Luke is himself involved in these events and so knows their value. (b) *A Gospel of the Spirit*. Luke–Acts must be considered as a whole. Luke has even been called 'Proto–Acts'. Writers have pointed out that Luke's Gospel in many of its themes is 'incomplete' in that it anticipates fulfilment of its themes in the 'Acts' account. Without doubt the teaching of the Spirit is a unity when 'Gospel' and 'Acts' are put together. This point we will deal with fully, later. (c) *An Apology*. The apologetic note of Acts is extremely strong. Some have seen it as a defence of the gospel in that the gospel works out positively from Pentecost to Paul's time in Rome. Others have seen it as 'apologia' for St. Paul himself. Some theologians have seen it as a defence of Paul as against Peter, but this need not be entertained. Apologia is present for the Jew (and thus the believing Gentile) in that the gospel (*kerugma*) is based in the Old Testament, and the Messiah springs not from political and religious opportunism

but from prophecy itself.

The main claim for apologia, however, is for a man such as Theophilus, probably in influential circles, who as a believer has his hand strengthened by the knowledge and proof that the Christians are not subversive. Certainly the account shows clearly that at no point did the Christians (emphasis *mainly* on Paul's ministry) cause, wittingly, insurrection, nor go against the Judaic or Roman powers, nor incite their followers to do so. Some have even suggested that the book is an attempt to exonerate Rome from the charge of harassing the Christians, wilful Jews rather being the cause, although it is not likely that Luke would be attempting to blame the Jews. (d) *A Defence Brief for Paul's Trial*. Suggested that this document would strengthen Theophilus's hand if he were to be seeking Paul's acquittal. No objective proof being available it seems this interesting theory need not be entertained. (e) *A Theological Document*. How consciously Luke is attempting such is debatable. It is suggested that Jerusalem and Rome have great significance for the writer, and also that the invasion of the world of Hellenism by Christian teaching is also highlighted. More probably Luke has a number of things in mind, the elements of which are historical, devotional, theological, practical. In short he sees what has happened, is aware of its significance, and seeks to communicate these elements. He has many themes and some of these are treated below.

### DATE OF WRITING

Opinion of dating is in three schools. (1) Prior to 64 AD (2) Post 70 AD to 85 AD (3) Second century.

Prior to 64 AD is based on the fact that in 64 AD Rome was burned and suspicion was placed on the Christians so that they were persecuted. This event is not even suggested in Luke's writings, although he does include the martyrdoms of Stephen

and James. Paul's two years at Rome seem to be mentioned with equanimity as though nothing untoward had happened. It must be admitted, however, that Luke could have avoided such references (being an historian) even after these events. However, those who argue for an early date suggest that the absence of a mention of Paul's death, the primitive (undeveloped) nature of the subject-matter, and of the theology, as also the impartial nature of the State towards the Church, all argue for an early date. Those who argue for a date post-AD 70, do so to a great degree on the basis of a post-AD 70 flavour in Luke's Gospel, that is, that the Gospel must be after AD 70 and much more so the 'Acts'. The reasonable assumption that Mark's Gospel was before Luke as he wrote and Luke's amendment of Mark 13: 14, 'the abomination of desolation' to the more specific 'compassed with armies', is thought to be necessarily after AD 70 when the event happened. This of course assumes (what has to be proved) that there is no predictive element in Luke. If, however (as Manson suggests), Mark's rough notes of his own Gospel were available to Luke even before Mark's Gospel was published, then a date prior to AD 64 is still possible. The third dating suggests that Luke was dependent upon Josephus whose *Antiquities* were published in the last decade of the first century. It is, however, by no means certain that Luke was dependent upon Josephus. Others find affinities between Acts and the writings of early Church Fathers. This latter view, however, is not now strongly held.

### THE ACTUAL HISTORICAL VALUE

This seems to be considerable. It has been confirmed by archaeological discovery. There is sufficient evidence to show that his narrative is set authentically in the framework of contemporary history, and the terms which he uses and 'which vary from place to place have been checked and verified. It has been said that his description of Paul's voyage to Rome (ch. 27)

‘remains to this day one of our most important documents on ancient seamanship’ (F.F. Bruce, p. 11 *The New Bible Dictionary*, IVF).

### SOME OF THE THEMES OF ACTS

The problem in compassing these is that they are not disparate but are basically interrelated and interdependent. Thus we can speak of the *Acts of the Apostles*, the early servants of Christ, and yet these are the *Acts of the Holy Spirit*. The *Holy Spirit* bulks largely in this book – more so than any other, and yet it is the book primarily concerned with the *Lordship of Christ* and its practical and historical outworking. At the same time the *nature and action of the church* is primary, and its elements of *fellowship* and *evangelism*. Again the *nations* and the *Jewish nation* primary considerations, particularly in relation to the *gospel*. Thus the theme of the *people of God* is prominent and particularly the *gospel as it is for the nations*. Any approach to the Book of Acts without the reader being alerted to these *themes* will mean a deficient reading. We will therefore treat them.

#### (a) The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

This includes the giving of the commands to the Apostles by the Spirit (1: 2), the *general* outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (‘all flesh’) in Chapter 2, and yet *particularly upon the Jews* (Ch. 2), *the Samaritans* (Ch. 8) and *the Gentiles* (Ch. 10). These outpourings are significant as the message is that of the Kingdom (cf. 1:3f., 8:12, cf. 19:8, etc). The movements of preaching are motivated and guided by Him, eg. Peter at Pentecost, Paul, others, and the growth of churches (as at Antioch) following persecution as well as missionary journeys (see 13: 1ff). Geographically the Spirit leads, as also to persons (cf. 13:4, 16:6, etc., 8:26ff., 10:20, etc). Obviously this is with a view to evangelism (1: 8), but also with a view to the *life* and *unity* of the Church. Thus

Ananias and Sapphira are disciplined (5:1ff), the widows’ arrangement controlled (6:1ff), the debate at Jerusalem resolved amicably (15:28). Prophecy is an aid to the life of the Church (11:28, 20:23, 21:4, 11) and is by the Spirit. Even the elders are appointed by Him to guard the Church (20:28). Many other elements of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit are contained in this account, but without doubt Luke’s account is a remarkable revelation both explicitly and implicitly of this third Person of the Trinity. (See, for example, *The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles*.)

#### (b) The Doctrine of the Lordship of Christ

Acts 2:36 makes ‘Messiah’ and ‘Lord’ almost synonymous. The primary message is that of the *Kingdom of God* (see 1:3, cf. 1:6, 8:12, 14:22, 19:8, 20:25, 28: 23, 28:31). Chapter 1:1–8 makes it clear that *events* are related to this message. Whilst the message would seem to be the evangel or proclamation (*kerugma*), yet it is to do with Messiah and his Lordship. Thus the constant preaching of *resurrection* (e. g. 2: 23ff., 3: 15, 4:10, 4:33, 5:31, 10:41, 13:33f., 17:3, 17:31, 26: 8) is the *evidence* of the power and Being of Messiah the Lord. Thus he is called *Lord* in varying terms, eg. 2:36, 3:14–15, 4:10, 12, 5:31, 10:36, etc. A rationale of his suffering (‘How can he be Messiah and suffer on a cross?’) is given in many of the speeches. However most of all it is the Lord who is working. *He is in action*. 1:8 – they are to be witnesses to him. 3:16f. – it is the name that heals; 4:12 – that saves; 4:30 – that does great works. 7:55 – it is Jesus who is standing (for action) at God’s right hand; 9:5f. who confronts Saul of Tarsus; 26: 16ff. – who commissions him (cf. 22:14f.), who appears often to him (22: 17f., 18:9, cf. 27:23), so that all the action by the agency of the Holy Spirit is that of the Lord. The commission has been given, not by the Holy Spirit but by the Lord himself. The Holy Spirit is the Agent for such witnessing.

**(c) The Doctrine of the People of God**

Whilst many of these doctrines are explicated in the Epistles they are more implicit in the 'Acts'. Sometimes they are germinal – but always basic. The doctrine of the Church is clear in I Corinthians 12–14 and Ephesians. The doctrine in this book is of the 'people of God', yet never apart from the *action* and *fact* of the church. Whilst it is difficult not to see it through the revealed elements of the Epistles, it is *possible* to withdraw the strands of this doctrine. It is, however, a gradual development. The 'all flesh' of 2:17 (cf. Joel 2: 28f.) was possibly understood of the Jews only by Peter, but Acts 8 shows the Samaritans are included in the Kingdom and the people of God, hence the need of the Apostles to go there. Acts 10 shows the reluctance of Peter to go to the Gentiles and his amazement that they too are included. The church at Antioch is composed largely of Gentiles and about its ministry revolves the matter of gospelling the Gentiles ( 13: if. ) and of acceptance of the Gentiles on fellowship conditions (15:1ff.). Paul is the protagonist of this point, yet Peter is also (15:7–11, 16f.). He speaks to his own people first (13:41f.) and then to the Gentiles. He does not lord Jewish traditions over Gentile, nor Gentile over Jewish ( 17:26 – 'one' or 'one blood'). It is, however, the *unity* of the redeemed that is a part of the Acts. So the unity is *described* (2:42f.), *defended* (5:1ff., 6:1ff., 15:1ff.). In one sense the whole book is this very theme itself summed up in 'Jerusalem and all Judea', 'Samaria', 'uttermost part of the earth'. The revolution from 'Jews only' to the all-inclusive body of believers is in itself a miracle – though not unchallenged. Here the doctrine of the Holy Spirit links with the unity or innate oneness of the people.

**(d) The Proclamation**

The theological form of the proclamation (*evangel*, *kerugma*) is clear enough. Its elements are, generally speaking:

- (i) The prophecies have been fulfilled;
- (ii) the Messiah has been born, declared, at work;
- (iii) has been crucified,
- (iv) buried, but God has raised him from the dead, therefore he is Lord of the dead and the living;
- (v) he is exalted to the right hand of God;
- (vi) the Spirit has been sent;
- (vii) the Messiah. will return in judgement.
- (viii) In the light of this, repent, receive baptism, the forgiveness of sins;
- (ix) receive the Spirit.

It is clear that those proclaiming expect this proclamation to save those who believe. It is, after all, that which matters most, the message (witness to Christ) which is to be proclaimed to the end of the earth. Its explication to a great degree belongs to the Epistles. Its immediate power and effect are evident in the 'Acts' account. A survey of all the messages or speeches of Acts adds up into a considerable message. From them we adduce an important Christology, a theodicy, an eschatology.

The *message* is related to its *mode* of preaching. Power which would reasonably be called supernatural is evident in preaching, as in the attendant signs and miracles (powers) which operate. Galatians 3:5 makes it evident that Luke does not record all these events which are not gimmicks but evident signs of Messiah and the Kingdom (eg. 3:16, 8:5–12, 6:8, 10, etc.). At the same time these acts are manifestations of the Spirit – see 1:8, 6:8, 10, 8:5f., 29, 39, 9:17, 20, 13: 9f., etc. The *message* is of course related to the *Person* and *work* of Christ. It is no small thing to call him *Lord* (see above), *the Servant of the Lord* (4:27, 30 – relating to the OT 'Servant of the Lord'), to claim he is *Messiah* (see 'Lord' above), that he *forgives sins* (eg. 2:38, 3:19, etc.) – a high claim – and *gives the Holy Spirit* (2:33, 5:32, etc.). His *Name* is power (3: 16, 4: 12, 18, etc.).' The same is also *Judge* (10:42, 17:31). Thus the proclamation is of Christ so

that the message and the Person are inseparable.

### **(e) Peter and Paul**

It cannot be denied that deep interest is shown in these two almost exclusive of the other Apostles. Luke's purpose as stated in his prefaces is maintained. Luke describes the events chronologically. As a Gentile writing at least in part for Gentiles he has the development of the three racial and geographical divisions firmly in mind (1: 8), and these involve Peter and Paul. There is no need to think of these as being opposed one to the other. Nor is Luke the protagonist of either. Paul and Peter simply represent the principles in a development of this universal faith. It can be said that Peter was not a burning apostle of Gentile conversion and Paul was. Thus the significance of the church at Antioch explains the constant references to it, as also the large part it plays in the account, and Paul's relationship to it. Peter's ministry is not simply prior to Paul's but different from it. Paul's raising up of churches amongst the Gentiles is well described. His going to Rome also occupies many chapters and this too must be significant in the light of the Gentile inclusion in the people of God, for he goes as a result of espousing the emancipation of the Gentiles.

### **CONCLUSION TO INTRODUCTION**

These themes, as also the consideration of authorship, purpose of writing, date, etc., should assist us in reading the text and understanding it. What is not included, however, is the background of the age, and these elements can be easily read in E.M. Blaiklock's commentary (Tyndale), pp. 20–44. It is essential to have this background.

## **ANALYSIS**

### Introduction

Prologue ( 1: 1– 2)

His Resurrection Ministry ( 1: 3– 8)

The Ascension ( 1: 9–11)

At Jerusalem: The Upper Room (1:12–14)

Replacement of Judas with Matthias ( 1: 15–26)

The Descent of the Spirit (2: 1–4)

The Crowd's Amazement (2:5–13)

Peter's Sermon ( 2: 14–36)

The Result of Peter's Preaching (2: 37–42)

The Common Life of the Church (2:43–47)

At the Gate Beautiful – A Significant Healing (3: 1–10)

Peter's Significant Speech (3: 11–26)

The First Persecution (4: 1–7)

Peter's Third Sermon ( 4: 8–12)

Conflict (4: 13–37)

Deceit & Death of Ananias & Sapphira ( 5: 1–11)

The Second Persecution ( 5: 12–23)

The Advice of Gamaliel ( 5: 34–42)

Another Crisis in (the) Fellowship (6: 1–7)

The Ministry, Trial & Defence of Stephen (6:8–15)

Stephen's Speech (7: 1–53)

Stephen's Martyrdom ( 7: 54–60)

The Persecution ( 8: 1– 3)

The Ministry of Philip (8: 4–17)  
 The Case of Simon the Sorcerer (8: 18–24)  
 Further Strategic Evangelism ( 8: 26–40)  
 The Conversion of Saul: Saul’s Experience on the Road to Damascus (9: 1–18)  
 Saul’s Preaching in Damascus ( 9: 19b– 25)  
 Saul at Jerusalem (9: 26–31)  
 Peter at Lydda & Joppa (9:32–43)  
 Cornelius & the Vision ( 10: 1–8)  
 Peter & the Vision ( 10: 9– 23)  
 Caesarea & the Gentile ‘Pentecost’ (10:24–43)  
 The Gentile Pentecost ( 10: 44–48)  
 The Gentile Inclusion Contested (11: 1–26)  
 The Ministry of Prophecy ( 11: 27–30)  
 Peter’s Imprisonment & Escape (12: 1–25)  
 The Call to Barnabas & Saul (13: 1–3)  
 Cyprus ( 13: 4–12)  
 Antioch of Pisidia ( 13: 13– 52)  
 Iconium ( 14: 1– 7)  
 Lystra & the Gospel (14:8–20)  
 The Strengthening of the Churches ( 14: 21–28)  
 The Controversy Raised ( 15: 1–3)  
 The Conference ( 15: 4–35)  
 The Provocation ( 15: 36–41)  
 Revisiting the Churches ( 16: 1– 5)  
 The Call to Europe (16:6–10)  
 Philippi & Lydia the First Convert (16:11–18)  
 The Persecution ( 16: 19– 34)

The Dignified Exit (16:35–40)  
 Thessalonica ( 17: 1–9)  
 Beroea ( 17: 10–15)  
 Athens ( 17: 16–21)  
 Paul’s Speech ( 17: 22–34)  
 Corinth ( 18: 1–18)  
 Paul’s Return ( 18: 19–23)  
 Apollos ( 18: 24–28)  
 Ephesus:’ The Baptism of the Spirit upon the Twelve ( 19: 1–22)  
 The Guilds: Demetrius’s Speech ( 19: 24– 27)  
 Demonstration ( 19: 28–41)  
 Paul at Miletus (20: 17–38)  
 The Journey to Jerusalem ( 21: 1–16)  
 The Events & the Arrest (21: 17–40)  
 Paul’s Defence ( 22: 3–40)  
 The Sanhedrin divided concerning Paul ( 23: 1–10)  
 Paul Strengthened by the Lord (23: 11)  
 The Plot against Paul ( 23: 12– 24)  
 The Lord’s Prophecy Confirmed ( 23: 23– 25)  
 Paul’s Defence before Felix (24: 1–9)  
 Paul’s Personal Defence ( 24: 10– 21)  
 The Outcome of the Trial (24:22–26)  
 The Jews & Festus (25:1–5)  
 Paul’s Appeal to Caesar (25:6–12)  
 Paul Brought before Agrippa (25: 13–27)  
 Paul’s Testimony before Agrippa ( 26: 1– 23)  
 From Caesarea to Malta ( 27: 1–44)

The Goal – Rome – is Reached  
The Happenings on Malta (28: 1–10)  
From Malta to Rome (28: 11–26)  
Paul and Rome (28: 17–31)  
Conclusion

## COMMENTARY

### CHAPTER ONE

#### INTRODUCTION

The chapter covers the preface, the ministry of our Lord from the resurrection to his ascension, the ascension, the choice of the twelfth apostle. However it is designed to introduce the book, the great theme of evangelism and particularly to set the stage for Pentecost.

#### PROLOGUE

**1:1** The ‘first book’ is of course Luke (see Luke 1:1–4). More correctly the word is *logon*, ie. ‘account’ or ‘treatise’. Some have thought that even a third account is intended. ‘Began to do and to teach’ (see J.H.E. Hull op.cit. pp. 179) can be translated as ‘of all that Jesus did and taught as a beginning until the day...’. Certainly it is inferred that Acts is the account of what he went on doing and teaching. C.K. Barrett says ‘The Church now, in this world lives under the rule of Jesus Christ the Lord, who works through the Spirit.’ (*Luke the Historian in Recent Study*, p.69). Theophilus (‘God-fearer’, ‘dear to God’) is called in Luke ‘most excellent’ – suggests probably a high status. Luke does not use the appellation here, possibly because he and Theophilus have become more intimate.

**1:2** ‘He had given commandment’ is an interpretation of ‘commandments’. Western text has ‘commanded them to proclaim the Gospel’, so see John 20: 19–23, Luke 24:46f., Mark 16:15f., Matthew 28:19f. Matthew 28:20 makes ‘commands’ clear. What is significant is the *continuity* of the Spirit in the life and

ministry of Jesus, and the *necessity* for the Spirit in giving of commands. ‘Whom he had chosen’, that is, to continue his work, convey his commands, etc. Being received up he does not leave the world without his witness.

### His Resurrection Ministry

**1:3** ‘Alive’, ie. not subjectively, but to *sense*. ‘Many proofs’, AV ‘infallible’ is the sense of the word. I Corinthians 15:5–7 gives most of the events. Whatever textual criticism may say to the contrary, the NT accounts are of a bodily resurrection. ‘Forty days’ mentioned *only here* in the accounts. ‘The Kingdom of God’ – this vast and important subject with all its meaning. This is undoubtedly the key thing he wishes to teach. See 1: 6, 8:12, 14:22, 20:25, 28:23, 31. In OT see Exodus 15:18, Psalm 103:19, Daniel 2:44, 7:13f., Psalm 2, etc. It is his Kingdom which is his concern (John 18: 36–37), and to this are his disciples related.

**1:4** ‘Staying’ (AV ‘assembled’) or ‘meeting’ or even ‘sharing a common meal’ – cf. Luke 24: 36–49. ‘Not to depart’ – perhaps because of impetuosity, even fear. ‘Promise’ (Luke 24: 49, Ephes. 1: 13, Gal. 3:14, Joel 2:28–32, etc.). His promise was clear in John chs. 14–16.

**1:5** ‘John...baptised...water’. There is no minimising of John’s baptism which was deeply significant, but an emphasis on ‘the Holy Spirit’, ‘with’ Greek *en* is seen by some as an instrumental dative, by others as a locative dative. Lenski translates ‘in connection with’, equating it with verse 3. The main point, however, is the ‘baptism’, the pouring out of the promised Spirit. See Mark 1:8, cf. Matthew 3:11, Luke 3: 16.

**1:6** They expect a (national) restoration of Israel. This must relate in this context to (a) Jesus’

teaching of the Kingdom, (b) the promise of the Spirit. Joel 2: 28f. shows the Spirit to be the sign of the new age. John’s prophecies were in the same vein. To date Jesus had not baptised with the Spirit (cf. Luke 24: 21). Both restoration and the Spirit are closely allied themes in the O.T. See, for example, Ezekiel 37:1–14, 36:24ff., Isaiah 35:6, 32:15f., 43: 18f., 44: 3f., Joel 2: 28f.

**1:7–8** He does not deny a restoration or affirm it. The ‘times or seasons’ are a vital element of all Scripture and belong to God’s sovereignty. There is to be no mere national or geographical and racial imperialism but that of Christ through his Spirit. Jesus had been anointed to be Messiah – so were they to be ‘Messiah-ites’. They would receive the same *power*. ‘Come upon you’—see 8:16, 10:44, 11:15, 19: 6. This aspect is equivalent to the mode of the Spirit in the OT (eg. Judges) coming upon one for power (cf. Luke 24:49). ‘Witnesses’, see Isaiah 43:10, 44:8, Luke 24: 48. The things which the disciples had seen (cf. I Cor. 9: 1) they were to know (cf. John 14: 26, 15:26–27, II Cor. 5:16), and as these would not be repeated as acts they were to be *special* witnesses. ‘Jerusalem...Samaria...uttermost part’. This sets the stage for ‘Acts’, for Jerusalem and Judea constitute Chapters 1–7, Samaria, Chapter 8, and to the ‘uttermost part’, Chapters 9ff. lead us to Rome. Undoubtedly this with the Spirit’s enduement relates to the Kingdom. The ‘uttermost part’ (Gk. *eschaton*) is clearly in line with Psalm 2: 8, and indeed all of Psalm 2. See Acts 4: 25f., 13: 33f. Also Paul later takes up this theme, cf. 13:47–48 with Isaiah 49:6.

### The Ascension

**1:9–11** There is now no need for further ministry or resurrection appearances. Bruce (op.cit. pp. 39–40) says we ought not to think that in the interval between his resurrection and ascension Christ was in ‘some intermediate, earth-bound state.’ His body was

already glorified and rarely appeared. His statement to Mary (John 20: 17), ‘I am not yet ascended’, is followed by ‘I ascend’, which Westcott translates, ‘I am ascending’. The main point is that on the fortieth day the disciples see something final and climactic so that they know he has now gone from them. Apart from a brief statement in Mark’s queried ending (16: 19) there is no other description of the Ascension. The disciples were *gazing*, ie. ‘kept looking’, so that the event could not have been instantaneous, as on other occasions. Luke 24: 50. has it that he blesses them as he ascends. The movement is upwards, but a cloud, that of the glory (of. transfiguration), enfolds him out of their sight. Whilst the event is in progress (not after it) two heavenly beings (‘white robes’) make explanation of the finality of the act, as also of Jesus’ eventual return. We need not occupy ourselves with concepts that are spatial only, especially in regard to heaven – cf. Revelation 21:1–2 where ‘heaven comes down to earth’ (Lenski, *op.cit.* p.37).

## AT JERUSALEM

### The Upper Room

**1:12–14** The post–ascension picture is one of joy and anticipation, as of prayer, for they are to await the descent of power. The list of disciples given shows some differences in names (cf. Mark 3: 16ff. and Matt. 10: 2ff.). The presence of Jesus’ brethren is surprising (see John 7: 5) and gratifying. The prayer is that of the appointed seasons – but undoubtedly with a view to the Spirit’s coming.

### Replacement of Judas with Matthias

**1:15–26** The presence of 120 and undoubtedly many more who were loyal would be in Galilee (see I Cor. 15:6). Peter naturally seems to take the lead. The choice of Matthias as the substitute for Judas has been warmly debated. The use of OT Scriptures is

consistent with our Lord’s own use of them in regard to himself (Luke 24:25ff., 44ff.). So see Acts 2:25ff., 34ff., 4: 25ff. – all of them Psalms. Note also Jesus’ use of Psalm 41:9 (John 13: 18), and his statement in John 17: 12, ‘none of them perished, but the son of perdition *that the scripture might be fulfilled.*’ Peter thus uses Psalm 69: 25, 109: 8. (For reconciliation of vs. 18–19 see Matt. 27:7.)

*Vs. 21–22* show the qualifications required of an apostle – the need to have witnessed the entire Messianic ministry. The *best two* were at first selected, then the lot–cast. This OT practice (see Lev. 16:8) was considered to be a way *God* chose (Prov. 16: 33). So Matthias is enrolled. It is interesting that our Lord had not given directions and that the apostles felt the need to fill up the number. The statement of verse 25, ‘apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place’, is interesting for (a) he rejected his divine calling, (b) ‘his own place’ is undoubtedly hell, the one from which he would not be turned aside by the efforts of Jesus to stop him. The debate as to the legitimacy of the act and method of choosing Matthias cannot be conclusively said to be wrong. There is no hint given of its wrongness, although the method is not repeated. On the other hand there is no reason why it should be repeated.

## CHAPTER TWO

In this chapter the new epoch is opened by the descent of the Holy Spirit, Christ is revealed as Messiah and the church comes into actional operation.

### THE DESCENT OF THE SPIRIT

**2:1–4** Pentecost was so called because it was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the presentation

of the first harvest sheaf of the *barley* harvest, ie. the fiftieth day from the first Sunday after Passover (cf. Lev. 23: 15f.). It was variously known as the ‘feast of weeks’ (Exod. 34:22a, Deut. 16: 10) and as ‘the day of the first fruits’ (Num. 28: 26, of Exodus 23: 16a), because it was the day when the first fruits of *wheat* harvest were presented to God. The *phenomena* of the event are, (i) a *sound* as of a violent blast of wind, (ii) a *fire-like* appearance – a sheet of fire – breaking up into *individual* flames which rested (one-for-one) on the heads of the 120, (iii) each person was *filled* with the Holy Spirit, (iv) each spoke in a language *not* his own. The utterance was stimulated by the Spirit, ie. not consciously formed by those uttering. The languages used were foreign, especially to these Galileans. The *significance* of these phenomena is strongly debated. Some see them as foreign tongues and not the glossolalia of I Corinthians 12 and 14, which are unknown tongues. Others believe that even though known foreign languages, they are nevertheless included in that glossolalia, ie. ‘tongues of *men* and of angels’ (I Cor. 13: 1). The wind and the fire are symbols for God, His Spirit, holiness and power. Many see the tongues as the reversal of Babel, for here many tongues make for unity. Whilst these points are relevant the basic reason is missed – God pouring out His Spirit *significantly*. Certainly this is the fulfilment of Luke 3:16 ‘He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.’ Acts 1: 5, ‘you shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.’

### The Crowd’s Amazement

2:5–13 The audience was composed of Jews and proselytes (vs. 5, 10–11), all of whom, presumably, could understand Aramaic or the Galilean dialect of Peter, and so in this sense would not need these ‘tongues’. It may have been the sweetness and clarity of hearing in one’s own language which was good and effective. However, it was *what* they heard which was

primary – ‘the wonderful works of God’. These are ‘great’ or ‘mighty’ deeds. What were these? At the very least the ‘acts’ were concerned with Messiah, if not the whole recital of salvation’s events from the beginning. This recital would lay the perfect foundation both in description and ‘climate’ for Peter’s speech to follow. The incredible climactic occasion of the beginning of the new age – a different age, the age of Messiah with his outpouring of the Spirit – is easily rationalised as drunkenness – ‘new wine’ or ‘sweet wine’ – and why not? See Luke 5:37–39. The pity is that the spectators (as now the readers of the account) get stuck on the phenomena and do not enquire as to its significance – they miss the miracle of the birth of a new age in the unreasonableness [: ] of the attendant signs. Some are honest enough to seek an explanation, others to give it on a low level.

### Peter’s Sermon

This message is significant enough to call for detailed study. It covers (i) the promise (universal) of the Spirit, (ii) the age before the end, (iii) a rationale of the crucifixion, (iv) an explication of the resurrection, (v) an assertion of Jesus’ Messiahship, (vi) the fact of the Spirit’s being poured forth, and (vii) an indictment of Messiah’s murderers. The whole thrust of the message is God’s grace in pouring forth the Spirit, whilst such is related to Christ’s Lordship, God’s sovereign purposes being fulfilled in the Cross.

2:14–21 The phenomena which had attracted the crowd were not a gimmick but clear personal signs that the Spirit was present, v. 4, ‘they were all *filled* with the Holy Spirit’. Now the inspired rationale is given. *All* are addressed as ‘dwellers in Jerusalem’, including those from other countries. The first hour of public prayer – nine o’clock – was not an hour by which men would have begun to drink wine. Peter’s ‘this is that’ contains all the truth necessary, as the

prophecy itself is designed *for just this time*. The Septuagint version is here quoted. ‘All flesh’ would be in contrast to the special ones anointed with the Spirit in the OT economy. For Peter it may have meant ‘all Israel’, but we cannot be sure. It has the echo of Numbers 11: 29, which speaks of a yearning of this Gift for all. If (as with F.F. Bruce) these physical phenomena of blood, fire, the sun into darkness (as at the crucifixion) are related to that time, then the episode is immediately before the ‘great and notable day’, but otherwise the prophecy, dreams, visions and the astronomical wonders, etc., will all be included in the *length* of this Age, until its consummation. Note that prophecy is to be one of the features of the age – *verses 17, 19*.

V. 21 is important (see its commentary in Romans 10: 13), meaning that when Messiah’s Kingdom is coming those that believe on the Lord will be saved from the doom of the ‘day of the Lord’.

V:22–28 The crowd that welcomed Jesus as King and crucified him as an impostor, now listens to the *proclamation*.

V. 22 Jesus is attested as Messiah by his acts or powers, inexplicable acts, and signs of his Messiahship (cf. 10: 38), and although the Cross seems an impediment to such belief it is in fact all part of God’s sovereign plan – let them not be stumbled but stricken for their hideous act – ‘you crucified and killed’. ‘Lawless men’ may here mean Romans.

V. 24 The breathtaking news that Jesus has been *resurrected* is announced in the same context of God’s sovereignty – not possible because of God’s plan, because of Jesus’ Messiahship, that he should not be raised up. Psalm 16: 8–11 is here applied. Is this one of the Scriptures (Luke 24:25, 44f.) that Jesus had used with the disciples? Peter is confident that it applies to Messiah. The Midrash of V. 26 has ‘my glory rejoices over Messiah’. The passage says in

essence that the speaker will not know the pangs of death. To the contrary, neither his flesh nor soul (vs. 26–27) will see death or corruption. Joy is the portion of this One.

2:29–36 Peter now proves that this is not an experimental statement confined simply to David. It is in fact a prophecy for David was a prophet (v.30) and has died without this prophecy applying to him. Instead David sees it of his posterity – on the *Messianic throne* – see II Samuel 7: 12, Psalm 132: 11.

V. 31 uses aorists not future tenses.

V. 32 God has raised him up. Incredible! The prophecy is fulfilled. We ought not to lose sight of the fact that Jesus never went into any intermediary state. He had conquered death before he rose. His physical rising has had actual flesh and blood witnesses – it happened!

V. 33 is most momentous. (See here C.S.C. Williams op.cit. p. 68.) Psalms 68:18 and 110:1 are undoubtedly conflated here. The throne of David is in the wider sense Messiah’s part in Jehovah’s throne (cf. Rev. 3: 21). Every Jew knew Messiah sat on the right hand, and some thought Abraham sat on the left. Knox (op .cit. p. 84ff. ) has an interesting thought that Psalm 68 originally referred to Moses ascending to heaven to receive the Law (Torah) in spite of angelic opposition, and the true parallel is Christ ascending to receive the Spirit. Certainly he does.’ Thus the result of resurrection and ascension and exaltation is this very historical happening before their eyes. Christ has now poured out the Spirit. The act of this they now both see and hear.

V. 34 Again David as prophet speaks of another Messiah – Lord who is commanded to take the place of authority (Psa. 110: 1). David knows his (present) earthly kingdom will be superseded by a higher Kingdom (that of Messiah). Also all his enemies will be defeated.

V. 36 then is a natural climax. He who has arisen is he who is attested to be truly Lord and Messiah, and Peter drives home the awfulness of their act by reiterating ‘Jesus, whom you crucified’. The speech is not demagogic nor impassioned oratory, but an incisive presenting of the facts of the case. The promise of John 16: 7–11 is now fulfilled. The Holy Spirit has rebuked, convinced, convicted.

### The Result of Peter’s Preaching

2:37 Luke’s account is intended to be no less than an historical event, yet much more. The revelation of Jesus as Messiah, the fearful realisation that they had murdered this Messiah–Prince was communicated by the Holy Spirit. ‘Cut’ or ‘stung’ of V. 37 is spoken of as ‘that conviction of guilt which leads to repentance.’ ( Bruce, Gk. text, ad. loc. ) Seemingly for them there was no way out. How could they offer ‘satisfaction’ for this terrible murder, this grievous failure to discern the very Son of God?

V. 38 Incredibly there is a way out – repentance. This was the way announced by both John and Jesus, and Luke has shown in his Gospel (24: 44ff. ) that the *way of repentance* has been both prophesied and enjoined. Baptism too, with John and Jesus, was the step enjoined for the repentant. But this is baptism into Messiah, into the new *age* with its *hope* for Israel and God’s people, for this had been John’s teaching. This baptism is in the name of Jesus Messiah – the new and powerful authority of the Kingdom. It is ‘every one’ who is commanded. The *result* is the *remission of sins*. John’s baptism had been with ‘a view to’ this, but *now* the sins are to be remitted. However eschatological this is intended to be, it is also very much in the present. The *full* result is the *gift* of the Holy Spirit. This is part of the proclamation. The Spirit is the same who now visibly has been poured out on the one hundred–and–twenty. Incredibly he is for all, even the ‘rank and file’.

V. 39 speaks of the *promise*. This is covenantal, related to all covenants but primarily to the Abrahamic, and this explains (a) ‘to you’ and (b) ‘to them that are afar off’, ie. the Gentiles. All nations are to be blessed. Already they have been commanded to make disciples of all nations. Peter uses a conflation of Isaiah 57:19 and Joel 2: 32. The ‘everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him’ speaks of the *effectual calling* of the Lord, ie. to both Jews and Gentiles.

It is breathtaking that the universal promise and coming of the Holy Spirit is now at the point of realisation.

V. 40 This verse shows that repentance, forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit entails separation from the ‘crooked generation’ (cf. Luke 9:41, 11:29, 17:25, Gal. 1:4). It is doomed under judgement, etc. (John 16:11, cf. I Cor. 7:31).

V. 41 assumes immediate baptism, but the objects of baptism were well informed and under the powerful impression of the Holy Spirit whom they would immediately receive, which would account for the vital action and experience of v. 42. Apostolic teaching is the clear crystallisation of the teaching of the OT seen and understood in the life and acts of Jesus Christ as these were fulfilment and the basics of the faith of the new age. All this would come brilliantly alive and the fellowship would arise from it and be sustained and enriched by it, the fellowship being the very heart of this whole new structure. ‘The breaking of the bread’ was almost certainly the fellowship meal at which would be celebrated the Lord’s Supper. In any case meals were always sacred things. ‘The prayers’ would constitute the ‘hour’ prayers, probably in the Temple where they often gathered, and perhaps also their own community prayer at that time, and perhaps together in the Temple. What should be remembered is the spontaneous activity which sprang from the enormous release of the burden of sins, and the inflooding of the Holy Spirit. These elements of apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and

prayers cannot be otherwise understood.

### The Common Life of the Church

2:43–47 Note that it is not yet caged the church (v. 47 AV is not in the most ancient MSS). The description in these verses must refer not only to the action of the days immediately following Pentecost but also for a period following the baptism of the 3,000. This is emphasised by the use of the imperfects. The picture is that they were fused together. One might almost call them a new, separate synagogue (congregation). The word of Pentecost had brought fear to all, both those who believed and the Jewish community, since many shortly afterwards believed (4:4, 5: 14, etc.). The communal love showed itself in selfless division of its goods to every one who had need. Obviously this was a crisis (of need) met by a community of love, though not necessarily a pattern for all time. Again it can only be understood in terms of the high ‘climate’ of their experience. ‘One mind’ and communal meals ‘house to house’ or ‘in households’ indicates their mutual love and the situation for folk being saved (a daily occurrence) was ideal. The Spirit was at work.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AT THE GATE BEAUTIFUL – A SIGNIFICANT HEALING

3:1–4 The account is vividly told, possibly by Peter to Luke himself. Peter and John are together as before. The time is 3:00 pm – the hour of the evening sacrifice, the hour of prayer. We need not look for any drastic break with Judaism at this point. In any case the proclamation is still being made to ‘Jerusalem and all Judea’. This event must be viewed, too, in the light of Luke’s Gospel, especially related to

Luke 4:18–19, 9:1–2, 10:9, 11:20, etc. – these elements of the Kingdom. To date Peter has simply stated Christ’s resurrection and (thus) the victory over death. Peter is filled with the Spirit (as also John) and so the look they directed to the crippled man is evocative of faith.

3:5–10 ‘Expecting to receive something from them’ may well indicate expectancy of more than alms, for Peter’s gaze is ‘earnest looking’. Here we are in fact seeing ‘kingdom action’. The aura of the Spirit excites expectancy, especially as the crippled man is commanded to look at the apostles. The mention in v. 6 of the recently crucified blasphemer and insurrectionist, Jesus of Nazareth, with the name ‘Christ’, must have sounded amazing in the ears of this beggar. The use of the ‘name’, a theme in Acts, plus the command to walk with the aid of the ‘fellowship of faith’ exercised by Peter as he grasps him (faith to faith), causes the release of the man from his bondage of crippledom. The ‘immediately’ of v. 7 is typical of the miracles of Messiah. The hand stretched out for alms is used for healing. The steps – feet and ankles strong, walking, leaping – are surely steps of realisation so that understanding brings praise. The event, however, is more than an event. It is typical of the new age. The Messianic passage of Isaiah 35 includes (in v. 6) ‘Then shall the lame man leap as a hart’. The event confirms the fact that Messiah, in his servants, is still active, indeed is ‘on the march’. It is not the isolated event that alone causes excitement, but its significance, hence ‘they were filled with wonder and amazement.’ It remains only for Peter to give a rationale of this event. The healing is. not a gimmick but a true sign.

### Peter’s Significant Speech

3:11–16 Not only the immediate viewers but others also crowd to the Colonnade of Solomon where believers gathered. They are dumbfounded at what

they see. *V. 12* indicates their palpable astonishment. The disciples disclaim any innate ability to heal and when they point to Jesus it is first through the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lest the matter be viewed as a curious novelty. The use of ‘servant’ in *v. 13* is to be preferred to ‘child’ and indeed is most significant (cf. 3:26, 4:27, 30, 8:26–end, Matt. 3:17, I Peter 2:22, Heb. 9:28, etc.). The Servant is the figure of the Isaianic passages. The word ‘glorified’ – verse 13 – refers to the *resurrection* and ascension of Christ (see the servant of Isa. 52: 13– 53: 12, especially 52: 13, ‘Behold, my servant shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high’). However, the main point is that he is certified as Messiah and is *at present* active and powerful. Again (kerugmatically) the people are reminded sternly that they have crucified Messiah, even when Pilate had decided to release him. ‘The Holy One’ (*v. 14*), ‘the Righteous One’ are Messianic titles (see Bruce, ad.loc. Gk. text) but here they contrast with the evil of a *murderer* (Barabbas). Messiah is ‘the author of life’, ie. the originator and leader, is all-inclusive of all life. Christ’s humanity is not denied in his death, but his death is defeated by the resurrection, the *act of God* on the One whom they had *denied*. *Their verdict* God has reversed. How *reprehensible* is their action! The powerful claim to witnesses to the *resurrection* is made ‘in the Spirit’ and is undeniable. *V. 16* is a difficult text but the essence is that the Name (of Jesus) made this man well. Faith in this Name has brought the result of healing. The ‘Name’ is more than a passive magical entity – it is the active person of Messiah. Some would have the faith of the man in the name, some Peter’s and John’s faith in it. However true the latter may be, the crippled had obeyed the mention of the Name (*v. 6*). The point is – ‘Jesus is Messiah; see now for yourselves.’

**3:17** shows an understanding of their ignorance, such as Jesus showed on the Cross (of. I Cor.

2: 7–8), and his gracious manner whilst not weak would be persuasive. *V. 18* gives the rationale for the victorious Messiah yet being the Suffering One, ie. the Suffering Servant. Nothing was untoward since it was but prophetic fulfilment. *V. 19* is the *command* of the gospel (of. 2:38). It insists on (i) repentance, (ii) conversion. It promises (i) *obliteration of sins*, (ii) *times of refreshing*, (iii) *restoration* or *restitution*. Obliteration of sins in the OT. is a wonderful promise, cf. Psalm 32, 103, Jeremiah 31:34, Isaiah 44:22–23. Refreshment was also promised by the prophets, eg. Isaiah chs 35, 43, etc. These blessings of refreshment would include remission of guilt, new life, the fellowship, etc. Restoration or restitution is also a prophetic theme involving the fulfilment of a state of righteousness, a final fixed renewal and establishment of God’s universal and righteous Kingdom. Note, however, that all of this is related to Messiah’s *present action* proven not only by his *resurrection* and ascension but the very healing of this crippled person.

**3:22–25** Particular reference is now made to the prophecies so that the statement is not just general. The passage of Deuteronomy 18: 15ff. that (as against the magic arts of the Canaanites) Israel is to look to prophetic ministry in time of need. So, Moses is such a prophet who aids them and *generally* God will raise up prophets for Israel’s guidance, and in particular a *special prophet*. The prophetic word must be listened to, and obeyed. Disobedience would bring destruction. Samuel is nominated, more or less, as the first in a (new!) series of prophets, ie. one of whom has spoken of the very elements Peter has claimed (cf. I Sam. 13: 14, 15: 28, 16: 13, 28: 17). Peter reminds them of their high calling as ‘sons of the prophets and the covenant’, with the promised blessing of the Abrahamic covenant now unfolding to them.

**3:26** is strong because it makes clear that the prophet foretold by Moses has come – a Servant –

with the view of turning them (sons of the covenant and the prophets) from their wickedness. This is the One who has healed the crippled man before them.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE FIRST PERSECUTION

**4:1–7** This chapter is not simply describing an incident of opposition but is introducing the whole theme of opposition and making clear the fact that the gospel and the church are not acceptable to Israel generally. It is also an apologia for the behaviour of the new group.

The vast multitude would be confusing, even frightening to the commander of the Temple guard, especially in these inflammatory days. The priests were mainly of Sadducean stock to whom the doctrine of the resurrection was anathema. However, the guilt situation was a sore and sensitive one since the decision of the Sanhedrin had been described as murder. Primarily it is Christ's resurrection which is announced, but the principle of resurrection is also proclaimed (see I Cor. 15: 12), and all would not be slow to see this. V. 4 indicates that the total of *men* who believed now reached 5,000. The Sanhedrin (vs. 6–7) must have virtually been that which tried Jesus. Their question then (v. 7) has great point, and the Greek indicates great scorn.

#### Peter's Third Sermon

**4:8–12** Peter's special endowment of the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 21: 14f.) enables him to speak authoritatively to this august assembly who might otherwise overawe a 'simple' person. Firmly claiming a *good* deed has been done, he attributes the miracle to Jesus

of Nazareth who is Messiah. The man healed is present (v. 9). The good then (in Jesus) has been rejected by those who should have discerned God's Chosen One. The rejected Stone is a theme of the OT (Psa. 118: 22, Isa. 28: 16), and Jesus had already used it (Luke 20: 17–18, Mark 12: 10f., Matt. 21: 42). The headstone was that which held the two walls together and over which the whole temple had its structure. Blaiklock adds, 'in which all the nations are one' (I Cor. 3: 11, Ephes. 2: 20).

V. 12 The claim for the Saviour as unique is not exclusivist dogmatism but a calm statement of fact – by nature of the case none other could save since Jesus alone has defeated death. The answer to their scornful question, 'By what name?' is powerfully given. 'Saved' of course refers to the total release from sin and the complete healing of the sinner, and this would relate to the resurrection.

#### Conflict

**4: 13–20** No less a miracle than the healed man (here standing) is the transformation of Peter and John. They give no timid answer, but being in formal debate and discussion they acquit themselves admirably. They speak as did Jesus. The Sanhedrin has its mouth stopped (v. 14) because of the powerful evidence of the healed man who is present. It is notable that they cannot (and do not) deny the resurrection of Jesus, although they do not believe it. In v.17 we need not think of them believing that there is efficacy in *the Name*, but rather that the Name incites, inflames and enlarges the new 'sect'. It also hangs back to the judgement decision of the rulers, now seen to be wrong. The answer by Peter to their prohibition to use the Name is both strong and authoritative. Politely they refuse to desist from using Jesus' Name. When Peter says 'we cannot but speak Of what we have seen and heard,' he is including the fact that what is preached is wonderful,

necessary, and in itself the motivation for utterance.

**4:21–22** show the acceptance generally of this self-evident miracle and its implications.

**4:23–31** The report of the two apostles to ‘their own’ (ie. other apostles, close friends, etc.), is not a criticism of the Sanhedrin but a statement of the critical situation. The immediate corporate prayer in unison is in itself a remarkable fact. The address of God as ‘Sovereign Lord’, ie. ‘Lord. Almighty,’ is to His omnipotence as Creator and therefore One able to do all things. The *immediate* use of Psalm 2, stated to be prophetic, suggests that the early church, as it were, saw these Messianic events through the ‘lens’ of Psalm 2. That is they saw Jesus as the King, the Son, the Anointed One of that Psalm, and the rulers and the people as the rebellious. Psalm 2:7 and Matthew 3:17 would have been linked. The great point here is the Sovereignty of God, already stressed by Peter in 2:23 (of. 3: 18). Whilst the Psalm is applied to situations of the rebellious people (the Jews) and the rulers – Herod and Pilate, plus the Gentiles – it is not limited to them. Moreover the use of ‘holy servant Jesus’ (vs. 27 and 30) suggests the whole Messianic outreach of Psalm 2: 8ff. The prayer itself is offered in unison (and unity) and has astonishing results. The place is visibly shaken and the group is *again* filled with the Holy Spirit. They were filled in one act (aorist) but ‘were going on’ (imperfect) speaking the word of God with boldness because this was what they had done before. They did not pray for a filling, but received it. They were not necessarily lacking filling, but the affusion was (evidently) necessary, being both a sign and an enablement.

**4:32–37** (Cf. 2:43ff.) These verses show that the believers naturally constituted a fellowship. This state is related to the Spirit of love and fellowship (cf. Rom. 5:5, 15:30, Phil. 2:1). Note that

it is general and common to the whole multitude. The unity of the Spirit worked out in the loving concern of all as brethren. The witness to the resurrection shows that it was not just a frenzy of social action but in the context of, and with a view also to, proclamation. The grace of God overcame the natural possessiveness of the rich and greed of the poor. None was needy for the principle was ‘distribution...to each as any had *need*.’ It was not equal distribution of wealth (v. 34). The trust of the apostles was also admirable although the apostles themselves do not seem to have been the distributors. In vs. 36–37 Barnabas is well-described as to race, country and disposition; doubtless with a view to his later appearances in the book and in contrast to designing Ananias of the next chapter. Barnabas typifies the high level of fellowship and true love consequent upon the outpouring of the Spirit. Such a level maintained would be dynamic and winning. Such Satan would view with alarm and deadly opposition ( see 5: 3).

## CHAPTER FIVE

The fourth chapter has shown unity of the church. The fifth chapter is intended to show a Satanic attack (v. 3) upon that unity which is so essential, not only by its *nature*, but for its purpose (cf. Acts 1:8, John 17:21f.). The division, however, is defeated by a drastic act of discipline. Kept unified the apostles can easily (again) confront the Sanhedrin.

### DECEIT AND DEATH OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

5:1–10 The contrast of the unity in 4:23–37 and the individualistic emphasis of the deceitful couple is marked. It is not only intended (by Luke) to introduce Barnabas (4:36–37), but to show his total

commitment as against the meanness of this couple. It must be noted that the sale and division of goods by the church was to meet *a crisis*, and in this context the couple had emulated the *voluntary* loving action of believers but had deliberately planned hypocrisy and deceit before the act, conniving together (v. 2}. The sin of it was they did this (deceit) in the Name of Christ. The intense love, sacrifice, and fellowship was the context in which their deceit was performed. Ananias appears to be a second Barnabas! Commentators instinctively liken it to the story of Israel and Achan (Joshua 7: 1ff.) and there are parallels – both peoples being in danger and both being betrayed by persons. The verb ‘kept back’ is the same as the LXX of Joshua 7:1 – ‘committed a trespass’, ie. by retaining for private use property that had been devoted to God. Controversy has raged over the disciplinary treatment meted out but the passage is only understood in the light of God’s holiness and the purpose of His church. In certain cultural situations people die of shock when they have infringed taboos. Sapphira would have had the added shock of her husband’s death. At such moments the Holy Spirit’s convicting power can be intense and bring deep shock – witness times of revival. Undoubtedly the ‘leaven of the Pharisees’ against which Christ had warned, was now working – with terrible danger to the church.

*Vs. 3–4* show the *freedom* the pair had to make any decision – they did not have *to* sell their goods – and they had used this *to* plan *deceit*. The Holy Spirit’s presence in the situation is as One among His people and this couple seek to deceive Him: The same Spirit had saved this community and accredited it.

*V. 5* The shock Ananias received – condemnation instead of (expected) commendation – is a divine visitation. The *moral responsibility* in allowing Satan’s incursion into the heart (the centre of intelligence, will, emotion) is an awful warning to others. The ones hearing it are afraid – ‘Awe for faith, fright for

the flesh’ ( Lenski, ad. loc. )

*V. 7* Perhaps Sapphira came for (prepared) congratulations. *V. 9* makes it clear that this action is a tempting of the Lord (cf. Exodus 17: 2, Deut. 6: 16, cf. Matt. 4: 7). No time is given for repentance. Sapphira has firmly adhered to her deceit. The dreadful judgement is a solemn warning to any who hold light or tolerant views Of sin. Any sympathy for –the couple, and secret judgement of Peter (and thus God), would be dangerous.

**5:11** The great fear upon all is related to these signs and wonders (cf. Mark 16:17f., John 14:12) and men are expected–to learn. We must remember that this is ,a clear destroying of a vicious and dangerous work of Satan himself.

### The Second Persecution

This judgement is one of many signs and wonders.

**5:12** shows there is a continuity of these. The phrase ‘through the hands’ (cf. Heb. 6: 2) indicates the actual manual acts. *Vs. 12b–13* make it clear that the believers constituted one separated, united body to Which others were afraid to join themselves, possibly because of the drastic discipline or the supernatural acts, but most probably because it was a body under suspicion and subject to persecution.

**5:13–21** *V. 13* shows the high honour in which the *people* them. *V. 14* shows others joined them (‘more than ever’) indeed multitudes – yet they were for all that a separated body (cf. 2: 47). *V. 15* makes it clear that the action of the apostles in their healing and miracles was a great aid to faith. The’ *‘shadow!* of *v. 15* must not be thought superstitious as they would–quickly have rejected it had it not healed them (see ‘shadow’ in Luke 1:35, 9:34’. cf. Acts

19:12. Matt. 9:20, Mark 6: 56). *V. 16* has an interesting point, ‘afflicted’, ‘vexed’, which shows the domination over humanity of unclean forces. *All healed* is greatly significant.

*V. 17* ‘jealousy’ (cf. Acts 13:45 and ‘envy’ – Matt. 27: 18) is of power and success, particularly as they had been warned not to speak in this Name (4: 18). These nominated are the Sadducean leaders of the Sanhedrin (Senate). *V. 20* ‘the words of this Life’, ie. ‘this Way’ – salvation. *V. 21* shows they obeyed as soon as possible.

5:26–28 In v. 26 the officers (temple police) get the apostles to come without violence, ie. voluntarily. The speech of the high priest (v. 28) assiduously avoids reference to their supernatural escape. It refers to ‘this man’s blood’ – guilt of death. Pilate refused such (Matt. 27:24–25) and the Jews called it upon themselves – thinking they were doing right. Undoubtedly the apostles are *not* calling for *vengeance*, although they are repeatedly indicting the Sanhedrin, see 2:23, 36, 3:14–15, 4:10, etc. Caiaphas, sternly judging, is now defending himself.

5:29–31 Constitute an immediate bold reply by the group (through Peter) that (i) obedience is firstly to God (cf. 4: 18–20) and so they are not breaking God’s law; (ii) they repeat the indictment of the Sanhedrin’s guilt; (iii) they use (as against the accursed ‘tree’, cf. Deut. 21: 23) ‘raised’, ie. as Prophet and King of Israel (Messiah, see 3: 26) by the ‘God of our fathers’ – historical continuity and fulfilment. Exaltation (v. 31) is *from* the dead, *to* the (Messiah’s) throne. This Prince (3:15 also) and Saviour now gives (for it was *for this purpose* he was exalted) the *gifts* of repentance and the Holy Spirit to *Israel*.

5:32–33 *V. 32* shows they are *witnesses* to the divine (unbelievable) events of grace and also the

Holy Spirit is witness – in and through them. This was tantamount to saying, ‘We are the ones who have seen God’s action, know it, and tell you – the leaders of the Jews – that Israel needed, needs, and now has the gift of *repentance* proffered and the (incredible) gift of the Holy Spirit. You understand then that our authority has (at least for all this) superseded yours. You may be the recipients of the grace we proclaim.’ That is why (v. 33) they are ‘enraged’ (RSV) and ‘cut to the heart’ and roused to murderous intent. The theological and psychological reasons are not difficult to assess – they are guilty of Messiah’s death; they are requested to be recipients of grace; they are not morally in authority.

### The Advice of Gamaliel

5: 34–39 This gentle Pharisee speaks placatingly to the Sadducees. It was said later that ‘since he died, there has been no more authority for the law, and purity and abstinence died out at the same time’. Pharisees were conservative – believing in the resurrection and the supernatural, and the Christians were somewhat to their way of thinking. This could (also) have been part of a power struggle with the Christians as (potential) allies. Gamaliel is wise in putting the apostles out while he speaks. His point is primarily the sovereignty of God which will look after the matter – either way. His historical reference cannot be located in the case of Theudas – although it could have been at the time of insurgence in BC 4. In the case of Judas, it can be located. The advice (*vs. 38–39*) is profound because the rise of the group has been attended with evidence of God’s support, and the Sanhedrin would be aware of the apostles innate authority.

5:40–42 His advice is taken, the Sadducean group being (virtually) defeated. There is a fallacy in Gamaliel’s argument, namely that they have *already decided the movement is wrong* by the slaying

of Jesus. The Sadducees are logical in their opposition, the Pharisees in ‘masterly indecision’.

V. 40 describes the beating (‘flaying’) of 39 blows across the back, with rods, that each received. This was for speaking in the Name, and a warning not to do so. Hence the disciples’ joy that they had been deemed worthy to suffer for the Name (v. 4/).

v. 42 makes it clear that they were totally undeterred and publicly (in the temple) as well as ‘from house to house’ they preached Jesus as Messiah.

## CHAPTER SIX

Undoubtedly the Hellenistic Jews are consciously introduced here. Acts is greatly concerned with the subject and *fact* of ‘the fellowship’. How Jews of different countries and dialects become of ‘one heart and one soul’ (4:32), and *remain* so, is significant news.

### ANOTHER CRISIS IN (THE) FELLOWSHIP

6:1–7 It is interesting to note the word ‘disciples’ used here. It appears nowhere in the Epistles, where they are ‘brethren’ or ‘saints’. The vast number (Lenski, p.239 – estimates it between 20,000 and 25,000) must have presented organisational difficulties and many widows must have been amongst them. The voluntary ‘ministration’ (‘service’) must have involved the apostles to some degree. Hellenists were Jews who had grown up outside Palestine though many were settled there – and who spoke Greek rather than Aramaic, and had certain ‘foreign’ elements. Nevertheless they were orthodox as Jews and yet the cultural differences are being felt to some degree at this point. The real problem is that of *unity* as much as of fairness. This section should not be seen as the election of deacons (they are not so

called), but as the power of Spirit-filled men (these only will suffice for the task) to maintain the precious and essential unity of the Spirit. It had been attacked in one way in Acts 5: 1f.; here now is another ‘attack’. The men selected are three Hellenists, three Hebrews and one proselyte (by their names – *Expositor’s* Greek N. T., ad.loc. Bruce, ad.loc., suggests all may have been Hellenists), and are set aside for the task by the laying on of hands. The fruit of their ministry is not only peace amongst the widows but an increased ministry of the word, so much so that a great *crowd* of priests were becoming (Gk. imperfect tense) obedient to the faith, ie. believing the gospel. An interesting point is the *choice* of men filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. It would seem that there were some who were not.

### The Ministry, Trial and Defence of Stephen

6:8 Whilst ‘the problem of the widows’ ‘ministration is an entity in itself, it serves to introduce Stephen. Gifted enough to assist in this ministry, Stephen is not limited to it. Nominated as a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit (v. 5), he is also ‘full of grace and power’. He, though not an apostle, does ‘great wonders and signs among the people’ (v. 8). He had a charismatic ministry in addition to his own moral and spiritual qualities. Some would see this as following the imposition of the apostolic hands (cf. I Tim. 4:14, II Tim. 1:6), as otherwise that custom was simply one of setting them aside for the task. In any case Stephen’s ministry made him the target of attention, and then debate. Stephen being a man of faith and gifts would also be a man of wisdom (vs. 3, 10, cf. Isa. 11: 2), and have a *reason* for the exercise of gifts as of proclamation.

6:9 Could indicate *one* synagogue, ie. the Libertines or previously ‘freedmen’, ie. from former slavery in other countries. The synagogue may not have been a building so much as a company

and could have been composed of those from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia. Saul of Tarsus in Cilicia could have been one who would attend these debates. Would he then have been one who could not withstand Stephen's wisdom? In any case Stephen's ministry foreshadowed Paul's, who understood clearly what he was saying though he violently disagreed.

6:10 Shows the old pattern of stirring up malicious and unfounded gossip is adhered to, and Stephen is made to front the Sanhedrin in the face of false accusation. Without doubt, as Stephen's address proves, he must have said things which implied the passing of an old epoch and the coming of a new, in Messiah (see R.A. Cole, *The New Temple*). Any statement about the Law or the Temple was emotive and incendiary. For such supposed words Jesus was also indicted (Mark 14:58, cf. Matt. 26:61; see also John 2:19–21, Ephes. 1:22f., I Peter 2:5).

6:15 Shows that Stephen was not abashed or afraid but was tasting an experience of transcendent glory as had Moses on the Mount. Doubtless the Spirit was equipping him for a true *apologia*.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Stephen's Speech

7:1–53 The speech is long and possibly only a digest of a longer one. However, it is remarkable that he was allowed to make so long a defence, which is perhaps accounted for by his 'charismatic' elements. The speech may be summarised as to its *contents, structure* and *purpose*, as follows:

God is the God of glory – long before anything

we know as our 'patterns' today. He appeared as such to Abraham (Stephen is on good historical ground throughout). From that point Abraham and his descendants are pilgrims and wanderers – there is no static situation. Abraham does not settle, nor Isaac, nor Jacob. His children are pestered by circumstances until they find some relief in Egypt. There is no static situation there, for it turns to slavery and the need for liberation, for which Moses is prepared. Even when they are finally liberated and on the move – 'the (ideal) church in the wilderness', ie. a travelling (not static) company – they are not godly. The settling in Israel takes many years before David conceives the idea of a temple, which is not carried out until Solomon, who confesses that such cannot contain God (II Chron. 6: 18), and Isaiah 66:1–2 shows that it is foolish to think so. Anyway, from the beginning these children of Israel have been rebellious – they set upon Joseph (v. upon Moses (*vs. 27–29, 39ff.*)), the prophets (v. and in fact far from their (the Jews') present pretensions to historical and contemporary godliness they have always been rebellious, not only against God's messengers (Joseph, Moses and now Jesus the Messiah, v. 52), but against His law also (given by angelic mediation, v. 53), because their ritual in the wilderness was not directed to God but to Moloch *vs. 40–43*, cf. Amos 5:25–27. In fact they have always resisted – and so now – resist the Holy Spirit (v. 51). That is, their rejection of Messiah is consistent with their historic pattern of resistance against the things of God. So evil are they that they have killed the prophets who spoke of Messiah, and very Messiah himself! How then do they lay claim to godliness and denounce him Stephen – who is by no means in that pattern?

### Stephen's Martyrdom

7:54–60 The impact of this well-formulated but aggressive defence (of the gospel) is so powerful

that rationality leaves them as they are enraged by his inferences. The grinding of the teeth is not a ritual but an evidence of their emotional hatred. The ‘but’ of v. 55 shows his calmness and control in contrast to them. In their hate they cannot see what he sees through the Spirit (cf. II Cor. 5:16, I Cor. 12:3, etc.) into heaven and Jesus standing at the place of authority. This is not only a statement (v. 56) of Jesus’ Messiahship but a claim to witness immediately to it. Technically they may now indict Stephen for blasphemy. ‘Son of man’ (v. 56) is linked with Daniel 7:13–14 and the claim of Christ which led to his crucifixion (see Matt. 26:63–65). Saul watched the grisly martyrdom although he did not assist in the stoning (see 8:1, 22:20). The beauty of Stephen’s death (see Phil. 3: 10) is that of the death of his Master. All through these early chapters we have to recognise the insecurity (in conscience and thought) of those that murdered Jesus. Every momentum of the death, and of his triumph in resurrection, and as Messiah, was a goad to madden the hearers.

*Note:* Details related to the history and action described in the speech should be seen in a good commentary.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

The account of Stephen is not the chronicling of one among many incidents. Stephen’s debates and death have clarified the issue. Gamaliel’s advice cannot be tolerated any longer. The Christian sect has denounced not only the Sanhedrin but even the race assumed to be the holy people of God. Moreover they insist Messiah has come and (so) inevitably the old order is outmoded. The persecution of the Church was not arbitrary but logical with the

rejection and killing of Jesus. Chapter 8 marks a new era of trouble which is as wide as Judea and continues until 9:31. The breach is made – at least to some degree – and the Sanhedrin is actively hostile to the Church.

## THE PERSECUTION

8:1–3 Saul is mentioned here, both to introduce him to the account and also to show the venom of the persecution (of. 26:9–12). The persecution is called ‘great’ (v. 1) and all but decimated the Jerusalem church. The lamentation for executed persons was forbidden, but ‘devout men’ did not seem to care, so great was their grief for this beloved and gifted brother.

### The Ministry of Philip

**8:4–13** It seems, since the apostles were left, that the brunt of the persecution was on the Hellenists. Doubtless Philip narrated this section to Luke when later he was in Philip’s home (see 21:8). Philip is fresh, vital and sensitive to the Spirit. It is significant that Philip was like Stephen – not an apostle and one of the seven ministrants to the widows. The ‘word’ proclaimed in v. 4 must equal the proclamation of the Messiah (Christ) of v. 5 and ‘the good news about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ’, of v. 12. The Samaritans were looked upon as a mongrel race and the mutual enmity of them and the Jews was proverbial (cf. John 4: 9). Christ had spoken of a ready harvest (John 4:35f.) and now the harvest is reaped. The context of preaching is that of incredible superstition and extended demon–possession (v. 7– ‘many who were possessed’), and this was possibly linked with Simon Magus’s own working in the occult. We are not told whether Philip was in a team or not, but if not it seems the only recorded occasions in Acts (Paul at Athens was waiting for his companions).

Philip's demonstration of Kingdom action which was a visible and powerful preaching showed forth its efficacy over and beyond the magic of Simon, who was impressed and capitulated to Philip's side. The action of liberation (cf. 10:38) from sickness and demons not only confirmed the word of the Kingdom but was also the word itself – in action. Simon the Samaritan magician had himself been impressive – see vs. 9–11 – and even called the great mediator between God and men (v./0}. Philip, however, revealed a greater – Jesus Christ – whose 'Name' was demonstrably powerful. The baptism of Simon does not prevent him being denounced by Peter (vs. 20–23)

8: 14–17 These verses occasion great debate because of doctrines purporting to find support in them. It should be noticed that at Pentecost the act of the descent of the Spirit was 'for all flesh'. Yet Samaria was scarcely envisaged by the apostles. It is clear the Spirit has not *fallen* on the Samaritans (in contrast to 10:44, 11:15, cf. 19:6), which, according to v. 17, is synonymous with *receive*. They had not received. It is clear that Peter and John came that they might receive the Spirit: that is the *only* stated reason. Why they needed to receive the Spirit, and why the apostles should be instruments for reception and not simply Philip (cf. 6:5–6), is debated. What 'right' had the Samaritans to the Spirit, and how could the original (Jerusalem) body of believers be linked and receive these new believers? Why indeed had the church at Jerusalem sent the apostles down? Answers could be many, eg. 'The Samaritans needed to be welcomed into the Church by those from Jerusalem.' 'The apostles needed to see the gift of the Spirit was for the Samaritans also.' 'The Samaritans needed to be reassured and know that the breach was healed between (Christian) Jew and (Christian) Samaritan.' What is clear is that the Samaritans had a virtual 'Samaritan Pentecost', and did receive the Spirit through the

instrumentality of the apostles. Seen in relation to the 'Gentile Pentecost' of Acts 10, it is understandable. Most commentators agree that something *visible* happened which left no doubt as to the acceptance by God of the Samaritans – probably praise, tongues, prophesyings.

### THE CASE OF SIMON THE SORCERER

8:18–24 Simon's sight of the supernatural phenomena may have tempted him to add this new (magical?) art to his own so that he did not recognise the quality of *moral* holiness – of the Kingdom. Baptism would not be without repentance (cf. 2:38, 3: 19, etc.). The offer of money (all he knew) was shocking. Without it a 'layman' such as Ananias could assist one in receiving the gift of the Spirit (see 9: 12, 17). The buying of the Holy Spirit is a thought too shocking to be voiced. The Holy Spirit is Himself a *Gift* (see 2: 38, 5: 32, etc. ), and given by the grace of God and the hands of Christ. *V.* 22 shows the wickedness (baseness) of Simon, calling for repentance, and 'if possible' shows that he may not presume even in repentance, seeing his case is so bad. The 'intent of the heart' shows the inner *condition*. *V.* 23 'gall of bitterness' does not so much mean Simon is bitter in attitude but is rooted in the bitterness that is of a depraved mind and which cannot bring forth anything sweet or wholesome – see *Deuteronomy 29: 1'8*, Hebrews 12: 15, of. Isaiah 58:6. Simon's heart is crooked (v. 21) and he needs to cry in fear as he does (v. 24).

8:25 *Evangelism in Samaria*. John 4:35 has its fulfilment in the preaching of the word by the apostles throughout Samaria – 'many villages' – so that, in effect, Samaria is evangelised, of. 9: 31.

### FURTHER STRATEGIC EVANGELISM

8:26–40 Whether Philip has been with the apostles until they propose to return to Jerusalem is not

quite clear. The fact is that Philip – this Spirit-filled servant – is again called upon for a work of God. Some have noted the seeming oneness of the angel of the Lord (v. 26) and the Holy Spirit (v. 29), cf. Acts 10:3, 19–20. Some would see only a vivid subjective guiding of the evangelist, although they would call it real. There is no need, however, to doubt it was an angel. The eunuch was the treasurer of the Queen of Candace, the Queen Mother, because the King (her son) was a sacred god not to be worried with the secular. The eunuch was a proselyte (v.27), but under the old system could not be a member of the congregation (see Deut. 23: 1, cf. Isa. 56: 3ff), yet was about to become a member of the new (true) congregation. Reading was generally aloud, particularly with ancient manuscript, but understanding needed assistance (vs. 30–31). The Spirit had led Philip to a great man in need. The passage of Isaiah 53:7b–8a, needed interpretation and this is why the Holy Spirit has sent one to an enquirer. Isaiah 53 itself is almost all of it, in one way or another, quoted in the N .T., and figured largely in apostolic thinking. No record exists to show that the suffering servant of Isaiah had been linked with the victorious Messiah, but Jesus had communicated this. So Philip could easily proclaim the good news of Jesus from–this point, undoubtedly using the remainder of the chapter. The eunuch convinced, he sought baptism. It is thought that v. 37 was added in the early second century to assure the record was straight, ie. that Philip had catechised him before baptism. Probably he had done this anyway. V. 39 speaks of the eunuch rejoicing and this is enough to show he had both salvation and the Spirit. The Western text says the angel of the Lord caught up Philip and the Spirit of the Lord fell on the eunuch. Virtually the gospel has been preached to a Gentile. Philip goes on to preach at Azotus, the old Philistine city of Ashdod, some 20 miles north of Gaza. Preaching in all cities (perhaps even Lydda and Joppa, shortly afterwards visited by Peter), he reached Caesarea. Twenty years later he

is seen there with four prophetess daughters – see Acts 21: 8f. He has remained an evangelist and a remarkable man.

## CHAPTER NINE

We must remember that Luke is describing the action of Messiah in history and whilst he retains this historical continuity the true perspective is seen. Paul's conversion, interesting as it is in its various aspects, is still the action of Messiah and has the purpose of using Paul for his ends. The thread of course is taken up from 8: 1–3.

### THE CONVERSION OF SAUL:

#### Saul's Experience on the Road to Damascus

9:1–16 .*V.I* shows the intensity of Saul's hatred, and involvement in persecuting the Christians. (For note on Paul, see dictionaries and Tyndale commentary, pp.83–87.) We have seen that Stephen's life and teaching must have made a strong impact on this Saul of Tarsus (see 7: 58, 22: 20). The savage intensity of Saul is that of an uneasy man rather than of one quietly convinced of his position. In this he is no true pupil of Gamaliel (cf. 22: 3). He must have been deeply impressed by the sincerity and devotion of the Christians. The fact of Jesus of Nazareth doing the things so clearly reported, as also his followers, could not have gone unnoticed. Psychologically (and theologically) everything was mounting up hence the proverb (9: 5, 26: 14) about him stupidly kicking against the goad. All Saul needed was an objective proof of Christ's resurrection (I Cor. 9: 1, 15: 8), which was here given to him. He is seeking for those of the Way (see 5:20, 'this Life', and 19:9, 23, 22:4, 24:14, 22) and is suddenly met by their Lord. It is debatable whether the incident can rightly

be called ‘a vision’ (though see Acts 26: 19) as we understand a vision, ie. something seen in a trance. The light and the *noise* of the voice are seen and heard by all, Saul only hearing the *words* (22:9, 9:7). Acts 22:6 and 26:13 show that the time was midday, and that the light of the appearance was brighter than the sun ( cf. Rev. 1: 16).

V. 4 shows that Saul first falls to the earth (from an animal) in reverent prostration (probably) and *then* learns that in persecuting the believers he has been persecuting Jesus. This outlines the union Christ has with all believers. 22:10 agrees that Saul had first to go into the city and probably 26: 16f. was related to the message through Ananias in Damascus, though not necessarily so. Damascus was a city with many Jews being so close to Palestine. Jung ( see C.S.C. Williams p. 123) has an explanation for Saul’s conversion on the psychological level. He says Saul’s blindness was psychogenetic, but this is rather refuted by the physical scales of v. 18.

V. 8 indicates the brilliance of the light which blinded him. That he was *led* by the hand may mean he had not been travelling on a beast, or was close to the city. His fasting may have simply been from the shock he had.

V. 10 should be compared with 22: 12, which shows Ananias to be a devout Jew. The significance of v. 15 – that Saul should go to the Gentiles – is seen by comparing 26: 17ff. with 22: 21f., for although the occasions are different the important principle is the same. Luke is introducing fully the universal nature of the gospel (cf. Gal. 2:2, 9).

V. 16 shows Paul’s ministry would involve suffering, for which see II Corinthians 4: 8ff., 11: 23ff., as also Acts. All true believers will suffer (II Tim. 2: 12), but Paul especially.

9:17 This verse raises the point of Paul’s claim to have received the gospel and apostolic commis–

sion directly (see eg. Gal. 1:1, 11f.). However, there is no basic contradiction since Ananias has been sent directly by Christ and is related to the baptism and the Spirit’s thrilling. Note 22: 14–16 makes it clear that Paul knows the gospel– hence Ananias’ question, ‘And now why do you wait?’ (22:16) for Paul is ready for baptism. Here in 9:17 regaining of sight and the infilling of the Spirit are prominent. Undoubtedly Saul in those three days had consciously admitted he was wrong. The many times he had heard the gospel assure us he knew its doctrinal content and the sight of Jesus so crystallised the truth that from now on it was ‘set’. Saul would have re–orientated his total

Old Testament and theological knowledge to truly see Jesus as the Christ – this is made clear by v. 20. Epistles such as Galatians, Romans and Ephesians make it clear that Paul had a high view of Messiah, even though some time may have been necessary for it to mature.

### **Saul’s Preaching in Damascus**

9: 19b–25 Galatians 1:15–24 should be read here. Piecing the two accounts we may see that Saul possibly preached Christ immediately, but fairly soon after his conversion went to Arabia – the Nabataean kingdom – whose north–western limit was close to Damascus. There are no grounds for the belief that he was there for three years, for three years covered his time both in Arabia and Damascus, before he went to Jerusalem. The preaching of Saul must have been powerful, and v. 25 shows he had disciples. II Corinthians 11: 32f. also gives us more light for Aretas was king of the Nabataeans and had the governor of Damascus under him.

### **Saul at Jerusalem**

9:26–30 It would be thought that the Christians at Jerusalem would know of Saul’s change of heart. Barnabas seems to have known and be–

lieved it best. Perhaps they thought of Saul as an ‘aggent provocateur’, and were suspicious. Barnabas, however, had the whole story. *Vs. 28–30* show that Saul went to the Hellenists, the very group with whom Stephen had disputed. Years had passed and perhaps the personnel to some degree had changed. Lenski thinks Saul spoke only to a Hellenist here and there (*op.cit.* pp. 376–77), but it seemed the group was seeking to kill him. Acts 22:17–21 shows Paul’s astonishment that his testimony should not be accepted, as also that the Lord commanded him to depart. At the same time (9: 30) the brethren lovingly sent him off to Tarsus. See also Galatians 1:21.

**9:31** It could be thought (humorously) that the church had peace now that Saul had departed, and whilst this is partly true, it simply means that the period of persecution for the church ceased at this time. The church (singular) would be composed of churches undoubtedly, but it is interesting that it exists and flourishes in Judea, Galilee and Samaria. It was growing in both power and numbers by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

### Peter at Lydda and Joppa

**9:32–43** Luke now returns to Peter because of the monumental fact of the conversion of the Gentiles of Chapter 10. The area is that of former Philistia. Peter, whilst seemingly alone, is ministering to the church and, we suppose (v. 35), through the church. The visible demonstration of Christ’s power (v. 34, ‘and *immediately* he arose’) causes the inhabitants (Jewish only, it seems) of this semi-Gentile area to turn to Christ, as, through Tabitha’s healing, those of Joppa. Note that Peter was called (by a delegation of two men) to come to Joppa. The request to come without delay (v. 38) as burial was imminent, may seem curious. It is not that Peter has some power to raise any (every) dead person to life, but it seems clear that the women who loved Dorcas for her truly

good works had some sense of the will of the Lord and why not? Peter prays first and then discerns the will of the Lord. His word is ‘Tabitha qumi,’ as against the Lord’s ‘Talitha qumi’ (Mark 5: 41). The stir at this raising results in many believing in Messiah.

*V. 43* shows that one so ceremonially impure as a tanner is nevertheless accepted as host. Peter, it appears, is being groomed for the events of Chapter 10.

## CHAPTER TEN

There is no doubt that the conversion of Saul to be the apostle to the Gentiles is no more startling than that Gentiles should be admitted to the church or the people of God. Luke patiently sets the chronological and spiritual order of events in this chapter to explain the outreach of the witness to Christ to ‘the uttermost parts’. It is not strictly correct to call this a ‘Mission to the Gentiles’, for Peter was reluctant, even with divine guidance, to go. Only the descent of the Spirit seemed to ultimately convince him. It was an astonishing event in the eyes of the church, as Chapter 11: 1f. shows. It was later adduced as evidence in 15:7–9 and reinforced that many (Gentiles) would sit down in the Kingdom whilst many (blood-born) Jews would not. See Matthew 8:11, cf. Luke 7:2ff.

### CORNELIUS AND THE VISION

**10:1–8** A centurion was a non-commissioned officer in charge of 100 men. There were six centurions in a cohort. Caesarea was a comparatively new city.

*V. 2* Cornelius was a ‘God-fearer’, ie. one who, although not circumcised as a proselyte, lived almost as a Jew in regard to food and times of prayer.

V. 3 would indicate that he was praying at the hour of prayer (see v. 30) when the angel appeared. The message of the visitation is that Cornelius' good deeds have been accepted by God. Some have seen this as contrary to the teaching of justification and man's inability to do good. The acceptance of his works, however, does not imply justification as such, for it is Cornelius later who with others believes and receives remission of sins and the Holy Spirit. What we do see clearly is that Cornelius' intention or *disposition* is right.

### Peter and the Vision

**10:9–16** The significance of this is grasped by Peter when in v. 28 he says, 'I should not call any *man* common or unclean', and in 15:9, 'cleansed their [the Gentiles'] hearts by *faith*'. Noon (sixth hour) was not technically a time of prayer, but the pious would use it as such (Daniel 6: 10). The vision must have pained him because of the unclean things (see Lev. 11) which were there – shockingly enough with the clean, and *all* in the same sheet. Peter would have no way of knowing what it meant and we need not debate as to whether the Levitical food laws were rescinded or not.

**10:17–23** The Spirit (note Peter knew the voice and said 'Lord:' – v. 14) now sends Peter. We do not see the full import unless we know it was abhorrent for a Jew (clean) to have social intercourse with a Gentile (unclean). His acceptance of them and his going with them means he understands at least in part. See 11: 12: 'The Spirit made me go, nothing doubting' (RSV, 'making no distinction').

### Caesarea and the Gentile 'Pentecost'

Peter is 'set' for the event. So is the centurion, his household and friends. We should see that they are prepared, particularly by the supernatural nature

of the event.

**10:25–26** show Peter's humility and that of the centurion who honours him beyond what a man should receive (of. Rev. 19: 10, 22: 8).

**10:27–29** Peter states nothing less than a miracle in new understanding. Up to this point, perhaps some eight years after Pentecost, it has not clearly come that all men may now be regarded as clean. Galatians 2: 11f. shows how difficult it was, even for Peter, to adhere to this understanding, but here it is new and shining. Those listening would well understand the Jewish prohibition to social intercourse. *V.* 29: 'I came without objection'. The climate is high in emancipation. Peter's question of v. 29 has already had its answer (vs. 22–23), but both actions of God must be known to all.

**10:30–33** The manner of the coming to the angel ('man', v. 30) has had this useful conclusion, 'Now therefore we are all present in the sight of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.' Truly the stage is set for ideal receptivity!

**10:34–43** Peter's speech is interesting in that it is the first given to a purely Gentile congregation. That Peter intended to say much more is clear from v. 44 and 11: 15. We cannot then conclude that he would not have added more significant points. We have to realise that *they believed without argument* (see v. 44). Yet he has included many things, eg. moral disposition can be right outside Israel, the gospel of peace, Jesus is Lord, Jesus was Messiah, defeater of the Devil, the Cross was not defeat, Jesus rose bodily (not in terms of Greek immortality) and is to be the judge of the living and dead. Belief in him brings forgiveness. Perhaps v. 38 is the most condensed account of the ministry of Jesus anywhere.

*Note:* The people (v. 42) is almost certainly simply

the Jews, cf. 26: 17, ‘people’, ‘Jews’.

### The Gentile ‘Pentecost’

**10:44–48** The falling of the Spirit must have been evident through the tongues and praising of God, as in the rapture of these (now) full believers. If Pentecost were an impressive miracle; this no less (cf. Ephes. 2: 11–21, cf. v. 18). Doubtless such an impression was needed as Chapter 11:1–18 proves, otherwise the Gentiles notwithstanding actual belief, would not have been accepted (.see Acts 15: 7–10). It must also be remembered that it is Messiah who pours out the gift, of. Psalm 2:8, Acts 1:8b. We need not be occupied with the nature of the tongues. Some see it as ecstatic glossolalia (as in I Cor. 12, 14) and some as at Pentecost (known tongues) because of ‘as on us’ (cf. 11: 15), as though this included ‘in like manner’. If the divine initiative had not been taken Peter may not have given them water baptism. Acts 15:7–9 makes it clear that he sees them as having their hearts cleansed by faith, the sign and seal of this being the outpouring of the Spirit. Peter himself does not baptise (cf. I Cor. 1: 14f.), but is happy to remain with them and, obviously, teach.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Up to this point the spread of the gospel has been described in Samaria, to the Ethiopian eunuch, to the partly Gentile towns of Joppa and Lydda, and then Caesarea. Now the conversion of the Gentiles is challenged. That challenge having been met, Luke describes the miracle of the church at Syrian Antioch. From this Antioch the gospel will fan out to Asia Minor (Gentiles) and Europe itself – in the economy of the Holy Spirit.

### THE GENTILE INCLUSION CONTESTED

11:1–18 Not all the Judean Christians (Jewish) had had Peter’s experience, which he in any case had found bewildering. It must be remembered that the (Jewish) church in Judea and particularly at Jerusalem could at least find acceptance whilst it did not infringe the cultus. Otherwise persecution could result (see Gal. 5: 11, 6:12) and would result. Peter had some brethren from Joppa (10: 23), and six of these (11:12) were still with him, so that probably only some weeks had elapsed since the event at Caesarea. At Jerusalem (v. 2) is a circumcision party which is only part of the church. These criticise him. Peter’s explanation is clear enough, ending in the commission of v. 12 and the assurance in v. 14 of the saving message. The key point is ‘the Holy Spirit fell on them just as [also] on us at the beginning’ (v. 15). John’s promise is recalled and the ‘same [equal] gift’ pointed to ‘(v. 17), consequent upon belief (as with them); so that is clear. The objectors are silenced, indeed are evoked to praise God, and their answer makes a theological point clear – repentance, faith, forgiveness and the Spirit are all (as it were) tied up in the one bundle. The fact of life for the Gentiles is astonishing.

**11:19–26** A number of interesting points arise with this account of the founding of a church at Syrian Antioch. Whilst Luke takes up the threads of 8:4 again, yet we cannot be sure of the chronology. If many thousands were dispersed from Jerusalem then evangelism apart from the apostles would surely take place. They had scattered over great distances (v. 19), preaching only to Jews, and the contrast intended in v. 20 is that they spoke to *Greeks* also, ie. not Hellenists but pagan Greeks. This was a revolutionary concept and the inner meaning of the gospel must have broken through, naturally, as by the Spirit. The use of the term ‘Lord Jesus’ carries its own teaching.

V. 21 shows they were not ‘free-lancing’ or experimenting, but that the power of Christ (‘Lord’s hand’) was operating. The fruit was ‘a great number’, so much so that the news reached Jerusalem. Barnabas is a Spirit-filled man (v. 24) and so able to discern the situation. His fellow Cypriots, too, have been preaching. In addition – by his encouragement – ‘a large company’ (‘considerable multitude’) is added to the faith. Barnabas must have discerned that Saul of Tarsus would be a man for such a situation and that it was strategic enough for him to take the journey to find him. It is clear the Jerusalem church, far from being suspicious, has a ‘missionary’ interest and outreach and has given him a commission of encouragement.

V. 26 shows that Barnabas and Paul taught the church and also outsiders. A year’s teaching must have accomplished much. That they were called Christians is probably only a testimony to the fact that they were always talking about Messiah – Christos and was not necessarily a disparaging term.

### The Ministry of Prophecy

11:27–30 There is nothing curious about prophecy. Christianity has been described as a prophetic movement. Its main function is exhortation and encouragement (I Cor. 14:1ff.), but here it is related to an historic forecast. The advent of prophets and teachers (see 13: If.) must have made Antioch a conspicuous (and favoured) church. It is the Spirit ministering through Agabus who seeks to assist the ‘mother’ church, although church-finance is not the question but ‘survival needs’ (cf. Matt. 25: 35–36). This matter of the needy church at Jerusalem and all Judea was yet to greatly occupy Paul. Since the church was large and all gave, it must have been of considerable help. It may be noted that ‘elders’ are mentioned for the Judean churches for the first time.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

In the whole account of Acts which is about to tell of the ministry among the Gentiles, it would seem that Luke is tidying off the section which will do justice to Peter and close the events of ‘Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria’. The happenings at Caesarea and Antioch would not endear the church to the Jews, especially the Sadducees and Pharisees, and the division caused by the admission of Gentiles was an occasion when the wily Herod could cause disruption. It is thought that the famine visit would be about AD 46 and the death of Herod in AD 44. This necessitates seeing Paul as arriving in Jerusalem after the events of Chapter 12. For ‘Herod’ see note in Bruce (op.cit. pp. 246– 247).

### PETER’S IMPRISONMENT AND ESCAPE

12 :1–4 show that Herod Agrippa I was setting himself to win the Jews. James the brother of John is first seized and this first martyrdom accords with Jesus’ prophecy that he would drink the cup of death – Mark 10: 38. The Jews were ‘pleased’ (v. 3) a pleasant if temporary relief from the guilt of the crucifixion and the rejection of a gospel so assiduously preached. John, his brother, was later to suffer. V. 4 shows there was great sympathy for Peter – hence the unusual guard precautions.

12:5–11 describe the ‘effectual fervent prayer’ of ‘righteous men’ and women. Had it not (providentially) been the days of the Passover, Peter would have been destroyed. It is to Peter’s credit that he slept calmly on the night preceding his execution (see John 21:18 and the suggestion that he knew his ‘time’ was not yet! ). The angers personal attention to the matter of his dress is touching. The story is only for the credulous who believe God intervenes miraculously, and to such the supernatural events

such as the gate opening of itself is no difficulty. Peter's assurance that he was free draws him to the conclusion that the Lord has intervened in an act on his behalf.

**12:12–17** have a touch of humour. In v. 5 we see that 'earnest prayer' was being made for Peter, but when he is freed they cannot believe it! At Mark's mother's home, Rhoda answers the knock at the courtyard gate and is not believed. 'It is his angel' may mean 'His angel has come to tell us he is dead', or the angel is his 'spirit-counterpart' (Bruce, ad.loc.). We do not know.

V. 17 'Tell this to James' could mean another group also was in prayer.

**12:18–19** Herod may not have believed the report, or dared not. Thwarted of his desire to please the Jews, he leaves Judea abruptly. The guards are all deeply disturbed at the phenomenon of an unaccountable disappearance. The guards must suffer in the cause of 'saving face'.

**12:20–23** Josephus recounts the story in detail, including the bad omen of an evil which brought the onset of death (Bruce, p. 255). Dr. Rendle Short (*The Bible & Modern Medicine*, pp. 66–68) gives a medical explanation. In any case Herod was caught in 'hubris', an overweening pride whereby a man becomes inflated and impious and invites judgement. As a Jew, and coveting their acceptance of him as a Jew, he ought to have rebuked the flatterers. Lenski (pp. 487–88) gives a list of those who persecuted Jews and Christians and who suffered similar deaths.

**12:24–25** The contrast between the death of Herod who would have suppressed the faith is in the statement, 'But the word of God grew and multiplied'. The mention of 'the word' is in itself (in Acts a fascinating study. It is mentioned some 40 times.

How does 'the Word' grow? Answer: As it touches lives increasingly and brings forth a harvest.

V. 25 Some MSS have 'to Jerusalem', but this is scarcely acceptable. Note, too, that the famine visit is well after the event of Herod's death. Mark is here mentioned to explain his presence in Antioch (13:5).

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

This has been called the beginning of the second half of Acts. The church at Antioch repays special study. The church at Jerusalem was by no means inverted, as its deep interest in Antioch shows. The use of the gifts of non-Antiochenes is also significant. Lenski translated the *kata* of v. 1 as 'throughout', claiming the church was widespread in large Antioch. Possibly its meaning is 'among', ie. 'among many others there were prophets...' However the presence of so many gifts, following much teaching, is significant. The Holy Spirit has ripened the situation and from Antioch new beach-heads are to be established in Asia Minor and Europe. Some call this Paul's first missionary journey, but II Corinthians 11:24–28 makes it clear that Paul must have had other journeyings before this. Luke's main point of course is the new drive among the Gentiles – not, of course, excluding the Jews.

### THE CALL TO BARNABAS AND SAUL

**13:1** The prophets and teachers are not distinguished, and it could be possible that all were both. 'Niger' = 'black' and some assume he is an African. Lucius being of Cyrene may have been one of the earliest preachers (see 11:20). If Simeon was also of Cyrene then he may have been the one of Mark 15:21 who carried Jesus' cross.

**13:2** It is difficult to know whether the worship and fasting were *regular or* particular. Apparently the Holy Spirit spoke through prophecy by revelation to the church. Again we see the action of their going is not reasoned strategy but the personal direction of the Holy Spirit.

**13:3** The laying on of hands is accompanied by extended fasting and prayer (see 14: 23). The certainty of God's will was a factor for moral power and assurance (cf. Rom. 12:1–2, Ephes. 5:17, etc.).

### Cyprus

**13:4** Barnabas of course was a Cypriot. Luke always supplies travel and geographical details. No question of 'support' or 'finance' is raised. It would seem they supported themselves.

**13:5** Barnabas would know his fellow Jews. 'Word of God' is mentioned but not the details preached, nor the result. It seems Barnabas was the leader. John Mark is merely mentioned.

**13:6–12** covers the incident of Elymas the sorcerer. Details are that enlightened men (v. 7 – 'intelligent') were deeply superstitious and this magician obviously had a lucrative position. Sergius Paulus (whose name is known in history) had taken the initiative and *called* them. (Why?) For the problem of v. 8 'translation' (of Elymas the magician) – see Lenski, p. 501, and Bruce, p. 264. Had the proconsul been converted (we do not know whether he was see v. 12), then the gospel could have made rapid progress, but in any case this is another attempt by Satan to check the gospel. Saul, who is now called Paul (the Roman name he had had from birth), had a sudden effusion of the Spirit and the knowledge that he must oppose Satan. His discernment of the sorcerer would be clear at this heightened moment. He had no innate capacity to blind any one – it was God's

judgement. Doubtless Paul would have remembered the benefits, as the darkness of his own temporary blindness. The depth of belief of the proconsul cannot be assessed, but it must not be stated definitely that he was not converted. He was certainly convinced of the authenticity of the message – 'He was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.' It seems that Paul now takes the lead and that Barnabas is content that it be this way.

### Antioch of Pisidia

**13:13** In v. 13 we see the arrival in Asia Minor and the return of John Mark. Was it because Paul had taken the precedence of his uncle, Barnabas? Was it because he was afraid? See 15: 36ff. Mark had not been nominated by the Spirit. Should he have gone? Later Mark is found acceptable by Paul (see II Tim. 4: 11), as also he became the writer of a Gospel.

**13:15–41** It was customary after the Sabbath lections to have an exhortation or commentary. The lections were one each from the Pentateuch and the Prophets. Jesus had sat down to speak (see Luke 4); Paul stood up. Both Paul and Barnabas would have been recognised as competent men of God. Some have suggested that the lections for that day were Deuteronomy 1 (cf. Deut. 1:31 and Acts 13:18) and Isaiah 1 (Isa. 1:2, and Acts 13:17). However, Paul's message is just good *kerugma*, and after his many years of teaching he must have been expert in its details. Summarised, his message is:

'History is not a disconnected series of events, but leads to the *promise* and fact of a Saviour (vs. 17–23). Jesus' coming was historically linked with that of the well-known precursor, John the Baptist (vs. 24–25). Whilst Israel did not recognise him, yet God attested him by the resurrection (vs. 26–30). However, even the death was in line with prophecy and

God's sovereignty. His resurrection also is historically attested (vs. 29–31). However surprising this matter of resurrection, it is in accordance with Hebrew prophecy— see Psalm 2:7, Isa. 55:3, Psa. 16:10 (vs. 32–36). These Psalms seemingly related to David must perforce refer to Jesus (vs. 36–37). The *result* of this death and *resurrection* is forgiveness of sins and justification from the Mosaic law's condemnation (vs. 38–39). (Note v. 39 could be taken to mean justification for those things [only] from which the law of Moses did not justify. However this is absurd. ) This proclamation *must* be believed – that is a command of God. Belief is not optional but mandatory. Habakkuk 1:5 undoubtedly may be applied here as though Israel not having believed, the Chaldeans were Sent to swoop upon them, and rejection of Christ would invite a similar judgement.

Paul's message is valuable, as interesting. Its crux is forgiveness and justification, and – amazingly enough – tied to One Man. This man can forgive and justify because of his death and *resurrection*. That this was no unrelated, abstract theology was evident from the results. Not only did the promise come out of (historical) events but the promise of forgiveness and justification was based in these events. The human heart and conscience *needs* the relief of *forgiveness* and *justification*. Just as God had delivered from Egypt (v. 17), so now He delivers.

*Additional Points in Vs. 16–41:*

V. 19 '450 years' (cf. Acts 7:6, Gen. 15:13) indicate 400 years. These 450 probably include the 40 years in the wilderness and some 10 years in conquering the land ( see Joshua 14: lf. ).

Vs. 20–23 The growth to monarchy and then the promise to *David* (cf. I Sam. 13:13f., 15:23, 26, 28, cf. Psa. 89:19ff., II Sam. 7:13–14 and Psa. 2:7) directly relate to this promise.

V. 29 'Fulfilled all that was written of him'. The

shame of the 'tree' – here deliberately mentioned – is cleared by the fact that these things had been prophesied as inevitable and necessary. Possibly Paul even referred to the OT passages. However, the shame of the blood is not side-stepped.

13:42–47 indicate the *results* of the preaching (see Gal. 3: 1). The *many* Jews and devout converts (v. 43) who followed Paul and Barnabas were evidently gripped by this new message of free (non–Mosaic) forgiveness and justification. These were persuaded to continue. The result of the message was to bring almost the whole city to hear the Word. They could not have fitted in the synagogue. It seems the local Jews – perhaps the leaders – were distrustful of this 'mass–movement', and particularly of the universal offer (to the Gentiles! ) of salvation. It seems Paul and Barnabas may have preached but been contradicted and reviled. The break had to come, hence Luke's introduction to a pattern of ministry often to follow this occasion. The crucifixion must have been an offence, hence the Jews contradicted Paul – their way of salvation was different! The 'Word of God' (v. 46) is the word which gives eternal life and this was *first* for the Jews. However, they consciously reject it and in accordance with the Scripture (Isa. 49: 6) – as the Lord's emissaries – they now turn to the Gentiles. This Scripture is most conclusive.

13: 48 clearly has a predestinarian note ( 'inscribed', 'enrolled' ). Some debate the verb, suggesting it is middle and not passive voice, ie. 'as many as had set themselves unto eternal life', but it is best to see it simply as a passive so that there is no room for human synergism. It is doubtful whether the question of predestination as such is raised here. The emphasis is on the fact that *Gentiles* (as against Jewish exclusivism) are *also* ordained to eternal life. The Jews rejecting were lost. Jews and Gentiles accepting naturally constitute the elect of God.

**13:49–52** The rejection did not harness the power of the Word – eternal life was now flooding the people all the region. The devout women (v. 50) were influential socially and probably worked through their husbands. Luke is showing that nowhere are the Christians insurrectionists – to the contrary. The *manner* of persecution is now shown. Dust-shaking is not against the city – but rejecting Jews.

V. 52 The sense here is of continuing to be filled with joy (through ministry) and the Holy Spirit (cf. Ephes. 5: 18).

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### ICONIUM

**14:1–7** The ministry at Iconium was likewise fruitful ‘a great company believed’ (v. 1). Here not the women but the unbelieving Jews foment trouble (v. 2). V. 3 shows the apostles stayed a *considerable* time. No doubt the unbelieving Jews were working, but so was the Lord! Galatians 3:5 refers to this miraculous working – the giving of the Spirit and miracles. These should have convinced all, for this was partly the purpose of them (see Matt. 11: 25, John 14: 11, etc.). ‘The word of his grace’ – that word which brings undeserved forgiveness, justification, and removes guilt. It is an active word and active grace and was also shown in the miracles and signs.

Vs. 5–7 show they were not just anxious to stand on their rights but to preach the word – to redeem the *willing*

### Lystra and the Gospel

**14:8–10** present a remarkable fact. Paul saw the man had faith to be made well. How? Faith builds on *facts*. Did the cripple know? Faith also is

alerted and activated in a certain climate, ie. of the word and others’ belief. Cf. Romans 10: 17, and here verse 7. Had Paul recounted miracles? The command of the Word must also be taken into account.

**14:11–20** If we understand the action of these verses only as a hideous misunderstanding, we are not then aware of Paul’s horror of (the dynamic of) idolatry (see I Cot. 10: 19–22, Acts 17: 16ff., espec. vs. 129–30). Idol worship is not just quaintness of an ignorant culture but cultivation of the –demonic and immoral (see Rom. 1: 19f.) So see v. 15. In this case local legend had it that the two gods Hermes and Zeus had come down previously – but unnoticed (see Bruce, p. 291).

Vs. 15–17 are interesting because they show us something of Paul’s teaching to *pagans*. ‘Vain things’ (v. 15) shows that the idols are nothing, empty. Now they do not have to be occupied with them but the living God.’ He is not empty but *Creator*. In vs. 16–17, Paul is saying there are two times, one in which God temporarily allowed men to proceed as they pleased. Now (by inference) that time is finished. Even in that time He, as Creator, showed active goodness in creation.

V. 18 The emotional tide of an idolatrous sacrificial surge is not easily quelled.

V. 19 shows how quickly that tide was turned. The occasion was memorable (II Cor. 11: 25, of. Gal. 5: 17, ‘the marks’) and close to, if not totally, miraculous. V. 20 shows that Paul had disciples so that he must have had occasions to preach. He was sustained remarkably to re-enter the city and proceed to Derbe the next day. Timothy must have been a witness of these things (see 16: 1–2, I Cot. 4:17, II Tim. 1:2).

### The Strengthening of the Churches

14:21–28 Derbe’s ministry seems uneventful of persecution but greatly fruitful. The city had been

evangelised. The strengthening of disciples in the cities would be by teaching and exhortation. A rationale of suffering was given to prepare them. The eschatological nature (and reward) of the Kingdom is also stressed. The appointment of elders so soon after conversion seems to some premature. The answer is (i) the Holy Spirit enables and sustains, (ii) many of them would have been Jewish elders, knowledgeable in the Scriptures, (iii) Paul and Barnabas had taught dynamically in a 'high' climate.

Note v. 23, 'prayer and fasting', ie. sense of responsibility for this choice. The closing verses show they reported to the church which had sent them out, the most important point being that faith's door had been opened to the Gentiles. Faith's door is opposed of course to 'works' door'. This was the new freedom which was so thrilling. Doubtless (v. 28) this was shared much with the brethren at Antioch'.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The church was now firmly established in the Gentile world. We cannot speak of Gentile churches (cf. Gal. 3:26–29, Ephes. 2:14–18, etc.), but it is true that the church at Jerusalem was composed only of the circumcised. The church at Antioch had sent out Paul and Barnabas, had assisted the poor Christians at Jerusalem, and had experienced a rich ministry of the gifts. The original evangelists and other Jews had carried across with them the Judaic laws and patterns but had not enforced these upon the new converts – so far as we can see. Some of Paul's and Barnabas' teaching may have been on *moral* issues and almost certainly Paul would have rationalised the new liberty of non-Jewish believers (so see Galatians). It was this which was attacked by the men who came down from Judea (v. 1). In regard to the chronology of Paul's Jerusalem visits and this visit, it is

better to see the visit mentioned in Galatians 2:1 as previous to this conference because (a) if Paul had received the conference finding on that visit he would have referred to it as conclusive and (b) he seems in Galatians 2:2 to have gone up by *revelation*, and in Acts 15:2 by *appointment*, although these *may* not be opposed.

### The Controversy Raised

**15:1–3** The party cannot be said to be official, but the same disturbing doubts treated by Paul in Galatians needed drastic treatment. Without doubt the arguments of Paul and Barnabas were sufficient but the uneasiness roused would have to be cleared by a church decision. It was not just a matter of circumcision (see Gal. 5: 3–4), but of the gospel, and Of the church which would soon outnumber in its ranks Jews by Gentiles. The sending of a selected party was valuable.

V. 3 Those spoken to on the way seem to have supported the new Gentile inclusion.

### The Conference

**15:4–5** *Vs. 4–5* show that they were generally welcomed. However, the core of Judaisers was present – believers who were Pharisees. Their innate legalism has not been disturbed by their belief in Jesus as Messiah.

**15:6–12** The action here seems to have taken place in a special conference of the apostles and the elders. Was this conference in the *presence* of the whole church? They could not reject out of hand 'circumcision, and the law of Moses', for in essence they still followed these. Also the objectors probably had a reasonable fear that the Gentiles might import some of their own views and practices and so swamp the finer elements of the law. Peter's argument

(*vs.* 7–11) is conclusive – God, by the Spirit, has already included the Gentiles. God had sent Peter to preach and the Spirit’s coming upon the Gentiles has saved and cleansed them – and this many years before.’ Notice the word ‘yoke’ (v. 10). In this case it was wrongly heavy (cf. Matt. 23:4), but there is a light yoke – Christ’s (Matt. 11:29f.). It is the unnecessary heaviness against which they protest. Peter finishes (v. 11) gloriously on the subject of grace. Galatians 2: 11f. – if it had happened prior to this – would have had its effects upon Peter.’ The *hearts* of both Jew and Gentile were cleansed – so what avail circumcision, or what its necessity? *V.* 12 shows that the church was present and now listened to Paul and Barnabas recount the things God had done.

**15:13–21** James’ use of Scripture is a conflation of Amos 9:11–12, Jeremiah 12:15 and Isaiah 45:21 (see Bruce, p. 310, and Lenski pp. 609–611), and is sufficient to claim that the Gentiles are included in the rebuilding of the *tabernacle of David*. What this tabernacle is strongly debated, but the general idea is clear that through its rebuilding the Gentiles would be included. However (*vs.* 20–21) there have to be certain bases for fellowship and social intercourse and the minimal are nominated. ‘In any case,’ adds James to calm the qualms of the legalists, ‘Moses [ie. the law] is taught in almost every city – the Gentiles will be conversant with it.’ The pronouncement from the virtual leader of the church and one who is by no means a Hellenist is a tremendous triumph of, and witness to the power of grace.

**15:22–29** The tension is now broken. James is greatly respected and seems to have power to make decisions. However, there is a corporate witness to this decision and that is of the Holy Spirit (see v. 28. *Note:* there is no voting as such). The letter commends Paul and Barnabas, rebukes the Judaisers as acting on their own behalf, and lays down quite

reasonable conditions, not for salvation, but as the basis of fellowship. This would accord with Paul’s own view since he sought not to be a stumbling block to any and commended this view to all (cf. Rom. 14: 1ff., I Cor. 8: 1f.). The point in sending Judas and Silas (prophets – v. 32 – and so highly regarded) was to send some who could confirm the letter and expand on it without Paul and Barnabas appearing to give only their view. In any case the decision is a triumph of grace and the accepted emancipation of the Gentiles, to say nothing of the (Christian) Jews.

**15:30** *V.* 31–35 shows the relief and joy at the pronouncement. The Spirit also at this time ministers through Silas and Judas, for it seems their ministry was vigorous and forthright, so that the believers were strengthened. Also they spent considerable time in such ministry. This – to say the least – (v. 35) was carried on by Paul, Barnabas and many others.

### The Provocation

**15:36–41** I Corinthians 13:5 says clearly ‘Love is not provoked’. In v. 39 the word ‘contention’ can be translated ‘provocation’. The difference of course was over John Mark. Paul and Barnabas had had a difference previously – see Galatians 2:11–14. However, the weakness of great men reminds us that we are all such. It is not easy to take sides. Paul’s choice of Silas set this one on missionary ministry and the church supports their going. Barnabas and Mark now constitute another missionary party. The further teaching ministry in Syria and Cilicia has its message for us.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### REVISITING THE CHURCHES

16:1–5 it is not by a literary accident that the case

of Timothy comes up immediately after the conference that discussed the necessity or otherwise of circumcision. II Timothy 1:5f. shows the godly Jewish parentage on Timothy's mother's side. Paul's doctrine of expediency has no link with legalism whatever. In the struggle at Jerusalem of (both) Galatians 2: 1f. and Acts 15: 1f., Paul was contending for grace in salvation as against law. Here he is contending for 'being all things to all men' that he might win some (I Cor.9: 19–23). Timothy having part-Jewish parentage would be an offence to Jews, without circumcision, but Titus being forced to be circumcised would bewilder the Gentiles. This is Paul's doctrine of expediency, true Christian freedom. Paul, in this sense, was pragmatic. Note that Timothy was well spoken of.

Vs. 4–5 show that the Jerusalem decision was a matter for edification of the churches, as was the ministry of the three in evangelism, and maturing of believers. Note the increase in numbers of the church (evangelism) without, as it were, campaigns.

### The Call to Europe

**16:6–10** The Asia referred to in v. 6 would mean the Aegean coast near Ephesus rather than the whole Roman province of Asia. The timeless aorist participle has been correctly translated in the RSV, 'having been forbidden', meaning Paul was prevented from preaching before, not after, leaving the Phrygian and Galatian region. That is why they went through without preaching. This shows then that they were not just 'wandering' but that, as it were, they were watching the Spirit's radar. However, they sought to go into Bithynia but were led away by the Spirit of Jesus. 'Spirit of Jesus' is a rare phrase, and Bruce suggests it may have had to do with an appearance of Jesus in his exalted form (p. 327). The point is clear in vs. 6–7 that the Spirit is guiding them to Troas and so to Europe. The vision is one

means of guidance, not necessarily to be thought of apart from the Holy Spirit. The man of Macedonia was communicated 'vision-wise'. The 'we' passages (see Introduction to this Commentary, p. 4) commence here. An old suggestion was that Luke was the Macedonian. The evidence is fair enough that Luke was of the city of Philippi, though Rackham thinks not (p. 281), but says that the 'we' passages indicate long residence at Philippi (see period between 16:8 and 20: 5); hence his deep understanding of and affection –for Philippi. How and where did Luke join the party? We do not know but that 'God had called us to preach the gospel' is the inclusion of not just a new convert.

### Philippi and Lydia the First Convert

**16:11–15** Blaiklock (op.cit. p. 12, para 2) has a view of Paul as a great strategist seeing and planning to capture (evangelistically and morally) the Empire. However it seems better to see Paul as one simply following the leading of the Spirit, though understanding something of the ends Blaiklock indicates. Lydia (v. 14) was a wealthy woman and the purple dyes were the unique possession of Thyatira. She was at least a 'God-fearer', and note 'the Lord opened her heart' (cf. Rev. 3: 20). It seems there were only women at this prayer place, for a synagogue required at least ten *men*. It is interesting that the first convert in Europe (of this ministry) was a woman. Note, too, Philippians 4:2–3 which speaks of other women being in the situation from the beginning. Lydia is one who is 'faithful to the Lord'.

**16:16–18** 'Spirit of divination' is literally 'spirit of a python'. She was related to the worship of Apollo, the god particularly associated with the giving of oracles, and this maid was a 'pythoness' for Apollo was supposed to be embodied in a snake at Delphi. She was demon-possessed and her testimony had Satanic, and therefore unhelpful, sources. The exorcism of the demon affected 'big business'.

### The Persecution

**16:19–34** It is not fanciful to see a Satanic backlash here, explainable as it is on the basis of human greed. It is also good to remember Luke's thesis that the Christians never deliberately disturbed the peace. The testimony of an evil spirit would not enhance the ministry of the evangelists. At the same time we must see the event as under Messiah's hand, for it is in his Name that the demon is exorcised. We cannot say the Philippian church was ever the worse for the remarkable incidents which followed. Big business was hit, a community of Rome roused by demagoguery forgets its Roman justice enough to act as an hysterical rabble. Nor would the knowledge that these men were the purveyors of salvation necessarily endear them, since mobs hate such information the world over. The noise and the pace of action may have prevented Paul and Silas communicating the fact that they were Roman citizens, or the Spirit may have prevented them. Note the accusation 'being Jews'. The stocks (v. 24) could be most uncomfortable, but this does not prevent their praises – and these were a magnificent way of evangelism besides communicating the joy that they experienced in their suffering (Matt. 5: 11–12). The earthquake – a natural one – must be seen as the act of God. This, too, was an added witness, as also the general restraint upon the prisoners now technically free. The attempt of the gaoler to kill himself was that this was the only honourable death. We have to understand this 'climate' in order to comprehend his cry for salvation. We have to remember not only the demon's testimony but the preaching of Paul, plus the inner knowledge of man whether he admit it or not – that he is lost. Note his state (v. 29), 'trembling with fear'. The answer of v. 31 is clear – 'thou and thy house.' Yet the *Word* is preached immediately to the gaoler and his house, ie. family and servants. This does not do away with the necessity for *personal* belief, but again this high 'Climate' must be taken into account that this is no

general laconic promise. The kindness of the gaoler reveals the change of his heart. *V.* 34 shows that all had believed and now had joy.

### The Dignified Exit

**16:35–40** The 'let those men go' of v. 35 surely is the result of the earthquake, the strangeness of the night and (probably) the report of the prisoners' behaviour. It is scarcely believable that the leaders would not have been concerned by this and called for reports. The gentle reporting of the council by the gaoler does not swerve Paul from his intention to see a just rebuke administered, and perhaps as much for the sake of the new church (Luke, surely, now helping it) as for that of the gospel itself. The use of the word 'brethren' (plus the notes in the Epistle to the Philippians) confirms the fact of a church. Bruce (p. 341) thinks Luke was the 'true yokefellow' of Philippians 4: 3.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### THESSALONICA

**17:1–9** We can gather quite a number of details from Paul's two letters to the church of the city, as to what happened in the early days of its formation. Some 33 miles from Philippi, it would seem the party paused on the way. The pattern of synagogue preaching is followed ('the Jew first...') and Paul's method was (i) Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead, (ii) Jesus is (this) Messiah. As Jesus had opened the Scriptures on this matter to his disciples, so Paul does to these people of the Word. The pattern seen in Galatia is now followed – baseless rioting to confuse the issues and persecute the one who opened the door to '*a great many* of the devout Greeks' (v. 4).

Jealousy is again the motive. Jason seems to be one who was also converted and becomes the object of the hatred of the rabble when they cannot find Paul and Silas. ‘Turned upside down’, ‘upset, disturbed’.

The accusation is ‘seditious Messianism’—a trumped up charge. Jason gives bail for Paul, which probably means Paul was debarred from returning (of. I Thess. 2: 18), when he really ached for his converts.

### Beroea

**17:10–15** Beroea was some 60 miles away, which would mean a little relief from pressure of immediate persecution. The word ‘noble’ refers to the Jews. Blaiklock says they had ‘a notable freedom from the endemic jealousy of their race.’ It does seem they were educated and so less parochial in their views. That attitude of simple but discerning openness carried its own reward. Paul had nothing to fear by their daily searching the Scriptures – to the contrary. Note, too, their searching is not negative, but to see whether these things were so – or not so! This time it was many Jews who believed and, as against Antioch of Pisidia, honourable women also believed. It is interesting to see that it is the educated primarily who believe – the rabble are stirred up, lacking discernment. There is no indication that there would have been trouble at Beroea but for the inciters from Thessalonica, Paul (v. 14) being the main target of the opposition. (See 18:5, I Thess. 3:1f. for the movements following. See Bruce, pp. 347–8.)

### Athens

**17:16–21** Blaiklock, being a classical scholar, has an excellent note on Athens (pp. 132–136). The contrast of *Jerusalem* and Athens has often been made, and it is difficult to think of two cities more diverse in thought and culture, although not necessarily opposite. Paul was no stranger to the culture of either; indeed he had a gospel for both, of

which he was not ashamed. Waiting for Silas and Timothy to come to him he does not deliberately seek to preach the word alone, but (v. 16) is stirred by the sight of so many idols – and with his view of idolatry he is provoked to speak (of. I Cor. 10: 20f.). A point not often noticed is that he debated in the *synagogue* and had already laid the foundation of his Areopagus address – ‘he preached Jesus and the resurrection’ (v. 18), and it is not likely he would bypass the Cross in order to do this, so that I Corinthians 2: 1f. is *not* an admission of failure to preach the Cross, or a resolution *not* to preach the Resurrection! The word ‘babblers’ (v. 18) means literally ‘seed-picker’, ie. eclectic or incoherent in argument, putting together bits and pieces one has learned. Their interest in Paul’s new ideas is simply that of a jaded mental palate.

### Paul’s Speech

**17:22–31** Whilst the court of the Areopagus was not a law court in the strictly judicial sense, yet it was a place where men claiming to have something to say could be tested. Paul’s listeners would be informed men of the two prevalent schools of philosophy – Epicureanism and Stoicism. (See IVP *New Bible Dictionary*, pp. 383 and 1217, Blaiklock, pp. 138–139).

Paul’s sermon is deeply significant because it is not an adaptation of Greek thinking but a translation of Biblical thought (of. Acts 14: 15f.). Whereas Jews (who believe in God) are asked to believe in Christ, pagans who are idolatrous are asked to see God as He is.

In vs. 22–23 Paul acknowledges their deeply religious nature and establishes contact. (Pagans were not atheists. The ‘unknown God’ inscription was designed not to omit any god. ) He also uses quotations from two Stoic poets – Aratus and Cleanthes (vs. 24 and 28). However, Paul is also stirred by the

fact that they do not know God and makes the bold claim (v. 23) that he does!

Vs. 24–28 show that He is the God who has created all things, and cannot be contained in shrines. Human hands (v. 25) may make idols or serve them but He makes human hands! No one assists Him for He gives breath (life) to all things! The point of v. 26 is that nothing is arbitrary or by chance for God has planned all things ethnic, governmental, geographical (of. Deut. 32:8–9, Gen. 28:12f., John 1:51, Daniel 10:13, 20–21), and all of these with a view to man’s knowing Him (v. 27), by searching. Note v. 26 ‘from one’ (RSV; in AV ‘of one blood’, but this not attested) means one common ancestry, so that the Greeks are not superior to barbarians or others – He is the same Creator of all. He is Lord of heaven and earth (of. Matt. 11: 25).

Vs. 27–28 virtually imply that we can find Him (‘He is not far from us, indeed IN Him we live and move and have our being’), and yet these Athenians for all their vaunted intellect have not yet found Him.’ The word ‘offspring’ (v. 29) means that in some sense we are like Him so that to make God look like something, out of *something*, is to debase Him. (Incidentally, to worship less than what we are is to debase ourselves also. )

V. 30 Now this ignorance God has in some sense tolerated, but the coming of ‘a man’ has altered that. Idolatry was in ignorance but God will now judge so that we all must repent. The judgement in righteousness (v. 31) will be on not knowing and worshipping Him, as upon idolatrous worship. The resurrection attests this one He has made Judge. The sermon is really masterly but would be abhorrent because of repentance and the statement concerning repentance.

**17:32–34** The element of the *moral* as against the intellectual, and a *bodily resurrection* as against innate immortality of the soul would make his

message unacceptable. Some, however, would have heard his former pronouncements on ‘Jesus and the resurrection’ and some of these may have been those who responded.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Corinth has been called the (moral) cesspit of the East. It would be impossible to describe its looseness and evil. Paul was able to claim (I Cot. 1: 18) the gospel to be the power of God because it made its inroads into this evil city. It was affluent, being one of the most favoured ports of the world, and of course it revelled in the culture of its past as well as its Roman present. It is interesting to see that Paul settled into this city and remained for some time (18 months, v. 11 ).

### CORINTH

**18:1–10** It is thought that Aquila and Priscilla at this time were Jews but not Christians. It is interesting to note that Paul worked at his trade. V. 4 shows that Paul was about his proclamation and apologia with power. It is suggested that at this point a gift from Philippi reached him through Silas and Timothy (see II Cor. 11: 9, Phil. 4: 15).

V. 5 (which comes through limply in the RSV) shows a quickening, a real pressure upon Paul’s spirit to proclaim strongly. Was this because the members of the team had arrived, or just the moment? Is it to this that Paul later refers ‘with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling’? It crystallised the position anyway, and those against Messiah reviled him (v. 6). Titius Justus seems to have been a Gentile God-fearer and possibly the ‘Gaius mine host’ of Romans 16:23, cf. I Corinthians 1:14. For Crispus,

the ruler of the synagogue to follow Paul, was a helpful thing, and it seems the church was large. The experience of another vision (vs. 9–10) must have been strengthening (of. 23:11, 27:23f.). The statement ‘I have many people’ reassures us that it was still *the* Lord working.

**18:11** The eighteen months of teaching (autumn A50 to spring AD 52) would be the pattern Paul used both for *evangelism and the strengthening* of the new converts, and would be invaluable.

**18:12** show that Paul’s act of shaking out his garments against the Jews, the winning of Crispus and ‘much people’ had been resented by the Jews. A Greek city such as Corinth was not an ideal place for turning the general public against Paul so that the Jews planned a legal attack through the new proconsul. They had no legal point because Paul was not attacking Rome in any way and the charge of Messianism was not brought up. There was no case established. Even had it been a criminal charge he (Gallio) would have had to *bear* with them.

**18:16–18** indicate that Gallio, who has a reputation of being a noble ruler, seizes the opportunity of this Jewish invasion of his court to squash them. They insist on nagging him and he has them driven from the court. Sosthenes, persistent, is beaten because he will not desist, and Gallio, who could have saved Sosthenes, paid no attention to what the law court lictors were doing. The vision Paul had is vindicated. The ‘many days’ of v. 18 would be included in the eighteen months and naturally followed the defeat of the Jewish opposition. His taking of Priscilla and Aquila raises the question of whether Paul had not lived with them all the time and had only taught in the house of Titius Justus. V. 7 seems to suggest this. *The* vow is a mystery and no suitable explanation is given. Other texts credit it to Aquila and some also to Priscilla. A vow, however, need not

be taken as a form of legalism.

### Paul’s Return

18:19–23 The Ephesus which had been previously denied him (16:6), is now open, yet Paul senses it is not yet time. The impression on the synagogue is good but time was pressing on him. V. 22 means he went up to Jerusalem as he would not otherwise have gone to Caesarea but taken another route – to Seleucia. His ‘care of the churches’ draws him into the ministry of strengthening and Paul would have been aware both of the need and his gifts.

### Apollos

**18:24–28** This vital man comes on the scene without a great deal of his background given. From Alexandria, and surely a Jew, he must have John the Baptist on a visit to Palestine and probably was baptised by him. He certainly knew of Jesus and had a tremendous grip of the Scriptures, perhaps propounding them in the Alexandrine patterns. ‘Fervent in spirit’ (cf. Rom. 12:11) could mean ‘fervent in the Spirit’, but the question is asked whether he had had this baptism. His exposition lacked something and this was supplied by those two versed in ‘Pauline’ theology. He was certainly well received and recommended to the church in Achaia, and was used as an apologist to those Jews outside the church. His ministry must have been valuable and most attractive as a party formed around him (I Cor. 1: 12, 3: 4), although this was not his desire. Many have thought he wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### EPHESUS:

#### The Baptism of the Spirit upon the Twelve

**19:1–7** Some of the details are not easy to sort out. Were these twelve the disciples of John the Baptist, ie. having been baptised by him, or were they taught in regard to John's baptism by Apollos, or earlier than he by some other? It is difficult to say. Was there a church at Ephesus', albeit the 'brethren'. are mentioned in 18: 27? What we do know is that Apollos taught much concerning Jesus. These twelve had received John's baptism, that is had been baptised *with a view to repentance*, and that repentance was to lead to the remission of sins. V. 2 can scarcely mean that they had never heard of the Holy Spirit, for if John's baptism had been preached, part of its vital significance would have been in the promise of the Spirit's baptism. Either the teaching they had heard was quite deficient, or it means much the same as John 7:39 – 'the Holy Spirit was not yet,' ie. epochally.

V. 4 may be a *reminder* of what John taught or the teaching of something new to these 'disciples'. All the evidence is that they were not Christian believers. Almost certainly, however, they were Jews.

V. 5 This verse shows their quick response – they are baptised in the name of Christ and v. 6 shows the same signs attended the group as at the other 'Pentecosts', ie. of the Jews, the Samaritans and the Gentiles. Interest is shown in the fact that this is an occasion unique to Paul's ministry (so far as we know). One rationalisation is that it is a 'make-up' to the Jerusalem Pentecost for these special ones adhering to John's baptism, and needing to enter into the new Christian experience. However, there is no reason why such an occasion should not happen, any more perhaps than it should to other than such in

their particular case. Lampe (*The Seal of the Spirit*, p. 76) sees Paul's arrival at Ephesus as marking 'another decisive moment in the missionary history.' It certainly is a dramatic and definitive way of true church-founding.

**19:8–10** Points to notice are that he spends 3 months in the synagogue – possibly longer than other places.– and that his teaching is nominated as that of the Kingdom, involving of course, Messiah. The *public* criticism and slander of the 'Way' would make the kind of ministry Paul wished to give too difficult. Up until this time the baptised disciples had been 'contained' in the synagogue, but now they are withdrawn. The arguing of v. 3 was really lecturing, probably positive apologia and proof of the gospel from the Scriptures. F.F. Bruce has evidence that Tyrannus held his classes before 11 a.m., after which Paul (having worked at his trade) would lecture until 4 p.m. The *two* years (cf. Acts 20:31) of this would give much opportunity for the gospel to spread from the core of teaching and for the churches of the Lychus valley to be established – possibly all seven mentioned in Revelation chs 2 and 3. Almost certainly those at Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea were founded. It is to be noted that this *long ministry of teaching* began to have deep effect.

**19:11–12** The 'handkerchiefs and aprons' were in fact sweat rags Paul would use in his work and the aprons part of his workman's clothing (of his tent-making trade). They had no magical efficacy (such things are condemned in v. 19), but faith in the power of God through Paul was evident, the facts being that healings and exorcisms resulted, but notice all are related to the *Name of Jesus*.

**19:13–16** These verses show a *magical use* of the Name of Jesus. There were seven sons of one known as a high priest – which he could not have been. Possibly Sceva was using his priestly connec-

tions to be something special in this place so far from Jerusalem. Certainly these sons were practising exorcism and demonic forces were well-acquainted with the name used, but not the *experimental manner* which they quickly detected. The incident heightened the message of Jesus and the reputation of St. Paul.

**19:17–20** Undoubtedly it was a city with much vested in the practice of the occult and the news would rapidly spread. Possibly these sorcerers were afraid this new and high power would invade them also. Two conclusions are possible, (a) believers had not previously been convicted deeply enough to abandon magical practices and were now doing so, or (b) these had just believed because of the practical evidence and so were glad to abandon the evil that was being rapidly exposed. The public witness of this exposure of evil, and the destruction of the magical formulae, would have impressed itself on the whole city.

*V. 20* This means that the Word progressively increased in its power. The defeat of evil would aid this considerably.

**19:21–22** The work at Ephesus and the surrounding district is now established. Paul does not work out a strategy so much as he seeks the mind of the Spirit. The Epistles make it clear that he must visit Jerusalem with the ‘collection’ for the poor, whilst Rome is in his mind because it was probably to become a centre for countries further north, as Antioch had been for Asia Minor and Greece (see Rom. 1: 10, 13).

#### The Guilds: Demetrius’ Speech

**19:23–27** ‘The Way’ is a designation for the Gospel (cf. 9:2) and without doubt the rapid growth of its adherents, whilst perhaps not alarming in

itself, was constituting a threat to the income of the silversmiths, whose primary activity was manufacturing small replicas of the goddess Artemis, said to have fallen from heaven. In fact it seems ‘she’ was a meteorite which had a resemblance to a many-breasted female. As at Philippi business was outraged, and we doubt not the demonic powers behind this worship. Nor can we obviate the probability that this is a ‘kickback’ from the former destruction of magical equipment. Paul obviously had not hesitated to preach against idolatry (v. 26). Demetrius is demagogic. The guilds were not only economic but social units with, in this case, the unifying elements of religion. Thus Paul seemed to be striking at these three units economic, social and religious—a dangerous situation now inflamed by Demetrius’ oratory.

#### Demonstration

**19:28–41** A typical mob situation, so well-known today as not to need explanation, now takes place. Luke’s touch of humour (v. 32) ‘most did not know why they were there’! indicates the confusion. Alexander was seeking ‘– in speaking – to dissociate the Jews from the Christian ‘attack’ on idolatry, but his presence as a Jew brings the mob–defence of Artemis. Paul obviously was prepared to defend ‘the Way’ and use the opportunity. Luke makes it clear that the Asiarchs – leading citizens and representatives of the Emperor cult – were friendly to St. Paul, thus showing there was no imperial opposition here to the gospel. The town clerk’s remarkable quietening of the crowd is based upon logical facts – the channel of the law concepts and the danger of Imperial discipline – seeing that riots were forbidden. His appeal to commonsense takes the day and the crowd is quietened. Luke’s apologia for the Christian faith is thus established. It is Demetrius, not Paul, who causes the riot.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

**20:1–6** The early church needed to be flexible. Paul, the great teacher, was about to leave. The church was now put on its own mettle, but we may understand that it had grown from his teaching but not simply *dependent* upon him. In any case he exhorted it, ie. strengthened and encouraged it. Bruce estimates the period covered in *vs. 1–16* (ie. through Macedonia, to Achaia and back to Troas, then Miletus) as taking something over a year. At Corinth he wrote his Epistle to the Romans (cf. Rom. 16: 23, 1:9ff., 15:22ff.), and this must have proved a rich time with his friend Gaius. We do not know the plot of v. 3 but assume it was to kill him once he was aboard the vessel. The ‘collection’ for the poor of the church of Jerusalem was gathered by the brethren. V. 5 is the point of resumption of the ‘we’ passages.

**20:7–12** The restoration to life of Eutychus should be recognised. V. 9b makes it clear that he was dead. Undoubtedly the lights and their vapours had induced sleep and so the calamity of falling through the open window. The miracle took place in the context of the Lord’s Supper which was resumed following this raising from the dead. The length of discourse seems taken for granted and is only mentioned because of the fall of Eutyches. The ‘conversing’ of v. 11 was probably not simply a resumption of the address but that which related to the raising. It must have given a new dimension to the night’s events.

**20:13–16** It is suggested that but for the plot at Corinth Paul would have reached Jerusalem for the Passover. Now it must be Pentecost when he would reach there, thus he bypasses Ephesus where he would certainly have been detained by the brethren and the need of the church.

### Paul at Miletus

**20:17–38** Why does Paul call the elders? True, he is in haste. It seems, however, that he has two things to communicate: (i) a vindication of his own ministry, and (ii) an exhortation for the times and things that are (even now) coming upon the church. It ought to be noted that a church rarely sustains spiritual poise, power and integrity without interruption (cf. NT Epistles and ‘seven’ churches’ of Rev. chs. 2–3). His defence of his ministry is simply a statement of the facts – that he had preached the whole counsel of God (v. 27). The text of the message (see vs. 19, 20, 27, cf. I Cor. 15: 32) is that he has suffered, and had been under constant pressure from the opponents of the gospel. It seems that already some were questioning and even opposing Paul’s ministry. Hence his defence. However this was not simply to defend himself, but primarily to warn the elders (a) of their own high calling and responsibility, (b) of the pastoral need of the church, (c) of the danger of ‘wolves’ who would (i) come in, and (it) arise from within the flock. This is quite possibly a prophecy or warning of a general apostasy soon to be seen in the church. Paul commends his own method of ‘warning’ or ‘admonishing’ (v. 31) which he had used, accompanied by a deep intensity of feeling (of. ‘with tears’, v. 31). He is oriented towards the ‘weak’ (v. 35). He had earned not only his own livelihood but had assisted others. The tearful farewell is a proof of their deep love for him, indeed of Christian fellowship based on the reality of love and true service.

There is a question raised in vs. 22–24– that of Paul being constrained inwardly by the communication of the Holy Spirit (‘in every city’) that imprisonment and affliction await Paul – obviously at Jerusalem. Probably the prophets in every city had been moved to thus prophesy. Chapter 21:4 seems to indicate some conflict of *opinion* or *understanding*. The pro–

phets at Tyre urge Paul not to go to Jerusalem. The reconciliation seems to be that the Spirit indicates to the prophets what *will* happen to Paul when he goes to Jerusalem, and they assume it would only happen *if* he were to go – hence their warning not to go. *Vs. 10–14* of Chapter 21 make it clear that it is the Lord’s will for Paul to go, but human love would save Paul.

## CHAPTER TWENTY–ONE

### THE JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

**21:1–6** The church at Tyre (cf. Acts 11: 19) is small enough for they have to seek *out* the disciples. Yet in this small group the charisma of prophecy is present. The love of the fellowship is evident for one week which binds them closely, and they repeat the affectionate farewell of the Ephesian elders.

**21:7** Undoubtedly this section is to include the forewarning of what will happen to Paul. Its chief point is that it gives a *rationale* of Paul’s imprisonment – that this is part of God’s sovereign plan. Philip of course is one of the ‘Seven’ of Acts 6, and not to be confused with the Apostle, which is probably why he is called ‘evangelist’. Agabus is called a prophet, not simply because he has the charisma, and probably the daughters were not, technically speaking, prophetesses, yet they had the charisma. Four daughters would assist also in hospitality. Agabus’s action of binding his own hands and feet is clearly under the guidance of the Spirit. The Spirit had sent him to bind himself and so communicate Paul’s imminent imprisonment. This should be noted as most significant, not only for Paul personally, but for the Church, since it shows the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church in every action. It also indicates genuine concern by the Spirit for Paul himself. Paul sees this

act (later) as most significant, and this is shown in the Imprisonment Epistles. The binding, of course, signifies limitation of his (previously) unlimited ministry. *V. 12* shows that not only those of Caesarea but also his eight travelling companions (cf. ‘we’, *v. 12*) now break down, pleading for him not to go to Jerusalem. (Paul had generally avoided unnecessary danger and trouble – why should he now go to Jerusalem?) Paul’s protest of *v. 13* is against anything that will weaken his will, but also expresses his desire that they should be one with him in the Lord’s will – which they become – *v. 14*.

**21:15–16** show that Paul is lodging with an old and well-known disciple which would (normally) place him above suspicion. Paul’s welcome is in no doubt (*v. 17*).

### The Events and the Arrest

**21:17–26** The events are as follows: *Vs. 17–20e*. Paul and his companions are welcomed and their testimony genuinely received with joy and approval. *Vs. 20b–26*. There is uneasiness that Paul will be mistaken as one opposed to the law and the temple. (Without doubt Paul is precipitating a crisis because the Asian Jews are inflamed against him. ) Paul is wrought upon to share in the expenses of those who had taken vows and pay for the shaving of their heads. The vow is a voluntary thing and not necessarily legalistic (cf. Num. 6:1–21 where voluntary vows are simply regulated). Paul (I Cor. 9: 20–23) has always been ready to ‘unto the Jews become a Jew’. Vows were generally related to blessing, thanksgiving, etc. (of. Psa. 116:12–14), and there was nothing in which Paul could not participate. His action was to make void the false accusation of *v. 21*. James in *v. 25* virtually assures Paul that he has kept the basic requirements for Gentiles as set out by the Council of Jerusalem and has not infringed any principles of the law. *V. 26* shows that Paul, having

sanctified himself (though not necessarily himself taking the vow), is in the process of undertaking the vow expenses (offerings) when he was seen and misrepresented (of. v. 29 for the cause) as defiling the Temple. It has been assumed that his act was futile. To the contrary, it was establishing his *bona fide* as a Jew of true Christian freedom. It was not that his act was vain in itself but that it was not seen for its genuineness. V. 29 indicates that the Asian Jews would have recognised Trophimus as an Asian Gentile.

**21:27–32** It is the *Jews which were in Asia* (see Acts 19:9, 33) who would not even seek to understand Paul's situation, for their long-standing enmity would not permit them to understand rationally. Their inciting any of v. 28 is typical of all irrational religious incitement cries which appeal to deep patriotic and religious drives, and incite irrationality. The fact that 'the whole city' was involved underlines the explosive nature of the cry. V. 31 shows that the temple police shut the gates of the sanctuary so that the sanctity of the inner sanctuary will not be outraged. The Roman authorities are sensitive to a city-wide tumult and intervene, otherwise Paul would have been killed, because the death-inscription between the temple proper and the court of the Gentiles warned of death to an intruder and the Roman authorities had accepted this ruling – even for a Roman!

**21: 33–35** The crowd refuses to be baulked of its prey and presses on the Roman forces of law and order, but without avail, and we cannot but see the hand of God in the act, seeing the Holy Spirit has been so aware of this sovereign act and has communicated to Paul and the church concerning it.

**21:36–40** Three years previously 'the Egyptian' had deluded 4,000 Sicarii (assassins) into believing (as Jewish zealots) that they could overthrow the Roman rule. Paul's question to the tribune is in Greek (not Egyptian) and he is surprised. Paul's

claim to be a Jew of Tarsus (v. 39) causes the tribune to allow him to speak before the people, they hushing because he speaks in their language – Aramaic, the language of Palestine, as also the Dispersion. His gesture (v. 40) must have been commanding'.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

**22:1–2** The crowd, generally, did not know what it was about (21: 34), and they are prepared to gain the facts from this one speaking, especially as he is obviously a Jew, both by appearance and speech. He also calls his statement a 'defence'.

### PAUL'S DEFENCE

**22:3–21** The essence of this *apologia* is as follows:–

(i) *His commencement* as a Jew, vs. 3–4. Paul authenticates himself as a Jew, one who was not only trained by the great Gamaliel, but who also persecuted the church, indeed beyond others. He of all men ought not to be suspect.

(ii) *His conversion*, vs. 5–16. His intended journey for persecution is interrupted by a supernatural experience involving a great light and a heavenly voice. The heavenly person is Jesus of Nazareth who rebukes him, and commands him to go to Damascus where he will receive his commission. (It is to be noted here that none of the listeners objects to this explanation, even though he speaks of the Jesus of the crucifixion events of some 27 years previous.) Vs. 12–16 give the conclusion of his conversion. (These events should be read with Chs. 9 and 26.) V. 14 is especially significant for Paul has *seen* the Just (Righteous) One (cf. I Cor. 9:1, 15:8), and knows His will for him. This word of [concerning] Christ, he is now to communicate (v. 15) because he

has *seen and heard* (cf. Acts 4:20). Paul's mention of baptism and the remission of sins was related to the whole programme and significance of Messiah, especially as he is to call upon his Name.

(iii) *His commission, vs. 17–21*. This section is aimed at explaining his relationship to Gentiles, it being *through* (or by) Messiah. He is heard out, up to v. 21, even accepting the fact that the Lord appears to him (in a trance), but from this they derive no divine commission, for Paul seeing it (v. 21) relates it to the Gentiles. Here their Jewish bias, as also their present suspicion, appears to be well-founded and they immediately revert to irrational passion – this in spite of the fact that it was in the very temple that he had been commanded to go to the Gentiles. Note here that Paul passes over the three years that passed between the Damascus event and his return to Jerusalem (cf. Gal. 1:17–18, etc.).

**22:22–30** The tribune would not have understood Aramaic, and wished to know the reason – by scourging – for their violent reaction. Paul in stating his case has achieved his goal – they are now culpable for their rejection of Christ and their action concerning Paul. The tribune assumes his prisoner to be reprehensible for the riot and assumes he will not make explanation. apart from forced confession, the fact, undoubtedly, with most. Paul's statement that he is a Roman citizen is startling, and already the tribune was indictable, for even having bound Paul. That is why (v. 30) he seeks the explanation of Paul, the chief priest and the Sanhedrin, and so convenes it.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### THE SANHEDRIN DIVIDED CONCERNING PAUL

**23:1** For Paul the justifying element of a man is a

clear conscience. He uses the point again in his own defence. It is often used in his writings (cf. 24:16 in Rom. 9: 1, II Cor. 1:12, 4:2, I Tim. 1:5, Titus 1:15).

**23:2** The high priest sees this as a lie, as blasphemy. Paul has called the assembly 'brethren', identifying with them. For the Jews he was a blasphemer since Judaism officially rejected Christ. Paul is claiming to be faithful to the law, ie. 'before God'. The high priest had no right to order violence. Leviticus 19:15 demands 'righteous judgement'.

**23:3** Paul is prophetic rather than judgemental in his reply. In fact Ananias died a violent death at a later date. Paul's point is correct. Ananias is inconsistent in judging Paul law-wise, but hitting him un-law-wise!

**23:4–5** Paul obviously was not aware it was the high priest, and apologises on discovering it was he. Exodus 22:28 prohibits reviling of a leader. This does not excuse Ananias for what he did. Even so rulers are to be obeyed (Rom. 13: lff. ), and not for worthiness but the office given to them.

**23:6–10** Paul now uses what may have seemed the only way out. He was not going to be allowed to make a calm and reasoned defence. He uses the way open, ie. to divide the assembly. 'At the same time what he says is true. He is a Pharisee and reasons along the lines of their beliefs, ie. the resurrection from the dead. The Sadducees did not believe in such (v. 8). They refused to believe in the supernatural. We have to remember that in 22: 6–10 Paul has spoken of the supernatural voice which came to him. The Sadducees' argument is that there is none such, and so Paul must be wrong. The Pharisees are arguing for a principle. Hence they find themselves defending Paul.. The dissension is so threatening that Paul has to be removed. The reasoned defence (and trial) cannot therefore take place.

### Paul Strengthened by the Lord

**23:11** In 18:9 (cf. 19:21) and 27:24 it is evident that Paul had personal contact with the Lord, and that his going to Rome was significant. This direct prophecy would set his mind at rest.

### The Plot against Paul

**23:12–22** The whole passage is explanatory of itself, and needs little interpretation. It is assumed that the band of plotters was composed of zealots who fiercely opposed any betrayal of Judaism. Paul's nephew was present at the time of the plot. Paul – it is often assumed – was discarded by his family, His sister must have had regard for him. The plotters had made a binding oath, but the casuistry of the Jewish lawyers would certainly release them from such. The fact that the Sanhedrin (Pharisees also?) agreed to the plot shows their evil, as also the weakness of their case.

### The Lord's Prophecy Confirmed

**23:23–35** Again the temporal powers protect the Roman, Paul. The letter of Claudius Lysias to the governor Felix puts Paul in a good light. He has actually done no crime. The matter is an internal Jewish one. Felix was not bound to hear the case of one who came from the province of Cilicia. However he seemed to have an interest in Paul, perhaps because of the intended attempt on his life. Hence he was prepared to hear Paul and his accusers.

## CHAPTER TWENTY–FOUR

### PAUL'S DEFENCE BEFORE FELIX

**24: 1–9** We need to remember whilst examining the

events of trial and defence, that Paul is not the primary target of the Jews. It is the gospel. This has been so all the time. Hence the Lord's appearances to Paul, and his support of the apostle. In one sense Paul is alone, but in another not. The word for Tertullus has been translated 'orator', 'spokesman', and 'attorney'. Doubtless he was a lawyer. His address to the Governor is suave, well-placed and clever. Possibly Tertullus was not a Jew (of. v. 9, 'the Jews also'), and probably spoke in Latin. His accusations against Paul would seem justified from a current Jewish point of view, but there is no attempt to test out the claims of Paul, or truly examine the matter. The Book of Acts was partly written to vindicate the Christians as a peaceable people, but the charge is strong that Paul was a universal trouble-maker, especially when it came to the Jews. The particular charge is of a recent profaning of the Temple. Note that the Received Text adds to v. 6, 'and we would have judged him according to our law. But the chief captain, Lysias, came and with great violence took him away out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come before thee.' The accusation suggests that the Nazarenes were (a) a sect, and (b) troublesome to Judaism.

### Paul's Personal Defence

**24:10–21** As suggested, Paul's defence is not only to Felix and the Jews, but to history. Paul, like Tertullus, refers to Felix's experience in current (Jewish) affairs. He makes his defence thus:

- (i) He worshipped at the Temple without doing anything adverse to Jewish custom,
- (ii) He stirred nobody, and the charges cannot be authenticated,
- (iii) Everything that he does (and did) is according to 'the Way', which is the term used for the Christian in that day. The Jews called it a sect, a point which Paul does

not admit. This Way operates only in accordance with the Scriptures. That is Paul and others believe the law and the prophets in what they say. The point is not expanded as it is in 26: 22, ‘saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass’.

In other words Paul is saying there are no grounds for accusation against him. In v. 15 he again raises the point of the resurrection (‘of the just and the unjust’) – a tenet many believed in Judaism. The rest of his speech claims that he has done nothing they can judge him for.

*Vs. 20–21* are interesting. He challenges the others to accuse him of anything but the provocative claim he made before the Sanhedrin, ie. that of the resurrection. Some think Paul was guilty in his own mind for doing this, and that it was a departure from his ‘clear conscience’. However it is the principle of the resurrection that is debatable, since all Jews did not believe it.

### The Outcome of the Trial

**24:22–27** *V. 22* suggests that Felix had a clear understanding of the Way, ie. he was familiar with Christianity. This could easily be, since it had grown over the years. His wife being a Jewess may have made him more familiar. He does not pronounce on the trial, but at the same time he does not judge Paul. So he puts them off with political skill. He suggests they wait until Lysias comes down, but then the tribune does not come down! Knowing the Way, Felix and Drusilla then wish to hear Paul personally. Paul’s three topics (related) are justice (righteousness), self-control (temperance), and judgement. At first these themes seem strange until we realise that Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I and sister of Herod Agrippa II, had left her first husband to marry Felix, and he not a Jew. Note that the basic

presentation by Paul was ‘faith in Christ’. Felix (who had been married three times) is ‘alarmed’, ‘frightened’, and gets rid of Paul, saying he will hear him another time. This he does not do, and instead Paul is left in prison. It was common custom to accept bribes from prisoners in exchange for freedom. This Paul refuses to do. Two years elapse before the coming of the new governor, Festus.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### THE JEWS AND FESTUS

**25:1–5** The Jews attempt to sway Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem, hoping to kill him in the way previously planned. Festus was probably conversant with the whole matter, and insisted that the leading Jews come to Caesarea and make their accusation there – at the head of the province.

### Paul’s Appeal to Caesar

**25:6–32** Festus was a man of prompt action. A day after his return he brought Paul to trial. The charges against Paul were repeated by the Jews as previously. Since the charges were serious they needed to be proved. Festus in his own past history had clashed with the Jews, and seemed to wish to keep their favour. His offer to have the trial in Jerusalem was to this purpose, but Paul knew the danger. In all the trials none had proved a charge against him. He would not then have a fair trial. Paul, then, appealed to Caesar. He did this on the grounds that he must not be given up to the Jews, for nothing had been proved by them against him. He had not done what they had said he had done. This is a further part of the *apologia* of Acts, showing that the Christians were not in the business of opposing

authority or raising insurrection. Paul, as a Roman citizen, knew he would get justice from Rome, but never from the Jews. Also he was entitled to this.

### Paul brought before Agrippa

**25:13–22** This Agrippa was a descendant of Herod the Great, and son of the Agrippa who had imprisoned Peter. Bernice was Agrippa's sister and there was scandal concerning their relationships, as indeed the family of the Herods had been connected with continuous scandal. Festus tells Agrippa that he was surprised that nothing of significant nature was brought against Paul by the Jews. Festus confesses himself puzzled by the nature of their charges, not understanding them. A Roman could not be tried in the absence of his accusers, so he had rightly refused Jerusalem and appealed to Rome. It is the 'superstition' about which the governor is puzzled, that is that the man Jesus supposed to be dead is indeed alive. Paul, then, must have pressed the matter of resurrection as primary. Agrippa was probably quite conversant with the sect of the Nazarenes, and so wished to hear Paul.

**25:23–27** Luke seems to contrast the simple Paul with the pageantry and pomp (vanity) of Agrippa, Bernice and the nobles. Anyway, a fine audience was supplied for Paul in which 'to' testify (cf. Acts 9: 15, '...he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the nations, and kings and the sons of Israel'). It is interesting that Festus admits to all that he is baffled by the case, not knowing what to do, and this mainly because he has done nothing worthy of death, and in fact there are no specific charges to go with his case when he stands before Caesar. Thus Luke establishes the injustice of the Jewish charges. Agrippa, being Jewish, will probably be able to nominate what the charges should be.

## CHAPTER TWENTY–SIX

### PAUL'S TESTIMONY BEFORE AGRIPPA

**26:1–3** Paul addresses Agrippa as one who is familiar with Jewish matters, religion and customs. He seeks to enlist a fair hearing by the king.

**26:4–8** Paul affirms his orthodoxy as a Jew. He speaks of being a Pharisee, and one of the tenets of this sect was known to be the resurrection. Agrippa would know that. Basically the argument was about there being a resurrection (25: 19, cf. 24: 15, 23:6f.). Paul puts this tenet as a basic to all Israel. All the tribes hope to attain to this. It is the reason for their daily worship. Paul shows that to be accused for this is fatuous. There can be nothing wrong in it.

**26:9–18** Paul's testimony is his conversion. Strongly opposed to the Christians, he did those things which showed he could not possibly favour them. Here we see what Paul did. Not only persecuted the Christians, but gaoled them, and sought to cause them to blaspheme. He confesses he was irrational – 'raging fury'. He gives the substance (again) of his experience on the road to Damascus (see commentary on Ch. 9). Here he adds to what he has told before, eg. that he was thus persecuting Jesus of Nazareth and 'kicking against the goads'. This latter may have been the pricks of his conscience, troubling him since he saw Stephen and others, or it may just mean that Christ was seeking to guide him in and to the true way, but he was opposing his Master. In this way Paul was telling the Jew Agrippa that the Jew Jesus had appeared to him in supernatural circumstances. This one whom Paul addressed as 'Lord!' was also 'Jesus'.

Also the commission Jesus had given him – set out in vs. 17–18 – is most significant.

- (i) Jesus delivers him from the Jews and the Gentiles (nations) to whom he sends Paul.
- (ii) Paul is to open their eyes, turning them from darkness to light, delivering them from Satan's power, bringing them to God.
- (iii) He is to bring them into forgiveness of sins, and make them part of the holy people of God.

Agrippa would understand this message. Also few – even the Jews – would oppose a supernatural voice. There was no sin in hearing or obeying such, provided what was ordered was not contrary to Judaism.

**26:19–23** Paul now describes his loyalty to this commission – it being a heavenly one – and the way in which it was carried out. His message had been both to Jews and Gentiles. It was a true message – repentance, turning to God, bringing forth deeds consonant with repentance. Paul claims he was persecuted because of this. His powerful point and claim is that in all that he has said and done nothing has been inconsistent with the law (Moses) and the prophets. That is the Hebrew Scriptures prophesied that Messiah must suffer (the rejection and Cross), would rise from the dead, and become (saving) light to the Gentiles. Paul may have produced Scriptures to attest his claim. We cannot say one way or another.

**26:24–29** The apostle must have been effective in his proclamation. Festus is deeply moved but can scarcely comprehend the things Paul has said. Paul's reply to Festus is that Agrippa understands all he has said. Paul forces Agrippa into a corner in regard to the prophets. Of course the king must believe them, and so believe Christ. Agrippa's words are famous: 'In a [so] short time you think to make me a Christian!' Paul's reply is an earnest one.

**26:30–32** The general opinion of the leaders is that Paul has done nothing worthy of death or imprisonment. Thus neither Festus nor Agrippa can

formulate charges. Had Paul not appealed to Caesar he could be set free. This is, of course, providing he had not been led towards Jerusalem for the trial, ambushed and killed!

## CHAPTER TWENTY–SEVEN

### FROM CAESAREA TO MALTA

This chapter is filled with details of a journey and a shipwreck. Paul was not a stranger to shipwreck. In II Corinthians 11:25 he says in a letter written some years before the events of Acts 27, '...three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea'. Paul, of course, is not including this present account! Luke's point behind this chapter is to show (as he has been showing) that Paul has been sovereignly drawn by God to Rome, and that the events which have happened (in his capture) are not a regrettable error. Also he further vindicates Paul (and the Christians) in the eyes of the Roman and Gentile people. The journey should be followed in a Bible map.

**27:1–8** Caesarea to Crete. Note the change to 'we', indicating that Luke has joined Paul. There were other prisoners than Paul. Julius the centurion comes in for good comment. He is kind to Paul. Aristarchus is a special companion of Paul. See Acts 19: 29, 20: 4. Also he was with Paul in his imprisonment (Col. 4: 10, Philemon 24). He probably was with Paul during the entire journey. Note also that Paul has friends at Sidon. Probably there was a church there. II Corinthians 11:25–27 indicates that much of Paul's life and ministry is not recorded in Acts. Paul may even have founded the church at Sidon.

**27:9–12** A disastrous decision was made in spite of

Paul's foreboding. Doubtless Paul believed disaster would come if they moved from the harbour of Fair Havens. The centurion, although kindly towards Paul, followed the advice of the ship-owner and its captain, in a desire to reach Phoenix in Crete and winter there.

**27:13–20** Those interested in nautical terms and details will find the account interesting and authentic. However, it is the vindication of Paul's premonition.

**27:21–44** Fearlessly Paul now confronts the centurion, captain, crew and others and assures them of an angelic visitation, and the cheering news that they will be safe although they will have to run ashore on an island. The reason for their safety is that *Paul has to stand before Caesar*. On these grounds the others will be safe. Paul's advice is needed on a number of occasions, and it seems he takes a degree of leadership. He prevents the sailors deserting the ship. He encourages the disheartened 267 persons on the ship to eat, assuring them that not one of them would perish. Doubtless some were superstitious in believing him. Others would have been convicted by his own belief, and his communication with supernatural sources. The centurion counteracts the plan of the soldiers to destroy the prisoners so that they might not escape. The primary purpose of the centurion was to save Paul. Much could be deduced from this fact. Paul had made a personal impression, and doubtless the officer knew he had his heart set on standing before Caesar, ie. not escaping, but fulfilling some plan God had shown him.

## CHAPTER TWENTY–EIGHT

### THE GOAL–ROME–IS REACHED THE HAPPENINGS ON MALTA

**28:1–10** The term 'natives' is in fact 'barbarians', and that is how Greeks spoke of those other than themselves. Hence Luke's use of the term (of. Rom. 1: 14, I Cor. 14: 11, Col. 3: 11). These natives were unusually kind. At the same time they were superstitious, as indicated by thinking Paul was a murderer, a snake biting him after a miraculous escape from the water. Their superstition made him into a god when there were no effects from the snake (cf. Mark 16: 18). The healing of Publius' father by Paul opened up an avenue of ministry of need. Others too were healed. Doubtless all was done in the Name of Jesus and opportunity taken to explain the good news of Christ. The gratitude of the inhabitants was shown by their material provision of food for the entire party.

#### From Malta to Rome

**28:11–16** It is interesting to note that the church was in being at Puteoli, their last stop before Rome. Finally they reach Rome, having passed overland. At the market of Appius (43 miles from Rome) and at Three Inns (33 miles from Rome) they are met by brethren who have heard of their coming. Their coming heartened Paul 'who thanked God and took courage'. In Rome Paul was allowed to stay at his own lodging with a soldier who guarded him.

#### Paul and Rome

**28:17** The *apologia* of Luke is completed in these last –22 14 verses.

- (i) Paul vindicates himself before the local Jewish

leaders on the basis we have already considered. He has asked to see the leaders so that they will be properly informed. This speaks much for Paul's eirenic approach to the ministry of the gospel. Note that Paul spends three days in preparation for the event.

(ii) He shows that the charges brought against him were invalid, and none was worthy of death, hence his appeal to Caesar. He sees the whole happening as related to 'the hope of Israel', which is of course specifically the resurrection, but generically the matter of God's covenant people. The local Jewish leaders had heard no reports concerning Paul, and wished to hear from him concerning this 'sect', ie. the group called Nazarenes. All they have heard has been universally critical.

**28:23–29** The gospel is now proclaimed to many of the Jews in Rome. V. 23 speaks of them coming 'in large numbers'. Romans 1:15 had shown Paul as anxious to come to Rome to preach the gospel. Now he can do this. His exposition must have been a careful one, lasting as it did from morning until evening. We are reminded of the Apostolic pattern of saying nothing but what the Hebrew Scriptures have said. We note also that the main theme was the Kingdom of God (vs. 23, 31, cf. 20:25). The message polarises the attitudes of the hearers. Paul must have anticipated the polarisation which by now would have been greatly familiar, ie. acceptance or rejection for the reasons inherent in the Gospel of the Kingdom. In 13:40 and 47ff Paul uses the same technique. It is the equivalent to Christ's command to shake the dust off one's sandals, having proclaimed the Kingdom. For Luke as apologist it is to show that Paul proclaimed the truth, and left the outcome to the Spirit of God (vs. 25–27). The passage quoted from Isaiah 6:9–10 was quoted by Jesus against his hearers (Matt. 13: 14–15, cf. II Cor. 3: 14). In conclusion (v. 28) Paul renews his favourite theme, ie. that the Scriptures foretell that the gospel will be preached also to the

Gentiles (the nations). V. 29 is omitted in a number of manuscripts, and is a repeating of verses 24–25.

**28:30–31** These verses make it clear that Paul lived in rented premises, and was free to have people come and go. Why this should have been so is debated. It may have been that the charges laid against him were so vague, or not pressed by the Palestinian Jews. It may have been that time was needed to prepare the cases of defence and prosecution. Whatever the reason, Paul was left wonderfully free to preach the Kingdom of God. Note again that 'Kingdom of God' and 'about the Lord Jesus' are the one theme (cf. Acts 8: 5, 12). It is obvious that no one presses for Paul to be gagged from proclaiming the Nazarene teaching.

### Conclusion

We conclude then generally that Luke has reasonably fulfilled his apologetic goals by presenting the Christians as peaceable people. He shows they are meticulous in obeying Rome in general, and local authorities in particular. Also he conveys the fact that the Christians are not revolutionaries in the political sense. The Jews have no historical or theological grounds for objecting to the proclamation of Christ since he is the fulfilment of their own Scriptures. Also Luke has shown the new community – the church – to be the truly prophetic community. Descriptions of miracles, healings, signs and wonders are not used to lay claim, merely, to supernatural power, but to show that the gospel is sealed by God and His Messiah. This is the true message of the Kingdom. With all this Luke has shown clearly that the gospel is universal, ie. from Jerusalem to Samaria and to 'the uttermost part' (ie. the nations). Most particularly Luke shows that the Gentiles are included – and this in accordance with the prophecies – in the people of God.