



# ACTS of the Apostles

*A Verse-By-Verse Commentary*

By Pastor Charlie Garrett

Copyright 2024, Emlen S. "Charlie" Garrett. All Rights reserved

[SuperiorWord.org](http://SuperiorWord.org)

# CONTENTS

*(Hyperlinked- Clicking the title will take you to that location)*

The Book of Acts; an Introduction.....	4
The Book of Acts; a Brief Guide on How to Interpret and Apply its Contents.....	18
Chapter 1 .....	22
Chapter 2 .....	101
Chapter 3 .....	255
Chapter 4 .....	334
Chapter 5 .....	425
Chapter 6 .....	522
Chapter 7 .....	558
Chapter 8 .....	708
Chapter 9 .....	797
Chapter 10 .....	891
Chapter 11 .....	1003
Chapter 12 .....	1065
Chapter 13 .....	1118
Chapter 14 .....	1251
Chapter 15 .....	1323
Chapter 16 .....	1421
Chapter 17 .....	1506
Chapter 18 .....	1584
Chapter 19 .....	1646
Chapter 20 .....	1740
Chapter 21 .....	1819
Chapter 22 .....	1906
Chapter 23 .....	1969

Chapter 24 .....	2035
Chapter 25 .....	2088
Chapter 26 .....	2140
Chapter 27 .....	2209
Chapter 28 .....	2295

## THE BOOK OF ACTS; AN INTRODUCTION

The book of Acts is comprised of 28 chapters of 1007 verses (as in the NKJV). Therefore, a daily evaluation of Acts, one verse per day, will take approximately 2.76 years to complete. Adding in the introduction will take a couple more days.

### Explanation of the Title:

The name, Acts, is a shortened form of “The Acts of the Apostles.” That is often dismissed in favor of another title, “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” Though it is true that the Holy Spirit is behind the events occurring throughout the book, this is actually true throughout the entire body of Scripture.

The “Acts of the Apostles” is an acceptable title because it details exactly that. In particular, it details the acts of Peter and Paul as the church goes through a particular transition that will be noted below. It is these two that are the main focus of what occurs in the book. Thus, the title, “The Acts of the Apostles” is both pertinent and acceptable.

### Author:

It is almost unanimously agreed upon that the book of Acts was written by Luke the physician and the author of the Gospel of Luke. Both Luke and Acts are addressed to a person named Theophilus –

“Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, <sup>3</sup> it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.” Luke 1:1-4

“The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, <sup>3</sup> to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Acts 1:1-3

There are other clues that Luke is, in fact, the author of Acts. The writing style, meaning structure and vocabulary, are noticeably similar. There are sections within Acts, known

as the “we” sections, where Luke is with Paul and he writes in the first person – “We did this,” or “We went there.” When analyzed, it becomes clear that Luke is the only person who fits the identity of the author. For example, those referred to in the “we” sections in the third person can be excluded. Also, those known to have not traveled at such times can be excluded. In this, only Luke is the obvious author.

Also, there are topics common to both Luke and Acts. Luke details aspects of individuals that others would simply brush over. He has a particular interest in Gentiles. He refers to aspects of the resurrection appearances consistently in both books – specifically mentioning only the appearances related to Judea. Along with this, are details found only in gospel of Luke that are also repeated in Acts.

As Luke is a Gentile (see Colossians 4:11 and 4:14) with no noticeable role in the gospels or Acts, it becomes notable that so many early church commentaries and witnesses so heavily agreed upon him as the author. It is its own mark of agreement that he is, in fact, the true author. For these, and numerous other reasons that stand out, it is certain that Luke is the author of both the gospel that bears his name as well as the book of Acts.

### **Luke:**

As this is the case, it is of value to understand who Luke is. The anti-Marcionite Prologue to the gospel that bears his name, and which is believed to date to around AD170, says–

“Luke was an Antiochian of Syria, a physician by profession. He was a disciple of the apostles and later accompanied Paul until his martyrdom. He served the Lord without distraction, having neither wife nor children, and at the age of eighty-four he fell asleep in Boeotia, full of the Holy Spirit. While there were already Gospels previously in existence, that according to Matthew written in Judaea, and that according to Mark in Italy, Luke, moved by the Holy Spirit, composed the whole of this Gospel in the parts about Achaia, showing in the Prologue this very thing, that others had been written before it, and that it was necessary to expound to the Gentile believers the accurate account of the dispensation, so that they should not be distracted by Jewish fables, nor be deceived by heretical and vain imaginations and thus err from the truth.”

Later, the same source states, “And afterwards the same Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles.”

### **Dating:**

The detail of Luke's writings makes the dating of Acts rather certain. If there were major events that occurred during the time of his writing, he would have included them. Such an event is found in Acts 18:2 with the expulsion of the Jews from Rome –

“And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.”

As such, the dating of Acts can be reasonably assigned to the period of AD62-64. The book ends with Paul being imprisoned in Rome. That was in AD62, and so it was written (or at least completed) after that. But there is no mention of Nero's persecutions (AD64), the war between the Jews and Rome (AD66), nor – most poignantly – the destruction of Jerusalem/the temple in AD70. The lack of these evidences point, rather certainly, to around AD62-64.

### **Internal Structure:**

There are innumerable patterns running through Acts that reveal a wisdom that goes beyond a careful human planner of such a book. Rather, these patterns demonstrate a higher wisdom that guided the hand of Luke, inspiring him to reveal a transition in the redemptive narrative prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures long before his time.

One main structure, however, which still fits that theme, is the transition of the church from predominantly Jewish to one which is predominantly Gentile –

The book begins in Jerusalem; it ends in Rome.

The book carefully details the acts of Peter (the Apostle to the Jews) from Chapter 1 until Chapter 12. After this, it carefully details the acts of Paul (the Apostle to the Gentiles) from Chapter 13 until Chapter 28.

The book is preceded by the gospels, detailing Christ's life in fulfillment of the law given to Israel. The book is immediately followed by Paul's epistles (beginning with Romans) which detail Christ's work and how it is pertinent not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles.

The main thought of this transition from Acts 1 is found in these verses that anticipate the restoration of the kingdom to Israel –

“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’<sup>7</sup> And He said to them, ‘It is not for you

to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'" Acts 1:6-8

The main thought of the transition from Acts 28 (the last chapter) is found in these verses that reveal the rejection of the message of Christ by the Jews, but its certain acceptance by the Gentile world –

"So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. <sup>24</sup> And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. <sup>25</sup> So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, <sup>26</sup> saying,

'Go to this people and say:

"Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand;

And seeing you will see, and not perceive;

<sup>27</sup> For the hearts of this people have grown dull.

*Their* ears are hard of hearing,

And their eyes they have closed,

Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears,

Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn,

So that I should heal them.'"

<sup>28</sup> "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" Acts 28:23-28

In the next introductory segment, several patterns found in Acts will be provided. Including them now would be too lengthy for a single commentary without a short division.

### **Main Themes/Purpose:**

There are a multitude of themes running through the book of Acts. It is certain that Acts is given as a transitional book showing the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises that Gentiles would be included in God's redemptive plans. This becomes evident early on (in Acts 8) where Samaritans were brought into the young church. It is expanded upon in the same chapter when an Ethiopian eunuch is also noted as being accepted. Still during Peter's ministry, Gentiles of the house of Cornelius are accepted in Chapter

10. This not only continues, but it blossoms in the chapters where Paul becomes the main focus.

As such, a secondary theme, though not as obvious, is the rejection of the gospel by the Jews as a nation. This would lead to their exile and punishment set forth very clearly in the Old Testament.

In this, however, an interesting concept develops. Throughout Acts, the Jews consistently attempt to separate this new aspect of the faith from their authorized religion. In other words, only religions identified as *Religio Licita*, or “permitted religion,” were acknowledged by Rome and considered acceptable to be practiced in the empire. Judaism was considered *Religio Licita*.

Time and again, the Jews are seen to dismiss faith in Christ as an acceptable expression found under the umbrella of Judaism. And yet, each time this attempt is made, it is overturned by the Roman authorities, thus allowing the Christian faith to grow unimpeded in the empire. Further, it implicitly demonstrates that Christianity (meaning faith in Christ Jesus) is the logical, correct, and accepted outcome of the Scriptures held to by the Jewish nation.

There is also a historical theme running through the book. In Acts 1:8 (cited above), Jesus says that the faith was to be proclaimed “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” This pattern, proclaimed by Jesus, is methodically and exactly followed in Acts. Exactly as stated by the Lord, the gospel goes forth beginning in Jerusalem, expanding to Judea and then Samaria, and then even throughout the Gentile areas of the Roman empire. The gospel continues spreading beyond these locations to this day.

There is an ecclesiastical purpose to the book as well. The edification of the church is certainly a determined purpose of Acts. It is further a book that demonstrates the effectiveness of the church in doing what it was commissioned to do because the Lord is directing it for His purposes and with a specific intent in mind. This is seen, at times, both implicitly and explicitly in the book. It is thus a reassurance to the church that the same Lord who began the church is even now surely working out His purposes within the church.

#### **A Note Concerning Luke’s Writings:**

Despite being a Gentile, Luke has been given the honor of penning more content in the New Testament than any other author. His writings (Luke and Acts) comprise



approximately thirty percent of the New Testament, exceeding the writings of both John and Paul. Without his gospel, a full picture of the work of Christ in fulfillment of the law would be lacking. Without Acts, there would be a great deficiency in understanding the role of the church early on, and a void in our understanding of the importance of Paul's writings.

Life application: With this all too brief summary of the book of Acts, and with more introductory comments to come – and before we begin to analyze the book's content – a discussion of how to analyze, evaluate, and apply the book of Acts will be provided. Acts is a book that must be considered carefully. It is certain that almost all major theological errors within the church arise by a misapplication, or a misuse, of the book of Acts.

If the book is taken in its proper light, it is an invaluable tool for understanding what God is doing in the redemptive narrative in human history. If it is taken incorrectly, failed doctrine, and even heretical ideas, will arise (and consistently have arisen) within the church.

Let us consider the book of Acts in its proper light. In doing so, these errors in thinking and theology will be avoided.

*Heavenly Father, how we thank You for Your precious word. Help us to consider it carefully, handle it with respect, and be filled with joy as we search out its treasures. May we find Your proper purpose and intent for us in it, and may we apply what we learn to our lives. Yes, may it be so to Your glory. Amen.*

## **THE BOOK OF ACTS; AN INTRODUCTION – PART II**

As noted in the first introductory segment, this segment will reveal some of the patterns of Acts, and how Acts fits into the overall structure of how the Bible is laid out.

### **Main Purposes:**

There are several purposes concerning the need for the book of Acts as well as its placement in the Bible.

#### **1. The Spreading of the Gospel:**

Acts is a historical narrative that develops the theme set forth by Jesus before His ascension. In Acts 1:8, He will say –

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Both a purpose for the book and one main structure of the book are found in this statement. Acts begins in Jerusalem. It then extends out to Judea and then to Samaria. Eventually, it extends out into the Gentile world. From that point, the implication is that the narrative then continues throughout the whole world, exactly as Jesus proclaims. Paul and Barnabas use this terminology when speaking to the Jews at a synagogue in Acts 13:47 (a quote from Isaiah 49:6).

The pattern is set forth by sections of chapters –

- 1) Chapters 1 through 7 largely deal with the area of Jerusalem and focus on the Jews.
- 2) Chapters 8 through 12 largely deal with the areas of Judea and Samaria. As the Samaritans are a mixed-race, this is a key transition that leads into...
- 3) Chapters 13 through 28 largely deal with the evangelization of the Gentiles as the message spreads to the uttermost parts of the earth.

## **2. The Transfer of Authority from Jew to Gentile:**

This transition from predominantly a focus on the Jews to that of the Gentiles is clearly seen in the fact that the Apostle Peter (aka Simon), who is the “apostle to the circumcision” (as noted in Galatians 2:7), is mentioned over 60 times in Chapters 1-12. At the same time, Paul (aka Saul) is seen more than 20 times in those chapters, but he is always mentioned by his Jewish name Saul.

However, in chapters 13-28, Peter (Simon) is mentioned only twice. Both times are in Acts 15. In these same chapters, Paul (Saul), who is the “apostle to the Gentiles” (as noted in Romans 11:13, etc.), is mentioned over 130 times. The only time he is called by his Jewish name Saul in these chapters is when referring to accounts already mentioned in the first 12 chapters of the book.

To highlight these underlying patterns, between Peter and Paul which reveals the transfer of church authority from Jew to Gentile, a comparison of events that are detailed between Peter and Paul is provided by Luke –

Act of the Apostle/Chapter Act Occurs \*\* (see footnote)

1. Peter's work began by the Holy Spirit (2)
1. Paul's work began by the Holy Spirit (13)
  
2. Peter was thought to be drunk and then explains himself (2)
2. Paul was thought to be mad and then explains himself (26)
  
3. Peter's first sermon begins a new section of book (2)
3. Paul's first sermon begins a new section of book (13)
  
4. Peter has a time of work, preaching, and then persecution (2-11)
4. Paul has a time of work, preaching, and then persecution (13-19)
  
5. Peter has trouble after healing a man lame from birth (3)
5. Paul has trouble after healing a man lame from birth (14)
  
6. Peter says, "Silver and gold have I none" (3)
6. Paul says, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold" (20)
  
7. Peter's shadow heals (5)
7. Paul's handkerchief heals (19)
  
8. Peter is arrested in the temple and taken to Sanhedrin (4, 5)
8. Paul is arrested in the temple and taken to Sanhedrin (21-23)
  
9. Peter confronts Simon the sorcerer (8)
9. Paul confronts Elymas the sorcerer (13)
  
10. Peter performs an exorcism (5)
10. Paul performs an exorcism (16)
  
11. Peter raises Tabitha from the dead (9)
11. Paul raises Eutychus from the dead (20)
  
12. Peter lays hands for the reception of Spirit (8)
12. Paul lays hands for the reception of Spirit (19)
  
13. Peter worshipped (10)
13. Paul worshipped (14)

- 14. Peter imprisoned with miraculous escape (12)
- 14. Paul imprisoned with miraculous escape (16)
  
- 15. Angel stood by Peter (12)
- 15. Angel stood by Paul (27)
  
- 16. Peter called by vision to preach in Caesarea (10)
- 16. Paul called by vision to preach in Macedonia (16)
  
- 17. Peter's success brings Jewish jealousy (5)
- 17. Paul's success brings Jewish jealousy (13)
  
- 18. Peter heals the bedridden Aeneas (9)
- 18. Paul heals the bedridden father of Publius (28)
  
- 19. Peter ordains deacons (6)
- 19. Paul ordains elders (14)
  
- 20. Peter is "filled with the Spirit" (4)
- 20. Paul is "filled with the Spirit" (13)
  
- 21. Peter is bound with two chains (12:6)
- 21. Paul is bound with two chains (21:33)
  
- 22. Peter (twice) the Apostle to the Jews
- 22. Paul (four times) the Apostle to the Gentiles

### **3. The Fulfillment of the Blessing of Noah:**

In Genesis 9, a key to the entire redemptive scenario, from that time on, is given in Noah's blessing upon his sons –

And he said:

"Blessed *be* the LORD,  
 The God of Shem,  
 And may Canaan be his servant.  
<sup>27</sup> May God enlarge Japheth,  
 And may he dwell in the tents of Shem;  
 And may Canaan be his servant." Genesis 9:26-27

The primary blessing was given to Shem. It is he (his descendants) that would carry the spiritual blessing of the Lord from that time forward. However, a secondary blessing was laid upon Japheth saying, "And may he dwell in the tents of Shem." Though cryptic, it reveals what would occur in the possession of this spiritual banner.

The "tents of Shem" speaks of Shem's possession of this banner more than once. Japheth dwelling in those tents is a way of saying that he would also possess this banner at some point. It is evident from the structure of Acts that this spiritual banner transfers from Jerusalem to Rome, from Shem to Japheth, from Jew to Gentile (as expressed in the highlight of the apostles who ministered to these groups – Peter and Paul). All of the epistles are written to people groups descended from Japheth.

A key to this is found in the trade in which Paul was employed, a tentmaker (see Acts 18:3). It is a subtle note confirming the entire concept as he works with his hands, building up the "tent of Japheth."

This tent will, according to the dispensational model, end at the rapture of the church – a doctrine revealed by Paul. From there, the spiritual banner will transfer back to Shem, meaning the Jews of the tribulation and following into the millennial reign of Christ. This pattern is then actually seen in the structure of the Bible itself as is seen next.

#### **4. The Pivotal Placement of Acts:**

The layout of the Bible forms innumerable patterns. One is seen in the order of how the books are placed, with Acts providing a key turning point anticipated by John's gospel –

##### a. Tent of Shem:

Genesis - Malachi (Law)

Synoptic Gospels according to naming of Noah's sons (OT Law Fulfillment)

- \* Matthew – Directed predominantly to Shem
- \* Mark – Directed predominantly to Ham
- \* Luke – Directed predominantly to Japheth

##### b. Mixture/Transition

John (mixture of OT Law and NT concepts/theology)

Acts – Transition / Jerusalem to Rome / Peter to Paul / Jew to Gentile / Shem to Japheth

c. Tent of Japheth (dwelling in, meaning between, tents of Shem)

Romans-Philemon – to Gentile-led church

d. Tent of Shem

Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter to Jews (Shem)

e. Mixture

John (mixture)

Jude (mixture, final letter of warning)

f. Summary from John's time until the end

Revelation -1:1 - 4:1 (church – Japheth)

4:2 - 19:21 (tribulation upon the whole world)

21 - (millennial reign and final battle – Shem)

22 - (restoration of all things good for all of mankind)

\* In the sons of Noah, a secondary pattern is found in Acts as well. The three sons are mentioned together six times in the Old Testament (Genesis 5:32, 6:10, 7:13, 9:18, 10:1; and 1 Chronicles 1:4). In all instances, they are listed as Shem, Ham, and Japheth – regardless of their actual birth order. Significantly, this is the order in which the gospel is received by descendants of these three sons –

1) Sons of Shem – Acts 2 (the men of Israel)

2) Son of Ham – Acts 8:27 (the Ethiopian eunuch)

3) Sons of Japheth – Acts 10 (the house of Cornelius, the Italian)

## **5. Doctrinal Themes:**

Historical – This reveals the development of Acts 1:8 (Jerusalem, Judea & Samaria, ends of the earth)

Spiritual – This reveals the transfer of the spiritual banner from Jew to Gentile

Apostolic – This reveals the united message, but distinct audience, of Peter and Paul  
 Political – This reveals the truth that Christianity a legitimate religion (Religio Licita) stemming from the Jewish faith

Prophetic – This reveals the fulfillment of Noah’s blessing in the stream of redemptive history

**6. A Very Brief Outline:**

The Book of Acts – Fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission

Book Superstructure/ Jewish-Gentile contrast	Book Structure/ Church Growth	Book Outline
	Structure given by the Lord – v.8	1. The Ascension and awaiting the Promise.
Jewish witness with harvest.	Witness in Jerusalem.	2. The Omer is counted, the time has come! The birth of the Church – Pentecost.
		3. Apostolic signs of healing.
		4. Organized opposition begins.
Jewish resistance.	Witness to cities surrounding Jerusalem – v16.	5. The Spirit cleans house within; the Sanhedrin debates without.
		6. Resolution of internal conflicts.
Jewish leadership rejection of the message.		7. Stephan’s trial and martyrdom.
Jewish active persecution of the church.	Persecution resulting in witness to Judea and Samaria – v1.	8. Reception of the message by Samaritans and proselytes.
	Conversion of the Apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)	9. Saul’s conversion.
	First witness to the Gentiles.	10. Divine message to Cornelius and Peter – Gentile conversion.

Jewish believers confusion at Gentile acceptance.	Witness spreading out rapidly.	11. The message spreads as far as Antioch where the term “Christian” is established.
		12. The Apostle James is martyred; Peter is imprisoned and escapes; Herod dies.
Continued Jewish rejection – Paul and Barnabas turn to the Gentiles (v.46)	Official missions work established.	13. Saul and Barnabas set aside for missions.
		14. Effective missions with great Jewish resistance.
	Witness guidelines for Gentiles.	15. The council at Jerusalem.
	Witness carried forth with full church sanction.	16. Encounters in Macedonia.
		17. Encounters in Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens (Paul at the Areopagus).
Book Superstructure	Book Structure	Book Outline
		18. Encounters in Corinth, Ephesus, Antioch, Caesarea, Galatia, and Phrygia.
		19. Church growth and uproar in Ephesus!
		20. Paul’s encounters on the way to Jerusalem.
		21. Paul’s arrival and arrest in Jerusalem.
Total Jewish rejection of Paul’s testimony to the Gentiles		22. Paul’s testimony before the people of Jerusalem.
		23. Paul’s hectic path to Caesarea.



		24. Paul's trial before Felix.
		25. Paul's trial before Festus and King Agrippa.
		26. Paul's trial before Festus and King Agrippa (2).
		27. Sailing to Rome; lost at sea; shipwrecked on Malta.
Salvation of God has gone to the Gentiles – and they will hear it! (v.28)	Witness arrives in the Seat of Power – Rome.	28. Paul arrives in Rome.

\*\*I did not discover most of these Peter/Paul patterns. Many came in a college course conducted by Dr. W. Gary Phillips of Southern Evangelical Seminary. Credit is to him, if discovered by him.

*Lord God, thank You for allowing us to see wonderful treasures in Your word. They give us every confidence that it truly is from You, and it is revealing Your heart and mind to us. Yes, Lord God, thank You for Your precious word. Amen!*

## **THE BOOK OF ACTS; A BRIEF GUIDE ON HOW TO INTERPRET AND APPLY ITS CONTENTS**

Before beginning a detailed study of Acts, it should be noted that a vast majority of errors in proper doctrine within the church are found in ignoring the five main rules of sound biblical interpretation. They are –

Prescriptive. The verse or passage prescribes something.

Descriptive. The verse or passage merely describes what happens without establishing a precedent that is to be followed, obeyed, adhered to, and so on.

Context. This defines who is being spoken to, under what circumstances, under what covenant, under what dispensation, and so on.

Context. See above.

Context. See above.

In misapplying a verse as prescriptive or descriptive, a faulty view of what the Christian is to do will result. A prescriptive verse under one covenant is not necessarily prescriptive under another, such as –

“Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners.” Numbers 15:38

Obviously, we are not under the law of Moses, and we do not need to have tassels on our garments. This thinking is true within testaments when the author or speaker is referring to one covenant or another. In other words, Jesus’ words – when speaking to Israel in the synoptic gospels – do not necessarily apply to conduct within the church. This is because the context is:

He is speaking to Israel, not the church.

He is speaking under the Law of Moses (the Old Covenant), prior to the establishment of the New Covenant in His blood – which sets aside, annuls, and makes obsolete the Old Covenant (see Hebrews 7:18, 8:13, and 10:9). For example –

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” Matthew 5:23, 24

“Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out *His* hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ <sup>42</sup> As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. <sup>43</sup> And He strictly warned him and sent him away at once, <sup>44</sup> and said to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.’”

-Mark 1:41-44

In the first example, under the New Covenant, there is no altar because there is not a temple to go to. Christ is the fulfillment of those things. In the second example, there is no priest (apart from our great High Priest, Jesus) to go to if cleansed, and there are no offerings to be made for such a cleansing. In both examples, Jesus was speaking to members of the Israelite society, under the law, prior to His fulfillment of the law.

These examples are obvious, but everything must be evaluated in this manner. In understanding these five principal rules of biblical interpretation, it must be noted that almost all doctrinal error within the Christian church stems from not properly following these basic rules. Inserting the synoptic gospels into one’s New Covenant theology will (not maybe) result in error –

“Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

-Luke 21:36

“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, <sup>4</sup> just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, <sup>5</sup> having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.” Ephesians 1:3-6

There is no need for a believer in Christ to “pray always” that he “may be counted worthy” as Jesus said. Jesus was speaking to Israel about matters pertaining to Israel. In Christ, believers are accepted in the beloved, and are not appointed “to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

Understanding this, it must be noted that of all of the major doctrinal error found within the church, we can estimate that apart from the obvious error of improperly applying the synoptic gospels to one’s doctrine, 99.827635% (obviously this is intended as

humor) of all major error can be avoided (or corrected) by properly applying the five basic rules mentioned above to the book of Acts.

The book of Acts is almost entirely a descriptive account of what occurred during the establishment of the church. Other than just a few verses, it prescribes pretty much nothing. And of that which is prescriptive at the time it was given to the church (such as the ruling of the council in Acts 15), even that is later explained, set aside, or expanded upon in the epistles. The things prescribed were often short-term expediencies that were given for guidance to the church until the epistles were written by the New Testament writers through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Luke merely documents these things.

Therefore, outside of a very small number of verses (such as Acts 1:7, 8) there is almost nothing that can be considered prescriptive for the church –

“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ <sup>7</sup> And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’” Acts 1:6-8

A good example of the misapplication of a passage, which has resulted in faulty doctrine or even heresy within the church (such as in the Church of Christ denomination) is found in Acts 2 –

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’” Acts 2:38, 39

Peter was speaking solely to the men of Israel who had just crucified their Messiah. The baptism was mandated as an outward demonstration of their inward repentance. And the repentance (the word means “to change one’s mind”) was necessary because they had just crucified Jesus. Paul’s epistles (and even later verses in Acts) clearly set aside both of these things. Believers now receive the Spirit immediately upon belief in the work of Christ (see Ephesians 1:13, 14), and belief alone – even without repentance, based upon the circumstances – is all that is necessary for salvation (see the gospel as detailed in 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4).

The number of failed points of doctrine and even heresy that have resulted from a misunderstanding, or a misapplication, of the book of Acts is immense. If Acts is taken in its proper light, error within the Church of Christ, the charismatic/Pentecostal movement, the heresy of hyperdispensationalism, and so on would be eliminated in part or entirely.

Acts is obviously a key transitional book, coming after the gospels but prior to the doctrine-setting epistles. It is indispensable in what it contains, but it is also to be handled properly, evaluated carefully, and applied correctly. With this approach, the faithful Christian will be properly trained in how to continue along his path of growth and understanding of this precious gift we call the word of God.

If you are willing to commit to the next 1007 days, one day at a time, to reading each coming commentary, I will attempt to provide you with my very best effort to instruct you properly in this marvelous treasure we call the book of Acts. May you be blessed as you seek the Lord's face, and as you pursue Him through this study – and indeed all of your studies in His sacred word.

~Emlen S. "Charlie" Garrett

Life application: Take time to memorize these five principal rules of biblical understanding: Prescriptive, Descriptive, and Context, Context, Context.

*Lord God, help us to pursue Your word properly. Help us to maintain the proper context, and to never misapply verses or precepts. It is our hope and great desire that we will be pleasing to You because we have rightly applied Your word to our walk in Your presence. Thank You for Your wonderful word, O God. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 1

**The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Acts 1:1**

To open the book of Acts, Luke immediately refers to his first work concerning the ministry of the Lord, saying, “The former account, I made.” The word translated as “former” (*prótos*) is literally “first,” and it should be translated as such. It was the beginning of his writings concerning the work of the Lord Jesus.

This is not being nitpicky. Rather, Luke is being precise because someone could – ostensibly – claim that another book, a forgery, was written by Luke to detail the interim years of Jesus’ life from His youth (see Luke 2:42) until the time He began His ministry (see Luke 3:23). There is another such false writing known as the “Infancy of the Gospel of Thomas.” Such a writing could not be ascribed to Luke because of Luke’s careful wording.

In stating that the gospel of Luke is his first such writing, it then sets the sequence from that point on. In the next verses, he will show that the ending of the gospel leads directly into this writing. As such, this is his second writing concerning what has occurred.

The word translated as “account” (*logos*) is literally “word.” It signifies the expression of a thought. It is a discourse. Various translations say “account,” “treatise,” “book,” “narrative,” and so on.

Next, the word “made” signifies “to do.” A good paraphrase, because of the content, would be “composed.” Luke wrote his gospel, and now he is composing another work to build upon what he previously put forth. And this is addressed as, “O Theophilus.”

The Greek word *ó* is used much as our “oh!” today. It is an expression of deep emotion. One can almost feel Luke’s intensity and sense the joy of his beginning this second composition as the blood pulses through him as he considers the enormity of all of the things he had come to know, and that he – at times – had personally participated in.

The name Theophilus is found only here and in Luke 1:3. It is a compound name, coming from *theos* (God) and *philos* (friendly). Thus, his name means “Friend of God.” In Luke 1:3, the honorific “most excellent” was affixed to the stating of his name –

“it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus.”

As such, he may have been a person of note or rank. Not including that title now may indicate that the two had become more intimate friends since the penning of the first letter. Or, it may simply be that having used the honorific in the first composition, and because this composition can be considered a continuation of what occurred, Luke didn't feel the honorific was necessary again. With the recipient established, Luke explains what the first composition detailed, saying, “of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.”

The words “of all” do not necessarily mean “everything.” Rather, the Greek word can be used in a superlative sense, such as in Matthew 2:3. Or, it can simply refer to everything that Luke chose to include in his gospel narrative. This is obvious. Luke doesn't record what Jesus ate for breakfast on any given day. Thus, this is referring to the works of the Lord that were pertinent to conveying the message intended by Luke to convince his reader that Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah given by God.

The word translated as “began” can be either a historical statement which encompasses the words “to do and teach,” or it can be a note of ongoing activity. In other words, in Genesis 9:20, it says, “And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard.” It is a Hebraism where the statement encompasses everything about his actions in farming. Or, the words could be conveying the idea of “My first letter began the story of what Jesus said and did, and this letter continues those things.”

The first option may be correct, but it is also true that Acts is a continuation of the works of Jesus. He is spoken of directly in Chapter 1, and He appears at several key points in the book as well (such as in Acts 9:5). Of this word, Charles Ellicott states the following –

“The verb ‘begin’ is specially characteristic of St. Luke's Gospel, in which it occurs not less than thirty-one times. Its occurrence at the beginning of the Acts is, accordingly, as far as it goes, an indication of identity of authorship. He sought his materials from those who had been ‘from the beginning’ eye-witnesses and ministers of the word (Luke 1:2).”

The word “do” signifies the acts accomplished by the Lord, such as healings, miracles, signs, and wonders. His actions demonstrated that He was appointed by God to do the works of God.

The word “teach” signifies those things that either corrected the people’s thinking about the law, or which established doctrines that needed to be set forth for the people to properly live before God. The word certainly also includes the giving of His parables to enlighten both the state of man in many ways (morally, for example) and in what would come upon Israel in the future (such as the parable of the ten minas as detailed in Luke 19:11-27).

A note concerning translations: It is the intent of this Acts commentary to teach what is right, correct that which is deficient, and to highlight that which is wrong. One error found in the church, and which has – unfortunately – turned into a cult, is that of King James Onlyism. When someone is in a cult, there is little chance of training them out of it.

However, others can be made aware of the cult, and they can be instructed on what is proper. This commentary will not highlight all of the errors in the KJV in relation to the book of Acts. If it did, the commentary would be many pages longer, and for little reason. But it is worth highlighting that the KJV has a knack of mistranslating the first sentence of many books in the Bible, such as Acts 1:1 –

The word “former” is the “first,” and it should be translated as such. (see Matthew 10:2). Also, the words “have I made” should be “I made.” Of this, Cambridge states, “The time is indefinite, and we have no warrant in the text for that closer union of the two books, in point of date, which is made by the language of the A. V.”

So common is this, that their translation of the first sentence of the Bible, Genesis 1:1, is in error –

The KJV translates *ha’shemayim* (literally, the heavens) in the singular (the heaven). They then translate the exact same phrase in the plural in Genesis 2:1, 2:4, etc. There is an annoying lack of consistency in this. This is not a great way to start a Bible translation, with such an obvious error, and it does not bode well for the reader who desires to know what is being conveyed in the original texts.

Although these are minor deficiencies, the KJV is – literally – riddled with error. If you would like to read an ongoing list of errors in this translation, please go to the Superior Word website, then go to WRITINGS, and there will be a list of them there. This is updated from time to time. Enough said of that. Just be sure to read many translations to get a better sense of what is being said.



Life application: In the book of Acts, Luke will put forth one of the most detailed writings found in the entire Bible. It is a beautiful follow up to the gospel that bears his name, and it is important that the book be studied carefully, contemplated intensely, and not rushed through. It is a foundational book to understanding what God has done in order to continue the redemptive narrative of man, as it transitions from the time of the law to the age of the church.

Let us slowly and methodically pursue each detail. It has been given by God to us, and therefore we should be willing to spend the time necessary to say we have done our best to understand what He is conveying to us. To His glory!

*Lord God, help us to be methodical, patient, and studious in our pursuit of Your word. Give us the time and desire to do so, and may we not cut corners in our search of it. Your word is a reflection of who You are, and so let us tend to it with that in mind. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, Acts 1:2**

The Greek of these words allows for various translations. Note the connection to the Holy Spirit in these –

until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen (NKJV)

Until the day in which he was taken up, after he had commanded the Apostles whom he had chosen by The Spirit of Holiness, Aramaic Bible (also CEV)

Another option is that he was “taken up” through (or by) the Holy Spirit.

The most natural and obvious translation is connecting the Holy Spirit to the giving of the commandments by Jesus. Also, the word translated as “He was taken up” is actually at the end of the verse. A literal reading would be, “until the day, having given orders to the apostles by Spirit Holy, whom He had chosen, He was taken up.”

With these things stated, the words can be more thoroughly evaluated. The previous verse noted that Jesus both began to do and to teach “until the day in which He was taken up.” The words anticipate what is coming in verse 1:8. In other words, there is a period between His resurrection and ascension that formed the basis of the words of

verse 1. This period will be seen in the next verse to be forty days. For now, the words next state, “after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments.”

The word “after” is inferred by the translators and is tied to the words “had given commandments.” That can be seen in the literal translation (above). The single word translated as “having given orders” is an aorist participle. The giving of the commandment through the Holy Spirit occurred and then He was taken up.

The purpose of what is being said is that everything about Christ’s ministry was directed by the spirit of God. He was filled with the Spirit (see Luke 4:1). The Spirit was involved in raising Christ (Romans 8:11), and after His being raised, then He gave commandments through the Holy Spirit. Thus, everything about the process is at the sanction of God. Of the work of the Holy Spirit, Albert Barnes more fully states the situation –

“It was to be his office to carry forward the work of redemption in applying it to the hearts of people. Whatever was done, therefore, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, was to be regarded as under the unique influence and direction of the Holy Spirit. Even the instructions of Jesus and his commission to the apostles, were to be regarded as coming within the department of the sacred Spirit, or within the province of his unique work. The instructions were given by divine authority, by infallible guidance, and as a part of the work which the Holy Spirit was sent down to accomplish. Under the direction and guidance of that Spirit the apostles were to go forth; by his aid they were to preach the gospel, to organize the church, to establish its order and its doctrines; and hence, the entire work was declared to be by his direction.”

With this understood, the verse finishes the thought of Christ giving the commandments (through the Holy Spirit) “to the apostles whom He had chosen.” The process of establishing the church and its guidelines for functioning was to be initiated by these men who were to receive the Promise of the Father (Luke 24:48), meaning the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them.

This immediately sets the stage for understanding everything that will occur from this point on. It is the Holy Spirit that will be the One who directs the process. He is also the One who inspired Luke to record these things (see 2 Timothy 3:16 & 2 Peter 1:21). As such, this should clue the reader into several key doctrines that will be expanded upon later in Acts.

1. There is one church that goes through a developmental and transitional process that is guided by the Holy Spirit.

2. There is one gospel that will be conveyed to this church body as conveyed by these apostles.

There is a united purpose in the apostles, even if their audience is specifically designated (meaning to the Jew and to the Gentile – see Galatians 2:8).

3. The New Covenant forms the basis of everything that occurs from this point on.
  - a. There is one, and only one, New Covenant in Christ's blood that is applied to both Jew and Gentile (see Luke 22:20 as conveyed to these same apostles by Jesus, and 1 Corinthians 11:25 as conveyed by Paul to the Gentile church in Corinth).
  - b. This New Covenant is specifically given to “the house of Israel” and “the house of Judah” (see Jeremiah 31:31). Clearly demonstrating that the church has not replaced Israel.
  - c. The church is a single, unified body of Jew and Gentile with the exact same gospel to both. Gentiles are simply grafted into this body (see Romans 11:16-25), sharing in the one commonwealth of Israel (see Ephesians 2:11-13).

Understanding these points, we can be aware – in advance – of several insidious teachings within the church. This includes false teachings such as Hebrew Roots, Hyperdispensationalism, and so forth. They are heretical and must be vehemently argued against.

There is one, and only one gospel that is given to one, and only one, body. The question of national Israel, their eventual restoration, and the rule of Christ during the millennial reign, along with all of the associated promises made to them, is not unrelated, but it is separate and distinct from what is occurring in the church at this time.

Life application: Understanding the intent and purpose of the book of Acts, in relation to everything else that is going on in redemptive history, is necessary to form a full picture of what God is doing in the world.

To separate the church into two separate entities, as hyperdispensationalism does; to reinsert the law (in part or in whole) into the New Covenant, as the Hebrew Roots movement does; or to say that the church has replaced Israel as replacement theology claims, blemishes the intent of what God is doing in the world.

Depending on the teaching, it can doctrinally destroy the effective working of Jesus Christ on behalf of all people. It can incorrectly apply other covenant promises made by God to the people of Israel. It attempts to diminish the efficacy of the shed blood of Christ, marring or destroying the marvel of what God has done through His perfect life, sacrificial death in fulfillment of the law, and His resurrection.

Let us carefully pay attention to what Acts reveals. In doing so, we will avoid these false teachings, and we will be able to hold fast to the wonder of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for Your wonderful and precious word that leads us to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. May we carefully and faithfully present the gospel of Christ to those who so desperately need to hear it. And may we conduct our lives in holiness all of our days. To Your glory, O God! Amen.*

**to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Acts 1:3**

The words now, speaking of Christ Jesus, begin by referring back to “the apostles whom He had chosen” of the previous verse. These words say, “to whom He also presented Himself.” The word translated as “presented” is a compound verb coming from a word signifying “close beside” and another meaning “to stand.” It was used in Luke 1:9, for example, when speaking of Gabriel “who stands” in the presence of God.

In other words, this wasn’t a vision. It wasn’t just that they saw Jesus afar off. It wasn’t that someone said, “I saw Jesus hovering above me.” Rather, He was physically there before the apostles. This destroys the Jehovah’s Witnesses argument that Jesus was resurrected as a “spirit being.” It is a false and heretical teaching.

And more, He “presented Himself alive.” Christ Jesus died on the cross. This was clearly witnessed by those who stood and watched the event. His body was taken down from the cross and placed in a tomb. The tomb was closed. The tomb was sealed. The tomb was guarded. But Christ rose –

“He is risen!” Mark 16:6

It was in this resurrected state of Christ that He presented Himself to the apostles. This is the foundational truth upon which all of Christianity stands or falls. The physical,

bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is what allows the faith to continue from generation to generation in a state of hope that cannot be extinguished. If the story is not true, or if it is not believed, there would be no hope of glory for the people of God. Hence, there would be no “people of God.”

However, Christ rose and was seen alive “after His suffering.” There was no mix-up in the timing of events. There was no misremembering of the chronology of what occurred. Christ ministered to the people of Israel. On a particular night, He shared a meal with His apostles. He spoke of His suffering to come and of the initiation of a New Covenant in His blood. He went with them to the Mount of Olives and withdrew from them to pray.

At this time, He truly began His suffering as Luke carefully records –

“And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” Luke 22:44

It was there He was arrested and taken through a long night/morning of abuse. Eventually, He was tried and sentenced to be crucified. In His crucifixion, He died. Upon His death, He was placed in the tomb. The chronology of events was carefully detailed. After all of these events concerning His suffering, He presented Himself alive “by many infallible proofs.”

The word translated as “infallible proofs” is found only here in Scripture, *tekmérion*. It signifies a marker, as in a signpost. Thus, it is something that marks itself off as unmistakable or irrefutable.

Ruckman goes into great lengths to argue that there is some type of plot to undermine the truth of the resurrection by changing the translation from “irrefutable proofs” to things like “proofs,” “convincing proofs,” and so on. He does this by citing the Douay-Rheims Version of 1582 that uses the words “many arguments.” Thus, supposedly demonstrating that this was an intentional manipulation to deny the truth of the “infallible proofs.”

The ridiculous nature of this argument is seen in that earlier English Bibles, like the Wycliffe and Tyndale versions, used the word “tokens.” The first Bible to use “irrefutable proofs” is the Geneva Bible that comes after (not before) the 1582 Douay-Rheims. Ruckman then says, “Plato, Aristotle, and Lysias used it for a *convincing, sure, certain, demonstrative* proof.”

In this, Ruckman uses one of the very words he just argued against, *convincing*, in his attempt to diminish the work of other translators. This type of niggling over minutiae is a distraction from the overall intent of the words which is clearly that Jesus was “seen by them.” Everything about the surrounding context clearly demonstrates that Jesus was resurrected in a bodily form. This is a huge problem within the church, arguing for single translations that one is familiar with or “agrees with more,” when the point of what is said is clearly expressed in the larger context of the passage.

Concerning Jesus in this passage, in His presentation of Himself, there could be no doubt that it was Him. He was able to remind them of His own words telling them what would occur. He was able to demonstrate from their own prophetic writings that the things they saw would happen and that He would then enter into His glory. He was able to talk to them about intimate details of their time together that no deceiver could know.

The evidence was certain, convincing, infallible, and it was irrefutable. Luke’s research of the events left him with no doubt as to the veracity of their claims. They saw Christ Jesus die in the most brutal manner possible, and then they saw Him alive again. But more, Luke records that He was “being seen by them during forty days.”

The Greek reads “through forty days.” This is the only time this interval of time is recorded, but it is an important point to make. It wasn’t just that these men saw Christ, or rather “thought they saw Christ” in a mass hallucination, once or twice during a gathering to mourn Him.

Rather, they saw Him over forty days in various locations and in various ways. The “infallible proofs” continued to heap up as He interacted with them. There are more than a dozen times that the Lord is recorded to have appeared. Each interaction brought more surety to the truth that He was victorious over death. During those appearances through this forty-day period, Luke notes that He was “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

The idea here is that a plan that had already been developed was now revealed to them. However, His words left them with still unanswered questions about how things would be in various aspects. This is certain, based on the coming words of verse 1:6. Christ spoke of the kingdom of God, which was to be built on who He is, what He did, and what it meant for the people of the world. The apostles, although obviously understanding this to some extent, still misunderstood aspects of what would occur as well.

Of this kingdom of God, the apostles, including Paul, who would only later be included in its development, is referred to throughout Acts and the epistles. The same “kingdom of God” is spoken of by Peter, such as in 2 Peter 1, and by Paul, such as in Ephesians 5:5. In Acts, Philip preached of it in Acts 8:12, and Peter and John confirmed it later in the chapter. Paul, likewise, refers to it again and again in Acts.

Understanding this, there is one – and only one – kingdom of God that is variously referred to by these men. This kingdom is based solely on the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is the focus of what occurs, and it is something that even the Old Testament Scriptures testified to. It is expressed to both Jew and Gentile, and it is based on the single gospel message that was preached by both Peter and Paul (as well as all of the apostles – see 1 Corinthians 15:11) –

“So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. <sup>24</sup> And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.” Acts 28:23, 24

“Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” <sup>29</sup> And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

<sup>30</sup> Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, <sup>31</sup> preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”

-Acts 28:28-31

Life application: The commentaries set forth in this study of the book of Acts will warn you from time to time of the heresy of hyperdispensationalism. It is an insidious teaching that divides the kingdom of God into two separate entities that are based on two separate gospels – one to the Jew and one to the Gentile. It destroys the typology of the Old Testament for the Gentile believers by saying those things only apply to Jewish thinking. It removes the church from the blessings, admonitions, and warnings of the book of Revelation – spoken by Jesus Christ to the people of the world.

Be wise and understanding concerning the state of Israel. The Jews must come to saving faith in Jesus Christ individually in order to be saved. However, God still has a plan for national Israel that is based on His covenant promises to them as a people. Salvation of national Israel is something that will occur after the church age, and it is something that

will occur when the same prophetic words of the Old Testament that refer to Christ, and that were spoken of by Paul to the Gentiles in Acts 28 (above), will be accepted by the nation of Israel collectively.

In keeping the categories straight, heresies such as this will be understood for what they are, and they will be avoided.

*Lord God, how good it is to know that our hope in Christ Jesus is grounded in the certainty of those who beheld Him after His resurrection. We don't need to fret if this was just a single mass hallucination of a group of demented people. Rather, it is a well-documented set of events that happened at various times and in various places, and which included a great number of first-hand witnesses. Thank You for the surety we possess as we continue in the faith we profess. Amen.*

**And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” *He said*, “you have heard from Me; Acts 1:4**

Luke just noted that Christ presented Himself alive to the apostles through a forty-day period, “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” The idea of a kingdom is that of a particular place and/or group ruled by a king. There is nothing stated in Scripture to negate the same term applying to more than one thing at the same time.

For example, Paul speaks of the kingdom of God (as noted in the previous verse) in Acts. And yet, this was during a time when Rome ruled, where kings and kingdoms were in place and where Christians were subject to those earthly rulers, such as Herod in the land of Israel. The fact that there are various meanings to the word “kingdom” will become important in just a few verses. For now, Christ Jesus has spoken of the kingdom of God. That is now immediately followed by the words of verse 1:4, beginning with, “And being assembled together with *them*.”

Some translations say, “And eating together.” This is based on a variant spelling of the word. In one spelling, it signifies to “crowd,” or “throng.” In the other, it signifies “salt” (hence, eating salt, or dining together). Either translation is possible, because Luke’s words follow after those of his gospel. In Luke 24:43, it says that Jesus “ate in their presence.” In that same encounter, it then says –



“Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” Luke 24:49

Only after that does He lead them out to Bethany. As the accounts state the same events, but without specificity, either word (assembled or ate) is possible. With that analyzed, it next says, “He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem.” This is perfectly in accord with the words of Luke 24:49. They were in Jerusalem, He appeared to them and spoke to them, and so on.

However, it is true that Matthew and John record Jesus as meeting with the disciples in Galilee. Therefore, various events occurred somewhere in between the events Luke records. Luke’s gospel, and these beginning verses of Acts, are directed to particular events leading from the resurrection to the ascension. This is their focus, and no contradiction between his words and those of the other gospels can be inferred.

The words to not depart from Jerusalem, then, are referring to the time after His ascension, not after the resurrection (as might be inferred from the end of the gospel narrative). As such, what is being stated now by Jesus is at the end of the forty-day period. In this, Luke continues by saying, “but to wait for the Promise of the Father.”

The word translated as “wait” is found only here in the Bible. It signifies to “remain all around.” It is a way of saying that they are to stay despite any obstacles that may be involved. In other words, there may be business back at home that needs to be attended to. Whatever would normally keep them from remaining was to be secondary to staying and waiting for what was promised to come.

Also, the word translated as “Promise” is defined by Vincent’s Word Studies as “Signifying a free promise, given without solicitation. This is the invariable sense of the word throughout the New Testament, and this and its kindred and compound words are the only words for promise in the New Testament.” Further, Walter Kaiser says of this word, “Almost every NT use of the word promise (*epaggelia*) points back to the OT.” It is a legal term that speaks of a promise which is officially sanctioned. This is the Promise, “‘which,’ *He said*, ‘you have heard from Me.’”

This is referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit as is repeatedly spoken of in John 14, 15, and 16. However, this may also be the words of the Promise recorded in Luke 24:49 (cited above) which occurred just after the resurrection. He may be restating that now, just prior to the ascension. Hence, the timeline should not be called into question when placed along with the events recorded in the other gospels.

Life application: Though there are difficulties in forming an exact timeline of the events recorded in the gospels and now in Acts, none of the accounts contradicts any other. Rather, inferences have to be made. But this is the same with any such record when various eyewitnesses are brought together.

Each gives his own perspective, and a chronology is then developed based on that. In the case of Luke's words, it is possible, and even likely, that Jesus said the Promise was coming soon after His resurrection, and then He said it again, just prior to His ascension – reminding the disciples that they were to remain in Jerusalem.

The matter ahead was of such importance that they were not to be pulled away for any lesser reason. And Jesus has promised to return again for His church. We are not to be pulled away from our hope for any reason. Let us remain vigilant and not get our attention sidetracked by the things of this world. But let us hold fast to this great hope that we possess.

This thought is repeated again and again by Paul, by the author of Hebrews (probably Paul), and by Jesus. HOLD FAST! Good things are in store for those who do so.

*Lord God, Your word asks us to hold fast to the name of Christ, to the things that we have been given in Christ, to our hope in Him, to the doctrine that has been laid before us in Your word, to our confession of faith, and so on. Help us to be responsible with the wonderful treasure we have been blessed with – the hope of glory. May we hold fast to it always. Amen.*

**for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Acts 1:5**

The words now complete the thought of the previous verse where Jesus spoke to the apostles concerning “the Promise of the Father.” He had already told them of the Promise to come on several occasions. Two such times are found in John 14 –

“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” John 14:16, 17

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”

-John 14:26

References to the coming, indwelling, and work of the Spirit are also found in John 16 and 17. In these descriptions, the Spirit’s role is more fully understood, but Jesus next explains that the Spirit’s coming is an antitype that was anticipated in typology previously set forth, saying, “for John truly baptized with water.”

To understand what Jesus is referring to, a few verses from the gospels should be considered –

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Matthew 3:11

“I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”

-Luke 3:16

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup>This is He of whom I said, “After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.” <sup>31</sup>I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.’

<sup>32</sup> And John bore witness, saying, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. <sup>33</sup>I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>34</sup> And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.’” John 1:29-34

John’s baptism was one in water and of repentance. But more, his ministry was one directing the people to Another who was to come (see Acts 19:4). His typological baptism anticipated the baptism of the Holy Spirit. John baptized the people, immersing them in water, based on repentance. In contrast, Jesus (see above, “He will baptize you”) baptizes the people into the “Holy Spirit and fire” based upon belief in His accomplished work.

The “water” of John’s baptism was an outward washing of the body. It was a ritual purification intended to demonstrate an inward change in the person. The “fire” of Jesus’ baptism is an internal purification of the soul. Fire in this case is not literal fire, but what fire symbolizes, meaning purification. Peter refers to this internal purification in 1 Peter 3 –

“There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”

-1 Peter 3:21, 22

The promised baptism that John spoke of is now repeated by Jesus. This is “the Promise of the Father” referred to in verse 1:4. He next explicitly states this, saying, “but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Just as John immersed the people in the waters of Israel, turning them again to the Law of Moses (his words “unto repentance” signify a change in mind), so Christ would immerse the people in the Holy Spirit of God, based on their acceptance of His completed work under (and in fulfillment of) that same Law of Moses. The Spirit is to be given to those who accept that He has accomplished all things, died in fulfillment of them (thereby establishing the New Covenant in His blood), and was raised again – thus confirming the validity and doctrine of the New Covenant.

This coming of the Holy Spirit was to be God’s stamp of approval concerning the work of Christ, His evidence of it, to the people of Israel. With that understood, Jesus next says that it will be “not many days from now.”

No set time is given. The apostles only knew that they were to wait in Jerusalem. Having already seen Christ’s fulfillment of the Feast of Passover (Leviticus 23:5), and the Feast of Firstfruits (Leviticus 23:9-14), if they were attentive, they could have logically guessed that this Promise would be coming in just a few more days. Whether they deduced this or not is unstated, but certainly when the time came, they would understand the event as the fulfillment of the typology set forth in the law. That will be seen in Acts 2.

Life application: There is a very poor doctrine set forth concerning baptism based on the heresy of hyperdispensationalism. This says that believers today do not need to perform water baptism, but that was only intended for Israel. Though it is true that John’s baptism was in water and a baptism of repentance, this does not negate the

requirement for water baptism for believers under the New Covenant. In fact, it is after the establishment of the New Covenant that Christ mandates water baptism for believers –

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus says nothing of repentance there. He gives this not as a part of the salvation process, but as an ordinance to those who have believed already. They have been baptized into the Holy Spirit. As such, the ordinance is an outward display of the inward change that has taken place. It is a public acknowledgment of the act of God upon the believer. Though none of the accounts in Acts are prescriptive, time and again, those who believe the gospel in the book of Acts – Jew and Gentile – are baptized in accord with the word of the Lord stated in Matthew. The precedent is given to highlight the precept. And the precept is a command of the risen Christ.

The same people who deny that baptism is expected of believers will faithfully proclaim that believers are to take the Lord’s Supper. That was an ordinance also commanded by the Lord, *even before* He was crucified and rose. It, like baptism, is a public acknowledgement concerning what the Lord has already accomplished as well as an anticipation of His return someday.

It is the epitome of confused theology to say that the Lord’s Supper is an expected ordinance of the Lord, but that water baptism is not. The antisemitic undertones of saying that one ordinance applies to the church and the other only applies to Jews are evident. But more, it destroys the purpose and intent of the Lord’s words that are directed to “all the nations.”

Followers of the Lord Jesus do not baptize others into the Holy Spirit. Only Christ immerses His believers in the Holy Spirit. Followers of Christ (well, faithful followers of Christ) baptize converts into the typology of what Christ has accomplished. Such baptism is not only for the believer, but it is also for those who see the rite and understand the commitment to Christ. The twisting of Scripture by this heretical ideology is to be rejected and spoken against.

*Glorious God, how good it is to share in the wonder and marvel of what Christ Jesus has done for us. Not only are we freed from the stain of sin upon our souls, but we are also given the absolute guarantee that it is so through the sealing of Your Holy Spirit when we have faith in what He has done. We have moved from death to life, even life eternal! Hallelujah and Amen!*

**Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Acts 1:6**

The verse now folds into what was said in the previous two verses. In verse 1:4, it said, “And being assembled together.” After that, they were given instruction by the Lord. Now, it reiterates that they had been assembled. However, this doesn’t negate that they were assembled in one place, and then they came together in another.

In other words, verse 1:4 may be the same event recorded in Luke 24:49, and this verse now is their assembling on the Mount of Olives many days later, or verse 1:4 could be a repeat of the thought of Luke 24:49 many days later, and the words now are recorded at that same time. Either way, no damage is done to the chronology.

The Promise was made, events occurred over the next many days, and now forty days later (after the resurrection – Luke 1:3), the Lord gives his final words to His disciples. In this context, the words begin with, “Therefore, when they had come together.”

This is the final gathering on the Mount of Olives (see 1:9). The disciples don’t yet know this, but this location is chosen in anticipation of the fulfillment of a prophecy from Scripture that will be explained when verse 1:11 is evaluated. For now, it next says, “they asked Him.”

The verb is in the imperfect tense. It thus indicates a repetition of the question, urging Him for an answer. As such, it is like an interrogation – “they were asking Him” (repeatedly). This was a topic of much importance to them as they were “saying, Lord, ‘will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’”

One can see John asking, “Lord are we going to kick the Romans out of the land?” The next asks, “Where is Your palace going to be?” A third might have asked, “Lord, can I choose the area I will supervise. I really love the area around Galilee.” In other words, the questions are all stemming from a particular perspective – that of the promised messianic kingdom age.

This would have been the hope of every Jew who held to the veracity of their Scriptures. They literally drip with such promises, such as –

“The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> Now it shall come to pass in the latter days

*That* the mountain of the LORD’s house

Shall be established on the top of the mountains,

And shall be exalted above the hills;

And all nations shall flow to it.

<sup>3</sup> Many people shall come and say,

“Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

To the house of the God of Jacob;

He will teach us His ways,

And we shall walk in His paths.”

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,

And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup> He shall judge between the nations,

And rebuke many people;

They shall beat their swords into plowshares,

And their spears into pruning hooks;

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,

Neither shall they learn war anymore.” Isaiah 2:1-4

So certain is this particular prophecy that it is carefully repeated in Malachi 4:1-4.

Understanding that this is a literal, earthly rule, and understanding that Jesus appears to confirm it here and elsewhere (such as Matthew 19:28 and in several of His parables), this was what was most pressing on the minds of the disciples.

It is this idea, that of a literal rule on earth known as the “kingdom age,” that causes a great deal of confusion among scholars. Many deny the literal nature of the prophecies, saying that when the Jews rejected Christ, the kingdom was transferred to the church and the church has replaced Israel.

That view, known as replacement theology, is not heretical, but it is dismissive of a literal interpretation of Old Testament passages, it denies a literal reading of the “thousand years” referred to six times in Revelation 20, and it disregards the establishment and fulfillment of the covenants with the fathers (meaning both that made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and that made to the people brought out of Egypt and given covenantal promises at Mount Sinai) in the books of Moses.

Others find this kingdom to be one designated for the Jews, and therefore there must be two gospels (one to the Jew through Peter and one to the Gentiles through Paul). This is a heretical view known as hyperdispensationalism. It takes the words of the New Testament authors and epistles and it divides them up in such a manner that only the words of Paul are accepted as a valid presentation of doctrine and practice to the church today. It dismisses the words of Revelation 1-3, saying they belong solely to Israel of the future, and it rejects the words of Jesus which are prescriptive for the church concerning baptism and evangelism.

There are innumerable other incorrect ideas concerning the status and future of Israel that have been presented. Some are simply poor doctrine, some are heretical. One must carefully pay heed to what is stated in the Old Testament in order to form a proper understanding of what the future of Israel will be.

Life application: The “kingdom” spoken of in Acts 1:6 is not always the same kingdom referred to by the apostles in the epistles. Further, in Acts 8, Philip preaches “the things concerning the kingdom of God.” This kingdom of God is then validated and approved of by Peter and John who went to Samaria in response to Philip’s preaching. This same kingdom is then referred to in Acts 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; and 28:23 & 28:31 when it is proclaimed by Paul and those with him.

The “kingdom of God” refers to a right relationship with God because of the final, full, and finished work of Jesus Christ. It applies to Jew and Gentile. This is obvious, because Paul first proclaims it to the Jews in every location he goes, such as in Acts 28:23 noted above, and then he proclaims it to the Gentiles immediately afterward.

The “kingdom” of Israel is the fulfillment of the “kingdom age” promises made to Israel for possession of and security within the land of Israel, and of ruling by the Lord over the nations from that land. In dismissing the latter (replacement theology), or incorrectly mixing the two (hyperdispensationalism), a faulty view of the redemptive narrative is arrived at.

Be careful what you absorb into your doctrine, or you are bound to wind up as confused as the countless souls who have accepted such views. Your walk with the Lord will be harmed, and your understanding of other core doctrines (such as eternal security, the covenant-keeping nature of the Lord, the eternal nature of God’s decrees, and so on) are all tied up in what you believe about the literal nature of the kingdom promises to Israel, and how they relate to the overall “kingdom of God” that proclaims a right restoration with God because of the work of Jesus Christ.



*Lord God, how wonderful it is to know of Your faithfulness to Your covenantal promises to Israel. If You were to not fulfill them, then how could we trust You with our souls in the New Covenant that was established through the blood of Christ. But You are faithful to that unfaithful nation, and we know that You will always be faithful to us, even when we fail You. Praise You forever, O God! Amen.*

**And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. Acts 1:7**

The question pressed upon Christ Jesus by the apostles has been submitted, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” The answer He will give to that question is telling. Of all of the answers He could have given, the answer is direct in one way, but indirect in another. It is direct enough that the reader should not make particular errors concerning it, but it is indirect enough to allow for the future to remain completely open to the timing of the event to occur.

Luke records, “And He said to them.” It is the word of the Lord to His disciples concerning their pressing question. As such, it is an answer sufficient to fully express to them what they need to know, which is, “It is not for you to know.”

If the restoration of the kingdom, of which they had asked about, was not ever going to come, then He would have said something like, “You have misunderstood Scripture. There will be no kingdom restored to Israel.” Or, He may have said, “The kingdom that you are anticipating is now to be fulfilled spiritually by the church.” He didn’t hint at any such notion.

The reason for this is obvious. He had already told them, just a short time before, that Israel had a long difficult road ahead of her –

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. <sup>21</sup> Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. <sup>22</sup> For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. <sup>23</sup> But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. <sup>24</sup> And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” Luke 21:20-24

The disciples failed to understand what would occur in the days ahead concerning their people and their nation. This is what Luke will detail in the chapters and verses ahead. The lack of a direct answer concerning this matter clearly indicates that a kingdom will be restored to Israel, but that the event would not come “at this time” as they had anticipated. In this, Replacement Theology fails.

With this understood, Jesus continues with His answer. It was not for the disciples (meaning any that follow after them as well) to know “times or seasons.” Jesus carefully leaves off definite articles, stating the words in an indefinite manner. The Greek words are –

*chronos* – this expresses time in sequence (think of a chronometer or the idea of chronology). It is a succession of moments that occur as the stream of time. In reference to God, it is that time that has been allocated by Him for events (such as a person’s life, or the time of Israel’s punishment) to occur.

*kairos* – it is a word coming from *kara*, or “head,” that speaks of things “coming to a head.” As such, it is a designated time, a favorable moment, a particular time, and so on. For example, in the harvest cycle, there is a time for the harvest to come. Thus, it is a season in which that occurs.

Jesus tells the apostles that such things are not for them to know. Paul uses the same words, with the articles, in 1 Thessalonians 5:1 –

“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.”

Paul had just described the rapture at the end of 1 Thessalonians 4. He then went on to detail the Day of the Lord, of which the coming of “the man of sin” would also be revealed (as he details in 2 Thessalonians 2). It is these events that Paul specifically refers to as “the times and the seasons,” noting that they would come as a “thief in the night.” As such, it means that no one will know when they will occur and that believers are always to be ready for them.

As Jesus said this, and as Paul repeats it concerning both the rapture and the Day of the Lord, anyone who claims that he knows the timing of these events is to be ignored. Predictive Rapture Theology fails.

Rather, these “times and seasons” are those “which the Father has put in His own authority.” Of the words *te idia*, or “the His own,” Vincent’s Word Studies states –

“Stronger than the simple possessive pronoun. The adjective means private, personal. Often used adverbially in the phrase *κατ' ιδίαν*, apart, privately.”

In other words, God has a timeline that is set, and we are not privy to it – either in the chronological sense or in the event occurrence sense. They personally belong to Him. Jesus has spoken this. As such, it is thus an inviolable truth. Paul has repeated it concerning the rapture, the Day of the Lord, and the revealing of the antichrist. As such, we are to leave those matters to God and not attempt to interfere in them or “outsmart” Him.

Life application: Core doctrinal truths are confirmed or are revealed in this one verse. Israel as a nation is not through as far as God’s redemptive purposes are concerned. That is clearly and unambiguously stated elsewhere, but it is confirmed by Jesus’ response. As such, the church has not replaced Israel. This is clearly seen later, such as in Paul’s words of Romans 9-11.

Further, the Lord has purposefully told His disciples (and thus us who follow in succession to them in church history) that the events of life and of redemptive history belong to God the Father. As such, we are to leave those things in God’s hands and accept His will concerning them.

What is implied now, but which will be stated explicitly in the coming verse, is that there is a job to be done and we are to get out and do it. Therefore, let us do it to the glory of the Lord who has so commissioned us.

*Lord God, help us to be careful as we anxiously await the events to come that have been revealed in Your word. Christ Jesus has told us that the timing of those events belongs to You alone. Therefore, may we accept this truth and not get misled by those who claim to have secret insights into what You have kept private. Instead, may we be about Your business, working to bring others the good news of Your gospel. Amen.*

**But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8**

Jesus just told the disciples that it was not their business to know “times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.” He now explains what immediately matters, and it isn’t speculating on the day of the rapture (a doctrine not yet revealed to the church as is indicated in 1 Corinthians 15:51) or the time when the kingdom promised in the prophets would come about.

Rather, these disciples had a job to perform. In this task, they would be both directed and assisted, as Jesus notes saying, “But you shall receive power.” The Greek word is *dunamis*. It carries various meanings including might, ability, efficacy, deeds of power, and so on.

In this case, it is a received power granting the disciples the ability to perform what is necessary to accomplish the task set before them. It is the basis of our modern word dynamite, though the meaning is obviously different in that case. Jesus next notes this power will be received “when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.”

This is the same Spirit that rested upon the Lord in His ministry –

“Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. <sup>15</sup> And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.” Luke 4:14, 15

It is the same power referred to as being available to the saints in Rome –

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13

This power of the Holy Spirit is referred to again and again throughout the New Testament. It is what ultimately directs those who are working in accord with the will of the Spirit to meet the charge of Jesus that He has given to His church, which is stated with the words, “and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

As noted in the introduction to Acts, this is a purpose of the book of Acts. It is to detail the fulfillment of this command of the Lord as set forth in these words. Hence, it also forms one of the main structures of the book. The disciples are, in fact, recorded as following this pattern exactly.

First is the recorded witness in Jerusalem –

“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words.’” Acts 2:14

Next, the word went out into Judea –

“At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ... Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Acts 8:1, 4

This is immediately followed up in Acts 8:5 –

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.”

And then, the beginning of the final portion of the fulfillment of Christ’s words is recorded in Acts 13 –

“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> For so the Lord has commanded us:

“I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,  
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.” Acts 13:46-47

The words of Acts 1:8 are quite similar in content to those spoken by Christ just after the resurrection, even if the structure varies –

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

“Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> And you are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.’” Luke 24:46-49

The consistency of Luke's recording of Jesus' words demonstrates careful attention to the detail He spoke forth. Christ spoke of what His resurrection meant to the world, and then He reminded those who heard Him again before He departed. In essence, "You have been told the significance of what I have done. Now, you are to take that knowledge and share it with the world."

Life application: The words of Jesus in this verse, accompanied by their fulfillment as noted above in the book of Acts (to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the world), once again reveal the false nature of the doctrine of hyperdispensationalism. The same unified message, being empowered by the Holy Spirit, is carried out by the Lord's command in the manner He set forth.

However, that one message was set forth by both Peter and Paul. They are not speaking a different gospel, nor is one speaking of an earthly kingdom while the other is referring to a heavenly one. Instead, it is one message being proclaimed by two people – one better qualified to speak to his own countrymen while the other is better qualified to speak to the Gentiles.

In dividing up the gospel of Jesus Christ, a heretical view of what is commanded by Jesus, and a heretical doctrine pitting Jews against Gentiles arises. Be careful when listening to teachers to determine if they are doing this. If they are, it is best to find someone else to listen to. Otherwise, you are bound to quickly lose proper footing in your understanding of what God is doing in redemptive history.

*Glorious God Almighty! You have set forth Your plan of redemption, You have outlined how it will come about, and You are – even to this day – leading people by the power of Your Holy Spirit to bring it to completion. Lord God, if You can use me, failing as I am, be pleased to do so. You are greater than all of my faults. So, use me Lord, according to Your wisdom. Amen.*

**Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.** Acts 1:9

With His instruction and commission to His apostles stated in the previous words, Luke next says, "Now when He had spoken these things." Luke makes a point of repeating that Jesus had spoken the words of the previous verses –

1:4 – remain in Jerusalem and wait for the Promise of the Father

1:5 – you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit

1:6 – questioned by the apostles concerning the restoration of the kingdom to Israel

1:7 – it is not for you to know the times and the seasons reserved by the Father

1:8 – you shall receive power and you shall be witnesses to Me

The Holy Spirit (the Promise of the Father) would be given. Despite this, with the giving of the Spirit, we do not have a direct connection to all of the infinite knowledge of God. Certain things are withheld at the Father's prerogative. However, the Holy Spirit will endow the Lord's people with everything needed to accomplish His purposes, with the main point being to witness to the Person of Jesus Christ.

While focusing on these details of primary importance (even if the Lord spoke with them for an hour about a hundred other subjects), Luke next says, "while they watched."

In his gospel, Luke notes the following at this time –

"And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup> and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen." Luke 24:50-53

The Lord spoke to the apostles (and any others who may have accompanied them), He blessed them, and then "while they watched, He was taken up." It is of note that none of the apostles "watched" as Jesus was resurrected. The fact that He appeared to them was sufficient evidence that the resurrection had occurred. The four gospels then relay the events surrounding that event in various ways, each highlighting certain aspects of it.

It is also of note that only Luke especially highlights the timing and events surrounding this ascension. Mark's gospel simply refers to it as if it were commonly known –

"So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. <sup>20</sup> And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with *them* and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen." Mark 16:19, 20

After the ascension, it was and written about by the apostles at various times and in various ways. A couple of them are –

“This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. <sup>33</sup> Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.”

-Acts 2:32, 33

“God was manifested in the flesh,  
Justified in the Spirit,  
Seen by angels,  
Preached among the Gentiles,  
Believed on in the world,  
Received up in glory.” 1 Timothy 3:16

The fact that the ascension is simply referred to as an actual occurrence, without any notable highlight apart from Luke’s words, adds a level of credibility that would otherwise not exist. The event happened, it was documented, and then it is taken as an axiom that it occurred.

The taking up of Christ is of the highest importance. Charles Ellicott gives his thoughts on possibilities that may have arisen if Christ did not ascend –

“We may add that there was something like a moral necessity, assuming the Resurrection as a fact, for such a conclusion to our Lord’s work on earth. Two other alternatives may, perhaps, be just imagined as possible: He might, like Lazarus, have lived out His restored life to its appointed term, and then died the common death of all men; but in that case where would have been the victory over death, and the witness that He was the Son of Man? He might have lived on an endless life on earth; but in this case, being such as He was, conflict, persecution, and suffering would have come again and again at every stage, and in each instance a miracle would have been needed to save the suffering from passing on to death, or many deaths must have been followed by many resurrections.”

Ellicott’s thoughts are well stated and what Peter says to Israel in Acts 3 explains Ellicott’s final point quite well –

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, <sup>20</sup> and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, <sup>21</sup> whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:19-21



The redemptive narrative must take its course. There is no need to endlessly speculate on what it would be like if Christ remained, although there is no harm in doing so. God saw the ascension as an integral part of what is necessary for His plans to come about, and so Christ was taken up.

In this, sin is allowed to run its course. Faith, rather than sight, is an essential part of the reception of the gospel. The kingdom promised to Israel is not denied them, but it is withheld until they (as a nation) receive Jesus as their Messiah. And so on. But importantly, Christ gave a personal reason for His going away –

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.” John 16:7

In order for one thing to occur, another must take place. What is promised to come upon the believers cannot happen until Christ ascends. Hence, the ascension of the Lord to the Right hand of God is a fundamental part of the workings of the Triune God. While the Holy Spirit is accomplishing His role at this time, Christ is in heaven performing His many roles before the Father – mediation, advocacy, and so on. With these things considered, the verse finishes with, “and a cloud received Him out of their sight.”

The symbolism goes back to the Old Testament where the Lord is repeatedly said to dwell in a cloud, or even to be taken up in a cloud –

“Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. <sup>35</sup> And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. <sup>36</sup> Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. <sup>37</sup> But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. <sup>38</sup> For the cloud of the LORD *was* above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.”

-Exodus 40:34-38

“The LORD reigns;  
Let the earth rejoice;  
Let the multitude of isles be glad!  
<sup>2</sup> Clouds and darkness surround Him;  
Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of His throne.” Psalm 97:1, 2

The ascension of Christ was bodily, and it was visible. At some point, He was taken into the clouds, and He was no longer seen by those who beheld this. But it was another confirmation to them that Jesus is, in fact, the Lord (Yehovah) incarnate. As Paul said to Timothy (see above), He was “Received up in glory.”

Life application: The Lord’s words to the apostles before He was taken up were His final instructions of what was to be known and also accomplished by them. The same instructions applied to Paul as they applied to those who stood watching. And from there, the same message is now carried on by those who have their testimony. There is one Lord and one gospel that is to be carried to the world. There is one church in which this is to occur, despite the countless denominations that divide that church.

The content of Acts, the epistles that are set forth after Acts, and the seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation confirm this. The Lord ascended and during the time until He returns, we have a commission to perform. Let us be about the Lord’s business, conveying this message that cannot be believed unless it is first conveyed –

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> And how shall they preach unless they are sent?”

-Romans 10:14, 15

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the surety we possess in Christ. We have the written testimony of who He is and what He did. The eyewitnesses who recorded those things provide us with the certainty we need to live by faith and not by sight. But, Lord, when our faith is challenged, help us through such times. Help us in our weakness and be with us as we wait for the glory to come. Amen.*

**And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,** Acts 1:10

The previous verse saw the Lord ascend in the sight of the apostles until He was received out of their sight. With that, Luke now says, “And while they looked steadfastly.”

The verb is a present participle, saying, “And as they were looking intently.” Luke is bringing his reader into what was going on at the time, revealing what was happening while they were watching the Lord ascend. It is the same verb, in the same tense, that was used by Luke in Luke 4:20 –

“And having folded the roll, having given it back to the officer, he sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogues were gazing on him.” (YLT)

Those with Jesus were literally captivated by the sight before them. The Lord who they had seen crucified and dead, but who then was alive again, is now ascending before their very eyes. So incredible is the sight that their eyes are literally fixed on Him to the exclusion of everything else. They are focused on the Lord Jesus, but their eyes are “toward heaven.” The Greek reads, “into the heaven.”

It isn't just that they saw Him walking higher up the Mount of Olives, ascending to a higher point so that He could preach to them. Rather, He is ascending – bodily – above them. It is in this incredible motion into heaven that they continued to gaze “as He went up.”

Here again, it is a present participle. It should say something like, “in His going,” or “while He was going.” They are intently gazing into heaven while He is ascending. The words of Luke are active and alive as he describes things as they were occurring. And there is a point to the structure which is revealed in the next words. It is while this was actively occurring that, “behold, two men stood by them.”

The verb now is pluperfect, indicative – “behold, two men were standing by them.” The obvious meaning of Luke's words is that these guys didn't just come with the apostles, but there was an appearance of them that occurred while Jesus was ascending. It is as if an exchange took place without their realizing it.

The speculation on whether these are men or angels goes on and on. Luke, being precise, states “two men.” There is no reason to go beyond that. The point is that they are now accompanied by these two who were obviously sent by the Lord.

The appearance of two men with the Lord is seen again and again in Scripture. Two men were with the Lord when He appeared to Abraham in Genesis 18:2. Two men were with Him when He was seen in Daniel 12:5. Two men (Moses and Elijah) were with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. Two men were at the tomb after the Lord's resurrection in Luke 24:4.

Such appearances give added weight that the same Lord (Yehovah) of the Old Testament is the risen Lord (Jesus) of the New. This appears to be the point of Luke's meticulous description of what is happening. Of these two men, he then notes they were “in white apparel.”

The idea here is that of purity as well as righteousness (being free from sin). The metaphor is explained, for example, in Revelation –

“You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. <sup>5</sup> He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments.” Revelation 3:4

“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.” Revelation 3:18

Life application: Hints of the deity of Christ are found throughout the New Testament. Some are so obvious that it is inexcusable to deny the matter. And yet, the words of Scripture are twisted to do just this. Cults, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, go to great lengths to deny this fundamental truth.

Be careful to check what you hear, and to hold fast to what the word is conveying. Jesus Christ is the Lord God. Any doctrine or teacher that denies this is to be rejected –

“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup> If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; <sup>11</sup> for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

-2 John 1:9-11

*Lord God, what You have presented in Scripture leaves absolutely no doubt that Jesus Christ is God. You have entered into the stream of humanity in order to redeem us back to Yourself. Help us to carefully contemplate, and to never deny, this fundamental truth as it is revealed in Your word. To Your glory we pray. Amen.*

**who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” Acts 1:11**

In the previous verse, two men were noted as standing by the apostles when Christ ascended into heaven. With that said, Luke next reveals their words to the apostles, beginning with, “who also said.”

It is as if it took their speaking to the apostles for them to even be noticed. The apostles were so intently looking up that they failed to see the coming of these two men. In their address, they say, “Men of Galilee.”

Luke makes a point of documenting where they were from, here and again in Acts 2 –

“And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, ‘Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?’” Acts 2:5-7

He notes the same again in Acts 13 –

“He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. <sup>32</sup> And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers.” Acts 13:31, 32

It appears that Luke is intentionally noting their origin to remind the reader of the prophecy of Isaiah 9 –

“Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed,  
As when at first He lightly esteemed  
The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
And afterward more heavily oppressed her,  
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,  
In Galilee of the Gentiles.  
<sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness  
Have seen a great light;  
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,  
Upon them a light has shined.” Isaiah 9:1, 2

As such, Luke is making the implication that Jesus is, in fact, the fulfillment of this prophecy. It is Galilee where this great light shined, and those who were from there are now those commissioned with spreading this good news. It is to them that the two men with them now state, “why do you stand gazing up into heaven?”

Like the questions proposed to those at the empty tomb (see Luke 24:5) and later by the Lord (Luke 24:38), the words are intended to redirect the minds of the hearers. It is as if

they are saying, “Don’t you understand? These things had to take place. It is all there, right in the Scriptures. Each thing that occurs is according to God’s set plan and purpose.”

Of the possible things that could have been on the minds of the apostles, Albert Barnes provides three valid suggestions –

-----

(1) In the feeling of disappointment, as if he would not restore the kingdom to Israel.

(2) Possibly they were expecting that he would again soon appear, though he had often foretold them that he would ascend to heaven.

(3) There might have been an impropriety in their earnest desire for the mere bodily presence of the Lord Jesus when it was more important that he should be in heaven. We may see here also that it is our duty not to stand in idleness, and to gaze even toward heaven. We, as well as the apostles, have a great work to do, and we should actively engage in it without delay.

-----

For these and/or for other reasons, their question is intended to get the apostles to think everything through in accord with the word. As such, they next state, “This same Jesus.”

The words are given to highlight the name, and thus the Person. “We have something to tell you that you should have already deduced, and it concerns this same Jesus whom you saw crucified, buried, and risen again. It is this same Jesus also that you just saw ascend... ‘who was taken up from you into heaven.’”

Again, one can only speculate on the exact intent, but it rightly seems to be, “You have seen this human being do things that no human being has ever done before. But more, you have seen that it was prophesied of before it occurred. The things that happened to Him were at the set times and by the appointment of God who said it would come about. The One you have been witnessing accomplish these things, and who has now ascended into heaven,... ‘will so come in like manner.’”

In other words, there are yet to be fulfilled prophecies. “To the word! Remember the word! It has all been spoken of before! And they will be fulfilled by THIS SAME JESUS!”

It seems this is the unstated intent of their words. They are proclaiming that Jesus is the fulfillment of not only everything that has occurred, but all that will occur as well. His departure is not the end of the thing, but a planned part of it. As such, they can now put things together.

Christ rose into heaven, and so He will come again from heaven. A cloud received Him out of their sight, and so He will come again on the cloud. He ascended from the Mount of Olives, and so He will return again to that spot. “You are asking about the kingdom being restored to Israel? Look at what Daniel and Zechariah have already said” –

“I was watching in the night visions,  
And behold, One like the Son of Man,  
Coming with the clouds of heaven!  
He came to the Ancient of Days,  
And they brought Him near before Him.  
<sup>14</sup> Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,  
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
Which shall not pass away,  
And His kingdom the one  
Which shall not be destroyed.” Daniel 7:13, 14

“Behold, the day of the LORD is coming,  
And your spoil will be divided in your midst.  
<sup>2</sup> For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem;  
The city shall be taken,  
The houses rifled,  
And the women ravished.  
Half of the city shall go into captivity,  
But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.  
<sup>3</sup> Then the LORD will go forth  
And fight against those nations,  
As He fights in the day of battle.  
<sup>4</sup> And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,  
Which faces Jerusalem on the east.  
And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two,  
From east to west,  
Making a very large valley;  
Half of the mountain shall move toward the north

And half of it toward the south.  
<sup>5</sup> Then you shall flee through My mountain valley,  
For the mountain valley shall reach to Azal.  
Yes, you shall flee  
As you fled from the earthquake  
In the days of Uzziah king of Judah.  
Thus the LORD my God will come,  
And all the saints with You.  
<sup>6</sup> It shall come to pass in that day  
That there will be no light;  
The lights will diminish.  
<sup>7</sup> It shall be one day  
Which is known to the LORD—  
Neither day nor night.  
But at evening time it shall happen  
That it will be light.  
<sup>8</sup> And in that day it shall be  
That living waters shall flow from Jerusalem,  
Half of them toward the eastern sea  
And half of them toward the western sea;  
In both summer and winter it shall occur.  
<sup>9</sup> And the LORD shall be King over all the earth.  
In that day it shall be—  
'The LORD is one,'  
And His name one." Zechariah 14:1-9

This is what the two men are telling the apostles. This same Jesus who ascended out of their sight, who did not directly answer their question about a kingdom for Israel, didn't have to give them an answer. The Scriptures have already given it. Jesus never said, "You have misunderstood the Scriptures." Rather, the rebuke of these two men is that the apostles should have faith in the Scriptures. Just as He has ascended, so shall He come again, just "as you saw Him go into heaven."

The words of Scripture have been written. They are faithful and reliable. God's people simply need to study them, remember them, and have faith in them. Those who deny a literal millennial reign of Christ from Jerusalem have not done this. Epic fail.

The words have already been confirmed by Jesus Himself –



“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>30</sup> Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup> And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” Matthew 24:29-31

(see also Matthew 26:64 and Revelation 1:7).

Life application: If you cannot trust a literal reading of the Old Testament verses cited above, then there is no reason to trust anything else the Bible says. The two men standing on the Mount of Olives with the apostles not only confirm that Jesus will fulfill these verses, literally, but that He is also the Lord (Yehovah) of those same Scriptures.

Go back and read Zechariah 14:3, 4 cited above. It is as clear as the purest crystal that this is what they are indicating. Those who deny the deity of Jesus Christ will not be saved because they have called on a false Christ through a false gospel. Epic Fail. Don't be an epic failure. Instead, believe the word, call out to God through Christ, and be reconciled to Him forever. God has done it all, and He has done it through JESUS!

*Lord God, the wonder and marvel of Your word is beyond comprehension. We have a sure and great hope that can never be taken from us because Your word tells us of Jesus, Your coming in human flesh. Nothing can take away our joy, and our hope in Him is secure. Thank You for Your word that reveals these truths to us. Amen!*

**Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. Acts 1:12**

The two men who appeared with the apostles just relayed the news of Christ's promised return. With that complete, nothing more is said of them. It simply states, “Then they returned to Jerusalem.”

In Luke 24, it says the following –

“Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup> and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.” Luke 24:51-53

The words, “And they worshiped Him,” appear to have occurred after His ascension. It may be that the confirming words of the two men that Jesus Christ is, in fact, the Lord (see previous commentary), resulted in a time of prayer and praise to God. If so, it is after this time of worship that they proceeded to head back to Jerusalem “from the mount called Olivet.”

The word translated as “Olivet” is found only here in the Bible, *Elaión*. It is derived from *elaia*, meaning “an olive tree.” It is the area where an orchard of olive trees was located. The mountain ridge is one that is separated from Jerusalem by the Kidron Valley. Of this walk from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, Luke specifically says that it is “a Sabbath day’s journey.”

There are two possibilities for the inclusion of this statement. The first is that it is a general term used to describe the distance if it were a Sabbath, even if it was not a Sabbath. In other words, even if this was not a Saturday (Sabbath), it is the distance that would be considered allowable to walk on a Sabbath. This maximum distance is two thousand cubits as is based on Joshua 3:4. It is about three-quarters of a mile. Luke is careful to give specific distances elsewhere, such as in Luke 24:13.

The other possibility is that this was, in fact, a Sabbath. As such, Luke is noting that the distance they walked was not a violation of the Sabbath laws. This would then mean that they had gone to the mount on Friday, and walked back Friday evening, the start of the Sabbath (or even Saturday morning after a night of worship and sleep). This would then be in accord with statements recorded by Luke, such as –

“And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. <sup>56</sup> Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.” Luke 23:55, 56

Without being dogmatic, it would appear that Luke is stating this distance *because* it was a Sabbath. If so, then the traditional dating for the ascension is incorrect. The church places it ten days prior to Pentecost. Acts 1:3 says that Christ was seen “during forty days.” The Greek reads “through forty days.” As such, instead of a Thursday ascension, it very well could be a Friday (or Friday evening) ascension. Thus, Luke is now specifying that with the term “a Sabbath day’s journey.”

If so, then the ascension of Christ until Pentecost is eight days. The reason this is possible is because of typology. Christ would then be seen to have completed all of His

work and then entered into His rest on (or just at the coming of) the Sabbath. The importance of this for believers is explained in Hebrews 4 –

“Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. <sup>2</sup> For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*. <sup>3</sup> For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said:

“So I swore in My wrath,

‘They shall not enter My rest,’”

although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. <sup>4</sup> For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh *day* in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”; <sup>5</sup> and again in this *place*: “They shall not enter My rest.”

<sup>6</sup> Since therefore it remains that some *must* enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, <sup>7</sup> again He designates a certain day, saying in David, “Today,” after such a long time, as it has been said:

“Today, if you will hear His voice,  
Do not harden your hearts.”

<sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. <sup>9</sup> There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. <sup>10</sup> For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His.”

-Hebrews 4:1-10

Believers enter into Christ’s rest through faith in what He has done. As He is the Lord God, the typology would be appropriate.

Life application: The term “a Sabbath day’s journey” prescribes nothing. Remember the five principal rules of proper biblical interpretation – Descriptive, Prescriptive, Context, Context, Context. Luke is describing what occurred, and quite possibly on the day it occurred. Luke is neither arguing for either a Sabbath observance nor is he stipulating that one can only walk so far on a Sabbath Day.

Rather, he was (possibly) stating that the recorded event occurred on a Sabbath, and this is his way of noting that fact. Today in Israel people observe the Sabbath. It is a fact that prescribes nothing for those who know they do.

Several times later in Acts, it will be noted that Paul went into the synagogues and preached on the Sabbath. This does not mean that Paul is prescribing Sabbath

observance. Instead, it is describing to us what Paul did because the Jews (who had not come to Christ and who were being evangelized by Paul) were, in fact, Sabbath observers.

This is a problem with the Hebrew Roots Movement, Judaizers, etc. They take such descriptive passages in the book of Acts, and they treat them as prescriptive. This leads to a faulty hermeneutic. Such a doctrine places believers back under the Law of Moses. As such, it is heresy.

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (see Romans 10:4). Don't be misdirected by such people. Read Acts with the understanding that it is a historical recording of events. Nothing is prescribed by Luke's inclusion of the words of Acts 1:12. Hold fast to Christ alone and you will be in the sweet spot.

*Lord God, how good it is to know that Jesus fulfilled the law on our behalf. In knowing this, we have every reason to rejoice in Him and what He has done. We are freed from the impossible yoke placed upon Israel through His full, final, and forever satisfaction of the law. Thank you, O God, for Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

**And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son* of James.** Acts 1:13

The words now are dependent on what was said in the previous verse. The apostles returned to Jerusalem. Upon their return, Luke next says, "And when they had entered." This is referring to Jerusalem the city. It is upon entering it that, "they went up into the upper room."

The KJV incorrectly states "an upper room." The use of the article defines this as a room set aside for them that they specifically used in order to meet. The Greek word is *huperóon*. It signifies the upper part of the house. This word is only found in Acts where it is used four times – Acts 1:13, 9:37, 9:39, 20:8. From the uses, it can be determined that such a room was set aside for gatherings. They may be for meetings, parties, funerals, and so on.

In Luke 24, it says –

“And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup> and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.” Luke 24:52, 53

Because of this, some take this as being an upper room of the temple. It is then assumed that this is where the events of Acts 2:1 take place –

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.”

This connection is not necessary. The wording of Luke 24:53 simply means that they went to the temple to worship often, not that they were living there. What occurs in Acts 2 is certainly at the temple though. There is a place where they met as a group, and the temple is where they went to worship. The two are probably distinct thoughts.

It is in this room “where they were staying.” Again, the older KJV incorrectly says “where abode.” Rather, it is a present participle. They were staying there, and they continued to do so now that they had returned.

At the time of Luke, this room would have been known, and anyone who wanted to check his writing for accuracy could easily have followed his narrative to determine if his words were plausible or invented. With this carefully noted by Luke, he next presents the names of those who need to be highlighted. The list is the same as that given in Luke 16:14-16, except the order is changed for a few of the names. Also, Judas Iscariot is obviously not with the apostles in Acts, having come to a gruesome end. His demise was recorded in Matthew 27:5. Luke will give a secondary description of the end of Judas in Acts 1:18.

For now, here are those listed by Luke who gathered in the upper room –

“Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son* of James.”

This is how they are listed in Luke and then again in Acts –

Luke 16:14-16 –

Simon, whom He also named Peter

Andrew his brother

James

John

Acts 1:13 –

Peter

James

John

Andrew

Philip  
Bartholomew  
Matthew  
Thomas  
James the *son* of Alphaeus  
Simon called the Zealot  
Judas *the son* of James  
Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor

Philip  
Thomas  
Bartholomew  
Matthew  
James the *son* of Alphaeus  
Simon the Zealot  
Judas *the son* of James

Life application: If you are going to take the book of Acts in a prescriptive manner, then churches would be meeting in upper rooms. The words here describe what occurred. They prescribe nothing. Remember this, because when we get to verses that are used by some to set church doctrine from the book of Acts, you must ask, “What is the difference between this verse and the verse about meeting in an upper room?”

Be sure to think such things through and not rush ahead in setting doctrine based merely on what the text is saying. Is it only describing something? Is it prescribing something? Acts is presenting a historical account of what occurred. For the most part, it is not intended to establish church doctrine. Keep reminding yourself of this as you continue.

*Lord God Almighty, You have set Your word down as a guide to us. At times, it tells us of future events. At times, it tells us of historical events. And at times, it sets forth doctrine for us to walk in accord with what is set forth. Help us to maintain the proper context so that we rightly divide the words set forth before us. Amen.*

**These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. Acts 1:14**

With the naming of those who were in the upper room of the meeting place complete, Luke continues that thought showing that more people accompanied them, but the highlight is upon those mentioned. It is they, in particular, who are noted as apostles in verse 1:2.

The word “apostle” (Greek: *apostolos*), signifies a messenger or one sent on a mission. It is the sender of the apostle, then, by whom the apostle is known. If an emperor sent out an apostle, he would be an apostle of the emperor. It is the men named in the previous verse that are considered the apostles of Jesus in its strictest sense. They were personally commissioned by Him.

As this is so, it is inappropriate to use the term “apostle of Jesus” today. There was no commission because the Lord did not personally send that individual. The reason for stating this now is that others may have been on the Mount of Olives with Jesus and the apostles, but it is the apostles who were highlighted upon their return to the upper room. Now, in that same thought, others are mentioned separately, indicating that they were not so commissioned by the Lord.

With this understood, Luke begins this verse with, “These all.” It is referring to the apostles just named. The highlight is on them, and it is they who are set to continue this message as designated apostles. They have a particular task to perform, and that will continue to be highlighted as the narrative progresses. It is they who “continued with one accord.”

The word used is a new one to Scripture, *homothumadon*. It means “with one mind,” “unanimously,” “with one accord,” and so on. It is a compound word derived from *homo* (*same*) and *thumos*, signifying “passion.” Thus, there is a uniting in purpose. It can be in intent, in wrath, and so on. A fuller study of this word will be included below to make a point about the early church. In the case of these apostles, their united passion was “in prayer and supplication.”

The two Greek words are similar in meaning. Some texts only say, “in prayer.” The main point is that these men were united in intent and purpose in the prayers they set forth, probably praying for wisdom, understanding, and the ability to convey this new message properly. Along with this, there must have been an almost unlimited number of prayers for eyes to be opened concerning Christ to the people.

For such a small group, without their leader physically present, it must have seemed a daunting task. But they had been given the assurance by Jesus that He would not leave them alone He would send the Holy Spirit. Their prayers must have included many words concerning this as well. Next, Luke notes that they were also “with the women.”

These are the women who had accompanied Jesus and who were most highly noted in the gospels by Luke. One of several examples is found in Luke 8 –

“Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve *were* with Him, <sup>2</sup> and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven

demons,<sup>3</sup> and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance." Luke 8:1-3

Only after noting them does Luke next include the words, "and Mary the mother of Jesus." The inclusion of Jesus' mother is to demonstrate that she was not neglected by the apostles, even if she had nothing to offer them as the other women did. Although the Gospel of John is written much later, the knowledge that Jesus had appointed His beloved apostle to care for her was already known –

"When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' <sup>27</sup> Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own *home*." John 19:26, 27

The inclusion of Mary in this list is to show that she had been cared for accordingly. This is the last of the few times she is mentioned in Scripture. There is nothing said of note concerning her that would excuse the Roman Catholic teachings and idolatry of her. There is no allowance for prayers to or through her, there is no idolizing of her authorized, and so on. Scripture does not mention the doctrine of Immaculate Conception, and it in fact argues against it. It also does not speak of her "perpetual virginity," but also clearly argues against it. There is no note of her assumption as well. These are heretical teachings set forth with the sole intent of diminishing the role of Jesus Christ.

Luke completes the thought with, "and with His brothers." This is certainly included for several reasons. The first is that they came to understand that Jesus is, in fact, the sinless Son of God and the Messiah, something they were previously skeptical about. Further, being listed after the apostles, it shows that they were not considered as such. And thirdly, James (the Lord's brother) will eventually be the leader of the church as is inferred from the words of Acts 15:13.

As such, it shows that being an apostle has its own purpose, but it does not necessarily confer authority or preeminence in all areas. As such, the idea of "apostolic authority" which is supposedly claimed by various denominations, is another incorrect and inappropriate doctrine. It abuses the intended meaning of the word "apostle," and it claims an authority that cannot be inferred from Scripture.

As can be seen, this one verse – when considered rightly with other parts of Scripture – refutes a couple points of bad doctrine or even heresy.



Life application: As noted above, the word *homothumadon* will be looked at a little more closely. These are all of the uses of the word in Scripture –

“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” Acts 1:14

“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,”  
-Acts 2:46

“So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: ‘Lord, You *are* God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,’” Acts 4:24

“And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch.”  
-Acts 5:12

“Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord,” Acts 7:57

“And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.” Acts 8:6

“Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king’s personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king’s *country*.” Acts 12:20

“it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,” Acts 15:25

“When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat,” Acts 18:12

“So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul’s travel companions.” Acts 19:29

“that you may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus” Christ. Romans 15:6

A great deal can be learned from the careful placement of this word at the various points in Acts. But only a short evaluation will be made. First, the word is used eleven times total with ten being in Acts. The first seven uses are in the “Peter” chapters of Acts 1-12. One use (Acts 8:6) is among the Samaritans, a people who had their own Pentateuch and are more of an offshoot of what is going on in the religion of the Jews than anything else.

Of the two uses in the “Paul” chapters of Acts (Acts 13-28) the eighth use is in the Council of Jerusalem as led by the Jews. The ninth and final use is seen in the Gentiles coming against the believers of the church.

The eleventh and final use of the word is by Paul, writing to the Romans (and thus by extension to the entire Gentile-led church) to be of one mind in glorifying “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

With only this minimal evaluation of this word, it is plainly evident that unlike the early Jewish-led church, the gentile churches agree on very little. The reason for this is quite apparent. There is a complete breakdown in theology within the church. There is a lack of applying proper context, there is a mixing of dispensations, there is a failure to understand what is prescriptive and what is descriptive for doctrine and practice.

The early church had one body of Scripture that they were well versed in. The early Gentiles had the same body of Scripture, but they were not well versed in it. Therefore, they were easily swayed by external pressures. A perfect example of this is found in the book of Galatians. There was a failure to recognize false teachings, false teachers, and heretical ideas.

To this day, that continues. And the entire reason it does is BECAUSE WE FAIL TO HEED THE WORD. When the word is ignored, diminished, added to (see the Roman Catholic heresies mentioned above), and so on, we can never be in one accord. It is the word of God, in its proper context, that is to be held to and properly evaluated. May it be so in our lives, to the glory of God who has so ordained it. In such a state, the “with one accord” mentioned above will be realized, and there will be harmony among believers –

“Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is*  
For brethren to dwell together in unity!

<sup>2</sup> *It is* like the precious oil upon the head,  
Running down on the beard,  
The beard of Aaron,  
Running down on the edge of his garments.

<sup>3</sup> *It is* like the dew of Hermon,  
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;  
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—  
Life forevermore.” Psalm 133

*Lord God, help us to rightly divide Your precious word, and then to present it in this manner so that all believers will be built up into one body that has Jesus Christ properly placed in His glorious position before You and before us! Amen.*

**And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, Acts 1:15**

It was just noted that all of the apostles, and those who joined them, were in one accord. Understanding there is a lack in the apostleship, it now says, “And in those days.” This defines the period between the ascension and the time when the Promise of the Father would come. It is during this interval that “Peter stood up.”

This is a general way of saying that someone is presenting himself to do something, be it speak, read, or so on. A couple of examples from Luke will show this –

“So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah.” Luke 4:16, 17

“And behold, a certain Lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” Luke 10:25

In this posture of presenting himself, it next says, “in the midst of the disciples.” Some translations say “brethren” instead of “disciples.” Either way, the words “in the midst” are a way of saying that all attention is directed at him and that he is now the center of focus in the narrative. With that stated by Luke, he then – as he so often does – makes a careful recording of those gathered, saying, “altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty.”

There are a variety of ways of translating this –

the company of persons  
number of names  
multitude of persons  
multitude of the names  
etc.

It seems unlikely that the word “number” would be used to identify a group just about to be numbered, so “multitude” may be better. The word “name” is used at times to refer to individuals, and so “persons” is also an acceptable translation. The major point is that Luke is being specific in the number, regardless as to whether he is being specific about the individual identification of each person.

It is in this large gathering that Peter will address an issue that he believes needs to be resolved. This is indicated by the words, “and said.” What will be said is to be found in the coming verse.

Life application: The early church started slowly, and it was a small body of believers. But their faith in what they had seen was unshakeable. The bonds of their fellowship were also strong because they had a united purpose based on their faith.

Eventually, disputes and troubles will arise in the book of Acts. However, some of them will be resolved while others have no indication of that being the case. If things don't work out on an earthly level between people, the main thing is to still be determined in the set goal of promoting faith in Christ and fellowship among one another.

It is rather easy to cut oneself off from the body because of being hurt, but this solves nothing. If a personal disagreement can't be resolved, it should not be allowed to destroy all other aspects of one's walk with the Lord. Hold fast to Jesus above all else, and let everything else take second stage to that. In this, everything will find its proper place.

*Heavenly Father, we have troubles, and we have trials, even within the church. This can't be helped at times. But help us to stand strong in our faith despite these things. May our focus be on You and on what You have done through Jesus. If we can do that, then everything else will work out as it should. Help us to keep this perspective. Amen.*

**“Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; Acts 1:16**

In the previous verse, Peter stood to speak. His words now commence with, “Men *and* brethren.” It is a single address in the Greek signifying “brother-men.” Simply saying “brothers” would get the point across in our modern speech. In this, he is addressing those with him in a personal, friendly manner. With the tone set, he then says, “this Scripture had to be fulfilled.”

Understanding that there was no New Testament at the time, the only thing the people had to rely on for their knowledge of the workings of God in Christ was the Hebrew Scriptures, now our Old Testament. What Peter is referring to has two parts to it. The first is that of Judas’ betrayal, something he will not cite, but which had already been cited by Jesus in John 13 –

“I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.’ <sup>19</sup> Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am *He*.” John 13:18, 19

Jesus’ words are a quote from the 41<sup>st</sup> Psalm –

“Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted,  
Who ate my bread,  
Has lifted up *his* heel against me.” Psalm 41:9

Though Peter doesn’t cite this, it can be inferred that he is referring to it. Later, he will cite more Scripture to show what must be done in order to replace the traitor. For now, Peter is reminding the brethren that what occurred was a part of the plan of God, even if Judas willingly set out to do what he did. That is evidenced in the next words, saying, “which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David.”

David, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit (see 2 Peter 1:19-21), prophesied what would occur concerning Judas’ interactions with the Messiah. This in no way means that the psalm written by David wasn’t something that pertained directly to him as well. David was betrayed, he was disturbed in his heart over his betrayal, and he wrote a psalm to the Lord about what happened. And yet, the words prophetically anticipate what would happen to the Messiah also. Such dual meaning in Scripture occurs constantly –

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. <sup>6</sup> Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you

shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.' And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel." Exodus 1:5, 6

"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup> all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup> all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ." 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

Real events of the past, as recorded in Scripture, are given as types and pictures of the coming Messiah, of His work, and of the effects of His work – both for Israel and for the church. These events are often so precise that they can identify the interactions of a single person. As Peter next says, "concerning Judas."

God, who created time and who is outside of time, knows everything that will ever happen. He knew that Judas would betray Christ Jesus, and He allowed David's words to become a part of what would be realized in that betrayal. This, however, does not mean that God is responsible for what occurred. Foreknowledge does not, by default, mean "prearranging." We can know that a clock will ring at a certain time, and it does. And yet, we may have had nothing to do with it happening.

In 1 Samuel 22, David said –

"I knew that day, when Doeg the Edomite *was* there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have caused *the death* of all the persons of your father's house. <sup>23</sup> Stay with me; do not fear. For he who seeks my life seeks your life, but with me you *shall be safe*." 1 Samuel 22:22, 23

David understood the character of Doeg and that he would tell Saul what David did. Doeg then killed 85 of the priests of the Lord. If David had killed Doeg, he would have been a murderer. But in not killing him, the priests died. Despite David's knowledge concerning Doeg, he could not be blamed for the murder of the priests, even if he felt bad about what occurred.

This is a simple example of a man with intuition concerning a matter. Considering God, whose knowledge is infinite, what occurs is known to Him, but it does not mean that He prearranged the good or evil that occurs. He simply knows the logical outcome and uses it in accord with His will to continue His work within the stream of time. Judas is solely to blame for his actions. It is he "who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus."

The events surrounding what Judas did are recorded in the gospels, specifically in Matthew 26:14 and 47-56, Mark 14:10 and 43-50, Luke 22:3-6 and 47-53, and John 13:18-30 and 18:1-11. Reading these accounts, one can see that the comments of John Gill are correct when he says, “so that he was not only a guide as to the way, but was a director, and conductor, and manager of the whole affair.”

Life application: The events recorded concerning the deeds of Judas are evidence of the state of free will in man. God does not force His will upon man. When it says in Exodus, “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” (Exodus 7:3), it is perfectly clear from the account that this was done passively, not actively. The Lord arranged events to occur that caused Pharaoh to harden his own heart.

For example, Moses was told to throw down his rod before Pharaoh. In doing so, it became a serpent. However, Pharaoh’s own men did the same. In this, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened towards the power of the Lord. In the next instance, Moses was told to strike the waters of the Nile and they would turn to blood. He did and they did. But it says that Egypt’s magicians did the same with their enchantments. As a result, it specifically says, “and Pharaoh’s heart grew hard” (Exodus 7:22). The hardening was passively accomplished by the Lord. Pharaoh, not the Lord, is to blame for his actions.

The Lord knew the character of the man, He knew what man would do, and He used the circumstances to continue to reveal His glory –

“Now if I had stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, then you would have been cut off from the earth. <sup>16</sup> But indeed for this *purpose* I have raised you up, that I may show My power *in* you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.” Exodus 9:15, 16

This doctrine of free will is essential to a right relationship with God. Without it, man would be nothing more than an automaton, doing the bidding of the Lord without any true sense of fellowship, love, fear, awe, admiration, and so on. And this is a key and principal part of salvation as well. One false doctrine espoused within the church, part of the teaching known as Calvinism (after John Calvin), says that man does not have free will to choose God.

Rather, it teaches that man is first regenerated by God (he is “born again”), and then he chooses God and is saved. In other words, he is saved before he is saved. It is a confused theology that has no basis in Scripture. The free will of man is taught from the first pages of the Bible until the last pages of the Bible. Nowhere is it taught that man does

not choose Christ. Rather, it is explicitly or implicitly stated throughout Scripture, including John 3:16 –

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

God reveals, God offers, and God expects a response. If you disagree, that is your choice. God gave you free will to do so.

*Lord God, thank You for the offer of salvation that is found in the giving of Your Son for us. All You ask us to do is to believe the simple message of salvation, the gospel. In accepting that He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, we are sealed with Your Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our salvation. Thank You for this simple and glorious path to eternity with You. Amen.*

**for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry.” Acts 1:17**

The words concerning Judas continue in this verse. It was he who the previous verse said, “became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.” Of him, Peter continues, saying, “for he was numbered with us.”

Peter uses a word found only here in Scripture, *katarithmeó*. It signifies “to reckon with.” It is a compound word coming from *kata*, or “according to,” and *arithmeó*, “to count.” As such, Judas was truly reckoned among the apostles. As such, someone must take his place to fill the void that has arisen. Being numbered among them, Peter says, “and obtained a part in this ministry.”

There is a play on words here that will give a hint as to what is coming in the verses ahead. It literally reads, “and was allotted the lot.” It isn’t that Jesus cast lots to determine who would be His apostles. Rather, the words of the gospels were clear –

“Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. <sup>13</sup> And when it was day, He called His disciples to *Himself*; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: <sup>14</sup> Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; <sup>15</sup> Matthew and Thomas; James the *son* of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; <sup>16</sup> Judas *the son* of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.” Luke 6:12-16



Jesus “chose twelve.” However, in using the words “allotted the lot,” the implication is that the apostles were decided upon in a manner as authoritative as the lot itself. Hence, it is a subtle note of the deity of Christ, as can be inferred from the Proverbs –

“The lot is cast into the lap,  
But its every decision *is* from the LORD.” Proverbs 16:33

As Christ chose His apostles, and as Judas was “allotted the lot,” it signifies that Christ’s decision stands as a decision from the Lord.

Life application: In 2 Peter 1:1, the final use of the verb *lagchanó*, or “to obtain by lot,” is used. There, he says –

“Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ,  
To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:”

The way one obtains (is allotted) the like precious faith of righteousness is to be counted as such. And the way that occurs is by being a part of the lot designated by the Lord. In other words, the Lord has provided a set measure by which man participates in His goodness. That measure is the perfection of Christ. Apart from that, man cannot participate in Him.

We can have faith in many things, but that does not necessarily signify a faith unto salvation. Where are you placing your hope? For us today, there is one source of knowing who Jesus is. That is found in Scripture. To reject the Christ revealed in Scripture is to reject the only path to salvation as revealed in Scripture.

What are you doing in church? If it is not pursuing God through the Bible, and as He has only specifically revealed Himself there, then without knowing if you are right or not, you are following whatever version of “God” (or “god”) the pastor or preacher presents to you. Is that wise?

Be wise and discerning by being well-read in this marvelous treasure from God. Know this word and be informed about Him so that you are not led down unhappy trails of unsound doctrine.

*Lord God, Your word itself says that it is a light to our path and a lamp to our feet. If this is so, then help us to be wise and let that light shine upon the path of our lives. May the*

*way be illuminated with the knowledge of Your word so that our feet stay on the path that is right and proper. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**(Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. Acts 1:18**

Note: The explanation of this verse comes with a gross-out warning.

The words now continue to refer to Judas. The gospels record this concerning his death—

“Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, <sup>4</sup> saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’

And they said, ‘What *is that* to us? You see *to it!*’

<sup>5</sup> Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.

<sup>6</sup> But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, ‘It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood.’ <sup>7</sup> And they consulted together and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. <sup>8</sup> Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

<sup>9</sup> Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, <sup>10</sup> and gave them for the potter’s field, as the LORD directed me.’” Matthew 27:3-10

Understanding the context, Luke now parenthetically records, “Now this man purchased a field.” Obviously, Judas was unable to actually purchase anything while dangling from a rope. Instead, the idea is that the money he earned through betraying Jesus was used in his name by the chief priests. As Vincent’s Word Studies says, “The expression means merely that the field was purchased with the money of Judas.”

From there, Luke continues, “with the wages of iniquity.” This expression means that the silver he was paid was reckoned to him as wages. He earned the money through his actions, but they were actions of iniquity. Therefore, despite throwing the money down in the temple, his name remained attached to them.

This same concept is found throughout the world. When it is known where a sum of money comes from, the acknowledgment for that money is assigned to the one from

whom it issued. For example, “This hall was built with the money provided by Glen Giver.”

With that understood, Luke continues with the unhappy details of the final state of Judas’ earthly body, saying, “and falling headlong.” The Greek reads, *genomenos elakēsen*, “and becoming headlong.” The inference is that he hung himself (Matthew 27:5), and at some point, his rotting corpse fell. Hence, translators rightly say “having fallen.”

As far as the word “headlong,” it is *prénés*, an adjective found only here in the Bible. It signifies headlong, or prone. Hence, one can see him hanging and when his body finally fell from that position, he landed face-first on the ground. When he did, “he burst open in the middle.”

Again, a word found only here in the Bible is used, *laskó*, to burst asunder with a loud noise. With all of the detail given, a clear mental picture is made. In Israel, even at the time of year of the Passover, the sun is direct and would have quickly caused Judas’ body to swell up from rapid decomposition. The gasses caused pressure from the inside, and when he came down, he fell flat, face first, and forcefully. As such the pressure of the gasses was great enough to cause him to burst open, “and all his entrails gushed out.”

The inclusion of the details, culminating with this note here, is given to explain the ignoble end of Judas. It is a note of disgrace in death. Such a death, and the surrounding circumstances concerning the body, are being given to highlight the despicable deeds of the man. An example of the disgrace recorded here is found in the death of Joram, a contemptible king of Judah. Because of his vile life and actions, the prophet Elijah said to him –

“Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or in the ways of Asa king of Judah, <sup>13</sup> but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot like the harlotry of the house of Ahab, and also have killed your brothers, those of your father’s household, *who were* better than yourself, <sup>14</sup> behold, the LORD will strike your people with a serious affliction—your children, your wives, and all your possessions; <sup>15</sup> and you *will become* very sick with a disease of your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day.”

-2 Chronicles 21:14, 15

Exactly as the prophet stated, so it occurred (see 2 Chronicles 21:18, 19).

The fact that no record of Judas' burial is given is also telling. To not be buried is an added note of disgrace, as is evidenced by the words of the Lord through Jeremiah –

“They shall die gruesome deaths; they shall not be lamented nor shall they be buried, *but* they shall be like refuse on the face of the earth. They shall be consumed by the sword and by famine, and their corpses shall be meat for the birds of heaven and for the beasts of the earth.” Jeremiah 16:4

Understanding these things, one might wonder how Luke would know the details. First, the reason for the gas buildup and resulting explosion is obvious. Judas hung himself at the Passover, so the next day was a Sabbath. Depending on where he hung himself, he might not have been discovered until that was over on Sunday morning. People would be home resting according to the commandment (see Luke 23:56).

This would allow plenty of time for him to swell up. Secondly, the recorded detail tells us that he was discovered, and someone saw the resulting explosion when he landed headlong. But a dead body in Israel was considered unclean. As such, whoever found him (or whoever was told about it), had no desire to even touch his rotting corpse. Instead, he probably would have taken a knife and cut the rope. Down Judas went, and apart he came. Hence, an eyewitness is not only possible, it is likely.

Finally, the death of Judas in this way has one more highly ignoble consequence laid upon him. As he was hanging there for some time, it means he was hanging overnight. But the law says this –

“If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, <sup>23</sup> his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you *as* an inheritance; for he who is hanged *is* accursed of God.” Deuteronomy 21:22, 23

Anyone hanged is accursed of God. As such anyone who was hanged was to be taken down before evening (the start of the new day). Judas did not receive this treatment. The contrast is given –

Christ was nailed to a tree, but He was taken down and buried.  
Judas was hanged and his body remained up.

Christ rose on the third day, whole and complete, and having prevailed over death. Judas fell (probably on the third day, but that is speculation) and burst open; a most ignoble end for his corpse.

Christ was anointed with spices in His burial (see John 19:39). Judas bloated up while hanging in his exposed death.

Christ removed the curse of the law and the sting of death through His work. Judas was accursed of God in his hanging, and he never received the atoning work of the Lord for his iniquity.

Life application: The Bible doesn't hide gruesome facts or difficult to swallow details. But when they are given, it isn't just for a sensational story. Rather, they are provided for a specific reason, and they call out to us to consider them and contemplate why they are stated.

When we come across events such as these, let us consider them and try to learn from them. In the end, the glory of what Jesus did is usually not far away from the evaluation, being hinted at for us to see. Thank God for the Person of Jesus Christ who has done marvelous things for His people!

*We thank You, O God, for the events recorded in Scripture that provide us with the detail we need to see the marvel of what You have done in Christ. Even some details that seem hard to swallow when we read them will often give us wonderful hints of the contrasting glory to be found in what Jesus did. Thank You for this precious word You have given us. Amen.*

**And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) Acts 1:19**

In the previous verse, the final note concerning the gruesome disposition of Judas was noted. Of that explosive event, Luke next says, "And it became known."

What happened to Judas was over the Passover. It was also over a Sabbath. It was also suicide. Such things as this would be long remembered by any who heard it. And the word would have gone out like wildfire for everyone to consider. If there were a town crier who called out the day's news, it would have been one of the main stories for all to hear as it was passed on.

In contrast to that, this is said of Jesus' resurrection –

“Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. <sup>12</sup> When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, <sup>13</sup> saying, ‘Tell them, “His disciples came at night and stole Him *away* while we slept.” <sup>14</sup> And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.’ <sup>15</sup> So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.” Matthew 28:11-15

Two deaths had occurred within the same circle. Jesus was openly crucified and then buried. Despite His resurrection, the leaders did what they could to hide this. Although not entirely successful, what was passed on was sufficient to convince many Jews, even to this day, that the lie they told the soldiers was the true end of His story.

Judas' death was locally notable, being explained by Luke as going out “to all those dwelling in Jerusalem.” Unlike the story of the resurrection that was covered up by the leaders, this was openly passed on.

What is ironic is that the news about Judas filled the city, while the news about Jesus was secreted away as much as possible. And yet, in the larger picture, the knowledge of Jesus' death and resurrection has filled the entire world, but the death of Judas, along with its surrounding events, make a mere footnote in Scripture.

Despite being a footnote now, at the time it was such big news that the place where it occurred was actually given a name by the people as a memorial to the event. As Luke next says, “so that field is called.”

The naming of the field is memorialized by the event. Hence, anytime someone would pass by it, the event would be called to mind. Fathers would tell their children, friends would tell their visitors, maybe pilgrims and tourists would be taken by to remember the macabre event. To this day, it is still a known location where there is little doubt about its identity. Those who go there will take pictures and film videos, witnessing to the tragedy that occurred at that time.

Luke next makes a statement that should clear up the confusion that many have concerning the language of the time in Jerusalem, saying “in their own language.”

The word used is *dialektos*. This is the first of six times it will be seen in the New Testament. All six of them will be found in Acts. It means “dialect.” Luke explicitly tells us what the dialect of Jerusalem at that time was, confirming what can already be inferred from the gospels. He does this by saying that they named the field in their own (meaning Jerusalem’s own) dialect. The name is “Akel Dama.”

A more literal transliteration from the Greek is “Hakeldamakh.” It is a compound Aramaic word corresponding to the cognate Hebrew words *cheleq* (portion, lot, tract, territory) and *dam* (blood). Thus, the meaning is then given by Luke, saying, “that is, Field of Blood.”

The name is given based on the event. But it is also based on what occurred in Matthew 27 where the field was named based on the blood money which the chief priests used to purchase the field. Thus, there is the irony of both events converging on this one spot of land. This is explained by The Expositor’s Greek Testament –

“It is true that the two accounts in St. Matthew and St. Luke give two reasons for the name Field of Blood. But why should there not be two reasons? If the traitor in the agony of his remorse rushed from the Temple into the valley of Hinnom, and across the valley to “the potter’s field” of Jeremiah, the old name of the potter’s field might easily become changed in the popular language into that of “field of blood,” whilst the reason given by St. Matthew for the name might still hold good, since the blood-money, which by a fiction of law was still considered to belong to Judas, was employed for the purchase of the accursed spot as a burial ground for strangers. See Edersheim, *Jesus the Messiah*, ii., 574, 575.”

If this is correct, and it appears likely based on the nature of the event, then the price of betraying the blood (meaning the life) of Christ Jesus is witness to the naming of the field just as the ghastly death of Judas is. The latter event cannot erase the magnitude of the former event. Rather, it highlights it.

Life application: There is often argument over what language the New Testament was originally written in. It is not a sound argument, but it is one that never seems to be settled as presuppositions, biases, and even pride step in.

The obvious main choices are Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Other ridiculous choices are Latin, King James English (yes, you read that right), and so on.

A secondary argument is, “What predominant language was spoken in Israel at the time of Jesus?” The main choices are Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

The answer to the question concerning the original New Testament language is “Greek.” We can know this because the gospels, Acts, and even the epistles translate words from either Hebrew or Aramaic into Greek. A few of many such examples are –

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’” Matthew 1:23

Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, “Talitha, cumi,” which is translated, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” Mark 5:41

“Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, ‘What do you seek?’ They said to Him, ‘Rabbi’ (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), ‘where are You staying?’” John 1:38

“And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)” Acts 1:19

“For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, <sup>2</sup>to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated ‘king of righteousness,’ and then also king of Salem, meaning ‘king of peace.’”

-Hebrews 7:1, 2

If either Hebrew or Aramaic was the original language of the New Testament, the word “translated” would be superfluous. It is evident from the context that Greek was the original language in which the New Testament was penned.

As far as the language spoken at the time, it is evidently Aramaic. This can be discerned in the same way from the gospels and Acts. Matthew relies heavily on Hebrew words, which is not unsurprising as his gospel is directed to the Hebrew people with the idea that Jesus is the King of Israel. However, the other gospels pretty clearly indicate that the words conveyed by the people were generally Aramaic, even if many Hebrew words are either translated or transliterated into the Greek. The languages are cognate, but the use of Aramaic at the time of Jesus is quite evident. Further, it is explicitly noted by Luke in Acts 1:19.



These aren't points that need to be argued over, but it happens for various reasons. In the end, the use of a variety of languages in the Bible tells us that God's word does not need to be read in only one language to get a proper understanding of what is being conveyed. It is acceptable for the Bible to be translated into any and every language on the planet, and yet, it will also reward those who study what was penned in the original languages as well.

Be sure to read your Bible daily and be sure to cherish this marvelous gift of God that has gone forth, and continues to go forth, in languages throughout the world.

*Lord God, it is so wonderful to know that Your word is available to people all around the world in their own languages. Today, we pray for those who are diligently translating the Bible into the remaining languages where it does not yet exist. Give these people wisdom in their efforts and the ability to overcome all obstacles so that Your word will be available to people everywhere. Amen.*

**“For it is written in the Book of Psalms:  
‘Let his dwelling place be desolate,  
And let no one live in it’;  
and,  
‘Let another take his office.’ Acts 1:20**

Peter having noted that Judas was a part of the ministry (1:17), now continues after the parenthetical thought concerning Judas' demise (1:18, 19). In his ongoing words, he quotes Scripture, saying, “For it is written in the Book of Psalms.” It is an expression unique to Luke's writings, *en biblō Psalmōn*, or “in book Psalms.”

From Luke's words, as confirmed by the citation of Peter, the Psalms were considered their own book at this time. This is not surprising, but it is simply a point of fact concerning them. It is understood that there were writings considered inspired and that they were divided in various ways.

For example, Jesus speaks of the “book of Moses,” in Mark 12:26 when referring to Exodus. At other times, the body of literature ascribed to Moses is called “the law of Moses” (e.g., Luke 2:22). The entire body of Old Testament writings is also divided up in various ways, such as “the Law and the Prophets” in Matthew 7:12, or as “the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms” in Luke 24:44.

Such terms clearly indicate that the Scriptures were considered inspired and that they were held to as individual books, as sections of a whole, and as a whole body of distinct literature. As for Peter's words now, what he says takes it as an axiom that the Psalms are inspired. As such, there should be no surprise that Christ was crucified, nor should it be a surprise that one of his own apostles would betray Him.

And so, with that encouragement conveyed to the others for them to know that God had, in fact, worked out a plan that included the deeds of Judas, he says –

“Let his dwelling place be desolate,  
And let no one live in it.”

The words are taken from Psalm 69:25 –

“Let their dwelling place be desolate;  
Let no one live in their tents.”

Peter changes the plural (general enemies who war against David) and changes them to the singular (a specific enemy who arose against the Messiah).

In the Psalm, the Hebrew word “dwelling place” is that of an encampment. In Peter's words, he uses a Greek word found only here in the Bible, *epaulis*. The word is derived from *epi* (over) and *aulé* (sheepfold, courtyard, etc). It is then accepted in translations to signify a dwelling place. Vincent's Word Studies notes –

“The word is used in classical Greek of a place for cattle. So Herodotus (i., 111): ‘The herdsman took the child in his arms, and went back the way he had come, till he reached the fold’ (ἐπαυλίον). Also of farm-building, a country-house.”

As this is the case, there is no reason to not assume Peter is referring to a sheepfold. Jesus had already equated the office of the apostle to a tender of sheep (see John 21:15, 16). Paul will refer to leaders within the church as shepherds of the church in Acts 20:28, and Peter will repeat the sentiment in 1 Peter 5:2. As such, whether a dwelling place or a position of being over the sheep (those in the church), Peter ascribes the words of the psalm to Judas, noting that his dwelling place should be made desolate. The type of shepherding he would have conducted is not to be emulated.

His next words, “And let no one live in it,” signify that not only should it be desolate, but it should remain as such. If a replacement for him is to be found, it is to be in a

completely new direction and not in the one of a traitor. With that stated, Peter then quotes another psalm, saying, “Let another take his office.”

It is a quote from Psalm 109:8 –

“Let his days be few,  
And let another take his office.”

Peter uses the word *heteros*, signifying a different person. The word translated as “office” is *episkopé*. Paul uses it in 1 Timothy 3:1 where it is translated as “overseer.” It is an office of care and attention where a leader is known to personally visit those under him. The position originally assigned to Judas as an apostle, an office that assumes the responsibility of being an overseer, was to be taken over by someone else.

Life application: To help get the sense of Peter’s words, if one were to take the general thought of this verse (a verse which only describes what occurred and does not prescribe anything) and apply it in a similar manner within the church, an example might be that of replacing a doctrinally poor pastor or teacher.

For example, if a local church has several teaching pastors, and one of them started denying the deity of Christ, he would need to be replaced – immediately. One might say, “Let his dwelling place (his doctrine) be removed completely and let no one live in it (no one teach this heretical nonsense) again.” At the same time, it is appropriate to hire a new teacher, one that will teach properly. So, the call is, “Let another take his office (someone different needs to take over his duties).”

Though not prescriptive, the general principle is sound. When someone fills a position within the church, and he turns out to be a dud like Judas, the best thing to do is to not only replace him, but to ensure that what he was doing (or teaching) is not repeated. The church is where people are to go to learn about the faith. The Bible is where one learns about the faith. The faith is to be based on proper doctrine and on a right understanding of theology. That theology is to adequately and rightly instruct concerning Jesus. When that is accomplished, people will then properly understand their state in relation to God.

In this case, one thing leads to another, and it all starts with proper instruction. And so, the highest care is to be given to ensure those who teach are actually qualified, capable, and rightly directed to doing exactly that.

*Lord God, may those we select to teach and preach within the church actually be acceptable to do so. Your word calls people “sheep” for a reason. We are helpless and easily led astray. And so, we pray that You will only allow qualified, competent, and faithful men of God over us. May it be so, to Your glory. Amen.*

**“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Acts 1:21**

Peter has just stated his words, right from Scripture, concerning God’s foreknowledge of what would occur in relation to Judas. He affirms that Scripture itself testifies to the fact that someone else should replace him in his office. As such, he next says, “Therefore.”

He is making a conclusion based on his reasoning. What follows will be a decision concerning the avenue that he recommends to be followed. Instead of “Therefore,” the KJV incorrectly states, “Wherefore.” Peter is not asking why, or for what reason, something should happen. Rather, he is affirming that Scripture has spoken, and it is to thus be acted upon.

Hence, the idea is, “Scripture says, ‘Let another take his office,’ therefore, of these men who have accompanied us...” He is obviously looking for one of “these men” to take the office of Judas. However, he continues to qualify his words in order to ensure certain necessary conditions will be met. As such, he says, “all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us.”

Peter has set forth the condition that whoever fills Judas’ office should be someone who had actively been a participant in the ministry of Jesus, seeing all that He had done and who had been faithful to not depart from Him when things got tough. An example of what he has in mind that should be avoided is found in John 6 –

“From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. <sup>67</sup> Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’  
<sup>68</sup> But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup> Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” John 6:66-69

The words “many of His disciples” indicate that not all of them departed. Some held fast, just as the apostles did. It is such a person that Peter is looking for as a replacement. The words “in and out among us” signifies just that. It is a way of saying that He was in constant interaction with them and that it was as if they dwelt in the

same house together. As naturally as one would come in and go out of his own house, so the Lord came in and went out among the apostles.

Life application: Peter was obviously looking for someone who was qualified in the knowledge of the Lord and thus capable of continuing on in the ministry of the Lord in a competent manner. Paul alludes to this necessity himself in 1 Corinthians –

“Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?” 1 Corinthians 9:1

But Paul was not with Jesus as the other apostles were. Therefore, he again states –

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. <sup>6</sup>After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup>After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. <sup>8</sup>Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Paul notes that he was different from the other apostles in that he had seen the risen Christ, but that his selection was not in the same way as the others. And yet, he clearly states that the gospel he preached was the exact same gospel as was presented by the other apostles –

“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. <sup>12</sup>For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Galatians 1:11, 12

Everything that Paul says in the surrounding verses and chapters of Galatians clearly reveals this. There is one gospel that is proclaimed to both Jew and Gentile. The difference is not in the message, but in the audience. The reason for the selection of Paul to proclaim this message to the Gentiles (even though he always first presented it to the Jews) is because he was gifted to do so. The other apostles were limited in their interaction with Gentiles and would have been less effective in conveying what needed to be said. Paul had the ability they lacked, and so he was chosen to be the main apostle for this ministry.

The selection of Barnabas, who was first a disciple under Peter, but who was later a witness to Paul's conversion and who eventually became a minister to the Gentiles along with Paul demonstrates this. The same is true with Silas (Silvanus) who ministered with Paul and who then later was commended by Peter (1 Peter 5:12).

The point of this is that the heretical doctrine which teaches there are two gospels, one to the Jew and one to the Gentile, must be firmly spoken against. What Peter is conveying concerning the apostleship is as applicable to Paul as it is to the one to replace Judas, but Paul's conversion came about in a different way, and by the Lord's personal intervention. Again, the difference between Peter's gospel and that of what Paul presents is not in the message (it is the same gospel), but in the audience who receives it – who is best qualified to present it to the particular audience. Paul was well-suited to do what Peter was not fully qualified to do.

*Lord God, when Your word is properly analyzed, the wisdom of who You selected to do certain things is always evident. You chose a young shepherd boy to slay a giant, and You chose a persecutor of the church to proclaim the message of the church to the Gentiles. Each time a person is commissioned by You for a particular purpose, we can see how perfectly that person filled the need. Great are You, O God. Amen.*

**beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” Acts 1:22**

To get a better sense of the contents of this verse, it is good to read it together with the previous verse –

“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

The idea is that a selection to replace Judas was to be made from someone who had witnessed the entire time of Jesus' ministry “beginning from the baptism of John.”

The intent of Peter's words is that of the time when Jesus was baptized by John, not from the time that John began to baptize. John already had a ministry to the people of Israel, calling them to repentance and preparing the way of the Lord. But the focus of Peter's words is on the time of Jesus' ministry, not John's. Thus, he is referring to the moment when the two ministries came together in John's baptism of Jesus. The one

selected as an apostle should have a personal knowledge of this event “to that day when He was taken up from us.”

This is referring to the ascension of the Lord recorded in Acts 1:9. What seems probable is that this means that there were more than just the eleven apostles on the Mount of Olives with Jesus at that time. If that were not the case, Peter would not make this statement. Though the focus was on the apostles (see Acts 1:2), it is clear that they were a part of a larger group to have been with the Lord as He ascended.

From this larger group, Peter then says, “one of these must become a witness.” The word translated as “witness” is *martus*. It means a witness, but it not only conveys the sense of having seen, but of “bearing testimony of.” The act of witnessing (the seeing) is to be proclaimed (bearing the testimony).

As such, the word eventually also takes on the meaning of being a martyr. The one who bears the testimony of the Lord may even be martyred for that testimony. But in such a case, it would certainly be worth it. For the one selected to replace Judas, Peter says he is to be a witness “with us of His resurrection.”

This is the central point of the Christian faith, upon which all else either stands or falls. Of this, John Gill says –

“...the resurrection of Christ from the dead, which supposes his incarnation and life, and so his obedience, ministry, and miracles in it; and also his sufferings and death, with all the benefits and advantages thereof; and is particularly mentioned, because it not only supposes and includes the above things, but is the principal article, basis, and foundation of the Christian religion; and the sign which Christ gave to the Jews, of the truth of his being the Messiah.”

Concerning this great and prominent act of the Lord, Paul says –

“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. <sup>15</sup> Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. <sup>16</sup> For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! <sup>18</sup> Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have

perished. <sup>19</sup> If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Life application: Everything about the record of the Person of Jesus Christ would be pointless if there was no resurrection. If He came, lived a perfect life, and then was crucified and buried, it would be of no value to us without His victory over death.

This is why the New Testament goes to such great pains to not only record the event as it happened, but to validate it through the recording of all of the surrounding events, including who saw it, how many saw the risen Lord, the things He did afterward, and so on. In reading and believing these things, we then can have faith that the other things recorded in the Bible are true as well, including the promise of eternal life.

And if the promise of eternal life is true, then why should we allow our faith to be shaken? Why should we be fearful? What does it really matter if things don't go well for us now? We have a hope that transcends those things because of our trust in the promises made to us. Let us be faithful witnesses to the hope we possess, even if that means that we must also become martyrs for it. Christ is risen! What can man truly do to us? Press on in the goodness of God that is found in the giving of His Son, JESUS!

*Heavenly Father, what sure and wonderful promises we possess in Christ. You have laid out the details in Your word so precisely that we can be absolutely certain in our hearts that it is true and what it tells us will come to pass. No fear here. We are grounded in Your word, and our eyes are fixed on Jesus. Amen.*

**And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.** Acts 1:23

Peter has proposed the selection of another apostle to replace Judas. This is in accord with the Scriptures he cited, and therefore it is an appropriate step to take. Before proceeding to the verse, it should be noted that many take this decision by Peter and the others as an aberration. If a twelfth is now selected, then it – presumably – makes the selection of Paul problematic. How can he be chosen as an apostle and yet there be twelve apostles?

The reasoning is that there were twelve sons of Israel. To maintain the pattern, there should then only be twelve apostles. The thinking is flawed. The twelve sons of Israel as recorded in Genesis are at first twelve –



Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin.

However, in Genesis 48, the following is recorded –

“Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, ‘Indeed your father *is* sick’; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. <sup>2</sup> And Jacob was told, ‘Look, your son Joseph is coming to you’; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed. <sup>3</sup> Then Jacob said to Joseph: ‘God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, <sup>4</sup> and said to me, “Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you *as* an everlasting possession.” <sup>5</sup> And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, *are* mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.” Genesis 48:1-5

Thus, the sons of Israel are fourteen –

Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin, Manasseh, and Ephraim.

Throughout the rest of Scripture, even in the New Testament, various listings of the sons of Israel are given based on the number twelve. At times, one name or another is given in replacement of another name, but the list is given as twelve.

Of the apostles, Luke lists twelve –

“Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; <sup>15</sup> Matthew and Thomas; James the *son* of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; <sup>16</sup> Judas *the son* of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.” Luke 6:14-16

With the selection of another apostle now in Acts 1, and with the designation of another apostle – Paul – beginning in Acts 9, the number is fourteen –

Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, John; Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the *son* of Alphaeus, Simon called the Zealot, Judas *the son* of James, Judas Iscariot, Matthias, and Paul.

With this pattern set forth and understood, there is no reason to assume that the selection of Matthias (as will occur in verse 1:26) is inappropriate. Judas, being dead, does not discount that he was a named apostle. Nor does the adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim mean that these two sons are not “sons of Israel.” The pattern is set forth for us to learn from.

Having said that, the verse set before us begins with, “And they proposed two.” Of those who had been with Jesus “from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up” (Acts 1:22), two qualified men have been identified. The first is “Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus.”

The name “Joseph” essentially means, “He shall add,” coming from the Hebrew verb *yasaph*, “to add.” However, it is also connected to the word *asaph*, “to take away.” Therefore, the name is actually a double entendre.

The name Barsabas (Barsabbas) is probably a patronymic. The word bar is Aramaic, meaning “son.” Thus, he is “Son of Sabas.” The Greek Sabas is derived from one of various Hebrew words, depending on which transliteration is accepted. The name could mean Son of the Host, Son of the Imbiber, Son of Pleasure, Son of an Oath, or something similar. If the name is not a patronymic, the term “son of” may be relating to his character. This is common in the Bible. A person is known as a “Son of XXX” because his character exemplifies that quality. Thus, the term “Son of Sabas” designates either his father, or his personal character.

Finally, Justus is a name of Latin origin meaning “just.” It was not uncommon for people to have both a Hebrew name and a Latin or Greek name at this time. It was also common to be called “Son of XXX,” as well. Hence, he was known by any of these names.

The second nominee is “Matthias.” This is believed to be a shortened form of the name Mattathias. If so, it is a transliteration from the Hebrew name Mattithyah (or Mattithyahu). The Hebrew word *mattah* signifies a gift or reward. The Hebrew *Yah* is an abbreviation for Yehovah. Thus, the name means “Gift of Yah (Yehovah).”

Life application: Peter quoted Scripture to demonstrate that God’s plans were not upset by the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, but that this was in accord with what God knew would occur. He again cited Scripture to demonstrate that another person should replace him.

Peter's thinking was not in error. It was in accord with what was set forth in the word. The selection of the two men was in accord with what was just and right concerning the knowledge of Jesus' ministry.

In other words, the events in Acts 1 concerning the replacement of Judas are not an error as many claim. Instead, they are a part of what occurred. They are documented by Luke to show that this was what was decided, and in the conduct of this selection – and the later selection of Paul – a set pattern is brought forth that matches what occurred already in the Old Testament in relation to the sons of Israel.

As such, EW Bullinger defines the number fourteen as –

“...being a multiple of *seven*, partakes of its significance; and, being double that number, implies a double measure of spiritual perfection.

“The number *two* with which it is combined (2x7) may, however, bring its own significance into its meaning, as in Matthew 1, where the genealogy of Jesus Christ is divided up and given in sets of 14 (2x7) generations, *two* being the number associated with incarnation.”

Be sure to carefully read the word, think on what is occurring as you do, and then continue to meditate on the word as you conduct your other affairs. The word is active and alive, and it will reward those who diligently ponder its truths, patterns, structure, and so on.

*Glorious Heavenly Father, what a treasure Your word is. Thank You for the richness it contains. We have one life to live before we stand before You. Help us not to squander it on that which is temporary and futile, but to direct our hearts, minds, thoughts, and actions to a study and contemplation of Your precious word. To Your glory! Amen!*

**And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen Acts 1:24**

With the proposal of either Joseph or Matthias to replace Judas, it now says, “And they prayed and said.” This is not only the apostles, but all of the disciples, as is noted in verse 1:15. Peter had stood up among them all to speak, and that discourse continues now. This certainly would have included the women as it notes that the women were included in prayer in verse 1:14. The entire group is together, the candidates have been set forth, and so now the prayer is given, beginning with, “You, O Lord.”

This is an interesting phrase because it is believed by some to be speaking of Jesus. This is explained by the scholar Olshausen –

“The word ‘Lord,’ placed absolutely, denotes in the New Testament almost universally THE SON; and the words, ‘Show whom Thou hast chosen,’ are decisive. The apostles are just Christ’s messengers: It is He that sends them, and of Him they bear witness. Here, therefore, we have the first example of a prayer offered to the exalted Redeemer; furnishing indirectly the strongest proof of His divinity.”

This is probably correct. It would be appropriate to pray to Jesus. It would mean the person was selected by Jesus. Obviously, Jesus is God. But the point is that they are appealing to “You, O Lord,” specifically. It is He “who knows the hearts of all.”

The Greek word, *kardiognóstés*, is used here. It is found only here and in Acts 15:8, and it is not found in any other Greek writers. It is a noun literally meaning “heart knower,” coming from the words *kardía*, meaning “heart” and *ginōskō*, signifying to “experientially know.” Thus, God is “the one who knows all the inner workings of every person’s heart, i.e. all their moral preferences (convictions)” (HELPS Word Studies).

As noted, the word is also only found in Acts 15:8 –

“So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, <sup>9</sup> and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.” Acts 15:8, 9

There, “God” is said to be the “heart-knower.” But this does not exclude Jesus as such. In fact, in Revelation 2, He explicitly says that He searches hearts –

“I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.” Revelation 2:23

But this is also said to be something that is accomplished by the Spirit –

“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. <sup>27</sup> Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.” Romans 8:26, 27

Understanding this, we can then go to the Old Testament and see how these things tie together when reading Solomon's prayer to Yehovah Elohim, or "the Lord God" –

"then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men), <sup>40</sup> that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You gave to our fathers." 1 Kings 8:39, 40

What is clearly being revealed is the doctrine of the Trinity. There is one God who has expressed Himself in this Triune manner. Thus, the Lord (Yehovah) of the Old Testament is revealed in Jesus of the New. As such, the prayer is to the Lord (Jesus, who is God) petitioning Him to "show which of these two You have chosen."

As noted, it is Jesus (the Lord) who selects His apostles (see John 6:70). As such, the appeal is surely made to Jesus that He would select a replacement for Judas accordingly in order to fulfill Scripture.

Life application: An argument for the prayer of this verse having been made to Jesus has been made. That can be argued against based on a prayer found in Acts 4 –

So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, <sup>25</sup> who by the mouth of Your servant David have said:

'Why did the nations rage,  
And the people plot vain things?

<sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth took their stand,  
And the rulers were gathered together  
Against the LORD and against His Christ.'

<sup>27</sup> "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together <sup>28</sup> to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. <sup>29</sup> Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, <sup>30</sup> by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." Acts 4:24-30

One could say that this prayer is made to God, calling Him "Lord." However, the word used in Acts 4:24, *despotés*, is also used when speaking of Jesus in Jude 1:4. Thus, there is no reason to assume that the apostles are not praying to Jesus – who is God – while

praying to God. Whether they had a developed knowledge of the Trinity or not, they knew quite clearly that Jesus is the incarnate Lord (Yehovah).

An argument against the Trinity is that the term itself is not used in Scripture. But that is an argument from silence. The doctrine of original sin is not mentioned, and yet it is taught. The word “rapture” is not found in Scripture, but it is taught. Likewise, the doctrine of the Trinity is clearly taught in Scripture. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. And yet, there is one God.

*Lord God, Your word is large, and it is complicated at times. But with proper study, we can learn things that are evident, even if they are not openly expressed. Help us to search these treasures out and then to accept them when they are clearly seen. May our doctrine be pure and may our understanding of You be proper. Amen.*

**to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” Acts 1:25**

In the previous verse, the apostles prayed that the Lord would reveal which of the two candidates to replace Judas was to be chosen. That prayer continues with the words, “to take part in this ministry.”

Here, the same word as was used in 1:17, *kléros*, or “lot,” is used again (although some texts use the word “place” instead of “lot”). This word signifies the casting of the lot. The Lord is the director of the lot (see the commentary on 1:17). As such, Jesus’ decision concerning apostolic appointment was authoritative because He is the Lord.

Having rightly interpreted the Scriptures concerning what happened to Judas (as noted in verses 20 and 21), Peter and those with him are clearly directed to replace him with a suitable candidate in order to further the ministry, which is – as the prayer next states – “an apostleship.”

Not only were they to fill a void in the ministry, but they were to do so in accord with the apostolic ministry. The term “apostle” signifies one who is sent. There is a close connection between the two. Just as an ambassador personally represents the nation or leader of a nation, so the apostle is personally sent and bears the name (and/or title) of the one who sends him.

In this case, it is the apostleship “from which Judas by transgression fell.” In other words, due to his transgression, the apostleship was lost to him. Being dead, that is

obvious, but it is specifically noted that the events which brought that about were because of transgression.

The word, translated as “transgression,” is a verb now used for the last of three times. It is a compound word, *parabainó*, coming from words signifying “beside” and “go.” Hence, it signifies willful, defiant stepping over a set line. A more literal and correct translation would be to simply say, “from which Judas fell away.”

The only other two uses of this word are found in Matthew 15 –

“Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, <sup>2</sup> ‘Why do Your disciples **transgress** the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.’

<sup>3</sup> He answered and said to them, ‘Why do you also **transgress** the commandment of God because of your tradition?’” Matthew 15:1-3

Judas’ actions caused him to fall away from his part (his allotted portion) in the ministry, so “that he might go to his own place.” The verb “go” is an infinitive. A more literal rendering would be, “fell away Judas to go to the place his own.” It’s not that he “might” go there. It is that his actions resulted in going there.

Further, the way the Greek words are stated, translated as “his own,” it is more intensive than simply saying “his.” It signifies that he is specifically designated for this place. This is reflected in the Lord’s words in John 17 –

“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” John 17:12

This explains the words “his own place.” The word “perdition” signifies destruction or cutting off. Judas is set to never receive an inheritance with those saved through the blood of Christ. Instead, he is forever cut off from such a hope.

This is the prayer that has been set forth by those gathered. Judas has lost his allotted portion due to his falling away. This must be corrected according to Scripture. Therefore, the apostles rightly take action to do so, first by praying, and next by doing what was the set custom in Israel for handling such matters. That will be seen in the coming verse.

Life application: It is a common teaching that the actions of the apostles are unsanctioned, and that the apostle to be chosen is not legitimate. This is because Paul clearly becomes an apostle of Jesus. The logic is that if this apostle is the twelfth, and there are supposed to be only twelve apostles, then it is Paul who is the rightful twelfth. Thus, this is an illegitimate appointment.

The reason this is accepted as such is because of what is stated in Revelation concerning the foundation stones of New Jerusalem –

“Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” Revelation 21:14

It is an incorrect analysis, and it bears the exact same problem as the twelve gates of New Jerusalem –

“Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: <sup>13</sup> three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.” Revelation 21:12, 13

The “twelve tribes” of Israel as noted in Revelation 7 are not the same as the twelve sons born to Jacob. Manasseh is listed along with Joseph, while Ephraim and Dan are not named. The pattern of the fourteen names was described in a previous commentary, and it explains the pattern set forth for the “tribes (sons) of Israel” and the “twelve (fourteen) apostles.”

The question of which tribes of Israel will be inscribed on the gates, and which apostles will be named on the foundations, is an incorrect way of looking at what is said in Revelation.

The point of the symbolism given there is that of the unity of government (the number twelve). Just as there were actually fourteen sons of Israel (Jacob adopted Ephraim and Manasseh for inheritance purposes), and as those sons are variously listed in the rest of Scripture, there are fourteen named apostles (Judas, Matthias, and Paul all reckoned in this). Thus, the “names” of the sons of Israel on the gates, and the “names” of the apostles on the foundation, do not have to be their actual names at all. Rather, this is simply a way of saying that the proclamation of these is united. That proclamation is JESUS!



He is the focus of everything going on in Scripture. The tribes of Israel anticipated Messiah, and the apostles proclaimed Messiah that had come. This is actually seen in Paul's words of 1 Corinthians 3:11 –

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

When we lose our focus on what the Bible is pointing to, we make the error of inserting our own presuppositions into what is being conveyed. When the apostles gathered together in Acts 1 to choose a successor for Judas, they did not err. Rather, they have been obedient to Scripture in choosing a replacement for the one who fell away.

Let each of us likewise be obedient to the word as it is set before us, taking it in context and applying its precepts to our own lives.

*Lord God, Your word often has difficulties in it that arise in what is said. And yet, if we take the word as a whole, we can often find out the resolution to the difficulty. It just takes study, contemplation, and setting aside our own presuppositions. So, Lord, help us to be faithful in pursuing Your word all our days. Amen.*

**And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.** Acts 1:26

With the proposal of either Joseph or Matthias to replace Judas, as Scripture called for, the account next says, “And they cast their lots.” Some take this as meaning a vote was made, but that is not how lots are conducted. Further, the wording of the next clause dismisses the idea of a vote having been made. Rather, lots were cast as is in accord with Scripture elsewhere.

Lots were cast on the Day of Atonement for the selection of the goat for the Lord and for the scapegoat. Land was called to be divided by lot in the book of Numbers, and that division was conducted in Joshua. Saul is recorded as having used lots. The division of the priests in 1 Chronicles 24 occurred by lot. Other lots are recorded in 1 Chronicles also. Nehemiah cast lots among the priests after the exile. David prophesied of lots being cast for the clothing of the Messiah in Psalm 22. And Solomon, in the Proverbs, takes it as an axiom that lots had value –

“The lot is cast into the lap,  
But its every decision *is* from the LORD.” Proverbs 16:33

“Casting lots causes contentions to cease,  
And keeps the mighty apart.” Proverbs 18:18

These and other references concerning the use of lots demonstrate that it was a common practice in the decision-making process in Israel. In particular, Scripture itself condones the practice and acknowledges that when the lot was employed, its decision was from the Lord. As such, this practice, meaning casting lots, was employed by the apostles, “and the lot fell on Matthias.”

The wording here demonstrates that this was a casting of the lot and not a vote. For the lot to “fall” on Matthias indicates that it was the decision of the Lord through the lot, rather than a selection by the others.

Nothing about this process has been out of the will of the Lord, nor is it to be considered unsanctioned by the Lord. If this were the case, an explicit note of the inappropriate nature of the process would have been noted. Scripture called for a replacement, the office was to be filled by another who was qualified, prayer was made calling for the Lord’s hand upon the process, and then the lot – which is explicitly stated in Scripture to be used to remove contentions and seek the decision of the Lord – was cast.

In addition to this, the pattern of the twelve tribes equaling fourteen named people is remarkably repeated in the twelve apostles equaling fourteen named people. Matthias was selected in accord with Scripture, “And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” Here, the word translated as “he was numbered” is *sugkatapséphizomai*. It is a compound word found only here in the Bible, coming from three other words indicating “with,” “among,” and “to calculate.” It is a different word than that used in verse 1:17, which was *katarithmeó*.

The idea here is that Matthias was fully accepted among the others and was recognized as an apostle, having been chosen by the Lord (see Proverbs 16:33 above) and received among them accordingly.

Life application: Reading the account here, and elsewhere in Scripture, often leads to the obvious question among believers today, “Is it acceptable to cast lots now?” The question is valid and there is no explicit answer. However, there is an inference that can be made. After this account in Acts 1, no mention of the lot is ever again made in Scripture.

The noun *kléros*, or lot, is used again, but not in the sense of a lot having been cast. Rather, it will refer to an inheritance or portion. It is of note that in the next chapter of Acts, the account immediately goes to the giving of the Holy Spirit. It may be that this is placed directly after the account of casting lots in order to show that a new way of determining matters has arisen.

In other words, with the coming of the Spirit, dependence on His guidance – rather than the casting of lots – is the expectation. That the casting of the lots is never referred to again – and thus is not an acceptable means of decision making – is an argument from silence, but it is one supported by the immediate noting of the coming of the Spirit.

With the coming of the Spirit, a new dynamic is introduced, because the Spirit not only directs the lives and decisions of those who wrote out the New Testament, but the Spirit also directed exactly that – the writing out of the New Testament. As such, we have everything that is needed for right conduct and doctrine.

The requirements for the selection of elders and deacons, for example, are laid out in the pastoral epistles. There is no need to cast lots for such a decision. In consideration of this, at least for church decisions, the lot is implicitly no longer necessary. As the proverbs are wisdom literature that can be applied to life at any time in redemptive history, a person could argue, “The proverbs say that ‘because every decision of the lot is from the Lord,’ it must be ok for me to cast lots.”

This was the attitude of John Wesley who famously cast lots, including for the purpose of deciding matters of marriage and even church doctrine. One could argue that the marriage part was ok, but one cannot argue that casting lots to determine doctrine could ever be acceptable. That is what the Bible is for. Why anyone would attempt to set doctrine by lot, when the Holy Spirit has already given us the word, is beyond comprehension. It is an inexcusable option to use.

As far as for marriage, finances, job decisions, and the like, if someone were to accept the premise of Proverbs and cast the lot, that person would – by default – have to accept the decision was from the Lord. As such, there should be NO COMPLAINTS from that person as to how his life turned out.

If he wound up with a nagging wife, poverty, a horrifying job that won't pay the bills and where the boss is worse than Ebenezer Scrooge before his change of heart, he would have to acknowledge, “This must be the will of the Lord for my life.” In other words, stick to Scripture, apply its precepts to your life, pray for guidance, and live your life to

the glory of God. And do so without testing Him to see what He “really” wants for your life by casting lots.

*Lord God, we don't have any way of looking into the future and seeing how we should make our life decisions. But You have given us Your word to apply to our lives, our conduct, and our doctrine. You have also given us the right to come to the throne of grace through prayer and ask for Your will to be done in our lives. May we pursue these avenues, and may we glorify You in each decision we make. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 2

**When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.**

Acts 2:1

With the selection of Matthias noted at the end of Chapter 1, the account immediately turns to the fulfillment of the Feast of the Lord recorded in Leviticus 23:15-22. This is directly referenced by Luke, saying, “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come.”

The word translated as “fully come” signifies “to be completed.” The name Pentecost means “fiftieth.” It is the fiftieth day of a particular cycle that was celebrated every year during the time of the law. It is a typological anticipation of an event that occurs at a set time after the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord. Of this time, Vincent’s Word Studies rightly states –

“The day, according to the Hebrew mode, is conceived as a measure to be filled up. So long as the day had not yet arrived, the measure was not full. The words denote in process of fulfillment.”

Arriving at this fiftieth day, one comes to the pilgrim feast known as Shavuoth in Hebrew and Pentecost in Greek. Each of the Leviticus 23 Feasts of the Lord anticipates the work of Jesus Christ during His first advent or the state/conduct of the believer’s lives because of His completed work.

The word “feast” is, unfortunately, often used to translate two different Hebrew words. The first is *moed*, meaning an appointed time. The second is *khagag*, signifying a pilgrimage/pilgrim feast. There are eight of the “appointed times” listed in Leviticus 23, three of those are “pilgrim feasts.” Pentecost is the fifth of the recorded “appointed times,” and it is the second “pilgrim feast.”

The difference is important to understand because the “appointed times” point to something directly accomplished by the Lord in the redemptive process. The “pilgrim feasts” point to the life of believers in Christ as a result of the work of the Lord. The important point of these appointed times is that they all pertain to every believer in Christ – Jew and Gentile alike.

Because of what happens at Pentecost in Acts 2 is seemingly directed only to the Jews, the heretics who hold to hyperdispensationalism claim that what occurred only applies to them. This is incorrect. What occurred at Pentecost – in the year of Christ’s

completed work – happened to the Jew first, but it pertains to any person in Christ since then, even to this day. This is true with all of the appointed times seen in Leviticus 23.

The instruction for celebrating Shavuoth/Pentecost states –

“And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. <sup>16</sup>Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. <sup>17</sup>You shall bring from your dwellings two wave *loaves* of two-tenths of an *ephah*. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. *They are* the firstfruits to the LORD. <sup>18</sup>And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be *as* a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the LORD. <sup>19</sup>Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two male lambs of the first year as a sacrifice of a peace offering. <sup>20</sup>The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits *as* a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. <sup>21</sup>And you shall proclaim on the same day *that* it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work *on it*. *It shall be* a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.

<sup>22</sup> ‘When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I *am* the LORD your God.’”

-Leviticus 23:15-22

To understand what is being pictured and how it points to both the completed work of the Lord and believer’s lives in Christ, the Feast of the Lord series from Leviticus 23 – as presented by the Superior Word – can be read or viewed online.

Though the New Covenant was established in Christ’s blood almost two months prior to Pentecost, the true beginning of the church occurred at this time. That it pertains to both Jew and Gentile is typologically seen in the two loaves of bread baked with leaven that are presented to the Lord. That it encompasses the entire time of the church age, and even contains provision for those of the tribulation period, is seen in not reaping the corners of the field.

The reason the account records only Jews at this time is because this was an annual pilgrim feast of the Jews. Of these pilgrim feasts, it is recorded –

“Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. <sup>17</sup> Every man *shall give* as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.” Deuteronomy 16:16, 17

That the males are specifically noted does not mean women were not included. Elsewhere, it notes that all in the household were to attend. This means wives, children, and so on. The typology was given to Israel; the fulfillment of the typology pertains to all believers. To deny this fundamental truth of the “appointed times” is to deny that the process of salvation as accomplished by Jesus Christ pertains to all people – Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free.

For the time being, it is noted that the believers are together at Pentecost (Hebrew: Shavuoth), and “they were all with one accord in one place.” The believers were all together in Jerusalem as required by the law of the feast. This would have been at the temple area, in the presence of the Lord. This is stated in Deuteronomy 16:16 (above). It is at this place, amid all of the people of Israel, that the events to be described will take place.

Life application: As noted, there are eight “appointed times” of the Lord recorded in Leviticus 23. Three of them are “pilgrim feasts.” A very brief description of these is listed here –

1. *Shabbath* (Sabbath). This is fulfilled by the Lord as is recorded in Hebrews 4:3 (and elsewhere) saying, “For we who have believed do enter that rest.”
2. *Pesach* (Passover). 1 Corinthians 5:7, “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”
3. *Matsoth* (Unleavened Bread; a pilgrim feast). 1 Corinthians 5:8, “Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”
4. *Bikurim* (Firstfruits). 1 Corinthians 15:20, “But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”
5. *Shavuoth* (Pentecost/the Feast of Weeks; a pilgrim feast). Ephesians 1:13 (and elsewhere), “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” Weeks, or Pentecost, is shown to be fulfilled in Romans and 1 Corinthians –

“Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.” Romans 16:5

“I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia...” 1 Corinthians 16:15

The presentation of the two loaves is what those verses are speaking of – one a Jew, one a Gentile, and thus one gospel message.

6. *Yom Teruah* (The Day of Acclamation). 1 Corinthians 15:47, “The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven.”
7. *Yom Kippur* (The Day of Atonement) Romans 3:24, 25, “...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood.”
8. *Sukkoth* (Tabernacles; a pilgrim feast). 2 Corinthians 5:7, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

All eight appointed times of the Lord are fulfilled by the Lord Jesus and/or are being lived out by His people because of His accomplished work. Each pertains to both Jew and Gentile that is based on the one and only gospel. Note: They are not “Jewish” feasts, nor are they “Feasts of Israel.” They are Feasts of the Lord. They pertain to the one, and only one, Church which is the Body of Christ – Jew and Gentile. One gospel.

In understanding the typology from the Old Testament, many heresies found in the church today can be avoided. Seventh Day Adventism (mandatory Sabbath observance); Hebrew Roots Movement (observance of the feasts of the Lord, dietary restrictions, and so on are mandatory); hyperdispensationalism (there are two gospels – one to the Jew and one to the Gentile); and so on. Each of these heresies comes about based on a failure to understand the typology from the Old Testament, its fulfillment in the New, and/or the scope of the fulfillment among the people who have come to Christ.

Another heresy that is seen within the church is the teaching that only the “Spring” feasts have been fulfilled, and the “Fall” feasts picture something coming at the end of the church age, specifically dealing with Israel. This is heresy because if these feasts are not fulfilled, then Christ did not fulfill the law (because these are a part of the Law of Moses). If He did not fulfill the law, then He is not the Messiah. Further, these are Feasts of the Lord, not Feasts of Israel. They were merely observed by Israel, but their fulfillment is in Christ.



By understanding the typology and the scope of what occurs, the heresies stated here (and others as well) are clearly identified. Beware of these false teachings and those who espouse them. They will be held accountable for their failure to give God the glory through what Jesus Christ has accomplished for His people. There is one gospel based on the completed work of Jesus Christ our Lord. Hallelujah for JESUS!

*Lord God, thank You for the surety we possess because of Christ's fulfillment of the types and shadows of the Old Covenant which only pointed to His more perfect work. Thank You that we can participate in what those things only anticipated. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Acts 2:2**

Note: It is a good time to remind the reader of the five basic rules for interpreting the Bible –

1. Is this prescriptive (does it prescribe something)?
2. Is this descriptive (does it only describe what occurred)?
3. Context (Who is being addressed, what does the surrounding passage speak of, what is the dispensation, etc.).
4. Context (see 3).
5. Context (see 4).

Chapter 2 of Acts is a descriptive passage. It prescribes absolutely nothing for the church at this time. Instead, it is a historical account of what occurred. The fact that events occur in Acts 2 in a certain manner in no way means that they will occur in this manner ever again. An example of such an unusual event is found in Exodus 40, Leviticus 9, and again in 2 Chronicles 7 –

“Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. <sup>35</sup> And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” Exodus 40:34, 35

“And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, <sup>24</sup> and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt

offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw *it*, they shouted and fell on their faces.” Leviticus 9:23, 24

“When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD’s house.” 2 Chronicles 7:1, 2

Such an event is not recorded elsewhere for either the tabernacle or the temple. Each was a one-time occurrence to demonstrate that the Lord had approved of the edifice that had been consecrated to Him. The events surrounding the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, the words of Peter to the people of Israel in this chapter, the growth of the church noted here, and so on are all simply a historical record of what occurred. They prescribe nothing for the conversion or doctrine of any believer – Jew or Gentile – into the future. This is especially so with the words of Peter to Israel concerning their conversion as is recorded in verse 2:38, and which will be evaluated at that time.

For now, the context is an event that occurs in Jerusalem, probably at the temple, and as a demonstration of the fulfillment of the symbolism of the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot/Pentecost) for the Jewish people to see and to understand that the Christian faith, which stems directly from the word of the Lord to and through the nation of Israel, conveys the fulfillment of those things that Israel had been promised concerning the coming of their Messiah.

With these things stated, the verse begins with, “And suddenly.” It is a new word found only three times in Acts, *aphnó*. It is an adverb signifying “suddenly,” or “unexpectedly.” What is occurring was unknown to the apostles as to its coming. They were told to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Promise from the Father (Acts 1:4), and now that is to be fulfilled.

In this sudden manner, “there came a sound from heaven.” It is reminiscent of the events of the past. Fire came from heaven at the consecration of the tabernacle (see above). Likewise, fire from the Lord fell upon the burnt sacrifice presented by Elijah on Mount Carmel. Events like this are given as a sign to the people that the Lord has accepted what is presented to Him. Now, a sound is heard coming from heaven “as of a rushing mighty wind.”

The word translated as “wind,” *pnoé*, is found only here and in Acts 17:25. It signifies “wind,” “breath,” or “gust.” It is the root of the word *pneuma*, or spirit, which is also a

word that signifies breath, and wind. This is the same as the word *ruakh* in Hebrew. It likewise can be translated as wind, breath, or spirit depending on the context. The idea here is that this rushing wind is heard coming from heaven.

The word translated as “rushing,” *pheró*, signifies “to bear along.” One should get the notion of what will later be said by Peter concerning the word of the Lord. He uses the word three times in a row to describe what occurred while on the Mount of Transfiguration and also as it came through the prophets –

“And we heard this voice **which came** from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

<sup>19</sup> And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; <sup>20</sup> knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, <sup>21</sup> for prophecy never **came** by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were moved* by the Holy Spirit.”

The adjective used to describe the wind is *biaios*, meaning “strong,” or “violent.” The sound of the wind was probably like that of a massive whirlwind, like what Job experienced when the presence of the Lord was near (see Job 40:6). That same wind Job experienced was noted when Elijah was translated to heaven as he went up “by a whirlwind.” The word is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe the tempest which surrounds the Lord as He accomplishes His work –

“Then the LORD will be seen over them,  
And His arrow will go forth like lightning.  
The Lord GOD will blow the trumpet,  
And go with whirlwinds from the south.” Zechariah 9:14

The idea being conveyed is that something heavenly is occurring, and it is on the day of Pentecost, confirming again that the Lord is at work, fulfilling the symbolism of what the Leviticus feast day only typologically anticipated. With this understanding, Luke next records, “and it filled the whole house.”

The word translated as “house” is *oikos*. It means a house, but it is used frequently to describe the “house of the Lord,” meaning the temple and its surrounding area. For example –

“Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. <sup>13</sup> And He said to them, ‘It is written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer,” but you have made it a “den of thieves.”’”

-Matthew 21:12, 13

There is no reason to assume that the events occurring here are anywhere else but this “house.” The temple is where the events of Exodus, Leviticus, and 2 Chronicles (noted above) occurred, and it is where the pilgrims on such feast days would have gathered. It is in this place that they would be feasting, talking about the events of the past year, and so on – just as Israelites had been doing for many generations. It is in this house “where they were sitting.”

At the pilgrim feasts, the people would gather and sit together, eating and rejoicing. It was a time of celebration and joy. It was a time to relax and to take a break during the harvest cycle. Everything about Luke’s description points to a gathering of Israel, in the presence of the Lord, just as it is described in Deuteronomy –

“But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. <sup>6</sup> There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. <sup>7</sup> And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.” Deuteronomy 12:5-7

Life application: As noted above, in this and the surrounding verses, it is seen that the Lord is at work, fulfilling the symbolism of what the Leviticus feast day only typologically anticipated. As such, there is no need for it to ever occur again.

There was one cross of Christ to fulfill the Passover sacrifice (1 Corinthians 5:7). There is one church that is united on one gospel in which believers are to conduct their lives in a sinless manner (1 Corinthians 5:8). There was one resurrection of the Lord that fulfilled the typology of the Feast of Firstfruits (1 Corinthians 15:20). The giving of the Spirit in a demonstrable way was only needed to establish the church. As such, it is only found in this way in the book of Acts (see Acts 2, Acts 8, Acts 10, etc.).

These demonstrations do not prescribe anything. They are simply given as confirmation of the works of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Resultingly, they confirm that Jesus is, in

fact, the Messiah. They further confirm that the Spirit is available to Jew, Samaritan, and Gentile. Such demonstrations confirmed the apostleship of Peter (such as in Acts 8), and they confirmed the apostleship of Paul (such as in Acts 19:6).

As this is the purpose of the book of Acts, and as the book has been compiled and added to the canon of Scripture, there is no longer any need for an external demonstration of the coming of the Spirit. In fact, that would be contrary to the prescriptive writings of Paul which say that believers now live by faith and not by sight. If we require a demonstrable working of the Spirit, we are not living by faith, and we have a contradiction in the theology which governs our spiritual lives. No sign for our faith should be expected. It is presumptuous, and it excludes faith. Paul is clear –

“For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

*Lord God, help us to be people of faith. May we never presumptuously demand a sign from You for us to accept that You are there and that Your word is true. Rather, help us to align our faith with the word You have given to us. With that, we will surely be satisfied. Your word is sufficient for our life, doctrine, and practice at this time. Thank You for this precious word. Amen.*

**Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. Acts 2:3**

In the previous verse, it was noted that the sound of the rushing mighty wind filled the house where the people were sitting. It is at this time that Luke next records, “Then there appeared.”

The idea seems to be that within the house, and without any known, visible source, something new came forth. The thought is not unlike what happened as is recorded in Daniel 5 –

“In the same hour the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.” Daniel 5:5

Seemingly, and out of nowhere, the fingers of a man's hand appeared. Likewise, Luke records that to these disciples there appeared "to them divided tongues." The verb is actually a present participle. The thought is something like "dividing tongues," or "parting tongues."

The word "tongues" is *glossa*. It signifies a tongue, a language, or even a nation which is distinguished by its language. Even before getting to the next verse, the idea is clear. A language is being presented "as of fire."

Here the Greek is specific. It is not necessarily fire (although it could be), but that the tongues appeared and acted as if they were tongues of fire. Their appearance brought to mind how a tongue of fire would look and act as it divided from the main source. In the Old Testament, the term "tongue of fire" is found only once, in Isaiah 5:24 –

"Therefore, as a tongue of fire consumes the straw, and as dry grass shrivels in the flame, so their roots will decay and their blossoms will blow away like dust; for they have rejected the instruction of the LORD of Hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel." Isaiah 5:24

There, it signified the disapproval of the Lord towards the people of Israel and the judgment to be rendered upon them. The exact opposite is seen here in Acts. The display is one of favor upon the Lord's people as is clearly seen in the next words, which say, "and one sat upon each of them."

The tongues of fire came to rest individually upon those who had accepted the "Lord of Hosts," meaning Jesus (see James 5:4 where he uses the same title and ascribes it to Jesus). Instead of judgment, as in Isaiah, it is a sign of divine favor.

Life application: It should be noted that the Day of Pentecost is held to be the exact same day of the calendar year that the Law of Moses was received at Mount Sinai. This can be affirmed by looking at the account found in Exodus. As such, there is now a contrast being made between the law which brings judgment and condemnation (as in Isaiah above) and the New Covenant which brings divine favor and a baptism (of fire – see Matthew 3:11, etc.) by the Spirit of God.

Having noted that, it must be remembered that this account in Acts is a descriptive passage. It prescribes nothing, and it cannot even be inferred that such a demonstration is normative. Rather, it is simply a confirmation that the Spirit approved of the faith of

these believers and has given a manifested display of that approval. There are both similarities, and also differences, with two other accounts in Acts –

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. <sup>45</sup> And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. <sup>46</sup> For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.” Acts 10:44-46

“Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.’ <sup>5</sup> When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. <sup>7</sup> Now the men were about twelve in all.” Acts 19:4-7

These two descriptive passages are given to complement the account in Acts, and for very specific purposes. The first was to confirm that the same gospel message that brought the Spirit upon the Jews of Acts 2 also brought the Spirit upon Gentiles in Acts 10 (Peter was the apostle who was present in both instances). The tongues confirmed the acceptance of those who were saved in Acts 10.

In Acts 19, it was Jews that received the message of Christ, but this time it was Paul who presented it. In like manner to the gospel presented by Peter, the message was received, and it was confirmed by the speaking of tongues. These are the only times that such tongues are noted as coming upon believers in the book of Acts, and the giving of the accounts is purposeful.

What is being clearly revealed is that the exact same gospel is being conveyed by Peter and by Paul, and that the gospel presented by Peter is intended for both Jew and for Gentile. Likewise, the gospel presented by Paul is both for Jew and for Gentile. The demonstration of the speaking of tongues is the surety of this fact.

In other words, the word clearly and unambiguously reveals that hyperdispensationalism – which says that the gospel presented by Peter is not the same as the gospel presented by Paul – is a heretical teaching. As there is only one gospel, the teaching is anathema –

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, <sup>7</sup> which is not another; but there are some who

trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:6-8

And again –

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> For in fact the body is not one member but many.” 1 Corinthians 12:12-14

Be sure to avoid getting caught up in this heresy and be sure to let those know, who are caught up in it, that what they teach is anathema. There is one, and only one gospel message. That same message was proclaimed by all of the apostles, and it was confirmed by the giving of the Holy Spirit in an outward display of approval. We now have the record of that in the Bible, and such a display is no longer necessary.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of the Spirit that You have graciously given to us because of the finished work of Jesus Christ. Now, through the gospel, we have peace and reconciliation with You. You have given us the Promise, and we await the day when we are brought into Your presence forever. May that Day be soon! Amen.*

**And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:4**

The previous verse saw divided tongues, as of fire, rest upon each of the disciples who were sitting in the house. With that noted, Luke next records, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” It is what Jesus earlier spoke to the people about as is described in John –

“On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. <sup>38</sup> He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ <sup>39</sup> But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” John 7:37-39

This is what Jesus later refers to in John 14 and John 15 –



“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”  
-John 14:26

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. <sup>27</sup> And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”  
-John 15:26, 27

It is also what Jesus was referring to when He spoke to the apostles after the resurrection in John 20 –

“So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ <sup>22</sup> And when He had said this, He breathed on *them*, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained.” John 20:21-23

In these verses from John 20, the word translated as “He breathed on *them*” is *emphusaó*. It is a word found only there in the New Testament. However, it is the same word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Genesis 2:7 –

“And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

Jesus was making a point in John 20 that He is the Lord God who originally formed man. His breathing on them was a token that they would be born again from above with the coming of the Spirit. This is not, then, a “second-birthing” of the Spirit here in Acts as claimed by charismatics. It is an attestation that Jesus is God.

In John 14, Jesus said the Father would send the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ name. In John 15, Jesus said that He would send the Holy Spirit from the Father. And in John 20, Jesus’ breath upon the apostles is a token of that occurrence. It is the work of the Godhead that is being revealed, and it reveals the truth of Jesus’ words of John 14 –

“Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father”?’ <sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the

Father who dwells in Me does the works. <sup>11</sup> Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.”

-John 14:9-11

The three members of the Godhead are working together in the redemptive process. The coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts is an outward, visible, audible demonstration of this. It is a confirmation that Jesus is, in fact, the Lord God. The new birth has come and the church that bears Jesus' name is founded at this moment. This is based on the New Covenant that was established in Jesus' blood only a short time before.

This is clearly evidenced in the fact that the New Covenant extends beyond the Jewish believers to include the Gentiles, as witnessed by Paul in both 1 Corinthians 11:25 and 2 Corinthians 3:4-6 and then again by the author of Hebrews in Hebrews 8 and 9.

This “filling of the Holy Spirit” is that new birth. It is being born again from above because of the completed work of Christ. It is the spiritual reconnection to God that was lost when Adam transgressed the command. The outward display in Acts 2 is not normative for the church age. Rather, it was an outward display to confirm that the Spirit is now given to those who believe the gospel.

The outward display of tongues is first occurring in Jerusalem as a sign that the Feast of Shavuot (Weeks), which is Pentecost, is fulfilled. But this does not mean it is only fulfilled for those in Jerusalem. Just as Christ's Passover sacrifice was observed as fulfilled by those in Jerusalem, it still extends to all believers (see 1 Corinthians 5:7).

Each thing must start somewhere, but that is only the beginning of the thing. The church started in Jerusalem, and it has continued to expand, as Jesus stated in Acts 1, to the ends of the earth –

“And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; <sup>5</sup> for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’ <sup>6</sup> Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ <sup>7</sup> And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

-Acts 1:4-8

In understanding these things, it next says of those who were filled with the Holy Spirit that they “began to speak with other tongues.” The word “tongues” means “languages.” In the case of what occurs in Acts 2, it does not mean gibberish, nor is it something acquired over time or improved through use. It is an immediate infusion of a new language into the person who is so filled. This is evidenced in the coming verses.

Later Paul will speak of tongues in a different way, acknowledging them as languages he already knew –

“I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; <sup>19</sup> yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.” 1 Corinthians 14:18, 19

These languages, given to the believers as a sign to the people, came “as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Here Luke uses a word, *apophtheggomai*, found for the first of three times. It is seen only in Acts. It refers to a clear and plain enunciation, a declaration, and a speaking forth. The words spoken by these people were clearly conveyed, perfectly understood, and had precise meaning. Paul uses the word in Acts 26:25 and then explains it for his hearer –

“But he said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.’”

The word “reason” literally means “sobriety.” In Acts 2:13, the people will claim the believers are “full of new wine.” Peter will correct this saying that they are not drunk. The enraptured voices of the believers were filled with reason, eloquence, power, and they were heightened with joy. What has come upon these believers in Jerusalem is solely of God, and it is an undoing of what occurred in Genesis 11 –

“And the LORD said, ‘Indeed the people *are* one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. <sup>7</sup> Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’ <sup>8</sup> So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. <sup>9</sup> Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.’” Genesis 11:6-9

Where the Lord confused the language of all the earth, He has now brought understanding. Where there was misunderstanding, there is now clarity. Though the tongues would cease in a supernatural way, languages continue to be learned in order to convey the gospel to all people on earth. In other words, the display of tongues in Acts 2, though not normative for the church age, is a token that the gospel is intended to speak to all people in any tongue, at any place, and at any time. Thus, it is the reuniting of all people on the planet into one body when the message of the gospel is accepted.

Life application: Acts 2 is a descriptive account of what occurred at the establishment of the church. It prescribes nothing. Further, it is not normative for the church age as is testified to throughout Acts and the epistles. Nothing is said that these same believers retained the tongues they spoke. Further, the epistles do not hint that what is described in Acts would reoccur later.

In this, the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement fails. They have taken descriptive accounts that refer to known languages that were given, along with temporary workings of the Spirit, and they have twisted them into something wholly unintended. Further, their supposed displays of tongues fail to adhere to the prescriptive directives for tongues given by Paul under the inspiration of the Spirit.

Secondly, the Feast of Pentecost is fulfilled because of Christ's work, as is evidenced in Acts, just as were all of the other feasts of the Lord. The Hebrew Roots movement fails because they reintroduce these feasts, prescribing their observance when they were, in fact, fulfilled by Him. It is a heretical doctrine because it negates the work of Christ who fulfilled them. It is one thing to observe Pentecost as a memorial, and it is another thing to prescribe observance of the feasts as given in the Law of Moses, ignoring the fulfillment in Christ.

Thirdly, the church is clearly presented as being established in Acts 2. It is based on the one and only New Covenant that came through Christ's shed blood. It is based on the one and only gospel that is to be conveyed to Jew and Gentile, and it is confirmed by the giving of the Holy Spirit of God to believers, based on the completed work of Christ. This will continue to be seen as Acts continues. Hyperdispensationalism fails because it teaches a heretical theology that separates both the gospel and the church into two separate entities.

Fourthly, Calvinism fails because it teaches that believers must be regenerated in order to believe (being born again), that people then believe, and they are then saved. This is contrary to both the descriptive and prescriptive passages of Scripture. Rather, a person

hears the word, believes the gospel, and is sealed with the Holy Spirit unto salvation. This is more expressly seen in the epistles, but following the book of Acts is helpful in understanding this.

Be sure to reject such false doctrines. Just because something is described does not mean that it is normative. That which is fulfilled by Christ is to be acknowledged as such. And there is one church that began with the giving of the Spirit and continues with the giving of that Spirit to any who believe the gospel. When a person believes, he is then born again through the sealing of the Holy Spirit as the guarantee of the inheritance.

*Lord God, thank You for the gift of Your Spirit. The record of Your word shows that it came among the early believers confirming the words of Jesus, and the record of the epistles assures us that we receive the Spirit the moment we believe the gospel. He seals us for the day of redemption. We have faith that it is true, even without any external confirmation of this. Believing that Christ died for us, was buried, and rose again is all we need to assure us that we are Yours. Thank you for Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

**And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.** Acts 2:5

In the previous verses, the Holy Spirit came upon the believers and they “began to speak with other tongues.” With that noted, Luke now turns to the broader audience who witnessed these things, saying, “And there were dwelling.”

The word *katoikeó*, is used. It signifies to settle down as a permanent resident. Scholars generally argue against this notion though because in the coming verses Jews from many locations will be noted, and in verse 9, it uses the same word in the same present tense to indicate those dwelling in Mesopotamia and elsewhere.

There is no difficulty with this. Some of these foreign-born Jews now dwelt permanently in Jerusalem. Some were pilgrims visiting Jerusalem. In Deuteronomy, Moses says what the Lord will do to the people if they disobey Him –

“Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known—wood and stone.” Deuteronomy 28:64

However, the Lord also promised restoration –

“Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, <sup>2</sup>and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>3</sup>that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. <sup>4</sup>If *any* of you are driven out to the farthest *parts* under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. <sup>5</sup>Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”

-Deuteronomy 30:1-6

The people who were exiled were brought back. Many came back permanently, some would come back at appointed times, such as the pilgrim feasts, of which the time of Pentecost was one. Paul specifically returned to Jerusalem, as is indicated in Acts 18, to keep a feast –

“So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila *were* with him. He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. <sup>19</sup>And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. <sup>20</sup>When they asked *him* to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, <sup>21</sup>but took leave of them, saying, ‘I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.’ And he sailed from Ephesus.”

-Acts 18:18-21

Even today in Israel, this is true. One can go to a large dancehall and see people who have returned to the land from dozens of countries gathered together. They will have learned the Hebrew language, but they will most commonly speak to family in their own native language, such as Russian, Arabic, English, or etc.

Understanding this, Luke continues with, “in Jerusalem.” As this is Pentecost, and as there are people gathered from many different areas, it makes the thought of this gathering being at the temple complex all the more certain. The disciples are gathered in one place (1:1), also called a “house” (1:2), and there are many others gathered there. This would be as directed by Moses –

“But *when* you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, <sup>11</sup> then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the LORD.”  
-Deuteronomy 12:10, 11

As this is certain, Luke continues, saying, “Jews.” The term speaks of any person, regardless as to which tribe the person was actually from. It is an all-encompassing term that became acceptable to speak of anyone of the stock of Israel. This is how Paul uses the term, even when referring to himself –

“For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; <sup>20</sup> and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews.”  
-1 Corinthians 9:19, 20

Despite using this term, Paul is actually from the tribe of Benjamin (see Philippians 3:5). As such, the term “Jews” as used by Luke is referring to any and all of Israel. The tribe of Judah became the predominant tribe. The designation “Jew” is the umbrella by which those of all tribes were labeled, and that has remained true to this day. Of these Jews, Luke says they are “devout men.”

The Greek word is only used by Luke. Once in his gospel (Luke 2:25) and three times in Acts. It is a compound word that literally means “‘taking hold of what is good.’ It focuses on the *outward response* someone gives to what they feel is *truly worthwhile* (worthy of respect)” HELPS Word Studies. At times, translators say, “God-fearing” which is more of a paraphrase, but it implies that a godly fear is instilled in the person.

This would be obvious as the people had followed the Law of Moses, as stated above, and had come to the temple to observe the feast as the law instructed. This description is made more pronounced by the final words of the verse, “from every nation under heaven.”

These were men who had been returned from exile and had returned to the land as the Lord promised, or they were men of the diaspora that believed the words of Scripture to some degree, and they wanted to participate in the customs of the Jews as the law stated. Thus, they were “taking hold of what is good,” at least in this respect of the law.

Of this verse, Ruckman ridiculously says, “There are no ‘Christians’ present in the chapter; no ‘**Christians**’ show up until Acts 11:26. Peter is addressing *Jews* (here; vs 10, 14, 22). The only Gentiles present are ‘**proselytes**’ to Judaism (vs. 10).” As such, Ruckman is trying to divide the church into two separate entities with two separate gospels.

Acts 11:26, that he cites, simply says, “And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” It is an acknowledgement that the movement that began on Pentecost in Jerusalem developed into what would become its only separately identified group of people known as “Christians.” This is evidenced by Peter’s words of 1 Peter 4:16 –

“Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.”

The designation “Christian” means “follower of Christ.” In Acts 2, Peter will use the term “Christ” four times, clearly indicating in two of them that he (Peter) is a “Christian,” as are those with him, even if the term had not come into common use at the time –

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Acts 2:36

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38

In the middle of his analysis, Ruckman switches from the subject to the object – from Peter to Peter’s audience, thus pulling a fast one in his flawed theology. Of course, Peter was only speaking to Jews. This is in the temple in Jerusalem, and only Jews and proselytes were allowed into this area. The message itself was designated to go to the Jew first and then to the Gentile (see Acts 26:23). But it is the same group of believers that spread the message, meaning Christians (aka “followers of Christ”).

The doctrine of hyperdispensationalism which Ruckman teaches is heretical and insidiously divides the church established by Jesus Christ for truly malignant purposes.

Life application: For such a seemingly simple verse, much is tied up in what it says. It is important to know the rest of Scripture to understand the context of what is being conveyed. For those who spend most of their time trying to separate the testaments, covenants, and promises by dividing them into wholly separate ideas, there will be a failure in grasping the overall message being conveyed.



It is true that the Mosaic Covenant is obsolete in Christ, but one cannot have a New Covenant without there first being an Old Covenant. God is slowly and progressively revealing Himself in the stream of human existence, logically building a case for man's need for Christ in every dispensation that arises.

In the end, the final point of everything that God is doing is to reveal Himself through Christ and to reveal our need for Christ. He used Israel, the Jewish people, to reveal a very large part of that program. Without understanding their history, as well as the promises yet to be fulfilled in them, a huge void in our understanding of God's message will result. Hence, you are admonished to READ YOUR BIBLE.

It is in Scripture that the glory of what God has done for you is revealed. Again, READ YOUR BIBLE.

*Lord God, thank You for Your precious word – the Holy Bible. Amen.*

**And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Acts 2:6**

The previous verses noted the sound of the rushing wind and the speaking in tongues. They also noted that there were Jews "from every nation under heaven." The verse now begins with, "And when this sound occurred." It is referring to the events just mentioned, probably beginning with the rushing wind followed by the speaking in tongues, and certainly with a stress on the tongues.

This is because the word translated as "sound" is different than that of verse 2:2. There, it was the word *échos*. That refers to a loud or confused sound (the mighty, rushing wind). Here, the word is *phóné*. This refers to a sound which is inclusive of a voice, language, or dialect (the utterances of the disciples). With that occurring, it says, "the multitude."

That is a direct reference to those of the previous verse just mentioned, "Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven." It is the pilgrims of the pilgrim feast. The law mandated that they come, and these men (certainly with their families as the law directed), in obedience to the law, had presented themselves in the temple area. In this place, they were drawn to the spot, where the disciples had gathered, to find out what was going on. It is there and while listening to the sound – that it says they "were confused."

The word in Greek is a compound verb coming from *sun* (together) and *cheó* (to pour). If one takes two liquids and pours them together, they intermingle, and their properties become confused. This is the thought of those who heard. They were unable to properly process what was going on “because everyone heard them speak.”

The verb is imperfect, saying, “because everyone was hearing.” They heard and they kept on hearing. It is an important part of what is being conveyed. To simply say, “they heard” is not as uncommon as we might initially think, as will be explained in a minute. However, these people heard, and what they heard continued on, as Luke says, “in his own language.”

It is the same word first used in Acts 1:19 –

“And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own *language*, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)”

Translating this as “language” is incorrect. In verses 2:8-11, it will mention some of the various tongues that are heard. Understanding their origin, Vincent’s Word Studies notes, “The Phrygians and Pamphylans, for instance, both spoke Greek, but in different idioms; the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites all spoke Persian, but in different provincial forms.”

Hence, these are not only unique languages, but dialects (tongues is acceptable) within various languages are noted. The point is that what is heard is completely understandable to those who heard. The next verse will explain the confusion, noting that those who are speaking are Galileans. As such, even if they spoke the language, they would certainly not be proficient in the pronunciation nor in the dialect.

What is happening may not have been confusing if they heard someone call out an expression in his own language, or even his own dialect. This happens all the time. Someone knows a word or two of Spanish, Malay, German, or Japanese, and they call it out to a person of that nation. This might be the case if someone visited a Japanese restaurant and he said to the owners as he walked in, 私は日本食が大好きです。最も良い！ (*Watashi wa nipponshoku ga daisukidesu. Mottomo yoi!*).

This might be impressive to some extent, but such a simple phrase can be learned quickly enough. However, if the person said it in a perfect local dialect, and the owners happened to be from that area, they may be a bit surprised. If the person continued to speak in this dialect, a state of confusion would come upon the owners. “This guy has

blond hair and round eyes (nice hazel round eyes!) and he not only speaks Japanese, but he speaks it perfectly in our own dialect” – 本当にすごいです (*Hontōni sugoidesu!*)

Remember, what is happening here is occurring at the same time of year that the law was received by the people at Mount Sinai. The difference is quite striking. The law was received from the Lord in a state of fear, quaking, trembling, and with a voice that brought terror upon the people. It was the Lord speaking *to* Israel in their own language. But more, it was only spoken to Israel.

At Pentecost, the sound is familiar, and it is at a time of rejoicing (Deuteronomy 12:12). In fact, no one who was in mourning could participate in this event (Deuteronomy 26:14). And further, it came not only in the language of the people, but in the language of all people “from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). Though these are Jews, they are Jews who came from those other nations, implying that the word is not only intended for these Jews, but for all people.

But more, what is heard is from the Lord *through* His people. In this, the contrast to the law is complete. The law is of fear. The giving of the Spirit is of friendliness. The law calls for works. The Spirit comes through faith. The law brings condemnation. The work of Christ brings salvation. These, and innumerable other contrasts, are seen in the law versus the gospel of grace.

Life application: There is a Jewish teaching that the Law of Moses, given at Mount Sinai, went out to all the world in the seventy known languages of the people recorded in Genesis 10. This is certainly a false teaching that began after the events at Pentecost.

This is found in a midrash, or Jewish commentary on Scripture, that was supposedly recorded by Rabbi Yohannan (30BC to AD90). If Yohannan actually said this, he certainly realized the significance of what occurred at Pentecost. He possibly made that story up in order to demonstrate that what occurred at Pentecost was not without precedent and was not something special or unique to faith in Christ Jesus. There is nothing in Scripture to justify this false teaching, and if it were so, the Bible would have recorded it.

It is just as possible that this is credited to Yohannan because he lived during the time that the events occurred, and it is a way of robbing the truth of the Pentecost experience recorded in Scripture away from its actual source.

One must be exceedingly careful when referring to Jewish commentaries. If what they state or claim is not in accord with Scripture, it is best to disregard it. There has been an agenda in Judaism to obscure the truth of Christ for two thousand years.

Likewise, it is unsound to take Jewish cultural events, such as how their wedding marriages are conducted, and to insert that into one's New Testament theology. This is a giant problem that often confuses the truth of what is being conveyed by Jesus and the apostles, and it leads to many incorrect doctrines concerning events that have, or that will, occur.

This is especially true with modern Messianic and Hebrew Roots evaluations of things like the Leviticus 23 Feasts of the Lord, the Shemitah, the Sabbath and Jubilee cycles, and so on. These extra-biblical insertions do not help us evaluate those things. Rather, they misdirect our eyes away from what God intends for us to see, meaning Jesus Christ.

The Bible stands alone as the testament to what God is doing in Christ. If any extra-biblical teaching does not sync with what is stated in Scripture, toss it. Just because someone is Jewish and appears well-versed in the language and culture of the Jews, it does not mean he is a specialist on the Bible. It is a huge problem within the modern church, and it should not become a part of our personal theology. Stick with the Bible!

*Lord God, Your word is sufficient for our knowledge, doctrine, and practice concerning our faith. May we be careful to not trust people with fine sounding arguments that do not align with Your word, even if they claim it is something that reveals secrets about You. That is what Your word is for. May we let this sink into our minds. Amen.*

**Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? Acts 2:7**

In verse 2:5, Luke made a point of recording who the people were that were seeing the events occurring, saying, "And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven." Then, in verse 2:6, he noted that "everyone heard them speak in his own language."

As was seen, the word "language" is more appropriately rendered "dialect." This would include the "dialect" of those in (meaning "from") Jerusalem. Because of what they were hearing emanate from the disciples, Luke next notes, "Then they were all amazed and marveled."

Both verbs are in the imperfect tense, “they were amazed, and they were marveling.” As the tongues were being spoken, the astonishment of the people continued. The word translated as “amazed” means “to put out of place.” In other words, it is as if they were out of their mind because they were unable to grasp what was happening.

The other word is described by Vincent’s Word Studies as, “to cause ‘wonder; ... to regard with amazement, and with a suggestion of *beginning to speculate* on the matter.” Vincent’s is correct because the speculation immediately begins to follow. Luke says they were “saying to one another.”

In other words, the people were seeing the spectacle and were beginning to speculate on what was going on. There is a hint of contempt in their attitude towards those who were speaking because the talk is among those beholding the spectacle and not directed towards those who were engaged in what was occurring. That is clearly evidenced in the next words, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?”

The focus is on who these people are. They were understood to be Galileans. As such, they were considered the hicks of the nation. They had their own dialect that was clearly distinguished from those in Jerusalem. They were also noted for their lack of care in their speech. As Vincent’s says of them, “They were blamed for neglecting the study of their language, and charged with errors in grammar and ridiculous mispronunciations.” This is noted elsewhere in the gospels, such as in Mark 14 –

“And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, ‘Surely you are *one* of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows *it*.’” Mark 14:70

The word translated as “speech” in that verse from Mark is *lalia*. In classical Greek, it is used to signify babble or chattering talk. It is a word used to signify one’s manner of speech. One can see that the dialect of Jerusalem, which Luke focused on previously, was clearly distinguishable from that of Galilee –

“And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)” Acts 1:19

What is occurring here is just what Paul says the purpose of tongues was for. It is as a sign to those who do not believe –

“Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. <sup>23</sup> Therefore if

the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those who are* uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?" 1 Corinthians 14:22, 23

At the pilgrim feast in Jerusalem, the presentation of tongues was to be a sign to unbelievers. This is what Isaiah prophesied of –

“Bind up the testimony,  
Seal the law among my disciples.

<sup>17</sup> And I will wait on the LORD,  
Who hides His face from the house of Jacob;  
And I will hope in Him.

<sup>18</sup> Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me!

We are for signs and wonders in Israel  
From the LORD of hosts,  
Who dwells in Mount Zion.

<sup>19</sup> And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people seek their God? *Should they seek* the dead on behalf of the living? <sup>20</sup> To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them.”

-Isaiah 8:16-20

Instead of seeking the mediums and wizards who whisper and mutter, the people were to seek their God. The Lord was giving Israel a sign. This is evidenced in Hebrews 2:13 where the author of the epistle cites this passage from Isaiah, ascribing it to Christ and His people.

Life application: The people in Jerusalem were highly astonished at what they saw, especially because those who were speaking in tongues were “lowly and uneducated” Galileans. It would be incredible to think that such boorish people could perfectly enunciate the particular dialects of the languages that were being spoken, and yet it was occurring.

This was as much of a sign as the tongues themselves were. If someone who was linguistically proficient in picking up other languages was to stand up and speak fluently in another dialect, it wouldn't seem so amazing. But if a person from the backwater areas of Louisiana or the deep mountains of Appalachia were to suddenly start speaking proper English in the court of the royal halls of England, it would be rather remarkable.

As such, one can see the wisdom in God's selection of these Galileans. It provides an added touch to the incredible nature of what was occurring. The Lord chose unimpressive people to be used to bring forth an amazing sign to those in Jerusalem. This is exactly what Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians –

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*.<sup>27</sup> But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;<sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,<sup>29</sup> that no flesh should glory in His presence.<sup>30</sup> But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—<sup>31</sup> that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.’” 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

God chooses those who seem least likely to do anything great or amazing in order to bring His glory to the fullest light possible. As such, if you are feeling like you have no particular capabilities or qualifications that will make an impact for Christ, you have underestimated yourself.

You may think you are the least of all people, but because you have been saved by Christ, you can be used to make the greatest of difference in the lives of others. Take time today to offer yourself, wholly and unreservedly, to the Lord. Allow Him to be glorified through you. It is certain that He can do so. And so, talk to Him about it and let His glory shine through you so that others may see and believe.

*Great are You, O God, and You can do great things through the most unexpected people. This has been proven true throughout history and we know it will continue. And so, Lord, use us in the manner that will bring You the most glory. Be pleased to continue Your plan of redemption through us in the way that You see fit. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**And how *is it* that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Acts 2:8**

The previous verse noted that those speaking were Galileans. Despite this, those listening now ask, “And how *is it* that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?” The word translated as “language” again signifies a dialect, and this may be the intent as one's personal dialect is the most notable aspect of what one hears.

A person may be in the streets of Japan and hear three people speaking English, but if he hears one with his similar southern accent (say like one from Georgia), he will pick up on that first and foremost. However, in this case, the thought being conveyed may also extend to a particular language. This will be seen in verse 11 where the word *glossa*, or “tongue,” is used.

Either way, the point is that those who hear these Galileans can understand them speaking the language they were born into perfectly. With this display, the question arises concerning these languages. Are they actually spoken by the Galileans, or are the Galileans speaking in their own language but being understood by the hearers in their own language – as if they are translated by the Spirit into the ears of the hearers?

What seems likely is that the disciples are actually speaking in these other languages. If not, the miracle would be in the hearer and not in the speaker. As this is the case, it goes beyond what we experience with modern translators which take what we say (or type) and convert that language into a new target language. Instead, what is spoken comes directly from the source speaker while under the influence of the Spirit.

Life application: Those who hear the disciples speaking clearly acknowledge that the words are intelligible and perfectly spoken in their own native language (or dialect). In the coming verses, actual languages will be named to confirm this.

There is nothing in Scripture to justify the inane, incoherent ramblings of Charismatics and Pentecostals who make up (meaning they are not inspired to speak) false “tongues.” As tongues are a sign to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:22), the Spirit would not make that “sign” a nonsensical load of gibberish.

To understand Paul’s description of tongues as conveyed in 1 Corinthians 14, the full study is available in a line-by-line analysis on the Superior Word website or on the Superior Word YouTube channel. The conduct of those who participate in these false tongues is disgraceful, and it is disrespectful to the Spirit of God.

The Lord divided the languages of the world for His sovereign purposes. The Spirit of God united these people in this miraculous way on the first Pentecost as a sign that He approved of their faith in Christ. It was a demonstration of His ability to reunite humanity in Him once again, purifying their language according to His determination.

There will be other times that tongues will come upon believers as recorded in Acts. These occur at specific times and as an approval of the faith that was professed by those



who believe. These are descriptive accounts, and they are not to be considered normative for the church age. And they certainly do not, nor will they ever, involve false tongues spoken in nonsensical gibberish.

Further, in the later use of tongues, as directed by Paul in the epistles (Paul's words are the divinely inspired word of God), very specific directions for the speaking of tongues are given. When those instructions are not followed, it is evidence that it is not the Spirit who is inspiring them. The Spirit will never contradict Himself. As the word of God is Spirit inspired, such things that are not in accord with the word are not Spirit inspired. If they are not Spirit inspired, then who do you suppose is behind these false utterances?

Hold fast to the word, be obedient to it, and reject anyone who mars this precious gift by such false presentations.

*Lord God, we are grateful to You for what You have done for us in Christ. You have established Your church, You have given us guidance in Your word, and You have provided us with everything we need to pursue You as is pleasing to You. Thank You for these things. Help us to be obedient to Your word, and to fix our eyes always on Jesus. Amen.*

### **Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Acts 2:9**

The list of various dialects (even within various languages) is now presented. This list is probably not all-inclusive, but it gives a sense of the scope of what was heard by those gathered in Jerusalem. Hence, it gives the scope of the miracle itself. As these are Galileans speaking forth, and as there is such an expansive number of individual languages and dialects, it reveals the knowledge and understanding of the Spirit who caused these people to speak.

The languages, as they are presented, generally follow from east to west in their geographic locations. Albert Barnes gives a detailed description of these people groups and his work will be cited here.

The list begins with "Parthians." Of them, Barnes says, "Parthians mean those Jews or proselytes who dwelt in Parthia. This country was a part of Persia, and was situated between the Persian Gulf and the Tigris on the west, and the Indus River on the east. The term 'Parthia' originally referred to a small mountainous district lying to the northeast of Media. Afterward it came to be applied to the great Parthian kingdom into

which this province expanded. Parthia proper, or Ancient Parthia, lying between Asia and Hyrcania, the residence of a rude and poor tribe, and traversed by bare mountains, woods, and sandy steppes, formed a part of the great Persian monarchy. Its inhabitants were of Scythian origin. About 256 years before Christ, Arsaces rose against the Syro-Macedonian power, and commenced a new dynasty in her own person, designated by the title of Arsacidae. This was the beginning of the great Parthian empire, which extended itself in the early days of Christianity over all the provinces of what had been the Persian kingdom, having the Euphrates for its western boundary, by which it was separated from the dominions of Rome (Kitto's Encyclop.). Their empire lasted about 400 years. The Parthians were much distinguished for their manner of fighting. They usually fought on horseback, and when appearing to retreat, discharged their arrows with great execution behind them. They disputed the empire of the East with the Romans for a long time. The language spoken there was that of Persia, and in ancient writers Parthia and Persia often mean the same country."

Next, Luke says, "and Medes." Of them, Barnes says, "Inhabitants of Media. This country was situated westward and southward of the Caspian Sea, between 35 degrees and 40 degrees of north latitude. It had Persia on the south and Armenia on the west. It was about the size of Spain, and was one of the richest parts of Asia. In the Scriptures it is called Madai, Genesis 10:2. The Medes are often mentioned, frequently in connection with the Persians, with whom they were often connected under the same government, 2 Kings 17:6; 2 Kings 18:11; Esther 1:3, Esther 1:14, Esther 1:18-19; Jeremiah 25:25; Daniel 5:28; Daniel 6:8; Daniel 8:20; Daniel 9:1. The language spoken here was also that of Persia."

After them come the "Elamites." Barnes states, "The nation was descended from Elam, the son of Shem, Genesis 10:22. It is mentioned as being in alliance with Amraphel, the king of Shinar, and Arioch, king of Ellasar, and Tidal, king of nations, Genesis 14:1. Of these nations in alliance, Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, was the chief, Genesis 14:4. See also Ezra 2:7; Ezra 8:7; Nehemiah 7:12, Nehemiah 7:34; Isaiah 11:11; Isaiah 21:2; Isaiah 22:6, etc. They are mentioned as a part of the Persian empire, and Daniel is said to have resided at Shushan, which is in the province of Elam, Daniel 8:2. The Greeks and Romans gave to this country the name of Elymais. It is now called Kusistan. It was bounded by Persia on the east, by Media on the north, by Babylonia on the west, and by the Persian Gulf on the south. The Elamites were a warlike people, and celebrated for the use of the bow, Isaiah 22:6; Jeremiah 49:35. The language of this people was of course the Persian. Its capital, Shusan, called by the Greeks Susa, was much celebrated. It is said to have been fifteen miles in circumference, and was adorned with the celebrated palace of Ahasuerus. The inhabitants still pretend to show there the tomb of the prophet Daniel."

Luke next turns to “those dwelling in Mesopotamia.” Barnes details them, saying, “This name, which is Greek, signifies between the rivers; that is, the region lying between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. In Hebrew it was called Aram-Naharaim; that is, Aram, or Syria, of the two rivers. It was also called Padan Aram, the plain of Syria. In this region were situated some important places mentioned in the Bible: "Ur of the Chaldees, the birthplace of Abraham Genesis 11:27-28; Haran, where Terah stopped on his journey and died Genesis 11:31-32; Charchemish 2 Chronicles 35:20; Hena 2 Kings 19:13; Sepharvaim 2 Kings 17:24. This region, known as Mesopotamia, extended between the two rivers from their sources to Babylon on the south. It had on the north Armenia, on the west Syria, on the east Persia, and on the south Babylonia. It was an extensive, level, and fertile country. The language spoken here was probably the Syriac, with perhaps a mixture of the Chaldee.”

Luke next mentions “Judea.” In this, Barnes notably and wisely states, “This expression has greatly perplexed commentators. It has been thought difficult to see why Judea should be mentioned, as if it were a matter of surprise that they could speak in this language. Some have supposed that there is an error in the manuscripts, and have proposed to read Armenia, or India, or Lydia, or Idumea, etc. But all this has been without any authority. Others have supposed that the language of Galilee was so different from that of the other parts of Judea as to render it remarkable that they could speak that dialect. But this is an idle supposition. This is one of the many instances in which commentators have perplexed themselves to very little purpose. Luke recorded this as any other historian would have done. In running over the languages which they spoke, he enumerated this as a matter of course; not that it was remarkable simply that they should speak the language of Judea, but that they should speak so many, meaning about the same by it as if he had said they spoke every language in the world. It is as if a similar miracle were to occur at this time among an assembly of native Englishmen and foreigners. In describing it, nothing would be more natural than to say they spoke French, and German, and Spanish, and English, and Italian, etc. In this there would be nothing remarkable except that they spoke so many languages.”

Luke next turns to “Cappadocia.” Barnes diligently notes, “This was a region of Asia Minor, and was bounded on the east by the Euphrates and Armenia, on the north by Pontus, west by Phrygia and Galatia, and south by Mount Taurus, beyond which are Cilicia and Syria. The language which was spoken here is not certainly known. It was probably, however, a mixed dialect, made up of Greek and Syriac, perhaps the same as that of their neighbors, the Lycaonians, Acts 14:11. This place was formerly celebrated for iniquity, and is mentioned in Greek writers as one of the three eminently wicked places whose name began with C. The others were Crete (compare Titus 1:12) and

Cilicia. After its conversion to the Christian religion, however, it produced many eminent men, among whom were Gregory Nyssen and Basil the Great. It was one of the places to which Peter directed an epistle, 1 Peter 1:1.”

After that, Luke states “Pontus.” Again, to Barnes – “This was another province of Asia Minor, and was situated north of Cappadocia, and was bounded west by Paphlagonia. Pontus and Cappadocia under the Romans constituted one province. This was one of the places to which the apostle Peter directed his epistle, 1 Peter 1:1. This was the birthplace of Aquila, one of the companions of Paul, Acts 18:2, Acts 18:18, Acts 18:26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19.”

The verse ends with, “and Asia.” Of this area, Barnes details the following, “Pontus and Cappadocia, etc., were parts of Asia. But the word Asia is doubtless used here to denote the regions or provinces west of these, which are not particularly enumerated. Thus, it is used Acts 6:9; Acts 16:6; Acts 20:16. It probably embraced Mysia, Aeolis, Ionia, Caria, and Lydia. “The term probably denoted not so much a definite region as a jurisdiction, the limits of which varied from time to time, according to the plan of government which the Romans adopted for their Asiatic provinces” (Prof. Hackett, in loco). The capital of this region was Ephesus. See also 1 Peter 1:1. This region was frequently called Ionia, and was afterward the seat of the seven churches in Asia, Revelation 1:4.”

Concerning the term “Asia,” Vincent’s Word Studies further clarifies the term, saying, “Not the Asiatic continent nor Asia Minor. In the time of the apostles the term was commonly understood of the proconsular province of Asia, principally of the kingdom of Pergamus left by Attalus III. to the Romans, and including Lydia, Mysia, Caria, and at times parts of Phrygia. The name Asia Minor did not come into use until the fourth century of our era.”

Life application: When reading commentaries on verses such as Acts 2:9, be sure to thank the Lord for all of the diligent work that has gone into recording information about these places by scholars of past ages. At times they provide scriptural references that will help identify who is being referred to elsewhere in the Bible. Great scholars of the past spent a lot of time in rooms lighted by lamps, pouring over maps, books, and the Bible itself to put together reliable records of what is being described.

We are those who benefit from their labors, and they have made our lives much easier as we prepare our own commentaries, Bible studies, and sermons for those in our lives to also benefit from. A big “thank you” to them is due when we meet on the fairer shores we will someday walk upon.

And above all, thank the Lord that He has given us such wonderful words through Luke and the other writers of the Bible to get us going in our journey of understanding the greatness of what God is doing in redemptive history as He arranges His word, builds up His foundations, and weaves together His church. Yes, thank God for all He has done to give us the surety of His word and thus the surety of our salvation which is so clearly presented in this word.

*Lord God, thank You for the wonderful stream of instruction You have given us, both in Your word and in those who have evaluated Your word throughout the ages. We have a reliable testimony to all that is going on in the wonderful story of the redemption of man because of those things You have put together for us. Thank You, O God! Amen!*

**Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Acts 2:10**

Luke continues the list of those who were present and heard the disciples speaking in their own dialects. As with the previous verse, we will cite the work of Albert Barnes. His descriptions are detailed and provide all that is necessary to know where the people were from. This verse begins with, "Phrygia, and Pamphylia." Of these, Albert Barnes says, "These were also two provinces of Asia Minor. Phrygia was surrounded by Galatia, Cappadocia, and Pisidia. Pamphylia was on the Mediterranean, and was bounded north by Pisidia. The language of all these places was doubtless the Greek, more or less pure." Today, these areas are included in the nation of Turkey.

Next, Luke notes "Egypt." Barnes states, "This was that extensive country, well known, on the south of the Mediterranean, watered by the Nile. It extends 600 miles from north to south, and from 100 to 120 miles east and west. The language used there was the Coptic tongue. At present the Arabic is spoken. Vast numbers of Jews dwelt in Egypt, and many from that country would be present at the great feasts at Jerusalem. In this country the first translation of the Old Testament was made, which is now called the Septuagint."

After Egypt, it says, "and the parts of Libya." Of this, Barnes notes, "In the parts of Libya - Libya is a general name for Africa. It properly denoted the region which was near to Egypt; but the Greeks gave the name to all Africa."

That area is said to be "adjoining Cyrene." It is, as Barnes details, "...a region about 500 miles west of Alexandria in Egypt. It was also called Pentapolis, because there were in it five celebrated cities. This country now belongs to Tripoli. Great numbers of Jews

resided here. A Jew of this place, Simon by name, was compelled to bear our Saviour's cross after him to the place of crucifixion, Matthew 27:32; Luke 23:26. Some of the Cyrenians are mentioned among the earliest Christians, Acts 11:20; Acts 13:1. The language which they spoke is not certainly known."

Also noted at this time are "visitors from Rome." The word translated as "visitors" is found only here and in Acts 17:21, *epidémeó*. It signifies a sojourner. Of these Jews from Rome, Barnes notes, they "...were doubtless Jews who had taken up their residence in Italy, and had come to Jerusalem to attend the great feasts. The language which they spoke was the Latin. Great numbers of Jews were at that time dwelling at Rome. Josephus says that there were eight synagogues there. The Jews are often mentioned by the Roman writers. There was a Jewish colony across the Tiber from Rome. When Judea was conquered, about 60 years before Christ, vast numbers of Jews were taken captive and carried to Rome. But they had much difficulty in managing them as slaves. They pertinaciously adhered to their religion, observed the Sabbath, and refused to join in the idolatrous rites of the Romans. Hence, they were freed, and lived by themselves across the Tiber."

Of these from Rome, Luke carefully notes they were "both Jews and proselytes." The Jews are those who were born as Jews, even if outside of the land of Israel. They retained their cultural identity, and they continue to do this today, regardless as to where they are born and live. The proselytes are Gentiles who are converted to Judaism and who had come, along with the native Jews, to observe this pilgrim feast in Jerusalem.

The term "both Jews and proselytes" is probably a descriptor that applies to all of the people groups mentioned in both verses, not just to those in Rome. The point then is that there are native Jews from all of these locations as well as converts. This would make what is happening all the more notable. It isn't just that some Jews from these places had heard the disciples who would then go back and say, "This miraculous event occurred while we were in Jerusalem." Rather, it would be something that both native Jews and converts could both attest to. In their return to their own countries, the events would then be spoken of throughout much of the Roman empire.

Life application: The disciples of Jesus spoke in many different dialects, demonstrating that the Spirit is able to express God's words in an understandable way to all people. Though the languages are different, the idea of communicating knowledge is still possible.

Though it should not be expected that we will suddenly be infused with another language when we want to tell someone about Jesus, we still have the ability to learn other languages, or use translators, to convey the gospel. Jesus gave us the commission—

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Matthew 28:18-20

As this has been directed by the Lord, let us make use of every opportunity that arises to share this word. In today’s world, the gospel has been printed in innumerable languages. If you go to a Thai or Greek restaurant frequently, be sure to print off something in their language and pass this good news onto them. There are also CDs and DVDs with the message on them, even gospel-oriented movies about Jesus can be obtained in many languages for a dollar or two. Be inventive, but be sure to get this word out.

*Lord God, help us to be responsible with our time, and to share the message of the gospel to any and all who come our way. May we not fail in sharing this wonderful news with those around us. Give us both the opportunity and the desire to do so. Yes Lord, be with us as we do as we are directed in Your word to do. Amen.*

**Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” Acts 2:11**

Luke now finishes his list of the various locations where the people had gathered from. He first notes “Cretans.” Again, as before, the words of Albert Barnes will be quoted, “Crete, now called Candia, is an island in the Mediterranean, about 200 miles in length and 50 in breadth, about 500 miles southwest of Constantinople, and about the same distance west of Syria or Palestine. The climate is mild and delightful, the sky unclouded and serene. By some this island is supposed to be the Capptor of the Hebrews, Genesis 10:14. It is mentioned in the Acts as the place touched at by Paul, Acts 27:7-8, Acts 27:13. This was the residence of Titus, who was left there by Paul ‘to set in order the things that were missing,’ etc., Titus 1:5. The Cretans among the Greeks were famous for deceit and falsehood. See the notes on Titus 1:12-13. The language spoken there was probably the Greek.”

Barnes notes that Crete was later called Candia. Today, however, the name has returned to “Crete.” Luke finishes his list with “Arabs.”

Today, what we consider Arabia is quite different than before. At the time, there were three places considered Arabia. The first is Arabia Petraea. This was bordered by Egypt on the west; Judea, and Syria to the north; the Red Sea to the south and then Arabia Felix on the east. Arabia Felix was bordered on the north by Petraea, Arabia Deserta, and part of the Persian Gulf; the Gulf of Arabia on the west; the Red Sea on the south, and part of the Persian Gulf on the east. The third is Arabia Deserta, which was bordered on the north by some of Mesopotamia; by Babylonia on the east; on the south by Arabia Felix, and by part of Syria and Arabia Petraea on the west.

With all of these people groups and locations named, Luke next records what they called out, saying that “we hear them speaking in our own tongues.” Now, the term *glóssa*, signifying “language,” is used. Therefore, these disciples were speaking both the foreign languages, but also the particular dialects within the languages. Whatever was needed to accurately speak to the ears of each person was fluently conveyed. And the substance of what they proclaimed was “the wonderful works of God.”

Here is a word found only once in Scripture, *megaleios*. It comes from the word *me-gas*, or great. Thus, it signifies “great things,” or “mighty works.” What the great things of God are is left unstated, but we can reasonably speculate that their words were centered on the great works of God in Christ.

In the speaking of the tongues, it was evidence that their message was truly from God, who alone could cause the tongues of Galileans to speak fluently as they did.

Life application: As previously noted, what was spoken by these people were actual languages, and they were fluently spoken for their targeted audience. What occurred here is a descriptive passage and is not to be considered normative for the church age. Paul says elsewhere –

“If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be two or at the most three, each* in turn, and let one interpret. <sup>28</sup> But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.” 1 Corinthians 14:27, 28

Paul’s words are prescriptive. They were given through inspiration by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Any supposed “tongues” uttered in a church that do not meet these requirements are not of God. As Paul wrote these instructions, and as they do not



match what occurred in Acts 2, it is plainly evident that what occurred in Acts 2 (and elsewhere in Acts) were one-time events intended for the early establishment of the church. They are descriptive only and are not to be used as a basis for doctrine within the church.

Understanding the purpose of the book of Acts allows the student of the Bible to see how things came about. Being careful to not misapply what is stated in Acts, many unsound doctrines that have arisen within the church will be avoided. Read Acts, enjoy its contents, praise God for how He got things going, and then proceed to the epistles to obtain proper doctrine within the church – to the glory of God who purposed it to be this way.

*Lord God, how precious is Your word, and how wonderful are the things it reveals, explains, and teaches. Help us to apply right context in our evaluation of it and help us to properly apply the things You prescribe in that right context. To Your glory we pray. Amen.*

**So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?” Acts 2:12**

With his list of the many places where the pilgrims had come from, and of which all of them heard the disciples express “the wonderful work of God” in their own language and dialect, Luke next notes, “So they were all amazed and perplexed.”

The word translated as “amazed” is the same as was just used in verse 2:7. It signifies “to put out of place.” They were still unable to grasp what was happening. That state leads to the state of perplexity. The word translated as “perplexed” is only used by Luke, in Luke 9:7 and then three times in Acts. It gives the sense of being completely baffled or confused. It is the state when a person goes through every option, trying to find a solution to a matter, and no resolution comes forth. In this confused state, they were “saying to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’”

In their amazement, and in their inability to properly deduce the reason for what they were hearing, the question is obvious. When you can’t think something through yourself, you submit your question to others, hoping they will have a suitable answer.

Life application: It is in our nature to question the world around us. Johannes Kepler said that science is thinking God’s thoughts after Him. At times we will be confounded by

something and go through a process of trying to determine what is happening. But in our thinking, we can make various kinds of errors.

Errors in thinking are known as fallacies. A fallacy is a mistaken idea or belief that is based on an unsound argument. Our minds follow certain paths of thinking that may not be logical. This is normally not intentional. Rather, we are not generally born with the skill of thinking critically. That must be developed.

At times, we may not understand something and so we will ascribe it to the miraculous, or to the providence of God. An example of this is when scientists see something highly unusual in their field of study that has no reasonable explanation. It is something that doesn't fit any known scientific model. As such, they ascribe it to proof that God exists. This is known as the "God of the gaps" perspective. Something is happening, it is inexplicable by any other means, and therefore it must be God purposefully making it happen.

Unfortunately, this type of thinking can lead to real problems because someone will later come along and find a rational explanation for the event. When this happens, those who ascribed the gap to having been filled by God, have now become an embarrassment.

However, the exact opposite can occur as well. God (if He exists – and there is every reason to believe He does) is not incapable of doing the miraculous. For example, He may tell us about the future through prophecy. But some will dismiss any possibility of this happening. They are doing the exact opposite of the "God of the gaps" crowd by dismissing the hand of God in a matter that is clearly set forth by God.

For the Christian, we must be sound in our thinking in both directions. We must be careful to not ascribe to God something that is happening simply because we don't understand it, or because someone says it is so. False tongues of Charismatics are such an example. However, we should not deny the hand of God when it is reasonably discernible that He has purposefully done something. Creation is such a thing. The giving of predictive prophecy (and the Bible is a book of predictive prophecy) is another.

And yet, not all predictive prophecy is of God. False prophets make claims all the time, even saying that what they submit is based on an evaluation of the Bible. Therefore, we must be extremely careful as we evaluate what God has done, is doing, and would/will do. Everything must be evaluated in accord with His nature and with a right application of His word.

If someone predicts the rapture, you can ignore him. Jesus clearly said in Acts 1 that we are not going to know the timing of such things. We may have a general idea of how the world is heading, but that is a logical evaluation based on what Scripture says about such things which can then be applied to our surroundings. However, this does not mean we can then pinpoint set events, like the rapture, that we have been told we will not know.

Be wise, be circumspect, and be willing to acknowledge that you don't know everything, and neither does the guy who claims he does. Know-it-alls will get their comeuppance in due time.

*Lord God, give us wisdom to look at the world around us in a rational and clear mind frame, knowing that Your hand created it, and so what will happen is logical and orderly. And yet, help us to never dismiss the miraculous if You choose to do something extraordinary for the benefit of Your people that is in accord with Your nature and Your word. Help us to have the mind that You are sovereign and that You will bring about the good end that You have promised us in whatever way You determine. Amen.*

### **Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine." Acts 2:13**

Those who heard the Spirit speak in their own tongues were "amazed and perplexed." They struggled to understand what was happening. However, Luke now continues, referring to "Others."

These would probably be those who were from, and dwelt in, Jerusalem itself. They would hear the languages, and either not perceive the subtle differences in dialect (such as those from various areas of Judea noted in verse 2:9), or would think the other languages were simply gibberish. Of these would probably be the scribes and Pharisees and others who spent much of their time in Jerusalem. Without grasping the magnitude of the event occurring before them, and thinking it was all a put on, they were "mocking."

The word is found only here and in Acts 17:32. It properly means "to joke." As such, it speaks of using barbed humor and jeers that mocks others. With this attitude, they "said, 'They are full of new wine.'"

In these words, is a word found only here in Scripture, *gleukos*. It is a word akin to *glukus*, meaning "sweet." One can immediately see the basis of the word glucose. Thus, this is a type of sweet wine which uses fresh juice, but with a high level of sugars making

it easy to drink copiously and thus it would be highly inebriating. It is probably akin to the wine made today by Manischewitz.

In other words, these “others” are saying that the disciples were all drunk and simply talking nonsensical gibberish. As they were at a pilgrim feast, this would probably not be all that uncommon. Drinking alcohol was not only an acceptable part of rejoicing at these feasts, it was specifically referred to as something completely expected of them. The Lord, through Moses, says this in Deuteronomy 14 –

“And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.”  
-Deuteronomy 14:26

Moses, speaking of the times when the people ate their tithes – which was during the pilgrim feasts – refers to two separate intoxicants: *yayin*, or fermented (alcohol based) wine, and *shekar*, or highly intoxicating liquor. It is this allowance for the rejoicing of the pilgrims that the “others” of this verse thought was the basis for what was occurring. Hence, they were mocking the pilgrims as would be common at any such gathering when such visitors couldn’t hold their drink.

Life application: This is a descriptive verse. It prescribes nothing. But what it describes is the assumed conduct of pilgrims to Jerusalem by some who saw their speaking in tongues. A miracle was taking place. And yet, they did not perceive it as such. This is what Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians –

“In the law it is written:  
‘With *men of* other tongues and other lips  
I will speak to this people;  
And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,’  
says the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 14:21

Those who mocked heard, but they did not “hear.” It will take explaining to them the magnitude and meaning of what was being done before them. This is what will occur in the verses ahead. Until then, a couple things of interest can be considered from the evaluation of this short verse.

First, it was common and acceptable for the pilgrims to drink alcohol at the pilgrim feasts (when the tithes were eaten). The common teaching that the Jews only drank

wine cut by water so that it was highly diluted is not true. Moses' words in the law concerning the allowances at the pilgrim feasts, when the people came to eat their tithes, is explicit and it is easily understood. They were to enjoy the eating of their tithes in the presence of the Lord and to do so with the blessing of fermented drink. As the psalm says, "Wine that gladdens the heart of man" (Psalm 104:15, BSB).

Secondly, it is quite evident that, for whatever reason, some who saw the miraculous tongues being spoken did not understand. As it was the Pharisees and other leaders that purposefully had Christ crucified, it may be that they were denied understanding the miraculous nature of what occurred in order to cause them to consider the miracle differently than the others. This is speculation, but even after having what occurred openly explained, it is quite apparent throughout the rest of Acts that there were many who did not believe and who continued to work against the early church.

Let us be careful to hear the word when it is spoken, and then let us apply it to our lives. If we hear the word and don't understand it, let us think on it, search for an answer in a reliable commentary or from a trusted scholar, and then let us continue to consider its meaning. May we never mock the word that is heard but respond to it with care – applying its precepts to our lives.

*Lord God, Your word is precious. Thank You for it. Fill us with the desire to read it and contemplate its truths all the days of our lives. Amen.*

**But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words.**

Acts 2:14

The disciples were just accused of being full of new wine. In other words, they were thought to be drunk and were simply talking in gibberish. However, Luke describes what next took place, saying, "But Peter."

As is customary with Peter, he takes the lead in what happens. In this case, he is prepared to address the crowd. As such, Luke notes his action as "standing up with the eleven." The verb is aorist and indicates they stood first ("having stood") and then Peter began to speak for all of them. This is probably to counter what was just said about them being drunk. When all stood, it shows that they are all clearly sober rather than swaying or falling down. As a side note, these words also are a confirmation that the selection of Matthias was fully accepted by the Lord, he being counted among the eleven. With this, it next says that Peter "raised his voice."

In raising his voice, it will be clearly heard. As such, what he says will reflect the state of his mind, whether sober or drunk. If his words had no slurring or elongation of the vowels, they could no longer claim he was full of sweet wine. Luke is carefully describing what occurred in order to reveal what is going on. With his voice lifted up, it next says, “and said to them.”

The translation leaves a void in what is going on. It should say something like, “he spoke forth to them,” or something more distinct like that. It is the same word introduced in Acts 2:4, *apophtheggomai*, where it was translated as “utterance,” meaning of the Holy Spirit. As noted then, the word refers to a clear and plain enunciation, a declaration, and a speaking forth. The words are clearly conveyed, perfectly understood, and have precise meaning. The word will be used one more time when describing what Paul says in Acts 26:25 –

“But he said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but **speak** the words of truth and reason.’”

Luke, who authored Acts, uses this word to indicate that Peter is speaking clearly and intelligibly, and he is tying the utterance of the Spirit of verse 2:4 to what Peter is saying now. Peter is being given the proper words to utter forth (and this will be clearly seen in his discourse) in order to defend the truth of what has occurred in Christ, and what is continuing to occur in fulfillment of Scripture.

With this understood, the words of Peter are next recorded, saying, “Men of Judea.” The Greek literally reads, “Men, Jews.” Thus, this is probably not simply referring to those of Judea (remember that “Judea” was listed along with all of the other categories in verses 2:9-11). Rather, this is speaking to all of the people there, gathered from everywhere that was mentioned. They are all jointly termed “Men, Jews.” With that stated, Peter then includes those who are the most local of all, saying, “and all who dwell in Jerusalem.” This would then be an all-inclusive statement regarding everyone within earshot which would be inclusive of the strangers and the proselytes. Whoever could hear the voice of Peter is being called to attend to his words. With this understood, he next says, “let this be known to you.”

What he will say is something that can be understood, even if the previous words could not be. Only the one who spoke the particular language or dialect could perceive what was said through the tongues, but what will now be said is something that would be perfectly clear and stated with purpose. Peter’s words call for attention. But more, the verse finishes with, “and heed my words.”

Here is a word found only this once in Scripture, *enótizomai*. It is an aorist verb in the middle voice signifying “to take into one’s ear.” As such, it means to listen attentively. The Spirit had uttered, and the people had listened to the sound, claiming it was the result of too much wine. On the contrary, this was to be a discourse that should be taken into the ear and carefully evaluated in the brain once it was there. Everything about Luke’s description of this verse is exceedingly detailed to bring forth a clear understanding of what occurred at the time.

Life application: Even if you don’t understand the original languages that the Bible was written in, it is still a good practice to do word studies when possible, to find unusual or unique words used there. In becoming familiar with these, one can then attempt to think through why a particular word is used at a particular time, and then how that may then tie into other times the word is used. Or, if it is used only once, it may highlight the need to think through why that word was used at all.

This is not a necessary thing to do, but it is something that will help the student of the Bible to at least grow in knowledge and understanding. At the same time, we shouldn’t leap to unjustifiable conclusions about words in order to form our own doctrines or to line things up with our own presuppositions. This is an easy thing to do, and so we need to be careful to not do so.

In the end, it is good to follow along with word studies that have been evaluated by scholars before us, read commentaries on verses and passages by those who have come to their own conclusions, and then we should think on what we have read without simply accepting their evaluations at face value. Do everything with the mindset that this is the word of God, that He has a reason for everything that is included in it, and that you will do your best to evaluate it without inserting biases into the word. Instead, attempt to draw out the intended meaning from it.

*Heavenly Father, Your word is precious and it has set meaning and intent. Help us to not insert our own presuppositions into it, but to draw out from it the meaning that You intend to be conveyed. Give us the mind to seek You with all our heart and soul through meditation on Your word. May it fill us with Your wisdom, O God. Amen.*

**For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.**  
Acts 2:15

With the accusation that the disciples were simply “full of new wine,” Peter stood up to defend against their words. The previous verse noted that his address was to those of Judea and who dwell in Jerusalem. It is to them he says, “For these are not drunk.”

The verb is present tense. One might say, “these are not drunken,” “these are not inebriated,” or “these are not filled with intoxication.” What is being seen is not a state of being overcome by sweet wine at all. Peter is obviously referring to all of the disciples and not merely the eleven who stood with him. More than twelve languages and dialects were spoken, meaning that it was all of them who gathered, and all of them were being accused of joining in a big party of reveling. As Peter next says, “as you suppose.”

The supposition may have been that they were following along with the custom of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord, as directed by Moses in Deuteronomy 14, as they ate and drank their tithes in His presence. And from that night of fun, they just kept on going into the next day. This would probably not be uncommon, and so the charge leveled against them would be something as simple as, “Boy, they’ve been partying all night and they are still going strong.”

The gathering at the pilgrim feasts was a time to unwind, greet old friends and meet new ones, and to also enjoy dancing and singing. However, Peter next says that what they suppose is, at least for them, flawed thinking. He says, “since it is only the third hour of the day.”

The third hour is 9am in the morning. The synoptic gospels present the timing of the day in this fashion. For example, Mark records the hour of the crucifixion as 9am –

“Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. <sup>26</sup> And the inscription of His accusation was written above:  
THE KING OF THE JEWS.” Mark 15:25, 26

Mark then goes on to say that when the sixth hour came there was darkness until the ninth hour. That corresponds with Luke’s account as well –

“Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. <sup>45</sup> Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ Having said this, He breathed His last.”

-Luke 23:44-46



Luke records Peter's words which state that this is the same hour of the day, the third hour, or 9 am. Peter says that this is not the hour for being drunk. Rather, what is occurring is something entirely different. Several verses follow this line of thinking. First, Isaiah shows that those who follow the practice of early morning drinking are living in futility because that sets the tone for the entire day and into the night –

“Woe to those who rise early in the morning,  
*That* they may follow intoxicating drink;  
Who continue until night, *till* wine inflames them!” Isaiah 5:11

Later, Paul will clearly indicate that those who get drunk do so at night. His words do not mean that people don't get drunk during the day. People drink whenever they drink. Rather, he is equating being drunk to spiritual slumber. Night is then equated with not being spiritually alert –

“Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.” 1 Thessalonians 5:6, 7

Paul is using a general theme to set a principle concerning being alert. It is a thought that he presents to those at Corinth concerning the Lord's Supper –

“For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk. <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise *you*.” 1 Corinthians 11:21, 22

He uses the same word, translated as “drunk” that Peter now uses. Paul tells them that if they want to imbibe, to do so at home. Church attendance is to be a time of sobriety and alertness. This is the thought also conveyed by Peter. “We are not drunk! It is the morning, and we are all perfectly alert.” With that understood, he will continue his discourse.

Life application: There is a time and a season for all things. The Lord set the pilgrim feasts as a time of rejoicing and partaking in the abundance of what He had provided for the people. For the believers at this feast, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. The demonstration of the Spirit was something that was to alert the people of Israel to the finished work of Christ and that something new and extraordinary was happening.

And this should be the same for those who come to Christ even today. There should be a change in mind, in direction, and in hope. It should be evident to all around that something extraordinary has happened. Obviously, spiritual highs cannot last forever, but there should be an increased maturity in each person as he continues his walk in Christ.

The outward display of tongues was a sign to Israel. The change in the believer's life should be a sign to those around him as well. Let us be set apart to the Lord so that those around us see the difference and then want to know what it is that makes us different. Paul says –

“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another in the fear of God” Ephesians 5:18-21

In this, we will be proper examples to others of the change that has taken place in our lives.

*Heavenly Father, may we make the most of our time, bringing glory and honor to Your name through our conduct. Not everyone considers the importance of a relationship with You. But there are times when the lives of others fall apart. It is during those times that they will look for answers. When that happens, may they remember our conduct and come to us to find out about the hope we possess. So, Lord, help us to live rightly now and always for when such times arise. Amen.*

**But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: Acts 2:16**

Peter just noted that those speaking in tongues were not drunk as it was supposed. Instead, he will now explain to the people what is happening. In order to do so, he will cite Scripture to back up the notion that this was something prophesied of, and thus fully in accord with the redemptive workings of God. As such, Luke records Peter's words, saying, “But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.”

The words, “But this,” clearly and unambiguously refer to the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is denied by hyperdispensationalists, as if Peter's words (which cite Joel) are referring solely to the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus. Saying this is, then, an attempt to deny that

the church began at Pentecost and that what Joel prophesied of has nothing to do with the church age.

It is true that what occurs in Acts 2 is descriptive and is not normative for the church age. But what is described is clearly intended to demonstrate the fulfillment of the promise of the coming of the Spirit. This was exactly what Jesus was speaking of in John concerning the Comforter (also called the Helper), and in Luke where Jesus refers to “the Promise of My Father” –

“Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” Luke 24:49

Just because something occurs in Scripture, which is not normative for the church age, it does not mean it does not apply to the church age. The church age had to begin at some point. When it did, it began with evidences of its fulfillment.

The events of Acts 2 are those evidences. The continued giving of the Spirit in a demonstrable way in Acts 8, 10, and 19 are to show that the message of the apostles Peter and Paul is the same message. The recipients of the demonstrations (Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and again Jews) confirms that this is so.

Understanding this, Peter will cite a passage from Joel 2. It will not be a direct citation of either the Hebrew or the Greek, though it will more closely follow the Greek. However, the intent of what is stated by Peter is clearly understood to be the fulfillment of what Joel prophesied.

The words of Joel will be evaluated as they are cited. Many of them are clearly to be fulfilled in the end times, not in Acts 2. As with many prophecies uttered in Scripture, and even by Jesus Himself, they will take a “mountain view” perspective. When one looks at a mountain range, it is all one thing to the mind’s eye. However, if one focuses on a single mountain, it will come into focus. Then looking at another mountain further in the distance, that mountain will come into focus.

The same is true with prophecy. Joel and the other prophets would see visions that comprise events with long time frames between them. Such is the case with Joel 2, and as it is then relayed to the people in Acts 2 by Peter. The particular verses from Joel state –

“And it shall come to pass afterward  
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your old men shall dream dreams,  
Your young men shall see visions.  
<sup>29</sup> And also on *My* menservants and on *My* maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.  
<sup>30</sup> “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:  
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.  
<sup>31</sup> The sun shall be turned into darkness,  
And the moon into blood,  
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.  
<sup>32</sup> And it shall come to pass  
*That* whoever calls on the name of the LORD  
Shall be saved.  
For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance,  
As the LORD has said,  
Among the remnant whom the LORD calls.” Joel 2:28-32

Life application: Peter is speaking to Israel alone at this time. His words are words of prophesy that pertain to Israel, both in the immediate sense (Acts 2) and in the future (the tribulation period). This is because the New Covenant was given to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah (see Jeremiah 31:31).

The New Covenant was brought forth in Christ’s blood (see Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25, and etc.). However, this does not mean that the gospel that brings a person into the New Covenant relationship is different for Jews and for Gentiles. This is an error in thinking and a heretical doctrine.

Promises to Israel do not mean the Gentiles are excluded. It means that Israel the nation bears a promise as a collective whole. These promises are inclusive of individual Jews (obviously, because a nation is made up of individuals), but they are also inclusive of individual Gentiles who are brought into the commonwealth of Israel (see Ephesians 2:12).

This is important to understand and cannot be repeated enough. What occurred in Acts 2 is spoken to Israel and applies to Israel, and yet it is describing the establishment of a body of people that is inclusive of every Jew and Gentile that has come into that body since this Pentecost event.

Remember the key points of doctrine – Is this descriptive? Is this prescriptive? What is the context? What is the context? What is the context? And then, when you have determined these things, remind yourself that everything that is descriptive is not necessarily normative. In this, you will avoid many sad bumps on your road, and you will not be diverted down either Apostasy Avenue or the Heresy Highway.

*Lord God, thank You for how You have presented Your word. You tell us of wonderful events that have occurred, and You confirmed those events with signs and wonders when they came to pass. After that, You have asked Your people to have faith in what was presented, leaving the choice up to us to accept that You are still working among us, even without those demonstrations. Thus, You surely place a high value on our faith. Thank You for this honor. Amen.*

**'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,  
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your young men shall see visions,  
Your old men shall dream dreams. Acts 2:17**

Peter, having assured those present that what had occurred was not the effects of too much sweet wine. Now, he loosely cites the prophet Joel, showing that what is occurring was prophesied by Joel. As such, he says, “And it shall come to pass.”

Joel states that a time is yet ahead when certain things will occur. Peter says the time for those things to occur has begun with the coming of the Spirit as it rested upon the believers. Next, Peter says, “in the last days.” In Joel it simply says, “after.”

Joel’s words refer to a time centered around the day of the Lord. It is a time of restoration for Israel when the Spirit would be poured out upon them. Peter changes “after” to “in the last days.” This term signifies an unspecified time that is actually inclusive of the entire church age. Messiah’s work of fulfilling the law and establishing the New Covenant is complete. From that time, the thought of the last days takes center stage. Paul refers to this time frame in 2 Timothy 3:1, and it is inclusive of the entire time of the church age.

Peter then adds in, “says God.” This is a note confirming that the prophecy of Joel is the prophetic word of God. In this time frame, Peter next says, “That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh.” There is a time when the Spirit of God would come upon believers.

The term “all flesh” does not mean “every person on the earth.” It means “all believers regardless of age, sex, status, and so on.”

Having said this, care must be taken to understand that this pouring out of the Spirit does not necessarily mean that the event as it happens in Acts is normative for the church age. It is, like other such events, given as a confirmation of the work of Christ having converted those who – by faith – believe. This is what happened in Acts 2. Despite this obviously being so, Ruckman incredibly says, “Nothing in verses 16-21 takes place in Acts 2 at all, not even the pouring out of the Spirit.” It is the epitome of idiocy.

In order to justify the unjustifiable, he denies that the events of Acts 2:1-4 are a demonstration of the pouring out of the Spirit. But this is exactly what occurred, and it is what Peter is explicitly telling the people. The Spirit has come! God is demonstrating His approval of the work of His Son by pouring the Spirit out upon those who believe. This is explicitly stated in verse 2:33 –

“Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.”

If Ruckman only read a few verses ahead and stopped living by presuppositions and biases, he would have seen how faulty his analysis of Scripture actually is.

In the pouring out of the Spirit, Peter continues citing Joel, saying, “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” This is explicitly fulfilled in Acts 11:27-30, Acts 19:6, Acts 21:8-11, and etc. Peter continues with, “Your young men shall see visions.”

The idea is that of a waking vision. It is something that can be perceived that would otherwise be imperceptible. This was fulfilled in Acts 9:10-14 (two visions), 10:1-16 (two visions), etc. Peter next says, “Your old men shall dream dreams.”

There is no specific reference to the word “dream” in Acts, nor is there any specific reference to it later in the New Testament. The only time the Greek word for dreams is mentioned again is in Jude 1:8 when speaking in a negative sense about those who defile the flesh. However, Acts 16:9 refers to a vision appearing to Paul in the night. As such, this could ostensibly be considered a fulfillment of this. Paul also refers to an angel standing by him in the night in Acts 27:23. Again, specifying the night may be a way of saying that this occurred while dreaming.

The words of Joel, as spoken forth by Peter, are clearly indicated by him as being fulfilled in the pouring out of the Spirit upon the believers now in Acts 2. It is incredible that anyone could deny the clear and unambiguous words of Peter in an attempt to justify that this is not the case.

Life application: It is true that many of the coming words of Joel have not yet been fulfilled. This is because Israel, as a nation, collectively rejected Christ Jesus. The Spirit was poured out on those who believe at the beginning of the church age as a sign to Israel that God had approved of the work of His Son. It was a visible manifestation that this was so. At the end of the age, when Israel collectively accepts Jesus as their Messiah, it will again be so. This is also explicitly stated in Zechariah 12 –

“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.” Zechariah 12:10

Understanding these things, it must be remembered that the events which occurred in Acts 2 are given to Israel as a sign. They are not normative for the church age. The signs were given, the church is established, and there is no longer a need for the sign –

“For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” 2 Corinthians 5:7

“So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17

Paul’s epistles alert us, time and again, to the fact that we are to heed the word and believe by faith. The church was established, and the signs are no longer necessary to convince Israel. They have (collectively) rejected the Lord. When they, as a nation, accept Him, the Spirit will be poured out upon them as a nation. In the meantime, we are to live by faith, we are to convey that truth by the word of God, and those who accept the premise of the word of God will demonstrate faith and be saved. This is what is normative for the time in which we live.

*Lord God, thank You for the simplicity of the gospel. We are saved by accepting that Christ has done all that is necessary to reconcile us to You. Help us to not add to that, but to accept it, and revel in it all of our days. Thank You for the full, forever, and finished work of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And on My menservants and on My maidservants**

**I will pour out My Spirit in those days;**

**And they shall prophesy. Acts 2:18**

Peter, still citing Joel, continues with the words, “And on My menservants and on My maidservants.” The Spirit will come upon the Lord’s people regardless of sex. Any who believe in Christ Jesus will receive the Promise. In the Hebrew of Joel that Peter is citing, it says, “And also upon the menservants and upon the maidservants.” Instead of “My,” it simply says, “the.”

In the Hebrew, the words of Joel are qualifying the previous verse of Joel. It had said, “I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh.” And so, to say, “And also upon the menservants and upon the maidservants,” it would be understood that they were included in the term “all flesh.” The Lord was obviously speaking to the people of Israel, and so “My” would be understood.

However, Peter now makes a distinction by saying “My” – “My menservants and on My maidservants.” As some people there were speaking in tongues while others were not, it defines who “My” is referring to, meaning believers. Thus, anyone not having the Spirit poured out on them is not included in “My.” It is a subtle way of saying, “This is what God is now doing. We are what Joel prophesied of, and we are now the people of God.” To remedy this for those listening, Peter will later say –

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” Acts 2:38, 39

For now, Peter continues citing Joel, saying, “I will pour out My Spirit in those days.” The idea of the pouring out of the Spirit is more than just coming upon a prophet for the purpose of witnessing to Israel, but of coming upon all people, as noted in the words “all flesh” of the previous verse (in both Joel and Acts). It is an all-inclusive pouring out upon any who belongs to the Lord. Further, these words now tell us that “those days” that Joel



was referring to are now “these days.” The promised pouring out of the Spirit had arrived. With this gift, Peter next says, “And they shall prophesy.”

These words are not found in either the Hebrew or the Greek OT. However, Peter stating them now is probably an indication to the people that what he is saying, and what he will continue to say, is to be considered as prophetic utterances of the Lord. Thus, they are to heed Peter’s words just as if they were heeding the prophets of the past. To not do so would be to reject the word of the Lord.

And more, there are times where those who are believers are said to prophesy later in Acts, such as in Acts 11:28, 19:6, and 21:9. Thus, the Spirit is shown in Acts to come upon believers in fulfillment of Peter’s words now.

Another obvious point to be gleaned from Peter’s words is to be seen in what is stated now in Acts. First, who is speaking in Joel 2 when it says, “I will pour out My Spirit?” It is obviously the Lord God (Yehovah). However, Peter – who is quoting those verses from Joel – clearly shows that it is Jesus who is pouring out His Spirit –

“Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.” Acts 2:33

Therefore, Peter is clearly, precisely, and unambiguously stating that Jesus is the Lord God (Yehovah) of their Scriptures. This is an important point that will help establish doctrine later in this chapter, and it will explain why certain things occur as they do (here, toward Israel), but that are not later expected of new believers later in Acts.

Life application: It is necessary for us to remind ourselves that the verses being reviewed in Acts 2 are merely describing what occurred at that time. They do not prescribe anything, and they do not establish any ongoing precedent. In other words, just because something occurs here in Acts, it does not mean that it will occur again.

Fire came down on the sacrifices at the tabernacle and then later at the temple to show the Lord’s approval of those edifices. But that did not occur again. The one demonstration of approval was all that was needed to confirm that He was among His people and had accepted what was built.

Likewise, the Lord demonstrates in the book of Acts His approval of His followers, and of various conversions of people in an outward manner in order to demonstrate that He

has accepted their faith. But this does not set a new precedent that will reoccur later. We should not expect to have a “Charismatic style” conversion when we receive Jesus. In fact, it is contrary to the prescriptive words of Paul elsewhere to expect that. Most importantly, we are to have faith in the Lord Jesus without any external display of His approval, and with that, He will be pleased.

*Lord God, Your word says that if we believe the gospel, we will be saved. It also says that when we do, we are sealed with Your Spirit as a guarantee of our salvation. Help us to trust this and to not waffle in our minds as to whether this is true or not. When we have demonstrated faith, Your word says You are pleased with that, and we are saved. Thank You for the surety Your word provides. Amen.*

**I will show wonders in heaven above**

**And signs in the earth beneath:**

**Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. Acts 2:19**

Luke continues with Peter’s citation of Joel 2 now. This is from Joel 2:30 –

“And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:  
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.”

As can be seen, Peter’s words are not an exact quote. As the Greek translation of the OT reflects the Hebrew, Peter’s words are more of a paraphrase. He begins with, “I will show wonders in heaven above.”

The Greek literally means, “I will give.” The idea of a wonder is something that is miraculous and awesome. Further, it is the thing itself. In other words, if the Lord opens up the Red Sea, it is a wonder. If the Lord stills the storm-tossed sea, it is a wonder. Peter continues with, “And signs in the earth beneath.”

A sign is something that represents something else. In Genesis 1, it says –

“Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; <sup>15</sup> and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth’; and it was so.” Genesis 1:14, 15

The lights in the heavens are given for light and for dividing the day and the night. That is a purpose that they serve. They are also given for markers of the seasons. People

know when to plant and when to reap because of them, and so on. However, it also says that they are for “signs.”

Throughout the Bible, this is then confirmed as the Lord uses them to represent other things, or of the coming of certain events. The sun or the moon turning to blood, such as during an eclipse (Revelation 6:12), is shown to portend catastrophe at times. Stars are seen at times to indicate special events, such as the coming of Messiah (Matthew 2:2). The constellations are set in the sky as markers (see Job 9:9 and Job 38:32). With this understood, Peter continues with, “Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.”

The blood is stated explicitly to be the life in Deuteronomy 12:23. Therefore, when blood is brought forth, it signifies the shedding of life, such as a slaughter in battle or in the unsanctioned killing of others. For the shedding of blood in battle, Ezekiel 38:22 gives the proper sense –

“And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who *are* with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.”

As can be seen, this same verse mentions “fire,” as does Peter. It is reflective of war and the calamity that comes with it. There is destruction with fire and by fire –

“Now in the fifth month, on the tenth *day* of the month (which *was* the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, *who* served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> He burned the house of the LORD and the king’s house; all the houses of Jerusalem, that is, all the houses of the great, he burned with fire.” Jeremiah 52:12, 13

The “vapors of smoke” that Peter refers to comes from the effects of the fire and from other catastrophes, such as during the destruction of Sodom. Thus, the vapors (or in the Hebrew “pillars”) are columns of smoke rising up like a palm tree into the sky.

What is surely the case is that Peter has gone from the immediate events of Joel’s prophecy to events in the distant future, maybe without realizing it. The Spirit was poured out on the believers, and he described that in verses 17 & 18. Verses 19 & 20 then refer again to events that will come upon Israel during the tribulation period.

Joel’s prophesy seems to say that these things will come upon Israel “after” the great battles of the tribulation period (Joel 2:28 says, “And it shall come to pass afterward”).

However, Joel is looking into the future and describing events as they come before him. As such, there is nothing to negate that the giving of the Spirit to the believers is not intimately connected with the future pouring out upon the whole nation. As such, the events bracket the time between Christ's advents. This is seen in Jesus' words concerning the tribulation period –

“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. <sup>22</sup> And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.

<sup>23</sup> “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here *is* the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe *it*. <sup>24</sup> For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. <sup>25</sup> See, I have told you beforehand.” Matthew 24:21-25

The New Covenant was established with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. They are now (at the time of Acts 2) being given opportunity to accept it and come into all that the covenant promises to them. However, as Acts continues on, it will be seen that this will not occur. Israel (the nation collectively) will reject Christ, and the banner of leadership will go from the tent of Shem to the tent of Japheth (Genesis 9:27). It will go from Jew to Gentile.

This does not, however, mean that the Jews (Israel) are rejected. It means that God, in His advanced knowledge of what would occur, has had His gospel go out to the nations while Israel lives under the Mosaic Covenant curses for rejecting Him. The fact that they are under those curses means that they are still God's people. If they were not, there would be no covenant to punish them with. But the Lord is faithful to His unfaithful people.

And so, while Israel awaits being brought into the New Covenant, the gospel has gone forth to the Gentiles. It is the same covenant and the same gospel to both. But Israel, as a nation, must accept their Messiah before they – as a people – find restoration.

Life application: Peter's words, which cite Joel, show that Israel still has a purpose in God's redemptive narrative. Joel's words were spoken to Israel. The words pertain to Israel, and the events have (and will) come upon Israel. For now, the redemptive narrative continues through the tent of Japheth, and the spiritual banner is held by the Gentile people. This will end at some point, and the spiritual banner will be picked up

again by the tent of Shem. Until that happens, we can know that none of this was out of God's plans –

“Indeed He says,  
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,  
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,  
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Isaiah 49:6

There is one Messiah, there is one New Covenant, there is one gospel, and there is one plan of redemption that began at the fall and that will continue until all things are accomplished. Let each of us be a part of that plan by going forth and sharing this good news of salvation!

*Heavenly Father, how good it is to know that all we need to do is to simply receive what You have already done. As humans, we always want to do things our own way, and we want to work for what You have already offered freely. Help us to understand that nothing will satisfy You except trusting in the completed work of Christ. He has done the work. May the eyes of all people see this and place their trust in Him. Amen.*

**The sun shall be turned into darkness,  
And the moon into blood,  
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.** Acts 2:20

The words of Peter citing Joel, concerning the pouring out of the Spirit, continue now. This verse exactly corresponds to the OT Greek translation of Joel 2:31. The NKJV translates the Hebrew exactly the same as this verse in Acts –

“The sun shall be turned into darkness,  
And the moon into blood,  
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.”

The words now are also similar in content to various other Old Testament prophecies. A few examples are –

“For the stars of heaven and their constellations  
Will not give their light;

The sun will be darkened in its going forth,  
And the moon will not cause its light to shine.” Isaiah 13:10

“When I put out your light,  
I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark;  
I will cover the sun with a cloud,  
And the moon shall not give her light.” Ezekiel 32:7

“‘And it shall come to pass in that day,’ says the Lord GOD,  
‘That I will make the sun go down at noon,  
And I will darken the earth in broad daylight.’” Amos 8:9

Such words indicate phenomena that occur frequently, meaning the eclipse of the sun and the moon or other atmospheric events that obscure them, such as dust storms. This doesn't negate the supernatural, however, because the events are prophesied in advance. Further, what is probably the case is that these events will be specifically over the land of Israel. With these thoughts in mind, Peter's words of this verse begin with, “The sun shall be turned into darkness.”

Here, Luke introduces a word, *metastrephó*, that signifies to turn about, or corrupt. It is the changing of one thing into another. In Galatians 1:7, Paul uses this word concerning those who “pervert” the gospel. Peter's words indicate that what is normal in the sky will be unusually changed into a state of darkness.

As noted, this is the obscuring of the sun, probably during an eclipse. As solar eclipses can be precisely predicted as to when they will occur, it is as an advanced warning to those who are living in the tribulation period that the fulfillment of the prophecy is at hand. These words, however, could also be fulfilled in the covering of the sky with smoke. Such was the case during the Gulf War when Saddam Hussein set fire to the oil fields of Kuwait. The sun was turned to darkness.

Next, Peter says, “And the moon into blood.” Lunar eclipses will produce a sort of copper-colored effect. In this, it almost appears as blood. The term “blood moon” is thus appropriate. This effect can be realized by other such events, such as the smoke of fires as well. If the world is in a global conflict, which will surely be the case in the tribulation period, much of the planet could have smoky skies. Either way, these events will come, as Peter says, “Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.”

Here is a word found only this once in Scripture, *epiphanés*. It signifies that which is manifest, illustrious, or glorious. The corresponding noun, *epiphaneia*, is used to refer to the second coming of Christ in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 as well as verses in both 1 and 2 Timothy and also Titus.

What Joel prophesied is referred to by Jesus in the synoptic gospels, and it is repeated here by Peter. These great events will precede the day of the Lord. The words of Jesus confirm the prophecy –

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>30</sup>Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup>And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

-Matthew 24:29-31

There is a time coming when the Lord alone will be manifested in a unique and terrifying way. The world will already be in a state of complete turmoil and confusion, but it will find that nothing they could have imagined would prepare them for what will happen when He returns.

Life application: The Spirit was poured out on believers in Acts 2. The same Spirit is found in believers to this day as a seal and a guarantee for the day of redemption of the Lord’s purchased possession (Ephesians 1:13, 14). However, Israel as a nation rejected the Lord Jesus. As such, the nation went into an extended time period of punishment according to that set forth in the Law of Moses.

Seven more years under this law are set forth for Israel (see Daniel 9:24-27). That is the tribulation period, and it is coming at some point. Israel the people are back in the land of Israel. They have been prepared for the coming of this event, and they will eventually call out to God through Christ. What began in Acts, will find its final fulfillment. But before this occurs, the church will be taken home to glory.

Although it is not for us to speculate on the timing of these events, it is proper for us to be aware of the state of the world in which we live, and the state of Israel who is key to all of these prophecies. With the coming of modern technology, plandemics, a falling

away of the church from sound doctrine, and the reestablishment of Israel, the days are closing in on the time when such events are likely to occur.

Let us be faithful to continue to share the gospel, and to tell others about the goodness of the Lord before it is too late. We should let others know about the great and awesome Lord who came once to save and who will come again to judge. Let us tell the world about JESUS!

*Lord God, how exciting it is to see the world heading towards the fulfillment of prophecies made thousands of years ago. Time has marched on, and as it has, the world has slowly molded itself into matching what was written beforehand. It is exciting to live in such times. Give us wisdom, courage, and strength in our conduct through them. Amen.*

**And it shall come to pass  
That whoever calls on the name of the Lord  
Shall be saved.’ Acts 2:21**

Peter continues to cite Joel 2 as a proof that the things that have occurred were prophesied in advance. As they are now fulfilled in the pouring out of the Spirit, then what has occurred is of God. Now, with his final citing of the passage from Joel, he conveys what is the expectation of those who see and take to heart those things.

In his citing of Joel, he cuts short the verse from which the words are spoken, giving only the part that is pertinent to the present time –

“And it shall come to pass  
That whoever calls on the name of the LORD  
Shall be saved.  
For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance,  
As the LORD has said,  
Among the remnant whom the LORD calls.” Joel 2:32

Peter, under the influence of the Spirit, acknowledges now the first half of Joel’s words of prophecy from Joel 2:32. But he leaves off the second half of the verse. This is no different than what Jesus did when citing Isaiah. Notice the difference between Isaiah’s prophecy and of Jesus’ quoting of Isaiah’s words –



“The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me,  
Because the LORD has anointed Me  
To preach good tidings to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to the captives,  
And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound;  
<sup>2</sup>To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,  
And the day of vengeance of our God;  
To comfort all who mourn.” Isaiah 61:1, 2

“So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:  
<sup>18</sup> ‘The Spirit of the LORD *is* upon Me,  
Because He has anointed Me  
To preach the gospel to *the* poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to *the* captives  
And recovery of sight to *the* blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;  
<sup>19</sup> To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.’” Luke 4:16-19

Jesus stopped in the middle of the verse from Isaiah. The same Lord who came in His first advent to accomplish and set forth certain blessings for His people will come again in the vengeance of God. That these things are thousands of years apart was unknown when Isaiah prophesied. His words essentially portray a mountain range in one panorama view, but as the ideas are considered individually, it is as if one is focusing on either the closer or the more distant mountains at any given time.

This is what Peter is doing. His prophecy included details of the future (such as verses 2:19, 20), but the part about there being “deliverance” in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem is irrelevant to what is happening “right now” at Peter’s time. Those events will not happen for millennia. Therefore, the Spirit did not inspire him to speak them out. The deliverance Joel refers to, but which Peter left out is noted elsewhere in the Old Testament, such as in Zechariah. These are end times verses that have nothing to do with the time Acts 2 was occurring –

“The LORD will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not become greater than that of Judah. <sup>8</sup> In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the one who is feeble among them in that day shall be like David, and the house of David *shall be* like God, like the Angel of the LORD before them. <sup>9</sup> It shall be in that day *that* I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.”

-Zechariah 12:7-9

With this broader picture understood, the words of Peter that are applicable to the present time of his speaking are, “And it shall come to pass.” These words are a reference to Joel’s prophecy. As such, they are not to be taken as merely future to Peter’s time. Rather, Peter is saying that what Joel prophesied is relevant to his “right now.” The pouring out of the Spirit demonstrates that this is so. And so, the expectation and effects of that prophecy are next spoken by Peter, beginning with, “That whoever calls on the name of the Lord.”

This is a Hebraism where calling on a name means to call on the person who bears the name. Hence, to “call on the name of the Lord” is to call on the Lord. As Joel was referring to Yehovah, Israel’s God, and as Peter equates this passage to Christ Jesus now, it clearly indicates that Jesus is the Incarnate Lord (Yehovah). To call on the name of Jesus as Lord is the expectation. The effect of doing so is that such a person will find divine favor. As Peter says, he “Shall be saved.”

From this point, Peter will explain how Jesus is the One to fulfill the prophecy and what Israel needed to do about applying His work to their lives. Of Peter’s coming words, Ruckman incorrectly and ignorantly says on his comments of Acts 2:23 –

“Although Peter preaches about Christ’s death (here), His burial (vs. 27), and of His resurrection (vs. 31), he never applies those things as a blood atonement for sin (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4).”

In other words, Ruckman is arguing that Peter’s words to the Jews now are a “different” gospel than what is preached by Paul. The utterly ridiculous nature of this is almost beyond comprehension. The thinking is a major flaw of the heresy known as hyperdispensationalism.

First, there is a reason why there are 1189 chapters in the Bible. It is because there is a lot for God to convey to us. If God wanted everything about the work of Christ explained in one speech, there would be one long chapter spoken by Him with every detail

necessary to explain what He was going to do. Instead, He slowly and progressively has revealed His workings within the stream of time.

Secondly, it is – at this time – unnecessary to speak of blood atonement. Peter is making a point about what occurred within the past two months in Jerusalem and how what Christ did is the fulfillment of the typology the Jews had lived under for 1500 years. In verse 2:38, Peter will refer to the remission of sins based on Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. But the Bible clearly explains that "...according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22).

The author of Hebrews states this based on the already known sacrificial system set forth by Moses, and of which he is referring to in his epistle. To speak of the death of Christ IS to speak of blood atonement. Ruckman, in his zeal to put forth heresy, attempts to separate the death of Christ from the blood atonement of Christ. The two are one and the same thing; they are inseparable. That will be further explained as the epistles (including Peter's epistles) are put forth. What Israel needs at the time of Acts 2, is instruction on what they had done, how it had made them guilty before God, and to repent (change their minds) concerning those things.

Hence, they are to "call on the name of the Lord." This is the exact same thing that Paul will say in His epistles, which are directed to the Gentiles –

"For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. <sup>13</sup> For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.'" Romans 10:11-13

"To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

-1 Corinthians 1:2, 3

Life application: The Bible is a big book, and yet its message is one united stream of God's workings in the world for all people. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of what God is doing, and the work of Christ is exactly the same for all people – Jew and Gentile, males and females, masters and slaves, rich and poor, and so on. There is one gospel, there is

one New Covenant upon which that gospel is based, and there is no other path to reconciliation with God apart from it.

In remembering this simple truth, you will avoid innumerable heresies that have been put forth over the years. From there, you can work on proper doctrine based on that simple message. In this, your walk with God will be one of happiness and soundness.

Unfortunately, the only way to address such heresies is to highlight those who espouse them, citing what they have said. Without doing this, there can be no resolution to their improper or heretical doctrines. Today, we use terms like Pelagianism and Arianism to define the heretical doctrines of Pelagius and Arius. This is because they espoused heresy. With the advent of new heresies, the names of the heretics who espouse them are to be identified with the heresies themselves and they are to be called out for their teachings. Open rebuke of such things is fully established in Galatians 2 where Paul directly and publicly called out Peter for tolerating the heresy of the Judaizers.

The essential truth that there is one gospel must be defended and those who espouse otherwise are to be called out.

*Lord God, Your word is rich and pure and beautiful. Help us to carefully evaluate it and to rightly consider it. When something is presented that is not in accord with Your intent, please lead us away from it and to what is right and proper. It is our desire to please You through right doctrine and a close and personal walk with You. Amen.*

**“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— Acts 2:22**

With his completion of quoting the prophet Joel, Peter now begins to explain how the fulfillment of that prophecy came about through the work of Christ Jesus. As such, he begins by referring to those he is addressing. In the Greek, it is only two words. But they are two words that, if paid attention to, would resolve innumerable errors found within the church today.

In Peter’s coming words are all kinds of directions for the people, but they are not directions for the reader of Acts today. This is perfectly clear with the opening of his address, saying, “Men of Israel.”

As noted, in the Greek, it is two words, “Men, Israelites.” This is the context. Taking a verse out of context will inevitably form a pretext. Peter is addressing his fellow Israelites. These are the descendants of Jacob, who is Israel. It would also include any who were brought into Israel as proselytes according to the established norms. With that understood, he next says, “hear these words.”

He is calling for complete attention so that the reason for quoting Joel can be properly explained. The main connection between the events and the citing of the prophecy will be seen in verse 2:33, but he must first give a logical explanation of what led up to the pouring out of the Spirit. With that understood, he immediately introduces the main Subject of his explanation, saying, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

The entire point and purpose of his words comes forth in the stating of the name. In saying “of Nazareth,” he is tying in the reason it is Galileans who spoke the astonishing tongues (see verse 2:7). But more, it is an explanation as to why Nazareth is relevant at all. It is a reminder of the prophecy of Isaiah –

“Nevertheless the gloom *will not be* upon her who *is* distressed,  
As when at first He lightly esteemed  
The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
And afterward more heavily oppressed *her*,  
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,  
In Galilee of the Gentiles.

<sup>2</sup>The people who walked in darkness  
Have seen a great light;  
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,  
Upon them a light has shined.” Isaiah 9:1, 2

The “great light” that shone in Galilee of the Gentiles had come, thus – without saying it – not only is the prophecy of Joel fulfilled, but it is fulfilled by the One prophesied by Isaiah as well. Thus, it is the reason those who stood before the gathered of Israel were Galileans. They already knew these things, but Peter is reminding them in order to set the stage for his coming words. After noting his Subject, he says of Him, “a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs.”

The word translated as “attested” is introduced into Scripture here, *apodeiknumi*. It signifies “to show by proof,” “to demonstrate,” and so on. A claim is made, and the claim is then substantiated by a demonstration of validation. In this, there could be no doubt that the things Peter is recalling to mind are true. The entire nation had seen or heard of

the marvelous things Jesus has done, thus attesting that God had approved of His work. For example, this was said of Him in John 9 –

“The man answered and said to them, ‘Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! <sup>31</sup> Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. <sup>32</sup> Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. <sup>33</sup> If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.’” John 9:30-33

The gospels clearly testify to the fact that the people understood God has approved of Jesus’ ministry. As this was only a short time before, it would be fresh on the minds of all. Of His works, Peter notes three aspects. The first is “miracles.” The word is *dunamis*, and it speaks of mighty, powerful, and marvelous works. The second is “wonders.” The word is *teras*. It speaks of an extraordinary event which is given to bring forth a reaction from those who witness it, such as a portent from heaven. The third is “signs.” The word is *sémeion*. A sign is something that speaks to, or provides evidence of, something else. In other words, a sign is not the thing itself, but points to something other than itself. A sign in the sky may tell the people the Messiah has come. The changing of water to wine may testify to the coming change from the Mosaic Covenant to a New Covenant. And so on. It is these things that Peter says, “which God did through Him.”

The works of Jesus Christ are the works of God, being wrought through His physical existence. They are, however, of a magnitude greater than the prophets who came before Him. And this is for notable reasons, some of which will be explained by Peter as he continues. The words of Jesus to the people had already claimed what Peter now repeats –

“But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. <sup>37</sup> And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form.” John 5:36, 37

The works were given as a validation of the fact that He was the prophesied Messiah. From giving sight to the blind and cleansing lepers, even to casting out demons and raising the dead, everything that Jesus did was to validate that the power and authority of God was working through Him. And Peter next says that this was done “in your midst.”

The things Christ Jesus did were not accomplished in Rome or in Tibet. They were accomplished in the midst of the people to whom the prophecies were given. There was no need to wonder if the stories coming out of Crete were true about someone doing amazing things, God had spoken through Israel, to Israel, and about what would occur in Israel. Specific names were prophesied in advance, such as Galilee and Bethlehem. Miracles were done in Jerusalem and before the leaders and attendees of synagogues. There could be no doubt of these things, and so Peter finishes the verse with, “as you yourselves also know.”

The people standing before Peter were guilty of rejecting their Messiah. This was now fully evidenced by the fact that while the Spirit had been poured out upon Jesus’ disciples, it had not been poured out upon them. Thus, they knew very well now that Jesus was the Messiah and that they had missed the boat on this one. Now, they could either change their minds (repent) about this fact, or they could continue with dull minds and hardened hearts. Peter will continue to speak direct, piercing words to this group of people – the “Men, Israelites” standing before him.

Life application: Acts 2, as has been noted time and again, is a descriptive account of what occurred. In the verse just evaluated, it was noted that the words are directed to the men of Israel. Not only are these only words that describe what occurred, but they are words that are directed only to the men of Israel (women also as the masculine speaks for both). What Peter says does not apply to the Lutheran Church. It does not apply to the Roman Catholic Church. It does not apply to the Church of Christ, the Presbyterians, or Pentecostals.

Luke is providing a historical record of what occurred in order to establish the church as a whole. Certain elements of it must run their course before new elements can be introduced. It is flawed thinking to say that because Peter is speaking to the men of Israel, that the church in which Gentiles now participate is a different church. Rather, the events that established the one true church is going through a process of development.

Be careful to remember the five most basic elements of interpretation –

Is this descriptive?

Is this prescriptive?

What is the context?

What is the context?

And...

What is the context?

In this, you will not make the amazingly tragic errors that have led to innumerable denominations, all fighting over things that have nothing to do with proper doctrine and theology.

*Lord God, thank You for the sure proofs that the Bible records concerning the coming of Christ Jesus. He and the works He would do were prophesied in advance. When He came, the gospel writers recorded His deeds for us to know what occurred. And then the epistles explain to us these things so that we can more fully understand them. In this, we truly have a sure word and a written testimony we can trust. Thank You for this wonderful word. Amen.*

**Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; Acts 2:23**

Peter now gets to the point concerning the error of the Jews in what has occurred. He just noted that Christ was “attested by God” because of the “miracles, wonders, and signs” that He accomplished. This is something that they were all perfectly well aware of. In fact, this is what the two men on the road to Emmaus poignantly asked of the Lord after His resurrection as they walked –

“And He said to them, ‘What kind of conversation *is* this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?’

<sup>18</sup> Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, ‘Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?’

<sup>19</sup> And He said to them, ‘What things?’

So they said to Him, ‘The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, <sup>20</sup> and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. <sup>21</sup> But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. <sup>22</sup> Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. <sup>23</sup> When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. <sup>24</sup> And certain of those *who were* with us went to the tomb and found *it* just as the women had said; but Him they did not see.’” Luke 24:17-24



Calling the Lord a “stranger” was a way of saying, “It’s the only explanation for you to not know these things.” As this is so, the men of Israel were perfectly well aware of the ministry of the Lord, and yet Peter next directly says to them, “Him, being delivered.”

This is referring to Christ. The word translated as “being delivered” is an adjective. A more literal rendering would be “betrayed.” Hence, “Him, betrayed...” This is the explanation for what occurred. The word is connected to the coming words “you have taken,” not to the words “by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God.”

In other words, the betrayal was by the Jewish people. It wasn’t just that Christ got caught up in circumstances that ended in His death, but that He was purposefully given over by Israel. Despite this, Peter notes that this occurred “by the determined purpose.”

The word “determined” is translated from the Greek word *horizó*. One can see the root of the word “horizon.” Being a verb, it signifies “to set limits on.” There was an eternal purpose of God that set the boundaries for what would occur because God had ordained it to be so. The word is used again in Acts 17:26 where the meaning is clearly explained from the text –

“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.”

As such, the process of redemption was certainly the result of the “foreknowledge of God.” Here is a new word in Scripture, *prognósis*. One can see the obvious connection to our modern word of the same spelling. God’s foreknowledge allows Him to set the boundaries for all things to work out in accord with His redemptive plans. With that understood, Peter now states the words that are connected to the idea of being “betrayed” as noted above. He says, “you have taken.”

Here is a word used only once in Scripture, *ekdotos*. It is an adjective in the singular. Hence, it more appropriately reads, “[man] delivered.” In other words, it is referring to Jesus. With that understood, the NKJV next reads, “by lawless hands.”

The translation is incorrect. It says, “by hand lawless.” The word “hand” is singular. The guilt of the nation is highlighted in these words. It doesn’t matter if every person standing there had done this. Nor does it matter today, two thousand years later, that none of the people now alive were there. The guilt is a national guilt. Hence, Peter’s words are addressed to all.

Further, the word “lawless” is precisely translated. It signifies “without law.” At times, it is rendered “ungodly.” What occurred was a lawless act by the hand of the people. They had the law. The law clearly speaks of Jesus (see John 5:39 and 5:46). Thus, the delivering up of Jesus was a lawless act. As such, guilt is imputed because of it. There can be no forgiveness of the act apart from the atonement process.

What is evident is that the believers did have their guilt atoned for. This is clearly substantiated by the pouring out of the Spirit upon them. As the others did not, it means that their guilt remained unatoned for. Peter will explain to them how this can happen, and he will do it by referring to both an individual (e.g., Acts 2:38) and a national (e.g., Acts 3:19-26) atonement. Of this lawless hand, Peter next says, “have crucified.”

Again, Peter uses a word found only here in Scripture, *prospégnumi*. It signifies “to fasten to” and it refers to the act of nailing (fastening) Christ to the cross. The word is in the plural signifying that each person (you all) bears the guilt. Even if it was only Roman soldiers who took the hammer and nail and fastened Christ to the cross, each person was responsible for that having come about.

The guilt is national and it is all-encompassing. From the oldest man to the newborn baby, the nation bears the guilt. Remember, Peter is a Jew speaking to his people. He is not so much making an accusation as he is stating a point of fact. Again, this is obvious because the disciples who received the Spirit are a part of this body. And yet, they are set apart to God because of their belief in the work Christ accomplished. With that understood, it is exactly Christ’s work that allowed for them to receive the Spirit. As Peter says, “and put to death.”

The crucifixion led to the death. But the death is because of the crucifixion, and the crucifixion was because the people had fastened Christ to the cross. Everything is tied up in this act, including the atonement of those who believed.

Hebrews says that “without shedding of blood there is no remission.” The fact that those who followed Christ had received the Spirit signifies that their guilt was remitted. The fact that those who had not followed Christ had not received the Spirit means that their guilt remained. The only difference between the two is the disciples’ faith in Christ. As such, it demonstrates that Christ’s death was an atoning sacrifice for sin. The guilt is removed through faith in His work. This will continue to be seen as the narrative unfolds.

Life application: As seen in the evaluation of this verse, though it is not explicitly stated, the blood atonement of Christ is clearly evidenced in the words of Peter. Those who

deny this and who claim that Peter never referred to blood atonement (hyperdispensationalism) are clearly mistaken. One does not need to explicitly state a point of doctrine for it to be understood.

The doctrine of original sin is never explicitly stated in Scripture. The word “Trinity” is never stated in Scripture. And the word “rapture” is never explicitly stated. However, all three of these doctrines are clearly implied. Such is the case with the blood atonement of Christ in Peter’s words. There are those who stand forgiven and who received the Spirit. There are those whose guilt remains, and they did not. The only difference between the two is faith in the work of Christ.

There is one gospel. To say there are two is a heresy. Don’t be a heretic. Accept the one gospel of Jesus Christ and be saved from the wrath of God that is to come upon the world.

*Glorious, almighty, and most wonderful Lord God – thank You for having sent Christ Jesus to die for our sins. Thank You for the sealing of the Spirit that comes when we believe that it is so. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. Acts 2:24**

Peter has been describing the work of Christ, including His crucifixion and death. With that noted, he now notes the second half of this greatest combined event in human history. There was the cross-death and there was the triumph over it. Peter says, “whom God raised up.”

The resurrection isn’t just an event where God bypassed the normal course of human events. Nor was it a miracle of restoring life, such as occurred with those Jesus brought back from death as is recorded in the gospels. It was the necessary and logical outcome for Jesus, as will be explained. For now, the words, “whom God raised up,” are referring to the working of each member of the Godhead. Paul states in Romans –

“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:4

However, Jesus had already referred to His own hand in the resurrection in John –

“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.” John 10:17, 18

And yet, Paul again ascribes the resurrection to the Holy Spirit in Romans 8 –

“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. <sup>10</sup> And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” Romans 8:9-11

In these and other verses, we are shown that each member of the Godhead participated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was this immense and intentional power of God that was directed to bring the human body of Christ back to life, as Peter says, “having loosed the pains of death.”

The word translated as “loosed” signifies exactly that. When a donkey or ox is untied, it is loosed. When laces are untied on one’s shoes, they are loosed. Jesus said that “the Scripture cannot be broken” in John 10:35. It is firmly bound, and it remains binding. Death is a bind upon human beings. When the body dies, the soul is left bound in that state. Without an external force, it cannot be unloosed.

But even before death, the soul is bound to death. The animation of the body is not a permanent thing. Rather it continues until the body dies, but the binding of the soul does not change. This is evidenced in Christ’s reanimation of the bodies of the son of the widow of Nain recorded in Luke 7. It is evidenced in His raising of Lazarus in John 11. Such instances of restoring the body to life were not permanent as it is understood that both eventually died again. If they didn’t, they would be a sensation wherever they traveled to, even to this day.

The reason these things are true is because, as Paul says in Romans 6:23, “the wages of sin *is* death.” What this is clearly and unambiguously saying is that human beings die as payment for sin. It is the earned wage of it. But this then is understood to include every human at every age, and thus the Bible implicitly refers to the doctrine of “original sin.” This is explained by Paul in Romans 5:18 –

“Therefore, as through one man’s offense *judgment came* to all men, resulting in condemnation.”

It is explicitly stated by David in the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm –

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
And in sin my mother conceived me.

<sup>6</sup>Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,  
And in the hidden *part* You will make me to know wisdom.” Psalm 51:5, 6

This is why when babies die, they do not resurrect. And it is why child sacrifice is so abhorrent to God. The sin of our first father, Adam, has been transmitted to all human beings because the human species has a terminal infection in it. That infection is passed from father to child, and it ultimately ends in the death of the body. But that infection is tied to the soul which is bound to the sin of Adam, and which separates man from God. Christ Jesus came to correct this in human beings.

It is in this work of God in Christ that the “pains of death” are loosed. Vincent’s Word Studies explains the word translated as “pains,” saying –

“The meaning is disputed. Some claim that Peter followed the Septuagint mistranslation of Psalm 18:5, where the Hebrew word for snares is rendered by the word used here, pains; and that, therefore, it should be rendered snares of death; the figure being that of escape from the snare of a huntsman. Others suppose that death is represented in travail, the birth-pangs ceasing with the delivery; i.e., the resurrection. This seems to be far-fetched, though it is true that in classical Greek the word is used commonly of birth-throes. It is better, perhaps, on the whole, to take the expression in the sense of the A. V., and to make the pains of death stand for death generally.”

Whatever the sense of the word, the pains center on death, and the loosing of death is the key point to consider. But this is only speaking of the physical body of Christ, as will be explained. For now, and with that understanding, Peter remarkably tells his audience that the pains of death were loosed from Him “because it was not possible that He should be held by it.”

This is the key point of the entire outcome of the birth, life, and death of Christ. But it must be understood from what has already been stated.

Abraham was given the covenant of circumcision in Genesis 17 –

“This *is* My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; <sup>11</sup> and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.” Genesis 17:10, 11

The Lord noted that circumcision is a “sign.” A sign is something that points to something else. Jews consider circumcision as the thing itself. They point to their circumcision and say, “Because I am circumcised (signifying being a Jew), I am righteous.” This is incorrect. The “sign” does not call attention to itself, but rather points us to the fulfillment of the sign.

The implication in cutting the male organ is that the sign anticipates the cutting of sin. It tells us that sin travels from father to child. As every person has a father, it means that sin is inherited by every person (as noted in Psalm 51 above).

After the giving of the sign, the Lord eventually gave Israel the Law of Moses. This was His standard by which Israel was to live. And, in fact, He promised – explicitly – that life would be given if a man could perform the law –

“You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I *am* the LORD.” Leviticus 18:5

It is a promise of the law. The man who does the things of the law will live. To live is to not die. It is an explicit statement that speaks of righteousness leading to life, because “the wages of sin is death.”

When Christ came, He did not come to the Japanese. Nor did He come to those in Germany. Rather, He came as a descendant of Israel after the giving of the law. Thus, He was born under the law. However, He had no human father. Thus, no sin was transmitted to Him. The “sign” of circumcision was fulfilled in His coming. The line of sin was “cut” because His Father is God. As such, He was capable of living by the law, something no other person had done – proven by their deaths. Every person born under the law for the previous 1400+ years had died because “the wages of sin *is* death,” and all of them had sin and committed sin. Peter will further explain this in the verses to come.

In the virgin birth, Christ was born without sin. But being born under the law, Christ had to live without sin in order to fulfill the law. This is what the gospels were given to show.

Christ not only was born sinless, but He lived perfectly before His Father without sinning—

“Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? <sup>47</sup> He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.” John 8:46, 47

The record of Christ’s sinless life is documented, the book of Acts speaks of it, and the epistles explain it. But the resurrection proves it. Peter said, “it was not possible that He should be held by” death. If the wages of sin *is* death, and if Christ was born without sin and lived without ever sinning, then it was indeed impossible for death to hold Him. In Him was life, the life was never cut because of sin, and therefore the life remained in Him.

Therefore, and because of this, the power of God was brought to bear on the lifeless human body of Christ in fulfillment of the words of the law, “which if a man does, he shall live by them: I *am* the LORD” (Leviticus 18:5). The promise of the Lord (Yehovah) is fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Life application: Because the promise of the Lord found in Leviticus 18:5 is fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus, it signifies that the law is fulfilled in Him. As such, in Him is life. From this point, the gospel of Jesus Christ says that if you believe in this fulfilled work of Jesus, you will be imputed His righteousness. The fulfillment of the law will be reckoned to you.

As it is law by which sin is imputed (see Romans 5:13), and as a person who believes in the work of Christ is now “in Christ,” it means that sin is no longer imputed to that person —

“that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

-2 Corinthians 5:19

This then means, exactly and unambiguously, that a person who is saved is saved forever (eternal salvation). If we who are in Christ are no longer imputed sin, and if “the wages of sin is death,” then those who are in Christ can never die again. However, this is not referring to physical death, but the rebinding of the soul. These physical bodies will either die, or they will be cast off at the rapture, as explained by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.

The words of Peter today dispel two lines of incorrect theology/doctrine taught within the church. The first is that a person can lose his salvation. This is as impossible as it was for death to hold Christ. The second is that we are obligated to the Law of Moses in part or in whole (Hebrew Roots, Seventh Day Adventists, et al). If we were bound to the law, sin could be imputed. Paul says that is not the case in so many ways that it is incredible that people hold to this heretical doctrine.

Grace has been granted to those who call on Christ. Do not be anxious that it can be taken away, and do not put yourselves again under the yoke of bondage which is the Law of Moses. Be sound in your doctrine and be firm in your faith – to the glory of God who redeemed you through the perfect and pure shed blood of Christ!

*Lord God! How incredible it is what You have done through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.*

**For David says concerning Him:**

**'I foresaw the Lord always before my face,**

**For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Acts 2:25**

Peter has just spoken of the ministry, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of the Lord. Now, he will defend the statement that “it was not possible that He should be held by” death. He will do this by citing David from the psalms. As such, he begins with, “For David says concerning Him.”

The meaning of “concerning” is “in reference to.” What David wrote is in reference to the coming Messiah, as if He is writing about Himself. In other words, when reading the psalm, what David wrote at first appears to be referring to himself. David’s psalms are often from a first-person perspective, and they are centered around events in his life, and are often so personal in nature that it is obvious he is referring to himself. The 51<sup>st</sup> psalm (cited in the previous commentary) is such an example.

And yet, it is understood by Israel that the Scriptures, which include the psalms, are inspired by God. At times, they certainly carry a double significance – meaning they are personal, but that they also anticipate the coming Messiah. At other times, it is understood that they are certainly referring directly to the coming Messiah. They are prophetic in nature and speak of what is to occur in Him.

Peter will now cite Psalm 16 to make his case concerning Christ, and thus provide evidence that what occurred among the disciples was ordained of God. Both Acts and



the Psalms will be cited in their entirety now. The Psalm is cited by Peter from the Greek version of the OT –

“I foresaw the LORD always before my face,  
For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.  
<sup>26</sup> Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad;  
Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.  
<sup>27</sup> For You will not leave my soul in Hades,  
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.  
<sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the ways of life;  
You will make me full of joy in Your presence.” Acts 2:25-28

This is the original from the Hebrew –

“I have set the LORD always before me;  
Because *He is* at my right hand I shall not be moved.  
<sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;  
My flesh also will rest in hope.  
<sup>10</sup> For You will not leave my soul in Sheol,  
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.  
<sup>11</sup> You will show me the path of life;  
In Your presence *is* fullness of joy;  
At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore.” Psalm 16:8-11

With the verses now cited, Peter continues, saying, “I foresaw the LORD always before my face.” This is not saying that He is seeing the Lord beforehand. Rather, it is stated from a personal reference point. In essence, “I see the Lord right before Me.” This is reflected in the Hebrew, “I have set the Lord always before me.”

The meaning is that the Lord (Yehovah) is always present with Him and is therefore ready to help Him and deliver Him. As this is from the Messiah’s reference, we can understand that even in the anguish of His coming death, He will be delivered. Hence, we can think of Christ’s time in mournful prayer and yet obedient submission to the will of the Lord. It is a note of encouragement and comfort which is then bolstered by the words, “For He is at my right hand.”

The right hand is the position of power. It is the position of honor. It is the position of dignity. The Lord is by His Messiah, ready to help and defend Him, and to exalt Him in due time. In the 110<sup>th</sup> Psalm, after the completion of His work, the positions are

switched from that of verse 2:25, and the Messiah is set at the right hand of the Lord (Yehovah) –

The LORD said to my Lord,  
“Sit at My right hand,  
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”  
<sup>2</sup>The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.  
Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Psalm 110:1, 2

Charles Ellicott states of this position referred to now, “The Psalmist thought of the Eternal as the warrior thinks of him who, in the conflict of battle, extends his shield over the comrade who is on the left hand, and so guards him from attack.” It is a correct thought and is supported by the words of Psalm 91 –

“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High  
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.  
<sup>2</sup>I will say of the LORD, ‘*He is* my refuge and my fortress;  
My God, in Him I will trust.’” Psalm 91:1, 2

Jesus, the Messiah, has placed His trust in the eternal God and knows that He is safe. As such, Peter continues the quote by saying, “that I may not be shaken.”

The idea here is “shaken in mind” or “shaken in faith.” The Messiah would remain confident through the ordeal set before Him because He had the Lord before Him, even at His right hand. Paul’s words to the Thessalonians reflect the same thought –

“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, <sup>2</sup>not to be soon **shaken** in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.” 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2

Christ had an ordeal to face, and He set His eyes on the prize that lay ahead, not being shaken from it through fear or a love of the present world.

Life application: The level of our faith (not necessarily saving faith, but faith in the continued hand of the Lord in our lives) can be determined in seeing how we respond to trials, pains, difficulties, and the like. Are we moaning about every little thing that affects us personally, even when we hear of people with immensely greater trials

around us? If so, we are doing nothing to build them up in their greater need, and it demonstrates a weakness in our reliance on the Lord.

Life is messy, it can get very complicated very quickly, and it can turn disastrous in a moment. Because of this, and because we have absolutely no control over the next moment of our lives, we are wise to leave everything in the Lord's hands, surrendering to His will, relying on Him, and setting Him always before us.

We can do this by simply talking to Him throughout the day. We can do this by engaging with His word when we rise, when we drive (audio Bible, please!), when we have a break from work, and when we are ready to sleep. His word will inform us, guide us, comfort us, and encourage us.

The time we put the Lord before us will reflect our priorities. If we are not thinking about Him, we are engaging the world. And the world will never give us the true courage we need to conduct our affairs from an eternal perspective. Set the Lord before you and be encouraged in Him. Christ set the example, even when facing death. Let us follow Him in His steadfast reliance on the Lord.

*Glorious God Almighty, may we always place You before us, trusting in You and Your promises because of the finished work of Christ. He trusted in You and was not moved. And You brought Him through His ordeal, seating Him at Your right hand. We now have the assurance that we too will be brought safely to You. Let us remember this as we face our own trials, woes, and difficulties. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad;  
Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. Acts 2:26**

Peter began his quoting of Psalm 16 in order to defend the fact that it was not possible for death to hold Jesus. For many of the people there that day, this was probably necessary because of what is recorded in Matthew 28 –

“Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. <sup>12</sup> When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, <sup>13</sup> saying, ‘Tell them, “His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.” <sup>14</sup> And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure.’ <sup>15</sup> So they took the money and did as they

were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.” Matthew 28:11-15

The truth of the resurrection was quickly covered up by the elders. Thus, it would be pointless to believe in a dead Messiah. However, Peter is careful to explain that Jesus did, in fact, resurrect, and he now defends this by citing Scripture to prove that it was prophesied to occur all along. As such, he continues with the next lines of the psalm, saying, “Therefore my heart rejoiced.”

The Greek reads *dia touto*, or literally: “Through this.” In other words, through the entire time of Christ’s passion, and despite the horrors that came upon Him, there was still a joy in His heart. The word “because” or “therefore” conveys the idea well enough.

The citing of the psalm by Peter is based on the crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus noted here in verses Acts 2:23, 24. The previous words of the psalm spoke of the Lord being always before the face of His Messiah and there at His right hand to strengthen Him from being shaken. Because of this, the response – even in His time of greatest distress – is a heart of rejoicing.

The word used is *euphrainó*. It comes from two words signifying “good” and “moderation as regulated by a personal perspective.” Thus, it means “having a merry outlook (cheery state of mind) because feeling the sense of *victory* (‘inner triumph’)” (HELPS Word-studies). Our modern word euphoria carries a similar sense. Christ, even before and during the passion He suffered, was able to sense victory because of the presence of the Lord with Him and guarding Him through the ordeal.

Considering that Peter is speaking to an audience that was fully aware of the tortures of crucifixion, seeing it on open display for those who disobeyed Rome, the words must have been almost beyond comprehension. But Peter continues with His words, saying, “and my tongue was glad.”

Here, the word *glóssa*, or tongue, is used, whereas the Hebrew reads, “and rejoices my glory.” The idea between the two (tongue and glory) is found elsewhere in the psalms –

“My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;  
I will sing and give praise.  
<sup>8</sup>Awake, my glory!  
Awake, lute and harp!  
I will awaken the dawn.” Psalm 57:7, 8

“O God, my heart is steadfast;  
I will sing and give praise, even with my glory.” Psalm 108:1

The tongue is that which expresses the inward thoughts of man. Thus, it is that which sets man apart as glorious because he is a rational, cognitive being. With the tongue (his glory), the psalmist praises God. Understanding this, Jesus’ tongue (His glory) rejoiced even in His time of greatest suffering. The word translated as “rejoices” is *agalliaó*. It signifies to exult or be full of joy. The incredible part of this description is that the psalms elsewhere speak of the tongue of the Messiah in a much different way.

While Jesus was on the cross, He said, “I thirst” (John 19:28). In the psalms, the result of His thirsting is explained –

“I am poured out like water,  
And all My bones are out of joint;  
My heart is like wax;  
It has melted within Me.  
<sup>15</sup> My strength is dried up like a potsherd,  
And My tongue clings to My jaws;  
You have brought Me to the dust of death.” Psalm 22:14, 15

Even in this terrible state of thirst that is so complete that His tongue clung to His jaws, His tongue was still in a state of rejoicing. It shows the absolute trust and confidence He had in the coming victory.

With that considered, Peter next says, “Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.” The Greek reads “on hope,” thus providing elegant symbolism that will be noted in a moment. This is the last of four times that the particular word, translated as “rest,” is found. The other three uses are from the synoptic gospels and refer to the nesting of birds –

“Then He said, ‘What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? <sup>19</sup> It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches.’”

-Luke 13:18, 19

The word literally signifies “to camp down.” One has a tent that he has pitched, and he climbs inside and rests. The idea then is that of peaceful rest. What is being said here is that the most tumultuous turmoil-filled moments of the life of Christ Jesus were

moments where He possessed a state of peaceful rest, lying on a bed of hope-filled anticipation of success, expectation of glory, trust in His God, and confidence that what was happening was the right use of this time in His life. Of these words, Vincent's Word Studies states, "My flesh shall encamp on hope; pitch its tent there to rest through the night of death, until the morning of resurrection."

This is just what the author of Hebrews states in order to give his reader the same confidence as Christ –

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:1, 2

To the audience listening to Peter's words, if they accepted his message, it would cut to their very heart at the enormity of what he was conveying.

Life application: The word translated as "rejoices" above is used by Peter concerning how we should be in our own afflictions, tying them into the afflictions of Christ –

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; <sup>13</sup> but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad **with exceeding joy.**" 2 Peter 4:12, 13

Christ set the example that we are then to follow. Even in the times of the most horrifying persecution, Christians have been known to cry out the most beautiful melodies of love to their Lord. The anguished cries of pain are intermingled with words of hope and joy – "Lord God, I am yours, be glorified through the tortures I face. Receive my spirit Lord Jesus because my body is destroyed."

There is an exceeding joy that exists in those who truly hold the hope of Christ in their hearts. Knowing that nothing in heaven or earth can separate us from the love of God that is found in Christ Jesus our Lord is what makes it possible. Do you possess this confidence? To what measure is it so? Cultivate it. You never know if it will be necessary in the days ahead.

*O God, through the sufferings of Christ, came the glory of the resurrection and exaltation! And because of His work, we can also possess the same confidence He had. Help us to grow in our faith, and to rest on our hope, knowing that we have a better home awaiting us in Your glorious presence. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**For You will not leave my soul in Hades,  
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. Acts 2:27**

In this verse, Peter continues to cite the 16<sup>th</sup> Psalm. It is this verse, in particular, that he will use to build his case concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ that he spoke of in verse 2:23. As such, he begins with, “For You will not leave my soul in Hades.”

The word translated as “leave” means to “leave behind” or “abandon.” Other words which give the sense might be to “forsake,” or to “desert.” The word translated as “soul” is the Greek word *psuché*. That can have various significations, but the intent here is the being of the person that extends beyond the physical makeup. It is based on the Hebrew word *nephesh* which carries the same general meanings as the Greek. That this is referring to that which animates the body is obvious from the context because of the words “in Hades.”

Hades (translated as “hell” in older versions) is the repository for the dead. Today, hell is considered the place of damnation and eternal torment, but that was not its original intent. The Greek word *hadés* is the unseen world where departed spirits go. It is equivalent to the Hebrew word *sheol*, which is variously translated as the grave, hell, the pit, and so on. When a person dies, their soul (that which animates the physical body) is separated from the body. From there, it goes to *sheol* (*hadés*) where it awaits whatever is coming.

This is an unnatural state for man who is a soul/body unity. This is the doctrine known as anthropological hylomorphism, or the dual nature of man. Quite often, people incorrectly state that man has a triune nature – soul, body, and spirit. But this is not what Scripture teaches. Rather, the spirit is a connection to God. When Adam fell, the spiritual connection to God was lost. All people are born as a soul/body unity, but there is no spiritual connection to God.

The reconnection is the spiritual nature that needs to be corrected, but it is not a separate part of a person. When a person dies, he enters into an unnatural state where the body is dead, but the soul lives on. Paul calls this state being “naked” in 2 Corinthians 5:3. The intent for man that is clearly seen in Scripture is that he is to be a

soul/body unity (clothed), and that it is to last forever because of the spiritual connection to his Creator. When the spiritual connection was severed, the physical body became corrupt and was destined to die –

“In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread  
Till you return to the ground,  
For out of it you were taken;  
For dust you *are*,  
And to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:19

The soul, without the body (meaning when the body dies), goes to this pit. Whatever state that soul is in at the time of death will determine whether that person will be condemned to the Lake of Fire, or if that person will be given new and eternal life. An example of a soul in *sheol* (*hadés*) is found in 1 Samuel 28 –

“Then the woman said, ‘Whom shall I bring up for you?’  
And he said, ‘Bring up Samuel for me.’  
<sup>12</sup> When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, ‘Why have you deceived me? For you *are* Saul!’  
<sup>13</sup> And the king said to her, ‘Do not be afraid. What did you see?’  
And the woman said to Saul, ‘I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth.’  
<sup>14</sup> So he said to her, ‘What *is* his form?’  
And she said, ‘An old man is coming up, and he *is* covered with a mantle.’ And Saul perceived that it *was* Samuel, and he stooped with *his* face to the ground and bowed down.  
<sup>15</sup> Now Samuel said to Saul, ‘Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?’”  
-1 Samuel 28:11-15

This is what David was saying in the Psalms concerning the state of One who has died, “For You will not leave my soul in Hades.” In this, it could be that he is simply saying, “I know that I will be redeemed from the pit someday. The Lord will not abandon me forever.” It is the same sentiment that Job anticipated –

“For I know *that* my Redeemer lives,  
And He shall stand at last on the earth;  
<sup>26</sup> And after my skin is destroyed, this *I know*,  
That in my flesh I shall see God,  
<sup>27</sup> Whom I shall see for myself,



And my eyes shall behold, and not another.  
How my heart yearns within me!" Job 19:25-27

As this is the case with David and Job and so many others, it can be argued to this point that David is simply writing about himself in the psalm. However, his next words are what Peter's case hinges on. Continuing to cite David, he says, "Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption."

The word translated as "allow" is *didómi*. It means to "give." Hence, "Nor will You give Your Holy One to see corruption." As such, "allow" provides an acceptable way of understanding the intent. The Weymouth New Testament provides real clarity in the meaning of this verse –

"For Thou wilt not leave me in the Unseen World forsaken, nor give up Thy holy One to undergo decay."

The word translated as "corruption" is introduced into Scripture here, *diaphthora*. It is found six times, all in Acts 2 and Acts 13. All six uses will refer to this same context, that of the non-decay of the body of Christ. The word David uses in the Psalm is *shakhath*, signifying a pit. As such, it figuratively means "decay," because a body in a pit decays. The Greek translators of the Old Testament understood this and translated the words of David as Peter now repeats them.

It is the normal occurrence that happens to all people. It is the reason why some cultures embalm their dead. It is an attempt to arrest the degradation of the body in order to overthrow the effects of the fall. Job understood this state of degradation of the body and he forms a parallel thought, equating the pit (corruption) to the activity of worms which come to destroy his body –

"If I say to corruption, 'You *are* my father,'  
And to the worm, 'You *are* my mother and my sister,'" Job 17:14

As the soul does not decay, what David says is obviously referring to the body that has gone to the pit in death. The words of David are stating that a Person is going to die, that the soul of that Person will enter Hades, and that the body of that Person will not see corruption in this state. After finishing his quote from the psalms, Peter will then explain why this must be speaking of the Messiah rather than David referring to Himself.

Both of these clauses, when properly understood, point to a person who is protected by the Lord from being abandoned in the repository of the dead (Hades) and whose body – that has been temporarily separated from the soul – will not see any corruption, even though this is the usual and accepted norm for bodies that die. That this separation is temporary is to be inferred because the soul has not been left in Hades. As Hades is where disembodied souls go, the inference is then obvious. There will be a reuniting of the soul and body.

Life application: One valuable tool in studying particular verses or passages is to check the translation of multiple versions. In doing so, different ways of expressing the same thing can be considered. In knowing what the original language says, and then noting these various translations, it is as if a flower has opened up with many beautiful petals that look the same, but are individual from one another.

At the same time, one must be careful to not simply choose the translation that he likes the most because it is pleasing to the ear. It may be wrong, and indeed, translations are often wrong. But to see the variations can help come to a proper understanding about what is being said. This is exactly what the authors of the KJV said to do in their preface. Though the language is old and difficult, they say –

“For as it is a fault of incredulitie, to doubt of those things that are evident: so to determine of such things as the Spirit of God hath left (even in the judgment of the judicious) questionable, can beno lesse then presumption. Therefore as S. Augustine saith, that varietie of Translations is profitable for the finding out of the sense of the Scriptures: so diversitie of signification and sense in the margine, where the text is not so cleare, must needes doe good, yea is necessary, as we are perswaded.”

In other words, they are fully persuaded that it is necessary to use a multitude of translations, and to also check the margin notes where the text is not so clear. As such, we can close with an evaluation of the verse set before us today in a multitude of translations –

# because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay. (NIV)

# For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave. (NLT)

# For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.  
(ESV)

# because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor will You let Your Holy One  
see decay. (BSB)

#for You will not abandon my soul into Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to  
see decay. (BLB)

# Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy  
One to see corruption. (KJV)

#For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see  
corruption. (NKJV)

#FOR YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR WILL YOU ALLOW  
YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY. (NASB)

# FOR YOU WILL NOT FORSAKE ME and ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES (the realm  
of the dead), NOR LET YOUR HOLY ONE UNDERGO DECAY [after death].  
(Amplified)

# because you will not abandon me in Hades or allow your holy one to see decay.  
(CSB)

# because You will not leave me in Hades or allow Your Holy One to see decay.  
(HCSB)

# Because thou wilt not leave my soul unto Hades, Neither wilt thou give thy Holy  
One to see corruption. (ASV)

# "Because you did not leave my Soul in Sheol and you did not give your Pure One  
to see destruction." (Aramaic)

# The Lord won't leave me in the grave. I am his holy one, and he won't let my  
body decay. (CEV)

# Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, nor suffer thy Holy One to see  
corruption. (Douay-Rheims)

# Because thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, Neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption. (ERV)

# because you will not abandon me in the world of the dead; you will not allow your faithful servant to rot in the grave. (GNT)

# because you do not abandon my soul to the grave or allow your holy one to decay. (GWT)

# For you will not abandon my soul to Hades or allow your Holy One to experience decay. (ISV)

# Because You will not leave my soul to Hades, Nor will You give Your Holy One to see corruption; (LSV)

# because you will not leave my soul in Hades, nor permit your Holy One to experience decay. (NET Bible)

# because you will not abandon my soul in Sheol, neither will you allow your Holy One to see decay. (NHEB)

# For Thou wilt not leave me in the Unseen World forsaken, nor give up Thy holy One to undergo decay. (Weymouth New Testament)

# because you will not leave my soul in Hades, neither will you allow your Holy One to see decay. (WEB)

# because Thou wilt not leave my soul to hades, nor wilt Thou give Thy Kind One to see corruption; (YLT)

*Lord God, thank You for the diligent study and care of scholars and translators over the ages who have brought a richness to understanding Your word that fills us with a great and deep understanding and appreciation for what Your word is telling us. Help us to be diligent in our own studies, and to carefully evaluate and consider what You are telling us. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**You have made known to me the ways of life;  
You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’ Acts 2:28**

In this verse, Peter will complete his quoting of Psalm 16. He has directly equated the verses from it to the Lord's passion, His courage through the ordeal, His death, His burial, and then to the fact that even in death He would not see corruption. Now, and with that being the reference point, Peter continues, saying, "You have made known to me."

Peter cites the words directly from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, stating them in the aorist tense. As such, it reflects the words of Christ in the resurrection. His body did not see corruption, but instead, something new was made known to Him, which is "the ways of life." The Hebrew states this in the singular, "the way of life." However, the Greek OT continues to be cited by Peter, "the ways of life."

The word translated as "way," *hodos*, indicates a road, path, and so on. By implication, it then signifies a progress, such as the route or distance. Figuratively, it can indicate a mode or means of traveling. For example, one could use the word to say, "This is the way (the route) we will take, and it will be on this way (this path)." It can also be used to speak of a manner of life, "This is the way (*hodos*) of the Lord (Matthew 3:3 gives this meaning), and we should follow it." That type of use of the word is found, for example, in Job 16 –

"For when a few years are finished,  
I shall go the way of no return." Job 16:22

There is a way (path) of life that people pursue. For example, the same thought concerning the "way of life," as what David states in the Hebrew, is repeated in Proverbs 5 when referring to the way (path) of the immoral woman –

"Lest you ponder *her path of life*—  
Her ways are unstable;  
You do not know *them*." Proverbs 5:6

Peter's citing the plural of the Greek "ways" signifies the fullness of the manner of attaining life. This then takes one back to the words of Moses in Deuteronomy, such as in Deuteronomy 10 –

"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?"

-Deuteronomy 10:12, 13

There in Deuteronomy, Moses uses another word that carries essentially the same idea as the one David uses in the Psalm. It is the same word that is used in the Hebrew of Isaiah 40:3 that is cited in Matthew 3:3 (above). It also can mean a literal path, or it can signify the course or mode of life.

Israel failed to “walk in all His ways,” but where Israel failed, Christ prevailed. Because God favored Christ, He made known to Him the ways of life. In turn, Christ followed the ways of life, He attained the goal, and He attained to the resurrection from the dead.

With that understood, Peter finishes the quoting of David (Psalm 16:11) with the words, “You will make me full of joy in Your presence.” The Greek reads more precisely, “You will fill me with joy with Your face.” The idea of the face of the Lord is that of being in His presence, and thus being accepted by Him. With the face of the Lord, comes the thought of favor, honor, peace, and so on.

If one goes into the presence of a king and the king accepts him, he has received the king’s honor and the like. This idea is well-expressed in the words of the high priestly prayer found in Numbers 6 –

“The LORD bless you and keep you;  
25 The LORD make His face shine upon you,  
And be gracious to you;  
26 The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,  
And give you peace.” Numbers 6:24-26

Life application: What should be obvious is that if the “ways of the Lord” are those things that bring life, meaning those things detailed by Moses in the law, and if Christ has attained to them where nobody else prior to Him could, it is an acknowledgment that in Him – not in the law – is the way to life. It is as if simple arithmetic is set before us, and yet we find it hard to accept the equation.

Jesus does not ever say that we are saved through keeping the Law of Moses. In fact, He hints at exactly the opposite time and time again. In Matthew 5, He says –

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup> For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.”

-Matthew 5:17, 18

In His words, Jesus is not saying that we (Israel at that time) must obey the law of Moses in order to be saved. He is making a point that the Law of Moses must be obeyed in order to not be condemned, and that the Law of Moses was the binding precept that condemns. Hence, He acknowledges that the law must stand until it is fulfilled. And then He immediately says that this is what He came to do, to fulfill it.

In other words, one can hang his proverbial hat on the law and attempt to find life through it, and he will fail and be condemned. Or he can come to Christ who has fulfilled the law and find life through the One who already had life in Him (see John 1:4, "In Him was life..."). Jesus did not need to fulfill the law to find life. Rather, because He was born under the law, He needed to fulfill the law in order to not be condemned. The ways were set before Him.

The difference is that man is already condemned by original sin. But Christ bore no original sin. In His fulfillment of the law, the life remains in Him, and that life can then be bestowed upon any who accepts His fulfillment of it. As He says –

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” John 14:6

He uses the same term as Peter uses, *hodos*, way. But when Jesus says it, it is in the singular. Christ was shown the ways of life and He lived by them. The evidence of that is His resurrection, proving that He had fulfilled the law and was not condemned by it. Jesus shows us THE WAY OF LIFE and only through that can we also live. He embodies the law, and we are granted His perfect obedience under it by a mere act of faith.

As this is true, why (Why on earth!) would anyone want to go back under the law of condemnation? Choosing that path would be as smart as dunking one’s head in fluoroantimonic acid. Reason it out. Learn the simple equation. And then, give up on your futile attempts to merit God’s favor apart from the merits of Christ. Only in Him, and in Him alone, will you find the way of life.

And, as a bonus thought, once you have found this way – God’s superlative way – of attaining life, then act like it. He has redeemed you through the blood of Christ. Put away all worries, all neuroses, all anxieties, and all doubts. Be strong in your faith, be firm in your convictions, and do not let this world – a world that is passing away – steal the joy of Christ in you. Praise God for what He has done through Christ. Yes, praise God for JESUS!

*Glorious Heavenly Father, thank You for the completed work of Christ. To Him were shown the ways of life. In His fulfilling of the law, He now provides us with THE WAY OF LIFE. Thank You that You have made this path available to us. Yes, O God, thank You for our Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**“Men and brethren, let *me* speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Acts 2:29**

Peter has completed his citing of David’s words from the 16<sup>th</sup> Psalm. With that complete, he now immediately turns to the explanation of why those words were spoken by him, beginning with, “Men and brethren.”

In verse 2:14, Peter said, “Men of Judea and all who are in Jerusalem.” In verse 22, he then addressed them as “Men of Israel.” Now, he brings them even closer to himself by saying the exact same words he said to those gathered with him in verse 1:16, *Andres adelphoi*, “Men, brothers,” or more literally, “brother-men.”

In this, he is addressing those with him in a personal, friendly manner, acknowledging that those gathered are not just of Israel, and they are not just dwellers in the nearby areas. Instead, they are brothers united by the distinct culture that had bound them together in a unique way. With this bond of affinity stated, he continues by saying, “let *me* speak.”

Rather than “let me,” which would be begging permission, the meaning of the Greek is “it is permitted for me to speak.” Based on the display of tongues, based on the fact that he has shown from both the prophets and the psalms that the events that have taken place were prophesied, and based on the fact that he is a brother Israelite, he has the permitted right to speak forth.

From there, he says, “freely to you.” Rather, the Greek clearly reads “with freedom.” Based on what has occurred, and based on the facts presented in verses 22-24 concerning Christ’s ministry, crucifixion, death, and resurrection, Peter cited inspired Scripture in order to establish a baseline by which he could then make and support his argument concerning Christ and how He is the reason behind the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples.

As such, Peter next narrows his discourse to speak of the writer of the psalm that he just quoted, Israel’s famous king and sweet psalmist. He does this by saying, “of the patriarch



David.” Here, the word *patriarchés*, meaning the head or founder of a family, is introduced. The word will be used to describe the twelve sons of Jacob in Acts 7:8, 9, and also of Abraham in Hebrews 7:4.

David is called a patriarch because he is the father of the royal line and family leading to the Messiah. The term “House of David” is used numerous times in the Old Testament. It is referred to three times in the gospel of Luke as well. It is this key family that he is the patriarch of. Of King David, Peter now makes an obvious point to demonstrate why he brought in the words of the psalm. It is “that he is both dead and buried.”

Again, the translation is not precise. The verbs are aorist. It reads, “he both died and was buried.” There is a definite time in which these events occurred in the past. It is sure and fixed, and it is recorded for Israel to remember –

“So David rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David. <sup>11</sup>The period that David reigned over Israel *was* forty years; seven years he reigned in Hebron, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years.” 1 Kings 2:10, 11

The events happened, and time then marched on. David became a memory of the past. But a reminder of his time remained for those in Jerusalem. As Peter next says, “and his tomb is with us to this day.”

The word is *mnéma*. It signifies an identifiable sepulcher. The word comes from *mnaomai*, meaning to remember or to recollect. The resting place of David was still to be found among the place where most of the other kings of Judah were buried. It was a reminder of his time upon the earth, and that he had – in fact – gone the way of the earth.

As such, the entire point of Peter’s quoting of the psalms becomes clear –

“For You will not leave my soul in Hades,  
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” Acts 2:27

The psalms were considered both sacred and inspired by God. To say otherwise would be considered blasphemous. As this is so, no one could challenge Peter’s logic that David could not have been speaking of himself. David died, entered Hades, and remained there. And more, his body saw corruption, testified to by the tomb which remained in Jerusalem for all to see.

As this is so, then the psalm was clearly speaking of someone else. Therefore, Peter's claim in the resurrection of Jesus was a valid explanation of what occurred, and the tongues coming upon the believers were a sign and a witness that it was so. Peter will explain this in detail in the verses ahead.

Life application: When evangelizing Jews, it is good to first determine if they accept the premise that the Scriptures are inspired or not. If they accept this premise, then it is a valid approach to show them, from their own Scriptures, that the things presented there clearly point to a New Covenant, a crucified Savior, the resurrection, and so on. If they are willing to accept these things, you have a valid door through which to present them the gospel.

If they are not sure about the inspiration of Scripture, then you can attempt to convince them by reading them Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12. Most Jews have never heard these words read and they have no idea they are there. Without telling them that you are reading Isaiah, simply read them the words and then ask, "Who is this referring to?" Almost any who hears the words will say, "Jesus."

They have heard the claims, they have been told what Christians believe, and they are told that none of it is true. But after they say it is Jesus who is being referred to, you can then show them that the words come not from a "Christian" source, but from their own "Jewish" Bible. From there, you have demonstrated that Christ is referred to, seven hundred years in advance, and they have testified to it as such. From there, you can give them the simple gospel of their salvation.

In the end, it is the heart – softened by the word of God, or hardened to the word of God – that must accept the word and receive the Gift, or reject the word and be condemned. Be ready to evangelize Jew or Gentile at all times. There is only one way to be reconciled to God, and that is through the Messiah of the Jews and the Christ of the nations. It is through JESUS.

*Lord God, give us the desire to share the wonderful word of salvation to those who so desperately need to hear it. May we be willing to open our mouths and speak. Give us this desire, O God. Amen.*

**Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, Acts 2:30**

Peter began his explanation of why he cited the 16<sup>th</sup> Psalm in the previous verse. He now continues with that, saying, “Therefore.”

Peter cited the psalm. The psalm said that the Holy One of the Lord would not see corruption. But Peter explained that David’s tomb was right there in Jerusalem for all to see. He had corrupted back into the dust he was made from. As such, more words necessarily follow (Therefore) to explain what David was writing about while the Holy Spirit directed him. This is evident from the next words, “being a prophet.”

It is clear that David was guided by the Spirit of God when he did certain things in his life. A good example of it was receiving the instructions for the building of the temple –

“Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the vestibule, its houses, its treasuries, its upper chambers, its inner chambers, and the place of the mercy seat; <sup>12</sup> and the plans for all that he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD, of all the chambers all around, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries for the dedicated things; <sup>13</sup> also for the division of the priests and the Levites, for all the work of the service of the house of the LORD, and for all the articles of service in the house of the LORD. ...

“*All this,*” said David, “the LORD made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans.” 1 Chronicles 28:11-13 & 1 Chronicles 28:19

It is also understood that David’s Psalms were inspired by the Lord. As such, they were included in Scripture to testify to that fact. As David was a prophet, it means his words were to be considered from that light. Thus, in referring to One who would come who would not see corruption, Peter continues, “and knowing that God had sworn with an oath.”

David clearly understood that when God (the Lord) spoke to him, it was as an oath in and of itself. This is because God cannot lie. What He speaks forth will come to pass. At times, the Lord will confirm His words by vowing an oath, but even without this, what the Lord speaks is considered as if He has sworn. It is as if He has raised His right hand and committed Himself to the words He speaks forth. Understanding this, that which God had sworn was that “to him that of the fruit of his body.”

The “fruit of his body” can mean the direct issue of a child, such as Solomon being born to him. And indeed, such an occurrence fulfills an immediate aspect of the promise that is made, but it does not fulfill the entire promise. The fruit of the body can also refer to anyone who later issues from him as a descendant. David would be considered the fruit

of Abraham's body, even many centuries later. All humans can be considered the fruit of Adam's body. As this is a truth conveyed in Scripture, the "fruit of his body" can be referring to anyone that issues from David henceforth. And this fruit is next noted as "according to the flesh."

This clearly defines this One who is coming to be a literal, physical human being. Further, He will be one that directly descends from David, inheriting a direct human connection to him with all that this entails from a human aspect, such as DNA. This truth dispels several heresies that have arisen within the church over the years. This seed of David (see Romans 1:3 and 2 Timothy 2:8), meaning the fruit of his body, will be a literal, physical descendant of his. Of this Person, it next says, "He [God] would raise up the Christ."

This is a promise that began in Genesis 3, and which was the hope and anticipation of God's people ever since –

"And I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her Seed;  
He shall bruise your head,  
And you shall bruise His heel."

The line of the promised Messiah is carefully noted all the way throughout Scripture so that those who are in this line, and who can typologically be used to reveal redemptive truths, are carefully noted in stories which often otherwise seem to have no relevance at all.

For example, the story of Lot and his two daughters is introduced and seems like a curiosity, but it doesn't seem to have any purpose other than to show that he and his two daughters did something immoral. That has nothing to do with why the account is recorded. Rather, all three of them are ancestors of Jesus Christ. The account is to demonstrate the faith of the daughters and how it is rewarded by bringing them into His genealogy. Such is true with many other similar stories, like the account of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38.

The lengthy historical record of David is no different. God would raise up the Christ from the line of David, thus fulfilling His promises to David –

“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. <sup>15</sup> But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I removed from before you. <sup>16</sup> And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.”

-2 Samuel 7:12-16

“I have made a covenant with My chosen,  
I have sworn to My servant David:  
<sup>4</sup> ‘Your seed I will establish forever,  
And build up your throne to all generations.’” *Selah* Psalm 89:3, 4

These and other such references are given in Scripture as a confirmation that David would continue the line through which the Messiah would come. His throne would be the throne of the glory that lay ahead, as Peter explicitly states when he finishes the verse with, “to sit on his throne.” This promise was stated and confirmed to a young virgin of Israel many generations later –

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. <sup>33</sup> And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

-Luke 1:31-33

Of these words concerning the throne, Ruckman incorrectly evaluates what is going on in Scripture, saying, “Here is another place in Acts 2 where the Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox stumble. They teach that this expression, “**his throne**,” is *God’s* throne. This was done by tying this verse to verses 33-34. But in verse 33-34, Jesus Christ doesn’t sit on *any* throne. He is seated at the “right hand” of God’s throne (Heb. 1:3). “**His throne**” in this verse is a reference to the throne of “**the patriarch David**” in verse 29...”

The utterly ridiculous nature of this comment is almost beyond belief. It shows a complete lack of understanding concerning the nature of God. To him, it is as if God is sitting on a literal throne somewhere ruling the universe. God does not have parts. God is Spirit. If God had physical parts, He wouldn’t be God. The “right hand” of God signifies the position of authority. Jesus Christ sitting at the “right hand” of God does not mean

that He is sitting next to God on another throne. It means that He is seated on the throne of God with all of the authority of God, symbolized by the right hand.

Hebrews 1:3, that is cited by Ruckman, (“the right hand of the Majesty on high”) is explained in Hebrews 1:8, 9 –

“But to the Son *He says*:

‘Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever;

A scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of Your kingdom.

<sup>9</sup>You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;

Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You

With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.’”

David was promised that one of His descendants would reign on His throne forever. It is this throne that is referred to in Isaiah 9:7 –

“Of the increase of *His* government and peace

*There will be* no end,

Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,

To order it and establish it with judgment and justice

From that time forward, even forever.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”

The words of Peter do not negate that Christ will literally rule from Jerusalem during the millennium. But the throne of Christ is the throne of David. The throne does not simply speak of a physical throne where someone sits down. Instead, it is emblematic of the authority of the throne. That is why it can be said that Christ reigns from David’s throne even though the physical throne of David was destroyed eons before. It is a position of rule.

Unfortunately, in order to divide the church and put forth heretical doctrine, hyperdispensationalists destroy any meaning of the symbolism provided in Scripture, such as “right hand,” “throne,” “fruit,” “seed,” and so on.

Life application: The verse set before us is one that will dispel several heresies when properly considered. One of them is a heresy, known as Valentinianism. It teaches that Jesus was created by God in Mary’s womb. Thus, it denies he took his human nature from Mary. A modern proponent of this is Jacob Prasch. He teaches, “Adam and Yeshua were both created by Ha’Shem, by God, directly and personally.”

Jesus is not a created being. That is the error of many cults, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses. However, Jesus, in His humanity, is a *part of* the creation. There is a world of difference between the two, and it is what defines the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy.

To state that God created Jesus directly and personally as He did with Adam, is to then deny the entire body of Scripture which points to the begetting of human beings, one to another, from Adam to Christ.

God created all things, it is true, but the body of Christ is an incidental part of creation, not a direct act of creation. Rather, God prepared a body out of that creation for the incarnation. This is evidenced by Hebrews 10:5 –

“Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:  
‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,  
But a body You have prepared for Me.’” Hebrews 10:5

Scripture, given by God, carefully – even meticulously – details the preparation of the body of Christ through seventy-five direct generations of fallen human beings, as is recorded in Luke 3, and with the introduction of even more fallen souls who are found in the pages of Scripture, and who likewise enter into His genealogy.

To say that Jesus was created by God, directly and personally, and to have that mean what is being conveyed by Prash, would be exactly the same thing as saying that Charlie Garrett was created by God, directly and personally.

It is at best a category mistake, but such a category mistake results in the formulation of a heretical doctrine. The body of Christ, despite having come through these innumerable fallen souls, was *prepared* perfectly by God, not suddenly created. Jesus is the seventy-seventh name noted in Luke's genealogy, and God is the first.

The record is given, and the details are provided, to ensure that the error of assuming that Jesus was a being created directly and personally by God, would not be made. The statement that Jesus was created is incorrect. Despite being human, however, He was born without sin because He was born of Mary, but with no human father.

As such, the line of sin that is transmitted from father to child since Adam was cut. Christ is fully human, of the seed of David, and He is fully God – having been begotten of God. Let us carefully consider the word and never make the mistake that Jesus is a being

created directly and personally by God. Be it the Jehovah's Witnesses or some other heretical denomination or teacher, let us take the time to understand the nature of the God/Man who came to dwell among us and to die for our sins, redeeming us as the people of God.

*Lord God, thank You for the many blessings that are found in Christ our Lord. Thank You for what You did through Him, coming to unite with humanity in order to do what we could never do by fulfilling the law that stood against us. And in fulfilling it, Christ took all of the sin of the world upon Himself. Thank You for what You have done through Christ our Lord! Amen.*

**he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. Acts 2:31**

Peter continues now with his citing of the 16<sup>th</sup> Psalm and with his evaluation of how that is fulfilled in Christ, beginning with, "he, foreseeing this."

The words refer to David. In whatever manner, David foresaw the things he wrote about and penned them. The influence of the Spirit was upon him. In that capacity, he was able to prophesy of things to come. In this state, he "spoke concerning the resurrection."

This is certain, because his words imply both death and release from death –

The words, "For You will not leave my soul in Hades," imply death. If a soul has departed to Hades, it is because the person has died. Not being left in Hades means something else will come about. That is later followed with, "You have made known to me the ways of life." David clearly understood that if a soul had gone to Hades, and yet that same person has been made to know the ways of life, he has found the key by which to escape the state of death.

It could be reasonably argued that David was speaking in metaphor about himself, or that he was speaking poetically about some event that touched him and led him to write a psalm, but Peter – under the influence of the Spirit – corrects any such notion saying that what David wrote was specifically about God's plans concerning the resurrection "of the Christ."

David understood, from the words that he penned, that the Messiah would die and that He would rise again. The details and reason for these things may have been completely



hidden from him, but the facts set before him when he read his own words of prophecy clearly indicated to him that he had written about the Christ.

Somehow, this coming One would die, but David's words indicated without any doubt "that His soul was not left in Hades." Peter, standing before the people gathered there, confirmed that the words referred to Jesus and that He had returned from the dead. Hades could not hold Him. The remarkable thought is later more fully revealed by John –

"I *am* He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death." Revelation 1:18

Christ, because of His triumph over the law, possessed the keys of both Hades and Death. He had unlocked the prison which had bound men's souls ever since the time of Adam. And it was not a return in a ghostly state, nor into a body that was in a state of ghoulish decay. Rather, it was to a body that was untouched by the effects of sin. As Peter says, "nor did His flesh see corruption."

This is an important point. People claim to see ghosts and zombies. Samuel was brought back from his departed resting place as a disembodied spirit. But there has never been any occurrence such as that of Christ. He returned from Hades, and He returned to a body without any corruption. The victory is complete in Christ. This is the enormity of the thought being conveyed by Peter to the people standing before him whose ears heard of the marvelous workings of God in Christ.

Life application: David wrote under the influence of the Spirit concerning things that would come. According to Scripture, he even knew that what he wrote was concerning the coming Messiah. But this does not mean that he had a complete understanding of all things surrounding the events he prophesied of. Peter will later write concerning this –

"Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, <sup>11</sup> searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. <sup>12</sup> To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into." 1 Peter 1:10-12

David wrote beforehand of these things, and like the other prophets, he knew that these things pointed to “the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” This can certainly be said of the case of David’s words in the 16<sup>th</sup> Psalm. But Peter also says that such prophets “inquired and searched carefully” about such things.

David may have thought, “Why would the Christ need to die at all? What is the purpose of going to Sheol and then coming back from there?” Isaiah later went further, prophesying that Christ would be wounded for our transgressions and that he would be cut off from the land of the living. In this, he may have spent many hours pondering what these things could mean.

But in the end, they lacked all of the information. Instead, they realized that whatever was being conveyed would be formed into “the gospel.” It is this that they “preached” with their words, even if they didn’t fully understand what it was they were preaching.

The point of this is that the blood atonement of Christ is, in fact, proclaimed by the prophets, and it is confirmed right here in Chapter 2 of the book of Acts. Those who deny this do so because they have not thought through the enormity of what Christ has done. They have a myopic view of the world, dividing the work of Christ into two gospels, two bodies, and a twisted view of the united work of Christ.

The same gospel put forth in the many prophecies found in the Old Testament is summed up by Peter, and also by Paul, in the New. Paul elsewhere clearly and precisely defines this gospel that Peter is right now conveying to the people of Israel –

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. <sup>6</sup>After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup>After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. <sup>8</sup>Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

This is the gospel. It is the one gospel that pertains to both Jew and Gentile as witnessed first by Peter (Cephas), then by the other apostles, and finally by a large number of witnesses. And it is the same gospel that was later accepted by Paul and proclaimed among the nations. Any other gospel is no gospel. It is anathema.

Hold fast to the truth of God in Christ. Keep away from those who would destroy the beauty of the work of Christ, twisting it and perverting it for their own demented purposes.

*Lord God, thank You for what You have done in Christ our Lord. Thank You for the all-sufficient atonement and reconciliation that comes through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Acts 2:32**

The previous verse noted that David “spoke concerning the resurrection of Christ.” Peter now directly states this prophecy is fulfilled, saying, “This Jesus.” It is who he openly proclaimed in verse 2:22, after which he explained the events leading to his citing of the psalm –

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— <sup>23</sup> Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; <sup>24</sup> whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.” Acts 2:22-24

With his subject clearly understood to be “This Jesus,” he now repeats the fact stated in verse 2:24, saying, “God has raised up.” The repetition is to demonstrate that what he had claimed is perfectly in line with the prophecy of David. And more, for emphasis, he used the verb form of the noun used in the previous verse –

Concerning the resurrection (*anastasis*) of the Christ  
God has raised (*anistémi*) up

The mental idea conveyed to the ears of the people would be, “David spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, and God resurrected Christ, who is JESUS.” It is of this amazing event that Peter next says, “of which we are all witnesses.”

These words certainly extend beyond the thought of that stated concerning the selection of a replacement for Judas –

“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup> beginning from the baptism of John to that day

when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” Acts 1:21, 22

The apostles’ office was specifically to proclaim what they had seen, bearing witness to the events as a united group. This is noted, for example, in Acts 8:1 –

“At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

Because of the office, the apostles remained together while all the others were scattered. Understanding this, Peter’s words now that “we are all witnesses” is most likely speaking of whatever size of group of disciples were gathered and upon whom had been poured out the Holy Spirit. As there were more than twelve languages identified by Luke, it is probable that it was a gathering of all of the disciples, and Peter is referring to all of them.

Be it twelve, one hundred and twenty, or more, the matter is legally established before the people with his words. Deuteronomy 19:15 set the standard for witnesses in any testimony concerning iniquity or sin as “two or three witnesses.” That became the standard for any testimony in Israel. Jesus noted that to the Pharisees in John 8:17 because it was a clearly accepted provision among the people.

Therefore, the matter of the resurrection is clearly established through the multiple witnesses standing before the people.

Life application: The Bible is the written record of what has occurred in redemptive history. It details God’s workings in and through Christ in order to reconcile us to Himself. Is it reliable? If you are unsure, it is incumbent upon you to verify it in your own mind. Or, if you are challenged by someone as to why you believe it, can you defend your faith? Even if you cannot, if someone challenges you, the onus is on that person to make his claims for or against the word.

This was the case with Simon Greenleaf. He was a non-believer, but he was one of the greatest legal minds in history. He was a principal founder of Harvard law school. At one point, he was challenged by a student to look at the gospels from a legal standpoint.

As an intellectually honest person, he took the challenge, setting aside any presuppositions or biases. In doing so, he came to the conclusion that the gospels hold

the topmost weight of legal accuracy. His basis for this was that “Every document, apparently ancient, coming from the proper repository or custody, and bearing on its face no evident marks of forgery, the law presumes to be genuine, and devolves on the opposing party the burden of proving it to be otherwise.”

His conclusion was that the gospels bore this stamp of authenticity and were, in fact, what they claimed to be. As such, he states –

“The foundation of our belief is a basis of fact - the fact of the birth, ministry, miracles, death, resurrection by the Evangelists as having actually occurred, within their own personal knowledge it was therefore impossible that they could have persisted in affirming the truths they have narrated, had not Jesus actually rose from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact.”

Simon Greenleaf surrendered his life to Christ, knowing that no legal case could suitably challenge the Bible’s genuineness.

Be sure of your faith by being sure of what the basis for your faith is. Read this word, study this word, and cherish this word. Be ready to defend it, and also be ready to challenge those who dismiss it. Implore them to be as intellectually honest as Simon Greenleaf and to do their own evaluation of it – to the glory of God.

*Thank You Lord God that our faith, the faith we possess in Jesus Christ, is grounded in a word that is reliable, verifiable, and accurate in all that it contains and proclaims. Thank You that we have the surety of the truth of Jesus Christ and His gospel. He died for our sins, He was buried, and He rose again – according to Scripture. Thank You, O God, for the surety we possess. Amen.*

**Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.**

Acts 2:33

Peter just said that God had raised up Jesus. With that understood, He next says, “Therefore being exalted.” The word means “to lift up,” or “to raise on high.” Thus, it signifies “to elevate.” This happened to Christ who was dead. He was found worthy, and death could not hold Him.

As such, He was raised up – from the grave to the throne, and from the humiliation of the cross and death to the glory and power of the eternal King. The next words of Peter are debated over, “to the right hand of God.”

They are in the dative case. Simply stated, the Greek dative expresses a thing, or a person, indirectly affected by an action. With this being the case, there are two equally possible translations to these words –

“by the right hand of God”

“to the right hand of God”

Either is possible based on the surrounding context. The right hand signifies power, both in action (ability) and in position (authority). The previous verse just said that God raised Jesus. Therefore, it could be “by the right hand (ability) of God.” However, the next verse quotes David and will say, “Sit at my right hand (position of authority).” Nothing is lost in either translation because both possibilities are true. As such, translations such as Young’s use “at” which can convey both meanings at the same time –

“at the right hand of God having been exalted.”

As such, it can mean “at [by the power of] the right hand,” or “at [to the location of] the right hand of God.”

This may seem niggling, but the words have importance and should be considered. God’s power (His right hand) raised Jesus (Romans 10:9), and Jesus is seated at the right hand (the position of authority) of God (Romans 8:34). With this understood, Peter next says, “and having received from the Father.”

What Peter will refer to is something that had to wait for the full course of these events to occur. Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God, but He remained for a span before ascending to the Father. Only with that action completed would the disciples receive “the promise of the Holy Spirit.”

Jesus stated this explicitly in John 16 –

“But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’<sup>6</sup> But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him

to you. <sup>8</sup> And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: <sup>9</sup> of sin, because they do not believe in Me; <sup>10</sup> of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; <sup>11</sup> of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” John 16:5-11

In Christ’s return to the Father (the right hand of power and the position of authority), the Helper was promised to come. This is what Peter is now referring to. In the exaltation of Jesus to this position, they received the Spirit from the Father. But because Jesus is at the position of power and authority, it explains why Jesus went to the Father in order for this to occur –

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”  
-John 14:26

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. <sup>27</sup> And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”  
-John 15:26, 27

There is a unity within the Godhead that is clearly presented in Scripture. Thus, Jesus was able to say –

“Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.” John 14:11

In understanding the words of Jesus, and now the words of Peter as influenced by the Spirit, we see that the Spirit issues from the Father, through the Son. It is this event which Peter refers to by saying, “He poured out this which you now see and hear.”

This is a confirmation of what was prophesied by Joel, and which was cited earlier –

‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,  
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your young men shall see visions,  
Your old men shall dream dreams.

<sup>18</sup> And on My menservants and on My maidservants

I will pour out My Spirit in those days;  
And they shall prophesy.” Acts 2:17, 18

Peter is clearly and unambiguously stating that the promise of the pouring out of the Spirit prophesied in Joel has come. The church has been established, and this is the firstfruits of that event typologically anticipated in Leviticus 23 –

“You shall bring from your dwellings two wave *loaves* of two-tenths of an *ephah*. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. *They are* the firstfruits to the LORD.” Leviticus 23:17

In the words of Leviticus 23, “two loaves” were to be presented. The loaves were to be “baked with leaven.” This is one of only two times that leaven was to be presented to the Lord in the Old Covenant sacrificial system. Leaven pictures sin, and yet – because of the work of Christ – sinful people could be presented to the Lord, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. The Jews now being filled with the Spirit represent one of the loaves.

The Gentiles (coming later in Acts) represent the other loaf. The symbolism is clear. There is one New Covenant, there is one gospel, and there is one way to receive the promised Holy Spirit. That is through accepting the finished, final, and forever work of Jesus Christ.

Life application: The events of Acts 2 are descriptive in nature. They simply record what occurred. They do not prescribe anything. The reception of the Spirit by various believers in Acts will occur in various ways. Each will give insights into the early working of the Spirit in the church to confirm that Jesus is the Messiah.

Once those early events occurred, there was no longer a need for such outward displays to continue. The verifications are made, the apostles witness the events – confirming the acceptance by God on the various people – and the writings of the prescriptive epistles become the standard for how the church works henceforth.

What occurs now is historical but not normative. We are beholding the work of the Spirit in these demonstrable ways with our own spiritual eyes as we read the book of Acts. In this, we are to demonstrate faith that they occurred, and we are to be convinced that God has accepted all people into His church – Jew and Gentile – according to their belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ.



*Lord God Almighty! You possess all power in heaven and on earth. Thank You that despite this glory, You would look with favor upon us – sinners in need of a Savior – and send Jesus. Thank You for Your kind care and gentle hand upon us. Praises to You, O God. Amen.*

**“For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself:**

**‘The LORD said to my Lord,**

**“Sit at My right hand, Acts 2:34**

Peter just said that Jesus was exalted to (or by) the right hand of God. Peter is clearly implying that Jesus is God, thus it is signifying that God – through Jesus – has poured the Spirit out upon the believers. In order to substantiate what he is saying is not only possible, but is actually provable based on Scripture itself, he cites the 110<sup>th</sup> Psalm. It is a psalm cited by Jesus in all three of the synoptic gospels (Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36, and Luke 20:42). It is also cited in Hebrews 1:13.

Before citing the psalm, Peter begins with, “For David did not ascend into the heavens.” He has already noted that David had died, he was buried there in Jerusalem, and implied that his body had corrupted. The obvious meaning is that David was in Sheol (Hades) awaiting the resurrection of the dead. Therefore, what Peter will cite from the 110<sup>th</sup> Psalm, which was written by David, could not be referring to himself. Instead, it is a prophesy about the coming Messiah.

Peter confirms this line of thought by continuing with, “but he says himself.” This is referring to David. David wrote the psalm, David did not ascend into heaven, and yet, the psalm speaks of someone who has ascended into heaven. And so, David cannot be speaking of himself.

But more, David uses particular words that exclude any possibility at all that he could be referring to himself, even in metaphor or allegory. Peter now cites those words of David, beginning with, “The LORD.”

“The LORD” is the Hebrew name for God, Yehovah (Yahweh, YHVH, etc.), used over 6000 times in the Old Testament. It refers to Him and only Him. He is the I AM THAT I AM of Exodus 3, and the One that claims there is “no other god” in Isaiah 44 (and elsewhere) –

“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,  
And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:

'I am the First and I am the Last;  
Besides Me *there is no God.*'” Isaiah 44:6

Peter continues the citation, saying, “said to my Lord.” Here, “my Lord” is the Hebrew word *adoni*. It means, “my master,” or “my lord.” In this case, David is subordinating himself to the One he is referring to. This is what Jesus was conveying to those before Him –

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, <sup>42</sup> saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?”

They said to Him, “*The Son of David.*”

<sup>43</sup> He said to them, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying:

<sup>44</sup> ‘The LORD said to my Lord,

“Sit at My right hand,

Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”’?

<sup>45</sup> If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?” <sup>46</sup> And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

-Matthew 22:41-46

It was understood that David was obviously referring to the Messiah (the Christ). However, in the Bible, the father is always considered greater than the son. And yet, though the Messiah would descend from David (another precept clearly taught in Scripture), David still subordinates himself to his own Seed. “The LORD said to my Lord,” or paraphrased, “Yehovah said to my Master (the One greater than me).”

As this Son is greater than David, it implies that He was before David, even if He came after him. It is an implicit note of deity. Because of their inability to respond to Jesus’ question, they realized they were not as smart as they thought. What was presented to them was beyond their understanding.

Peter is taking what he learned from Jesus’ instructions of the Pharisees, and he is making his case that Jesus is – in fact – the incarnate Yehovah. It has been implied in the analysis of David’s words, and it continues to be supported by his next words, saying, “Sit at My right hand.”

Peter’s words earlier in the passage confirm that the Christ would die, He would be buried, and that He would resurrect. The words of this psalm confirm that He is greater than David. And more, they confirm that He not only resurrected, but ascended. To sit at

the right hand of God means that He is in heaven at the position of all power and authority.

And more, He has taken the words of Joel, cited earlier, to directly equate Jesus with Yehovah. Joel, quoting the Lord (Yehovah) said, “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (Acts 2:17). Peter said in Acts 2:33 that Jesus was the One who accomplished this.

The picture that Peter is painting is one that clearly portrays Jesus as the Christ, and that Christ is God. Any other analysis of his words would cause damage to what is being conveyed.

Life application: The Bible slowly and progressively reveals the beautiful thought that God loves the world, meaning humanity, so much that He was willing to do the incredible in order to restore us to Himself. He created man in His image. The implication is that He desired to bond with him in a unique way. But the Bible shows that this cannot be the case when sin is present.

But, without having sinned, man would not have had the knowledge of good and evil. Thus, we can see that God was willing to give man a conscience, and to use that conscience – even to his own harm – in order to make a full and mutual relationship with Him possible.

The sin still had to be dealt with though, and so, in due time, God entered into the stream of time and human existence in order to correct that part of the equation. In the coming of Jesus, He was able to do this. Now, God continues to give us the choice to accept Him or reject Him through His offer of peace. This is not forced, and so it is a mutual relationship.

To think on the enormity of what God has done in Christ leaves the mind bewildered. And yet, it is true. The message of God in Christ is one of wonder. Thank God for Jesus who has made our reconciliation with God possible. Yes, thank God for JESUS!

*Lord God, thank You for the coming of Christ our Lord who has made all things new. We wait for the day when they will be realized. May Your glorious name be praised forever and ever! Amen.*

**Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” Acts 2:35**

Peter referred to David in the previous verse, noting that he did not ascend into heaven, but he did prophesy in the 110<sup>th</sup> Psalm that Messiah would. In this, the Lord said to Him, “Sit at my right hand.” The Lord Jesus ascended to the position of all authority and power in heaven at that time. Peter finishes his quote with the next words, saying, “Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”

The Greek more precisely reads, “the footstool *for* Your feet.” The Lord Jesus will remain in His heavenly position until the course of human events comes to the right point where Christ will return again and intervene in the stream of time. The enemies of Christ are any who do not accept His offer of peace and reconciliation with God.

This has been, and it continues to be, the normal course of the world. Some have come to Christ while others have rejected Him. The gospel grew immensely at times, but it has also come under great attack in almost all places it has been preached.

In the world today, even the nations who have been most friendly to Christianity are becoming more and more hostile to it. This will increase as the world drums up reasons that Christians are the problem in society. A worldwide targeted agenda against the true faith is in motion as the world continues to devolve into moral perversion and ungodly agendas.

However, and actually, because of this, the world will devolve into being a place of death and destruction. This is clearly outlined in the pages of Revelation. Without faith in God as presented in the Bible, there can only be enmity with God and a life-course that will follow an unsound, even wicked, path. Chaos will be the inevitable result.

Those who do hold to the true faith as presented in Scripture will be harassed and martyred in enormous numbers. But this period of global wickedness will end. It is the time prophesied throughout Scripture, and it is simply defined in David’s words as when the Lord has made the enemies of Christ a footstool for His feet.

The symbolism of this is where the foot is placed upon the neck of one’s enemies, thus indicating total authority over them as they lie in helpless subjugation. It is seen, for example, in Joshua 10 –

“So it was, when they brought out those kings to Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said to the captains of the men of war who went with him, ‘Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings.’ And they drew near and put their feet on their necks. <sup>25</sup> Then Joshua said to them, ‘Do not be afraid,

nor be dismayed; be strong and of good courage, for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight.” Joshua 10:24, 25

This time of Christ reigning in heaven is alluded to by Paul in Ephesians 1 –

“and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power <sup>20</sup> which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, <sup>21</sup> far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.” Ephesians 1:19-21

It is also quite clearly expressed in 1 Corinthians 15 –

“The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death. <sup>27</sup> For ‘He has put all things under His feet.’ But when He says ‘all things are put under *Him*,’ *it is* evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. <sup>28</sup> Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.” 1 Corinthians 15:26-28

Paul’s words do not provide all of the information in the timeline, but they provide a broad brushstroke of how these things are laid out. Without going into all the detail, the anticipated timeline is:

- The church age. This ends at the rapture of the church (may that day be soon!).
- The seven final years of the Law of Moses for Israel (Daniel 9:24-27), also known as the Tribulation Period. This period ends when Israel as a nation calls out to Christ, acknowledging Him as their Messiah (Matthew 23:27-39, and etc.).
- The millennial reign of Christ.

The reason that the rapture is placed in this general timeline before the tribulation period is because that is what the Bible teaches.

Life application: One of the serious deficiencies in replacement theology (well, one of many) is that they believe the world will continue to be evangelized until a state of peace is realized. When this occurs, the marvelous time prophesied in the Old Testament will be realized. The church will have overcome the wickedness of the world and the gospel of Christ will be universally known and accepted.

That is not at all what the Bible teaches, nor does it even hint at this. The enemies of Christ will continue until the end. The world will come apart at its seams as wickedness increases. The enemies of the gospel will all but overpower the saints. But Christ will return and slay those who have come against them.

The church will have been removed before the tribulation period, and Israel will become the primary focus of world events. This is not because they will be right with God, but because God is faithful to His covenants. They will eventually come to this realization, they will call out to Him for deliverance through Christ Jesus, and Jesus will respond. The national salvation of Israel is clearly presented in Scripture, and it will come to pass.

This demonstrates the great faithfulness of the Lord to His word. As this is the case, each person who has been saved by the blood of Christ should be perfectly assured that his salvation is secure. Our unfaithfulness to the Lord will never negate His faithfulness to His covenant promises. Israel is a template of this. In His faithfulness to Israel, we can be assured of His faithfulness to us.

Thank God today for His unlimited grace and mercy toward the objects of His covenantal promises. The shed blood of Christ has secured our salvation. Yes, thank God for Jesus Christ our Lord.

*How good it is, O Lord, to wait upon You. Though times may get very terrible in the days ahead, we have a sure and blessed promise of eternal joy in Your presence. Whatever happens now is but a light and temporary affliction as we await the glory that is yet ahead. And so, O Lord, how very good it is to wait upon You. Amen.*

**“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Acts 2:36**

Peter has finished his citing of Psalm 110. Based on what he presented, it is understood that the words of David were evidently not referring to David himself, but to the coming Messiah. He is greater than David, He is sitting at the right hand of the Lord, and He is there until the Lord’s enemies have been made His footstool.

With this clearly presented and now perfectly understood, Peter says, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly.” The Greek order (which is how the verse will be evaluated) reads, “Assuredly, therefore, let know all the house of Israel.” There is a strong emphasis that the matter Peter will speak of is firmly established.

The word translated as “assuredly” is one which indicates “not to totter.” Thus, it is that which is secure. Its other two uses, Mark 14:44 and Acts 16:23, both refer to someone being securely guarded. Peter indicates that the truth of the matter is secure and sure. One might say, “This is an inescapable truth.”

As such, the next word – translated as “therefore” – is then supported by the words that follow. They are words that are to be heard, understood, and (hopefully) accepted as absolute truth. Hence Peter follows with “let know.”

It is the common Greek word *ginóskó*, signifying “to come to know,” “to recognize,” “to perceive,” and so on. Peter is indicating that the result of the surety of the matter that he has presented is intended to “let all the house of Israel” come to understand that – whether they like it or not, and whether they accept it or not – that the matter is established.

The term “house of Israel” is a way of saying “family.” Israel was the father of twelve sons. He also adopted two sons of Joseph as his own. It is this family which comprises the whole house of Israel.

Descendants from all of these tribes were gathered at the temple, they had seen the effects of the coming of the Spirit upon the apostles, and they had heard the explanation of the event. From there, they were to accept what was presented and continue to convey this message to all others in this nation – the “house of Israel.”

And what is it specifically that Israel is to hear, understand, and (hopefully) accept? Well, it is a thought that is based on what Peter had just presented right from Scripture, and which was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. It is “that God...”

What has occurred is an act of God, and thus it stands as an eternal edict of God. What God has done is set, it is fixed, it is firm, and it is fully resolved. With this being perfectly understood from Scripture, and from the fact that God is both the Creator and the One who directs His creation, it is He who determines what will come to pass.

As such, and as His words spoke forth of the coming of the Messiah, and as His Messiah had come (just as God determined), and as His Messiah had fulfilled His will (just as God stated), then it is established that He “has made this Jesus.”

It is “this Jesus” who Peter has explicitly referred to in verse 22 and verse 32 –

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— Acts 2:22

This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses -Acts 2:32

This same Jesus of Nazareth, who was attested to Israel by God, and whom God raised up from the dead, is the One that Peter is referring to. It is also He, as Peter says to Israel, “whom you crucified.”

These words would have been like sharp arrows pointing directly at the hearts of the men standing there. What had occurred was an event that was prophesied, and it was an event that was then fulfilled. But it was an event that Israel had been responsible for.

They were the people of the Lord. They were the stewards of the Scriptures. They were to be the people of the Messiah who was prophesied to come. And yet, they were the same people who did exactly what the Scriptures foretold, meaning the things they had done. They had crucified this Man – their Messiah. But Peter had said in verse 23 that this was “by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God.”

As such, there must be hope. It is the next verse that will both show their reaction to the words, and which will reveal that they will want to know if there is anything that they can do to make things right. For now, however, Peter finishes his thought concerning “this Jesus.” It is that God has made Him “both Lord and Christ.”

The word translated as “Lord” (*kurios*) signifies a master. In the Greek, it can indicate the Lord (YHVH), but it does not necessarily signify that. It can simply mean one greater than another, such as the “lord” or “master” of a house. The context decides the ultimate meaning. In this case, the context is that Jesus is the “Lord” or “Master” of Israel – its Messiah – based on the decision rendered by God. This is clearly understood from the word “Christ.”

The word Christ (Greek: Christos) comes from the word *chrió*, signifying “to anoint by rubbing or pouring *olive oil* on someone to represent the flow (empowering) of the *Holy Spirit*. Anointing (literally) involved rubbing olive oil on the head, etc., especially to present someone as *divinely-authorized* (appointed by God) to serve as prophet, priest or king” (HELPS Word Studies). As such, it means “Anointed One.” Thus, it is a direct translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah.”



God has made this Jesus both the Lord of Israel and the Messiah of Israel. This is the culminating thought of what has been presented to the ears of the people by Peter as he speaks forth his words of explanation concerning the events that have occurred before them.

Life application: There is absolute surety in the words of Scripture concerning Jesus. If the New Testament is the word of God, then there is no other possibility than that Jesus is the full, final, and forever expression of what God has done in Christ. As such, there is no other way to be reconciled to God except through Him.

There are people that believe Jews can be saved through adherence to the Law of Moses. This is the set doctrine of, surprisingly, the Roman Catholic Church. This is also the heretical teaching of John Hagee and other dual-covenant “theologians.”

There are others who say that even Jews who believe in Jesus (and some add in the Gentiles) must still adhere to the Law of Moses (in part or in whole). These are also heretics. The New Testament clearly reveals that the law is annulled, obsolete, and set aside in Christ. It is nailed to the cross.

As such, to teach such things (which is exactly what Paul refers to in the book of Galatians) is, as Paul states it, anathema. It is accursed –

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, <sup>7</sup> which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:6-9

Let us carefully heed the words of Scripture, and let us trust solely in the finished work, and thus in the merits, of Jesus Christ. It is He alone who is to receive our attention in our walk before the Lord. He alone fulfilled that which stood against us, meaning the Law of Moses.

*Lord God, thank You for having done that which we could never have done. You sent Christ to accomplish the mission, to prevail over sin and death, and to rise again in order to give us a new hope and a new direction. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.*

**Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?” Acts 2:37**

With Peter’s statement, which summed up his discourse that God had assuredly made Jesus both Lord and Christ, the response is quick and definitive. Luke records, “Now when they heard *this*.” The words are surely in reaction to everything Peter has said since verse 2:14. His discourse, influenced by the Holy Spirit, was perfectly suited to elicit what follows, which is that “they were cut to the heart.”

The word used, *katanussó*, is one not found elsewhere in Greek literature except in the Greek translation of Genesis 34:7. It is an intensified form of a word meaning “to pierce.” Thus, it is to pierce all the way down or all the way through. HELPS Word Studies then defines it as to be “emotionally *stunned*.” As it is the heart that is identified, it is as if a spear was thrust right through the heart so that there is a complete severing from the state of mind that existed only moments before. The idea can almost be felt in the use of the word from Genesis –

“And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter. Now his sons were with his livestock in the field; so Jacob held his peace until they came. <sup>6</sup> Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. <sup>7</sup> And the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard *it*; and the men were **grieved** and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter, a thing which ought not to be done.” Genesis 34:5-7

The sons of Israel had one attitude and, suddenly, their entire state of mind had completely changed. This is the idea now. Those that heard Peter, and who took his words to heart, had gone from laughing and blaming what they heard on the effects of new wine, to a state of complete shock that they were responsible for the crucifixion of their Messiah. Thus, the response is that they were deeply stunned “and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles...”

The words are not without purpose. As has already been seen, in Israel, the testimony of “two or three” witnesses is necessary to establish a matter. There are twelve standing as a united force of agreement, demonstrating that Peter’s words are fully supported, and they are validated by the precept of the Law of Moses.

With such a large number of witnesses, backing up the words of Peter, and with the greater weight and evidence of the proper use of Scripture to come to a right conclusion concerning the words of prophecy, those who have heard have every reason to believe

the discourse was true. They were all guilty of shedding innocent blood. But more, it was the innocent blood of God's Messiah who was prophesied in Scripture.

Scripture itself pointed at them and essentially called out, "You have done exactly what was prophesied in advance." As such, they called out to Peter and the others, "Men *and* brethren."

It is the same expression seen in Acts 1:16 and Acts 2:29, *andres adelphoi*, "men, brothers." In the middle of Peter's speech, after citing Joel and before citing David, Peter had called them this. He was drawing them into the bond of brotherhood that Israel was called to demonstrate. His audience had not received the Spirit, but they were still brothers according to the flesh, and Peter had indicated as such as a way of influencing their thoughts as he spoke.

The words of Paul concerning Israel reflect this bond that exists between the people –

"For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup> who are Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of *God*, and the promises; <sup>5</sup> of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God. Amen."

-Romans 9:3-5

The response of the people to Peter's words indicates that they fully accepted his words and that they were in fact brothers to be hearkened to. They had gone from accusing the apostles of being drunk to seeking their very advice in how to correct the terrible predicament that they now found themselves in. As such, they called out, "what shall we do?"

They had the guilt of bloodshed resting upon them, but it was obvious that this could be expiated. Otherwise, what would be the point of the Christ rising again? If they had killed Him and He remained in the grave, there might be no remedy, but because He lived, there must be a greater purpose that they had missed. As such, their forgiveness must be a part of the plan that was set in motion by God, even from the fall of man.

Life application: It is often said that the Jews killed Jesus and thus they are no longer God's people. But this flies in the face of the covenant-keeping nature of the Lord, and of future prophecy which clearly indicates that the guilt of Israel will be atoned for.

In Acts 2, the people are cut to the heart at hearing what they had done. Zechariah shows that someday this will be a state that permeates the entire nation. When they realize that they have borne the guilt of the blood of the Messiah for millennia, they will be cut to the heart, and they will mourn over what they have done –

“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. <sup>11</sup> In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. <sup>12</sup> And the land shall mourn, every family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; <sup>13</sup> the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; <sup>14</sup> all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves.” Zechariah 12:10-14

The words of Zechariah 12 refer to the future and they will come to pass. Israel will have a national piercing of the heart, and they will finally come to realize what they had done. For each person today, Jew or Gentile, the most important question that we can ever answer is in relation to the gospel message. “What shall I do?”

When the gospel is presented, it can either be accepted or it can be rejected. The choice is up to each individual. Choose wisely. Choose life. Choose God’s offer of forgiveness found in Christ.

*Lord God, thank You for the offer of peace that You have extended to us. Thank You for the gospel! What a blessed assurance we possess because of the forgiveness found in the shed blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38**

Acts 2:38 is a marvelous verse to practice your memorization skills. Let’s see how you do. What are the five basic rules of biblical interpretation that you have been asked to remember? They are:

Is this prescriptive (does it prescribe something)?

Is this descriptive (does it only describe something)?

What is the context?

What is the context?

What is the context?

The answers to these questions will help resolve an untold number of errors in theology that have arisen because of this single verse. The verse is based on the question asked by those gathered before Peter while listening to his discourse, which was, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

The question was asked in response to the obvious fact submitted to them that they had crucified Jesus, their Messiah. This made them enemies of Him. In the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, they had been excluded, proving this fact. Salvation had been presented to Israel, and they missed the offer. And yet, their actions are the very thing that made their salvation possible.

The answers are that the passage is prescriptive. It is prescribing something for those standing before Peter (and before the Lord as they were at a pilgrim feast in the presence of the Lord). The passage is also descriptive. It is describing what occurred and who is involved in what is occurring. The context is that this is Peter speaking to the “men of Israel.” Not a single Gentile is involved, nor will any be involved in the entire passage. As such, it is prescriptive for those standing there, but not for anyone else who is not involved in the events at that moment.

The context is also that the people standing before Peter are all a part of the body of Israel who had crucified their Messiah. The context is also that some of those of Israel (not those in the crowd being addressed, but rather the disciples) had received the Spirit while others had not. And so forth.

As these things are true, and as the events at the conversion of others – throughout the rest of Acts – are completely different, then despite this passage having a prescription tied to it, the prescription is only for this particular event. It is not a prescription for any other event. It is not normative for the church age. Rather, it is now only a descriptive account for those who receive the completed New Testament.

In other words, and stated plainly, what is said here now – and in the verses to come – was a one-time event that is not to be made into doctrine for the church age. It does not apply (it is not normative) for our doctrine today. With that hopefully understood, the account recorded by Luke proceeds, saying, “Then Peter.”

Peter has been the leader of the twelve. It is he who has spoken out all of the words since verse 2:14, and he continues with the instruction. Luke then records that he “said to them.” The word “them” is speaking of the “men of Israel.” The masculine speaks for the whole and Peter’s words will be inclusive of women who are given the same instruction.

It is the body of people who had just crucified Jesus. They had rejected Him openly. In Israel, unlike any other body of people, there is both an individual salvation and a corporate salvation. The individual salvation is evident in Scripture elsewhere, but it is proven by the coming of the Holy Spirit upon some and not upon others.

The corporate salvation is spoken of throughout all of Israel’s history, and it is confirmed by the words of Jesus and of the apostles. The nation bears collective guilt for its actions. This is based on their agreement to the covenant set forth at Mount Sinai, a covenant that is still binding on them today until they – as a nation – enter into the New Covenant in Christ’s shed blood –

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— <sup>32</sup> not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. <sup>33</sup> But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup> No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” Jeremiah 31:31-34

The words of Jeremiah are addressed to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The words are only dealing with them, even if Gentiles are also brought into this New Covenant. Other prophets, Jesus, and the apostles clearly indicate this.

This is the context – Peter, Israel, Israel’s rejection and crucifixion of Christ, some receiving the Holy Spirit and some not receiving the Holy Spirit. This is what had occurred only a short time earlier –

Pilate said to them, “What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?”  
*They* all said to him, “Let Him be crucified!”

<sup>23</sup> Then the governor said, “Why, what evil has He done?”

But they cried out all the more, saying, “Let Him be crucified!”

<sup>24</sup> When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather *that* a tumult was rising, he took water and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see *to it*.”

<sup>25</sup> And all the people answered and said, “His blood *be* on us and on our children.”

<sup>26</sup> Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered *Him* to be crucified. Matthew 27:22-26

As such, these words of Peter now are based on this event. The words apply to corporate and to individual Israel, but they do not apply to anyone else, including individual Jews, at any other time. But the precept does apply to the corporate body for all time. With this understanding, Peter states, “Repent.”

This is one of the most misunderstood and misused words in all of Christianity. The Greek word is *metanoeó*. It means “to change one’s mind or purpose,” “to think differently after,” and so on. It does not mean actually doing any work at all. It is simply a changing of the heart (the heart signifying the reasoning process of a person in the Bible).

Peter is telling the people (it is second person plural, and thus he is speaking to each person as much as to all of the people gathered before him) to change their minds. The question is, “About what?” The answer is, “About Jesus, the Messiah, and their rejection of Him.” They had to repent of this. Their mind was, “Crucify Him. He is not our King.” Their change in mind must correspond to that – “We believe! He is our Messiah!”

The word “repent” is prescriptive for Israel who had just crucified Jesus. It is not prescriptive for anyone else who has not first rejected Jesus. In other words, these two examples will help –

- John walks up to Tom and tells him about Jesus. Tom had never heard of Jesus. Tom does not need to repent of anything. He needs to simply believe the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4) and he will be sealed with the Holy Spirit, and he will be saved (Ephesians 1:13, 14).
- Tom has heard the gospel. Tom has rejected the gospel. Tom must “repent” of his former rejection (change his mind), believe the gospel, and Tom will be saved.

This is the context of Peter’s words. Israel (individually and collectively), who had just crucified their Messiah, must repent. For those who will do so, Peter then says, “and let

every one of you be baptized.” The question here is “what baptism” is being referred to. It does say in verse 2:41 that those who received his words were baptized. That is certainly speaking of water baptism.

The word “baptize” is a transliteration of the Greek word *baptizó*. It signifies to immerse. The people were to have an immersion in water. However, it is not the water baptism that saves. Christ’s finished work is what saves. Peter makes this clear in 1 Peter 3 –

“There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”

-1 Peter 3:21, 22

The Weymouth Version translates these words as “with a view to remission of your sins.” This then is in accord with both the idea of baptism of the Holy Spirit which occurs when one believes and the water baptism which is a later outward demonstration of what has occurred.

The expectation for this guilty group of people is to first change their minds. It is to then make a public acknowledgment of this change in mind by being baptized.

The main question to be resolved is, “Does this mean that these people must be water baptized in order to receive the Spirit, or does it mean that these people will receive the ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit’ based upon their faith and that the water baptism then follows as an outward display of the inward change?”

The text says later nothing of their receiving the Spirit after being water baptized in verse 2:41. What appears to be the case is that the formula of Mark 16:16 is evidenced here –

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

When one believes and is baptized, salvation is realized. However, when one does not believe, condemnation remains. Hence, baptism is conditional upon belief. In other words, it follows necessarily that these people will be baptized into the Holy Spirit when they demonstrate faith.



One might suppose that this one time in Scripture Peter is making baptism in water a requirement for salvation (which would be contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture). If such was believed, it would still not be a normative thing for the church. Water baptism is a symbolic act of washing away the sin and defilement. This is not something that is required for salvation by anyone else after this.

Hence, what Peter must be saying is that these people will be saved when they turn to the Lord, they will receive the baptism of Holy Spirit, and then they are to be water baptized as the outward sign of their new life in Christ as was directed by Jesus in Matthew 28:19.

Next, Peter says this baptism is to be “in the name of Jesus Christ.” The Greek reads “upon the name.” Where would the people now stand? Upon the name of Caesar? Or will it be upon the name of the One they had rejected?

The crucified Christ, He who was openly rejected by the people – and upon whom His blood remained (see Matthew 27:25 above) – is now to be the One who provides forgiveness and salvation to those who just repented. This is perfectly evidenced in the next words, which say, “for the remission of sins.”

The blood atonement of Christ is set forth, clearly and unambiguously, in these words. The Lord was crucified, their actions had caused it, and their repentance of that will allow for atonement for their sins. The word translated as “remission” is *aphesis*. It signifies “dismissal,” “release,” “pardon,” “complete forgiveness,” and so on.

For those who repent and who are subsequently baptized from this group of people, a change will take place which will be explained in a moment. But notice that two things are required for the people standing before Peter to receive that change – 1) repent, and 2) be baptized. The repentance must occur, but so must the baptism. There must be a complete separation from the old and an acceptance of the new for them BECAUSE they were guilty of having rejected Christ along with their nation.

This is why what occurs here is not normative for the church age. It only applies to these people, at this time, in order to establish the complete separation between the two. Some of these people may never have heard of Jesus. Some of them might have heard and sympathized with Him. But the point is that the nation bears the guilt, and it is to instruct the nation that these requirements are set forth. It is instructional for Israel, and it is a testimony to bear witness against them for all time.

Peter next says, “and you shall receive the gift.” A gift is something one cannot earn. It is grace and nothing more. And yet, Peter has said they must do something in order to receive it. The apostles had received the gift. It simply came upon them. But it did not come upon the others. This means that the reception of the gift is conditional.

If someone says, “I have ten thousand squiggalmidoos and they are free to anyone who meets these criteria,” it doesn’t mean that it is not a gift. It means that they must be in a certain category. If one of the requirements is to have blond hair, then none but those with blond hair are eligible. Those with blond hair, along with any other set requirements, will be able to receive the gift.

For those standing before Israel, the apostles had met the requirements. The others had not. For those who had not, they must first meet the categorical requirements. Once they were satisfactorily met, they would receive the gift. There are no works here. There are only set requirements. And the gift they would receive would be that “of the Holy Spirit.”

This is salvation. It is the sealing of the person for redemption. It is receiving the full, final, and forever forgiveness of sins through the shed blood of Christ. It is moving from the Mosaic Covenant (the Law of Moses) to the New Covenant in Christ’s blood. It is the covenant that speaks of the non-imputation of sin and the surety of reconciliation with God for all eternity.

The words here are prescriptive for those at the time. They are descriptive after the event. The context is Israel who crucified the Lord, and the prescriptions are necessary but are not normative.

We are not to take what is said in Acts 2:38 and change the parameters. Even if Peter is speaking of water baptism (which is probably not the case), the requirement would not apply in any other context, and it certainly does not apply to salvation today. The epistles convey to us what is required for salvation. They tell the people of the world what God expects of them in order to be in a right standing with Him.

Life application: Acts is a descriptive account of what occurred. The prescriptions within that historical record are not necessarily (and are almost never) normative for the church age.

Understand and maintain proper context within your theology and you will be in the sweet spot.

*Lord God, help us to be in the sweet spot concerning our doctrine and theology at all times. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” Acts 2:39**

Peter just instructed the men of Israel what they needed to do in order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. At first, it might seem contradictory to do something in order to receive a gift, but that was seen to be incorrect. A gift is not necessarily something everyone will get. Only those who meet the qualifications for receiving it will. In the case of those of Israel who had just crucified Christ Jesus, they had to prepare themselves in order to be eligible by repenting (changing their mind). Today, we too must be prepared, meeting the qualifications that are set forth for us as outlined in the epistles.

Understanding this, and having seen what Peter instructed the people before him, he notes to them, “For the promise.” This is certainly referring to the reception of the Spirit. It is what Peter cited in verse 2:17 –

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,  
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;”

However, and whether they understood it or not, this promise is based on the establishment of a New Covenant. Peter was fully aware of this, having sat with Christ as He proclaimed it. But those there before him will receive that instruction in due time if they accept the terms set forth to receive the gift. This New Covenant was prophesied by Jeremiah, and it is what allows the pouring forth of the Spirit –

“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” Jeremiah 31:31

In the establishment of this New Covenant, the Spirit has been poured out. It is the promise Joel referred to. As such, Peter continues, saying that it “is to you and to your children.”

Again, it follows directly with the next half of the verse that Peter cited from Joel –

“Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your young men shall see visions,  
Your old men shall dream dreams.” Joel 2:17

The people of Israel were to receive the promise, and it was one that extended beyond a single generation. It would continue from that point on, testified to by the words “and to your children.” It implies a new order of things had come to pass. From there, Peter then says, “and to all who are afar off.”

The words “afar off” mean “at a distance” or “unto a long way.” The idea of “to you and to your children” is temporal in nature. The idea of “to all who are afar off” is spatial in nature. It is an all-encompassing thought then. Whatever Peter is thinking of, and whatever the Jews standing there were thinking of, cannot be fully known. Any or all of them may be thinking only of Jews of the dispersion and not of Gentiles at all. However, the words are words of prophecy, therefore, the full scope of their meaning does not necessarily have to be understood at this time. For example, in John 11, it says –

“And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, <sup>50</sup> nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.’ <sup>51</sup> Now this he did not say on his own *authority*; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, <sup>52</sup> and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.” John 11:49-52

Caiaphas prophesied concerning the nation of Israel, but John clearly indicates that what he prophesied extended beyond the nation. Thus, by default, it extends to the Gentiles. The same is true here, whether Peter and those before him realized this.

Peter and the others had already been told that they were to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. That is clearly recorded in Matthew 28 –

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Matthew 28:18-20

The sentiment is also reflected in Jesus’ final words to those gathered with Him in Acts 1:8. However, as Acts continues on, it will be seen quite clearly that Peter did not fully understand this. There is a developmental process that is identified in Acts that shows that the apostles and disciples were learning as they went. Paul, however, will be taken from outside of this group and given a direct commission apart from their slowly

developing understanding. This way, the focus of one group, though bearing the same gospel, will be more user-friendly to one audience, while that of the other will be more acceptable and palatable to another audience.

When the two sides meet up, such as is recorded in Galatians 2, it will be seen that Peter, not Paul, must continue to develop in his theology to come to the same level of understanding concerning what is going on as that of Paul. For now, and even if Peter and those before him did not understand that the words applied to the Gentiles, it does not negate the fact that they do. Paul makes this clear in his words of Ephesians 2 where he clearly shows that the words apply to Gentiles who were once outside of the commonwealth of Israel –

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—<sup>12</sup> that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, <sup>15</sup> having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, <sup>16</sup> and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. <sup>17</sup> And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Ephesians 2:11-18

As such, and understanding that this promise applies to both Jew and to Gentile, Peter concludes with the words, “as many as the Lord our God will call.” The promise extends to whoever the Lord calls. The words of prophecy are not limited by man, but by God. It is He who determines the extent of the call. As such, and even if a prophecy is misunderstood, it is God’s prerogative that stands.

With this understood, a person could take a Calvinistic stand on the words “the Lord our God will call” and say, “See, this proves that a person must be regenerated in order to believe. Only then can he be saved.” This would assume the “call” is active (God actually reaches out to the individual and selects him for salvation), and the assumption would be incorrect.

It has already been seen that God sets forth the conditions for salvation. In the case of these Jews before Peter, it was with a particular requirement based on particular circumstances which are not to be considered normative for today. As far as the call being referred to, meaning salvation through the gospel, the call has been made by Jesus in the giving of the gospel. It has been recorded in Scripture as directed by the Holy Spirit. God has made the move, and now that call – which is passive – must be responded to.

Therefore, the words “as many as the Lord our God will call” find their extent based on that. The fact is that the church age will end at some point. Therefore, to say, “as many,” is a parameter set by God. Suppose there is an island that has never been evangelized. If it is expected to take a certain number of missionaries a certain amount of time to evangelize them all, it may be that the rapture will happen before they are all evangelized.

As such, “as many as the Lord God will call” will only apply to those who were evangelized before the rapture. This doesn’t mean that God actively chose some and actively rejected some (Calvinism). Peter says that God was not willing for any to perish, but that all should turn and be saved (2 Peter 3:9). However, because of the timing of redemptive events, it did not come about. This is the extent of Peter’s words now. It is a passive, not an active, calling from God.

Life application: One thing that can be highlighted from Peter’s words of this verse is the universal nature of the calling of God through the gospel. It is a constant problem with cults and sects that they believe certain things belong only to certain people – such as spiritual gifts, salvation, and so on – and that this is based on limitations they have assumed from Scripture or from their own imaginations.

In fact, this is generally the main indication of an incorrect doctrine. The truth of the matter, however, is that salvation is offered to any and to all who meet the requirements set forth by God. His requirement in the church age is that a person must believe the gospel. In this, the Spirit is given in full measure to the person who believes.

The Church of Christ, for example, says that a person must be baptized in order to be saved. That is not a requirement set forth in Scripture, even if Peter told the people to be baptized at a certain time (Acts 2:38). One must determine what is normative, meet the requirements for that, and he will be saved.

Anytime someone or somebody claims an exclusivity that is not clearly stated in Scripture (those who read the King James Version only, only Jehovah's Witnesses, only Mormons, only the elect (when taken out of context), must be baptized into the Church of Christ, and so on), then be sure to compare their "onlyism" with Scripture. When it is determined that it is not to be found, then run to get away from that body.

God does not show favorites. He saves everyone who comes to Him through the parameters He sets forth. Be sure to know what those parameters are (know the gospel) and meet them. When you have, you are saved. This is what God expects for salvation. From there, be sure to continue to learn what God expects from His word for those who have been saved through the gospel. Grow in doctrine, pursue holiness, and walk circumspectly in this world. Oh, and be sure to tell others the message of hope that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Lord God, thank You for the simplicity of the gospel. Thank You that it is clear, understandable, and available to any and to all who are willing to simply believe its words. You have done the work. Help us to accept this and to be saved through the precious blood of Christ. Amen.*

**And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Acts 2:40**

The recorded words of Peter's discourse are ended, but this is not all that he said to the people as is evidenced by the words, "And with many other words." What this means is that what was deemed appropriate by the Spirit to be conveyed was included in the passage, but nothing else. Everything in Scripture has a set purpose. Nothing is left out that should have been included, and nothing superfluous is added in.

What is recorded from Peter's words was sufficient to convey why the event of speaking in tongues took place, what it signified, proof that it was prophesied in advance, how it pointed to the work of Christ Jesus, how the Scriptures prophesied of the work of Jesus, what that work led to (meaning His exaltation), and what was necessary for those standing before Peter to be saved from the wrath that would most surely come upon the people for having crucified their Messiah.

The recorded account is fully sufficient to meet the purposes of being a proper witness against Israel concerning their actions and their guilt. It is also a witness that the Feast of Pentecost (Shavuoth) has found its fulfillment in the work of the Lord.

With these things sufficiently explained and their truths established, it says of the many words of Peter's that are left unrecorded that "he testified and exhorted them." The Greek words give the sense of a complete and encouraging testimony. In other words, Peter left no questions unanswered, and what he said was fully sufficient to convince, if those who heard were willing to pay heed. Included in his exhortation, Peter included a stern warning, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

In other words, the wrath of God was aroused against Israel, just as had happened so many times in their past. Each time, their Scriptures carefully recorded the surrounding events, testifying to them why the things that happened to them came about. Their standard was the Law of Moses, and when they departed from it, they were explicitly told what the resulting punishment would be. And yet, nothing is recorded in their Scriptures – meaning the Old Testament – to explain their second exile.

This means that either Israel was left without explanation, in their own writings, as to why they were exiled, or it means that Sacred Scripture *does* record the reason, but they have failed to accept that body of Scripture as divinely inspired.

In other words, the Old Testament is an incomplete account of Israel's history. Only with the New Testament do Moses' words, to which Israel is bound, now have any meaning for the modern nation. Indeed, the Old Testament tells of Israel's modern restoration, but it does not tell why they needed to be restored. Only with their rejection of Christ do the past two thousand years of their history make any sense.

This is what Peter is implying when he calls them a "perverse generation." The word translated here as "perverse" is *skolios*. It literally means "crooked." HELPS Word Studies defines it as "crooked (bent) because *dried out* (like a piece of *parched* wood); (figuratively) morally *twisted* (warped) because lacking the oil of the Holy Spirit – hence, *unacceptable* to God (His standards)."

The definition is a perfect fit for what occurred in Israel. They lacked the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by the lack of speaking in tongues at the fulfillment of the Feast of Pentecost. As such, they were unable to accept God's standard as presented to them in the Person of Jesus Christ. Their thoughts were crooked and there would be no hope for the nation. Only those who stepped away from the national mindset could be saved.

Life application: There is an interesting set of patterns that is found in Scripture, and which connects what occurred in the wilderness wanderings of Israel to the Roman exile of Israel. Israel was offered Canaan, the Land of Promise. Before they entered, men



were selected to spy out the land. When they returned, a bad report was spread throughout the camp and the people rebelled.

At that time, the Lord promised to destroy the congregation through exile in the wilderness. They would continue to fall dead during that period until all that generation was gone. Only after that would Israel then enter into Canaan. The Bible is clear, both in Numbers – and as is explained in Hebrews – that they were punished because they lacked faith –

“Therefore I was angry with that generation,  
And said, ‘They always go astray in *their* heart,  
And they have not known My ways.’  
<sup>11</sup> So I swore in My wrath,  
‘They shall not enter My rest.’” Hebrews 3:10, 11

“For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, *was it* not all who came out of Egypt, *led* by Moses? <sup>17</sup> Now with whom was He angry forty years? *Was it* not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup> And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? <sup>19</sup> So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.” Hebrews 3:16-19

The pattern is repeated in the coming of Christ. The people did not believe Him. In their unbelief, they were not given the rest that is found in Jesus Christ. For those who do believe, they have entered God’s rest (Hebrews 4:3). The entire account of Israel’s Roman exile was typologically anticipated in the wilderness wanderings. They, as a nation, were removed from God’s presence because of their unbelief.

However, the nation eventually did cross the Jordan and enter. Likewise, Israel will someday come to Christ in faith and enter into His rest. The pattern is explained in the Numbers and Deuteronomy sermons at the Superior Word website.

One of the main themes of this, however, is that Moses did not enter into the promise, but died outside of Canaan in the land of Moab. Moses represents the law. As such, a clear and unambiguous picture is made for us. By the law, no person can enter into God’s rest. They must come by faith in Christ alone.

If you are stuck in a law-observant church, meaning observing the law in part or in whole, you must remove yourself from that doctrine. What is taught by the Seventh Day Adventists, the Hebrew Roots movement, and so on is the highest form of heresy

because it denies the all-sufficient work of Jesus Christ. Be sure to never add deeds of the law into your theology in an attempt to please God. He is pleased with you based on your faith in the work of His Son.

Only after being saved are your works credited for rewards. These are not works of the law, but works as outlined in the New Testament epistles. Have faith in Christ Jesus and be pleasing to God.

*Lord God, Your word is a wonderful testimony to Your working in and through Jesus Christ. Help us to be sound in our thinking and to know in our hearts that You have done everything necessary to reconcile us to Yourself. Help us to put away our arrogance by trying to do what He has already done. Help us to find our sufficiency in His work alone. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to *them*.** Acts 2:41

Peter has given the instructions to those of Israel before him concerning what they must do in order to, as he said, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” The instructions were found in verse 2:38, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”

The reason for this is because they are a part of Israel and because they lived during the time of this “perverse generation” that had crucified the Lord. Thus, they bore the national guilt of Israel, whether they had actually participated in His crucifixion or not. Therefore, they **had** to repent (change their mind). It was a necessary part of their conversion. Further, the baptism was to show an alignment with Christ, thus rejecting the actions against Him that had taken place.

The account describes what occurred and why. It does not prescribe anything for us today because it is not normative in the process of salvation as laid out in the epistles. This is a one-time event that sets apart believers in Christ from those who would not believe.

Remembering this now, we read the continued words of Luke, “Then those who gladly received his word.” The word translated as “received,” *apodechomai*, is a forceful one used only by Luke, mostly in Acts, that signifies “to gladly receive.” In some manuscripts, such as that used for the NKJV, it is accompanied by the word *asmenós*, signifying “with

delight.” Thus, there is a heightened sense of the joy they felt as they anticipated a joyous turn of events in their lives.

Though the words are merely descriptive, they go to the heart of the gospel, and they clearly convey the doctrine of free will. Nothing is said here, or anywhere else in Scripture, that God caused them to receive the word. They heard the word preached, and they had faith that the word was true –

“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘LORD, who has believed our report?’ <sup>17</sup> So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

-Romans 10:16, 17

The word “obey” cited by Paul in Romans 10 clearly means “to believe,” as it does elsewhere in this context. These people before Peter heard the good news, and in their hearing, they had faith (they “received his word”). Of those who received this word, it next says they “were baptized.”

This is in accord with the Lord’s instructions of Matthew 28 –

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Matthew 28:18-20

The people had believed, meaning they had faith after receiving the word. In this, they were saved. And so, as an outward demonstration of the inward change, they were water baptized. Because nothing is said of them receiving the Holy Spirit, it cannot therefore be known if that came before or after the water baptism. But the equation of Mark 16:16, which was cited when Acts 2:38 was evaluated, says that the Holy Spirit is received upon belief.

As such, it can be reasonably inferred that this is the case here. From that point, these now-saved believers were obedient to the word of the Lord recorded in Matthew 28, and they were baptized. But even if during this recorded event the Spirit came upon them *after* water baptism, such would not be normative for the church age.

For example, the description of the coming of the Spirit in Acts 8 and Acts 10 will be different than it is here. What is presented in these three chapters is not to establish a

norm for the church, but to provide confirmation to Peter that these various groups had, in fact, been accepted by God. This will be seen as the accounts are evaluated.

As noted in the Acts 2:38 commentary, and supposing Peter was speaking of water baptism (something that cannot be wholly determined from the text), this could not be considered a work for these people. Rather, it would be a necessary condition to bring them into the proper category where they could be acceptable to receive the Spirit. The categorical requirements were set forth. In being water baptized, this group of people would have then met the categorical requirement.

As the timing of the coming of the Spirit upon them is not recorded, it cannot be known what Peter was referring to with one hundred percent certainty. The point, however, is that Luke is providing a historical record of what occurred. He is not setting doctrine for the church. And so, either way, this is not to be considered a normative standard. It is simply a description of what took place. With this understood, it next says, “and that day about three thousand souls were added to *them*.”

A great number indeed! They had heard the words of Peter, they had believed the message, and they were saved. They were water baptized as a way of publicly professing their new faith in Christ Jesus.

The number three thousand is an important number to see and understand. This is because it fulfills a pattern that is set forth in Scripture in which a theological point is made. In Exodus 32, we read –

Now when Moses saw that the people *were* unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to *their* shame among their enemies), <sup>26</sup> then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, “Whoever *is* on the LORD’s side—*come* to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. <sup>27</sup> And he said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.’” <sup>28</sup> So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. <sup>29</sup> Then Moses said, “Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother.” Exodus 32:25-29

At Sinai, which according to Galatians 4 symbolizes the temple in Jerusalem, the law was received, and it was written on tablets of stone. Those tablets were given to Moses but

were broken at the base of the mountain because of the people's turning from the Lord to a false God. After this, three thousand people *died* because of their sins.

In Acts 2, at the temple in Jerusalem, the word of the Lord was again given, but this time it was written on the tablets of the hearts of the people, as Paul calls the work of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3:3. In this, three thousand people were *saved* because of their faith in Christ Jesus.

The two accounts are given to show the superiority of the fulfilled law in Christ to the giving of the law by Moses. One was written on stone, and it leads to death. The other is written on the heart, and it leads to life.

It was a perverse generation who failed to believe, having time and again rejected the Lord in the wilderness, and it was a perverse generation who rejected Christ and sought to seek their own righteousness apart from Him.

The lesson we see is that for those three thousand who died at Sinai, they died *in sin* because of their deeds and their failure to believe. For the three thousand who received Jesus in Jerusalem, they died *to sin* because of faith in the deeds of Jesus. The contrast is complete.

Life application: The question for each of us is, "When the Lord comes to visit us for punishment, will it be punishment *in us* for the sins we have committed in this life, or will it have been *in Christ* for those same sins?" These are the only two options available to man.

If our sins have been judged in Christ, our names are written in the book of life, and they shall never be blotted out; we have overcome. If our sins have not been dealt with through Him, then another fate awaits

It is the most marvelous news – in Christ, God so pardons sin as to remember our sin no more! The world doesn't even want to hear about sin. But it is a reality that cannot be denied when considering the holiness of God.

Today many churches are filled with worshippers quite often because the church is geared towards the carnal man. There are promises of health, wealth, and prosperity, but there is no heart for the grace of God which frees us from sin. The sin is passed over and not dealt with. Or churches return their people to the law in an attempt to turn away the wrath of God. But God rejects this.

What God has done is to accomplish all the work that is necessary for our salvation in and through the Person of Jesus Christ. To return to the law is to reject this. It is a self-condemning act. Or, to fail to acknowledge one's sins at all insanely asserts that one doesn't really need a Savior. It too is a self-condemning act.

Sin is the problem, and Jesus is the cure. Today, if you are wanting a true and right relationship with God, come to the foot of the cross and call out your need for the Savior. After that, all else will fall into its proper place. If you have never come to do this, please make today the day.

*Lord God, there is nothing surer in my life than the fact that I need a Savior from sin. I know that You sent Christ Jesus into the world to accomplish this, and I receive the offer You have made in Him. I receive the good news! Thank You, O God, for Jesus. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Acts 2:42**

The previous verse saw three thousand souls added to the number of followers of Christ. With this great increase, Luke now records the results of their conversion, saying, "And they continued steadfastly."

He uses the same word as in Luke 1:14 to describe their conduct –

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers."

The word used, *proskartereó*, signifies a consistent display of strength that does not fail, even in times of difficulty. It is a remarkable attitude considering that they had first been among those who mocked what they saw. But when they heard the words of Peter, and when they realized the magnitude of what had occurred in the coming of their Messiah, they were wholly converted. There is no record of any of these people falling away. Rather, their lives had been completely changed by the events that occurred.

In this state, it says they continued "in the apostles' doctrine." The word is more precisely rendered "teaching." It signifies both the act and the matter rather than just the matter (as in "doctrine"). Those who had joined the faith were willing to sit and be instructed on what it meant to enter into the New Covenant. Along with continuing in

the apostles' teaching, it adds "and fellowship." Vincent's Word Studies provides the meaning –

"From κοινός, [*koinos*] common. A relation between individuals which involves a common interest and a mutual, active participation in that interest and in each other. The word answers to the Latin *communio*, from *communis*, common. Hence, sometimes rendered communion, as 1 Corinthians 10:16; 2 Corinthians 13:14. Fellowship is the most common rendering."

Indeed, the life of the early believers wasn't just in common, it was almost in commune. This will be seen in Chapter 4. There was an intimate fellowship that goes well beyond that experienced in almost all of the church today. To find any church that is even closely similar to what is described is almost unheard of. But, if such a body exists, it is more of a fringe cult than anything else.

This alone shows the descriptive nature of the book. It also shows the hypocrisy of those who pull various verses or passages out of Acts and force them upon a congregation in a prescriptive manner while completely ignoring other passages that are just as clearly stated. What is occurring in the early church, as is recorded in Acts, is a state of necessity for the body to survive, grow, and continue within the society in which it existed.

To impose the same type of life upon others in societies elsewhere would not only likely be unwise, it would most certainly be damaging to those who joined. As noted above, this is the type of environment that easily leads to complete bondage in cults. The reason is that any such teacher is not an apostle of Jesus. When such control of others' lives is obtained, the most aberrant of doctrines quickly arise. This has been seen innumerable times in the present dispensation.

As for these early believers, they had a state of instruction, community, and a reliance on one another. Along with that, they continued "in the breaking of bread."

The word used, *klasis*, is derived from a word, *klaó*, signifying "to break." It is found only here and in Luke 24:35 where Jesus broke the bread in Emmaus after His resurrection. This is the final use of the word in Scripture, but the connection to Luke 24 may be intended to signify more than just the fact that common meals were shared, but that each meal was considered a participation in the Lord's Supper.

In other words, the bread in a family would have been broken by the head of the house who would then say a prayer for blessing upon it. In the case of the breaking of bread

among the believers, it would be asking for a blessing within the body of Christ. This is, of course, speculation. However, it is reasonable to assume this. Christ had said in Luke 22:19 (and Paul repeats in 1 Corinthians 11:24) to “do this in remembrance of Me.”

Along with these points of activity, Luke adds in the words, “and in prayers.” Even the prayer life of these early believers was a united activity, and it shows the highly intimate closeness of the body as they continued on in their relationship based on the memory of the Messiah who had come to the people of Israel.

Life application: It is often said that those described in the book of Acts who had converted to the faith continued to adhere to the instruction (Torah) of Moses. This is then used to justify that believers today are also bound to Moses.

This is not only untrue, it is one of the principle teachings that Paul argues against. In fact, the book of Galatians is so clear, unambiguous, and precise in arguing against it that it is astonishing that anyone gets caught up in this heretical doctrine. Peter is even used as an example of why this is untrue, being called out openly by Paul for his heresy. In fact, because it is the basis for the book of Galatians, Paul calls it out as *anathema*, or accursed, right at the beginning of the epistle –

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, <sup>7</sup> which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:6-9

Thus, this is not a light and unimportant matter. It is the highest of offenses against the cross of Jesus Christ. The reason these early believers continued on in the culture of the Jews was because they were... Jews. To this day, Jews have a Sabbath. Jews circumcise. Jews (in part) observe their annual feast days. Jews get married under a *khupa*. These are things they do culturally, whether they believe in God or not, and whether they are believers in Jesus or not.

Even though these things are what they do culturally, they actually have nothing to do with faith in the finished work of Christ. Reinserting the Law of Moses, in part or in whole, is not to be tolerated in our lives as Christians. It is the arrogant attitude that



says, “Jesus, You did a good job, but I will improve upon it. Thanks for Your help, but I’ve got this.” You will not survive the judgment for your arrogance.

Be sure to understand the historical record of Acts, but also be sure to understand proper theology so that you do not get swept up into the judgment of God for failing to simply believe that Christ has completed what is necessary for you to be saved. The words, “It is finished,” have meaning. Believe them.

*Lord God, thank You for Jesus Christ who has fulfilled all that is necessary to bring me into a right relationship with You. Thank You that we are free from the bondage of the law and that we are brought into the perfect liberty of living by faith in the completed work of Christ. Amen.*

**Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Acts 2:43**

The previous verse noted that those who had believed and were added to the number continued resolutely in the Lord, in teaching, in fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers. With that noted, a word about those who had witnessed these things is given, saying, “Then fear came upon every soul.”

The word “fear” has various significations, such as terror, alarm, withdrawal (as in fleeing from something), etc. Here, it probably does not speak of terror, but of awe. It appears that this is referring to not only those who believed, but also those who merely saw what occurred, even if they were not added to the number of disciples.

Those who were added to the number would have been in awe at the events their eyes beheld and the enormity of what it meant that the Christ had come and fulfilled Scripture. Those who didn’t believe would still be in awe of the fact that so many people had suddenly been converted in their lives and conduct.

In all, there would be a sense of something major going on that they were being swept up in. Those inside would want to grow; those outside would want to know. And one of the major reasons for the intensity of the awe is connected to the next words, saying, “and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.”

The words here are *teras* and *sémeion*. The *teras*, or wonder, is something that is done in order to bring about a reaction from those who see it. The effect upon those who witness it is intended to bring about a change in them. A wonder is a thing that is

evident in itself. It is something that extends beyond what is normal and is thus considered miraculous. When it is done, it is to be attributed to the Lord because there is no other explanation for it to occur.

The *sémeion*, or sign, is a sign, a miracle, a token, and so on. It generally is given to authenticate, corroborate, or confirm a person or a matter. Whereas a wonder is the thing itself, the sign stands for, testifies to, or points to something else. A simple example of a sign would be the blood of the Passover applied to the doorposts of a house. It is a sign. Jesus' miracles, at times, are noted as signs. Though they may be miraculous, like the changing of water to wine, they are signs that were given to authenticate Him as the Messiah and His ministry as approved by God.

These things, having been done through the apostles, were clear demonstrations of the power and effective working of the Lord, and they were given as confirmations of their office and of the approval by the Lord concerning their ministry.

The important thing, however, is that everything done by them and through them was ascribed not to their own abilities or capabilities, but to the effectual working of the Lord through them. Thus, even though these signs and wonders confirmed their office, and their approval by the Lord, they ultimately point back to the Lord Himself, acknowledging that He and His ministry among Israel was exactly what was claimed. Jesus is the Messiah.

Life application: Despite it being as common as coins in a slot machine among churches and individuals in the church today, the claim that people are still exhibiting signs and wonders is both unnecessary and contradictory to the word itself. It is the apostles who had this power. There are no more apostles. The signs and wonders were given to testify to the church of the authority and office of the apostles who represented Jesus. The Bible now does this.

Those in the church are to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). If we are expecting signs and wonders, we are not adhering to this precept. And so on. The purpose of the Bible is to be a witness to the workings of God in Christ. As it is given by the Holy Spirit, and as we are to accept it as such after doing our personal evaluation of it, then what do we need signs and wonders for? They are completely superfluous to our walk.

This does not mean that we should not pray for, or hope for, healing. We are specifically told to do so. But we are not to expect it or claim it. That is presumptuous. Should our

prayers be answered, we should give God the glory for what has occurred. Let us be sound in our doctrine, reasonable in our walk, and understand the difference in what is merely descriptive and what is prescriptive in Scripture. In this, we will be in the sweet spot.

*Lord God, how wonderful it is to have the written testimony of those things that occurred in order to confirm Your workings in redemptive history. Now, we can read about the signs and wonders that were given to establish the faith of early believers, and we can then more readily accept that the message we have is true. Thank You for Your precious word! Amen.*

### **Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, Acts 2:44**

Acts 2:44 (along with other verses to come) is a great verse for dispelling the notion of applying the book of Acts to our current religious lives. Luke has been describing the growth and fellowship of the early church. To highlight the unity and brotherhood that existed, he continues with, “Now all who believed.”

It is referring to those who had accepted that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. They are all Jews at this point, and they have separated themselves from the larger group within the nation, identifying themselves first and foremost with Jesus. Only after that were they considered people of Israel.

This was not uncommon. Pharisees had their own sect that stood apart from the others. Sadducees did as well. The extra-biblical record refers to the Essenes. These and other groups identified as Jews, but with a separation based on various beliefs. This had become the case with followers of Christ.

As such, Luke notes that they “were together.” This implies communal living. It is something that is found in various sects even today, and it is something that is set forth as an ideal in the modern Jewish kibbutzim. Though not believers in Jesus, the people live together, work together, and are almost one large family. If one were to add in Jesus, such a community would closely reflect what is developing here in Acts. One noted aspect of the kibbutz that is stated here in Acts is that they “had all things in common.”

This will be further explained in the next verse, and then it will continue to be explained a bit later in Acts. This system will be seen to be a flawed one that will eventually break down, even to the point where these people will become dependent on the Gentiles in order to meet their needs.

As noted, the words here show the folly of selecting verses from Acts and applying them in a prescriptive manner. How common it is to argue over Acts 2:38. Churches set doctrine based on that verse, or other verses, that have nothing to do with the intended structure of the church or of rightly established doctrine within the church.

And yet, right in the same chapter, and in verses dealing with the exact same group of people, verses that clearly define what they did and how they lived are completely ignored for establishing any sort of doctrine. The chances of establishing a viable, working church based on the words stated now are pretty much zero. Those churches that would attempt to do so would almost immediately turn into an aberrant cult led by a megalomaniac. This is the natural outcome of such a system.

Rather, the words here simply describe what occurred, and they will eventually describe the failed outcome of the system. This is not because it is not a noble ideal, but because we are living in a fallen world. Such a system cannot sustain itself. It has been attempted by sects and even governments (communism) and the result is always failure. The human heart is not conditioned for such a system at this time.

This is why Paul gives instruction to the church concerning our responsibility to work and to earn one's own keep, such as –

“But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. <sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, <sup>9</sup> not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

<sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. <sup>11</sup> For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.” 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

Paul's words are prescriptive. They are commands for us during the church age, and they are to be adhered to. If you want to eat, get to work. If you want to excel in this current system, you will be diligent in your labors, save when you can, and pay your bills with money earned by your own efforts.

Life application: Remember that Acts describes what occurred at various points in the early church. It shows us how things were, but it does not speak to whether those things are right or not. Nor does it set forth doctrine for us to live by. Instead, we are to look at what Acts says as a way of understanding how the church began, was able to grow, and how it eventually became established in the world.

During this early period, things took one form or another, identifying what did work and what failed to work. Eventually, the epistles were completed. They give enough information for the church to have effectively continued for two millennia.

Let us not pick and choose verses from Acts in order to establish doctrine. Should the temptation arise to do so, then simply come back to this verse in Acts and ask yourself, “Why am I not also applying what it says here to my doctrine as well?” The answer will come forth telling you that Acts is not intended for such purposes.

*Glorious heavenly Father, thank You for Your kind hand upon us. Bless the work of our hands as we go forth to our respective places of employment. Help us to be productive, fruitful, and to work honorably for the wages we receive. May our lives be examples to others of our desire to honor You through our daily actions. Amen.*

**and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. Acts 2:45**

The previous verse noted that “all who believed were together, and had all things in common.” Along with that, it now goes on to say, “and sold their possessions and goods.” It should be noted that all of the verbs in this verse are in the imperfect tense – “they were selling,” “they were dividing,” “anyone having a need.”

The idea is that they were in a state of selling everything they had as the occasion called for it. The word translated as “possessions” signifies landed property, such as a field or the like. The word translated as “goods” signifies stuff in general. It is simply something under the authority and discretion of a person.

One can get the sense that the disciples really thought that Jesus must be coming back quickly and there would be no need to have these things. So, they gathered together into a commune and sold their things off, waiting for that day. In doing this, they “divided them among all.”

There is a definite state of generosity here that follows after precepts found in the Law of Moses, such as –

“If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, <sup>8</sup> but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.”

-Deuteronomy 15:7, 8

This doesn't mean these people were all poor that came into the fellowship, but that the principle of extending your hand to another to meet his need is one that Israel was aware of and lived by. As people sold their things, eventually someone would need to follow suit to take care of the person who had done so and found himself with nothing left. This is seen in the final words of the verse, “as anyone had need.”

Until these people joined the movement, they would have had their own property, their own employment, and their own means of tending to themselves. But it is quite apparent that they felt that these things would no longer be needed. The Lord would surely return soon, and the kingdom had arrived where there would be a new order of things.

Unfortunately, they misunderstood the meaning of the “times and the seasons” Jesus spoke of in Acts 1:7. Israel, as a nation, had rejected the Lord. As a corporate body, they would be corporately punished for this, as outlined in the law – such as in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. They would go into an extended exile and the gentiles would pick up and carry the spiritual banner that had been carried by Israel for so long.

This is all clearly seen and revealed to them as Acts closes out –

“Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” Acts 28:28

It would be a calamitous mistake indeed to use Acts in a prescriptive way by following along with this verse in the church today.

Life application: The early church, misunderstanding the timeline of events to come, must have thought that they would enter into the kingdom age quickly. As such, they followed a rather reckless path concerning future savings. But even the Proverbs warned against that –

“A good *man* leaves an inheritance to his children’s children,  
But the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.” Proverbs 13:22

Solomon’s advice did not stop being true after the resurrection of Jesus. We should save for contingencies in life, and we should even save in anticipation of blessing the next generations.

Unfortunately, the early Gentile church at Thessalonica caught the same fever as the Jews in Jerusalem. Paul told them about the coming of the Lord at the rapture in his first epistle, and they took that as an indication that they would be swooped out of there in short order. Hence, in his second epistle, it is seen that there were believers who were lolling around and not being productive. That is what brought about Paul’s words that anyone not working would also not eat.

What is similar, but is found on a spiritual level, is the constant whittling away of time by the people of the church today because of the shape the world is in. And this has been going on constantly since the 1800s. Individuals and groups have gotten so into date setting that every twenty or thirty minutes it seems that a new date for the rapture is set. When it doesn’t happen, a new and “corrected” calculation comes out, moving the timing back a couple days or a month.

This constant stream of failure is bad enough, but the true failure is that these same people spend all their time consumed in the thought of their speedy departure, and they fail to do the things that are truly necessary – like telling people the gospel and actually learning proper doctrine.

It is a sad state of affairs, and it is as common as bed bugs in a boarding house. What people need to do is to forget about the timing of the rapture (meaning the dating of it, not necessarily the sequence of events as Scripture lays out), and actually live their lives in a productive manner – spiritually, towards their family and friends, and economically as well. The Lord will come when He comes. All of the false date setting in the world will not change the time of His coming one bit. And, when it happens, the date setting won’t have mattered at all.

*Lord God, help us to be responsible with the time You have given us in our lives. Amen.*

**So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, Acts 2:46**

The previous verses spoke of the new believers having everything in common, and of the people selling their goods and possessions, and then dividing up the proceeds among one another. With that noted, and implying it is a reason the people could gather daily, the words now state, “So continuing daily.”

Because of having sold all their possessions, the believers could remain together as a group, even after the end of the pilgrim feast. Normally, people would come to the feasts, spend time in the presence of the Lord, and then return to their homes in order to return to their employment. Whether it was working in the fields, working as a potter, or doing whatever else they once did for their livelihood. In essence, the believers had come to live out an almost permanent festive celebration.

The instructions for the attendance at the pilgrim feasts are stated several times in the books of Moses. The particular instructions for the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) are noted in Deuteronomy 16 –

“You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from *the time* you begin to *put* the sickle to the grain. <sup>10</sup> Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you. <sup>11</sup> You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who *is* within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who *are* among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. <sup>12</sup> And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.” Deuteronomy 16:9-12

Because of the enormity of what occurred, and because of the marked change in the people who had come to this feast, they were so converted that they kept the spirit of the feast going, even after it had ended. This attitude was found in all the believers who continued together “with one accord.”

There was a unity of purpose and heart among the believers because of their faith in Christ. It is the same attitude that has been seen, such as in Acts 1:14, and it will be seen several more times (where the same Greek word is used) through Acts 12 when referring to the faith and unity of these early believers. For now, it is a unity of mind that was on display “in the temple.”



The disciples would gather there openly to consider the wonder of what God had done in Christ. It is probably at this time that they began to ponder the larger picture of what their history had been leading to and how it was actually all a typological anticipation of the coming of the Messiah.

The Passover celebration that they had observed year by year would have taken on a whole new meaning to them. The Day of Atonement would suddenly stand out in a whole new way. And so on. There must have been an overwhelming sense that they belonged to a people that had served a greater purpose than they ever could have previously imagined.

In this state of amazed joy, they were not only in the temple daily, but they were also “breaking bread from house to house.” The Greek reads “at home.” The words are then set in contrast to “in the temple.” When they weren’t at the temple, they were at someone’s home. Wherever the believers dwelt, other believers would come and sit over a meal, symbolized by the breaking of bread that would set the tone for the meal.

Bread would be brought forth, a blessing would be made, and then bread would be broken and passed around. This is seen in all three synoptic gospels, such as in Mark 8 –

“So He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground. And He took the seven loaves and gave thanks, broke *them* and gave *them* to His disciples to set before *them*; and they set *them* before the multitude. <sup>7</sup> They also had a few small fish; and having blessed them, He said to set them also before *them*. <sup>8</sup> So they ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets of leftover fragments.”

-Mark 8:6-8

Once the bread was brought forth, blessed, and broken, “they ate their food with gladness.”

One can think of the complete joy of knowing they had become a part of what God had been preparing since the fall of man. Step by step, He was working in the world as it led to the coming of Christ and toward the restoration of all things in Him. These early believers were sensing the glory of God in a way that probably stunned their senses from moment to moment.

Each time someone brought up a story from their Scriptures, they would probably talk about it and how it actually was leading to Jesus. As they ate their meals, they would be filled with gladness in the Spirit that their eyes had been opened to these marvelous

things. Luke next notes that this state would be combined with that of “simplicity of heart.”

Here is a word found only this once in Scripture, *aphelotés*. It means “not stony ground.” As such, it is that which is simple or plain. There is nothing complicated to the eyes or to the feet when walking, and thus the steps are unencumbered. The term “purity of heart” would give a good sense. There is nothing complicated in it, there is nothing uneven or difficult in it.

As such, there would be no concerns or worries. No matter what arose during the day, the people would acknowledge it as being within the will of the Lord. In other words, “If the Lord took everything that we know of our part of human history, and He organized it so meticulously that we can see Jesus in every detail, then He must be guiding our lives for a good purpose, even if difficult or bad things happen along the way.”

The story of Joseph would have taken on a completely new meaning in their minds. The exile to Babylon would begin to make sense, the raising up of good kings, and the failings of the bad kings would be understood more clearly. The story of Ruth and that of Esther would suddenly call out to them in a completely new way. There would be no stony ground in their hearts because they could see the world with eyes that had never seen such wonder and glory before.

Life application: There are people who have been Christians for many years, or even for all of their lives – having come to know Jesus at young ages – and yet, they have never taken the time to dive into Scripture and search out its treasures. But at some point, they decide to start listening to sermons from the Old Testament, and they start to realize that everything there is about... JESUS.

In this realization, they start to hunger for the word as they never had before. Not only do the Old Testament Scriptures start to make sense, but the New Testament starts to take on a completely new tone. This is because they see that the Bible is one united whole, all telling the same story – slow and progressively revealing what God is doing in Christ.

With this new appreciation, their faith finds a stronger footing than it ever had before, and their lives take on a new calmness that they had never experienced. “If God had everything so carefully structured in the past, certainly my life is being carefully handled as well.” With this new attitude, the trials, pains, and woes all seem less troubling. A new reliance on Christ is realized, and a surety in salvation is more fully appreciated.

If you have not pursued God's word to its fullest, start today. The sermons from the Superior Word will help you in this. Start with Genesis 1:1 and just keep on going. There is treasure in this word. Forget the TV shows! Get into the word!

*Lord God, help us to not squander our time, but to focus on You and on Your word now... while we can. Surely our lives will be more grounded if we do this. So, help us to pursue this path. Give us the heart to cherish this word all the days of our lives. Amen.*

**praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:47**

The words of this verse continue those of the previous verse. Taken together they read, "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." With this noted, we see that the early church was "praising God."

This is a general statement that was noted by Luke at the very end of his gospel –

"And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, <sup>53</sup> and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen." Luke 24:50-53

This attitude of praise concerning the crucified Lord, their Passover Lamb (Leviticus 23:14) and Atoning Sacrifice (Leviticus 23:26-32); and the risen Lord, the Firstfruits of God (Leviticus 23:9-15); continued on in an attitude of praise at the Lord who gave forth His Spirit to the people (Leviticus 24:15-22). The fulfillment of typology from Scripture was being realized before their eyes.

With each occurrence, the praises of the people must have grown greater and greater. The thought of Ecclesiastes 9 must have saturated their conduct –

"Go, eat your bread with joy,  
And drink your wine with a merry heart;  
For God has already accepted your works.  
<sup>8</sup> Let your garments always be white,  
And let your head lack no oil." Ecclesiastes 9:7, 8

The Lord had accepted them, and thus their works were now acceptable to the Lord. Along with this, it says of them, “and having favor with all the people.” This doesn’t mean the masses were being converted, nor that the leaders accepted their message as true. It is the same general sentiment found in Mark 12:37 where it says, “And the common people heard Him gladly.”

Those who heard the apostles speak would have nothing to hold against them, and – indeed – they would have been glad to listen to them and learn from them, even if they didn’t join the faith. People can go to a lecture by a person and learn from him, even if they don’t necessarily agree with him. We can watch a show on TV about something we don’t agree with, maybe evolution, and still enjoy the content.

As such, the apostles and disciples found favor with people in general. There was nothing worthy of calling for a good stoning in order to silence them. And so, they continued proclaiming their message. In this, it next says, “And the Lord added to the church daily.”

The verb is imperfect. It more rightly says, “And the Lord kept adding to the church daily.” Of those that heard from day to day, some were convinced, their hearts were touched, and they yielded to the call upon their hearts. Saying that “the Lord” did this does not in any way need to imply that the Lord actively reached into their hearts and converted them. This would be contrary to the notion of free will in man.

Rather, the apostles would have quoted directly from Scripture (as evidenced by Peter’s quoting of Scripture in Acts 2 and elsewhere, and also in the epistles). Along with that, they would explain how Christ fulfilled these things. In hearing, there would be a response. This is how salvation works. Paul states this directly in Romans 10:16, 17 –

“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘LORD, who has believed our report?’ <sup>17</sup> So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

It is the Lord who gave Scripture, it is the Lord who fulfilled Scripture, it was the Lord who appointed His ambassadors, and thus it is the Lord who adds to the church. Luke finishes the verse with the thought that those who are so added are “those who were being saved.”

The KJV tragically renders these words, “such as should be saved.” This would compel the verb to be rendered in the future. But it is a present participle. Vincent’s Word

Studies, citing Lightfoot, reveals the extent of the damage such an incorrect translation of these words means –

“Salvation is a thing of the present, as well as of the past and future. ... ‘Godliness, righteousness, is life, is salvation. And it is hardly necessary to say that the divorce of morality and religion must be fostered and encouraged by failing to note this, and so laying the whole stress either on the past or on the future - on the first call, or on the final change. It is, therefore, important that the idea of salvation as a rescue from sin, through the knowledge of God in Christ, and therefore a progressive condition, a present state, should not be obscured, and we can but regret such a translation as Acts 2:47, “The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved,” where the Greek implies a different idea’ (Lightfoot, ‘On a Fresh Revision of the New Testament’).”

The church was growing, and people were being saved. But the theology behind the words is important to understand, and it cannot be properly understood when a translation gives a faulty sense of what has occurred, is occurring, or will occur within the redemptive narrative.

Life application: There is a lot of theology that is to be found in this final verse of Acts 2. But Acts 2 is a chapter literally overflowing with information that is to be taken in the proper context and applied to our theology in the proper manner.

As for Acts 2:47, how one perceives the words here will be based on what one believes about salvation. Does man have free will? Does God actively choose some for salvation while condemning all others? Is salvation a “right now” event, or is it some concept that applies to the future in an obscure way? Paul tells us the importance of “right now” in his second letter to the Corinthians –

“We then, *as workers together with Him* also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup> For He says:

‘In an acceptable time I have heard you,  
And in the day of salvation I have helped you.’

Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.”

-2 Corinthians 6:1, 2

What is your attitude concerning sharing the gospel? If people are predestined to be saved by God, then it doesn’t really matter, does it? Can God’s will be thwarted? And so, if there are those who “should be saved,” there would be no need to worry about telling

them anything. There would be no need to send missionaries out to bring the message of Christ to the world.

Great errors in theology have arisen because of great errors in translations, in thinking, and in doctrine. Let us be aware of such errors and flee from them. Let us purpose in our hearts to get the saving message of Jesus Christ out to those around us.

*Lord God, help us to be responsible with our time in Your word. Help us to reject faulty translations when we realize they are faulty, making notes to carefully correct the doctrinal errors that are presented in verses or passages that were incorrectly presented. We can be sure that most translators really cared about what they were doing, but we can also be sure that they were just fallible people translating Your word in a fallible way. Help us to see the error and to correct it in order to be right in our walk with You. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 3

**Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. Acts 3:1**

Acts 3 opens with a great verse to demonstrate why the book of Acts is descriptive in nature and doesn't prescribe doctrine. Because that is what some will suddenly claim concerning verses that will soon come up in Acts 3. Acts 2 ended with these words –

“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:46, 47

The apostles and disciples would meet in the temple. That now continues to be seen with the words, “Now Peter and John.” These two (along with James) spent a great deal of intimate time with Jesus. While the other apostles were left behind, Jesus would take them to witness various events in His ministry, such as –

“Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. <sup>3</sup> His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. <sup>4</sup> And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah’— <sup>6</sup> because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.” Mark 9:2-6

“But when Jesus heard *it*, He answered him, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well.’ <sup>51</sup> When He came into the house, He permitted no one to go in except Peter, James, and John, and the father and mother of the girl. <sup>52</sup> Now all wept and mourned for her; but He said, “Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping.’ <sup>53</sup> And they ridiculed Him, knowing that she was dead.” Luke 8:50-53

Luke specifically notes the two preparing for Christ's final Passover meal as well –

“Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. <sup>8</sup> And He sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.’

<sup>9</sup> ‘So they said to Him, “Where do You want us to prepare?”’

<sup>10</sup> And He said to them, ‘Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. <sup>11</sup> Then you shall say to the master of the house, “The Teacher says to you, ‘Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’”’ <sup>12</sup> Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready.’

<sup>13</sup> So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover.” Luke 22:7-13

Peter and John will also be seen together in Acts 4 and Acts 8. Of these two apostles Luke next says they “went up together to the temple.” This is where the believers were said to gather daily, and so it is the standard thing they would be expected to do. However, Luke adds in specific information to be considered, saying it was “at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*.”

This would be at 3pm. It is the time of Israel’s evening sacrifice, and it is the hour that Christ died on the cross –

“Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. <sup>45</sup> Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ Having said this, He breathed His last.”

-Luke 23:44-46

This was a common time for the people to gather and pray, but it was also a time that other great events in Israel’s history are recorded to have occurred. One of these events is found in 1 Kings 18 –

“And it came to pass, at *the time of* the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, ‘LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You *are* God in Israel and I *am* Your servant, and *that* I have done all these things at Your word. <sup>37</sup> Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You *are* the LORD God, and *that* You have turned their hearts back *to You* again.’



<sup>38</sup> Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that *was* in the trench. <sup>39</sup> Now when all the people saw *it*, they fell on their faces; and they said, ‘The LORD, He *is* God! The LORD, He *is* God!’” 1 Kings 18:36-39

Prayer was customarily made at this time and also at the time of the morning sacrifice. These were the times when the incense was presented in the temple as first specified to Moses in Exodus 30 –

“Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. <sup>8</sup> And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.” Exodus 30:7, 8

That this time of incense and sacrifice was also the time of prayer is then noted in Luke 1 –

“So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, <sup>9</sup> according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. <sup>10</sup> And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.” Luke 1:8-10

It is at this specific hour that Luke records the events that will follow.

Life application: In Acts 3, there will be a miraculous healing. It is not uncommon, especially for Pentecostals and Charismatics, to claim healing over another based on the recorded healings found in Acts. The logic is that these things occurred in Acts, and they can claim the same healing power now. Thus, they are taking such verses as prescribing healing power for believers in Christ.

The pick and choose nature of such things is found, quite clearly, in the fact that none of these same people specifically go to church at the ninth hour to pray. Nor do they follow a host of other things done by the apostles as recorded in Acts 3 or elsewhere. One can see that by selectively choosing verses from Acts, pulling them out of their intended context, and applying them to Christian life today, any number of aberrant doctrines can be conjured up.

But the record of these events in Acts was never intended to prescribe anything. They simply give us a historical account of what happened during the early establishment of the church.

Remember this as You read the Bible. Ask yourself: “Who is being addressed?”, “Why are the events recorded?”, “What dispensation is being referred to?”, and so on. In maintaining a proper perspective concerning the context, you will avoid great error in your doctrine.

*Lord God, how wonderful it is to be in Your presence and to be able to pray to You anytime and anywhere we choose. In fact, Your word tells us to pray without ceasing. As this is so, we know that You are ever attentive to our prayers. Thank You for such comforting reassurance. All glory to You! Amen.*

**And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; Acts 3:2**

As seen in the previous verse, Peter and John went together, up to the temple at the hour of prayer. It was at the ninth hour that this occurred. At this particular time, Luke next records, “And a certain man.”

Based on the surrounding words, it is apparent that this man was well known and easily identifiable to those who came and went. This is first certain because of the words that he was “lame from his mother’s womb.”

The verb is a present participle. It says he “was being lame.” Rendering this verb correctly is important because someone can be lame from his mother’s womb but be fixed by a doctor. “Craig was lame from his mother’s womb, but Dr. Voitenko was able to correct that.” In this case, the lameness continued on without correction, even until the time of this account. Of this man, it says he “was carried.”

Again, the verb needs correction. It is imperfect. He was “being carried.” This means that it was a regular event, from day to day without any end to the ordeal. It wasn’t just that he was carried there one particular day, but that it was a regular and ongoing thing. Both of these thoughts are especially noted by Luke to ensure that it is understood by the reader that what occurred was not a setup by the apostles. Rather, the man was lame, he remained lame, and he was being carried from day to day.

It is this particular man, in this particular situation, “whom they laid daily.” Now, for the third time, the verb needs correction. It is again imperfect. It reads, “whom they were laying daily.” Saying, “they laid daily,” could indicate 20 years ago. “Craig used to be laid daily at this spot.” That is not the intent at all. It had happened, and it was continuing on without any end in sight – “Craig is being laid daily at this spot... poor guy! His misery goes on and on.”

It is this ongoing action that occurred “at the gate of the temple.” The man is being continuously laid, from day to day, at a place where countless multitudes would pass by. At the pilgrim feasts, the numbers would be staggering. But even on regular days, the same people who were inclined to go to the temple would see him every day.

And, because it is the ninth hour, he was there at the hour of prayer when many who would come for this specific purpose would be going by. That was seen in the citation of Luke 1:10 in the previous commentary. This man would be a notable fixture that would be unmistakably recognizable when the coming events had taken place. In the case of the gate, of which there were many, he was daily laid at the gate “which is called Beautiful.”

The word “gate” literally signifies a “door.” The gates of the temple could be shut with a door anytime it was deemed necessary, both from a customary standpoint, or out of necessity, such as during an emergency. The latter is seen later in Acts 21–

“And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.”

-Acts 21:30

It is at the door of the temple that this man was customarily laid. Of the placement of this gate (door), Albert Barnes provides suitable information –

“In regard to this gate there have been two opinions, one of which supposes that it was the gate commonly called Nicanor, which led from the court of the Gentiles to the court of the women (see Plan in notes on Matthew 21:12), and the other that it was the gate at the eastern entrance of the temple, commonly called Susan. It is not easy to determine which is intended; though from the fact that what is here recorded occurred near Solomon's porch (Acts 3:11; compare the Plan of the Temple, Matthew 21:12), it seems probable that the latter was intended. This gate was large and splendid. It was made of Corinthian brass, a most valuable metal, and made a magnificent appearance (Josephus, Jewish Wars, book 5, chapter 5, section 3).”

There at this spot, the man was laid in order “to ask alms.” This was a regular practice at the time, and it was also something that occurred elsewhere throughout the Roman empire. It is still seen today in areas of the world. People that are handicapped in one way or another are laid in public places where they will have the best opportunity to receive pity from those passing by. It was the regular daily occurrence in this man’s life. There he would be laid, and there he would anticipate something to be handed to him “from those who entered the temple.”

As they were entering the temple, it would be a time when they probably felt most inclined to be generous, especially because the Lord’s presence would be especially felt by them in this place. Everything about the verse gives us the sense that the man would have been well known, his condition would have been fully understood by many multitudes, and it was a state that had no anticipation of ever changing.

Life application: The wording in the verse certainly gives us the sense that the man’s state, and his placement at this location, was one that had been going on for a long time. As such, it is quite possible, even highly likely, that Jesus Himself had passed by this man during His ministry. He had only ascended recently, and the man was a regular at this particular spot. For all we know, Jesus may have stopped and talked to him. It is all speculation, but it is not at all improbable. And yet, He had not healed this man.

God works in His own timing and for His own purposes. If Jesus had previously healed this man, it would not have changed the hearts of those who had seen His countless other signs and wonders. But by allowing this sad state of the man to continue until after His crucifixion, it would add a great deal of credibility to the fact that His name had power, and that His ministry was being carried on by His apostles.

If you are personally struggling with something debilitating in your life, even something that has been ongoing for an extended period of time, it doesn’t mean God is uncaring. He may have you in that state to continue to bring Him glory. If you think of your pains, trials, woes, and afflictions in this light, you will be more responsible in how you respond to them. So be wise and be willing to allow the Lord to be glorified through your woes.

He has promised us so much more in the life to come. Do you believe that? If so, then allow Him to be glorified through your temporary afflictions in this one.

*Lord God, may our lives be used to bring glory to You. Yes, be glorified in us, O God. Amen.*

**who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. Acts 3:3**

The narrative continues concerning Peter and John's going to the temple at the ninth hour. As they were going through the Beautiful gate of the temple, Luke noted that a certain man was placed there to ask for alms, meaning he was a beggar. It is he "who, seeing Peter and John" is described by Luke.

The verb is aorist. Rather than "seeing," it reads "who, having seen Peter and John." The idea is that he noticed them coming, but as will be seen in the coming verse, he really didn't pay any special attention to them. Peter and John were going through the gate, and they were "about to go into the temple."

The words "about to go" are correctly rendered. Luke is writing as if they are passing by as we read. There is a beggar, sitting at his place of begging, and he noticed two people coming. As they were passing through the gate (the door) and about to enter the temple complex, it says he "asked for alms."

Now the verb is imperfect. More appropriately, it says, "he was asking for alms." If one is reading it in the proper tenses, the scene is more alive, and the mental picture is that of a movie scene. Young's Literal translation catches the sense –

"who, having seen Peter and John about to go into the temple, was begging to receive a kindness." YLT

This poor beggar, unable to tend for himself, probably worn out from the degrading life he was assigned, is doing what he did from day to day. When someone passes by, he notices them and picks up his mournful call, "Alms... alms... can you spare a kindness? Alms... alms... it's the Lord's temple. Have mercy!"

There he sat from day to day with no hopes or expectations beyond the kindness, or maybe the pitied conscience, of whoever passed by. This man was not one to plan a vacation or even a weekend walk up the Mount of Olives. His life bore little meaning except maybe to a couple of people. He was afflicted, probably thought accursed of God by many, and one who was easily ignored as the healthy people passed him by without a care in the world.

Life application: It is true that there are people standing on the side of the road with signs that are there to scam those who drive by. Many make more than people who go to a full-time job. By handing them money, you also only increase their desire to

continue begging, and you will spur others on to do the same. It is a problem. The desire may be to help people out, but our kindness may be taken advantage of.

However, this doesn't mean we should turn a cold shoulder to those in need. Often, we have the opportunity to help people that are truly in need, and we should do so. But the most important thing we can do is share the good news of Christ with them. To meet someone's physical needs, without tending to his spiritual needs, is a temporary bandage on a fully open and septic wound.

But this goes beyond us to the church or denomination we attend. Think of the Roman Catholic church for a moment. Regardless as to what you think about its theology, the world looks at it as the symbol of "Christianity." They have certain organizations set up for tending to the needy, the outcasts, and so on. And yet, there is little or no sharing of the true gospel as presented in the Bible. Instead, there is an unceasing number of scandals that come forth from it – sexual abuse, perversion, even murdering of youth which is evidenced by unmarked graveyards filled with unknown children.

Along with that, the "pope" of the catholic church places himself into countless political entanglements, works to direct world events that will ultimately benefit him and the church, and now the current pope (2021) is a champion of social justice, redistribution of wealth, ecumenicalism, religious pluralism, and even climate change.

The pope regularly champions ridiculous clauses. These things are undeniable because they happen openly from day to day. And yet, knowing this, ask yourself if you have ever – even once – heard the pope give a clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is outlined in Scripture. The answer is assuredly "No."

Where are your priorities placed? There is nothing wrong with engaging in politics if it is intended to bolster the moral state of a society. However, there is a world of difference between that and what is carried out by the Roman Catholic Church.

Now extend that to the other large denominations you know of. How many of them have social programs galore, and yet how many of them present the gospel while engaging in these social programs? Be aware of your surroundings! If you are a part of a church or denomination that is presenting a social gospel, but which is failing to simply preach the gospel, you are a part of the problem. Evaluate yourself and determine to do right before the Lord. Your day to stand before Him is coming. Be about His business now.

*Lord God, if we are not sharing the gospel in our churches and in our daily lives, we are not acting in accord with what You expect of us as Christians. Help us to correct this. To Your glory, O God. Amen.*

**And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, “Look at us.” Acts 3:4**

The lame man sitting at the gate called Beautiful had noticed Peter and John going into the temple. Upon noticing them, he asked for alms. In response to this, Luke records concerning Peter, “And fixing his eyes on him.” The Greek word, *atenizó*, gives the sense of the attention of the individual being completely fixed on what is before him. It is a word that is used fourteen times in the New Testament, and all but two are from Luke. The other two uses are by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3.

With this directed and steady stare upon the beggar, Luke adds in the words, “with John.” Peter is the one who is inspired to act, but John is there as well. As such, he is able to confirm the event as a second witness to what will take place. With this noted, the verse ends with, “Peter said, ‘Look at us.’”

Here, Luke uses the word *blepó*. It is not an uncommon word, but it gives the sense of looking attentively. The previous verse used another word when it said of the beggar, “who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple.” There, he saw, but he wasn’t attentive to what he was seeing. He just simply saw a couple of guys coming and was set to ask alms from them without really paying attention to who they were. He discerned their presence, but his attention was not fixed upon them. However, Peter now asks for full and undivided attention.

Life application: In your daily life, you will see many people and many things without really paying attention to them. This doesn’t mean you are uncaring. Rather, if we took the time to carefully observe everything we passed, we would never get anywhere.

When we drive down the road, we see trees, but we don’t see each tree. And even if we went slow enough to see each tree, we wouldn’t see each branch. But suppose we stopped and looked at each branch. We still probably wouldn’t continue by looking at every leaf or pine needle. Again, if we were attentive to every detail, we would never get anywhere.

However, there are things we should be more attentive to than others. The word of God, for example, is something we may read every day. But our level of attention to it may be more or less, depending on how careful we are with it.

As noted above, the word *atenizó* is used twice by Paul, both times in 2 Corinthians 3. The second time he uses it, he says –

“Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech— <sup>13</sup> unlike Moses, *who* put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not **look steadily** at the end of what was passing away. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament because the *veil* is taken away in Christ.” 2 Corinthians 3:12-14

Paul compares the veiling of Moses’ face to the veil which blinds the eyes of the Jews to the truth of Christ. The same words of the Old Testament are read by Jew and Gentile alike, and yet, unbelieving Jews have no sense of discernment concerning how it all points to Jesus. The same is true with us before we are shown how it anticipates Him.

Have you ever read a passage and thought, “I wonder why that is included in the Bible?” And then, shortly after, a preacher does a sermon on exactly that passage. In his sermon, he carefully explains how it anticipates Christ. It is as if a light goes on. “Yes, of course! I see it. If only I had thought it through.”

When we read the Bible, we are reading the word of God. It is a book intended to show us what He has done, is doing, and will do in redemptive history. And every bit of it is centered on Jesus. If we keep that in mind, and if we are careful to think about what we are reading, we can often see things that are right there in plain sight, but which are veiled in how they are presented.

When reading the Bible, be careful not to insert what you are looking for into what you are reading. Rather, ask the Lord, “What are You showing us?” Then think on what you have read, considering it in relation to the rest of Scripture. In this, you may find types and pictures of what God is doing in the text right before you.

Fix your gaze attentively on this precious word, contemplate what it says, and cherish what it conveys. This word is what tells us of Jesus, and Jesus is the One who reveals the unseen Father to us. Yes, cherish this sacred word and this beautiful gift that God has given to reveal Himself to us.

*Lord God, how wonderful it is to study Your word, to think on its precepts, and to consider its lessons. There are foundational truths recorded there. In it, we find a properly established moral base for our lives. And through it, we are directed to You – the Giver of all good blessings in Christ. Thank You for this precious word, O God. Amen.*



**So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Acts 3:5**

In the previous verse, Peter fixed his eyes on the beggar who had asked for alms and called out to him, “Look at us.” Now, in response to that, Luke records, “So he gave them his attention.”

The verb is imperfect and should say something like, “So he began to give them his attention.” The action began and is continuing into the present. This clearly shows that even though the beggar saw Peter and John as is recorded in verse 3:5, he didn’t really “see” them. He simply noticed that they were there and immediately did what beggars do. He asked for alms. His care was not on “who” in particular was going by, but that potential givers were going by, regardless as to who they were.

Now, with Peter calling for him to give them his attention, he began to notice them for “who” they were. This still doesn’t mean he has made a mental note of who they really were as people, but that he has gained their attention and so he was going to give them his attention. This is as common as Brits in the UK. When one stands to profit from another, more attention is given in hopes of securing the deal, or even for increasing the amount that may be offered. Luke’s use of the imperfect brings this to life. And the reason for his attention being given to the apostles is then explained with the words that he was “expecting to receive something from them.”

The verb is a present participle. He began to look at them because he was anticipating alms to be delivered to him. One can get the mental idea of what was going on in the man’s head. “I had better start directing my attention at these guys because they are about to hand me some silver.” A full gaze of attention from him may come if they handed him ten silver coins, but a quick look up and then back down may come if they handed him a small copper coin. The response of the beggar will now be fully brought forth by how the hand is filled.

Life application: When sharing the gospel, there are as many reactions to it as there are people who are willing to listen. And those who are willing to listen may only be doing so because they are too shy to tell the one sharing the message that they are not really interested. Once the message starts to be presented, the person hearing the message will give cues as to whether he is actually interested in hearing what is said or not.

What happened with this beggar is just what needs to happen with the person being given the gospel. His attention needs to be fixed. There should be no other distractions, and no more than two people should be there. And even if there are two people, only

one should do the talking. If there are more than two people, the presentation will be intimidating. If more than one is talking, the message will be confused in the mind of the hearer.

Once the hearer has his attention directed to the one who is speaking, the speaker needs to be attentive to the body cues. The eyes, the feet, the arms... each part of the person will give cues as to his state of mind. Is he fidgeting? He is nervous. Is he backing up? He is scared. Are his arms crossed in front of him? He feels exposed and maybe threatened. Are the eyes darting around? He wants the conversation to just end so he can get away.

Ten thousand little cues will tell you if you are having an impact or not. If you are not, then you need to redirect your approach so that the person will feel comfortable, not threatened, welcomed, and so on. This is what Peter and John have done, and it is how we are to do such things as well. The attention must be focused, direct, caring, and of personal value to the hearer.

You have the greatest “alms” in the world to give to this person, if you can get him to understand that he is a beggar in need of them. Sin is the problem, we are desperately in need of the kind hand of the Lord to cure it, and the gospel is the gift that we cannot do without. Be ready with this message at all times. Pass on the gift of eternal life that was secured for the person standing before you through the shed blood of Christ.

*Lord God, help us to be responsible with sharing the gospel message. None can do without it, and all who come must do so through it. So, Lord, give us wisdom in sharing this all-important message of life and hope. Amen.*

**Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” Acts 3:6**

Luke’s precisely worded account of the beggar at the gate called Beautiful has been detailed up to the point where the beggar has now given his full attention to the apostles standing before him. With that being the case, the narrative continues, saying, “Then Peter said.”

Again, it is Peter who speaks. He is the central focus of Acts during the first twelve chapters. Whatever else was going on with the other disciples, Luke’s focus is most especially on Peter, his words, and his actions. Noting John during this account provides

adequate testimony for the events that take place. The words of Peter to the beggar are, “Silver and gold I do not have.”

As apostles, and as members of the society of disciples, they would have had access to the money distributed among believers as was noted in Acts 2:45. This distribution will be noted again, such as in Acts 6:1. Having access to this does not cause any conflict with what is stated here. The two were simply going to the temple. There is no reason to assume that they always carried money with them as they went out, nor should any such thought be inferred, as if Peter was somehow not being honest. His words are clear and precise. Peter was not carrying any silver or gold that he could pass on to the man. Despite this, he did have something of value that he could provide. That is seen in the words, “but what I do have I give you.”

The apostles had been given the authority to heal. That is explicitly stated in Mark 16 –

“And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

Peter, knowing the words of Jesus, and having been a part of his ministry where those sent forth by Jesus throughout Israel had already accomplished such things (such as in Luke 10:9), was confident that he had the power and ability to continue to do what Jesus said. With this confidence, he next said to the man, “In the name.”

The words set forth the Source of the power and authority. To proclaim a name is to proclaim that person’s position and sphere of influence. To say, “I come in the name of Caesar,” is to proclaim the authority of Caesar. Peter now proclaims a name. As such, he is saying, “I proclaim under the authority of..” And the name he proclaims is that of “Jesus Christ.”

To a Jewish person, the name would mean, “Jesus the Messiah,” meaning, “Jesus the Anointed One.” Peter is proclaiming that the Person he is naming bears the authority and power of the Lord (Yehovah) because He had been anointed as such. This is noted in the prophetic writings of Isaiah, words which would have been well known to the people–

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me,  
Because the LORD has anointed Me

To preach good tidings to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to the captives,  
And the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound;  
<sup>2</sup>To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,  
And the day of vengeance of our God;  
To comfort all who mourn,  
<sup>3</sup>To console those who mourn in Zion,  
To give them beauty for ashes,  
The oil of joy for mourning,  
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;  
That they may be called trees of righteousness,  
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.” Isaiah 61:1-3

The Lord God, Yehovah Elohim, had promised to anoint One to come who would bring healing and restoration to the people. This is the anticipated Messiah whom Peter now proclaims. But to further define who he is referring to, he adds in the words “of Nazareth.”

The name Yeshua, or Jesus, was a common name in Israel at the time. However, by adding the designation of the town from which He came, it set Him apart more clearly. The term “Jesus of Nazareth,” or the affixing of the location to His name, is used time and again in the gospels to specifically refer to the Lord, such as in Matthew 21:10, 11 –

“And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, ‘Who is this?’

<sup>11</sup> So the multitudes said, ‘This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.’”

So notable is the name, that it was purposely placed upon the cross when He was crucified –

“And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called *the Place* of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, <sup>18</sup> where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center. <sup>19</sup> Now Pilate wrote a title and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was:  
JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.” John 19:17-19

This would have been known by almost everyone at this point, and the title is purposefully used by Peter to ensure that there was no doubt about the exact Person he

was referring to. So important is this designation, that Peter will again use it when speaking to Gentiles about Him in Acts 10 –

“Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. <sup>35</sup> But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. <sup>36</sup> The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all— <sup>37</sup> that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. <sup>39</sup> And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.’” Acts 10:34-39

With the Name proclaimed, and thus having credited the One to whom the power issues from, Peter next says, “rise up and walk.” It is the same general command given by Jesus at times, such as in Matthew 9:6 and John 5:8. There was someone lame, and Jesus – by the power He possessed – healed the lame. Peter now proclaims that same power by proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Life application: Verses such as these in Acts have led Charismatics and Pentecostals to assume that they have the same power to heal as the apostles did. They claim healing over people and often perform false healings. Or they will claim healing power over someone, but the healing never comes to pass, thus destroying the faith and confidence of those they prayed over.

The first problem with this theology is that they are not apostles of Jesus. The office of apostle no longer exists because Jesus does not personally commission anyone anymore, a necessity for the office. But more, even the apostles – who healed at times – did not have the power to heal at all times. Paul had the power to heal in Acts 14:8-10 and elsewhere. However, he certainly could not heal his own affliction as is recorded in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. It is said that he left Trophimus sick in Miletus in 2 Timothy 4:20. He also notes his inability to cure Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25-27. And Timothy, who was with Paul quite often, had an affliction of the stomach, along with other infirmities, that Paul never healed. That is noted in 1 Timothy 5:23.

Such examples are provided, right in the prescriptive epistles, to show us that the power and authority used by the apostles was something that was not to be abused, and it only came at certain times and for reasons set forth by the Lord. When the healing power

was there, it may have been evident to them just as the words of prophecy were evident to the prophet. But prophets did not prophesy at all times. They only did so when the Lord spoke through them. Likewise, it is clear that the apostles did not heal at all times, but only when they were somehow prompted to do so by the Lord.

In whatever manner these things occurred, they are not normative for the church age. If we desire the healing of another, we are to pray for it. If the Lord heals, it is His prerogative alone. It is presumptuous and sinful to claim something over another when we have no right to do so. Let us not be found to act in this manner.

*Lord God, Your word asks us to pray for the healing of others, but there is no guarantee that it will come to pass. Help us to understand this, and to leave such matters in Your capable hands as we pour out our desires to You. In the end, we know that You will do what is just, good, and right. All things will come out as You determine, and so help us to be satisfied with this knowledge. Amen.*

**And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.** Acts 3:7

Peter's last words to the beggar on the street were, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." With that stated, it now says, "And he took him." Peter, knowing that the man was crippled and did not have any experience at what it meant to rise in his own strength, was prepared to help him in his new walk of life. The word Luke uses, *piazó*, signifies "to squeeze." In other words, Peter firmly seized his hand, demonstrating complete confidence in what was to occur.

In reaching out his hand, it was a sign to the man that he honestly believed the healing had been realized. It was also an encouragement to him to be confident as well. As a note of authenticity to what he is writing, Luke specifically next says, "by the right hand."

In noting this, Luke is showing that he was fully aware of every detail and had carefully and meticulously investigated the account. As it was only Peter and John with the beggar, and yet by noting the right hand, it is seen that he went beyond the normal description of someone who would have been standing right there.

Most people would say, "Well, I grabbed him by the hand and raised him up." Upon hearing that, the hearer would say, "Well, isn't that amazing!" It appears that Luke, however, went a step further by specifically asking which hand he grabbed. Everything about the account is perfectly detailed to be that of an investigator who is determining

the absolute accuracy and truth of what is being conveyed. Only after noting which hand, it then says, “and lifted *him* up.”

The man was probably so incredulous at what occurred that without Peter’s help, he might have spent a few minutes testing the waters before taking the plunge. But with Peter’s assistance, he was impelled to rise immediately and go all-in with utilizing his body in this new condition.

The words of the account so far are not unlike the manner in which Jesus treated others that He had healed. The account of the boy possessed by a demon in Mark 9 is given. After Jesus cast it out, he was so still that those around him thought he was dead. But Mark then records, “But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose” (Mark 9:27).

The care of the Healer for His patient is beautifully seen in Christ’s care of the boy. Peter learned from that and followed in like manner when he was given the power to perform his own healings. With this noted, Luke next records, “and immediately.”

There wasn’t any delay in what occurred. Peter spoke the words, reached out to take the man up, and with the instant power of the workings of God, there was a change in “his feet and ankle bones.”

In these words, the particular language of a physician is clearly evidenced. Luke’s knowledge of the human body led him to describe exactly what occurred. So precise are his words that it is probable he personally interviewed the man who was healed. Peter and John probably would have said, “Well, he couldn’t walk, and then he could.” However, Luke not only describes what was wrong, but he uses specific terminology to report the change. It is something the beggar would probably have had to point at and say, “Well, it was this and this... these things that were healed.”

Both words are found only here in Scripture. The first is *basis*. It signifies “a pace.” It is the base step and thus, by implication the foot. It is the source of our modern word of the same spelling which came to us via Latin from the Greek, and it bears much the same sense. Vincent’s Word Studies describes its meaning –

“A peculiar, technical word, used by Luke only, and described by Galen as the part of the foot lying beneath the leg, upon which the leg directly rests, as distinguished from the τάρσος [tarsos], the flat of the foot between the toes and heel, and πεδίον [pedion], the part next the toes.”

The next word is *sphudron*. That is believed to be basically the same as the word *sphaira*, meaning a ball or sphere. As such, it signifies the ankle bone that is globular in nature. Luke's medical knowledge of the event is carefully detailing the exact changes that took place in this man, crippled even from his mother's womb.

With the description of the body parts complete, Luke then carefully notes that they "received strength."

The Greek word is found only three times in Acts. The first two are in this account (3:7 & 3:16). The last is used when referring to the strengthening of the church in Acts 16:5. Paul uses the kindred noun in Colossians 2:5 when referring to the steadfastness of the Colossians' faith in Christ. When used in medical language, it is especially applied to the bones.

Luke's careful and thorough record of the events that took place gives us every reason to believe that the account took place, exactly as described.

Life application: When a person is given the gospel and he receives it, a complete change in that person occurs at that very moment. There is a new walk of life that is realized. But that person may not even notice the change has taken place. Yes, there was belief in what Christ did and the sealing of the Spirit. And yet, for each person who accepts the gospel, there will be a personal and individual reaction to it.

Because of this, it is incumbent on those who share the gospel to be willing to take them by the hand and help them stand on their new spiritual legs. At the same time, some people will simply spring up automatically and get going. But even this type may need assistance that he may not realize. Such a person can run ahead without knowledge and have a head-on crash in his theology.

If we are willing to share the gospel, we should also be willing to help those who receive it understand what to do with it. "Live for the Lord, read the word, grow in Christ, and walk as the Bible instructs us to."

The more effort we put into those who receive the word, the better grounded they will be as they head into a church that is actually quite dysfunctional, filled with bad doctrine (or even heresy), and that is known to chew up and spit out those who are truly on fire for the new life they have come to know.



But there is another truth to convey. How grounded are we in our own walk? If we lead someone to Christ, and yet are not doing our own part to increase our spiritual maturity, we will be like a fish out of water trying to teach another fish out of water how to swim. Therefore, each of us needs to not only share the gospel, but to also be in the word, growing in it daily. May it be so, to the glory of God who first saved us so that we can then go out and tell others.

*Lord God, help us to be responsible witnesses of Your wonderful gospel message and then help us to be reliable and responsible helpers to those who receive it. May it be so to Your glory. Amen.*

**So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. Acts 3:8**

Peter took the beggar by the right hand and lifted him up. As he did this, the feet and bones were healed, and they received strength. With this done, Luke's words follow with the delight of the moment, saying, "So he, leaping up."

Luke is referring to the beggar using a word found only here in Scripture *exallomai*. It is a compound verb signifying "out" and "springing up." Hence, "leaping up" or "leaping forth" gives the sense. Vincent's Word Studies notes of this word –

"Used in medical language of the sudden starting of a bone from the socket, of starting from sleep, or of the sudden bound of the pulse."

Again, Luke's knowledge of medical terminology defines the action in a technical sense. Peter lifted him up and then he simply leaped forth in incredulity, joy, or maybe sheer amazement. A form of the word is found in Isaiah 35, and it beautifully resembles what occurred at this moment –

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.  
<sup>6</sup>Then the lame **shall leap** like a deer,  
And the tongue of the dumb sing." Isaiah 35:5, 6

From there, it says he "stood and walked." The first verb is aorist while the second is imperfect. The man stood and then he began walking. One gets the heightened sense of a person who has never done so in his life. He probably stood looking down at his

strengthened legs – no longer twisted, wasted away, and useless – and then he... took a step, and then another, and then another.

His heart is racing, his blood is pulsing, his mind is considering the moment and everything that it signifies. Ten thousand thoughts of the past, of the present moment, and what the future held filled his mind. He continued walking... “and entered the temple.”

The man had been brought by others to the Beautiful gate, set down, and stayed in the same spot all day, day after day. Now, instead of remaining outside of the temple of the Lord, he could – under his own power – enter into the complex. The moment would have had a sense of absolute amazement attached to it.

As he walked over mosaics, walked past huge cut blocks, and passed by intricately carved columns and pillars, they would have looked new and vibrant to him. Everything would be seen from a new perspective because he would have to watch for obstacles as they came near. A lame man would have no need of such observances. Luke records next that the now-healed beggar wasn't alone, but he entered the temple “with them— walking, leaping, and praising God.”

The Greek includes “and” with each verb. He was “walking, and leaping, and praising.” Each is set off as an individual occurrence which together formed the first moment of a man restored to normalcy after over forty years of being lame, even from birth. In this state, Peter and John would have shared in the delight of the man's exuberance.

The entire scene is alive with excitement, and the most poignant part of it all is that he was there in the temple “praising God.” As will be noted, the leaders will acknowledge that this could only have been a miracle, meaning an act of God –

“But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, <sup>16</sup>saying, “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them *is* evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it*.” Acts 4:15, 16

The man himself, more than any other, knew this to be the case. What occurred was personal and life changing. As such, he stood, walked, and leaped before God, praising Him for what had occurred.

Life application: What is it that we praise God for? Generally, we praise God when good things happen to us or to those we love. When things don't go so well in life, we often exclude praises. However, we may start praying more. Why is it that we praise God when things are going well, and pray to Him when they aren't?

Rather, we should do both at all times. Even in our affliction, we can find a reason to bless His name and praise Him. Job, a man "blameless and upright" was noted as such because this was his nature. In the time of his greatest affliction, he said –

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,  
And naked shall I return there.  
The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;  
Blessed be the name of the LORD.” Job 1:21

Let us endeavor to not use God when we need Him and then ignore Him when we don't. Instead, may our life attitude be to praise Him through our storms, and to pray to Him, even when we don't have any pressing needs in our lives. He is worthy of our attention and our devotion at all times. And so may we give this to Him always.

*Lord God, great are You and You are greatly to be praised! Amen.*

**And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Acts 3:9**

With the complete healing of the crippled beggar, it then said that he went into the temple with Peter and John "walking, leaping, and praising God." With that stated, Luke next records, "And all the people."

This was at the hour of prayer in the afternoon (Acts 3:1). The number of people would not be small. In Luke 1, when Zecharias went into the temple to burn incense, it says, "And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense." Nothing is said of it being a particular day, like a Sabbath or a feast day. If it was, this would have been carefully recorded by Luke. As such, it can be inferred that a "great multitude" would be the regular attendance at this event. Of this multitude of people, it next says they "saw him."

This is in the temple, at the hour of prayer and when the incense would be burned to the Lord. One might think this event with the beggar would be a great distraction from the Lord and something that would be inappropriate. Rather, it is honoring of the Lord. It is God who healed the man. It was done in the name of Jesus Christ. Everything about

the ritual burning of the incense, and the offering of the lamb that would also have occurred at this time, points to the work of Christ Jesus. Every detail anticipates what He came to do.

Rather than being inappropriate, it is a beautiful expression of what God intended for the world to see. There is a man healed of his affliction, just as the prophets prophesied would someday occur. It was seen by the multitude, and the man was “walking and praising God.” He was giving Him glory for what had occurred in the name of His Christ. Nothing could be more honoring of the Lord than this wonderful display of renewal of the beggar through Him.

The lame had been cured. Nothing could be hidden in this. He was over forty, he had been crippled since birth, and he was suddenly and miraculously healed. This was a true and absolutely verifiable miracle that had occurred in the presence of the people. God was to be glorified for what He had done, and the name of Jesus would be exalted for the power it carried.

Life application: Throughout the years, there have been innumerable scam artists who would claim healing in Jesus’ name. One of the common tricks is to wheel a person into a church or arena who supposedly had one leg shorter than another. The charlatan would then come forward and miraculously make the shorter leg grow, right before the people.

Even a teenager can figure this out. By pulling the hip up, it causes one leg to appear shorter than the other. By relaxing the muscles, it appears as if the leg is actually growing. And walah! The money starts filling the coffers. There are innumerable scams like this. There are also well-known evangelists who have claimed to be capable of miraculous healings. Peter Popoff, for example, would make claims concerning erratic conditions in people who had come for healing.

However, it was discovered that while people were standing in line to enter, conversations would be brought up by his staff. The information they gleaned would then be given to people in the control room who would then transmit that to Popoff through a device in his ear. He was eventually exposed as a fraud when recordings of what he was doing were made.

A person who was associated with Popoff’s scam tried to justify what occurred, saying, “When you’re praying for the sick, it’s through the Holy Spirit, and there’s some times that it works freely, and then there are other times when the Spirit’s just not there.” He

also added that “on the days it didn’t show, you still had to pay for the auditorium, so you needed to help the Holy Spirit along.”

Though bankrupted through this, Popoff continued his ministry and eventually rebuilt it, still scamming people who are gullible enough to continue to give to a person who knowingly did the disgraceful things he did.

The Holy Spirit does not need help. God is fully capable of accomplishing everything needed to fully and completely express Himself in the manner He deems is appropriate. And He has provided us a written testimony of His great deeds in the pages of Scripture. We do not need to have outward displays of miraculous healings any longer. We have exactly what God deems is sufficient for us to live by faith.

Let us not get caught up in that which is false. We can pray for healing of those around us, and we can also pray for the grace to endure through our trials if healing is not realized. In the end, we must accept that God has done, and will do, what He determines. He does not need our help. Instead, He simply asks us for our faith.

*Lord God, help us to be people of faith. We have Your written word. What more do we need to testify to the miraculous deeds that You have done, and to the marvels which You continue to do – such as preserving Israel, and changing lives – in the world? Thank You for all the evidence that You have provided us. They are sufficient to establish our faith. Amen.*

**Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. Acts 3:10**

When the people saw the man joyously walking and praising God, Luke says, “Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms.” The word translated as “knew” signifies to recognize. Jesus used the word when saying, “you will know them by their fruits.” One sees, he recognizes, and an understanding is realized. So it is with this man.

But the verb is in the imperfect tense – “they “were knowing,” or “they were recognizing.” The use of the imperfect brings life to what is said. It wasn’t as if everyone knew, but that one realized it and then another and then another. Thus, the bewildering nature of the event becomes evident.

At times, it is hard to place someone that we see, “I am sure I know that guy.” But because of the context of where he is regularly seen has changed, his identity is just out of grasp. Once the mind remembers the context, then the understanding is realized – “Oh! That is John who works at the grocery store!”

This is how it was for the people. They each saw the man, the identity seemed familiar, but the context was missing. But all of a sudden, one after another began to realize that he.... this man! was the beggar “at the Beautiful Gate of the temple.”

One can sense the knowledge suddenly being realized and the overwhelming sense of bewilderment flooding over the crowd. “How can this be?” Luke masterfully brings us into the narrative to feel the experience. One can sense what may have been said. “That guy has been sitting at the temple gate for years and years. His legs were twisted and emaciated. In fact, I just saw him there as I passed fifteen minutes ago... and now this? What does this mean?” As such, Luke records, “and they were filled with wonder and amazement.”

The word translated as “wonder” is unique to Luke’s writings, being seen now for the last of three times. It signifies astonishment that is allied with terror or awe. One could think of being stunned or dumbfounded. What is witnessed is just beyond the ability of the mind to grasp. The word translated as “amazement,” *ekstasis*, is obviously the root to our modern word “ecstasy.” Its direct meaning is “to completely remove.” As such, it means to confuse the mind so that it reaches out beyond ordinary perception. In this case, the minds of the people verge on a sense of overwhelming delight that something incomprehensible has taken place “at what had happened to him.”

The miracle that occurred wasn’t something that was far off. It was something in their midst. And it wasn’t something that occurred to someone they didn’t know, as if it could be the word of a charlatan. Rather, it happened to someone almost every single person would have seen at one time or another. Nothing could be more striking to imagine. The effects of seeing the man could not have made a greater impact upon those who now stood beholding him.

Life application: There are many people with great afflictions of the body around us. We know of blind people, crippled people, and people with various chronic diseases or maladies. This is a part of the human condition. We will pray for those we know, and there are times where it is heard that a true miracle occurs, and they are healed. But for many, the malady continues throughout the person’s entire life, and then he or she dies.

If such people are believers in Christ, it will only make what is coming next for them even more wonderful. They spent a lifetime in pain, being incapacitated, being shunned, or whatever. But when they are called forth from the grave at the rapture, there will be an instantaneous change. The body they will possess will be incorruptible, and it will be perfectly suited for an eternity in the presence of God.

For those who were pretty healthy when they died (or are raptured), the change will be no less incredible. Our bodies, even when in pretty great shape, have times of sickness, overwhelming tiredness, sadness, and so on. Such things will be forever behind us when we are off to meet the Lord. Hold fast to this truth. The life we live now is temporary and it is passing away. Fix your eyes on what lies ahead and be ready for glory that you cannot even imagine when Christ comes for His people. The day will be like none other!

*Lord God, we are hoping Jesus will be back soon to deliver us from this body of corruption into our eternal home. Amen.*

**Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed.** Acts 3:11

Luke continues to describe the excitement of the healing of the beggar which took place, saying, "Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John." The idea here is not of needing support from them. He has already been shown to walk around and even leap. Luke is saying that he, now being swarmed by the multitude, does not want to get separated from Peter and John. And so, in order for that to not occur, he literally seizes them and clings onto them. The verb is a present participle. He "is clinging" to them.

The need for this becomes more evident with the next words, which read, "all the people ran together to them." There is an excited fever of awe and wonder, and as one draws nearer so does another and another. Everyone wanted to be able to participate in the event surrounding them.

The same thing was seen when Jesus was active in His ministry. In Luke 8, for example, it says twice that the multitudes thronged Him. He was so pressed in by them that when someone purposefully touched him for healing, He was unaware of who it was. Here, likewise, the crowds are thronging these three. The beggar did not want to be separated from them, and so he steadfastly clung to them. This was "in the porch which is called Solomon's."

The word translated as “porch” is *stoa*. It refers to a portico. It is a covered colonnade, normally open on one side, where people would gather. This particular portico is known as “Solomon’s.” Charles Ellicott describes it –

“The porch—or better, portico or cloister—was outside the Temple, on the eastern side. It consisted, in the Herodian Temple, of a double row of Corinthian columns, about thirty-seven feet high, and received its name as having been in part constructed, when the Temple was rebuilt by Zerubbabel, with the fragments of the older edifice. The people tried to persuade Herod Agrippa the First to pull it down and rebuild it, but he shrank from the risk and cost of such an undertaking (Jos. Ant. xx. 9, § 7). It was, like the porticos in all Greek cities, a favourite place of resort, especially as facing the morning sun in winter.”

There, in this gathering place, it says the people who thronged these three were “greatly amazed.” The words are translated from a single Greek word found only here in Scripture, *ekthambos*. It goes beyond astonishment to a sense of bewilderment. Most of them were fully aware of who the beggar was. All of them were now apprised of the matter, even if they were previously unaware of him.

The name Solomon is derived from the word *shalom*, or “peace,” “wholeness,” or “soundness.” The giving of the name is explained in 1 Chronicles 22 –

“Then he called for his son Solomon, and charged him to build a house for the LORD God of Israel. <sup>7</sup> And David said to Solomon: ‘My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build a house to the name of the LORD my God; <sup>8</sup> but the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘You have shed much blood and have made great wars; you shall not build a house for My name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in My sight. <sup>9</sup> Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies all around. His name shall be Solomon, for I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days.’”

-1 Chronicles 22:6-9

In one way, there was anything but “peace,” meaning quietude, in the portico that day. And yet, for the beggar who is now healed, there is a sense of completeness and peace that had never existed before. His body was formed into a state of *shalom* that he had never previously known.



It is with the crowd, in the state of bewildered excitement because of the miracle performed on him, that Peter will seize the opportunity to address the crowd and explain the marvel of what God had done in Christ.

Life application: The physical healing of this man is actually nothing in comparison to the healing that occurs in a sinner who has been reconciled to God through Christ. The gulf between the two was an infinite one. But God can span the infinite in Christ – the God/Man. His humanity can remove the stain of sin from the soul worn down by it. And His deity can then reach out to His Father to span the gap and form a bridge between the two.

The same sense of astonishment that filled the people of Israel at the healing of the beggar should be experienced by all who know the miracle that has occurred in each of the redeemed of the Lord. But too often, we miss the spiritual, focusing too heavily on the physical. Let us consider the glory of what God has done in our lives, and let us never fail to wonder at the majesty of the cross of Christ. Through it, there is perfect healing and total restoration for the weary soul.

*Lord God, thank You for what You have done in Christ to reconcile us back to Yourself. We were sinners in need of a Savior, and through His cross we are restored. Thank You for the great things You have done for us in our lives. Amen.*

**So when Peter saw *it*, he responded to the people: “Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? Acts 3:12**

It was just seen how the people ran together in amazement at what had taken place. Now, their attitude concerning this miracle becomes clear. They have misunderstood what the Source of the miracle actually is. It is something Peter will correct in his words ahead. As such, he begins with, “So when Peter saw *it*.”

This refers to the previous words, “all the people ran together to them.” The implication is that they think that what happened was because of the miraculous power of Peter and John. Running to them may have included words like, “Explain how you did it,” or “Let us see more of this.” Whatever it was, something clued Peter into the fact that the multitude thinks it was the apostles who are behind the healing. As such, it says, “he responded to the people.”

The Greek more literally reads, “he answered to the people.” However, saying this, the Bible’s use of “answering” someone is not the way we use the term today. It can mean to answer, as in a response, but it also means “to take up a conversation.”

It also can be an answer based on an inferred, but unstated question. This is probably the case here. Even if the questions speculated on a moment ago were not actually asked, the expression of the people alone would be sufficient to elicit such an answer. With that in mind, Peter begins his discourse with, “Men of Israel.”

The Greek reads, “men, Israelites.” This is their defining clan and culture. Today, the term “Jew” is applied in the same manner, coming from the predominant tribe of Judah. However, before that became the customary identification, being an Israelite was the first and most important designation. It is to this group of people, descended from Jacob – who is Israel – that the next words are spoken, “why do you marvel at this?”

This is the same word used to describe the state of the people in Acts 2:7 –

“Then they were all amazed and **marveled**, saying to one another, ‘Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?’”

Peter could look at the faces and tell what was on their minds. There was the same sense of confused wonder that he had seen among the people when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost. At that time, Peter seized the opportunity to tell the people about the marvelous workings of God in Christ. Such will be the case again now. But to continue to settle their minds first, he asks again, “Or why look so intently at us.”

The verb is the same as in Acts 3:4. The beggar fixed his eyes on Peter and John when he thought he would receive alms from them. Now, the people have intently fixed their gaze upon them, looking for an answer to what now so greatly perplexed them. With these questions carefully directed to the multitude, Peter is able to begin to redirect their attention to the One who is the Healer of the crippled beggar. He does this by asking, “as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”

Peter implicitly denies their having performed the miracle under either their own “power” or “godliness.” The word translated as “power” signifies might, strength, ability, and so on. They lacked the medical skills to heal the man, they lacked the power to heal him, and so on. There was nothing in them that could account for the healing.

The word translated as “godliness” is introduced into Scripture, *eusebeia*. Other than this one use in Acts, it is seen only where it is used heavily by Paul in the pastoral epistles, and then four times by Peter in his second epistle. The word “godliness” is probably the best possible translation. It signifies piety or a right-hearted response towards God.

By asking in the manner he has, denying such power is their own, Peter is clearly indicating that the healing was not something connected to these traits in either he or John. Rather, an explanation of where the miracle stemmed from must be provided.

Life application: Peter and John could have immediately seized upon the moment and drawn attention to themselves. But before that is even hinted at, they rightly redirect the people’s attention away from themselves.

Who is it that deserves the attention, praise, and acclamation for the things that have been done through you? If you are a faithful follower of Christ, it is always right to redirect compliments given to you about your abilities and capabilities to the Lord. It is He who fashioned humanity, and you are a human being. It is He who knows you would be born when you were, what your DNA makeup would be, that you would receive His offer of Jesus, and so on.

As such, everything ultimately stems from Him, and He should be given the credit for all good things that stem from your life. It can be hard to not accept praise, especially when you put a lot of effort into the things you do. And you can be complimented at a time when it catches you off guard. At such a time, you may accept the compliment without even thinking about it.

But if we can be of the mind to continuously redirect praises and the like to the Lord, we do well. Let us endeavor to do this. And by doing so, it would be hoped that those who hear our words will truly want to know why we are so willing to give credit to Him. One never knows where the first opportunity to share the gospel will arise. And this attitude may be just the place.

*Heavenly Father, help us to live our lives in a manner that will ultimately be pleasing to You and glorifying of You in the sight of others. This is good and right, so help our minds to be always tuned into this attitude. Amen.*

**The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let *Him* go. Acts 3:13**

Peter now explains the source of the healing power that brought the beggar to full health of his legs. He had just noted that it was not by their own power or godliness that he was made to walk. Rather, his words will point to the power of God in Christ, beginning with, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

By introducing the patriarchs, Peter is clearly identifying the accomplishment of the miracle with the same God who had been faithfully followed by the fathers of the “men of Israel” whom he began to address in the previous verse. There has been an unbroken line of His power being displayed in this line, and Peter acknowledges that it continues at their present time. Having noted these three patriarchs by name, he next says that he is “the God of our fathers.”

The selection of this line was carefully recorded each step of the way. Abraham was called, he was directed by the Lord to follow a certain course of life, he was given promises and the covenant of faith was made with him. He was given the sign of circumcision. He was tested and the surety of the promise was restated because of his faithfulness.

From him, the line was carefully detailed to continue through Isaac, the son of promise. And from Isaac, the line continued through Jacob, who is Israel. The same God who had directed the course of events of their lives, and who had carefully detailed the continued course of events through the specified chosen line, is the same God who “glorified His Servant Jesus.”

By noting the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Peter is carefully ensuring that he is proclaiming the works and power as belonging to that same God. He is not introducing a new god, nor is he introducing an aberrant way of worshipping this same God. Rather, as he continues, he will clearly demonstrate that “His Servant Jesus” is the fulfillment of the Scriptures.

As yet, Peter has not called their God by His name Lord (YHVH). Rather, he has only used the term “God” and affixed His identity to the patriarchs. What will be implied in his continued words is that the Lord their God is, in fact, the Lord Jesus. For now, however, he is acknowledging that Jesus is the One Scripture testifies to.

In this verse, some translations say “Son” or “Child” here instead of “Servant.” The word can be translated either way, but Peter is clearly identifying Christ in His role as the “Servant of the Lord” who was prophesied of in their Scriptures. More specifically, he is surely tying Him to the “Servant” of Isaiah 52/53 –

“Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently;  
He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.” Isaiah 52:13

That this is what is on Peter’s mind is to be inferred beginning with the next words which say, “whom you delivered up and denied.”

“He is despised and rejected by men,  
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.  
And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him;  
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” Isaiah 53:3

The rejection of the Servant is prophesied in these words. Peter is calling them to mind and telling the people before Him that it is they who fulfilled this prophecy. There is no need to directly cite the words as they would have been familiar to all of the people before him. They would be able to clearly tie the prophecy together with the event, if they were mentally willing to do so. Peter then adds salt into the wound of the event by saying, “in the presence of Pilate.”

Not only did they reject the Servant of the God of their fathers who was glorified by Him, but they had done it in the presence of a Gentile ruler. They called out for a guilty sentence upon the One who was clearly innocent in God’s eyes, but who was also clearly innocent in the eyes of this Gentile placed over them. Peter avows this poignantly by saying, “when he was determined to let *Him* go.”

The words of Pilate would have rushed back into the mind of any of the people who had been present at the time –

Pilate then went out again, and said to them, “Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him.”

<sup>5</sup> Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.  
And *Pilate* said to them, “Behold the Man!”

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, “Crucify *Him*, crucify *Him*!”

Pilate said to them, “You take Him and crucify *Him*, for I find no fault in Him.”

<sup>7</sup>The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.”

<sup>8</sup>Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, <sup>9</sup> and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, “Where are You from?” But Jesus gave him no answer.

<sup>10</sup>Then Pilate said to Him, “Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?”

<sup>11</sup>Jesus answered, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.”

<sup>12</sup>From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, “If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.” John 19:4-12

Pilate clearly saw the innocence of the Man, and he attempted to have him released several times. But more, the account shows that Pilate was aware that Jesus was more than just another “Man.” He may not have understood the truth of who Jesus was, but he understood that God’s hand was certainly upon Him and thus it made the contrast to the angry calls of the Jews all the more striking.

This is clearly seen in the structure of Peter’s words. As Vincent’s Word Studies notes –

“He is ἐκείνου [ekeinou], the pronoun of more definite and emphatic reference, the latter, Pilate, ‘in order to make the contrast felt between what Pilate judged and what they did.’ This is further emphasized in the next verse.”

Peter is setting the actions of Israel against the decision of Pilate, bringing the guilt of their conduct squarely back on them. And this is before even acknowledging that it is Christ Jesus who is the One who healed the man. That will not be specifically stated until verse 3:16. Peter is applying lashes upon the people before telling them of the healing balm that can bring restoration to their souls. For now, he is simply acknowledging that they bear guilt for the sin which they committed.

Life application: Peter’s words reveal an effective way of reaching some people with the gospel. Some people already know that they are guilty of sin. They wear it on their shoulders for all the world to see, and they are scared of the day they have to meet their Maker. For these, the simple gospel that tells them Christ died for their sins is all they

need to hear. When presented to them, the wonderful words of release flow over them like a flood of cool water while in a dry and barren land.

Others, however, feel just fine with themselves. They may compare themselves to others, as if God grades on a bell curve. “Well, I’m a lot better than most people. God understands my faults. All is good.” They have no idea that “others” are not a valid standard, but rather absolute perfection is.

For such people, they need to be presented with their (many) imperfections in light of the absolute perfection of the Lord. “You have done this in the presence of God, even a criminal can know that. Why can’t you see this?” Eventually, when the sin is presented as an infinite crime against God, the person will then realize how terrible his state before God actually is. From that understanding, a presentation of the gospel will bring peace to the now-troubled soul.

Each person must be evaluated to understand what is going on in his or her mind. Once that is done, the proper approach to evangelizing is then to be pursued. Peter knew the guilt of the people before him, but because a miracle had been done in their presence, they sure thought that they were right with God. “We are Israel, and God is doing great things among us!”

To avoid any such notion that God approved of them because of what had been done, Peter gave them the bad news first. Let us use this tool when necessary.

*Lord God, help us to be effective at telling others about Your wonderful workings in Christ on our behalf. Each person is an individual, and so help us to carefully understand what he needs to know in order to be saved. From there, may we then present it in a way that will be effective in his life. To Your glory we pray. Amen.*

**But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, Acts 3:14**

Peter just noted to those gathered before him. They, men of Israel who should have known better, had delivered up Jesus when even a Gentile, Pilate, was determined to let Him go. To continue describing the guilt that rested upon them, he next says, “But you denied the Holy One.”

When considered, the irony is palpable. Israel denied the Holy One, something even the demons acknowledged –

Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, <sup>24</sup> saying, “Let *us* alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”

-Mark 1:23, 24

Despite even the demons knowing who Christ was, the men of Israel rejected him and denied His position as their Messiah – a title which includes the thought of kingship –

When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called *The Pavement*, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. <sup>14</sup> Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, “Behold your King!”

<sup>15</sup> But they cried out, “Away with *Him*, away with *Him*! Crucify Him!”

Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?”

The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar!”

<sup>16</sup> Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led *Him* away. John 19:13-16

Peter is standing before them and is defending who Christ Jesus is, preparing to explicitly state that it is He who healed the beggar. But before he does this, he wants them to understand the guilt they bear. What he has said so far cannot be denied. He was there, they were there, and they had called out the words rejecting Jesus. Peter next adds in another set of words to increase the accusation. Not only is He the Holy One, but Peter next says, “and the Just.”

The word signifies “righteous” or “just in the sight of God.” A righteous person is one who conforms to the will of God and meets His standards of uprightness. Peter claims that Jesus fits this description. But more, and again showing the irony of the matter, both Pilate and his wife recognized this quality in Him –

While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, “Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him.” Matthew 27:19

When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather *that* a tumult was rising, he took water and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see *to it*.”

<sup>25</sup> And all the people answered and said, “His blood *be* on us and on our children.”

Matthew 27:24, 25



But even worse than this obvious fact is that Israel went a step further. Not only did they deny Christ who is both the Holy One and the Just, but they added to their guilt by violating the Law of Moses in an open and direct way. Peter explicitly states this by saying, “and asked for a murderer to be granted to you.”

The Greek reads, “and asked for a man, a murderer, to be granted to you.” In this, there is a hint of Christ’s deity being conveyed by Peter without explicitly stating it. The Scriptures implicitly reveal the deity of the coming Messiah. Without getting into a long theological discussion about the matter, Peter sets Barabbas – a mere man – against the Holy One and the Just. But along with this contrast, Peter identifies Barabbas as a murderer. This fact, along with the request for his return, is recorded in Mark 15 –

Now at the feast he was accustomed to releasing one prisoner to them, whomever they requested. <sup>7</sup> And there was one named Barabbas, *who was* chained with his fellow rebels; they had committed murder in the rebellion. <sup>8</sup> Then the multitude, crying aloud, began to ask *him to do* just as he had always done for them. <sup>9</sup> But Pilate answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” <sup>10</sup> For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy.

<sup>11</sup> But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release Barabbas to them. <sup>12</sup> Pilate answered and said to them again, “What then do you want me to do *with Him* whom you call the King of the Jews?”

<sup>13</sup> So they cried out again, “Crucify Him!”

<sup>14</sup> Then Pilate said to them, “Why, what evil has He done?”

But they cried out all the more, “Crucify Him!”

<sup>15</sup> So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged *Him*, to be crucified. Mark 15:6-15

Israel had called out for a murderer to be released to them while calling out for One who was clearly innocent to be led away for crucifixion. This is in direct violation of their own law –

“Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who *is* guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.” Numbers 35:31

And again –

‘Cursed *is* the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person.’

“And all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ Deuteronomy 27:25

Those guilty of murder were not to be allowed to live, and those who were innocent were not to be slain for the price of a bribe, which is essentially what occurred when they took Barabbas over Jesus. A bribe is a type of inducement which is given, normally illegally or through dishonesty, in order to act favorably towards one party over another. Israel looked for the favor (which is the meaning of the word used) of ridding them of this Man in exchange for a known criminal.

The testimony is recorded for the world to see, but while Peter stood before the men of Israel it was clearly evident that it was true. The events had only happened a short time earlier. There could be no denying what had transpired. The burden of guilt rested (and continues to rest) upon the nation who betrayed its Messiah.

Life application: Today, something unexpected has come upon the world. Within the past generation, the nation of Israel has been reestablished. This is an amazing miracle that confirms the words of Scripture which stated this would come about. Only a short time ago in relation to their time of exile, it would never have even been imagined possible.

Because this has occurred, many churches and individuals take this as a sign of God's divine favor upon them and that their time of punishment is over. This is incorrect. The national guilt of Israel remains, and it will not be cleansed until they acknowledge Jesus as their rightful Messiah. That is explicitly stated by the Lord –

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen *gathers* her brood under *her* wings, but you were not willing! <sup>35</sup> See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until *the time* comes when you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’ Luke 13:34, 35

God has returned the people to the land in preparation for this event, and it is right that Christians support this and pray for their restoration. But this does not mean that Israel is to be given a blanket approval for their actions. They, like all of the nations, are immersed in approving immorality. Their abortion laws are more liberal than most nations and they are working to make them even looser. As a nation, they do not acknowledge the hand of the Lord in their restoration, nor in their continued existence. They are filled with pride and self-righteousness, just like all of the nations of the world.

This must all be purged from them before they are a people prepared for their God. Let us take a balanced look at Israel and understand that what God has done, is doing, and

will continue to do the miraculous in and through them. And yet, they continue to reject Him and act indecently before Him. To this day, the words of Ezekiel 36 remain true of this peculiar nation –

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “I do not do *this* for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. <sup>23</sup> And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I *am* the LORD,” says the Lord GOD, “when I am hallowed in you before their eyes.” Ezekiel 36:22, 23

Let us consider Israel in the light in which God does, just as any sinner. We evangelize the lost while condemning their actions. We hope for restoration and new life to be found in them, and we pray for their healing. So it should be in our attitude towards this wayward nation. Remember to pray for Israel.

*Lord God, help us to have a right and proper understanding of the events unfolding in the world today. A people under sentence for their past actions are being prepared for a time where their guilt will be atoned for, and they will stand purified in Your presence. May that day be soon. Until then, we pray for Israel the people and for each within the nation. May Your Spirit continue to call them to Yourself through the cleansing power of the shed blood of Christ. Amen.*

**and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.** Acts 3:15

The previous verse should be cited together with this to see the contrast and to better understand the paradox that is presented –

“But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, <sup>15</sup> and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.”

The immediate contrast –

“asked for a murderer” / “killed the Prince of life.”

The paradox –

The Prince of life was killed.

The broader contrast –

“But you denied the Holy One and the Just” / “whom God raised from the dead.”

Peter sets the actions of Israel in complete contrast one to another. Whereas they asked for Barabbas, a man who purposefully ended another’s life, they also killed the One who grants it. The word *archégos* is introduced here. It will be seen again in Acts 5 and then twice in Hebrews. It comes from *arché*, meaning “beginning” or “origin,” and *agó*, “to lead” or “to guide.” Hence, it is one who is a file-leader. He sets the way for others to follow.

Some translations use the term “author.” Though this is a close thought, it is not exact. It more closely would signify an originator or founder that continues to lead. Its other uses will help understand the significance of the word –

Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be Prince* and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. Acts 5:31

For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the **captain** of their salvation perfect through sufferings. Hebrews 2:10

looking unto Jesus, the **author** and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

Christ is the “file-Leader” of life, of restoring others to God, of salvation itself, and of the faith possessed by those who look to Him. The question of what “life” is being referred to is appropriate. It could be referring to life itself, that which animates humans (and indeed all life), or it could refer to the “life” which is obtained through restoration with God, meaning the spiritual restoration to God that was lost at the fall.

The immediate context is surely referring to the latter because Peter will next speak of the resurrection that makes this life possible. But the former is true as well. Jesus is clearly revealed as the Lord (YHVH) of the Old Testament Scriptures. It is He who breathed life into Adam at the first (Genesis 2:7), but He is also the one who indicated He would breathe the new life, the Holy Spirit, into those who would come to Him by

faith (John 20:22). In Him is life (John 1:4), both the initial giving of it, and the restoration of that spiritual life through His completed work.

It is this One that Israel killed, revealing the great paradox. How could the Life-Leader of life die? And yet, He had to die to bring about life in those who killed Him. One necessitated the other. It reveals the wisdom and the immensity of God's plans. And in their killing of Christ came the victory over death, as Peter notes, saying, "but whom God raised from the dead."

Peter has already said in Acts 2:24 that "it was not possible that He should be held" by death. This is because "the wages of sin is death." But Christ, the Prince of life, had no sin. As such, death could not hold Him. He had done nothing to earn death, and He therefore was resurrected by the power of God.

Life was found in Him who is the life. The enormity of the event, and the piercing nature of the words, must have been terrifying to those who realized what they meant. And to make certain that the words could be trusted, Peter next says, "of which we are witnesses."

It is debated what Peter is referring to:

"the Prince of life...of whom we are witnesses."

"God raised from the dead...of which we are witnesses."

Either way, the fact is that Peter and John are witnesses, thus establishing the truth of the matter as required by law. They did witness the life and deeds of Christ, and they did witness Christ in His resurrection. Both testify to the fact that He was, and still remained, the Messiah. Israel is being presented with information that they cannot live without. Likewise, each individual was being presented with that same information. The choice is both an individual one and it is a collective one. Each person standing there had to individually choose to believe, and the nation as a whole – who was under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant – had to do so as well.

Life application: What God has done in Christ is incredible in the extreme. But it is not impossible to believe. If the story of Jesus was just one made up in the minds of a group of people at a given time, it could easily be ignored.

However, the books of the Bible span about fifteen hundred years of time. And more, not only are they written over that span of time, but they encompass details that go

from the very beginning of time until the end of time as we currently understand it – telling of things that would happen well into the future, and which continue to be realized even at the current time.

They are comprised of the writings of about forty different people. They are written in various locations throughout the Middle East. They are written in several different languages, and they are written to various groups of people.

Despite all of these things, the message found in these sixty-six books is a single, unified whole. It carries one overall theme while also carrying – very consistently – many individual themes that form it into a single body of literature that defines the very purpose of man’s existence on earth.

The main theme, the Subject, of this compilation is God working in Christ in order to have an eternal relationship exist between the two. The Person of Jesus, who is Christ, is that Subject. It is He who is the Prince of life, and it is He to whom we are responsible.

Let us never forget this, and may we spend our time and energy – above all else – focused on this. Let us praise God, exalt Him, and magnify His glorious name for all the world to see and understand His goodness towards us in the giving of His Son. May this be how we direct our lives, all the days of our lives.

*Lord God, thank You for what You have done in and through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which *comes* through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. Acts 3:16**

Peter has conveyed to the people their denial and killing of Jesus, but God’s approval of Him through the resurrection. With that stated, he now immediately turns to the power that comes with this fact. The Greek reads in a different order than the NKJV cited above –

And His name, through faith in His name... (NKJV)

And upon the faith *of* the name of Him... (CG)

In this, the Greek does not say *dia*, or “through.” It says *epi*, or “upon.” It is an important distinction. There is also an article which must be translated, “the faith.” The account

from Luke is precise. This man had not heard any word concerning Christ Jesus. Peter simply brought him from being a cripple to being healed –

And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; <sup>3</sup> who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. <sup>4</sup> And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, “Look at us.” <sup>5</sup> So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. <sup>6</sup> Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” <sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. Acts 3:2-7

It was not the man’s faith, but “the faith” which is found in Jesus Christ. One might say, “The church is established upon the faith found in (as the basis of) the name of Jesus.” This is the thought being expressed by Peter. The corresponding account of Paul healing a cripple is completely different –

And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother’s womb, who had never walked. <sup>9</sup> *This* man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, <sup>10</sup> said with a loud voice, “Stand up straight on your feet!” And he leaped and walked.

-Acts 14:8-10

There, it refers to the man’s faith. He had faith (there is no preceding article in the Greek) to be healed after hearing the gospel and Paul commanded him to stand. As for Peter, he healed the man based upon the faith found in (based upon) the name of Jesus. It is this faith which Peter says, “has made this man strong.”

Faith in the man was not a requirement for this healing for exactly the reason that Peter had been explaining. Israel was guilty of crucifying their Messiah, but to demonstrate that God had, in fact, raised Christ, the power of His name was used to prove the matter. This is to contrast what Peter said in verse 3:12

“...why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” (3:12)

“And upon the faith of the name of Him has made this man strong.” (3:16).

This is the proof of what Peter carefully explained in the intervening verses. The miracle had been wrought by power which is upon (based on) the faith of the name. As an additional note of the undeniable surety of the matter, Peter next says, “whom you see and know.”

So surely is this a valid miracle that Acts 4 will detail a trial held by the leaders concerning what happened. There it says –

For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”<sup>21</sup> So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.<sup>22</sup> For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed. Acts 4:20-22

The people knew the man, they had seen the miraculous change in his physical body, and they had no excuse to not believe what their eyes beheld. Peter’s words, as recorded by Luke, are precise and exacting. This includes what he next says to the people, “Yes, the faith which *comes* through Him.”

This time, the translation is correct. The word *dia*, or “through,” is used when speaking of Christ. Again, it is not speaking of the man’s faith. It is speaking of “the faith,” meaning the basis of the faith, which comes through the resurrected Messiah. It is this new formulation in the ongoing redemptive narrative that has been presented to Israel.

In times past, miracles were done in the name of the Lord, Yehovah. But now, it is power in the name of Jesus (Yeshua – Salvation) that such miracles are proclaimed, and which then occur. As such, Peter notes that the faith which comes through Jesus “has given him this perfect soundness.”

Here, Peter uses a word found only this one time in the Bible, *holokléria*. Souter says that it pertains to “the condition of *wholeness*, where all the parts work together for ‘unimpaired health.’” The miracle was wrought, and there was nothing lacking in it. The man went from a total cripple from his mother’s womb to a man that could walk and leap about without even needing to be trained to do so once his body was healed. Everything worked as if it had been working all his life. With that stated, Peter finishes with a note that it was done “in the presence of you all.”

Even if the people didn’t actually see the healing happen, many had come through the same gate just before it happened. The man lay there, broken and helpless, begging



alms. Some may have handed him a coin. Some may have pointed at him and mocked. Some may have said to their children, "This is the curse of God." Whatever they thought or did as they passed, they had seen him laying there, understanding his condition was hopeless. And yet, he was now before them completely healed. The testimony to all of the people concerning the faith in the name could not be denied.

Life application: Just a few incorrectly translated prepositions and missing articles can change the entire meaning of a verse. And with the change in meaning, there is seen to be an entirely different purpose for what was said than would otherwise have been known. Israel is being given instruction on a miracle that occurred among them. But with the faulty translation of the KJV, which is then repeated in the NKJV, people will have a complete misunderstanding of what is being conveyed.

In Acts 14, in the comparable healing passage which refers to Paul, there will be a different design and purpose for what is said. In noticing these differences, one's theology will be strengthened and more perfectly aligned with what the Bible is telling us. But without noticing these things, we will remain deficient in our thinking.

In learning this lesson, it should teach us for our own spiritual lives. Let us endeavor to always be precise in how we present the gospel. Including various words not laid out in Scripture concerning the gospel, we can easily present a false gospel. The beauty of being saved by faith alone through Christ alone can be obliterated by saying something as innocuous as "repent and be baptized."

Acts 2:38 says this, but Acts 2:38 must be taken in its proper context (as noted then) or a false impression of what Peter was saying (and to whom he is speaking) will arise. Learn the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4), and then proclaim that by believing that message salvation will be realized. Yes, let us be precise concerning such important matters.

*O God, help us to be faithful in presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ to others. And when we do, help us to faithfully present it. May our words be words approved by You in Your word so that no errors in thinking arise in those we speak to. To Your glory we pray, Amen*

**"Yet now, brethren, I know that you did *it* in ignorance, as *did* also your rulers.  
Acts 3:17**

Peter has scathingly rebuked the “Men of Israel” (verse 3:12), and then he provided the explanation for his rebuke in the previous verse. With that stated, he changes his address, saying, “Yet now, brethren.”

He spoke to them as countrymen in an equal but general manner when he called them, “Men of Israel.” It was clearly a way of identifying himself with them as being of the same people who committed the crime of killing their Messiah without sharing directly in the guilt. Now, his address draws them into a closer bond, as if the past deeds are forgivable, and by which a restored closeness within the nation is readily possible. With this stated, he next says, “I know that you did *it* in ignorance.”

They are still men of Israel, and they still – both individually and collectively – bear the guilt for what occurred, even if done in ignorance. This is clearly laid out in their own law–

“Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘If a person sins unintentionally against any of the commandments of the LORD *in anything* which ought not to be done, and does any of them, <sup>3</sup> if the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to the LORD for his sin which he has sinned a young bull without blemish as a sin offering.’ Leviticus 4:2, 3 (Individual sin).

“Now if the whole congregation of Israel sins unintentionally, and the thing is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done *something against* any of the commandments of the LORD *in anything* which should not be done, and are guilty; <sup>14</sup> when the sin which they have committed becomes known, then the assembly shall offer a young bull for the sin, and bring it before the tabernacle of meeting.” Leviticus 4:13, 14 (The entire congregation).

Because of their guilt, each person must make the appropriate sacrifice for what he has done. And because the entire nation bears guilt, there must be a national sacrifice for what they have collectively done. But Peter will not direct them to make those sacrifices demanded by the Law of Moses, which are only types and shadows of the coming Messiah. Rather, he will call for them to “repent” and be converted, as will be noted in verse 3:19.

A new order of things has come, and a new means of satisfying God through the atonement process has been realized. The church is only at the very beginning of understanding this. It will take all of the New Testament epistles to fully realize the magnitude of what Christ did through His sacrificial work. For now, Peter simply points

out that their guilt exists, even if it was done in ignorance. And this extends beyond the common people who may be standing before him. This is seen in his final words of the verse, “as *did* also your rulers.”

The rulers were responsible for the killing of Jesus, even if they too did it in ignorance. They bore the guilt of the act. But more, as leaders, their guilt must be admitted before the nation can find its promised redemption. That is seen, again, in the Levitical law –

‘When a ruler has sinned, and done *something* unintentionally *against* any of the commandments of the LORD his God *in anything* which should not be done, and is guilty, ... So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him.’ Leviticus 4:22 & 4:26

Israel bears guilt in various ways for what they have done. The Law of Moses can no longer purge their guilt. This is clearly laid out in the book of Hebrews, explaining that everything that happened under the law was only anticipatory of the coming of Christ. When Christ came, He fulfilled that law. In His fulfillment of it, it is annulled (Hebrews 7:18), it is obsolete (Hebrews 8:13), and it is set aside (Hebrews 10:9).

The Law of Moses is done. It is nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). In saying the law is nailed to the cross, it means that Christ embodied it. He fulfilled it. And in His death, it died with Him. When He came out of the grave, it was under the establishment of a new and better covenant.

Paul’s words to Timothy clearly understood the guilt he bore, even when his actions were in ignorance, but the forgiveness he had received was absolute when it came through the finished, final, and forever work of Jesus Christ –

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry, <sup>13</sup> although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.” 1 Timothy 1:12, 13

Life application: The nation of Israel continues to bear the guilt for what it did in rejecting Christ, even two thousand years later. Nothing can atone for their guilt apart from repenting of their actions, calling out to Christ, and being restored through the New Covenant. The Tribulation period that lies ahead will be the seven final years of the Mosaic Law being worked out in order for them to figure this out (Daniel 9:24-27).

The incredible thing to consider isn't that the nation of Israel hasn't figured this out, but that innumerable people who should know better – because they have the New Testament right there before them – cannot seem to figure it out.

There is a constant returning to the Law of Moses, in part or in whole, as they try to earn what God has already granted. They try to work through what God has already accomplished. And they will never find rest nor peace in the Lord through doing so.

Grace is grace. It cannot be earned. One must simply trust in what Christ has done, and then live out his life with this continued understanding. Be sure to run from the Hebrew Roots Movement, Seventh Day Adventism, and any other church that reinstates precepts from a fulfilled and now-obsolete law. And stay away from those who say that Jews have either a different gospel (hyperdispensationalism) or can be saved through adherence to the Law of Moses (dual-covenantalism).

There is one gospel, it is the only way to reconciliation with God. What happens in Acts is merely a descriptive account of how the church developed while its theology was in the process of being laid out by the apostles. Their epistles explain how all things find their fulfillment and completion in Christ.

*Lord God, thank You that Christ is the fulfillment and the end of the law that stood against us. Yes, praise God for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.** Acts 3:18

Peter, after having clearly identified the men of Israel as having been those who killed their Messiah, then noted that they did it in ignorance. A sin of ignorance, as was seen in the previous commentary, could be forgiven with the appropriate sacrifices. But now, Peter doesn't say to them, "You must observe the rituals laid down by Moses for the atonement of your sins." Rather, he immediately turns to explain what those sacrifices only anticipated. He does this by beginning with, "But those things."

This is referring to what he had just said in the previous verses –

But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, <sup>15</sup> and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.

What Peter is saying is that what occurred in the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ Jesus had a set purpose. Despite the fact that Israel did these things, thus bearing guilt for their actions, the very things they did actually served as the means of making their own forgiveness possible. This continues to be seen with the words, “which God foretold.”

In other words, the things that happened to Jesus were actually prophesied in advance, meaning that God knew what would occur. Despite this, two things are to be taken as axioms: 1) God did not cause the events. His foreknowledge does not mean active participation in the event. And 2) the people bore guilt for their actions. God’s foreknowledge does not negate personal culpability in the things that they participated in.

God, knowing all things and understanding the hearts of the people of Israel, foresaw their rejection of Christ and allowed them to continue through with His crucifixion, knowing that it would be the means by which the world could be saved. What should have occurred came about. God’s plans and purposes were fulfilled exactly as spoken “by the mouth of all His prophets.”

This is clearly evidenced throughout Scripture, especially it is seen in typology, but it is also directly prophesied to have occurred at times. Jesus indicated this after the resurrection –

Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup>Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” <sup>27</sup>And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

-Luke 24:25-27

The word of God reveals Jesus. From beginning to end, He is the main subject of what God is doing in the span of redemptive history. The word of God is given to show this. And the word of God clearly revealed the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of man. Of all of the words of the prophets, this is most explicitly seen in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Take the time to read that short passage today, thinking about how they point to the Person of Jesus. In those words, as elsewhere in Scripture, it clearly indicates “that the Christ would suffer.”

By saying this, Peter is plainly and unambiguously saying that the sufferings of Christ were prophesied in advance, and that what happened to Him was in fulfillment of Scripture. As this is so, and as all of the sacrificial system pointed to what He would do,

Scripture – meaning the Law of Moses – is fulfilled in Him. As such, it is now set aside (made obsolete and annulled) in Him.

With this understanding, Peter is indicating that Jesus – not the sacrificial system of the law – is the only Sacrifice acceptable to atone for what they had done. Depending on our knowledge of the Old Testament, we may or may not get this. But the men standing before Peter would have. They had heard that God foretold these things, that Christ was the fulfillment of what was spoken forth, and that there was intent and purpose behind those events. Everything added up, and they would have fully grasped this, whether they believed it or not.

This is perfectly evident from discussions with Jews today. Any Jew who is even remotely versed in Scripture, and who understands who Jesus is, knows fully well that Christians believe this to be true. They grasp the theology mentally, but they do not believe it to be so. They also know it because, throughout the centuries, a remnant of believing Jews has always existed. There are Jews who have not only grasped what is said, but they have believed it. Of these things concerning the sufferings of Christ that were prophesied in advance, Peter – still speaking of God in Christ – says, “He has thus fulfilled.”

As before, this does not mean that God actively caused these things to happen. And further, God could have actively stopped them from happening. This is evidenced by Jesus’ words prior to His crucifixion –

But Jesus said to him, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. <sup>53</sup>Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? <sup>54</sup>How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?” Matthew 26:52-54

God allowed the events to take their course because He knew that what Christ would do was necessary for restoration between Him and man to take place. But the guilt of what took place rests squarely upon Israel for their actions, the denial they professed, and the rejection that occurred among them. Peter has stated it is so, he has shown that Scripture confirms his words, and he will next explain what they need to do in order to be forgiven for their actions. He will also explain to them what a failure to do what is necessary will mean for them.

Life application: When thought through, this verse is a good one to understand other important issues that arise in theology, such as the process of salvation. For example,

many people believe that because God knows in advance what will transpire, it necessarily follows that man does not actually have free will. This is nonsense, and that becomes perfectly evident from evaluating this verse.

If that were so, then there would be no culpability for Israel's actions in having crucified their Messiah. Peter clearly told them that Scripture foretold what would happen. And yet, he also unmistakably has told them that they are guilty before God because of it, and they must do something in order to be absolved of their guilt. God's foreknowledge in no way negates man's free will, nor the guilt that comes from exercising it.

Further, God's foreknowledge in no way negates man's responsibility toward the gospel. As an example, Calvinism teaches that man does not have free will in choosing Christ. It says that man is incapable of calling out to God because he is totally depraved. But total depravity can have various meanings. Just two of the many examples of total depravity are:

1. Man is completely fallen and cannot choose what is good. The image of God in him is erased.
2. Man is fallen and can do nothing pleasing to God because he bears a sin nature. But man still bears the image of God, even if it is marred. He still has a knowledge of what is right and wrong. He can see the good and choose it.

The first is wrong on the surface. James 3:9 clearly indicates that the image of God in man remains. And more, Genesis 3:22 plainly indicates that, in the fall of man, he obtained the knowledge of good and evil. He can know the difference and choose what is good and what is evil (see Genesis 4:7).

With the incorrect view of man in relation to God, Calvinism says that man cannot receive Christ without God imposing the decision on him. As such, it teaches that God chooses who will be saved, He regenerates their spirit (they are born again), they then can choose what is good by calling on Christ, and they are then saved. In essence, a person is saved before he is saved. It is confused thinking and poor theology.

Calvinists cling to John 6:44 as evidence of their view –

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

Using this verse as a stand-alone rejects the entire context of what Jesus is saying. In John 5, Jesus distinctly indicates that God uses Scripture for this very purpose. God the Father IS DRAWING man through the word of God. The word of God speaks of Christ, and Christ came to fulfill Scripture. As such, Jesus later says in John 12:32 –

“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself.”

In every numbering system ever devised, except that used by Calvinists, 12:32 comes after 6:44. There is a reason why Jesus’ words are placed there. It is because Scripture is used to draw man to God. Jesus fulfills and thus embodies Scripture. Therefore, when He is crucified, He will become the principal means for God to draw men to Himself. This is just one of the many points where Calvinism incorrectly uses Scripture to come to erroneous conclusions concerning key theological points of doctrine.

Conclusion to life application: Calvinism is a failed theological system.

*Lord God, thank You for the offer of Jesus Christ that has been presented to all people. It is by personal faith, through free will, that we are allowed to believe or reject Your offer. This demonstrates a great care for Your creatures. You allow us, without forcing us, to simply believe and be saved. Thank You for this offer of peace and reconciliation. Yes, thank You for the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, Acts 3:19**

The words of verse 17 just said, “I know that you did *it* in ignorance, as *did* also your rulers.” It is based on those words that we next read of Peter saying, “Repent therefore.” The Greek word is *metanoëó*. It means “to change one’s mind or purpose,” “to think differently after,” and so on. It does not mean actually doing any work at all. It is simply a changing of the heart (the heart signifying the reasoning process of a person in the Bible).

Just as in Acts 2:38, Peter is telling the people (it is second person plural, and thus he is speaking to each person as much as to all of the people gathered before him) to change their minds. The question is, “About what?” The answer is, “About Jesus, the Messiah, and their rejection of Him.” Though they did it in ignorance, they had rejected and killed Him. As such, they had to repent of this. Their mind was, “Crucify Him. He is not our King.” Their change in mind must correspond to that: “We believe! He is our Messiah!”



The word “repent” is prescriptive for Israel who had crucified Jesus. It is not prescriptive for anyone else who has not first rejected Jesus. In other words, the same two examples that were used in Acts 2:38 (below) will help remind what the intent here is –

- John walks up to Tom and tells him about Jesus. Tom had never heard of Jesus. Tom does not need to repent of anything. He needs to simply believe the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4) and he will be sealed with the Holy Spirit, and he will be saved (Ephesians 1:13, 14).
- Tom has heard the gospel. Tom has rejected the gospel. Tom must “repent” of his former rejection (change his mind), believe the gospel, and Tom will be saved.

This is the context of Peter’s words. The men of Israel, and Israel collectively, must repent of what they had previously thought concerning Jesus. For those who will do so, Peter then says, “and be converted.” The Greek word is *epistrephó*. It signifies to turn or return. It corresponds to the Hebrew word *shuv*, which bears basically the same meaning, and which is used in the same manner time and again towards Israel –

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “**Repent**, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations. <sup>7</sup> For anyone of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who separates himself from Me and sets up his idols in his heart and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, then comes to a prophet to inquire of him concerning Me, I the LORD will answer him by Myself. <sup>8</sup> I will set My face against that man and make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD. Ezekiel 14:6-8

In essence, Peter’s words say, “Change your mind and turn back.” Israel had denied Christ, they had asked for a murderer in His place, and they had then killed Him (Acts 3:14, 15). Peter is asking them to “undeny” the Lord and to return to right thinking concerning Him, turning back to the path that God had purposed in Christ Jesus. Peter then says, “that your sins may be blotted out.”

The guilt of the sin was carefully laid out by Peter. The guilt remained unatoned for and was clearly written upon them for God to see. But Peter says that those sins could be “blotted out.” It is a new word in Scripture, *exaleiphó*. It signifies complete removal, as in wiping away or being erased. This word will be found in Colossians 2:14 concerning the ending of the Law of Moses because of Christ’s work –

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, <sup>14</sup> having **wiped out** the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. Colossians 2:13-15

In Christ, the law is fulfilled and ended. But without Christ, the guilt of the law stands against those who will be judged by it. In coming to Christ, the sin is atoned for and there is no longer the imputation of future sin.

This is exactly what Peter is referring to. The sin of those who had crucified Christ will be atoned for by simply changing their mind and turning back to the proper path. Ezekiel spoke of the “idols of the heart,” and law observance had become exactly that to the people. Instead of coming to Christ, the embodiment of the law, they wanted Him crucified and thought to do things their own way. No atonement, apart from Christ, could cover such a sin (see Hebrews 6:4). But in returning to Christ, the sins could be blotted out “so that times of refreshing may come.”

The word translated as “times” signifies a season or a fitting moment, such as the timing of the harvest. The right times for “refreshing” would come upon the turning of the people. This word, translated as “refreshing,” is found only here in Scripture. It signifies “to breathe easily.” As such, it is the state of being revived with fresh air. One can think of stagnation and oppression until that time. But when the time comes, there will be deep breaths of cooling. And Peter finishes up noting that these will be “from the presence of the Lord.”

The Greek word is *prosópon*. It comes from two words signifying “towards the eye.” Thus, it refers to the face or the countenance, corresponding to the Hebrew word *panim*, or face. The idea then is the favorable countenance of the Lord looking toward people.

In Leviticus 26, the Lord told the people that if they were not obedient that His face would be against them –

I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies.

-Leviticus 26:17

In their rejection of Christ, the Lord had set His face against the people. He would pursue them and destroy them. Only in calling out to Christ will this time end and will the times of the Lord turning His face to them in favor come to pass.

Life application: What Peter says to Israel now is never used by those who insist on baptism as a necessary part of being saved. Instead, they cite Acts 2:38 and leave it at that. But look at the two verses side by side –

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” Acts 3:19

What happened in Acts 2? The believers were baptized into the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2, the people were told to repent and be baptized (most assuredly speaking of the baptism of the Spirit – one being the result of the other). What happened in Acts 3? A man was healed of his infirmity. The people are told to repent and be converted (the changing of the mind results in the action of turning back to the Lord). In both, the sins are forgiven (remission/blotting out). In one, the gift of the Holy Spirit is promised. In the other, refreshing from the favorable face of the Lord, instead of oppression which comes from the face of the Lord being turned against them, is the result.

The man is being used as an object lesson (a sign) concerning the state of Israel, just as the event of speaking in tongues was used as a sign to Israel. It is as clear as the nose on one’s face that the ONLY thing that Israel is being instructed to do in order to be forgiven is to “repent,” or “change the mind.” This is perfectly in accord with all other instances of salvation in Scripture.

If one has been given the gospel and rejected it, he must – by default – repent of that state of mind. If a person has never been given the gospel and he then accepts it, only his faith – and nothing more – saves him. At that moment, he is sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 14), and he is saved.

Doctrine falls into individual categories. When the categories are mixed, faulty theology is the result. If anyone ever tells you that you must be baptized (water baptism) in order to be saved, be sure to explain to him what is actually being conveyed in Acts 2:38 and Acts 3:19. If he continues in his faulty theology, separate yourself from him. He is teaching a false gospel.

And remember, Acts is a descriptive account of what is happening. Read it, understand what the purpose of each event is given for, and then consider it as a historical record of what happened. But to obtain right doctrine, go to the epistles and study them, applying their precepts to your walk before the Lord.

*Lord God, thank You for the consistent message of Scripture. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone. Anything else is a false gospel. May we proclaim the simple path to salvation that came at the high cost of Christ's work on our behalf. Amen.*

**and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, Acts 3:20**

The words now continue the thought of Peter that is being expressed to the men of Israel. As they are a continuation of the previous verse, it is right to restate them together –

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, <sup>20</sup> and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before,

The context demands that attention is paid to who is being addressed. It is specifically Israel. They had killed their Messiah, and they are being asked to repent of this. Like Peter's words of Acts 2, the matter has absolutely nothing to do with Gentiles. The "times of refreshing" are a certain reference to what we now know as the millennial kingdom. To Israel, it was a time anticipated in the prophets concerning a coming messianic kingdom where the Lord's Messiah would reign among them.

This is then more fully confirmed with the words of verse 3:30, which say, "and that He." This is referring to "the Lord" who was just noted in the previous words, "so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." The times of refreshing will come from the Lord, and Peter notes that it is He who then "may send Jesus Christ."

The Jews standing there have been told that their Messiah had been glorified (verse 2:13). In the coming verse, Peter will explain that this means He is currently in heaven. Thus, Jesus is not among them, nor will He be among them until a set time and after a specific event has taken place.

This is an obvious conclusion when Peter has already noted that what happened to Jesus at the hand of the Jews was "foretold by the mouth of all His prophets" as noted in verse 3:18. Those hearing Jesus' words would more clearly understand that there is a set

purpose and a set time for all things to occur, including the absence and then return of their Messiah.

As noted several times already, Jesus has clearly and unambiguously told the people when He would return –

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen *gathers* her brood under *her* wings, but you were not willing! <sup>35</sup> See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until *the time* comes when you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” Luke 13:34, 35

Jerusalem is the seat of power and authority. It is from where Israel’s rulers direct the affairs of the nation. At the time of Jesus’ words, it was anticipated that they would reject Him. This came to pass, and Peter is again telling them that what they did to their Messiah required that they repent of it as individuals, but also on a national scale. Until the leaders of Israel acknowledge Christ Jesus as their Messiah, He will not return. When they do, He will. And when He does, the times of refreshing – the messianic age – will come to pass. All Scripture will be fulfilled, and not a word of the Lord shall fail.

It is this scenario, concerning this Jesus, that Peter next notes, “who was preached to you before.” This is certainly referring to the words he conveyed to the people in this same location on the day of Pentecost and who he again stood and proclaimed now after the healing of the beggar.

They had seen the coming of the Spirit, they had seen the healing of the man, and they had choices to make. And those choices must be rendered both individually and collectively. Again, the passage before us has absolutely nothing to do with Gentiles. They have not ever been mentioned in any of what is occurring in the narrative. Israel must be first presented with the opportunity to receive her King. As that fails to come to pass, the message will begin to go out to those who would gladly receive the good news of salvation by faith in His completed work.

Having said that, nothing is said – here or elsewhere – that if the Jews rejected their Messiah, they would be rejected as the people of the Lord. In fact, the opposite is explicitly stated in both testaments of Scripture, including the verse now being considered. It is up to the Jews for them to be restored. When they do what is expected of them, it will come to pass.

Life application: Two particular points should be considered from the verse that is being looked at. The first is that it is never said in Scripture that the Lord is returning to His church so that times of refreshing may result. The church isn't under punishment and in need of refreshing.

Instead, it has been a part of the nations of the world. Anyone who calls out to God through the gospel of Jesus becomes a part of the church. The idea of "refreshing" implies that such is needed. Israel would be judged for the rejection of Christ, and the resulting punishments of the curses – laid out in the Law of Moses – would be realized. It is from that state that refreshing would be needed. Jesus will return to Israel when they first return (repent and acknowledge) to Him.

However, Jesus never returns to the church because He never left the church. Jesus will gather His church together in the air, exactly as Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 4. It is not a return at all; it is a rapturous event.

The second point is that just because it says that the Lord (implying Yehovah of the Old Testament Scriptures) will send Jesus Christ, it in no way negates that Jesus is the God/Man. This cannot be used as a verse to deny the deity of Christ. In the Old Testament, there are times where one verse will speak of God and another of the Lord. Both are clearly presented as God.

At times, the Angel of the Lord is sent by God, and yet – when He is – He is clearly identified as the Lord (Yehovah). This is the same with Jesus in the New Testament. The Lord (the divine God) will send Jesus Christ (the Man who is the Messiah) to the people of Israel. But He does it by sending Himself in the form of a Man, just as occurs so many times in the Old Testament. There is no contradiction at all here. Rather, the Person of Jesus is the full, final, and forever expression of who this "Angel of the Lord" is who is found in the Old Testament.

We now know and more fully understand what Israel could not even guess at. If they did, they would not have crucified their Messiah (1 Corinthians 2:8). But in rejecting Him, they rejected the Lord God. The two are One. He is the God/Man. He is JESUS.

*Heavenly Father, how great it is to know that You have expressed Yourself in the Person of Jesus so that we can understand who You are. We can also appreciate all that You were willing to do in order to reconcile us to Yourself. Thank You for the story of redemption and love that is so beautifully expressed in the coming of Jesus. Amen.*

**whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. Acts 3:21**

Peter has asked the men of Israel to repent and be converted so that “times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” Further, he told them that the Lord would send Jesus Christ. Now he explains when this will happen, beginning with the words, “whom heaven must receive.”

The Greek word is *dechomai*. Helps word studies notes that “The personal element is emphasized ... which accounts for it always being in the Greek middle voice. This stresses the high level of self-involvement (interest) involved with the ‘welcoming-receiving.’” Further, Charles Ellicott says, “The words have a pregnant force: ‘must receive and keep.’”

Christ Jesus has been received into heaven, welcomed from His time of service on the earth. And He will remain there “until the times of restoration of all things.”

The Greek word translated as “restoration” refers not only to the rule of the Lord in a true theocracy, but in a condition suitable for that rule. This means that even the physical earth will be restored to a more perfect condition.

Some say it will be like the earth before the fall. This may be true to some extent, but there will still be a problem with man’s relationship with God, and those born at that time will still be susceptible to death. This is found in various Old Testament passages. Three will be cited of this thousand-year epoch to get the idea of where things are marvelous, but are still not perfect –

“No more shall an infant from there *live but a few days*,  
Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days;  
For the child shall die one hundred years old,  
But the sinner *being* one hundred years old shall be accursed.

<sup>21</sup> They shall build houses and inhabit *them*;  
They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

<sup>22</sup> They shall not build and another inhabit;  
They shall not plant and another eat;  
For as the days of a tree, *so shall be* the days of My people,  
And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

<sup>23</sup> They shall not labor in vain,  
Nor bring forth children for trouble;

For they *shall be* the descendants of the blessed of the LORD,  
And their offspring with them.” Isaiah 65:20-23

Despite men living to extremely old ages (as the days of a tree), something seen before the flood of Noah, Isaiah notes that there will still be death. Further...

“And it shall come to pass *that* everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. <sup>17</sup> And it shall be *that* whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. <sup>18</sup> If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they *shall have no rain*; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. <sup>19</sup> This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.”

-Zechariah 14:16-19

Zechariah’s words show that there is anticipated rebellion by the nations, refusing to honor the King, the Lord of hosts. And more...

“Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison <sup>8</sup> and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number *is* as the sand of the sea. <sup>9</sup> They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. <sup>10</sup> The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet *are*. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” Revelation 20:7-10

Revelation shows that there will be the desire for rebellion and war in the hearts of men. Eventually, a large-scale rebellion against the Lord and His people will occur. These show us that the “restoration of all things” is more in line with the pre-flood world than it is with the pre-fall world.

Unlike the pre-flood world, though, its defining character is that righteousness will be more prevalent than sin. Genesis 6 shows how desperately wicked man on earth became. On the other hand, with the messianic rule, man will be guided to (for the most part) make right moral choices and to live in a manner honoring of the Lord. Peter, citing Isaiah, will refer to this epoch of time later in his second epistle –



“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. <sup>11</sup> Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup> looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? <sup>13</sup> Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” 2 Peter 3:10-13

It will be this time of long life and one dominant ruling government under the Lord that Peter speaks of now to the men of Israel. Of this, he next says, “which God has spoken.”

The words signify divine inspiration. It is what Peter will also refer to in his second epistle—

“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; <sup>20</sup> knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, <sup>21</sup> for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:19-21

God speaks, His words foretell, and what He says will come to pass. But His words are conveyed through men. Israel understood this because they were the people who kept these oracles of God. As such, Peter continues with, “by the mouth of all His holy prophets.”

This does not mean that all of the prophets spoke of this future period. Rather, it means that there is a united message from God that is conveyed by His true prophets. Their message is one because God is One. What God speaks through His many prophets is, therefore, a reliable testimony of what He has done, is doing, and will continue to do throughout all of redemptive history. And that message is ultimately given for one overarching purpose which is to reveal Himself through the Person of Jesus Christ.

This consistent message of prophecy has occurred “since the world began.” The Greek reads “from the age.” It signifies from the earliest point. God spoke the universe into existence, and yet John 1 says that the Word was there at the beginning with God. It says that all things were made through Him. Thus, even though those words were penned long after they occurred, both Moses and John spoke of things concerning the very beginning.

Everything about the creation account ultimately points to God's work in Christ. When evaluated from that perspective, the words come alive as to why the Lord had them recorded in His word. Further, Moses records the words of the Lord in Genesis 3:15, the first explicit prophecy concerning the coming of Christ known as the protoevangelium –

“And I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her Seed;  
He shall bruise your head,  
And you shall bruise His heel.”

Everything in the word is given through God's prophets to lead us to this wonderful understanding of God's workings in and through His Messiah, Jesus.

Life application: When reading the Bible, we should continuously ask ourselves why God used the specific words and stories. In our asking, we should question how these things point to Christ. When we discover the answer, the narrative comes alive in an entirely new way.

However, we have to be extremely careful to never insert our ideas into the Bible. It is very easy to decide a passage means what we want it to mean. That is not a healthy way of reviewing Scripture. Rather let us evaluate what is presented and compare it with the rest of Scripture in order to form a sound picture of the typology that God is presenting. Otherwise, we can find ourselves making anything say anything. This is not honoring of God and of His precious word.

*Lord God, thank You for the wonderful gift You have presented to us in the pages of Scripture. It is a wonder, a marvel, and a treasure. Prompt us, O God, to open it and seek out its secrets all the days of our lives. Thank You for Your majestic and superior word! Amen.*

**For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you.**  
Acts 3:22

Peter had just mentioned “all His holy prophets.” Speaking of one of them in particular, Moses, the great lawgiver of Israel, he next says, “For Moses truly said to the fathers.”

Peter will cite words from Deuteronomy 18, words given to Israel by Moses as instruction and guidance concerning their future conduct. They are words of law, and what they say are binding upon the nation. To fail to heed them will result in whatever penalty is given to accompany them.

In other words, at times Moses might direct that the offender be stoned to death. At others, that he is to be beaten a certain number of times. In the coming verse, the penalty will be mentioned. But first, Peter cites the mandate, beginning with, “The Lord your God.”

In the Hebrew of Deuteronomy 18:15, it says, *Yehovah Elohekha* – “Yehovah your God.” It is the name of the God of Israel. Moses prophesied that the Lord God would be the initiator of the action that is to come about. With that understanding, Peter next says, “will raise up for you.”

The words, whether in Hebrew or Greek, speak of the Lord raising up or causing to stand. The Lord is the initiator of the action. The sense is that at some point in Israel’s history, what Moses says will come about according to the set plan of the Lord. And what He will raise up, according to Moses, is “a Prophet like me.”

Moses was a prophet of the Lord, and after him came many more prophets whose words were often carefully recorded and maintained, becoming the basis for Israel’s Scriptures. However, none of these were “like” Moses, apart from the fact that they were prophets. The difference between Moses and all others was that the words of Moses formed the basis of the law. He was the one who initiated the covenant.

But more, not only did he initiate the covenant, he also performed the priestly role in its initiation, serving at the altar and ministering the blood. Though he was not to continue in the role of priest, he did serve in this function initially.

And further, not only did he serve in these ways, but he also served as the legislator of the covenant. No other prophet would be like Moses in all of these ways. His position in Israel was unique and distinct from all other prophets.

As Moses said that the Lord would raise up a Prophet like him, it meant that this prophet would – by default – be the Initiator, Priest, and Legislator of a New Covenant. This is carefully and minutely explained to Israel in the book of Hebrews where Jesus is said to be “greater than” Moses and Aaron in all ways.

With this understood, because it came from the unbreakable words of law issued forth from Moses, Peter next says that this Prophet would come “from your brethren.”

The meaning of this was clearly understood by every single person in Israel. The One God would raise up will be an Israelite, not a foreigner. When John the Baptist came, the people wondered if he was this coming Prophet –

“Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’

<sup>20</sup> He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’

<sup>21</sup> And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’

He said, ‘I am not.’

“Are you the Prophet?”

And he answered, ‘No.’

<sup>22</sup> Then they said to him, ‘Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?’

<sup>23</sup> He said: “I am

‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

“Make straight the way of the LORD,”

as the prophet Isaiah said.” John 1:19-23

John denied he was the coming Prophet. Others immediately recognized Jesus as such –

“We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote— Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” John 1:45

Saying “of whom Moses” wrote about, it is clearly referring specifically to the coming Prophet. Likewise, Peter is now building his case before the men of Israel that Jesus is, in fact, the One Moses spoke of. The importance of this is that Moses clearly commanded the people concerning this coming One, saying, “Him you shall hear.”

In the Hebrew of the referenced verse from Moses, there is an added stress in the word translated as “you shall hear.” This is indicated by the structure. It says, *elav tishmaun* – “Him you shall *certainly* hear.” Further, the sense of the word “hear” is not just to listen to the audible sounds, but to heed them and to obey them.

As such, there will be no excuse for the rejecting of this Prophet. The people must heed the words He speaks. It is a command of Moses, and it is a provision specifically directed

by the Lord. Further, the people were to heed him, as Peter says, “in all things, whatever He says to you.”

The basis for these words is found also in Deuteronomy 18 –

“And the LORD said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good. <sup>18</sup>I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.’”

-Deuteronomy 18:17, 18

The words of the Prophet are equated directly to the words of the Lord. Therefore, to reject the Prophet’s words is to reject both Moses and the Lord. What is said by Him is to be heard and complied with.

Because this is clearly to be understood from the law itself, no person of Israel – to whom the Law of Moses was given – could (or can) say that he was being obedient to Moses if he rejected this Prophet Moses spoke of and that Peter now refers to. To reject Jesus is to reject Moses. Jesus said this explicitly to them –

“Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is *one* who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. <sup>46</sup>For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. <sup>47</sup>But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” John 5:45-47

In rejecting Moses, the people would reject the Lord who commissioned Moses. The logical progression of thought is that only condemnation could result from a rejection of Jesus. To ensure this is understood, Peter will continue this thought in the next verse.

Life application: Jews, and heretical sects of Christianity, will claim that salvation can be obtained through adherence to the Law of Moses. But this is a false teaching. The Law of Moses, from both the words of Moses and those of the Lord, clearly indicated that to not comply with Jesus’ words is to reject Moses.

And Jesus’ words establish a New Covenant –

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”

<sup>20</sup>Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, “This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. <sup>21</sup>But behold, the hand of My

betrayed *is* with Me on the table. <sup>22</sup> And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" Luke 22:19-22

This is explicit and it is clear. The author of Hebrews then explains what this means –

"In that He says, 'A new *covenant*,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." Hebrews 8:13

The Mosaic code is obsolete. It has served its purpose and it is no longer in effect. Therefore, to fall back on it for salvation means that salvation will never be realized. Be sure to stay away from the damaging teachings of such people. One must either come to Christ, fully and completely, setting aside attempts at self-righteousness through the law, or he will never find salvation. Come to Jesus by faith alone and you will be in the sweet spot.

*Lord God, thank You for the surety we possess through faith in Christ. May Your glorious name ever be praised for what You have done for us through Him. May we never set aside this grace by attempting to be justified through our own righteousness. Instead, may we find our hope and rest in Christ alone. Amen.*

**And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' Acts 3:23**

Peter, quoting Deuteronomy, has been referring to the Prophet who would come and who would be like Moses. The command in Deuteronomy was spoken from the Lord to Moses. From there, it was to be communicated to the people through the law. This command was that the Prophet to come was to be heard in all things. Peter now speaks of the consequences of disobeying this command, saying, "And it shall be."

The words speak of a state of being that must exist. In essence, "The people are to do what I command. And what I command includes..." With that in mind, Peter continues, saying, "that every soul who will not hear that Prophet."

As the Prophet to come was promised by the Lord, and as He had the words of the Lord in His mouth, speaking everything commanded by Him, then to not hear Him would be to ignore the Lord. In this, one can see that the word of the Lord is a reflection of who He is. When He speaks, He is revealing the substance of who He is to us. To not hear Him, as revealed through this Prophet sent by Him, that person "shall be utterly destroyed."

Peter does not cite Moses exactly here. In Deuteronomy, it says, “I will require it of him.” Despite the change in wording, Peter’s words surely paraphrase the intent. When the Lord seeks out why He was ignored, it is a way for Him to reveal to the person the error of his way and to understand the judgment he deserves.

The person failed to believe, and to fail to believe the Lord means that person will be destroyed. The word Peter uses to convey this is found only here in Scripture, *exolethreuó*. It is a compound verb, coming from *ek*, or “out,” and *olothreuó*, or “destroy.” Thus, it signifies complete destruction. Peter finishes his thought by saying that such a person was to be so destroyed “from among the people.”

What this means isn’t just being destroyed for sins committed in the flesh, but that there is no hope of being saved from eternal condemnation. Further, this signifies that the person will be utterly cut off from the people of God as well. It means to die apart from the atonement of sin. The reason this would occur comes down to one simple word: faith.

The Day of Atonement in Israel was a day of faith. It was a day of acknowledging one’s sins before God. To not have faith in the atonement process meant that the person did not believe it was effective – for whatever reason. But Scripture, meaning the words of the Lord, said that this was how atonement was to be received.

In the same manner, to not believe the words of the Prophet, who had the words of the Lord in His mouth, was to not believe the words of the Lord. In the end, one is saved or condemned by what he believes or fails to believe.

Life application: Though spoken to Israel under the law, the words of Jesus teach us that our words have power. But words are a reflection of what is in the heart –

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit. <sup>34</sup> Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. <sup>35</sup> A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. <sup>36</sup> But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. <sup>37</sup> For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 12:33-37

This remains true in the church age. The words we speak will either bring salvation or condemnation. First, the gospel is given –

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4

This is what Christ did for us. Paul then tells us in Romans how that is appropriated –

But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): <sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. <sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. <sup>13</sup> For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” Romans 10:8-13

The mouth speaks forth what the heart believes. This doesn't mean that one is saved by simply speaking forth just anything then. Rather, it means that a person whose words speak forth what his heart believes, when that belief is in accord with the gospel message, will be saved. When the heart and the word are in one accord, the message is accepted by God.

This is because, unlike God whose words always reflect who He is, man's words are often not truthful. It is the Lord who searches the hearts and minds. It is He who discerns what is true and what is false. Only a true confession, which is an open profession of the state of the heart, will be pleasing to God.

In the end, everything about our relationship with God must come down to faith. When our faith is properly directed, our words will express that. And in our profession of faith, we will be justified before God. Good stuff from our marvelously gracious Creator!

*Lord God, thank You for the simplicity of the gospel. Thank You also that all You ask for us to do is to believe that simple gospel message in order to be saved. You have done all that is necessary to bring us back to You. Thank You that our faith in this is pleasing in Your eyes. Amen.*



**Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. Acts 3:24**

In the previous two verses, Peter has spoken out the words of Moses concerning the “Prophet like me” that he had mentioned in Deuteronomy 18. But the word concerning Christ didn’t begin there, as noted in verse 3:21 where Peter referenced “all His holy prophets since the world began.” Nor did it end with Moses either. Rather, Moses spoke of prophets that would arise in Deuteronomy 18 as well –

But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’<sup>21</sup> And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ —<sup>22</sup> when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. Deuteronomy 18:20-22

The implication of Moses’ words is not that there will only be false prophets, but there will be true prophets, but that the false prophets must be identified and weeded out. With this understanding, Peter begins this verse with, “Yes, and all the prophets.”

In Scripture, the word “all” does not necessarily have to mean “all” in the absolute sense. For example, in Matthew 3, it says –

“Now John himself was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.<sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him<sup>6</sup> and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.” Matthew 3:4-6

However, in Luke 7, it says –

“And when all the people heard *Him*, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John.<sup>30</sup> But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.”

-Luke 7:29, 30

Thus, not every prophet is necessarily referred to here. It simply speaks of a unified message from the office of a true prophet. And that includes “from Samuel and those who follow.”

Peter specifically mentions Samuel, and yet prophets were noted between the time of Moses and Samuel, such as in Judges 4:4 and 6:8. In 1 Samuel 2:27-36, a person – though not specifically called a prophet – carried the word of the Lord to Eli the high priest. It can even be inferred that Eli the high priest heard and knew the word of the Lord from 1 Samuel 3:9.

However, the office of prophets took on a rather distinct nature at the time of Samuel where groups of prophets are recorded together. Further, the distinct nature of Samuel's prophetic office is noted in Psalm 99 –

“Moses and Aaron were among His priests,  
And Samuel was among those who called upon His name;  
They called upon the LORD, and He answered them.” Psalm 99:6

Of this office of prophet, of which Samuel is noted as the chief example, Peter next says, “as many as have spoken.”

These words have to be considered in a limited sense. First, not all of the words of a prophet were words of prophecy. Some prophets only spoke a limited number of words of prophecy from the Lord in their lives, such as King Saul (1 Samuel 10:11). Some prophets spoke the word of the Lord, but only the substance of their words – without any specifics – are recorded in Scripture (see Jeremiah 26:20-23).

Therefore, what Peter is saying is that there is a general tenor of the prophetic word of the Lord that is conveyed which ultimately points to something specific, and that is that they “have also foretold these days.”

This is speaking of the promise of the coming Christ and of that which is involved in His coming – a New Covenant, the rejection of Him by His people, the inclusion of Gentiles in the work of the Messiah, the regathering of His people to the land of Israel, a future tribulation, a glorious messianic kingdom, and so on. The prophets spoke forth words of the events surrounding the coming of Christ, sometimes in typology, sometimes in veiled terms, sometimes in generalities, and sometimes in explicit words. Jesus referred to this after His resurrection –

“Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ <sup>27</sup> And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He

expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

-Luke 24:25-27

As far as Samuel and Moses being given as the chief examples of this class of people, it should be noted that even his mother spoke forth words of prophecy at the time she dedicated him to the Lord. In her words, she specifically notes the coming of Israel’s king at a time when there were no kings, and then refers to the Lord’s Messiah (anointed) –

“The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken in pieces;  
From heaven He will thunder against them.  
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth.  
‘He will give strength to His king,  
And exalt the horn of His anointed.’” 1 Samuel 2:10

Likewise, though not through Samuel directly, the words of the book ascribed to him explicitly speak of the establishment and eternal nature of the Davidic line of kings, an obvious reference to the coming of Christ –

“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men.” 2 Samuel 7:12-14

Thus, Peter’s words to the men of Israel were clearly understood and carried with them the note of certainty that the prophetic utterances given to the people of Israel were intended to lead them to the times in which Christ would come. He is the central point and intent of prophecy, whether it directly speaks of Him or not. As it says in Revelation 19:10, “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

Life application: In the main commentary, Jeremiah 26:20-23 was referenced –

“Now there was also a man who prophesied in the name of the LORD, Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjath Jearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah. <sup>21</sup> And when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Urijah heard *it*, he was afraid and fled, and went to Egypt. <sup>22</sup> Then Jehoiakim the king sent men to Egypt: Elnathan the son of Achbor,

and *other* men *who went* with him to Egypt. <sup>23</sup> And they brought Urijah from Egypt and brought him to Jehoiakim the king, who killed him with the sword and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people.”

Though seemingly unnecessary to the biblical narrative, the words are actually key in understanding exactly what Peter is referring to in his words. Israel is being told that they have been guided by the warnings of the prophets all along. And it isn't just the spoken words that were recorded in Scripture that were guiding them. Rather, prophets – both true and false – were speaking to the people.

The true were to be heeded; the false were to be destroyed. But the testimony in Scripture is that quite often the false were exalted and the true were destroyed. As such, the very existence of these people – whether recorded in Scripture or not – was a guiding factor in the nation as it led towards punishment, exile, return to the land, and so on.

And all of these things were leading the nation to the time when Messiah would come. Everything about the nation of Israel was being geared for this one main purpose. Therefore, when we read the history leading up to Israel, in the nation of Israel, or even of the alignment of nations that align with or come against Israel, we are seeing the unfolding of God's workings within humanity in order to bring about the fulfillment of His plan for humanity.

As such, when we read Scripture, let us consider this. This book lays down the outline of everything that is needed for us to understand everything God wants us to know concerning His redemptive process within the stream of time and human existence. In our hands, we are holding the precious and sacred treasure which is THE WORD OF GOD.

Let us handle it wisely and never fail to be careful with its sacred contents.

*Lord God, help us to be responsible with our time, vigilant in our walk before You, and ever-so careful with how we treat the precious words of life that are revealed in Your Holy Bible. May we seek out its treasures all the days of our lives. Give us wisdom in Your word, O God. Amen.*

**You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’**

Acts 3:25

The previous words of Peter referred to the prophets having spoken concerning Christ, foretelling the days that had now come in Him. With that stated, he next says, “You are sons of the prophets.”

In other words, Peter now connects the people before him directly to those who spoke of Christ. The prophets had received the words, the prophets’ words foretold the coming of Christ, the words of the prophets were intended for the people of God, and the sons of those prophets had now been the recipients of what was foretold. Thus, they were without excuse if they turned away from the words of the prophets.

It actually doesn’t bode well for them if taken in conjunction with Jesus’ words spoken to the Pharisees during His ministry –

“And He said, ‘Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. <sup>47</sup> Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. <sup>48</sup> In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. <sup>49</sup> Therefore the wisdom of God also said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and persecute,’ <sup>50</sup> that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, <sup>51</sup> from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.’”

-Luke 11:46-51

Jesus knew that he would be rejected, even though the prophets had foretold of His coming. Peter was now telling them that this same Jesus would now hold them accountable if they continued in their rejection of Him. This was explicit in verse 3:23 where he cited Moses concerning anyone who would not hear the words of the Prophet prophesied by him. With this understood, he next says, “and of the covenant which God made.”

In the Greek, Peter uses the noun and verb form of the same root word. In essence, he says, “and of the covenant which God covenanted.” God had entered into a covenant that was still in force at the time. Israel is being reminded of this with the words of Peter. But more, Peter continues by saying that the covenant is “with our fathers.”

This means that a covenant was made long ago and yet it was still in full effect. It was set forth and the terms remained unchanged. It was open and available to the people

standing before him. But more, Peter is implying that he and John who stood before them had been recipients of the covenant promises and that they had not. If they had, Peter wouldn't have to be standing there explaining all of this to them.

At this point, one would think that Peter is speaking of the Mosaic Covenant. He has just gotten done referring to Moses' words that were written in Deuteronomy 18, a part of the covenant originally established at Mount Sinai. He then continued on referring to the prophets of that covenant when he said, "from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days" (3:24).

Because of this, the initial thought might have been, "What is this guy talking about. We are all sons of the covenant set forth by Moses." But this is not at all what Peter is referring to. This is seen in his next words, "saying to Abraham."

Despite having referred to precepts found in the Law of Moses and of those who lived and prophesied under that covenant, Peter is not at all referring to the Mosaic Covenant. That was a two-way covenant. The offer was made to the people, and they agreed to its provisions. They placed themselves under it and were bound to it. There was no future option to get out from under it. It stuck to them like glue and only in its annulment (through its fulfillment) could they be released from its yoke.

However, the "covenant which God covenanted" with Abraham was a completely different sort. God spoke forth the promise, and it was He who would see it through for those who were to be included in its provisions. With that understood, Peter next cites the promise of that covenant to Abraham, saying, "And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This covenant was initially promised in Genesis 12 –

“Now the LORD had said to Abram:

‘Get out of your country,

From your family

And from your father’s house,

To a land that I will show you.

<sup>2</sup> I will make you a great nation;

I will bless you

And make your name great;

And you shall be a blessing.

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,

And I will curse him who curses you;  
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Genesis 12:1-3

In Genesis 15, Abraham noted to the Lord that he had no “seed,” meaning offspring. But the Lord promised, on oath and by covenant, that His earlier promise would – in fact – come to pass. There it said –

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, “Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?” <sup>3</sup> Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!”

<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” <sup>5</sup> Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” <sup>6</sup> And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

-Genesis 15:1-6

In response to the spoken word alone, Abraham believed the otherwise incredible. He demonstrated faith and was declared righteous. After that, the Lord Himself cut the covenant as is recorded in the rest of the chapter.

In Genesis 17, the sign of the covenant was given, circumcision. The sign anticipated the coming of Christ. In the coming of Christ, the sign was fulfilled. In Genesis 22, a test of Abraham’s faith was made, and Abraham was vindicated through the test. As such, the Lord said to him –

“By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only *son*— <sup>17</sup> blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. <sup>18</sup> In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” Genesis 22:16-18

It is this covenant, made with Abraham, and which continued through Isaac and Jacob, that Peter is referring to. This means that Peter’s citing of Moses concerning the Prophet to come, and of his citing of the prophets under the Mosaic Covenant, indicates that even the words of Moses and the prophets anticipated the fulfillment of the Law of

Moses by the Messiah and its subsequent annulment by Him, thus allowing for the Abrahamic Covenant to take full effect.

As the Abrahamic Covenant was one based on faith alone, and which bore the sign of circumcision, and because the sign of circumcision is fulfilled in Christ, it means that anyone who demonstrates the faith of Abraham is “circumcised” in the heart and declared righteous through that act of faith - (see Romans 2:29).

All of this is carefully explained in the epistles, but those standing before Peter would have had an inkling of what was being presented. Restoration and fellowship with God cannot be obtained by a person through the Mosaic Code.

Rather, it could only be realized by faith in God’s fulfillment of it in Christ. And anyone, whether of Israel or not, could have possessed that faith. Hence, “all the families of the earth” means that all along Israel was not the only thing that God was focused on. Rather, God was reconciling the world to Himself through Jesus Christ. As will be seen in the next verse, Israel is just the first to be given this offer of reconciliation.

However, Jesus carefully explained this to Israel during His ministry, using the faith of a Gentile to show them this –

Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, <sup>6</sup>saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented.”

<sup>7</sup>And Jesus said to him, “I will come and heal him.”

<sup>8</sup>The centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>9</sup>For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this *one*, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does *it*.”

<sup>10</sup>When Jesus heard *it*, He marveled, and said to those who followed, “Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! <sup>11</sup>And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>12</sup>But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” <sup>13</sup>Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.” And his servant was healed that same hour. Matthew 8:5-13



Life application: The Mosaic Covenant, which is the basis for the Law of Moses, is not a means to an end for those to whom it was given. Rather, it was a tutor to them, and to us, that something else was necessary to bring peace between God and man. It was a steppingstone in the process. This is clearly and unambiguously stated by Paul in Galatians 3 –

What purpose then *does* the law *serve*? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. <sup>20</sup> Now a mediator does not *mediate* for one *only*, but God is one.

<sup>21</sup> *Is* the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. <sup>22</sup> But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. <sup>23</sup> But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. <sup>24</sup> Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. Galatians 3:19-25

As this is so, why would anyone want to return to the law in order to attempt to be pleasing to God? It is a slap in His face, it is a rejection of Christ's work, and it calls out, "The blood of Jesus was insufficient to do what needs to be done! Thanks for trying, God, but I've got this."

Can you see how disgraceful the theology of those who return to the law for justification is? Don't just walk away from such teachers... run. God has done the work. All He asks you to do is to simply believe. Have faith in Christ's finished, final, and forever work; and be pleasing to your Creator. This is all that you can give Him. Jesus has done the rest.

Also, Peter's words here demonstrate, without any doubt at all, that his "gospel" is exactly the same as that of Paul. He speaks of the gospel of grace through faith. Works are excluded.

*Lord God, thank You for the all-sufficient work of Jesus Christ our Lord. Today, we pray for those who are caught up in various religious expressions that are displeasing to You. We pray for those caught up in Judaism, the Hebrew Roots Movement, Seventh Day Adventists, and all others who have set aside the grace of Christ in order to work their way back to You. Open their eyes to what Jesus has done. This we pray in His glorious and exalted name. Amen.*

**To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities.” Acts 3:26**

Peter just referred to the covenant made with Abraham, which was a covenant of faith – something even Moses and the prophets spoke of in their words. Now, Peter explains what that means in regard to the coming of Christ Jesus, saying, “To you first.”

Peter is speaking to the men of Israel (3:11). This is perfectly in accord with Jesus’ words of Luke 24 –

“Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’” Luke 24:46, 47

The sentiment is repeated by Christ just prior to the ascension in Acts 1, and then it is picked up now by Peter and later by Paul several times in Acts and then in his epistles –

“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.’” Acts 13:46

The message was to go first to those who bore the burden of the law, to free them from its bondage. This was even the purpose of Jesus’ earthly ministry, as He said in Matthew 15:24, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

The house of Israel bore the weight and responsibility of the law. Therefore, the law had to be fulfilled first before a New Covenant could be introduced. Christ came to take the weight of the law upon Himself in order to remove that weight from the people. Jesus said this explicitly in Matthew 11 –

“Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

With this being understood, Peter next says, “God, having raised up His Servant Jesus.” This is not speaking of the resurrection. The structure of the Greek indicates clearly that

it is referring to the act of bringing Christ into the world in order to accomplish His mission.

It is the same terminology as was used in verse 3:22, which said, “For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren.’” Jesus was raised up by God within the house of Israel. Peter indicates this, saying that He “sent Him to bless you.”

The verb is a present participle. The words more correctly read, “blessing you.” It is an ongoing action, always present before the people. The blessing of Christ is one that can be appropriated at any point in time because the eternal Christ has been raised up for this very purpose. The contrast between the ongoing action of the law in comparison to the ongoing blessing of Christ is reflected by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 –

“Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech— <sup>13</sup> unlike Moses, *who* put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ. <sup>15</sup> But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. <sup>16</sup> Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty. <sup>18</sup> But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 3:12-18

This “blessing” is then realized in the action that results from it, which Peter says is “in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities.” This was exactly what Zecharias the father of John the Baptist prophesied concerning the coming of Messiah –

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest;  
For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,  
<sup>77</sup> To give knowledge of salvation to His people  
By the remission of their sins,  
<sup>78</sup> Through the tender mercy of our God,  
With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;  
<sup>79</sup> To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,  
To guide our feet into the way of peace.” Luke 1:76-79

Sin is what separates man from God. The law only highlights, and even magnifies, the sin in man. As such, Christ came to take man's sin upon Himself, and to remove the weight and burden of the law from the people so that they would no longer face the imputation of sin. In turning to Christ, man turns away from sin. Reconciliation is realized, and pure *shalom* – wholeness in all ways – is restored.

Life application: In Revelation 21:3, 4, it says –

“Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. <sup>4</sup> And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

This is a marvelous promise from the word of God that someday the world in which we live will be behind us. All of the sorrows, pains, trials, divorces, murders... all of it will be gone. A state of perfect wholeness will be realized, and humanity will be blessed with what was originally intended for them.

But this cannot occur unless the sin in man is dealt with first. For those who fail to come to God through Jesus Christ, their sin remains. As such, their condemnation remains. No person can enter into what God has prepared for His people without coming through Jesus Christ. And this is exactly what the first point of the simple gospel of salvation through Jesus proclaims, “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3).

We have sin, Christ is the cure for the sin we bear, and we must believe that these things are true. Unless we acknowledge this, there can be no salvation. And, incredibly, all God asks us to do in order to receive His salvation is to believe. This is what Abraham did, as indicated in the previous verse of Acts. And this is what the gospel Peter and Paul put forth for humanity calls for – BELIEVE!

Let us accept God's offer of peace and reconciliation which comes through the giving of His Son for us –

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...” 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4

Accept what God has done, and be guaranteed a place in the glorious new heavens and earth that Revelation so beautifully describes! Do it today.

*Lord God, we are so very grateful to You for having sent Christ Jesus to take care of the sin in our lives. An infinite void separated us from You, but through Him, that gap is repaired. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. In His name, we pray. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 4

**Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, Acts 4:1**

Chapter 3 ended with Peter addressing the men of Israel at the temple complex at the “porch which is called Solomon’s.” It is while Peter is addressing the people that Chapter 4 begins. That is noted with the words, “Now as they spoke to the people.”

Peter is still in the process of giving his speech as this occurs, and his words were heard by some who were not at all pleased with what they were hearing. That will be seen in the coming verses. But, for now, the narrative continues with the identity of those who are not pleased, beginning with “the priests.”

The priests are those descending from Aaron who was designated and ordained as the first high priest of Israel. The term “chief priests” is used many times in the gospels, indicating that there was a hierarchy within the priesthood. Luke does not use that term now, and so this may simply be the priests who were on duty at the time, fulfilling their regular duties as scheduled according to their divisions. Along with them came “the captain of the temple.”

Aaron the priest is descended from Levi. Along with him, all of the tribe of Levi – including those who were not of the priestly class – were designated for the service of the tabernacle and later the temple. They were interspersed throughout the land of Israel in Levitical cities to minister to the people. But Levites from the various clans with Levi were designated to serve in rotating courses at the temple as outlined in 1 Chronicles. Over them would be chief men who stayed at the temple. These are noted by Luke at the time when the plot to kill Jesus was being worked out –

“So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them. <sup>5</sup> And they were glad, and agreed to give him money.”

-Luke 22:4, 5

Over these captains, there would be one to direct all of them. That is the person now being detailed in Acts. Of this captain of the temple, Vincent’s Word Studies says –

“It was the duty of the Levites to keep guard at the gates of the temple, in order to prevent the unclean from entering. To them the duties of the temple-police were entrusted, under the command of an official known in the New Testament as “the

captain of the temple," but in Jewish writings chiefly as "the man of the temple mount." Josephus speaks of him as a person of such consequence as to be sent, along with the high-priest, prisoner to Rome."

Along with these came others who were there at the temple as well. As Luke says, "and the Sadducees." Of this group, Albert Barnes gives a sufficiently detailed description –

The Sadducees are supposed to have taken their name from Sadok, who flourished about 260 years before the Christian era. He was a pupil of Antigonus Sochaeus, president of the sanhedrin, or great council of the nation. He had taught the duty of serving God disinterestedly, without the hope of reward or the fear of punishment. Sadok, not properly understanding the doctrine of his master, drew the inference that there was no future state of rewards or punishments, and on this belief he founded the sect. The other notions which they held, all to be traced to this leading doctrine, were:

1. That there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit Matthew 22:23; Acts 23:8; and that the soul of man perishes with the body.
2. They rejected the doctrine of fate or decrees.
3. They rejected all traditions, and professed to receive only the books of the Old Testament. They were far less numerous than the Pharisees, but their want of numbers was compensated, in some degree, by their wealth and standing in society. Though they did not generally seek office, yet several of them were advanced to the high priesthood.

Of these three classes noted by Luke, it says they "came upon them," meaning Peter, John, and the beggar who were there before the crowd. The words indicate they didn't just come to hear, but that they are there to confront the men. The encounter is not one of friendly greeting and acceptance, but rather – as will be seen – one of displeasure and of forceful intent.

Life application: One can go to YouTube, or other video sources, and see people on the streets giving the gospel to others. At times, those who are being recorded may have the attention of the person or people they are witnessing to and then along comes some public official to stop them or even arrest them – quite often when they are perfectly within their rights concerning what they are doing.

The truth is often not acceptable to those who hear it. This is especially so when it comes to religion. As there are about fifty jillion religions out there, it is unpalatable to tell people that you carry the only one that bears the truth. People don't want to hear

that. And yet, anyone who belongs to a religion either thinks what he believes is the truth, or he is an idiot for believing what he knows is untrue.

As such, their standing there – believing in their own religion – should be just as offensive to the officials as that of those presenting the gospel. Therefore, if the evangelists are within their public rights, there should be no harm nor foul. But that is not how things will often go, is it?

Because there is truth, and because that truth can be reasonably verified through study, and because it is at variance with how people perceive themselves before God, the truth can be difficult to swallow. And so, it is easier to rough up, persecute, and even arrest those bearing the truth as a temporary fix to the situation.

As Christians, if we are willing to actually open our mouths and speak, there is always the possibility that people will take offense, and they may have you attacked, arrested, or even killed – depending on the surrounding circumstances. This goes along with the witness for Christ, and we must be willing to accept things as such. How far are you willing to go to get the truth out to others?

Everyone must stand before the Lord someday, and each will see the embodiment of truth in the Person of Jesus Christ. It will be either for salvation or for condemnation. If you do your job properly, you may save a soul from the latter. Our current lives are temporary, but we will all spend eternity somewhere. Let us be willing to share the good news now, even if it means this current life gets more difficult or even cut short for doing so.

*Lord God, help us to be bold in our proclamation of the gospel. And give us the strength to never waffle in our conviction that it is the absolute truth of God. We know there is only one way to be reconciled to You. Help us to be strong and defend that truth when it is time to do so. Amen.*

**being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. Acts 4:2**

The previous verse saw the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees coming upon Peter, John, and the beggar. Now, the account continues, saying, “being greatly disturbed.”



The verb is *diaponeomai*. It comes from *dia* (through) and *poneomai* (to work hard). Hence, it gives the sense of great distress or vexation. One might say, “troubled through and through,” or “thoroughly vexed.” These leaders were highly agitated “that they taught the people.”

Although what they taught is not yet stated, the very fact that these men were standing in the temple teaching would have been enough of a source of grief for them to be indignant. As has been seen in the gospels and already in Acts, the leaders looked at these men as uneducated Galileans.

How could they know anything of value concerning theology or what was culturally or morally right? It was only they, the priests, Levites, Sadducees, and other elites, that could debate such higher points. Not mere Galileans. But what really galled them was that they stood there teaching the people “and preached in Jesus.”

The words are correct, and they clean up a grievous error of the KJV which says, “through Jesus.” The Greek preposition *en* (in), not *dia* (through), is used. The preaching of John and Paul is “in Jesus” and it concerns “the resurrection from the dead.”

It is true that the resurrection of the dead for all people comes through Jesus, but this is not the point that John and Peter are making. Rather, it was Jesus who had resurrected just a short time ago. The point isn’t just that people standing there being preached to will be resurrected through Jesus, but that Jesus had resurrected. He is the firstfruits of those to be resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:20). If Jesus had not first resurrected, there would be no resurrection. This is the very argument that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 15–

“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? <sup>13</sup> But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. <sup>14</sup> And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty. <sup>15</sup> Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. <sup>16</sup> For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! <sup>18</sup> Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Paul goes on with his logical argument in that chapter explaining all of the finer details that exist because of what occurred “in Jesus.” The truly galling point to these men is

that it was they and the other leaders of Israel who had stood before Pilate calling out for His crucifixion. If Jesus had resurrected, then it meant that they had crucified their Messiah.

Such a notion could not be tolerated, and it vexed them through and through to even have it considered. If the resurrection is found in Jesus, then everything that they clung to – their status, their power, their influence – would be taken from them and would belong to the One they had done away with just a short time ago. To them, this was a great affront, and it could not be allowed to be conveyed to the people.

Life application: Again, and again, we see the importance of proper translation concerning the Bibles we use. When giving a general reading of Scripture for our daily devotionals, it may not seem so overly important. At such times, we just read to get an appreciation for the general sense of what is said.

However, as we mature in our thinking concerning Scripture, or when we attend studies that are intended to convey proper doctrine, it becomes more and more important to know exactly and precisely what is being said. Words have meaning. Sentence structure carries ideas that can be misunderstood. Tenses convey the thoughts of the author. If such are botched up, like the translation of the KJV above, real errors in thinking will eventually occur.

Fortunately, the theology of what is conveyed in this verse, and which was mistranslated by the KJV, is properly explained elsewhere. We cannot say, “Well then, no harm no foul.” That is incorrect. The concept of what is conveyed in Acts 4 is important and it is to be rightly understood by those who are reading and thinking on what is being said. Thus, it is important to not get captivated by one translation.

Instead, be studious in your daily reading and change up translations from time to time. This will give you a broader sense of what is going on. When you come to something that doesn't read as you once read it, you should then say, “I need to find out which is correct, and why!” When reading this word, you are reading the very words conveyed to us by God. Therefore, let us pursue it as best we can for all our days.

*Gracious heavenly Father, help us to see what is right and proper concerning various translations of Your precious word. Lead us to understand it more and more each day, and to think on the minutest of details that can actually have the greatest of meaning to the overall narrative. In rightly knowing Your word, we will more closely match our thinking with what You are telling us. May it be so to Your glory. Amen.*

**And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.** Acts 4:3

The authorities had come upon Peter and John who were presenting words concerning the resurrection to the people. In their disturbed state, it next says, “And they laid hands on them.” The obvious meaning is that being men of authority, they were arresting them. Of these words, the Pulpit Commentary notes –

“The harsh persecution of the disciples at Jerusalem at this time when the Sadducees were in power is in exact accordance with Josephus's statement in the passage just referred to, that the Sadducees were more severe and cruel in their administration of justice than any other Jews. Their tenet of no life to come made them look to severe punishments in this life.”

As there were more than just Sadducees there, this may be a stretch of the analysis, but the truth of the statement concerning the Sadducees is still relevant to their attitude concerning matters of life. With the arrest of Peter and John, it next says, “and put *them* in custody.”

The word is new to Scripture, *térésis*. It signifies the state of safely keeping something. It will be seen again in Acts 5:18 concerning a public jail, and then again in 1 Corinthians 7:19 where it refers to the keeping of the commandments.

This is less of a punishment than it is a way of simply holding them over for a trial. There is a perceived offense that has been committed. As such, there will be an evaluation of that offense, but it will not occur “until the next day.”

Some believe this is based on the words of Jeremiah 21:12, where it says, “Execute judgment in the morning.” If this is correct, then it would show the illegal nature of Christ's trial which was held, at least partially, at night. That is recorded in Matthew 26. As for Peter and John, they would be held in custody for a trial the next day. Luke records the reason as the verse finishes, saying, “for it was already evening.”

Acts 3:1 had said that “Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*.” As this verse says it was already evening time, it would now be about 6pm. Therefore, from the time of their entering through the gate and meeting the beggar until their arrest was about three hours. It would have been an afternoon filled with their imploring the people to heed the message concerning Christ Jesus. Eventually word got to the leaders by some offended soul, and the subsequent arrest came about.

Life application: The comment about the Sadducees by the Pulpit Commentary is valid, even if that is not the reason for their arresting Peter and John. Sadducees are specifically noted three times in Scripture. Each time, it also notes that they say there is no resurrection. Once, in Acts 23:8, it also says they believe there are no angels or spirits.

Regardless of the last points, the fact that they denied any resurrection sets them off as men without any true hope. Their state is reflected in the words of David –

“Arise, O LORD,  
Confront him, cast him down;  
Deliver my life from the wicked with Your sword,  
<sup>14</sup> With Your hand from men, O LORD,  
From men of the world *who have* their portion in *this* life.” Psalm 17:13, 14

If man’s portion is only in this life, then his attitude will reflect that. However, if a man truly believes in an after-life, his attitude will then reflect that. And further, if a man not only believes in an after-life, but also has the absolute surety of attaining the promises of eternal restoration with God because of the cleansing power of Christ, his life will reflect that as well.

The state of the world in which we live has become one which is turning more and more towards a hope and a portion in this life only. Because of that, the conduct of the people who believe this, especially when they are in power, will reflect this belief.

The doctrine of evolution has brought about an entire change in the thinking of humanity. If we are evolved from unthinking slime, and if we will return to nothing but corruption without any further hope, then the natural inclination is to get everything you can, while you can get it. Why not! “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. And when we die, there will be nothing left to gain.”

It is a hopeless, tragic attitude that more and more permeates the world. And with it comes a diminished value of others in the eyes of those who hold it. “If I am a bug’s descendant, and he is too, then I might as well try to squash him before he squashes me.”

Thank God for Jesus Christ who gives man a hope that transcends this fallen, broken, and evil existence. For those who possess the surety of eternal life, there is a contentment that transcends the temporary and depressing nature of this current walk.

There is a hope of eternal joy in the presence of God in a state that we cannot yet comprehend. This is the wonder of the hope that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord. Let us rejoice in Him no matter what our current state is like. Yes, let us rejoice in our Savior!

*Lord God, no matter what happens in this life, we possess a hope that transcends the evils we may face. We have this hope because You have sent Jesus. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.** Acts 4:4

The previous verse referred to arresting Peter and John and taking them into custody until the next day. Despite this, their words to the people were not without effect. This is seen as Luke continues, saying, “However, many of those who heard the word.” This is referring to those mentioned in Acts 3:11 –

“Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon’s, greatly amazed.”

No indication of how many were gathered is given, but it would have been no small number. The people were amazed and curious concerning the healing of the beggar, and they would want to know everything they could about the matter. Because of this, they were willing to listen to Peter’s discourse for several hours.

Eventually, the leaders got word of what was going on and were furious that Jesus Christ was being portrayed as resurrected. But it was during this time of Peter speaking that the people were convinced and many “believed.”

This clearly indicates that they had “repented” as Peter told them to do in Acts 3:19. They were a part of the nation that had crucified the Lord Jesus, and they had changed their minds about what happened. No longer was Jesus rejected by them, but rather they had accepted that He died for their sins and rose again. Thus, those who believed were saved through their faith in Christ. This is the intent of what is conveyed by Luke. As such, it demonstrates that they were saved by faith alone in the grace of God found in Jesus Christ. With this noted, Luke next records, “and the number of the men.”

This is the general way that numbers were reckoned. It is found time and again in Scripture –

“You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. <sup>14</sup> And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who *are* within your gates. <sup>15</sup> Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice.

<sup>16</sup> “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed. <sup>17</sup> Every man *shall give* as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.” Deuteronomy 16:13-17

All people were to attend each pilgrim feast, without exception. However, the reckoning is based upon the males. Likewise, it says in Matthew –

“Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. <sup>20</sup> So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained. <sup>21</sup> Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children.”

-Matthew 14:19-21

In the feeding of the five thousand, only the men were counted. As such, the number was at least double and possibly triple or more of that number, depending on how many family members were present. Based on Luke’s wording, the same is probably true here. The men are counted, standing as representative of those who accompanied them. With this understood, Luke provides the numbers, saying, “came to be about five thousand.”

Some older translations like the Geneva and the KJV say the number “was” about five thousand. This gives a false sense of what is being conveyed by Luke. It was not five thousand who had been converted, but the number of believers had grown (in total) to about five thousand men. Before Pentecost, in Acts 1:15, there were recorded one hundred and twenty believers. On Pentecost, it says that “three thousand souls were added to *them*” (Acts 3:41).

In that account, it does not specify men, but that may be the case. However, Luke’s specificity now in Acts 4 indicates a body of about five thousand men, meaning a much

larger body of believing family members would be counted in that number as well. It is a large amount, but it is still only a very small portion of Israel, and it does not include the leaders who must be a part of the faith before a true national turning can be considered for the coming of the promised times of refreshing Peter spoke of in Acts 3:19.

Life application: No dating is given concerning the event which has taken place. It could have been days, weeks, or months after Pentecost. The matter is not included by Luke because that is not what was important. The fact that the event happened, and that many believed, is what is important.

Further, the number of believers had increased now to about five thousand men. However long that took, it is the result that is focused on. It is a good lesson. If we get caught up on setting numbers in a ministry, the focus is all wrong. We are to enter into the ministry, in whatever particular job we do, without worrying about numbers. We are to continue to minister whether there are five or five hundred.

It is very easy to get so caught up in numbers, such as YouTube views, that we forget that what we should be doing is simply the thing we have been called to do. If we are doing our job properly, and in accord with Scripture, then what we are doing is proper. It doesn't matter if we have seats filled in a stadium of fifty thousand people if what we are doing is not in accord with the word of God. If it is not, the ministry is to be considered a failure.

Can you imagine the Lord saying, "What you did was not in accord with My word, but the result was effective, so here is a big reward for you"? No. The ends never justify the means, if the means are not aligned with God's word. Be content with what you do for Christ if what you are doing is done in obedience.

It is certain that the faithful in heart who quietly sit in church on Sunday, and the only thing they have to offer is a small monetary gift or a box of donuts for the ministry, are more pleasing to the Lord than a preacher with a hundred thousand followers on YouTube, but who misuses the word of God. The former will receive their reward while the latter will be punished for his disobedience.

*Heavenly Father, help us to have our priorities right. May we not feel that what we do for You is lacking just because it is not great in the eyes of the world. Even the small things we do, when done with a right heart toward You, are pleasing in Your eyes. Help us to remember that this is so. Amen.*

**And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, Acts 4:5**

The words of this verse are in response to what has happened in verses 4:1-3. Some of the leaders gathered together against Peter and John because of their preaching, they laid hands on them, and they put them in custody “until the next day” (4:3). Now, that time has arrived. Luke says, “And it came to pass, on the next day.”

Peter and John were incarcerated all night. With the coming of the new day, Luke records that there was a gathering of the leaders of Israel. This included “their rulers.” The Greek is *archón*. It signifies one of first rank or power. This is referring to the Sanhedrin or ruling seventy of Israel. In verse 4:15, the gathering will be called a “council.” As such, it certainly would have included some or all of the Sanhedrin. Saying “their” rulers, it indicates that this is a Gentile author writing to a Gentile audience. That is a reasonable inference to be made. Next, he says, “elders.”

The Greek word is *presbuteros*. It refers to a mature person who is considered one of seasoned judgment. What their distinction from the Sanhedrin is cannot be certain, but they surely held some position of importance. Along with them, it then says, “and scribes.”

The Greek is *grammateus*. This would be a person learned in the law and thus a religious teacher. Ezra was a scribe as is noted in Ezra 7:6 and elsewhere. These men would have kept recordings of court cases, probably the registers maintained in synagogues, and so on. They would have also kept genealogical records, provided receipts for sales of land and other such things, issued bills of divorce, and so on. Their functions would be more societal rather than religious in nature.

These, and more to be listed in the coming verse, are gathered together to consider the matter of the arrest. It is not at all unlike what had happened in the not too distant past concerning the arrest of another Man –

“As soon as it was day, the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led Him into their council, saying, <sup>67</sup> ‘If You are the Christ, tell us.’” Luke 22:66, 67

Life application: To this day, people around the world are gathered together to judge matters concerning those who preach the gospel of Christ. In once-Christian nations, preachers are arrested for simply speaking out the words of Scripture and telling people to turn to (or back to) the Lord.



Telling someone that there is only one path to God is deemed offensive. Telling someone that his path to God is false is termed “hate speech.” Because of this people are handcuffed and put in prison. And yet, the fact is that there is only one path to God, and anyone who seeks God apart from Jesus Christ is following a false message.

How willing are you to actually speak what the Bible proclaims? Is it worth being ostracized by friends or family? Or is it easier to just keep your mouth shut and to keep the words of life and restoration to yourself? To what extent are you willing to go to share what others simply cannot do without?

*Lord God, help us to never be ashamed of the gospel. May we be willing to proclaim it at all times and in a manner that does not water down the truth of what it conveys. Help us to be bold in our proclamation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. Acts 4:6**

The previous verse noted the rulers, elders, and scribes. Now, added to them, Luke says, “as well as Annas the high priest.” Of him, Albert Barnes notes in his commentary from John 18:13 –

“He had been himself a long time high priest; he had had five sons who had successively enjoyed the office of high priest, and that office was now filled by his son-in-law. It was of importance, therefore, to obtain his sanction and counsel in their work of evil.”

As he is called the high priest now, it adds a note of difficulty to the overall narrative because of the next person’s name, Caiaphas. In John 18, it says –

“Then the detachment *of troops* and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him. <sup>13</sup> And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year.” John 18:12, 13

Caiaphas is called the “high priest that year” by John. He was the son-in-law of Annas. Assuming this is shortly after the ascension of Christ, then the narrative gets a bit confusing. However, this could be telling us the events are happening later in the year. Israel had two calendars by which they conducted their affairs.

One began in the springtime in the month of Aviv, which is known as Nisan. That calendar is focused on the Lord’s redemptive narrative (see Exodus 12:2). The other

began in the fall in the month of Tishri. That is used in the Old Testament for civil matters and is considered the regnant, or royal calendar. It could be that by this time, the office of high priest had returned to Caiaphas. Of the confusing nature of the appointment of the high priests, the Pulpit Commentary says –

“The succession of the high priests was so irregular, and their tenure of the office so uncertain, in these later years of the Jewish commonwealth, being dependent upon the caprice of the civil rulers who appointed and deposed them at their pleasure, that it does not surprise us to find Annas and Caiaphas high priests at the commencement of John the Baptist's ministry, then Caiaphas at the time of our Lord's passion, and now Annas again. It is possible, however, that Annas may have continued to be president of the Sanhedrim, and be called high priest, even when not actually so.”

No matter what, there is not necessarily any contradiction between John 18 and Luke's note here. And, indeed, it is certain there is not. Of these two, Charles Ellicott also provides insight –

“These are mentioned by themselves as representing the section that had probably convened the meeting, and came in as if to dominate its proceedings. The order of the first two names is the same as in Luke 3:2, and as that implied in John 18:13; John 18:24. Annas, or Ananus, had been made high priest by Quirinus, the Governor of Syria, filled the office A.D. 7-15, and lived to see five of his sons occupy it after him. At this time, Joseph Caiaphas was the actual high priest, ... having been appointed in A.D. 17. He was deposed A.D. 37. He had married the daughter of Annas; and the latter seems to have exercised a dominant influence, perhaps, as the Nasi, the Prince, or President, of the Sanhedrin, during the remainder of his life. If he presided on this occasion, it may explain St. Luke's calling him ‘the high priest.’”

Along with these two, Luke mentions “John, and Alexander.” Of these two, the Pulpit Commentary says –

“Of John and Alexander nothing further is known, but Farrar conjectures that John may be “the celebrated Johanan Ben Zakkai, and Alexander perhaps the wealthy brother of Philo.”

Regardless of their identity, they were known at the time of Luke's writing, and thus they add validity to his narrative that would otherwise be lacking. Along with these, it next says, “and as many as were of the family of the high priest.”

These would be people of prominence and some measure of status and even possibly of authority. Some speculate that they would be of the party of the Sadducees. Others think they may have become members of the Sanhedrin. Luke finishes the thought, saying that they “were gathered together at Jerusalem.”

The words “at Jerusalem” are not unimportant. Rather, Luke – as led by the Holy Spirit – is clearly indicating the seat of power and authority of the nation. As such, their decision will affect the entire nation. The collective guilt of the people exists because of their rejection of Christ. That national guilt will only be atoned for when Jerusalem, the seat of the nation’s power, repents.

For now, it is certain that all of these chief officials are noted to show that there was a great resistance to the word of the apostles, and they had gathered in force to intimidate them into silence. Will this come about? Or will the testimony of these two apostles convert the hearts of these leaders?

Life application: These are generally the same men who were gathered together to hold trial against Jesus. They had violated the law in many remarkable ways in their interrogation and sentencing of the Lord. As such, they felt they were above the law. But the law issued from Moses and Moses received it from the Lord. One can see that there was no true fear of God for them to have done the things they did. Now, Peter and John have been hauled before them to receive their own interrogation.

In the world today, there is a state of increasing wickedness. The thought of “God” is one of intimidation for those who can be intimidated by religious authority, but it is certain there is no corresponding fear of God in those same people. As such, there is no care about truth, justice, or pursuing that which is righteous. Judges make arbitrary decisions without any fear of God, nor with any care for the rule of law.

Therefore, should you be brought before such people for trial, you can expect that you will not be treated fairly if you are an avowed Christian. As such, you should probably firmly resolve, in advance, that you will uphold your faith in Christ at all costs. If you have a fear of God, and if you are certain that the message of Jesus Christ is true, then you must be willing to live by that. Have faith that He will, in fact, deliver you. It may not be deliverance from prison or execution, but He will deliver you unto Himself – just as He has promised.

Have faith, pronounce your faith without fear, and let the chips fall where they may.

*Lord God Almighty, we know that the message of Jesus is true. We know that we have You on our side because of our faith in Him. Give us the courage and the resolve to stand fast in our proclamation of the truth of the gospel and of the faith that saves men. Help us to always be willing to stand up and proclaim JESUS. Amen.*

**And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, “By what power or by what name have you done this?” Acts 4:7**

All of those leaders necessary to establish the authority of the tribunal have been named in the previous two verses. They were specifically noted as being “together at Jerusalem.” The seat of national power and authority has gathered together. It is an opportunity to repent and turn from their previous actions. The account to be presented will detail this. For now, with these gathered together, Luke next notes, “And when they had set them in the midst.”

Charles Ellicott notes, “The Sanhedrin sat in a semi-circle, the president being in the middle of the arc, the accused standing in the centre.” This would be a rather intimidating thing. Being encircled by the leaders, and with guards stationed around them as well, there would be every reason to be timid and to quickly acquiesce by even the strongest of rebellious souls. With this in mind, “they asked.”

The verb is imperfect. Rather than “they asked,” it more appropriately says, “they were asking.” One gets the sense of an interrogation being conducted and various people speaking out the same thing again and again. This doesn’t necessarily mean an unorderly questioning, but a repeated one. This occurred when Christ healed a blind man –

“Then they said to him again, ‘What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?’

<sup>27</sup> He answered them, ‘I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear *it* again? Do you also want to become His disciples?’” John 9:26, 27

This is the same sense now. They asked and they kept on asking, trying to find a hole in the story of the apostles. And their question is, “By what power.” The Greek reads, “In what power.” There is a power that exists, and that power has extended to the apostles. As a man does not possess such power in and of himself, it is understood that the power they wield comes from a source external to them, even if it now comes through them.

It is similar to the question put before Christ as he stood before the leaders in the temple –

“Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, ‘By [literally: in] what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?’”

-Matthew 21:23

It is understood that authority bestows power. They understood that Christ Jesus bore the power. Therefore, the question presented to Him asked of the authority that granted the power. Here, in Acts, the leaders are simply first asking what kind of power was possessed by the men. Next, they ask, “or by what name.”

Again, the Greek reads, “or in what name.” This is the same as when Jesus was asked, “By [literally: in] what authority.” A name is to be taken synonymously with the authority. If a king calls for someone to be arrested or executed, it is in his name that this occurs. His name is the legal authority for the action.

The leaders are trying to determine the source of what has occurred, but the question is put in a most derogatory manner. This is seen in the final words where the English does not convey the sense of the Greek, “have you done this?”

The order of the words in the Greek is, “did this you.” First, the explanation for the word “this” is left off. Instead of saying, “did this miracle,” or “did this sign,” it simply says “this.” There is a note of contempt for those through whom the miracle was accomplished.

Secondly, the question ending with “you” is a way of heaping contempt on them. A long and flowery paraphrase may help convey the meaning – “You? You are country hicks from Galilee. And you did this? C’mon, tell us the story! We’re surprised you can even feed yourselves. So how did YOU do this?”

Life application: When talking about sharing the gospel, there is often the sense from one of the people in the conversation that they are “just not good at it.” This may mean a multitude of things, but one of them is, “I am just not an effective speaker.” Another may be, “I get intimidated by the people I want to talk to.”

Such things should be entirely erased from the mind. The gospel is “the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). The gospel is not the power of

(insert your name here). It is the power of God. What is there to be intimidated over? What is there that you cannot effectively speak forth?

All you need to do is to remember the simple gospel, be able to explain it, and let it be accepted or rejected by the one who hears. A child can do this because even a child can understand what the gospel signifies. Be bold about the power of God that is found in the gospel. Be willing to speak it forth! And then, when you have done your job, find someone else to tell it to.

*Lord God, may we be bold in the proclamation of that which contains Your power to save. May we be willing to simply speak forth the gospel as responsible members of Your church. Give us the desire and strength of character to do so. Amen.*

**Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: Acts 4:8**

Standing before the leaders gathered at Jerusalem, Peter and John were just asked, “By what power or by what name have you done this?” Now, in response to that, Luke records, “Then Peter.”

As is the norm, Peter is the one who speaks on behalf of both. It was he that was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven as detailed in Matthew 16 –

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’” Matthew 16:17-19

The idea of the “keys of the kingdom” will be more clearly understood as Acts progresses. For now, it is also of note that it was also Peter who was given the main commission by the Lord to “Feed My sheep.”

Peter is given specific authority and responsibility, and so he is the one who the narrative focuses on. Luke next notes that Peter is “filled with the Holy Spirit.” This is something explicitly said to the disciples of Jesus concerning their ministry –

“Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. <sup>12</sup> For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

-Luke 12:11, 12

In fulfillment of that, Peter is filled with the words and the wisdom of God to respond in the manner best determined by Him. As this is so, the exact and perfect words necessary to fulfill His purposes will be realized. Israel had rejected Christ and crucified Him. They bore the national guilt of what occurred.

Like in Acts 2 and again in Acts 3, Peter’s testimony now will be sufficient to unmistakably demonstrate that Jesus was and is their Messiah. They will have the freewill to repent of their actions and be healed, or the words Peter will speak will testify against them as a nation. The collective guilt will remain, and Acts will stand as a valid witness against them that their rejection and subsequent punishment by the Lord is justified.

This begins to be seen once again in the words of Peter now. As such, Luke continues, noting that Peter “said to them.” The council of rulers, elders, scribes, and priestly class – meaning all of those who should know and recognize Christ from Scripture, and who bear the authority for national decisions – are being addressed by the Lord’s messenger, filled with the Holy Spirit. It is in this state that Peter begins, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel.”

There is an underlying ominous tone for the nation with these words. The high priest was the mediator of the sacrificial system of the covenant. It is a minutely detailed system that was set up to anticipate the work of Jesus Christ. But a main point of that system was that various levels of authority within the nation required particular sacrifices for guilt.

In other words, when the high priest sinned, the sacrifice and the blood of the sacrifice had to be handled differently than for the common people (see Leviticus 4:1-12). This is true with a ruler of the people (see Leviticus 4:22-26) and of a sin committed by the entire congregation (see Leviticus 4:13-21).

However, because Christ had come and fulfilled the typology of all of these sacrifices, and because He had then brought the Mosaic Covenant to its fulfillment and annulment, those in these positions must come through Him to receive atonement – meaning the

high priest, the rulers, and indeed the entire congregation. The national guilt exists, and it cannot be cleansed apart from acceptance of the work of their Messiah.

A clear note from the Lord's mouth demonstrates this –

“Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.” Matthew 23:1, 2

These rulers sat upon the seat of Moses. They administered the legislative aspect of the covenant. Along with the high priest who administered the sacrificial parts of it, they should have known better. They were responsible for knowing Scripture and understanding the time of their visitation. But they failed in this. The national guilt rested upon them. Peter is, once again, speaking to them in hopes of removing this guilt. If they reject His words, which are now recorded in Acts, those words will stand as a witness against them.

Life application: Luke 12 is cited above. Again, Jesus said, “Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. <sup>12</sup> For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” Luke 12:11, 12.

Have you ever heard anyone quote this, claiming that their words are inspired of God because of Jesus' promise? If so, what is the problem with that? The answer is that Jesus was not speaking to or of them. Rather, he was speaking to His disciples, under the law, and in relation to the events that would relate to that particular context, and into the issuing of the New Covenant.

With Scripture complete, we now have the full and complete word of God to guide our speech before the world. It stands as the witness to God's workings in Christ. We are to know Scripture, and to stand – by faith – upon its words.

This does not mean that people will not be filled with the Spirit during the church age. It is quite apparent that they are from Paul's words. But when Paul says, “Be filled with the Spirit,” it is passive in the Greek – ἀλλὰ πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι (*alla plērousthe en Pneumati*).

Paul's words thus mean that we are not actively filled with the Spirit as Peter was. Instead, we receive the full measure of the Spirit the moment that we believe the gospel and are saved. Just as a man who marries a woman will never get more married, we will



never get more of the Spirit. But just as a spouse can get more of his or her spouse through yielding to the other, the Spirit can get more of us as we yield our lives to God. In this, we are passively filled with the Spirit.

How does this come about? It comes about through study of the word, prayer, talking to God, rejoicing in the wonders of God, fellowshiping with other believers, praising God, etc. In our active pursuit of the things of God, we will be passively filled with the Spirit.

When a cup is filled, the cup doesn't do anything active. It receives the wine because it is in a state ready to receive it. We must be in the proper state to receive the filling of the Spirit, and it isn't in the manner that Pentecostals and Charismatics insist.

Let us honor the Lord with our lives and in our actions. In turn, we will be filled with the Spirit.

*Lord God, thank You for our sealing with the Holy Spirit upon our faith in Christ. Now, may we be responsible with that event and yield ourselves to You, being filled – even to overflowing – with the joy of the Spirit and the life in Christ that we now possess. To Your glory we pray! Amen.*

**If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, Acts 4:9**

John and Peter stand before the council for interrogation, and Peter opens by addressing the “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel.” He now continues that with, “If we this day are judged.”

The words, “If we this day,” are a way of saying something like, “Since it is a fact that we are.” There they stood as if wrongdoers being “judged.” This is a technical word signifying to interrogate, inquire into, or examine. In other words, the council is set forth to determine a matter, not merely to make a judgment concerning an issue that has already been decided. It is a tribunal to determine facts concerning “a good deed.”

Here, the word *euergesia* is used. It signifies an act of beneficence. It is found only here and in 1 Timothy 6:2. After saying this, Peter immediately defines the subject of the act of beneficence without using any verb. The Greek reads –

“...a good work man ailing.”

His answer is abrupt and direct. It can be inferred that the way Peter responds is an emphatic retort to the question that was derogatorily asked of him in verse 4:7. The way the question was asked of them (indicated by the structure of the Greek) was demeaning. Peter's response is not argumentative, but emphatic –

“By what power or by what name have you done this?”

“...a good work man ailing in what (means) he has been healed.”

It is with this empathic statement that Peter will next explain “by what means he has been made well.” In other words, there is no question that the man was healed. It has been accepted from the outset that it actually took place. However, the questioning of them is to determine how it came about. As far as the healing, the word Peter uses is *sózó*. It carries with it the sense of not only physical healing, but it is frequently connected to spiritual healing, or salvation.

It appears that Peter is setting up the rest of his response based on the use of this word. He easily could have just used a general term for healing, such as was used of Jesus' work many times, *therapeúó*. But that would only refer to a physical healing, such as –

“Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.” Matthew 4:24

On the other hand, *sózó* is used for both the physical and the spiritual at times, such as is hinted at in Matthew 9 –

“But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, ‘Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.’ And the woman was made well from that hour.” Matthew 9:22

The woman's faith in Jesus brought her to a state of healing. Likewise, Peter's healing of the beggar afterward appears to have brought a state of wholeness to him that extends beyond the physical act.

Life application: It is common in churches today to spread a social gospel where doing good things for others becomes a means an end in itself. There are soup kitchens, shelters for the night, and the like. However, in many of these types of ministries there is actually no communication of the gospel at all. In some, there is none because the gospel is deemed “offensive.”

Therefore, the idea is that the body will be taken care of by the ministry, and if the person appreciates the effort, maybe he will want to know about Jesus. If not, that is his choice. This is a perverse abuse of the gospel because it is no gospel at all. The person may be filled, warm, or feel better, but he is just as much on the path to the Lake of Fire as before he entered the doors of the church. In the end, nothing is really solved with this approach.

Unfortunately, this is the only “gospel” proclaimed by the pope in Rome. There is never a mention from the lips of whoever occupies that seat that people need Jesus to be saved. With his example, denominations around the world have followed suit.

The church is failing because the word of God is not proclaimed, and the gospel of Jesus Christ is not preached. If you are in such a church, it is time for you to bring up the faulty view of the ministry and work to get it corrected. If there is an unwillingness to do so, it is time for you to pack up and leave.

First and foremost, people need to hear the saving message of Jesus. After that, everything else will fall into its proper place.

*Lord God, may we be willing to put You and Your word first in our lives. Help us to not be a part of that which fails to bring You glory through the sharing of the gospel of our wonderful Lord, Jesus. Amen.*

**“let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. Acts 4:10**

Peter’s response to the council that has been assembled concerning the healing of the beggar has already begun. He continues his opening words to them now by naming the Source of the healing miracle that took place, saying, “let it be known to you all.”

Commentators give various ideas on Peter’s words, noting the boldness of what he says. Although this is true, it fails to acknowledge Jesus’ words from the gospels –

“You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; <sup>20</sup> for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.” Matthew 10:18-20

Peter was given this promise and he knew that what he was saying was being directed by the Lord. As such, the credit for the boldness may only go to him indirectly. Ultimately his conduct is because of the Lord's promise and because of the Lord's hand upon him. As such, he could boldly proclaim the words to this notable gathering of Israel's highest officials.

But Peter's words extend beyond them. This is because they stand as the representatives of the nation. What they determined would decide the direction and the fate of the nation. Because of this, Peter continues with, "and to all the people of Israel."

Whether the records of such meetings were available to the public or not, the intent of the words is that the proclamation stands, and that it will be one that affects everyone who belongs to the nation. It is as if Peter is calling out a judicial decree. As Jesus promised that it would be "the Spirit of your Father" who is speaking, it is – in fact – just this. The Lord God of Israel was conveying through His chosen apostle the words for Israel to hear and understand His intent.

With that in mind, Peter now directly refers to the Source of the healing, saying, "that by the name of Jesus Christ."

Rather than "by the name," the Greek more appropriately reads, *en tō onnomati*, "in the name." The proclamation was made by Peter, and it had its effect –

"Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.'" Acts 3:6

The Name itself is where the healing was derived from because the name reflects the being. As Jesus Christ is the Lord, in Peter's invoking the name, the healing was realized. But more, the title "Christ" is affixed to the name. As the word "Christ" is the Greek form of "Messiah," Peter is saying, "in the name of Jesus the Messiah."

What this demonstrates is that the office of Messiah is One that was completely misunderstood by the rulers of the people. This is clearly evident from what is happening. If Jesus is the Messiah, and if it was in His name that the man was healed (and determining the Source of the healing is the purpose of the gathering), then they have misunderstood everything about what was to be expected concerning the Messiah, even that He was "of Nazareth."

They had already dismissed Jesus for exactly this reason –

“They answered and said to him, ‘Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.’” John 7:52

As Nazareth is in the area of the Galilee, they had misunderstood their own Scriptures which clearly identified that God’s light would shine forth from that area –

“Nevertheless the gloom *will not be* upon her who *is* distressed,  
As when at first He lightly esteemed  
The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,  
And afterward more heavily oppressed *her*,  
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,  
In Galilee of the Gentiles.

<sup>2</sup>The people who walked in darkness  
Have seen a great light;  
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,  
Upon them a light has shined.” Isaiah 9:1, 2

What may have been veiled was at least understandable in the general sense of the words. Something magnificent would occur in this area, and it would shine a wondrous light upon the people. As Israel’s leaders, it is inexcusable that they would not know this. It was their job, above all else, to know what the Scriptures – that established and guided them as a people – proclaimed.

With this understood, the words of Peter continue, saying, “whom you crucified.” Peter has proclaimed that Jesus is the Messiah. As this is so, and as the Scriptures testified to His life and work, it is apparent that their misunderstanding of who the Messiah was to be went even further.

It is unthinkable that the Messiah could have been crucified without it being a part of God’s plan. But here was Peter, proclaiming an obviously miraculous healing in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, “whom you crucified.”

The first point of this is that the blame rests squarely on those seated before the apostles, and to whom the words are directed. The word “you” means the council and thus all of Israel, who was also addressed. The nation bears the guilt for the crucifixion of their Messiah.

However, the second point is that this means the act had to be a part of God's plan. The words of the Spirit of the Father, through Peter, are manifestly pointing to the fact that they had completely misunderstood everything in Scripture about the coming Messiah. This is true whether they acknowledge it or not.

But the Scriptures clearly indicated that Christ would die for the people. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 indicates this. It is acceptable for them to have misunderstood this, but it is no longer acceptable that they should continue in their ignorance. They have the Scriptures, they have the healed man bearing witness to the power of God being displayed, and they now have an explanation of the Scriptures that resulted from the own actions. The facts and the evidence of the events are undeniable.

Now that this has been clearly and unambiguously presented to the council, Peter tells the leaders what at least some of them already knew, saying, "whom God raised from the dead."

A dead Messiah couldn't do a thing to heal a man. And in Israel's history, there had been plenty of "Messiahs" that had come and gone. However, the One now proclaimed by Peter is given full credit for having accomplished the miracle. As this is so, He cannot be dead. Peter's words testify that He is not, and that it is God who raised Him. Thus, God's approval must have been upon Him.

The amount of theology that is piling up in what is stated is literally incredible. It will continue to be explored for thousands of years. New insights into what occurred will arise and be contemplated based on what Peter is proclaiming to the council.

Each person there would be responsible for considering what they heard and applying their knowledge of Scripture to determine if what Peter was saying was in accord with it or not. From there, they would then be responsible for determining the meaning of it all. Or they could simply dismiss his words and ignore the truth of what was completely obvious that was being presented to them. And that truth is based on the very response to the question that they had asked. Their question was –

"By what power or by what name have you done this?" Acts 4:7

The summary of the response is, "by Him this man stands here before you whole." Again, the Greek actually says, "in Him." It is in Jesus Christ because it is in the name of Jesus Christ that the miraculous had been realized. The man who was obviously doomed to life as a cripple stood whole and restored, and with a new direction in both his

physical and spiritual life, was healed in the name of Israel's Messiah. The crucified One had prevailed over death, and the power that was realized in His name is evidenced in that fact.

Life application: It was noted that Israel had the Scriptures that testify to the coming of the Messiah. They tell what He would do, where He would do those things, and the result of His work. These Scriptures testified against them –

“And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. <sup>38</sup> But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. <sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. <sup>40</sup> But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.”

-John 5:37-40

“Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is *one* who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. <sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. <sup>47</sup> But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” John 5:45-47

Those same Scriptures are still available to Israel today. In their continued rejection of Him, the same condemnation remains that came upon the people two thousand years ago. We must never make the mistake in assuming that because Israel is back in the land that they are right with God. They are not. The favor of the Lord that is promised to be upon the people and the land is future to us now.

We cannot pick and choose our allegiances. Rather, we must take God's word as it is given to us. Until they, as a nation and under the approval of their leaders, call out to Jesus, they remain under the wrath of God. His reestablishing them, and the resulting catastrophes to come upon them, are also detailed in the prophets.

Pray for Israel just as you would pray for any lost people. But thank God for His faithfulness to them, despite their continued rejection of Him. Great are His tender mercies to those He has covenanted with. If you are in Christ, this includes you. So, thank God for His favor towards you.

*Lord God Almighty, thank You for the hope we possess in Jesus Christ our Lord. Thank You for Your faithfulness to us, even when we stray. And Lord, we lift up Israel. Guide*

*them to search out Your word and to find what they have missed for so long. Yes, Lord God, lead them to You through Your precious word. Amen.*

**This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Acts 4:11**

Peter just referred to Jesus, who was crucified by the leaders. Now, to directly show the fulfillment of Scripture in this, he cites Psalm 118:22, beginning with, “This is.”

The Greek word here is a masculine pronoun. It can be rendered “This,” but it may be more appropriately rendered “He” in this case. Some versions paraphrase it and simply say, “Jesus is...” or, “This Jesus is...” No matter what, the words are clear enough to get the sense of Peter’s intent. With this subject given, he then says that He is “the stone.”

The Hebrew word, translated as “stone,” is *eben*. That comes from the same root as the word *banah*, to build. As such, it is something that is employed in a building process. For example, one builds an altar with stones. Also, one builds a temple with stones. In Genesis 28, Jacob is said to have used a stone for resting his head when he had his dream of a ladder reaching to heaven.

One can see the symbolism of Christ in it. A stone was set, and from it a ladder was placed reaching back to heaven. Christ is the stone, Christ is the ladder, Christ is the gate (the door) at the top of the ladder – He is the means of access to restoration with God. In the morning, Jacob set up the stone, building a pillar as a memorial to what occurred.

Understanding the symbolism of the stone, Peter continues, saying of it, “which was rejected by you.”

The accusation is directed to the council, represented by the priests, the scribes, the elders, and the rulers. In other words, all of the leadership of the nation had together rejected the stone. To make this more poignant, he then says, “builders.”

The Greek reads, *tōn oikodomōn*, “the builders,” and it should be rendered as such. As noted, this is a citation from the 118<sup>th</sup> Psalm –

“The stone *which* the builders rejected  
Has become the chief cornerstone.” Psalm 118:22



These people are called “the builders,” because they formed together the civil and religious government, shaping it according to the needs of the nation and (supposedly) in accordance with the law that established them. Through them the nation was built into a nation that was to reflect the name and nature of the Lord as His people.

Jesus had already cited the psalm to them during His ministry –

“Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. <sup>34</sup> Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. <sup>35</sup> And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. <sup>37</sup> Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ <sup>38</sup> But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ <sup>39</sup> So they took him and cast *him* out of the vineyard and killed *him*.

<sup>40</sup> “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?”

<sup>41</sup> They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease *his* vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.”

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

‘The stone which the builders rejected

Has become the chief cornerstone.

This was the LORD’S doing,

And it is marvelous in our eyes’?

<sup>43</sup> “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. <sup>44</sup> And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”

<sup>45</sup> Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. <sup>46</sup> But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

-Matthew 21:33-46

Now, in fulfillment of the psalm, and in fulfillment of Jesus’ words that they would do exactly what the psalm prophesied, Peter repeats the words to this council, calling what He said to their memory. It is a sharp and piercing indictment that what they had done was known to God before it ever took place, and thus their actions were known to God

at that very moment. However, despite their rejection of Him, Peter finishes the citation, saying, “which has become the chief cornerstone.”

If the word “He” is used as the subject, then “who” should now be used to agree with that. If “This” is used, then “which” should be used –

“He is the ‘stone who was rejected by you builders, who has become the chief cornerstone.’”

“This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’”

Either way, the leaders would understand. They were responsible for the building of the nation based on the Law of Moses. In their building, they were to select “stones” appropriate to that task in order to bring the Law and the Prophets to their fullness. As these things pointed to Jesus, they were to recognize that and to then use Him as that very foundational stone of their building.

However, they rejected Him, thus they rejected the cornerstone of what God would do. This is because, despite their rejection of Him, Christ did become the Chief Cornerstone. However, this would not have happened if they did not reject Him first. The paradox is amazing to consider.

Despite their rejection of Him, He was used by God and upon Him the true temple of the Lord would be built. They now had a choice to make in accepting that or rejecting it. Isaiah also prophesied of the event, providing additional confirmation of what God would do in and through Christ Jesus –

“Therefore thus says the Lord GOD:  
‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation,  
A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation;  
Whoever believes will not act hastily.’” Isaiah 28:16

Life application: The words of this psalm, and the corresponding words of Isaiah, will be repeated in the New Testament as it is ascribed to Jesus. They are found in Romans 9:33 (citing Isaiah), Ephesians 2:20 (citing the psalm), and 1 Peter 2:6-8 (citing both Isaiah and the psalm together).

Following such things after learning the symbolism of individual words will give a much fuller understanding of how God is developing theology within Scripture. Individual words, concepts, or material things (like rocks, stones, water, the fig tree, and so on), are consistently used to form concepts that then reveal truths about the nature of God, the state of things in the world in relation to God, how things operate in His mind so that we can align our thoughts to His, and so on.

Don't rush through the Bible as you read it, but rather think on the things that are presented, and then file them away in your memory. As you come to another use of that thing (a stone for example), think on how its use aligns or contrasts with the previous use you had filed away.

In this, your mind will begin to develop in sound theology. Just don't make things up on your own. Rather, draw out from what is being revealed. In this, your understanding of God's intent for how things are presented and how they can be applied to your own spiritual life will be solidified.

*Lord God, thank You for the marvelous intricacy of Your word. As we read it, new insights seem to spring forth that allow us to say, "Aha! I get it. I see what God is saying." Thank You for this wonderful, joyful process of looking into and learning about Your mind. Amen.*

**Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12**

Peter has clearly identified Jesus with the Messianic hope through his citing of Scripture. The council would understand this perfectly. But now, He more precisely identifies Jesus in a particular role that was impossible to come from any other source than God, saying, "Nor is there salvation in any other."

A definite article precedes "salvation" in the Greek – "Nor is there the salvation in any other." This then refers to the messianic hope of deliverance from sin and restoration with God that was lost at the fall of man. In the Old Testament, the use of an article before "salvation" is found only three times. The first is found in 1 Samuel 14 which is referring to salvation of the nation in battle. The other two times are in the psalms where David obtains "the salvation" from the Lord in battle, and in Isaiah 12 –

"And in that day you will say:  
'O LORD, I will praise You;

Though You were angry with me,  
Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me.  
<sup>2</sup> Behold, God *is* my salvation,  
I will trust and not be afraid;  
'For YAH, the LORD, *is* my strength and song;  
He also has become my salvation.'  
<sup>3</sup> Therefore with joy you will draw water  
From the wells of [the] salvation." Isaiah 12:1-3

The words of Isaiah are messianic in nature, and they reflect a sense of “the salvation” being accessible solely from the Lord God. It is a hope that the Messiah would come to provide this, and Peter confirms that this was to be found in Jesus and in Him alone. As he said, it is not found in any other. He then continues on by saying, “for there is no other name.”

The Greek translated here as “other” signifies another, something different, a second, and so on. It is a word of exclusivity. The salvation is found in Christ Jesus, and it is not to be found in any other source. This unmistakably indicates that “the salvation,” of which the leaders of Israel would be perfectly aware of the meaning, was a direct threat to their direct positions within the community. The reason for this is that it then means at least two immediate things, with innumerable new thoughts issuing from them:

1. No person could be saved through obedience to the Law of Moses, of whom they were the stewards. This is because “Moses” is another name.
2. If “the salvation” is found in Jesus, then the law must now be annulled in Him.

One of the thoughts that would be a direct explanation for this is that the Mosaic law included the Levitical system of priestly sacrifices. But they never brought about complete cleansing from sin. If they did, a single sacrifice would have been offered and that would have been the end of it. But the sacrifices were repeated continuously – as needed, daily, monthly, and year after year as directed by the law.

But if “the salvation” came through Jesus, then His death was a one-time and for-all-time sacrifice for sin. As it occurred apart from the Mosaic Law, it means that the law must have first been fulfilled in Him and then it was set aside in order to establish the New Covenant.

In other words, as the Law of Moses anticipated the coming of Messiah, and as the Messiah had come, then the New Covenant anticipated in the law itself (Jeremiah 31:31)

must be found in Him alone, apart from the Law of Moses. All of this is more fully explained in the book of Hebrews, but the truth of what is stated there would have been understood by the leaders in some aspect, even as Peter spoke out his words to them.

With this noted, Peter adds in more words of exclusivity concerning the name of Jesus, saying, “under heaven.”

The words qualify and further explain “no other name.” There is not any other person born into the stream of human existence by which “the salvation” can be obtained. Peter then adds a synonymous thought to ensure this is more perfectly understood with the words, “given among men.”

This excludes anyone born to Adam. Apart from Jesus, no prophet, no priest, no king, no instructor of the law, no other religious leader (such as Buddha or Muhammed) and so on, is to be found in the stream of humanity “by which we must be saved.”

The Greek uses the word “in.” It is in the name of Jesus, and in none other, that it is necessary to find salvation. One is either in Christ Jesus and he is saved, or he is not in Christ Jesus, and he will not be saved. Everything about what Peter says is clear, unambiguous, and perfectly exclusive to the name of Jesus.

A somewhat paraphrased but marvelous translation of this verse is given in the Weymouth New Testament –

“And in no other is the great salvation to be found; for, in fact, there is no second name under Heaven that has been given among men through which we are to be saved.”

Life application: This verse teaches us what Jesus has already said in John 14:6. There is one way, and one way alone, to be reconciled to God the Father. Apart from Him, the condemnation that rests upon all men (John 3:18) remains upon them. One must move from Adam to Christ in order to be saved. If you are not grounded in, and willing to proclaim, this fundamental truth, then you need to adjust your thinking. God has spoken, and as Paul says, “let God be true but every man a liar.”

We can lie to ourselves and to others, but we cannot lie to God, nor will God ever speak that which is untrue. Ground yourself in Christ and proclaim His name alone for the salvation which has been presented to all men.

*Lord God, Your word proclaims that Jesus Christ alone can reconcile us to You. It is an unpopular word in today's world, but it is... Your word. I will stand upon it to the end. Jesus Christ alone! Amen and amen.*

**Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. Acts 4:13**

Only the words of Peter are recorded, but from this verse it appears that both Peter and John had spoken. As Peter is the main focus of the ongoing narrative, it is his words that Luke has focused on. With this understanding, it is probable that John had spoken previously at the temple as well. This is a side issue, but it is at least worth noting.

The focus is on Peter specifically to stand as a testimony that he, as the apostle to the circumcision (meaning the Jews), had witnessed and presented the gospel to them. In their national rejection of Jesus, the focus will then switch to that of Paul and to the effective evangelism of the Gentiles. For now, and understanding this, Luke continues by saying, "Now when they saw."

The verb is a present participle and should be rendered as such, "Seeing now..." or "Now seeing..." It is a reference to the council that included the rulers, elders, scribes, high priest, and others of the high priestly family noted in verses 4:5, 6. This gathering is then to be considered the most educated and sophisticated group of people in the nation. What they saw (meaning saw and heard) concerns "the boldness of Peter and John."

The word signifying "boldness" means more than just being outwardly brash or offensive, but rather it reveals a confidence in what they were conveying. There was no ambiguity, equivocation, or peevishness in them. What they said was plainly stated and would have been plainly understood. With this defining them and their words, it notes that those of the council "perceived."

The word translated as "perceived" signifies to lay hold of something, and thus to understand or apprehend. Despite their eloquence and confidence of speech, the council had become fully aware "that they were uneducated."

The word, found only here in Scripture, literally means "unlettered." This means they had not had any formal rabbinic training. And yet, what they had spoken forth was based upon Scripture and was spoken in the proper context. One would expect Peter's

citing of Scripture to be a “pick and choose” approach that presented a few verses out of context, but this was not the case. This continues to be seen in the next description of them which says, “and untrained men.”

It is a new word in Scripture, *idiótés*. One can see the immediate connection to our modern word “idiot,” of which it still bears a similar meaning to that of the Greek. It signifies a person who lacks education or proper instruction. Because of this, his words would be poorly structured and easily misunderstood.

However, despite being unlettered and unlearned Galileans – apparent idiots in comparison to them – the apostles spoke with an eloquence and flavor of speech that amazed the council. As such, “they marveled.”

It is the same word used in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples, and they began to speak in tongues. At that time, it said –

“Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, ‘Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?’” Acts 2:7

The fluency of speech in other languages of that passage has turned into a fluency of speech and oration in this passage. In both instances, the reaction is to be awestruck to the point of wondering greatly. One can almost hear the mutters among the council, “How can they know these things? They are just country bumpkins!” But this process of thought brought them to a new comprehension. As Luke next records, “And they realized that they had been with Jesus.”

Here, the same word is used as was cited when the crowd recognized the beggar who was healed in Acts 3:10. It was as if a light had switched on. In essence, “The same awareness of the Scriptures that we saw in Jesus is also in them.” And, of course, it should be so. The same Author of Scripture filled them both. This is something Peter carefully records later in his second epistle –

“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; <sup>20</sup> knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, <sup>21</sup> for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:19-21

The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of Scripture, and the Holy Spirit filled Jesus, and now He fills the apostle with the understanding and ability to rightly communicate this word to those they encountered. This is explicitly stated of Jesus in Luke 4:1, and it was just noted of Peter in Acts 4:8.

The fact that these men had been with Jesus should have clued them into the fact that more was going on than would normally be realized. But their minds rejected what they perceived in Jesus, instead finding offense at Him –

“Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. <sup>54</sup> When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, ‘Where did this *Man* get this wisdom and *these* mighty works? <sup>55</sup> Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? <sup>56</sup> And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this *Man* get all these things?’ <sup>57</sup> So they were offended at Him.

But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.’ <sup>58</sup> Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” Matthew 13:53-58

Life application: It should not be expected that believers today will suddenly be filled with the Spirit and start to rightly quote Scripture when challenged by others. The passage before us is descriptive. It simply describes what occurred in order to establish the basis for the faith, and to demonstrate that even with an active working on the part of the Spirit, the leaders and people of Israel rejected their Messiah.

Today, we have the whole counsel of God, and we are expected to know it. And, we are expected to not only know it, but to handle it properly. There are countless professors of theology that do neither in both colleges and seminaries around the world. They are untrained in proper theology because they are first unschooled in the word.

Those who grow in the word first will be able to avoid this happening to them. They will know when faulty theology is presented. Even if they do not necessarily know what is correct, they can at least weed out that which is incorrect.

Learning proper theology is hard work, but once it is obtained, then right doctrine can be applied to that theology. The most important aspect of this process is to be properly learned in Scripture. Therefore, read the Bible. Keep reading the Bible. And then, read



the Bible more. Never stop reading this word. It is a safeguard against the poor theologies that abound in the world today.

As a final note, be sure to read the Bible.

*Lord God, give us the strong hunger to desire Your word at all times. Help us to be wise and to set it before us when we rise. Help us to be discerning and to contemplate it throughout the day. And, Lord, help us to consider it once again before we retire at night. May our days be filled with reading and considering Your precious word. Amen.*

**And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. Acts 4:14**

The previous verse noted the boldness of Peter and John despite being uneducated and untrained. It also noted that these two had been with Jesus. With that thought in mind, a thought that brought them into union with the One the authorities had supposedly done away with, the thought is surely that they must be punished for speaking about Jesus and the resurrection. However, there was a problem with that. Luke introduces that with the words, “And seeing the man.”

As in verse 4:10, it is evident that the man who was healed was right there in front of everyone. He would have been known by sight to anyone who regularly passed through the gate where he sat. His deformed and emaciated legs would have been readily apparent to them, and yet he now stood before them healed. And more, the credit has gone solely to the One they had crucified, and whom the apostles avowed had been resurrected. The apostles were proclaiming that it was in the power of His name that the council was seeing the man “who had been healed standing with them.”

This was a huge problem for them, because if every one of them had passed by the man time and time again, and if he had remained unhealed with each passing, it then meant that they – the leading men of Israel – were unable to do what these uneducated men were able to do by simply proclaiming healing in the name of Jesus.

They had seen the miracles of Jesus during His entire ministry. Again, and again, they had challenged Him and spoken against Him. And now, those who followed Him had performed their own miracle. But they had done it under the authority of His name. This would only be effective if His name truly had power, and His name could only hold such power if He was alive. The conundrum for them was an impossible one. As such, “they could say nothing against it.”

The Greek word, *antilegó*, translated as “say against,” signifies “to contradict.” It is a compound word coming from *anti*, or “opposite to,” and *legó*, meaning “to say.” They have made a claim that the man was healed through Jesus. He stood there healed, something otherwise completely impossible for them to have done. As such, the council could not contradict their claim. If the authorities could not do that, then they could not punish the apostles for any wrongdoing, even if they wished to. And verse 4:21 indicates that this is exactly what they wished to do.

Life application: Many have come to Christ over the years. Some simply accept the gospel, but their lives don’t need a lot of change. They simply believe and are grateful for what happened. Some have larger changes where it is evident a new direction has taken place. Friends of family may see it and be curious, or they may think the person has simply flipped out. They accept the change but aren’t sure of the power behind it. And then, there are those whose lives are so utterly changed that it truly is an inexplicable conversion.

Such a person may have been a brawler, a drunkard, a drug addict, a prostitute, or some other lost soul. Nobody would have ever thought he or she would amount to anything again. And yet, there he or she is, cleaned up and completely whole again. When asked what happened and the answer is “Jesus,” it is something that simply cannot be contradicted. What was otherwise ruined and on the way to the garbage dump of human history suddenly becomes a precious gem in the stream of human existence.

Such people are living testimonies to the healing power of the name of Jesus. But just because many believers did not have such tremendous conversions, it doesn’t change the fundamental truth that every person who comes to Christ has had such a change. They each went from being 100% lost to 100% saved. Let us remember this. It is an argument that anyone can use while witnessing to others.

God does not grade on a bell curve. Rather, there are the redeemed of the Lord, and then there are all others. The problem isn’t the severity of the sin, nor the amount of sin in one’s life. The problem is that there is sin in one’s life. Let us each be thankful for the healing that came about through Christ’s cross, and let us be willing to tell others of the gift that they too can share in. It is a gift that everyone needs.

*Heavenly Father, we are all in need of Jesus. Being saved through His cross is something that no person can do without if they want to be restored to You. Help us to be able to explain this fundamental truth to all who we encounter along life’s path. Everything else will find its place after that, but help us to remember to get this through first. Help us to*

*share the good news that is found in the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life through Jesus. Amen.*

**But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, Acts 4:15**

Luke just noted that the council had no way of speaking against the healing of the beggar because he was there, standing with them. However, this doesn't mean that a decision by the council could not be made. As such, Luke continues with, "But when they had commanded them."

They are Israel's leaders, and as such, they had the right to direct the men within the parameters of the law. Further, they had the right to deliberate matters that came before them. In order to do this, they determined it would be better to confer without the continued presence of the apostles and the healed man. Therefore, they were directed "to go aside out of the council."

This is still a common practice in courts. Private discussions and reviews occur, such as when the jurists are directed to go into a private setting to decide a matter or when the judge and the lawyers confer alone. In this, the objective is obviously not to speak against the healing of the man, but to stop the apostles from speaking about Jesus. That is evident from earlier in this same chapter –

"Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, <sup>2</sup> being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." Acts 4:1, 2

The apostles were proclaiming Jesus was alive when those of the council had seen Him crucified and dead. They were proclaiming He was the Messiah when the leaders of the nation had rejected Him. They were proclaiming healing in His name while these same leaders had ambled past the man day after day without ever entertaining such a thought.

What was happening was like a stain upon them in many ways and they wanted it washed away. As such, they looked for an answer to the matter and "they conferred among themselves."

The main reason for this private deliberation was to come to an agreed resolution on the matter. Each division of these men had something to gain from stopping the speech of

the apostles, and each of them surely had something to lose if the matter was not handled properly. Certain aspects of their previous involvement in the crucifixion of Christ could come to light.

But more, and this surely had to be on their minds, is the continued nagging thought that what these men had been preaching might be true. The evidence of the healing was undeniable. The conversion of many thousands had already taken place. These things were not hidden in a corner. What was decided by this council wasn't just a matter of imprisoning a couple of hicks from Galilee. Rather, it was something that appeared to be substantial, and it was growing more so with each day that passed.

Life application: Up to this point, the apostles have been obedient to the rulers of Israel. They allowed themselves to be taken into custody. They spent the night in the jail. They have stood before the council of leaders and stated their case. Now, they have complied with being removed from the council as it deliberates.

Likewise, Paul writes in Romans something that corresponds to Jesus' words of rendering unto Caesar what is due to Caesar –

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. <sup>2</sup>Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup>For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. <sup>4</sup>For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. <sup>5</sup>Therefore *you* must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. <sup>6</sup>For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. <sup>7</sup>Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”

-Romans 13:1-7

At what point does allegiance to the governing authorities no longer apply? It is a question each person must be prepared to consider. Is it ever right to be disobedient to such authorities?

The Bible is often used as a tool to meet set agendas by one side or another. One common method is for those who couldn't care one iota about God or what the Bible

says to cite verses from Scripture in order to shame Christians into silence. This is consistently done by taking verses completely out of their intended context. But unless those Christians know what the context is, they may actually be having their rights stripped from them by the very source which gives them their rights within the faith in the first place.

Christians must know the Bible well enough to know when it is being cited properly or not. They must engage in critical thinking, and they must be grounded in what is morally right. Without these things, the Christian is set to be misused by those who may have evil intent for them. Please read and know your Bible.

*Lord God, we thank You for Your wonderful word. May we be wise and diligently study it daily. Give us wisdom in its contents, the ability to discern its truths, and the smarts to know when it is being miscited by those who have perverse agendas. Yes, Lord. Help us to be well-informed concerning this precious word. Amen.*

**saying, “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them *is* evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it*.”**

Acts 4:16

The verse now begins in the middle of a thought that started with the previous verse. Taken together, they read –

“But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, <sup>16</sup>saying, ‘What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them *is* evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it*.’”

As can be seen, it is the council that has gathered together that has sent Peter and John outside while they confer. With them excused, they begin by “saying, ‘What shall we do to these men?’”

For such a council, the question is wholly inappropriate. They were called together to hear a matter, judge as to its legality in accord with the law, and to then determine the verdict on that matter alone. The verdict was to be “Guilty before the law” or “Not guilty of violating the law.” Only if a finding of guilt was determined would a punishment then be decided upon. And that too was to be according to whatever the law set forth.

Nothing like this is now taking place. To ask, “What shall we do to these men?”, is to decide a punishment without a verdict of guilt. It is obvious that what they wanted was to quiet them concerning the message they proclaimed. But it is a message that was validated as to its truth, as they themselves note, saying, “For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done.”

Rather than “miracle,” the word *sémeion*, or “sign,” is used. It should be translated as such. It is true that this was a miracle, but miracles are often signs. However, miracles don’t necessarily point to something else. They are often simply a demonstration of power which results in an effect. A sign goes further and points to something else.

In this case, it is a sign because it points directly to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. It is a confirmation of this to the house of Israel. This is evident from what occurred in the healing of the beggar. He did not have faith to be healed. In fact, he did nothing. The record shows that Peter simply saw him and healed him. A miracle? Yes. But it is a miracle that is a sign –

“And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, ‘Look at us.’<sup>5</sup> So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them.<sup>6</sup> Then Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’<sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.”

-Acts 3:4-7

After this, Peter spoke to the people clearly stating that it was not they who healed the man, but rather the faith which is found in Jesus (not the man’s faith) that made it possible. This was carefully detailed during the analysis of Acts 3. It is this sign that was given, and the council even acknowledges that it is so. They go further, though, saying that the sign has been done “through them.”

It is an absolute confirmation that the sign points to something else. The sign was done *dia*, through, them. They were simply the means, not the Source, by which it came about. This is the same thing that is revealed in the confirmation that the Lord was with Moses. He was given three signs while on Mount Sinai. They were given to him to validate that his authority came from the Lord. When Moses presented them to the people, the signs confirmed the messengers –

“So Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him.<sup>29</sup> Then Moses and Aaron went and

gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. <sup>30</sup> And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people. <sup>31</sup> So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped.” Exodus 4:28-31

The people believed that the Lord was with Moses and Aaron. What they ultimately failed to do was to believe the Lord who sent them. The same is true here. That begins to be seen with the next words where they acknowledge that the sign done through them “*is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem.*”

Everyone who saw the healing of the beggar had to face the stark truth that it was a miracle. But more, they had to acknowledge that it was a confirmation of the power of Jesus, a sign. The apostles denied that they had been the source of the healing. Instead, they openly stated Who the Source was.

The sign pointed to the truth that Jesus is, in fact, alive. As such, it means He resurrected. And because of this, it proves that He is the Messiah. Even the council knew it was a sign. Not only was it evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, but they finish the thought with, “and we cannot deny *it.*”

Astonishingly, their own words testify to the truth of the matter, and their own words testify against them. They believed the words of the apostles that Jesus worked through them, but just like Israel at Moses’ time, they have failed to believe in the Lord who sent them.

Life application: Head knowledge does not always equate to acceptance of the heart. There are people in churches, denominations, and seminaries all over the world that know what the Bible says about Jesus being resurrected. They know what the doctrine of the Trinity states. They know Jesus is said to be God incarnate. These things are understood by them. And yet, they don’t believe the God who has revealed these things.

Their religion is dead because they have never appropriated the grace of God by simply believing the gospel. Unless the head knowledge becomes belief in the heart, they are as far from God as any pagan. God is not a point of academics. And the things He has done are not simply acts without meaning. The very creation calls out who God is and what He is like –

“The heavens declare the glory of God;  
And the firmament shows His handiwork.  
<sup>2</sup> Day unto day utters speech,  
And night unto night reveals knowledge.  
<sup>3</sup> *There is no speech nor language  
Where their voice is not heard.*  
<sup>4</sup> Their line has gone out through all the earth,  
And their words to the end of the world.” Psalm 19:1-4

When we pursue knowledge, such as the knowledge of creation, we err if we do not include God in the pursuit. Our contemplation of all things should include God’s handiwork in what we are considering. With that in mind, we will become more and more in tune with a knowledge that goes beyond the mere mechanics of a thing. We will have an appreciation of why God has arranged things as He has.

May we let our every thought and study be guided by the desire to know more about our God who has so carefully arranged the world for man, and who has so consciously worked to return man to Himself through the giving of His Son.

*Lord God, help us to see You as we seek out the wonders of life. Help us to appreciate You and all You have created and designed. You are worthy of our contemplations in such things. And so, may we never fail to add You into our evaluation of the things that we encounter from day to day. Amen.*

**But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.” Acts 4:17**

The council has deliberated concerning the matter of the healing and the apostle’s proclamation. They have even acknowledged that they cannot deny the authenticity of what occurred in the healing of the man. But they feel they must respond to what has occurred nonetheless, and so they render their decision, saying, “But so that it spreads no further.”

It has already been noted that what occurred has become “evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem,” as noted in the previous verse. However, being Galileans, it is certain that they would pass the words on to others visiting from Galilee, and they would probably continue to proclaim Christ to others visiting Jerusalem as well. If they were to go back to Galilee, there would even be their firsthand witness to share with the people. With



just a few men, the entire nation could be apprised of the event rather quickly “among the people.”

This is the threat. If the message of Jesus is conveyed, saying that He has risen and it has been validated by a sign, it would mean that the leaders were complicit in the crucifixion of the Messiah. What would at first be news of a great miracle and the coming of the Messiah, would quickly turn into a backlash against the authorities who failed to recognize that He was, in fact, the Messiah. The people would no longer be compliant to their failed leadership. As such, the decision is to “let us severely threaten them.”

Manuscripts vary here. Some simply say, “threaten them.” Others say, “threaten them with a threat.” The latter seems more natural from the Hebrew perspective. Repeating a word in this manner is a common form of literary device that magnifies the intent of a matter. One might say, “With blessing I will bless you,” or “With killing you shall kill him.” In this, the matter is intensified. If this is what they said, it is likely Luke would have carefully recorded the intent of their words into the Greek.

Either way, their words will have no effect on the men. They will immediately refuse to comply and Acts 5 will have them once again arrested and taken before the council resulting in an even stricter penalty levied upon them. For now, however, the words of the council continue with, “that from now on they speak to no man in this name.”

The Greek preposition is *epi*, “upon.” It is the same one that was used in Acts 3:16. At that time, it was noted that Peter had healed the man based upon the faith found in (based upon) the name of Jesus. The same is being conveyed here. The council does not want the apostles to speak upon the name of Jesus, meaning as a foundational subject of their faith.

This is what defines the words “that it spreads no further.” The miracle was simply a proof of the authority of the name. It is the name that both convicts and offends, and it is proclaiming the foundation of that name that the council demands should come to an end.

Life application: Philippians 2 refers to the name of Jesus in the most exalted way that it could be proclaimed –

“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in

heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

-Philippians 2: 9-11

This is a citation based upon Isaiah 45:23 –

“I have sworn by Myself;  
The word has gone out of My mouth *in* righteousness,  
And shall not return,  
That to Me every knee shall bow,  
Every tongue shall take an oath.”

Paul directly equates the name and authority of the Lord (Yehovah) of the Old Testament to Jesus in the new, clearly identifying the two as the same Being. As such, the name of Jesus is an affront and an offence to both Jew and to Gentile. The Jew (meaning the nation of Israel) has rejected the name. The Gentile world, for the most part, also rejects it. There are innumerable religions and false gods associated with them. To be told that someday all will bow the knee to Jesus is an obvious affront to those people.

And more, many within supposed “Christian” denominations also find the name an affront because they proclaim “another Jesus” (2 Corinthians 11:4). Thus, it is intolerable even to them that they have gotten things wrong.

With advancements in internet technology, the true Jesus can easily be contrasted to the false. No wonder the whole world will someday be opposed to the true gospel! The timing of the rapture, despite false predictions that arise almost daily, is (and will remain) completely unknown to us until it happens. There is no guarantee that believers will be free from intense persecution before that day. Indeed, in much of the world, this is as common as sand is in the desert.

If we truly believe the message of Christ, we must be willing to stand for it – even through any adversity that must come. This is not an issue of losing one’s salvation, but it is an issue of demonstrating faith to a world that increasingly needs such a witness. If not you, then who? Be sure to hold fast the name which is above every name. Hold fast to JESUS.

*Gracious and merciful heavenly Father, You have done all that we need in order to be reconciled to You. As such, is it too difficult a thing for us to do all that we can to share*

*this message of hope and reconciliation? Give us the fortitude to stand fast in the exalted name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. Acts 4:18**

The previous verse said, “But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.” The intent of those words is now conveyed in the council’s injunction as explained by Luke, beginning with, “So they called them.”

In verse 19, only Peter and John will be noted. However, it is likely that these words were conveyed to the beggar as well. It is hard to imagine it would be otherwise, but the focus is on the apostles. The only thing that will be expressed about the beggar is found in verse 4:22. That will be a reference to his age, but the location of where the man himself is has been dropped from the narrative. As far as the words of the council, it simply says they called the apostles “and commanded them.”

The word translated as “commanded” is used by Luke several times when he refers to Jesus’ commanding those who were healed, or who saw His healing, not to tell anyone about the matter. It was also seen in Acts 1:4 when He commanded those assembled with Him to not depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father. As such, one gets the sense of an order that is to be maintained without exception. As far as the command from the council, it is “not to speak at all nor teach.”

The structure of the Greek words bears a strong emphasis. It is a strict prohibition as if saying, “You are absolutely never to speak or teach – at all – concerning this matter.” Further, Luke introduces a word into Scripture here that will only be seen again in 2 Peter 2:16 and 2 Peter 2:18. In 2 Peter 2:16, it is a reference to the donkey speaking to Balaam that is found in the book of Numbers. HELPS Word Studies gives a definition of the word that is exactly the opposite of what it means. They say –

“...to make a generic or unintelligible sound (resembling the whinny of a horse, LS); (figuratively) to speak in a way that is not understandable to the listener (‘unintelligible’).”

Rather, it means “to utter a clear sound” (Strong’s). It comes from the word *pheggos*, meaning brightness or light, and *phémi*, to declare. As such, Thayer’s Greek Lexicon defines it, saying, “to give out a sound, noise, or cry; used by the Greeks of any sort of

sound or voice, whether of man or animal or inanimate object — as of thunder, musical instruments, etc.; (φθέγγεσθαι [phtheggesthai]) denotes sound in its relation to the hearer rather than to its cause.”

When the donkey spoke to Balaam, it was a clearly understood proclamation. Likewise, the council was also clear. There was to be no proclamation made, nor teaching conducted “in the name of Jesus.”

As in the previous verse, the preposition in the Greek is *epi*, upon. They were not to speak or teach “upon” the name of Jesus. The name is the foundation of their proclamation, and the command is that they were not to make such an utterance again. The reason this is important is because the same preposition is used in Matthew 23:2 –

“saying, ‘Upon the seat of Moses the Pharisees and scribes sit.’”

Moses’ seat means his place of position and authority. It is the foundation of the law, and the Pharisees and scribes sat upon it. They are clearly calling the apostles to not speak upon the name of Jesus because it would clearly usurp their position upon the seat of Moses. But this is exactly what has happened. This is explained meticulously in Hebrews –

“Previously saying, “Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and *offerings* for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure *in them*” (which are offered according to the law), <sup>9</sup> then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second. <sup>10</sup> By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.”

-Hebrews 10:8-10

The words “the first” and “the second” are referring to the Old and the New Covenants. Jesus’ work takes away the Old Covenant. The authority of Moses’ seat rests in Him, the embodiment of the law. As such, he is the Foundation of the New Covenant, and through His work a new and better hope is realized. The slight correction of the preposition makes a huge difference in being able to properly evaluate and understand what is being conveyed.

The council knows full well what the healing of the beggar means, but they have rejected that meaning and have fallen back on Moses. Their hope is a futile one, indeed. Because of their choice, their condemnation remains.

Life application: A couple important lessons are to be realized from studying this verse. The first is to think on the explanation of Greek words rather than to assume a commentary's evaluation is necessarily correct. The meaning of the word translated as "speak" is exactly the opposite of what HELPS Word Studies gave (as noted above). Rather than to make an unintelligible sound, it is to speak out so that what is said is clearly understood by the hearer.

The second lesson is that just because a translation, or many translations, all say the same thing, it does not mean that they are correct. After analyzing this verse for commentary, forty-six versions of this verse were compared. Only one rendered the preposition as given in the Greek, the Literal Emphasis Translation, which says, "And having called them, they commanded them to not speak at all nor to teach upon the name of Jesus."

And yet, the meaning of "upon" has a set and definite purpose that more clearly and perfectly explains the intent of what is being said. The contrast concerning the seat of Moses (upon which the council sat) to the position of Christ who now is at the right hand of God (Act 2:33) is absolute.

Because of these things, be sure to spend as much time and thought as necessary to consider the Scripture that you are studying. Think on what is presented, meditate on what you have read, and ask the Lord to lead you as you consider this magnificent treasure we call "the Holy Bible."

*Lord God, Your word is a treasure. It is a light to our feet as we walk along the path of life. It is a lamp that illuminates the world around us so that we can avoid evil and pursue what is good and right. Help us, O God, to carefully and conscientiously consider Your word each and every day of our lives. Amen.*

**But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. Acts 4:19**

Peter and John have just been called in and commanded to not speak or teach upon the name of Jesus. Now they wisely choose to appeal to a higher authority. That begins with Luke recording, "But Peter and John."

Although referring to both Peter and John in the same sentence is not unusual, it is of note that it is almost always Peter who is then noted as speaking. However, Luke specifically notes John and includes his voice in what is said, demonstrating that the

matter is something they both agree to and openly avow. With this noted, Luke continues that it is both who “answered and said to them.”

John is not just a timid bystander allowing Peter to carry all the weight of what is spoken. He clearly has his priorities in line with what is right and is willing to speak out along with Peter, even against the entire council that has gathered to hear their words, and which has now commanded their silence about Jesus Christ. Their bold stand starts with, “Whether it is right in the sight of God.”

This is what is of paramount importance, and their words clearly indicate it as such. The highest human authorities in the land have gathered, those who sit on Moses’ seat, those who minister in the temple, the elders, and so on. They all have rendered a decision concerning a matter, but Peter and John together voice their minds, elevating the matter to one that must be pleasing to God, first and foremost.

The implication clearly is that they believe those in authority before them are – by default – not pleasing to God in their judgment. Their words want to know if it is right in God’s sight “to listen to you more than to God.”

How can this be? It comes back, once again, to Scripture. The words of the author of Hebrews clearly demonstrate that Moses was the highest authority in the land. As these men sat on Moses’ seat, they were sitting in the place of God concerning the law –

“Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on *the testimony of two or three witnesses.*” Hebrews 10:28

This is why the author of the psalm (as agreed to by Jesus in John) uses the term *elohim*, or “gods,” to describe such men –

“I said, ‘You *are* gods,  
And all of you *are* children of the Most High.’” Psalm 82:6

They were elevated to such a position that they were considered separate from the people in this regard, making decisions on behalf of God when in accord with the Law of Moses. However, the Psalm doesn’t end with that. In the next verse it says –

“But you shall die like men,  
And fall like one of the princes.” Psalm 82:7

They were, in fact, men. Their position was to uphold Moses. But Moses wrote of one to come who would present words introducing a New and better Covenant. Jesus claimed, and then proved, to be that One –

“Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your law, “I said, “You are gods”’? <sup>35</sup> If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), <sup>36</sup> do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? <sup>37</sup> If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; <sup>38</sup> but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him.” John 10:34-38

This is then what the author of Hebrews tells the people in his next words of Hebrews 10–

“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? <sup>30</sup> For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people.’ <sup>31</sup> It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Hebrews 10:29-31

The Son of God had come. He had demonstrated His position and authority, and He was now to be heard, confirming the very words of Moses that the council had rejected. So, who should the apostles listen to, God or these men? With this stated to them, they adamantly state, “you judge.”

The apostles had clearly presented their case to the council, proving that the same Jesus whom they had crucified had healed the man. The sign stood as confirmation of the claim that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah) and, as such, He was to be obeyed. If a right and honest decision was made concerning the matter by the council, it would be that He – rather than they – were to be obeyed concerning their decision.

Life application: The words of this verse are in accord with the words of Acts 5:29 –

“But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’”

Though the passage is descriptive in and of itself it states, they form a precept that still applies to all believers. We cannot disobey God, meaning what He has stated in Scripture, and rather obey a lesser authority. For example, though abortion is not directly addressed in Scripture, a moral precept concerning the matter is clearly defined in Scripture. If a society says that its people are to abort children, that must be disobeyed by believers. Abortion is a moral evil that is not to be allowed within the church, even if it is allowed within society.

All moral issues are first and foremost to be evaluated against Scripture. What man decides must be rejected when that decision does not align with the moral basis provided by God.

A second precept to be drawn, once again, from this verse is that the Law of Moses is now fulfilled and annulled in Christ. This is perfectly obvious from what has been stated, right in this verse, from Acts. Jesus had earlier said to the people –

“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. <sup>3</sup> Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.” Matthew 23:2, 3

If the law were still in effect, Peter and John would be guilty of violating both the Law of Moses and Jesus’ instructions concerning it. But a New Covenant with a new Leader and direction had been instituted. In disobeying the leaders on what they decided, it is a clear indication that this New Covenant had superseded the old. The lesson is to stay away from any teacher who instructs you to obey any precept of the Law of Moses. Our doctrine is to be obtained solely from what is presented in the New Covenant.

*Lord God, it is right and proper that we will obey You rather than men. When a law of the land in which we live is contrary to a precept that is clearly presented in Your word, give us the wisdom to recognize it, the voice to speak against it, and the willingness to disobey it rather than to be found disobedient to Your word. Give us both the wisdom and the desire to be obedient in this. To Your glory we pray. Amen.*

**For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” Acts 4:20**

Peter and John had just stated to the council, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.” Now, they add on their note of intended non-compliance to the council’s determination, beginning with, “For.”



In essence, they are clearly justifying why they will not comply with the decision that has been rendered. They had said, “you judge.” As for them, they have already judged and if the two judgments do not align, it is theirs that will take the priority. That is unambiguously made known with the words, “we cannot but speak the things.”

They will speak, and there is a higher authority that requires them to do so. That thought is tied in with the idea of listening to God. If God has spoken, then it would be inappropriate to not heed the things that He has said. Again, as noted in the previous verse, this is a clear indication that the Law of Moses is now no longer in force.

The men who stood and commanded Peter and John to not speak in the name of Jesus were those who sat upon Moses’ seat. They bore the authority of Moses, and Moses has spoken for God. If Peter and John were disobedient to them, it was as if they were disobedient to God... unless they had proof that their conduct was validated by God.

As Moses had spoken of the coming Messiah, and as he had told them that He must be heard, then it is a poignant note that Messiah’s word would now be what held rule over the people of Israel. In essence, Moses, almost fifteen hundred years earlier, had talked himself out of a job at some point in future history. Time had met up with that point, and now a new order of things had come. That time is validated by their next words, which say, “which we have seen and heard.”

The council itself had noted that the healing was a sign. Added onto that were all of the doctrines of Christ that Peter and John had been taught, all of the miracles, signs, and wonders He had performed, the cross which had taken His life, and then the resurrection where He stood alive and whole before them.

They had the proofs needed to assure them of what was right and proper, and they would boldly proclaim those things no matter what. The decision was not a difficult one because it was fully supported by the hand of God upon the message they proclaimed.

Life application: Many people were raised in Christian homes, and what they believe is based upon what they were taught. That is a good thing. However, many people were brought up in Buddhist, Muslim, or Shinto homes, and they believe what they were taught. Someone could then say, “Well that is a good thing too.”

What is the difference? The answer depends on which God or “god” one is serving. That there is one God can be deduced in various ways. We do not need a book to determine

this. Simply taking the time to think the matter through can bring the human mind to know this.

And more, there are certain things about this one God that can be known as well. These things take careful thought to deduce, but it can be done. Eventually, one can weed out all non-monotheistic religions, Hinduism, for example. And more, one can then weed out incorrect monotheistic religions, Islam, for example.

These things can be done. In the doing, one is left with actually only one possibility as to what God is like. But this does not prove that the God presented in Scripture is the one true God. However, there is such an abundance of evidence that He is – such as in fulfilled prophecy – that eventually a person must reasonably ask, “If there is a God, and if He has presented Himself to the world, is what I am reading about Him in the Bible true?”

One can say, “The fulfillment of these prophecies is interesting, but it is still just random chance. The descriptions are perfectly in accord with what I can know about God, but someone just figured out the same thing and wrote a book that matches what I know. I just cannot believe that God would make this effort.”

Or, one can say, “I have all the evidence I need to believe that the God presented in the Bible is the true God, and that He has actually communicated His message to mankind in a knowable, verifiable way. I accept this word, and I believe.”

In the end, it comes down to one word – faith. God asks us to simply believe that He has done it. The smartest biblical scholar on the planet is as far from God as is the vilest murderer if he will not believe. God has spoken, and He has presented His word to the people of the world. He asks you to have faith in what He says. Trust Him and believe.

*Lord God, thank You for the Holy Bible that tells us of what You have done, are doing, and have yet to do for us in order to bring us back to You. It is a precious and sacred word that we possess. Help us to be responsible with it all the days of our lives. Amen.*

**So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. Acts 4:21**

Peter and John have clearly stated their intentions to speak concerning what they had seen and heard. The council’s command found no footing in them, but there was

nothing further that could be done other than bring more empty words of threat. This is seen now in verse 21, beginning with, “So when they had further threatened them.”

As just noted, Peter and John plainly stated that it was their intention to continue speaking out. They knew it was right, they had the authority of the Lord to do so, and those who administered the law had no justifiable reason to punish them. All they could do was threaten them some more and then “they let them go.”

Whether the beggar was there with them, or if he had already been excused, Luke’s words center on the apostles. Their words effectively communicated the events that occurred, the healing that had been performed stood as its own witness to the truth of their words, and thus their defense was valid. Those who wished to silence them had to release them, “finding no way of punishing them.”

Here is a new word that will only be seen again in 2 Peter 2:9, *kolazó*, to chastise. Vincent’s Word Studies says it was, “Originally, to curtail or dock; to prune as trees: thence to check, keep in bounds, punish.” The council was in a bind because they did not have the weight of the law behind them to support them and to legally keep the apostles curtailed. There was nothing to be found in Scripture that would justify one of the punishments authorized by Moses. In fact, just the opposite was true.

Luke, who carefully and meticulously provides every necessary detail, says nothing of witnesses – even false witnesses – that could testify against the apostles. But witnesses were required in order to render punishment upon offenders. Should they abuse their authority in such a way, it would cause real problems for them “because of the people.”

This was their main concern, not just at this time, but at other times as well. For example, when the leaders confronted Jesus about a matter, instead of directly responding to their question, knowing it was a trap, He asked them another question that put them in a bind. Their fear of the people’s reaction dictated their words and their judgments –

Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?”

<sup>24</sup> But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: <sup>25</sup> The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?”

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' <sup>26</sup> But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet." <sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know."

And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

-Matthew 21:23-27

The same state of fear concerning the people is seen in them now in Acts. They understood that they were limited by the constraints of the law, and the people were aware of what those constraints were. In this case, the apostles had the support of the people and therefore the council had to give up any intention of punishing them. If they did, it would have aroused the masses who had – only one day before – seen the sign of the healing "since they all glorified God for what had been done."

These words follow directly upon what the beggar himself had done –

"So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them— walking, leaping, and praising God. <sup>9</sup> And all the people saw him walking and praising God." Acts 3:8, 9

When the man was healed, he gave God the praise. When Peter addressed the crowd, he then denied that he had accomplished the miracle, but instead said that it had been upon "the faith" in Jesus' name that it had occurred. It was a demonstration of God's approval of Christ Jesus.

Further, Peter indicated to the people that Jesus was the fulfillment of the words of Moses that God would raise up a Prophet like him. As this was accepted by the people, it meant that what was done was in accord with the law of Moses. Because of this, the people glorified God for the man's healing. If the council were to punish the apostles, it would be taken as an act against the Law of Moses and against God who directed the issuance of that law. The consequences of that would be that the people would surely revolt.

Life application: In the US, there is a constitution that establishes the rule of law. The government, when run by miscreants, will do its best to work around the law, override the law, or simply suspend the law. But the constitution is the basis of the law. It is what gives them power in the first place. Because this is so, if the people are aware of what the constitution says, they will rightly revolt when the fundamental precepts found in this document are not adhered to.

For example, the Second Amendment to the US Constitution clearly and unambiguously provides for the bearing of arms by the citizens of the nation. When the government whittles away at this right, there will be blowback from the citizens through the legal process. If that is ignored, at some point the people will be (not may be) justified in taking action against the government because the fundamental right – set down in the nation’s founding document – has been violated.

The word of God is of far greater weight and importance than the US Constitution. It is the very source of humanity’s rights, responsibilities, and code of conduct before God. Man has no right to add to it or to take from it. It must be adhered to, in its proper context, and accurately explaining it is to be held as a sacred charge by those who preach it and teach it.

When this is not the case, the people should question on what authority the pastor, priest, preacher, teacher, church, or denomination thinks they stand. They should rightly revolt against any authority that does not align its teachings to be in accord with this word. Unfortunately, like the citizens of the nation in regard to their establishing documents, the people cannot do this if they do not know what the word of God says.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon you to read this word, to study this word, and to be able to defend a right interpretation of this word at all times – lest your life be led astray from what God intends for you by miscreants who enter the church in order to tear the people away from what is sound and proper.

*Lord God, may we be sound in our doctrine because of our study of Your word. Keep us from being led astray by those who would curtail our freedoms in Christ, but also from those who would lead us to abusing our freedoms as well. May our walk before You be in accord with Your word at all times. Amen.*

**And being let go, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. Acts 4:23**

With Peter and John officially released from the custody of the council, Luke records what immediately follows, saying, “And being let go, they went to their own *companions*.” The word “*companions*” is inserted. The Greek word, translated as “own,” can be a district, people, family, home, etc. It is a word designating something uniquely one’s own possession.

As such, a word like people, group, family, companion, or so on is appropriate. They were with an unfamiliar group, and they immediately returned to their own group. The lines are clearly drawn, and they show that even if all are of Israel, there is an unmistakable separation between the two. Once there, they “reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.”

In these words, there is a designation, chief priests, not noted in the earlier account. Instead, there it mentioned the rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander. The word has been used throughout the gospels, and it may be a way of referring to the priests who were serving or who had served as the high priest. The selection of high priests was as much of a political one as anything else. Rather than there being one high priest until his death, they were appointed by their rulers at this time.

Another possibility is that these were the leaders of the twenty-four courses of priests that were originally set up at the time of David to minister throughout the year in the temple complex. That division is found in 1 Chronicles 24.

Life application: The apostles have been commanded to not speak nor teach anymore in the name of Jesus. That is a part of what will be conveyed to the group that Peter and John have returned to. This is a time that probably caused them some consternation, and so the very first thing they have done is to gather with other believers and discuss what occurred.

There is a lesson for us in this, which is to seek the counsel of other believers when we are facing matters of great importance. In doing this, we can get a better sense of what to do because our own thoughts might be clouded by the events hemming us in. Others, however, can add in thoughts that have been unaffected by our own circumstances. This is stated early on in the book of Proverbs –

“A wise *man* will hear and increase learning,  
And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel.” Proverbs 1:5

And again –

“Where *there is* no counsel, the people fall;  
But in the multitude of counselors *there is* safety.” Proverbs 11:14

Let us take advantage of the wise counsel of others in order to make right decisions concerning the large and important matters we face. In doing so, we will surely avoid many pitfalls as we wind our way through life.

*Lord God, may we be wise in how we conduct our affairs before You. When we face really important matters that can affect the direction of our lives, help us to use wisdom and seek out good advice when it is necessary. Lead us to do this. Your word shows that this is a good and proper path, and so may we take it and be spared the ills of going it alone! Amen.*

**So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You *are* God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,**  
Acts 4:24

Peter and John returned to their own group and reported to them everything that the council had said to them. With this noted, Luke now records the actions of the group, beginning with, “So when they heard that.”

This refers to the news concerning the words of the council. The reaction that happens next is based on hearing the report of the council’s rejection of Peter’s words concerning Jesus. This includes the explanation for how the sign that had been performed in the healing of the man had come about. Everything about the occasion called out that Jesus is alive, and He is Lord. And yet, their words had been rejected. With this understood, it next says, “they raised their voice to God.”

The idea here is that of an outwardly expressive voice. It is a Hebraism, corresponding to the word *nasa* (to lift, carry, or take) found throughout the Old Testament. One could lift his voice in mourning (Genesis 21:16) or in tears of joy (Genesis 29:11). One could lift his voice in distress (Genesis 27:38) or in terror (Isaiah 10:3). Entire groups could lift up a united voice for any such reason as well (2 Chronicles 5:13). In this case now in Acts, it says that this was done by the people “with one accord.”

It is a united lifting of the voice by the people. Thus, it is to be considered in the same light as the last example cited above from 2 Chronicles 5:13 –

indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers *were* as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, *saying:*

*“For He is good,  
For His mercy endures forever,”*  
that the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud,

As the words of the next verse in Acts will be the citing of a portion of Psalm 2, it appears that the words of this verse now are actually sung out, just as the words of a psalm were lifted up in 2 Chronicles 5. If so, it would be done either in harmony or antiphonally. Further, if this is the case, it is the earliest singing of a hymn to the Lord in the church age that is recorded in Scripture. This appears to be likely, and it is a beautiful expression of the state of the people’s minds as they united their voices together “and said: ‘Lord, You *are* God.’”

Here, a particular word for “Lord,” *despotés*, signifying the Sovereign Lord, is used. It signifies an authority figure, like a master or even a husband who has complete authority and jurisdiction, and who wields total and unrestricted power in his realm. Being a reference to God, it signifies the Sovereign Lord who has complete and total authority over the universe, meaning temporally, spiritually, chronologically, and so on. Everything is within His power and ultimately under His rule.

The word was first used in Luke 2:29 when Simeon beheld God’s Messiah and uttered out a song of joy. This is its second of ten uses in Scripture. Both Peter and Jude will use the term and apply it to Jesus. In the Old Testament, it is used to refer to the Angel of the Lord and to the Lord directly as well. With this address stated, it next says, “who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them.”

It is a citation from Psalm 146 –

*“Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help,  
Whose hope is in the LORD his God,  
Who made heaven and earth,  
The sea, and all that is in them;  
Who keeps truth forever,”* Psalm 146:5, 6

This psalm goes on to speak of “those who are bowed down” in verse 8. As such, it is an appropriate psalm to recite, even if only in part. The beggar who was raised up was the act that began the entire process, and he may very well have been there among the disciples at this time. Either way, the point of citing this psalm is to acknowledge the absolute sovereignty of the Lord.



The general thought expressed in the words is found again in Revelation 14 –

“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—<sup>7</sup> saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.’” Revelation 14:6, 7

Life application: Paul says elsewhere –

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.<sup>17</sup> And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

-Colossians 3:16, 17

He says this same general thought in Ephesians 5:19 as well. This is something that will turn our minds to higher things and away from the world around us. In having songs that exalt God nearby, we will be less likely to think on the immoral or perverse. It is a good way to stay in tune with God and His word.

Having said that, this can become a source of legalism with some. Anything can be taken to an unintended extreme. What starts out with good intent suddenly becomes a source of pride or personal exaltation. “How could you listen to that radio station? I only listen to Christian songs on my radio!” Suddenly what is a personal choice to stay in tune with the Lord becomes a way of accusing others of being “less spiritual.”

This can occur with types of dress, personal choices concerning things such as drinking alcohol, and so on. Anything can become a personal idol or a means of exalting oneself in the presence of others. So, let us live our lives to God, be examples to others of what we value in our relationship with Him, but not act as if our personal choices are the only way to express ourselves properly before the Lord.

Paul gave his exhortation, and it should be followed. But we also have freedom to do things not explicitly forbidden in Scripture. Let us be wise, circumspect, and gracious in our conduct around and toward others.

*Gracious heavenly Father, how wonderful it is to praise You, to sing praises to You, and to hear others do so as well. You are God! You have created all things, and by Your hand*

*all things exist and have their being. Be exalted in Your creation, O God. And hear the praises of Your people as we lift our voices to You. Amen.*

**who by the mouth of Your servant David have said:**

**'Why did the nations rage,  
And the people plot vain things? Acts 4:25**

The previous verse began quoting the words of the group of disciples after having received Peter and John's report about the events that occurred at the council. The quoting of their words continues now by saying, "who by the mouth."

Rather than "by," the Greek reads "who through the mouth." It is an absolute confirmation of the doctrine of divine inspiration. God spoke through the mouth of another to convey His words, breathing out the very thoughts He chose to set forth. This goes along with Peter's words from his second epistle where he said, "for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as *they were* moved by the Holy Spirit."

In the case of the words to be quoted, they were through the mouth "of Your servant David." David's words fill the psalms. They are also found in the books of Samuel. The content David set forth in these songs and psalms is literally filled with anticipations of the coming Messiah.

God saw the life and actions of David and knew that how he conducted his affairs, how he expressed himself, and how the world around him responded to his actions would mirror how Christ Jesus would live and be treated. As such, God spoke through David to provide the world a snapshot of what was coming. This is why it is noted that David was a man after God's own heart. That is seen in the psalm now to be quoted. Of them, those words of God "have said."

The verb is singular. The Lord alone is noted as having said the following words, even though it is said to be through the mouth of David. With this note, the words of the psalm to be cited in this verse comprise Psalm 2:1. They begin with –

"Why did the nations rage." An aorist verb is used. In the Hebrew, which is often deficient in tenses, it simply says something like, "Why rage nations?" However, the words are quoted from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and the assumption is that the action has happened. Thus, the disciples are identifying the event with what occurred in Christ's coming. He was raged against by the nations.

The word they use is an interesting one, found only here in the New Testament, *phruassó*. It signifies “to snort” or to neigh in a vehement manner as a horse would. Thus, the nations acted in a manner not unlike an uncontrolled, snorting horse.

As the council’s decision hasn’t changed anything, it can be lumped in with all that has previously happened. From there, the second clause of the verse is cited, saying, “And the people plot vain things?”

The word “people” is plural. Hence, it should say, “And the peoples plot vain things.” The idea is parallel to the previous clause placing the “nations” along with “peoples.” This is without regard to Jews and Gentiles. It is a way of expressing that there was a united effort by all to rage and to plot. One can see the actions of both Israel and Rome being united as a stand against the Person of Christ.

The “vain things” referred to are things that are foolish. Both in the Hebrew and in the Greek, the word signifies “empty.” Thus, in a moral way, it is ineffective, foolish, and so on. Despite raging and plotting, their actions fail. It is as if a wind is blowing against a stone wall. The wall remains unaffected by it. The question shows the futility of the actions of those who came against Christ. God’s purposes in Him were realized because nothing could thwart them.

Life application: When you read the Bible, how do you consider what you are reading? Is it a book that simply conveys morals from a Mideastern perspective? It is a book that simply contains the word of God as if His thoughts are satisfactorily expressed in it? Is it book about the things of God with ideas that are conveyed to detail what man thinks is expected of Him from God’s perspective? Do you view it in some other way that hints at such a notion? Or when you read the Bible, do you say to yourself, “This is the word of God”?

How you consider this book, and how you approach its contents, has all of the importance in the world as to how you will then respond to what it says. The Bible, right in its own words, claims to be uttered out by God, even if it is through men. As this is so, should we not consider it as sacred, holy, and even terrifying?

The Lord, through Isaiah, tells us who is pleasing to God in regard to His word –

“Thus says the LORD:  
“Heaven *is* My throne,  
And earth *is* My footstool.

Where *is* the house that you will build Me?  
And where *is* the place of My rest?  
<sup>2</sup> For all those *things* My hand has made,  
And all those *things* exist,”  
Says the LORD.  
“But on this *one* will I look:  
On *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit,  
And who trembles at My word.” Isaiah 66:1, 2

The whole creation belongs to the Lord. Everything came from His hand, but the Lord favors the part of His creation that respects, honors, and exalts His word. The one who trembles while reading it is more pleasing to Him than any of the magnificent things that He has placed in the heavens and upon the earth. Be sure to consider this as you read and contemplate this sacred word that we have been given to illuminate the path upon which we tread.

*Thank You, Lord God Almighty, for the precious and exalted word that You have allowed us to read and to enlighten our lives by if we choose to do so. You have allowed us to accept it or reject it without forcing it upon us. What will we do with it during this short life we live? Help us to consider it rightly and to cherish its every word. In it, we will find life, because in it we will find Jesus. Praise God for this wonderful word. Amen.*

**The kings of the earth took their stand,  
And the rulers were gathered together  
Against the Lord and against His Christ.’ Acts 4:26**

The words of the group, which are citing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Psalm, continue now with verse 2 of the psalm. This is a direct citing of the Greek translation of the psalm as well. As such, the words begin with, “The kings of the earth took their stand.”

At times, the word “kings” is used somewhat more freely than our modern sense of the word. Today we think of the sovereign over a nation, but the intent here can signify people in positions of power, especially when they represent another who is sovereign. Therefore, the thought of Pilate representing Caesar could fit into this thought. Further, there is Herod Antipas who was known as the “tetrarch of Galilee” in Luke 3:1, who is also known as a king in Mark 6:14.

As such, there is every reason to assume that this is considered fulfilled by past events in the eyes of the disciples, even if it continues to be true even to modern times. Kings of

the earth continue to fight against the name of Jesus, but the disciples are looking at what occurred during Christ's ministry and are noting that it is an absolute fulfillment of David's words. What is also true is that the same ruling authorities would continue to do so, even as is recorded in Acts, such as in Acts 12 –

“Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church. <sup>2</sup> Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. <sup>3</sup> And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup> So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.” Acts 12:1-4

Next, the words of the psalm read, “And the rulers were gathered together.” This is recorded again and again in the gospels, even right up until the time of Christ's crucifixion. But more, and what probably brought the citing of the psalm to mind in the first place, is that they had continued to do so even after the resurrection.

The power of God in Christ is evident and on full display among the apostles, clearly demonstrating that He is both alive and in possession of the power of God, and yet the council had continued to stand against Him. That is seen in the third clause of the verse, saying, “Against the Lord and against His Christ.”

The original Hebrew reads, “Against Yehovah and against His Anointed.” The word “Anointed” is a translation from the Hebrew “Messiah,” and that is a direct equivalent to the Greek “Christ.” The meaning of this word does not necessarily have to refer to “THE MESSIAH,” but can refer to anyone who is anointed for a position.

Leviticus 4:3 speaks of the “anointed priest” with this word. David refers to the office of king, such as King Saul or himself, because they had been anointed to that position, for example –

“Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured *it* on his head, and kissed him and said: ‘*Is it* not because the LORD has anointed you commander over His inheritance?’” 1 Samuel 10:1

The title is given to Cyrus, King of Persia, in Isaiah 45:1. However, in the case of the psalm, it is speaking of a particular person who would come to fulfill a prophesied role. The Lord God anointed Jesus with His Spirit, and thus to come against Jesus, God's

Anointed, is to come against the Lord Himself. The people mentioned in this verse had directly butted heads with the God of the universe.

Life application: As noted, the rulers of the world (obviously!) continue to set themselves against the Lord Jesus. The rulers of Israel do as well. They reject Christ as Lord, and many in the rabbinic and religious circles go further, actively pursuing and attacking believers. There is an underlying enmity towards Jesus that permeates Jewish society.

But that is not unlike much of the world, even the once Christian world. To mention Jesus in public can cause major division in Germany, the UK, the US, and so on. And yet, these nations once openly allowed the open exercise of faith in Him to one degree or another. This will certainly only get worse until the coming of the Lord for His church.

Until that happens, however, the Great Commission remains in effect. We have a job to do, and we have good news to share. But the Lord has not left us without His presence. He is here with us, and He will not leave us nor forsake us. If we get attacked, or even killed, for talking about Jesus, such is life. We have a job to do, and we should be willing to expend ourselves in doing it.

Be ready and willing to speak out this great and exalted Name. It is what we have been called to do.

*Lord God, thank You for allowing us to be Your messengers of the wonderful news of salvation, reconciliation, and peace that is found in the gospel of Jesus. May we be responsible to uphold our part of this process by being willing to speak. To Your glory. Amen.*

**“For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together  
Acts 4:27**

The disciples have raised their collective voice and praised God while citing the psalms. With that complete, they now confirm that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Psalm was, in fact, fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. As they say, “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus.”

The translation is correct – “Your holy Servant.” The word translated as “Servant” can be rendered “Son,” or “Child,” but it is referring to Jesus in His ministry as the Christ, God’s suffering Servant. It is the same word translated as “servant” when speaking of David in

verse 4:25. It is against the designated Servant of God that the people next say, “whom You anointed.”

The anointing is referring to the specific act of establishing Christ for His ministry. The word used is *chrió*, signifying to consecrate by anointing. It has so far only been seen in Luke 4–

“So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup> ‘The Spirit of the LORD *is* upon Me,  
Because He has **anointed** Me  
To preach the gospel to *the* poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to *the* captives  
And recovery of sight to *the* blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;

<sup>19</sup> To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.’” Luke 4:16-19

Though the word literally means consecration by anointing, meaning rubbing the head with olive oil in order to signify divine authorization to perform a function, that only symbolically represents the empowering of the Holy Spirit. This word, *chrió*, is used five times, and all but one are directly tied to the anointing of Christ Jesus. With this understood, it next says, “both Herod and Pontius Pilate.”

The account of Herod’s involvement in the act of coming against Jesus is only found in Luke’s gospel, in Luke 23:6-12. He would be the connection to “kings” cited in verse 4:26. Pilate’s involvement in the crucifixion of Christ is noted in all four gospels, and he would be the connection to the “rulers” of that same verse, but more, Luke continues with the disciple’s words, saying, “with the Gentiles and the people of Israel.”

There are no articles in the Greek, and the word “people” is actually plural –

“with Gentiles and peoples of Israel.”

As such, it is a general statement that includes all who were participants in the torturous events of Christ’s passion and crucifixion. There were Roman and Jewish soldiers along with many peoples of Israel. People shouted for His death, people rose against Him,

people mocked Him, and there were those who physically came against Him. It was a din of humanity, Jew and Gentile, that rose against Him and led to His cross and all that was associated with that event. All of these, as they note, “were gathered together.”

As just noted, it is a din of humanity, all with a united purpose that led to Christ’s cross. The words are most significant for several reasons. Such a mixing of the intent of both Jew and Gentile would normally be at odds with the state of things. But there was a sense of all conspiring together. Also, it shows that none can say, “We are guiltless in what occurred.”

Such a thought reigns true for all. It extends to every nation, culture, society, and person because it is an indictment on the hearts of all. A nation may not have even existed at the time of the event, just as countless people have been born since the event. However, all people issue from the same original father, and the collective heart of man is clearly what is on trial with these words. And so, ironically, the joy for humanity that comes from the resurrection is one that first had to be initiated by the healing which came from the shed blood at the cross.

Life application: Above, it was noted that the word *chrió*, is seen five times in the New Testament and that four of them are directed to the anointing of Christ. Did you curiously ask yourself, “What was the fifth use of the word?” If so, you receive ten merit points. The fifth use is found in Paul’s words of 2 Corinthians 1 –

“For all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. <sup>21</sup> Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has **anointed** us *is* God, <sup>22</sup> who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” 2 Corinthians 1:20-22

In Christ is the Yes, and in Him is the Amen. It is Christ who is the fulfillment of the promises. When we call on Him, those promises, which were fulfilled in Him, now belong to us. Further, they are emphatically fulfilled in Him.

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Scripture and therefore the promises of God which were made to the people of God (to Abraham for example, explaining that in his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed) are realized in Him. Paul gives this thought in Romans 15 –



“Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers, <sup>9</sup> and that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy...” Romans 15:8, 9

And in the book of Hebrews, this is seen –

“And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” Hebrews 9:15

Every Messianic promise is realized in Him, and in Him is the Amen. In Him is the confirmation and establishment of those promises.

Understanding this, when a person calls on Christ, he is anointed in Christ. From that moment, he is established and continues to be established. God will no more reject Christ’s anointing of us than He would reject His anointing of Christ. And to assure us that this is so, and that it is an eternal decree of God (ETERNAL SALVATION), Paul’s words state that we are sealed with the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

The word translated as “guarantee” is *arrabón*. It signifies a pledge. It is given as an advance, as a security, that the final and full payment will be paid afterward. In other words, the onus and the payment are not on us. They are on God. It is the believer whose right it is to collect the final, full, and forever payment. The doctrine of eternal salvation stands, or our God is not God.

*Lord God, You have given us the sealing of Your Spirit as a guarantee. We eagerly await collecting on that pledge. May that day of final payment come soon. We wish to be forever in Your glorious presence. Amen and amen.*

**to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.** Acts 4:28

The sense of the words is much clearer when stated as a whole with the previous verse –

“For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together <sup>28</sup> to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

As can be seen, the words now presented show us that a divine hand is guiding the ages. However, in evaluating the words, immense errors in thinking can (and often do) arise. The previous verse noted that these various groups of people “were gathered together.” This was a willing decision on the part of each.

Herod voluntarily took the actions he took. The same is true with Pilate. Likewise, the Gentiles and the people of Israel all willingly gathered together. As such, the next verse now begins with, “to do.”

It is a simple and common word in the Greek signifying “do,” “make,” “observe,” “perform,” and on and on. It has a great deal of significations. Comparing the actions of a person to a plant, it is translated as to “bring forth” fruit. It can be a voluntary thing, such as, “someone did as they were told.” It can be something done with purposeful intent, such as Jesus saying, “I will make you fishers of men.”

An action is described. In this case, the people gathered together “to do.” But Luke next records the words of the disciples as crediting the “doing” to God. This is seen in the words, “whatever Your hand.”

The hand is that which accomplishes a thing. For example, in Exodus, the Lord specified various things to be brought forward to erect a tabernacle. However, he did so through Moses. As such, Moses is the one to accomplish the action –

“The children of Israel brought a freewill offering to the LORD, all the men and women whose hearts were willing to bring *material* for all kinds of work which the LORD, by the hand of Moses, had commanded to be done.” Exodus 35:29

Now, in Acts, the people have gathered together “to do,” but the action is by the Lord’s hand. Further, the account continues with, “and Your purpose.”

The Greek word comes from a root signifying “volition.” There is the sense of the act of a will that is driving the matter. The word itself signifies a purpose, counsel, plan, decision, and so on. It is the same word rendered in Acts 2:23 as “plan.” One can see a similar thought is given there that is stated here –

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—<sup>23</sup> Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and

put to death; <sup>24</sup> whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.” Acts 2:22-24

The men of Israel took an action that was set forth “by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God.” This is the same general idea again now presented. The various groups had gathered together, obviously voluntarily, and yet it is stated that it has been done at the hand of God and by His purpose which was – as it next says – an event “determined before to be done.”

This is a new word in Scripture, *proorizó*. It is found six times in the New Testament with five of them from the hand of Paul. It comes from the words *pro*, or “before,” and *horizó*, meaning “to establish boundaries.” Thus, it signifies to foreordain, predetermine, or mark out beforehand.

One can see the basis of our modern word “horizon” in it. There is a defined boundary, and that boundary was set in advance. As this is a boundary set forth by God, it is one that occurred even before creation. He set a boundary that is fixed and unchanging. The event will come to pass.

As such, the actions of those gathered against Jesus are voluntary (obviously) actions of the people, and yet they came about by the hand, purpose, and predestined decision of God. For this reason, many cannot comprehend how the “free will” of man could be a part of the equation. And yet, to ascribe the evil that occurred to God is something unthinkable.

Because of this, many incorrect doctrines have arisen concerning man’s state before God. Calvinism, for example, denies man has free will to choose Jesus Christ, but that God elects them, regenerates them, and then they choose Jesus. This is something Scripture does not even hint at.

In the case of the events of Acts 4, God had set up the time, location, and all of the details of the unfolding narrative so that He knew what would transpire. The outcome was logical and inescapable, and yet it was by the freewill of those who were involved. God’s foreknowledge does not, in any way, negate man’s free will choices. We are responsible for the choices we make, and we will be held accountable for them.

If a pastor sets up a church to meet at a certain time and all of the conditions are set forth in advance – seating, popcorn, particular movie, set time, and so on – then it is logical to know that a certain number of people will show up to view the movie he has

selected for movie night. He may know that a particular person will sit in a particular seat, and so – in advance – he puts a note in that seat for the person.

Everything comes out as he figured it would. Does that mean they did not have free will? Of course not. If a man can predetermine certain things in advance, then how much more can God – who is infinite in knowledge – predetermine the setting for the crucifixion of Christ. And yet, free will is a clearly presented principle and an inescapable aspect of what the Bible teaches. In fact, it is plainly and evidently seen in both this account from Acts 4 as well as the account from Acts 2 which is cited above.

Life application: If it seems that the events of the world are following an exact and predetermined course of history, it is because they are. The book is written. The words of the prophets and the apostles have been recorded. History is catching up with what they state, and it will happen exactly as God has indicated in His word.

And yet, every single event that happens among man is based on his freewill choice. God, having created all things, and who knows the hearts and minds of man, knows every choice that will ever be made. And yet, He is not forcing man to make those choices any more than the pastor did not force the congregant to choose what seat he would sit in.

When the Bible speaks of the wisdom and knowledge of God, it is because He is infinitely wise and understanding. And yet, He has given us the right, the honor, and – indeed – the responsibility to freely choose Him or to willingly reject Him. This is the wonder of God's hand as it works in the stream of human existence –

“O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.

<sup>2</sup>You know my sitting down and my rising up;  
You understand my thought afar off.

<sup>3</sup>You comprehend my path and my lying down,  
And are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup>For *there is* not a word on my tongue,  
*But* behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.

<sup>5</sup>You have hedged me behind and before,  
And laid Your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup>*Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me;  
It is high, I cannot *attain* it.” Psalm 139:1-6

David didn't understand the matter, but he accepted it as an axiom. God is not the author of evil, even if evil exists. God does not force our will, and yet God knows what our will is and what we will do with it. Great is our God! Let us carefully consider His ways.

*Lord God, it is with the greatest awe and wonder that we stand before You, voluntarily having come to You, and yet You knew – before the first atom came into existence – that we would do so. We thank You for allowing us free will, but we are also sorry for having constantly used that will against You and in defiance of Your will. Thank You for Jesus who alone has made our reconciliation possible. Thank You for our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, Acts 4:29**

The prayer of the disciples continues. They had just noted the gathering of various groups in order to “do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.” This gathering of disciples clearly saw the hand and purpose of God in the events that had taken place. Understanding that they too have a continued role in God's unfolding plan (see Matthew 28:18-20, for example), they desire to do what God wills, both effectively and with boldness. As such, they continue with “Now, Lord, look on their threats.”

In verse 4:24, the address was made to *Theos*, God. At the same time, they used the title *Despotés*, or Sovereign Lord. They now say *Kurios*, signifying a master, sir, or lord, but which is used in the Greek Old Testament when referring to Yehovah. This is certainly what is on their mind as they speak forth to God. In citing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Psalm, they had said that the rulers were gathered together “Against the Lord [Yehovah] and His Christ.”

As such, they are acknowledging that God who is the Sovereign over all things has, along with His Christ, been attacked. It is therefore incumbent upon His followers to defend His name, title, and position – along with that of His Christ – as they continue on in the charge they had been given. Therefore, their petition is clearly made with the thought of defending the name of the Lord Yehovah and of the Lord Jesus. Because of this, they continue with, “and grant to Your servants.”

This clearly sets the disciples in contrast to ruling council. If the disciples are followers of the Lord, Yehovah, it means that those in the establishment are not. But Jesus had already said as much to the leaders during His ministry –

“Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. <sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. <sup>44</sup> You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it.’” John 8:42-44

This is not simply an earthly spat between two rival factions, but a spiritual war between the followers of the true God and followers of the devil. This is clearly understood by them. Therefore, the disciples’ petition is “that with all boldness they may speak Your word.”

In saying, “Your word,” they are clearly referring to the message of Christ, inclusive of the gospel itself. They are not referring to the Old Testament Scriptures, except as they point to Christ. In other words, they are not asking to boldly proclaim the Law of Moses, meaning the Old Covenant. That is clearly understood to be completed through Jesus’ work. He initiated a New Covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20), and – as the author of Hebrews says –

“In that He says, ‘A new *covenant*,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” Hebrews 8:13

In coming to Christ, the Mosaic Covenant is made obsolete. It was ineffectual to save, and it had served its intended purpose until the coming of the Messiah who would fulfill it and set it aside. As noted, this is a spiritual war. It pits man and his works against Christ and His works. But the problem with man’s self-righteousness is that it is already stained with sin. Christ’s perfection is what is needed to be pleasing to God. This is what the disciples are asking for boldness to proclaim.

Life application: It may seem almost contradictory to note in one sentence that God has purposed and determined before that certain things be accomplished, and then to ask for boldness to speak on behalf of God in the next. If God has purposed all things, why would people need to act at all?

In such things, we must always consider God’s sovereignty, something already considered by the disciples. Therefore, their prayers (and ours) should factor this in. “Lord, we are Your servants. Direct our steps according to Your will. May our actions be

in accord with that.” The apostles have been given a specific charge to speak forth God’s word, so such an appeal is implied in their prayer.

If what we are doing is in accord with God’s will, it will happen. If it is not, it will not. This does not negate the need for prayer. Rather, it highlights it. We are demonstrating a reliance on God’s sovereignty when we lift our prayers to Him in such a manner.

In all things, let us remember that God is God. We are His subjects. What He determines is right, it is good, and it is what is best. Even if we do not understand that, we should take it as an axiom that it is true. From there, we simply need to get out and live our lives according to the manner which He has shown us is right, meaning as is recorded in His word.

*Heavenly Father, Your word is written, and it provides guidance for our lives. Help us to live out our lives in accord with that word, and to glorify You as we do. May our lives be proper examples to others of how to live in a manner which pleases You. Amen.*

**by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” Acts 4:30**

The verse now completes the prayer of the disciples, but to remember the context, it should be read along with the previous verse –

Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,<sup>30</sup> by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.”

With this context understood, the words of this verse begin with, “by stretching out Your hand.” A more literal rendering would be, “in the stretching forth of Your hand.” It is as if the Lord’s hand is directly equated to the actions which will take place. As He stretches it forth, the intended event occurs. The implication is that the power of the Lord that filled Jesus is to be available now, after His ascension, that was with Him during His ministry. For example, and using the same word, Mark 1 says –

“Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out *His* hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’<sup>42</sup> As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.” Mark 1:41, 42

It is the power of the Lord that the apostles are asking to appropriate in order to glorify Him. This is then noted for several reasons. The first is “to heal.”

Charles Ellicott notes that the Greek word chosen by Luke is a play on words, and assonance, that corresponds to the Greek name translated as Jesus. It is the same word used in verse 4:22, but this time it is used directly in connection with the name –

*iasis* - healing  
*Iésous*- Jesus

As for the prayer, it continues with, “and that signs and wonders may be done.” The word “and” seems to show that this is still dependent on the stretching forth of the hand of the first clause –

“in the stretching forth of Your hand...that signs and wonders may be done.”

The stretching forth of the hand is an anthropomorphism where the hand accomplishes things. It is this hand of the Lord that is stretched forth to heal, and also to perform signs and wonders. Thus, the Source is the Lord for all that occurs. That then leads to the next words, “through the name.”

In this, the words connect the act to the Lord. In the stretching forth of the Lord’s hand, signs and wonders are accomplished through the name, meaning the name “Jesus” as seen in the coming words. In this, the connection of the name to the Lord’s hand is made. And the name that is connected to the hand of the Lord is next said to be “of Your holy Servant Jesus.”

Again, the idea of the Messiah being the Servant of the Lord is brought forth. The suffering Servant has become the Healer. As such, an implied connection is made in the play on words noted above. Through the suffering of Jesus (*Iésous*), healing (*iasis*) is brought about by the Lord. The importance of the connection of the healing being done as a consequence of the stretching out of the Lord’s hand can be more fully appreciated by looking at the account in Acts 19 –

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.”<sup>14</sup> Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so.



<sup>15</sup> And the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?”

<sup>16</sup> Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. <sup>17</sup> This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

These Jews were using the name of Jesus as a talisman, looking to gain from throwing it about. But the name is to be magnified, not treated as a cliché or a trinket that can be pulled out and used to suit a personal fancy or agenda. The name of the Lord is directly equated to the name Jesus.

Life application: How often it is that people toss around the name of Jesus, claiming things that they have no right to claim! It is used to claim healing when the one claiming only looks to benefit personally from the claim. It is used to claim sports cars or winning football games. It is used to pronounce a curse on someone that another person may not like.

On and on the abuse of the name continues. But we have been told otherwise –

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup> but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

-Philippians 2:5-11

Let us confess the name, hold the name as sacred, and not allow the name to be degraded through the whims of false teachers and false prophets. Reject this evil and be sure to honor the name JESUS!

*Lord God Almighty, You have chosen to have all the power of the Godhead expressed in the exalted name of Jesus. It is in that name, and through that name, that we find our life, our hope, and our joy. Help us, Lord, to never diminish this exalted name through the*

*frivolous use of it. Rather, may we exalt that great name, the name that is above every name - JESUS. Amen.*

**And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.** Acts 4:31

With the prayer of the previous verses complete, we receive a description of what next occurred. Luke begins with, “And when they had prayed.” The idea behind these words is that of a connection to whatever follows. There was the prayer by this group, and then there was an event that resulted from the prayer. The two are tied together. As such, it is an acknowledgment that the prayer has been accepted. This is seen in the next words, saying, “the place where they were assembled together was shaken.”

The Greek word, translated as shaken, comes from another word, *salos*. That is used just one time, but its use may give a sense of what it was like in the place where they were –

“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the **waves roaring;**” Luke 21:25

There may have been a rush of wind into their quarters that caused everything inside to fly about, or a mild earthquake may have hit the area at that exact moment. Whatever occurred, such an event was taken by them as a clear indication that the Lord was behind it. The presence of such trembling in conjunction with the coming of the Lord is seen elsewhere –

“The earth shook;  
The heavens also dropped *rain* at the presence of God;  
Sinai itself *was moved* at the presence of God, the God of Israel.” Psalm 68:8

With that understood, Luke next says, “and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” The verb is passive. The prayer and praise to God allowed them to be opened up and filled. Just as wine cups are simply ready to receive a filling, this group had been prepared for the filling which then came upon them. As they were all believers, and because they had already received the Spirit, the meaning here is that of confidence, encouragement, and a renewal of determination to act boldly on behalf of the Lord and His gospel message.

That is clearly seen and understood as Luke next records, “and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” This is the result of the filling of the Spirit. It brings about a sense of

joy, determination, renewed anticipation of what God has in store for His people, and so on. These believers understood from the shaking they experienced that the Lord had fully approved of the events that took place, that the threats to Peter and John were worth the cost, and that continuing on as they had been was the right thing to do.

Life application: Such passages in Acts are given as a descriptive account of what occurred during the early establishment of the church. They are not to be considered normative for all of the church age, nor do they prescribe anything at all.

If we keep reminding ourselves of this, we will find our own walk with the Lord much more grounded. These early believers did not have the New Testament writings, and so the Lord worked in a manner that should no longer be expected. When we read the Bible, we should be shaken in our souls at the majesty of what is recorded there. We have no need for outward displays of the Lord's power to confirm we are on the right path.

The word itself reveals the power of God. Let us hold fast to this word, cherish this word, and be pleased in our hearts and souls that we have so much more than what the early believers had. We have the word of God! Let us rejoice in this.

*Lord God, thank You for Your precious and sacred word. Amen.*

**Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.** Acts 4:32

With the ending of the event in the house where the disciples prayed, the story now changes its direction, beginning with, "Now the multitude of those who believed."

Acts 4:4 said the number of men had arisen to five thousand. Adding in women and children, it would be a rather large number, and it was one that was surely growing quickly after the event with the healing. Of this large group, it next says, "were of one heart and one soul."

The Greek uses the word "one" only once – "were of one heart and soul." It is an idiomatic expression revealing a closeness as if they were literally one body. The blood pumping through them would be as if one. But more, because the heart reflects the seat of reasoning in the Bible, they also had a united purpose.

The animation of the soul is, likewise, as with one united purpose. That makes it the closest bond of all. The expression is seen in the love found between David and Jonathan—

“Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” 1 Samuel 18:1

In this state, they were like one living organism. Because of this, Luke next records “neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own.” Unlike the communist model where the state forcibly takes over the private property of the people, this is a completely voluntary thing. The people were pleased to say, “What’s mine is yours.”

This approach to the possessions of the people is an unsustainable one, as will be seen, but it was probably based on the thought that the Lord would be returning soon. If this was on their mind, it was a wonderful expression of hope in the event, but it would eventually lead these people to require charity themselves, as will be noted later and in the epistles.

Luke finishes the verse with, “but they had all things in common.” This is a close model to the modern kibbutz found in Israel. That has worked pretty well, but this is because the people work together and have a united purpose in making the kibbutz run properly. As for these early believers, their model was not as developed, and it would eventually not work out. However, with this, and with persecution of these believers ahead, it will be an impetus for the people to spread out and share the message beyond the area of Jerusalem.

Life application: Even if believers do not share all personal goods in common today, we can still attempt to be of one heart and soul. It is a difficult thing to do because sin fills our lives, but it should be the goal of the body to act in such a manner.

Obviously, doctrinal differences can be so great that it is simply impossible to fellowship with some who have called on Christ. As much as it is possible, however, we should do our best to be closely united with those who are the redeemed of the Lord —

“Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”

-2 Corinthians 13:11

*Heavenly Father, while it isn't always easy to be close and in a united mind with other believers, we know that this is what You would desire for us. Help us to live in this way, overlooking faults, forgiving disagreements, and loving others just as You have loved us. Help it to be so in our lives. Amen.*

**And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Acts 4:33**

The previous verse noted the state of the believers as all being of one heart and soul, and that they held all things in common. Luke next records, "And with great power."

The word translated as "power" is often translated as "miracles," "mighty works," and so on. In this case the idea is probably to be taken as the preaching itself and not as any demonstrations that went along with it. The word was preached, and the power of the word is what is being referred to. That seems both reasonable and correct when considering the rest of the words of the verse, beginning with, "the apostles gave witness."

The word, as it is translated "gave," is insufficient for two reasons. First, it is an indefinite verb. Secondly, the word itself means more than "gave," but it more rightly signifies "to return," "restore," "give back," and so on. In other words, the seemingly abrupt change from the previous verse is only so because the faulty rendering of this word now –

"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. <sup>33</sup> And with great power the apostles gave [lit: were returning] witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all."

The people had decided to give up on claims to personal possessions, but what was to be gained from that? The answer is that they lived in such a way that they were the recipients of the preaching of the apostles. This wasn't just a group of people benefitting off the converted masses, but there was a yielding of the people to the whole, and there was a returning by the apostles to the people, through the preaching of the word, a great and powerful understanding of what God had done in Christ, meaning "to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

This is the central point of everything that mattered. If Jesus was crucified and did not resurrect, that would be as common as raindrops in a monsoon. But the apostles had

walked with the Lord, they had participated in His life and seen the power of His miracles. And then, they saw Him taken away under guard and they had seen Him crucified. And yet, they saw Him alive again.

They were able to bear witness to the resurrection because they had borne witness to it. With this knowledge, they could then tie all of Scripture into a book with meaning never even imagined before. Everything fits from the word when the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is properly understood. With that in mind, the verse finishes with, “And great grace was upon them all.”

The translation of these words is not complicated, but the meaning is somewhat difficult to determine. There can be one of several meanings, but the two most likely will be considered. The first is that the grace of God rested upon the disciples. If this is correct, it would be in accord with Luke 2:40 –

“And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.” Luke 2:40

The second possibility is that it speaks of the favor of the people resting upon the disciples. A parallel to this would be Acts 2 where the same Greek word is translated as “favor” –

“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,<sup>47</sup> praising God and having **favor** with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:46, 47

Either way, there was a state of grace which existed because of the situation.

Life application: The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is the central point of our faith, because without these occurring there is nothing to have faith in. There have been innumerable spiritual leaders over the span of man’s existence, but their teachings are simply various aspects about what is right or wrong, what is morally acceptable or objectionable, and so on.

However, in the cross and resurrection of Jesus there is the indisputable evidence that God has favored His ministry, accepting it as the way to reconciliation with Him. Anyone can speak eloquently and with convincing arguments, but upon the death of that person, the stream of his knowledge and wisdom ends. This is not so with Christ Jesus.

Rather, because of the resurrection, we know that His infinite knowledge continues on and will continue to do so for all eternity.

Let us hold fast to the glory that is found in Christ Jesus. May our lives be witnesses to others of what God has done, and what God is still doing, among the sons of men.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the surety we possess in our faith. It is backed up by the greatest event in all of human history, because You have so ordained it. May we be willing to share the knowledge of this wondrous story to any and all we encounter. To Your glory! Amen.*

**Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, Acts 4:34**

The past couple of verses have shown the state of how the believer's lives were in the Jerusalem community that had arisen. The description now continues with, "Nor was there anyone among them who lacked."

The meaning is that there were no unfulfilled needs. Everyone had food enough, and all their other needs were met. This would have been a great time of abundance, and it would have been even overflowing because the apostles were there to tell of all that happened over the years of Jesus' ministry.

Nothing is said of the people maintaining employment. If that had ended, which in many cases seems likely – because Israel was mostly an agrarian society where livelihood came from working one's own field, this model would eventually become unsustainable. This begins to be seen in the next words, "for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them."

The verbs should read that they "were selling them." Also, the word "all" is incorrect. The Greek word, *hosos*, is indefinite. It signifies something closer to "those that" without specifically meaning "each and every." This will be seen in the next chapter where Peter will say, "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?" (Acts 5:4).

To say "all" implies that this was an absolute, but such was not the case. To understand the laws concerning the land and its use, one would need to especially study Leviticus – Deuteronomy from the books of Moses. There, the parceling out of the land, the selling of land and houses, and so on, are all minutely detailed.

The land was never actually owned by the people, but they were the Lord's stewards of it. Hence, certain intervals of time were set up for people to sell their land, and then it was automatically reacquired by that person or family upon the coming of the year of Jubilee.

The rest of Scripture is mostly silent on whether these practices from the law were actually followed at any time in Israel's history. However, these were precepts of the law. As such, there was a possible remedy for the eventually financial train wreck that lay ahead, at least temporarily. Once the land was reacquired, it could be worked, rented, or even sold again.

In such a state, impending financial troubles could be pushed further down the line. But as the number of new people joined the movement, the more tenuous the ability to make ends meet for the whole would be.

The book of Acts doesn't go into any detail concerning the employment of the people, or much of the other information needed to know exactly how they managed. And so, lining their situation up with the precepts of the law is difficult. For now, Luke next refers to what happened to the money once land or house was sold with the words, "and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold."

Again, the verbs need to be corrected to read, "and were bringing the proceeds of that which is sold." Luke is writing the account as if he is sitting there watching it happen. Thus, he was probably carefully writing down the words of someone like Peter who described to him what had taken place.

The money from the sales was being brought forth for use by the whole.

Life application: A model like this could only sustain itself if there was a way to place such money in a type of bank or other interest-bearing entity, and to allow it to grow along with the use of it. The larger the number of people who joined such a community, the more mouths there would be to feed.

Unless people were productively working, the dependence upon the top to take care of every need would become unsupportable. Communist countries have tried this, even while making their people work, and it has never succeeded. In a perfect society, without all of the problems of this fallen world, a perfect community could be realized, but people get sick, people get old, things get broken, and money is used up.



For today's world, we have been given instructions directly from the word –

“For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. <sup>11</sup> For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.” 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12

Voting for people who promise you ease while you sit around waiting on the Lord will not help anyone except those who are voted in. They will get fat off of what they have robbed from you. The Lord will be back in due time. Until then, do not vote for those on the left. They will promise ease and fairness, but only corruption of individuals and of the society will result.

Get up, get to work, and don't expect others to carry your weight.

*Lord God and Heavenly Father, how good it is that You tend to our needs. And surely one of the ways which You do this is to give us hands and feet to work for ourselves in the fields of life. We can earn as much as we are willing to expend our time earning. For those who are incapable of working, help us to be gracious and helpful according to our ability to do so. May our lives be productive and may our sharing for the needy be pleasing to You. Amen.*

**and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.**

Acts 4:35

The previous verse showed the state of life among the disciples when there was the practice of selling lands or houses and bringing the proceeds of such things that were sold. This verse now will tell what becomes of that money, saying, “and laid *them*.”

The verb is imperfect and should read, “and were laying *them*.” Luke is giving the account as if it is ongoing. One can think of people, from time to time, coming forward and laying these things down. It is not just, “Oh, this happened and then it was done.” It is more like, “Well, from time to time they were coming, and they were laying them down.”

The word “them” is inserted for clarity, but it is an acceptable insertion that speaks of the proceeds themselves. One would assume this was in the common currency and minted, for the most part, in silver. Other metals were used, but silver was the standard

at the time. So, one can think of a bag of silver – of whatever amount – being brought forward as an offering. In this manner, they are laid “at the apostles’ feet.”

The meaning of this is symbolic and figurative, but it probably still literally happened. One can think of royal subjects coming forward to make an offering to a king, of devotees coming forward to make an offering to a priest, of students making an offering to a teacher, or of a diplomatic procession coming forward to offer to a greater nation’s representative.

Each is coming to offer something to one in a higher position, and they will place the offering before the receiver, on the ground at his feet. In the case of the king or teacher, he is the final recipient. However, for the priest or the ambassador, they simply receive the offering on behalf of the one they represent. Thus, this is an offering to the Lord through their apostles, or “sent ones.”

The meaning of the act is that of authority. The place where the foot is represents that which is under the authority of the person. This is seen in Exodus 4 when Zipporah circumcised her son and touched the foreskin to the feet of the one standing there –

“and Zipporah takes a flint, and cuts off the foreskin of her son, and causes [it] to touch his feet, and says, ‘You [are] surely a bridegroom of blood to me.’”

-Exodus 4:25 (LST)

Although many translations insert Moses’s name, saying, “Moses’ feet,” this is not what is being conveyed. Rather, it was to the Lord’s feet that it was taken, demonstrating His authority over the matter. To get a fuller understanding of such symbology, a short (but limited) study will help you to see this. See Deuteronomy 11:24, Psalm 110:1, 2, and Revelation 10:2. Scripture, however, has a multitude of such examples.

With this beautiful imagery understood, it next says, “and they distributed to each as anyone had need.”

The authority of the proceeds was transferred from the previous owner to those who are the Lord’s designated representatives. From there, they were allowed to do with it as they saw fit. As needs arose, they would be evaluated and tended to.

Life application: Acts 4:34 and 4:35 are a good set of verses to, once again, highlight the need to understand proper context, and to remember and consider whether a verse is descriptive or prescriptive. For example, the same people who demand that you must be

baptized in order to be saved and receive the Spirit would never say, “You must sell everything you have and put it at the feet of Mr. XYZ.”

And yet, we are dealing with the same group of people (Israel without a single Gentile yet introduced), the same context (early church as it develops and without any New Testament epistles), and the same figure of authority who has led to this point (Peter). The disconnect in thinking is astonishing.

When someone tells you that you must do some particular thing described in Acts, be ready to explain to him why his thinking is flawed. Explain what determining the context first means, and then explain why what is being claimed is based on a descriptive passage where nothing is prescribed.

If that person is still adamant about his stand, ignore him. Almost nobody lives in a communal society today, and of them, it is surely not the habit of the people to sell their possessions and lay them at the feet of the leader. If that is going on, you can bet it is an abusive cult that has swallowed up those who are involved in it.

Rather than everyone relying on everyone else to survive, we are to work with our hands, tend to those things the epistles tell us to, and live out our lives in anticipation of the life that is truly life, and which still lies ahead of us now.

*Lord God, help us to think clearly concerning Your word. Give us instructors who will lead us in sound instruction, who will make us hungry for You and Your word, and who will not lead us down strange paths that do nothing to solidify our walk with You. To Your glory. Amen.*

**And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, Acts 4:36**

The previous paragraph revealed the state of the people and how they were supported from within as people gave of their own possessions to meet the needs of the community. With that stated, the words of Luke now introduce a new and significant character into the ongoing narrative. The way he will do this is by tying what this person does in with these same previously noted actions of the people. That begins now with the words, “And Joses.”

The name Joses is a variant of Joseph. In many Greek manuscripts, it reads Joseph as the name. The name Joseph is derived from the Hebrew name *Yoseph*, or “He shall add,” or

“He increases.” From there, and which is not uncommon, a second name is provided for him. This is recorded by Luke next, saying, “who was also named Barnabas.”

The name literally indicates “Son of Prophecy,” coming from *bar*, an Aramaic term signifying “son,” and *nevi*, the Hebrew word for a prophet. This name was given to him “by the apostles.”

The reason for calling him Barnabas isn’t clear when it is translated as “Son of Prophecy,” but Luke next provides an explanation saying, “which is translated Son of Encouragement.” The reason for the name is given in its explanation. The name defines the person. That will then be more fully revealed as the account progresses and as this person’s character becomes more evident.

The difference in the name from its original meaning (Son of Prophecy) still requires an explanation. Albert Barnes gives a suitable one concerning it, saying –

“The Greek word which is used to interpret this παράκλησις *paraklēsis*, translated ‘consolation,’ means properly exhortation, entreaty, petition, or advocacy. It also means ‘consolation’ or ‘solace’; and from this meaning the interpretation has been given to the word ‘Barnabas,’ but with evident impropriety.”

What may be the case is that Barnabas was well schooled in the prophets and was able to “encourage” or “comfort” others with his knowledge of these scriptures by directing them to Jesus, the fulfillment of them all. This may be how the two thoughts harmonize, but this is only speculation.

Concerning a reason for Luke’s explaining the name, it may be as simple as that his addressee, Theophilus (see Acts 1:1), was unschooled in Hebrew. For this, or some other reason, Luke felt it necessary to provide this additional note. Of Barnabas, Luke next notes that he was “a Levite.”

As this is the case, he was a member of the tribe set apart to the Lord for religious instruction. It is the tribe from which the priests (descended from Aaron) are from, but they were their own class within the tribe. As he is not noted as a priest, it means he was not of the line of Aaron. However, the other Levites were the ones designated to assist the priests in the service of the temple, and they performed other religious duties between the priests and the people.

Finally, Luke notes Barnabas was “of the country of Cyprus.” Again, Albert Barnes suitably explains the meaning and importance of including this –

“Cyprus is the largest island in the Mediterranean; an island extremely fertile, abounding in wine, honey, oil, wool, etc. It is mentioned in Acts 13:4; Acts 15:39. The island is near to Sicilia, and is not far from the Jewish coast. ... Barnabas afterward became, with Paul, a distinguished preacher to the Gentiles. It is worthy of remark, that ‘both’ were born in pagan countries, though by descent Jews; and as they were trained in pagan lands, they were better suited for their special work.”

Life application: Luke’s inclusion of an explanation of the meaning of the name Barnabas is not without importance. Among Christians, there are innumerable claims concerning the origin of various things, the reliability of certain manuscripts over others, which Bible version is the “best,” and so on.

A little bit of logic is often all that is necessary to dispel many of the falsities that arise. One is that of what original language certain things were penned in. For example, there are several views concerning what language the New Testament was originally penned in. Some say Hebrew, others Aramaic, others Greek, and so on.

Quite often, there is absolutely no proof for a particular claim. Pride has a way of stepping in and forcing out any other option. Adherents condemn any other option as heretical, and they claim that they have the true “key” to enlightenment. Yes, it is ridiculous, but it is as common as leaves on a tree.

As far as the original language of Acts, Luke’s words of this verse clearly indicate that Greek is the original language. For him to translate the name as he did, by default, means that he is explaining to his recipient something that required an understanding in Greek. If the words are a part of the inspired text, as anyone who holds to the inspiration of Scripture will agree they are, then it means that the translation itself is inspired – in whatever translation was used. In this case, it is Greek.

This is true with all four of the gospels as well. Each of them has a similar note which logically brings the scholar to an understanding that the original language of them was Greek.

When presented with claims concerning things like this, think things through. It is not hard to find out when such a doctrine is based on a false claim.

*Heavenly Father, help us to not get misdirected by aberrant doctrines and by things that only distract us from a sound and proper analysis of Your word. May we stay focused on what is important and be diligent in our study of that. Be with us in this, O God. Amen.*

**having land, sold *it*, and brought the money and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.** Acts 4:37

This is now the final verse of Chapter 4. The previous verse introduced Joses, also named Barnabas. It noted he was a Levite from Cyprus. Of him, it next says, “having land, sold *it*.” The word translated as “land” signifies a field, particularly a field that produces a crop.

Of this event, Bengel notes, “This must have been outside of the land of Israel, in which the Levites had no portion.” This is incorrect. He is basing this on this provision of the law –

“The priests, the Levites—all the tribe of Levi—shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and His portion. <sup>2</sup> Therefore they shall have no inheritance among their brethren; the LORD is their inheritance, as He said to them.” Deuteronomy 18:1, 2

This is stated several times and in various ways within the law. Its meaning is not that Levites would own no property within Israel, but that the tribe of Levi would have no allocation of land within Israel. The land was divided up among the other tribes, and then Levitical cities were interspersed throughout those divisions.

However, the provisions of the law allowed for anyone to buy and sell the land. It was just not to pass between tribes permanently. An example of those of Levi (specifically the priests) owning their own land is found in Jeremiah –

“And Jeremiah said, ‘The word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>7</sup> ‘Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you, saying, “Buy my field which *is* in Anathoth, for the right of redemption *is* yours to buy *it*.”’ <sup>8</sup> Then Hanamel my uncle’s son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said to me, ‘Please buy my field that *is* in Anathoth, which *is* in the country of Benjamin; for the right of inheritance *is* yours, and the redemption yours; buy *it* for yourself.’ Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.”

-Jeremiah 32:6-8

Anathoth was one of the Levitical cities of Israel. There were such provisions found for buying and selling land and houses, but the main point was that the borders of each tribe were to remain fixed, not transferring between tribes based on inheritances and the like. As for the land sold by Barnabas, it next says, “and brought the money.”

It was his right to own the land, it was his right to sell the land, and when it was sold, it was his right to do as he wished with it. There is nothing compulsory in this event. This is a completely voluntary occurrence in all ways. With this being the case, it tells what he chose to do with it, saying, “and laid *it* at the apostles’ feet.”

This is in accord with what is said in verses 34 and 35. It appears that Barnabas was chosen as an example simply because his life will be highlighted in Acts as the church expands and moves into Gentile areas. He will become a traveling companion of Paul, and together they will set out with the message of hope that began in Israel and then spread outward from there. This account is a way of introducing him into the ongoing narrative.

Life application: As far as giving within the church, there is very little to prescribe what should be given or how it should be given. The two main verses that are to be considered are –

*“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”* 2 Corinthians 9:7

*“Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.”*  
-Galatians 6:6

That is pretty much it. There are no other prescriptions that apply to all of the church concerning the matter. If you have been told, or if you are being told, that you should tithe, you are being misled in doctrine. Tithing is a precept of the Mosaic Law. It is not mentioned as a precept under the New Covenant. To mandate tithing would actually violate Paul’s prescription of 2 Corinthians 9:7.

In the church, you are admonished to give cheerfully – without consideration of amount. There is freedom in the church, not the bondage of the law.

*Thank You for the freedoms we possess in Christ, O God. You allow us to come to You without the heavy and burdensome constraints of the law. In this, we can worship You freely and with a grateful heart for all You have done for us. You have blessed us with*

*every spiritual blessing in Christ. Praise God for this pure state of fellowship and reconciliation. Amen.*



## CHAPTER 5

**But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession.** Acts 5:1

Acts 5 now records a rather negative incident in the development of the early church. It is an event that somewhat contrasts that of the account of Barnabas. Introducing such a negative incident at an early point like this was also not uncommon to the giving of the Mosaic Covenant. Two specific instances, that of a Sabbath breaker and that of a blasphemer, are recorded (see Leviticus 24:10-23 and Numbers 15:32-36).

Even before looking into the coming account, it should be remembered that it is descriptive in nature. It prescribes nothing concerning the handling of such matters. Further, what occurs is obviously not normative. We cannot expect that the same outcome will occur every time a comparable event happens.

One of the most common questions concerning the two that are about to be introduced is, “Were these saved believers?” Although it is impossible to say because the Lord alone reads the hearts of man. The answer leans very heavily in the direction of “Yes, they were saved believers.” The account would have little reason to be included otherwise. Instead of the outcome, one would think the matter would have been handled in a different way.

The point isn’t that unbelievers had wormed their way into the church, but that the heart of man, which is desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9), can work against the purposes of the church when it is not focused on what is right and proper. The epistles are well marked with such people or with warnings of such attitudes. Their words refer to, or serve as warnings to, saved believers who walk in the flesh and not in the Spirit.

With that, the verse and the chapter begin with, “But a certain man.” The Greek word *de* is a conjunction that is added to statements opposed to a preceding statement. It can be translated as “and,” “but,” “now,” and so on. Regardless of the translation, it is a way of setting this account as a contrast to the previous one. Of this certain man, it says he was “named Ananias.”

This is a transliteration of a common Hebrew name, Khananyah. That comes from *khanan*, meaning to show favor, or be gracious, and *Yah*, which is a contracted form of Yehovah, the Lord. Thus, the name means, “Yah has been gracious.” He is noted along “with Sapphira his wife.”

Her name is derived from the Hebrew word *sappir*, a sapphire. That is derived from *saphar*, to count or recount. The reason for this may be that the sapphire is an especially hard stone that may have been used to scratch other substances. As such, a tally could be made when counting. As she is the wife of Ananias, the account demonstrates that deceit of the heart can be something that spreads to others. It is not something isolated when it has its influencing effects. As such, it says that they, husband and wife, together “sold a possession.”

The word signifies something belonging to the individual, as if landed property, a personal possession, and so on. It will be noted as land in verses 3 and 7. The point is that it was under their authority, and they had the right to do with it whatever they wished. In this case, they wished to sell it, and so that is what they did.

Life application: Whether Ananias and Sapphira were saved or not can be argued over until the second coming, but what should not be at all debatable is whether this account is to be taken in a prescriptive manner or not. If it were, the number of dead bodies of those in the church would fill every generation, even to overflowing. In fact, the church would never get anywhere if the Spirit took out every person whose heart went astray.

The point isn't that we can expect to keel over if we have deceit well up in our hearts. Rather, the point is that the Lord is aware of our hearts. He knows the motives behind our actions, and He is there with His people in their struggles of this life. David was guilty of no less a crime than what these two will be seen to have done. He coveted another man's wife, he took her, and he then had that man killed to cover over his actions.

The Bible doesn't hide the faults and failings of the people it highlights. Rather, it highlights those faults and failings along with them. In this, we should see our own shortcomings and recalibrate our lives and actions to work in accord with, not opposed to, the will of the Lord. Accepting the premise that these two were probably saved brings the account into a much more personal nature for those who are willing to admit their own failings.

*Heavenly Father, Your word is like a mirror on our own lives. The faults and failings of each of us are highlighted through those we read about, because they share in the same human limitations that we do. Thank You that we can see our own weaknesses, and then see how to rise above them by applying the lessons You have provided. And above all, thank You for the grace and mercy we receive, even when we fail You. Amen.*

**And he kept back *part* of the proceeds, his wife also being aware *of it*, and brought a certain part and laid *it* at the apostles' feet. Acts 5:2**

The previous verse introduced Ananias and Sapphira, noting that they sold a possession. The narrative concerning them continues now, beginning with, "And he."

It first focuses on Ananias, apart from his wife. This actually highlights the events of the narrative in a more pronounced way. As they unfold, the united nature of their deed, despite the order in which the events unfold, is brought to the forefront of the account. As for Ananias at this time, he "kept back *part* of the proceeds."

The Greek word, translated as "kept back," is *nosphizó*. It is found here in verses 2 & 3, and only again in Titus 2:10 –

*"Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, <sup>10</sup> not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things."* Titus 2:9, 10

It signifies purloining, pilfering, or embezzling. It is the clearly wrong action of setting apart something for oneself. In this case, the setting apart is not what is wrong. The disposition of the money would be up to them. However, what accompanies the setting apart of the money is what makes their actions inappropriate.

It is clearly to be understood that their actions imply that the entire amount is supposedly being offered to God. Thus, it is the lie that accompanies the offering that is being focused on. Ananias has looked to find favor in the eyes of the people through a dishonest display of charity. But the guilt of the act extends beyond him because of "his wife also being aware *of it*."

They are both complicit in the deceitful act, and thus both bear guilt before the Lord. It is in this state of trickery that it next says, "and brought a certain part and laid *it* at the apostles' feet."

The account gives the basic details and says nothing further about how it was presented, meaning what was said, what kind of a cheerful response came from those who received it, or any other such things. One can easily speculate about how esteemed the act would have been in the eyes of others, and how these two would suddenly be moved up a couple of notches in the rungs of whatever perceived hierarchy there was among the people.

And this would have been the exact intent of making such a claim. With everyone's attention focused on them, they would be the heroes of the day. But such a state has no value in the eyes of God. Rather, He looks upon deceitfulness and a faithless heart in a completely different light. When King Saul did something that followed in a similar fashion, he was directly addressed concerning it by Samuel –

“So Samuel said:

‘Has the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,  
As in obeying the voice of the LORD?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,

*And* to heed than the fat of rams.

<sup>23</sup> For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft,

And stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,

He also has rejected you from *being* king.” 1 Samuel 15:22, 23

Saul looked for esteem in the eyes of his men as of more importance than a heart that was set on pleasing the Lord. It cost him the kingship. Ananias and Sapphira followed a similar path, and they will not go unscathed.

Life application: In our society today, people have become almost totally consumed with seeing themselves and being recognized on social media. All kinds of filters are used to enhance photos, and once photos have been taken, they are manipulated further to hide imperfections.

As this is so, what is being seen is nothing more than a cheap lie. Even though we know this is being done, it is ignored as an acceptable part of being in the public eye. Such deceitfulness then harms everything else around us because our view of people becomes skewed. We see the actual flaws of others and decide they need to be “corrected” before we can truly accept them.

And so, people rush off to have plastic surgery, Botox fillers, and so on. Life is cheapened with each such thing we allow. And all the while, God is evaluating what is going on inside of us. The externals mean nothing. He is looking to see if our hearts are directed to Him and to His word.

Let us not worry about the shallow, temporary, and completely vain things that do not profit. Instead, we should be concerned with building up our spiritual lives through hearts that are more in love with the Lord every day. May it be so.

*Lord God, help us to forget the vain and temporary things that this world focuses on, and help us to cultivate hearts that are pleasing to You. May we be acceptable in Your sight despite all of our outward bumps and scars that will be forever removed when we receive new bodies of glory and holiness some wonderful day. Amen.*

**But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself? Acts 5:3**

The previous verse revealed Ananias having kept back a part of the proceeds from what he had sold, and yet placing a certain part of it at the feet of the apostles. With that done, the account continues with, “But Peter said.”

The attention of the narrative continues on with Peter. This is not an indication that Peter is the leader of the people, nor is it a note that such notable things only occurred to Peter. Rather, the narrative is recording the events surrounding Peter because he is the main apostle at this time, and he is also the one – between Peter and Paul, who Acts is mainly centered around – whose ministry is focused more especially on the Jews.

When Paul arrives on the scene, the narrative will begin to focus on him more and more because the spiritual banner of Israel will begin to transfer from Peter to Paul, and from the Jew to the Gentile. As the narrative is on Peter at this time, Luke continues with the words of Peter, saying, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart.”

This is one of two times Satan is spoken of by name in Acts. The other being in Acts 26:18. It is a clear indication that he is alive and active in the world after the time of the cross. In this case, it was to fill the heart of Ananias. The heart is reflective of the seat of reason and understanding. Ananias’ thought process was clearly afflicted so that he would presume to be deceitful with the money that was intended for the aid of the church.

It is an egregious offense because the apostles represented the leadership of the church, and they were those who demonstrated the power of God working through them. However, the words here no more indicate an unsaved person than they did when Jesus essentially said the same thing to Peter –

“And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.’” Luke 22:31, 32

Likewise, Paul's epistles clearly show that Satan is working within the church and is active in that work, even among and against believers –

“Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” 1 Corinthians 7:5

Paul gives a comparable note of warning again in 2 Corinthians 2:11 and elsewhere. As for now with Ananias, the filling of his heart by Satan was “to lie to the Holy Spirit.” The offense is especially said to be directed toward the Holy Spirit as opposed to “the Lord” or “God” in a more general sense. Albert Barnes gives a long, detailed, and specific analysis of this, but the key point of his thoughts center on these words –

“Peter intended, doubtless, to designate an offence as committed particularly against the person, or influence, by which he and the other apostles were inspired. Ananias supposed that he could escape detection, and the offence was one, therefore, against the Inspirer of the apostles. Yet that was the Holy Spirit as "distinct from the Father." See John 14:16-17, John 14:26; John 15:26; John 16:7-11; John 20:22. Compare Acts 5:32. The offence, therefore, being against him who was "sent" by the Father, and who was appointed to a particular work, clearly supposes that the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Father.”

Barnes also equates what happened here to the “blasphemy of the Spirit” noted in Matthew 12 and Mark 3. The presence of the working of the Spirit in and through Jesus can be equated to that now working through the apostles, but the magnitude of the offense does not appear to be the same. The people accused Jesus of being filled with Satan when it was the Holy Spirit. Ananias has not done this.

And more, Jesus didn't call for those who blasphemed the Spirit to suddenly keel over and die. He simply told them that what they had done was an unpardonable offence. The very fact that punishment will come so swiftly upon Ananias is a better indication that he was saved than it would be that he is unsaved. However, it is not a proof of the matter and only a general inference can be made. Regardless of that debatable issue, Peter explains why this is lying to the Holy Spirit, saying, “and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself?”

The spiritual aspect of the ministry was plainly evident through the work of the apostles. They were carrying on the ministry of Christ, and they were responsible for the development of the church. As His “sent ones,” they bore His authority and their

decisions were on His behalf. In lying to them, it was taken as a lie against the Holy Spirit who empowered them. Ananias and his wife will be given as object lessons to the people concerning this truth. What occurs to them will be a means of establishing the apostles' authority to conduct the affairs of the church during this period of its establishment.

Life application: Things like what is occurring with Ananias no longer occur in the church today. The lesson has been recorded, and we have this descriptive account to read and accept or reject. But the Bible is a testament to it having occurred. To not believe it is not much different than what Ananias has done.

The Bible claims that it has come under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It claims to be the word of God, including that of Him working through the apostles. How is it different, then, to ignore the prescriptions found in Scripture than it is to do what Ananias did? In other words, Paul (an apostle of Jesus Christ) clearly states that a woman is not to teach or have authority over a man.

And yet, there are female teachers, preachers, and pastors that fill churches throughout the world. It is no less lying to the Holy Spirit. This same logic can be used in countless other doctrines that are recorded by the apostles in the pages of the epistles. The word of God must be held as sacred, and it must be treated with the same respect and honor that we give to the Holy Spirit who authored it. It is a reflection of who He is.

If we are willing to consider the word in this light, our treatment of it will be as it should be. Let us not fail to hold the word in the highest of esteem, being obedient to its precepts, lest our hearts be guilty of lying to the One who breathed it out for us as a moral guide in a darkened world.

*Glorious God, how can we say we love You, and yet ignore what Your word says? And how can we know what Your word says unless we take time to read it and to know it? We have a great disconnect in our thinking when we say we love You and want to be pleasing to You, and yet we don't spend the time getting to know who You are and what You expect! Help us to correct this by learning and applying this sacred treasure to our lives. Amen.*

**“While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.” Acts 5:4**

The account of Ananias and his deceitfulness continues. Peter has poignantly told him that what has happened is a result of Satan filling his heart and causing him to lie to the Holy Spirit. He was looking for attention and accolades while making a claim that was untrue. Now, to show how ridiculous what he has done truly is, Peter continues to address him, saying, “While it remained, was it not your own?”

The Greek bears a play on words which is also a common Hebraism. In essence, it says, “Remaining, did it not remain to you?” It is an emphatic way of stating a truth, by repeating while also changing the form of the verb.

In this, Peter was telling Ananias that what he possessed was his and he alone had charge over it. Therefore, if he gave one quarter, one half, three quarters, or all of it, the amount was solely up to him. Because of this, to lie about the amount could only be a perverse display of pride. It had nothing to do with necessity. And more, Peter continued with, “And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?”

It is the same basic thought, repeated once again. It was his, and even after selling it, the money was his. There was no need to lie about his own possession. And so, the repetition is an emphatic way of showing Ananias how stupid and deceitful what he had done truly was. There was no threat to his financial security, there was no compulsion to give even one penny, and what he did give was solely up to him. The sin of pride had stepped in and made him long for an undeserved recognition. Because of this, Peter asks, “Why have you conceived this thing in your heart?”

Peter asks the question, but James later provides the answer –

“Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. <sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. <sup>14</sup> But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” James 1:12-15

Ananias was drawn away by his own desires, and his actions have formed a lesson for the church to consider. The evil in him was not from God, but was formed from the lies of Satan. It then sprang from the flesh of his own self, and he proceeded down the perverse path from there. With that set forth for him to consider, Peter finishes with, “You have not lied to men but to God.”



In just the previous verse, Peter said that he had lied to the Holy Spirit. Now he says that he has lied to God. Unless Peter is theologically confused, which he is not, he is stating that the Holy Spirit is – in fact – God.

The restating of this from “Holy Spirit” to “God” also appears to be another evidence that Ananias was probably a saved believer. It appears to be implied that he had received the Holy Spirit and had misunderstood the significance of that event. Peter is schooling him on the fact that in receiving the Holy Spirit, one has received the Spirit of God, who is God.

The working of the Godhead is realized in each person that comes to a saving knowledge of Christ, and from there, care needs to be taken to conduct one’s life properly in that sanctified state henceforth. Ananias had not done so and had discredited that glorious name by which he was sanctified.

Life application: One mark that is often evident among cults is that of the leaders exacting huge sums of money from those who follow. It may be that they are required to give up everything to join.

Within the church, there are ten thousand permutations of what it means to give. Some churches have annual sermons on tithing. Some mention tithing at the end of almost every sermon, just before the plate is passed.

Pressure to give may come in a variety of ways, or subtle hints of people not doing enough may be spoken out in order to shame people into giving more. Peter’s words dispel any idea that the property of an individual belongs to the church. Until it is given, it belongs to the person alone.

Paul’s words in the epistles then give the directions for proper giving. This is it, so if you can remember these two verses, you will satisfactorily handle your financial affairs in relation to giving to the church you attend –

*“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7*

*“Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.”  
-Galatians 6:6*

“Not grudgingly or of necessity” means giving is to be an act of the freewill that makes the person happy. If he isn’t happy in giving, he should not give. And it should only be what he purposes in his heart. “All good things” does not necessarily mean money. It simply means to share in what is good with one’s teacher. Whether that means a compliment, a cookie, or an invite over for dinner is solely up to the individual.

That is it. Beyond that, no person should ever feel pressured into giving. It should be from a willing heart, and it should be because it blesses the giver.

*Lord God, thank You for Jesus who has done all things for us. Help us to decide what we can do in return for the grace we have been granted, and then let us live out our lives in that manner, glorifying You with our deeds and actions. May it be so. Amen.*

**Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things. Acts 5:5**

Peter has just accosted Ananias with his deceitfulness, telling him that what he has done is to lie to God and not to men. With that stated, Luke next records the punishment that immediately follows, beginning with, “Then Ananias.”

There is a sense of separation from Peter by saying this. It doesn’t say, “Then Peter reached out and...” or any such thing. What occurs is only to Ananias. It has nothing to do with anything Peter either initiated or that he was subsequently involved in. The effects are upon Ananias, and they came upon “hearing these words.”

Again, this is still indicating a separation from Peter and from anyone else. Ananias is the only one involved, and the event occurs simply upon hearing. He heard the charges and, Luke records, he “fell down and breathed his last.”

The meaning is plain and obvious. Apart from any action by Peter or anyone else, Ananias simply keeled over and was dead. In his description of the event, Luke uses a rare word, *ekpsuchó*. It is found for the first of only three times, all in Acts. It is also found in the Greek translation of the OT and also in ancient Greek medical writers. It comes from *ek*, meaning “out,” and *psuchó*, meaning “to breathe out,” but with the sense of blowing to make cool.

One can think of him collapsing to the floor, and out comes his final breath. There was no appeal, there wasn’t even time for him to beg forgiveness. Instead, he was laid low, and his breath was extinguished. Whether he was a saved believer or not, the judgment

upon him was given as an example of what any one of us deserves for such an offense. Even if immediate judgment isn't forthcoming, that is a demonstration of mercy, not that the Lord isn't aware of the offense.

As for those who heard of such things, Luke records, "So great fear came upon all those who heard these things." This was one of the reasons for the swift, strict, and sudden event. It was to instill in the minds of the people the terrifying nature of just how close the judgment of the Lord can be at any time. It is not as if God is far off and unconcerned. He is right among His people, and He is perfectly aware of the things that we do – be they right or wrong.

It is a common practice among Charismatics and Pentecostals to claim to be "slain in the Spirit." They fall down and roll around on the ground in supposedly ecstatic states. This type of religion is not found in the epistles, and it does damage to the beauty of the Christian experience, sensationalizing what should be a dignified approach to the holiness of God. When Ananias was slain in the Spirit, it was a permanent effect, and it was because he deserved what happened to him.

If believers were punished for treating the holiness of God with such contempt every time they did so, there would very quickly be a lot fewer people filling the halls of churches.

Life application: Paul says the following in his epistles –

"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach): <sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Romans 10:8-10

And again –

"In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." Ephesians 1:13,14

We hear the word, we believe, and we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. And yet, for many, the rest of their lives is a walk with the Lord that is one of doubt and uncertainty. “I know that I believe the gospel, but how do I know I’m really (really, really) saved?”

It is as if they want an outward confirmation that what happened to them really took hold. Ananias got a confirmation that what he did really was known to God. It was a costly lesson. God is under no obligation to give us any outward sign that we have been saved, nor should any such sign ever be expected.

But this is just what charismatics claim is the case. It is as common as sand on the beach to hear them teach that speaking in tongues is a sign of having the Spirit. Such a false teaching completely damages the purpose and intent of the word “faith.” It nullifies it in the believer, and for the rest of his life, he is looking for the next sensational proof of his holiness.

The Bible never teaches such a thing, nor does it teach that we should doubt that the Lord has saved us once we have believed the gospel. What the word does teach us is to ensure the gospel we have accepted is the true gospel, and to be certain that the Jesus we have received is the true Jesus. If we are certain of this, let us accept that we have been saved, and let us live lives of gratitude – not doubt – for that salvation. This is certainly something that is pleasing to the Lord.

*Heavenly Father, give us wisdom in Your word so that we live faithful lives that are properly balanced in our doctrine. Help us to stay away from strange, unbiblical doctrines. And keep us from those who would misdirect us in our walk with You. You are pleased with our faith. And so, may we be people of faith as we live out our lives in Your presence. Amen.*

**And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried *him* out, and buried *him*.**

Acts 5:6

In the previous verse, the demise of Ananias was recorded. Down he went and out went his breath. With that, Luke now records, “And the young men arose.” The word is literally “younger” men. Much speculation is given over these words, but what seems likely is that they are simply being contrasted to elder men. They are youthful, they are not in any leadership position. Also, they are asked to do a job that would be expected of someone young. And so, Luke notes that the “younger men arose” to do what was necessary, which is that they “wrapped him up.”

This is common in the Middle East to this day. A shroud or blanket was laid out, and then the body is placed on it, wrapped up, and taken for internment. The verb itself gives the sense of drawing together or drawing in, as if it is a sail being shortened. Hence, the shroud is drawn into the body, and that is how it is carried to where it is deposited.

Along with that, it was not uncommon for spices to be added into this burial cloth as it was being drawn in. That is noted of Jesus' body in John 19:40, saying it was "the custom of the Jews." Next, Luke specifically notes that they "carried *him* out."

There were places appointed for burial outside of the city. Quite often, such places were already prepared so that the body was simply placed into the chamber and a stone was then rolled over the entrance. In this, the body would decompose to the point where its bones could be later gathered together into a stone box known as an ossuary. From there, the gravesite could be used again, as it stood ready to receive its next body. As this was a customary way of quickly and efficiently disposing of a corpse, this is probably the process by which they "buried *him*."

This was a quick and efficient way of getting the job done, and it avoided a lot of the drama we go through in today's world. Rather, the place would be noted, and from there, mourners would come and go as they saw fit. This is seen, for example, in John 11 in relation to the grave of Lazarus.

Life application: The body of Ananias was handled in accord with the custom of the Jews. This prescribes nothing. It simply describes what occurred. It is an error in thinking to then come to the conclusion that all bodies must be buried. If the practice of the Jews was to be followed, we wouldn't be using caskets. Further, we would later be gathering up the bones of the dead and placing them in ossuaries. And etc. On and on, the thinking concerning what to do with a body would go.

The Bible is silent on this issue. There are no prescriptions at all concerning the matter. As this is so, it is a matter that is left solely up to the discretion of the family or society to handle. Whether a person is vaporized in a nuclear detonation, devoured by sharks, or slowly consumed by worms, the result is pretty much the same. The body returns to its basic elements, and nothing is left of it.

The body is not what the Bible focuses on in such matters. It is the soul of the man that it is concerned with. If Christians spent less time worrying about what is going to happen to their corruptible bodies and more on what will happen to their eternal souls, things would be in a much better perspective. Unfortunately, such is normally not the case.

Jesus is the Christ of the nations. The way those nations dispose of their bodies is up to them. The way that the state of the eternal soul of man is addressed should be where the focus is. Let us consider this and get about the business of sharing the gospel.

*Glorious God, You have fashioned us to live out our lives in bodies that are marvelously pieced together. But they also degrade and tire out. If there is such majesty in these frail, temporary bodies, what will it be like when we are united with our eternal dwellings? How wonderful it is to hope for that day. May it be soon! Amen.*

**Now it was about three hours later when his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.** Acts 5:7

Ananias has died and been wrapped up, carried out, and buried. With that recorded, Luke now turns to the second person to be involved in the devious matter, saying, “Now it was about three hours later.” The Greek bears an idiomatic expression commonly found in the gospels. It more literally reads, “And it came to pass, about three hours later.”

It is a way of conveying that the events were not preplanned by Peter. The first thing occurred, and, eventually, the next event began to unfold as well. In this instance, the event surrounds the wife of Ananias, saying, “when his wife came in.” This is Sapphira, noted by name in verse 5:1, and of whom it said “his wife also being aware *of it*” in verse 5:2.

She is complicit in the lie concerning the money obtained from the sale of the land, but she is clueless as to the events that occurred concerning Ananias. As it says, “not knowing what had happened.” With this, she is given an opportunity to set the course of her future, for good or for ill.

Life application: The book of Proverbs provides wisdom to those who are willing to accept what it says. If the discourses and pithy sayings that are given there are mulled over and meditated upon, a lot of woes that otherwise occur might be eliminated from our lives. In Proverbs 4, Solomon says –

“My son, give attention to my words;  
Incline your ear to my sayings.  
<sup>21</sup> Do not let them depart from your eyes;  
Keep them in the midst of your heart;  
<sup>22</sup> For they *are* life to those who find them,

And health to all their flesh.  
<sup>23</sup> Keep your heart with all diligence,  
For out of it *spring* the issues of life.  
<sup>24</sup> Put away from you a deceitful mouth,  
And put perverse lips far from you.  
<sup>25</sup> Let your eyes look straight ahead,  
And your eyelids look right before you.  
<sup>26</sup> Ponder the path of your feet,  
And let all your ways be established.  
<sup>27</sup> Do not turn to the right or the left;  
Remove your foot from evil.” Proverbs 4:20-27

In those few lines are several admonitions that would help Sapphira decide what course of action to take when she is questioned about the affair of the sale of land. We'll see if she stayed awake during Sabbath school when Solomon was read.

Take time to read through Proverbs. If you read one chapter a day, it will take you a month to go through it. If you read three a day... well, you do the math. Just be sure to review the wisdom recorded there. You will often find that from day to day what you read will be applicable to events of that same day.

*Lord God, Your word is precious. Thank You that it is there, waiting for us to give our attention to it. Now, Lord, give us the desire and the wisdom to search it out and to then apply its precepts to our walk before You. Thank You for this word that can safely guide the steps of our lives. Amen.*

**And Peter answered her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?”  
She said, “Yes, for so much.” Acts 5:8**

The previous verse noted that Sapphira had come in without knowing any of the details concerning the death of Ananias. With that being the context, Peter is obviously prompted in his spirit to find out if the matter extended to her as well. With that in mind, it says, “And Peter answered her.”

In the Bible, the word “answered” is frequently used to indicate “asked,” even if it is the beginning of a conversation. There is a matter that is waiting for a resolution and so it is “answered” to. Hence, the word “answered” responds to the as-yet unstated issue and not necessarily to someone’s query. Understanding this, Peter introduces the issue, saying, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much?”

The issue is the sale of the land for a certain amount of money. It may be that the bag of money was still there where it had been left as a witness to the deceit of Ananias. The arrival of Sapphira was like its own discourse to open the matter up for a resolution. As such, Peter answers by asking.

In this, the matter is set forth and the evidence is either openly present, or the amount was asked by Peter, even if unrecorded by Luke. Either way, the amount was made manifest to her, and Peter then asked about it. With this precise line of presenting evidence and then questioning the details, Luke next records that “She said, ‘Yes, for so much.’”

The question from Peter was not, “Is this the amount you and your husband decided to present to us?” Rather, it was whether the land was sold for the amount presented. As such, her answer is false.

Life application: Although we should not expect that every person who lies about such a matter will suddenly keel over and expire, the purpose of including this story is surely to instruct us in our own responsibilities in running matters of the church.

First, it is an indication that the Lord is aware of even the smallest details of our daily lives. This is evident from the parable He gave concerning the unjust steward in Luke 16:1-13. Secondly, it is to be remembered that that church at this time did not have a New Testament to conduct its affairs by. And so, the Lord directed the early church, through the apostles, and He did it – at times – by having things come about that are not to be considered normative once the epistles were written.

With the epistles now available, a matter such as this one can now be evaluated based on what is written there, and decisions can be rendered based on that guidance. Thus, it is incumbent on those who find error within the church to go to the word, ensure that the matter is evaluated based on what the word says, and then a decision is rendered based on that evaluation.

Let us be sure to consult the word. To not do so defeats the purpose of having it in the first place. Keep reminding yourself as you go through Acts that it is a descriptive account. It is not prescribing anything in matters such as this one, and what occurs is certainly not to be considered normative for the rest of the church age.

*Glorious God, what a gift You have given to us in the pages of the Bible. If we are willing to adhere to it as the guiding rule for our lives, then our lives will certainly be better off*



*for it. You are the Creator, and we are the work of Your hands. Certainly, what You have given us in the word is a reflection of the care You have for us. Thank You for this word! Amen.*

**Then Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband *are* at the door, and they will carry you out.” Acts 5:9**

Peter had just questioned Sapphira as to whether the land was sold for the amount Peter had indicated. Her answer was a lie, saying it was. With that, it now says, “Then Peter said to her.” Peter has information that is as yet unknown by Sapphira concerning Ananias. He also knows that she has lied, just as he did. With that knowledge, he questions her directly, asking, “How is it that you have agreed together?”

Rather than “agreed together,” the verb is passive, being rightly translated, “How was it agreed by you?” The word Peter uses, *sumphóneó*, is the etymological root for our modern word “symphony.” It originally signified a harmony of voices, thus being in agreement. A cunning idea was brought forth, and it was agreed to by both “to test the Spirit of the Lord?”

In verse 5:3, Peter had told Ananias that Satan had filled his heart to lie to the Holy Spirit. Then in 5:4, he said that Ananias had lied to God. Now, the same action is described as testing the Spirit of the Lord. One can see how the concept of the Godhead is somewhat revealed by how Peter has made the three statements. His wording is not unlike that found in 2 Corinthians 3 where Paul refers to “Christ,” “the Spirit of the living God,” “God,” “the Spirit,” “the Lord,” “the Lord is the Spirit,” and “the Spirit of the Lord.”

Each member has His own role, but the role and the terminology are also seen to overlap as their workings are displayed in the stream of time. In Peter’s use of “the Spirit of the Lord” in this verse of Acts, he is certainly using the term synonymously with “the Spirit of Jesus Christ” as is seen, for example, in Philippians 1:19. And yet, Peter also used the term Holy Spirit as noted before in verse 5:3. As such, the act is one that has come before the Godhead and Peter understands the consequences of their actions by declaring, “Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband *are* at the door.”

Sapphira may have heard the words and not even really understood what was being said. The sentencing is so abrupt and direct that her mind may not have had time to process what he meant. But they were stated clearly enough to tell her that some sort of

disaster had taken place in regard to Ananias, and that meant disaster was certainly coming upon her as well. And without a break in his words, Peter then conveys what that disaster would be, saying, “and they will carry you out.”

The span of time would have been very short between the two intervals, especially if a tomb was already set to receive Ananias’ body. Just as the feet of the young men who had put him in his grave had returned, the sentence upon Sapphira was being spoken and executed. She would be joining him in burial within moments.

Life application: If one slowly reads through the epistles and notes every use of the names and designations – God, Jesus, the Spirit, and so on – a round and rich tapestry of the workings of God is revealed. The amount of overlap in the terminology makes it utterly inexcusable that people deny the concept of a Godhead where the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each a member.

This is unquestionable. As such, only a few options are available concerning the matter. One can say, “I simply don’t believe this is the word of God.” In this, the indication is that the person does not accept the Bible as a revelation of who God is. But if the person is honest, he will at least admit that the Bible does convey the notion that the God presented in it is triune in nature.

If a person says, “I believe the Bible is the word of God,” then there is a true disconnect in his thinking if he also says, “I do not believe in a Trinity.” The evidence is right there for anyone who is willing to simply open his eyes. Such a person is deluded and has not sought out the truth of the God who is revealed in those same Scriptures.

And, of course, there are those who accept the Bible as the true revelation of God, and they are willing to accept what it says at face value concerning how God has revealed Himself. “Yes, I accept that the Bible teaches the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. I may not understand this, and I may have some of the nuances wrong in my thinking, but this is what the Bible clearly teaches.”

If you are struggling with the concept of the Trinity, take the time to do your own study. The epistles and Revelation are not that long. In a short amount of time, you can have every instance of how God has revealed Himself written down. From there, you can consider them. If you are honest with what is there before you, you will agree that the Bible teaches a Triune Godhead.

*Lord God, You greatly reward those who diligently seek You through Your word. This is certain. And so, help us to be wise and to spend our time wisely through reading it, studying it, contemplating it, and meditating upon it. What could be more important than knowing You and growing closer to You? Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying *her* out, buried *her* by her husband.**

Acts 5:10

The previous verse had Peter proclaim judgment upon Sapphira for her having tested the Spirit of the Lord. He proclaimed that the same young men who carried out her husband would likewise carry her out, meaning that she would die. With that spoken, Luke records next that exactly that happened, saying, "Then immediately she fell down at his feet."

As soon as the words left his mouth, she punched her ticket and fell down dead. The note of her falling at his feet is a nice touch. The very place where the money had been left by Ananias, meaning at the apostles' feet (as noted in verse 5:2), is the same place where she wound up. The spot where the money testified against her is the same spot where she lay dead.

In this, she (like her husband) became an immediate object lesson to any who would dare to be deceitful in this manner again. As the word is now written, it stands as a testimony to the nature of the act, and to what is rightly deserved by those who do such things.

However, this does not mean that such an action is to be expected with every incident that arises. The example was set to show what is rightly deserved, but it is not prescribing that this will be normative in every instance. Hence, we can find the mercy of God in every such instance we find ourselves in during our walk before the Lord. As for Sapphira, after keeling over, it says, "and breathed her last."

It is the same word introduced in verse 5:5 when Ananias was said to have breathed his last. Within just a short time, the same thing happened to Sapphira, and the matter was settled as a recorded testimony for all time. In her expiring, Luke next records, "And the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying *her* out, buried her by her husband."

The verbs of this sentence are not well translated by the NKJV. Here, instead of “came in,” it is an aorist participle, “having come in.” Likewise, the words, “carrying *her* out,” are also an aorist participle, “having carried *her* out.”

Hence, it should read something like, “And the young men, having come in, found her dead, and having carried her out, they buried her by her husband.” Luke’s description is alive with the actions that occurred in order to convey that the same young men, who had just picked up the dead body of Ananias and transported him to a grave, likewise had come in and found Sapphira in the same state as he had been.

After “having carried her out” they took her to the same location as he had been carried, and “they buried her by her husband.” In this, the tragic story of Ananias and Sapphira comes to its end. They had neglected to consider the words of Scripture, they had failed to apply the knowledge of the Lord to their understanding, and they had tested the Lord.

Life application: The 94<sup>th</sup> Psalm gives insights into the nature of the Lord in such an instance as that which came about with Ananias and Sapphira –

“Yet they say, ‘The LORD does not see,  
Nor does the God of Jacob understand.’

<sup>8</sup> Understand, you senseless among the people;  
And *you* fools, when will you be wise?

<sup>9</sup> He who planted the ear, shall He not hear?  
He who formed the eye, shall He not see?

<sup>10</sup> He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct,  
He who teaches man knowledge?

<sup>11</sup> The LORD knows the thoughts of man,  
That they *are* futile.” Psalm 94:7-11

The Lord is aware of those things we think we have kept secret, and He will act in accord with His wisdom in each and every such case. Let us consider this and take it to heart. And let us also be grateful that we do not always get what we deserve. If we did, the church would be a lot emptier come Sunday morning. Thank God that He mercifully does not act against our every transgression!

*Lord God, You are gracious and merciful. You return to us less than our sins deserve, and You are abundantly good to us in so many ways. Help us to remember this and to always be grateful to You for Your kind hand of discipline when it is brought upon us. Great are You, O God, and greatly are You to be praised. Amen.*

**So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things. Acts 5:11**

The previous verse found Sapphira keeling over and breathing her last, right at the feet of Peter. With her sudden demise, the young men who had carried out Ananias arrived and carried her out for burial by him. With that recorded, Luke next writes, “So great fear came upon all the church.”

Here, the word *ekklésia* is used and translated as “church.” It was used by Jesus in Matthew 16:18 and again twice in Matthew 18:17. It signifies a called-out assembly. It will be used many times as Acts continues, and it will then fill Paul’s epistles. It will also be used in Hebrews, James, 3 John, and Revelation.

The word refers to the people who comprise the faith, meaning the faith that leads to an individual’s inclusion in the body of Christ. Faith in what Jesus has accomplished is the key to inclusion. When faith is demonstrated before God, that person is sealed with the Holy Spirit and becomes a member of the *ekklésia*, or “called out assembly.”

HELPS Word Studies provides a more important meaning for the student of Scripture to remember, saying, “The *English* word ‘church’ comes from the Greek word *kyriakos*, ‘belonging to the Lord’ (*kyrios*). 1577 /*ekklēsía* (‘church’) is the root of the terms ‘ecclesiology’ and ‘ecclesiastical.’”

This called-out body is who Luke is referring to now. They, meaning all of the believers in Christ, are the church, and it is said that great fear came upon them because of what happened to Ananias and Sapphira. They have now come to understand one of the traits of the Lord. He is not just merciful and forgiving, but He is also holy. He is to be treated as such. It is reminiscent of what was said in 1 Samuel 6 when the people realized the sternness of the Lord in judgment –

“And the men of Beth Shemesh said, ‘Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? And to whom shall it go up from us?’” 1 Samuel 6:20

The church has been given a stern example of what it means to not treat the Lord as holy. This doesn’t mean that this is what will happen at all times, but it is what is deserved at all times. As every infraction will be judged, all believers can expect their times of treating the Lord in a less than holy manner will be presented to them when they stand before Him at the bema seat judgment that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 3 and 2 Corinthians 5.

Along with the church, Luke also notes, “and upon all who heard these things.” Not only did those within the church hear of the matter, but non-believers did as well. This was probably a convincing proof to many that the Lord was, in fact, among the church. As such, the act may have led to more conversions to the faith. Verse 5:14 refers to the expansion of the church, and this demonstration of the Lord’s power and holiness, through His apostle, may have been one of the reasons for this.

Life application: A study of the use of the word *ekklésia* in Acts clearly shows that it refers to one united body of Jew and Gentile, not two separate bodies based on two separate gospels. Further, the use of it shows that the church is not an organization based on a centralized building or location, such as one might think while considering Roman Catholicism.

The church is shown to be the people who are saved believers in Jesus Christ. Too often, the word “church” is used when referring to a building. Even abandoned buildings are often referred to in this way, such as, “That is an old church.” What would be more appropriate would be to say, “That is an old building where the church used to meet.”

This would then help both believers and non-believers to understand that the church is comprised of those people who are followers of Jesus. Further, those who are true followers of Jesus are also known as “saints.” That is clearly seen in Paul’s letters, such as in his first letter to the Corinthians –

“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:” 1 Corinthians 1:2

Remember these things and, to the extent possible, try to be precise concerning them. In this, those who misunderstand the terminology can be corrected. The church (the called-out assembly) refers to believers in Jesus Christ, and those believers are all saints.

*Thank You, Lord God, for allowing us to be members of Your called-out assembly when we have faith in the gospel concerning what Jesus Christ has done. As Your saints, help us to be responsible and remember to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of this high calling. May our lives be lived to Your glory. Amen.*

**And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch. Acts 5:12**

The matter of Ananias and Sapphira is complete. With that out of the way, the last verse said, “So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.” That thought now ties in with what is next given by Luke, beginning with, “And through the hands of the apostles.”

This is a somewhat idiomatic expression. Something done “through the hand” means “by the power of,” or “under the authority of.” It does not necessarily mean that physical contact is required, even if that is often the case. For example, the death of Ananias and Sapphira could be said to have been done by the Lord through the hand of Peter.

Peter clearly didn’t strike them, but it was under the authority of the Lord, and by Peter’s spoken word, that the events took place. That authority and power is now stated to be not just with Peter, but through the hands of the other apostles as well. And this power was reflected in “many signs and wonders.”

As has been noted, the difference between a sign and a wonder comes down to whether the thing accomplished points to something else (a sign), or if it simply speaks for itself (a wonder).

The sign will authenticate the purposes of the Lord, pointing to what He is doing in the process of redemptive history. In this case, that is accomplished through the signs given by the apostles. The wonder is given to elicit a response of awe from those who behold it, but it does not necessarily speak of anything beyond itself. Luke notes that both of these “were done among the people.”

The early church was provided these, and indeed unbelievers beheld them as well, to convince and convict them of the truth of the apostles’ message concerning Jesus. Thus, these things were given to establish the early church, grounding it, and solidifying the faith of the people. The record here describes what occurred, it does so in relation to the apostles, and it prescribes nothing for anyone else in future times.

As for the ongoing events, Luke next notes, “And they were all with one accord.” Who “all” is referring to is debated. The subject of the previous sentence was the apostles. However, the nearest antecedent is “the people.” The next verse seems to indicate that it is referring to the apostles, but even that can be debated.

Due to the ambiguity, Luke’s intent may just be “And they all – apostles and those who came to hear them – were all in one accord.” Thus, it would be a general statement that

when the people met, any who were free at the moment, were in a state of agreement and contentedly came together “in Solomon’s Porch.”

This is where the healing of the beggar in Acts 3:11 was highlighted. It is also where Jesus is said to have walked in John 10:23. Due to the size and layout of the area, it was a good place to gather, and so this is where the people would come to teach and be taught.

Life application: As has been noted, and as will certainly continue to be stated as the book of Acts continues to unfold, there were signs, wonders, miracles, and demonstrations of power in the early church. These served their purpose by establishing a reliable basis of authority for the apostles, and they stood as a witness to the people that the Lord was working through them.

In this, the people could then fully trust that what was done was true and that it was also approved by the Lord. These instances describe what occurred, and their record is now written down for us to accept or to reject. Either way, however, there is no longer a need for such demonstrations of power because the recorded testimony has been given. It now stands as the authority and witness to us. As such, there is no longer a need for such events to occur.

But more, there are no longer any apostles of Jesus to do such miracles. The word of God has been given, it testifies to what they have done, and that written testimony then testifies to the power of the Lord working through them. As we have this word, what more do we need? And more, what more should we expect? As Paul says in Romans 10:17, “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

The word is given, and it sufficiently provides all we need to make our decision concerning Christ. Therefore, we do not need – nor should we expect – anything beyond it. Let us be content in this knowledge. Let us accept the word as a suitable and sufficient witness. And then, let us go forward proclaiming the good news that is recorded there.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the precious and sacred word that You have given us. It is just what we need to lead us to You, it tells us all that we need to know about You, and it establishes and grounds our faith in You. It is sufficient, and we shall look to it for our guidance as we live our lives out before You. Amen.*

**Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. Acts 5:13**



The previous verse noted that “they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch.” This was probably a general statement that when the people met, any who were free at the moment were in a state of agreement and contentedly came together. Now, another difficult set of words is given by Luke, beginning with, “Yet none of the rest dared join them.”

Who this is referring to is not at all agreed upon. If “them” is referring to the apostles, then some think that the other disciples feared to be closely associated with them lest they should wind up like Ananias and Sapphira. But this would not align well with the fact that they are said to be in one accord elsewhere. That implies that they were all like-minded and without any sort of fear.

Vincent’s Word Studies says this refers to unbelievers and then aligns that with Ananias, thus indicating he was never a true believer. As such, the rest of the unbelievers would not join the church under false pretenses because they were scared they might suffer his fate. This is possible, but the vague nature of Luke’s words makes this view suspect. If this were the case, he could have stated it directly, leaving no room for such intense speculation.

Some see this as any who had not yet joined with the apostles, whether believers or unbelievers, having been shied away from any open union with them, especially while in the public area, because of what happened to Ananias and Sapphira. This is possible, and it would alleviate any contradiction in the next verses.

Another possibility is that this is referring to non-believing Jews in general who may have sympathized with the work and message of the apostles, but they were afraid of openly aligning with them – either because of the fate of Ananias and Sapphira, or because of fear of others who would then spurn them. If this final view is correct, it is not at all unlike what is said about this same type of individual in the book of John –

“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; <sup>43</sup>for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

-John 12:42, 43

One of the two latter options seems to be more in line with the general tenor of the attitude of the people. There is also no contradictory sense to be found with the coming verses. Despite a group standing off from aligning with the apostles, Luke next notes

that this didn't mean they weren't regarded in a most respectable light, saying, "but the people esteemed them highly."

Here, the same term is used as in verse 5:12. Many signs and wonders were done among the people, and the people esteemed them highly. This refers to the population in general. There was nothing among them that said, "This is just a crazy cult," or "These people are deviants and miscreants," or any other such thing. Rather, there was an understanding that they were doing nothing wrong, and that they were – in fact – worthy of note and even high respect.

Life application: The words of this, and the surrounding verses, can be a bit challenging to determine exactly who Luke is referring to. But the overall idea is clear. The apostles and disciples were surrounded by people who held them in esteem, even if some of them were reticent to join with them for one of several possible reasons.

There is nothing contradictory in these two thoughts, and there are many modern parallels to consider what the ministry was like. One of the most obvious is that of the Billy Graham Crusades. Whether you agree with his method, style, doctrine, or other aspects of his ministry, it is quite clear that he was highly regarded by almost all the people.

He brought many to Christ through his ministry, and yet, there were many who respected him highly who would not dare to join him. This included Jews who were afraid of being shunned by their own synagogues and families, Muslims who had the same fears, and so on. There was a great respect for the man, and there was a great admiration for his message.

In looking at the parallels between Acts 5 and Billy Graham's ministry, it helps us to maybe see a little more clearly the intent of Luke's otherwise difficult words. The main point being that the word of the Lord, the gospel, was being preached and people were choosing to accept it or reject it, but those who conveyed it carried themselves in such a favorable light that it allowed the message to be the main deciding point. The messengers themselves did nothing to alienate the general populace from making a decision about the content of the message.

Let us apply this to our own lives by being above reproach in our conduct. Then, when we share the gospel, the decision to accept or reject the message will be based on the message itself and on the personal choice of the hearer. May our personal character not interfere with getting the message across.

*Heavenly Father, give us the wisdom to live our lives in such a manner that others will see our conduct and not find anything in it by which the name of Jesus is diminished in their eyes. Rather, may our lives be of the caliber that people will want to know why we possess the hope we profess and want to hear the wonderful story of what You have done in the giving of Jesus. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, Acts 5:14**

The previous verse noted that “none of the rest dared join them.” The words are debatable, but they were seen to possibly be referring to joining the apostles during their open, public speaking. People would hear and quietly listen, but not openly attach themselves to the group while among the multitudes.

However, this verse now does note that growth did continue. As Luke records, “And believers.” This is referring to people who have heard the gospel that Christ died for their sins, that He was buried, and that He had risen again. They believed this, accepting the words as true. Thus, they are reckoned among believers. It is to people of this group, believers, that they “were increasingly added.”

The verb is imperfect, signifying an ongoing process. They were increasingly (kept on being) added. It shows a continued growth that means people were truly converted, and they had been saved according to the words of the Lord that “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

The Lord’s work was finished, the people accepted Him as their Messiah, and they were saved. Thus, the next words, “to the Lord,” refer to Jesus. It is the Greek word *kurios* that can be used in a multitude of contexts to mean a variety of things. In this case, it speaks of Jesus who is the God/Man. He is the Master of the faith, and the One who saves those who come to Him.

Luke next records that this included “multitudes of both men and women.” Despite being a somewhat common word, the plural of the word “multitudes” is found only here. It reveals the great expansion in numbers that occurred, so much so that the exact numbers are no longer included as the narrative continues. Also, the inclusion of women is an expected thing for Luke to note. He was careful to include them in many narratives in his gospel account, and he continues with this in Acts.

Life application: The early church expanded quickly, and this is not an unexpected thing. The people of Israel had heard Jesus speak throughout His ministry. The things that He did were brought into conversations throughout the land. The connection between their sacrificial system and His fulfillment of the typology would be easy to make and simple to understand.

They had the culture, the Scriptures, and the personal connection to what the anticipated Messiah would come to do. As these things were the case, many believed. However, the word “many” was still just a small portion in relation to the whole society. And further, until the leaders accepted Him, it could not be considered a national turning of the heart.

To this day, there has been no such turning. While nations have arisen and received the gospel message, even to its highest authorities, Israel has languished under the curses of Deuteronomy 28 for their failure to recognize Christ for who He is.

Be sure to pray for Israel’s collective eyes to be opened, and be ready to evangelize any who come your way, Jew or Gentile. But be sure to present your words to Jews in a manner that includes the thought that Jesus isn’t some Gentile person who is followed by Gentile nations, but that He is the fulfillment of their own Scriptures and the true Messiah of Israel. Many have no idea that this is so.

Once they realize He is a Jew who shares in the same culture as they do, they can more easily break through the barriers that have been erected around them by their religious leaders for so very long.

*Heavenly Father, help us to get the word out about Jesus! Help us to present Him in a way that is understandable and relevant to each person we talk to. May we be about this most important task. Thank You that You allow us to share this precious message of life and restoration. Amen.*

**so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid *them* on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.** Acts 5:15

The previous verse noted how believers were increasingly added to the Lord. With that stated, it now says, “so that they brought the sick out into the streets.” The words seem to logically connect to verse 5:12 –

“And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people...so that they brought the sick out into the streets.”

As such, the words “so that they” would then be speaking of the people. It is the populace who would bring any person who was sick out into the streets, probably at the time they knew Peter would be going to the temple (Solomon’s Porch, noted in verse 5:12) or returning from it. With this thought in mind, it next says, “and laid *them* on beds and couches.”

The words in Greek are *klinōn* and *krabattōn*. The words are suitably described by Albert Barnes –

*klinōn*. “This word denotes usually the ‘soft’ and ‘valuable’ beds on which the rich commonly lay.”

*krabattōn*. “The coarse and hard couches on which the poor used to lie.”

The meaning then is that people of every social class, from the rich to the poor, understood that Peter was able to heal. It signifies a hopeful belief that his passing might bring the person to restoration. That is seen in the next words, saying, “that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.”

The translation is deficient. Rather, it reads, “that at the coming of Peter, even his shadow might overshadow some one of them” (YLT).

It is not that Peter’s shadow would pass by, but that as Peter came by, his shadow might come upon them. It is possible that this means that they hoped his shadow passing over them might heal them, and this is how it is generally taken. In Acts 19, a similarly unusual type of healing is noted –

“Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, <sup>12</sup> so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.” Acts 19:11, 12

This more closely aligns with the thought of the people touching the hem of Jesus’ garment as is recorded in Matthew and Mark. There is physical contact.

As the physical contact is highlighted, and because of the way the words are written concerning Peter coming by, it very well may be a way of saying, “that at the coming of

Peter, he might stop to heal them.” In the act of stopping, his shadow would thus be over them.

If this is the case, it is not the mere passing of the shadow, but the fact that Peter was willing to stop and be attentive to the sick. While he was there, his shadow (his presence) would be on them.

Whatever the actual meaning, the words do not in any way negate the notion of the other apostles also healing. The point is not that Peter is the only one who heals, but that the focus of the narrative is on him. As noted elsewhere, the focus is on Peter in the first twelve chapters of Acts, and then it moves to Paul in chapters 13-28.

In this, a point is being made about the transfer of the spiritual banner from Jew to Gentile, Peter being the apostle to the circumcision, and Paul being the apostle to the Gentiles. The accounts are given to show this movement away from Israel and to the Gentiles.

Life application: It is common for Pentecostals to claim all kinds of spiritual occurrences, including healings, by merely being around a particular area or person. Such a sensationalist approach is certainly based on verses from Acts, as if what happened through the apostles is still normative for the church today.

This is a poor way of arranging one’s theological position because the accounts in Acts prescribe nothing. They only describe what occurred, and when rightly considered, what is described is to make a point concerning what is going on in the greater picture of redemptive history.

In interpreting Acts already, many of the verses that describe various events are simply ignored by these same Pentecostals, as if the “good stuff” still applies today, but the “other things” don’t. This is a pick and choose theology that is not supported by the epistles.

As far as the epistles, they establish doctrine, they set the guidelines for conduct in the church, and the things they do not address (casting out demons, for example) means that those things are not to be considered as a part of Christian faith and practice. God has not left anything out of His word that we need to conduct affairs in the church, and He has not put things into His word that are superfluous. Rather, what is there is given for us to evaluate based on the context in which it is presented.

Be careful what you accept, be sure it is supported by the epistles (which are prescriptive for the church age), and be sound in your doctrine lest you get misdirected down many strange and unhealthy paths.

*Heavenly Father, keep us from those who are unschooled in properly handling Your word. May we not get pulled down the wrong paths as we live out our lives. Instead, help us to think clearly on Your word, rightly applying its precepts to our lives. May it be so, to Your glory. Amen.*

**Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.**

Acts 5:16

The previous verse spoke of ailing people being brought into the streets in hopes that “the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.” From there, Luke records, “Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem.”

The word “gathered” is an imperfect verb. It should read something like, “Also a multitude were gathering.” The people came, and they just kept on coming. At this point, the ministry is limited to Jerusalem. This is still the beginning of the command of the Lord to the apostles that said, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

However, despite not yet going forth into the surrounding cities, the surrounding cities were coming to Jerusalem because of the message of hope which is based upon faith in Christ Jesus. And the gathering was no small group. Rather, Luke records it as a multitude. The word was going forth, and those who heard of it were passing it along so that the streets of Jerusalem were filling up as many were “bringing sick people.”

The word signifies “without strength,” and it indicates those who are feeble, frail, weak, sickly, and so on. It is a general word that is defined well by the simple word “sick.” Any who were generally ailing, for whatever reason, would be brought. Along with them were “those who were tormented by unclean spirits.”

Here, the verb is a present participle. It speaks of those “being tormented.” One can imagine people being brought forth who were actively going through the torments of possession, just as was seen of those brought to Jesus. They may be argumentative, foaming at the mouth, struck dumb, or whatever else. They were in an active state of possession, and there was no other hope but to bring them to Jerusalem where there

were apostles of Jesus Christ, proclaiming healing in His name, “and they were all healed.”

It is interesting to note that the previous verse did not include this final statement of healing. People were anticipating the shadow of Peter passing by to fall on the sick. From this, it appears that the term may have been used to indicate a hope for Peter to stop and actually heal the people. In the act of stopping, his shadow would actually fall on the individual while he took the time to proclaim healing in Jesus’ name. It is speculation, but it appears to be a valid thought.

Life application: The word “all” does not always mean “all” in the Bible. Paul says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Because of the words of Paul, some immediately come to the conclusion that there is one judgement for all people. From that springboard, an incredibly confused theology arises. For example, the judgment spoken of by Jesus is suddenly lumped in with what Paul refers to –

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats.” Matthew 25:31, 32

This is a giant problem with this. Actually several. First, Jesus was speaking to Israel about issues that were relevant to Israel. The synoptic gospels focus on His ministry under the law and in anticipation of the coming millennial kingdom. Paul, on the other hand, was writing to Gentiles in the church – a completely separate body in a completely different dispensation.

Secondly, even if that is misunderstood, Paul clearly states that those being judged are saved and their judgment has nothing to do with condemnation. On the other hand, those Jesus refers to will either be brought in to inherit the kingdom or they will be cast into the everlasting fire. And so on.

Thus, the word “all” used by Paul is clearly not speaking of the same group of people mentioned by Jesus. In other words, context must be maintained or a pretext will naturally be the result. Understanding this, the “all” mentioned in Acts 5:16 does not



have to mean that everyone who was so afflicted was healed, but that all who met up with the apostles were.

It is not Jerusalem that brought about healing, nor is it Azusa Street that somehow has power to bring about healing, revival, and so forth. Likewise, it is not an individual – like Peter or Paul – that brought about healing. Rather, it is God who supernaturally healed in all instances. And there are those instances recorded in Scripture where healing by an apostle did not occur, such as 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, Philippians 2:25-30, 1 Timothy 5:23, 2 Timothy 4:20, and so on.

With the Bible recorded and the epistles completed, we are to refer to those same epistles for our doctrine and our instruction. We are to pray for others, we are to ask for the Lord's hand of healing upon us if it is His will, and we are to take the appropriate measures concerning physical healing that are developed by competent people in whatever field they are trained in.

At times, the same people who refuse medical treatment of one kind or another (or all medical treatment) because of some inane religious reasoning will still put on warm clothes when it gets cold, wash their hands with soap, use disinfectants (natural or otherwise), and so on. The disconnect in thinking is astonishing.

Taking preventative measures and not taking curative measures is about as smart as buying a gun and not buying bullets for it. Or maybe the same person will buy both a gun and bullets, but never put the bullets in the gun. Such would indicate a very unclear thinker indeed.

Think things through, use reason, and remember to take everything in context. In failing to do so, there will always be faulty doctrine in your life.

*Heavenly Father, help us to reasonably consider Your word and to take what it says in the proper context at all times. In this, we will avoid many pitfalls that come before us in order to trip us up. Yes, Lord, help us to be sound in our thinking and theology. Amen.*

**Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, Acts 5:17**

The previous verses spoke of the multitudes who were bringing the sick out into the streets and others coming from surrounding cities, all to be healed. In this, healings were taking place, and it signifies that people were believing that healing was possible. When

it came about, the message of the good news would be more readily accepted as well. As such, it would obviously cause consternation to the leaders. This verse now shows that is exactly what occurred, beginning with, "Then the high priest rose up."

The word "Then" is probably better rendered as "But." This is given in contrast to the healings. Many people came for healing, but that led to a negative effect on the high priest and other authorities. It seems as if Luke is purposefully stating this directly after the healings which would have caused the people to "rise up" from their beds (for example, see Mark 9:27 where the same word is used) upon being healed. And so, a sort of negative pun is being given. In their healing, the people were "rising up," but this caused a rising up in anger by the jealous leaders of the people.

But more, the same word is also used of rebels in Acts 5:36, 37. And so another contrast is probably being inferred between the true leadership of the Lord and the rebellious leadership of the high priest against the Lord. Depending on when this occurred, this high priest could be Caiaphas, noted in John 11:49. He was already opposed to Christ and His message. If he is still the high priest, his rebelliousness against the Lord continues on now. Further, Luke next says, "and all those who were with him."

When one understands that this is a rising up against the purposes of the Lord, which is exactly what is being described, the expression unites these people with the high priest as if they are a bunch of thugs thronging together in order to work their mischief. Of this group, Luke specifically notes it "is the sect of the Sadducees."

Here is a new word in Scripture, *hairesis*, translated as "sect." It is where our modern word "heresy" is derived from. It signifies a philosophical division of adherents. The word especially stresses the personal choice of those who adhere to the particular belief.

Today, the word heresy is used in a manner that is not seen in the New Testament. Rather, because the truth of Jesus Christ is fully expressed in the New Testament, a more definite meaning has arisen. There is the truth of God in Christ, and there are all other incorrect religious philosophies, defined as "heresies," because they are opposed to God's truth.

As far as the sect itself, it is those of the Sadducees. This was a group whose philosophies included a belief that there is no resurrection and that there are no angels or spirits (Acts 23:8). This group would find the work of the apostles especially troublesome because of this. The apostles' main message was that they were sent on behalf of Jesus, who had risen from the dead. Further, they were specifically said to be

healing people who had unclean spirits in verse 5:16. These Sadducees will be even more upset when an angel clearly works on behalf of the apostles in verse 5:19.

For now, it states that the high priest, along with these obviously frustrated Sadducees, “were filled with indignation.” The word is *ze/los*. It signifies zeal, eagerness, enthusiasm, and also jealousy. It is this last word, jealousy, that drives them to be zealous against the message of the apostles.

They see the expansion of the church. They see the multitudes surely praising God for the healings they have personally experienced or witnessed, and so on. In this, their jealousy at their own inability to have the same effect on the people would lead to them enthusiastically wanting to end what they perceived as a great threat to their authority, and also to their obviously faulty doctrine.

Life application: Today, heresies need to be identified, and aberrant cults and unsound doctrines need to be highlighted. We are shown this by example (for example, see Galatians 2:11-21), and we are told this explicitly as well (such as in Ephesians 4:14 and elsewhere).

Therefore, it is not wrong – and indeed it is exactly correct – to call out those who are teaching unsound doctrines. But it is also true that when this occurs, those who are teaching these lies and distortions will not sit idly by and take it. They will be just like the high priest and the Sadducees, and they will rise in jealousy against those who speak the truth.

As this is so, those who see this occurring must decide who has the valid argument and the proper doctrine. How are they going to do this? Will it be by casting lots? Should they do it by deciding who is wearing the best clothes? Does a title (such as Dr., Rev., Apostle, and so on) indicate right doctrine? Is a person’s culture (such as being Jewish) an identifier that he knows more than someone of another culture?

What is it that will allow the one being presented with varying doctrines to decide which is wrong and which is right, or if both are wrong? The answer is, “Unless you already know the Bible and what it says on that particular issue, you cannot properly evaluate what is presented.”

Hence, you are directed to read this word, meditate on it, contemplate it, and then defend it. This is what God, in his word, asks you to do. He wants you to be prepared because Satan already is. And Satan has many followers who would gladly steal you

away from what is proper. Be in the word! The Sadducees arose against the Lord's designated apostles. Today, there are innumerable sects that are there to do the same against the truth of the word. Be prepared!

*Lord God Almighty, please be with us as we face the many troubling characters who come stealthily into the church and present that which is false so that they can direct attention to themselves. Help us to be responsible and to know Your word, reading it and meditating on it constantly. Give us wisdom in this, O God. May it be so. Amen.*

**and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. Acts 5:18**

The previous verse noted the rising up of the high priest and those with him from the sect of the Sadducees, being filled with indignation. From there it now says, "and laid their hands." It is essentially the same words found in Acts 4:3, an account that occurred in the same general manner as is happening now –

"Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, <sup>2</sup> being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. <sup>3</sup> And they laid hands on them, and put *them* in custody until the next day, for it was already evening." Acts 4:1-3

There is an active arrest going on. This time it isn't just Peter and John, but it more generally says, "on the apostles." No indication is given if it is all the apostles, or just some of them, but those that had been meeting together at the time are certainly who are being referred to, be it five, eight, or all twelve. From there, it next notes the actions of those arresting them, saying, "and put them in the common prison."

The translation is not correct. There is no definite article, and the word translated as "prison" signifies "custody" as in Acts 4:3. A literal rendering would be "and put them in public custody." Once again, trouble from the leading authorities of Israel has come upon those who are proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Life application: There are pastors, evangelists, teachers, etc., who spend their entire lives without ever being confronted with arrest for their teaching. And then, there are some who seem to be hounded by the authorities at every turn. The reason can be as simple as the person is a miscreant who is looking for attention and willingly goes outside of the bounds of propriety in a culture, or even beyond the legally set laws of the land.

There is nothing heroic in this, but such people are often heralded as champions of freedom or lights for the oppressed. But then, there are those men who are simply upholding the values of Scripture and teaching what is distasteful to those in leadership positions, even if they are not doing anything wrong. In this, the leaders are the ones who go beyond the legally set laws of the land, imposing their corrupt power upon the people, attempting to silence anyone who they disagree with.

There are many varied other levels of such things as well. Scripture gives us general guidelines concerning obedience to the governing authorities, but it also teaches that God's word must come first in all matters. If the word of God is silenced by a nation, then that must be disobeyed.

As far as moral, cultural, or governmental issues not directly addressed by the Bible, each person must evaluate his position within the society and decide if what he intends to do is right or wrong. For example, the constitution of the US grants certain freedoms. At times, the government, usually the lefties, will attempt to override those freedoms. And yet, the issue really has nothing to do with Scripture. In such instances, it is up to the citizens to decide how to respond to such matters.

The Bible should not be used to make cases against government tyranny when the issue has nothing to do with the Bible. But the Bible is to be the ultimate standard for the conduct of believers in Jesus Christ. When a government attempts to silence Christians concerning matters directly related to their faith, or when a government mandates disobedience to the precepts of Scripture, it is incumbent upon men of God to stand against those unlawful edicts.

Let us pray for wisdom in such matters, and may we be firm that the Bible is the ultimate standard by which we will conduct our lives before God.

*Most gracious and kind God, please grant us the wisdom to know when to act in matters concerning our faith when it is necessary to do so. But may we refrain from acting improperly concerning such matters when the Bible is silent on them. We need a proper balance in our thinking. And so, Lord, grant us wisdom in these things. To Your glory we pray. Amen.*

**But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, Acts 5:19**

The events to this point are that the high priest and those with him have risen up against the apostles, laid their hands on them, and have put them in public custody. With that context stated, it next says, “But at night.”

The Greek word *dia* is used, signifying “through.” As such it is at some point during the course of the night that came “an angel of the Lord.”

The lack of any article means that this is simply an angel, or messenger, of the Lord and not a manifestation of the Lord Himself. This messenger has been sent as is later stated in Hebrews as a “ministering spirit” who is directed to help those saved by the Lord. With him now sent, it says that he “opened the prison doors.”

Here, Luke now uses the word *phulaké*, a prison. The public custody they were taken to in the previous verse is noted as a prison. Hence, it is a locked and guarded chamber of some sort. However, Luke leaves out any particular details. He doesn’t say if the messenger came to the apostles in the place where they were incarcerated or if he came from outside, opening the door for them to exit. It doesn’t say anything about any guards standing by as well. We are given only the most relevant information. They were incarcerated, a messenger of the Lord has come, and he has opened the doors for them. With this noted, it says, “and brought them out, and said...”

Again, minimal information is provided. Where they were brought out to, the time of the night, and other such details are not given by Luke. At other times, Luke will be more specific, but for this account, he is only telling in broad brushstrokes what occurred. Now that they have been brought out, however, he has words for them which will come in the next verse.

Life application: It is not uncommon for people to claim angelic visitations. Just search the internet and there is an almost unlimited supply of such accounts in blogs, on YouTube videos, and so on. However, you probably won’t find any people claiming they were miraculously released from a locked prison in the middle of the night. Something verifiable like that can easily be disproven.

Rather, claims of angelic visitations are general in nature and they make wild and fantastic claims about things that have been seen, special words from God that have been given, and so on. And more, those who make these claims aren’t just made by “Christians.” They are found among people of almost any religion you can think of.

Is it reasonable to think that God would give a vision to a non-Christian? Of course not. Why would He validate the thinking of a non-believer concerning his false religion? Is it reasonable to assume that God would tell a non-believer that he needs Jesus? No. If He did, it would then contradict His own word, given by inspiration of the Spirit, that we are to be the ones to spread this message, and that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

And if there are innumerable claims of such things from non-believers concerning their angelic visitations, then why should we believe anyone, even those who claim to be Christians, concerning such things? That is what got millions of people going down the wrong path when Joseph Smith claimed he was visited by the angel Moroni. It is what got countless souls misdirected by Ellen G. White, the leader of the Seventh Day Adventists. And so forth.

If God truly intended for us to accept the testimony of such lunatics as those false prophets, He would have given us more credible proofs of their claims to look for in His word. But He has not. Rather, He has given us His word that has been completed. It is now the place where we are to turn in order to hear the voice of the Lord.

What is recorded in Acts describes what occurred as the church was being established. These things happened, they were sufficiently witnessed to and recorded, and they prescribe nothing. Nor are they considered normative for the church age. Normative for us means, "Pick up your Bible and read it. There you will find your instruction." Who will you trust? God has spoken. Trust Him!

*Thank You for the surety of Your word, O God. In it is all we need for our life, our doctrine, and for the practice of our faith. We have the story of Jesus, we have the promises of His coming for us. We have hope of eternity in Your presence because of what He has done. What more could we ask for! It is sufficient and we are grateful for what You have told us there. Thank You for Your word. Amen.*

**"Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." Acts 5:20**

The apostles, having been brought out of their place of custody by an angel, are now instructed by him, saying, "Go, stand in the temple."

This is the public place where the people would hear their message. It is also the place where things would be most carefully monitored by those on duty at any given time. This then speaks of both a public charge and one that is to be without fear of reprisal.

They are to go back out and get about the business set before them by the Lord, which is to “speak to the people.”

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. The apostles are to speak forth this word that they had heard. They are to speak forth about the One they had seen. And they are to convey the message that He has commissioned them with. If the Lord can send an angel to deliver them all from the prison, then He will not abandon them as they stand in the temple that bears His name as they proclaim the word He has put into their mouths! There is to be no fear, but rather boldness on their part as they speak “all the words of this life.”

The words, “this life,” refer to the coming of the Messiah and of those who receive Him as being positionally “in Him,” saved from this fallen world and granted the guarantee of eternal life. Jesus spoke about the contrasting lives in John 6 –

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. <sup>64</sup> But there are some of you who do not believe.”

-John 6:63, 64

Peter then followed up with his understanding of the matter –

“But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’” John 6:68

The words “this life” then do not refer to a new philosophy about how to live out our lives as better people. They do not refer to how we can obtain status, wealth, power, or any other such thing. They do not refer to how to be free from sickness or troubles, nor do they speak about how to be content and satisfied in all situations. These are earthly approaches to an earthly existence. Although any of these things may come upon a follower of Christ, none of them may come as well. And yet, the life that is now lived is one that has a hope that extends beyond what we now experience.

What “this life” means is atonement of sin, freedom from condemnation (resulting from sin), eternal life in a new and incorruptible body, and the hope of an existence that has been prepared by God for those upon whom His favor shall eternally rest. It is an existence that comes solely by faith in the completed work of Jesus Christ. And it is also a life that comes with a guarantee that it is so, the sealing of the Holy Spirit.



What the apostles are being charged to proclaim at the temple is the same as what has now been carefully recorded in the epistles for us to read and understand with perfect clarity. It is the hope of God in Christ.

Life application: Proclaiming the message of the gospel is the duty and responsibility of those who know it. We are not just to get saved and then spend the rest of our lives keeping it secret. It is a message that must be shared in order for others to receive what we have received.

And it is a message we are not to be fearful in speaking out. This is because “this life” is now an eternal one. If you believe that, then the persecutions we face are simply a step on the path to what lies ahead. What is there to fear? If we are guaranteed what God has granted, then to die is gain, not loss. Paul gives us words to consider in this matter –

“So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written:

‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’

<sup>55</sup> ‘O Death, where *is* your sting?

O Hades, where *is* your victory?’

<sup>56</sup> The sting of death *is* sin, and the strength of sin *is* the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

-1 Corinthians 15:54-58

God has our future taken care of. Let’s consider this as we live out our lives right now.

*Heavenly Father, help us to look at the world as a temporary step on the way to a glorious new life. Christ has done the work, we have been granted reconciliation, and what happens now is only a temporary and transitory moment on the way to eternal glory. Help us to remember this always. We are Yours. Use us for Your glory and according to Your wisdom. Amen.*

**And when they heard *that*, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. Acts 5:21**

The angel who had set the apostles free from the prison instructed them to go and stand in the temple in order to speak to the people “all the words of this life.” With that instruction, the apostles complied as is evidenced in this verse, beginning with, “And when they heard *that*.”

It is referring to the apostles. They heard the instruction they were given and having understood, they next immediately complied, as Luke next records that “they entered the temple.”

In this, there isn’t just compliance, but immediate compliance. One might think that they would tell the disciples how they were, what had happened, or where they were going. Or, maybe, after a long night of being in the prison, they might decide to get two hours of sleep or at least stop along the way for a bit of falafel. However, the record indicates that they immediately headed to the temple. Luke notes it was “early in the morning.”

The Greek reads, “at the daybreak.” It is a word used for the third and last time, *othros*. That comes from *oros*, meaning a mountain or hill. As such, one gets the sense of the rising of the light and thus the breaking of the day. It is literally as the sun is starting to shoot forth that they entered the temple “and taught.” The verb in Greek is imperfect. Literally, they “were teaching.”

Luke’s words give us the sense of immediate compliance and continued action. This then sets up the words to come. While everyone else was having a nice night of sleep, the apostles were in custody. By the time others were getting up, they were already at the temple teaching. And as the coming events are recorded, they were still in the temple teaching. The narrative continues to unfold with the words, “But the high priest and those with him came.”

This may be the same group noted in Acts 4:6, or it is some other group that happened to be with the high priest at the time. Luke didn’t feel it necessary to name them as he had in verse 4:6, and so it may be that either the eyewitness he interviewed was unsure, or the same people are again together. Having noted this, it says that they “called the council together.”

This would be the entire Sanhedrin. Along with them, Luke next notes, “with all the elders of the children of Israel.” This is a word found only this once in Scripture, *gerousia*. That is derived from the word *gerón*, an old man. Thus, it is the body of elders. Vincent’s Word Studies gives a detailed description of who these would be –

“From γέρον, an old man, like the Latin senatus, from senex, old. Taking on very early an official sense, the notion of age being merged in that of dignity. ... The word in this passage is the name of the Spartan assembly, Gerousia, the assembly of elders, consisting of thirty members, with the two kings. ‘The well-known term,’ as Meyer remarks, ‘is fittingly transferred from the college of the Greek gerontes to that of the Jewish presbyters.’ They summoned, not only those elders of the people who were likewise members of the Sanhedrim, but the whole council (all the senate) of the representatives of the people.”

The obvious meaning is that the high priest and his associates wanted a full debate over what to do, and they certainly were hoping for a complete crushing of this sect that had arisen. With the elders of the land involved, every city would be apprised of the council’s decision, and they would then work to implement whatever was decided in each city they came from. Once this large body of men was gathered, Luke next notes that they “sent to the prison.”

This is the third description of the place of their incarceration. The first was verse 5:18 and it signified public custody. The next was in verse 5:19, and it was described as a prison. Now, the word *desmóterion* is used. It is a dungeon, a place of bondage. Hence, the different aspects of their confinement are carefully noted by Luke. First, there is the public custody, then being placed under guard, and finally their being put into bonds.

Noting this, then, adds weight to the miraculous delivery from incarceration. The angel didn’t just walk into a public custody and usher them out, but he loosed them from their bonds, delivered them from the guards, and didn’t stop to sign them out at the register. With them out of the prison, but without the knowledge of this, the great assembled council has sent “to have them brought.”

There will certainly be a surprise and curiosity ahead for all involved in this.

Life application: As has been often noted, Acts is describing the events that occurred. And they really happened. The apostles were safely brought out of a guarded dungeon and then they immediately went out to tell others about the good news of Jesus.

People claim all kinds of fancy things from Acts and apply them to their own doctrine or life situation, but it is not likely that they will ever claim that they fully expect to be delivered miraculously from prison. They may be brought out through the legal system, through an inventive escape plan, or delivered from execution, but it is doubtful people

held in prison today go in expecting that an angel will transport them out of the cell and to safety.

In considering this, we see the folly of attempting to turn Acts into prescriptions over things we want to apply to our religious experience, like a visible manifestation of the coming of the Spirit. That is no more prescriptive than is the account now being evaluated. Both merely describe what occurred, they prescribe nothing, and neither is to be considered normative for the church today.

Let us carefully evaluate Acts because it gives us marvelous insights into how the church developed but let us never attempt to co-opt parts of stories for our own experiences when they are simply not going to happen.

*It is so very wonderful to know that You have the power to deliver us from all trials and troubles, Lord. But we also know that we have been placed here to experience exactly such things in our walk before You. We are molded, shaped, and formed into more perfect followers of You through such times. And so, Lord, help us to accept such things as precious tools of instruction. Thank You for all such things as this that mold us for Your purposes! Amen.*

**But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, Acts 5:22**

It was just noted that the high priest and those with him, the council, and all the elders of Israel had sent to have the apostles brought from prison. With that noted, Luke next says, “But when the officers came.”

Luke’s thoughts are progressing through the sequence of time – “when...came.” The officers were dispatched. In coming to the place where they were sent, they got a big surprise. As Luke next records, “and did not find them in the prison.”

The word for “prison” now reverts to the term used in verse 5:19. To see the progression of his use of different words to show what is going on, the three different terms can be placed side by side –

5:18 - They were put in public custody.

5:19 – The angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison.

5:21 – The leaders sent to the dungeon to have them brought.

5:22 – The officers did not find them in the prison.

To get an idea of this, we could use the booking of someone today. “Sam was taken to the county jail. While he was in there, Tom opened the door of the cell. The police came to bring Sam from his confinement. But the cops didn’t find him in the cell.”

Luke is carefully recording what took place as if he was an eyewitness from a distance, like a spectator. Each word and each thought reflects what he had been told as he investigated the matter concerning this time of incarceration of the apostles. Because of this, his words are credible and there is no reason at all to not take them as they are written. With the officers not finding the apostles in the prison, Luke next says, “they returned and reported.”

Like the first clause, this is an aorist participle. It reads, “and having turned back.” Luke is still in the process of his careful annotation of each detail in the sequence of time in which it occurred. The text is alive and exciting as it reveals what occurred. With their having turned back, it closes with, “they reported.”

With the action of the events concerning the sending of the officers now coming to a logical point of conclusion, Luke sums up what transpired by noting that they gave their report. The details they will present in that report will be seen in the next verse.

Life application: Although you don’t need to read the Bible in the original languages, it is good to have a translation that at least reflects the original. But translations are a lot of work and even the best will erringly translate things at times. However, if you take the time to learn the basics of what various verbs mean, when someone says, “that is an aorist participle,” you can at least have an idea of what the text should say.

So, when you read a commentary and come across something you don’t understand, take a moment and do a general search on “What does aorist mean?”, “what does participle mean?”, and “What does aorist participle mean?” From there, you will find something like (using quotes from sources highlighted by Google) –

Aorist – “Aorist Tense. The aorist tense is the Greek grammarian’s term for simple past tense.”

Participle – “The Greek grammarians called a participle a μετοχή [metékhō] ‘participation, share’, because it shares the properties of a verb and of an adjective. Latin calqued the word as participium, from which English gets participle.”

Aorist Participle – “When an aorist participle is used adverbially, you will often find it appropriate to translate into English using the word ‘after,’ or perhaps ‘when,’ with the

auxiliary verb 'had' (e.g., 'when he had looked up'), or simply the auxiliary verb 'having' (e.g., having looked up)."

In doing a quick search like this, you still might not have any idea of how it all fits together, but you will slowly begin to get a sense of what is going on. And a lot of this is just a way of being more precise in relation to the original, but the difference between "they returned" and "they, having returned..." is not that great. The sense is still understandable. To know that one is more precise than the other may or may not even be something you really want to know. If not, then press on and continue to enjoy whatever commentary you are reading.

In the end, the words of Solomon tell us what is really important –

"Of making many books *there is* no end, and much study *is* wearisome to the flesh.

<sup>13</sup> Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:

Fear God and keep His commandments,  
For this is man's all." Ecclesiastes 12:12, 13

Sometimes one can study the details and miss the big picture. We are to love the Lord our God, fear Him, and keep His commandments (in the context of the dispensation in which we live). If knowing the minutest details of the word is a part of your fearing God, that is great. If a simple knowledge of the gospel is all you know and that leads you to fear God, then that is sufficient. Each person will deal with the Lord on the level that is suitable, but be sure to fear God always, at whatever level you are on. He is the great God after all!

*Lord God, You are great and all that You do is marvelous! Amen.*

**saying, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside!" Acts 5:23**

It was just seen that the officers who were sent to retrieve the apostles from prison returned and reported. Their report is now given, beginning with, "Indeed we found the prison shut securely."

This is the same word used in verse 5:21, indicating the actual place of imprisonment, such as a dungeon. There is probably a main building, and then within the building are

individual cells, possibly with chains, and the cells were kept secure with doors or bars. It is the same word used to describe Paul's incarceration in Acts 16 –

“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.” Acts 16:25, 26

As can be seen, there were both chains and doors in this place. There are at least doors where the apostles were being kept, and those doors were securely shut when the officers arrived. Concerning the doors, the Greek reads “in all security.” If there were locks, they were untampered with. If there were bolts, they were in place. All of the measures that would be proper to lock up the apostles had been taken, and they had not been manipulated or removed. And more, it next notes, “the guards standing outside before the doors.”

Not only had every physical measure remained secure, but the guards were completely unaware of any change in the status of the occupants of the cell. They had been taken in, the guards had been posted, and they remained stationed just where they were posted. All is as it was when the apostles were ushered in. And yet, the officers next exclaim, “but when we opened them, we found no one inside!”

This would have been a complete shock to all. The dungeons may have been a part of a building made by hands, but they very well may have been cut directly into the earth, like a cave. From there, doors would be set. Either way, the utter impossibility of getting out of such a place, especially in just a few hours, would be obvious. And yet, the dungeon where they had been was empty.

This means that the apostles had been supernaturally transported out of the prison, or that the guards had gone into a type of supernatural blindness (as occurred in Genesis 19:11 and 2 Kings 6:18). If the guards were in a trance-like state, they could have been manipulated into allowing the apostles out without even knowing it.

Either way, the hand of God was upon what occurred, and the apostles were not where they had been placed only a few hours before.

Life application: Psalm 147, a psalm already cited in the Acts commentary over other points that have occurred, also speaks of the event found in this passage, saying, “The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners.”

How this event in Acts occurred is less important than the fact that it did occur. The Lord validated His ability to set the prisoners free from an otherwise impossible situation. It is unlikely that this was a life-threatening incarceration where the men may have faced execution. Rather, it more likely was a one-night stay in the local jail awaiting a trial that would have led to some type of minor punishment, at best.

And yet, the Lord intervened in order to show that He is willing to release His people from their bonds when He sees fit. At other times, He will allow His people to remain in jail, to be punished, or even to be executed – such as with John the Baptist or James the brother of John (see Acts 12:2).

Because the Lord acted as He did in this instance and not in others, we should ask, “Why now? Why at this time?” The answer seems to be that He was confirming to the leaders that He is in control, that the message of Jesus that the apostles proclaim is true, and that they must come to Him in order to be right with God.

In this, it is a dual-edged sword. They can either be cut to the heart and accept Jesus, being saved through Him, or they will be cut off from Him. Their failure to acknowledge His miracles, which further validate the message of Christ, will witness against them. God is at work! He is doing things to bring people either to repentance or to judgment. With His word now written, it stands as the ultimate tool for either.

Let us use this precious word to convict hearts, to witness to the truth, and to lead people to the gospel of Jesus. But this cannot happen if we do not share it with others. May we be wise and responsible in this most urgent of matters.

*Lord God, You are great and Your ways are perfect. Everything You do has purpose and is carefully laid out so that the most beneficial avenue is available for people to come to You. And yet, how many take another path into perdition! Help us to be a part of keeping people from that sad end. Use us to get the message out now. Amen.*

**Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be. Acts 5:24**

No one was inside! The prison was shut securely, the guards were properly stationed, and yet the cell was empty! With that being the case, it next says, “Now when the high priest.” Some manuscripts leave out this designation. Further, for those manuscripts that



contain it, the word here translated as “high priest,” *hiereus*, is one that is not used this way elsewhere. Rather, in the New Testament, this word is translated simply as “priest.”

However, in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *kohen*, which also simply means “priest,” is used to refer to the high priest at times. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this is then translated as *hiereus*. Luke would have known this, and the obvious nature of who it is referring to meant that calling him “the priest” was sufficient to convey the meaning of “the high priest.” Along with this individual is next noted, “the captain of the temple.”

It is the same word used in Acts 4:1. He had authority as the main officer of the temple complex and may have been the actual arresting officer on the previous day. Luke next says, “and the chief priests.”

This is the same word used to refer to the high priest when it is in the singular. It is also the same word in the plural used elsewhere already to refer to those “chief priests” that were not currently filling the role as the high priest, such as in Acts 4:23. All of these together are said to have “heard these things.”

The report is from the officers who had gone to collect the apostles. One can almost see it, “Well, we went to the prison, the guards were standing right there. The door was shut, bolted, and locked. We unlocked it and went in... but nobody was there!” It was as if they had been beamed out by Scotty. There wasn’t a trace of them, nor was there a trace of any escape. They were just gone. Because of this, Luke finishes the verse with, “they wondered what the outcome would be.”

It is the same word used by Luke in verse 2:12, *diaporeó*. It comes from *dia* (through) and *aporeó*, to be perplexed. As such, it is an intensive word signifying very perplexed or perplexed through and through. This group of leaders was completely confounded at what had happened, and they wondered what it all meant.

Life application: None of what is said here is without purpose. These men, the leaders of the nation, had all been gathered together to have a trial concerning the actions of the apostles. It is perfectly clear that they were locked away awaiting that trial, and it is fully evident that they were not where they were locked away.

As this is so, it is a sign to them that they should take these things to heart and to consider the force behind the actions. As will be seen, the apostles will be questioned concerning their actions at the temple, but the issue of them being brought out of

prison will not even be addressed. No question concerning it will be raised, or at least as is recorded by Luke.

This exclusion of such an important and relevant question tells us all we need to know concerning the state of their hearts. They were unwilling to ask because they already knew the truth of what had happened. Jesus had broken through the greatest place of bondage of all, death. They were fully aware of this –

“Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. <sup>12</sup> When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, <sup>13</sup> saying, ‘Tell them, “His disciples came at night and stole Him *away* while we slept.” <sup>14</sup> And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.’ <sup>15</sup> So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.” Matthew 28:11-15

Why should they ask about such a simple matter as a group of apostles being brought out of a locked prison cell when He had been brought out of the pit of Sheol itself? The answer for them would have simply been a further indictment upon them that they did not want openly exposed.

What is unstated in the Bible is often as telling as that which is stated. Because of this, and because it is recorded and considered a reliable document of actual history, there is no reason to not accept what is being stated. It is also a reason why such things no longer need to occur today. The record that it can be done is sufficient to tell us that when it is prophesied to be done again (meaning the rapture of the church), it will occur as prophesied.

Until then, we are to live by faith in what the recorded witness, the Holy Bible, states. And so, let us do so. Let us have faith in the word and never equivocate on our proclamation of it being the literal truth of God.

*Heavenly Father, Your word says that someday Your faithful – of all of the ages – will be taken to glory. Some are in the grave. Some will be in prison on that day. Some will be in their offices working. There will be people around the world in seemingly impossible states of confinement or simply leading their lives in a normal way. And yet, they will be taken out and brought to You. It is a marvelous hope that we possess. Thank You for the surety of this. Your word proclaims it, and it shall be. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**So one came and told them, saying, “Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!” Acts 5:25**

The previous verse showed the men of rank baffled concerning the disappearance of the apostles, wondering where things would next turn. Luke’s narrative doesn’t take long to answer the question as the next verse begins to resolve the matter, beginning with, “So one came and told them.”

The verb is an aorist participle and more closely reads, “And a certain one having come” (BLB). The priests and temple guards were standing around dumbfounded, and it is during this time that someone arrives bearing incredible words for them to consider, “saying, ‘Look, the men whom you put in prison’”

It was probably not intentional on the part of the person, but his words actually reflect the incompetence of these leaders and their inability to control the events occurring around them. “The men you put in prison... you know, the ones that aren’t there anymore. Well, have I got news for you!”

Luke’s narrative of the events is certainly precise, but it is almost like a comedy at this point. These are the leaders of the religious life of the people of Israel. They have the authority of the law of Moses behind them. And yet, they are completely unaware of what is happening and ineffective in controlling what is going on. With this comedy of events unfolding, the level of humor only increases with the next words, saying that the apostles “are standing in the temple.”

The list of people who were referred to in the previous verse was, “the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests.” Their duties centered on the temple! And yet, the apostles were already there at the temple. While these men had been home sleeping, the apostles had been brought out of a locked and guarded cell. And instead of running home or fleeing to Galilee, they were standing in the temple that these leaders were responsible for.

The word “standing” implies a fearless and purposeful attitude. It is exactly what the messenger who brought them out of the prison had said –

“Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.”

-Acts 5:20

The apostles had complied, and they had done so exactly, including that of the final words of the verse, which say that they were “teaching the people!” The priests bore the law of Moses. The Levites were then between the priests and the people as instructors of the law. And yet, these apostles were there teaching the people something new because the covenant they spoke of was new. Moses was taken away (Hebrews 10:9), his law was now obsolete (Hebrews 8:13), and as such, it was annulled (Hebrews 7:18) for all who would come to Christ.

This is what the introduction of a New Covenant means, and this is what the apostles were sharing with those who would hear them. But what was certainly just as galling to these leaders was that the apostles were even speaking at all. Peter and John had recently been arrested when they had healed the lame beggar. When they were brought before the leaders for a trial it says, “So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”

In continuing this, the apostles were arrested. But in their escape from the prison, they were right back in the temple and teaching about life in Christ Jesus again. The situation would certainly seem intolerable to the leaders!

Life application: Do you believe the gospel? Do you believe that you will live forever because of what Christ did? Do you truly believe this? Then how can you shut up about it? Who can keep such things in? We are all destined to die because these bodies we have are mortal and corruptible. But if you truly accept that the message of the Bible is true, what happens to us now is hardly worth considering.

It is true that pain can really, really stink. Inconvenience is inconvenient. And loss is frustrating. But if this is all temporary anyway, then what does it really matter in the end? Let us tell the world about what we possess. Don't hide away the one thing that can truly change the lives of people permanently. Be bold! Tell the world about JESUS!

*Lord God Almighty, You hold the span of our lives in Your hands. Nothing will happen to us that You didn't already know would occur. As You possess this knowledge, please give us the supernatural peace that is found in Christ Jesus to accept what happens, to not let it deter us from telling about Jesus, and to keep our eyes on the life which is truly life – the life that lies ahead. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Then the captain went with the officers and brought them without violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. Acts 5:26**

The apostles were just noted as “standing in the temple and teaching the people” when they were supposed to be locked up in the prison. With that being the case, Luke next records, “Then the captain went with the officers.”

It doesn't say why the captain has gone with the officers, but the reason seems rather obvious. Anytime there is something sensational or exciting going on, it will add to the spice of life. He was certainly truly curious about the matter and wanted to be in the know concerning it. And more, his men had already been left looking inept or maybe even in collusion with the apostles for them to have been let out of the prison. He probably did not want any repeat in bumbling the matter as had taken place. And so, he, along with the officers, “brought them without violence.”

One can see these officials walking up and, without any force or threats, saying, “You must come with us to the Sanhedrin.” The apostles might have said in front of all of the people, “OK.” There is no hint of any rebellious words or actions. It is a lawful order from those appointed over them, it doesn't in any way contradict their obligations to the Lord, and so they complied without any conflict at all.

The reason for words from, rather than rough actions by, the temple officers is next explained by the words, “for they feared the people.” This fear of the people is seen elsewhere, such as in Luke 20 –

“Now it happened on one of those days, as He taught the people in the temple and preached the gospel, *that* the chief priests and the scribes, together with the elders, confronted *Him* <sup>2</sup> and spoke to Him, saying, ‘Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?’

<sup>3</sup> But He answered and said to them, ‘I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me: <sup>4</sup> The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men?’

<sup>5</sup> And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘If we say, “From heaven,” He will say, “Why then did you not believe him?” <sup>6</sup> But if we say, “From men,” all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet.’ <sup>7</sup> So they answered that they did not know where *it was* from.” Luke 20:1-7

Due to the passion of the people for the word of God from His apostles and prophets, it was a risky thing to just come against His sent messengers. Depending on the size of the crowd, these temple officers could easily have been overrun or surrounded. From there, their fate would have been sealed. This is what they feared, “lest they should be stoned.”

Exactly what the leaders feared when they challenged the teachings of John the Baptist, so they also feared concerning the teachings of the apostles. Stoning could certainly be a painful and possibly lengthy means of execution. Unless someone was as adept at throwing as Sandy Koufax, it may be a while before anyone got in a headshot suitable for knocking the person out. Until that happened, there would be agony on the checkout line. The officers hoped to avoid this.

Life application: Crowds are a hard thing to control. And when there are passions at work within a crowd, anything can happen, and it can happen very quickly. This is especially true because once something bad happens, it may be from a part of the crowd that is unseen in another part of the crowd. Without knowing exactly what occurred, people may assume the wrong thing and suddenly pandemonium erupts.

This must always be considered. In a crowd of otherwise peaceful but passionate protestors, miscreants may step in and purposefully get the crowd's passions inflamed. In doing so, they are actually using an unsuspecting crowd to work against itself. This was seen in the US capitol on January 6, 2021. Government agents were planted in the crowd, and left-wing terrorists were also there. These incited the people as a pretext to have the crowd subdued, arrested, and persecuted.

If you are going to participate in a demonstration, it is good to be aware of your surroundings and be ready to identify such wicked dements and provocateurs. You can then point them out before they can cause you and your peaceful agenda much harm. The tactics of the left have been used by communists for many years. These are now coming to peaceful nations, and they are quickly being overrun by really bad people.

Be aware and be observant. Above all, however, be ready to share the good news about Jesus. One never knows who will be receptive to the life-changing news that He has overcome the world, and through Him, the evil heart can be changed.

*Lord God, it is a fallen and wicked world, but there are opportunities to share the good news with people. Help us to be responsible and do so. The book is written, and someday the ball will drop. When it does, chaos on a global scale will follow. But we can still get the news out before that terrible day comes. Help us in this. Amen.*

**And when they had brought them, they set *them* before the council. And the high priest asked them, Acts 5:27**

The captain and officers just went to collect the apostles but without any violence. From there, it next notes, “And when they had brought them.” The wording makes it evident that the apostles freely went with the guards and that they were not bound or conducted with swords or spears. If they were, it is certain Luke would have noted this.

It shows that there was no threat or rebellion on their part. They were asked to come, they came, and they were taken to the council, unreservedly coming with the guards. When they had arrived, it says of the captain and officers that “they set *them* before the council.”

Jesus had spoken to the twelve about exactly this in Matthew 10:17, where He said that “they will deliver you up to councils.” Peter and John had already been brought before such a council in Acts 4, but now some or all of the other apostles are there with them. With them there before this large body of Israel’s elite leaders, the verse finishes with, “And the high priest asked them.”

The high priest is the first to speak, and it is in the form of a question from an authority figure, as the Greek word *eperótaó* implies. The word is derived from *epi*, signifying “on.” That intensifies the word *erótaó*, meaning to inquire or ask. HELPS Word Studies notes that the asking is “done by someone on ‘preferred footing’ who makes a request from a ‘preferred position.’”

In this case, it is from the preferred position of the seat of authority to the supposedly lower position of one being interrogated for possible wrongdoing. Ironically, Jesus had promised these twelve that someday they would “sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28).

Everything in its due time though. The course of events in God’s redemptive plan must be worked out in their proper order, and so these apostles who would sit as Israel’s judges must first stand in judgment before the Sanhedrin established under the Law of Moses that was – even as they stood there – “obsolete and growing old,” and “ready to vanish away” (Hebrews 8:13).

Life application: How do you take the timing of the rapture in relation to your life in the Lord? Are you anticipating it and frustrated because it hasn’t happened yet? Are you looking forward to it, but not worried about when it will happen? Do you dismiss it as a ridiculous premise that comes from a misreading of Scripture?

If the latter, how do you see the events of the future unfolding? God has a plan. It is set, and it is in motion. Further, it will come to pass. The book is written, and we have been placed in the stream of time – that He created – for a purpose. That purpose is not to sit around moaning that the world is so corrupt that it is unfair we are still here. If we are still here, it is because God still has a plan for us while we are here.

Someday, the Lord will have us stand before Him, and our lives will be evaluated according to the things we have done, especially those things done since being saved by Him. Do you think He is going to pass out rewards to you for making (or following those who make) constant predictions about the rapture? One fails and so we are off to another sensational message that it is coming next week. The cycle repeats again and again, and we still have not gone out to tell anyone about what He has done.

Be wise with your time. Jesus directly spoke in Acts saying that it is not for us to know the times and the seasons of such things. Paul repeats this sentiment in 1 Thessalonians 5. The plan is set, we have been given the overall details of it so that we possess a great hope that can carry us through, but we do not have – nor will we be given – the finer details. So, be content to not pry into what God has reserved to Himself.

*Lord God, give us the wisdom to be about Your business as we live out our lives in Your presence. Help us to be productive and do our best in all we set our hands to do, glorifying You through our work. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**saying, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!”**  
Acts 5:28

The apostles have been brought before the council. With them there, it is the high priest who questions them, “saying, ‘Did we not strictly command you...?’” The Greek bears a Hebraism which makes the question emphatic, “Not with a charge we charged you...?”

Some manuscripts leave out the word “Not.” In this, it would make it an emphatic statement rather than a question emphatically asked. Either way, the meaning is easily understood. A charge was emphatically laid upon the apostles to “not to teach in this name.”

Rather than “in” (*en*) the name, the Greek reads “upon” (*epi*) the name. The name is the basis of the teaching because the name identifies the One to whom it belongs. Therefore, the teaching of the apostles is upon that great and exalted name. But this is



what they had been charged to stop doing, and it is now the reason they – once again – stood before the council.

And not only had they taught upon the name of Jesus, but they had been having immense success in doing so, as testified to by the mouth of the high priest, saying, “And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine.”

Here, the noun form of the word “teach” is now used. “And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.” It is a testament to the resolve of the apostles. They not only taught and brought the word to the people, but they did so after having been strictly charged by the leaders of the nation to not do so. And so bold had they been that the city had become filled with the teaching.

It demonstrates that what is said about Jesus has power. If a religious leader had been crucified and the people had continued to follow him only because of his teaching, there would be a marked difference in the acceptance of the teaching by others. But if the leader was crucified and then resurrected, there wouldn’t need to be another reason why the people accepted the teaching. The resurrection itself provides a sufficient reason.

If there was no proof of the resurrection, the teaching of the apostles would be laughed at and ignored. But their own Scriptures, which the apostles argued from, testified to the fact that Jesus had to come, fulfill the law, and die in fulfillment of it –

“But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. <sup>19</sup> Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, <sup>20</sup> and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, <sup>21</sup> whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:18-21

This is the teaching that went forth from the apostles, and it was backed up by the very Scriptures that they had heard read throughout their lives. The high priest and the council knew this very well. But they sat upon Moses’ seat. Because they did, they knew they would lose their position and authority if Christ – who initiated a New Covenant in His blood – was fully revealed to the people.

Because of their rejection of Jesus, they rightly took it as a personal offense against them, as the high priest says, “and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” Here, the same word, *epi*, is used that they just used concerning the teaching of the apostles –

“Did we not strictly command you not to teach **upon** this name?”

“And look, you ... intend to bring this Man’s blood **upon** us!”

The blood can only come upon them if the Man was innocent. And if He had resurrected, then He was found innocent of any sin before God. If this is so, then He is the Lord God incarnate. Each point becomes a greater and greater indictment upon the actions of those who conspired against Jesus.

And, whether it was the “intent” of the apostles to do this, or whether it was simply a consequence of the preaching, the result does not change. Those in the council did bear the bloodguilt, and it was being highlighted through the message. But they had already admitted the guilt of the blood –

But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The governor answered and said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?”

They said, “Barabbas!”

<sup>22</sup> Pilate said to them, “What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?”

*They* all said to him, “Let Him be crucified!”

<sup>23</sup> Then the governor said, “Why, what evil has He done?”

But they cried out all the more, saying, “Let Him be crucified!”

<sup>24</sup> When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather *that* a tumult was rising, he took water and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see *to it*.”

<sup>25</sup> And all the people answered and said, “His blood *be* on us and on our children.”

-Matthew 27:20-25

They called for the blood of Jesus to be upon them and upon their children. Telling the apostles to not teach upon His name did nothing to change that. But so vehement was the high priest against this, that he doesn’t even speak Jesus’ name. Instead, he simply says, “this Man.” Vincent’s Word Studies notes that this is “the first instance of that avoidance of the name of Christ which makes the Talmud, in the very same terms, refer to him most frequently as *Peloni equals*, ‘so and so.’”

In other words, the Talmud, the document that codifies Jewish law and custom, refuses to address Jesus by His name. Instead, they use various terms when referring to Him. This has carried on into Jewish life where many will not speak His name at all. Or, if they do, they will use a term of derision which is pronounced very similarly to His name instead.

Life application: To hear the simple gospel, and to believe it, is what brings salvation. There does not need to be a complicated lesson on the deity of Christ, nor does the doctrine of the Trinity need to be explained. God sent His Son into the world to save sinners. Jesus is that Son. He died for our sins, He was buried, and He resurrected. Belief in that is what saves.

Any person will hear, and – in their minds – they will know that a son bears the same characteristics as the father. Hence, there is an implicit understanding in the deity of Jesus, even if it is not thought through.

However, if a person is told – in advance – that Jesus is not God, there a problem arises. He is God. Therefore, that person is now being told about “another Jesus” (2 Corinthians 11:4) and he has accepted a “different gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:4 & Galatians 1:6). But a different gospel is not another. It is a heresy. Paul states this explicitly in Galatians 1:6-9.

Therefore, that person will not be saved when presented a false Jesus and a false gospel. Be sure to keep the gospel simple, and be sure that when you teach, your doctrine is proper. We are all accountable for what we teach to others, so be properly instructed in what is right concerning this glorious Man who came from heaven and gave up His life for us. Yes, the Man is Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Glorious and wonderful God! How good it is to know that You sent Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to take away our sins. Cleanse us with the blood of the spotless Lamb of God! Wash away our sins! And, O God, reconcile us to Yourself through Him! We thank You for Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

**But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29**

The previous words contained the reminder from the high priest to the apostles, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?” With that being the context, the response of the apostles is now noted, saying, “But Peter and the other apostles.”

This is not a common set of words. The Greek reads, “Peter and the apostles said.” The word “other” is not found in the original. However, it cannot be construed as, “Peter spoke on behalf of the other apostles.” The verb is plural, indicating that Peter and the others are all speaking up. Further, it cannot be construed as saying that Peter is not one of the apostles, as in “But Peter, and the apostles...” Peter is one of the apostles, but Luke singles him out as the leader.

As such, the translation, “But Peter and the other apostles,” suitably reflects the intent of the Greek. All of them “answered and said.” The words are both a response to the high priest, and they are a proclamation of a truth that has already been conveyed to this body in the recent past. One can almost see a united protest from their lips, each expressing the same general thought, but all in one accord concerning the matter, which is that “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

It is essentially what Peter and John both proclaimed the last time they were standing in this same location –

“So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup> But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. <sup>20</sup> For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’” Acts 4:18-20

There is a difference now, however. The words of the angel just a couple verses ago make this more than an implicitly understood thing, but a command from the Lord through His angel –

“But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, <sup>20</sup> ‘Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.’” Acts 5:19, 20

As such, their response is bold and firm. Whatever number of apostles were in the cell, they had personally been told to speak, and they were under obligation to do so. Understanding this, the word “ought” is generally not strong enough to the mind of the reader. Rather, it is a word signifying “must” or “necessary.”

The apostles are under order of the Lord’s messenger, and they are under moral obligation of the truth of the gospel itself. Hence, their response is one that had to be stated to the leaders at this time. They must obey. Of the word translated as “obey,” the Greek word is a new one to Scripture, *peitharcheó*. It comes from two words signifying

“persuade” and “what comes first.” Thus, it signifies being obedient to the higher authority. Vincent’s Word Studies provides an important insight –

“Not often used in the New Testament to express obedience, the most common word being ὑπακούω [*hupakouó*]. Sometimes πείθω [*peithó*] is used. But this word, in itself, is the only one of the several in use which expresses the conception of obedience exclusively. ... It occurs four times in the New Testament: Acts 5:29, Acts 5:32; Acts 27:21; Titus 3:1; and in every case, of obedience to established authority, either of God or of magistrates. In Acts 27:21, where it is used of the ship's officers hearkening to Paul’s admonition not to loose from Crete, Paul speaks of his admonition as divinely inspired; compare Acts 27:10. In Acts 4:19, Peter and John say hearken (ἀκούειν) [*akouein*]. That is a mere listening to or considering the proposition made to them. This is a deliberate course of action.”

The apostles’ appeal is to the higher authority. Disobedience to Moses, of whom the council represents (see Matthew 23:2), must take place. This is not because God is overriding His own words in the law, but because the law is annulled through the work of Christ.

Life application: The verse here is one that sets a clear and defining line between the covenant at Sinai and that found in Christ. Jesus explicitly said to the people –

“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. <sup>3</sup> Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.” Matthew 23:2, 3

However, the angel from the Lord told the apostles to go out and preach to the people what is now found in Christ. That is in distinction to what was said in Acts 4 (as noted above), and the words of this verse now are in direct defiance of the words of the high priest and the council again in Acts 5.

This shows, without any doubt or ambiguity, that the New Covenant is the higher priority, and it is to be obeyed. And yet, there is no conflict between the two because the Law of Moses is –

Annulled – “For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, <sup>19</sup> for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, *there is the* bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.” Hebrews 7:18, 19

Obsolete – “In that He says, ‘A new *covenant*,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” Hebrews 8:13

Taken away – “Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and *offerings* for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure *in them*’ (which are offered according to the law), <sup>9</sup> then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second.” Hebrews 10:8, 9

Wiped out (meaning “erased”) and nailed to the cross (meaning it died when Christ died) – “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, <sup>14</sup> having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Colossians 2:13, 14

To reinsert the law of Moses as binding is the highest of heresy because it negates (makes null and void) the work of Christ in one’s life. It is essentially saying, “Nice try, God. You did your best, but I will add to it; improving what you were unable to complete.” It is a rejection of the full, final, and forever work of Jesus Christ. It is a self-condemning act.

You must reject the teachings of the Hebrew Roots movement and all who would claim the Law of Moses is binding (in part or in whole) upon you. Come to the grace of God in Christ. Be freed from your arrogant and futile attempts to do better than what God in Christ has done!

*Heavenly Father, it is as if we just cannot trust You with our souls! So many of us in the church constantly fear about the future, strive to return to the law to please You, reject the cross through our actions, and show contempt for the shed blood of Christ. Help us to trust and to just keep on trusting that what You have done is sufficient. To Your glory, and Your glory alone, may we simply demonstrate the faith of children and TRUST!  
Amen.*

**The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.**  
Acts 5:30

The words of the last verse were those of the apostles as they proclaimed, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Now, to continue with their lecturing of the high priest and the council, the words of Peter and the apostles say, “The God of our fathers.”

This is referring to YHVH (Yehovah), the covenant Lord God of Israel, such as is recorded in Exodus 6:7 –

“I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”

It is He who set forth the law through Moses which the people agreed to. It is, ironically, this law that these men at the council administered for the people of Israel, but which the apostles will school them on in the verses ahead concerning Jesus Christ whom that same law spoke of.

In saying “The God of our fathers,” it is clear that the apostles are claiming that their worship is not of a new God, a false God, or a misrepresentation of the true God. They are aligning themselves with the people at the council (our), and they are aligning themselves with the God whom the council represents (our fathers).

As such, what they will claim is an extension of what the Lord (YHVH) is doing in redemptive history, not merely something entirely new, but a continuance of the overall redemptive plan in a new direction. This same thought is seen in the words of the Lord to Moses –

“Then He said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground.’<sup>6</sup> Moreover He said, ‘I *am* the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.” Exodus 3:5, 6

When the Lord spoke to Moses, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – who preceded him – were not under the law that was to be given through him, and yet nobody in Israel would deny that those patriarchs were a part of what the Lord was doing in redemptive history. And so, what the apostles now proclaim bears the exact same weight, if the words are true. To validate that their words are, in fact, true, the schooling of the council by the apostles begins with the words that the God of their fathers “raised up Jesus.”

This is an obvious reference to the resurrection. The council was fully aware of the claim that Jesus had been raised. By saying that God raised Him up, it meant that God was fully satisfied concerning His innocence and that His sacrifice was acceptable before

Him. And this, despite the next words of the apostles to the council, saying, “whom you murdered.”

Here is a new word in Scripture, *diacheirizomai*. It comes from *dia* (through) and a derivative of *cheir* (to handle thoroughly). Thus, it means “To lay violent hands upon.” In the case of Jesus, it means they killed Him violently. This word will only be found one more time, in Acts 26:21.

Peter and the apostles firmly avow that what happened to Jesus was a willful, violent, and unjustified attack against the Lord’s Messiah. God had approved of His life, He had raised Jesus from the dead, and thus those of the council (the verb is plural – “you all”) were guilty of His death. But more, they then added in the most striking words of all, saying, “by hanging on a tree.”

The verb is an aorist participle and should read, “having hanged.” The act occurred, it was successfully accomplished, and it was one intentionally brought about by those at the council. These words are a clear and unambiguous reference to Deuteronomy 21:23. There, the Greek translation uses the same word as is used now in Acts, *xulon*, or tree. That is a direct translation from the Hebrew word *ets*, signifying wood, or a tree –

“If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, <sup>23</sup> his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you *as* an inheritance; for he who is hanged *is* accursed of God.” Deuteronomy 21:22, 23

The council had determined that Jesus was deserving of death. And yet, both Pilate and Herod had determined exactly the opposite –

“Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, <sup>14</sup> said to them, ‘You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined *Him* in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; <sup>15</sup> no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. <sup>16</sup> I will therefore chastise Him and release *Him*’ <sup>17</sup> (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast).” Luke 23:13-17

Because the council had violently, and yet wrongfully, participated in the crucifixion of the Messiah (proved by God’s having raised Him from the dead), it means they bore the



guilt of what occurred. This is the weight of what is being said to them now. If they understood the scope of what this meant, however, they would then realize that what occurred was not outside of, but a part of, what the Lord had planned –

“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree’), <sup>14</sup> that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Galatians 3:13, 14

If the council would acknowledge their part in what happened, forgiveness could come. But this is not what took place. Until Israel’s leaders acknowledge their part in what occurred, they – even to this day – remain under the curse that they brought upon themselves.

Life application: Such a seemingly unimportant set of words, that can be quickly read over and easily forgotten, carry an immense amount of theological importance. And the words of this verse have not been fully explained in relation to many other verses in Scripture. They tie in with other parts of the law, with words in the psalms and the prophets, with what is stated in the gospels, the epistles, and Revelation.

Everything in Scripture ultimately ties in with what God is doing in Christ to reconcile the world to Himself. And Christ (the Messiah) is Jesus who is clearly depicted in the gospels and Acts, and who is then explained throughout the rest of the New Testament. Be careful to know this now because there are people all over the world who claim to be the Messiah, or who claim to be Jesus the Messiah.

There are also others who add to the word about Christ, such as the Mormons. Jesus is the central point of all of what God is doing in the world, Jesus is revealed to us in Scripture. So be sure to know exactly what books form Scripture, and then be sure to know which “Jesus” it is that Scripture is presenting. When you get these things right, and when you believe the message of what He has done, you will be saved. Anything else will only lead to condemnation.

*Thank You, Lord God, that we have a sure word in the pages of the Bible. Nothing is missing, and nothing is superfluous. And thank You that the Bible tells us all we need to know about Jesus and the proper path to salvation. Thank You, Lord God. Amen.*

**Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. Acts 5:31**

The previous verse said, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.” Now, Luke records the next words of Peter and the apostles, saying, “Him God has exalted.” The verb is *hupsoó*. It signifies to lift up, raise up, and so on. It is the same word used in the Greek translation of Isaiah 52:13 to describe the coming Messiah –

“Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently;  
He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.”

One can see that the words are parallel to the previous verse in somewhat of a pun –

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus.  
Him God has lifted up.

Jesus was hung on a tree, having been lifted up (see John 3:14 where the same Greek word is used) by the leaders of Israel, but God has lifted Jesus up “to His right hand.” Here, some translations say, “with His right hand,” others “to His right hand.” The Greek is not specific and must be supplied. It is the same terminology as in Acts 2:33.

Either is possible based on the surrounding context. The right hand signifies power, both in action (ability) and in position (authority). As noted, the previous verse just said that God raised Jesus. Therefore, it could be “by the right hand (ability) of God.” However, the next clause will speak of repentance and forgiveness of sins, something that comes from the position of authority.

Nothing is lost in either translation because both possibilities are true. Therefore, a word such as “at” might be a better choice because it can convey either meaning or both meanings at the same time –

“exalted at the right hand of Him...”

As such, it could mean “at [by the power of] the right hand,” or “at [to the location of] the right hand of God.”

Although this may seem like trifling, the words have importance and should be considered. God’s power (His right hand) raised Jesus (Romans 10:9), and Jesus is seated at the right hand (the position of authority) of God (Romans 8:34).

The apostles, though stating a truth, are letting the council know that there is hope for them. The actions of Israel's leaders actually served the greater purposes of God. Forgiveness is possible if they could but accept the matter and acknowledge what they had done. With this, their next words state, "to be Prince."

It is the same thought already presented by Peter in Acts 3:14, 15 –

"But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, <sup>15</sup> and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses."

The word there translated as Prince signifies "a *file-leader* who *pioneers the way* for many others to follow" (HELPS Word Studies). It is also found in Hebrews 2:10 and 12:2. Reading those verses will give a fuller idea of the thought now being presented. Jesus is the "File-leader." He is the One who leads the way for all others who will be raised up by God, lifted up at His right hand. This is because He is also the "Savior."

This is specifically referring to Jesus Christ in His position of ability to save. The word specifically refers to Him as the One "who saves believers from their sin *and delivers them into His safety*" (HELPS Word Studies). It is in this capacity that Jesus is able "to give repentance to Israel."

The word *metanoia*, or repentance, signifies changing of the mind. What this is saying is that Israel is offered a change of mind concerning wrongdoing. Paul says in Romans 3:20 that "by the law *is* the knowledge of sin." When law exists, there is always a struggle in the mind of the one under that law. The word "compunction" explains this. It is the guilty feeling or moral hesitation that either prevents, or follows, the doing of something wrong.

Jesus came to give Israel a change of mind from this. In fulfilling the law, the law is annulled through His death. As such, there is no longer this feeling of guilt concerning a matter (such as eating pork or not). And this exists both in abstaining from pork, even though there is nothing wrong with it, and in the state that comes after eating pork because the law said not to do so. In the giving of the law, the conscience becomes guilty. But more than this, Jesus also came to offer "forgiveness of sins."

Not only is the mind reformed through the annulling of the law, but the sins committed under the law are forgiven through His death in fulfillment of it. This is noted by Paul in Romans, Galatians, and elsewhere. And more, because the law is now annulled, there is

no longer the imputation of sin – because sin comes from a violation of law. This is noted by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:19.

Without the law, then sin is no longer an issue. Thus, the words of Peter and the apostles now can be summed up by the words of Paul in Romans 3:36, saying of Jesus, “that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

If one looks at the previous verse side by side with this verse, the parallelism of what is stated comes forth –

5:30 - The God of our fathers raised up Jesus (from the dead, proving He is God)

5:31 - Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior (assuming His position as God)

5:30 - Whom you murdered (an action that gives guilt under the law)

5:31 - To give repentance to Israel (dealing with the moral hesitation after violating the law)

5:30 - By hanging on a tree (the death of Christ in fulfillment of the law)

5:31 - And forgiveness of sins (the action resulting from the death of Christ in fulfillment of the law)

Life application: There are wonderful truths to be found in a detailed study of the words of Scripture, and it is never a waste of time to search them out. When doing a personal study, be sure to be aware of the many types of literary devices that the Bible uses, such as poetry, prose, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, idiom, personification, parallelisms, parable, typology, and so on.

In understanding what is being said, and in properly identifying the context in which it is said, there is a treasure trove of wisdom to be obtained from the mind of God as it is revealed in the pages of this wonderful treasure that we call the Holy Bible.

*Lord God, Your word is wonderful. Thank You for Your glorious and superior word. Amen.*

**And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him. Acts 5:32**

The words here must be kept in relation to what was just said since verse 5:29 in order to be rightly understood. Taken together, they say, “But Peter and the *other* apostles

answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’<sup>30</sup> The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.<sup>31</sup> Him God has exalted to His right hand *to be* Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.<sup>32</sup> And we are His witnesses to these things, and *so also is* the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.’”

With this context remembered, the words can be more clearly understood. They begin with, “And we are His witnesses.” This is the purpose of the apostles. They are “sent ones” who testify to everything that they saw concerning Jesus. This is an important point because it is an office that only existed in those who were personally involved in what occurred in His ministry. Paul is the only exception to this as is carefully explained by him in 1 Corinthians 15.

It was the condition specifically given when deciding upon the replacement for Judas –

“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,<sup>22</sup> beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” Acts 1:21, 22

With this understood, they continue by saying that they are witnesses “to these things.” This refers to what is given in the previous verses cited above –

God raised up Jesus.

Israel’s leaders, representative of Israel, murdered Him by hanging Him on a tree.

God has exalted Him to (or by) His right hand to be Prince and Savior.

Repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sin is available through this.

It is the gospel message – Christ died for our sins, Christ was buried, Christ rose again. Calling on the Lord Jesus (meaning He is God because He is at the right hand of God, the position of power and authority) brings salvation. From there, Peter and the apostles next say, “and *so also is* the Holy Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit, the third member of the Godhead and the One who inspired God’s prophets to write out Scripture, is a witness to the workings of God in Christ –

“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;<sup>20</sup> knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private

interpretation, <sup>21</sup> for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:19-21

The visual, audible coming of the Holy Spirit upon these men also provided a supporting witness to their testimony. That witness continues again in their ability to properly convey the meaning of Scripture, of their healing of the sick, and so on. The acts of the apostles are another part of the witness of the Holy Spirit, testifying to the fact that Jesus is the Christ. With this understood, the apostles next say of the Holy Spirit, “whom God has given.”

The Holy Spirit is God, giving of Himself. It is not unlike God giving of Himself in Christ. Christ was given for the sin of the world, but that forgiveness is only applied to those who appropriate it through belief. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is given by God to humanity, but this only comes to those who appropriate the offering, and that only occurs for “to those who obey Him.”

The word the apostles use, which is translated as “obey,” is the one introduced in verse 5:29 (cited above). It is the word, *peitharcheó*. As previously noted, it comes from two words signifying “persuade” and “what comes first.” Thus, it signifies being obedient to the higher authority.

One must decide who he will obey. The apostles clearly state that they will be obedient to Christ, the fulfillment of the Law of Moses, rather than to those appointed to administer that law. Israel was given the law, only Israel. And so, this precept pertains only to Israel in the sense that they must put aside the law and come to the One who fulfilled it. And yet, the precept also applies to any who voluntarily place themselves under this law. To understand this, Paul refers to circumcision, the identifying mark of those who have so placed themselves under the law.

One cannot claim obedience to the law and not be circumcised, because it is a precept of the law. The precept applied to any part of the law, but Paul uses it as the premier example of choosing the law over grace. The result of doing so is clearly stated by him –

“Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. <sup>3</sup> And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. <sup>5</sup> For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus

neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.” Galatians 5:2-6

Israel was given the law and they were under the law. To “obey” Christ for them was to follow the higher authority of Christ. A person who is not of Israel and who follows the law has failed to follow the higher authority of Christ. Either way, they do not have the Spirit, and they remain at enmity with God. This is the significance of the apostles’ words to the leaders of Israel.

The council will give their response, and the narrative will continue showing the failure of Israel to come to Christ. Eventually, the transfer of the spiritual banner will go from Jew to Gentile, from Israel to the church. This is because Israel is represented by this council. God isn’t overriding His own words found in the law. Instead, He is showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, and the law is then annulled through His work.

Life application: The words of this verse speak of the witness of the Holy Spirit. As noted, the Holy Spirit witnesses through His word. He is given to those “who obey Him.” It must be understood that because the apostles personally saw the work of Christ and were witnesses of it, there are no longer apostles today. Nor is there any need for them.

The books of the Bible were completed before all of the apostles had died, being written by them, or those who were approved by them (such as Luke) to accurately report what was done by Christ and the apostles. As such, the Holy Spirit now witnesses to us only through His word. There is no need for believers to perform miraculous signs, nor the like.

The word is written, and it calls for faith to accept what it says. This is the premise for believers today. God has spoken, the Holy Spirit – through His word – witnesses to us of the work of Christ, and we are expected to believe it and accept that He is the Christ of God. In this, the Holy Spirit is given as a seal and a guarantee of our future redemption (Ephesians 1:13, 14).

Be of sound mind, believe what God has done, and be saved through the cleansing power of God’s Anointed, the Lord Jesus Christ.

*The message is so simple, and it is all-sufficient for us to be saved. What more do we need, O God, to have the sure and unfailing faith that will carry us through the dark and distressing world? We have all we need, and we are so grateful for it! Thank You for the witness of the word, given to us by inspiration from You. Amen.*

**When they heard *this*, they were furious and plotted to kill them. Acts 5:33**

The apostles just offended the council with their words concerning Jesus, particularly that God had given the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him. That, in particular, must have really set them off. These were Israel's leaders! These were those who sat in Moses' seat! It was they who explained the law to the people! And yet, these men before them – mere Galileans by the way! – claimed that it is they who stood in favor with God. As such, Luke next records, "When they heard *this*."

The entire discourse was probably upsetting to the council – 1) We ought to obey God rather than men. 2) God raised up Jesus whom you murdered. 3) Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God. 4) It is through Jesus that repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sin comes. 5) The Holy Spirit is given to those who obey Him.

Each point was a direct poke at those of the council. By the time the apostles arrived at the last point, the minds of those on the council would be enraged at what they had heard. As such, Luke next says that "they were furious."

This is a new word to Scripture, *diaprió*. It is found only here and in Acts 7:54. It comes from two words signifying "through" and "cut with a saw." Hence, it signifies "sawn in two." It is a state where a person feels they have been cut right in two, right down the middle, when overcome with grief or rage.

In the case of the council, one can imagine a saw cutting through their minds as bits fly off in different directions. The more words they heard, the more their minds would be drawn apart. At some point, in this case, the mentioning of receiving the Spirit for those who obeyed, their minds would become completely enraged and disjointed. In this state, Luke says that they "plotted to kill them."

The verb is imperfect. It says that they "were plotting to kill them." They were sitting there, stewing away at what they heard, and with every new indictment against them, each person was thinking of how he could use the law to do away with this group of arrogant miscreants. If the law was incapable of removing them, they certainly were thinking about how they could devise their own plan to do so. This seems evident because this is exactly what they later attempted to do to Paul, as is recorded in Acts 23:12-15.



What is important to remember, and which is a point upon which the council's evaluation of the matter hinges, is that these apostles before them had been arrested and locked securely in the prison just a few hours before. And yet, they were not in the prison despite it being shut securely and with the guards still standing outside. Further, they had not run away from Jerusalem but had gone to its most prominent spot, the temple, in order to continue preaching.

What occurred there stood as a witness and a testimony to the truth of the words that the apostles spoke. The ignoring of each such validation of their message is another reason to justify the cutting off of the nation for their stubborn refusal to accept the truth of God in Christ Jesus.

Life application: The apostles said nothing wrong, and each point presented to the council was true. Many on the council would even know this. It is true that every person should obey God rather than men. It is true that those on the council had murdered Jesus. It is true that if He had been raised (which is what they knew and tried to cover up), that He was exalted at the right hand of God. It is also true that if Jesus had been raised, then He was the prophesied Servant of Isaiah 52/53 who would first die for the transgressions of the people. And it is true that the Holy Spirit had come upon those who believed in Jesus (as is carefully recorded in Acts 2 and as was validated by the signs, wonders, and miracles performed by the apostles).

Despite this, hearing the words of the apostles was enough to enrage the council. As such, we must remember that quite often the truth hurts. Thus, when we are presenting the truth, it may get us into trouble. That has been proven true throughout human history. But it is better to be persecuted for the truth than it is to hide safely behind lies.

Be people of truth, let things fall where they fall, and be pleased in never compromising the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This life is short, we will soon go the way of all the world, and we will stand before the Lord for our judgment. It is right that we should do so having been truthful and having been faithful. May it be so.

*Lord God Almighty, help us to never hide the truth when it should be presented. Help us to never waver in our convictions about what is right and proper. And, Lord, help us to be people of integrity in all we do. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. Acts 5:34**

The events to this point have led the members of the council to become furious at the words of defense spoken by the apostles. In addition, it said that those in the council “plotted to kill them.” With that, a voice of reason now stands up within the council. Luke begins the note concerning him by saying, “Then one in the council stood up.”

This person probably heard the grumblings of some of the people and knew that their words were contrary to both reason and to the Law of Moses. Their violent speech and actions of the leadership had led to the crucifixion of Christ, and now His followers were standing before the council with the same type of anger being cast towards them. Luke next identifies him as “a Pharisee named Gamaliel.”

The name Gamaliel means “Reward of God.” Being a Pharisee is a key point. As a Pharisee, he accepted the premise that there is a resurrection, and also that there are angels and spirits. This is seen later in Acts –

“And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup> For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.” Acts 23:7, 8

As this is the case, he would at least be sympathetic to the words of the apostles concerning Christ, and he could actually accept that the unexplained release of the apostles from prison could have been accomplished by an angel. The latter point is not noted in the account now. And yet, it is otherwise hard to imagine that the council did not ask about it, even if Luke does not record the conversation (see the life application in the commentary on Acts 5:24).

Because of his views, he will be a voice of reason toward the situation now being brought before the council. Of this person, Gamaliel, Paul will later note in Acts 22:3 that he was brought up at his feet. The meaning is that he personally studied under this man. Hence, Paul’s doctrine followed after Gamaliel, and it was from this source that Paul’s grounding in Scripture was then used by the Lord to bring the message of life in Christ and the name of Jesus “before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

Of this person, the following is noted by Albert Barnes –

“...this man was the teacher of Paul Acts 22:3, the son of the ‘Simon’ who took the Saviour in his arms Luke 2, and the grandson of the famous ‘Hillel,’ and was known

among the Jews by the title of ‘Rabban Gamaliel the elder.’ There were other people of this name, who were also eminent among the Jews. This man is said to have died 18 years after the destruction of Jerusalem, and he died as he had lived, a Pharisee. There is not the least evidence that he was a friend of the Christian religion; but he was evidently a man of far more liberal views than the other members of the Sanhedrin.”

Luke next notes him as “a teacher of the law.” The meaning is that he instructed others in the law (as noted above concerning Paul), but he also would have interpreted the law, learned the traditional views of the scholars of the law before him, preserved the traditions of the Jewish culture and society, and so on. These things can be seen in how Paul, his student, presented himself before a tribunal later in Acts –

“My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. <sup>5</sup>They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.” Acts 26:4, 5

Paul’s life was modeled after the teachings of Gamaliel, and his conduct and teaching – even as a believer in Christ – are to be understood from that perspective. His training and knowledge are certainly one reason why the Lord chose him for his apostolic ministry. Understanding the type of man Gamaliel was helps us to understand the reasoned passion Paul had concerning the things he knew about Jesus, and how they stand in relation to the Law of Moses. For now, Luke continues with his word about Gamaliel, saying that he was “held in respect by all the people.”

Even if the Sadducees and others disagreed with his beliefs, it is of note that those in the council still held Gamaliel in high regard. They were willing to listen to his thoughts and consider his arguments. This shows that he was understood to be a man of intelligence and reason. In this notable state, Luke next says that he “commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while.”

From what will be said in the verses ahead, it is obvious that the discussion would only embolden the apostles to persevere in the spreading of their message if they knew what it was that will be stated. To avoid this, and to allow the movement of the apostles to either grow or die out without prejudice, they were to be removed from the deliberations.

What is interesting is that what is said in the council is, in fact, recorded by Luke. That means that someone who was in the room was aware of what was said and recalled it

for Luke during his investigations leading to the writing of the book of Acts. Hence, it could be Gamaliel himself, or even Paul that heard and remembered the words that will next be looked at.

As a side note, the Alexandrian text says “men” instead of “apostles” in this final clause. Thus, many translations, going back as far as the Latin Vulgate, follow this wording. This will explain the change for those who notice the difference.

Life application: Above, the training and knowledge of Paul is noted. It was because of his in-depth knowledge of the Law of Moses and his grounded belief in his training as a Pharisee that he was able to piece together so much of his theology. It is true that God inspired Paul to write out his epistles, but what is inspired is still based upon what Paul knew and how he perceived the world around him in relation to the law and its fulfillment in Christ.

For example, though the author of Hebrews is not identified in the epistle, it is highly likely that Paul is its author. To understand why this is so, refer to the introduction to the commentary by the Superior Word on Hebrews. Whether it was Paul or not, it is someone who had an extensive knowledge of the law, and who obviously believed in the resurrection, angels, and spirits. He further was able to take that knowledge and weave together a sound and reasonable discourse for the Hebrew people to understand that Jesus is the fulfillment of these things.

This is what Paul does throughout all of his letters. His training as a Pharisee made the obvious connections to Jesus jump out of the law that he once lived under. From there, he was able to fully and rightly discern what even the other apostles could not quite grasp (see Acts 11 and Galatians 2 for example). In this, Paul – more than any other – was able to see that everything he had grown up with and been trained in was to find its fulfillment in Christ –

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, <sup>17</sup> which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. <sup>18</sup> Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, <sup>19</sup> and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is* from God.” Colossians 2:16-19

Today, we will also look at the words of Paul based on how we perceive our relationship to the law. The same words are read by those who accept that Christ is the end of the

law for righteousness to everyone who believes (the correct view), and by those who believe the law is still in effect for all people, in part or in whole (the heretical view).

The difference is in their understanding of Paul's words, meaning in relation to Christ as the fulfillment of the law or in relation to the law which Paul had once been under. The only way to get beyond the law is to properly understand its purpose in relation to Jesus. And the only way to do that is to read the Bible in its proper context. Once it is understood that that law was only a stepping stone on the way to Christ, and not an end in and of itself, only then does the law find its proper place in our thinking about the magnitude of what Jesus did for us.

Keep reading the Bible, and do not be led astray by those who would reinsert the law into our lives. It is a law that could never save anyone. Only in coming to Christ can we find the true hope that God has set before us. Thank God for our hope. Thank God for Jesus!

*Lord God, You have taken real people, from all walks of life and from all kinds of interesting situations, and You have used them and their experiences in order to reveal to us Your intent for humanity, expressing these things in Your word. How great You are to show us such things so that we can know the proper path that leads us to Jesus. Yes, how great You are! Amen.*

**And he said to them: “Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. Acts 5:35**

The previous verse introduced Gamaliel who stood up and commanded that the apostles be put outside for a little while. With them removed from the council, Luke continues describing what occurred, next noting, “And he said to them.”

It is Gamaliel who had requested removal of the apostles, and it is now he who addresses the council, beginning with, “Men of Israel.” They are words of familiarity addressed to those on a similar standing within the council. This is unlike when Peter addressed this same council in Acts 4. There, his words carefully acknowledged their position within the society –

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders of Israel.’” Acts 4:8

What is more important in considering Peter's address is that he was speaking as a person who was fully aware of the work of Jesus Christ. In addressing the council, he was addressing the body responsible for the direction of Israel. The choices they made would affect the entire nation.

Gamaliel's words are on the same societal level as the others in the council, and he seems fully aware of this by his coming words to them, especially what he will say in verse 39. As a member of the body, he has the potential to direct them in a way that the apostles did not. But if the leadership of Israel ultimately fails to heed the sound advice of even one of their own, it will only increase their guilt in the matter of who Jesus is.

For now, his words continue with, "take heed to yourselves." It is a phrase that was used by Jesus. There is the implication that careful thought should be given to a matter before any decision is hurriedly rendered.

One might say, "Guard yourselves concerning this." It is as if there is a looming danger if the advice is not taken. The word is used by Paul in the Pastoral epistles concerning doctrinal matters. With this understood, that thing which Gamaliel warns of is concerning their actions toward the apostles. He warns the council to beware of "what you intend to do regarding these men."

Although it is not yet known what is on his mind, Gamaliel has a definite concern that cannot be ignored. Whatever decision that will be rendered, his advice needs to be considered. This is surely based on his seeing their conduct after hearing the words of Peter and the others. Luke had noted that they were furious and plotted to kill the apostles.

Gamaliel smells potential trouble brewing, and he wants to avoid that. Being one who knew the Scriptures, he was fully aware that God's plans cannot be thwarted. His words will use this knowledge in an attempt to keep things running smoothly and to keep anyone from actually harming themselves.

Life application: Gamaliel's advice is based on a life of reading, contemplating, and studying Scripture. The only way he could make a reasoned decision in relation to what Scripture says is to... (Yes, you, in the corner over there! Yes! That is correct!) ... It is to know what the word says.

And the only way you can do that is by reading the word. People all over the world make well thought out decisions all the time, and it is based on their knowledge of whatever subject they are dealing with. Be well versed in the words of the Bible if you want to

make right decisions that are intimately linked to your faith. Otherwise, you are setting yourself up for failure.

Read your Bible.

*How great are You, O God. You are beyond our understanding, and yet, You have told us about Yourself and what You expect of us in Your word. Where are our priorities? If they are directed toward You, we will be responsible by studying and knowing that source of knowledge, reading it all the days of our lives. Help us to do this, O God. Amen.*

**For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing.** Acts 5:36

The advice from Gamaliel concerning the apostles is now to be given, but before actually providing his recommendation, he gives background data that will lead to his recommendation. What he says is from the historical record, and it details things the council would have been fully aware of. The first example begins with the words, “For some time ago Theudas rose up.”

Bringing in the name Theudas causes scholars a great deal of difficulty. The only known Theudas outside of the Bible is found in the writings of Josephus. However, he is placed later in history by Josephus than Gamaliel’s speech now. As such, some find Luke’s words an anachronism. A great deal is written on the inclusion of this name now, but the Pulpit commentary gives three options concerning him that allow for the biblical account to stand as correct –

“1. Josephus may have misplaced the adventure of Theudas by some accidental error. Considering the vast number of Jewish insurrections from the death of Herod the Great to the destruction of Jerusalem, such a mistake is not very improbable. 2. There may have been two adventurers of the name of Theudas, one in the reign of Augustus Caesar, and the other in the reign of Claudius; and so both the historians may be right, and the apparent discrepancy may have no real existence (see Wordsworth, in loc.). 3. The person named Theudas by Gamaliel may be the same whom Josephus speaks of (‘Bell. Jud.,’ it. 4:2) by the common name of Simon, as gathering a band of robbers around him, and making himself king at Herod’s death (‘Sonntag,’ cited by Meyer, etc.). But he was killed by Gratus, and the insurrection suppressed. A variety in this last mode has also been suggested (Kitto’s ‘Cyclopaedia’), viz. to understand Theudas to be an Aramaic form of Theodotus, and the equivalent Hebrew form of Theodotus to be מַתְּתִיָּה, Matthias, and so the person meant by Theudas to be a certain Matthias who with one

Judas made an insurrection, when Herod the Great was dying, by tearing down the golden eagle which Herod had put over the great gate of the temple, and who was burnt alive with his companions, after defending his deed in a speech of great boldness and constancy ('Ant. Jud' 17:6)."

The first option, as noted, is not improbable. Josephus is often cited as an absolute authority when someone wants to defend his opinion concerning one matter or another. However, in comparing the writings of Josephus to Scripture an almost infinite number of discrepancies arise between the two. What he says will often deviate significantly from a plain reading of the Scriptures.

Therefore, and because of the reliability of the Bible, it is always best to defer to it and only to cite Josephus when his writings contain unique accounts that cannot be verified elsewhere. His writings are important, but they are certainly not inspired.

But just as important concerning this is that the details of Josephus concerning his account do not match what is stated in this verse by Gamaliel. To assume that Josephus is correct, and that Luke made such a blundering error, shows a bias against the writings of Luke, and a bias against the Bible, picking one similarity and disregarding other differences.

With this understood, Gamaliel continues with his reference to Theudas, saying that he rose up "claiming to be somebody." The meaning of this is that Theudas put himself forth as an authority figure who was worth being heeded and who was also deemed worthy of being followed – "I am divinely appointed by God to deliver Israel! Men... Follow me!"

It is to be remembered that Gamaliel is giving examples that are to be taken in the context of the claims of the apostles. Therefore, Theudas' "claiming to be somebody" is to be set parallel to the thought that "the apostles claim that Jesus is somebody." In other words, Gamaliel is using a historical account to build a case based on precedent in order to make a decision. As such, he continues with, "A number of men, about four hundred, joined him."

The number is not large compared to the Roman army, nor is it especially large in relation to many other groups of insurrectionists that might arise in hopes of overthrowing a sizeable army. Despite this, it is the same size of force that David originally had when he broke away from Saul –



“David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father’s house heard *it*, they went down there to him. <sup>2</sup> And everyone *who was* in distress, everyone who *was* in debt, and everyone *who was* discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him.” 1 Samuel 22:1, 2  
However, this band of four hundred eventually grew into a large fighting force. Later, David became the ruler of all of Israel. Again, the account must be set in parallel to what Gamaliel is saying.

David had been chosen by the Lord to be the next king. He was anointed as such by Samuel. And though his army started small, it grew into a vast kingdom of great power. The Scriptures reveal that God was behind the actions of David, and therefore David became the great leader of his people and the king of his nation. God’s will and purposes could not be thwarted. On the other hand, Theudas had an army of the same size as David. And yet, “He was slain.”

In David’s battles, he did the slaying. Again, and again, the Bible records the magnificent fighting and leadership abilities of David. God had chosen the man, He was there with the man, and thus David was unstoppable as he defeated the enemies of God’s people. Instead of being slain in battle, he died in his own bed, having seen the continuance of his kingdom through the establishment of his own son, Solomon, as king in his place with all of Israel subject to him. As for Theudas, Gamaliel says, “and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing.”

David and his four hundred grew into the leaders of an entire nation. He appointed those with him to leadership positions, and rewarded those who were faithful subjects. Theudas, on the other hand, was defeated in battle, lay slain in the dust, and his followers dispersed. And the reason is obvious, no group of people of sane mind would continue to follow a slain leader who accomplished nothing he had set out to do.

And again, the parallel to Jesus and the apostles must be considered. This small band of apostles had grown into a very sizeable following because of the message they conveyed to the people. Their Leader had also been slain, but His death was both a part of what was supposed to happen, and it was not the end of the story the apostles spoke forth. Instead, Jesus had risen in victory. And the Foe was not merely an oppressive ruler over the people. Rather, it was the power of Satan himself that Jesus had defeated.

Death had been defeated, and a new life had come out of what Jesus had done. Gamaliel is making a point. If the message of the apostles is true, whatever the council

decided must take that into consideration. David and his four hundred eventually led to an eternal dynasty –

“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. <sup>15</sup> But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I removed from before you. <sup>16</sup> And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.”

-2 Samuel 7:12-16

On the other hand, Theudas and his four hundred men came to nothing. The difference between the two is whether their actions met with the approval of the Lord or not.

Life application: Many people have built great and lasting dynasties. This does not mean that the people rightly followed God and were set in place because He approved of them. But they could not have arisen to such positions unless God had allowed them to do so.

We cannot make the assumption that just because someone is powerful or wealthy that they are right with the Lord. However, the power and wealth of that person ultimately came from the Lord allowing it to be so. Likewise, a person who is faithful to the Lord may be poor, he may have no authority, he may be a minister with a very small ministry, or he may be a cripple or someone who even dies at an early age.

The main thing that we need to guide our lives is faithfulness to the Lord. Whatever else happens, good or bad, is what the Lord allows in our lives. It may actually be more difficult to be faithful to the Lord when one has great power, wealth, and abundance. How easy it is to forget the Lord in such circumstances!

Let us remember to be faithful no matter what our lot in life is. The life that is truly life is ahead, and the Lord will reward our faithfulness in a way that we cannot yet even imagine.

*Lord God, Your will in our lives! May that be the driving motivation in all that we do. Help us to focus on that which is truly of value and not on the temporary, fleeting*

*pleasures of this life we currently live. Help us! Give us strength and wisdom to be faithful to You as we walk down this temporary path on the way to glory. Amen.*

**After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed.**

Acts 5:37

Gamaliel just gave an example from history concerning Theudas and his band of four hundred men. He now gives a second example, saying, “After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up.” Of this name, Charles Ellicott writes –

“In one passage Josephus (Ant. xviii. 1) calls him a Gaulonite—i.e., of the country east of Galilee. Had this stood alone, St. Luke might have been charged here also with inaccuracy; but in other passages (Ant. xx. 5, § 2; Wars, ii. 8, § 1) he is described as a Galilean.”

This leaves a couple of possibilities. One is that Josephus misidentified Judas at one time in his writings. Another is that two people are being referred to by Josephus. Or, possibly, it is the same person who is first identified by the place where he was born and then by the place he was most known for. No matter what, there is an extra-biblical note supporting Luke’s writing concerning the words of Gamaliel. This person named Judas was an actual historical figure who is being referred to. Of him, Gamaliel next says, “in the days of the census.”

This is also referred to by Josephus. Albert Barnes gives sufficient detail concerning his revolt as described by Josephus –

“He says that the revolt took place under ‘Cyrenius,’ a Roman senator, who came into ‘Syria to be judge of that nation, and to take account of their substance.’ ‘Moreover,’ says he, ‘Cyrenius came himself into Judea, which was now added to the province of Syria, to take an account of their substance, and to dispose of Archelaus’ money.’ ‘Yet Judas, taking with him Saddouk, a Pharisee, became zealous to draw them to a revolt, who both said that this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery, and exhorted the nation to assert their liberty, etc.’ ‘This’ revolt, he says, was the commencement of the series of revolts and calamities that terminated in the destruction of the city, temple, and nation.”

Also, of this account, Charles Ellicott says, “He was assisted by a Pharisee, named Sadduk, and the absolute independence of Israel was the watchword of his followers. It was unlawful, in any form, to pay tribute to Cæsar. It was lawful to use any weapons in defence of freedom.”

This then probably explains the reason for the question presented to Jesus by the Pharisees –

“Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in *His* talk. <sup>16</sup> And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, ‘Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. <sup>17</sup> Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?’

<sup>18</sup> But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, ‘Why do you test Me, *you* hypocrites? <sup>19</sup> Show Me the tax money.’

So they brought Him a denarius.

<sup>20</sup> And He said to them, ‘Whose image and inscription *is* this?’

<sup>21</sup> They said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’

And He said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ <sup>22</sup> When they had heard *these words*, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.” Matthew 22:15-22

This was something that would have been on the minds of the people throughout their time under Rome. If they had paid heed to the words of the Lord, things would have gone much better for them. As far as Judas, Luke continues Gamaliel’s words, saying, “and drew away many people after him.”

The lack of any specific number, unlike that of Theudas, seems to imply a greater number had followed Judas. As such, it would help explain why Gamaliel is giving a second example. The first was a man with a small force, comparable to that of David. However, where David was supported by the hand of God, Theudas was obviously not. His efforts failed. Now, Gamaliel refers to someone with a larger following, probably not unlike the number that were aligned with the teaching of Jesus, reaching into the thousands or maybe even tens of thousands by this point. However, of this Judas, Gamaliel notes that even with a larger force, “He also perished.”

Judas died or was taken prisoner by the Romans never to be heard from again. Either way, his time of leadership in the rebellion against Rome ended, “and all who obeyed him were dispersed.” Once the leader was gone, the movement allied with him ended.

Those who were still alive simply went on with life, taking a new direction than the one they had been on under Judas.

Life application: It was noted above that a Pharisee named Sadduk accompanied Judas and had his own idea about how to handle the rule of Rome over them. When Jesus came, the Pharisees asked Him about this exact topic, wanting to see what He thought. They also were hoping to trap Him in His words. If He said, “No, you are not to pay taxes to Rome,” they would have had a reason to hand Him over to the Romans as an insurrectionist.

However, if He said, “Yes, you should pay the Romans,” the Pharisees would have then stirred up the people by saying, “This guy is a sellout to the Romans.” Either way, they planned to trap Jesus in His words, thus taking away His hand of guidance over the people who followed Him.

Jesus gave them an answer they were completely unprepared for. He showed that compliance with, and allegiance to, an earthly body does not mean people are being unfaithful to the Lord. Paul demonstrates this in his life and actions as well. Our duties to those over us in this world should be performed according to the station in which we are born and live. Likewise, our duties to God should be performed accordingly as well.

Let us remember this and let us live out our lives working in whatever country we are in as citizens of that country. At the same time, we are to be faithful citizens of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, being obedient to His precepts as set forth in His word. When the two conflict, we are to defer to the Lord’s kingdom. When they do not, we should be obedient to both.

*Lord God, give us wisdom in the conduct of our lives so that we will be good and faithful citizens of the nation in which we find ourselves, while still being obedient to the calling we have upon our lives in Your kingdom. May You be glorified in all that we do as we live our lives before You. Amen.*

**And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; Acts 5:38**

Gamaliel, having given two historical examples of failed leaders of the past, now gives his advice concerning the faith that is based on the leadership of Christ Jesus. This begins with his words, saying, “And now I say to you.”

Based on what had happened in the past to those who initiated uprisings, meaning Theudas and Judas of Galilee, there is a precedent that their followers will scatter and disperse when the leader has died. As such, he continues, “keep away from these men.”

The word translated as “keep away” signifies “to depart” or “stand off.” The leaders in the council “were furious and plotted to kill them” (5:33), Gamaliel is telling them to take another path and simply depart from them and not interfere. And more, he continues with, “and let them alone.”

The word signifies “to send away.” It carries with it the sense of permitting. When one is sent away, he is allowed to continue with his own devices. Gamaliel, understanding the failure of Theudas and Judas of Galilee, knew that if what the apostles were doing fell into the disfavor of Rome, it would be handled by them.

For the council to take action, it would only increase the zealotry of the followers and ultimately bring them unnecessary trouble. However, without the presence of Jesus, another option was more likely. As he next says, “for if this plan or this work is of men.”

The Greek reads, “for if this plan or this work is out of men.” The meaning is, out of their own strength, planning, or devices. Just as with the previous two examples of failed insurrections that did not have divine approval, so this might be as well. If that is the case, Gamaliel says, “it will come to nothing.”

The Greek word signifies “to loosen down.” It is what one does when he unpacks a horse or tears down a tent. It is also used to speak of the abolishing of the law or the destroying of the temple. If the movement of the apostles is out of man, it will simply collapse, either under its own weight or by another force that will cause it to be destroyed. Either way, it will not continue. As such, why should the council stir things up and cause exactly the opposite to occur?

Life application: The words of Gamaliel bear a wisdom that reflects principles found in the book of Proverbs. He gives sound advice concerning a matter that could have been handled in one of several ways. With thought and contemplation, a recommendation is put forth for consideration by the council. Before he finishes, he will also give another possible outcome for the movement of the apostles, and he will explain what would be the reason for its happening as well.

This is a sound way of presenting a case for action, and it has been based upon carefully evaluating events of the past and also how things could be affected into the future.

Reading the Proverbs will give a person insight into such things. Rather than commands about how to do things, general guidelines, based upon personal insights and experiences, are given by the author for the reader to consider.

Be familiar enough with what is recorded there in Proverbs, so that when a matter arises, you can recall the words and consider them as you make your own decisions about important matters that you will certainly face at various times in your life.

*Heavenly Father, You endowed Solomon with wisdom and understanding. He took some of that wisdom and wrote it down for us to consider as our own lives unfold. If we could ask for such wisdom, You would certainly say, "I have already given it to you, it is in My word." And so, Lord, help us to search out the wisdom You gave Solomon by searching out his words that are recorded in Your word. Amen.*

**but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.** Acts 5:39

Gamaliel has given two examples of groups that fizzled out after their leaders died. After that, he gave his recommendation concerning the apostles, saying, "let them alone." He then gave a part of his reasoning for this with the words, "for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing." Now, he will finish his words with a contrasting reason why they should be left alone. That begins with, "but if it is of God."

It is interesting that the mood of these words is different than the previous clause. There, the verb was in the subjunctive mood. Now it is in the indicative mood. Cambridge notes the difference saying, "The verb is not in the same mood as in the previous clause, and had the construction been in classical Greek, it might have indicated some opinion on Gamaliel's part of the truth of Christianity = 'If it is [as it is] of God.' But in the N. T. the construction indicates no more than a simple conditional."

Regardless of it being a simple conditional, Gamaliel has chosen his words to make a contrast between the two states. One is hypothetically from man; the other is questioned if it is really from God. If it is so, there will be a marked difference in the outcome.

Man's work will find success or failure based on innumerable circumstances. But in the case of the nation of Israel, there is a more important element at work. Gamaliel understood this. The Lord Himself watches over the people, and He determines what their outcome will be based upon their relationship with Him.

This precept is found time and again in Deuteronomy. It is then confirmed in the prophetic writings, and it is evidenced throughout the historical writings. Clear examples of this are seen, for example, in the Song of Moses, such as –

“How could one chase a thousand,  
And two put ten thousand to flight,  
Unless their Rock had sold them,  
And the LORD had surrendered them?” Deuteronomy 32:30

If the Lord is on the side of a person who is striving to overthrow Roman authority, nothing could stop him from doing so –

“You will chase your enemies, and they shall fall by the sword before you.  
<sup>8</sup> Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight; your enemies shall fall by the sword before you.” Leviticus 26:7, 8

However, if the Lord is not with him, his attempt will fail, and he will perish. This is the point of Gamaliel’s mentioning of Theudas and Judas of Galilee. On the other hand, David had the Lord with him, and he prevailed over his foes, attained the position of king, and ruled the land. As such, his counsel is that if the movement of the apostles is led by God, “you cannot overthrow it.”

He is speaking to the spiritual leaders of the nation about matters that will affect the destiny of the nation. Gamaliel was aware of the words of Moses. If a movement had arisen that was spiritually correct before God because it was in accord with the words of Moses, and which was also confirmed by the prophets, then it absolutely could not fail. God knew the future, spoke forth through the prophets what would happen, and so it was impossible that what was prophesied could be thwarted.

The apostles had presented their case to the people, their words were heard and understood by those in the council, and they claimed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. If these things were true, and if the council continued to resist them and their message, there would be consequences. Gamaliel notes this as he finishes, saying, “lest you even be found to fight against God.”

This is a word, an adjective, found only here in Scripture, *theomachos*. Being an adjective, it literally means, “God-fighters.” Its kindred verb is found in Acts 23:9 when Paul was brought before this same council –



“Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees’ party arose and protested, saying, ‘We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.’”

Though nothing in history speaks of Gamaliel as a saved person, his words seem to indicate that he may have suspected that the message of the apostles was true. His words, and the way they are presented, demonstrate the thoughts of a person who is carefully watching the unfolding events of history, evaluating them from the lens of the writings which established his people, and looking to see if what those writings said matched up with the very events that were occurring before his eyes.

What he says now is certainly in accord with what Peter and the other apostles had just said moments before, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). As noted then, if the words of the apostles were true, and if they were rightly following God because of faith in Christ, it meant that the Mosaic Covenant had found its fulfillment and its end in Jesus. The hope of the New Covenant was what they proclaimed had come through His completed work. Gamaliel’s words demonstrate caution be exercised by those with whom he sat to judge.

Life application: The directions for our walk before the Lord are found in the New Testament epistles. We have entered into a New Covenant. It is not possible to have one foot in the law and one foot in Christ. The two are wholly incompatible.

As such, the warnings of the epistles are clear and unambiguous. One will either follow Christ or he will return to the law. Only one path can be taken, and there will be judgment based on which path was decided upon. If a person is saved, he is saved. That will not be lost, but to return to adherence to the law will mean zero rewards for that person.

Be wise, be circumspect, and put your faith and trust solely in the merits of Jesus Christ. What you do while in that state will be evaluated and either be counted as loss and burned up, or it will be counted as gain and be purified. For the one who returns to the law, there will only be loss. Jesus didn’t come and complete His job just so that we could try to do better after He left. What He did was perfect, fully sufficient, and finished – once and for all time.

*Thank You, Lord God, for the sure hope we possess in Christ. Our salvation isn’t just given to us, it is guaranteed to us! We have an absolute hope of eternal life because of the work of Jesus. Thank You for this surety we now have! Amen and amen.*

**And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.** Acts 5:40

With Gamaliel's recommendation now stated, Luke next records, "And they agreed with him." His argument was convincing because it was based on precedent. Further, it was based on the assumption that if the movement of the apostles was simply the work of man, it would die out, but if it was truly the work of God, nothing could thwart it anyway. The advice was sound and reasonable. With that decided, they still could not let the apostles go away without a demonstration of their authority. Hence, it next says, "and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them."

In such a tribunal, there must be a reason for such a punishment. However, none is given. It could be argued that Peter and John could be beaten because they had not obeyed the previous command given to them –

"So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." Acts 4:18

However, none of the other apostles were present at that time. As such, it would be a stretch of the law to include them in a charge of disobedience. It could only be considered a crime of guilt by association. Regardless of this, the men were probably beaten with rods according to the words of Moses –

"If there is a dispute between men, and they come to court, that *the judges* may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, <sup>2</sup> then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge will cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, with a certain number of blows. <sup>3</sup> Forty blows he may give him *and* no more, lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight." Deuteronomy 25:1-3

Along with the beating, they were also given a charge, as Luke notes, "they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus." It is the same command previously given. Like before, the Greek actually reads "upon the name of Jesus." The command forbids them to speak on the authority of Jesus' name. Unlike the charge in Acts 4, this

time their directive came with an additional measure, beating them to hopefully ensure compliance. However, the apostles have already spoken as to the matter –

“But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. <sup>20</sup> For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’” Acts 4:19, 20

“But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Acts 5:29

Only time will tell if the beating they received will cause them to obey men rather than God. For now, Luke ends the verse saying, “and let them go.”

With no valid justification to further incarcerate or punish the apostles, the council allowed them to leave. But there was nothing recorded by Luke about one of the key points of the entire event. The council never asked (at least nothing is recorded concerning the matter) how the apostles got out of a locked and guarded prison in the middle of the night. It appears that they were truly afraid to ask that simple question because it might open up a can of worms that could possibly divide the council.

Paul will later use his knowledge of how the council operates to do exactly that as is recorded in Acts 23:9. For now, the apostles are free to go.

Life application: Paul, writing to the saints at Philippi, gave a strong exhortation to the church about a matter that first became evident in the account of Acts 5 –

“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup> and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. <sup>29</sup> For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, <sup>30</sup> having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.” Philippians 1:27-30

Though the punishment was minor at this time, the apostles did suffer for the sake of Christ. A beating with rods is no pleasant thing, and it is given to correct offenders. This means that the apostles were considered offenders by the leaders of Israel. Despite the warnings and the punishment, the apostles provided the “proof of perdition” to the council and the proof of “salvation” that they possessed.

The account in Acts is descriptive. It does not provide any command that we are to act in a like manner. But Paul's words are prescriptive. He has built upon the acts of the apostles, including himself, a sound and reasonable directive for the church to live by. This has been accepted by many martyrs over the past two thousand years. It may be that even in once Christian-friendly nations, believers may be called to act in the same manner in the days ahead.

Be mentally prepared now to accept what comes, including suffering for the sake of Christ, as an acceptable demonstration of your faith. It is our calling, and it has been directed by God in His word. Stand fast and accept what comes with gladness that your name is written in heaven.

*Heavenly Father, it is evident that faith in Jesus is becoming less tolerable to the leadership of many nations. Unless it is in a faith that is unbiblical. You have asked us to stand apart from perversion, idolatry, and all wickedness. Help us in this. As churches depart from the true faith, help those of us who hold fast to it to remain strong, never departing from the right and proper path. Amen.*

**So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Acts 5:41**

In the previous verse, the apostles were beaten. They were also commanded to not speak in (literally "upon") the name of Jesus. After that, they were released. With their release, it now says, "So they departed from the presence of the council."

It is certain that there was no small amount of pain among them. Being beaten with rods was not a minor thing, and only a few stripes would really smart. If they were given the full measure of the law, meaning up to forty stripes (Deuteronomy 25:3), they would be rather miserable – at least physically – as they departed. And yet, it next says they were "rejoicing."

Despite both the physical damage inflicted to their backs, as well as the disgrace they faced in the eyes of whoever considered it, they literally rejoiced over the event. It is the fulfillment of the words of Jesus, thus providing another measure of confidence that they were doing exactly what He desired of them –

"Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5:10-12

“But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues.” Matthew 10:17

Though this was at the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem and not a synagogue, the truth remains the same. They were delivered up and they were beaten. Jesus had told them such things would occur, and they have come about. Rather than a moment of defeat, it is a time of vindication “that they were counted worthy.”

One can be brought before such a tribunal for wrongdoing, maybe theft. When that occurs and a beating is ordered, there is only disgrace. There is the disgrace of having been caught. There is the disgrace of having been convicted. There is the disgrace of the beating itself. And there is the disgrace of having everyone know that these things happened to you.

On the other hand, one can be wrongfully judged. When nothing was done to deserve a beating, and yet a beating is received, there is nothing to be ashamed of. Rather, when the truth is eventually brought forth, and it will be brought forth someday, the one who was wrongly treated will be vindicated. Peter speaks of this in his first epistle –

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; <sup>16</sup> having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. <sup>17</sup> For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” 1 Peter 3:15-17

As this is true, the apostles rejoiced. They knew that their actions were sanctioned by God, and they had faithfully fulfilled the charge given to them by the angel concerning speaking out about the gospel of Jesus. Therefore, they deemed what happened to them as a point of being counted worthy “to suffer shame for His name.”

There is a difference in suffering shame and in doing that which is shameful. The verb is passive in the Greek. The shame was inflicted upon them, but they had done nothing shameful to deserve it. Hence, Vincent’s Word Studies explains the terminology of this event –

“This is an instance of what rhetoricians style an oxymoron, from ὀξύς [oxus], sharp, and μωρός [moros], foolish; a pointedly foolish saying, which is witty or impressive through sheer contradiction or paradox, as laborious idleness, sublime indifference. In this case the apostles are described as dignified by indignity.”

Life application: There are times when people may incur damage simply because they have a bumper sticker on their car that points people to Jesus. It is most upsetting to come out and find tires slashed or metal scratched or dented. It is inconvenient, it is costly, and it is just plain wasteful. At the same time, there is now a choice. “Will I take the sticker off my car to avoid more damage, or will I stand fast on my faith in Christ?”

A bumper sticker doesn’t prove faith in Christ, and it is not a necessary part of our faith, but it does indicate who we are and what we believe. A car is a temporary item that will eventually be crushed and made into something else. But what about something more personal. What if you are actually being beaten up by people because of your faith? Or maybe they are imprisoning you or even threatening your life because of Jesus?

This has happened, and it continues to happen, to people all along and throughout the world. Those who are willing to stand up for their faith are a real testimony to the One they are willing to follow, even at such a great cost. You may or may not have to face this now, but someday you might. What will you be willing to give up in order to remain faithful to the Lord? Think about that, and be ready to respond if that day should come.

*Lord Jesus, You gave up heaven’s riches in order to come and restore us to Yourself. Help us to be willing to respond in the right way if we should be asked to give up our lives of ease, material wealth, freedom, or even our lives in remaining faithful to You. Grant us in that day the ability to stand fast on Your name, no matter what the cost. Amen.*

**And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Acts 5:42**

In the previous verse, the apostles had just “departed from the council.” As they departed, they rejoiced because “they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” With that, we come to the last verse of Chapter 5 which is an important verse to consider carefully.

There are pastors, preachers, teachers, and denominations that adamantly state Christians are bound to some, or all of the precepts of the Law of Moses. In order to

justify this, they will tear verses out of their context in order to make their case. For example, this is an often-cited set of verses –

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup> For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. <sup>19</sup> Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

-Matthew 5:17-20

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.” John 14:15

“But Jesus also said, ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. <sup>3</sup> Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.’” Matthew 23:2, 3

Jesus directly told those with Him that they were to observe (be obedient to) those who sit in Moses’ seat. They were the authority in the land, and they were thus to be obeyed. With that in mind, Luke begins this final verse of the chapter with, “And daily in the temple.”

The temple is the central point of Jerusalem, the place where the law of Moses was administered. Paul explains the significance of it, in relation to the law, in Galatians 4 –

“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. <sup>23</sup> But he *who was* of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, <sup>24</sup> which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— <sup>25</sup> for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— <sup>26</sup> but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.”

-Galatians 4:21-26

The temple in Jerusalem represents the Law of Moses. It is a law of bondage. Luke continues with, “and in every house.”

The houses in Jerusalem are filled with the inhabitants of Jerusalem, meaning the people of Israel. It is the very people that Jesus had spoken to saying that they must observe whatever the leaders of Israel who sit in Moses' seat direct. At both the temple and in the private homes of the people, it next says that "they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

Acts 5:40, just two verses ago, said concerning those who sit in Moses' seat, "when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go."

As this council is the very body referred to by Jesus, then either the apostles are directly disobeying Jesus' words of Matthew 5 and John 14 (noted above), or something else is going on that is completely ignored by the heretics in these denominations, teaching that we must observe the Law of Moses.

Life application: There are five principal rules that should be considered at all times when evaluating Bible passages. There are many others, but these five must be considered –

Is the passage prescriptive? (Does it prescribe anything?)

Is the passage descriptive? (Is this merely describing something?)

Context. (What is the context?)

Context. (What is the context?)

Context. (What is the context?)

As you can see, the final three rules are so important that they are one thought that needs to be drummed into our heads at least three times to make sure error does not creep into our consideration of a passage.

Considering Matthew 5:17-20 (above), are those verses prescriptive or descriptive? They are both. They *prescribe* something for the intended audience, and yet they only *describe* what occurred for anyone who is not the intended audience; they tell what was said by Jesus to the people gathered before Him.

Context: Who was Jesus speaking to? Israel. Under what authority was Israel living? The Law of Moses. Who was the Law of Moses given to? Israel? Was the Law of Moses given to any other group of people? No. What did Jesus say? He did not come to destroy the Law or the prophets. Rather, He came to fulfill them.



After that, He said that the Law is a binding code. He then went on to speak of the leaders of Israel, living under the law and doing more than any other people in the land in their attempt to meet the requirements of the law, saying that their attempts were insufficient to enter the kingdom of heaven and that every person there needed to do more than they (the scribes and Pharisees) needed to do in order to enter that kingdom. That would include being obedient to those leaders because they sat in Moses' seat (Matthew 23:2, 3).

As this was impossible, then they need to again consider Jesus' words. He did not come to destroy the Law or the prophets... but to fulfill them. As the highest authorities of Israel fell short of meeting the requirements to enter the kingdom of heaven, then NO PERSON of Israel could meet those same requirements. Hence, Jesus came to fulfill them on our behalf. In His fulfilling of them, the law is:

Annulled (Hebrews 7:18).

Obsolete (Hebrews 8:13).

Taken away (Hebrews 10:9).

Wiped out (erased) and nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14).

One must choose where he will hang his hat. If one desires to be under the law, he must meet every single precept of the law perfectly, not letting even one fall short. He must also obey those who sit in Moses' seat, something the apostles of Acts 5:45 refused to do – thus, ostensibly, violating Jesus' words under the law. As they did this, it means that either they have not met the requirements of the law, or they are not... under the law. The latter is correct. They had entered into the New Covenant and for them, the Old was annulled, obsolete, and taken away.

To obey Jesus' commandments (John 14:15 cited above) means to be obedient to Jesus' words under the New Covenant, not the Old. Moses gave the Old, not Jesus. Either the words Jesus spoke under the Old were flagrantly disregarded by the apostles, or they were no longer the context of the lives of those apostles. The latter is true. Jesus' commandments center on Jesus, not on Moses.

Summary: Doctrine matters.

*Lord God, after we have come to Christ, please lead us to teachers with sound doctrine. And then give us the wisdom to learn it and apply it to our lives. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 6

**Now in those days, when *the number of the disciples was multiplying*, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Acts 6:1**

Chapter 6 begins with a thought that is most probably tied in with what is said earlier in the previous chapter. It opens by saying, “Now in those days.” This could be speaking of the previously cited arrest of the apostles as a continuing narrative, or it could be referring to what was said before that short account. This is because the next words say, “when *the number of the disciples was multiplying*.”

That seems to more logically be connected to Acts 5:14 –

“And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women...”

The account of the arrest of the apostles is occurring at this same time. This is important because what is said in this chapter begins with continued problems for the apostles that need to be rectified, as well as continued persecution for the believers by the council. In this latter event, the enmity between the truth of God in Christ and the active fighting against it by the leaders of Israel continues to be highlighted.

This is logically necessary to show why Israel’s destruction and exile came about. Hence, these undertones that are provided are not unlike the book of Jeremiah which carefully details the reasons why the Lord destroyed the nation and exiled them to Babylon.

God did not just arbitrarily punish Israel in the Roman exile, but rather, the book of Acts stands as a witness against them for having failed to accept the One sent by God to fulfill the law and reconcile the people to Himself. As such, He turned to the Gentiles –

“They have provoked Me to jealousy by *what* is not God;  
They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols.  
But I will provoke them to jealousy by *those who are* not a nation;  
I will move them to anger by a foolish nation.” Deuteronomy 32:21

For now, it is during the time of the multiplying of the disciples that “there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists.” The word translated as “complaint” is *goggusmos*. It is an onomatopoeia. The sound of the word matches the sound of the

grumbling. The word “Hellenists” refers to Grecian Jews. They are Jews who only speak Greek and not the language of those in Judea (Hebrew or Aramaic).

The meaning of the words is that a division had arisen between the Hebrew (or Aramaic) speaking Jews and the Greek-speaking Jews. One can imagine the Greek-speaking Jews muttering under their breath at what is taking place. Because they were of the Diaspora and returned to the land not speaking the native language, they were considered as second-class citizens.

To understand the situation and the reference to other key points that will be seen in Acts, Vincent’s Word Studies provides background information into the matter –

“The word Hellenists denotes Jews, not Greeks, but Jews who spoke Greek. The contact of Jews with Greeks was first effected by the conquests of Alexander. He settled eight thousand Jews in the Thebais, and the Jews formed a third of the population of his new city of Alexandria. From Egypt they gradually spread along the whole Mediterranean coast of Africa. They were removed by Seleucus Nicator from Babylonia, by thousands, to Antioch and Seleucia, and under the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes scattered themselves through Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia, and the Aegean islands. The vast majority of them adopted the Greek language, and forgot the Aramaic dialect which had been their language since the Captivity. The word is used but twice in the New Testament - here and Acts 9:29 - and, in both cases, of Jews who had embraced Christianity, but who spoke Greek and used the Septuagint version of the Bible instead of the original Hebrew or the Chaldaic targum or paraphrase. The word Ἕλλην [*Hellén*], Greek, which is very common in the New Testament, is used in antithesis, either to ‘Barbarians’ or to ‘Jews.’ In the former case it means all nations which spoke the Greek language (see Acts 18:17; Romans 1:14; 1 Corinthians 1:22, 1 Corinthians 1:23). In the latter it is equivalent to Gentiles (see Romans 1:16; Romans 2:9; 1 Corinthians 10:32; Galatians 2:3). Hence, in either case, it is wholly different from Hellenist.”

With this understood, the actual reason for the division is next explained, saying, “because their widows were neglected.”

The word translated as “neglected” is in the imperfect tense. It means that this was something ongoing. Being overlooked would not be unexpected in such a situation. A person who didn’t speak the language and who was alone and without anyone to speak for her, would have a difficult time going forward and being listened to. Those with an understandable voice would naturally receive attention without any difficulty and the others would be overlooked.

However, the problem wasn't that they were overlooked in getting their hair cut at the local salon. It was a much more pressing need. They were missing out "in the daily distribution."

In other words, the money that was raised was to be distributed as needs arose. The Hebrew widows were coming forward and were receiving what they needed, but the Greek-speaking widows were being overlooked, and that habitually. As such, they were truly alone, with no support, and even the distribution by the church – which they depended on to simply survive – was not being fair towards them.

Life application: It is always easy to take the path of least resistance. When someone speaks another language or has a different way of doing things than we do, it is easier to overlook them and side up to those we are more comfortable with. In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with this, but when it causes a division in the church, it needs to be addressed.

People come into a local church to be a part of it. If they don't receive any care or attention, it will be perceived as if their needs are less important than the others. But needs are needs, not wants. It is important to identify what true needs are and then address them in all of those we fellowship with.

It is right to be attentive to all, even those we may not want to be especially close to. Endeavor to look around you and see who is being left out of close and personal contact, and be sure to make an extra effort to be attentive to them as well.

*Heavenly Father, give us the wisdom to identify needs in others and to respond to them, even when they may have a different culture, color, or way of doing things. Help us to give of ourselves to everyone and not just isolate ourselves with those we feel most comfortable with. Help us in this, O Lord. Amen.*

**Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Acts 6:2**

Chapter 6 opened with a problem concerning a complaint by the Hellenists against the Hebrews. Their widows were being neglected during the daily distribution. With that set forth, it now says, "Then the twelve."

It is a reference to the twelve apostles. Judas had gone off the list when he hung himself and Matthias had been added to it by the drawing of lots. It is these twelve that have now “summoned the multitude of the disciples.”

This is probably not a reference to all of the disciples. By Acts 4:4, there were about five thousand believers, with many more being added since then (Acts 5:14). Rather, this may be those who were there and referenced in verse 1, meaning those who had brought the complaint forward and those against whom the complaint had been made.

Or it may simply be referring to a large number that was regularly in the area. Either way, it is a multitude large enough to be addressed concerning the matter and to take part in its resolution. It is to this group that the apostles gathered together “and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God.’”

The translation is incorrect, it is an aorist participle. It has happened and should be rendered “having left,” or even better, “having forsaken,” or “having abandoned.” They were obviously called to attend to the matter, thus having abandoned their primary responsibility which was to attend to the word of God. Instead of that, they were facing a matter of quibbling that should have been resolvable by others in order to “serve tables.”

The Greek word, translated as “serve,” signifies “to wait at a table on guests.” The literal meaning is “to kick up the dust” because the one attending to the table scurries about. The idea of a table in this context is that which is used to serve at. It can be food or it can be money – such as in Matthew 21:12. Either way, the idea is that of a distribution of something that is meant to sustain the needs of those coming forward to it.

As this is a common job, anyone responsible enough could do it. To interfere with the apostles’ study and teaching of the word in order to serve tables would be counterproductive to the intent of their commission.

Life application: As surprising as this may be, the number of pastors that write their own sermons, in part or in whole, is actually rather small. The number of them that do so in larger churches is even smaller. Outlines of sermons, or entire sermons, are available in books. They are prewritten and cover almost every topic one can think of. They can be obtained from online resources. Completely unique sermons can be bought for one-time use by a single person. Others are available to anyone who is willing to pay whatever fee is charged.

For larger churches, there is often a designated sermon writer or even a team that comes together to write the pastor's sermon for Sunday morning. As cheesy as this sounds, it is as common as eggs in a henhouse. If a pastor isn't writing his own sermons, what does that say about his care of, and for, the word of God? What does it say about his devotion to the congregation? What does it tell you about his priorities? Do you care that the person in the pulpit at your church may not even know whether the theology he is presenting to you is actually correct or not?

At some point, see if you can find out how the pastor or preacher you listen to develops his sermons. Does he write them himself, or use outlines already laid out by others and then fill in the blanks? Does he just copy sermons from denomination resources or elsewhere? Having a knowledge of where he gets his sermon material from will tell you much about his priorities concerning the word and concerning the faith.

And the same is true with "Bible studies." Quite often, the Bible is never used. Instead, a book by a pastor or scholar may be the subject material. Outlines by other preachers or teachers may be the content of the study. Isn't the person supposed to be opening and teaching from the Bible at a Bible study? If the Bible is used, are the notes for the study his, or just items printed off from some book or online resource?

These things should actually be at the forefront of the minds of those who are being instructed. If the pastor, preacher, or teacher isn't using his own materials, how do you know if he even intimately understands what he is presenting? Maybe he is actually more suited to serving tables than serving the word of God to you. A fancy speaker does not equate to proper theology. Be aware of what you are absorbing as you spend your time seeking out the truth of God from the word.

*Gracious and glorious God, Your word is a precious treasure. Please direct us to those who carefully consider Your word, who diligently study Your word, and who competently teach Your word. It is too precious for us to be led astray by those who are not properly versed in it. Thank You for Your glorious and superior word. Amen.*

**Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; Acts 6:3**

The apostles just noted that it was not good that they had left the word of God in order to serve tables. To avoid this in the future, their decision is given, beginning with, "Therefore, brethren." Despite having a different calling, it is a calling among the others. All are brethren, and all have duties to be performed. The high calling of attending to the

word necessitated that the apostles should not get overburdened with these other things, but they still acknowledge that they are all brethren in the same common cause. With this thought conveyed, they next say, “seek out from among you.”

This is a wise course of action to take. First, it allows the decision to be rendered by those who were in the middle of the problem. Deciding among themselves who was to be selected would ensure it would be men competent to do what will be necessary as there is a vested interest in the matter at hand.

Secondly, as this matter dealt with the daily distribution, certainly meaning money or that which was purchased with the money entrusted by others, it would take any hint of suspicion off the apostles that they were purposefully selecting those of whom they could profit off through kickbacks or the like. It is an arrangement that will allow a close and fair level of control over that which is entrusted to them. Those selected are to be “seven men of good reputation.”

Rather than this translation, the Greek is a present participle. It more precisely reads, “seven men who are well attested.” The meaning is basically the same, but rather than a description of the men, it is a favorable view by others that is being conveyed. The approval of others being necessary to ensure that both sides of this division will be satisfied with the choice. Otherwise, one side may say, “they have a good reputation,” while the other side may not even know who the men are. Next, they are to be “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.”

It is of note that various texts do not include the word “Holy.” If it belongs, the meaning is obvious. If it does not, then it could simply be referring to having an energetic spirit within the individual, such as, “filled with spirit and wisdom.” The former is probable, but as one is filled passively by the Spirit after salvation, it would indicate those who were living in accord with proper values and in a way suitable for their filling. This, in turn, would demonstrate its own form of wisdom that made them sound and reliable choices for the positions they were selected to. It is such as these, “whom we may appoint over this business.”

As noted, it was the duty of the apostles to attend to the word of God. It is the duty of these men to oversee the daily distribution. Each category within the early church was being defined based on the qualifications of the individual and it was to those duties that they were to be attentive. If a change in the person’s assignment was forthcoming, it would need to be accompanied by a confirmation of that change by the approval of

those above the person. This is a logical and orderly way of ensuring people stay in the proper lanes.

Likewise, the pastoral epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus) further define the responsibilities and the safeguards for such men who are accepted into the various leadership positions within the church. To stray from these guidelines is a sure path to problems within the church.

Life application: The structure of the church, who may be given various responsibilities, and what to do about problems that may arise concerning those men are carefully detailed in Scripture, especially in the pastoral epistles. This account in Acts tells how the early church was set up, and it provides a historical record of what was done at times, but there is really nothing prescriptive in what is said.

In other words, there is a wise way of selecting the men who were chosen, and a church would be foolish to not select men who were well attested to, full of the Holy Spirit, and filled with wisdom. And yet, nothing is said elsewhere that there would have to be seven men chosen for every such incident in church history. As such, the verse here has to be evaluated as a historical record that is not prescriptive in nature, even though it carries with it wisdom in the selection process.

For the exact parameters concerning the selection of elders and deacons, the pastoral epistles are to be evaluated and strictly adhered to. If this is not done, people who are unqualified to hold positions within the church will eventually be brought in, the church will suffer, and eventually, the church will lose its way, apostatizing from sound doctrine. It is the inevitable outcome of straying from the parameters defined in Scripture. As Paul says elsewhere, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9).

*Heavenly Father, give us wise and discerning minds concerning the churches we attend or think about attending. Is it structured in accord with Your word? Do the leaders of the church meet the limited, but unchanging guidelines set forth there? If the church can't get the simple basics of what You have laid down in Your word right, will they truly teach proper doctrine elsewhere? Help us to not enter into a church that is not aligned with Your will as is detailed in Your word. Amen.*

**but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.**

Acts 6:4



The decision of the apostles was given in the previous verse concerning the daily distribution. Seven men, of good reputation and full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, were to be appointed over that business. The apostles now continue, saying, “but we will give ourselves continually.”

The word translated as “continually” is one that signifies not only continuance, but steadfast continuance. It is defined as “consistently showing strength which prevails (in spite of difficulties)” (HELPS Word Studies). One can think of a ship heading in a fixed direction and remaining on course, even when the winds attempt to redirect the chosen course.

The apostles had been compelled to “leave the word of God and serve tables,” as noted in verse 6:2. This could not be. Their calling was to minister in the word, and it must continue without such interference, as they next note, saying, “to prayer.”

Along with the word, the apostles reveal that active participation in prayer was to be a part of what their duties entailed. Nothing is said concerning the type of prayer, but it is probably multileveled. First, it would include their private prayers – whether alone or with the other apostles. Secondly, it might include public prayers, including any who were at whatever gathering they were presiding over. And third, it would probably include prayer for the occasions where healings were beyond what was normally encountered by these men.

This was noted by Jesus in Mark 9. When the apostles were awaiting the return of Jesus, Peter, and John, they could not heal a boy of his affliction. When the three had returned, Jesus healed the boy. When asked about the matter, Jesus’ response was, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting” (Mark 9:29). Along with prayer, the apostles also note, “and to the ministry of the word.”

Here, the Greek word translated as “ministry” is the same word used in verse 6:1 when referring to the “daily distribution.” It is a word that signifies “waiting at a table.” The apostles have not placed themselves apart or above the others. Rather, they are simply performing their particular service at the table of the Lord as the church goes forward in accomplishing its mission.

Life application: Two key points are to be seen in this short verse, prayer and service. First, it is a common question to ask, “If God already knows the outcome of what is going to happen, then why should we pray?” The answer is that God already knows

whether you will pray or not. He has factored in His response to our prayers. A prayer that is not made has not been factored into His response.

A simple example may be mom making cookies. She has a son who she knows will ask for a cookie when he comes home from school, and so she sets one aside for him. After he asks, he gets his tasty treat. But if the same mom and the same boy had an argument in the morning, and she knows his attitude in advance – that he will sulk for at least five days, not saying a word to her – she won't bother setting aside a cookie.

Obviously, mom doesn't know everything as God does, but the example is clear enough to understand that Angry Andy gets no cookie, and it is because of his refusal to simply ask. A prayer not spoken to God will receive no attention because it was never uttered. Having said that, we may pray and pray and never get what we want. This is because what is prayed for is not within the will of God. Or it may be that God wants to mold us by allowing us to continue praying for a long time before responding. We cannot know, and so the Bible admonishes us to pray.

The second point, that of service, is one that – unfortunately – gets twisted out of its original intent by some in the church. It is true that Paul gives directions for the appointment of elders and deacons. They are held to a high standard, both in what is expected of them and in the honor that is to be given to them. And yet, Paul set forth his example of ministry by working with his own hands to meet his needs. And more, Christ gave us the premier example of servanthood in leadership.

Today, many pastors are so out of touch with their congregations, in the sense of Christlike servanthood, that there is almost no connection to the people at all. Obviously, when a pastor leads a church of thousands or tens of thousands of people, it is impossible to minister to all of them. But there is often an unhealthy adoration of these men. And more, there is an almost cult-like status granted to them. Congregations don't seem to mind that they have houses bigger than Hollywood movie stars, private jet planes, and so on.

There needs to be a walk in the lives of those who lead their churches that brings them into a close and uniting relationship with their congregations, at least in how they live their lives. Prayer and service. Let us remember the lessons we can glean from this short verse in the book of Acts.

*Glorious Heavenly Father, help us to be people of prayer, knowing that You do hear, You do act in accord with Your will, and You will respond when the prayer aligns with Your*

*will. May we see Your glorious hand at work as we present our prayers to You as they come from hearts that truly care about the words we speak. Amen.*

**And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, Acts 6:5**

The apostles' instructed that seven men should be selected to attend to the daily distribution while they would continue with the duties of their ministry. With that noted, Luke next records, "And the saying pleased the whole multitude."

This doesn't mean that the apostles required their approval, but that the decision of the apostles was a good, just, and fair one that was agreeable to all who heard it. With this happily rendered decision, it next says, "And they chose Stephen."

Stephen is the first to be noted of the seven chosen. The reason for noting him first will become evident as the narrative continues. His name (Stephanos in the Greek) means "Crown." The word *stephanos* is used in the New Testament when referring to the crown of thorns on Jesus' head, as well as the various crowns Paul, Peter, and James refer to in their writings. Revelation also uses the word eight times. Of this person, he is next described as "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit."

This statement will be more fully realized later in this chapter and throughout Acts 7. He had a deep-seated faith in the truth of God in Christ as it is realized in the Person of Jesus. He understood Scripture well enough to be able to clearly see that everything written there was leading to Jesus, and that Jesus was the fulfillment of it all. Further, later in this chapter, and as Stephen will speak before the people, the filling of the Holy Spirit for performing signs and wonders, as well as faithfully speaking about the scriptural writings, will become evident.

Next, it says, "and Philip." His name means "Horse Loving." He will be noted again in Acts 21 as the evangelist with four daughters who prophesied. Also, as the name was a common one, he may or may not be the same person who preached in Samaria in Acts 8 and then later in the same chapter who met with the Ethiopian eunuch. Next, it notes the following men: Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas.

They are known by their names only and nothing further is noted of them. The name Prochorus literally means "Before the Dancing," or "Before the Chorus," but the intent may be "Choir Director." Nicanor literally means "Man of Victory," but it may indicate

something like “Victorious,” or “Conqueror.” Timon means “Valuable,” or “Honoring.” Parmenas means “Near-Stayer.” One might paraphrase it as the “Guy Close By.” Finally, the list ends, saying, “and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.”

The name means “Victor Over the People.” A proselyte is a non-Jew that has been circumcised and has adopted the religious practices of the Jews.

All of the names are Greek. Although this does not mean they are all Hellenistic Jews, it could mean that. Many Hebrews Jews had both a Hebrew name and another name, usually a Greek one. Whether they are all Hellenists or not, the Greek names show an affinity for the Hellenists. As such, they would be well-suited to be a part of the daily distribution where the Hellenistic widows had been previously overlooked. The selection shows wisdom because of this.

Life application: The selection of these men to serve is specifically given to reveal that the problem had been handled, that the decision was appealing to everyone, and that their particular selection was agreeable because they identified with those who had been previously neglected.

However, the first requirement was already stated in the previous verses. They were first and foremost to be of good reputation and full of the Holy Spirit. It is a lesson that has been almost wholly ignored in our modern world. People of ability have traditionally been chosen because of their abilities first and foremost. It is true that many people of ability have been overlooked because of their race, culture, gender, and so on. But in today’s woke world, those characteristics are being placed above ability.

As such, businesses, companies, schools, the military, and governments at all levels are being filled with people who are wholly unqualified for their duties. People are promoted because of skin color, even if they don’t have the reasoning of a rabbit. They are promoted because of their gender, even though they could not find their way out of a public bathroom. And they are selected for high-level positions because they have moral leanings comparable to Nero.

When the biblical model is ignored, a society cannot endure. The world is heading down the exact same path that it followed before the flood of Noah. Wickedness is pervading every aspect of society, and the strong and determined hand of judgment will come upon the world because of it. As Christians, we are not to accept nor tolerate these things. We are to keep ourselves from being molded into society’s corrupting image.

Instead, we are to work as best we can to have society return from the path it has chosen to one of reason and right morals.

Stand firm on what the Bible reveals. Hold fast to its instruction and be pleasing to the Lord who has so directed it to be.

*Lord God, Your word is not something we can compromise on. We must hold to its moral precepts and stand fast on what You have revealed. Help us in this. The world is devolving into wickedness and immorality, and it is so easy to be swept along with that tide. May we stand fast on the Rock of our salvation and proclaim the better way! Yes, help us in this Lord God. Amen.*

**whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.** Acts 6:6

The previous verse saw the selection of the seven men who were to be responsible for the daily distribution, with the selection complete, it next says, “whom they set before the apostles.”

The choice had been made by the multitude, deciding that these seven met the requirements of being of good reputation and full of the Holy Spirit. To confirm the selection, the men were brought before the apostles and were set there awaiting their consecration. With that complete, it says, “and when they had prayed.”

It can be assumed that this is the apostles, but it may be praying by all – both those to be ordained and the apostles who would ordain. Assuming it is the apostles praying over them, it next says, “they laid hands on them.”

This is the first time this act is noted since the establishment of the church. It is something that occurred when Paul was commissioned in Acts 9 –

“And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 9:17

It is also something Paul refers to concerning the establishment of authority elsewhere as well, such as when Timothy was consecrated –

“Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.” 1 Timothy 4:14

Also, Paul says this to Timothy concerning the continuance of such a practice –

“Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.” 1 Timothy 5:22

This act is a symbolic one of both petitioning God through prayer as well as the transferring of authority through the laying on of hands. Ultimately, it is the Lord who recognizes or rejects a person, but there is to be an open acknowledgment of the transfer of authority to others in this manner. This remains the case to this day because of the inclusion of the practice in Paul’s pastoral epistles. Hebrews 6 also notes this practice, calling it a doctrine of elementary principle –

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary *principles* of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>2</sup>of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.” Hebrews 6:1, 2

Life application: Though the book of Acts is descriptive, the noting of the practice of prayer and the laying on of hands by Paul tells us that it is something that is expected throughout the church age. As such, it is not something to be ignored. Further, those in the congregation have a right to know how and where the person who pastors them was so ordained.

This is especially important because anyone can buy an ordination certificate right on the internet for a few dollars. No qualifications are needed except to give someone else your money. This is not a suitable way of recognizing or establishing authority. Rather, a dignified process should be in place to monitor candidates, evaluate their abilities, and then proceed with the ordination process.

Having said this, there is not an “unbroken line of succession” from the apostles in any particular denomination. The Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and so on claim that the same line of those ordained by the apostles still exists in their ordination process. As such, they claim a special calling rests upon them. If that were so, these denominations wouldn’t be filled with perverts and miscreants.

Ordination does not mean “holy.” It is simply an act by which authority is conferred. That authority may be completely tainted. Despite this, it is still an act that should be performed by any church that faithfully follows Jesus, holds to the word of God, and wants to continue its line of authority in another generation of faithful servants.

*Lord God, You alone decide who is a faithful and just servant of Yours. And yet, You have given us the right to choose men who will carry on in positions of authority in Your church. And so, may we be faithful to carefully evaluate those we consider, and then when they are ordained, pray for Your blessing and for their endurance in the arduous task that they have been called to. May it be so to Your glory. Amen.*

**Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. Acts 6:7**

The words now follow immediately after the choosing of seven men to handle the daily distribution. There appears to be no logical connection between the two, and so it seems as if Luke is simply moving on to a new matter now that the previous issue has been resolved.

However, Acts 6:5 and Acts 6:8 both mention Stephen. And it is he who is the focus of the narrative through all of Acts 7. As such, it appears that Luke is implicitly tying what he will now say into the ministry and testimony of Stephen. With that noted, the verse begins with, “Then the word of God spread.”

The word translated as “spread,” signifies growing or increasing. It is an imperfect verb signifying an ongoing process. For example, the same verb in the same form is used in Luke 1 to describe the growing up of John the Baptist from a child into a man strong in the spirit.

The effect of the apostles has been rather profound, but because of their being Galileans, they were looked down on by those who were more educated (see Acts 2:7). Stephen has been noted as “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.” In the next verse, he will be noted as “full of faith and power.” And in Acts 7, he will demonstrate intimate knowledge of Scripture and of the history of his people.

Thus, it may be that Luke is now connecting some of the present growth to the efforts and knowledge of Stephen. Next, Luke records, “and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.”

At this time, Jerusalem remains the central hub of the faith. It is a logical place for the apostles to remain because there were three annual pilgrim feasts to the city. All people were to come and rejoice in the presence of the Lord during these feasts. During the rest of the year, the city was still full and bustling with activity, and evangelism would be ongoing. With the addition of more people, especially people like Stephen, the number of believers would, in fact, greatly multiply. It is a natural consequence of such things. Concerning this growth come Luke's next words, saying, "and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith."

This is a key point in the development of the faith, meaning the body of believers in Jesus. It is based on the faith, meaning acceptance of the gospel by the priests. The word translated "obedient" is exactly right. It signifies "to obey." But the underlying meaning is "to believe" or "to have faith." In other words, the priests "have faith" in "the faith."

This is not double talk, but it is exactly what is being presented. For example, Hebrews explicitly demonstrates this –

"For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, *was it* not all who came out of Egypt, *led* by Moses? <sup>17</sup> Now with whom was He angry forty years? *Was it* not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup> And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? <sup>19</sup> So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." Hebrews 3:16-19

The account that is cited by the author is that of Numbers 14, where the spies returned from Canaan and gave the people a bad report. The people failed to believe God, and thus they did not obey. Despite many poor translations that use the word "command" in that Numbers passage, there was no direct command spoken forth.

Rather, the word of the Lord said the people would enter, and the people simply failed to believe. Instead, they feared because of the negative report and failed to trust the Lord who had already proven Himself to them, time and again. It was because of their unbelief that they failed to enter into the promised rest.

These priests have now "obeyed" by believing. And it appears based on the placement of the verse that Stephen is to be considered a large part of this coming about.

Life application: Far too often, people take words and concepts out of their intended context, thus forming a pretext. The word "obey" has a meaning, but the substance



behind that must be properly understood. If one is commanded to do something, then obedience is expected. That is the context.

However, if someone is told that they should simply trust and accept that another will safely guide him through the waters of disaster, then “obey” takes on a more subtle meaning. There was no command. Instead, there is only a hope that faith will be demonstrated.

God does not “command” anybody into salvation. He also does not “regenerate” people in order for them to believe. He set forth His proposition, and He asks us to believe: “I have sent My Son into the world. He has fulfilled the law and died for the sins of the world. I ask you to simply trust that and be saved.” That is the proposition. Obedience to it is “to believe.”

To add to that by stating that we must first believe His commands – whatever ones we decide upon – is to damage the simple message of obedience to faith (the gospel), and it is thus a false message, not given by God. It is a false gospel.

Be sure to understand these nuances of what is stated, and then effectively communicate them to others when presenting the gospel. If you tell someone that he does not have free will, and that a person must first be regenerated in order to believe (Calvinism), that person will have no idea what you are talking about, because what you are saying both makes no sense and it is unbiblical.

If you tell someone that they must obey Jesus in order to believe, and then start telling them that he has to observe the Sabbath, get circumcised, stop eating pork, quit cussing, and etc., you are presenting a false gospel of works. The gospel is about Jesus –

“that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

-1 Corinthians 15:3, 4

Explain this message to them, and don’t turn “obey” into something that doesn’t exist or something that is unintended. Keep it simple and you will be doing what God has done and expects us to do. Despite all of the complicated theology in Scripture, the gospel is the simplest message of all. Don’t add to it or change it! If you do, then it is no longer the gospel.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the simplicity of the gospel. You have taken the thing that has complicated all other things, meaning sin, and You have made the resolution to it so simple that even a young child can understand it. And it is rightfully simple. We are prone to complicate things. And so, You have laid it out for us, and done so in the most wonderful way. You sent Jesus to do it all. All we need to do is believe. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.**

Acts 6:8

The previous verse spoke of the multiplication of the number of disciples. It also referred to the fact that many of the priests were obedient to the faith. The words now bring in Stephen again who was introduced as one of the seven in verse 6:5, saying he was a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. Of him, it reconfirms this saying, “And Stephen, full of faith and power.”

It is of note that some manuscripts say “grace” rather than “faith” here. The word “faith” is more suited to verse 6:5, confirming that thought. Either way, he is carefully described here, being singled out from the other six chosen with him. The narrative will continue focusing on him throughout Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. As noted, saying that he is full of faith and power is given to parallel verse 6:5 –

And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit...

And Stephen, full of faith and power...

As such, the “power” is set in parallel to “the Holy Spirit.” That is then further defined by saying that he “did great wonders and signs.”

The verb is imperfect. More rightly, it should be rendered saying he “was performing great wonders and signs.” It wasn’t that he simply did these things once, or a year ago, or when he was a certain age. Rather, it is speaking of him doing them during the entire time of the record set before us, and he continued doing them as well. Luke’s words further define his doing these things as being “among the people.”

It is an important inclusion. Stephen didn’t just do these things in the courts of a king. Nor did he do them in a traveling show for money. He was among the people and his actions were personally witnessed by them. What he did is not defined, but it can be supposed that it included miraculous healings and the like.

Or it could be that the coming words concerning him define what he did – that he was a great and effective orator. No matter what, so full of faith and of the Holy Spirit was he that he was able to do great things right among the people.

Life application: From time to time it is good to remember that being filled with the Holy Spirit is a passive thing. One is prepared to receive the Spirit. If a cup has a lid on it, it must have the lid removed in order for it to be filled. But the cup simply sits there and is filled. It happens passively. The cup doesn't reach up and start filling itself.

Likewise, we need to be prepared for the reception of the Spirit. The way to do this is to have our lives opened up for His coming. Stephen was a man of faith. If we lack faith, we will not receive the Spirit. One can sing praises to God in a church band, but if he doesn't believe in God (he was simply hired to sing for \$150.00 a gig), then there is nothing about him that would allow the Spirit to fill him.

If we prepare ourselves through true faith, and if we live our lives in accord with the word and in a state of being opened up to God, then we will be filled. The more opened we are (through faith, love of God, appreciation for His goodness, in praising Him, in telling others about Him, and so on), the more we will be filled.

Let us live our lives totally in tune with God as He is presented in Scripture. Let us think on Him at all times. Let us overflow with His goodness in praise, prayer, and thanks! Be filled with the Spirit by being open receptacles prepared to receive Him.

*Lord God, how good it is to read Your word, to think on You and Your goodness, to hold fast to You even in times of trial and difficulty. How good it is to know You in the most intimate of ways. Fill us with all of who You are, O God. Amen.*

**Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen.**

Acts 6:9

The previous verse referred to the faith and power of Stephen as he did great wonders and signs among the people. Now, another group is introduced. Luke states, "Then there arose some."

Because of the wording, one can assume they either have arisen to join, or to argue against, Stephen. Stephen is the main character of the narrative, and these now to be

mentioned are brought in to define the narrative further. Those who have arisen are said to be “from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen.”

A short explanation of who these men are is given by Vincent’s Word Studies –

“In Jerusalem, and probably in other large cities, the several synagogues were arranged according to nationalities, and even crafts. Thus we have in this verse mention of the synagogues of the Cyrenians, Alexandrians, Cilicians, and Asiatics. Libertines is a Latin word (*libertini*, freedmen), and means here Jews or their descendants who had been taken as slaves to Rome, and had there received their liberty; and who, in consequence of the decree of Tiberius, about 19 a.d., expelling them from Rome, had returned in great numbers to Jerusalem. They were likely to be the chief opponents of Stephen, because they supposed that by his preaching, their religion, for which they had suffered at Rome, was endangered in Jerusalem.”

However, Albert Barnes provides much more information on this designation –

-----

1. The word is Latin, and means properly a ‘freedman,’ a man who had been a slave and was set at liberty. Many have supposed that these persons were manumitted slaves of Roman origin, but who had become proselyted to the Jewish religion, and who had a synagogue in Jerusalem. This opinion is not very probable; though it is certain, from Tacitus (*Ann.*, lib. 2:c. 85), that there were many persons of this description at Rome. He says that 4,000 Jewish proselytes of Roman slaves made free were sent at one time to Sardinia.
2. A second opinion is, that these persons were Jews by birth, and had been taken captives by the Romans, and then set at liberty, and were thus called ‘freedmen’ or ‘liberties.’ That there were many Jews of this description there can be no doubt. Pompey the Great, when he subjugated Judea, sent large numbers of the Jews to Rome (*Philo*, *In Legat.* a.d. Caium). These Jews were set at liberty at Rome, and assigned a place beyond the Tiber for a residence. See *Introduction to the Epistle to the Romans*. These persons are by *Philo* called “libertines,” or ‘freedmen’ (*Kuinoel*, *in loco*). Many Jews were also conveyed as captives by *Ptolemy I.* to Egypt, and obtained a residence in that country and the vicinity.
3. Another opinion is, that they took their name from some ‘place’ which they occupied. This opinion is more probable from the fact that all the “other” persons mentioned here

are named from the countries which they occupied. Suidas says that this is the name of a place. And in one of the fathers this passage occurs: 'Victor, Bishop of the Catholic Church at Libertina, says, unity is there, etc.' from this passage it is plain that there was a place called 'Libertina.' That place was in Africa, not far from ancient Carthage. See Dr. Pearce's Commentary on this place.

-----

Whatever the exact meaning of the name, the group was comprised of "Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia."

The Cyrenians are those who dwelt in Cyrene in Africa, a location west of Egypt. This is where Simon of Cyrene, who carried Jesus' cross in Matthew 27:32 was from.

Alexandrians are those who dwelt in Alexandria in Egypt. A great deal of Jews lived there inhabiting large sections of the city. This is the location where the Greek translation of the Bible, the Septuagint or LXX, came from.

Cilicia was in Asia Minor, a province on the seacoast, located at Turkey's south, north of Cyprus. Its capital, Tarsus, is where the Apostle Paul came from – as is recorded in Acts 9:11 (and as is noted elsewhere). As such, it makes it appear likely that Paul attended this synagogue and participated in what will be said in this verse.

Finally, Asia is noted. This is not Asia as we think of it today. Rather, it is the same as was referred to in Acts 2:9. It is a term that may refer to a jurisdiction according to the layout of the provinces of Rome. Of this location, Vincent's Word Studies says –

"Not the Asiatic continent nor Asia Minor. In the time of the apostles the term was commonly understood of the proconsular province of Asia, principally of the kingdom of Pergamus left by Attalus III. to the Romans, and including Lydia, Mysia, Caria, and at times parts of Phrygia. The name Asia Minor did not come into use until the fourth century of our era."

It is from this synagogue, filled with people from these various locations, that men arose "disputing with Stephen."

The word translated as "disputing" essentially means "to examine together." It is rendered as "question," "debate," "discuss," "argue," and so on. It does not necessarily indicate any animosity, but it can. Or it can be a debate that eventually leads to an

argument. It is probable that Stephen voiced his words concerning Jesus, and they came back against him in a debate that will eventually lead to the forming of a charge against him. It is to be noted again (as stated in the previous verse) that Stephen was “full of faith and power,” and he “did great wonders and signs among the people.”

This is a key thought that certainly set in motion the debate.

Life application: In Christianity, there are Calvinists, there are Free Grace proponents, there are Baptists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians. In fact, there are so many sects and divisions within the church that it is almost impossible to know them all, much less what they all believe.

Because of this, there are obviously disagreements between them concerning valid points of doctrine. In the end, there can only be one completely correct idea about any particular point. Is Jesus God? Yes or No. Is salvation eternal? Yes or No. Does man have free will to choose Christ? Yes or No. And so on.

The Bible is the source of our knowledge of who Jesus is. It is where we are to build our doctrine from. Anything that is said about our theology and doctrine must find its source there or be in accord with what is said there. If it isn't, then it is something that came out of the head of man.

The more one knows the Bible, the less likely it is that he will be duped into believing something incorrect. It is still possible, but it is less likely. For those who do not know Scripture, the probability is that they will be more easily led astray from what is sound.

Read your Bible. Think about what you have read. Study theology after you know your Bible. And set your doctrine in accord with the Bible. It is important.

*Glorious God Almighty, You have provided us with a source of knowledge in order for us to know You, to know what You are doing, and to know why You have done those things. How can we neglect such a great and precious treasure? Help us, Lord, to make Your word our priority all the days of our lives. Amen.*

**And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.**

Acts 6:10

The previous verses referred to Stephen. It next referred to some arising from the Synagogue of the Freedmen who disputed with him. With that noted, it next says, “And

they were not able to resist.” The word translated as “resist” signifies “to withstand.” It is a compound word coming from *anti* (opposite) and *hístēmi* (to stand). It is a 180 degree, opposing position on a matter. And so here we have Stephen laying out his case, and those who oppose what he says are completely unable to stand against it.

As they obviously must be dealing with Scripture, because they are arguing a position concerning Christ, Stephen is giving his evidence and the men of this synagogue are unable to refute the evidence that is presented. One can have a stand on a matter while another may oppose that stand when it is merely a philosophical argument. Either side can claim that their idea about what is stated is better than the other. However, when there is an established basis for a claim, such as Scripture concerning an issue involving the Messiah, there will ultimately be one side whose argument cannot stand against the other.

Stephen’s position is obviously the one that is supported by the very writings the sides are striving over. Specifically, they were not able to resist “the wisdom and the Spirit.” On several occasions, the Bible repeats this same general sentiment, such as in Proverbs 9:10 –

“The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom,  
And the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding.”

In order to fear the Lord, one must know who the Lord is, what He is capable of, what He expects, and so on. The same is true with having a knowledge of the Holy One. There must be a source for understanding the knowledge of Him. That source is, first and foremost, Scripture. Stephen obviously possessed this knowledge.

Further, as the Spirit is the One who inspired men to write out and compile Scripture (2 Peter 1:21), then it is the Spirit who will illuminate it in order for it to be properly understood. In other words, there may be two (or more) sides arguing over the meaning of Scripture, but they cannot all be correct. The Spirit inspired it, and the one who is properly in sync with the Spirit’s intent concerning the passage is the one whose argument is sound. Stephen’s handling of the word could not be refuted by these others.

None of this is explicitly stated, but it is to be inferred from the passage. There is a claim being presented, there is an argument against it, and there is an inability to support the argument against it or to dismiss the argument itself. As such, there must be a basis for the claim. That basis must be Scripture. This must be the source “by which he spoke.”

If it were not, he would be making claims pulled out of the thin air. There would be no basis to argue with such a person because one cannot argue against something that actually doesn't exist except in the head of another. Stephen is speaking words that cannot be withstood. They are words of wisdom, and they are Spirit-led. What will be the outcome of it? Jesus gave words to those who followed Him concerning this –

“And He said, ‘Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. <sup>47</sup> Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. <sup>48</sup> In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. <sup>49</sup> Therefore the wisdom of God also said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and persecute,’ <sup>50</sup> that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, <sup>51</sup> from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.’”

-Luke 11:46-51

Stephen is not specifically identified as either a prophet or an apostle, but his words of the coming chapter demonstrate that he fills a role suitable to at least that of a prophet. He will speak out the word of God to the people and there will be a resulting reaction to what he says that is in accord with what Jesus says in Luke 11.

Life application: In the proverbs, one right after another, the two seemingly contradictory proverbs are given –

“Do not answer a fool according to his folly,  
Lest you also be like him.

<sup>5</sup> Answer a fool according to his folly,  
Lest he be wise in his own eyes.” Proverbs 26:4, 5

The meaning here is that there is a time to argue a point and there is a time to not argue a point. In the case of the first proverb, Solomon is asking us to be wise. When there is a fool out there spouting off nonsense that is obviously nonsense, we are admonished to not even respond to him.

The reason why is that if we do, there will be nothing that is valid that we can say to refute him. His words come out of his own head and so it doesn't matter what you say, more retorts will continue to come out of that same vacuous place. You will be arguing



against a maker of wind. When you do this, you will end up just like him with petty little arguments blowing back and forth. As such, you will only look foolish.

However, if a fool is arguing over something that can be refuted, especially something as important as Scripture, and if a defense against his foolish interpretation is not given, then he will walk away feeling vindicated in his stand. Anyone who sees his challenge go unmet will think that this fool is actually correct. Soon, a whole cohort of fools will be out claiming what is utterly foolish, simply because no one is there to correct what is obviously incorrect.

Stephen demonstrated wisdom and the filling of the Spirit. These men stood against him. However, because he was Spirit-filled, and because it is the Spirit who gave Scripture in the first place, they were unable to stand against his wisdom. The opposite must have been true as well. They foolishly tried to make their own case, and Stephen stood against them so that they would not be vindicated in their heads and feel wise in their own eyes.

In all such matters, be careful to evaluate the situation and respond with wisdom. Is this person a bag of hot air? Ignore him. Is this person foolishly handling Scripture to the detriment of himself and others? Respond to him. Consider, contemplate, and respond accordingly. Demonstrate your own wisdom by demonstrating the wisdom of God.

*Lord God, help us not to get caught up in endless ramblings against fools who do not have the sense to listen to reason. It is unproductive and unhealthy. But, Lord, give us the wisdom to refute those who are simply following the wrong path and making an error in their thinking. Maybe they will listen. Yes, give us wisdom in such things. Amen.*

**Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” Acts 6:11**

The words prior to this verse revealed that those of the Synagogue of the Freedmen were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which Stephen spoke. As this is so, they were obviously filled with jealousy, and they were also surely miffed at the surety of what he was saying, finding it wholly distasteful.

But this brings in an immediate problem. If Stephen’s words could not be resisted, and if they were based upon what is stated in Scripture, then what is stated in Scripture supports Stephen’s words. As this is so, who are they resisting? Stephen or the one

Stephen is proclaiming. But the situation is unpalatable to them and so Luke records, “Then they secretly induced men.”

The word translated as “secretly induced” is found only here in Scripture, *hupoballó*. It comes from *hupo*, meaning “under,” and *balló*, signifying “to cast down.” As such, it gives the sense of throwing something in stealthily or introducing by collusion. A word that gives the proper sense is “suborn.” Vincent’s Word Studies gives examples to better understand its meaning –

“The verb originally means to put under, as carpets under one's feet; hence, to put one person in place of another; to substitute, as another's child for one's own; to employ a secret agent in one's place, and to instigate or secretly instruct him.”

These deceivers then are bringing a false accusation against Stephen, replacing the true intent of his words with a different meaning. It is what happened several times to Jesus, such as –

“Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, <sup>60</sup> but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward <sup>61</sup> and said, ‘This *fellow* said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’” Matthew 26:59-61

However, in John, the true meaning of Jesus’ words is explained, there it says, “But He was speaking of the temple of His body” (John 2:21). The same type of false accusation will be brought forth by those who have been induced “to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words.’”

The exact words in the charge against him are found in verses 6:13, 14. They are words that have certainly added spice to those presented by Stephen, even if the substance of them may actually be close to what he said. This is because what Stephen said was, as already noted, surely in accord with Scripture. If it was not, then his words could have been easily resisted. However, they are falsely charging him with blasphemy “against Moses and God.”

The Greek has an additional force that is left untranslated. It reads indefinitely at first and then definitely, building to a climax by saying, “against Moses and the God.” As such, it is comparable to saying, “against Moses and God Himself.” The NLT gives the sense by saying, “We heard him blaspheme Moses, and even God.”

To this day, what is recorded as Stephen's words (in verses 6:13, 14, and which will be evaluated as the commentary arrives at them) are charged by both Jews and unschooled Christians as being points of blasphemy. And yet, it is certain that they are words that are in accord with what is stated later in Acts and the epistles. As such, they are not only not words of blasphemy, but they are proper statements concerning the final, forever, and finished work of Jesus Christ.

Life application: Finding something distasteful to our senses in the word of God is not an excuse to argue against the word of God. In fact, it shows a rather dull sense in a person to do so. We might look at the actions of those from the Synagogue of the Freedmen as ridiculous – “If God's word clearly reveals that Stephen's words are correct, then why would they attack Stephen? It doesn't change God's word!”

But that is how we are. We will shoot the messenger, even when the army he represents is a thousand times larger, as if shooting the messenger will solve the problem. But the army is still outside the city, and it will only be more enraged and ready to destroy because of the offense against it.

The same is true with God's word. We find the Freedmen's actions ridiculous, but do we do the same thing? There is a point of doctrine laid out in the New Testament that we just don't like. We disagree with it, and we hide it away or ignore it. For example, maybe the church we attend has a female pastor. The Bible is explicit that this is not allowed, but we don't like that part of the word, and so we ignore it.

This does not change what the word says. Rather, it demonstrates an unwillingness to be obedient to the very word we have wrongly used to allow a female pastor. This is because she claims to be a Christian. Being a Christian is something that is derived from precepts laid out in the Bible. She claims to follow Jesus. But the proper way to follow Jesus is laid out in the Bible. She reads Scripture from the Bible each week. But she ignores the parts of the word that she disagrees with that are found in the same book from which she reads her Scripture and of which she bases her sermons on each week.

All of what she does ignores precepts in the very same book that she claims as the authority for her ordination, instruction, faith, and practice. It is confused, it is illogical, and it is as common as cans in the soup section of the grocery store.

When something is explicit in the word, we are to be obedient to it. It doesn't matter a hill of beans if we agree with it or not, God is God. His word is our instruction. And we are to be honoring of the sanctity of the faith we profess by being obedient to His word.

*Lord God, help us to be molded into Your image by being obedient to Your word. We are humans, and it is in our nature to buck against things we don't like or things we find unpalatable. And so, Lord, change us from within. May we be pleasing to You in all ways and at all times. Amen.*

**And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him*, seized him, and brought *him* to the council. Acts 6:12**

Charges of speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God have been made against Stephen. With that, it now reads, "And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes." The word translated as "stirred up" is found only here in the Bible. It comes from two other words signifying "together" and "move." As such, it is to take the entire mass and to stir, resulting in an excited mixture.

The sense then isn't that it was just the common people, but even the elders and scribes had been stirred up. It was as if the entire population was brought to a frenzy. A good example of the resulting mayhem is found in Acts 21 and 22 where Paul found himself in a similar pickle as the people beat him and shouted accusations against him. There is somewhat of an irony in the matter though, because Paul refers to this exact event in Acts 6 & 7 while stating his case concerning Christ –

"And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him."

-Acts 22:20

For now, the crowd around Stephen has been stirred up against him. Therefore, Luke next records, "and they came upon *him*." The verb is an aorist participle and should be rendered, "and having come upon *him*." That then naturally leads into the action whereby they "seized him."

The word used here is found only in Luke and Acts. It is a compound word coming from *sun* (together with) and *harpazó* (to snatch away). In other words, it wasn't that a group of people came upon him, and then one grabbed him. Rather, a whole group grabbed him. Maybe one took an arm while another took a leg. Pretty soon, he was lifted up and hauled away. Or it could be that they surrounded him like a mob, everyone laying a hand on him, and he was manhandled like someone in the process of being tackled in a football game.

The entire scene is active and alive as they jostled with their captive “and brought *him* to the council.” It is the same council that the apostles had been taken to, and it is the same council to which Jesus had been brought.

Life application: During the January 6 rally in Washington, there were people who stirred up the crowd, somewhat like what happened to Stephen. They were government informants and government operators who purposefully stirred up the people in order to later target those in the crowd as insurgents and insurrectionists.

Those who were otherwise innocent were brought into the fray and taken along with the miscreants who riled the people up in the first place. From there, those who actually stirred up the crowds were carefully ignored and any photos of them were excised from the public’s attention.

This is how such things get started. The tactics are recorded by Luke so that we can see that this is how humans work against one another in order to meet a set and perverse agenda. As this is so, it is wise to always be aware of your surroundings. If you suspect someone is stirring up the masses in order to incite them in an inappropriate way, be watchful and attentive to their actions.

This will probably become a more common tactic to be used against Christians in the days ahead. So, watch and be prepared to call out anyone who is seen to be setting up those of the faith for later accusation. Be alert and be ready to record any such person so that he can be identified when it is necessary to make a proper defense.

*Heavenly Father, people have been wrongly accusing Your faithful all along. Help us to be prepared at such times to have a proper defense for our words and our actions. Today we have cameras on almost every phone. Help us to take advantage of them when needed so that we can single out such miscreants, thus protecting Your people from unjust accusations and harm. Amen.*

**They also set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; Acts 6:13**

Stephen has been seized and brought to the council. Now that he stands before it, charges will be laid against him. However, Luke sadly notes that “They also set up false witnesses.” This is not unlike Jesus’ trial –

“Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, <sup>60</sup> but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward <sup>61</sup> and said, ‘This *fellow* said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’” Matthew 26:59-61

The description of them as false witnesses is based upon twisting the words that he surely spoke, in order to make them say something he actually would not have said. The charge against Stephen is stated in this verse, but then the explanation of what is said will come in the next verse. They are words that bear some truth, and yet they are cunningly manipulated. For now, the charge is, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words.”

The word “blasphemous” is not in some ancient texts. Rather, it simply says, “This man does not cease to speak words.” Either way, the intent is the same. The false witnesses are making a claim based upon words only. Stephen has actually done nothing other than speak, and because this is so, his words can be easily manipulated to reflect something that will raise the ire of the council. The words they claim he has said are, first, “against this holy place.”

The meaning is “against the temple,” or the words may even extend to the holy city itself. Exactly what they claim Stephen said is yet to be noted, but it is true that the temple in particular, and the location of it in general, is considered holy –

The temple:

“O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance;  
Your holy temple they have defiled;  
They have laid Jerusalem in heaps.” Psalm 79:1

Jerusalem:

“Now the leaders of the people dwelt at Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to dwell in Jerusalem, the holy city, and nine-tenths *were to dwell in other* cities. <sup>2</sup> And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.” Nehemiah 11:1, 2

But the accusation doesn’t stop there. After noting that Stephen spoke words against “this holy place,” they next add, “and the law.”

The “law” specifically refers to the Law of Moses. It was considered as divinely inspired by the Lord and written out by Moses. This would explain the earlier words of verse 11 that said, “against Moses and God.” The law is the covenant that established Israel as the Lord’s people, and it is the foundation of their society, culture, and lives. Everything Israel did from day to day, throughout the months, annually, and even throughout their lives rotated around precepts found in the law. To speak against the law would be considered both blasphemous and treasonous.

Life application: To speak against the word of God by those who profess to be Christians is something that should not be tolerated. It is the document that establishes the faith, and it is the document that records what God has done, is doing, and will do in order to bring men back to Himself.

As it is the document that details this, the implication is that it is divinely inspired. If it is not so, then what is the basis for the faith of the Christian? Man’s word? If so, then how can it be an accurate record of God’s workings? In other words, the Bible is either the word of God or it is not. The person who claims to be a Christian, and yet dismisses it, is basing his faith on pretty much nothing.

And this disbelief in the word will be true in varying degrees as well. Some claim that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are not an accurate record of what actually occurred. Some hold to the New Testament, but not the Old. And so on. And yet, these stances show a complete disconnect in how those people perceive God.

Jesus clearly held to the absolute integrity of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, as well as all of the Old Testament. The apostles did as well. And it is they who have explained the life of Jesus to us. Because of this, those who say that they believe in Jesus suddenly believe in a false (or maybe incompetent) Jesus. How can someone put their faith in a man who was wrong about something so basic as what the word of God actually contains? If this is so, He is not God. And if He is not God, then why on the earth would anyone follow Him?

The thinking is unclear at best, but it carries the same blasphemous undertones that are presented in Acts 6:13. To speak against the word is to speak against Jesus who confirmed the word. It is a scary place to be while claiming to be a Christian. Have faith. Trust the word of God as it is presented, and let God sort out for you the things you may not currently understand on the day come before Him.

*Lord God, we may not understand everything that is in Your word, but we can take what it says as absolute truth when we accept it by faith. And so, help us to be people of faith. Your word confirms Your doings, and Your doings are bringing us back to You. Thank You for the glorious and precious gift that tells us of these things. Amen.*

**for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us. Acts 6:14**

False witnesses were presented before the council to speak against Stephen. They began with “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law.” They will now state the actual words they claim Stephen said. That begins with, “for we have heard him say.”

In order to make a charge of blasphemy against another, the words that are claimed to have been said must be presented. Further, according to the law, there had to be at least two or three witnesses in order for the words to be accepted as true. Hence, they say “we.” It is not that two false witnesses have come forward, each with his own different statement. Rather, they combine their voices into one accusation. When this is not done, the charges cannot be accepted. This was seen at the trial of Jesus –

“Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying, <sup>58</sup> ‘We heard Him say, “I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.”’ <sup>59</sup> But not even then did their testimony agree.”

-Mark 14:57-59

There must be a minimum number of witnesses, and if they are making the same charge, the charge must be consistent with any others coming forward with the same accusation. In this case, they jointly state their words, saying, “that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place.”

The first point of these words concerns the way the Greek is structured, there is great contempt for the name they refer to – “Jesus of Nazareth, this.” It sets the tone for their testimony as being biased against the Lord. Also, there are two possible references to what they are speaking about –

Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

<sup>20</sup> Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?”



<sup>21</sup> But He was speaking of the temple of His body. <sup>22</sup> Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

-John 2:19-22

Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, <sup>6</sup> “These things which you see—the days will come in which not *one* stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down.” Luke 21:5,6

In the first example, the reference – as John notes – was clearly to Jesus’ body. It is something that could be easily defended against because the apostles had already proclaimed that Jesus resurrected on the third day.

The second point to consider is what “this place” means. As noted in Acts 6:13, it could be either the temple or the entire city of Jerusalem. Jesus also said in Luke 21 –

“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. <sup>21</sup> Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. <sup>22</sup> For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. <sup>23</sup> But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. <sup>24</sup> And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” Luke 21:20-24

Either way, Jesus did not say that he would destroy the temple or Jerusalem. Rather, His words were a prophecy against the temple and the city, confirming that they would be destroyed. As distasteful as that may be to the Jews listening to the charges, it is not something that they could condemn Stephen or anyone else over.

A comparable passage is found in Jeremiah 26:1-19. Jeremiah prophesied against the temple and the city. The people wanted to stone him to death, but then Scripture provided previous testimony that what Jeremiah prophesied would come to pass. Therefore, they could not stone him without being guilty of his blood.

With the first charge stated, the second charge is next given, saying, “and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.” Charles Ellicott says the following concerning these words –

“The words seem to have been used in a half-technical sense as including the whole complex system of the Mosaic law, its ritual, its symbolism, its laws and rules of life, circumcision, the Sabbath, the distinction of clean and unclean meats (Acts 15:1; Acts 21:21; Acts 26:3; Acts 28:17).”

He is correct in this analysis. It is an all-encompassing ending of the Mosaic Law. In whatever way Stephen worded his statement, it certainly included the words of Jesus that a New Covenant had been instituted. The author of Hebrews explains the meaning of this, and it is something that the young church took time to grasp. But it appears to be something that Stephen understood from the outset –

“In that He says, ‘A new *covenant*,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” Hebrews 8:13

Again, the Jews may dislike what he has said, but it is nothing that was not already fully supported by their own Scriptures –

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— <sup>32</sup> not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. <sup>33</sup> But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup> No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” Jeremiah 31:31-34

As this is the case, and as Jesus claimed to be the Initiator of that New Covenant, the burden of proof now rested on the council to prove that it was not so. Stephen has past precedent and also the weight of prophecy in Scripture on his side, both from the same source – Jeremiah the prophet. When the accusations were rightly considered within the context of when and how Jesus spoke His words, there could be no doubt that Stephen was innocent of the charges against him.

Life application: The Bible is a big book, filled with wonderful stories, prophetic utterances, praises to God, insightful analyses of what God is doing in the stream of time and human existence, and so much more. It is a self-confirming word as well. One section may seem to bring in an impossible to resolve dilemma, and then another section will come along and take care of the issue, confirming that the Lord is in control of all things.

However, the only way you will ever be able to know how these various things are presented is to ... .. read your Bible. Until you read it, you cannot know the treasure and wonder that is to be found in it. It is God's gift to you. Open it up and revel in it. You can start today by reading Jeremiah 26:1-19 which is referred to above.

*How precious is Your word, O God! It is more delightful than the sweetest honey. Thank You for Your wonderful word. Amen.*

**And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.** Acts 6:15

To get the proper sense of the flow of the words, the verbs must be corrected, and the order of the clauses needs to be reversed. The NKJV says, "And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him..."

Rather, the original text reads, "And having looked steadfastly at him, all those sitting in the council..." When reading the previous verses together with this, it comes alive. The action moves from the accusers of the previous verse to Stephen. The council is held, they are looking at the accusers as each presents his case. With their words complete, only then are the eyes turned to the accused. This includes "all those sitting in the council."

The verb is an aorist participle. They are sitting there with their eyes fixed on the accused. It is as if the reader is actually viewing the trial as it happens. What the council is now seeing is what the reader is also able to mentally see. And that is, as Luke notes, that they "saw his face as the face of an angel."

Unfortunately, many commentaries unnecessarily state what is compared here to a shining or radiant countenance, as if Stephen has already started to be glorified. Or some say that the illumination of God is coming forth from his countenance. For example, the Pulpit Commentary says that he was "illuminated with a Divine radiance."

There is no reason to assume anything like this, nor would it agree with what actually happens to Stephen towards the end of Chapter 7.

Rather, the idea being expressed here is one of confidence, serenity, discernment, being undisturbed by the challenge against him, and so on. Three examples where a similar expression is used will give the sense. None of these are referring to a supernatural shining or illumination. Rather, they speak of a human who is in control of his emotions and exudes confidence –

“And Jacob said, ‘No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me.’” Genesis 33:10

“Your maidservant said, ‘The word of my lord the king will now be comforting; for as the angel of God, so *is* my lord the king in discerning good and evil. And may the LORD your God be with you.’” 2 Samuel 14:17

“And he has slandered your servant to my lord the king, but my lord the king *is* like the angel of God. Therefore do *what is* good in your eyes.”

-2 Samuel 19:27

Life application: It is true that angels (messengers) are seen at times in Scripture to have a radiance that is beyond human, but when that is the case, it is also explicitly stated. At other times, angels – even the angel of the Lord (meaning the eternal Christ) – appears completely human. So much is this the case that the one who sees Him will not even realize He is the Lord. For example, this is seen in Judges 6.

When something is beyond what is normally experienced, it will say so. And so, as you read the Bible, consider each passage just as it is presented, just as if you were reading any normal book. When the sensational comes, it will be explained in the text. This is actually an important lesson because the more sensational we make the passage in our own minds (or as someone has presented it), the less it may be reflecting what the actual intent is.

In this state, the Bible becomes something that goes beyond a book about the redemption of man, and the focus becomes like a Hollywood movie. This type of approach is hugely popular, and videos like this will get countless views, but the people are also desensitized to the main point of what Scripture is telling us.

God loves us, God sent His Son (in an otherwise unremarkable human form) in order to redeem us, and we are being brought back to Him through His wonderful program of redemption. That alone is the most sensational news of all! Let us not miss the beauty of God's workings by going off into many over-sensationalized paths.

*What a treasure! What a gift! What a marvelous wonder is Your word, O God. It gives us the details of the most glorious thing we could imagine. It tells us of restoration with You through Jesus Christ our Lord. Thank You for what this precious word conveys concerning Him! Amen.*

## CHAPTER 7

**Then the high priest said, “Are these things so?” Acts 7:1**

Chapter 6 ended with the charge of blasphemy raised against Stephen while he stood confidently before the council. As it is noted of him, “his face was like the face of an angel.” He had nothing to fear because the truth was on his side, even if he was falsely accused. And even if the false accusations prevailed in the court, they could not prevail over his security in Christ. Hence there was nothing to be timid about.

Chapter 7 now opens with a simple question from the high priest who is obviously in the position to lead the council. Luke records this, saying, “Then the high priest said.” As this is a matter of a religious nature, it is handled under the authority of the high priest. Rome decided if a conquered nation could worship its god or gods, and to what extent they were allowed to do so. They understood that a nation that can practice its religion openly was likely to be less of a threat than one that could not.

The religious life of Israel was found acceptable to the Romans and so it was allowed to continue, even if politics were involved in the matter of appointing high priests and the like. With this authority allowed, the Sanhedrin met, and the high priest conducted his duties for the nation, leading the religion accordingly. In this case, the question asked of Stephen is, “Are these things so?”

It is a simple question, anticipating a plea of guilt or innocence, but with the allowance that the one charged could speak in his own defense. In this case, the simple question addressed to Stephen will turn into 52 verses of response, none of which directly answers the high priest’s query. Instead, it will be a history lesson concerning the state of Israel’s relationship with, and continued rejection of, the Lord. Stephen’s words ahead are much more of an accusation against the nation than were the simple charges of blasphemy against him.

The events now, even the questioning by the high priest, are similar to what happened at the trial of Jesus –

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. <sup>58</sup> But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.

<sup>59</sup> The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. <sup>60</sup> But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

Finally two came forward <sup>61</sup> and declared, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’”

<sup>62</sup> Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” <sup>63</sup> But Jesus remained silent. Matthew 26:57-63

Life application: Stephen has a choice concerning his response. Should he try to defend himself against the false charges, or will his response serve a greater purpose if he speaks of other matters? In his case, he will actually go on the offensive. Though he may not have fully realized it at the time, his words now form a lengthy note of accusation against Israel.

As this is recorded in the word of God, it stands as a testimony to why Israel was punished, sent into exile, and has lived under the curses of Deuteronomy 28 for the past two millennia. It is up to Israel, meaning the leadership of the nation, to acknowledge their guilt and to call on Jesus (see Matthew 23:37-39).

Although it is right and proper to support the nation of Israel, it is not right to blindly support them without calling out their guilt. They bear guilt in rejecting the Lord, and they bear the guilt of failing to measure up to the laws found within the covenant they agreed to at Mount Sinai. Until they come into the New Covenant, they remain bound to the Old. Pray that those in Israel will have their eyes opened to their state before the Lord – both as individuals and as a nation.

*Heavenly Father, the Bible is Your witness to the world – both Israel and the world at large – as to what You are doing in redemptive history. Help us to never withhold telling the entire story that we are aware of when it is needed to open people’s eyes to whatever truth they have not yet grasped. May we be ready to tell anyone and everyone about those things that are clearly presented in Your word that will help them understand the things You expect of them. Amen.*

**And he said, “Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, Acts 7:2**

At the beginning of Chapter 7, as seen in the last verse, the high priest asked if the charges against Stephen were true. Stephen now begins his response without even

providing an answer to the charge. Instead, he dives right into giving a dissertation on the history of Israel. Luke records his words, beginning with, “And he said, ‘Brethren and fathers, listen.’”

The word “brethren” is stated as a general address. It is directed to all who hear as equal members of the society of those of Israel as far as cultural affiliation is concerned. The word “fathers” indicates the members of the council specifically, acknowledging that they are in authority positions, and thus it is an extra note of courtesy and honor.

The idea would be the same as addressing a church where all are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). And yet, the elders are to be given double honor (1 Timothy 5:17). Stephen is acknowledging both at the same time. He is noting that he is of Israel, just as they are, but they are also elders of the society and are due an additional mark of respect.

With this opening address complete, he begins his general discourse, saying, “The God of glory.” The phrase is a rare one in the way it is presented. The Greek has an article that is often left untranslated, but it should probably be rendered in this statement – “The God of the glory.” The same idea is expressed in Psalm 24:7 where the Hebrew also uses a definite article before the word “glory” –

“Lift up, gates, your heads  
And be lifted up, doors, everlasting  
And shall come in *the* King of the glory.” (CG)

Though the expression used by Stephen is unusual, the idea behind it is quite common. The glory of God is expressed throughout both testaments of Scripture in various ways. Some scholars explain the term as denoting the visible glory manifested at times by the Lord. There is no reason at all to assume this.

The word “glory” is from the Greek word “*dóksa* (from *dokeō*, ‘exercising personal opinion which determines value’) – glory. ... *dóksa* (‘glory’) corresponds to the OT word, *kabo* (OT ... ‘to be heavy’). Both terms convey God’s infinite, intrinsic worth (substance, essence)” (HELPS Word Studies).

Stephen is certainly referring to God’s state of worth, being the Creator of all things. Whether there is an outward expression of this or not at any given time, He remains of the same worth. The reason for Stephen stating the description of Him in this manner may be to alert the council that he regards the glory of God as something uniquely tied



to Him. As such, he would not be one to blaspheme Him in any manner. Next, he says that God “appeared to our father Abraham.”

This is something that happened quite a few times in the life of Abraham. At key points in his life, the Bible records the visitations of the Lord to him. Sometimes, only a conversation is recorded. At other times, the Lord appeared in a human form (see Genesis 18:1, 2). In such an instance, it is surely a visit of the Lord by the eternal Christ, meaning Jesus.

However, until Stephen’s speech, this particular visitation now being noted by him has been left unstated. He says that God appeared to him “when he was in Mesopotamia.” That is seen in the words, “before he dwelt in Haran.”

The meaning then is that the Lord appeared to him in Ur of the Chaldeans, the place from which Abraham originally came. The only thing said of this in Genesis is recorded in a few passages, such as –

“And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there.” Genesis 11:31

“Then He said to him, ‘I *am* the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.’” Genesis 15:7

“And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Your fathers, *including* Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods. <sup>3</sup>Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.’” Joshua 24:2, 3

Other such references are found in Scripture, but – like these – they do not explicitly speak of the Lord appearing to Abraham while in Mesopotamia. Instead, they only speak in a general way, without any note of a personal appearance, even if it may be implied.

Some will tie Stephen’s words into Genesis 12:1, but that is then explained in Genesis 12:4 as being a departure from Haran, not Ur. As such, Stephen’s words provide explicit details not previously seen. This is the first of several times that Stephen will give insights into the biblical narrative that are not explicitly stated elsewhere, thus making

his speech a most important source for understanding some key things that would otherwise not be known.

Life application: There are times when we can make inferences about what is going on in Scripture, but unless something is explicitly stated, it is best to acknowledge our inference as such. In the case of the Lord appearing to Abraham, without Stephen's words in Acts, such an inference would have to be stated in this way.

But because Stephen said what he said, we are no longer bound to a mere inference, and we can rightly state that the Lord explicitly appeared to Abraham even before the first recorded appearance in the book of Genesis. This then means that we must be familiar with all of Scripture in order to make such a statement.

Therefore, it is incumbent on us to check things out when they are presented to us by pastors, preachers, and teachers. It is also incumbent on us to read the word again and again, until we are familiar with it. And finally, it means that when we find that our initial analysis of something was wrong, we should go about correcting it in the future.

The Bible is a big and complicated book. Let us diligently study it each and every day of our lives. It is certain making His word a priority is pleasing to the Lord. Read and study it!

*Glorious Heavenly Father, help us to be people of study, knowing that You have given us Your word so that we can know it and then act in accord with Your will. We can certainly see Your glorious hand at work in the pages of Scripture and as it is revealed in the ongoing movement of human history. Thank You for Your wonderful word! Amen.*

**and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.'** Acts 7:3

The previous verse revealed that God had appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, even before he dwelt in Haran. Continuing that thought, and still speaking of God, it next says, "and said to him."

The Lord has a purpose for Abraham. As such, He sovereignly entered into his life and spoke to him in order for His will to come about within the stream of human existence. Note that this is a communication to Abraham, and not some type of overwhelming impulse. It doesn't say, "God appeared to Abraham and impelled him to do such and

so.” Instead, He speaks to him. With that understood, it next says, “Get out of your country.”

The Lord is now directing the steps of Abraham, calling him out of Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia. There is no indication concerning how long his family had lived there, but it was not a short span as can be determined from the next words, “and from your relatives.”

Abraham’s family had moved to Ur at some point in time, and they had become established there long enough to grow into an extended family of relatives. This is certain because when he left, he took along his immediate family, leaving other relatives behind. Because of this, it wasn’t just a temporary home that a traveling Bedouin might pick up and move from. Rather, it was a place of family, memories, and roots. But the Lord directed him, and he responded after hearing the words, “and come to a land that I will show you.”

The same Greek word was used in the previous clause as in this clause. It should be translated as such –

Get out of your **land** and from your relatives  
And come to a **land** that I will show you.

The land in which Abraham lived was known, it had family, it was what he knew. On the other hand, the land to which the Lord directed him was unknown, it had no family, and he had no idea what awaited him. But it was known to the Lord. Abraham, hearing the call of the Lord, now had a choice to make. Although it may seem obvious to us now that he would say, “Well, God has spoken and so I must do as He instructs.” But that is not the case at all, is it?

Life application: The Lord appeared to Abraham and told him to pick up and move on. Even if it was only one generation that he lived in Ur, the fact is that it was his home. He had family there, and it was his land. Would he be obedient to the Lord’s direction? We can say, “Well, what did he have to lose, and how much he had to gain!”

But this is all because of our knowledge of the story and how it plays out. He had no idea at all what lay ahead, and we have no idea at all what he was leaving behind. All we have is the fact that the Lord has spoken and that Abraham, as we now know, did as the Lord said. Again, as noted above, we might think, “Of course, he went. God told him to do so, and he would be a fool to not do so!”

But then, we would probably be pointing at ourselves, right? We say that we believe in Jesus. We claim that He is the Lord, and we are His people. If that is so, then we are claiming that we have a knowledge of who He is and that if He speaks to us, we will do just as he has said. But wait... He has "said." His word is what we call the Bible. It is the only source of who Jesus is. We have used information from that source to say that we believe He is the Lord and that He is our Savior.

So, what is the difference? The difference is great! Abraham did not have the story as we do. He did not know the end from the beginning. He did not know what would happen along the way or what it would be like when he got there. And yet, Abraham obeyed.

We do have the story, from the beginning (Genesis 1:1) to the end (Revelation 22:21). We know the major plan of what will happen along the way, because the Bible has laid it out. And we know just what the land we are heading to will be like, because its marvelous description is given in Revelation. And yet, we – unlike Abraham – do not simply hear and obey.

In fact, quite often, we don't hear at all because we don't listen. How can we hear unless we read what He has spoken out for us? And in the times when we do hear, we often still fail to do as instructed. How great was the faith of Abraham! How failing and weak is our faith! Let us be people of faith. Let us be obedient to the word. May the Lord find us faithful to comply. May it be so, to our benefit and to His glory.

*Heavenly Father, we have Your precious word. It is not overburdensome at all. Instead, it is a guide for us to use as we head to the fairer land which You have promised us. Help us to see this, and to be obedient to Your will and Your word as we take our steps along this journey of life. Yes, help us in this Lord God. Amen.*

**Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. Acts 7:4**

The previous verses referred to Abraham's having been called out of Mesopotamia and to a land that God would show him. The words now continue, and they clearly show that the calling indicated here is not the same as the statement referred to in Genesis 12:1. He was first called out of Ur, and then the Lord spoke to him again sometime later. Luke's words of the verse begin with, "Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran."

The verb is an aorist participle. The words more appropriately read, “Then having come out of the land of the Chaldeans, he dwelt in Haran.” With the proper rendering, it is one continuous action as the reader follows the words of Stephen. The movement to this location, Haran, is recorded in Genesis 11:31 –

“And Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram’s wife, and they went out with them from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan; and they came to Haran and dwelt there.”

The call out of Ur was to Abraham, but it is Terah, the father, who led the family out. It is speculation, but the name of the location, Haran, may have been selected by Terah in honor of his dead son. He is recorded in Genesis 11:26 –

“Now Terah lived seventy years, and begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran.”

No matter what, they were called out of Mesopotamia, and along the way, they stopped in this location and stayed. The Bible does not say why. It says nothing of disobedience to the Lord in having done so or anything like that. All that is recorded is that they dwelt in Haran.

If one were to speculate, it may be that the selection of the location was because Terah liked it, or maybe he was too frail to move on. It could be that the Lord purposed that Abraham, not Terah, would be considered the father of the people’s time in Canaan, and so Terah was not to be the one to lead the family into the land. No matter what the reason, they stayed there in Haran. But Luke next records Stephen, saying, “And from there, when his father was dead.”

That agrees with Genesis 11:32 –

“So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran.”

The dating here brings in a problem. Genesis 11:26 (above) said that Terah was seventy years old when he had his sons. And yet, it says that Abraham was 75 when he departed from Haran in Genesis 12:4. That leaves 60 years that are hard to reconcile with the biblical narrative. But this is not really a problem.

All it says is that Terah was seventy years old when he had his sons. Abraham is placed first in the list, but this does not mean that either Abraham was born first, nor does it

mean that all the sons were born by the time he was seventy. Rather, Abraham is placed first, just as the Bible often places the son of the chosen line first. And so, Terah started to have sons, not finished having sons, at seventy.

With this, we can see that Terah would have been one hundred and thirty when he had Abraham. That would have been in the year 2009AM (from the creation of the world). Terah was seventy when he had his first child, Haran, and Haran would have been sixty years older than Abraham.

With this complication explained, Luke next writes that “He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.” That is the second calling of Abraham, but the first calling recorded in Genesis –

“Now the LORD had said to Abram:

‘Get out of your country,

From your family

And from your father’s house,

To a land that I will show you.

<sup>2</sup> I will make you a great nation;

I will bless you

And make your name great;

And you shall be a blessing.

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,

And I will curse him who curses you;

And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’

<sup>4</sup> So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram *was* seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.” Genesis 12:1-4

Life application: There is often confusion in how people read and interpret difficult verses such as what is presented in Acts 7:4. Many find it easy to simply say there is an error in the chronology presented by Stephen. Others use a text which has obviously been manipulated. For example, the Samaritan Pentateuch simply changes Terah’s age from two hundred and five to one hundred and five. Because it simplifies things, they claim that must be the true reading.

However, by following the timeline of the world (as noted above with the year of Abraham’s birth), the chronology fits perfectly. The study of understanding the biblical narrative is hard at times, but it is well worth the effort in order to see what God is doing, and also to see just how accurate the Bible actually is.

To understand the timeline of the world, as it is recorded in the Bible, the chronology as compiled during the giving of the Superior Word sermons will be provided below. It goes as far as Deuteronomy because that is where the sermons are up to at the time of writing this Acts commentary. It would be beneficial to you to print this off and keep it handy.

This chronology carefully follows the Bible, but for any given date there may be a deviation of a single year depending on what time of the year an event occurs. However, it closely and accurately reflects what is faithfully recorded in Scripture within one year throughout the entire chronology.

Take time to carefully study the details as you read the Bible. It is well worth your time. You will find that what some people claim are “errors” is simply their lack of careful study showing through.

*Lord God, thank You that we have a sure and reliable word. It is a treasure and a marvel to follow its many wonderful patterns and truths as we read of the story of redemption as You have laid it out. We know we have a sure word! Thank You for this. Amen.*

#### Biblical Timeline of the World – AM = Anno Mundi (Year of the World)

-----  
GENESIS

Adam created 1AM; died 930AM  
Seth born 130AM; died 1042AM  
Enosh born 235AM; died 1140AM  
Cainan born 325AM; died 1235AM  
Mahalalel born 395AM; died 1290AM  
Jared born 460AM; died 1422AM  
Enoch born 622AM; translated 987AM  
Methuselah born 687AM; died 1656AM (the year of the flood)  
Lamech born 874AM; died 1651AM  
Noah born 1056AM  
Flood of Noah – 1656 AM (Noah was 600 years old – Genesis 7:6)  
Waters dried up from earth – 1657AM (1<sup>st</sup> of the year – Genesis 8:13)  
Shem 100 years old 1659AM (Genesis 11:10)  
Arphaxad born 1659AM (Genesis 11:10)  
Salah born 1694AM (Genesis 11:12)

Eber born 1724AM (Genesis 11:14)  
Peleg born 1758AM (Genesis 11:16)  
Reu born 1788AM (Genesis 11:18)  
Serug born 1820AM (Genesis 11:20)  
Nahor born 1850AM (Genesis 11:22)  
Terah born 1879AM (Genesis 11:24)  
Peleg died 1997AM (Genesis 11:19)  
Nahor died 1998AM (Genesis 11:25)  
Noah died 2006AM (Genesis 9:28)  
Abram born 2009AM (Deduced from Genesis)  
Reu died 2027AM (Genesis 11:21)  
Serug died 2050AM (Genesis 11:23)  
Abram called to move to Canaan 2084AM  
Ishmael born 2095AM (Genesis 16:16)  
Arphaxad died 2097AM (Genesis 11:12)  
Covenant of Circumcision 2108AM (Genesis 17:1)  
Isaac born 2109AM (Genesis 21:5)  
Salah died 2127AM (Genesis 11:15)  
Sarah died 2146AM (Genesis 23:1)  
Isaac married Rebekah 2149AM (Genesis 25:20)  
Shem died 2159AM (Genesis 11:11)  
Abraham died 2184AM (Genesis 25:7)  
Eber died 2188AM (Genesis 11:17)  
Jacob and Esau born 2169AM (Genesis 25:26)  
Esau married two wives 2209AM (Genesis 26:34)  
Ishmael died 2232AM (Genesis 25:17)  
Isaac blesses Jacob approx. 2247AM (Back-dated from Joseph being 30 Genesis 41:46)  
Jacob marries Leah and Rachel approx. 2254AM (Genesis 29)  
Jacob completes 14 years of labor approx. 2261AM (Genesis 30:25)  
Jacob departs to return to Canaan approx. 2267AM (Genesis 31:38)  
Joseph 17 years old approx. 2275AM (Genesis 37:2)  
Isaac died 2289AM (Genesis 35:28)  
Joseph 30 years old; second over all Egypt 2289AM (Genesis 41:46)  
Jacob stands before Pharaoh at 130 2299AM (Genesis 47:9) \* 215 years after promise to Abraham  
Jacob died 2316AM (Genesis 47:28)  
Joseph died approx. 2370AM (Genesis 50:26)

-----



Genesis ended with the death of Joseph. He was born right around the year 2260 Anno Mundi. He lived 110 years and so his death came at approximately 2370AM. After the death of Joseph, not another word about the time which the Israelites remained in Egypt was given until sometime around the birth of Moses.

This was a period of about 64 years and so Exodus 1:1 is somewhere around the year 2434AM, but the date isn't specific. However, the dating of the Bible will become specific again at key points during the book.

Just because it is a period of only 64 years from the death of Joseph until the time of the birth of Moses, it is a full 215-year period from Jacob's arrival until the Exodus, which occurs when Moses is about 80 years old.

-----  
EXODUS

Israel departs Egypt on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the 1<sup>st</sup> month in the year 2514AM (Exodus 12:40; see Exodus 12:6)

Israel comes to Wilderness of Sin on 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month in the year 2514AM (Exodus 16:1)

Israel comes to Wilderness of Sinai on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> month in the year 2514AM (Exodus 19:1)

Tabernacle is raised up on first day of 1<sup>st</sup> month of the year 2515 (Exodus 40:17)

-----  
LEVITICUS

The dating of Leviticus can be figured based on when Solomon's Temple was built. By tracing back from that day as stated in 1 Kings 6:1, which indicates 480 years from the Exodus, we can assert with relative confidence that it was penned approximately 1445 BC.

There was a 45-day journey to reach Mount Sinai, where the Israelites worked to construct the Tabernacle. In Exodus 40:2 it stated, "On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting." This would have been the beginning of the second year and 345 days after the Exodus and 300 days since their arrival at Sinai. It would also make it the year 2515 AM. Later, the Israelites departed Sinai as indicated in Numbers 10:11 –

“Now it came to pass on the twentieth *day* of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle of the Testimony.”

As Leviticus was certainly recorded by Moses during this 50-day period, we can be confident of this timeframe and dating.

-----

After the exodus, there was a 45-day journey to reach Mount Sinai, where the Israelites worked to construct the Tabernacle. In Exodus 40:2 it stated, “On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting.” This was the beginning of the second year, 345 days after the Exodus, and 300 days since their arrival at Sinai. It would also be the year 2515 AM.

Numbers begins its text thirty days later on the first day of the second month of this same year. The book of Leviticus was compiled during a very short period of time between the ending of Exodus and up to Numbers 10:11, a period of fifty days. Numbers lasts much longer.

-----

## NUMBERS

The Lord speaks to Moses on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year after coming out of Egypt, 2515AM (Numbers 1:1)

Israel departs Sinai on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year after coming out of Egypt, 2515AM (Numbers 10:11)

Miriam dies in the Wilderness of Zin in the 1<sup>st</sup> month of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year after leaving Egypt, 2516AM (Numbers 20:1)

Aaron dies on Mt. Hor on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month in the 40<sup>th</sup> year after leaving Egypt, 2554AM (Numbers 33:38)

-----

The Exodus occurred in the year 2514 Anno Mundi. Deuteronomy comes at the ending of the fortieth year since the Exodus, as is noted in Deuteronomy 1:3. Therefore, it is recorded in the 11th month of the year 2554 Anno Mundi.

-----

## DEUTERONOMY

On the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of the 40<sup>th</sup> year Moses spoke to the children of Israel, 2554AM (Deuteronomy 1:3)

Moses died no later than the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the 40<sup>th</sup> year (possibly earlier) in the year 2554 Anno Mundi, or from the creation of the world.

**And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even *enough* to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him.** Acts 7:5

The previous verse referred to the coming of Abraham from Haran to Canaan after the death of his father. Despite being called to Canaan, Stephen's words continue by saying, "And God gave him no inheritance in it."

The statement is given to show that Abraham, despite being promised the inheritance, would only receive it through his offspring. As such it is an inheritance based on faith. This is clearly attested to in Hebrews –

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; <sup>10</sup> for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God."

-Hebrews 11:8-10

Abraham heard the word, accepted it, and lived by it in faith. He was obedient to God, anticipating the promise while living as a sojourner. Understanding this, Stephen continues, saying, "not even *enough* to set his foot on."

The Greek more literally reads, "not even *the* step of a foot." The word "step" is the noun *béma*. It signifies a step, a raised place, or a platform that is walked up to in order to receive judgment. The idea is that one spot where the step of a foot is made was more than Abraham actually received as an inheritance in his life. This same idea was expressed in Deuteronomy concerning the land of Edom as Israel passed through it –

"And command the people, saying, 'You *are about to* pass through the territory of your brethren, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid

of you. Therefore watch yourselves carefully. <sup>5</sup> Do not meddle with them, for I will not give you *any* of their land, no, not so much as one footstep, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau *as a possession.*” Deuteronomy 2:4, 5

It is an expression then that signifies a total exclusion of any possession at all. Despite this, Abraham did make a purchase of land while dwelling in Canaan. That is recorded in Genesis 23 when he bought a field and cave for the burial of Sarah (and later for himself and other family members). In this, there is nothing contradictory to what is said by Stephen. This was not an inheritance, but a purchase. Further, it was not for the living, but for the dead. It was an act of faith in hope of the resurrection and the true land of promise that Canaan only typified.

Continuing on, Stephen next says, “But even when *Abraham* had no child.” This refers to the state of Sarah’s barren womb, even at an advanced age. Abraham remained childless, but God had promised that he would possess the land through his own child, as Stephen notes, “He promised to give it to him for a possession.”

This would be considered problematic. Abraham has been given a promise, he has not personally been allowed any of what the promise signifies, and so the promise would have to be through a child, and yet he had no child. This conundrum is seen in the words of Genesis 15 –

“After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward.’

<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, ‘Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?’ <sup>3</sup> Then Abram said, ‘Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!’” Genesis 15:1-3

With that understood, the Lord confirmed His promise to Abraham. Stephen notes this with the words, “and to his descendants after him.”

Despite being old and without an heir, the Lord spoke to Abraham that the promise stood and would come to pass –

“And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, ‘This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.’ <sup>5</sup> Then He brought him outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ <sup>6</sup> And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

<sup>7</sup> Then He said to him, 'I *am* the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.'" Genesis 15:4-7

Abraham, by faith, accepted the word of the Lord. He dwelt in tents, he remained confident that the Lord's word was true, and he did not doubt or resist what was spoken to him. Stephen's words about Abraham are making a point for the leaders of Israel to consider if they will simply pay heed.

Life application: Abraham heard the word of the Lord and accepted it by faith. When given a promise that seemed absolutely incredible, even impossible by any stretch of the imagination, he believed the Lord's word.

In the Bible, there are claims made, and great and rich promises given to the people of God. Some of the things that are said are incredible. The Bible tells us that Jesus died for our sins, but that He was also raised again. Such a thing, meaning a man coming back to life after being crucified, would seem impossible by any stretch of the imagination, and yet God asks us to believe that it is true.

If one cannot believe that, then the other promises of God will never apply to him. What is presented is given for us to accept by faith. As faith is exclusive of works, then to work for what is promised is an offense to the One who promises.

Be steadfast in your faith that the word of God is true, that what it conveys will come to pass, and that your faith in what it says is all you need in order to appropriate what is promised. This is what will be pleasing to God, not your attempts to buy Him off through the observance of certain rites or rituals. God has done the work. Just believe! That is what He asks of you.

*Heavenly Father, if we truly believe that You are God and that the Bible is Your word, then we should have no problem accepting that what it says is true. Help us in our lack of faith. Give us the ability to understand those things that are incredible and to accept them as they are written. May we faithfully trust in Your word as we await the fulfillment of the promises that You have spoken out. Amen.*

**But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* four hundred years.**

Acts 7:6

The previous verse spoke of God giving Abraham no inheritance despite the Lord promising him the land for a possession, even to his descendants after him. With that noted, words that are often completely misunderstood are presented by Stephen, beginning with, “But God spoke in this way.”

This is obviously referring to something already recorded in Scripture that must be cited in order to confirm what Stephen is saying. For now, Stephen continues with his words, saying, “that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land.”

This is still referring to Abraham. His descendants, specifically to be understood as the line of promise, would dwell in a foreign land. That this is specifically understood to be the line of promise, and not just any of his descendants, is based on what it said in the previous verse with the words, “He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him.” It refers to the inheritance, and only those who are of the line of promise were given the inheritance.

Ishmael was sent away from the inheritance in Genesis 21. Likewise, it says this of Abraham’s other children in Genesis 25 –

“And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. <sup>6</sup> But Abraham gave gifts to the sons of the concubines which Abraham had; and while he was still living he sent them eastward, away from Isaac his son, to the country of the east.” Genesis 25:5, 6

As the other descendants have been removed from the inheritance, it is seen that this is only speaking of the chosen line, meaning through Isaac and then Jacob. Of this line, it next says, “and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them.”

Because of these words, it is often assumed that this is only speaking of the time in Egypt. It is an incorrect assumption. The descendants of Abraham would be brought into bondage and oppression. But even in Egypt that was not always the case. The first years of their stay in Egypt were under Joseph. Thus, the words “bondage” and “oppress” are not being used collectively, as if both were occurring at the same time and/or all of the time. They are words that indicate the state of things at any given time.

To further define this, Stephen finishes the verse with the words, “four hundred years.” It is a set time frame that is then assumed, incorrectly, as referring only to the time in Egypt. For example, Meyer’s NT Commentary not only erroneously evaluates this verse, but he ascribes error to Paul in Galatians 3:17 concerning his words. Rather, it is Meyers who is incorrect. He says –

“τετρακόσια] [*tetrakousia* means ‘four hundred’] Here, as in an oracle, the duration is given, as also at Gen. 1.c., in round numbers; but in Exodus 12:40 this period of Egyptian sojourning and bondage (“ΕΤΗ ΤΕΤΡΑΚ. belongs to the whole” ΕΣΤΑΙ ... ΚΑΚΩΣΟΥΣΙΝ) is historically specified exactly as 430 years. In Galatians 3:17 (see in loc.), Paul has inappropriately referred the chronological statement of Exodus 12:40 to the space of time from the promise made to Abraham down to the giving of the law.”

Meyers is completely wrong in this, and Paul’s note in Galatians 3:17 is exact. This is not solely referring to the “period of Egyptian sojourning and bondage.” Rather, it is referring to dwelling in Canaan and in Egypt. The “four hundred” years that Stephen is referring to are spoken of by the Lord in Genesis 15 –

“Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror *and* great darkness fell upon him. <sup>13</sup> Then He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.’” Genesis 15:12-14

This is clearly referring to both Canaan and Egypt. By referring to the Acts 7:4 commentary [Biblical Timeline of the World](#) attachment (that you were admonished to print off and keep handy ☺), this can be seen. Isaac was born in 2109AM. Israel departed Egypt in 2514AM. Understanding these, one can then note that Genesis 21:8-10 is the beginning of the persecutions by other nations –

“So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.

<sup>9</sup> And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. <sup>10</sup> Therefore she said to Abraham, ‘Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, *namely* with Isaac.’”

Even though this was only two young boys, it is one nation oppressing another. A child is normally weaned between two and four years old, and so one can see that the timeframe indicated by Stephen is right at four hundred years, (2514-2109 is approximately a four-hundred-year period) plus or minus a couple of years. This could even be exactly four hundred years if Isaac was weaned at the outside of the normal timeframe and the other events occurred at the time before or after the middle of the starting and ending years. Thus, the biblical timeline is exacting in what it states.

The extra thirty years Paul refers to in Galatians 3:17 is exactly seen in the Biblical Timeline of the world where Abram was called to move to Canaan in 2084AM. Israel departed Egypt in 2514AM. This is exactly 430 years. Paul's words are vindicated by a correct reading of the biblical timeline.

Further, to confirm that the words, "dwell in a foreign land" refer to both Canaan and Egypt, Hebrews 11 uses the same word, *alotrios*, to describe the time Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob dwelt in the land of Canaan –

"By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as **in a foreign country**, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; <sup>10</sup> for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God."

-Hebrews 11:9, 10

The biblical timeline is exact, the words of Scripture – meaning that given in Genesis, Stephen in Acts, and Paul in Galatians – are all exact and without error. It just takes time and study to determine it is so.

Life application: In the Meyer's NT Commentary cited above, there are evaluations of the biblical text and of the Greek words specifically. There are adamant stances taken, and there are accusations against the accuracy of the Bible being made. And yet, what is stated is completely inaccurate.

To trust someone simply because he is trained in Hebrew, Aramaic, and/or Greek is not smart. Many scholars are trained in any or all of these and they come to completely different conclusions. Sometimes their conclusions are like polar opposites.

Likewise, to follow a person simply because he is Jewish is not smart. Just because someone may live in the land of Israel and speak Hebrew, it conveys nothing about his understanding of Scripture. Similarly, to follow someone because he has a Doctorate in Theology, pastors a church, has written extensive commentaries, or so on, is not wise.

These are known as source fallacies. To accept someone's opinion on a matter based on their source (knowledge of a language, race or culture, degree, and so on) says nothing of his actual knowledge of a subject. In biblical theology, the only thing that matters is if the person is properly analyzing the word. And that, for any given passage. Meyers certainly analyzed some things properly, and yet he completely botched his analysis cited above.



The only way for you to know if what he says is correct this time and wrong the next is to... is to... is to KNOW YOUR BIBLE and to study what is presented.

Read the word! Study it. Think about it. And trust no one until you have verified what that person has said. Study to show yourself approved!

*Lord God Almighty, Your word is beautiful. Amen.*

**‘And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.’ Acts 7:7**

The previous verse referred to the dwelling of Israel in a foreign land, being brought into bondage, and the time frame – four hundred years – in which this would occur. With that stated, Stephen now continues quoting the Lord, saying, “And the nation to whom they will be in bondage.”

This is referring to Egypt. Approximately half of the period referred to will be in Egypt. And for a period of that time while in Egypt, they were brought into bondage –

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. <sup>9</sup> And he said to his people, ‘Look, the people of the children of Israel *are* more and mightier than we; <sup>10</sup> come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.’ <sup>11</sup> Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. <sup>12</sup> But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. <sup>13</sup> So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. <sup>14</sup> And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve *was* with rigor.”

-Exodus 1:8-14

As can be seen, the bondage was not the entire span of four hundred years. Only a part of the time was spent in Egypt. Further, only a part of the time in Egypt was a time of bondage. With the reference understood, Stephen’s words continue, quoting God, and saying of this nation, “I will judge,’ said God.”

That is explicitly stated in Genesis 15 –

“Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror *and* great darkness fell upon him. <sup>13</sup> Then He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. <sup>16</sup> But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete.’” Genesis 15:12-16

So far, as long as the proper reference is understood, the words of Stephen have followed the narrative logically and without any real difficulty. But, as with the previous verse, there is debate about the next words. Stephen finishes verse 7 saying, “and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.”

It is not uncommon for scholars to change the reference here from Abraham and Canaan to Moses and Mount Sinai. This is because Stephen’s words closely match the words of Exodus when Moses spoke with the Lord on Sinai –

“So He said, ‘I will certainly be with you. And this *shall be* a sign to you that I have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.’” Exodus 3:12

This is problematic, however, because the reference immediately returns to Abraham in Stephen’s next words of verse 7:8. As such, this is not speaking of Moses and Mount Sinai at all. Rather, it is still referring to the conversation between the Lord and Abraham. That is found later in Genesis 15 –

“And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. <sup>18</sup> On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates— <sup>19</sup> the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, <sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.’” Genesis 15:17-21

By the Lord giving the land to Abraham’s descendants after they are brought out of Egypt, it implies that they will serve the Lord in Canaan (“this place”), rather than on Sinai (“this mountain”). Stephen’s terminology varies from both Genesis 15 and Exodus 3. As such, determining which is the proper reference must be done apart from direct

quotes. In this case, the reference being Abraham has not changed, and Stephen's words – though not a direct quote – are implied in (and fully supported by) the text.

Life application: There are difficulties in Scripture that are easy to simply pass over with the most expedient explanation. We hear it, it sounds ok, and so we move on. But this only confuses the narrative. Thus, it is better to consider that the first, and easiest, explanation may not be the correct one. Unless the issue is clear and without any controversy, we should consider all of the options we can think of, or refer to.

By doing this, we will keep things in their proper context. As noted above, Abraham was the reference in the text, and Abraham will continue to be the reference in the text. Thus, contemplating the difficulty in the intervening words, and considering them from Stephen's perspective, will eventually lead to what was on his mind.

On the other hand, there was a difficulty in the previous verse where both Canaan and Egypt were being referred to, while certain words only applied to Egypt. Then, in this verse, only Egypt is the reference. As such, it is expedient to just say, "everything is referring to Egypt." However, in doing this, the timeline of the actual Genesis narrative is then completely botched up.

Real care needs to be taken concerning this precious word. Let us be willing to spend the time to make sure that what we are presenting is actually properly aligned with what God has already presented.

*Glorious God, Your word is big, difficult at times, and filled with things that take a lot of mental exertion to figure out. But it is worth the effort. At the end of the day, may we say, "I have done my very best to properly and rightly divide this sacred treasure." To Your glory! Amen.*

**Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so *Abraham* begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac *begot* Jacob, and Jacob *begot* the twelve patriarchs. Acts 7:8**

Stephen has just detailed the history of Abraham, from his call out of Mesopotamia, even until the time of the covenant set forth in Genesis 15 that came with the promise that the Lord would bring Abraham's descendants out of bondage to serve Him in the land of Canaan. It is with this history in mind that Stephen now says, "Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision."

There is no article before “circumcision,” and it should be left out. Circumcision is not the covenant. Rather, it refers to the covenant that had just been explained by Stephen. It is the sign of the covenant, as is explained in Genesis 17:1-8. After that, it then says –

“And God said to Abraham: ‘As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup> This *is* My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; <sup>11</sup> and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.’”

-Genesis 17:9-11

A sign is something that points to something else. Being misunderstood, a Jew will point to their circumcision and say, “See, this makes me righteous.” But that is incorrect. Paul explains this in Romans 2 –

“For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; <sup>29</sup> but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.” Romans 2:28, 29

Many cultures circumcise, and it does not make them righteous. As such, this sign does not make Abraham’s descendants righteous, but it is a sign of what the covenant speaks of. Two translations that convey this properly, even if they are somewhat of a paraphrase, are –

“Then God gave to Abraham the ceremony of circumcision as a sign of the covenant. So Abraham circumcised Isaac a week after he was born; Isaac circumcised his son Jacob, and Jacob circumcised his twelve sons, the famous ancestors of our race.” GNT

“And God gave Abraham a covenant [a formal agreement to be strictly observed] of [which] circumcision [was the sign]; and so [under these circumstances] Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac [became the father] of Jacob, and Jacob [became the father] of the twelve patriarchs.” Amplified

With this understood, Stephen continues with, “and so *Abraham* begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day.” This is in obedience to the word of the Lord as later explained in Genesis 17 –

“He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. <sup>13</sup> He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup> And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” Genesis 17:12-14

Circumcision (on the eighth day) is a necessary condition of the covenant, but it is not the covenant itself. Paul further explains this in Romans 4 –

“Does this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. <sup>10</sup> How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. <sup>11</sup> And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, <sup>12</sup> and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised.” Romans 4:9-12

Abraham was obedient to the covenant, and he circumcised Isaac on the eighth day. After this, Stephen next states, “and Isaac *begot* Jacob, and Jacob *begot* the twelve patriarchs.” These words are given to define the line through whom the conditions of the covenant apply. All of this is spoken by Stephen to argue against the accusations levied against him.

One of those charges was that Jesus would “change the customs which Moses delivered to us.” The law of Moses records the requirement for circumcising on the eighth day in Leviticus 12:3. However, Stephen appears to have understood that if the law was now annulled in Christ, it means that circumcision was not a requirement for being a part of the New Covenant.

This then lays the groundwork for Paul’s argument for justification by faith. Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised, as stated above in Romans 4. As this is so, then, as Paul notes, the law coming four hundred and thirty years later, “cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect” (Galatians 3:17).

Because of this, the sign of circumcision must have a different purpose for God to have given it to Abraham. And it does. As a sign points to something else, and that thing – in this case – is based on the righteousness of Abraham, one must understand where that righteousness came from, which was the faith he had while still uncircumcised (Romans 4:11). It was faith in the promise of God stated in Genesis 15:4, 5.

Thus, a sign was given to confirm that it was faith in the promises of God that would be the mark of being declared righteous. The sign, then, points to Christ Jesus. The rite of circumcision, which is the sign, is the cutting of the male sex organ. As sin is inherited, there must be a way that it is transmitted. That is understood to be through the uniting of a man and a woman. When a child is conceived, that child inherits Adam's sin.

Cutting the male organ is the sign. It represents cutting the transmission of sin. And sin is that which makes a person unrighteous. When Christ came, He was born of a virgin and of God. Thus, no sin was transmitted to Him. As this was so, the "sign" of circumcision was fulfilled. The sign pointed to the coming Messiah – Jesus.

Thus, the words of Romans 4 (above) are realized. It is by faith in God's promise, as fulfilled in Christ Jesus, that righteousness is granted – the righteousness of God in Christ. As such, and though the dull leaders of Israel did not grasp this, Stephen was clearly indicating that the words he spoke concerning "changing the customs" may have been misunderstood, but they were not blasphemous. Rather, they were in accord with the redemptive plans of God in Christ.

Life application: A little thought concerning what God is doing in the stream of redemptive history clears up many misconceptions about really important theological issues. In this one instance, when carefully considered, several points of doctrine – some of which will lead to heresy if incorrect – can be determined:

- The law is annulled in Christ.
- The sign of circumcision is fulfilled in Christ.
- Salvation is, by default, eternal.
- Faith, and nothing else, is what saves a person.

These, and certainly many other points, can be deduced from what is presented above. Be sure to not only read the Bible, but think on it, study it, read commentaries on it. Don't be so headstrong that you would reject something you initially disagree with until you have thought through what is said. If we are wrong, we should be willing to admit it

and adjust our thinking in order to properly align our doctrine with what the Bible actually teaches.

Do these things and you will be one who stands approved when you come before the Lord.

*Gracious and most merciful God, You have given us such a simple message of salvation – believe in what Your word says You have done in order to be saved. And yet, there is so much tied up in this message that we can spend the rest of our lives learning more about it. How wonderful it is to do so! Thank You for this precious word. Amen.*

**“And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him**  
Acts 7:9

Stephen’s speech, detailing the history of the Jewish people, quickly moved from Abraham to Isaac, to Jacob, and then to the twelve patriarchs. With them noted, he will move on again. Before looking at his words, the overall context of Stephen’s speech should be evaluated.

The God of glory appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia where he was called to another land. After the death of his father, and as is recorded in Genesis, he was called to move again. While in Canaan, but while Canaan was still under the rule of other people groups, Abraham was promised the land as a possession for his descendants. It was at this same time that Abraham was given the covenant with circumcision as a sign.

During all of this time, there was no temple and no law. And some of the time was outside of Canaan, the land of promise. Despite this, there has been a faithful obedience to the Lord. Now the narrative continues with the words, “And the patriarchs.”

This is referring to those just mentioned in the previous verse, meaning the twelve sons of Israel. The word patriarch was first seen in Acts 2:29 when referring to David. It is a word that signifies the head or founder of a family.

Of these twelve patriarchs, it now refers to all but one of them, saying they were “becoming envious.” The first overarching premise of Stephen’s speech was just noted. It is that the workings of God had occurred, and continued to often occur, outside of the land of promise, apart from the Law of Moses, and apart from any physical temple. As will be seen, even when those things come into the narrative, there is a rebelling against the Lord by the people of Israel.

For now, the envy of the patriarchs has been noted. Of these men, their jealousy was displayed in their actions being specifically directed against their own brother, saying that they “sold Joseph into Egypt.”

This introduces the second overarching premise of Stephen’s speech. Starting in Genesis 37, and apart from some relevant side stories, Joseph became the main focus of the redemptive narrative for an extended period. And yet, there was a jealousy that was displayed toward him and an active working against him by his brothers. As they are noted as patriarchs, they stand as representative of the people of Israel who descend from them. There is a working against God’s chosen order, leaders, prophets, and law. This theme will continue right down to the time of Jesus.

Some try to find a contradiction in the narrative here by saying that Joseph was not sold into Egypt, but to Midianite traders, as is recorded in Genesis 37 –

“Then Midianite traders passed by; so *the brothers* pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.” Genesis 37:28

That is a shallow argument at best. The traders were heading to Egypt as a part of their trading. But more, the words of Stephen reflect the words of Joseph himself as are recorded in Genesis 45 –

“And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Please come near to me.’ So they came near. Then he said: ‘I *am* Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup> But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.’” Genesis 45:4, 5

Joseph noted that God had sent him before the brothers. That is noted by Stephen to close out this verse, saying, “But God was with him.” This is noted of the one who was rejected by his brothers, and it is noted of him having God with him, even outside of the land of promise. While the brothers anticipated that they had cast off any chance of Joseph ruling over them (for it was by his dreams that this became known – Genesis 37:1-11), God was working through their rejection of him to accomplish a great salvation.

At this time, Stephen does not draw out any actual connection to Jesus, but even the dullest of dimwits could not help but notice the parallel if they were willing to open their eyes. As for the council, it says nothing at the time of their state of mind. Stephen is



carefully and methodically laying out his defense of Jesus while the council sits and takes each connection without a word.

Life application: Jesus said to the woman at the well in John 4 –

“Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. <sup>24</sup> God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:21-24

It is hard to imagine that people who say they are following Jesus forget that He said these words. Stephen is telling the people of Israel that there is a redemptive process and a faith that goes beyond a place, a land, and a set means of religious rites. Jesus had already said as much to a non-Jew in a place that was considered “out” of the proper religious life of those accepted by God. And more, of the people of this location, it later says –

“And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all that I *ever* did.’ <sup>40</sup> So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. <sup>41</sup> And many more believed because of His own word. <sup>42</sup> Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard *Him* and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.’” John 4:39-42

This comes the chapter *after* Jesus’ words of John 3 –

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:14-17

Likewise, His words to the woman at the well come in the chapter *before* His words to the leaders in Jerusalem –

“And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. <sup>38</sup> But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. <sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. <sup>40</sup> But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.”

-John 5:37-40

Immediately after that, Jesus continued saying “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me” John 5:46

Jesus is the end of what Moses spoke of. In Him is the final, full, and forever-after revelation of all of the prophetic writings. And yet, innumerable Christians fall back on Moses, in part or in whole, in order to attempt to merit status before God. Jesus warns us, Stephen admonishes us, and all of the rest of the New Testament directs us to pay heed. It is in Jesus alone, belief in Him, that we find our salvation.

*Glorious and wonderful God, You sent us Jesus! Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Acts 7:10**

The previous verse referred to the patriarchs becoming jealous and then selling Joseph into Egypt. It then noted, “But God was with him.” That continues now with, “and delivered him out of all of his troubles.” If one follows the life of Joseph, from being cast into the pit by his brothers, being sold to the traders, and being taken down to Egypt, clear and precise parallels to the work of Christ come forth. They can be seen in the corresponding Superior Word sermons.

The tribes of Israel, represented by the leaders of Israel, crucified Christ and He was buried. But God delivered Him from the pit as well. Again, while Joseph was in Egypt, circumstances brought him to the state of being incarcerated for something he had not done. The story (found in Genesis 39-41) again parallels the events of Christ’s life. Each detail was selected to anticipate the Person and work of Christ.

Joseph was brought out of that prison and, as Stephen says, God “gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.” That is found in Genesis 41 as Joseph

reveals the meaning of the dreams of Pharaoh. The conclusion of that particular section is found in Genesis 41:37-39 –

“So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. <sup>38</sup> And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find *such a one* as this, a man in whom *is* the Spirit of God?’

<sup>39</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, *there is no one as discerning and wise as you.*’”

With this historical account stated, the verse finishes with, “and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.”

That is also found in the next verses of Genesis 41 –

“‘You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.’ <sup>41</sup> And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’

<sup>42</sup> Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. <sup>43</sup> And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, ‘Bow the knee!’ So he set him over all the land of Egypt. <sup>44</sup> Pharaoh also said to Joseph, ‘I *am* Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.’ <sup>45</sup> And Pharaoh called Joseph’s name Zaphnath-Paaneah. And he gave him as a wife Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On. So Joseph went out over *all* the land of Egypt.” Genesis 41:40-45

Again, the details clearly point to the exaltation of Christ who is now seated at the right hand of God. Each point was detailed from the life of Joseph to mirror what occurred with Christ. Stephen is not merely telling history to amuse the council that he is standing before. Rather, he is bringing his own charges against them right from Scripture. He is revealing to them, if they are willing to pay heed, that the words of Solomon are true –

“That which has been *is* what will be,  
That which *is* done is what will be done,  
And *there is* nothing new under the sun.” Ecclesiastes 1:9

And again –

“That which has been already: It,  
And which is to be, already has been;  
And the God seeks that which is pursued.” Ecclesiastes 3:15 (CG)

Stephen’s words are spoken with care and purpose. He is speaking by the Spirit who is providing exacting words to convict Israel or to indict Israel. What he conveys has obvious intent, and so it is up to these leaders to accept or reject the history lesson and the warnings.

Life application: The stories of Genesis and throughout the rest of the Old Testament are given to reveal what God would do in Christ. Many are so specific that once the details are examined, and then compared with what we know about Jesus, it is incredible that anyone could say, “I don’t accept that this is actually referring to Him.”

Someday, Israel will face inevitable destruction. Something will wake them up to the fact that they missed the significance of Jesus’ first advent. They will acknowledge their guilt, and they will call out to Him. This is clearly presented in Scripture, and it will come to pass. The blinders will be removed and the glory of what has been recorded will finally shine forth.

For those of us who have accepted Jesus, are we even aware of these Old Testament types and shadows? They are a treasure trove of wonder, and they are given to alert us to the many details of Jesus’ ministry, His exaltation, and His current authority. Let us be sure to consider these things. In knowing the details, our own faith in Him will surely be strengthened. Let us not ignore the Old Testament but read it with open eyes and hearts. There you will find JESUS!

*Heavenly Father, give us the desire to set aside time each day for Your word. How can our time be properly prioritized when what You have revealed to us there is not included in our day? Give us wisdom in this. Thank You for Your wonderful word. Amen.*

**Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. Acts 7:11**

The previous verses referred to Joseph’s being sold off to Egypt, but also God’s care of him while there, eventually exalting him to being governor over the land and all of Pharaoh’s house. The thing that most precipitated this was Joseph’s ability to properly interpret the dreams of Pharaoh that anticipated a coming famine. In his wise

interpretation of the dreams, and of his excellent counsel concerning what to do about the coming famine, Pharaoh had said –

“Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, *there is* no one as discerning and wise as you. <sup>40</sup>You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.’ <sup>41</sup>And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’”

-Genesis 41:39-41

With that context remembered, Stephen now continues by saying, “Now a famine and great trouble came.” Just as Joseph had spoken, so it came to pass. That is recorded in Genesis 41 as well –

“Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt ended, <sup>54</sup>and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. The famine was in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. <sup>55</sup>So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread.” Genesis 41:53-55

The famine covered all lands, including Egypt, but Egypt had prepared for the coming famine by having supplies stored up. The term “all lands” specifically includes where Israel was, as is stated by Stephen, saying, “over all the land of Egypt and Canaan.” That is seen in the opening words of Genesis 42 –

“When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, ‘Why do you look at one another?’ <sup>2</sup>And he said, ‘Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die.’”

-Genesis 42:1, 2

Stephen properly explains this sentiment with the words, “and our fathers found no sustenance.” Here is a noun found only this one time in the Bible, *chortasma*. It signifies food, sustenance, or provision. It is derived from the verb *chortazó* which means to feed, satisfy, fatten, and so on.

The famine covered all lands, including the land where Israel was. The famine was revealed to be coming in advance by a dream from God. Joseph was able to interpret the dream when no other person could. Enough advance notice was given to ensure that Egypt would have abundant provision, even enough to sell to other nations. And this abundant provision led Israel to go to Egypt to be saved from perishing in the famine.

The sequence of events clearly indicates that God's guiding hand was behind what occurred, leading to a specific end purpose.

Life application: Though the entire section of Stephen's speech concerning Egypt is not yet complete, it is already apparent that God's hand of care for the events taking place is clearly evident. There is a famine of such magnitude that it is described as covering all lands. The number of people affected by it would be in the millions.

And yet, the entire focus of the story is on one family. And despite this being the case, the family and its history – ultimately numbering in the millions later in the Bible – is highlighted for one main purpose as well, which is the coming of the Messiah.

As this is so, it demonstrates that God's ultimate purpose for everything recorded in Scripture is this Messiah, Jesus Christ. And Jesus came to highlight the many attributes of God, thus bringing glory to God through His Messiah.

Let us remember this. The Bible is not about Israel, even if Israel is a highlighted aspect of it. The Bible is not about man, even though man may be the purpose of why Jesus was sent. The Bible, above all else, is about God's coming in human form in order to demonstrate His magnificence, His perfection, His glory, and His care for the people who come to Him by faith.

May we never change the ultimate focus of the word to anything less than God, who has revealed Himself through the Person and work of Jesus Christ. When we keep the focus on God, everything else will find its proper place as we search out the mysteries of this precious and sacred word.

*How magnificent is the story You have laid before us in the pages of Scripture, O God! It is a story of love and tender care for Your people. May we be willing to expend ourselves to get this word out to those who so desperately need to hear what it says. Help us to be bold in our proclamation of Jesus! Amen.*

**But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.**

Acts 7:12

The previous verse noted the famine that came all over the land of Egypt and Canaan leaving no sustenance for the fathers. With that, Stephen now says, "But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt."

As noted in the previous verse of the Acts commentary, that is specifically recorded in Genesis 42 –

“When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, ‘Why do you look at one another?’” Genesis 42:1

The idea of them looking at one another conveys a sense of futility. There is nothing to harvest, there would be no grassy fields for the animals to graze on, and so on. Because of this, they just sat looking at one another, probably thinking, “Maybe one of them has an idea of what to do.” In such a destitute state, Jacob finally spoke up. As Stephen says, “he sent out our fathers first.”

Again, that is recorded in the next verse of Genesis 42 –

“And he said, ‘Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die.’” Genesis 42:2

In obedience to his word, the following is then recorded –

“So Joseph’s ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. <sup>4</sup> But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, ‘Lest some calamity befall him.’ <sup>5</sup> And the sons of Israel went to buy *grain* among those who journeyed, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.” Genesis 42:3-5

The rest of Genesis 42 continues the narrative of their first trip to Egypt. They stood before Joseph not knowing it was him. During their time in his presence, several events took place that caused trouble among the brothers leaving Jacob in a state of great agitation when they returned to him. Despite these things, the famine was long and drawn out, and it would necessitate another trip to Egypt at some point just to survive.

Life application: Stephen continues to choose highlights of Israel’s history, carefully selecting events that clearly point to Jesus as the Messiah and that what happened to Jacob and his sons (inclusive of Joseph) clearly mirrored events that happened or would happen to Israel at the coming of Jesus or in His anticipated return.

God has taken real people, real historical events, and carefully recorded words to provide typological hints of what would happen in the coming of the promised Messiah. Unless these stories are read from that perspective, they might be curious oddities, or they otherwise seem irrelevant or unconnected to anything else. But when they are

taken in their proper light, they clearly reveal a great story of what is going on in the history of man's redemption.

When reading the word, keep asking yourself, "How does this point to Jesus?" If you have enough of an understanding of the rest of the word, it is bound to come into focus. God has given us this word to see His working in and through Christ. Let us remember this as we read and consider it.

*How wonderful and uplifting is Your word, O God! It always brings forth new and exciting things for us to consider, even if we have read it many times, new insights come forth just when we need them in our own lives. Thank You for giving us this word of wisdom and inspiration. Thank You for Your word, O God. Amen.*

**And the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. Acts 7:13**

The previous verse spoke of Jacob hearing of grain in Egypt, and so he sent out his sons (the fathers) in order to obtain grain. Now, immediately after that, Stephen says, "And the second *time*."

Stephen has skipped over a great deal of the Genesis story in order to come to this thought. He never mentions many important details of the first visit or what transpired after it. His words allow his audience to mentally insert everything that they already knew from their recorded history. He speaks only of the details of this second visit where "Joseph was made known to his brothers."

Because of his selection of such a small portion of the words of what occurred in Genesis, Stephen is surely asking the council to consider what he is focusing on, which is the fact that the brothers, who represent the tribes of Israel, did not recognize their own brother – their own kin – when they stood before him. Only on their second visit was who he was revealed to them.

Stephen is on trial for his witness concerning Jesus, who he claims is the Messiah of Israel. The leaders of Israel, who represent the people of Israel, did not realize who they had been in the presence of. Now, He is gone, the implication is that He will only be truly revealed to them on His second advent.

This pictorial story in Genesis is not without a prophetic confirmation in their own Scriptures. Zechariah prophesies of exactly this –



“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only *son*, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.” Zechariah 12:10

The Lord came and they pierced Him. For them to “look” on Him means that He has appeared to them again. It speaks of His second advent. Israel has just not yet realized the implication of either the pictures in Genesis or the prophecy in Zechariah. They rejected the words of Stephen and the apostles, and they are blinded to the truth of who Jesus is at this time. Next, Stephen says, “and Joseph’s family became known to the Pharaoh.”

Joseph was placed over all of Pharaoh’s house. As Jesus is claimed to be the Messiah by Stephen and the others, and as Stephen is equating Joseph to Jesus, the implication is perfectly clear. Stephen, by inspiration of the Spirit, is saying that those standing before him are not “known” to God. They have forsaken Him, and He has forsaken them. They represent the people, and thus the nation itself is rejected by Him until the time of Christ’s second advent.

Life application: To understand what is going on in the world today as far as the redemptive narrative, meaning God’s focus on the people of the world in relation to their redemption, it becomes much clearer when the stories of the Pentateuch are properly understood. In following them, and in understanding the details there, the entire history of Israel opens up and becomes clear.

And what becomes evident is that during Israel’s time between the two advents of Christ, God has not simply stopped the redemptive process. Rather, He has allowed it to continue unabated through another group of people. In the Song of Moses, it says –

“They have provoked Me to jealousy by *what* is not God;  
They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols.  
But I will provoke them to jealousy by *those who are* not a nation;  
I will move them to anger by a foolish nation.” Deuteronomy 32:21

Paul then cites that passage from Deuteronomy in Romans 10 to show that Moses is referring to Israel’s rejection of the Lord, and of the Lord’s turning to the Gentiles during Israel’s time of being rejected by the Lord –

“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘LORD, who has believed our report?’ <sup>17</sup> So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

<sup>18</sup> But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed:

‘Their sound has gone out to all the earth,  
And their words to the ends of the world.’

<sup>19</sup> But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says:

‘I will provoke you to jealousy by *those who are* not a nation,  
I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.’

<sup>20</sup> But Isaiah is very bold and says:

‘I was found by those who did not seek Me;  
I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.’

<sup>21</sup> But to Israel he says:

‘All day long I have stretched out My hands  
To a disobedient and contrary people.’” Romans 10:16-21

Paul, a Jew and a Pharisee fully trained in the Hebrew Scriptures – and who then came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ – was able to see exactly what God was doing and to see that God had already shown Israel, in their own Scriptures, what would come to pass.

The lesson for us is to look at the Old Testament Scriptures as either types and pictures of things to come or as prophecies that are to be taken literally. We are not to insert ourselves where we don’t belong (such as saying we are now Israel) when the word is not speaking to us. Israel is Israel and the nations are the nations. Keeping these distinctions separate is of paramount importance.

Read the passage from Romans again and note who Paul is speaking to (the Gentiles/the nations). Then note who is being referred to in each section (the nations or Israel). Paul clearly makes a distinction between the two because the Scriptures had already done so. The error of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the error of the Mormons, the error of replacement theology proponents, and so on, is the error of inserting themselves into verses that apply to Israel, not the Gentiles.

A problem arises, however, when groups actually claim to be the lost tribes of Israel. In doing that, they are no longer saying, “We are Gentiles who have now become ‘spiritual Israel.’” Instead, they are actually claiming to be the race of people who are Israel. If that is so, then another tact needs to be taken with them. As they claim to be Israel, and as Paul has clearly stated that Israel is blinded to this day (Romans 11:7, Romans 11:25,

and 2 Corinthians 3:14), then that means they should not be listened to because, “Who wants to follow a blind guide?”

Either way, reject these people’s doctrine. Israel has yet to receive its Messiah, the Gentiles are currently carrying the spiritual banner and – someday – Jesus will be revealed to His long-lost brethren.

*Lord, help us to have a right and proper understanding of what You are doing in the history of redemption. By knowing what is going on in the world in relation to Your word, we can more clearly understand the timeline of what lies ahead as well. Help us to be responsible with Your word and what it so carefully details. Amen.*

**Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him*, seventy-five people. Acts 7:14**

The previous verse noted that, in the second meeting between Joseph and his brothers, he was made known to them. Further, it said, “and Joseph’s family became known to the Pharaoh.” With that come words that are at first perplexing based on a reading of the Hebrew Scriptures. That begins with, “Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob.”

This part of the verse is without complication. It is found recorded in Genesis 45 –

“And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Say to your brothers, “Do this: Load your animals and depart; go to the land of Canaan. <sup>18</sup> Bring your father and your households and come to me; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you will eat the fat of the land. <sup>19</sup> Now you are commanded—do this: Take carts out of the land of Egypt for your little ones and your wives; bring your father and come. <sup>20</sup> Also do not be concerned about your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.’”” Genesis 45:17-20

With that, and according to the word of Pharaoh, Joseph sent his brothers back to Canaan to gather the family and bring them to reside in Egypt. From there, Stephen continues, saying, “and all his relatives to *him*.”

This was included in the words of Pharaoh. Not only was Jacob called to come, but everyone directly related to him as well was welcomed. With this detail given, Stephen then speaks forth words that complicate the narrative, “seventy-five people.”

The Bible often gives specific details, and they are provided for a reason. In the Hebrew text, the account says –

“All the persons who went with Jacob to Egypt, who came from his body, besides Jacob’s sons’ wives, *were* sixty-six persons in all. <sup>27</sup> And the sons of Joseph who were born to him in Egypt *were* two persons. All the persons of the house of Jacob who went to Egypt were seventy.” Genesis 46:26, 27

There is a five-person discrepancy between the two. However, this is not an impossible-to-solve dilemma. First, the Greek reads, “in souls seventy-five.” The preposition “in” expresses a sum total of all who are included in the family. In the Greek translation of Genesis 46:27, it reads, “And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in the land of Egypt, were nine souls; all the souls of the house of Jacob who came with Joseph into Egypt, were seventy-five souls.” Of this, Albert Barnes notes –

“This number is made out by adding these nine souls to the 66 mentioned in Genesis 46:26. The difference between the Septuagint and Moses is, that the former mentions five descendants of Joseph who are not recorded by the latter. The ‘names’ of the sons of Ephraim and Manasseh are recorded in 1 Chronicles 7:14-21. Their names were Ashriel, Machir, Zelophehad, Peresh, sons of Manasseh; and Shuthelah, son of Ephraim. Why the Septuagint inserted these, it may not be easy to see. But such was evidently the fact; and the fact accords accurately with the historic record, though Moses did not insert their names. The solution of difficulties in regard to chronology is always difficult; and what might be entirely apparent to a Jew in the time of Stephen, may be wholly inexplicable to us.”

Stephen, being a Grecian Jew, would have used the Septuagint, thus following that reckoning. This is often the main text cited by Jesus and the apostles elsewhere as well. Despite deviating from the Hebrew Text, the Septuagint was translated by scholars who had suitable information at hand to make a determination at the time of their translation to note what was not yet fully recorded at the time of Moses. The original rendering may have been included as a margin note that does not exist in subsequent copies, or there may be some other reason for the diversion.

No matter what, there is a reliable source for Stephen’s words, and it goes unchallenged as he continues his discourse. As such, it was considered an accepted statement at the time he stood before the council. By using the term “in souls seventy-five,” it certainly allows for the inclusion of those grandsons of Jacob mentioned above in Barnes’ commentary.

The number five is the number of grace. It may be, and this is mere supposition, that the additional five being included in the latter genealogical record is a note of grace that their birth in Egypt, having never even been to the land of Canaan, does not dismiss them from the rights of membership into the family.

Life application: Throughout Scripture, there are issues that are often quite complicated. The easy path is to dismiss such things as scribal errors, later insertions, or outright misstatements. However, that does not necessarily have to be so. We have to consider what is going on in the word from a global perspective. It is true that, at the time of Moses, seventy souls were recorded. But the adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim by Jacob, would bring their sons directly into the immediate family of Jacob, as accepted grandsons.

To just jump ahead and call out, “Error!” without checking the details may show a lack of contemplation on our part. Even the clear text is often extremely complicated. How much more when we come to things that are not so clear. In the end, the record of Stephen’s words is in accord with Scripture that precedes the coming of Christ, and what he says goes unchallenged by the highest religious council in Israel. As such, what he says must be considered acceptable – both to that council at the time and to us in our studies today.

Be confident of the word! It is given to us as a story of loving redemption, and it stands as a witness against those who shun it, as well as a witness of faithfulness to those who hold fast to it.

*Heavenly Father, the Bible stands as a witness both for and against those who interact with it. Help us to be faithful in our consideration of it. Likewise, help us to cherish it always. May it be a witness for us on the day when we stand before You that we faithfully held to its words. Thank You, O God, for this precious word of life. Amen.*

**So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers.** Acts 7:15

The previous verse noted Joseph’s call for Jacob and his relatives to come down to Egypt. With that said, Stephen continues with, “So Jacob went down to Egypt.”

That is recorded in Genesis 46 –

“So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. <sup>2</sup> Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, ‘Jacob, Jacob!’

And he said, ‘Here I am.’

<sup>3</sup> So He said, ‘I *am* God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. <sup>4</sup> I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up *again*; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes.’

<sup>5</sup> Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the carts which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. <sup>6</sup> So they took their livestock and their goods, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him. <sup>7</sup> His sons and his sons’ sons, his daughters and his sons’ daughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt.” Genesis 46:1-7

Stephen’s words skip over a lot of the Genesis narrative by next stating, “and he died.” It is a simple statement of fact. Stephen’s main words are focused on several points. One is that there has always been strife coming from the people of Israel, especially against the leadership – be it the Lord, the law, or Moses who issued forth the law of the Lord.

The other is that God’s revelation of Himself is not confined to either the temple or the land of Israel, but that a great deal of what is recorded came outside of the land. The Lord is the God of the whole world. His word and His authority stretch out beyond mere physical borders. As the life of Jacob in Egypt has nothing to add to these concepts that Stephen is developing, he simply cites the fact that he went to Egypt. From there, he continues by saying, “he and our fathers.”

Again, it is a simple statement of fact to close the point he had made concerning the patriarchs’ time in Egypt. Who “he” is referring to here should be questioned. Is this referring to Jacob or Joseph? The previous verse says that Joseph sent and called Jacob and his relatives down to Egypt. It then said, “So Jacob went down to Egypt.” Then it says, “And he died, he and our fathers.” Jacob is the nearest antecedent, but the clause could also be parenthetical. Thus, Joseph would be the subject now, for example –

“Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him*, seventy-five people. (So Jacob went down to Egypt.) And he [Joseph] died, he and our fathers.”

This is quite possible, and it has an important bearing on what will be said in the next verse. As for now, the main focus has been Joseph’s not being recognized for who he

was and that it was only on the second visit that he revealed himself to his brothers. Stephen is hinting to the council that they are no different than their fathers who could not perceive the truth of who was standing right in front of them when Jesus came.

As for the death of Jacob, that is recorded in Genesis 49:33, saying, “And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.” The note of the death of “the fathers” is found in Exodus 1:6, saying, “And Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation.”

Life application: Stephen’s speech, like all of the Bible, focuses on that which is relevant to the narrative. Anything that is not relevant is overlooked. When Genesis 10 mentions a people group, there is a purpose for it. They may never be mentioned again in the Bible, or they may be referred to in a general sense, but that people group’s overall history will be irrelevant to the immediate plan of redemption and so nothing more is detailed about them.

The Chinese people, for example, are one of the most populous people groups on earth. But other than listing their first father in Genesis 10:17, they are only possibly referred to again in the all-inclusive statement “the kings of the east” mentioned in Revelation 16:12. And that verse may not be referring to them at all.

This doesn’t mean God doesn’t care about the Chinese people. They are certainly to be included in John 3:16, Matthew 28:19, and so on. But their history is otherwise irrelevant to the redemptive narrative. And so, they are not mentioned. Stephen’s speech follows this idea. What is necessary to make his point is stated. That which is not is simply closed out with a few simple words or it is completely ignored.

Keeping our focus on what is primary as we read the Bible will help us to keep from getting into strange teachings that profit nothing. For example, the Bible is not about the redemption of angels. And yet, there are teachers that spend an inordinate amount of time dealing with exactly that subject. In the process, and certainly because of their skewed focus, they make wild speculation and come to incorrect conclusions about what God is doing.

Keep the main narrative in mind. Focus on what God is revealing. In doing this, a lot of time that may be wasted will instead be productive. Above all, keep asking, “How does this point to Jesus.” God is revealing Himself in Christ for the reconciliation of the world. Keep that in mind as you read this treasure.

*Yes, Lord God! It is so wonderful to contemplate Your word and to think about what You are telling us in it. Help us to keep our focus in line with what You want us to see. Help us to understand the glory of what You are doing in the stream of human existence to bring us back to Yourself. Amen.*

**And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. Acts 7:16**

The previous verse noted Jacob going down to Egypt, dying, and then also the fathers (meaning the sons of Israel) also died. Now Stephen turns to something that is out of order in the chronology, but it is a point that reflects an event that occurred with the fathers after their deaths, and so he mentions it now. However, it is a verse that is exceedingly confusing, even to the point where many scholars state it is actually a contradiction or a mistake. Stephen begins by saying, “And they were carried back to Shechem.”

The question here is, “Who is this referring to?” If it is referring to Joseph, Jacob, and the fathers, then there becomes a great difficulty in the text. If it is referring to Joseph and the fathers, then there is much less difficulty in what is said. In the previous commentary, this translation of the prior two verses was suggested, offsetting Jacob (who represents all of Israel) in parenthesis –

“Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him*, seventy-five people. (So Jacob went down to Egypt.) And he [Joseph] died, he and our fathers.” Acts 7:14, 15

For now, first and foremost, this is referring explicitly to what is noted as the book of Genesis ends –

“And Joseph said to his brethren, ‘I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.’<sup>25</sup> Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.’<sup>26</sup> So Joseph died, *being* one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.” Genesis 50:24-26

What Joseph requested is noted as fulfilled in Joshua 24 –



“The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph.” Joshua 24:32

Nothing is said in the Old Testament concerning the bones of the other fathers being carried back. The promise was only made to Joseph, and it was right that Joshua recorded it. However, it is logical that all of the fathers would be carried back for burial, and there are extra-biblical writings that state this is so. The fact that Stephen says it, and that the council did not object, also stands as a witness that it is so. Hence, it can be agreed upon that Stephen’s words reflect what occurred. With that noted, Stephen continues with, “and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought.”

Abraham’s name being included here is the problematic portion of the words. Only one purchase of a tomb by Abraham was recorded in Scripture, and that is found in Genesis 23. It is referring to the purchase of the cave of Machpelah in Hebron from Ephron the Hittite. Because of this, Jacob is almost always figured into the commentary of scholars. That would be erroneous. Jacob’s burial is clearly recorded in Genesis 50. He was buried prior to the years of bondage. But because Abraham is mentioned, the assumption is that it is somehow speaking of the cave of Machpelah in Hebron. But then Stephen continues, by saying, “for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem.”

The purchase of land from Hamor, the father of Shechem, has already been noted above in the quote from Joshua. But it was Jacob, not Abraham, that was mentioned. So, the logic is that either Stephen used the wrong name (Abraham), or that he used the wrong location (the land bought in Shechem). However, if Jacob is excluded from the thought of those whose bones were carried back and buried, as should be the case, it resolves the first problem. It is only speaking of the fathers (meaning Joseph and his brothers), and it is only speaking of the land in Shechem.

Understanding this, the only confusion is why it says “Abraham” instead of “Jacob” in regard to the purchase. In Genesis 12, it says the following –

“Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites *were* then in the land.

<sup>7</sup>Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’ And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.”

-Genesis 12:6, 7

As such, it can be inferred, even if it is not stated, that Abraham purchased the land before building an altar. But even if he did not, Stephen has noted Abraham concerning the land and the future inheritance several times. He will note him again in the coming verse as well. With that understood, Genesis 33 says this of Jacob –

“Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which *is* in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city. <sup>19</sup> And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for one hundred pieces of money. <sup>20</sup> Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel.” Genesis 33:18-20

This is the same location as where Abraham was, and Jacob probably erected his altar in the same location as did Abraham. In this, and because Jacob is descended from Abraham, his building of the altar and buying of the land is an act of confirming what Abraham had done. As such, the purchase by Jacob can be said to have been made by Abraham.

And this is not without precedent elsewhere in Scripture. Abraham gave a tenth of his spoils to Melchizedek in Genesis 14. And yet, the author of Hebrews says that because of this, the tithes of Israel are paid through Abraham to Melchizedek.

“Now consider how great this man *was*, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. <sup>5</sup> And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; <sup>6</sup> but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. <sup>7</sup> Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. <sup>8</sup> Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he *receives them*, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. <sup>9</sup> Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, <sup>10</sup> for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.” Hebrews 7:4-10

A similar type of event has occurred now with Abraham and Jacob. Being so, the purchase of the land by Jacob is a confirmation of the right to the land. It is considered a purchase by Abraham – this would be true whether Abraham originally paid money for the land or not. Abraham, by building an altar, was making a claim on the land for the Lord.

The author of Hebrews didn't just arbitrarily make up the thought of a son paying through the loins of his father, but it would have been an understood precept because of its logical nature. The evidence of this is that the council did not argue the matter. They understood that the land was claimed by Abraham as an altar for the Lord. Jacob confirmed this by first buying the land and then building (rebuilding) the altar of Father Abraham.

Life application: Jacob was in the loins of his father Abraham when Abraham erected the altar in Genesis 12. In this, what Abraham has done belongs to Jacob, and thus it belongs to his descendants unless it is transferred from him somehow, such as being sold, given away or lost in war, or so on.

If Abraham was considered to have owned the land, that land will be passed to the son when it is either gifted to him or when the father dies. But if there is no record of a purchase of the land, there may be a sum later paid to confirm the ownership of that land. If so, that payment would be credited to the past times when the claim had been made by the father.

Jacob may have said, "Hamor, I am paying for this land my grandfather claimed when he built an altar on it. I would now like to build an altar on it. To ensure that there is no conflict with you, I am confirming Abraham's claim by buying the land from you, which you also claim as yours." In accepting the money, Hamor confirms the land is now Jacob's. Thus, it would settle all disputes as to who owned it. But the original owner would still be considered by Jacob to be Abraham. Hence, Jacob's money is credited by him to his grandfather Abraham.

In this, we can see that there is no contradiction or conflict in Stephen's words. What he has said was fully understood by the council. They allowed him to continue with his discourse without correction or interruption, demonstrating that they accepted his words.

*Lord God, Your word is filled with wonder and delight. It is a treasure house of wisdom and joy! Thank You for Your word that challenges us to seek out its depths, and to more fully appreciate the wisdom and care You put into it. Yes, thank You for Your precious word. Amen.*

**"But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt Acts 7:17**

The previous verse detailed the highly complicated statement from Stephen concerning the purchase of land by Abraham. With that stated, Stephen now continues with another note concerning Abraham. This helps to confirm the evaluation of the previous verse. The narrative is concerning the land of promise and how it is connected to Abraham personally. It explains why Stephen mentioned things the way he did. With that understood, Stephen says, “But when the time of the promise drew near.”

This is obviously speaking about the chosen line of inheritance, meaning the line of Jacob through his sons, during their stay in Egypt. It is based on the words of verse 7:15 that said, “So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers.”

God had said to Abraham “that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them*” (verse 7:6). That included both Canaan and Egypt. With the time in Egypt drawing to a close, Stephen notes, “which God had sworn to Abraham.”

The promise is noted in verse 7:5. Even though Abraham did not receive even as much as the step of a foot, God had promised the land of Canaan to him as a possession. The details about the timing and events were then conveyed and the covenant sign (circumcision) was then noted. After that came many more details concerning how Israel wound up in Egypt, but the connection to Canaan, though seemingly in the background, remained central to everything Stephen was relaying.

The entire thought was centered on the promise to Abraham, inclusive of Abraham’s purchase of the land from Hamor the father of Shechem. It is at that time, when the promise to Abraham was to come after four hundred years – and which included bondage and oppression – that “the people grew and multiplied in Egypt.”

The exponential growth in Egypt became a central point in the ongoing narrative. That will be seen in the verses to come. But noting it shows this. Israel is no longer a small clan of people consisting of seventy-five relatives. Rather, it has grown into a great multitude. How the Egyptians would deal with such a large group will be conveyed in the verses ahead by Stephen.

Life application: Stephen is chronicling the history of his people to the leaders of his people. He isn’t doing this to show them what a great historian he is. He is doing so as an indictment against them for not seeing what God is trying to convey, right from their own history.

Many key events in their history, in which God dealt with them intimately, are recorded as being outside of the land of Canaan. They are also prior to the law of Moses. The fact that the promise of the inheritance is prior to the law, and that many of the interactions with God are outside of the inheritance, should clue the leaders of Israel into the fact that Canaan is only typical of something else.

Further, that the promise was made prior to the law should clue them in that obtaining it cannot be by law observance. As it was given by promise (an act of grace), and the law is contrary to grace, then the law must simply be a tool to teach the people of Israel their need for grace. Paul explains this quite clearly in Galatians 3.

What Stephen is relaying – in what may seem to us as somewhat obscure words – is something that should have been perfectly understandable to his audience. But even if it went right over their heads, more lessons from Stephen will be forthcoming that will continue to demonstrate Israel’s constant resisting of the Holy Spirit.

As this is so, and as the Holy Spirit is intending to highlight the work of God in Christ, then it is no wonder that they missed the significance of Christ Jesus when He came. Keep thinking about how God is revealing Christ in the pages of the Bible as you read. That is the main focus of what God wants us to see.

*Lord God, the way the Bible is written, it just keeps giving us new things to think about. Even after thousands of years of it being read and studied, new insights continue to come forth. What a precious treasure Your word is. May we be willing to consider it and to apply its precepts to our lives each and every day we live! Amen.*

**till another king arose who did not know Joseph. Acts 7:18**

As was noted in the previous verse, it said that “when the time of promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt.” From there, and in accord with the detailed narrative of Exodus, Stephen continues by saying, “till another king arose.”

The identity of this king is debated, even today. In his commentary, Albert Barnes gives some possibilities –

“It has commonly been supposed to have been the celebrated Rameses, the sixth king of the eighteenth dynasty, and the event is supposed to have occurred about 1559 years before the Christian era. M. Champollion supposes that his name was Mandonei, whose

reign commenced in 1585 b.c., and ended 1565 years before Christ (Essay on the Hieroglyphic System, p. 94, 95). Sir Jas. G. Wilkinson supposes that it was Amosis, or Ames, the 'first' king of the eighteenth dynasty (Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians, vol. 1, pp. 42, 2nd ed.). 'The present knowledge of Egyptian history is too imperfect to enable us to determine this point' (Prof. Hackett)."

Though the history of Egyptian rulers is much more fully known today, there is still debate on who the king was. Much of this depends on a person's view of when the events of the biblical narrative actually took place. Regardless of this, it is relevant to understand that the word translated as "another" signifies another of a different kind. HELPS Word Studies defines it as, "*héteros* ('another but *distinct in kind*') stands in contrast to */állos* ('another of the *same* kind'). ... [it] 'emphasizes it is *qualitatively* different from its counterpart (comparison).'"

As such, this is a king, meaning a Pharaoh, that is distinctly different from the one that had previously ruled. Pharaoh at Joseph's time was accommodating to the Israelites. However, and as will be noted by Stephen, this one will not be. That begins to be reflected in the next words, saying, "who did not know Joseph."

The idea here could be either figurative or literal. If literal, it would mean he was unaware of the rule of the previous Pharaoh. This is unlikely as historical records would have been kept, and there was only a period of sixty-four years from the death of Joseph until the time of the birth of Moses.

What is more likely is that the word "know" is to be taken figuratively, as the word in Hebrew, *yada*, is often used. The Greek word used here, *eidó*, can also be used in a figurative sense. As such, it would mean that he did not recognize, or care about, the type of rule the previous Pharaoh acknowledged.

In other words, and as a suitable example, the founding fathers of the US had a certain type of rule which guided them. It was based on morality, Christian principles, personal industry and accountability, limited government, and so on. To sum them up, we might say, "Men of character."

In contrast to that, one could name any modern democrat president and say he does not "know" or "care about" the type of leaders of the past. Instead, their decisions are based on perversion, anti-Christian principles, collectivism, no accountability for criminal behavior, government control, and so on. To sum them up, we might note them as "Moral minuscules."

This is the type of contrast seen between the two kings. As such, there will be a completely different type of rule over his kingdom. The verse now quoted by Stephen comes from Exodus 1:8 –

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.”

Life application: Because the commentary above touched upon the thought of good leaders and crummy ones, it is worth noting that if you live in a country where you have a right to vote, when you fail to do so and you then have a crummy leader elected over you (at whatever level of government), you are part of the problem. In the end, you have only yourself to blame for not being an active participant in the process which you have a right and a duty to engage in.

And more, by withholding one’s vote, that person is – by default – supporting whoever the elected official will be. It is worthy to note the words of James in such a situation –

“Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.”

-James 4:17

It is reasonable to assume that through inaction, the one who does not work against the wicked, when he has the opportunity to do so, will be held accountable for his chosen path. It is a sobering thing to consider when human life, personal property, and common morality are at stake. Take time to consider this and work to correct that which is evil by exercising your vote. If your candidate loses, it does not mean you didn’t try. Your efforts may have not succeeded, but they were also not in vain.

*Lord God, how we would love to return to the days of sanity in government and morality within our society. And maybe it will happen. Or it may be that the country in which we live is destined to become as corrupt as the world before the flood. We are almost there already, for sure. No matter what, may we be willing to work against the rising tide of wickedness while we are able. Amen.*

**This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live. Acts 7:19**

Stephen just referred to “another king” who “arose who did not know Joseph.” He now continues referring to that king, saying, “This man dealt treacherously with our people.” Here, Stephen uses a word found only this one time in Scripture, *katasophizomai*. It is a

compound verb coming from *kata* (bring down) and *sophizó* (make wise). As such, it signifies to deal craftily with or to act subtly.

This is a reference to the treatment of Israel as is first noted in Exodus 1 –

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. <sup>9</sup> And he said to his people, ‘Look, the people of the children of Israel *are* more and mightier than we; <sup>10</sup> come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.’” Exodus 1:8-10

Stephen next says, “and oppressed our forefathers.” That is certainly what is next stated in the Exodus narrative –

“Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. <sup>12</sup> But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. <sup>13</sup> So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. <sup>14</sup> And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve *was* with rigor.” Exodus 1:11-14

In this state of oppression, Stephen next explicitly describes at least a portion of their treatment with the horrifying words, “making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.”

An attack against the male babies was first noted in the ongoing narrative of Exodus –

“Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of one *was* Shiphrah and the name of the other Puah; <sup>16</sup> and he said, ‘When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see *them* on the birthstools, if it *is* a son, then you shall kill him; but if it *is* a daughter, then she shall live.’”

-Exodus 1:15, 16

That directive from Pharaoh took an unusual turn and was not effective at meeting his goals, and so he made a command which was intended to reduce the number of Hebrews to a manageable level –



“So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, ‘Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive.’” Exodus 1:22

The narrative, as given by Stephen, has carefully followed the words of Exodus 1, revealing the progression of what happened at that time.

Life application: What is unstated by Stephen, but which is something that would have been known to every Israelite, even from their earliest days as the parents talked about their history, is what is said about why the first attempt to reduce the male population failed. That is recorded in Exodus 1 as well –

“But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive. <sup>18</sup> So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, ‘Why have you done this thing, and saved the male children alive?’

<sup>19</sup> And the midwives said to Pharaoh, ‘Because the Hebrew women *are* not like the Egyptian women; for they *are* lively and give birth before the midwives come to them.’

<sup>20</sup> Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty. <sup>21</sup> And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them.” Exodus 1:17-21

Stephen skipped right over this, and yet by doing so it would have been its own reminder of the events to those he stood before. By simply recalling a story, the memory of the story would come to mind. In not mentioning this portion of it, it would surely have highlighted it in the minds of those who heard. It is in our nature to fill in the blanks of such things.

As this is so, it would be a reminder that non-Hebrews had been obedient to the inner moral standard placed in humans by God. They had not committed such a wicked act by being disobedient to the king’s edict. This would be an appeal, all by itself, to have the council consider their own wicked deeds by ignoring the words and actions of Christ and then, later, the obvious signs and wonders that have come through the apostles and which have been done in the name of Jesus.

Sometimes, what is left unstated is as poignant as what is openly stated. It is a good tool for each of us to consider. Ecclesiastes 5:2 says, “let your words be few.” It is good advice to remember before God and man. The few words we speak should carry weight, and the words we refrain from speaking can be just as heavy.

*Lord God Almighty, help us to be wise in our speech, carefully considering everything we have to say, and only speaking out that which is wholesome, helpful, and pleasing in Your sight. It is so easy for us to allow our tongues to go beyond that which is proper, so help us in this Lord! For sure, we need it. Amen.*

**At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months.** Acts 7:20

Stephen's previous words referred to the king of Egypt's treacherous instructions against the people of Israel. This included, "making them expose their babies, so that they might not live." With that thought introduced, he next says, "At this time Moses was born."

The word translated as "time" signifies a fitting season, as if the opportune moment. In this, Stephen is certainly indicating that God planned it out that this would be the proper time for the events leading up to the Exodus to take place, according to His promise to Abraham hundreds of years earlier.

It is at this fitting and opportune time that Moses was born. Moses means "He who draws out." It is based upon his being drawn out of the Nile, but it certainly is a prophetic anticipation of him being the one to draw out the word of God (the law) to then pass it onto the people. In this, he is a type, or picture, of the coming Christ – the Word of God – who draws out the will of God through His word in order to fulfill it. These things are more fully explained in the Superior Word sermons that begin in Exodus and progress through Deuteronomy.

As for Stephen, his words continue with, "and was well pleasing to God." The word translated as "well pleasing" is *asteios*, and it is only found here and in Hebrews 11:23 where it also speaks of Moses. The word comes from *astu*, a city. And so, it literally means "belonging to the city." This is because a city is considered a place of polished manners and living. Thus, one could paraphrase the word as "he was a city dweller," and the sense may be brought out.

The idea of him being pleasing "to God" is both superlative and idiomatic. It refers to anything that is beautiful, grand, lofty, and so on. Albert Barnes explains this –

"Thus, Psalm 36:7, 'mountains of God,' mean lofty mountains; Psalm 80:11, 'cedars of God,' mean lofty, beautiful cedars. Thus, Nineveh is called 'a great city to God' (Jonah 3:3, Greek), meaning a very great city. The expression here simply means that Moses was 'very fair,' or handsome."

With this understood, Stephen finishes with, “and he was brought up in his father’s house for three months.”

Because of the elegant nature of the child, the parents were emboldened and, as it says in Hebrews 11, “they were not afraid of the king’s command.” The two aspects, that of the beauty of the child, and that of the parents not caring about obeying an immoral command, combined into their determination to hide the child. In the Hebrews reference, it is ascribed to them as an act of faith. He was protected during these early months because of this.

Life application: Hebrews 11 describes this same event, saying that what the parents did was an act of faith. In this, they were recorded in the Bible’s Hall of Fame of Faith for their deed. Though the things we do will not be recorded in the Bible, they will be remembered by God. Those that are of faith will receive their reward. Those that are not, will not.

If a pastor mandates tithing in his church, there is no faith in the giving. It is considered an obligation and the congregants, rightly or wrongly, will give (or not give) based on his words. Only if a person knows that tithing is not a New Covenant precept is he freed from this legalistic nonsense. His giving, then, can be considered an act of faith.

In other words, when a pastor mandates tithing – something contrary to the word of God – he denies his congregants who are uneducated in the word the blessing of rewards for their giving. This is all the more poignant when Paul, speaking of eating various foods, says, “for whatever *is* not from faith is sin.” Though referring to foods, the precept is universal in its scope.

We are to live our lives in faith. When we give, it is to be because we have faith in the giving, not because of a legalistic mandate that is not to be found in Scripture. The law mandated tithing. Those who did not tithe were guilty before the law. Now that Christians are not under law, but under grace, to be forced to tithe removes faith from the process.

Think about this as a simple example for everything you do. What you do, do in faith that you are in the presence of God and that He is evaluating your life and actions as such. In all your ways, acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

*Glorious God, thank You that we can live our lives in faith by simply acknowledging You in our thoughts. May we consider our actions, knowing that You are there, and You are*

*with us. As we go forth with this attitude, direct our paths accordingly. Thank You that there can be such an intimate fellowship between us. Thank You for this, O God. Amen.*

**But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. Acts 7:21**

Stephen had just previously said that Moses was brought up in his father's house for three months. He next notes, "But when he was set out." That refers to what is stated in the narrative of Exodus 2 –

"But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid *it* in the reeds by the river's bank. <sup>4</sup> And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him."

-Exodus 2:3, 4

The brevity of Stephen's words in relation to the Exodus narrative shows that the story of Moses was universally known. Instead of giving the details, he simply acknowledges the account in the simplest of words. The events themselves would automatically be mentally filled in by each member of the council.

The word translated as "But when he was set out" means that he was exposed. The same word is used three more times in Acts where it means to explain, such as when Peter explained events that occurred (Acts 11:4), or when Paul explained the significance of the kingdom of God (Acts 28:23). Stephen continues with, "Pharaoh's daughter took him away."

Again, the few words of Stephen are much more detailed in Exodus –

"Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. <sup>6</sup> And when she opened *it*, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.'

<sup>7</sup> Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?'

<sup>8</sup> And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Go.' So the maiden went and called the child's mother. <sup>9</sup> Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give *you* your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed him." Exodus 2:5-9

The word translated as “took him away” is quite interesting. It is *anaireó*. It is almost always translated as kill, end life, murder, put to death, and so on. For example, it is used this way in Acts 7:28. In one instance, Hebrews 10:9, it is used to signify the taking away of the Old Covenant as it is replaced with the New. It is a compound verb coming from *ana*, a word giving the sense of upwards, and *haireó*, meaning to choose or take.

In this, Vincent’s Word Studies notes –

“Used among Greek writers of taking up exposed children; also of owning new-born children. So Aristophanes: ‘I exposed (the child) and some other woman, having taken it, adopted (ανείλετο) it’ (‘Clouds,’ 531). There is no reason why the meaning should be limited to took him up from the water (as Gloag).”

In other words, some (like Gloag) might think, “This is referring to Pharaoh’s daughter taking Moses up from the water of the Nile.” But it is surely signifying more than this. It is the ending of one part of his life and the entrance of a new aspect. She “took him up” from his life as a Hebrew “and brought him up as her own son.”

This is noted in Exodus 2 as well –

“And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses, saying, ‘Because I drew him out of the water.’” Exodus 2:10

The meaning of Stephen’s words is that Moses was both nourished and educated as a member of Pharaoh’s home. What is ironic, and what may (?) be on Stephen’s mind, is that just as Moses was taken away from his life as a Hebrew in order to become the deliverer of Israel, so Moses (the law) must be taken away in order for Israel to be delivered from the law’s bondage. As noted, the word used to describe this is also found in Hebrews 10 –

“Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and *offerings* for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure *in them*’ (which are offered according to the law), <sup>9</sup> then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He **takes away** the first that He may establish the second. <sup>10</sup> By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.”

ˆHebrews 10:8-10

Whether this was on Stephen's mind or not, the ironic nature of the use of the word to signify the changes concerning Moses (representative of the law) is remarkable.

Life application: The words of Exodus, as confirmed here, show us that Pharaoh's daughter was an exceptional financier. We can deduce this because she went down to the bank of the Nile and drew out a little prophet.

Sometimes, a little humor is a good thing.

*Lord God, what a treasure Your word is. It is filled with wisdom, history, poetry, irony, and revealed glory. In it, we find the answer to our needs. In it, we find rest for the weary soul. In it, we find Jesus. Thank You for this wonderful, beautiful word. Amen.*

**And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. Acts 7:22**

It was just noted that Moses was set out, but Pharaoh's daughter "took him away and brought him up as her own son." With that remembered, Stephen next says, "And Moses was learned."

The word is *paideuó*. It signifies the process of learning, not the result. In other words, this doesn't mean, "Moses was known for having learned everything." Instead, it means "Moses was given training in." Other than Stephen's speech, this is not recorded in Scripture. However, Flavius Josephus and Philo both referred to this. The Pulpit Commentary states –

"Josephus makes Thermeutis speak of him as 'of a noble understanding;' and says that he was 'brought up with much care and diligence.' And Philo, in his life of Moses (quoted by Whitby), says he was skilled [skilled] in music, geometry, arithmetic, and hieroglyphics, and the whole circle of arts and sciences."

It is evident from this, as well as verses such as 2 Timothy 3:8 and Jude 1:9, that extrabiblical references were accepted among the people concerning their history. Likewise, Paul cites Greek philosophers in his writings as well. Despite the sources not being inspired, their inclusion in Scripture tells us that those particular things that have been cited should be considered accurate statements concerning what is stated.

As for Moses, whatever his final level of education was, he was educated "in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." As noted in the words of the Pulpit Commentary above, this

included a wide range of disciplines. It probably also included astrology, medical studies, Egyptian religious rites and practices, various types of divination and dream interpretation, and so on.

Moses was aware of these things, as can be seen in the law. For example, there is great structure and poetical beauty in his writings at times, such as the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. These things can only be speculated on, but by reading what he speaks of, the way he writes, and the things he warns against, a fuller picture of the things he was aware of can be determined. Because of his learning, Stephen next says, “and was mighty in words and deeds.”

This refers to his pronouncements and actions in life. His learning gave him the ability to utter forth things that were intelligent, structured, and of great importance. He was also able to turn the things he instructed into action, accomplishing great feats, such as uniting Israel and keeping them united despite all the troubles that they faced, both from without and from within. The statement in Exodus 4:10 (below) does not at all conflict with what Stephen now says –

“Then Moses said to the LORD, ‘O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I *am* slow of speech and slow of tongue.’”

Having a speech impediment is not connected to what Stephen speaks of when he says, “mighty in words.” Words can be written down, they can be communicated by another (such as Aaron), and they can also simply refer to what a word signifies – a matter – and not the speaking out of the word. The words of Moses have immense weight, regardless as to how they may have fumbled off of his lips.

Life application: There is often a dilemma among Christians concerning education. Some demand that getting an education in theology is an excuse to reject that person’s doctrine (yes, there are people out there like this). Some think that one should only be trained in the Bible. Some find extrabiblical studies relevant to some extent, dismissing some things as unacceptable and claiming other things are acceptable.

It is hard to know where education becomes pointless, such as obtaining knowledge merely for the sake of having it, but without any valid reason for having it. Those things can be debated forever. But one should not dismiss being educated as leading to being tainted and unqualified to teach the Bible. For example, someone might learn about heresies in order to know how to identify that which is heretical.

Further, someone may use the writings of Greek philosophers as a way of conveying a biblical truth that can then be more readily understood. As noted above, Paul cites several Greek philosophers. Some are stated in Acts as recorded by Luke, and some are in Paul's own writings.

In regard to the Bible, the first and most important thing is to know it sufficiently before any other training in relation to it is obtained. If one is trained in theology without first knowing the Bible, then two things will immediately be true. The first is that he will have no idea if what he is being trained in is actually in accord with the word or not.

The second is that once he is trained in that theology, he will have presuppositions based on that training which will then bias his analysis of the Bible from that point on. It is very hard to mentally separate oneself from what he has been trained in, even when provided evidence that his training was faulty.

For example, a Jehovah's Witness will be trained, in advance of his knowing the Bible, that Jesus is not God. From that point on, he will always believe this, even when provided all the evidence necessary to validate that Jesus is, in fact, God. It is a state known as cognitive dissonance, and it is an extremely hard thing to overcome.

Only when the Bible is read and understood to a sufficient degree should a person be introduced to various theologies. And it is always good to learn as many viewpoints on those particular theologies as possible. Understanding the variations in thought can help a person process what he already knows, and come to a right decision about what is correct and what is to be rejected. Above all, know the Bible intimately first. From there, never stop checking the Bible for confirmation of what you are told.

*Glorious God Almighty, give us the desire to seek Your word daily, and give us the ability to remember what is there. Help us in this, O Lord, so that when we are presented with a teaching on its contents, we can properly evaluate if what we have been told is correct or not. May it be so, to Your glory and for our benefit. Amen.*

**“Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. Acts 7:23**

Stephen's last words spoke of Moses being learned in all the wisdom of Egypt, something not referred to in the Old Testament. He also referred to Moses being mighty in words and deeds. Now, Stephen gives another insight not previously recorded in Scripture, saying, “Now when he was forty years old.”



The translation falls short. The verb used is *pléroó*, to fulfill. Furthermore, it is imperfect. It more closely says, “And when *a* period of forty years was fulfilling to him.” In other words, it is as if his life was coming to a set point where there would be a change in him. At that time, an inner impulse came upon him. As Stephen notes, “it came into his heart.”

The Greek bears an idiom, saying, “it arose upon his heart.” It is as if this inner impulse suddenly activated and there arose into his thinking (the heart being the seat of reasoning and understanding) something that he had not previously experienced. It is similar to the words of the Greek translation of Jeremiah 3:16. There, referring to the Ark of the Covenant, it says that “it shall not ascend upon *the* heart.” As for Moses, nothing is said of why this came about, but it is the timing of the event that opens up the narrative. He was forty at this time.

As this is so, Moses’ life was divided up into three periods of forty years. He was in Egypt till he was forty. He went to Midian and was there forty years until his calling. He then led Israel for forty years. Bullinger defines the number forty by associating it “with a period of probation, trial, and chastisement—(not judgment, like the number 9, which stands in connection with the punishment of enemies, but the chastisement of sons, and of a covenant people). It is the product of 5 and 8, and points to the action of grace (5), leading to and ending in revival and renewal (8).”

This very suitably defines the periods of Moses’ life. Taken together, they equal one hundred and twenty, the time recorded as the life of Moses upon his death (Deuteronomy 34:7). Of that, Bullinger notes that the number one hundred and twenty “is made up of three forties ( $3 \times 40 = 120$ ). Applied to time therefore it signifies a divinely appointed period of probation.”

As Moses is emblematic of the law, this is a marvelously fulfilled pattern. As for Stephen’s words, they continue with “to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.” This is what arose upon his heart. It was an inner impulse probably weighing upon him to discover his roots and to understand who he was as a person. With this mindset, Stephen will next continue the narrative.

By specifically naming them as “the children of Israel,” it is a clear indication that there should be a bond of fellowship between them. Upon his coming to them, they should acknowledge him as their own and treat him accordingly.

Life application: In this verse, one can see the guiding hand of the Lord in how He is working out the redemptive narrative to meet His plan. It is like the call of Abraham, the seemingly chance meeting of Abraham's servant with Rebekah at a well, and so on. Various things occur that seem unrelated or through simple good luck, but each was purposefully arranged in order to lead His chosen instruments through history until it finally arrives at Jesus.

This will continue to be true at the rapture of the church. The Restrainer will be taken out of the way, and only then will the antichrist be revealed. There is nothing arbitrary about how the events of history are unfolding. The plan is known to God, it is set, and it will come to pass.

This should not lead us to a fatalistic attitude though. We are living out our lives as individuals, and God is not forcing us into decisions. We can sit on the porch all day and wait for a welfare check, or we can be industrious and get to work. Those are personal choices, and we will be accountable for each such thing we do.

Despite this, we should be comforted that there is a process that is occurring around us that has been set and that we will participate in when the time has reached its fullness. Because of this, let us not be troubled as those of the world are. Whatever happens to us in this life, it is a part of the human experience. But what will happen to us when Christ comes is a part of His divinely appointed plan for His people.

Live in the world, but do not live as the world. In this, we will be demonstrating faith in God's overarching plan that is guiding us to a very good end.

*Heavenly Father, help us to not be fearful when troubles or catastrophes occur. May we stand fast on the sure promises You have spoken out to us in Your word, being reassured that a good end will be the result, even if the way is difficult or even dangerous at times. We know that You have all things under control. Hallelujah and amen.*

**And seeing one of *them* suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. Acts 7:24**

Stephen previously spoke of Moses being forty years old and how at that time "it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel." Now Stephen's words continue with words that are active and alive, using participles. A better rendering of the entire set of words than that of the NKJV would be –

“And having seen a certain one being wronged, he defended and did avenge him being oppressed, having struck down the Egyptian” (CG).

As for the words, the NKJV begins with, “And seeing one of *them* suffer wrong.” That is recorded in Exodus 2 –

“Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren.” Exodus 2:11

It was already made clear from the context of the previous verse that it is an Israelite that is being mistreated. Further, the previous verse noted that it had come into Moses’ heart (literally: it arose upon his heart) to visit his brethren. As such, the desire to be with his true kin was impelling him to join with them. As this is so, he now perceives the injustice against this Israelite. With that, Stephen says, “he defended and avenged him who was oppressed.”

The Greek words used are carefully chosen. The word translated as “defended” is only found here. Vincent’s Word Studies notes that “The word means originally to ward off from one’s self, with a collateral notion of requital or revenge.” Also, the word translated as “avenged” is found in the parable of the unjust judge of Luke 18 –

“Then the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unjust judge said. <sup>7</sup> And shall God not **avenge** His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? <sup>8</sup> I tell you that He will **avenge** them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?’” Luke 18:6-8

Moses is there to avenge this Israelite in the same manner that God will avenge those who call upon Him. But, as will be seen, Israel failed to see Moses’ intent. For now, Stephen concludes with, “and struck down the Egyptian.” That is seen in the continuing Exodus narrative –

“So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.” Exodus 2:12

Stephen gives the main details that sufficiently connect Moses’ actions on behalf of Israel to hopefully wake up his audience to Jesus’ parallel actions on behalf of Israel.

Life application: Moses killed another man who was doing him no personal harm. It is a fact of the story. The Bible doesn't hide such things or try to sugarcoat them. It simply gives the facts and allows the narrative to continue. David did something like this when he had Uriah the Hittite killed after first committing adultery with Uriah's wife.

Despite these things, they are both considered great men before God, even champions of the biblical narrative. The reason this is so is that their hearts were right toward and before the Lord. They both failed at key points in their lives, but they didn't allow their failures to define who they were as people. Rather, they acknowledged their actions and pressed on in humility and faithfulness to the Lord.

The Lord understands our failings, He knows our every imperfection, and because of Jesus, our sins are forgiven. Let us be grateful for this, mindful of our need to correct our deficiencies, and let us do our best to live faithfully before the Lord all our days. When we fail, our hearts should be convicted and remorseful, but they should also be determined to glorify God for His abundant and merciful faithfulness to us through the giving of Christ Jesus.

*How blessed we are for what You have done for us in Christ, O God. We have failed You; we have been as enemies toward You, and yet You gave Your Son to reconcile us to Yourself. What is it that would prompt such an offer of grace and mercy? We are reconciled! Praise God! You have reconciled us through the shed blood of Jesus! Hallelujah and Amen.*

**For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.** Acts 7:25

Stephen's previous words were that of Moses defending one of the Israelites by striking down an Egyptian. With that, he continues by saying, "For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand."

Again, as with the previous verse, the translation does not follow the action of the Greek which includes present tense verbs. It is active and alive, and it is better rendered, "and he was supposing his brothers *might* understand that God, through his hand is giving salvation. But they did not understand." Despite the translation, we will continue with the NKJV, beginning with, "For he supposed that his brethren would have understood."

Moses certainly was known to have been of Israel. That can be inferred from the words of Exodus 2:14 where Moses is set in contrast to the Egyptian. Being of Israelite birth, he then must have assumed that they would acknowledge this and welcome him as one of their own. However, such was not the case. Not knowing their attitude would be unaccepting, after defending his brother Israelite, he thought that surely they were seeing “that God would deliver them by his hand.”

In his thinking, it seemed obvious: “I was born of Israel. I was drawn out of the Nile and rescued from death. I have been raised in Pharaoh’s house and understand the culture of Egypt. These people will recognize that I have taken their side and see that I am here to provide salvation from their oppressors.” It is a logical possibility of what went on in Moses’ mind. And yet, Stephen says, “but they did not understand.”

Stephen’s words are certainly given to tie what Moses did to the coming of Jesus. He was born an Israelite, He was obviously well learned despite not being schooled (Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:2). He also had come to free the people from their bondage, and so on. And yet Israel “did not understand.” The parallel is being expressed right to the faces of the leading council of the nation, and yet they sat there not comprehending in the slightest what Stephen was talking about.

Life application: Presuppositions lead to cognitive dissonance. When we suppose we know what is correct about a matter, such as a particular doctrine in the Bible, we will then close out anything from coming in and challenging what we think we know. That is cognitive dissonance. It is a state of mental discomfort resulting from being exposed to conflicting attitudes, beliefs, values, and so on.

We don’t want to think we are wrong, and so we mentally shut off opposing views without due consideration. If we believe that Jesus is not God, we will be prone to shutting out any thought that refutes or challenges our belief. This will go so far as denying the obvious.

Using the blue sky as an analogy, we know that it being blue is perfectly evident. It is something anyone will acknowledge who is honestly willing to admit. But if someone has been told that the sky is brown, and that is what he has accepted, he will shut out anything that clashes with his presupposition.

The same is true with any biblical doctrine. The Bible teaches that the rapture and other end-times events will happen in a particular sequence. This sequence is perfectly

understandable as it has been laid out by Paul. It actually takes little effort to grasp what he outlines. And yet, there are many, many views on when the rapture will occur.

When a person is presented with a suitable explanation of the proper outline, if he already believes it is different, then the black and white words on the paper mean very little to him. They will be ignored or argued against with fallacious thinking, irrelevant side arguments, and so on. The true and correct reading will be ignored and even belittled.

Let us be willing to acknowledge that maybe we are wrong. We should then be willing to consider other options until they have been fully researched and proven right or wrong. As the word says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

*Lord God, help us to put aside incorrect ideas about what is presented in Your word. Until we have done the hard work, may we be willing to acknowledge that what we initially believed may – in fact – be wrong. Your word is big and complicated, and we are prone to error. But You give more grace when we will humble ourselves and acknowledge our errors. Thank You for Your grace. Amen.*

**And the next day he appeared to *two of them* as they were fighting, and *tried to reconcile them*, saying, ‘Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?’**  
Acts 7:26

Stephen will now explain the words of the previous verse concerning Moses. There, it said, “For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.” Their not understanding begins to be explained with the words, “And the next day he appeared to *two of them*.”

The word used signifies that he appeared in an unexpected way or suddenly. It is the kind of appearance that would describe someone having a vision or being sent from God. The use of this word is clearly hinting at the advent of Christ Jesus who came in an unexpected and sudden way. As for Moses, this unexpected appearance occurred “as they were fighting.”

One gets the sense of two men having a fight and Moses is suddenly there, as if he was destined to be the one to bring peace between the two. It is at this time, and with this unexpected appearance, that Moses “*tried to reconcile them*.”

The phrase is more literally rendered, “urged them to peace.” One can see a fight going on today and another person coming up and saying, “Hey guys, lighten up and calm down. There is no need for this!” Moses feels he is doing the right thing. It was laid upon his heart to visit his brethren, and instead of finding a group that is united and caring of one another, he finds fighting. In this state of things, he looks to bring reconciliation, “saying, ‘Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?’”

Stephen gives more information than the original account in Exodus, which reads –

“And when he went out the second day, behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, ‘Why are you striking your companion?’” Exodus 7:13

Stephen acknowledges the bond between the two and uses that as an anchor to then question why they would have enmity for one another. His words are undoubtedly chosen to reveal the attitude of Israel towards Jesus. That will be more fully expressed in the verses to come. Moses came to deliver his people from the bondage of Egypt and to unite them as a people under the Lord. Jesus came to deliver His people from the bondage of sin and to unite them as children of God.

Life application: Solomon was an observant man. He was able to look at the world around him and see how things should work, what is effective or ineffective, what will lead to peace and what will lead to trouble, and so on. It could be that he was reading this account of Moses from Exodus and then thought about other similar instances he had seen, and then penned the words of this proverb –

“He who passes by *and* meddles in a quarrel not his own  
*Is like* one who takes a dog by the ears.” Proverbs 26:17

Taking a dog by the ears means you are more than likely going to get bit. Such is true when you step into an already explosive situation. The two who are quarreling are set on fixing the matter themselves. When someone who has no stake in the matter sticks his nose into the fight, it is like bringing along a bucket of gasoline and an already lit match. Things will probably not go well.

Instead of bringing peace and reconciliation, the two who are fighting will find the interference unacceptable and are bound to take out their frustration on the meddler first, before finishing their own quarrel. Moses didn’t see this, and to this day, those who fail to heed the words of proverbs will continue to make exactly the same mistake.

Human nature doesn't change, so to gain wisdom, be sure to read and apply the words of Proverbs to your life.

*Lord God, thank You for the wisdom Your word provides. If we will just apply it to our lives, things will go better for sure. Help us to display wisdom by reading and taking heed to Your word. You created us, and You have given the manual for proper operating conditions concerning us. Therefore, Lord, help us to tweak our walk before You so that all things will go smoothly! Amen.*

**“But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Acts 7:27**

The previous verse had Moses trying to reconcile the Israelites who were fighting. That now continues with, “But he who did his neighbor wrong.”

In the commentary of the previous verse, a proverb was cited, warning people to not get involved in a quarrel that is not their own. The reason is that one or both of the people are bound to turn and bite at you. In this case, it is the one who was the wrongdoer in the argument. He is obviously a bully, and he has taken offense at someone attempting to correct his wrongdoing. With his state of anger turned towards Moses, it says he then “pushed him away.”

This is not recorded in the Exodus account –

“And when he went out the second day, behold, two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the one who did the wrong, ‘Why are you striking your companion?’

<sup>14</sup> Then he said, ‘Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?’” Exodus 2:13, 14

Stephen's words are as much a theological addition as anything else. A main point of what he is conveying is the rebellious nature of Israel in general, especially to those in authority over them or those who are willing to guide and instruct them, most especially the Lord.

In His incarnation, this is exactly what they had done. They had “pushed him away,” rejecting His appointed authority over them. The similarity continues with the final words of the verse, where Stephen says this bully was “saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?’”



It was obvious that Moses was in a place of authority, even if it was only based on his adopted family's status. His position, then, entitled him a level of respect not seen in his treatment by this miscreant. But this person's actions are recorded specifically as a type of all of Israel throughout their history, pushing the authority of Moses (meaning the law that came through him) away. In this, they "pushed away" the authority of the Lord who gave that law through Moses.

Further, they "pushed away" the Lord Jesus who not only fulfilled the law but who then initiated a New Covenant in His blood. They rejected Him as their ruler, and they rejected Him as their judge. Ironically, in rejecting Jesus, they fell back on Moses (meaning the law), the same leader they had constantly rejected over their entire history –

"Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is *one* who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. <sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. <sup>47</sup> But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" John 5:45-47

Life application: As a reminder to each of us, we need to not assume that we are any better than Israel. We read the words of the Old Testament, and even into the New, and we say, "Boy, they really were a disobedient nation. They rejected Moses and went their own way constantly." This is true, they did. But Moses' words came from the Lord.

Today, we have the word of the Lord through the apostles. And yet, do we faithfully follow what He says? Even on the best of days, we fall short of all that is expected of us. Some more than others. But when we are not obedient to what is given in the epistles, we are just like Israel.

Let us consider this, especially in 1) adding to the word things that are not in the word – pet peeves, legalistic precepts, and so on, 2) taking from the word (meaning not doing) things that are explicit, and 3) mishandling the word by not following sound rules of biblical interpretation. We must be especially careful to KNOW THE WORD, or we can never do these things with any reliability. Our doctrine will be at the whims of whatever we are told, but it will not be backed up with our own knowledge of whether what we are told is actually correct or not.

*Glorious Heavenly Father, thank You for Your grace and tender mercy upon us through the giving of Your Son. Help us to show our thanks by desiring to know more about Him,*

*about what He has done, and about how that knowledge comes through knowing Your word. May it be so, to Your glory. Amen.*

### **Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday? Acts 7:28**

The previous verse saw the Israelite who was doing wrong to his fellow Israelite push Moses away and ask, “Who made you a ruler and judge over us?” His words to Moses continue in this verse with, “Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?”

Stephen’s words are close to those of Exodus 2:14, which say, “Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” The tone of the man cannot be known, but it is obvious that he is poking at Moses. The intent of Moses was to separate the two and bring about harmony. However, the one who was bullying the other wanted to continue with his perverse actions and now flippantly speaks out his words to Moses as if he were some type of common murderer who took joy in killing.

The parallel to the leaders of Israel is obvious. Jesus had rebuked the leaders for their treatment of their own people. This is found in Matthew 23 and in Luke 11. Just a portion of that says –

“Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. <sup>47</sup> Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. <sup>48</sup> In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs.” Luke 11:46-48

The leaders of Israel oppressed the people. Jesus addressed this personally and the leaders didn’t like it, just as the man Stephen is referring to took offense at Moses for trying to stop the wrong he was doing to his own brother Israelite. It is the same attitude of the heart that the Bible addresses between the two as it reveals the rejection of Moses’ words and later the rejection of Jesus’ words.

Life application: One has to beware of who to interact with, even in the church. Just because someone claims to be a Christian, it does not mean he has positive intent towards those around him. The epistles of Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude all deal with people in the church who do not have the good of others in mind –

“But shun profane *and* idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. <sup>17</sup> And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus

are of this sort, <sup>18</sup> who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.”

-2 Timothy 2:16-18

“But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? <sup>7</sup> Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?” James 2:6, 7

“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction. <sup>2</sup> And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.” 2 Peter 2:1, 2

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church.” 3 John -9, 10

“These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving *only* themselves. *They are* clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; <sup>13</sup> raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” Jude -12, 13

As this is such a common warning among the writers of the New Testament, we should pay heed. Both those in the church and those over the church must be carefully evaluated in doctrine and in how they conduct their lives. Be accepting of the brotherhood but be careful at the same time.

*Lord God, give us wisdom in our interactions with others. There are many who are out there to take advantage of the fellowship, tearing others apart like ravenous wolves. May we be mindful of them and keep them from dividing the church and bringing harm to the fellowship. Yes, give us wisdom in this, O God. Amen.*

**Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons. Acts 7:29**

Moses, being challenged by one of the Israelites he encountered, was asked, “Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?” With that, Stephen continues the narrative with, “Then, at this saying, Moses fled.” The reason for this, which is left out by Stephen now, is found in Exodus 2 –

“So Moses feared and said, ‘Surely this thing is known!’<sup>15</sup> When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well.” Exodus 2:14, 15

Moses thought that his killing of the Egyptian was done in secret. That was seen earlier in Exodus 2 where it said, “So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand” (Exodus 1:12). He thought his act had gone unnoticed, but it had not. Soon, it became known even to Pharaoh who then sought Moses for punishment. That is when Moses fled. With this context more fully understood, Stephen’s words continue with, “and became a dweller in the land of Midian.”

The location of Midian has never been exactly determined. Those who believe Mt. Sinai is on the Sinai Peninsula (once known as Arabia Petraea) would place it in the body of land going from the land of Moab and extending south along the eastern shore of the peninsula. Others believe Mt. Sinai is where Saudi Arabia is today. If so, Midian would have to be somewhere further east in that area.

Its location is less important than the fact that the Lord was always aware of where Moses was, and He interacted with him there. The Lord is not simply a local god that dwells in the land of Canaan, but He is the one true God who is not bound by physical limitations. He can and does deal with people in any location in order to meet His set purposes.

As for Moses dwelling in Midian, Stephen notes that is “where he had two sons.” While in Midian, he married Zipporah. She was the daughter of Reuel, the priest of Midian. Their first son was named Gershom. This is recorded in Exodus 2 –

“Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. And they came and drew water, and they filled the troughs to water their father’s flock.<sup>17</sup> Then the shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock.

<sup>18</sup> When they came to Reuel their father, he said, ‘How *is it that* you have come so soon today?’

<sup>19</sup> And they said, 'An Egyptian delivered us from the hand of the shepherds, and he also drew enough water for us and watered the flock.'

<sup>20</sup> So he said to his daughters, 'And where *is* he? Why *is* it *that* you have left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread.'

<sup>21</sup> Then Moses was content to live with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses. <sup>22</sup> And she bore *him* a son. He called his name Gershom, for he said, 'I have been a stranger in a foreign land.'" Exodus 2:16-22

The second son's name is Eliezer. He is first recorded in Exodus 18:4.

Life application: Moses was forty (Acts 7:23) at the time he killed the Egyptian and fled to Midian. He was then in Midian for forty years. After all that time, the Lord visited him on Mount Sinai in the burning bush (Acts. 7:30). The Lord determined when He would appear to Moses, and it was at an age when most people were on their way out (see Psalm 90:10). And yet, he was just starting the most productive third of his life.

We may not see the big changes coming that the Lord plans for our lives, but when they come, we should be willing to recognize His hand in what has occurred and use the events to bring Him glory in whatever capacity He has chosen for us.

Moses shepherded flocks for forty years, as can be deduced from Exodus 3:1. Some might see this as a dull existence, but it was a part of the Lord's plan for him. Today, he is one of the most well-known names in all of human history. Those forty years did nothing to detract from what we think of him. They were simply a part of what the Lord had determined.

No matter what our job is, where we live, or how simple we find our surroundings, let us consider that it is no different than what occurred with Moses. If the Lord keeps us there forever, or if He determines something great and exciting for the future, it really doesn't matter if we are living for Him. For those in Christ, the days of the life we now live will end, and there will be eternal days of wonder when we are in our true, heavenly home.

*Lord God, help us to be encouraged in the lives we live. Whatever our station is, You have allowed it to be so. May we consider this and be willing to live for You, no matter where we are or whatever our vocation may be. As long as we are honoring You with this life, we are doing what is good and proper. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**“And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. Acts 7:30**

The previous verse noted that Moses had become a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons. Stephen now continues, going directly to the expiration of that time, saying, “And when forty years had passed.”

The verb translated as “had passed” signifies “to fulfill.” It is as if a divinely chosen interval of time had been fulfilled, and the events to follow were ready to be directed by the Lord. As such, Stephen continues, saying, “an Angel of the Lord appeared to him.”

The word translated as “angel” simply means a “messenger.” Here, it has no article before it. Who this messenger is must be determined from the surrounding text in the Exodus narrative. Stephen will explain it in the verses ahead.

As for the reason for the coming of this Messenger, it is to be remembered that the Lord had spoken out a timeline, in advance, to Abraham concerning the state of his descendants. The arrival of this Messenger means that the time for the fulfillment of those promises is at hand. As such, this Angel reveals Himself to Moses “in a flame of fire in a bush.”

The account is found as Exodus 3 opens –

“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush *was* not consumed. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.’” Exodus 3:1-3

The word used to describe the bush is *batos*. It signifies a bramble or thorn bush. This rightly corresponds to the Hebrew word used in Exodus, *seneh*. It too signifies a bramble, coming from an unused root meaning “to prick.” It is from this thorny bush that the angel will speak. The words of Stephen finish with, “in the wilderness of Mount Sinai.”

Again, the words of Moses correspond to verse 7:30. In Exodus, it said “Horeb,” but the name is used interchangeably with Sinai. Some believe it is two separate peaks of one mountain. Or it could be two separate names for the one mountain, regardless of the

peaks. Either way, it is a word used synonymously with Sinai. This can be deduced from several verses where Sinai and Horeb are spoken of in the same context, such as –

“And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount **Sinai** in the sight of all the people.” Exodus 19:11

“*especially concerning* the day you stood before the LORD your God in **Horeb**, when the LORD said to me, ‘Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and *that* they may teach their children.’” Deuteronomy 4:10

“And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount **Sinai**, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.” Exodus 31:18

“Nothing *was* in the ark except the two tablets of stone which Moses put there at **Horeb**, when the LORD made *a covenant* with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt.” 1 Kings 8:9

These and other references show that the names are being used synonymously when speaking of the same mountain and area around it.

Life application: In the life application from the previous verse, it was noted that Moses was not yet ready to lead Israel when he was in Egypt. Therefore, he went to Midian and spent forty years in obscurity. In this verse, we can see that the Lord appeared to him in a bush at Sinai. It wasn't for Moses to decide when the Lord would act. Rather, it was the Lord who appeared and who will direct Moses.

It is not to be assumed that the Lord is going to appear to any of us and tell us what to do. It is even unscriptural to think that it could or will happen. The Bible says that we live by faith, not by sight. To have the Lord appear and direct us is not living by faith.

However, we can – and should – ask for the Lord to direct us. We can do this in various ways. One is to ask Him to direct your ways. “Lord, I am unsure of which way to go. I must make a choice, and so be with me to make the right one.”

In this, you are acknowledging His presence in your life and making a petition that He will be a part of the process that guides you.

Another way is to ask Him to not let anything happen contrary to His will. This is basically the same thing as before but in a negative petition. “Lord, please don’t let this happen if it is not what is right for us or if it is contrary to what You would want us to do.”

You can add others in when making such petitions as well. “Lord, I pray that the decision I make will not negatively affect anyone else.” And so on.

The main point of this is that you are including the Lord in your every action and decision. It is an acknowledgment of faith that you believe He is there and that He is truly concerned about the actions you take and the decisions you make. This is why Paul says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; <sup>7</sup> and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6, 7).

Be sure to include Him in all you do. Acknowledge Him and He will be pleased with this.

*Lord God, thank You for being ever-present with us. We know that You are there, and we pray that You direct our steps according to Your wisdom. Keep us from taking the wrong paths in life. Instead, may our steps always be in accord with what is right and proper, by which we will keep from harming others and ourselves. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**When Moses saw *it*, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, Acts 7:31**

The previous verse said, “And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai.” With that remembered, Stephen now says, “When Moses saw *it*, he marveled at the sight.”

The words are more fully explained in Exodus, saying, “And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush *was* not consumed. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn’” (Exodus 3:2, 3).

Seeing a bush on fire may not be that unusual, but one that burns and is not consumed would certainly draw one’s attention. The mountain is Sinai, where the law was given. Paul says that “by the law *is* the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). Thus, we have a



picture developed of the work of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul says, “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

The bush anticipates Christ who became our sin and yet instead of being consumed through the judgment on our sin, He purifies us from it. He embodies the law given at Sinai for us, having never sinned under it. Through this account, the Bible gives us an anticipatory look into the work of Christ. As for Moses, Stephen continues with, “and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him.”

That is recorded in Exodus 3 as well –

“So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’  
And he said, ‘Here I am.’” Exodus 3:4

There is the fire, and there is a voice, but there is no physical form. Moses responds to the voice, acknowledging his presence. It is a beautiful picture being developed. Moses means “He who draws out.” He is being called to draw out the word of the Lord to present it to the people. But first, He must draw the people out of the bondage of Egypt. The Lord is using Moses to anticipate the greater fulfillment of the redemptive plans of God in delivering His people from the bondage of sin through His drawing out the Word of God through the Person of Jesus Christ.

Life application: Although we should not expect divine appearances of the Lord, nor expect to hear audible voices from the Lord today, we have the word of the Lord right with us in the pages of Scripture. Too often, we look for the miraculous and ignore that which is right at hand, ready to serve us up a meal of what God desires us to do. Let us not have this attitude, but instead hold fast to the word, reading it all the days of our lives.

It is through this word that we can intimately fellowship with our Creator. And so, let us make use of this beautiful avenue of fellowship every day of our lives!

*Lord God, Your word is a treasure for us to read and consider. May we be responsible in seeking out its guidance every day of our lives. To Your glory! Amen.*

**saying, 'I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. Acts 7:32**

In the previous verse, Moses had approached the burning bush. As he drew near, “the voice of the Lord came to him.” With that stated, it now says, “saying, 'I am the God of your fathers.’” This would bring to remembrance the promises passed down among the Hebrew people that God had promised to deliver them.

Despite being raised among the Egyptians, it is likely that Moses was not only aware of his heritage, but also of what that heritage meant according to the stories kept in the collective mind of the people. Of note, the Hebrew text says, “I am the God of your father.”

The singular is taken by some to be a collective designation. However, it could just as likely mean that the Lord is referring to Amram, the father of Moses, ensuring that it is understood that the same God of his own father is the one who was also there all along with each generation that had passed. Stephen, however, focuses on the collective line by saying “fathers.”

With His words now introduced, the Lord continues, saying, “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” The words speak of the Lord’s transcendence over time. He is the God of Moses’ father and the same God who was worshipped by his ancestors, even 400 years earlier. Jesus uses this exact passage to make a theological point concerning the resurrection –

“But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, <sup>32</sup> ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” <sup>33</sup> And when the multitudes heard *this*, they were astonished at His teaching. Matthew 22:31-33

Stephen’s inclusion of these words, which would have been remembered by those who heard Jesus speak, provides suitable evidence that Jesus’ resurrection was not a mere fantasy, but something that has a precedent right from the words of Moses as recorded in Exodus. The Lord is the God of things that actually exist. If these fathers were alive to Him, even though they were dead to Moses, it means that the Lord is outside of time as we understand it, and He is in control of the state of His people in a way that we do not fully understand.

In Moses hearing these words issue from the burning bush that is not consumed, Stephen next says, “And Moses trembled and dared not look.”

The verb is an aorist participle, and it is united with an adjective. As such, it should read, “And Moses, having become terrified, dared not look.” The immensity of what he had seen and heard was beyond his ability to grasp. He was overwhelmed to the point that he could not raise his eyes to behold the sight before him.

Life application: The hope of the resurrection is no more impossible than the fact that there are fish in the ocean. God is not limited in what He can do, and He is fully capable of keeping every promise He has spoken forth.

If trials or loss have arisen in your life and you are wondering how God will work it all out, just remember the words of Jesus concerning the fathers. God has everything perfectly under control. We can, and should, absolutely trust that this is so. Demonstrate faith and be pleasing to God as you do.

*Lord God Almighty, surely You are faithful to Your word. We can trust that Your plan will unfold exactly as You have stated. No fear here! We trust You to carry us through to the good land which You have promised to Your people. And may that day be soon, Lord! Amen.*

**‘Then the Lord said to him, “Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. Acts 7:33**

The previous verse is where the Lord revealed Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Stephen next says, “Then the Lord said to him.” Moses was terrified and would not look at the sight. Despite this, the Lord continues to speak to him. His words demand a state of humility in His presence, saying, “Take your sandals off your feet.”

There is much to be learned about shoes, their use, and their removal in the Bible. And this is true even though they are only mentioned about 35 times.

In this command, and it is a command, God is instructing Moses from One who is greater to one who is lesser. In essence, “Resign yourself to me.” He is the possessor of, and in authority over, the land. Moses’ shoes, whether made by him or by someone else, were the work of man’s hands. The footprints of Moses were created by God, implying God's mastery over him.

There is then a uniting of the created foot with the dust from which it was created. Nothing of human origin would be considered acceptable in the presence of such a place of holiness. This is also seen later in Exodus 20, where it says –

“And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it.” Exodus 20:25

God made the stones, not man. If man’s efforts are placed along with God’s holiness, only defilement can take place. God calls, God sanctifies, and God glorifies. The process of holiness is of and by God and God alone.

Only twice in the Bible is someone told to take off their shoes because the ground is holy. Here, and in Joshua. To understand this better, that account needs to also be given–

“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, ‘Are You for us or for our adversaries?’  
<sup>14</sup> So He said, ‘No, but *as* Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.’ And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, ‘What does my Lord say to His servant?’  
<sup>15</sup> Then the Commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, ‘Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand *is* holy.’ And Joshua did so.”

-Joshua 5:13-15

When two things, or two similar occurrences, are noted in the Bible, there is a reason for it. There will be a contrast between the two and yet they will confirm something. In the case of these two accounts, one is before Israel is delivered from bondage; one is after they have been safely led into the land of promise. He is the covenant-keeping Lord.

One is outside of Canaan; one is in Canaan. The Lord is God over the whole earth, over both Jew and Gentile. In one there is the Lord unseen and the voice of God from “over there.” In the other, there is the Lord visible, tangible, and in human form. The Lord is the incarnate Word of God; He is Jesus.

In one, He is the Lord who will give the Law – the Angel or Messenger of it; in the other, He is the Lord who defends the Law which is given – the Commander of the Lord’s army. He is the Lord of the Law, its herald and upholder. For these, and certainly other

reasons, we are given these two accounts to compare and ponder. Stephen finishes the verse, saying, “for the place where you stand is holy ground.”

In the Old Testament, the word for “holy” is *qodesh*. This was the first time it was used in the Bible. Over 2500 years of human history had been recorded, and yet it was the first mention of anything connected to God's holiness since the creation.

A parallel word to *qodesh* is *qadash* which means to sanctify. That was used just once in the Bible to this point, in the creation account in Genesis 2:3 where it said, “God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.” From this point in Exodus, the two terms will cumulatively be used about six hundred and forty times in the Old Testament.

The holiness of God was being introduced at the burning bush because Moses will become the human giver of God’s law for His chosen people. Moses was being taught a lesson, right from the start, of God's holiness. It is a lesson he would carry with him all the days of his life.

He would even see on many occasions what it means to step over the bounds of propriety concerning that state of holiness in his Creator and Lord. This will be seen in others, both within the covenant community and without, and it will be seen in himself as well when he failed to take it to heart during a brief moment of anger.

For now, Moses stands on ground that has been rendered holy by the presence of God. As a final note, Stephen has cited the words of this verse and the previous one in opposite order –

“Then He said, ‘Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand *is* holy ground.’<sup>6</sup> Moreover He said, ‘I *am* the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.” Exodus 3:5, 6

This lends credence to the notion that it is truly the way Stephen presented it. Anyone simply copying the Exodus narrative would have done so in the order it was given there.

Life application: As noted above, Moses died outside of the Promised Land. The reason for this punishment is found in Numbers 20 –

“And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, ‘Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this

rock?’ <sup>11</sup> Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.

<sup>12</sup> Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.’

<sup>13</sup> This *was* the water of Meribah, because the children of Israel contended with the LORD, and He was hallowed among them.” Numbers 20:10-13

Moses was to speak to the rock, not strike it. This was to reveal the pattern of justification before God based on faith. Moses did not provide the word of faith, and he ruined the typology of Christ. But this was used by the Lord to show us another truth. The law cannot bring anyone into a right standing before God.

One must come to Him in faith, and by faith alone. Works of the law are excluded. If one attempts to merit God’s favor by works, he is excluded. The credit for entry into the promise is solely through the merits of Christ. Be careful to remember this lesson. Stay away from those who would tell you that you must do something to be pleasing to God. Have faith in Jesus and in Him alone in order to be reconciled to Him!

*Glorious God, thank You that You have done all that is necessary to reconcile us to Yourself. Thank You for the giving of Jesus our Lord and for all that means to us. We are reunited to You through a simple act of faith in what He has done. Help us to never diminish the glory of His work through our selfish attempts to “do better” through our own works. To Your glory alone! Amen.*

**“I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.”** Acts 7:34

In the previous verse, the Lord instructed Moses to take his sandals off because the place where he stood was holy ground. Stephen now continues with the words of the Lord, saying, “I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt.”

Stephen follows the wording and structure of the Hebrew. In Exodus 3:7, it reads, “seeing, I have seen, the oppression.” The Greek now reads, “having seen, I saw.” The structure is a Hebraism that displays emphasis. Thus, the Lord is emphatically stating that He is fully aware of the treatment being received by Israel from the Egyptians. Stephen continues with his words, paraphrasing what is said in Exodus, “I have heard their groaning.”

The groaning (or outcry) is specifically stated to be because of their taskmasters. Their lives were in bondage, and they suffered oppression in that state. As such, Stephen continues with, “and have come down to deliver them.”

The words “have come down” are an anthropomorphic way of saying that the Lord is attentive to their cries and intends to now deliver the people. It is as if a ruler has stepped down from His throne in order to assist those under Him, or as a person being called to help another in a time of crisis. In this, one cannot help but see the parallel to Jesus –

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” John 6:38

The Exodus account is being equated directly to the state of the world under law. It is a state of bondage because by the law is the knowledge of sin, and the wages of sin is death. The call of Moses to lead the people out of the bondage of Egypt is only a typological anticipation of Jesus’ coming down to free the world from the bondage of sin. This is what Stephen is focusing on. With that, he next skips over several verses from Exodus and finishes the words of this verse with, “And now come, I will send you to Egypt.”

Moses is being called to go from a place outside of Egypt to the land of Egypt itself. It is he who is to be the Lord’s instrument to bring the Israelites out to freedom from their oppression. Likewise, Jesus is the Lord’s instrument to bring humanity out to freedom from their bondage. As Jesus said –

“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. <sup>32</sup> And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’” John 8:31, 32

In response to this, it next says –

“They answered Him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How *can* You say, “You will be made free”?’” John 8:33

And then, in His reply to them, we read –

“Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. <sup>35</sup> And a slave does not abide in the house forever, *but* a son abides forever. <sup>36</sup> Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” John 8:34-36

Stephen is taking the council back to school, tutoring them on what they had failed to see when Jesus came. What man needs is freedom from sin. Being free in a nation or in a society gives people a false sense of security. Only when the true oppressor is identified and removed can a human truly be considered free.

Notice how Stephen focuses on the negative aspect of bondage and skips over the benefit of having that removed when his words are placed side by side with the corresponding Exodus narrative –

“I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.”

“And the LORD said: ‘I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. <sup>8</sup> So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. <sup>9</sup> Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. <sup>10</sup> Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.’” Exodus 3:7-10

Stephen left out the words concerning bringing the nation into the land of promise for a reason. The council sat there in that land. As such, they thought that they were in a right standing and favor with the Lord. But Stephen’s words are intended to make them think. Canaan was only a typological representation of something far greater – freedom in Christ from the bondage of the human soul to sin. Heaven, a return to paradise, it is the benefit of that state.

Life application: The Bible is written for man’s benefit. When we read about God in words like, “He came down,” “His right hand,” “His arm is not shortened,” and so on, we are reading anthropomorphisms that help us to see what the Lord is doing or what He is



like in a way that we can understand. God doesn't have a right hand, nor does He sit on a throne. God is Spirit.

When the Bible says that the sun also rises, that is for man's benefit. The sun does not rise. The earth rotates. As it does, from man's perspective, the sun appears to come up and go down. The Bible refers to the four corners of the earth (Isaiah 11:12). The earth is a sphere. It doesn't have corners. However, the words are given for man's benefit as he stands on the ground.

This is actually very important to remember because there are people who claim the earth is flat. To justify this, they misuse Scripture – twisting it – in order to confuse people. Why would they do this? It isn't because they are religious at all. It is because by getting people to believe that they have been lied to, those who “understand the truth” can now wield authority over their newly made disciples. It is a return to bondage.

In the end, all such control tears people away from focusing on Christ Jesus. Be wise and be aware of what the Bible is saying and why. How easy it is for people to get pulled away from the truth, simply because they have failed to read, know, and understand the word.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the wisdom You have displayed in the creation. We live on a beautiful ball, suspended upon nothing, as it moves through space. We have the warmth of the sun and the soft light of the moon. The stars twinkle and shine to delight our eyes. Thank You for Your care of us through such wonderful detail. Amen.*

**“This Moses whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one God sent *to be* a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. Acts 7:35**

The previous verse referred to the Lord's words at the bush noting the oppression of His people and His coming down to deliver them. He completed the thought to Moses with, “And now come, I will send you to Egypt.” Stephen continues now, saying, “This Moses whom they rejected.”

What had happened forty years earlier is being reminded to the council again. Moses had appeared to his brother Israelites, coming to them as one of them, and yet they rejected him, “saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’”

It is the words of verse 7:27 being called to mind. Moses had attempted to intercede by bringing harmony between the two who were fighting, but his attempts met with being pushed away and stinging words of rejection. Despite this, Stephen continues with his words about Moses, saying that this same Moses “is the one God sent.”

This refers to the words, “And now come, I will send you to Egypt,” of the previous verse. Despite having been rejected by his own people, it is he who was commissioned to be sent “*to be* a ruler and a deliverer.”

The word translated as “ruler” signifies one commanding with authority. It can be a governor, a leading man, a member of the elders, and so on. It is a general word that would rightly describe Moses over the people. The next word, translated as “deliverer,” is found only here in the Bible, *lutrótés*. It comes from the verb, *lutroó*, to release by paying a ransom, or to redeem. As such, it is more appropriately translated as “redeemer.”

In the choice of this word, Stephen is clearly tying the leadership of Moses in with the work of Christ. Moses worked on behalf of the Lord who redeemed Egypt –

“Therefore say to the children of Israel: ‘I *am* the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.’” Exodus 6:6

“And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’ <sup>16</sup> It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.” Exodus 13:15, 16

The verb from which this noun comes is applied to Jesus three times in the New Testament: Luke 24:21, Titus 2:14, and 1 Peter 1:18. It says in 1 Peter –

“knowing that you were not **redeemed** with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

-1 Peter 1:18, 19

Stephen is showing that Moses, through the blood of the Passover, was a type and picture of the coming Christ. This is exactly stated by Paul in Ephesians 1:7 where he notes that it is “In Him we have redemption through His blood.” It is Jesus who would be rejected by those he came to, and yet, he was appointed by God to be their Ruler and Redeemer. As for Moses, he was sent in this capacity “by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush.”

The Greek preposition, *en*, or “in,” is used – “in the hand.” The hand is a symbol of power and strength. Thus, it is a way of saying, “in the strength of the Angel.” Thus, it is the power of the Lord who led him and by which he performed the miracles, signs, and wonders before Pharaoh and the people of Egypt. The connection to Jesus, the Ruler of Israel and who performs in the strength of the Lord, is being called forth once again –

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,  
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me  
The One to be Ruler in Israel,  
Whose goings forth *are* from of old,  
From everlasting.’  
<sup>3</sup>Therefore He shall give them up,  
Until the time *that* she who is in labor has given birth;  
Then the remnant of His brethren  
Shall return to the children of Israel.  
<sup>4</sup>And He shall stand and feed *His flock*  
In the strength of the LORD,  
In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God;  
And they shall abide,  
For now He shall be great  
To the ends of the earth;  
<sup>5</sup>And this *One* shall be peace.” Micah 5:2-5

Stephen is clearly and precisely showing the council that everything about the coming Messiah was clearly prophesied in advance and that the typology of their historical figures – along with the prophecies – is exactly fulfilled in Jesus.

Life application: Studying what Jesus has done, as it was anticipated in Old Testament types and pictures, clearly reveals His deity. If you are struggling with this concept, or if you have someone telling you that it is not a proper doctrine, all you need to do is pick

up your Bible and read it – cover to cover and again and again. The more familiar you are with it, the more obvious what is being said becomes.

Jesus Christ is clearly a Man, born of a woman. Jesus Christ is clearly God, born of the Holy Spirit. The pattern for all things reproducing after their own kind is found on the first page of the Bible. It is explicitly stated there for a reason. Be confident in your faith concerning Jesus Christ, the God/Man.

*Glorious God Almighty, what You have done is incredible! We may struggle with the core doctrines concerning You and what You have done, but they are so clearly presented in Scripture that we would be foolish to deny them. And so, Lord, help us to have faith when our knowledge may be lacking. But also, Lord, lead us to those who can also firm up our knowledge. Thank You, O God. Amen.*

**He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years. Acts 7:36**

The previous verse referred to Moses, who was rejected by his own brothers, being the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. Still referring to Moses, Stephen next says, “He brought them out.”

This refers to the leadership of Moses, bringing the nation out of the bondage of Egypt. From there, the NKJV incorrectly (following the blunder of the KJV) includes the word “after.” This is not in the Greek, and it needs to be ignored. Including the word “after” as they have done leaves the words impossible to reconcile with the sequence of events. Moses “brought them out, having shown wonders and signs.”

The words translated as “wonders and signs” have already been seen in Acts, such as in Acts 2:22. The wonders refer to an event that occurs that is beyond what is normal. Calling forth frogs, lice, locusts, and hail (and so forth) are wonders. Moses said these things would come, and then they came, just as prophesied.

A sign is something that anticipates something else. Moses was given three signs to present in order to validate that the Lord had commissioned him. These were the rod that turned into a snake, the hand that turned leprous, and the turning of water into blood. The sign may be a wonder, but it has a greater purpose by pointing to something else, validating what it points to. Stephen notes that these wonders and signs were accomplished in three specific locations. The first is “in the land of Egypt.”

These were documented in Exodus 5-12, culminating in the slaying of the firstborn of Egypt and the passing over of the firstborn of Israel. Stephen next says, “and in the Red Sea.”

This was not only the parting of the Red Sea, but of the presence of the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud, His protecting of them as they passed through the sea, and of His destruction of the Egyptians in the sea. Everything about the event was wondrous.

As a side note, this is the first of two times the Red Sea is mentioned in the New Testament, here and in Hebrews 11:29. The name Red Sea is derived not from the Hebrew, but from the Greek. The Hebrew calls it *yam suph*, or “Sea of ending,” coming from the verb *suph*, meaning to come to an end, or cease. This would refer to the sea from the perspective of the land of Israel, where its southern edge ends at the sea.

The origin of the Greek name, *Erythra Thalassē*, is unknown. Some think it might be because of red seaweed found there, while some because of the coast having a reddish appearance, and some find it etymologically connected to Edom (the Edom Sea) because the border of Edom ends at the sea. Edom means red, and so this is not an unlikely possibility. No matter where the name comes from, it is evident that the Greek name, from the Greek translation of Scripture, is where Stephen’s word is derived from.

Finally, Stephen finishes with, “and in the wilderness forty years.” Obviously, passing through the Red Sea was at the time of bringing Israel out of Egypt, not before. And the time in the wilderness was after being brought out and through the sea, not before. As such, the use of the word “after,” as added in by the NKJV, confuses the timing of the events described in this verse.

As for the wonders and signs in the wilderness, they are recorded from Exodus 13 and continue through the book of Numbers. The name Etham, found in Exodus 13:20, means “Their Sign.” It was given based on the surrounding events.

From there, Israel had bitter waters made sweet, manna from heaven throughout the entire time they wandered, water from the rock, quail in abundance, the giving of the law, the punishment of offenders in unique and interesting ways, the snake on the pole, and on and on and on. The wonders and signs were there with Israel as God maintained them as a people. The Lord never failed them during their entire time of wandering.

Life application: It is not uncommon to hear people muse as to why some say we do not have signs and wonders today. The answer is right in the Bible. Paul says that we live by

faith, not by sight. If we had sight, we wouldn't need faith. But think about it. Did the signs and wonders change anyone? For the most part, no.

Pharaoh saw them and continuously hardened his heart. Israel saw them and failed to believe the Lord and refused to trust Him. Jesus performed them among the people, and they crucified Him. The apostles demonstrated signs, wonders, and healings, and they were persecuted and rejected. To this day, they are still rejected.

And to say that a wonder does not exist in the world today is not completely true. Israel exists, despite all that it has gone through. This is exactly what the Lord said would be the case. And more, Israel the people are back in the land of Israel, exactly as the Lord – as testified to in His word – said would occur. And yet, the vast majority of the church rejects that this has anything to do with the workings of God. To them, it is an aberration that is to be rejected as such.

As you can see, things such as signs, wonders, and healings may be interesting, but without faith, they have no real meaning to the person who sees them. So, which is greater? What is it that God is looking for in you? He is looking for faith. If you want to experience a true wonder in your own home, try picking up your Bible and reading it.

God has authored it through chosen men. It took centuries to complete, and it details the history of the world and the process of redemption. It tells us of Jesus, the God/Man who has come to reconcile us to God. It tells of how we should live at this time, and it tells of the glories that lie ahead for those who simply believe the gospel. If you want a true wonder, right in your own home, try picking up the Bible and reading it.

*Precious and glorious is Your word, O God. Thank You for the wonder that is there for us to search out and experience. We don't need to watch more movies to be entertained, and we don't need to see signs and wonders to be awed. Rather, we can find all the joy, excitement, emotion, and marvel we can imagine right in Your wonderful word. Thank you for this gift. Thank You for the Bible. Amen.*

**“This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’ Acts 7:37**

The previous verse described Moses, by the hand of the Angel, bringing Israel out and showing wonders and signs in Egypt, in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. Stephen now says, “This is that Moses.”

The words are stated to emphatically show that it is the same Moses and none other. Stephen continues, noting that the same man who led Israel is the same man “who said to the children of Israel.” Again, the words are not without purpose. Just as it is the same Moses who did all the great things for Israel, so it is the same man who spoke out words of instruction to them in the law of Moses. And within that law, Moses said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you.”

What Moses says is law, it includes prophecy, and it is the word of the Lord. Therefore, when he wrote out the law, it became binding upon those who would receive it. It is as if Moses was still there with them in the council as Stephen spoke. Just because the man had died and been buried, the weight of his words continued as if he was sitting there speaking them out directly to this body of leaders.

As they were words of prophecy as well, when he said that an event would happen in the future, and when that event met up with the stream of time, whatever that event was had to be considered as happening by the will of the Lord and treated as such. It was not to be neglected, overlooked, or dismissed as an aberration. As for the event now referred to by Stephen, it is an event already proclaimed to this same council by Peter as fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. It is that God shall raise up “a Prophet like me from your brethren.”

The words are stated in Deuteronomy 18:18 and are explained in the commentary of Acts 3:22. In short, Moses was a prophet of the Lord, and after him came many more prophets whose words were often carefully recorded and maintained, becoming the basis for Israel’s Scriptures. However, none of these were “like” Moses, apart from the fact that they were prophets. The difference between Moses and all others was that the words of Moses formed the basis of the law. He was the one who initiated the covenant.

And more, not only did he initiate the covenant, but he also performed the priestly role in its initiation, serving at the altar and ministering the blood. Though he was not to continue in the role of priest, he did serve in this function initially.

And further, not only did he serve in these ways, but he also served as the legislator of the covenant. No other prophet would be like Moses in all of these ways. His position in Israel was unique and distinct from all other prophets.

As Moses said that the Lord would raise up a Prophet like him, it meant that this prophet would – by default – be the Initiator, Priest, and Legislator of a New Covenant. This is carefully and minutely explained to Israel in the book of Hebrews where Jesus is said to

be “greater than” Moses and Aaron in all ways. With this understood, Stephen repeats the words of Moses that were already spoken to this council by Peter, saying, “Him you shall hear.”

In the Hebrew of the referenced verse from Moses, there is an added stress in the word translated as “you shall hear.” This is indicated by the structure. It says, *elav tishmaun* – “Him you shall *certainly* hear.” Further, the sense of the word “hear” is not just to listen to the audible sounds, but to heed them and to obey them.

As such, there will be no excuse for rejection of this Prophet. The people must heed the words He speaks. It is a command of Moses, and it is a provision specifically directed by the Lord. Further, the people were to heed him, as Peter says, “in all things, whatever He says to you.”

The basis for these words is found also in Deuteronomy 18 –

“And the LORD said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good. <sup>18</sup> I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.’”

-Deuteronomy 18:17, 18

The words of the Prophet are equated directly to the words of the Lord. Therefore, to reject the Prophet’s words is to reject both Moses and the Lord. What is said by Him is to be heard and obeyed.

Because this is clearly to be understood from the law itself, no person of Israel – to whom the Law of Moses was given – could (or can) say that he was being obedient to Moses if he rejected this Prophet that Moses spoke of and that Peter now refers to. To reject Jesus is to reject Moses. Jesus said this explicitly to them –

“Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is *one* who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. <sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. <sup>47</sup> But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” John 5:45-47

In rejecting Moses, the people would reject the Lord who commissioned Moses. The logical progression of thought is that only condemnation could result from a rejection of Jesus. The words of Peter in Acts 3, and the words of Stephen now, can be put side by side to see their parallel nature –



“For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. <sup>23</sup> And it shall be *that* every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’” Acts 3:22, 23

“This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’” Acts 7:37

The two testimonies before the council stand as witnesses to them. If they are rejected, they stand as witnesses against them. But more, the words of Moses that they have cited are their own witness. The apostles are simply confirming that these words do, in fact, point to Christ Jesus.

Life application: Israel of today is taught by their own rabbis that Ezekiel 36 is fulfilled in their return to the land. Ezekiel was a prophet under the law of Moses, and his words prophesied of events that would happen in confirmation of what Moses had already recorded –

“If *any* of you are driven out to the farthest *parts* under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. <sup>5</sup> Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. <sup>6</sup> And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” Deuteronomy 30:4-6

“For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup> Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup> I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*. <sup>28</sup> Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.” Ezekiel 36:24-28

It is the epitome of hypocrisy to claim that the Lord has favored them and brought them back to the land while ignoring the very words of the Lord that say they were exiled for their rejection of Jesus. Even though these words of Acts are found in the New Testament, they are based upon the words of the Law of Moses, they have been

witnessed and testified to, and the witness stands as a historical record, bearing authority as such.

Picking and choosing what applies and what does not from the word of the Lord does not solve anything. It only confuses things even further. This is what Israel has done and continues to do. It is, unfortunately, what innumerable denominations, churches, and individual pastors, preachers, and teachers do. What is not liked about the prescriptions from the word is simply ignored. This is not a healthy way of taking in what the Lord is saying, and it can only lead to sadness in the end.

Let us take all things in their proper context, adhere to what is prescribed in the proper dispensation, and be willing to accept what is presented for what it is – the word of God that is to guide our life and conduct before the Lord.

*Lord God, help us to be responsible with our analysis and application of Your precious word. It is far too important to dismiss or only partially apply it to our lives. Rather, may we be willing to carefully adhere to Your word, allowing it to guide our steps all the days of our lives. Amen.*

**“This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and *with* our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, Acts 7:38**

Following in the same thoughts as Peter from Acts 3, Stephen implicitly tied Jesus in with the “Prophet like Moses” from the previous verse. He did this by noting that Moses had admonished Israel to hear that coming Prophet. Now, he continues with his words about Moses, saying, “This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness.”

In the Hebrew Old Testament, two main words are used to define those in the wilderness: *qahal* – assembly, and *edah* – congregation. The two words are similar in meaning but are distinct enough that a good translation will render them consistently as “assembly” and “congregation” to show the difference between the two. The word Stephen uses is the Greek word *ekklésia*. It can signify either word from the Hebrew. It refers to a group that is assembled, whether religious or secular (such as in Acts 19:32).

His use of the word simply indicates that the people of Israel had been called together as a people, assembling for a purpose. In this case, the assembly is defined by the next words, saying, “with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai.”

The congregation of those assembled met with the Angel of the Lord, meaning a visible/audible manifestation of God. As God is Spirit, it is a reference to the Lord Jesus who is the Angel (Messenger) of the Lord seen at that time and throughout the Old Testament.

The people were called together to hear the law spoken forth. They agreed to the conditions set forth, and they accepted the rule of the Lord over them. As such, they accepted Moses as the Lord's representative. With this understood, Stephen confirms that not only Moses, but the people had heard this, saying, "and *with* our fathers."

The people as an assembly had gathered at the foot of Sinai. They had heard the words of law, and they were overcome with terror at what they had heard. This is found just after the giving of the Ten Commandments –

"Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood afar off. <sup>19</sup> Then they said to Moses, 'You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.'" Exodus 20:18, 19

The people agreed that hearing the voice of the Lord was too much for them. And so, they asked Moses to speak out the words of law and they would hear – meaning obey – them. This is then reflected in the final words of the verse, saying, "the one who received the living oracles to give to us."

This refers again to Moses. The people accepted that Moses would receive and transmit the word of the Lord to them. These are then called "the living oracles." Some translations incorrectly say, "lively oracles," "words of life," or "life-giving." Such translations are not the intent. It is a verb and signifies that the oracles are alive and active.

In Deuteronomy 33:2, Moses says, "From His right hand, fire-law for them" (CG). The meaning is that the law is alive and both purifying and consuming. This is the intent of what is given. These oracles are what work in Israel to either purify them as a people in their obedience or to consume them in their disobedience.

Life application: In Hebrews, it says –

"Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. <sup>12</sup> For the word of God *is* living and powerful,

and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. <sup>13</sup> And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.”

-Hebrews 4:11-13

This is the same thought as that of what Stephen presents to the council as he speaks to them. It is the same thought that we are to remember as well. Assuming the person is saved by faith in Christ, there is still the need to develop in Him. We are saved out of sin to live in holiness. This is what the Word of God is given for. We can learn what is pleasing to Him. We can learn how to walk properly before Him. We can avoid those things that are contrary to His nature.

Let us make use of this wonderful word. We will not lose our salvation if we don't learn the word, but our life will never be one that is properly conducted unless we apply it to our walk before Him. Read the word, think on it, and let it fill you so that it can guide your actions, your conduct, and your words all the days of your life.

*Glorious God, thank You for the wonderful words that You have given to us in the pages of Scripture! It is a living and powerful word that can mold us into Your image if we will just learn it and apply it to our lives. Help us in this, O God. May we do so, and may we be pleasing in Your sight as we walk before You in holiness. Amen.*

**whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, Acts 7:39**

Stephen is still referring to Moses. He just noted that it was he to whom the Angel spoke on Mount Sinai, having received the living oracles which were then given to the people. Now he says of him, “whom our fathers would not obey.”

In the Greek, the word “obey” is an adjective. It should be rendered, “to whom our fathers were not willing to become obedient.” Obedience to Moses is to obey the Lord who gave the law through Moses. But they were unwilling to be obedient, as Stephen says, “but rejected.”

The specific events by which they rejected obedience to Moses, and of which Stephen is referring to, will be detailed in the coming verses. They are centered on what occurred in Exodus 32 in the incident of the golden calf.

For now, there is a casting off of what the Lord commanded. In this, they have cast off obedience to Moses who was chosen by the Lord to lead them. In rejecting this leadership, Stephen next says, “And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt.”

This is something that is specifically recorded in both Exodus 16 and Numbers 14. For example, in Exodus 16, it says –

“Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup>And the children of Israel said to them, ‘Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat *and* when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’” Exodus 16:2, 3

Even though not explicitly stated in Exodus 32, the same attitude is seen there. They rejected the Lord whose presence was seen atop the mountain, and they rejected Moses who was there conferring with the Lord. Instead, they turned their hearts back to Egypt in the sense that they longed for a physical, tangible idol that they could worship.

Life application: Israel turned its heart back to Egypt when they faced lack, such as in Exodus 16. The people turned their heart back to Egypt when they faced the idea of entering Canaan and having to deal with the inhabitants there that had fortified cities and strong defenses as in Numbers 14. They turned their heart back to Egypt in desiring gods that are not God as in Exodus 32. Each of these incidents demonstrates a lack in the people. That lack is faith.

They did not have faith that the Lord would provide for their physical needs, they did not have faith that the Lord would go before them and defeat their foes, and they lacked faith in God if they could not see Him right there among them.

People would rather trust a deaf and mute idol that they have fashioned with their own hands than to trust the unseen God who created all things. We must rise above this type of thinking and trust God through hardship and ease, through victory and possible defeat, and in not seeing the One who has made all that we see.

If we can just remember that He is there and that He has a plan that is being worked out for our ultimate benefit, then the temporary trials can be put in their proper perspective. There is no guarantee of living a life without pains, sadness, or loss. In fact, we should expect all of these things. But we can know that what we experience is

temporary and will have a good end in the restoration of all things that God, who cannot lie, has promised to His people. Have faith in this.

*Lord God, You are looking for faith in Your faithless creatures. Help us to be people of faith even when it seems beyond our ability to control anything around us. While the whirlwind swirls and destroys, may we remember that the calm and tranquil joy of heaven awaits us because of our hope in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**saying to Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ Acts 7:40**

In the previous verse, Stephen noted that the fathers rejected Moses and “in their hearts they turned back to Egypt.” With that in mind, he continues by citing the words of the people, what they were “saying to Aaron.”

Aaron is Moses’ older brother and the person who had been with him as they confronted Pharaoh numerous times. He personally spoke for Moses as his mouthpiece. He saw the signs, wonders, and miracles that led to the Exodus. If anyone would be expected to wait for and support Moses, it would certainly be him. And yet, the people came to him with a demand, saying, “Make us gods to go before us.”

The verb is future, and the wording is more precise. The Greek reads, “Make us gods which shall go before us.” The idea is that they were to fashion their own gods that would be used as emblems to be carried before them as they marched. With this understood, Stephen continues with the words of the people, saying, “as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt.”

The people acknowledged that it was Moses who conducted them out of Egypt. As Moses spoke on behalf of the Lord, it is thus a rejection of the Lord. The agreement for Moses to serve in this capacity – by receiving the word and passing it on to them – had already been made and they were bound to it. And yet, they ignored this in their rush to hurry into making their own future. As this is so, they continue by saying, “we do not know what has become of him.”

It is a pathetic excuse for their statement. Moses had ascended the mountain. The presence of the Lord was clearly visible upon the mountain. If they didn’t believe Moses, they could have simply walked up the mountain and checked on his state. However, if they believed that they were accountable to the Lord and would be punished by Him for going up the mountain, then it meant that they knew the Lord was there.

Either way, they were completely without excuse for their words. Stephen's inclusion of this account is a clear presentation to the council that they were doing exactly the same thing. They, like Aaron, were there to transmit the words of Moses. The council knew what Scripture had prophesied concerning the Lord. And yet, they turned their back on Moses, and thus they turned their back on the Lord. They did this by looking to fashion their own gods to lead them – gods of self, legalism, and so on. They were following the same pattern as their fathers in their actions towards the Lord.

The words of Stephen in this verse are found in Exodus 32 –

“Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, ‘Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’” Exodus 32:1

Life application: As is apparent, whether we have a visible manifestation of the Lord right in front of us or not, our inclination as people is to reject Him. How often do we hear others say (or personally think ourselves) that they would believe if they just had a sign from God? “Why doesn't He clearly show Himself so that we can believe?”

Two things can be considered from this type of thinking. First, “No. No, you wouldn't.” Even if God wrote His name in the stars, people would certainly ignore it and claim the form of the letters in the alphabet were derived from the pattern of the stars. Thus, the stars came before the alphabet, being the basis for it. Or they would find some other reason to disbelieve.

Secondly, however, God has revealed Himself in the stars, in the sun, in the flower, and in the workings of the bumblebee. The wisdom of God is found throughout the universe, from the smallest particle we can contemplate to the overall structure of the universe itself. It is seen in the complexity of the human brain and in the intricate fashioning of the hand of man. God's power, intellect, and glory are seen in all such things. And yet, we ascribe all of this to random chance and evolution.

Expect no sign. It is very likely that you wouldn't believe it anyway. You have already been given ten billion times ten billion signs. If you cannot believe based upon what He has done, you will not believe anything else He might do. Rather, by simple faith, accept that He is God, that He has given us His word, and that He has sent His Son to bring us back to Himself. This is what God finds pleasing. Have faith and be pleasing to Him.

*Lord God, You look for faith in Your faithless creatures, so a little bit will do. And when we have faith, help us to increase it daily by thinking about You and what You have done for us in the giving of Christ Jesus. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Acts 7:41**

Included among other words in the previous verse, Stephen quoted the people of Israel saying, "Make us gods to go before us." He continues with that now, saying, "And they made a calf in those days."

The word translated as "they made a calf" is found only here, *moschopoieó*. It is not used in the Greek Old Testament. It comes from *moschos* (a calf, heifer, or bull) and *poieó* (to construct or make). Stephen coins a new word to show the disdainful nature of what occurred. The event is recorded in Exodus 32 –

"And Aaron said to them, 'Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me.'<sup>3</sup> So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* to Aaron.<sup>4</sup> And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, 'This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'" Exodus 32:2-4

The reason for making this calf is not perfectly evident without understanding the symbolism. It said in Exodus 32:39 that "their hearts turned back to Egypt." Vincent's Word Studies explains how the calf is so intimately connected to Egypt –

-----

This was in imitation of the Egyptian bull-worship. Several of these animals were worshipped at different places in Egypt. Apis was worshipped at Memphis. Herodotus says: "Now this Apis, or Epaphus, is the calf of a cow which is never afterward able to bear young. The Egyptians say that fire comes down from heaven upon the cow, which thereupon conceives Apis. The calf which is so called has the following marks: He is black, with a square spot of white upon his forehead, and on his back the figure of an eagle. The hairs in his tail are double, and there is a beetle upon his tongue" (iii., 28). He was regarded by the Egyptians, not merely as an emblem, but as a god. He was lodged in a magnificent court, ornamented with figures twelve cubits high, which he never



quitted except on fixed days, when he was led in procession through the streets. His festival lasted seven days, and all came forward from their houses to welcome him as he passed. He was not allowed to reach the natural term of his life. If a natural death did not remove him earlier, he was drowned when he reached the age of twenty-five, and was then embalmed and entombed in one of the sepulchral chambers of the Serapeum, a temple devoted expressly to the burial of these animals.

Another sacred bull was maintained at Heliopolis, in the great Temple of the Sun, under the name of Mnevis, and was honored with a reverence next to Apis. Wilkinson thinks that it was from this, and not from Apis, that the Israelites borrowed their notions of the golden calf. "The offerings, dancing, and rejoicings practised on the occasion, were doubtless in imitation of a ceremony they had witnessed in honor of Mnevis during their sojourn in Egypt" ("Ancient Egyptians," 2 sen, vol. ii., p. 197). A third sacred bull, called Bacis, was maintained at Hermonthis, near Thebes. It was a huge, black animal, and its hairs were said to grow the wrong way. Other bulls and cows did not hold the rank of gods, but were only sacred.

-----  
With this symbol of Egypt now before them, Stephen next says that the people "offered sacrifices to the idol."

Sacrifices were made as offerings of devotion, for appeasement, for atonement, for fellowship, and so on. In offering sacrifices, they were aligning themselves with this idol as a representation of the Lord (YHVH). Aaron stated this explicitly. This was in violation of the covenant they agreed to when the Lord spoke out the Ten Commandments. Rather than obtaining favor, they were bringing wrath down upon themselves. Stephen then finishes the verse with "and rejoiced in the works of their own hands."

The thought of this and the previous clause are found in Exodus 32 –

"So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD.' <sup>6</sup> Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Exodus 32:5, 6

The thought of rejoicing in the work of their own hands means that they fashioned their own god, and they were thus participants in their own supposed reconnection to the divine. This is what Adam and Eve did when "they sewed fig leaves together and made

themselves coverings” (Genesis 3:7). They were attempting to reestablish the connection to God that had been lost, covering over their sinful state in order to restore a propitious relationship with Him. But the Lord rejected that. It is not through our effort, but through His that a covering is provided and restoration is realized.

Israel made the same mistake, rejecting the Lord and attempting to obtain their own path to appeasement, atonement, and fellowship.

Life application: The same concepts come up again and again in Scripture, attempting to help us think through what is going on. In the case of salvation, Paul says that it is by grace through faith. It is not of ourselves, but rather it is the gift of God.

If you ask almost any teacher or preacher if that is so, they will immediately agree with it. They could do no less. The words are clear, precise, and unambiguous. And yet, no sooner do many avow that this is true, then they immediately turn around and inject their own works back into the equation. They may do it by saying you can lose your salvation. They may do it by saying you must submit to the law of Moses or certain precepts from it. They may say that you need to give up your sin before you can be saved, and so on.

Such things either directly contradict the notion of salvation being a gift that comes by grace through faith, or they put the cart before the horse by claiming you must do something before receiving the gift (which is contradictory as well).

Be sure to keep simple what is simple. Don't allow anyone to rob you of the very basics of theology and be sure not to rob others of them as well. Grace! Grace! We are saved by God's grace! Why should we take such a pure and simple message and tarnish it? Hold fast to the grace of God that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Lord God, forgive us for always trying to fashion our own path to salvation by rejecting the simple message of grace that Your word speaks of. Help us to never add to the glory of what You have done through the giving of Jesus. His cross! His death! His burial! His resurrection! What could we ever add to that? Only after receiving it will we attempt to please You with lives lived in holiness. Amen.*

**Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: ‘Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices *during* forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? Acts 7:42**

The previous verse said, “And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.” Now Stephen continues to describe the conduct of Israel, saying, “Then God turned.”

The idea here is that in forsaking the Lord, the Lord will forsake them. It is the warning Joshua gave to the people –

“But Joshua said to the people, ‘You cannot serve the LORD, for He *is* a holy God. He *is* a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. <sup>20</sup> If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good.’” Joshua 24:19, 20

In God’s turning, Stephen next says, “and gave them up.” Instead of continuing to appeal to Israel to do what is right and to worship Him, the Lord essentially says, “Ok. Have it your way. If you will not worship me, we’ll see if the gods you do serve will help you.” That is the same thought found in the Song of Moses –

“He will say: ‘Where *are* their gods,  
The rock in which they sought refuge?  
<sup>38</sup> Who ate the fat of their sacrifices,  
*And* drank the wine of their drink offering?  
Let them rise and help you,  
*And* be your refuge.’” Deuteronomy 32:37, 38

The Lord allowed Israel to follow their own gods, and when times of trouble came, they had no one to turn to. The gods they trusted in were out “having a party” and too busy to help apparently. In actuality, they didn’t exist because they were not gods at all. Stephen next says that God gave them up “to worship the host of heaven.”

It is a term describing the sun, moon, planets, and stars. The word “host” signifies an army. Their regular movements and the way they are set in the heavens is as if they are arrayed for battle. The worship of this host is seen, for example, in 2 Chronicles –

“Manasseh *was* twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> But he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. <sup>3</sup> For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. <sup>4</sup> He also built altars in the

house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, 'In Jerusalem shall My name be forever.' <sup>5</sup> And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD." 2 Chronicles 33:1-5

These and other such verses refer to Israel serving and worshipping the created "host of heaven" rather than the Creator of those hosts. To support his words to the council, Stephen next quotes Scripture, saying, "as it is written in the book of the Prophets."

The Hebrew Bible of today is divided into three sections, commonly referred to as the Tanakh. It is an acronym combining the first letters of those sections, the Torah (the books of Moses also known as the Pentateuch or simply "the Law"); the Nevi'im (the Prophets); and the Ketuvim (the Writings). A similar division is referred to by Jesus in Luke 24 –

"Then He said to them, 'These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me.'" Luke 24:44

As for Stephen's words noting the book of the Prophets, he specifically cites the book of Amos, saying –

"Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices *during* forty years in the wilderness,  
O house of Israel?"

The words are specifically being remembered from Amos 5:25 –

"Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings  
In the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?"

The words of Stephen will continue to cite Amos, but the question of Amos 5:25 begs a negative answer. Israel was out worshipping other gods, failing to give the Creator of the heavenly host credit for His handiwork. But right in the same chapter of Amos, the Lord is directly credited with the creation of these things –

"He made the Pleiades and Orion;  
He turns the shadow of death into morning  
And makes the day dark as night;  
He calls for the waters of the sea

And pours them out on the face of the earth;  
The LORD is His name.” Amos 5:8

The Pleiades and Orion were, and still are, known constellations. It is He who made them. Their structure and placement are according to His wisdom alone. Why worship the lesser? The Lord is the Creator.

Life application: The Bible does not deny that there is structure and order in the alignment of the stars. On the contrary, it acknowledges it. These heavenly bodies tell their own stories. This is acknowledged in several places in both testaments. An example of this is found in Jacob’s blessing upon his son, Judah –

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,  
Until Shiloh comes;  
And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people.” Genesis 49:10

The words here are believed to be the heavenly sign that the Magi understood to refer to the coming of the Messiah. When Leo, Regulus, and the moon were in a particular alignment, the coming of Messiah was known to have occurred. Likewise, Peter has already spoken in Acts 2 of the moon turning to blood. That refers to an eclipse. Such events are placed or timed according to God’s purposes.

Having said that, there is no reason why we should try to predict the future based on such events. This is as common as holes in a donut shop, but it is not a sound way of determining the future. Only after the event takes place should we expect to understand that it has been fulfilled. Eclipses come and go, the movement of the planets and stars continue to take place with their set precision, and we are to be about worshipping the Creator of those things. His wisdom in how such things align is up to Him and we will understand it after those things are revealed.

*Heavenly Father, You have truly displayed wisdom in how You have structured all things. We can see it in the movement of the sun, moon, planets, and stars. And yet, we err when we look to them to reveal to us our destinies. Rather, we should look to You, the Creator of them, for our hope, our joy, and our delight. May we never substitute that which is less for the joy that is found in You alone. Amen.*

**You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch,  
And the star of your god Remphan,  
Images which you made to worship;  
And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.’ Acts 7:43**

Stephen had just begun to quote Amos 5 in the previous verse. He now continues with that here. His citation does not completely match the Hebrew, which says –

“You also carried Sikkuth your king  
And Chiun, your idols,  
The star of your gods,  
Which you made for yourselves.  
<sup>27</sup> Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus,  
Says the LORD, whose name *is* the God of hosts.”

Noting these differences, Stephen begins with, “You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch.” A tabernacle is a tent in which an entity dwells. This would have been carried by the people in a procession as was common among the pagans, and which is seen even in parts of the world today. Moloch is the god of the Ammonites. In the Old Testament, he is noted as Molech.

Worship of Molech was expressly forbidden five times in the book of Leviticus. Solomon made a high place to Molech in 1 Kings 11:7. Also, in Jeremiah 32:35, it says –

“And they built the high places of Baal which *are* in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through *the* fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.”

Despite the differences in the English, the translation of the Hebrew is exceedingly close to Stephen’s words. The name Sikkuth is spelled similarly to Succoth, or “tabernacle.” And the words “your king” are closely associated with Molech, which comes from the Hebrew word meaning “king.”

The reason for saying “tabernacle” here is certainly because he is making a play on words, connecting the thought to what is coming in verse 44. There, he will refer to the “tabernacle in the wilderness,” showing a contrast between this tabernacle and that one.

Stephen next says, “And the star of your god Remphan.” This clause can be seen to be quite different from the Hebrew. The explanation for the difference is provided by the Pulpit Commentary –

“Rephan, or Raiphan, or Remphan, as it is variously written, is the LXX. translation of the Hebrew Chiun in Amos 5:26. The best explanation of this is that Rephan is the Coptic name of the planet Saturn, well-known of course to the LXX., and that Chiun is the Hebrew and Arabic name of the same star, which they therefore translated by Rephan.”

Stephen next says, “Images which you made to worship.” Stephen returns to the thought of verse 7:41 which referred to the golden calf and which said, “and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.” Israel had a proclivity to fashioning gods instead of trusting in the uncreated God. In this, they were completely disobedient to Moses, and thus to the Lord.

Stephen finishes with, “And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.” Although this seems completely contradictory to the Hebrew that reads “Damascus,” it is evident that if one is carried beyond Babylon, he has been carried beyond Damascus. John Gill provides a thorough account of this –

“...in Amos it is beyond Damascus, and so some copies read here, which was in Babylon; and explains the sense of the prophet more fully, that they should not only be carried for their idolatry beyond Damascus, and into the furthest parts of Babylon, but beyond it, even into the cities of the Medea, Halah, and Habor, by the river Gozan; and here is no contradiction: how far beyond Damascus, the prophet does not say; and if they were carried beyond Babylon, they must be carried beyond Damascus, and so the words of the prophet were fulfilled; and Stephen living after the fulfilment of the prophecy, by which it appeared that they were carried into Media, could say how far they were carried; wherefore the Jew (i) has no reason to cavil at Stephen, as if he misrepresented the words of the prophet, and related things otherwise than they were.”

Life application: Stephen is talking to the lead council of Israel, and he is citing things that are a part of their history. Though the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament do not appear to match, the differences are settled by including both the Greek Old Testament and analysis of the customs, cultures, and languages of the surrounding countries that the people of Israel were fully aware of.

Throughout Acts 7, the council is not seen to stop Stephen and correct him. This would have occurred if what he said was not considered acceptable. Luke is simply chronicling

what was said and what happened. And more, if the record of what Luke had said was not compatible with what was considered a reasonable understanding of the citation of the Old Testament, such as that found here, there would have been countless critiques of it throughout the years, starting immediately after Acts was published.

On the other hand, scholars have analyzed every word of the book of Acts and have been able to reasonably settle any difficulties. As this is so, we can be content that we have a reliable record of what was said, and that it is fully in accord with an acceptable interpretation of the passages set before the council.

When people attempt to disparage your faith by disparaging the Bible – and they will – be ready to defend it. There are difficulties in it, but there are reasonable explanations for each of them if you are willing to put in the time and effort to understand them. Don't be shy about this. Stand up for the word. It is the basis for our faith in the Lord. As Paul says, "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

*Lord God, thank You for those scholars who have come before us, and who have carefully analyzed the Bible, seeking out its mysteries and finding reasonable solutions to very difficult passages that arise at times. Their work helps us to have greater confidence when we speak to others, and it helps us to want to go further in opening up the treasures that are still awaiting us in Your word. We are surely blessed as this stream of effort continues, even to this day. Amen.*

**"Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, Acts 7:44**

In the previous verse, Stephen completed his citation of Amos 5. In that citation (verse 7:42), he mentioned "the tabernacle of Molech." Now, he contrasts that with the words of this verse, saying, "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness."

This is the edifice detailed in Exodus which was the central part of the sanctuary where the Lord dwelt. The sanctuary was enclosed by hangings forming a courtyard. Within that was kept the brazen altar and the laver. Those led to the tabernacle (also called "tent" when a different word is used) which was a tent where the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place were. It is known by various names in the books of Moses, such as the tabernacle of witness, the tabernacle of the testimony, the tabernacle of the congregation, the tabernacle of meeting, the tabernacle of the Lord, and so on.



Within the Most Holy Place was the ark of the covenant where the presence of the Lord dwelt. This was “in the wilderness.” This edifice was constructed at Sinai and was carried from there to the doorstep of Canaan where the people rebelled. When they were turned back because of their faithlessness, it was carried throughout the wilderness wanderings, and it was eventually taken across the Jordan and into Canaan. This was a temporary, mobile edifice that was constructed “as He appointed.”

The Lord gave Moses explicit and detailed instructions concerning exactly what materials to use, what colors the fabrics were to be, how much certain implements would weigh, how long things would be, and so on. Everything was according to His word and was presented to Moses. The Lord was “instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen.”

This was first said to Moses in Exodus –

“And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. <sup>9</sup> According to all that I show you, *that is*, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make *it*.” Exodus 25:8, 9

This is further explained in Hebrews where it says –

“For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore *it is* necessary that this One also have something to offer. <sup>4</sup> For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; <sup>5</sup> who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘See *that* you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’ <sup>6</sup> But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.”  
-Hebrews 8:3-6

The author of Hebrews says that this sanctuary was a “copy and shadow of the heavenly things.” In every detail and in every respect, it anticipated the Person and work of Jesus. As such, it was only a shadow of the good things to come in Christ. As an explicit example of this, the author of Hebrews says of the veil that hangs between the holy and the most holy place pictured the flesh of Jesus –

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh.” Hebrews 10:19, 20

As this is so, and it is fully confirmed in the gospels through typology that it is, it tells us that their rejection of the law that was given to them, and which detailed those things concerning the tabernacle, was a rejection of what those things only anticipated, the coming Messiah. When He came, it was no wonder that they rejected Him. The same spirit of disobedience worked in them all along.

Life application: A proper study of the Bible takes a lifetime, and even then, we won't know all that is contained there. But in order to rightly know what is said, one has to have a right translation. Otherwise, a misunderstanding of important concepts will come about. Therefore, it is important to weed out mistranslations, errors, and contradictions that come about through faulty translational work.

As an example of this, notice the difference between these three sets of verses from the KJV and the NKJV. To make it simple, the error is highlighted. Which version is in error and why? See if you can identify and explain it –

KJV:

According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the **pattern** of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it. Exodus 25:9

“Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the **pattern** shewed to thee in the mount.”  
-Hebrews 8:5

“It was therefore necessary that the **patterns** of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.” Hebrews 9:23

NKJV:

“According to all that I show you, *that is*, the **pattern** of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make *it*.” Exodus 25:9

“who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘See *that* you make all things according to the **pattern** shown you on the mountain.’”

-Hebrews 8:5

“Therefore *it was* necessary that the **copies** of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.” Hebrews 9:23

Now that you have thought it through, you can see that the KJV botched up its translation of Hebrews 9:23, forming a contradiction in the text. The exact opposite of what the Bible says is what they have said. It is the earthly things are COPIES of the heavenly things, which are the pattern.

By translating this as PATTERNS, they have brought error into their translation. As such, don't just rush through your reading of Scripture, but think about what is said. Mull it over. When such an obvious error is identified, do a thorough study. Read various translations, study the original Hebrew or Greek, if available, and find out what is correct. In this, you will not be left thinking the Bible has an error.

Instead, you can place the blame for such a botched-up job right where it belongs, meaning with the human translators of God's infallible word. When such an error is identified, make sure to then make a margin note correcting the error. When the Bible transfers to someone else, they won't have to go through all the pains of checking that you did.

*Lord God, Your word is too precious to just rush through. Help us to carefully contemplate it and to revel in its perfection all the days of our lives. Thank You for Your wondrous word! Amen.*

**which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, Acts 7:45**

The previous verse referred to the tabernacle in the wilderness, and that Moses was instructed to make it according to the pattern he had seen. Having seen a pattern, it then conveys to us an obvious truth. If there is a pattern, then the copy is not the actual thing that has been copied. Stephen will explain that in a few verses. For now, he

explains more about the earthly tabernacle, beginning with, “which our fathers, having received it in turn.”

The Greek word translated as “having received it in turn,” is found only here in Scripture. It speaks of the succession of the tabernacle. It was fashioned at the time of Moses and it was the central point of worship for those who constructed it. Eventually, that generation died off, and the next generation received it in turn.

This is because the first generation was disobedient and failed to enter into Canaan when it was offered to them. They did not believe the Lord, and they were condemned to die in the wilderness. Only when that generation had died off would the people enter. Two exceptions to this were Joshua and Caleb who believed the Lord. It is this next generation that is being referred to. From there, Stephen continues by saying, “also brought with Joshua.”

Joshua is explicitly noted as being with the next generation. As the leader of the people, but as one of the previous generation, Stephen ensures that this distinction in him is made. He was of faith, and because he was, he led the next generation of Israel into Canaan. It was this generation, with Joshua leading them, that brought the tabernacle “into the land possessed by the Gentiles.”

Here, Stephen uses the same word found in Acts 7:5 where it speaks of promising the land of Canaan to Abraham “for a possession.” This is now its only other use in Scripture. The Greek literally reads, “in the possession of the nations.” Because of this, translations vary. Some see this as the act of possessing the land. But the word “possession” is a noun. It is, therefore, most probably speaking of the land that was possessed by the nations, and who would then be disposed from the land.

Also, it is to be noted that some earlier translations say “Jesus” in this verse instead of “Joshua.” The names of both in the Greek are the same. It is obvious that Joshua brought Israel into the land. But the similarity of the names is still important.

In reading the Greek, the mental connection to both is made. It is certainly historically accurate to translate this as Joshua, but in typology, it is good to know that the Greek names Joshua and Jesus are the same. Joshua brought the tabernacle of the Lord into the land possessed by the Gentiles. Jesus, the Lord, is the one who brought the knowledge of the Lord into the Gentile world.

It is this presence of the Lord as indicated by the tabernacle being brought by the next generation of Israel, and as led by Joshua, that enabled Israel to drive out the nations “before the face of our fathers.”

The Greek actually reads just the opposite, saying “from *the* face of our fathers.” It is the same expression used in the Greek translation of Deuteronomy 11:23. It is the Lord who does the work, removing the Gentiles from before Israel. Israel participated in the wars, but without the Lord, they could never have succeeded in accomplishing the task.

This process of removing the Gentiles, with the presence of the tabernacle among Israel, is carefully recorded in Joshua, and the battles in the land continue on through Judges. Saul, the first king of Israel dealt with this as well. This continued on, according to Stephen, “until the days of David.”

What this is referring to is not the removing of the Gentiles until the time of David, but of the presence of the tabernacle until the time of David. The removing of the Gentiles is a fact that occurred because of the presence of the tabernacle, but the main subject is the tabernacle itself. That will be seen in the next two verses.

Life application: The tabernacle is noted above as a copy of something else. As such, it is not the real thing, but only a type or shadow of the real thing. It is important to understand this because it was telling Israel that the One who dwelt in that tabernacle was not limited to it.

It is God in Christ that this tabernacle was modeled after. Until one sees this, he cannot fully appreciate that what God is doing is larger than just what is spoken of concerning Israel. To this day, people get excited about events surrounding the coming temple in Jerusalem, such as finding a suitable red heifer for sacrifice.

And, indeed, it is exciting in the sense that prophecy is being fulfilled, but it should not be exciting to think that Israel is going to build a temple for worship. As Jesus is the fulfillment of these things, it means that Israel has not yet learned this lesson. The sacrifice of a red heifer cannot do anything for Israel. Only what that red heifer anticipated, meaning the work of Jesus, can cleanse them.

Let us remember this. It is not good to send money to fund temple projects in Israel. In doing so, we are participating in Israel’s rejection of Christ! Be understanding of these things. We need to get out the word about Jesus, not about Israel’s return to an obsolete law.

*Heavenly Father, we pray that Israel's eyes will be opened to the truth of what You have done through Jesus. May their hearts be turned to You through Him. The law was ineffective in bringing them to a right standing with You. Only in Jesus' fulfillment of it can that happen. Help them to see this, O God. Amen.*

**who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob.**

Acts 7:46

The previous verse mentioned that the fathers who entered Canaan had received the tabernacle. This continued until the days of David. With that, Stephen now says, "who found favor before God."

This is referring to David. Saul had dropped out of favor with the Lord and was told that his dynasty would not continue. Instead, David was chosen. Because of his faithful heart, he was promised an everlasting dynasty. It was at this same time that he "asked to find a dwelling."

The word used is the same as that of the tabernacle. It is a tent for the ark to be brought into. The intention of David was to bring the ark to Jerusalem and to eventually build a permanent house for it. The passage of bringing it to Jerusalem is found in 2 Samuel 6. Eventually, it was his intent to have it taken from the temporary tent to a permanent house.

The tabernacle built at the time of Moses was the central point of worship from Moses until David, but David determined to eventually build a temple for a permanent edifice in which the ark could be housed for the "God of Jacob."

This is referenced in the words of Psalm 132 –

"LORD, remember David  
And all his afflictions;  
<sup>2</sup>How he swore to the LORD,  
And vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob:  
<sup>3</sup>'Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house,  
Or go up to the comfort of my bed;  
<sup>4</sup>I will not give sleep to my eyes  
Or slumber to my eyelids,

<sup>5</sup>Until I find a place for the LORD,  
A dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.” Psalm 132:1-5

Life application: Take time to read 1 Samuel 6 and 7 today. With Jerusalem subdued and under David’s control, he intended to bring the ark there. When it came, it was placed in another temporary tent while David determined to build a temple. This will not come about in David’s time, but the promise of an everlasting dynasty was made. Also, he was told that a temple for the Lord would come about through his seed.

Stephen’s words are dealing with the matter of blasphemy that he has been accused of. What is the proper means and mode of worship for God’s people? Did it come through the tabernacle constructed in the wilderness? Did it come about through the tabernacle of David? Will it come about through the temple built by Solomon as will be noted in the next verse?

These are edifices produced by the work of man’s hands. What type of worship is God ultimately expecting from His people? Each step of the process, the people thought that what they had was the final piece of the puzzle, or that (as in David’s case) it was leading to the erection of a final temple.

We can get so caught up in our own type and style of worship that we put God into a box and secret Him away, just as the ark was secreted away in a tent or house. But we are being taught through Stephen the same truth that Jesus told to the woman at the well –

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. <sup>24</sup>God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:23, 24

God is not to be limited to our own preconceived notions about Him. Our attention and devotion are to be on Jesus, and our hearts are to be conformed to that. Everything else is simply a temporary form of expression that we have developed in order to, hopefully, help others express that attention and devotion properly. Jesus is the true and final expression of what these Old Testament types and pictures only anticipate. Keep yourself from the legalism that so easily entraps us when we gather together to worship Jesus.

*Glorious God Almighty, You have given us the final expression of who You are to us in the Person of Jesus. It is through Him that we will forever worship You. Help us to remember this and to not get caught up in legalistic expressions that take our eyes off of this fact. Help us to remain focused on You, through Jesus, all our days. Amen.*

**But Solomon built Him a house.** Acts 7:47

The previous verse referred to David, saying, “who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob.” With that, Stephen now notes, “But Solomon built Him a house.”

It was David’s intent to build a house for the Lord to dwell in, but he was a man of war and so that honor was denied him –

“Then he called for his son Solomon, and charged him to build a house for the LORD God of Israel. <sup>7</sup> And David said to Solomon: ‘My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build a house to the name of the LORD my God; <sup>8</sup> but the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “You have shed much blood and have made great wars; you shall not build a house for My name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in My sight. <sup>9</sup> Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies all around. His name shall be Solomon, for I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days. <sup>10</sup> He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son, and I *will be* his Father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.””

-1 Chronicles 22:6-10

As David could not build the house, Solomon was given charge to do so. But David had prepared all that was necessary for the task in advance. That is recorded in the same chapter –

“Indeed I have taken much trouble to prepare for the house of the LORD one hundred thousand talents of gold and one million talents of silver, and bronze and iron beyond measure, for it is so abundant. I have prepared timber and stone also, and you may add to them. <sup>15</sup> Moreover *there are* workmen with you in abundance: woodsmen and stonecutters, and all types of skillful men for every kind of work. <sup>16</sup> Of gold and silver and bronze and iron *there is* no limit. Arise and begin working, and the LORD be with you.” 1 Chronicles 22:14-16



But there is more than just the “house,” which is the temple that is referred to in the original promise made to David as is recorded in 2 Samuel 7. The Hebrew word *bayith*, or house, is used again and again in that chapter. There, it has two main meanings. The first is a literal structure, a temple, where the Lord would dwell. The second refers to a family, such as saying, “the house of David.”

Both ideas are found in one paragraph of 2 Samuel 7 –

“When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He shall build a **house** for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. <sup>15</sup> But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I removed from before you. <sup>16</sup> And your **house** and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.”

-2 Samuel 7:12-16

The words “He shall build a house for My name” immediately refer to Solomon, as Stephen indicates in Acts. However, the words go further, referring to the work of Christ who is the One to build the true house of God. Peter, using the same word that Stephen uses, says –

“you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 2:5

This is the same thing that Paul refers to as well. In his words, the edifice he refers to is a temple, but it is the same idea as the “house” that Peter refers to –

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” Ephesians 2:19-22

Stephen’s words are intended to wake the council up to the truth that what man has made is not, nor can it be, the final home of God. It is simply a perishable structure that meets a temporary purpose. He will confirm this in his words ahead. It is the apostles

who then explain this so that we can understand just what the Lord is referring to in using the word “house” when speaking of a holy dwelling place, as well as an eternal family in His words to David. What He says goes beyond the line of Solomon and the temple which Solomon built by referring to what Christ would do in building the true house of God through David’s greater Son, Jesus.

Life application: Let us remember that no matter where we worship, the true church is not a building. Rather, it is the people of God. If you attend an online church, you are as much a part of the “church” as a person who has sat in the same pew for 45 years. Paul shows us this several times in his epistles, such as –

“To Philemon our beloved *friend* and fellow laborer, <sup>2</sup>to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:”

-Philemon 1:1, 2

The church meets in a building; the building is not the church. Wherever you are, you are a living stone in the true house that God is building. Be confident in this and don’t worry if the latte machine in the corner of the building is broken. It will not affect your salvation at all. Be assured of your position in Christ. He has you safely cared for as a member of His true church.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the knowledge that we are accepted members of Your church because of the work of Jesus. We are accepted, and we are being built into a house that will endure forever. Thank You for Your kind care for each one of us. Glory to You in the highest. Amen.*

**“However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: Acts 7:48**

Stephen has been speaking of the tabernacle, David’s desire to build a house for the Lord, and then acknowledging, “But Solomon built Him a house.” Now, as a clear indication that such a building is only a type of something greater, he substantially conveys the thought of Solomon at the dedication of the temple, beginning with, “However, the Most High.”

The term “Most High” (or “Highest”) is used more than fifty times in Scripture, usually in poetical verses, and mostly in the psalms, but it is also used quite often in Daniel. It speaks of God as being above all else. In Hebrew, the term is El Elyon God Most High.

The word *elyon* refers to that which is at the highest point; that which is uppermost. This term was first used by Abraham –

“Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he *was* the priest of God Most High.” Genesis 14:18

It is used to refer to the Lord God being above all other “gods” and of the absolute preeminence –

“Let all be put to shame who serve carved images,  
Who boast of idols.  
Worship Him, all *you* gods.  
<sup>8</sup>Zion hears and is glad,  
And the daughters of Judah rejoice  
Because of Your judgments, O LORD.  
<sup>9</sup>For You, LORD, *are* most high above all the earth;  
You are exalted far above all gods.” Psalm 97:7-9

Daniel uses it in relation to the absolute power and authority of the Lord. Of the Most High, Stephen logically states that He “does not dwell in temples made with hands.”

Paul uses the same sentiment in Acts 17 when making his case concerning God while speaking at the Areopagus –

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.” Acts 17:24

The author of Hebrews shows that the tabernacle/temple was only a type, or representation, of the true dwelling of God, heaven itself –

“For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are* copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”  
-Hebrews 9:24

The words of Stephen, and which are agreed upon in both testaments, is that the temple itself, though a representation of who Jesus is and of what He would do, was a temporary point of worship until the coming of Christ. As noted above, his words are perfectly in line with what Solomon said at the dedication of the temple –

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!”

-1 Kings 8:27

As this is so, then a different type of worship will come when the Messiah has fulfilled the types and shadows seen in the rites and rituals of the temple. Jesus stated as much when He noted that true believers will worship God in spirit and in truth. Stephen’s statement now is a defense against the charge made against him in Acts 6:13 –

“This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law.”

Stephen is carefully making his case that what has been said about him is untrue. But more, he is showing the council that it is they who have misunderstood the significance of the rites, rituals, and edifices that have made up the history of their people. In doing so, they were unable to see Jesus for who He is when He came among them. This verse now finishes in the middle of a thought with, “as the prophet says.” Stephen will next cite Isaiah to confirm that Scripture bears out what he is conveying.

Life application: Like the nation of Israel, who failed to see that all of their biblically instituted rites and rituals were only types and shadows of the coming Messiah (see Colossians 2:17), the same is true today with the Jewish people. But more, this truth permeates churches as well.

To some extent or another, churches fall back on mandating rites and rituals that are made null and void in Christ. Circumcision, Sabbath worship, tithing, observance of certain feast days, dietary restrictions, and so on. All such things do not bring a person any closer to God. In fact, they bring in a wall that separates them from God.

Because Christ is the fulfillment of these things, mandating them essentially says, “I trust in my own observance of these things to make God happy instead of trusting in Christ who fulfilled these things.”

To mandate something means it is more than simple instruction. If a church wants to have a Passover ceremony to show what it was like before Christ’s coming, that is fine and acceptable. But to mandate observance of the same as a ritual observance sets aside its greater fulfillment in Christ. Be wise and discerning. A little yeast leavens the whole lump.

Trust in Christ, rest in Christ, and look to Christ alone for your righteousness.

*Lord God, thank You that Jesus has done all we need to be reconciled to You. We shall fix our eyes on Him and give You glory through this. Surely, we thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**'Heaven is My throne,  
And earth is My footstool.  
What house will you build for Me? says the LORD,  
Or what is the place of My rest? Acts 7:49**

Stephen had just said that “the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands.” To support this, he now cites Isaiah 66. His citation of Isaiah 66:1 and the corresponding Hebrew are listed in order here –

“Heaven is My throne,  
And earth is My footstool.  
What house will you build for Me? says the LORD,  
Or what is the place of My rest?” (NKJV)

“Thus says Yehovah:  
'The heavens are My throne,  
And the earth is the footstool for My feet.  
Where is this – the house which you will build to Me?  
And where is this – the place of My rest?’” (CG)

Stephen begins by saying, “Heaven is My throne.” The translation should contain the articles that are found in the Greek – “The heaven is My throne.” It is as if heaven is the place where the Lord sits in authority and judgment over all things, looking down upon His subjects below, evaluating them, and directing them.

Heaven is the place of His hosts, and it is from there that He directs them as they then direct the course of human governments, accomplishments, and achievements. Stephen next says, “And earth is My footstool.”

Again, the definite article should be translated. It should read, “And the earth a footstool of the feet of Me.” It speaks of the earth being totally subject to Him. The place of the foot is the place where authority is exercised. As the feet of the Lord rest upon the earth, it signifies that He possesses all authority over it. Everything that

happens on it is at His discretion and is subject to His will. With this understood, Stephen next says, “What house will you build for Me? says the LORD.”

The Greek word translated as “what” signifies “what manner.” It is as if the Lord says, “You are down there on earth. What manner of house could you possibly build for Me that could contain Me? Your human hands are insufficient to do such a thing!” This is based on the previous two declarations. If the Lord is ruling from heaven, and if His rule is over all the earth, then what earthly house would be sufficient to contain Him? With that, Stephen says, “Or what *is* the place of My rest?”

Again, the question begs for an obvious answer. Isaiah was quoting the Lord at the time when the first temple stood. Stephen is quoting Isaiah while the second temple was still standing. How could the people truly believe that the temple could contain the substance of the Lord in His fulness? It again calls to mind Solomon’s proclamation when the temple was dedicated –

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!”

-1 Kings 8:27

How could the Lord find rest in such a place? But there is a dwelling in which the Lord could find His rest. It is one not made with human hands. It is this that Stephen is trying to convey to the council.

Life application: The Bible is using anthropomorphism to make a point about the nature of God. This is not saying that God has body parts that are actually sitting on a throne in heaven with His feet resting on the earth. As John Gill says, “...these things are not to be literally understood, but are images and figures, representing the majesty, sovereignty, and immensity of God; who is the maker of all things, the governor of the universe, and is above all places, and not to be contained in any.”

It is good practice to actively remind yourself of this type of speech when reading the Bible and to think about what is being conveyed. What idea does each body part that is mentioned express? For example, the hand signifies that which accomplishes things. The right hand is the position of authority. The finger is that which directs and participates in the hand’s accomplishments. The arm signifies reach of authority and ability. And so on.

All the way through Scripture, God is using terms, ideas, and concepts that man should be aware of in any culture and in any language. So, think about the analogy and why it is used in the particular passage. What is the surrounding context asking you to consider?

When reading the Bible in this way, you will more fully grasp the intent of its words. Again, be careful to understand that these things are to be taken as anthropomorphisms and not as literal terminology. In misunderstanding this, you may become a flat earther. Forget the tinfoil hat, understand the terminology, and consider the greatness of God as it is expressed to you in His precious word.

*Lord God, Your word resonates with people all over the world and from every culture and language. As You created man, You have found a way to express Yourself to him in a way that is universally understood. The simplicity of the overall message simply cannot be missed! Jesus. It is all about Your work in and through Jesus. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord who makes You understandable to us. Amen.*

### **Has My hand not made all these things?’ Acts 7:50**

Stephen is in the process of quoting Isaiah 66:1, 2. He will finish his citation with this verse which is only the first clause of Isaiah 66:2. His entire citation says –

“Heaven *is* My throne,  
And earth *is* My footstool.  
What house will you build for Me? says the LORD,  
Or what *is* the place of My rest?  
<sup>50</sup> Has My hand not made all these things?” Acts 7:49, 50

With this context remembered, he finishes with, “Has My hand not made all these things?” The Hebrew is very close, saying, “For all those *things* My hand has made.”

The previous words spoke of the position of authority and the state of having all of the earth in a state of subjection. The words now bring in the fact that not only is this so, but that the Lord is the Creator of them as well. What is implied in this is that if He is the Creator of them, then He is also the Sustainer of them. This is stated explicitly in the continued words of Isaiah (not cited by Stephen) that say, “And all those *things* exist.”

They came into being because of Him (existence from creation), but they remain now only because He purposes it to be so (continued existence). This concept is mentioned by Paul and by the author of Hebrews –

“And he is before all, and all things subsist together by him.” Colossians 1:17  
(Darby)

“...has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; <sup>3</sup> who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power.” Hebrews 1:2, 3

As these things are so, then it must be that a temple fashioned by human hands is both insufficient to contain Him, and that what occurs at that temple is actually for our benefit, not His. He needs nothing as all things are from Him and all things belong to Him. Further, true righteousness and holiness cannot come from such a temple and its rites and rituals. Rather, they are intended to school those to whom they are given that only such a state can come from the work of God.

What man does is already tainted with unholiness. The thought of what Stephen is saying through the words of Isaiah is that a right standing before God will come through what God does. That is actually seen in the finishing words of Isaiah 66:2 –

“But on this *one* will I look:  
On *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit,  
And who trembles at My word.”

The word of God is a reflection of who He is. It is true that the rites and rituals used in the worship of the temple were set forth by the Lord, but they are only types and shadows of what is more perfect. To demonstrate this, the Lord’s word prophesied the coming of the Messiah who would perfectly fulfill all things that Israel imperfectly lived out. This will be seen as Stephen continues. He has clearly set forth his case, and he will show how Israel failed to recognize the time of their visitation.

Life application: In worshipping Jesus, we are worshipping the fullest expression of who God is in a form that we can understand. The Holy Spirit intends for us to see God revealed in Christ. The influence of the Spirit on the prophets was for them to prophesy. The overshadowing of Mary so that she would conceive was given to bring forth the incarnate Word of God. The influence of the Spirit on the apostles was to remind them of the work of the Lord and to testify to it. The sealing of the Spirit now is given as an acceptance of faith (belief in) the gospel of the Lord Jesus.



Everything is centered on Christ Jesus. Let us fix our eyes on Him as we await the wondrous day when we are brought into the presence of God and of the Lamb for all eternity. Let us thank God for His favor, His grace, and His mercy towards us in Christ.

*Lord God, all praise, glory, and honor belong to You. We give You our hearts and our devotion as we await the day when You renew all things and bring us into the pure and undefiled state that will allow us perfect union with You for all eternity. Glory to You in the highest! Amen.*

**“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. Acts 7:51**

Stephen has carefully and methodically laid out his analysis of the worship of Israel, and of their attitude toward the Lord throughout their history. With his words now finished concerning the Lord in relation to the temple, his complete disappointment in the ability of the leaders to perceive what is good and right concerning the Lord comes forth.

Citing Scripture, he has shown that the Lord is not confined to a building of stone that has been fashioned by men’s hands. Because of their inability to perceive this basic truth, he next calls out to them, “*You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!*”

He uses two words that are only found here in Scripture:

*sklérotrachélos* – This comes from two separate words, the first of which is *skléros*. It means hard, stiff, stubborn, and so on. It describes people that simply won’t budge. And *trachélos*, meaning the neck or throat. Together, they obviously signify stiff-necked. It speaks of a people who are contrary and obstinate.

*aperitmétos* – This comes from the negative particle *a* being united to *peritemnó*, or to circumcise.

The second word, uncircumcised, is then defined by the words “in heart and ears.” Being uncircumcised would signify that the people were both outside of the covenant of Abraham and outside of the Law of Moses. Stephen is using this as an example of being in that state, not legally but morally. They were circumcised in the flesh, but that did not mean they were right with the Lord. This concept is found in both testaments of Scripture going back as far as Moses –

“Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.”  
-Deuteronomy 10:16

“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” Deuteronomy 30:6

“Circumcise yourselves to the LORD,  
And take away the foreskins of your hearts,  
You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,  
Lest My fury come forth like fire,  
And burn so that no one can quench *it*,  
Because of the evil of your doings.” Jeremiah 4:4

“For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; <sup>29</sup> but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.” Romans 2: 28, 29

To be uncircumcised in the heart is to lack reasoning towards God, resulting in being disobedient towards Him. It would be a person who lives for the flesh and not for the spiritual things laid out by the Lord. To be uncircumcised in the ear is to fail to hear (both hearing and then applying) the word of the Lord to one’s life. The word “hearken” gives a good sense of this. One can hear and not do. Or one can fail to hear at all and be incapable of doing. One who hearkens will both hear and do.

In this state, Stephen continues by saying, “You always resist the Holy Spirit.” Again, he uses a word that is only found this one time in Scripture, *antiptó*. It is an especially strong word signifying “to fall against.” As such, it means active resistance. HELPS Word Studies says it is “like someone trying to crush an adversary in battle.”

These people hadn’t just resisted the Holy Spirit by ignoring Him. Rather, they were actively working against Him. It is He who inspired Scripture, and thus the meaning is that they were actively working against what He had provided in the word by actively trying to crush anything concerning Jesus, who is the Subject of Scripture. But this attitude was nothing new. He says that this is “as your fathers *did*, so *do* you.”

This is certainly referring to the examples given in verses 7:39-43. He is equating those sitting before him with those who actively rejected Moses, made a golden calf, turned

their hearts back to Egypt, offered sacrifices to the idol, and who continued to do such things ever since. The rebellious streak of the fathers was still being openly evidenced in the council of leaders to that very day.

Life application: Israel was crushed, destroyed, and exiled because they rejected Jesus. This is what the Bible, even by the words of Jesus Himself, teaches. They purposefully and willfully continued to do so even after the resurrection and the witness of the apostles.

As such, they were exiled in accord with the Law of Moses, and the punishments laid out there have been brought upon them for the past two millennia. To this day, they actively work against any notion of Jesus being the Messiah, and they are – for the most part – intolerant of Him within their culture and community.

Though they are back in the land, this is not because they are right with the Lord, but it is the Lord's way of bringing them to a right standing with Him. Jesus lays all of this out in the gospels, such as in Matthew 24.

As this is so, it means that His coming for His people in the church is probably not far off. We have a great hope that we will be delivered from this world of wickedness and into our heavenly home. Israel, along with the rest of the unbelieving world, will enter into the tribulation where most will not survive. Now is the time to tell people about the goodness of God in Christ, and to convey to them the gospel. Be sure to get this word out while you can.

*Lord God, help our hearts to be softened towards those who have not yet come to You through Jesus. Help us to be caring enough to share this good news while we can. Direct our steps to those whom You know will favorably respond to the call when it is given. Time is winding down, Lord. Help us to take full advantage of it while we can. Amen.*

**Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, Acts 7:52**

Stephen's last words were concerning the stiff necks and uncircumcised hearts and ears of those in the council. He also noted that they always resist the Holy Spirit, just as their fathers did. Now he asks them a direct question that somewhat mirrors the words of Jesus, "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?"

It is reflective of what Jesus said to the leaders in Matthew 5 (and also in Luke 13) –

“Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. <sup>32</sup> Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ *guilt*. <sup>33</sup> Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? <sup>34</sup> Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: *some* of them you will kill and crucify, and *some* of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, <sup>35</sup> that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. <sup>36</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.”

-Matthew 5:31-36

Jesus’ words were an affirmative statement. Stephen’s words are put in the form of a question, but one that begs the answer, “Your fathers have persecuted them all.” The Scriptures themselves testify to the truth of the matter. But that question was only asked to connect what the fathers had done to what this very council would do. He is showing that there is an unbroken line of hatred by them to the very people who proclaimed the coming of the Messiah. This is seen in Stephen’s continued words, saying, “And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One.”

The title, the Just One, is not directly proclaimed by the prophets, but the intent behind it is seen in the words of the prophets. A similar thought to it is found in Isaiah 11 –

“But with righteousness He shall judge the poor,  
And decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,  
And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.

<sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,  
And faithfulness the belt of His waist.” Isaiah 11:4, 5

The title was understood well enough that it is used here. Likewise, 1 John 2:1 uses a similar title saying, “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” The word John uses is the same Greek word meaning both just and righteous. The title is also similar to that already stated by Peter in Acts 3:14.

As for the continued words of Stephen, what he says still refers to the fathers, meaning those leaders who had come before. At the time when the prophets were proclaiming

the coming of the Messiah, these leaders of Israel were busy killing those same prophets. The prophets called the people to turn from their wicked ways while also proclaiming that the Messiah was coming. Because of their words of correction concerning holiness and living according to God's standards, the fathers had persecuted and killed those prophets of God. And, following in their unrighteous footsteps, Stephen says of those before him, "of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers."

There is no article before "betrayers" in the Greek. Because of the way he says it, the statement bears an emphasis, "you betrayers and murderers have become." The council both conspired against God's Messiah, and they were directly involved in His killing. One example of the conspiracy is found in Matthew 27:3, 4 –

"Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, <sup>4</sup>saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.'  
And they said, 'What *is that* to us? You see *to it!*'"

As for acknowledging guilt in the murder, that is also found in Matthew 27. In verse 27:20, it acknowledges that the chief priests and elders were present at this time. Then in verses 27:24, 25, it says –

"When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather *that* a tumult was rising, he took water and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see *to it.*'  
<sup>25</sup> And all the people answered and said, 'His blood *be* on us and on our children.'"

The weight of Stephen's words may not be pleasant to the ears of the council, but they are words of truth that cannot be denied from the written eyewitness record of what occurred.

Life application: To this day, those who call the people to turn from wickedness are persecuted and even killed for their stand. The message of Jesus is not one of tolerance, even if it is one of acceptance. Jesus will accept any who come to Him, but the expectation is that in coming to Him there will be lives lived out in holiness. There will be judgment upon all – both saved and unsaved – for unholy living. The difference is that those who never come to Him are destined for an eternal swim in the Lake of Fire. Those who do come to Him will be judged for loss of rewards.

It is best to come to Jesus and then put Him first in our lives. Let us endeavor to learn the word, apply it to our lives, and live out our days in right conduct and holy living. May it be so to the glory of God who has saved us.

*Lord God, thank You for the salvation that is found in the giving of Your precious Son for us. Help us to live out our lives in holiness rather than in pursuit of the things of the flesh. It is a tempting world, a world filled with trials and stresses, and a world that calls out for us to join it in earthly pursuits. But, Lord, help us as we keep our eyes on Jesus, striving for that which lies ahead of us. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.” Acts 7:53**

Stephen’s words of this verse should be taken in connection with the previous verses to get the full context –

*“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. <sup>52</sup> Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, <sup>53</sup> who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*.”*

Understanding the context, this verse begins with, “who have received the law.” The word translated as “who” is “Stronger than the simple relative who, and emphasizing their sin by contrast with their privileges: inasmuch as ye were those who received, etc.” (Vincent’s Word Studies).

Stephen is clearly pointing his finger at the council and pointing out their hypocrisy. They have been entrusted with the law and they are the guardians of it. As such, they are responsible to ensure others keep it accordingly. It is the law, as he next says, given “by the direction of angels.”

Here, Stephen introduces a word into the Bible, *diatagé*, that is found only here and in Romans 13:2. It signifies an ordinance or disposition. Reading it in Romans 13 will help understand the meaning –

*“Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the **ordinance** of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.” Romans 13:2*

As for the meaning, it is quite common for scholars to cite Jewish references that claim the Law of Moses was received from God through angels as if they mediated the law to the people of Israel. This is not found in the account of Exodus, nor anywhere else. To simply cite Jewish commentary in this manner is not responsible because it does not match what the Bible says.

Rather, and quite simply, the word translated as “angels” means “messengers.” This is the same as the Hebrew where the word translated as “angel” means just the same thing as in the Greek. It can refer to a supernatural angel (see Zechariah 1:9, for example), the Angel of the Lord, meaning the eternal Christ – Jesus (see Numbers 22:22, for example), the coming Messiah (see second use of the word “Messenger” in Malachi 3:1, for example), or even mere human beings who bring messages (such as John the Baptist – see the first use of “messenger” in Malachi 3:1 and in Mark 1:2).

In this case now presented by Stephen, it is a clear reference to Moses and Aaron, the “messengers” who were designated to receive the law and transmit it to the people. They acted as the angels, or messengers, of the Lord. Later during the time of the law, it is seen that angels, such as Gabriel and Michael, also spoke out words to certain people. Further, prophets and seers continued to receive the word, passing it along to the people.

The point of what is being said here is that the law was “received by the direction of angels.” The Lord spoke, and His chosen messengers – be it Moses and Aaron, the prophets, or heavenly angels – relayed His word to the people. This same thought is seen in Galatians 3:19 and in Hebrews 2:2. Despite this, Stephen accuses those in the council. They had received this law “and have not kept *it*.”

The council sits in authority over Israel. The words he speaks are not just pointing at the men sitting before him, but they refer to this council over the entire dispensation of the law. He says that in the entire history of Israel, this council had failed to uphold the law and to administer it properly. The Scriptures themselves testify to this fact, and it was no less so now when they had dismissed, rejected, and crucified the very One that those Scriptures testified to.

These men were just the recipients of the final expression of what God was doing under the law. As such, they were more accountable than any others for failing as they had. They had turned their responsibilities into a point of shame, and they would turn their nation into a people set for destruction, as warned in the very law they administered.

Life application: The dispensation of the law was intended to teach Israel that they, as a people, needed God's grace and mercy. If nothing else, the sacrificial system that accompanied the law should have taught them this. Though the law is based on works, including the mandatory sacrifices, the fact that sacrifices were given for sins committed under the law are their own mark of grace. And the fact that the entire nation, without exception – including Israel's high priest – needed to observe the Day of Atonement told them that they had failed to meet the demands of the law. Hence, they needed the grace and mercy offered on that day.

But because of a perceived self-righteousness that came from having the law, they could not see this. They thought (and still think to this day) that the law elevated them as a people to a special status that brought them an inherent righteousness. What does one need the sacrifice of the Messiah for if the law has been given? Without seeing that the law only pointed to Jesus, it became a supposed means to an end.

This is the problem with churches that mandate the law (in part or in whole) today. "I give ten percent." "I don't eat pork." "I observe the Feasts of the Lord." "I observe the Sabbath." The focus of each of these is on the subject, "I." That is the problem with such doctrine. It makes the same error as is held by Israel. It is not about us. It is about Jesus. Despite all of the "I haves" or "I ams" that Israel possesses, they are no closer to God than the worst pagan without the grace and mercy of God.

Come to God through His full, final, and forever offer of Jesus. Then you can do acceptable good stuff all day long. Get things in the proper order and never rely on "I" to get you to heaven. You will never make it. Come to Jesus, and you are guaranteed to make it.

*Lord God, thank You for Jesus Christ our precious Savior. Amen.*

**When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth.** Acts 7:54

Stephen has been quite clear in his words to the council, and they have perfectly understood what he meant. Because of this, a strong reaction has been elicited from them. As it now says, "When they heard these things they were cut to the heart."

It is the same word introduced into Scripture in Acts 5:33, *diaprió*. This is the second and last use of it in the Bible. It comes from two words signifying "through" and "cut with a saw." Hence, it signifies "sawn in two." It is a state where a person feels he has been cut



right in two, right down the middle, when overcome with grief or rage. At this time, it is a state of rage.

One can imagine a saw cutting through their minds as bits fly off in different directions. The more words they heard, the more their minds would be drawn apart. In this case, being reminded that they resisted the Spirit, were the murderers of the Messiah, and who were the stewards of the law, and yet they themselves did not keep it, their minds had become completely enraged and disjointed. In this state, Luke next says, “and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth.”

The Greek word translated as “gnashed” is found only here in the Bible, *bruchó*. Of this word, Vincent’s Word Studies notes, “Originally to eat greedily, with a noise, as wild beasts: hence to gnash or grind the teeth.” In their case, it is also a sign of rage. They were like wild animals clenching their teeth and snarling at Stephen. Things don’t look good for him at this point.

Life application: Speaking out the truth of the word can, and quite often will, get people riled up. Sometimes you can present it as a challenge, sometimes as a warning, sometimes as a point of correction for someone’s conduct, and so on. Depending on who is being addressed and what the circumstances are, these things may be taken well, or they may be taken as an offense. But as long as you are presenting your words with the proper intent and in the proper context, you are doing your job.

Stephen is addressing Israel’s leaders. They should have known better, and he has been as direct as Jesus was concerning their failings. There is nothing wrong with this approach. Quite often people get too caught up in the thought, “You need to do this in love.” That is often a means of silencing you. Stephen’s words are true, they are direct, and they are biting. The psalms are often written in such a manner. We must take God’s word as it is presented and accept that stern warnings or open chastisement are a part of how it is presented.

Let us remember this and present our words as the occasion necessitates. Don’t let others shut you down when you are doing exactly what you should be doing. Present your words and let the chips fall where they may.

*Lord God, help us to be wise and discerning in how to present Your word, and how to present correction to others when necessary. It is not always an easy task, so be with us and help us to glorify You in all such situations. May it be so! Amen.*

**But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, Acts 7:55**

The words of the previous verse said that upon hearing the words of Stephen, those who heard them “were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth.” With that said, Luke next notes, “But he.”

It is referring to Stephen. He is set in contrast to those who were like enraged animals snarling at him. Instead, it says of him, “being full of the Holy Spirit.”

This was just as promised by Jesus. First, it is a reminder that everything Stephen had said has been under the influence of the Spirit and in accord with His intents –

“Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. <sup>12</sup> For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

-Luke 12:11, 12

Also, it is an indication that Stephen was covered in the peace that can only come from being filled with the Holy Spirit –

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. <sup>27</sup> Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

-John 14:26, 27

As this is so, it also confirms that this council of leaders did not have the Holy Spirit to guide them. Instead, they stood as enemies of God because of their rejection of Christ. Stephen had said, “You always resist the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51). This truth is borne out in the filling of Stephen, of whose words they rejected. As Jesus said –

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” John 14:15-18

Next, in this state of being filled with the Holy Spirit, Luke says that Stephen “gazed into heaven.” It is the natural reaction of someone who is at his wit’s end. As humans, we may look away from something in disgust, we may look down in dejection, or we may look to heaven in hope of relief or to refocus our thoughts on higher things. It is the state that David wrote about –

“My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD;  
In the morning I will direct *it* to You,  
And I will look up.” Psalm 5:3

Stephen, finding no reassurance in the reaction from the council, lifted his eyes unto heaven “and saw the glory of God.”

It is the hope of the human soul. We look to heaven in hopes of discernment, relief, and stabilization of our thoughts, but we do so not really expecting to see anything but the roof of the building we are in or the expanse of the sky under which we stand. However, Stephen was given the relief for his soul that countless others of the past had hoped to find –

“Unto You I lift up my eyes,  
O You who dwell in the heavens.  
<sup>2</sup> Behold, as the eyes of servants *look* to the hand of their masters,  
As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress,  
So our eyes *look* to the LORD our God,  
Until He has mercy on us.  
<sup>3</sup> Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us!  
For we are exceedingly filled with contempt.  
<sup>4</sup> Our soul is exceedingly filled  
With the scorn of those who are at ease,  
With the contempt of the proud.” Psalm 123

In his looking up and beholding the glory of God, we are then given an insight into the exaltation of the Lord Jesus through what Stephen saw. Luke records that he saw the glory of God “and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”

Several key points can be determined from this. One is that seeing the glory of God does not mean that a person has seen God. Both Paul and John confirm this –

“I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and *before* Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, <sup>14</sup> that you keep *this* commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, <sup>15</sup> which He will manifest in His own time, *He who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom *be* honor and everlasting power. Amen.” 1 Timothy 6:13-16

“No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.” 1 John 4:12

Stephen saw the glory that let him know that God is there, even if He cannot be seen. Another point we can learn from this is one that has already been revealed earlier in Acts where Peter said, “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

To be at the right hand is not a physical location. God does not have parts. Rather, it signifies being at the position of all power and authority. It is a confirmation of the deity of Jesus. He is the physical manifestation of who God is. Through Him, the unseen God becomes knowable and understandable.

Thirdly, it says that this Jesus, who appears in the position of authority and power as He dwells in the glory of God, is standing. Acts has already said that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34). It is also recorded several times in the gospels, in Ephesians, and in Hebrews. This then reveals to us that a change has taken place. A potentate will sit on his throne as a sign of rule and authority. For him to rise to a standing position will signify the bestowal of an honor, such as the knighting of a person or the crowning of an authority figure under him. It may even occur as a sign of welcoming someone to whom the king is intimately connected –

“Bathsheba therefore went to King Solomon, to speak to him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her and bowed down to her, and sat down on his throne and had a throne set for the king’s mother; so she sat at his right hand.”

-1 Kings 2:19

Jesus, who is at the position of all authority and power, sitting at the right hand of God while dwelling in His glory, arose. It is a sign of welcoming family, of the closest friendship, and of honoring His subordinate. It is to confer a crown – the crown of life –

upon him, and to welcome him into his new home. It is the mark of honor to the person whom Scripture will reveal is the church's first martyr.

Life application: If any set of verses in Scripture shows us the affection of the Lord for His people, it is these verses concerning the coming death of Stephen. The Lord rose to acknowledge the one who would be His first recorded martyr. He will rise again someday when the last saint of the church age is brought into the number to be saved. At that moment, the call will go forth, and the church will be brought to Him.

Jesus is aware of every single person who is His. The deaths of His saints are not only known to Him, but they are being carefully recorded and tallied. Each brings us one count closer to the moment that our faith in Him has promised will come –

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

-1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

For the Lord to descend from heaven, He must first arise from the place of His sitting. Arise, Lord! Come for Your people. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

*Heavenly Father, You have sent Your Son to complete a mission and to call Him back to Your throne in heaven. But someday, He will arise from that throne to gather His people together. We long for that day, and may it be soon. Until then, give us patience as we live out our lives in hopeful anticipation of that glorious day. Amen.*

**and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” Acts 7:56**

The previous verse contained Luke's words describing the situation surrounding Stephen. This verse now describes Stephen's own words about that situation. When taken together, they read –

“But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, <sup>56</sup> and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’” Acts 7:55, 56

It is Stephen who saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at his right hand. With that vision, he exclaimed, “Look!”

The word can be variously translated depending on the surrounding words, but in this instance, it signifies “Behold!” His eyes so clearly saw the vision before him that he must have felt certain everyone else could see it as well, if they just directed their eyes in the same direction. To help them along, he then called out, “I see the heavens opened.”

It was as if what he was looking at was right in front of him. There is no doubt that what he saw was as real as the council members he had been speaking to. And yet, only he would have had the vision. The door to this otherwise unseen realm had been opened wide for him to behold. With this heavenly sight before him, he then says, “and the Son of Man standing.”

This is a term frequently used by Jesus when speaking of Himself. It is most commonly used in the books of Matthew and Luke, but all four gospels use it frequently. And yet, despite it being so commonly spoken by Jesus concerning Himself, this is the only time that the exact term is used outside of the gospels.

In Revelation, John uses the term twice without the article (a Son of Man rather than the Son of Man). Hebrews uses the term in a general way when citing the psalms as well. The term “the Son of Man” speaks more of Jesus’ deity than His humanity, even though it refers to His humanity. In other words, it is a way of saying that despite Him being a human being, He is also fully God.

Hence, this is the reason for Stephen’s proclamation now. He is telling the council just what Jesus had told them on the night before they crucified Him –

“Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God.’

<sup>70</sup> Then they all said, ‘Are You then the Son of God?’

So He said to them, ‘You *rightly* say that I am.’

<sup>71</sup> And they said, ‘What further testimony do we need? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth.’” Luke 22:69-71

The council understood perfectly what Jesus was saying. In claiming that He was the Son of Man, they took it to mean that He is the Son of God – deity. The reference came from their own Scriptures –

“I was watching in the night visions,  
And behold, *One* like the Son of Man,  
Coming with the clouds of heaven!  
He came to the Ancient of Days,  
And they brought Him near before Him.  
<sup>14</sup> Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,  
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.  
His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion,  
Which shall not pass away,  
And His kingdom *the one*  
Which shall not be destroyed.” Daniel 7:13, 14

Stephen now confirms this to the council, implying that the Man whom they crucified is also the Lord their God, and He now stood in a vision before Stephen “at the right hand of God!”

As noted in the previous commentary, God does not have parts. To say Jesus is at the right hand of God is to say that He is God, with all of His authority, position, and power. The Creator of all things, the One who breathed life into man, the Lord who spoke forth the law at Mount Sinai. And the Son of Man named Jesus, who this council had betrayed and sentenced to His death, is the Risen Messiah who stood from His position of authority to greet the man who would be His first of many martyrs.

Life application: As noted in the previous commentary, the care of the Lord Jesus for His people is wholly and perfectly evident in His standing up to receive Stephen’s martyrdom. Stephen faithfully witnessed to what he knew was true, and he was willing to boldly speak out his words despite whatever the council would decide to do to him.

Are we willing to do the same for the witness of Jesus? How sure are you of your faith in Christ? And how capable are you of telling others about Him? If you received the gospel and were saved, was your life changed? That is a witness all by itself. It is something that testifies to the power of the gospel message.

And what about explaining the weightier matters of your faith? Can you accurately tell people why you believe Jesus is God? Can you explain difficult verses that people use against that notion? Stephen believed with all of his being that Jesus is God. He could not have said what he said otherwise.

Be ready to defend your faith. Be ready to tell others about the wonder that Jesus has brought about in your own life. And be ready to do so even if it will cost you your life. Your faithfulness will receive a full reward when you are brought before this wonderful, tender, caring Savior. He is Jesus.

*Lord God, what a sure and blessed hope we possess! Thank You that our faith in Jesus is not dubious or unexplainable. We have a certain hope, and it is one that can be explained to any person, in any culture, and of any language. The gospel has a universal application because it speaks to the very heart of man. Thank You for this wonderful message of hope and reconciliation. Amen.*

**Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; Acts 7:57**

Stephen had just called out, stating that he saw the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. It was all the council could take. Stephen was claiming that the Man they had betrayed and handed over to the Romans for crucifixion was now in the position of all authority and power. It would mean that He was the One spoken of by Daniel who would judge them all.

With this, Luke next records, “Then they cried out.” This was probably done for two reasons. The first was to snarl at Stephen some more while accusing him of blasphemy. Secondly, it would have been to drown out any more words from him. Hence, they cried out “with a loud voice.”

One can almost imagine the ruckus of seventy-plus people wildly howling out. It would turn very quickly from a ruling council to an out-of-control mob. Along with crying out in a loud manner, it says they “stopped their ears.”

The verb means “held together.” In other words, they would have folded the bottom of their ears up and tightly held them in place so that they wouldn’t hear any more words. This, together with their crying out, would completely drown out the sound of Stephen’s words. It was a way of demonstrating that they believed his words were blasphemous, and they would no longer tolerate hearing anything he said. In this frenzied state, it next says, “and ran at him with one accord.”

The entire council got up from their seats and came forward as a single tidal wave, rushing upon him and seizing him. Their minds were made up and they would move to take action against the “offender.” But Stephen had seen the heavenly vision. Thus, he



was certain that whatever was to happen had divine sanction. He would be unmoved by whatever was to come.

Life application: The early church was heavily persecuted by the leaders of Israel. As Acts continues, it will be seen that the believers were subjected to being arrested, imprisoned, and even executed. This has continued on throughout the church age and throughout the world. The gospel is a point of liberty for the human soul. But leaders often want control over their people. Someone who is free in his soul is not a person that can be easily manipulated into perverse obedience.

This hostility towards believers is quickly rushing upon the people of the United States. Believers are being purged from the military through planned contrivances. This will make the military easier to manipulate. Believers are being openly attacked in their churches because of their opposition to murdering the unborn. Society is being deadened to such things by an unsympathetic news media.

Soon, to stand before others and proclaim the message of Jesus may be a cause for being openly executed, even without a trial. As far-fetched as that sounds, it is no more far-fetched than the current administration openly violating public law with no repercussions for their actions. And yet, it is happening daily. Be ready to take your stand now. Be firm in your convictions, and be prepared to hold fast to your faith, even if the inevitable outcome is death. This may be necessary, so prepare yourselves now for what may lie ahead.

*Lord God, it is sad to think that those nations that once proudly proclaimed the good news of Jesus are now almost at complete enmity with that message, but that day has arrived. Give Your people the inner strength to work against this unholy tide and to stand firm on their faith in Your word. It sure is needed in this darkened hour. Amen.*

**and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. Acts 7:58**

The previous verse saw the council in a tizzy, and they ran at Stephen with one accord. With that remembered, it now says, “and they cast *him* out of the city.”

The verb is an aorist participle and should read, “And having cast *him* out of the city.” One action is taken before the next in a lively description of what occurred. As for the act itself, offenders were to be taken outside of the gates of the city to be stoned. This is

not stated in every instance where stoning was outlined as the punishment, but it is generally understood that it was to be so.

This was to show the heinous nature of the crime. It was as if the person was cut off from the community's favor, blessing, and protection. There are exceptions to this, such as Deuteronomy 22:21 where a certain infraction required a young woman to be stoned at the door of her father's house. In the case of perceived blasphemy, being taken outside of the city was the appropriate spot for this to take place. As such, it says they cast him outside the city "and stoned *him*."

Here, the verb is imperfect. It more correctly reads, "and they were stoning him." Again, the presentation by Luke is lively and active, detailing it as if the reader is there watching the events unfold.

As for the process of stoning, there are some rabbinic commentaries on the method of stoning that was prescribed, but they may or may not match what Scripture actually says and should be avoided for this reason. When a person was stoned, the general practice would follow that stated in Deuteronomy 13 –

"If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, <sup>7</sup> of the gods of the people which *are* all around you, near to you or far off from you, from *one* end of the earth to the *other* end of the earth, <sup>8</sup> you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; <sup>9</sup> but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. <sup>10</sup> And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. <sup>11</sup> So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you." Deuteronomy 13:6-11

There are variations to the practice (as noted above concerning Deuteronomy 22:21), but the general idea was to symbolically excommunicate the person from the congregation by taking him out of the gates. This would also keep the city from defilement. From there, those who were personally aware of the offense were to be the first to cast the stones, and then all of the people were to join in until the offender was dead.

This could be the accusation that Jesus wrote with His finger in John 8. When they brought the woman caught in adultery to be stoned, they asked Him what should be done. He simply stooped down and wrote. It can only be speculated what He wrote, but it could have been this very law. They had failed in two ways. First, they only brought the woman, not both of them. Secondly, they brought her to the temple, not out to the gates of the city –

“If a young woman *who is* a virgin is betrothed to a husband, and a man finds her in the city and lies with her, <sup>24</sup> then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry out in the city, and the man because he humbled his neighbor’s wife; so you shall put away the evil from among you.”

-Deuteronomy 22:23, 24

With the reason for mentioning that Stephen was taken outside the city understood, the narrative continues, saying, “And the witnesses laid down their clothes.”

The word “clothes” should read “garments.” It is a long flowing outer garment that would inhibit the casting of stones. In other words, these witnesses – meaning those who were to cast the stone first – wanted to ensure they got the maximum amount of effect out of their toss. And so, they would take the outer garment off. The laying down of the clothes is specifically noted to introduce the next person. It is obvious they laid them down in order to cast, but it says they laid them down “at the feet of a young man.”

Vincent’s Word Studies notes that the term “young man” used by Luke “gives no indication of his age, since it is applied up to the age of forty-five. Thirty years after Stephen’s martyrdom, Paul speaks of himself as the aged (Plm 1:9).”

All we can know is that the person standing there watching over the garments is a man less than forty-five years old “named Saul.” This is the first time Saul, later called Paul and who will become the apostle to the Gentiles, is named in Scripture. This act of guarding the clothes of those stoning Stephen is alluded to in Acts 22:20, where Paul speaks of what is now recorded by Luke –

“And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.”

By guarding the clothes of these men, he was agreeing to the execution.

Life application: As you read the Bible, pay attention to the introduction of names or events that seem disconnected from the continuing narrative. Quite often, what is introduced at one point, and which seems to have nothing to do with what is said at the time, is a vital key to knowing where the narrative will soon be going. An example of this is found in Genesis 22.

There, the account of Abraham taking Isaac to be a whole burnt offering to the Lord is given. At the very end of the chapter, it suddenly says –

“Now it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, ‘Indeed Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: <sup>21</sup> Huz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, <sup>22</sup> Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.’ <sup>23</sup> And Bethuel begot Rebekah. These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother. <sup>24</sup> His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore Tebah, Gaham, Thahash, and Maachah.” Genesis 22:20-24

This family line comes after the account of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah, and before the record of Sarah’s death and burial in Genesis 23. But then the reason for it is realized in Genesis 24:15 when Rebekah is suddenly reintroduced into the ongoing narrative. This instance is not unique, but it happens again and again in the ongoing biblical account.

Pay attention to these introductory clues. The reason for them will be made manifest as you continue along with your reading. The Bible is showing us that it is a logical, orderly, and planned out document that leads in a steady fashion to its ultimate purpose – the coming of the Messiah. Everything in it makes sense when it is taken with that in mind.

*What a wonderful treasure of wisdom and order is Your precious word, O God. Thank You for how it is presented, and how it leads slowly and inevitably to the revealing of what is most important of all, meaning the coming of Jesus. Thank You for such wisdom and detail that fills us with the surety that we are truly dealing with Your word. Yes, thank You for this wonderful word. Amen!*

**And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Acts 7:59**

The words of this verse are important to consider in their greater context. They are tied directly to verses 55 & 56 and can be understood more clearly by presenting them in this manner –

“But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, <sup>56</sup> and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’ ... <sup>59</sup> And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’” Acts 7:55, 56, & 59

There are several points of importance concerning what is said now. The first is that the word “God” is inserted by the translators. The Greek reads –

“And they were stoning Stephen, *he* was calling and saying...”

As such, there are various ideas about how to rightly translate it. For example, the Pulpit Commentary (among other similar commentaries) says inserting God “is certainly not justified by the context, because the words which follow, ‘Lord Jesus,’ show to whom the invocation was made, even to him whom he saw standing at the right hand of God.”

As such, there are various translations of the words –

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, (NIV)  
And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, (NKJV)  
They *went on* stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, (NASB)

Some stick with the action and leave out the implied object. Some say “God.” Some say “Lord.” And so on. What is obvious is that Stephen is praying to Jesus. That is understood from the previous verses, and it is obvious from the final clause of this verse. To leave the object out is fine. It expresses the Greek. To say “Lord” is clear and precise and it is an exacting expression of what the intent is.

However, the commentaries (such as the Pulpit above) that say that translating this as “God” are incorrect and they fail to consider the intent of the translators. Jesus is the Lord and Jesus is God. By making such a statement, they fail to understand the meaning of “the right hand of God.”

As noted in previous commentaries, this is a statement that confirms Jesus is God, not the other way around. The right hand of God is not a physical position, as if He is sitting

(or standing) next to God. It is a way of saying that He is at the position of all of the authority and power of God. By inserting the word “God,” it is thus an acknowledgment of this.

With this understood, and regardless of the three general translations noted above, Stephen continues with, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” This is the second main point of importance. Prayers are to be made to the Lord YHVH, meaning “God” (such as in Psalm 39:12), or simply to God (such as in Psalm 54:2). Any observant Jew would know this. To hear any other prayer would be considered blasphemy –

“And in all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.” Exodus 23:13

“Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, <sup>7</sup> and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause *anyone* to swear *by them*; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them, <sup>8</sup> but you shall hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day.” Joshua 23:6-8

By invoking the name of Jesus, as he is being stoned, he is explicitly acknowledging that Jesus is the Lord God. The fact that he is being stoned means that the Jews have rejected this notion. Regardless of that, this is the intent of Stephen’s words, and thus it makes this a direct and explicit reference to the deity of Jesus.

The record says that Jesus is the glory of God and that He is at the position of all of the power and authority of God. Stephen then acknowledged that. Stephen then appeals to Jesus in the presence of all of the Jews, invoking His name and calling for Him to do something that only God can do, meaning receive his spirit.

Life application: Those who deny the deity of Christ are without excuse. The record of the Bible leaves no other option than the Father is God, the Son is God, and that the Holy Spirit is also God. As such, there is a Godhead that forms the Trinity.

Stephen’s words now clearly confirm that he understood that Jesus is God, and his calling out His name at the ending of his life is a final, forceful acknowledgment of that. It is another witness against those of his people who disbelieve, and it is a witness against anyone who denies the intent of what he says.

Even if you do not fully grasp the idea of the Trinity, and nobody fully does, you should – by faith – accept that it is what the Bible teaches. Be clear in your thinking and be steadfast in your acknowledgment that Jesus is God.

*Glorious God Almighty, You have revealed Yourself in the Person of Jesus. In seeing Him, we are seeing the complete expression of who You are in a manner that we can understand. Thank You for this eternally available view into Your very nature. You have done it! Thank You for what You have done. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.** Acts 7:60

The previous verse spoke of Stephen being stoned and calling out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” With that, the first recorded martyr of the church age is prepared to yield up his spirit, but he has one more thing to say while under the inspiration of the Spirit (Matthew 10:19, 20). And so, Luke records, “Then he knelt down.”

This is something Luke carefully records five times in Luke and Acts. The act of kneeling while praying is found here and in Luke 22:41, Acts 9:40, Acts 20:36, and Acts 21:5. Such a position of humility goes back to the Old Testament where Solomon knelt down before the assembly when praying at the dedication of the temple and when Daniel was said to kneel three times a day when he prayed and gave thanks before his God.

The act is then one that defines a particular communication between man and his Creator. The other instances of kneeling for prayer that have been recorded make this perfectly clear. With this noted, it next says, “and cried out with a loud voice.”

This would otherwise be perfectly unnecessary. If he had something to say to the Lord in his final moments before death, unless it was to make two points, he would have simply breathed it out to God alone. But the prayer is not for his benefit. It is for those stoning him. First, it is to once again impress upon their minds that he accepts Christ Jesus as being fully God. Secondly, it is to ask Jesus for mercy upon those set on his destruction. He had just called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” He now calls out, “Lord.”

He uses the same word, *Κύριε* [Kurie], that he just used when he said “Lord Jesus.” Thus, it is without any doubt that the address is to Jesus. And in his final petition, he calls out, “do not charge them with this sin.”

First, he acknowledges that Jesus is God through his kneeling to Him in prayer. Secondly, he reaffirms that by using the term Kurie, thus tying “Lord” with the glory of God described in verse 7:56. Thirdly, he does this by acknowledging that Jesus can, in fact, impute sin or withhold the imputation of sin – something only God can do.

But there is a fourth display of the deity of the Lord to be found here. Even if Stephen knew this or not, the Holy Spirit who was inspiring him to speak did. The reason for this is that with the coming of Christ, there is a new dispensation and a more perfect means of seeking God and of obtaining His pardon.

If anyone there stoning him reflected on their own Scriptures, they would remember the last martyr recorded there, which defined the dispensation of the law. In this, they would take to heart his words then and the contrasting words of Stephen now –

“Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, who stood above the people, and said to them, ‘Thus says God: “Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He also has forsaken you.”’<sup>21</sup> So they conspired against him, and at the command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD.<sup>22</sup> Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but killed his son; and as he died, he said, ‘The LORD look on it, and repay!’” 2 Chronicles 24:20-22

Jesus referred to this in Matthew and Luke, reminding these same leaders of this exact event –

“And He said, ‘Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.<sup>47</sup> Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them.<sup>48</sup> In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs.<sup>49</sup> Therefore the wisdom of God also said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and persecute,’<sup>50</sup> that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation,<sup>51</sup> from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.’”

-Luke 11:46-51



The order of the Hebrew Bible is different than how we have it. Their books go from Genesis to 2 Chronicles. As such, Abel was the first martyr recorded in their Scriptures while Zechariah was the last.

Jesus was saying that the blood of all of these would be required of all of them. The reason for this is that they rejected the word that recorded these things and continued down the same perverse path. Jesus would come to take the guilt for all sin if the one committing it would simply receive His pardon. But in not doing so, the blood guilt would remain.

Stephen now contrasts the appeal of Zechariah by asking for their sin to not be imputed to them. The Holy Spirit was telling them that this was possible because 1) Jesus had died for their sins, and 2) Jesus had risen, proving He is God. In His rising, He ascended to His rightful position of authority and had the ability to forgive any who would come to Him. And 3) it is thus a lesson concerning the law versus grace.

When the law was given, three thousand died in the first rebellion under that law (Exodus 32:28). When the Holy Spirit was given, three thousand were saved on that first day (Acts 2:41). When the law was in effect, the call was for justice against the offenders. When the dispensation of grace came into effect, the call is for mercy and pardon against the offender.

The clear and unambiguous lesson in this final verse of Acts Chapter 7 is that Jesus is God, and that through Him alone can come the forgiveness of sins. With this understood, Luke finishes the verse and the chapter with, "And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Rest well, Stephen, the call will not be long, and you shall be raised to receive your crown.

Life application: We need to be careful to not take the words of Stephen too far and assume that everyone is automatically forgiven since the coming of Christ. This is not taught in Scripture. Rather, all sins can be forgiven in Christ, but the offender must be willing to acknowledge his offense against God, and also acknowledge that the forgiveness can only come through the sacrifice of Jesus.

This is clearly demonstrated both here and in Jesus' words on the cross –

“Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’”

-Luke 23:34

Before running ahead with Jesus’ words and saying that 1) everyone must forgive everyone of their wrongdoings, and 2) God in Christ automatically forgives everyone for all of their sins (both teachings are to be found in various degrees throughout Christian churches), one needs to ask the simple question, “Were the Jews collectively forgiven of their rejection of Christ Jesus or not?”

The answer is clear. Their temple was destroyed, the people fell under the promised punishments of Deuteronomy 28, and they were beaten down, exiled, and pursued exactly as the law indicated they would be. No, they were not forgiven. Nor are any others forgiven who do not come to Christ acknowledging that they have sinned.

Stephen’s call was not a call to automatically forgive them. Rather, it was the call of the Holy Spirit, through Stephen conveying a witness that Jesus is God; that He is the full, final, and forever means of obtaining forgiveness; and that grace can be bestowed, even when the attack is personally against Jesus. To attack His church is to attack Him (see Acts 9:3-5).

The forgiveness that Israel still needs, even to this day, is available. It will come someday when they call out to Jesus for it. When they do, and only when they do, will it be poured out on them. For now, any individual person – Jew or Gentile – can be forgiven by placing his faith in the gospel (the one and only gospel). For Israel the nation, they will be placed in a right standing when they acknowledge Jesus as Lord –

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen *gathers* her brood under *her* wings, but you were not willing! <sup>35</sup> See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until *the time* comes when you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” Luke 13:34, 35

When they do, the fountain of forgiveness will be poured out on them –

“In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.” Zechariah 13:1

Pray for the lost around you. Pray for Israel. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. These things can come about when Jesus is added to the equation. And be ready to open your mouth and speak out the gospel when the opportunity arises.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the forgiveness that comes through the shed blood of Christ. May many eyes be opened to their need to call out today for it. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 8

**Now Saul was consenting to his death.**

**At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Acts 8:1**

Chapter 7 ended with the death of Stephen. Chapter 8 will now build upon that as the persecution of the church takes hold. This begins with the person, Saul, who was just introduced in verse 7:58 –

“Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; <sup>58</sup>and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup>And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’”

-Acts. 7:57-59

Of him, Luke records, “Now Saul was consenting to his death.” Luke uses a noun found only here in Scripture, *anairesis*. It is “a taking off,” or “a taking away.” In other words, Stephen’s life was taken away from him. As such, the word can indicate the state of death, murder, slaying, and so on. The ESV gives a good translation of this by saying, “execution.” Another way of conveying the thought might be, “And Saul was consenting to his termination.”

As for Paul himself, by allowing the clothes of the witnesses to be watched over by him, he agreed with what was occurring and may have even prompted each person to give his best shot, or “make that apostate pay.” With this setting the tone for the start of the chapter, the words continue with, “At that time.”

The Greek reads, “in that day.” There was no delay in moving from one event to the next as “a great persecution arose against the church.” The idea here is that if Stephen is apostate, then all those aligned with him – and who are teaching the same doctrine – are as well. There was guilt by association and those people who were aligned with him were to be weeded out.

Stephen died based on his words to the council, and they felt his words could not be condoned in others. Therefore, the persecution immediately began against the church, meaning the people who comprised the church, “which was at Jerusalem.”

Jerusalem was the focal point of all that had occurred, and it had become an established body of believers, united in their belief that Jesus is the Messiah. They met together, worshipped together, and were well established there. This has all been evidenced so far in Acts.

With the doctrine of Stephen now openly brought forth, the council perceived that his thoughts about the apostasy of the leaders did not die with Jesus, but that it had continued on with the apostles and disciples. They could not tolerate this.

Having consented to the death of Jesus, the connection made by Stephen to the past where Israel's leaders had put the previous prophets to death could not be swept under a rug. The writings of the same prophets who were rejected by the leaders in the past had become a part of their own Scriptures!

What Stephen said was true, but in their arrogance, they rejected his words because they had already rejected the words of Jesus. Surely, they were "different" than their fathers before them. But deep inside, they knew the words against them were true. And so, the witness of these followers had to be extinguished as well. As a result of this new persecution, Luke next records, "and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria."

The words now set the tone for what Jesus had said in Acts 1:8 –

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The actual fulfillment of His words will be seen in just a few verses. But this persecution now is the seed that will germinate and take root in those areas. The death of Stephen, and the persecution that now follows, is the means by which Jesus' words would begin to take effect.

These people in the church probably came from those other areas and had simply settled down in Jerusalem to learn from the apostles. With the persecution now taking hold, they would return to where they were from. That is all "except the apostles."

The apostles probably told each disciple something like, "You go. Get back to your hometown and tell the good news about Jesus. We will stay here and keep the church united, even in its dispersion." They would be a focal point for people to return to and

hear about others who had gone off to different areas, thus the church could be kept united through the efforts of the apostles.

Life application: What may seem like a catastrophe may be just the opportunity needed to get things going in a new direction. This is certainly the case with the church in Jerusalem. There was a time when people needed to separate and begin sharing the news about Jesus beyond the walls of their own houses. The persecution of the church was the spark that lit the fire of this new chance for growth in numbers and expansion in territory, but at the time, it certainly did not seem either pleasing or of great value.

The Lord, however, has plans that go beyond our own limited thinking, and so let us attempt to look for His hand in tragedies, trials, and difficulties. Let us accept that His will is to be done, and if what has happened or is happening is a part of that, we should be thankful that He can use us in such a state to continue His redemptive purposes.

When we look back someday, the wisdom displayed now, and that may be hidden at the time, will become evident. Let us trust in this.

*Heavenly Father, how many times have we experienced trials and troubles, and later looked back to see just how perfectly they fit into a greater plan. And yet, the ones we face now seem daunting and even overwhelming. Help us to remember that You worked out what happened in the past, and so we can trust that You are working out what is happening now. We know that You are with us. Help us to see Your hand in the events and to remain steadfast through them. Amen.*

**And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.**  
Acts 8:2

The last verse spoke of the consequences of Stephen's stoning which noted that great persecution arose against the church, and those of the church were "all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." With that remembered, it now says, "And devout men."

The word translated as "devout" is one that refers to being God-fearing, pious, and the like. It is used four times and each other instance refers to someone who is devout under the law –

“And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name *was* Simeon, and this man *was* just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.” Luke 2:25

“And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.” Acts 2:5

“Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there*,<sup>13</sup> came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him.” Acts 22:12, 13

It is true that any of these may have been a believer or become a believer, but their “devoutness” is in relation to the law. Further, as the previous verse specifically noted that those of the church were all scattered, Luke was surely making a point that it was men pious under the law that are being referred to now. It is a point of tenderness in an otherwise unhappy situation. From there, Luke next says that they “carried Stephen *to his burial*.”

Stephen means “crown.” At this point of the narrative, it is notable that despite being stoned for supposed blasphemy, he is the first recorded person in the new dispensation to receive the martyr’s crown. Thus, his name now meets up with his reward.

The word translated as “carry,” *sugkomizó*, is found only here. It signifies “to bring together.” Vincent’s Word Studies says, “Lit., to carry together; hence, either to assist in burying or, better, to bring the dead to the company (σύν) of the other dead. The word is used of bringing in harvest.”

Instead of simply leaving his body outside for beasts to eat, or chucking it into the valley of Hinnom (Gehenna), they removed it to a proper place. The words “to his burial” are inserted, but they surely reflect the appropriate idea. From there, it notes that they “made great lamentation over him.”

Again, it is a word found only here in the Bible, *kopetos*. It is a noun signifying “a beating of the breast or head while mourning.” It is an outward sign of working out an inner turmoil. Regardless as to whether these were believers or not, and the lack of calling them “brethren” points to them probably not being believers, the record is that an act of tenderness toward Stephen was carried out.

Life application: If you have traveled around the world or to various countries or states, you have surely met people who have been exceptionally pious towards “God.” This is, however, often as far as their understanding of God goes.

Humanity has the ability to do wonderful things in the care of others regardless of race, culture, or any other such distinguishing factor. Quite often, this is done by acknowledging that it is their understanding that God is overseeing their actions and He will be pleased with them.

There is nothing wrong with this, and it dispels the Calvinistic thought that there are none who actually seek after God. The words Paul uses in Romans to indicate this come from Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1. In both, the same general idea is presented, that of someone who is an atheist (or at least claiming to be one) –

“The fool has said in his heart,  
*‘There is no God.’*  
They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity;  
*There is none who does good.*” Psalm 53:1

These people, of many cultures, religions, and so on, are really seeking out how to be pleasing to the God they know is out there. But the problem isn’t with their attempts at doing good. Rather, the problem is the infection of sin in them. Until the sin can be dealt with, God cannot accept us. It is an impenetrable wall that is built up because of God’s holiness and our fallen state.

This is what Christ came to remove. His death was a sacrificial death for sin. With the sin removed, then a propitious relationship can be restored. Good works, without dealing with the sin, cannot be considered “good” to God. And more, they can easily lead to a sense of supposed worth before God. “I have done my best.” “I am not as bad as other people.” And so on. God does not grade on a curve.

God’s standard is absolute perfection. Until a person is perfected in Christ, they are not just fallen, but infinitely so. Christ Jesus! He is the answer. Remember the simple gospel and be ready to share it –

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4



Each of the underlined points is given in relation to sin. He died for our sin. He was buried with our sin. He rose again without sin, meaning: He had no sin of His own (Romans 6:23) and thus He is God (Romans 3:23), and our sin is left behind in His burial. Sin is removed from the equation. With the entrance into the New Covenant through belief in Christ's work, sin is no longer imputed (2 Corinthians 5:19). Sin has been dealt with, and salvation is thus guaranteed.

Be confident in your own salvation, be ready to explain the sin problem to others, and then be ready to share with them the good news that God has sealed them with His guarantee when they believe.

*Lord God, if sin is the problem, and if Christ has dealt with the sin problem, then sin is no longer a problem. Restoration has come! Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ, our atoning Sacrifice for sin. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison. Acts 8:3**

It was just noted that Stephen was carried to his burial. But that did not stop the persecution of the church. In fact, Luke's next words show that it continued, highlighting the very person who guarded the clothes of those who stoned Stephen, saying, "As for Saul."

The name Saul is from the Hebrew *Shaul*. That comes from the verb *shaal*, meaning to inquire or ask for. Thus, it means "Asked For." What may be implied is "Asked for (of Yah)." For example, the people of Israel had asked for a king, and the Lord gave them Saul, the first king to reign over Israel. Or it could be that a parent asks for a child and the Lord responds by granting one. The word, however, is identical in spelling to the word *sheol*, or the place of the dead. In this, one can imagine the grave calling out for the souls of humanity, asking for them to come and join it. Of Saul, Luke notes that "he made havoc of the church."

The tense is imperfect. It says, "making havoc." It shows that there was a continuous stream of him relentlessly going after the people. Also, here is a word found just this one time in Scripture and translated as "made havoc." It signifies outrage or to maltreat. Of this word, Vincent's Word Studies says –

"In Septuagint, Psalm 79:13, it is used of the laying waste of a vineyard by the wild boar. ... Canon Farrar observes: 'The part which he played at this time in the horrid work

of persecution has, I fear, been always underrated. It is only when we collect the separate passages - they are no less than eight in number - in which allusion is made to this sad period, it is only when we weigh the terrible significance of the expressions used that we feel the load of remorse which must have lain upon him, and the taunts to which he was liable from malignant enemies' ('Life and Work of St. Paul'). Note the imperfect, of continued action."

It has already been noted that the church was scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. However, the next verse will explain that this was a result of Saul's actions. As such, it can be concluded that as soon as Stephen was stoned, he immediately started going after the believers. As mere speculation, it could be that those in the council said, "We need to crush this teaching right now, when we have the initiative." With that, Saul responded with zeal. This would be in accord with his own words of Acts 26 –

"This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*. <sup>11</sup> And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities." Acts 26:10, 11

With this in mind, Luke says that Saul was "entering every house." It would explain why it says "devout men" rather than "brethren" who were there to bury Stephen. The believers had fled. Only the devout non-believers were left. The persecution began right away, and the believers were hiding in their homes or taking the roads back to their own hometowns. For those who were apprehended, Luke next notes that Saul was "dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison."

The verbs continue to show an active and ongoing action by Saul. He came after the people and he kept coming after them, tirelessly chasing them down and having them incarcerated. The word "dragging" indicates that they were in a rage as they arrested the people, so much so that they grabbed body parts – the hair, the arms, the legs – and simply dragged them out to be bound up and taken away.

Noting both men and women was to show that there was no tolerance at all for anyone who held to the name of Jesus. Even if the men were primarily responsible for the households, the women were a part of the households and were thus subject to the same charges of apostasy as the men.

Life application: Saul was really the first persecutor of the church. But it didn't end with his conversion. Rather, it has gone on steadily since those early days. One of the greatest persecutors of those who have faithfully held to Scripture is, not unsurprisingly, the Roman Catholic Church. While they have been caught up in a system of traditions, unbiblical rites and rituals, and in the adoration of the dead and of idols, faithful people have stood against this. And in their actions, they have been rounded up, sent through terrible tortures, and many were martyred.

Likewise, Christians have been killed in vast numbers by Muslims, Hindus, and people of other religions, or by those who deny any God exists – such as communists. This has been the norm, not the exception for much of the church age. The persecution of Christians has been on the increase in places like Canada, the US, Australia, Germany, and the UK in recent years. Legal battles have been played out in courts, but tolerance for the gospel has decreased in the minds of so many that it is only a matter of time before even worse comes upon believers.

Should the Lord tarry, the lines will surely be divided up between those who truly love Christ and are willing to stand up for His gospel, and those who either pay lip service to Him or are at odds with Him. Now is the time to prepare yourself for holding fast to the Lord. Stay in the word, keep Jesus in your heart and mind at all times, and determine now to never let this temporary world pull you away from Him!

*Lord God, may we be found faithful to You until the end. It is a tough world, and many of us have never had to face persecutions or trials of faith. May we be prepared now so that should those times come, we will hold fast to our proclamation that Jesus is the answer to the world's problems. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Acts 8:4**

In the previous verse, Saul was seen to make havoc on the church, dragging people off and putting them in prison. With that, Luke next records, "Therefore."

It is because of the persecution of the church, notably by Saul, that the events now about to happen will actually come about, and which concerns "those who were scattered."

In their desire to not be dragged away and put in prison, the believers in Jerusalem got up and left. This is what was already stated in verse 8:1, and which is being repeated now after the reason for their scattering has been explicitly stated –

“At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” Acts 8:1

It is true that this must have been a time of both fear and stress on the believers. Being uprooted suddenly and then rushing off to another place is a difficult change on most people, but we are being told these things for a specific reason, which is that those who were scattered “went everywhere preaching the word.”

The word translated as “everywhere” is *dierchomai*. It comes from *dia* (through) and *erchomai* (to come or go). It’s not that they went everywhere and preached, but that they preached everywhere they went. Wherever they passed through, on the way to the next place, they would boldly tell the people about what they knew.

As can be seen, the information now fills in what was first stated in verse 8:1. Now, and for the next several chapters, many details will continue to be filled in, and then in verse 11:19, this narrative will be called to mind again –

“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. <sup>20</sup> But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” Acts 11:19-21

This will be stated after the conversion of some from the mixed-race of the Samaritans, after the conversion of an Ethiopian eunuch, after Saul’s conversion, and after the conversion of an Italian centurion living in Caesarea. Thus, the words of Jesus in Acts 1:8 will be on their way to total fulfillment with each step being meticulously recorded by Luke –

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Life application: As difficult as it must have been for the believers to be uprooted by the persecution they faced, and as difficult as it must have been for Paul to later contemplate his actions towards the believers he persecuted, the word of the Lord was actually being fulfilled through these things.

As the Lord said that the word would be spread even to the end of the earth, we can know that the things that seem difficult or even terrible that happen now are a part of the larger plan to make this happen. Nothing is happening that is outside of the knowledge of God, and He has the ability to use all that happens to meet His greater plan.

Let us trust this and do our best to remember it when our own times of upheaval and trial come. He is working all things out for a good end for those who are His. The word says that it is so –

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. <sup>29</sup> For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. <sup>30</sup> Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” Romans 8:28-30

*Surely, we know that You are in control of all things Lord God. In our own times of trial and distress, we may lose sight of that. So, Lord, send us reminders along the way to help us keep our focus. We are wholly dependent on You in this, O God. May our hearts be prepared for the challenges ahead until the day when You bring us home to glory. Amen.*

**Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.** Acts 8:5

The previous verse said, “Therefore, those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” That is now built upon by Luke, beginning with, “Then Philip.”

This is not Philip of the apostles who is recorded in the gospels, such as in Luke 6:14. Rather, this may be the same man named Philip found in Acts 6:5 who is named among the seven chosen as deacons. If it is the same Philip, he will be seen again in Acts 21:8 where he is called Philip the evangelist. As for him, it says he “went down to the city of Samaria.”

The verb is an aorist participle and should read, “having gone down.” In having gone down, then the actions continue on at some point. As far as the city, Samaria is a region, and so it is probably the principal city of the region at the time. If so, Cambridge says that it was called Sebaste at this time. Sebaste carries the same meaning as Augusta,

and it was named in honor of Augustus Caesar. It was probably at this location that it next says, “and preached.”

The verb is imperfect. He didn't just preach, but he was preaching. He continued on in his proclamation with conviction and stating it as authoritative. This can be seen in the use of the word translated as “preach.” It is a different word than the previous verse. There, it was the word *euaggelizó*, to evangelize or “carry the good news.” Here it is *kérussó*, to proclaim, herald, or preach. Luke finishes by stating that he was preaching “Christ to them.”

More correctly, the words state that he was preaching the Christ to them. The definite article sets off his proclamation as specifically being about Jesus who is the Christ. Prior to the coming of Jesus, people may have preached Christ, such as, “Messiah is coming! Scripture says He will be born in Bethlehem,” and so on. However, Philip's words are specific about “the Christ.” One can see him standing in front of a crowd and saying, “The Messiah has come! He has accomplished all things necessary for salvation, and He has fulfilled the law and the prophets!” His words would set Jesus apart from any other preaching that had been proclaimed before.

Life application: Evangelizing is similar to the preaching noted here, and they can overlap. The main thing to remember is that anyone can evangelize. If you just take the time to remember the basics of the good news concerning Jesus, there should be no reason why you can't convey to the people you meet that there is hope in Him. Keep it simple and let them know the good news (the only good news!) that can save them.

Having tracts to hand out is a plus because they can carry a reminder of what you spoke about. As with what you speak about, keep tracts simple. They can have longer messages about hope and the like, but the gospel presentation should be basic. There is a universal need that all have, which is deliverance from sin. Jesus is the One who can fill that need. As long as the simple gospel is conveyed, there does not need to be an overload of theology to distract the person's attention.

Above all, what is proclaimed should be with conviction and with the assurance that Christ Jesus is the answer to man's dilemma, and more – that He is the only answer to it. With that, you will have properly done your duty to share the good news that God has presented to the world!

*Lord God, help us to be bold in our proclamation of the good news concerning the Lord Jesus. May we never water down the truth of this message. Sin is the problem, Jesus is*

*the answer, and in Him there is freedom from the guilt that separates man from God. Thank You for Jesus. May we be faithful to proclaim what You have done through Him. Amen.*

**And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. Acts 8:6**

The previous verse found Philip having gone down to the city of Samaria and preaching Christ to them. With that, Luke now records, “And the multitudes with one accord.” The meaning is that with the preaching of Philip, there is a united response.

This is something that is not unusual. When a multitude is presented with something, if one pays heed, those around him will too. Eventually, the entire multitude will respond in the same way. It may be a favorable response or one which is unfavorable, but either way, it is how things often transpire. In this case, Luke notes that this large crowd unitedly “heeded the things spoken by Philip.”

The first verb is imperfect and the second is a present participle. More rightly, it says that they “were giving heed to the things being spoken by Philip.” Luke draws his reader into what was occurring and presents it clearly and precisely. There is an active element to what is being presented.

Philip was there preaching to the people. As he spoke, another ear turns to listen, and then another, and soon the whole crowd is engaged as he continues to speak. With that set before us, Luke next describes the ongoing scene as the people were “hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.”

More correctly, the word translated as “miracles” signifies “signs.” Also, the final verb is a present participle. They were “hearing and seeing the signs which he was doing.” Everything is presented for the reader’s mind to participate in what is said. Philip is performing signs that point to the truth of his presentation of Jesus as the Messiah, and while he is doing these things, those watching are engaged in the process, carefully paying attention. With this in mind, Luke will next explain what the signs Philip is performing are.

Life application: At times, it is better to have a small audience that is personal in order to convey one’s intent. However, there are times when a person is skilled enough in speaking or in performing that going into a public space will have the most impact. One

has to decide what his own level of skill and confidence is in order to know if he will be able to effectively hold captive a large gathering.

Additionally, it must be considered whether one's message is going to be received favorably or not. If it will be, that is a bonus. But if the people are not sympathetic to the words being presented, he may end up like Stephen instead of Philip. A message may also be received favorably at the beginning, but then it gets redirected in some manner so that the mood of the crowd changes. This is what will happen to Paul and Barnabas while they are in the city of Lystra (Acts 14).

One must be able to quickly adapt to a changing crowd, or the message may go from being received favorably to one where a shower is needed because of all the tomatoes being thrown. Regardless of the size of the crowd though, it is right that we do our best to tell those we encounter about Jesus. This should be a main goal of each person who has been saved by Him. Whether by handing out a tract, inviting someone to church, or actively speaking about Him, let us do our best to always convey this message of hope.

*Lord God, help us to be bold in our willingness to speak out the gospel message to others. It is Your powerful message that can save, but it will not do so if it is not shared. Help us in this so that the people we encounter will at least be given the chance to respond. To Your glory, Amen.*

**For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. Acts 8:7**

The previous verse referred to Philip being heeded by the multitudes when hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. That now is explained in this verse. It should be noted that there are several differences in the structure of the words in this verse in various manuscripts. However, none of them change the meaning. Rather it is mostly variations in the tense of verbs. Luke begins the words with, "For unclean spirits."

What occurs here in the various ailments that are cured are given to confirm the ongoing work of the Lord through the disciples now. For example, the casting out of unclean spirits by Jesus is seen in the gospels, such as in Luke 4 –

"Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. <sup>32</sup> And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. <sup>33</sup> Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, <sup>34</sup> saying, 'Let us alone! What



have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!’

<sup>35</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be quiet, and come out of him!’ And when the demon had thrown him in *their* midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him. <sup>36</sup> Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, ‘What a word this *is!* For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.’ <sup>37</sup> And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region.” Luke 4:31-37

These unclean spirits were subject to the power of Christ Jesus, and now they are shown to be subject to the power of Christ working through the disciples, such as Philip. This continues to be seen with the next words, saying that they were “crying with a loud voice.”

These unclean spirits had found a home in the people they possessed, and they afflicted the people, controlling them or greatly influencing them. As they were cast out, the process was seen to be a noisy one. The one in Luke 4 recognized the power and authority of Christ. This is certainly what is happening now. They cry out loudly acknowledging that the power of the Holy Spirit had been endowed upon these followers of Jesus. As such, they “came out of many who were possessed.”

These visual and audible workings of the Spirit were given to confirm the work of Jesus. Acts is given as a record that they really occurred. The unclean spirits are shown to be under the control and authority of this power of the Spirit in them. It is a testament to the world that, in coming to Christ, the power of God is greater than anything that once defiled a person. Along with these unclean spirits, Luke also records physical healings by Philip, saying, “and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.”

This is also what Jesus did throughout the gospels, such as in Luke 5. In that account it says –

“When He saw their faith, He said to him, ‘Man, your sins are forgiven you.’

<sup>21</sup> And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, ‘Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’

<sup>22</sup> But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, ‘Why are you reasoning in your hearts? <sup>23</sup> Which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven you,” or to say, “Rise up and walk”? <sup>24</sup> But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’—He said to the man who was paralyzed, ‘I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.’” Luke 5:20-24

In other words, the physical healing was a sign that Jesus has the power to forgive sin. By performing the healing, it confirmed that His words concerning forgiveness were true. As the disciples of Jesus proclaimed forgiveness of sins through Christ's atoning sacrifice, the healings that were done in His name were given as signs that what they claimed concerning forgiveness was also true.

Life application: There are various views concerning the healing power of Jesus in today's world. Some say it continues on and that disciples have the power to heal just as they did in Acts. Some say that healings have completely ceased and no longer occur. Some say that healings can occur, but they are not accomplished by any particular people like in Acts, but that the healing – if it comes – is brought about through prayer.

The third option is correct. God may choose to heal in accord with the prayers of His people. We are instructed to pray in the epistles for exactly this reason. If it were not so, and if all healings ended with the apostolic age, then we would not be given explicit instruction in the epistles to pray for such things.

It should be noted that even the apostles were not always able to heal those around them who were sick. The healings and casting out of demons were to be signs to the people concerning the work of Christ. As we now have the Bible that witnesses to these things, we no longer need such signs. The Bible is a testament to itself of God's workings in Christ. Hence, we are to pray in hopes of healing, but we are to leave it up to God and His purposes for the healing to occur or not.

If healing comes about, who will receive the credit? God will leave it up to the faith of the person to decide, just as His word in the epistles says. We are to live by faith and not by sight. If we have sight, faith is excluded. The Bible will never contradict itself because the Bible is God's word, and it is a reflection of who He is – unchanging, fixed, and non-contradictory in His being.

Have faith, pray for the sick, and be sure to give credit to God for the healing – even if a medicine, a doctor, or an extended stay at a hospital is involved.

*Lord God, Your word asks us to pray for the sick, and so we do. But may we have faith that our words are heard, regardless of the outcome of our requests. You may have a different purpose for us than to be healed, and so may we be careful to never impute wrongdoing to You in the process, but to accept Your will as it is revealed through the person we pray for. Amen.*

## **And there was great joy in that city. Acts 8:8**

The words now being presented are based on the location given in verse 8:5, meaning the city of Samaria, and on the events described in verses 8:6 & 7 concerning the preaching and miraculous signs done by Philip. With those things described it now says, “And there was great joy in that city.”

This is not, as some commentators may say, joy in the Holy Spirit. The reason for this is found in the coming verses –

“Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, <sup>15</sup> who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>16</sup> For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”

-Acts 8:14-17

The joy was at the preaching of the gospel, believing what it conveyed, and finding relief in the forgiveness of sins that comes from what Christ Jesus has done. Accompanying that, there was certainly joy at the spiritual and physical healings that had been performed among the people. The city was in a state of joy because of what had happened. It is a state which is easily contagious as people experience the happiness of simply seeing others happy. Hence, the city was filled with elation over all that was happening among them.

Life application: As was noted, those in Samaria who have believed have not yet received the Holy Spirit. This is in contradistinction to those who had already believed in Acts 2, and who immediately received the Spirit in an outward display of tongues of fire alighting upon them and then through speaking in tongues (2:3, 4). The others who listened were told that if they repented and were baptized, they would receive the Holy Spirit. Many did. Of those who believed and received the Spirit, it says nothing of tongues of fire or speaking in tongues.

Now, something entirely different is taking place. The people have believed, but the Holy Spirit has not been given. This is a problem because people in various denominations and churches follow the words of Acts 2 and mandate repentance and baptism for salvation. But that is not taught here in Acts 8. These people are now believers. They just have not yet received the Spirit. Why is it ok to follow Acts 2, but not Acts 8? And more, in Acts 10 (and elsewhere) there will be a completely different set of

events that occur. Why are those patterns not prescribed in churches? But more, if they were, there would be a contradiction to Acts 2 then, wouldn't there?

What is happening in these passages clearly shows us that the events are not prescriptive. In other words, nothing is prescribed in Acts. It is a historical account of what transpired, but it does not set the pattern for the church to emulate. Indeed! It cannot. If it did, then the church would be in complete confusion as to what is supposed to occur. But wait! It already is. And this is because Acts is used in a pick and choose manner to prescribe that which is only intended to describe.

The city of Samaria has seen the miracles, they have believed the gospel, and they are reconciled to God through that belief. The reason for the order of events here is not yet revealed, but it is to teach us about the early establishment of the church, and why God has done the things He has done. To find out what is prescribed for the church, we are to go to the church epistles. That is where doctrine is to be derived from. The book of Acts is not intended to be used for this purpose.

If you are in an "Acts 2 church," or if your church has "Acts 2 experiences," you are following a false teaching. Acts 2 is directed to the Jews. The Gentiles are not even addressed in a specific manner until Acts 10. Avoid the sensationalism found in hyped-up churches and stick to what is doctrinally sound. Anything can be made to say anything unless a systematic and logical approach is taken to understand doctrine. God is the originator of logic. Nothing He does will be illogical or contradictory.

*Almighty and glorious God! Thank You for Your word that reveals to us how You are accomplishing things in redemptive history. Your word is logical and orderly, and it gives us direction and purpose to live out our lives in a holy and responsible manner before You. Thank You, above all, for Christ Jesus who has done all that is necessary to bring us back to You. Yes, thank You for Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

**But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, Acts 8:9**

The account has been focused on Philip and his preaching and signs. They brought great joy to the city. Now, the account brings in a new figure, saying, "But there was a certain man." This is stated to reveal a contrast between Philip, and his work on behalf of the Lord, and this person and his work. This man is "called Simon."

It is the same name as several others, including Simon Peter. The name means “Hearing,” or “He who hears.” A great deal has been written about who this may be in relation to extrabiblical history, but these commentaries are speculative. The person is described here in Acts and the account stands alone as sufficient to describe him and what occurs. Luke says he is a person “who previously practiced sorcery in the city.”

The verb is a present participle. It reads, “who had been formerly in the city practicing sorcery.” He went around doing it, probably as his profession or as a way of making money. The word translated as “sorcery” is found only here in the Bible, *mageuó*. It signifies to practice magic or sorcery. It is derived from *magos* (which we translate as Magi). It is for this reason that he is often called Simon Magus, or Simon the Magician.

He was probably comparable to someone who goes around today and does things that bewilder the senses of the people, like Houdini, David Copperfield, and the like. By using sleight of hand, or maybe by practicing black arts, he did such things “and astonished the people of Samaria.”

The Greek word translated as “astonished” is *existémi*. It signifies “to remove from a standing (fixed) position” or “put out of place” (HELPS Word Studies). As such, it is like saying, “He blew the people off their feet.” They were utterly amazed.

The KJV uses a most unfortunate “bewitched” here. This is not at all what is being said. There was no spell cast upon the people. Rather, they were simply astonished. The same word is used in 8:13 when referring to Simon being amazed at Philip’s miracles and signs, thus demonstrating a contrast between the two.

Again, it is a present participle. He was “amazing the people of Samaria.” As he went out and performed, the people would watch and be stupefied at the incredible things he was doing, just as would be the case with our current magicians.

They would be captivated by how things disappeared and then reappeared, how there might be a fire that wouldn’t burn, or how something might suddenly turn into a white dove. Whatever tricks he could flabbergast the people with, they would stand amazed. And more, because he could do these things, he was also “claiming that he was someone great.”

This is a natural attitude for people who can bewilder others. They get cocky and think more highly of themselves than they ought. These words, then, are set in contrast to the

work of Philip and the others who exalt not themselves, but the greatness of Jesus Christ.

Life application: Regardless of the source of Simon's magic, whether it was demonic or simply out of his own skills and cunning, it was intended for self-exaltation. He surely profited off of his skills and maybe in a great way. Successful magicians today can make millions of dollars. In the end, however, what they do has no lasting value.

There are people around the world living in very poor conditions and who are dependent on the goodness of others to simply pay their bills from month to month, but they are doing it as missionaries and teachers of the word and sharers of the good news about Jesus. What they are doing, if with the right intent, will someday be rewarded by the Lord.

Let us not squander our lives chasing the sensational and chasing after people like Simon Magus, but rather, let us remember to assist those who are doing what is truly of value. If those people will be rewarded for their efforts, then it logically follows that God will reward those who support them so that they can continue.

Remember to pray for your church's missionaries and be sure to let them know that they are appreciated.

*Lord God, today we lift up those who are out doing service for others in missionary work and in the work of evangelism. Be with them, bring comfort and happiness to their souls, and reveal to them things that will let them know their work is of value to those they minister to. Yes, Lord, be with these people of Yours. Amen.*

**to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." Acts 8:10**

The previous verse introduced Simon who practiced sorcery in the city and who astonished the people of Samaria. Along with that, he claimed that he was someone great. This verse shows us that he was believed, saying, "to whom they all gave heed."

It is referring to him, and it shows that because of what he was doing, the people paid attention to him, probably hanging on his every word. This is not unusual. The false prophets during the time of the kings held their courts captive, such as in 1 Kings –

“The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, having put on *their* robes, sat each on his throne, at a threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. <sup>11</sup> Now Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah had made horns of iron for himself; and he said, ‘Thus says the LORD: “With these you shall gore the Syrians until they are destroyed.”’ <sup>12</sup> And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, ‘Go up to Ramoth Gilead and prosper, for the LORD will deliver *it* into the king’s hand.’” 1 Kings 22:10-12

These, and many such instances, show that people are easily swayed by false messages and false displays of miracles, signs, and wonders. Jesus warned about this as well –

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here *is* the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe *it*. <sup>24</sup> For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. <sup>25</sup> See, I have told you beforehand.”

-Matthew 23:23-25

As for Simon, regardless as to whether he was in touch with demonic influences or whether he was simply good at tricks of magic, all of the people were swayed by him “from the least to the greatest.”

Young people love to look at what is curious and ponder how such things are done, but so do older people as well. People who aren’t so smart will marvel at things they don’t understand, but so will the intelligent. When we cannot grasp how something is done, we will naturally look to alternative explanations for what we see.

Seemingly highly intellectual people will believe in secret powers in certain people just because of the thing they see that they cannot explain. And such people will gladly claim that what they are doing (and this is certainly true in Christian circles as well) is by the power of God. This is the case with Simon. The people were “saying, ‘This man is the great power of God.’”

Because of the things he did, and because of the way he presented himself, the people were completely fooled as to the source of his supposed magic. He may have used smoke and mirrors, but he did so in an effective manner so that everyone was bamboozled by him.

Life application: How many countless Christians have been duped by false teachers over the years! This is both in doctrine and in simply being conned by sleight of hand “healers” and “miracle workers.” History is replete with such charlatans.

As for doctrine, Paul and the other writers of the epistles constantly warn about the importance of heeding the word, knowing it, and holding fast to it. For example, Paul says –

“But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. <sup>13</sup> For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. <sup>15</sup> Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” 1 Corinthians 11:12-15

Without knowing the word, people are at the whims of those who know how to twist it. Likewise, there are false presentations of power constantly performed in churches around the world. Today, Charismatics and Pentecostals (and others) have a constant stream of false healings, false receptions of “divine instruction,” and so on. People see these things, and because the person conducting them says he is doing them in the name of Jesus, it is blindly accepted as true.

Peter Popov is a classic example of this. Read up on what he did, and then realize that even AFTER he was exposed, people still follow him. The stupidity of man to give credit to people who make false claims is limitless. Unless we know the word, and unless we know what is true, we cannot identify what is false. As such, you are once again implored to think reasonably and rationally, and to know and study the Bible. Be cautious and be circumspect in what you are willing to accept.

*Lord God, You have given us Your word to guide us and direct us. And, You have given it to us to warn us and keep us from being led astray by false teachers and false miracle workers. Well, we sure can't do that without picking the Bible up and reading it. So, Lord, give us wisdom to put Your word first in our list of daily activities. Help us to not be swayed by what is false. Instead, give us the ability to discern what is good and proper. Amen.*

**And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. Acts 8:11**

Still speaking of Simon, the Sorcerer, of whom it was said in the last verse, “This man is the great power of God,” Luke now records of those in Samaria, “And they heeded him.”



The verb is imperfect – “And they were heeding him.” Wherever he went and whenever he showed up to perform, the people paid attention and were held captive by him as he astonished them with his capabilities.

When people believe you have a connection to the divine, they will heed you. This is true with palm readers, tarot card readers, priests in Catholic churches (meaning supposed “mediators” between God and men), and an innumerable list of others around the world who are supposedly able to connect to the spiritual world.

In the case of people like Simon who do magic that has outward signs, people are even more convinced. The signs they do supposedly point to the surety that they are really tapping into another dimension. Simon was considered the great power of God “because he had astonished them with his sorceries.”

Here is another word found only this once in Scripture, *mageia*. It is a noun and signifies magic. Being plural, it means “deeds of magic,” “magic arts,” “sorceries,” “witchcrafts,” or the like. He wasn’t limited to just one or two tricks up his sleeve, but he constantly impressed people with a litany of new things. And this went on “for a long time.”

This is not an unimportant addition to the verse. It shows that he was well established, and people expected him to show up and do something new and interesting. The reason for this specific detail concerning his abilities, the signs that supposedly accompanied them, and the long duration of time that he had done these things is to then contrast him and his practices with that of the disciples who had recently come to the area.

Life application: Since the coming of television, people like Simon have been able to obtain a much wider audience to fool even more people than would have ever been thought possible. Such demonstrations of magic excite the mind and make people even more curious about the person and his abilities.

Now, with the advent of social media, especially like YouTube which has an interactive counterpart, people who claim connections into the spiritual world can have innumerable followers who hang onto their claims. And this is no different than some fraud in Christianity.

YouTube is filled with people who supposedly have conversations with Jesus, Mary, the angels, and so on. Many have claimed to have gone to heaven (or hell) and been shown things that others can only dream about.

Don't be fooled by such claims. People are people. We are all born into the world, we live out our lives, and we will die (unless the rapture happens first). The only difference between them and you is that they claim something that has not happened, or they claim connections to the divine (or the spiritual world) that they don't actually possess.

Be content to live your life reading the word and living by faith in what God has said and done. This is sensational enough because it comes with the promise of eternal life in His presence. Ignore anything else that distracts you from this marvelous anticipation.

*Heavenly Father, please keep us from people that would distract us from what is truly important in this life. Help us to not be fooled by those that claim they are somebody when they are not. May we hold fast to what is good and proper all our days, thinking on Your word and living in faith concerning what You have promised. Amen!*

**But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Acts 8:12**

A contrast to the past few verses concerning Simon is now introduced. He practiced sorcery and astonished the people, having duped them to believe that he was the great power of God and so on. However, Philip is again brought into the narrative now, saying, "But when they believed Philip."

The word "they" is referring to the people in the city of Samaria. Simon was a highlight among them, but something new has been introduced that goes beyond their adoration of him. As it next says of Philip, "as he preached."

It is the same word, euaggelizó, used in verse 8:4. It means "to preach the good news." There it said –

"Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word."

Contained in that preaching of good news is "the things concerning the kingdom of God." Some manuscripts, and thus some translations, omit the words "the things." As such, it reads, "the good news about the kingdom of God." Either way, the subject of the kingdom of God is considered a part of the good news of Jesus. As such, it is important to understand what this is referring to.

There cannot be a kingdom without a king. In the case of the kingdom of God, it is the good news that Jesus is the King over an entirely new realm. Not only has he replaced Adam, but He is seated in authority over His people.

This kingdom is referred to throughout the epistles. Paul mentions it in Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 1:13, 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; 1 Timothy 1:17, 6:15 (Jesus the King); 2 Timothy 4:1, 4:18.

It is also mentioned in Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, and Revelation. The concept of a kingdom is likewise mentioned throughout Acts as having been preached by Jesus, as well as by both the apostles and disciples who ministered to the Jews, and by those who ministered to the Gentiles.

Having said that, care must be taken to understand that the kingdom referred to can, at times, mean a literal, physical reign of Christ on earth during the millennium, or it can refer to the kingdom of God that is a spiritual kingdom. What is being referred to now is the spiritual kingdom that is also preached by Paul in Acts and that is referred to in the epistles as well. This is evident from the next words, “and the name of Jesus Christ.”

The kingdom of God is the rule and authority of God in opposition to that of Satan, the ruler of this world and its present system. Jesus Christ is the King of the kingdom of God. He is the fulfillment of everything necessary to return man to the anticipated restoration of the perfection that was lost at the fall.

Adam was like a king over the realm of the world. He lost that right and authority, and Jesus Christ has regained title to it. This applies to those who put their trust in Him, and it is this that is methodically explained in the epistles, but which is also referred to in Acts. It is what Jesus spoke of prior to His crucifixion –

“Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.’

<sup>37</sup> Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’

Jesus answered, ‘You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.

Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’” John 18:36, 37

Of this kingdom that Philip proclaimed, it next says, “both men and women were baptized.” This is the outward sign of being accepted into the kingdom of God. It is a rite that was commanded by Jesus, after His resurrection (meaning after the introduction of the New Covenant), and thus it is applicable to all people: Jews, those of Samaria, and Gentiles (as will continue to be seen in Acts).

The rite itself is not necessary for salvation, but it is necessary for obedience to the Lord. To not receive baptism is to violate the prescriptions set down by the Lord, of which two are recorded, baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Life application: There is a heresy that has crept into the church over the years which has already been addressed earlier in the Acts commentary, but it is a good time to review it. It is most prominently known as hyperdispensationalism. It is taught in varying degrees and with some false teachings held to by one pastor and more of them held to by another.

In general, it departs from sound doctrine in that it teaches that baptism (meaning water baptism) is not a necessary part of the life of a believer. And yet, these same people will say that it is right to observe the Lord’s Supper. The same Lord, Jesus, who mandated one also mandated the other. He did so at (or after) the inauguration of the New Covenant, of which He spoke of at the Last Supper.

As there is one New Covenant, and as it applies to both Israel (Jeremiah 31:31 & Hebrews 8:8) and to the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 11:25 & 2 Corinthians 3:6), then the mandates of that covenant by the One who established it, equally apply to both.

Hyperdispensationalism, however, goes further down Heresy Highway by proclaiming that there are two different gospels, one for the Jew and one for the Gentile. But Paul explicitly states in 1 Corinthians 15:11 that his gospel is the same as the gospel preached by Peter and the other apostles.

Along with this, hyperdispensationalists will claim that Jesus is not the King over the Gentiles and that the title should not be used of Him in this manner. Instead, they claim that this is a title that belongs to Him over the Jews and that the “kingdom” for them is an earthly one. However, as noted above, if one proclaims a kingdom – as Paul does – then there must be a king that reigns over it. The exact same kingdom that Christ rules over (as noted in the list provided above) is proclaimed by all of the apostles in one united voice.

Another erroneous point taught in hyperdispensationalism is that the church did not begin until the preaching of Paul. A key and main point of the book of Acts is to show that this is not true, but that what God is doing is not dependent on Israel as a key point of what being in the “church” means.

Rather, what belongs to Israel concerning the Old Testament promises is a separate thing altogether. The church began with Christ’s work. It was proclaimed from Acts 2 on, but Israel the nation missed what was going on. From there, the message (the same gospel message) slowly gravitated toward the Gentiles as Paul’s ministry took hold.

If you know anyone who is caught up in these false teachings, let them know that they should first question their own salvation. Have they believed the one (and only) gospel as outlined in 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4? If so, they should then question their obedience to the Lord. He has given commands concerning our responsibilities in the salvation He provides. To refuse these is a mark of disobedience to His spoken word.

Finally, they should be properly instructed on what the “kingdom” means and who the King of that kingdom is. In this, you will be helping them out of a truly heretical cult that has arisen, and which divides the body of Christ and brings shame upon what He has done for His people.

*Lord God, help us to have sound doctrine. The church did not begin when Paul began preaching. It began when You established it through the giving of Christ Jesus for our sins. Help us to be responsible in our theology lest we be found inept in our doctrine. Above all, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. Acts 8:13**

The previous verse was given as a contrast to the words concerning Simon, referring to Philip’s preaching about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. It also noted that those who believed were baptized. With that remembered, verse 8:13 will show why all the detail was given concerning Simon. The NKJV that is used does not do a good job translating the verbs. A much better and more literal rendering is –

“and Simon also himself did believe, and, having been baptized, he was continuing with Philip, beholding also signs and mighty acts being done, he was amazed.” YLT

Because of this, Young's will be used for analyzing the verse, beginning with, "and Simon also himself did believe."

In verse 9, Simon was the one who "astonished the people." He was also "claiming that he was someone great." In verse 10 it said everyone heeded him, saying, "This man is the great power of God." The complete contrast to his supposedly great position now begins to be seen. He thought he was someone great, and yet now, he has believed that Jesus truly is the Messiah.

The word is quite clear, Simon believed. The exact same form of the verb (an aorist participle) is found five times in John's gospel. For example, John 20:8 says –

"Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed."

Because of the circumstances around Simon, especially what will occur in just a few verses, it is questioned whether he was truly saved or not. There is no reason to question that. These first words of the verse settle the matter. He heard the word concerning Jesus and he believed. With that, it next says, "and, having been baptized."

This is in accordance with the word of the Lord. It is the standard note after every conversion in the book of Acts. It happened to the Jews in Acts 2. It now happens with the mixed-race of Samaritans in Acts 8. It will happen to the Ethiopian eunuch later in Acts 8. It will happen to Paul in Acts 9. It will happen to the Gentile believers in Acts 11. And so on.

Although Acts is a descriptive account of what happened in early church history, it is evident that what occurred concerning these baptisms was plainly a result of the command of the Lord. He clearly and unambiguously stated that all who come to Him are to be baptized. With this (as will be seen) weak believer, Simon, being baptized in accord with the word of the Lord, it next says, "he was continuing with Philip."

It is apparent that his previous life was set aside, and he wanted to seek out the power of the Lord as displayed through Philip. He had been so self-consumed in the past that it must have been incredible to him to think that he wasn't so great after all. And so, like a curious child, he followed Philip "beholding also signs and mighty acts being done."

This would not be unexpected. Simon had spent his time duping people into believing that he had extraordinary powers, even touching upon the divine. But he knew that it

wasn't true. Whether what he did was sleight of hand magic or whether it was rooted in black magic, it was not the true power of God. He now saw the truth and was fully aware of the difference between it and the counterfeit. As such, it says "he was amazed."

Here was a man stupefying people daily, and yet it is he who is now amazed at what he sees. Luke uses the same word that was used in verses 8:9 and 8:11 to describe the people's reactions to Simon's bag of tricks and Simon's reaction to the Lord's power in Philip as he did signs and mighty acts.

The contrast is complete. Simon realized the true power of God and believed what he saw. The failings to be noted of him in the verses ahead are given not to show that he wasn't saved, but they rather point out – and even highlight – that new believers are not suddenly ultra-spiritual beings. They are people in need of instruction and correction. Hence, not only are they to be baptized, but they are also to be made sound disciples by teaching them what the Lord commanded, just as the Lord stated in Matthew 28:19.

Life application: One thing that is very common is to see people who have believed the gospel not grow into mature believers. In fact, it is more the norm than the exception. For, indeed, what is a mature believer?

A person who comes to Christ, goes to seminary, and is ordained to pastor a church will – eventually – look back at his early years as a pastor and say, "Boy, I had a lot to learn and a lot of growing up to do back then." And yet, he was the pastor of a church and supposedly a "mature believer" at that time.

In other words, to be in Christ and to grow in Him is something that should never cease. We should be maturing in our walk from day to day. But this does not mean that people who don't do this are not saved. If it did, and if a "fully mature" Christian was the proof of being saved, then nobody would be saved.

We need to be careful to not look down on those who are on a different level than we are. This is especially so when others could be looking down on us. Belief in Christ Jesus is what saves. Everything after that is, or it should be, a lifelong process of growing in Him.

*Heavenly Father, help us to strive for growth in our Christian lives. Let us faithfully seek out Your word, pursue a closer walk with You, and come to understand our lowly position in this world. The more we grow in You, the more evident it is just how far below*

*You we truly are. And so, Lord, help us to not look down on other believers, but to motivate them to strive ahead for the prize that is found in Christ. Amen.*

**Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, Acts 8:14**

The previous verse noted Simon's belief and baptism. This followed after the belief and baptism of "both men and women" of Samaria noted in verse 8:12. However, what has gone unnoted is any hint of the giving of the Spirit to these people. This is then a different occurrence than that which occurred in Acts 2 where Peter said to the people –

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38

Nothing has been said of repenting here in Acts 8. Further, the Spirit was promised to come upon baptism by those in Acts 2. That has neither been promised nor has it occurred. These things will be recorded in the verses to come, and an explanation of what occurs will be made.

For now, it is simply to be noted that this is the case, demonstrating that Acts is providing a description of what occurs at the establishment of the early church, but no individual account is to be taken as either normative or prescriptive. As for the ongoing account, it next records, “Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard.”

In the scattering of the church because of the persecution that was taking place (Acts 8:1 & 8:4), the apostles had remained in Jerusalem as an anchor for the church to remain united under their teaching. Eventually, the word got back to them “that Samaria had received the word of God.”

It is an important point that is dismissed by several heretical teachings that have infected the church. How often it is for false teachers to point to the words of Jesus and insist that there is one message to the Jews and another to the Gentiles –

“These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup> But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Matthew 10:5, 6

“Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to



Him, saying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.'

<sup>23</sup> But He answered her not a word.

And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, 'Send her away, for she cries out after us.'

<sup>24</sup> But He answered and said, 'I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.'" Matthew 15:21-24

Such verses are pulled out of their intended context, which is Jesus' ministry to Israel to hear first and to then either accept or reject their Messiah. It is clear and plainly evident from this verse in Acts that either the apostles were disobedient to the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:5, or they are being obedient to the commission that the one and only gospel is to go out from Jerusalem to "Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The latter is correct. Those who teach that there are two gospels, that baptism is not a commandment (even if not required for salvation) for those who come to Christ, or that the church began with Paul are heretics and have failed to take in the whole counsel of God. They divide the church and the message of Christ to the harm of those they teach. With this clearly seen, it next says that "they sent Peter and John to them."

With these words, another point of poor doctrine is argued against. It is one that will be further clarified as Acts and the epistles continue to demonstrate. By noting that the "apostles" sent Peter and John, it clearly indicates that the body has come to a mutual decision, and it argues against the idea that Peter was established by Jesus as the first leader (pope) of the church as Roman Catholicism claims.

The reason for the Holy Spirit's influence in this decision will be seen as Acts continues, but these words wholly argue against Peter as being a leading figure within the body of the apostles. Though not as egregious an error as the one stated above, the Roman Catholic Church has purposefully twisted its history in order to justify innumerable other faulty claims and doctrines, such as in this case concerning Peter.

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit (as can be assumed though not specifically stated), Peter and John were selected by the body of apostles to go to Samaria.

Life application: Jesus' ministry to Israel alone was for a set and determined purpose. The covenant at Sinai was given to them. The prophets spoke to them. The promises were given to them. And the promise of a New Covenant was given to them (see

Jeremiah 31:31). It was right and fitting that the earthly ministry of the Messiah was to be to Israel alone. And thus, it was.

However, the gospel was always intended to go out to the Gentiles after this time (see Isaiah 42:6, for example). This was not thwarted in Israel's rejection of Jesus. Rather, it was carried out exactly as was known by God all along. Even the Song of Moses from Deuteronomy explained this, in advance, to Israel –

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, *with* His people;  
For He will avenge the blood of His servants,  
And render vengeance to His adversaries;  
He will provide atonement for His land *and* His people.” Deuteronomy 32:43

Paul cites this in Romans 15:10, explaining such things. Pay attention to the details in Acts! Think about what God is doing. He is giving a descriptive account of how the church was established, but in this process, He is taking into consideration everything recorded in the Old Testament, fairly treating Israel according to His word and according to their acceptance or rejection of it. And it is all based on one unified gospel message that is given to all people of the world. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:11 concerning the united ministry of all of the apostles, including himself, “Therefore, whether *it was I* or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

Further, there is one Leader of the church, Jesus, and there are set offices below Him that are given in accord with the instructions in the epistles. There is no single authority within the faith that is set to direct the masses concerning the continuance of the church. Roman Catholicism is to be rejected based on this.

*Heavenly Father, help us to think rightly concerning Your word as it unfolds before us. May we not get misdirected by those who have failed to rightly divide what is clearly presented when things are taken in context. May our doctrine be pure, and may we be pleasing followers of You as we await Your coming for us. Amen.*

**who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:15**

It was previously noted that the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God. When this occurred, it says “they sent Peter and John to them.” Peter and John have been the focus of attention already in Acts. Going together, they play a

key role in the events now, but the brunt of the attention is on Peter. As for them being selected and then traveling together, Luke says, “who, when they had come down.”

The “who” is referring to both of them. The words, “when they had come down,” are referring to the trip from Jerusalem to Samaria. It doesn’t matter what direction one travels from Jerusalem, nor what the elevation of the area is, a trip from Jerusalem is always said to be “down,” and a trip to Jerusalem is always said to be “up.”

This is to acknowledge that Jerusalem is the exalted place where the Lord’s attention is focused. It is an earthly type of the greater New Jerusalem mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. Understanding this, they went down to Samaria and “prayed for them.”

Peter and John are said to have prayed. This is telling us that there is a petition to God for something that they cannot obtain, convey, possess, etc., on their own efforts. In other words, in the act of prayer, it is an acknowledgment that what is prayed for must be obtained from God in whatever way applies to the particular prayer. In this case, it is “that they might receive the Holy Spirit.”

The word “they” means those who have believed in Samaria. The words “might receive” indicate that they had not yet received what is prayed for. Further, it is something beyond the ability of the apostles to provide. And more, it is an indication that because what they are praying for has not yet been received, it is unsure whether it is something that will be given. In other words, this is something new and the apostles are clearly looking to determine what will be the outcome of their prayer.

In praying that they might receive “the Holy Spirit,” it is asking for the intimate bond that indicates that God has accepted a person as His own. It is the surety of the covenant, the New Covenant, that comes through the work of Christ. The apostles surely remembered the words of Jesus that were spoken in this same location –

“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,<sup>14</sup> but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.’” John 4:13, 14

“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.<sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.<sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father

in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. <sup>24</sup> God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.’” John 4:21-24

They would also have remembered Jesus’ words in Acts 1:8, saying, “and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” As such, the apostles are certainly trying to determine exactly what it means to be a true worshiper of God the Father and what witnessing to those in Samaria fully meant. These people have put their faith in the gospel of Jesus. Now, what does this exactly mean? This is the purpose of the apostles being sent and the reason for the prayer now.

Life application: Until this point in the narrative, the things that are occurring detail a story of heading into the unknown. Each step of the process is new to the apostles. They have the commission, but they do not fully understand what the expected outcome is as they carry it out.

This was true in Acts 2, it has been true as things have continued to unfold, and it will continue to be true as new events come before God’s chosen ministers who are carrying out His commands.

However, and this is key to understanding our lives before the Lord now, such things are no longer unknown to us. The book of Acts has been written. What was unknown with each step that was taken is now known based on past precedent. Further, along with the recording of Acts, the epistles are now written which give clear and explicit instruction concerning matters that were left unclarified in Acts.

Some of those epistles were written during the time that Acts was being written. Others are written after the period of Acts is over, but by those who were still alive – thus during the apostolic era.

Understanding this, Acts describes what occurred, it sets a baseline of precedents that are generally to be followed unless explicitly redefined or explained in the epistles, but the Acts accounts are descriptive in nature and are not to be considered as normative in the details of individual accounts.

Instead, these individual accounts are to be gathered into a whole picture of what occurred concerning any given issue (such as baptism), and then it is to be determined from them the overall message that is being conveyed, and why the individual accounts were given, why they differ, and what is the common denominator between them.

In following such an interpretive method, there will not be a “pick-and-choose” theology that arises from Luke’s descriptions of individual events that were never intended to set church doctrine.

*Lord God, what a treasure Your word is! It is so filled with interesting details that we can spend a lifetime contemplating them. Reading it again and again, we always find new insights into the marvelous things You are revealing to us. Thank You for this wonderful and precious word. Amen.*

**For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.** Acts 8:16

The previous verses told of Peter and John being selected to go down to Samaria. When they had done so, it says that they prayed for those of Samaria who had received the word so that they might receive the Holy Spirit. With that, Luke now continues, saying, “For as yet He had fallen upon none of them.”

The idea of the Holy Spirit falling on someone is first used here, but it will be seen again in Acts 10:44 and 11:15 when referring to the conversion of Cornelius and those with him. HELPS Word Studies says that the specific word used, *epiptó*, comes from *epi*, on or upon, and *pipto*, to embrace (with affection) or to seize (with more or less violence, literally or figuratively).

It is remarkable that such a term is used when referring to Samaritans and later those Gentiles in Caesarea. It is as if the Holy Spirit was there anticipating the right moment to respond with the greatest of all affection in welcoming these people into the family of God. What occurred with the Jews in Acts 2 seems like an anticipated event that was the fulfillment of the hope that had been in them all along. But with these unsuspecting people, the use of this word provides a sudden and overwhelming embrace in an unexpected union with God.

For now, Luke next notes, “They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” The preposition is into, not in. It is the same preposition used in Matthew 28:18 when the Lord commanded this rite in the first place –

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations; baptize them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Weymouth

The significance of the use of this preposition is not to be overlooked. The baptism was done at the command of the Lord, it was done to non-Jews in accordance with that word, and it sets the tone for a normative pattern that is developing in the book of Acts. Even though each instance of conversion is different (Such as in Acts 2, 8, 10, etc.), the same pattern of obedience to the word of the Lord is seen – give the gospel, when it is received, baptize. This is exactly what the Lord stated, and it is exactly what is expected even to this day.

Further, using the word “only” in this verse (They had only been baptized) demonstrates that there is a lack that needs to be filled. In other words, something is occurring in the sequence of events that is not normative, but purposeful. In Acts 2, it said –

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’” Acts 2:38, 39

Those in Jerusalem were told they were to 1) repent; 2) be baptized upon (*epi*), not into, the name of Jesus Christ; and then 3) they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now in Acts 8, nothing has been said of repentance. Instead, it notes the people heeded (8:6), believed (8:13), and received the word of God (8:14). After this, they were baptized. However, that was all that happened – highlighted by the word “only.”

It is of note that Paul uses the same preposition, into (*eis*), as is used here when writing to the Gentile believers in Romans 6 –

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Romans 6:3, 4

Such small details in the words used give great insights into sound doctrine. When properly considered, they will dispel wrong ideas about doctrine, including several insidious heresies that have arisen within the church. As for those in Samaria, a lack exists that still must be filled. This is obviously purposeful. What do you suppose the reason for this is?

Life application: Using individual accounts from Acts to set doctrine will inevitably lead to unsound doctrine. Some churches say that, based on Acts 2, baptism is mandatory in

order to be saved. But that is dispelled in the next chapter, and it continues to be dispelled throughout the rest of the book of Acts.

Some heretics say that baptism is not applicable to Gentile believers, in direct opposition to the word of the Lord in Matthew 28. Again, this is dispelled through a careful study of Acts and the epistles. Though not required for salvation, it is expected for obedience.

Some heretically say the church began with the apostle Paul and that the gospel is different for Jews and Gentiles. But that is dispelled by understanding the descriptive nature of the accounts of Acts and why those accounts are given, all of which follow a different order of events, in the first place. Acts is a tool to see what God did and why, but it is not specifically calling for any of these events to be taken as normative. And yet, by reviewing all of them as a whole, a normative doctrine can be elicited from what is provided.

Be sure to consider everything that is stated in its proper context. Only after that can a sound and reasonable evaluation of the whole package be more clearly understood. In other words, read your Bible, and keep reading your Bible – again and again. Only in thoroughly knowing its contents can you weed out the error that so many fall into.

*Lord God, help us to not be swayed by false teachings. Rather, give us wisdom as we read Your word so that we will be grounded enough to weed out such falsities. May it be so to Your glory. Amen.*

**Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:17**

In the previous verse, Luke carefully noted that the Holy Spirit had not fallen on any who had believed in Jesus. Rather, it said, “They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” With that understood, it next says, “Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”

The verbs in both clauses are imperfect. It more precisely reads, “Then they were laying hands on them, and they were receiving *the* Holy Spirit.” This is important because it leaves the number of believers in the area unrecorded, but it gives the sense of a large number. As the apostles laid their hands on each person, that person would then receive the Holy Spirit. With this in mind, the clauses can be evaluated, beginning with, “Then they were laying hands on them.”

It is the apostles, after having come down from Jerusalem, who “were praying for them” (verse 8:15), meaning the people of Samaria. As they did, they then “were laying hands on them.” How completely different than anything seen yet! It is a recorded account of what happened, and yet something entirely different was needed for the process to be complete.

No explanation is given, and yet, it is clear that this was deemed necessary by God for us to learn something concerning both the book of Acts in general, and of His workings within the church as well as He reveals His intent for it. With this act of the apostles noted, it next says, “and they were receiving *the* Holy Spirit.”

There is a process that is being followed and a result that is occurring. Each person who has the hands of the apostles laid upon him only then receives the Holy Spirit. One must ask, “Is this normative?” The answer should be obvious. If it is, then it would have been required for everyone since Acts 2. Further, it would continue to be needed throughout Acts. But in Acts 10, it will say, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word” (Acts 10:44).

One must read the whole account to see the process that occurs there, but it is clear that what is happening now in Acts 8 cannot be normative. And more, it is almost wholly ignored by churches that hold to various accounts in Acts in a prescriptive manner. However, for those churches that do claim hands must be laid upon a person in order for him to receive the Spirit, various problems arise, such as:

- 1) It ignores the other accounts where this process is not followed.
- 2) It assumes that the person laying the hands on another has apostolic authority, which he does not.
- 3) It leads to a convoluted theology that does not match what the prescriptive epistles clearly state.

In Acts 10, a more thorough evaluation of the various differences between the accounts will be made. At that time, these things will be considered and the purpose for them will be explained.

Life application: What has been the common denominator so far in the various accounts recorded in Acts, including in the manner of baptisms that have occurred? Consider this as you read and continue to explore the book. We are being given insights into the redemptive scenario as it continues throughout history.



As for the account in Acts 8, one can see the importance of properly translating verbs from the Greek. A few varying translations of Acts 8:17 say –

Then laid they *their* hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. (KJV)

Then they *began* laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. (NASB)

Then Peter and John laid their hands on them [one by one], and they received the Holy Spirit. (Amplified Bible)

Then Peter and John placed their hands on the Samaritans, and they received the Holy Spirit. (NET Bible)

then were they laying hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (YLT)

Then they were laying hands on them, and they were receiving *the* Holy Spirit. (CG)

As you can see, some introduce words (italics) to provide clarity of the subject. The Amplified Bible gives a fuller explanation of the process. Instead of directly translating what is happening, the explanation gives the mind time to consider what is being said. The NET Bible inserts the word “Samaritans” in order to remind the reader exactly who is the object of the action. Young’s (YLT) translates the first imperfect verb as it actually should be, and then it translates the second imperfect verb as a perfect verb. The final translation most closely follows the Greek, but it includes the italicized word “the” before “Holy Spirit” as is needed in the translation.

The words are mostly understandable from any of the translations. The italicized words may help with clarity if they are rightly inserted. The explanatory insertions can be useful for a reader who is new to the passage or who just needs help understanding it. But in accurately translating the verbs in the imperfect as they are in the Greek, the sense of motion and continuance is more fully appreciated.

Don’t be afraid to read various translations of Scripture, and don’t be captivated by just one as well. Most translations truly want people to understand the word in order for God to be glorified, but not all do. There are hidden agendas behind some translations, so get the advice of trusted sources in order to ensure your study is both productive and glorifying of God.

*What a gift Your word is, O God! Thank You for it and thank You that we can have a more intimate relationship with You as we search it out, consider it, and apply it to our walk before You. Praises to You for revealing Yourself to us in this Superior Word! Amen.*

**And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, Acts 8:18**

It was noted that as Peter and John laid their hands on those of Samaria the people then received the Holy Spirit. Luke now continues with, "And when Simon saw."

There was obviously a visual effect that came about when the Holy Spirit was given. This would have been a necessary confirmation to the apostles that the Samaritans had actually been accepted by God. In other words, this visual event was as much for them as it was for the people. Otherwise, it could later be claimed that God never accepted them, nor does he accept anyone except the Jews who had an obvious audible and visual reception of the Spirit in Acts 2.

But with Luke's record of the events of Acts, it definitively points to the fact that those in Samaria had received the Spirit and were equally accepted by God. With that, Luke continues by noting that Simon saw "that through the laying on of the apostles' hands."

It was through the physical contact with the hands of Peter and John that the event being described takes place. As noted, these people had already believed, and they had Philip there with them, but no such event took place. Now that Peter and John are present and physically in contact with the people, a visual and/or audible event occurs proving that "the Holy Spirit was given."

This is not unlike Acts 19 where the following account will take place –

"And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples <sup>2</sup> he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?'

So they said to him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.'

<sup>3</sup> And he said to them, 'Into what then were you baptized?'

So they said, 'Into John's baptism.'

<sup>4</sup> Then Paul said, 'John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.'

<sup>5</sup> When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. <sup>7</sup> Now the men were about twelve in all."

-Acts 19:1-7

At the laying of hands by Paul, these men received the Holy Spirit. Unlike now in Acts 8, the specific proofs of the Spirit are noted, which are speaking in tongues and prophesying. That is probably what occurred with these Samaritans, but it remains unstated.

Whatever transpired, it was sufficient proof to Peter and John that the matter was settled. There were the necessary “two or three witnesses” to establish the matter, and therefore the matter is established. The written words of Luke confirm that it is so. Seeing this, however, it says that when Simon saw what occurred, “he offered them money.”

Simon was in the business of amazing the people through magic. It may have been simple tricks to fool them or actual black arts. Either way, his source of livelihood was now gone because he had believed in something greater. With that now the case, and with seeing the demonstrable proof that what Peter and John had taught was true, he probably thought, “If I can do this, I can continue my livelihood by doing this with others by obtaining this ability.”

The coming verses will show the utterly perverse nature of this. With this in mind, it is something that scholars jump on and immediately start claiming that he isn't saved, and his actions have proven this. On the contrary, verse 8:13 clearly and unambiguously tells us that he believed the gospel. This is what saves, not making stupid errors concerning life in Christ after being saved. If such were the case, not a person who was ever saved would continue to be saved.

The account says that the Holy Spirit was given at the laying on of hands by the apostles. We have no idea if that included Simon or not. He may have seen this in others, or it may have occurred to him personally. All that is given is the record of his belief and then of what now transpires.

Life application: Are speaking in tongues and prophesying proof today that someone has received the Holy Spirit? The answer must be, “No.” People in other religions and in false sects of Christianity also speak in “tongues,” as well as “prophesy.” As such, these things do not prove anything. So why were these things given to those in the early church in Acts?

The answer is not so much to confirm to the people that they had been accepted by God, but to confirm to the apostles that they had. In the case of Paul's laying on of hands as noted in Acts 19, that was an additional confirmation that not only had these

people been accepted, but that it was after belief in Jesus' fulfillment of what John's baptism had only anticipated.

Repentance from sin imputed under the law cannot save anyone since the coming of Christ. Jews do that all the time, and not one of them is saved without coming to Christ. Only faith in Jesus' fulfillment of the law through His death, burial, and resurrection can bring about salvation.

As this is true, and as the reception of the Spirit was proof of the work of Jesus for the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 2), for the apostles that the Samaritans had been accepted by God (Acts 8), and for the apostles to know that the Gentiles are accepted by God (Acts 10), then such outward signs are no longer needed. The record of them has been established.

As for the account in Acts 19, it is a clear record for all today that repentance under the law is not enough to be saved. It is a clear sign to the Judaizers and Hebrew Roots Movement adherents that they are following the wrong path. One must place his faith in Christ to be saved. When that happens, he is saved. The historical descriptions found in Acts confirm these things once and for all time.

*Lord God, how grateful we are that the book of Acts reveals to us the truth concerning Your acceptance of those who have believed the gospel. We can now read the epistles that instruct us in proper doctrine and know that we too are accepted by faith alone in the completed work of Christ. The record is given, and we live by faith in the word we have been given. Amen!*

**saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Acts 8:19**

The previous verse revealed Simon's misunderstanding about the nature of what occurs when one comes to Christ. In seeing the apostles laying their hands on the believers, the believers then received the Holy Spirit. In seeing this, he then offered the apostles money, "saying, 'Give me this power also.'"

Having never seen such a display of authority, Simon is certainly astonished at what has happened. Whatever visual or audible demonstrations of the Spirit occurred, Simon probably saw it as an opportunity to make a new direction in his livelihood. This is obviously due to an error in thinking, and it is not something that can be condoned in

the church. And probably more than for any other reason, this is why the account is included in Acts.

In other words, the recording of the events now is less about the spiritual failing of Simon than it is about the holiness of God and the sanctity of what occurs when a believer is saved. Today, the Holy Spirit is given upon belief, not when an apostle lays his hands on another person. First, this is true because there are no longer any apostles of Jesus Christ. And, secondly, it is true because this is what is recorded in the epistles –

“In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13, 14

The giving of the Spirit is solely of God without any intermediaries, and it occurs immediately upon belief. Acts merely notes what occurred in the establishment of the church. With this understood, Luke next records, “that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” Simon is looking for the same authority as that of the apostles. As he assumes that it is an authority based on an earthly system of gaining some type of advantage, he offers them an earthly means of obtaining such things.

His thinking is in error and Peter will sharply correct him for this.

Life application: Assuming that Simon is not saved because he has misunderstood the doctrines of the Spirit is as inept in thinking as it is to assume that Peter (aka Simon Peter) is not saved because he failed in upholding the doctrine of freedom from the law in Christ. He completely mismanaged this as is recorded in Galatians 2, and he was just as upbraided by Paul as Simon will be by Peter now in Acts.

As noted above, Acts is recording events in order to teach us truths and to explain how the early church was established. How unfortunate that even today countless people claim they have the ability to transfer the Spirit to others! They make irrational claims about needing visual or audible proofs before a person can be said to possess the Spirit. Entire denominations make such erroneous claims, and seminaries demand that students speak in nonsensical “tongues” as a demonstration of the indwelling of the Spirit.

These things are comparable to Simon’s actions as are recorded right in Acts 8. There is no biblical authority for these things, and yet they are openly taught. Whether we are

considering Simon from Acts, or the incorrect doctrines of charismatic churches, the same correction of thinking is necessary. As will be seen, Simon will ask that his thinking and heart be corrected. We should hope for the same from these aberrant teachings today.

*Lord God, help us to have a right understanding of Your word, and help us to apply it rightly to our lives. May we be faithful in our attitude towards You when we know what is right and proper, putting away what is false. May we be vessels prepared to serve You rightly and in holiness. Amen.*

**But Peter said to him, “Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! Acts 8:20**

The previous verse cited Simon. He had offered money to Peter and then he said, “Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” With that, Luke records, “But Peter said to him.” From the coming words, it is evident that Peter completely flipped out at the offer. And more, he strongly rebukes him, saying, “Your money perish with you.”

More literally it reads, “Your money be along with you to destruction.” Today, to say this as forcefully as Peter, we might say, “Both you and your money can go straight to the pit.” This should not be taken, as many interpret, as Peter calling a curse down on Simon, although it would not be out of character for him. In his denial of Jesus, his words were packed with emotion, literally saying that he began to “anathematize.” It was as if he was calling down curses if he was lying, which of course he was.

In the case of his words to Simon, he is surely being expressive of contempt for the money more than contempt for Simon. We might say something like, “Even if you gave me a million dollars, it wouldn’t matter.” The very fact that Peter tells him to repent of his thought in the coming verses shows that he is not adamant that Simon will, in fact, perish. For now, however, Peter continues to correct Simon’s thinking about what is happening by saying, “because you thought that the gift of God.”

Peter acknowledges exactly what Paul will later write in his epistles. A gift is something that cannot be purchased. It doesn’t matter how good of a bargain it is, if it has a value attached to it, no matter how large or how small, it cannot be considered a gift. The giving of the Holy Spirit is called a gift.

As the Holy Spirit is something given upon belief, and as the Holy Spirit is considered a guarantee (see Ephesians 1:14), and because the guarantee is given as a mark of salvation (Ephesians 2:8, 9) which is also called a gift, then it clearly indicates that salvation is eternal. It is this matter that is being considered, and Simon thought it, as Peter says, “could be purchased with money!”

As one can see, Peter’s words are more of an idiomatic expression than a curse directed toward Simon. “What God has offered as a gift, you are trying to pay for? You and your money can go to destruction together!” Peter is trying to wake Simon up to the process of salvation and what it ultimately means. If the “gift” can be purchased, then it is not a gift. Further, it would then mean that what occurred does not come with a guarantee. But the process is of God, and it is something that He will see through to the end.

Life application: The words of Peter cannot override the promises of God. If Simon believed (which he did as is recorded in verse 8:13), and if belief is what brings salvation (see Ephesians 1:13, 14, for example), then Simon was saved. The giving of the Holy Spirit through the apostle’s hand has a purpose that is fulfilled in the act. It is not something that needs to be done again, as will be evidenced in Acts 10 with the conversion of Cornelius and those with him.

Peter is doing what is proper in rebuking Simon for his horrifying doctrine. He has fully misunderstood the process of salvation that takes place, and he is being corrected in his thinking. Later in the chronology of time, Paul will have to do this exact same thing to Peter –

“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; <sup>12</sup> for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. <sup>13</sup> And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

<sup>14</sup> But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before *them* all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? <sup>15</sup> We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, <sup>16</sup> knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.’” Galatians 2:11-16

Who is in the more damaging position from a theological standpoint, Simon Peter or Simon the Magician? Arguably, it is Simon Peter. Simon the Magician had no schooling on the matter, and what he was considering was not something that would keep a person from being saved, simply because what he was asking for was something that could not be purchased.

On the other hand, what Simon Peter was doing was setting aside the grace of God which comes through the work of Christ through His actions (Galatians 2:21). He was falling back on the law in order to please men. This can, and it does, lead directly to the introduction of a false gospel (Galatians 1:6-8).

As this is so, and as Peter remained as saved after his actions as he was the day he was saved, it demonstrates to us that Peter's words to Simon are surely to be taken in the proper context of a sharp rebuke, but not a statement of condemnation. The grace of God, even in regard to the abject failure of Peter in His conduct before those in Antioch – as is recorded in the book of Galatians – is a comforting reassurance that we are saved despite ourselves. Thank God for His grace in Jesus Christ!

*Lord God, what a comfort Your word is. It shows us that even when we really botch things up, we are Yours because of Jesus. And more, we will remain Yours because of Jesus. Thank God for the eternal salvation that is found in Him. Amen.*

**You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Acts 8:21**

Peter just let Simon have it for offering money and asking to be given the power to impart the Holy Spirit to others. He continues that now, saying, "You have neither part nor portion in this matter."

The word Peter uses, and which is translated as "portion," is *kléros*. It signifies an assigned portion, coming from a word signifying "to cast lots." When the lot is cast, the portion is assigned. Peter is not telling him he is not saved or that he has no portion in Jesus. He is saying that he has no part or portion in the imparting of the Holy Spirit, the matter now being considered.

This "portion" belonged to the office to which it has been assigned, meaning that of the apostles. This is obvious because Philip, not being an apostle, had preached the gospel and the people had believed, but the Holy Spirit had not come upon them until the apostles had come and placed their hands on the people. Further, this portion is not



something that was required at all times, as has been seen earlier in Acts and as will be seen later in Acts.

The absence of the apostles is what necessitated their coming to Samaria. The impartation of the Spirit by them was a confirmation to the people that the Spirit had approved them and their office. In other instances, this is obvious. In this instance, because they were not there at the time of the evangelization, it was deemed necessary by God. With this validation, the office – and thus the words from them – are validated. There was no need for this from Simon, and in fact, it would be contrary to the purposes of God for him to receive such powers. Further, Peter exclaims, “for your heart is not right.”

The word Peter uses, *euthus*, means “straight.” It is being straight such as in “straight paths.” It is also used figuratively to mean “true” or “right.” Peter will use it in this sense in his second epistle where he speaks of “the right way” rather than the way of the ungodly. Simon’s heart was perverse and was focused on what is earthly. He needs schooling in order for his heart to be right “in the sight of God.”

Here is a word used for the second and last time, *enanti*. It comes from “in” and “in place of.” Thus, it means “before.” Its other use was in Luke 1:8 where Zecharias was said to be serving “before” God, meaning in his priestly duties while at the temple. This does not mean that Peter is saying he was not a true believer. Rather, it means that in the matter at hand, his heart was not right and would need correction.

Life application: The issue of salvation is not the same as learning and instruction in what is pleasing to God (personal sanctification). And the issue of personal sanctification is not the same as positional sanctification. A person is saved by belief in the gospel message –

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God,* <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Ephesians 2:8, 9

A person is sanctified positionally before God at that time –

“But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Corinthians 6:11

The meaning of this positional sanctification is that because of being saved by Jesus, the person is now set apart as holy before God. This is more fully explained in Hebrews 10 where the believers had moved from the Old Covenant to the New –

“By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. <sup>11</sup> And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup> But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. <sup>14</sup> For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.”

-Hebrews 10:10-14

Those who are saved are sanctified, or set apart as holy, unto God. It is a done deal. However, there is still the matter of people not being right before God in their attitudes, actions, and manner of life after being saved. This then is what is needed for personal sanctification. In other words, there is not a zapping of the person that is saved by Christ, suddenly converting him into an ultra-spiritual person that conducts himself flawlessly before the Lord. Rather, this is what discipleship is for. We are to grow in personal holiness all the days of our lives –

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:9

Unfortunately, too many people mix these categories and demand that a person must not “be saved” because he acts in a manner contrary to personal holiness. The fact is that not a person ever saved has been personally perfected before the Lord. Further, every person ever saved is on a different level of personal sanctification. We are not, nor can we be, the standard by which to judge the salvation of others based on such things. We cannot do it with Simon, and we cannot do it with anyone else.

It is true that the Bible gives guidelines on such matters though. When we see a person who is named a brother but who is engaging in improper conduct, we are to warn him even to a second time and then have nothing to do with him (Titus 3:11). If such people are in the church, they are to be put out of the church until their actions are corrected (1 Corinthians 5).

Let us keep our categories straight. In doing so, we will not make the mistake of deciding who is saved based on external actions. Rather, in treating them as noted in 1 Corinthians 5, it is under the assumption that they are, in fact, saved.

*Glorious God, may we be willing to grow in holiness before You all our days. Help us in this. We are weak and temptations come easily. Give us both the desire to know Your word, and then to apply it to our walk before You. Thank You for Your word that can mold us into Your image as we await the day of our final glorification! And may that day be soon. Amen.*

**Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. Acts 8:22**

After offering money to Peter in order to obtain the power to impart the Holy Spirit, Peter really laid into Simon with the strong words of the previous two verses. Now, a remedy for his wicked thoughts is provided by Peter, saying, “Repent therefore.”

This is the first thing he is instructed to do, even before prayer. He must align his thoughts with what is correct and in accord with the will of God.

And this is what the word repent means. It is to change one’s mind or to think differently. It is especially so in reference to accepting and turning to the will of God. Peter is telling Simon that his thoughts are incorrect concerning the nature of God and the giving of the Holy Spirit, and he is to change his mind concerning these things. Peter continues by saying he should repent “of this your wickedness.”

The Greek says, “from this your wickedness.” In other words, Simon is in a mental state which is contrary to what is proper. Peter describes it as wickedness, and he is telling Simon that he is to turn from that state. If he doesn’t, his walk with the Lord will be completely perverse and at odds with what is right and proper. With that noted, he states the second thing Simon is to do, saying, “and pray God.”

Here, some manuscripts say “Lord” instead of “God.” Either way, the intent is to pray to the offended party concerning what has happened, petitioning Him to provide pardon for the wickedness that is so deeply rooted in Simon’s heart. In his praying to God, Peter next gives the purpose of the prayer, noting the conditional words, “if perhaps.”

The Greek word, translated as “perhaps,” is *ara*. JB Lightfoot says, “This difficult-to-translate interrogative particle (adverb) injects the element of *surprise* and the *pressing need to respond*. Depending on the context, 687 (*ára*) will emphasize the aspect of hesitation, bewilderment, etc.”

Due to the difficult nature of translating the word, it is variously rendered as indeed, perhaps, if possible, in the hope, if then, and so on. Jamieson-Fausset-Brown may capture the intent of Peter's words. They say, "this expression of doubt being designed to impress upon him the greatness of his sin, and the need of alarm on his part." With this in mind, Peter next says, that the "if perhaps" is that "the thought of your heart may be forgiven you."

Peter uses a word found only here in Scripture, *epinoia*. It signifies "upon the mind," and thus the intent. It is what is on the mind and where that thought leads to. Simon has profit on his mind, and it would then lead to peddling the imparting of the Holy Spirit to others. In this, it would lead to a complete cheapening of the divine gift of God.

Obviously, this is something that could not happen, but it is something that is on Simon's mind and what he is hoping for in the offering of money in order to obtain it. Peter is saying that such a thought is wicked, and it requires turning from in order to obtain forgiveness.

If Simon truly believed, as is implied in verse 8:13, this cannot mean forgiveness to keep his salvation. Rather, it would be the forgiveness needed for a right relationship with the Lord. Without that, there would be an ongoing state where Simon's actions were not acceptable to Him. An example from the epistles is the person described in 1 Corinthians 5:3-5 –

"For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. <sup>4</sup>In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>5</sup>deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

The person in this passage was to be handed over to Satan. His life would remain completely unusable for the glory of the Lord, and he would enter into the Lord's salvation without any rewards because of his wasted life. This is what Simon would be facing without changing his mind about his current intent.

Life application: It is not uncommon for people to pray about something that is opposed to what is taught in Scripture. In fact, it has almost become the standard in most major denominations. "Lord, we pray to you to guide us in our selection of Tom (who is a homosexual) to be our new deacon." "Lord, we pray to you concerning the baptism of Jane (who is presently in an adulterous relationship) and accepting her as a member of

our church.” “Lord, we pray for knowing which of these two women will be our new pastor.”

The prayers themselves are willingly disobedient. God will not provide direction in something that is already contrary to His written word. His word reflects His will, and people know this. Hence, to pray about something like these examples is a mark of rebellion against God. The attitude of the heart must first be right. This is why Peter first told Simon to repent (change his mind). Only then did he continue with direction, telling him to pray.

There is no point at all in praying for something until the heart (the mind) is properly directed concerning what is prayed for. One must know the word in order to know what the will of God is. Only then can prayers be properly directed to Him. And no prayer should ever be made that is openly contrary to what His word states. That only adds to the guilt of being presumptuous. How terrible it will be when people who do this find themselves standing before the Lord, set for judgment because of the wicked, unrepentant intents of their hearts.

*Lord God, please be with us in our efforts to know Your will first, and only then to seek out through prayer what to do concerning matters that are important to us. May we never be presumptuous or disobedient in our prayers, but may they always be in accord with Your will. Amen.*

**“For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.” Acts 8:23**

Peter has upbraided Simon for his offer of money to have the power to impart the Holy Spirit to others. He then offered the corrective measure which was for him to repent and pray. Now as an additional poke at him, he says, “For I see.”

Peter discerns the wickedness that fills Simon that he spoke of in the previous verse and he identifies it to him with the words, “that you are poisoned by bitterness.”

The verb is a present participle and the word “poisoned” is a noun, not a verb. It more precisely reads, “that you are being in the gall of bitterness.” The word translated as “gall” is *cholé*. It means gall or bitter herbs. It is what was given to Jesus in Matthew 27:34 as a painkiller and which He refused to drink. Here, it is used figuratively.

The next word, bitterness, is from the Greek word *pikria*. It is found only here, and it signifies bitterness, harshness, and such, as in an embittered spirit. This word will be

seen in Romans 3:14, Ephesians 4:31, and Hebrews 12:15. In Ephesians 4, Paul notes that this and other negative traits can exist in believers, but they are to be put away.

The two words together give the sense of Simon either being corrupted by (poison) or immune (anesthetized) to bitterness. Peter continues with his words saying, “and bound by iniquity.”

Again, the first word is a noun, not a verb. In essence, “You are being in the bond of iniquity.” It is as if iniquity (unrighteousness) is acting as a force that restrains him in the state of iniquity so that he can do nothing else. It is a word that Paul uses concerning believers, such as in Romans 3:5 and in an ironic way concerning himself in 2 Corinthians 12:13.

It is to be noted that throughout the epistles there are saved believers who are highlighted for their improper conduct and attitudes, but Paul does not question their salvation. They believed and were saved.

The record in Acts concerning Simon says he believed. What he needs is repentance and turning to sound thinking and doctrine, something desperately needed throughout the church and in all ages. If the words used to describe Simon were a statement that he was not saved, it would be a statement against the majority of believers at any given time in their lives after salvation.

Life application: The Bible says that a person is saved by grace through faith. Grace is unmerited favor. It is, therefore, something that no person deserves. It is also something that any person can obtain. Simon was said to have believed in Acts 8:13. Does his belief not justify being granted grace because he is described in such a negative way by Peter? On the contrary, Paul addresses this in Romans in an ironic fashion noting that the “truth of God has increased through my [supposed] lie to His glory” (Romans 3:7).

In other words, it is like saying, “When a person has done great wickedness and yet is forgiven, it shows the truly great nature of God who will still forgive.” The more sinful a person was before believing, the greater the mark of mercy is granted, and the greater the grace of God is highlighted.

Paul then goes further and says that some actually accused him of basically saying, “Well if this is true then let us sin even more so that God can be even more magnified in His forgiveness of us.” Paul immediately shows that that is perverse thinking, and someone who thinks that way is justly condemned for entertaining such an idea.

Simon believed. Assuming (and there is no reason to think otherwise) that he was saved, it does not mean that he suddenly became a person without fault. Rather, in his state, God's grace towards him was shown to be exceptional. Now, what Simon needs is correction (something he has been given by Peter), and turning to the appropriate path.

As you witness to people more and more, you will find that there are many people who truly believe but who are so theologically confused that it will take a long time to sort them out. And some may never get completely sorted out. Paul refers to a couple of men in this state in 1 Timothy 1:18-20. There is a point where you just have to deliver them over to Satan and let them learn their lesson the hard way.

In the end, it is our job to hold fast to what is right, to teach others in this manner, and to live our lives as faithful Christians so that we can be examples for others to emulate. If we do these things, we will be doing our part.

*Lord God, help us to be sound in our footing as we walk along the paths of right doctrine and personal holiness. In this, we can lead others as well. Give us the ability to remember Your word, to apply it to our lives, and to call it to memory as need be. With this, we can be the example to others that we should be. To Your glory! Amen.*

**Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me." Acts 8:24**

Peter has completed his words of reproof towards Simon. In them, he said, "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you" (8:22). In response to the sum of Peter's words, Luke now records, "Then Simon answered and said."

His words are in response to everything Peter has said, but they are directed to both Peter and John. This is evidenced in the next words, "Pray to the Lord for me." The Greek reads "Pray (plural) earnestly you (plural) on behalf of me to the Lord."

Though Peter has been recorded as the speaker, Simon is addressing both Peter and John and is asking for earnest prayers to be made for him. He then specifically asks "that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

It implies a full understanding of the consequences of his words and actions, and hopes for a reprieve from them. Unfortunately, in an effort to convince us that Simon could not be saved, Bible scholars will note various supposed defects in Simon's thinking and build

upon them to show that he was not a part of the body of believers. Such defects included (but are not limited to):

- 1) He is unwilling to pray for himself, even though Peter told him to pray to God.
- 2) He doesn't ask for deliverance from being bound by iniquity, but for relief from the things that Peter had said would come upon him.

Both of these points are easily refutable. First, and has been noted several times, verse 8:13 clearly and unambiguously stated that Simon "believed." Either the words of Jesus and the epistles (also found repeatedly in Acts) are true or they are not. The premise is, "Believe in the work of Jesus and you will be saved." Simon is not an exception to this truth; he is clearly an integral part of it.

Secondly, the word *huper* is used, here translated as "for." In this case, it signifies "on my behalf." The same word is used in the same manner repeatedly, in this same context, meaning having someone praying for someone else. Examples of this are found in 2 Corinthians 9:14, Ephesians 6:18, 2 Timothy 2:1, 2, and James 5:16.

It is to be remembered that in believing the gospel that was preached by Phillip, the Holy Spirit did not come upon any in Samaria. There is a set purpose for this, and it is realized in the coming of Peter and John to validate what occurs. In the laying on of their hands, the Spirit then came upon the believers.

As this is the case, it is not only natural but wholly expected, that Simon would appeal to the same people, through whom this gift was imparted, to ask them to pray on his behalf.

Thirdly, his asking both Peter and John to pray shows an understanding of the power of the prayer of many. This is in accord with 2 Corinthians 1:11 where Paul plainly shows that the prayers of the many are considered right and appropriate.

Fourth, in asking for prayers from the penalty of his actions, it means that he understands and is acknowledging that his actions are wrong. Thus, it further implies that he is looking for freedom from the iniquity that binds him.

Fifth, Peter had encouraged Simon to pray to "God." Simon, instead, asks Peter and John to pray to the "Lord," clearly indicating Jesus. As such, he has directly confessed that he believes Jesus is 1) alive, 2) capable of answering prayer, and 3) God. Peter said to pray



to God; Simon equates Jesus with God. Simon has met the qualification of believing the gospel message that he is already said to have “believed” in verse 8:13.

Jesus died for his sins, Jesus was buried, and Jesus rose again – all according to Scripture. The case against Simon’s salvation fails the sniff test. He believed the gospel, he accepted that Jesus is God, and he is – according to the words of Jesus and the apostles (as recorded in Acts and the epistles) – saved.

Life application: No two people on the planet now, nor any two people who have ever trusted in Christ, are on the same level of maturity. If one’s level of maturity in Christ defined salvation, then no person would ever be saved. This is because everyone in Christ can (and should) increase in the knowledge of the word, in applying that knowledge to his walk, and in turning around and being an example to others of his position in Christ.

If a person who is increasing in knowledge finds out he was wrong in a particular point of doctrine and corrects that, when was he saved? The fallacy of judging salvation based on poor doctrine is known as the fallacy of the beard. When a person doesn’t shave, when does his facial hair become a beard? After 2 seconds? After 1 day? After it is ¼ inch long? Who determines that? What is the set and fixed standard?

Salvation is based upon belief alone in the one and only gospel, nothing else. Be sure to determine if a person has believed and accepted that. However, it is acceptable to find out exactly what that person has believed. If a person has believed that Jesus was a created being that died for his sins, he is not saved. If a person has believed that Jesus may have fulfilled the law, but he is told (and believes) that the law is still binding on those who come to Him and that he must do stuff to be saved, then he is not saved. Etc.

In a proper presentation of the gospel, and in the receiving of that by a person, the person who believes is saved. From there, it is up to that person to grow in Christ.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the simplicity of the gospel. Help us to share it accurately and often, so that those who hear may believe rightly and be saved. Amen.*

**So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. Acts 8:25**

With the narrative concerning Simon complete, Luke now continues with the actions of Peter and John, beginning with, “So when they had testified.”

The word used, *diamarturomai*, is stronger than simply testifying. It is the giving of full and clear testimony. HELPS Word Studies says it “is always in the Greek middle voice which emphasizes witnessing done with a *high level of self-involvement*, i.e., with strong *personal* interest motivating it.” Hence, it may be more suitably translated “having earnestly testified.” They gave their earnest testimony “and preached.”

The word here, translated as “preached,” is not the same as the final clause of this verse. This word means “to say.” Hence, this first clause should read, “They then, indeed, having earnestly testified and having spoken the word of the Lord.” The words give a full description of the care of Peter and John for their mission. They proclaimed the word of the Lord, and they also were fully and intimately involved in testifying to what they personally knew concerning its fulfillment in Christ. Once that was complete in the area where they were, it says, “they returned to Jerusalem.”

This mission in Samaria is coming to a close. It is now understood by the apostles that not only was the gospel to be preached to those in Samaria (Acts 1:8), but that the people who believed were given the Holy Spirit. As this is now known, the report of this can be taken back to the apostles in Jerusalem for their understanding. The people of Israel are no longer the only focal point of God’s attention. Something far greater is coming about. The verse next ends with the fact that on their way back, the apostles were also “preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.”

Here, the word “preaching” is correct. It is the same word, *euaggelizó*, used so far in verses 8:4 and 8:12. It means to evangelize or preach the good news. This is what Philip did originally in “the city of Samaria,” and now these two are doing it in the smaller country towns and villages as they wind their way back to Jerusalem.

Life application: Suppose you go on a short-term mission trip. You are excited about going, you raise the funds to join, you get your tickets and such, and you go with the mission group. When you get there, you are told it will be a public bus that takes 10 hours to get to the location out in the country. You do your mission work, get back on the bus, head to the airport, and fly home.

It was a fun time. You got energized about helping others in a remote place. But did you talk to a single person on the way to the mission spot? Did you talk to anyone on the way back home? What was the point of your mission work? If building a house or a church, or helping to plant various crops, is all that you did then your time was not well spent.

The people at the mission site have all been evangelized. The building you helped put up could have been done without your help. You just helped it get done sooner. But the people that you passed by, on the streets and towns you stopped at, never got to hear about Jesus. The same is true with your vacations at home, your shopping at the store each week, and your visit to the restaurant last night.

Are you hoping someone else will tell all these people about Jesus? Try taking tracts and handing them out. Or try something really fun and do what Philip did in verse 8:4 and what Peter and John are doing in this verse. Try telling people about what you know. If not you, then who?

*Lord God, someone told us about Jesus, and we responded. Isn't it our time to do the same for others? Help us to be willing to share the saving message of Jesus to the people we encounter along life's path. May it be so, and may we start today. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. Acts 8:26**

With the account concerning Peter and John completed, the narrative now returns to Philip, beginning with, "Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip." As always, the word "angel" signifies a messenger. Nothing more is said to further define its meaning at this time, but in both 8:29 and 8:39, the Spirit is mentioned as communicating with or physically transporting him.

As this is the case, it may be that the "messenger" of the Lord is a dream, a vision, or by direct communication from the Spirit. But because that is not explicitly mentioned, this is only speculation. Regardless of this, Philip is given a direct communication from the Lord through a messenger, "saying, 'Arise.'"

It is a way of indicating that he must now take action according to the word of the Lord. The last time he was mentioned was in Acts 8:13. He may have received these instructions while he was still in Samaria. With the apostles there or having left (depending on when this call to him is made), he now has a new charge set before him. One can assume that because of his faithfulness in evangelizing, he is being personally selected to continue on with the Lord's unfolding of the redemptive narrative.

As such, the messenger continues with, "and go toward the south." As he is in Samaria, it would be to the south of that. The specific directions are being given for a specific

purpose which will be revealed in the coming verses. What occurs will bring about a conversion that fits a pattern that goes all the way back to the early Genesis narrative. The Lord is purposefully directing Philip to represent this pattern for the New Testament.

In order to do so, Philip is to go toward the south “along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” Here, a word is introduced that is found only one more time, in Acts 22:6, *mesémbria*, and which is translated as “south.” It is a compound word coming from *mesos*, meaning “middle,” and *hémera*, meaning “day.” Hence, it means “mid-day.”

All translations say “south” because it is where the sun is at mid-day. However, it could just as easily be that Philip is being told, “Rise up and go toward mid-day to the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” The reason for this is that people would not want to travel in such a hot place at a time like this. Instead, it would be much less taxing to go early in the morning when it was cool.

Gaza, or Azzah, means “Strong,” or “Strong Place.” It was granted to Israel as a part of their inheritance when the borders were originally defined in Numbers 34. It was then assigned to Judah in Joshua 15:47. For a historical view of the location, Charles Ellicott provides the following:

“The history of the city so named (appearing at times in the English version—Deuteronomy 2:23; 1Kings 4:24; Jeremiah 25:20—as Azzah) goes even as far back as that of Damascus, in the early records of Israel. It was the southernmost or border-city of the early Canaanites (Genesis 10:19), and was occupied first by the Avim, and then by the Caphtorim (Deuteronomy 2:23). Joshua was unable to conquer it (Joshua 10:41; Joshua 11:22). The tribe of Judah held it for a short time (Judges 1:18), but it soon fell into the hands of the Philistines (Judges 3:3; Judges 13:1), and though attacked by Samson, was held by them during the times of Samuel, Saul, and David (1Samuel 6:17; 1Samuel 14:52; 2Samuel 21:15). Solomon (1Kings 4:24), and later on Hezekiah (2Kings 18:8), attacked it. It resisted Alexander the Great during a siege of five months, and was an important military position, the very key of the country, during the struggles between the Ptolemies and the Seleucidæ, and in the wars of the Maccabees (1 Maccabees 11:61).”

The reason for the specificity concerning what to do (and/or when to do it) is explained by Vincent’s Word Studies –

“There were several roads from Jerusalem to Gaza. One is mentioned by the way of Bethlehem to Hebron, and thence through a region actually called a desert.”

In order to ensure that the divinely planned meeting that is intended to happen comes about, Philip is given exacting instruction. As such, it could be that he is being told to take the south road, or if “mid-day” is intended, the correct road to take would still be known based on the final words of the verse, which say, “This is desert.”

If “south” is meant, then these words now may be Luke’s explaining the directions of the messenger. If “mid-day” is meant, then this is the messenger’s explanation of which of the two roads to take. Either way, it is known by Philip to go on a particular road down to Gaza, and it very well may be at a particular time of day. The latter seems quite possible based on the events that will come about in the verses ahead.

Life application: The events taking place in Acts are often given with very specific instructions to those who are to carry them out. A plan is being worked out, and patterns and parallels to other parts of the Bible are being completed now in Acts. Only in referring to the Old Testament can these be understood.

God is revealing to us the redemption of man. But man isn’t just one line of people, even if all people descend from one man. Rather, there are records of who various people groups are, and we are seeing the divinely unfolding plan of God for those groups of people. Some were to be exterminated for His sovereign reasons. And yet, even in the extermination of those people groups, there are those who are spared. One example is seen in the instructions to Israel –

“But of the cities of these peoples which the LORD your God gives you *as* an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, <sup>17</sup> but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the LORD your God has commanded you, <sup>18</sup> lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God.”

-Deuteronomy 20:16-18

Among those in this group who Israel failed to exterminate are several people who became key figures in the redemptive narrative, such as Rahab the harlot, Uriah the Hittite whose wife was Bathsheba, and Araunah the Jebusite. Jesus descends from both Rahab and Bathsheba, and He holds the title to real estate because of the record of a purchase made from Araunah that is found in 2 Samuel. None of these things occurred by accident, even if Israel failed to do as they were instructed.

If you feel you are either unimportant or that your role in God's plans and designs is insignificant, you are incorrect. These people probably felt just the same way. And yet, they became central figures in what God was doing. And you will be a central part of what God is doing as well. Metaphors are used concerning believers, such as "living stones" or "pillars" in the temple that the Lord is building.

A temple cannot stand without proper support. As such, it cannot stand without you. God has figured you in as a most important part of what He is creating. Be pleased to know this.

*Lord God, thank You that we are counted as important parts of what You are doing. You hold all of the power of the universe, and more, in Your hands. And yet, You have determined that we are useful in the temple You are building where we will dwell with You forever. Thank You that You have such care, even of us. Amen.*

**So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, Acts 8:27**

The previous verse detailed Philip's commission by the messenger of the Lord to go on the desert road to Gaza. Luke now continues with a note concerning his immediate obedience, saying, "So he arose and went."

Philip is being given a charge completely separate and distinct from Peter and the other apostles. He was part of the dispersion noted early in Acts 8, and he was found faithful in opening his mouth and proclaiming the gospel to the mixed-race of Samaritans. Certainly because of his zeal for telling others the good news of Christ, he is commissioned to pass on this same good news again. That is seen with the next words, "And behold, a man of Ethiopia."

There is an immense amount of speculation concerning who this person is in relation to Judaism, but Luke – the most meticulous of chroniclers – says nothing of his being of Israelite descent or of him being a proselyte, both of which he carefully records concerning others elsewhere. Rather, he simply calls him a man of Ethiopia. Vincent's Word Studies provides additional insights into the word "Ethiopia" –

"The name for the lands lying south of Egypt, including the modern Nubia, Cordofan, and Northern Abyssinia. Rawlinson speaks of subjects of the Ethiopian queens living in an island near Mero, in the northern part of this district. He further remarks: 'The

monuments prove beyond all question that the Ethiopians borrowed from Egypt their religion and their habits of civilization. They even adopted the Egyptian as the language of religion and of the court, which it continued to be till the power of the Pharaohs had fallen, and their dominion was again confined to the frontier of Ethiopia. It was through Egypt, too, that Christianity passed into Ethiopia, even in the age of the apostles, as is shown by the eunuch of Queen Candace.”

As for the term *anér*, or man, it is a general word used to signify a male human. Nothing more should be read into it. To say anything more is to insert into the narrative something unintended by the record itself.

He is next called a *eunouchos*, a eunuch. The word comes from *eune* (a bed) and *echo* (to have or possess). As such, it is a person who possesses the bed of another. Scholars, in an attempt to claim he is something other than what is stated, will stretch the meaning of what Luke is clearly conveying. He is a castrated person who attended to the bed of another. He is next noted as being “of great authority.”

The Greek word is *dunastés*, a word connected to our modern word “dynasty.” It signifies a potentate or a mighty leader. Paul uses it in 1 Timothy 6:15 when describing Jesus as “the blessed and only Potentate.” In the case of this man, he is a member of the court “under Candace.”

Rather than a name, this is a title used only here in the Bible, *Kandaké*. Like the term Pharaoh, it is a term used as the dynastic title for the queens of Ethiopia. As such, the person now being described is a high-level official and a eunuch assigned under her. Next, the term *Kandaké* is explained with the words, “the queen of the Ethiopians.”

This would be comparable to saying, “Pharaoh, the king of Egypt,” as is seen quite frequently in the Old Testament and even once in Acts 7:10. This man, who is a eunuch under Candace is the one “who had charge of all her treasury.”

This indicates that he was not only powerful in authority, but he was a trustworthy man as well. His position put him over all her treasures. The word used, *gaza*, is found only here. It is a Persian word adopted by the Greeks and Latins to indicate the treasures and wealth she possessed. Finally, it says of this person that he “had come to Jerusalem to worship.”

The immediate conclusion is that some claim this “proves” that he was a proselyte. Rather, this only proves that he came to Jerusalem to worship, but that can actually

mean almost anything as people go to “worship” all over the world and for a variety of reasons. Jews went up on the hills of Israel to worship and get closer to whatever god they were worshipping at the time. If he was a proselyte, Luke would have carefully stated it, as he did in Acts 2:10, 6:5, and 13:43.

Further, it is claimed that he was there to worship on Passover (Barnes), or Pentecost (Cambridge, etc.), as was stated in Acts 2. These same scholars have already said in their commentaries that a long and/or unknown time has passed since Acts 2. It could have been years at this point. There is nothing recorded by Luke concerning the reason that he came other than to worship.

Also, being a eunuch, according to Deuteronomy 23:1, he was not acceptable to be counted among the assembly of Israel. Like the Ethiopian Ebed-Melech recorded in Jeremiah, he was not a part of the assembly, even if he was living in the land. This Ethiopian Eunuch may have been worshipping the Lord, like Ebed-Melech, with his heart, even if he was not acceptable under the law. Like Ebed-Melech, he will receive a special note of favor from the Lord for his attentiveness to Him (see Jeremiah 39:15-18).

Life application: A few points about this verse, if hyperdispensationalism were true, which it is not, the church would have begun with Philip, not with Paul. This is because he is the first noted as evangelizing a Gentile. However, the church did not begin with Philip either. It began in Acts 2 and both Philip now, and Paul in the verses to come, are (or will be) carrying out the tasks set before them to continue the growth of what the Lord is doing.

There is a specific reason for the selection of this Ethiopian and the evangelization of him now. It will be noted in the verses ahead, and it is specifically to complete a pattern that was laid down in the early Genesis account.

Secondly, the words “man” and “eunuch” are both used concerning this individual. According to this account in the Bible a man, even if he is physically changed through emasculation, remains a man. Cutting off body parts or being crazy in one’s head and thinking you are not what you were born as does not change what you are.

In today’s world, people claim they are something other than what they were designed by God to be. They even go to extreme lengths to physically alter themselves in order to be “something else.” But they are what they are. The only difference is that they no longer properly conform physically to what they are.



*Heavenly Father, help us to have right thinking concerning our doctrine so that our doctrine will be right. In straying from proper doctrine, our doctrine will be wrong. As such, only we will suffer, but Your word and its intent for us remains the same. Help us in this, O God. Help us to pursue Your word according to how it is presented. Amen.*

**was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Acts 8:28**

The previous verse introduced the Ethiopian eunuch who had come to Jerusalem to worship. Now it says he “was returning.” Like the Queen of Sheba who came to visit Solomon (1 Kings 10), she eventually returned to her own country. So, it is now with this unnamed eunuch. He was on his way back on the desert road leading to Gaza. Luke next records, “And sitting in his chariot.”

The word *harma*, or chariot, is introduced here. It will be seen three times in this account in Acts, and then one more time in Revelation 9:9. It signifies a vehicle of some sort. It is unknown exactly what type of carriage he was in. It is a conveyance that could have been on wheels, or it could have been borne by men on poles, as in a palanquin.

In this case, it is most probably not a palanquin. This will be seen in a few verses. Rather, it is probably a carriage suitable for carrying several people. Regardless of the type, it was slow enough for Philip to join beside it. Next, while sitting there in his chariot, it says of the eunuch that “he was reading Isaiah the prophet.”

The common way to read was out loud, and this is what would have made the coming events possible. What is most probable is that he was reading the Greek translation of Isaiah, the LXX, or Septuagint. Greek was the lingua franca at the time and would surely have been known to someone in the courts of Candace.

And more, it is probable that in having read the Septuagint in the past, it is what brought him to want to worship in Jerusalem in the first place. Not because he was a proselyte, but because he wanted to worship the God proclaimed in their Scriptures. With this now noted, the narrative will continue to unfold in the coming verses.

Life application: The man in the chariot was a trusted member of the court of Candace. He was an approved traveler to go to worship in Jerusalem. He is noted now in the Bible as playing a key and pivotal role in fulfilling a particular pattern that is noted in the early Genesis narrative, and yet there is no record of his name.

As such, it tells us that it is not his name that is important, but who he stems from – something carefully recorded by Luke, and which must have been told to him by Philip. He is from Ethiopia. As such, he descends from the line of Ham and then through his son Cush. Ham is the son that did something perverted to his father, and because of what he did, Noah placed a curse on Ham's son Canaan.

Along with the curse resting on Canaan, the entire line of Ham is the least favored line of the three sons of Noah because of what he did to his father. And yet, we are seeing an account of an Ethiopian becoming the center of the biblical narrative. But more, Moses was said to have married an Ethiopian (Numbers 12:1), and an Ethiopian eunuch was given a great note of grace from the Lord in Jeremiah 38.

God can work through any supposed limitation we possess. He did it with the Canaanite Rahab the harlot (two strikes against her), he did it through a sketchy intermarriage between Solomon and a woman of Ammon, bringing those who issue from her into the kingly line, and so on.

The point is, that whatever limitation you think might be resting upon you, God can still use you for His purposes and His glory. Don't feel that because the whole world doesn't know your name that you are somehow unimportant. God does. And with that, and if you are in Christ, you are a most important part of what He is doing in the world. Be confident of this.

*Lord God, thank You that our names are known to You, and that we each have a part to offer in Your eternal home where the righteous will dwell. Thank You that because of Jesus this is possible. Yes, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot.” Acts 8:29**

The previous words referred to the Ethiopian eunuch sitting in his chariot and reading Isaiah the prophet. Now, it says, “Then the Spirit said to Philip.”

Although it doesn't say, “the Holy Spirit,” that should be inferred. What is surely the same Spirit will also be referred to in verse 8:39 and is there called “the Spirit of the Lord.” It is the same term used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18. In whatever manner the Spirit spoke to him, it was clearly understandable, saying, “Go near and overtake this chariot.”

The word translated as “overtake” means to join to. It doesn’t just mean “walk alongside,” but actually adhere to it. The Greek word itself, *kollaó*, comes from the word *kólla*, glue. Hence, it is to attach to, either literally or figuratively. In this case, he is to come alongside his carriage and grab onto it, or maybe even ask to ride along in it.

Understanding the scenario quite well, Cambridge says, “No doubt this royal treasurer had a numerous retinue, and a single traveller on a desert road would be doing what was natural in attaching himself to a train of people who were journeying in the same direction. Philip would therefore be able to approach and hear what was read without being deemed an intruder.”

Life application: To this day, and on any given day, there are innumerable claims of people being told by God to do this or do that. People claim divine revelation on hundreds of videos posted to social media every day. But these things must always be considered suspect.

First, unless the person is proclaiming the truth about God, the claim must be dismissed immediately. God is not going to validate the religious belief of a person who is not proclaiming Jesus. The innumerable visions and prophecies that fall outside of a Jesus-directed message are lies.

Next, a person (Muslim, Buddhist, etc.) who claims to have had a vision of Jesus telling him that he must come to Jesus contradicts the Bible on several levels, but most importantly God has given the church the responsibility to share this message via the word He has given. The conversion of Paul is an exception, and it is recorded in Scripture for us to know what happened and why. To assume that God would go around His word to make exceptions negates the purpose of the word He has given us.

Why people cannot find the word of God sufficient for their lives, doctrine, and instruction is hard to figure? God has carefully and meticulously detailed things in His word to show us how His word was compiled, why things happened the way they did, and to show us the fulfillment of the necessary types, patterns, and pictures that are introduced into it.

For us to look for something more actually diminishes what the Lord has done in the giving of His word. Let us not do such things. If you come across someone claiming a word from the Lord, a vision, or a prophecy on a website or video, keep going. You are wasting time that could be spent much better on something else. The Bible presents to

us all we need to know concerning how things came about to give us the word. May it be considered sufficient to us!

*Lord God, thank You for the precious word You have given to lead us in our lives and to keep us from error. It will have importance to us when we pick it up and learn it. And so, help us to do just that. Help us to make learning this precious treasure a true priority in our lives. Amen.*

**So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” Acts 8:30**

Philip was just instructed to go near to the eunuch’s chariot and overtake it. With that instruction, it now says, “So Philip ran to him.” There could have been any number of misgivings about approaching a chariot, especially if it was accompanied by a contingent of soldiers or guards, which is not unlikely for such travel.

But knowing that the Lord had a plan, his immediate obedience is noted. Once joined up with the chariot, it next says, “and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah.” It was the common way of reading, and it still is in many places today, meaning to read aloud. This is a memory tool, but it would also have been something the others with him could listen to as well.

The words that will be cited in the coming verses are directly from the Greek translation of the book of Isaiah. It is probable that this is the version he was reading aloud as well, because Greek was the common language throughout the Eastern part Roman Empire. With Philip recognizing what is being read, he addressed the eunuch, “and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’”

There is a play on words that is expressed in the question. Philip uses the words *ginōskeis* (to know) and *anaginōskeis* (to know again). Vincent’s Word Studies notes: “The play upon the words cannot be translated. The interrogative particles which begin the question indicate a doubt on Philip’s part.”

A good paraphrase might be, “Do you really understand what you are reading?” As he has just been instructed by the Spirit to join himself to the chariot, it probably seemed like an obvious question to ask.

He is an evangelist, he comes up to the chariot and hears Scripture from Isaiah the prophet being read, he is familiar with Jesus’ fulfillment of the prophecy, and he is

obviously curious if this person had heard of what Jesus accomplished. With that, his words of questioning are fully understandable.

Life application: If you are pretty well versed in Scripture, and you hear someone listening to an audio Bible in their car at the gas station or in some other place, or if you see someone sitting and reading a Bible, it would be normal to strike up a conversation. If your pastor had recently preached on the passage the person is listening to or reading, your question may be similar to Philip's, "Hey, do you know what that passage is about?"

This is as common as shingles on a roof and most people are happy to then engage in the conversation. And more, the person may just be curious about the Bible. He or she may not even have a relationship with Jesus. So don't be afraid to start talking about what you know. Philip followed through with the instruction of the Spirit, and you should follow through with the example as it is laid out in Scripture. Don't hesitate to engage in a discussion about the word!

*What a treasure Your word is, O God! May we never lose the excitement we have about it. And, for sure, that will not happen if we stay in it and read it each day. So, Lord, prompt us to carefully attend to this wonderful treasure daily and to share our knowledge of it often! Amen.*

**And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. Acts 8:31**

In the previous verse, Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch if he understood what he was reading as he read the prophet Isaiah. Luke continues now with, "And he said."

It is the response of the eunuch to Philip, and it reveals a truth that Paul conveys concerning the speaking of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14. If someone speaks in a tongue, what good is it if the mind is not edified? The answer is, "None." Likewise, if one reads a passage of Scripture, and if it has no reference to anything else in the mind of the reader, then the mind cannot understand what is being conveyed. As such, and because the eunuch has no reference to what he is reading, he responds, saying, "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

Vincent's Word Studies notes that the Greek more closely reads, "For how should I be able?" He then says, "the for connecting the question with an implied negative: 'No; for how could I understand except.'"

This now shows the reason why Philip has been called to meet with the eunuch. He is reading Scripture, and in his reading, he has no reference to understand the context of the passage. With that now possible because someone with a suitable reference is at hand, it next says, “And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.”

Rather, it properly reads, “And he invited Philip, having come up, to sit with him” (BLB). One can see Philip, while the eunuch is talking, pulling himself up into the carriage as if he is going to help out with an explanation. Once Philip is up, the eunuch grants him the honor of sitting with him, probably on his own bench. It shows a willingness on the part of the eunuch to be considerate to a traveler. At the same time, it shows a willingness in him to want to know the meaning of what he is reading.

Life application: 1 Corinthians 14 is mentioned in the commentary above. It is a passage that should be carefully studied by everyone, but the overall message is that of edification. The eunuch is reading a passage of Scripture, but his mind is not being edified because he has no understanding of the subject of the material he is reading.

As such, if the eunuch were to try to teach on the passage himself, he could make the content mean anything he wanted. But there is a context that must be maintained. Philip will provide the appropriate context so that the eunuch will clearly understand what is being conveyed. And this is just what Jesus did for the two He met on the road to Emmaus –

“Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ <sup>27</sup> And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”

-Luke 24:25-27

The overall context of the Bible is Jesus. God is attempting to wake us up to this fact as the pages of Scripture unfold. The passage that the eunuch is reading will be seen to exactly reveal this truth. To this day, the Jews reject this. And so, when they read the passage that the eunuch is reading (which almost never occurs), their rabbis insert Israel – not Jesus – into it, claiming it is about them.

Let us carefully consider Scripture with Jesus as the main Subject. In doing this, we will not be led astray. And pray for the eyes of Israel to be opened to this truth. Until they are, they will continue to miss the most important point of everything God has done, is doing, and will do within the stream of redemptive history.

*Lord God, help our minds to be understanding of what the intent of Scripture is. May we be fruitful in our comprehension of what You are conveying to us, and may we not presuppose things, inserting them into what is being conveyed. Instead, Lord, help us to draw out from the word the truth of what You are conveying to us. Amen.*

**The place in the Scripture which he read was this:**

**“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;  
And as a lamb before its shearer *is* silent,  
So He opened not His mouth. Acts 8:32**

It was seen that the Ethiopian eunuch did not understand what he was reading, and he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. Now, Luke’s next words begin with, “The place in the Scripture which he read was this.”

The verb is imperfect and should read, “The place in the Scripture which he was reading was this.” The word translated as “place” is only found here in the Bible, *perioché*. It signifies the contents of a passage. Today, we might say, “the chapter of Isaiah,” or something similar. This allows us to know the section, portion, or particular area that is specifically set apart in one way or another. With Philip next to him, the reading from Isaiah in the particular section is cited –

“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter  
And as a lamb before its shearer *is* silent,  
So He opened not His mouth.”

This section is Isaiah 53. The exact verses are 7 and 8. The words of this verse in Acts are from the Greek translation of Isaiah 53:7. Everything in the chapter was clearly understood to be a reference to the coming Messiah. Only after Christ came and fulfilled the words so perfectly did the leaders of Israel decide to obscure or change the intent from this messianic understanding.

As for the content, the words, “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter,” signify willing compliance and even innocence as if it is the right thing to do. In essence, “This is where My Master is leading Me, and so I will not question His direction.”

The next words, “And as a lamb before its shearer *is* silent,” indicate the calm nature of the lamb. It will not resist the master’s manipulation of its body as its hair is cut away. Likewise, Christ did not resist as He was mocked, beaten, scourged, and crucified. He

willingly submitted Himself to those appointed over Him and to the will of the Father who had sent Him.

And the words, “So He opened not His mouth,” highlight His submission even more. Not only did He not struggle against the physical attacks that He suffered, but He silently endured those things as well, even when false accusations had been leveled against Him. As it says, for example, in Matthew 27 –

“Then Pilate said to Him, ‘Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?’<sup>14</sup> But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.” Matthew 27:13, 14

In all ways, He perfectly fulfilled the prophecy that anticipated His actions.

Life application: For the most part, Isaiah 53 is wholly unknown to the Jewish people. It is not read in the synagogue, and it is quickly dismissed as a metaphor for Israel if someone questions its meaning. However, almost all Jews know that the basis for their national identity goes back to the Old Testament Scriptures, even if they don’t have an idea of what they say. And most Jewish people know that these Scriptures go back to antiquity.

Further, there are certain names in Scripture that are well known and recognized, such as Moses, David, and Isaiah. Because this is true, using the words of Isaiah without identifying who wrote them is actually a good way of evangelizing Jews. If you ask a Jew, “Can I read you something and you tell me who it is talking about?”, most people will say, “Sure.” We all love to prove how smart we are.

And so, if you read Isaiah 52:12-53:13 out loud to a Jew, almost always they will say, “That is speaking about Jesus.” It would be the exception to not hear this reply. Almost all Jews know the record of what Jesus did.

After asking them who is being described, and after hearing their reply as “Jesus,” only then would you identify who has written it, meaning Isaiah. This will cause an immediate disconnect in their previous understanding of what is going on. They know Isaiah is from their own Scriptures. They know that Isaiah predates the coming of Jesus, and they know that the words they have heard describe Jesus. With this now facing them, a wall has been broken down. From there, a more complete description of Jesus can be given and a more perfect explanation of how He fulfills all of Scripture can be presented.



Be sure to use this means of evangelism if the opportunity comes up. Jews need Jesus just as do all other people. Take advantage of what God has presented in Scripture to bring them to an understanding and appreciation of who He is and what His gospel message means.

*Lord God, help us to competently and carefully present Your word to those who need to hear it. May we be ready at all times to share it with others. You have carefully provided all we need to bring people to a proper understanding of what Jesus means to them and to their relationship with You. So, help us to use it! To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“In His humiliation His justice was taken away,  
And who will declare His generation?  
For His life is taken from the earth.” Acts 8:33**

Luke now continues the quote from Isaiah 53:8 which speaks of the coming Messiah. The eunuch continues to read out the passage to Philip with the words, “In His humiliation His justice was taken away.” The words vary from the Hebrew text, which reads –

He was taken from prison and from judgment,  
And who will declare His generation?  
For He was cut off from the land of the living;

Despite the differences, the words cited now by Luke follow the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the LXX) exactly. As such, unless Luke only later referred to the Greek to write out the words, it demonstrates that the eunuch was reading from the Greek translation.

The Hebrew and Greek don't actually vary as much as may appear from the English translation. Albert Barnes notes, “The word rendered ‘prison’ denotes any kind of ‘detention,’ or even ‘oppression.’ It does not mean, as with us, to be confined ‘in’ a prison or jail, but may mean ‘custody,’ and be applied to the detention or custody of the Saviour when his hands were bound, and he was led to be tried.”

As such, the Greek translators may have seen “humiliation” as being equivalent to the idea of His imprisonment. It is in this state of humiliation and being bound and oppressed that He was also denied justice. In studying the events of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, it is clear that a large number of actions occurred that were contrary

to the law. Volumes have been written about this demonstrating the completely unfair trial that Christ Jesus faced.

Next, it says, “And who will declare His generation?” The seemingly simple intent of these words is highly debated, and there are many suggestions as to what the meaning actually is. Does “generation” refer to those who are Christ’s after the completion of His work? Meaning those who spring from Him? Does it refer to those who treated Him wickedly? Meaning they are a generation that must be called out and punished for the rejection of their Messiah. And so on.

The greater evidence would point to those of His generation who rejected Him. Jesus spoke of them again and again in the gospels. Two of the many examples are –

“But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup> For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah *is* here. <sup>42</sup> The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon *is* here.’”

-Matthew 12:39-42

“Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. <sup>32</sup> Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ *guilt*. <sup>33</sup> Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? <sup>34</sup> Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: *some* of them you will kill and crucify, and *some* of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, <sup>35</sup> that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. <sup>36</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.”

-Matthew 23:31-36

With this considered, the final portion of the eunuch’s reading is, “For His life is taken from the earth.” It is a close enough rendering to the Hebrew and the meaning is obvious in both. The Messiah would be “cut off from the land of the living” (Hebrew text) through a death that would be sudden. He was alive, and then His life was ended.

In the Greek, it is clear enough. He was on the earth and His life was in Him. However, that life was taken from Him. The reference of the action is the Messiah, not the earth as if He was abducted by aliens or snatched away by angels.

With the reading of these words of Isaiah complete, the narrative will continue in the next verse.

Life application: There may be differences between various source texts, and this can cause confusion as to what the true rendering of Scripture is. This is more the case when it becomes evident that some texts have been purposefully corrupted in order to hide or twist obvious things that don't fit a particular agenda. Likewise, commentaries may have been written which are clearly biased against what really occurred.

As this is so, it is a good thing that scholars over the years have taken a global view and looked at all of the texts and commentaries and carefully pieced together where errors have crept in or where they have been intentionally inserted into Scripture. By doing this, those corrupted areas of various texts can be highlighted and dismissed. God has ensured that enough translations exist of the word to allow us to do this, and there is very little doubt about what the actual reading of Scripture is.

A very simple example of this is to set a portion of Colossians 1:16 side by side with various translations and see what happened with one particular "translation" –

For in him all things were created. NIV

For by him all things were created. ESV

For everything was created by him. CSV

because by means of him all other things were created. NWT

The Greek is clear and easy to understand. It is speaking of Jesus, and it conveys the truth that everything was created by Him. However, the NWT of the Jehovah's Witnesses adds in a word, other, that cannot even be inferred. In their older translations, it used to say, "because by means of him all [other] things were created." However, the addition of this word was so obviously wrong that people would ask, "Hey, why did they insert that word there?" In order to avoid such questions that have no reasonable explanation, they simply took out the brackets. In this, it then removed any future questions by those who might otherwise be seeking the truth.

This sort of manipulation is common, and such an error is easily discovered and dismissed by referring to various translations and then checking with the original. So,

when you read the Bible and see things that are hard to reconcile, please understand that there is an answer to your question. Someone out there has done the hard work to point out to you where the resolution is. With a little searching, you will find it.

Be confident that what we have is God's word. Where variations arise, there is always another source text to refer to that will provide the needed clarification to settle any difficulties.

*Lord God, thank You that You have protected Your word so that we can know what is correct and what has been corrupted, either accidentally or purposefully. Thank You for the assurance we have concerning it. We have full confidence that it is reliable. Hallelujah for Your precious word! Amen.*

**So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" Acts 8:34**

With the eunuch's quoting of Isaiah complete, Luke next records, "So the eunuch answered Philip."

As has already been seen in Acts, the word "answered" is used in the sense of "spoke to" or "addressed." It is not a response to something but the beginning of a communication. He answered, "and said, 'I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this.'"

It is an obvious question to begin with. There is simile conveyed in the verses (as a sheep to the slaughter, etc.), and so to the eunuch it could be that the part seemingly speaking about death could be some type of literary device as well. Without knowing the context, it is just a set of words that could really mean anything. In order to know what is being conveyed, he naturally asks for this context. He then adds in the words, "of himself or of some other man?"

The word "man" is not in the original. It asks if it is about himself or someone else. The fact that it is a man is obvious from the text, however. But there are times in the Bible where speaking of a person can mean an entire group of people or even a location –

*"But you, Israel, are My servant,  
Jacob whom I have chosen,  
The descendants of Abraham My friend."* Isaiah 41:8

Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob;  
Israel shall blossom and bud,  
And fill the face of the world with fruit. Isaiah 27:6

If the eunuch had read through Isaiah, he may have no idea at all whether the words before him are speaking of a man, a group of people, a location, or some other entity. As such, his question is not only appropriate, but it is a wise thing to ask.

Life application: As always, the phrase “context is king” should be remembered and applied. Reading Isaiah and taking the words recorded there in their appropriate context, it should be obvious that the words of Isaiah 53 are messianic in nature. The rabbis of Israel destroy the context in order to hide this fact because it so obviously points to what Jesus accomplished.

But this is not uncommon. People shove the church into passages spoken to Israel under the law all the time. The Sermon on the Mount and the Olivet Discourse, for example, were spoken to Israel and they apply to Israel. The context is purposely manipulated to justify presuppositions about various issues, such as the timing of the rapture. But such manipulations don’t change when the rapture will occur. And so, the only thing that has happened is that a pretext is formed. In the forming of a pretext, people’s doctrine will be harmed.

To understand this concerning the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says in Matthew 5 –

“For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” Matthew 5:17

Are the people of the church waiting for the law to be fulfilled? The answer is obvious, “No.” Jesus was speaking to Israel. He still is speaking to Israel. Until they move from the law to Him, they must perfectly adhere to every precept of the law in order to be saved. Those in the church, both Jew and Gentile, have come to Christ. As such, our righteousness is not in the law, but in Him.

Context, context, context. Oh, how sweet will be the doctrine of those who maintain proper context!

*Glorious God, help us to maintain proper context in our doctrine. Amen.*

**Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.**  
Acts 8:35

In the previous verse, the Ethiopian eunuch asked who Isaiah was referring to in the passage that he had read. Now, Luke notes Philip's response. For a more precise translation, this and the next verb are aorist participles – "Then Philip, having opened his mouth, and having begun at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him." With this understood, they can be looked at, beginning with, "Then Philip having opened his mouth."

This is a common term, a Hebraism, that is used when a purposeful utterance is made. When referring to a living being, it actually goes back to the Lord opening the mouth of the donkey in Numbers 22 –

"Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?'" Numbers 22:28

This phrase continues to be used throughout the Old Testament to indicate such a considered and purposeful utterance –

"Give ear, O my people, *to* my law;  
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.  
<sup>2</sup>I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter dark sayings of old." Psalm 78:1, 2

It then continues on into the New Testament as well –

"And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. <sup>2</sup>Then He opened His mouth and taught them."  
-Matthew 5:1, 2

It is with such an intentional and fixed purpose that Philip speaks. With that, Luke next notes, "and beginning at this Scripture." Jesus said to the leaders of Israel –

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. <sup>40</sup>But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." John 5:39, 40

The Ethiopian eunuch has been reading prophecy. As such, Philip began with prophecy. The eunuch was reading Isaiah. As such, Philip began with Isaiah. The words of Isaiah were about the Suffering Servant. As such, Philip began with this depiction. By beginning with this and building upon it, Luke next records that Philip “preached Jesus to him.”

The word is the same one, *euaggelizó*, already seen three times in this chapter (8:4, 12, & 25). It means “to announce good news.” The Ethiopian eunuch is hearing the good news of Jesus Christ. Philip has obeyed his calling, he has been attentive to the duties associated with it, and a person who was once far off is being drawn near through the preaching of the good news. The results of this will be seen as the narrative continues.

Life application: The best place to start talking about Jesus to someone is whatever place in Scripture that you are in the word at any given time. If you are in a passage about the creation, you can begin with that passage in relation to Him as the Creator. If you are in a passage about someone sinning (like David and Bathsheba), you can begin with the fallen state of man and our relation to Jesus as the Redeemer.

If you are in the book of Exodus and the construction of the tabernacle, you can begin with that and talk about Jesus as the fulfillment of the types and shadows given in anticipation of His body, meaning His tabernacle (see John 1:14). If you are in Leviticus, you can start there and tell how Jesus is the One to cleanse us from defilement, He is our Sacrifice for sins, and He is our Healer and Sanctifier. And so on. If you are in the books of the prophets, you can begin with Jesus as the embodiment of prophecy and the One to whom all prophecy finds its Source, purpose, and ultimate fulfillment. And so on.

There is no part of the Bible that cannot be used to tell about Jesus because it is all ultimately pointing us to Him. Don’t be afraid to simply think it through and then open your mouth and share the good news! Jesus, Jesus, Jesus! It is all about Jesus!

*Lord God, help us to always be ready to speak about You, especially right from Your word. There is always a connection that can be made about Him because it was all given to lead us to Him and to reveal Him. Give us wisdom in this, O God. And give us boldness in our speech as well. To Your glory! Amen.*

**Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Acts 8:36**

The previous verse said that Philip opened his mouth and began to preach Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch. Luke next records, “Now as they went down the road.”

It is obvious that Philip continued with the preaching as they preceded from Jerusalem to Gaza, sitting next to the eunuch and telling him the things he knew about Jesus and His fulfillment of Scripture. And it obviously had the intended effect on him as is seen in the coming words, which begin with, “they came to some water.”

The words are not unimportant. It said that Philip preached Jesus to the eunuch. And yet, the obvious intent – and as will be seen explicitly in a moment – of the note about water is that a part of Philip’s preaching about Jesus was the fulfillment of the command concerning baptism. Luke directly ties evangelism about Jesus in with the requirement to be baptized.

Although this is a descriptive account, it is forming a normative pattern when taken with all of the other instances given in Acts. And more, it is a direct and unambiguous note of obedience to Jesus’ words that were given after the resurrection and in connection to the New Covenant. With this in mind, and in confirmation of this, it next says, “And the eunuch said, ‘See, *here is water.*’”

The Greek more directly says, “Behold! Water!” It is as if the eunuch was marveling that such a propitious thing occurred on the desert road at exactly the time that he had chosen to believe the gospel presented to him.

Of this water, various travelers over the centuries have attempted to determine what source is being spoken of. But that is less important than the fact that water was there, right in the barren desert, in order to provide immediate compliance with the Lord’s command to be baptized. Taking full advantage of the moment, the eunuch immediately asks, “What hinders me from being baptized?”

One cannot ask about something like baptism unless he has first been told about it. As such, it is apparent that the preaching of the gospel included the subject as a core part of what was said. Because this was so, the eunuch immediately wants to comply with this outward ritual as a demonstration of the inward change that has occurred.

Life application: The Ethiopian eunuch is a Gentile. He has not been described as a proselyte to Judaism, and that cannot be inferred from the text, nor was it allowed under the law due to his being a eunuch. He is a man who came to worship God in a nation where he could not be accepted into its assembly.

And yet, he has now been accepted by the very fulfillment of every type, shadow, and picture that the law only anticipated. And that, by a mere act of faith (as will be seen in



the coming verse). In his zeal to be identified with this new faith, and in direct obedience to the command of the Lord, he suggests baptism as soon as water is seen.

How is it that entire theologies have been developed and various cults have arisen that cannot comply with what this eunuch so readily was willing to seek. It is because they have improperly divided the word of God, and they have failed to understand the structure, intent, and message that the book of Acts is conveying.

This book is a key and pivotal marker in what God is doing, not by dividing His gospel between people groups, as if there is more than one gospel. Rather, God is showing a transition away from focusing on the Jewish people to a focus on Gentiles. And the reason for this is not that the Jews have been cut off permanently, but because – in their failure to accept Christ – they have gone into the punishment of the law that they chose to be judged under, instead of the freedom that He offered them in the giving of His Son.

The messianic promises to Israel will be realized when this time of punishment ends. And that will end when they – as a nation – call out to God through Christ Jesus. Until then, the one and only gospel (with its commands from the Lord), has gone to the Gentiles. Let us be faithful to comply with His words and not get ourselves caught up in the aberrant doctrines which have crept in and torn apart what is sound and proper concerning life in Christ.

*Lord God, may we be found obedient to those things You have commanded us in our acceptance of the good news about Jesus. You have told us to be baptized, and You have told us to observe the Lord's Supper. How is it that we can't get these two basic things right? May we not fail to comply henceforth. To Your glory! Amen.*

**Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may."**

**And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Acts 8:37**

The previous words revealed the eunuch's desire to be baptized, asking, "What hinders me from being baptized?" With that, the words of verse 8:37 are given. This verse, however, is not found in many Bibles. The usual reason given by scholars and translators is that it is "not found in the best texts." That is a subjective analysis, assuming that one text is better than the other, usually because of age – "If it is older, it is better."

The inclusion of this verse doesn't harm any other theology presented in the Bible, but more, it is to be remembered that Acts is a descriptive account of what occurred.

Doctrine is to be based upon what is stated in the epistles. Philip is simply saying what he believes the circumstances demand based upon a short meeting with this person. As such, in response to the eunuch's question, Luke records, "Then Philip said."

Philip is an evangelist. What he has done and continues to do is recorded in the epistles, but he is not an apostle, as such his words must be taken in light of the prescriptive epistles. Luke just records what he says as any accurate historian should. With that noted, Philip's words are, "If you believe with all your heart, you may."

More rightly, the words read, "If you believe out of [or from] all your heart, it is permitted." The word translated as "may" is generally translated as "lawful." It is that which is permitted based on the surrounding circumstances. For example, for one under the law, that person would use this word to indicate something acceptable to the law, hence "lawful."

Philip has set a standard for the eunuch to ensure that he fully grasps the gospel that has been presented. He is letting the eunuch know that an outward display doesn't save, but rather a change in the heart is what speaks out to God. This is reflective of what Paul says later in Romans 10 –

"But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach): <sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Romans 10:8-10

Philip's point of saying "out of all your heart" is certainly with the understanding that nobody really half-heartedly believes anything. A person may not fully understand a matter, but what he does understand is either accepted or rejected. The "heart" in Scripture does not speak of the emotions as we use it today. Rather, it is the seat of reason and understanding. The conditional statement has been set forth by Philip based on what he has said to the eunuch. With that, Luke records, "And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'"

Several points can be gleaned from his answer. The first is that he connects the term "Christ" to Jesus. The eunuch either knew that Israel anticipated a Messiah or Philip explained what that meant. The eunuch has affixed that title to the name, accepting that He is the One to have fulfilled that role.

Next, as the passage from Isaiah spoke of His suffering and death, something then explained by Philip, it is clear that the eunuch also heard of and accepted the resurrection of Jesus, because he says that Jesus Christ is (present tense) the Son of God. He has obviously accepted the premise of the resurrection.

Thirdly, in saying that He is the Son of God, it is an affirmation that God is His Father. The logical conclusion is that Philip explained this to him and told him of the incarnation. Jesus is not simply an “adopted” son of God, but the Son of God, begotten of the Father. Otherwise, there would be no need to state this. In his proclamation, he is thus acknowledging the deity of Christ and, therefore, His sinless perfection.

It is this that is expected of those who hear the message. He has believed and his confession has been made.

The Pulpit Commentary states, “Irenaeus, in the third book against Heresies, Acts 12:8, distinctly quotes a portion of this verse. ... and Cyprian, in his third book of Testimonies, 43, quotes the other part of the verse. In proof of the thesis that “whoever believes may be immediately baptized.”

Irenaeus was born in 130AD. Cyprian was born in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century and died in 258AD. As these two men included portions of this verse in their writings, if the verse is spurious, it was added at a very early date. The obvious reason why someone would claim that it was inserted later is that without verse 37, there appears to be a sudden jump in action from Acts 8:36 to Acts 8:38 –

Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, *here is* water. What hinders me from being baptized?”

<sup>38</sup> So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.

Without verse 8:37, someone may suppose that Philip didn’t cross every t and dot every i. But Acts is not given for that purpose. It is given to tell us what occurred, to whom they occurred, and where things took place. We are not supposed to get our precise theology from the book. Rather, we are to take a global view of the book of Acts in order to understand what occurred and why. Whether original or spurious, the inclusion harms no other doctrine, and its exclusion leaves nothing out that would leave a void in our understanding of right doctrine.

Life application: What Peter says in Acts 2 is not something that applies to all people at all times. He was speaking to the people of Israel during a certain time and at a certain event. His words cannot be applied to Gentile believers who are not of Israel, except as a descriptive account of what occurred.

The account of the Ethiopian eunuch is something that is historically recorded as having occurred. It was at the leading of the Holy Spirit, it was conducted by an evangelist who had sufficient information to properly witness to another person about Jesus, and it shows (in the coming verse) that this person was baptized into the faith.

Nothing is prescribed here for us. We do not have to evangelize people in the desert. We do not have to ride with people in a chariot in order to tell them about Jesus. We do not have to start with Isaiah 53 when we talk about the Lord. And so on. As these things are true, there must be another reason for the inclusion of this account.

That reason will be looked at in the next verse. Other than that, it is a historical record of a person physically unacceptable to be included in the assembly of the Jews under the Law of Moses, but who is fully acceptable to be included in the body of believers who are saved by Jesus Christ.

*Heavenly Father, help us to be willing to talk to any and to all who come into our paths about Jesus. There is none too far from Your saving grace, and there is every reason why we should open our mouths and speak forth the beautiful message of the gospel. Help us to be faithful in this, O God. Amen.*

**So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Acts 8:38**

The previous verse conveyed the proclamation by the eunuch that he believed the gospel. As such, he was saved (Ephesians 1:13, 14, etc.). With that noted, it next says, "So he commanded the chariot to stand still."

It is certainly the eunuch who gave the command. Without any intervening words, it is obvious that he was unwilling to wait another minute to comply with the command of the Lord that is to accompany acceptance of the gospel –

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all

things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Matthew 28:19, 20

The notable point to consider is that nothing is said in the account of Philip’s talk with the eunuch concerning baptism. And yet, the eunuch is the one who is said (verse 8:36) to have broached the subject. Baptism would have been wholly unknown to him as a rite of faith in Christ Jesus, and yet he both asked about it and then commanded the chariot to stand still the moment that he had professed his faith in the Lord.

In other words, and what must be the case, is that Philip – as a part of his evangelization – specifically discussed the matter of baptism. They may have talked about a thousand other things as well, but this account mentions none of them, including the Lord’s Supper, right living, holiness, Jesus’ genealogy, or innumerable other points of doctrine concerning life in Christ.

But in his zeal to be obedient to the Lord in whom he professed faith, he initiates the subject in this account. As such, Luke records, “And both Philip and the eunuch went down.”

They got down from the chariot and went to whatever source of water was there. Nothing is said of those who are with him. It is possible that Philip baptized one or more of the eunuch’s cohorts, but the attention is on him. If others heard and believed, their faith and baptism are simply overlooked. He stands as the focus of the narrative.

Next, it says they went “into the water.” Much discussion has been made concerning these words as if they prove full immersion was the standard practice. But the Greek word can mean either “to” or “into.” There is no point in speculating on this. The word transliterated as “baptize” speaks for itself. It means to submerge. To do anything else defeats the imagery of Christ. Further, baptism always follows faith in the Bible.

- 1) Hear the gospel
- 2) Believe the gospel
- 3) Be submerged in water as a mark of the faith that has been expressed

As such, Luke says, “and he baptized him.” Though the account is descriptive, it is in compliance with the word of the Lord, and it fits the repeated pattern in Acts where every person who comes to be a believer in Christ is seen to receive baptism.

As for the eunuch, his faith in Christ becomes a part of a greater pattern that goes back to the early Genesis account. In the record of the sons of Noah, they are named in the order of Shem, Ham, and Japheth. This is repeated five times in Genesis and then in 1 Chronicles. These three sons represent all of humanity today.

Shem, though not the eldest, is mentioned first, and those of his line are the first to receive baptism (Acts 2). The next son, Ham, is now represented by this Ethiopian eunuch. The final son, Japheth, will be represented in this pattern in Acts 10. Thus, the order of the sons of Genesis is followed exactly in Acts in relation to faith, and then baptism, of these people groups.

Life application: A few questions to understand proper doctrine:

1. When were the instructions for the Lord's supper given? The answer is in Luke 22 (see also Matthew 26 and Mark 14), prior to (but in anticipation of) Christ's cross and the introduction of the New Covenant. They are quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians, exactly following the instructions first given by Jesus.
2. When are the instructions for baptism given? The answer is in Matthew 28, after Christ completed His work, and after the introduction of the New Covenant.
3. Are all believers, Jew and Gentile, a part of the New Covenant or not? Yes. If someone answers "No" to this, then he has no part in Christ (See 1 Corinthians 11 and 2 Corinthians 3:6).

As all true believers are a part of the one and only New Covenant, and as Jesus ties the rite of baptism into the proper practice set forth for believers (just as the Lord's Supper is), it is the height of hypocrisy for someone to accept the Lord's Supper and yet not accept baptism – both in doctrine and in practice. It shows a poor understanding of doctrine, a streak of disobedience to the word of the Lord, and an attitude of arrogance that cannot be considered acceptable within the faith.

For proper doctrine, follow the three points noted in the main body of the commentary above. Anything else is disobedience to the word of the Lord.

*Lord God, help us to think clearly concerning what Your word is saying. Help us to properly divide what is being said. And help us not get caught up in false teachings that improperly handle this sacred treasure You have given us. May we be found as acceptable vessels, ready for Your use at all times. Amen.*

**Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. Acts 8:39**

The last verse saw Philip and the eunuch going down into the water where Philip baptized the eunuch. With that remembered, it next says, “Now when they came up out of the water.”

Though the act of full immersion baptism is debated based on the words of the last verse, the thought of coming up “out of the water” gives a good indication of being in the water, not “by” the water or having a jar of water in the hand. If they were in the water, it seems likely that the intent is to fully immerse. But, as previously stated, the Greek word transliterated as “baptize” signifies full immersion. Despite this, the baptism was conducted and then they came up out of the water. At this time, it says that “the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away.”

Here, the word *harpazó* is used. It signifies to seize, snatch, catch away, and so on. It is a forceful action of removal. Some, in an attempt to eliminate the supernatural element, will say that this was a strong urge that was so irresistible, Philip had to depart immediately. If this was the case, other words sufficient to the situation would be more appropriate. An example of this is found in Acts 18 –

“When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus is the Christ.*”

Philip was not merely compelled. Rather, he was snatched away by an external force, meaning the Spirit. As incredible as this sounds, it is not without precedent. It happened in the Old Testament, such as in the taking away of Enoch in Genesis 5, and which is explained in Hebrews 11:5. Elijah was also taken bodily to heaven in a chariot of fire and a whirlwind in 2 Kings 2:11. Ezekiel was taken in the spirit to another location in Ezekiel 3, but that could simply be a vision and not a physical transportation.

In the New Testament, the word *harpazó* is used fourteen times. Each time it is used with a clear reference to a physical removal, even if it is stopping such a physical removal (such as in John 10:28). It is used of Paul being caught up to the third heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:2 & 4. Admittedly, Paul says there, “whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know.” Even if it was out of the body, there was a removal from one place to another that was not accomplished by the one being transported. If it was in the body (of which he was not sure), then a physical transport would have taken place.

The word is also used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 when speaking of the saints being “caught up” together with the dead in Christ at the rapture. Due to the sudden and external nature of the words in these other instances, it seems unlikely the Spirit would inspire Luke to use this word unless Philip was abruptly and miraculously transported. A sudden urge to leave might cause Philip to get up and say, “Great baptism, now I simply must go,” but it would leave the eunuch thinking Philip was a bit odd. Rather, the purpose was certainly to confirm to the eunuch, and to those with him, that God had accepted the rite of baptism and demonstrated that fact with the sudden and remarkable catching away of Philip. With this certainly being the case, it next says, “so that the eunuch saw him no more.”

In the desert, one can see a long way in the distance. If Philip had suddenly departed, no matter how fast his feet could run or his mount could gallop, it would be a good long span before he could not be seen any longer. If that is how Philip departed, Luke would surely have said something like, “And so Philip departed in haste, leaving the eunuch behind.” The words shout out for a sudden, miraculous, and immediate removal of Philip from the spot. With that, and speaking of the eunuch, it says, “and he went on his way rejoicing.”

It is a mistranslation. Rather, it says, “for he was going his way rejoicing.” There is a reason (for) and the verb is imperfect (he was going). In 2 Kings, when Elijah was taken to heaven, it says –

“Now when the sons of the prophets who *were* from Jericho saw him, they said, ‘The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.’ And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him. <sup>16</sup> Then they said to him, ‘Look now, there are fifty strong men with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley.’

And he said, ‘You shall not send anyone.’

<sup>17</sup> But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, ‘Send *them!*’ Therefore they sent fifty men, and they searched for three days but did not find him. <sup>18</sup> And when they came back to him, for he had stayed in Jericho, he said to them, ‘Did I not say to you, ‘Do not go?’” 2 Kings 2:15-18

Luke is providing a contrast to this account. The prophets from Jericho wanted to find Elijah, not wanting to entertain the thought that they would never see him again. The eunuch in Acts didn’t do this. He did not send any of those with him to look for Philip. He did not travel back up the road to Jerusalem. Rather, he knew that Philip had been



caught away, and he was content with that, even to the point of rejoicing. He had received a visual confirmation that his faith was confirmed as saving faith and that his act of obedience in being baptized according to the Lord's word was acceptable.

Life application: The Ethiopian eunuch had very limited interaction with Philip, but it was long enough for him to make a reasoned decision about what he had heard. He accepted the message, he believed, and he was obedient to the command of the Lord in receiving baptism. In the end, he went away rejoicing.

But someone had to tell him about Jesus and share the gospel with him. The Lord sent Philip. There are people in your area, your family, your work environment, and your general sphere of life that need to hear about Jesus. Are you hoping the Lord will send someone to tell them about Jesus? He has. He has sent you. The only question is, "Are you going to be obedient to the commission you have been given?"

Don't wait for the Lord to do the miraculous and send someone along to tell these people. He already performed the greatest miracle in your life when He saved you. It's time for you to respond in kind and share what you know!

*Lord God, thank You for the salvation that I have been given through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Now, give me the strong desire, will, and ability to tell others the same message I have heard. Help me to be the next link in getting this word out to others. To Your glory, I pray. Amen.*

**But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea. Acts 8:40**

In the previous verse, Philip was caught away from the eunuch and the eunuch went on his way rejoicing. With that noted, Luke continues with, "But Philip was found at Azotus." This was a distance of about thirty miles, and nothing is said of him anywhere else. He was on the desert road to Gaza, and then he was found at Azotus.

Without any doubt, Luke is trying to convey a sequence of events in a manner that demonstrates something out of the ordinary. If he meant that Philip traveled to Azotus, he would have plainly said that, just as he did four times in this chapter alone while –

-----

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. (8:5)

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, <sup>15</sup> who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. (8:14, 15)

So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. (8:25)

Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is desert. <sup>27</sup> So he arose and went. (8:26, 27)

-----

As for Azotus, it is known in the Old Testament as Ashdod. That comes from the verb *shadad* which signifies dealing violently with, despoiling, devastating, and so on. As such, it means something like “Ravager.” It was a city of the Philistines in Old Testament times. It is a coastal town, and a part of modern Israel today. It is Israel’s sixth-largest city, and it is about 20 miles south of Tel Aviv.

After being found in Azotus, Luke continues the narrative, saying, “And passing through.”

Again, Luke’s narrative gives details about Philip’s travels that he did not give in the previous words. Luke has written clearly and precisely concerning the movements of Philip with the exception of the words about his miraculous transportation from Gaza to Azotus.

To attempt to dismiss the miraculous intent of the account then diminishes the precision of Luke’s other words that carefully document the movement of Philip and others elsewhere. In other words, it makes Luke look like a less careful chronicler of events than he truly is. The lack of wording here is not a failing of his recording of what happened. Rather, it is a remarkable choice of wording to show exactly what did happen. With that in mind, Luke returns to the carefully worded accounting of Philip’s continued evangelization, saying, “he preached in all the cities.”

The verb here is imperfect. It reads, “he was preaching in all the cities.” Philip didn’t just pass by small cities. Nor did he withhold preaching in some. Rather, as he went, he was actively preaching. It is the same careful attention given to describe the movement of Peter and John in verse 8:25 (noted above). Also, it is the same word already used four times in Acts 8, *euaggelizó*. Philip, Peter, and John had all been evangelizing as they

traveled from one major city to another. As for Philip, this continued “till he came to Caesarea.”

Luke’s care concerning the details is minute, and yet, they were specifically left out in Philip’s travel from the area of Gaza to Azotus. In other words, the main city of Ashkelon lies between Gaza and Azotus (Ashdod). Along that way are small, populated areas that could be described as “cities.” But Luke never mentions them. The language is purposefully blank to indicate a miraculous transport from one location to another.

Philip was taken from the area of Gaza, purposefully taken over the entire area of a major city with smaller surrounding cities, and was deposited in Azotus.

Life application: Of the movement of Philip from Gaza to Azotus, Albert Barnes says, “It does not mean here that there was any miracle in the case, but that Philip, after leaving the eunuch, came to or was in Azotus.” Charles Ellicott and others likewise try to justify Philip’s travel as having been in a state of ecstasy and not knowing what he was doing as he traveled all the way from Gaza to Azotus. Or they give some other similar explanation.

However, doesn’t that insert much more into the narrative than would have been overlooked by Luke? Stated differently, and as was noted above, it actually diminishes the careful attention that Luke always provides. If Philip was in a state of ecstasy, Luke would have said so. If he omitted that, it would then demonstrate a failing on his part to not say so.

The reason for dealing so minutely with what occurred is because if you give careful study to the doctrine of the rapture, you will eventually be told that “the church never taught the doctrine of the rapture until the 1800s.” There are several problems with this. First, it doesn’t matter when a point of biblical doctrine is introduced. If it is true, it is true.

John Calvin’s teachings, which are held to by the same people that say the rapture is a new doctrine, didn’t come about until John Calvin started teaching them, a couple hundred years before the time of Darby. And so, to claim that Calvin is right, and Darby is wrong based on the time of the introduction of the particular doctrine is a fallacy known as “Chronological Snobbery,” or simply a chronological fallacy. But more, John Calvin’s doctrine, in many ways, is entirely incorrect.

Secondly, it is not true that the rapture was first taught in the 1800s. In fact, it is explicitly taught in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4 by the apostle Paul. It is referred to elsewhere in the New Testament, and it is typologically hinted at in the Old Testament.

Luke's carefully detailed account of Philip's *harpazó* (his being caught away) is not a blundering account of omission. Rather, it is a purposeful account of omission. It is given to show us that God can remove a person in a moment from one place to another for His own purposes. There is a time when He will do this with all of His true believers in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

Take time to blink your eyes as fast as you can for a second. If you just did that, you blinked three to five times in one second. The blink of an eye occurs in about 1 tenth of a second which is 100 milliseconds.

Get ready. When Jesus calls His people home, it will happen so fast that we won't know it has happened until it is over. Jesus is coming. Be ready.

*Heavenly Father, it is true that some believers deny that there will be a rapture. But Your word tells us that their denial is wrong. Won't they be surprised on that day! And won't we all be elated when we realize what happened! May that day be soon. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 9

**Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest Acts 9:1**

The previous verse closed out Chapter 8, explaining how Philip was found at Azotus, and how he preached in all the cities until he came to Caesarea. With that noted, the narrative now returns to its focus that also began in Chapter 8. And so, with the intervening verses about the work of the apostles complete, Luke begins Chapter 9 with, “Then Saul.” He was last mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 8, saying –

“Now Saul was consenting to his death.

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. <sup>2</sup> And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him.

<sup>3</sup> As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.” Acts 8:1-3

Saul was bloodthirsty as Chapter 8 began, and nothing has changed in his demeanor with this new chapter, as Luke notes that he was “still breathing threats and murder.”

The Greek word translated as “breathing” is found only here, *empneó*. It signifies “to inhale.” Ironically, the KJV translated it just the opposite and incorrectly says, “breathing out.” It is the “element from which he drew his breath” (Thayer’s). Also, the Greek word translated as “threats” is singular, not plural. As such, the words should read that he was “still breathing in threat and murder.” The very breath that he inhaled animated him into a ravaging animal “against the disciples of the Lord.”

Paul later acknowledges this conduct during his trial before King Agrippa in Acts 26 –

“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. <sup>10</sup> This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*. <sup>11</sup> And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities.” Acts 26:9-11

As for his statement that he “received authority from the chief priests,” that is next recorded by Luke, saying he “went to the high priest.” The verb is an aorist participle and should read, “having gone to the high priest.” That sets up the continued words of the coming verse. For now, Paul has gone to the high priest with a purpose and intent. All of this is leading to the greatest moment of his life, and one that will affect the lives of billions of people in the millennia to come.

Life application: Understanding the meaning behind the words used in the biblical narrative can really give you a sense of what is actually going on in the mind of the person being described. For example, the word above, *empneó*, is from *en* (in) and *pneó* (to breathe). Think about how different translations change your mind about what is being said –

- Breathing out murderous threats (NIV).
- Breathing out threats and murder (BLB).
- Uttering threats with every breath (NLT).
- Breathing threats and murder (BSB).
- Breathing threatening and slaughter (ASV).
- Full of menace and the fury of murder (Aramaic).
- Spewing death threats (ISV).
- Whose every breath was a threat of destruction (Weymouth).
- Breathing in threat and murder (CG).

Most of these are outwardly directed. You would think that Paul is coming against the people and yelling out to them how he was going to destroy them. Many of them have “threats” in the plural. That gives the sense of repeated threats as if it is going on and on. The NIV (and others) combine the two separate words (threat and murder) into one that describes the other. Each of these will change your perception of what is going on.

However, in understanding the meaning of the base words that form the new word, it being from *en* (in) and *pneó* (to breathe), you can then see that even if Paul’s actions are directed toward others, the impulse behind them is something that is first animating him to be that way. This is the root of Paul’s problem. Until that is cured, there can be no change in him. The very breath that animates him is angry and hostile. As this is so, it will then be that way when he breathes out as well.

Don’t be afraid to do word studies. In fact, take time to do so. The richness of the source of words can completely change your perception of what is actually being conveyed. Translators do their best to convey intent, but unless they are willing to do such word

studies (a somewhat time-consuming and laborious task), they may not convey to you what is actually going on. And so, take time to do your own studies if a particular passage especially appeals to you. It is well worth the time you put into it.

*Lord God, what a wonderful treasure Your word is. It is rich and alive and filled with magnificent insights about the nature of man, the corrective measures for his defects, and how You apply those measures to mold us into Your image. Help us to seek out the riches of Your word all the days of our lives. Amen.*

**and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.** Acts 9:2

This verse should be taken together with the previous verse. Together, they say, "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." With that noted, verse 2 now begins with, "and asked letters from him."

It is from the high priest that the letters are being requested, demonstrating both the authority granted to Paul as well as the great zeal he had in identifying and bringing an end to any who were practicing their faith in the Lord Jesus.

As such, these letters would give him authority in any religious matters of the Jewish people. It is the religion under the Law of Moses that established them as a nation. As the worship and religious rites of Israel to serve Yehovah their God were considered religio licita (permitted religion) by the Romans, the high priest would have authority over the Jewish people in such matters as fell within his religious jurisdiction. With that understood, Luke continues noting that the letters were "to the synagogues of Damascus."

Damascus is considered the most ancient city in the world. At the time of Paul, many Jews lived there, and Josephus notes that at the time of Emperor Nero, a full ten thousand Jews were slaughtered there, showing how great the number was.

As noted, the Jewish nation was established under the principles of the Law of Moses. As such, the people of that nation were accountable as Jews to the authority of the high priest in this regard. Therefore, letters to the synagogues would bear the high priest's authority over any who attended those synagogues, or who were simply affiliated with

them. Paul notes in 2 Corinthians 11:32 that Aretas was the king at the time. As for the letters, they were to give Paul authority, “so that if he found any who were of the Way.”

The Greek reads *tēs Hodou* – “the Way.” Some translations incorrectly say, “this way,” as if it is referring to one of many ways, but this is not correct. It is a designation concerning the early faith, prior to the introduction of the now more commonly used term “Christian.” It is the same word, *hodos*, or way, that is found in John 14:4-6 –

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. <sup>4</sup> And where I go you know, and **the way** you know.’

<sup>5</sup> Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know **the way**?’

<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, ‘I am **the way**, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

Thus, “the Way” is an expression of faith that Jesus is the One way to be reconciled to God the Father. It is applicable to all people, Jews and Gentiles (see Acts 19, e.g.). As for Paul’s plans for those in Damascus, it was all-inclusive, “whether men or women.”

Paul was uninterested in what reason a person followed the Lord. He was also uninterested in their gender, as if a woman’s faith was less important than a man’s. His attitude was set on eradication of the faith without regard to any lesser divisions that may have been seen among believers. As such, it was his set determination to find them and arrest them so that “he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

Once in Jerusalem, there would be a trial to determine guilt and punishment. This is seen in Paul’s words of Acts 26 –

“This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*. <sup>11</sup> And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities.” Acts 26:10, 11

Life application: How do you personally feel about faith in Jesus Christ? Do you believe that He is one of many ways to approach God? Are there people in your circle of life that believe this? If so, when you talk to them, do you let them know that the Bible says



otherwise? Are you willing to stand on Jesus' words that He is the only way to restoration with God and that none can be restored apart from Him?

If you are willing to equivocate on this fundamental truth, what else will you waffle on? If you say you are a follower of Jesus (a Christian, a born-again Christian, a follower of the Way, or whatever) and yet you will not defend the most basic premise of the faith, then what Jesus are you following? His words cannot be picked at random. The Bible is the only source for our faith in Him. As such, we must either accept it (in the proper context) or we have rejected it. If we reject the Bible, then we have no basis for our faith at all.

Think reasonably about your faith, and then determine that if you truly believe the message of Jesus, you will put every effort into coming to know Him from His word. It will be well worth it when you stand before the Lord on the day when you are called before Him to give an account of your life.

*Lord God, help us to think clearly about who You are, about what You have done, and how Jesus is the way in which You have done so. And more, help us to consider that it is the Bible that tells us about Jesus. And so, Lord, help us to take the time each day to study this precious word, and then to also apply it to our walk before You. Amen.*

**As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.** Acts 9:3

The previous verse had Paul preparing for a journey to Damascus in order to bring back believers of the Way for trial in Jerusalem. Now that thought continues, saying, "As he journeyed."

Concerning the route he would have taken, Charles Ellicott says –

"The route by which the persecutor and his companions travelled was probably that taken by the Roman road, which extended from Jerusalem to Neapolis (Sychar, or Shechem), thence to Scythopolis, and so by the shores of the Sea of Galilee and Cæsarea Philippi, and thence under the slopes of Hermon, to Damascus. ... It is, however, possible that he may have taken the road by the Jordan valley by which Galilean pilgrims sometimes travelled in order to avoid Samaria; but the former was beyond all question the most direct and best frequented road."

With that, the Greek next says “it came to pass.” This is omitted by the translators, but it can be seen in the BLB translation –

“Now in proceeding, it came to pass *as* he draws near to Damascus, suddenly also a light from heaven flashed around him.”

Somewhere along the journey, it came to pass as “he came near Damascus.” The meaning of the name of the city depends on several things. Abarim defines it –

“The Hebrew term for Damascus, namely דמשק (*dammāsāq*), means something like **The Beginning Of Salvation**. The Chronicler's slightly adapted term for Damascus, namely דרמשק (*darammāsāq*) means **Period Of Salvation** or perhaps more precise **Full Turn In The Pattern Of Salvation**. The Greek name Damascus means **Tameness** or somewhat more positive **Synchronicity**.”

Damascus is outside of Israel’s borders which is appropriate for the calling that will occur. The apostle to the Gentiles will receive his calling outside of the set borders of Canaan, but still within the area of land originally promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:18. That promise extends the land as far as the River Euphrates. It was there, in the Gentile land close to Damascus that Paul was traveling, “and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.”

The word translated as “shone” is found only here and in Acts 22:6. It signifies to flash around like lightning. Acts 26 will further explain the intensity of this light –

“While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, <sup>13</sup>at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.” Acts 26:12, 13

The magnificence of the light outshined the radiance of the sun. With this ultra-intense display of the glory of the Lord now stated, the narrative will continue in the verses ahead.

Life application: There are commentaries that will attempt to diminish the magnitude of what occurred with Saul (Paul), saying things like he was driven mad while considering his acts of persecution, and this is what produced the vision that happened in his mind. Nothing of the sort is even hinted at. And more, the effects of the light upon his eyes

will demonstrate that this was not just an internalized event. Rather, it is an actual appearance of the glory of the Lord as He revealed Himself to Saul.

We need to always consider the words of Scripture in the context in which they are given. In the case of this theophany, there is no doubt about how it occurred. At the same time, we need to not be duped by people that claim they have their own visions of God. There is no need for such visions today, and it would be contrary to the word itself that they should occur.

Paul was chosen to be an apostle of Jesus, and the events that surround his conversion were necessary for the validation of his ministry, both for himself and for those who would interact with him, such as the other apostles. People's conversions now occur in accord with what is written in Scripture, and those who are placed in the ministry have the words of Scripture to explain their requirements. There is no need for any extra validations of such things, and none should be expected.

Logically, if God is going around giving visions of Himself to people today, there is no need for the word of God in their lives. And yet, it is the word of God that reveals to us what we need to do in order to be saved, to live out our lives in accord with His will, and to appoint to the ministry those we deem to have satisfactorily met its requirements for the position.

Don't look to the sensational when the Bible itself is sufficient for our lives, doctrine, and conduct. Let us be content with this wonderful treasure God has given us.

*Yes, Lord God! What a treasure Your word is! May we hold fast to it as the rule and guide of our lives as we live them out before You. Help us to apply its precepts to our lives and to seek out the mysteries in it all our days. Amen.*

**Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Acts 9:4**

The previous verse told of the light from heaven that shone around Paul as he was nearing Damascus. Now, a voice accompanies that brilliant light. The NKJV is not very precise in its translation. Comparing a more literal translation will show its weakness –

Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (NKJV)

“And having fallen upon the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?’” (CG)

With that noted, the verse can be looked over, beginning with, “And having fallen upon the ground.”

Some suppose that this means Paul was on a horse, mule, donkey, or camel. But there is nothing to suggest this. Jesus is said to have fallen upon the ground in Mark 14:35 while in the Garden of Gethsemane. The same words are used in that account as now in Acts, and it is clear that he was walking with the disciples at the time.

And so, whether on horse or simply walking by foot, Paul was overwhelmed with the brightness of the glory that shone around him and he fell to the ground. The sentiment is not at all uncommon in either testament. In the Old Testament, for example, when Daniel was confronted with the glory of the Lord, it says –

“And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision; but a great terror fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. <sup>8</sup>Therefore I was left alone when I saw this great vision, and no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength. <sup>9</sup>Yet I heard the sound of his words; and while I heard the sound of his words I was in a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground.”

-Daniel 10:7-9

In the New Testament, Peter saw a miracle of the Lord and it overwhelmed him –

“But Simon answered and said to Him, ‘Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.’ <sup>6</sup>And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. <sup>7</sup>So they signaled to *their* partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup>When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’” Luke 5:5-8

Peter’s encounter was one of seeing the effects of the Lord’s power, and yet in comprehending the scope of the miracle, he fell down before the Lord who had performed it. Other such encounters are noted in Scripture. In Paul’s case, as he lay on the ground, it says, “he heard a voice.”

In Paul's personal recounting of the event, he says, "I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language." As a side note, the word used to describe the language can mean Hebrew or Aramaic. It would have been the common language of the land at the time which was quite different than the Hebrew found in the Old Testament. This is evident from various other passages in the gospels and elsewhere in Acts. Regardless of that, Jesus spoke to Paul in his native tongue "saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?'"

The repetition of the name is a way of showing emphasis and also, at times, personal affinity. Such repetitions are found throughout Scripture in both Testaments. An example from each –

"Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. <sup>10</sup> And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. <sup>11</sup> But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' So he said, 'Here I am.'" Genesis 22:9-11

"And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren.'" Luke 22:31, 32

The Lord is making a personal, emphatic, and targeted call to Saul. It is personal by calling him by name. It is emphatic because he calls it twice. And it is targeted because of the accusation leveled at him, "Why do you persecute Me?"

The One, as yet unknown to Saul, directly accuses him of persecution, and He indicates that it is a persecution against His own being. He does not say, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting My people?" Rather, he says, "Me." If thought through, it is another clear indication of eternal salvation. The people of the Lord are "in" the Lord. An attack against them is an attack against Him. And alignment with Him brings the believer into union with Him in a permanent covenantal relationship.

Life application: It is important to understand the relationship that existed between Saul (Paul) and Jesus until this point. He was a law-observant Pharisee. Not only that, he was one while the temple still stood, and the rites and sacrifices for purification from sin were still being practiced. And yet, Paul was an enemy of Jesus because he had not come to participate in the New Covenant established in Jesus' blood.

Hebrews 7:18, 8:13, and 10:9 indicate that the law is set aside, obsolete, and annulled in Christ. Colossians 2:14 tells us that the law is nailed to the cross. Obviously, nobody walked up to Jesus' cross and nailed a copy of the law to it. Rather, the words of Paul are given in metaphor. Christ is the embodiment and fulfillment of the law. Jesus was crucified on the cross. The law (Jesus' fulfillment of it) was crucified on the cross. Jesus died on the cross. The law was made obsolete (abolished – Ephesians 2:15) in His death.

If Paul was an enemy of Jesus Christ (the only way to salvation – John 14:6), and yet he was a law-observant Jew living within the framework of the rites of the law, then it tells us – clearly and unambiguously – that no person can be saved by adherence to the law of Moses. But this is what the doctrine of dual covenantalism teaches.

It is a doctrine held by the Roman Catholic Church and various figures within Christianity today. Roman Catholicism's statement on this says, "From the Christian confession that there can be only one path to salvation, however, it does not in any way follow that the Jews are excluded from God's salvation because they do not believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God" (Source: The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable (Rom 11:29) by Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews).

Likewise, there are innumerable sects and cults within Christianity that espouse partial or total adherence to the Law of Moses as the means of salvation, ignoring the finished work of Jesus. Be sure to think about what is presented in the church you attend and consider the words of the pastor or leadership. This includes attending through videos or livestream. Such teachings are not a part of the gospel, and they must be identified so that they can be rejected.

Hold fast to the truth that God has sent His Son into the world, that He has established a New Covenant in His blood, and the only way to be saved is through belief in what He has done. Be ready to both teach this and defend this truth.

*Lord God, it should not be surprising to us that there is only one way to be reconciled to You. It should be overwhelming to our minds that there is even one way. We are fallen, we have disobeyed, and we are the sinners. And yet, while we were enemies, You sent Christ into the world to save us. Thank You that there is a path to reconciliation with You. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"**

**Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Acts 9:5**

Note: The text of verses 9:5 and 9:6 is different based on original manuscripts, and so your Bible may not match what is presented here:

\*And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. **6** But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” (ESV)

\* And he said, “Who are You, Lord?”

Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads.”

<sup>6</sup>So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

Then the Lord *said* to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” (NKJV)

-----

Paul was just shown to have fallen to the ground, and he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me?” With that, Luke now records Paul’s response, “And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’”

In the use of “Lord” (Greek: *kurios*), it is probably not yet to be understood as referring to the Lord, Yehovah, the God of Israel, although by now that may not be out of the question. The same word can be translated in various ways based on the context. For example, in John 4:19, it says, “The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.’” There, the word “Sir” is the same as what Paul now uses.

Paul may, at this time, be thinking it is an angel. Whatever was on his mind, he uses this title to indicate someone in a highly respectful position. With the question asked, the narrative continues, saying, “Then the Lord said.”

The same word, *kurios*, is used again. This time, it is from Luke’s understanding of who it actually is, and thus it should mentally be considered as “Lord God,” meaning the Lord Jesus. This is seen in the divine response, “I am Jesus.”

The words would have pierced right into Saul’s soul. Here he is, trying to eradicate this very name. He had surely believed the lie of the council that Jesus’ body was stolen –

“Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. <sup>12</sup> When they had

assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, <sup>13</sup> saying, 'Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him *away* while we slept.' <sup>14</sup> And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure.' <sup>15</sup> So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day." Matthew 28:11-15

Suddenly, this voice accompanied by the brilliant light has called out that He is alive. The enormity of the moment would never have left Paul's mind. This was the great transformative event that would change him forever. With this stated, Jesus continues, saying, "whom you are persecuting."

As with the previous verse, Jesus relays the thought that an attack against His people is an attack against Him. It is personal and it will be reckoned as such on the day of judgment. But Paul is given a mark of grace that will lead to mercy upon him and his previous actions (1 Timothy 1:13). With this stated, Jesus continues, saying, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

Here, the word translated as "goads," *kentron*, is introduced. It is from *kenteo* (to prick) and thus it signifies "center," as in the sharp part of a sting, a thorn, a sharp weapon, and so on. It is used in reference to the sting of bees, scorpions, and so on (see Revelation 9:10). It is also used figuratively as something that stings in the emotions, as in "the sting of death" referred to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:55.

Jesus' words certainly came from a proverbial expression of the time. It is seen in various ancient Greek writings. The meaning for Paul is that he is acting like a dumb ox that kicks against the goads that are intended to prod him along. Instead of responding positively, he kicks back into the goad itself. A common saying that gives a similar sense is, "You're only hurting yourself."

Life application: The Bible has been given as a guide for our lives if we will simply utilize it as such. There are many who simply reject it, and they reject the One who is proclaimed in it. They have no understanding, and they will die apart from God. Others hear the gospel and they come to a saving knowledge of the Lord. But then, they never apply the precepts of the Bible to their lives.

Imagine the state! These people are immature, and they are unwilling to grow in the knowledge of the Lord. Their lives are unproductive, unhappy, and without a sense of direction or purpose. In essence, they spend their lives kicking against the goads (see



Ecclesiastes 12:11). God is prodding them to grow up and become responsible members of His church. But they just keep plodding along without faithfully doing as they should. Every time someone says to them, “You really should attend church and start reading your Bible,” they kick against the advice, and their week is miserable.

Or maybe they attend a church that doesn’t properly feed them with the word of God. Instead of being grounded in the hope of Christ, they are told that God wants them to prosper materially. And yet, only the pastor seems to be getting rich. The money that is supposed to be a “seed offering” that will magically multiply in their pockets never does, because it has multiplied in the pockets of these false teachers.

What kind of a follower of Christ will you be? Don’t kick against the goads. God is prodding you to follow Him, to get to know Him, and to act in accord with His expectations for you. These things cannot occur unless you are willing to put Him and His word first in your life. Be wise and study this precious word. Avoid the pains of kicking against His divine will for you!

*Lord God, surely things will be a lot better off for us if we will simply apply Your will to our lives. Help us to do so by learning what that will is through a careful study of Your word. May we seek it out all the days of our lives. To Your glory, we pray! Amen.*

**So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”  
Then the Lord *said* to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” Acts 9:6**

Note: The text of verses 9:5 and 9:6 is different based on original manuscripts, and so your Bible may not match what is presented here:

\*And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. **6** But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” (ESV)

\* And he said, “Who are You, Lord?”

Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads.”

<sup>6</sup>So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

Then the Lord *said* to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” (NKJV)

Jesus just explained to Saul (Paul) who He is and informed Saul that it is “hard to kick against the goads.” With that noted, it now says of Saul, “So he, trembling and astonished.” The word translated as trembling, *tremó*, signifies to dread or to terrify, hence trembling is the result of the mental condition. One can see the obvious root of several modern English words, such as tremor, tremble, and so on.

The next word, *thambeó*, translated as astonished, gives the idea of being perplexed or amazed. In this state one, mentally shuts down, even to the point of terror depending on the situation. In other words, Saul was both terrified and he was unable to mentally grasp the enormity of the matter. The One he had been pursuing and persecuting is the Lord God. His cognitive abilities were overwrought with the magnitude of what he now perceived. In this state, He said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

The fact that he was still alive meant there must be a purpose for him. Otherwise, the Lord could have simply revealed Himself and consumed him in a moment. But Saul realized that would not be the case, especially when presented with the words concerning kicking against the goads. It was not a statement of threat, but of warning and instruction. Saul’s immediate reaction beyond the trembling and astonishment was a submissive spirit, asking for direction.

With this now realized in him, he is no longer kicking against the goads. Instead, his compliance is anticipated. As such, Luke records, “Then the Lord *said* to him.”

This is the beginning of the relationship that will carry Saul throughout his life. He will work harder, suffer more frequently, and more fully express what has happened in the coming of Christ than any of the others whom Jesus called His apostles. But above all, it has begun with a mark of grace. Saul did not deserve the favor bestowed upon him. He realizes it now and he will continue to realize it throughout his life.

The man of the law has become a man of God’s grace. This experience will shape and define his writings to all people because all people must come to the Lord in the same manner. None can come on personal merit but only through the grace that comes through the reception of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is with this in mind that Jesus gives him instruction to prepare him for this new life, saying, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

The city is Damascus. The details will come to Saul while there, but it is true that the Lord could have simply told him right there on the way to the city what He wanted. As such, there is more than mere verbal instruction for Saul. There is a process he must go

through, there is instruction for others that hardly seem involved at all, and there will be the ongoing explanation of this event for others to share that would have been lacking if Saul was simply commissioned on the spot.

Though Saul is the key figure in the process of his conversion, that conversion in Damascus will touch others as well. Each will have his life changed by the events that will take place.

Life application: At times in our lives, we all face what is known as Cognitive Dissonance. It is the state of discomfort of the mind that results when two conflicting beliefs, attitudes, or values arise. When we are presented with something that challenges our belief systems, we will immediately try to avoid accepting it, we may explain it away, and we may simply outright reject it.

For example, if we are taught that there will be no rapture, when presented with an analysis of the rapture that is directly from the Bible, in context, and evidently true, we will still work to dismiss it. The same is true with someone who believes the rapture will be mid-trib, but then is given clear evidence that it is pre-trib. Such things cause mental anxiety as we look to affirm our current belief and ignore or explain away the obviously correct explanation.

In Paul's case, he believed one thing, and yet he was faced with the overwhelming truth that what he had believed was one hundred percent wrong. Instead of trying to argue away what had now become wholly and perfectly evident, he simply shut down. His mind was overwhelmed (see above: *thambeó*, being perplexed or amazed) and he could no longer function. It would take time for his mind to heal and redirect to the proper path.

We will normally not get such a sudden and absolute confirmation of what is correct. Rather, we will be presented with the truth of what is found in Scripture, but because of our limited knowledge of the word, we will search for ways to explain away what we have been presented. This is not wise because we may be dismissing the truth when we do.

The surest way to avoid this is to know what Scripture says, intimately. The more well-versed we are in the word, the less likely we will follow a wrong teaching. Otherwise, the next person to come along will present a case that sounds right to our ears. When he does, it may satisfy our own presuppositions about a matter (whether they are right or

not), or it may be simply convenient and involve less hard work on our part (think of King James Onlyism), and so we go with it.

This is a big problem that can be avoided if we read the word, use logic in approaching the things the Bible presents, and – above all – pray for discernment and proper direction from the Lord. Paul could not argue against the appearance of the Lord and so he submitted himself to what he now knew to be true. If we intimately know the Bible, including the words of Paul, the same should be the case. The same Lord is presenting Himself to us there. Please! Know your Bible!

*Lord God, we come before You sincerely asking for You to lead us in Your word, to keep us from incorrect teachings, and to give us the great and strong desire to want to know Your word more fully all the days of our lives. Amen.*

**And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Acts 9:7**

The Lord Jesus just said to Paul, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” Luke continues the narrative now with the words, “And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless.”

The word translated as “speechless,” *enneos*, is found only here in the Bible. It comes from another unique word, *enneuó*, which means to nod at or make a sign by nodding. As such this word signifies mute, as in a person making signs. In this case, the men are silent from a state of complete astonishment. As this is the case, it tells us that they have been captured by the vision as well as Paul has. However, there is a difference. Here, Luke records that they were “hearing a voice but seeing no one.”

A literal rendering of the Greek is, “hearing indeed the voice but seeing no one.” This is a verse that naysayers and those who attack the Bible will point to when claiming there are contradictions in Scripture. The reason for this is that it says later in Acts –

“And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.” Acts 22:9

The supposed contradiction is eliminated through understanding the intent of what has been said. The same word, *akouó*, is used in both passages. It means physically hearing, but it also means to understand. In the case of Acts 9, the men indeed heard the voice. However, in Acts 22, Paul notes to those he is speaking to in Jerusalem (to those who

speak the same language as he did) that the men with him did not understand what was being said.

Again, the same word carries both connotations. We might say, “You aren't hearing me” to someone who hears but does not understand or pay heed. We may knock on someone’s head and say, “Hellloooo, did you hear me?” when we know perfectly well that he did, even though he may not have grasped or paid attention to what was said.

The reason for the specificity is because Paul, in his defense before King Agrippa in Acts 26, says –

“And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? *It is hard for you to kick against the goads.*’” Acts 26:14

There Paul identifies the language as Hebrew (the word also covers Aramaic). But those he spoke to in Jerusalem in Acts 22 (his crazed audience), would have understood Hebrew. As this is so, it is telling us that either those with Paul in Acts 9 did not speak Hebrew, or they were purposefully withheld from understanding what Paul could readily understand. This would be a miracle like in Acts 2 then. It is comparable to the fact that Paul saw the Lord while these men did not. Their hearing/understanding and vision were hindered from what Paul clearly heard, understood, and saw.

Two (of the many) examples of hearing physically while not understanding are –

“And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear *it* [*akouó*].” Mark 4:33

“For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands [*akouó*] *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.”

-1 Corinthians 14:2

One more example shows the intent of what is now said in Acts quite clearly –

“Therefore the people who stood by and heard [*akouó*] *it* said that it had thundered. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to Him.’” John 12:29

In the example from John, some “heard” what they thought was thunder. Others clearly heard words because they refer to it as having been spoken. Thus, we can see that those in Acts 9 heard but they did not hear. There is no contradiction.

The Pulpit Commentary on Acts 22:9 correctly notes, “To see and hear the risen Christ was a privilege given to St. Paul alone.” This is the intent and point of what is seen here. The Lord purposefully revealed Himself only to Paul. The others were given enough information to know that something took place, but not enough to allow them to be converted apart from faith in what they were then told by Paul.

Life application: Jesus withheld understanding His voice and seeing His form from those with Paul for His own reasons. He appeared to Israel at a particular point in time for His own reasons. If you are saved, it happened at a point in your life that was marked out according to God’s plans. Nothing occurs apart from the knowledge of God, and when He wants something to occur at a specific time, it is going to come about.

Trust in this and know that He is in complete control over what is happening. And yet, He does it while factoring in free will. He knows those who will believe or not believe. But more, He knows when those who may not believe at one time will believe at another. He is working out things so that the most glory will come to Him – either in salvation or in judgment. He is God. He is sovereign. His purposes will come to pass.

At the same time, He is using us to effect those purposes at times. So be ready to act. Hand out those tracts, open your mouth and speak, and be sure to talk about your hope in the Lord Jesus often. He already knows if you will or not, and that has been factored in too. So be on the rewards side of the equation and do what you can while you can.

*Glorious God Almighty, help us to be active participants in the unfolding plan of redemption that You have going on in the world. May we be responsible with our time and may we be willing to put our best foot forward and act. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. Acts 9:8**

Previously, it was seen that the men who were with Paul heard a voice, but they saw no one. The narrative continues with, “Then Saul arose from the ground.” As noted in verses 9:3 & 4, he had fallen to the ground after the bright light shone around him. In the intervening verses where he conversed with the Lord, Paul would have been on the

ground before Him and with his eyes closed. That is seen in the next words, saying, “and when his eyes were opened he saw no one.”

The word is different than the previous verse where those with Paul saw no one. Here, it is a neuter adjective, and it should be translated as, “he saw nothing” –

- And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.
- Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw nothing.

Unlike the men who were miraculously prevented from seeing the brilliancy surrounding the Lord, Paul was completely blinded. In this state, it next says, “But they led him by the hand.” The leader of those who were prepared to arrest the Lord’s people had to be led by those who previously followed him. In this state of helpless blindness, it says they “brought *him* into Damascus.”

Paul did make it to Damascus, but not in the way he expected. In Acts 22, he will attribute his blindness directly to the brilliancy of the light he encountered –

“And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.” Acts 22:11

There are several natural explanations for Paul’s blindness, one is known as conversion disorder or hysterical blindness. This is an affliction where an event that causes severe emotional distress, a psychological factor, and something that certainly was the case with Paul, manifests itself physically. In this case, the physical ailment would be blindness.

Such an explanation cannot be fully dismissed, but it also cannot completely explain what occurred with Paul. First, he clearly attributes his blindness to the glory of the light. Secondly, the effects that occur later in this chapter when he regains his sight are not something that can be explained by conversion disorder. Thirdly, such naturalistic explanations don’t answer why Paul saw the brilliant light while those with him did not.

Therefore, there is possibly a naturalistic explanation for parts of what occurred, something seen with many miracles in the Bible, but there is that which goes beyond the naturalistic as well.

Life application: When we read the Bible, there is nothing wrong with trying to figure out how God performs a miracle. At times, the explanation is given right in the text. For example, in the parting of the Red Sea, the answer as to how it occurred is right in the passage –

“Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go *back* by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry *land*, and the waters were divided.” Exodus 14:21

The Lord provided an east wind to part the waters just as he provided an east wind to bring in the locusts (Exodus 10:13). Such explanations show us that God is in control of the elements, and He can and will use them to effect His purposes. However, that is not the only part of the miracles.

When the locusts came upon the land, it was told in advance to Pharaoh that it would occur. When the Red Sea was parted, it was at the exact spot where such a wind could cause the waters to divide, it was at the exact time that it needed to occur for Israel to be saved. And more, the surrounding events – such as the destruction of the Egyptian army – occurred during the same event that brought Israel to safety.

Often, naysayers of the Bible will look so intently at the naturalistic explanations surrounding a miracle that they will overlook the truly miraculous parts of them. Be attentive to the surrounding events concerning such things. It is in these details that an argument for the miraculous is actually available.

But one of the key points of such a defense is that someone took the time to argue for a naturalistic explanation. That means that he has now set the account as both factual and acceptable as recorded history. Otherwise, there would be no reason to try to explain it away as naturalistic. Once a person has taken this position, providing the surrounding points that are truly miraculous will set their arguments off as illogical and without merit.

*Lord God, while people try to diminish the truth or accuracy of Your word, we can watch their attempts fail time and time again. But we can only do this if we know it well enough to dismiss their arguments as unacceptable. Otherwise, we have no footing to do so. Please help us to be prepared for the attacks that are made. Help us to be ready to defend what Your word says while having faith that what it conveys is true. Amen.*



**And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Acts 9:9**

The previous verse saw Saul being led by the hand into the city of Damascus. Now, while there, it says, “And he was three days without sight.”

The Greek is a present participle verb, not a noun. It says, “And he was three days without seeing.” Rather than saying he was blind, as if it was a form of punishment, it says he was without seeing. The meaning is the same, but the choice of words seems purposeful. Paul was given a period of darkness to help him consider his state before God. It is not unlike what occurred in Egypt –

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness *which* may even be felt.’<sup>22</sup> So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days.<sup>23</sup> They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.” Exodus 10:21-23

The people of Egypt were not blind, but rather they simply could not see. It is probably during this time that many Egyptians decided they had enough and would join with Israel. The probable timing of the events was the selection of the Passover Lambs followed by the three days of darkness. Once the darkness was over, the mixed multitude that went out of Egypt was probably more than ready to go with them. The darkness was a time to consider what had happened and to choose to follow the right path.

Likewise, Paul was not able to see for three days after having seen Christ. He could consider his life up to this point, meaning his actions that had brought him to where he was now, and then redirect everything he was made of for a new path.

It is not uncommon for scholars to attempt to tie this period in with Paul’s vision of 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. But there is nothing to suggest this and everything to argue against it. Paul says there that he did not know if the vision he had was in the body or out. While in Damascus, he would have known perfectly well that he was in the body. His inability to see would remind him of this. Further, the events in Damascus occurred at a point prior to his conversion and baptism. It is not likely that God would transport him to the “third heaven” prior to his becoming an apostle.

Paul had to first contemplate his state before God and have his mind and heart directed to Him. This was surely the purpose of the state of not being able to see. And more, it next says of him, “and neither ate nor drank.”

Both of these speak of intake. Combined with the inability to intake new information through his eyes, he was left with the basic senses of hearing and feeling. Thus, his mind would be far more attuned to what was important without the distractions of sight and food. This was a time of reflection and he used it as such by not filling himself with physical food, but with the spiritual food of thought and contemplation.

Life application: There are times in our lives when great decisions need to be made. At such times, redirecting our senses to the Lord in a greater way than we normally would is to be considered. When we are bombarded with a constant stream of information coming in, these things can only confuse the mind and distract it from what is most important.

If you have important decisions to make, a time of quiet, prayer, and even fasting may be called for. Cutting out the externals that can draw our attention away from proper focus should always be considered and acted upon based on the surrounding circumstances.

*Lord God, there is a lot to distract us in our daily lives. And there are times when we need to not be distracted. Give us wisdom when such times arise to put away the things that fill our normal daily life and to focus on seeking You more fully. In this, we will be prepared to more rightly decide what we should do. Give us wisdom in this, O God. Amen.*

**Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.”**

**And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” Acts 9:10**

The previous verse noted that Paul was without sight for three days and that he neither ate nor drank. It is during this time that the next words occur, saying, “Now there was a certain disciple.”

It is the same word, *mathétés*, used three times in Acts 6 (verses 1, 2, and 7), and then again in Acts 9:1 when referring to the disciples of Jesus. It signifies a learner. In this case, it is a follower of Christ who learns the doctrines laid out in Scripture and what is required to conduct oneself rightly. He is said to be “at Damascus.”

Rather, it says “in Damascus.” It is where he is located, and he was one of the people who would have been targeted by Paul once he arrived and started rounding up the believers. Of him, it says he is “named Ananias.”

It is the Greek transliteration from Khananyah (Hananyah), or “Yah is Gracious.” It is not an uncommon name, and it is seen about 30 times in the Old Testament. In the New Testament it is the name of the husband of Sapphira in Acts 5 and also one of the high priests seen in Acts 23:2 and 24:1. In Acts 22, this man is called a “devout man” using a term that signifies God-fearing or, literally, “taking hold of what is good.” Of him, it next says, “and to him the Lord said in a vision, ‘Ananias.’”

In the coming verses, it is fully apparent that this is the Lord Jesus who is addressing him. He is called personally in order to direct him. This is certainly intended to be used as a validation of the one who the Lord will commission. In other words, Ananias has been selected for the specific purpose of being a reliable testimony to the Lord’s having chosen Saul (Paul) for his apostolic ministry.

1. Ananias is a resident of Damascus, the city targeted by Paul.
2. Ananias is a disciple of Jesus, the specific group targeted by Paul.
3. Ananias is a devout man, meaning his testimony is known to be reliable.
4. Ananias is not an apostle. As such, this fact will add unique credence to Paul’s ministry. Paul’s apostolic doctrine came not from one of the apostles (Galatians 1:17), but directly from the Lord. Further, his calling is from the Lord, but the message is transmitted by a regular disciple.

Because of these things, Ananias’ testimony will be all the more credible and readily accepted by those who hear from him of what will now transpire. In response to the Lord’s call, it next says, “And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord.’”

This is the standard answer of many people called by the Lord in the Old Testament. It is a way of saying, “I am present and at your disposal.” With that noted, the Lord’s directions to him will be forthcoming.

Life application: Everything about Paul’s selection and conversion is marked off as a unique occurrence. In this, he is a part of, but separated from, the other apostles. As such, his commission is a unique one that will carry the already established church through the next two millennia (so far) as the Gentiles take the lead role in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. Because of this, a few points should be considered.

1. The church is already established based on the introduction of the New Covenant in Christ's blood.
2. Gentile inclusion has already been established *prior* to Saul's (Paul's) recorded conversion (Acts 8).
3. Gentile inclusion will continue to occur *prior* to the focus of Acts being on Paul (Acts 10).
4. The gospel that Paul proclaims is the same gospel as the other apostles proclaim (1 Corinthians 15:11).
5. Paul's ministry was not only to the Gentiles, but always to the Jew first (Acts 9:20, 13:14, 14:1, 17:1, 17:10, 18:4, 18:19, 19:8, 28:17, etc.). Therefore,
6. Paul's ministry is not a new ministry to establish the church. Rather, it is a ministry established to continue the expansion of the church in sharing the gospel, after the (known to the Lord) rejection of it by Israel, with the Gentiles.

These points are especially highlighted by the fact that Gentiles are included in the chapter prior to and directly after Paul's conversion in Acts 9. They are brought into the church by Jews at the direction of Jesus personally.

As this is so, it demonstrates that those who proclaim the doctrine of hyperdispensationalism are teaching a false and heretical doctrine that destroys the purpose and intent of the Lord's personal workings in Acts to establish and continue His church. Hyperdispensationalism teaches a false gospel by proclaiming two separate gospels, one for the Jew and one for the Gentile. This is, according to Paul in Galatians 1, anathema.

*Heavenly Father, may we carefully consider what Acts is telling us and properly evaluate what is going on there. Help us to consider it thoughtfully because many false teachers have come to proclaim heretical teachings based on a misapplication of what is taught out of the book. So, Lord, guide us carefully through this foundational part of Your precious word. Amen.*

**So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. Acts 9:11**

Ananias' calling by the Lord Jesus has been noted. His instruction concerning that calling now begins with the words, "So the Lord said to him." These words are now given in response to Ananias' answer, "Here I am, Lord." As he has acknowledged the Lord's call, the Lord will now give him direction by saying, "Arise."

The verb is an aorist participle. It should read, “Having arisen.” It is telling us that Ananias may have been lying down in bed when he received the call, hence it may be a vision not unlike that spoken by Job –

“For God may speak in one way, or in another,  
*Yet man does not perceive it.*

<sup>15</sup> In a dream, in a vision of the night,  
When deep sleep falls upon men,  
While slumbering on their beds,

<sup>16</sup> Then He opens the ears of men,  
And seals their instruction.” Job 33:14-16

Daniel refers to visions while on a bed several times as well. It is also possible that Ananias fell to the floor once the Lord appeared to him. But nothing is documented concerning that, which would be normal for Luke to record. Either way, however, Jesus is speaking to him in sequence. First, “Having arisen,” and then (omitting “and” which is not in the Greek text) “go to the street called Straight.”

The street called Straight is still in Damascus today. Damascus was redesigned during the Greek period by a man named Hippodamus, giving it a grid structure. The street called Straight was 1,500 meters long, extending across the city. It is the longest of the streets on this grid. There is the Mariamite Cathedral of Damascus on Straight Street which was built in the 2nd century. Since then, it has been rebuilt multiple times, and it presently is known as the seat of the Antiochian Orthodox Church. It is to this street that Ananias is directed to go “and inquire at the house of Judas.”

Nothing more is known about this particular man named Judas, even knowing if he was a believer or not. With Saul’s (Paul’s) status still up in the air concerning the faith, that could be guessed either way. What is certain is that after the coming events transpire, if he was not a believer, he would get an earful about Jesus from Saul. Another Judas is mentioned in Acts 15, but it cannot be known if he is the same man. As for Ananias, once he arrived at this house, he was to inquire “for one called Saul of Tarsus.”

This is the first time that the location identified with Saul, meaning his place of birth/growing up, is recorded. Identifying him as Saul of Tarsus is to pinpoint him distinctly from others named Saul. And more, it is also to inform the reader that he is a Jew that was a part of the dispersion. Thus, he would be familiar with the way Gentiles lived. He would also more than likely speak several languages and dialects (see 1

Corinthians 14:18). If so, and at this point it is only conjecture, he is a logical choice for being called as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Tarsus, or Tarseus as a literal transliteration of the Greek, is noted here and in Acts 21:39. It is also called Tarsos in Acts 9:30, 11:25, and 22:3. James Strong speculates that the name comes from *tarsos*, meaning a flat basket. If so, it may reflect the layout of the city.

About the city, Thayer's Greek Lexicon states it is "... a maritime city, the capital of Cilicia during the Roman period (Josephus, Antiquities 1, 6, 1), situated on the river Cydnus, which divided it into two parts (hence, the plural Τάρσοι). It was not only large and populous, but also renowned for its Greek learning and its numerous schools of philosophers (Strabo 14, p. 613 (cf. Lightfoot on Colossians, p. 303f)). Moreover, it was a free city (Pliny, 5, 22), and exempt alike from the jurisdiction of a Roman governor, and the maintenance of a Roman garrison; although it was not a Roman 'colony'. It had received its freedom from Antony (Appendix, b. 104:5, 7) on the condition that it might retain its own magistrates and laws, but should acknowledge the Roman sovereignty and furnish auxiliaries in time of war..."

As for Ananias, Jesus continues His words to him, saying, "for behold, he is praying." Saul went without seeing for three days and he neither ate nor drank (Acts 9:9). But he didn't waste his time lying around moaning. Instead, he spent it praying. He had seen the risen Lord, and his life would be forever changed. As of yet, he had no idea what that meant, but he is about to find out.

Life application: The Bible mentions the word "pray" almost 400 times, from Genesis to Revelation. At times, it is mandated, such as in Genesis 20:7 (the first time prayer is mentioned). At times, it is encouraged, such as in Psalm 122:6. Sometimes a prayer is heard immediately, such as in 2 Kings 20:1-4. Sometimes, a prayer is not responded to for a considerable amount of time (see Daniel 10:10-14).

There are prayers the Lord finds pleasing, and he responds favorably to them, such as in Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 1:12-18. And there are prayers that the Lord cannot respond to, as Isaiah 59:1, 2 reveals.

There are people that wonder how prayer can be effective if God already knows everything that will ever occur. If this is so, then how can prayer make any difference? But this is the same fallacious thinking as those who say that if God already knows about everyone who will be saved, then man must not have free will.

If God knows that He will take an action after prayer, it does not change the fact that prayer is needed. This is seen in Job 42:7-10. The obvious thing that can be deduced from the Bible about prayer is that it does have an effect, even if God already knows the outcome. As such, a prayer that is not uttered is a prayer that will not be responded to. A prayer that is made at least has the possibility of being granted if it is in accord with the will of God.

Paul tells us to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We cannot overload God with prayer. In fact, we are pleasing Him by being obedient to the exhortation to pray. And we can know from Jesus' words that the more we pray, the more likely we are to get an answer (Luke 18:1-8). As these things are seen to be true from Scripture, pray! An unspoken prayer is no prayer at all. Pray!

*Lord God, help us to be people of prayer. May our words of praise, petition, and supplication reach Your ears, and may You respond to them according to Your great wisdom. Hear the prayers of Your people, O God, including this one. Amen.*

**“And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.” Acts 9:12**

Ananias was told by the Lord to go to Straight Street, inquiring at the house of Judas for a Saul of Tarsus, noting that he would be praying. The Lord continues with His words now, saying, “And in a vision.”

The word translated as “vision” is the same word just used in verse 9:10 to describe the vision that Ananias is currently having. It is an interesting thought then that Ananias is having a vision explaining to him that another person has had a vision. If Ananias trusts his own senses, then he must trust what is conveyed in his vision, and therefore he must trust that the vision seen by Saul (Paul) was real as well. But Ananias has not yet laid his hands on him, despite the fact that Jesus says, “he has seen.”

It is an aorist verb. As such, it is an event that has occurred at a particular moment without regard to time, but Jesus is speaking of it as if it has occurred in a vision, meaning before the event actually takes place.

The vision which Saul had is now complete in Saul's mind as stated by Jesus, and yet it has not yet actually occurred in the stream of time. That is evident from the continued words of the verse. It shows that Christ is transcendent over time, and He has the ability to call it back from the past or to project it from the future.

As this is the case now, it really doesn't matter if the time is short, such as in a few hours, or if it spans millennia. It demonstrates that Christ is "above" time and thus can operate "outside of" time. As such, His appearance in Genesis 18 or Judges 13 is just as possible as it is within a short time between His appearance to Saul and then Ananias. And more, His knowledge of the future events referred to in Revelation are equally possible. Understanding this, His words continue, saying, "a man named Ananias."

Jesus tells Ananias that Saul's vision includes him and that after arriving at Saul's location, the vision will have been a past event. In this vision, it will be of Ananias "coming in and putting his hand on him."

The verbs are aorist participles. It rightly says, "having come and having put his hand on him." It is not known when Saul received the vision. For all we know, it could have happened at the same moment that Ananias had his. Or it could have been before it or as Ananias is on the way to the house. But by the time he arrives, Saul will have seen the the vision.

Because of this, it would then allow him to know with absolute certainty that what transpired was of the Lord and not of human effort. The Lord will be the Source and Power behind what happens, whereas Ananias will simply be the means by which it is carried out. The laying on of his hands will be the mode by which it occurs. Ananias is to do this to Paul "so that he might receive his sight."

The translation is correct. The verb is subjunctive. It is a hypothetical event. The laying on of the hands is what will bring about the reality of what is, at this time, merely a possibility. Ananias is being informed that he is the one to carry out what is needed for Saul to have his vision restored.

One can assume that if Ananias didn't do this, the vision Saul had would be proven false. In other words, if someone named Harry showed up and laid his hands on him and his sight was restored, it would not be a miracle of the Lord, but a healing by Harry because the Lord's vision for Saul was that Ananias would do it. Everything about its miraculous character would suddenly be called into question.

If Harry knew Saul's medical condition, he could come in and show himself to be a great healer and that a naturalistic explanation is sufficient. Or he could claim to be a man of God by healing Saul and profit off of the situation personally. Everything must occur as is seen in the vision. As it will, then it demonstrates the Lord's absolute knowledge of the matter and His sovereignty over time and the events that take place.



Life application: In Amos 9, it says when speaking of the people of Israel –

“I will bring back the captives of My people Israel;  
They shall build the waste cities and inhabit *them*;  
They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them;  
They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them.  
<sup>15</sup> I will plant them in their land,  
And no longer shall they be pulled up  
From the land I have given them,  
Says the LORD your God.” Amos 9:14,15

Either this is true, or it is not. As this has never taken place, because Israel has been uprooted in the past and is only now back in the land of Israel, then either it must continue to take place into the future, or the Bible is not the word of God.

Prophecy is a part of Scripture that either proves or disproves its veracity. If the prophecies of the Bible are not true, then the Bible is conveying a false message. As this is so, then we can look to the prophecies of the Bible that have been fulfilled, and we can then be confident that what is promised into the future will also be fulfilled. Essentially, God has placed His integrity on the line for us to check and see if what He says is true.

He has done this so that we can know. He has done this so that we should know. He has done this so that we are without excuse for not knowing.

Let us be confident in the word as it continues to unfold as prophesied within the stream of time. It has validated itself and it continues to do so to this day.

*Lord God, thank You for the surety we possess because of the reliability of Your word. It proclaims the future, and then the events come to pass as You have spoken. As this is so, we can confidently continue to hold fast to the promises that lie yet ahead, knowing that they will occur. And those promises, because of Jesus our Lord, are great indeed!  
Hallelujah and Amen!*

**Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. Acts 9:13**

Previously, it was seen that the Lord explained to Ananias that he was seen in a vision by Paul putting his hand on him so that he might receive his sight. The conversation now continues with, “Then Ananias answered.”

One might think Ananias would, without hesitation, agree to what he had been told. He is in a vision with the Lord. And more, he is being told by Him that he was to go do something that had already been revealed to someone else as an accomplished fact. It is straightforward and simple. It is clear and unambiguous. And it is the Lord Himself who is conveying the message to him.

But instead of simply saying, “Yes, Lord, I can do that!” He pulls a “Moses at the burning bush” and starts giving reasons why the direction of the Lord isn’t the right thing to do. This begins with, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man.”

The words, “I have heard,” indicate that Ananias had lived for an extended period in Damascus. He may have been visiting Jerusalem during the pilgrim feast right at the beginning of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 and became a believer at that time. In his return to his home after the feast, he had slowly become aware of the persecution those in Jerusalem were facing.

Further, the words also hint at the notion that he seems to think Jesus is unaware of what he knows. When taken with all that he is going to say, this first clause essentially says, “I’m sure you want me to do this, but I know other information about this guy that you are obviously unaware of. So, before I say, ‘No,’ I want you to know why.”

It really appears as if he thinks the Lord is somehow unaware of what is going on and so He needs to be brought up to speed on the matter. As such, Ananias continues, saying, “how much harm he has done to Your saints.”

The Lord is asking him to put his hands on Paul and heal him while Paul has been manhandling those he is aligned with. Jesus somehow missed this, and Ananias is giving him the necessary briefing to open the Lord’s own eyes so that he doesn’t have to open Paul’s eyes. The thought, though incredible to us now, appears to be just what is in the mind of Ananias.

It is of note that this is the first time since the establishment of the church in Acts 2 that the term *hagios*, “holy” or “saints,” has been used concerning the people of the Lord. There are a couple of points that can be deduced from this. The first is that Ananias says (and the Bible affirms) that they are “Your saints,” meaning saints of the Lord Jesus.

Those who follow Him are regarded as being His people. As they are saints set apart to God as holy, then it – by default – means that Jesus is God.

Secondly, so far, the word *hagios*, has been used when speaking of the Holy Spirit, when speaking of Jesus (such as in Acts 3:14), when referring to “the Holy One and the Just,” when referring to the Old Testament prophets (see Acts 3:21), and of the holy place in Jerusalem (see Acts 6:13).

It is a term used by Paul of those he persecuted in Acts 26:10, and it is a word he uses time and again in his epistles when referring to people in the exact same context as Ananias now, meaning people set apart by the Lord in this new dispensation, the church age. It is another clear and unambiguous clue that the church began in Acts 2 and not, as many ridiculously claim, as having begun with Paul’s ministry.

Rather, the “saints” of the New Testament are saints because of the finished work of Jesus, not because of the preaching of Paul. For now, Ananias’ words end with “in Jerusalem.”

The persecution of the saints was centered on, but not limited to, Jerusalem. But by saying “in Jerusalem,” it appears to be a continued questioning of the Lord’s awareness of what was going on. It is as if he is saying, “Lord, this is going on right in your Holy City. Aren’t you aware of how detrimental and cunning this guy is? He is doing this right behind your back... right in Jerusalem!”

As odd, and even comical, as this might seem to us now, Ananias is much like Moses at the burning bush. He stated things that we can almost shake our heads in amazement at, wondering what he was thinking. But this shows us our inability to perceive the greatness of God.

Life application: How often do we question God about events happening around us? “Lord, don’t you see what is going on in the world today? Don’t you care?” “O God, why did my son get into this horrible accident? Weren’t you paying attention? For the rest of his life, he will be a cripple.”

Our questioning of God’s ability, caring, knowledge, love, etc. goes on and on. It is as if we can trust Him for the proper functioning of the planet, the solar system, the galaxy, and – indeed – an entire universe, but we cannot trust Him with the affairs of our own lives. He has it all under control until something negatively affects us.

However, this is not true. The disconnect is not with God, but with us. When things get out of whack, it is from our perspective. We are not God, but by calling into question His ability to properly conduct His affairs, it places us – not Him – at the center of focus. We are just a small part of a plan that has been going on since the day God created man on this earth. It is not all about us. Rather, it is all about Him and what He is doing through Jesus Christ to bring us back to Himself. Let us trust this. Let God be God, and may we accept that what is happening around us is not out of His knowledge or control!

*Heavenly Father, surely You are in complete control. Even in a world that may seem to be spinning into complete chaos around us, You remain unaffected by it and completely aware of it. While we see turmoil, You see things working toward a good and proper end. Help us to have faith and to trust You through these trials. Amen.*

**And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”**

Acts 9:14

Ananias just attempted to instruct the Lord on why Saul was not a great person in order to avoid laying hands on him. That continues now with this verse, saying, “And here he has authority from the chief priests.”

Again, he sounds like Moses who protested three times about why he was unqualified and unsuitable for the calling he had been given. Ananias explains that Saul isn’t just a loose cannon who is out causing trouble on his own. Instead, what he is doing is with the support and authority of the chief priests. It is as if he is saying, “The weight of Israel’s religious leaders is with him, Lord, aren’t you aware of this?” With this in mind, he then explains to the Lord that Paul’s commission is “to bind all who call on Your name.”

“Lord, that includes me! Why would you tell me to go heal someone who is intent on arresting me?” As for calling on the Lord, this is the same thought that began in Acts 2 with Peter, and it continues on through the writings of Paul, demonstrating that the message, calling, and audience are one –

“And it shall come to pass  
That whoever calls on the name of the LORD  
Shall be saved.” Acts 2:21

“Then all who heard were amazed, and said, ‘Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?’” Acts 9:21

“For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’” Romans 10:13

“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:” 1 Corinthians 1:2

“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” 2 Timothy 2:22

Since the coming of Christ, to call on the name of the Lord (Yehovah) is directly equated to calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. This is because Jesus is the Lord (Yehovah) incarnate. He is the full, final, and forever expression of God for us to see and understand. As this is so, calling on Jesus brings one into the church and thus into the kingdom that is referred to by the apostles. It is one calling for both Jew and Gentile. It is based on one gospel message that is given to both Jew and Gentile. This is what Scripture teaches. The church that began in Acts 2 goes on in a continuous stream from that point.

On the other hand, the main focus of that church is set to transfer because of Israel’s rejection of the Lord Jesus. This is the primary purpose of Paul’s ministry. It is not to give a new gospel or to start a new entity, but to bring into the fold a group of people who will carry the one and only gospel message forth for a set time, predetermined by God, until the nation of Israel finally accepts the One they had once rejected.

Life application: Reading the Bible with a presupposition about a particular doctrine will naturally lead to a bias against anything else, even if that “something else” is correct. One must be willing to put aside his biases (and his pride at having been wrong) and acknowledge what is correct. It is one of the hardest things to do, but it is something that should be done in order to properly align one’s thinking with what God is actually doing in the process of redemptive history.

Be sure to go where the Bible leads. If you are wrong, the only one who is harmed is you. God remains unchanged by your poor doctrine. Before calling on Christ, Paul’s doctrine was based on a lifetime of study and then a misunderstanding of what God had done. When Christ came, he was unable to accept what was clearly before him. It took a divine intervention by the Lord Jesus to wake him up.

Today, we will not get a personal visit from Jesus because we now have the completed word of God. But we often still stubbornly bang our heads against theological walls

because we are unwilling to see what God has done and is doing. That's a sad place to be. If you need to, take three days off, isolate yourself, and get into the word. Do a study on the issue that you are told you are wrong about and check it out. The answers for right thinking and correct doctrine are there.

*Lord God, how marvelous You are to allow us to hold Your word, to consider it, and to search it out. But it is big, it is complicated, and there are a lot of people with false agendas that would lead us away from its truth. And so, O God, help us to see rightly what You are conveying to us in this wonderful treasure. Amen.*

**But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Acts 9:15**

The previous verse stated the words of Ananias, “And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” With his words complete, we read, “But the Lord said to him.”

Jesus responds to Ananias' protestations with a direct and unambiguous command, saying, “Go.” It is an imperative verb. Ananias probably was a bit confused at this point. He had just clearly explained to the Lord that Saul (Paul) was not a good guy, but the Lord directs him to go anyway. Jesus explains why he is to do this, saying, “for he is a chosen vessel of Mine.”

The Greek literally says, “he is a choice vessel *to Me.*” Jesus looked beyond Saul's current state and saw the value in him. Calling Saul a vessel is a Hebraism that is used in various ways in the Old Testament. For example, it is used a couple times in Jeremiah –

“Is this man Coniah a despised, broken idol—  
A vessel in which *is* no pleasure?  
Why are they cast out, he and his descendants,  
And cast into a land which they do not know?” Jeremiah 22:28

“Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon  
Has devoured me, he has crushed me;  
He has made me an empty vessel,  
He has swallowed me up like a monster;  
He has filled his stomach with my delicacies,  
He has spit me out.” Jeremiah 51:34

In the New Testament, it is also used when referring to people –

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.” 2 Corinthians 4:7

“that each of you know his own vessel to possess in sanctification and honour,” 1 Thessalonians 4:4 (YLT)

Unlike the king of Israel in Jeremiah 22 (above) who was a vessel in which the Lord had no pleasure, He knew Saul’s potential and his determined attitude. With a correction of his thinking about who Jesus is, it was clear that Paul was the very best possible choice to, as He says, “bear My name.”

The meaning is that Saul would be an ambassador of Christ Jesus, a function where a person bears the name – meaning one to communicate the intent and words – of the one who sends him. Saul twice specifically states that he is an ambassador of the Lord. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, he cites it in connection with the other apostles, saying, “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.” Also, in Ephesians 6:20, he says, “for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

As you can see, in both of those instances, the idea of bearing the name of Jesus is evident. The apostle spoke on behalf of the Lord, conveying His intents and purposes for those they encountered. In Saul’s case, that was to include writing out epistles on behalf of the Lord. Jesus next notes that Saul’s authority extended to representing Him “before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.”

Speaking to Ananias, the Lord clearly indicates what the primary function of Saul would be. It was not to speak to Israel so much as it was – first and foremost – to speak to the Gentiles. This explains the term “apostle to the Gentiles” that Paul states several times (Romans 11:13, Galatians 2:8, 1 Timothy 2:7, 2 Timothy 1:11, and implied many times elsewhere).

Despite this being his main calling, it was not his only calling. He was to speak on Christ’s behalf before Kings, something he did before Agrippa and Caesar, and he was to also carry the Lord’s words to the children of Israel, something he always did prior to then going to the Gentiles. In each new city or district that he traveled to, he would present himself and his doctrine to the synagogue first.

As can be seen here, the ministry of Saul to the Gentiles was to be one of primary focus, but not sole focus. The same is true with Peter. His primary focus was to the circumcision (meaning the Jews), but it was not to be his sole focus, as will be clearly evidenced in the coming chapter. The lie that there are two gospels and that the church began with Paul (hyperdispensationalism) is clearly refuted by a simple read through Acts and the epistles.

Life application: Jesus' words to Ananias clearly tell us that the church did not replace Israel (replacement theology). Jesus was commissioning Saul to go "before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel." He specifically states Israel as a separate category to be witnessed to. At no future time does the Bible ever call the church "Israel," nor do the promises to national Israel ever transfer to the church while leaving Israel out.

Rather, the church joins into the spiritual blessings (the commonwealth) of Israel (Ephesians 2:12). Such points of doctrine as this are not difficult to determine, but once someone accepts faulty doctrine, it becomes solidified in the mind. From that point on, no matter how much evidence of what is correct is presented, unless the person is willing to say, "Maybe I am wrong," nothing will change his mind.

This is why trying to convey one's personal doctrine to another person, even if it is absolutely correct, can be so maddening. What is accurate is plainly evident, but the other person's mind simply refuses to accept the truth. This is mostly because pride steps in and refuses to admit error has taken over. It is also why we are admonished to not argue with people over such things. State your case, show what is correct, and then let it be. Until they are willing to accept what Scripture actually teaches, they are vessels of obstruction and are of no value in discussing proper doctrine.

*Lord God, help us to know when to walk away from someone who is unwilling to accept sound doctrine. In the end, our constant attempts to correct them will fall on deaf ears, and they often only cause the person to even further set his feet on the path of falsity. May we know when to state our case and when it is time to no longer argue. Help us to be discerning in this. Amen.*

**For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." Acts 9:16**

The previous verse noted the Lord telling Ananias that he was to go to Saul (Paul) exactly as he had been instructed. The Lord then noted, "for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel." With that, Jesus continues, saying, "For I will show."



It is referring to Saul, and it speaks of how the Lord will reveal to him what will come to pass. Some of what he will be shown probably occurred within the immediate future. At times, as will be seen below, Saul would receive advanced notice of things lying just ahead. And what the Lord will show him is “how many things he must suffer.”

Ananias had just said a moment earlier, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name” Acts 9:13, 14. The Lord is now instructing Ananias that what is coming upon Saul will be more in number, and often more in intensity, than anything Saul had done to any of those he persecuted.

Just as Saul persecuted his own people, so the Jews would (and to this day many through cursing and reviling still) do to him. But there was no safety when he was away from his own people. The Gentiles also often hounded him or misunderstood him, causing him to suffer even among them. An example of a great trial that lay ahead of him, and which he was shown in advance was coming, is found in Acts 20.

“And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.” Acts 20:22, 23

The trials, accusations, and imprisonments that lay ahead in Acts 20 were to be from both Jews and Gentiles. But this was par for the course in his life. He wrote to those at Corinth about the troubles he faced in some detail –

“Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I. <sup>23</sup> Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool— I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. <sup>24</sup> From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; <sup>26</sup> *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; <sup>27</sup> in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— <sup>28</sup> besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. <sup>29</sup> Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn *with indignation*?” 2 Corinthians 11:22-29

Saul's afflictions went on and on during his life, and even to this day, his epistles bring his name scorn and contempt. And this isn't just from those outside of the faith. Rather, it comes even from those in the church, particularly in the more liberal congregations. It is as if the insertion of his letters into Scripture is to be subject to the greatest scrutiny of all. And all of this was to be, as Jesus says, "for My name's sake."

Ananias was being told, right from the start, that Saul's life henceforth was to be as an offering to God in the name of Jesus. Saul, later in his life, acknowledges just this to Timothy –

"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." 2 Timothy 4:6-8

But this ill treatment towards Saul couldn't faze him because he had his eyes firmly on the prize which is found in Jesus Christ –

"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. <sup>8</sup> Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; <sup>10</sup> that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, <sup>11</sup> if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

-Philippians 3:7-11

Life application: In his first epistle, Peter shows that suffering for the faith is not something confined to the apostles. Rather, any who are in the faith can and should expect it at any given time –

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; <sup>13</sup> but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. <sup>14</sup> If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. <sup>15</sup> But let none of you

suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. <sup>16</sup>Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter." 1 Peter 4:12-16

The term "Christian" as used by Peter is not limited to the addressees of his epistle, meaning Jewish believers. It is intended for any who follow Christ. In aligning oneself with Jesus, a person – by default – is aligned against the system of this world. Those who belong to this world cannot fully appreciate what it means to be a Christian, and their thinking may even be wholly opposed to the message of Christ.

This is especially so because the gospel not only applies exclusively to those who have believed, but it actively calls out that any who have not believed are enemies of God and they stand condemned. When this truth is understood by those who do not believe, it brings with it a great deal of enmity. This is why the pope today refuses to acknowledge that unbelievers are condemned. It is certainly why adding Mary into RCC theology occurred as well. In having more than one mediator, the message is no longer exclusive.

It is hard to acknowledge to those you are witnessing to that what they believe will only lead to condemnation. This is especially so when there are unbelieving family members involved. "How dare you condemn my dead mother!" But it is the Bible that makes the claim, and therefore we cannot equivocate on what it says. And this is what then leads to persecution and suffering to whatever degree. Those who hear are often willing to go to great extremes, even persecution of those who convey the message, in order to deny the truth of God's exclusive path to salvation.

*Lord God, help us to be strong in our faith and to stand fast on the truth of what Jesus has done. May we never deny that He alone is the answer to our disconnect with You. Help us to be bold and firm in our faith, even in the face of persecution, suffering, or death. Amen.*

**And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Acts 9:17**

After accepting the Lord's words concerning Saul (Paul), Ananias complies with the directive to meet with him. That now is seen with the words, "And Ananias went his way."

Ananias was initially reluctant to comply with the Lord's words, but after realizing that the Lord actually had a plan that was already figured out and that he was to be an active participant in it, he yielded to the Lord's will and departed to Straight Street "and entered the house."

This is exactly what he was initially instructed to do. In verse 9:11, it said, "So the Lord *said* to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus.'" Therefore, this is now that house belonging to Judas. Having entered it, Luke next records, "and laying his hands on him."

The verb is an aorist participle. It should read, "and having laid his hands on him." Luke is methodically detailing each step as it occurs in the order of events. As for this one, this is exactly what Saul was told would be the case in his vision in verse 9:12 –

"And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

This would be the confirmation to Saul (Paul), as well as to Ananias, that everything that has occurred has been carefully orchestrated by the Lord. Each man would be able to bear witness that the outcome was shown to them in advance and that it occurred just as it was revealed to them. With that understood, and with Ananias having laid his hand on him, "he said, Brother Saul."

It is obvious that this goes beyond the fellowship of being Jews. It is an indication that because the Lord has accepted Saul, he is to be considered a believing brother in the Lord. As such, he welcomes him with words regarding this fellowship, by first proclaiming the One who made it possible, saying, "the Lord Jesus."

The very One that Saul had implicitly persecuted through the active persecution of His people was now being proclaimed over him as the One who had granted him mercy and taken him to be an apostle. Ananias notes that it is this Lord Jesus "who appeared to you on the road as you came." This now forms a link to verse 9:5 –

"And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?'

Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads.'"

Any possibility that Saul was simply confused or maybe driven mad by his own guilt, thus fabricating the entire vision (as some have claimed), is now erased. The Lord who

appeared on the road is the One who is now being presented by Ananias once again to bring about Saul's deliverance from the darkness that overshadowed him. This is seen in Ananias' words that Jesus "has sent me that you may receive your sight."

This should actually say, "that you may regain your sight." Saul had a vision of the Lord on the road. He was unable to see after that occurred. He was then given another vision where a man named Ananias would come and put his hands on him so that he might regain his sight. And now, a man named Ananias has come and put his hands on him, claiming authority as the Lord's emissary to do exactly that.

No part of the equation is missing, and so there can be no question left in the mind of either man about the surety of the Source of the events now taking place. And more, new information is given for us to consider. Saul is not only to receive his sight, but Ananias adds, "and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

This is a unique occurrence so far in Acts where the Holy Spirit is given apart from the presence of any apostle. It is also given without any noted sequence of events in relation to Paul's baptism. Nothing is said if the Holy Spirit is received at this time, during the baptism, or after it. Ananias simply ties the event in with the laying on of his hands, and so only an inference can be made that Saul is immediately filled with the Spirit at this moment.

As such, it is completely out of the sequence of events given in Acts 2 which was the command given to those of Israel who had listened to Peter at Pentecost –

"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Acts 2:38

Saul did not need to repent (change his mind) because he had just spent the last three days doing exactly that. Therefore, he was already aware of who Jesus was and had accepted that He is the same One who had been crucified and resurrected.

Because Saul received the Spirit apart from the presence of the apostles, it confirms that his commission is to be considered one directly from the Lord as an apostle, and one bearing a unique charge. The record of Acts, and the later writings of Peter, will confirm this special commission, as do Paul's own epistles.

Life application: The church did not begin at this time. The church has already been in place for an extended period, having begun in Acts 2 with the coming of the Holy Spirit. The significance of the event now occurring in Acts 9 is that the nation of Israel will become less and less of a focus in redemptive history for an unknown, but extended period of time – exactly as the curses of Deuteronomy 28 proclaim.

During this time, any individual – Jew or Gentile – may partake of the benefit of inclusion in the church. This will become perfectly evident as the focus on Paul becomes preeminent. But it will begin to be seen not with Paul, but with Peter. That is coming in Acts 10. Acts is giving an orderly and methodical account of why Israel as a nation was to be set aside during a time of national punishment. When that time is over, the time of the Gentiles will also come to a close.

The church is not “spiritual Israel,” nor does it replace national Israel, and the church does not receive the Old Testament promises that were made to Israel. The church is a body that grows out of the completed work of Jesus Christ. National Israel is a body from which Christ came, and to which promises that are yet to be fulfilled will be realized.

Keep your theological boxes straight, and you will avoid great error in your theology and doctrine.

*Lord God, how faithful You are to Israel. They rejected You when they rejected the coming of Christ Jesus. And yet, You have kept them just as You promised You would, and You have brought them back to the land in order to fulfill the promises You made to them in Your word. How sure we can be that we will receive the same careful attention! We need not worry if we fail You. You will never fail us. Great are You, O God! Amen.*

**Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.** Acts 9:18

The previous verse referred to Ananias’ entrance into the house, his laying of hands upon Saul, and him noting to Paul that he had been sent so that Saul might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Now, this verse says, “Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales.”

It is a word found only here in the Bible, *lepis*, or scale. It can be a peel, like a rind or husk, a fish scale, and so on. Hippocrates used this word as a technical term for a

disease of the eye. The verb form is used in the apocryphal book Tobit to describe a similar disease –

“And the whiteness pilled away from the corners of his eyes: and when he saw his son, he fell upon his neck.” Tobit 11:13

Albert Barnes sees this not as a literal occurrence, however. He states that the words *hōs lepides*, or “like scales” mean that it was as if scales had been on his eyes. He could now see whereas before he could not. Thus, it was “as if” scales had been on his eyes.

Either way, the miraculous isn’t diminished if there were actually scales on his eyes or not. The miracle is that both Ananias and Paul had been given a vision in the past, they had now come together as seen in the vision, Ananias had placed his hands upon Paul in order for Paul to see again and to receive the Holy Spirit, and immediately Paul was able to see. This is what Luke specifically records, saying, “and he received his sight at once.”

As Saul could not see for three days and then he immediately was able to see, just as the visions had revealed, the miracle stands. With this accomplished, Saul is now ready to be obedient to the command of the Lord for all New Covenant believers. Whether Jew or Gentile, it is an expectation that was obviously conveyed to him because Luke next records, “and he arose and was baptized.”

If this was not expected of believers, this would not have been done. Saul already received the Holy Spirit, he was already saved, and his vision was restored. But the Lord commanded this as an outward sign for those who have entered the New Covenant, and so Saul – the one who had only days earlier openly persecuted the church – now made his open profession of being included in the faith he once tried to destroy (see Galatians 1:23).

As a side note, what is possible is that Paul’s baptism occurred in one of the two rivers noted in 2 Kings 5:12, the Abanah or the Pharpar. Both are still there to this day, although the names have been changed to Arabic. They are not far from where Paul received his sight, and it can be speculated that this is where they would have gone to.

Life application: We live in a physical world where the expectation is that things will work in a certain way. Because of this, we will look for naturalistic explanations for why things happen. There is nothing wrong with this. If Luke (a doctor who elsewhere meticulously records events as they occur) makes a statement that it was as scales

falling from Saul's eyes, there is nothing wrong with people trying to explain that in a natural way.

The thing is that even if they deny the miraculous nature of the event and come up with a naturalistic explanation for it, they are still confirming the miraculous nature of the event. This is because what is recorded in this verse is not a stand-alone matter. It is a part of a greater narrative that, beyond question, contains a miraculous element to it.

By arguing against the miraculous in this verse, a person is affirming that the event in the verse occurred. Otherwise, why even bother attacking what the verse says? Be confident concerning what is recorded in Scripture. People have argued against it for thousands of years, and yet it is they and their arguments that are lost to time. The Bible still stands as the sure and firm witness to the workings of God that it has since the time it was received. We have a sure word. We have the Bible!

*Lord God, how firm and sure is our foundation! The words contained in Your word are truth. They are light. They are a source of hope and encouragement. Thank You for Your attentive care in the history of the world as You have slowly and methodically recorded events that have revealed Your working in Christ for the sake of humanity. Yes, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord and for Your word that tells us of Him. Amen.*

**So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Acts 9:19**

The previous verse saw sight returned to Saul's eyes and then his baptism was performed. Now, the narrative immediately sees to his physical needs, saying, "So when he had received food, he was strengthened."

There is both the sense of his needing to be filled because he had not eaten for three days (verse 9:9), but also a more prophetic sense is being established as well. In 1 Kings 19, the record of Elijah states –

"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I *am* no better than my fathers!'

<sup>5</sup>Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, 'Arise *and* eat.'<sup>6</sup>Then he looked, and there by his head *was* a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again.<sup>7</sup>And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him,



and said, 'Arise *and* eat, because the journey *is* too great for you.' <sup>8</sup> So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

<sup>9</sup> And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and He said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" 1 Kings 19:4-9

Paul received food and he was strengthened just as Elijah was. However, with the next words of the verse, it doesn't appear to make any connection. But Paul says this in Galatians –

"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, <sup>16</sup> to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus." Galatians 1:15-17

There seems to be no room in Luke's record for Paul's words in Galatians. However, Luke was concerned with Paul's ministry in a particular way. Recording the trip to Arabia was not a necessary part of his account. The trip to Arabia would fit logically in the middle of verse 19 here in Acts 9. As Paul did not "confer with flesh and blood," it is probable that he immediately felt his calling to go to Arabia and then return after that. He may have even been instructed to do this during his three days of fasting.

As this is likely when this occurred, this brings in the next fundamental question, "Where in Arabia?" Arabia of Paul's day was considerably different than that of Saudi Arabia today. As it is only referred to one other time in the New Testament, Galatians 4:25, all we have is that one verse to give us a clue as to where Paul went.

In that verse, Paul says that Mount Sinai (Horeb) is in Arabia. For this reason, we can logically (although not dogmatically) suppose that Paul went to the very spot where Moses received the law, and where Elijah was drawn to after his great ordeal with the false prophets of Baal (please read all of 1 Kings 19 today!), in order to receive the instruction for his ministry after having received the commission of his apostleship. There is no reason to dismiss this, and a valid reason to accept it.

Regardless of this though, after his time in Arabia, it next says in Galatians 1 that he "returned again to Damascus." This then would be in line with the words in Acts 9:19, saying "Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus." After his time in

Arabia (assuming this is when it occurred, and which fits logically with the timeline from Galatians), Paul returned to Damascus. In 1 Kings 19:15, it says this concerning Elijah –

“Then the LORD said to him: ‘Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria.’” 1 Kings 19:15

Both departed from Arabia (Horeb), and both then went to (back to) Damascus. In the Acts 9:3 commentary, the meaning of Damascus was noted by Abarim –

“The Hebrew term for Damascus, namely דמשק (*dammashq*), means something like **The Beginning Of Salvation**. The Chronicler's slightly adapted term for Damascus, namely דרמשק (*darammasq*) means **Period Of Salvation** or perhaps more precise **Full Turn In The Pattern Of Salvation**. The Greek name Damascus means **Tameness** or somewhat more positive **Synchronicity**.”

Damascus is outside of Israel's borders, which is appropriate for Saul's calling that occurred. The apostle to the Gentiles received his calling outside of the set borders of Canaan, but still within the area of land originally promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:18. Understanding the typology, Elijah's life was a pattern of Jesus' ministry. The parallels between the two are many. A few to settle this notion –

Elijah means, “My God is Yehovah.”

Jesus is the Son of Yehovah, being Yehovah incarnate. (Matthew 22:41-45, etc.)

Elijah was a prophet.

Jesus is the Prophet. (John 7:40, etc.)

Elijah raised the dead. (1 Kings 17)

Jesus raised the dead. (John 11, etc.)

Elijah's life was threatened by wicked rulers. (1 Kings 18, etc.)

Jesus' life was threatened by wicked rulers. (Read the gospels)

Elijah multiplied food. (1 Kings 17)

Jesus multiplied food. (Matthew 14, etc.)

Elijah ascended to heaven. (2 Kings 2)

Jesus ascended to heaven. (Acts 1)

These and other parallels show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the typology set forth in Elijah. After Elijah ascended, Elisha continued his ministry. He also anticipated Christ and Christ fulfilled that typology, but the point is that the ministry continued after Christ's ascension in both Israel and to those outside of Israel. Paul is selected to go to the Gentiles, and his selection occurred at the place with a name (Damascus) that suggests his commission is the start of something new.

Jesus hinted at this early on in the account of Luke where he noted the healing of Naaman the Syrian (and others) in Luke 4, stating to those of Nazareth that the miracles of the past were not limited to Jews only. They didn't like this. Jesus gave a sure hint that the transition from Jewish leadership to Gentile leadership was coming in Luke 20:9-19. Again, they didn't like that. But this is what is being seen now.

It is not a different gospel, but a different direction in the furtherance of the gospel. The banner is now beginning to move from Jewish leadership to Gentile leadership. That will carry on until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in. When that is complete, the banner will again return to the Jews. Paul is the key to this. Salvation to the Gentiles is beginning (Acts 8 & 10), and Paul will be the one to take it forward. There will be a full turn in the pattern of salvation until the time designated by God. It is during this period of salvation that the Gentiles will carry the message forward. Paul's instruction in Arabia will come from the Lord, just as the other apostles' instruction came directly from the Lord.

Life application: There are beautiful patterns to be found throughout the Bible, demonstrating that it is a unified whole. In these patterns, there is a main thought – "God is doing the marvelous through Jesus Christ to redeem fallen man." Everything is focused on Jesus Christ. He is the central point and purpose of Scripture. Without Him as the lens of focus, there is no clarity of what is being conveyed. But in reading the Bible through the lens of Christ, it all makes sense.

God is using the most glorious means of telling us of His love for the people of the world. Be sure to accept this truth and then tell others about it. There is hope in this broken world, and that hope is to be found in Jesus! Praise God for Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Lord God, Your word is a treasure of wonder and delight because Your word tells us of the coming of Jesus. It tells us in advance of His coming, it tells us about when He came, and it explains His coming to us. And more, it tells of His coming again. And may that day be soon. We wait for our Lord from heaven. Yes, we long for Jesus! Amen.*

**Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.**

Acts 9:20

It was seen in the analysis of the previous verse that Saul's (Paul's) trip to Mt. Sinai in Arabia probably occurred between the two clauses of the verse –

So when he had received food, he was strengthened.

\* Journey to Arabia.

Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

With that being likely, the next words now fall into their proper place, saying, "Immediately he preached."

Saul had (presumably) received his instruction from the Lord in Arabia and was now well versed in the doctrines he would proclaim for the rest of his life. Therefore, and upon his return, he immediately preached in Damascus concerning "the Christ."

It is to be noted that many manuscripts here say "Jesus" instead of "the Christ." That would appear to fit more naturally, and it would be in accord with his preaching noted in Acts 13:16-41 where the term Christ is not used. Instead, it says "Jesus" twice. Hence, it is possible this is the original wording. However, because it would be wholly unnatural for a scribe to change "Jesus" to "Christ," it makes one wonder if the word "Christ" is actually the original. Further, the word "Christ" is "Messiah" in Hebrew, and it would be the thought on the minds of those attending.

Even if they spoke Greek or some other language in the synagogues of Damascus, there would always be certain words that were carried over in the thinking of the people, *mashiakh*, or the Messiah, being one of them. That remains true to this day. Therefore, it is quite possible that Saul was carefully explaining to them the doctrine of the Messiah, who is Jesus, rather than Jesus, who is the Messiah. In other words, he would first explain to them that Scripture foretold the coming of Messiah and "that He is the Son of God."

If this is what Saul was doing at this early stage of his instruction, he is clearly setting forth the proposition that the Messiah is not simply a son of David, but that He is God incarnate. As such, it would explain why Jesus didn't just come to liberate the Jews from their enemies, but that He came to deal with their greatest enemy, sin.

If “Jesus” is the true reading, then it would be that his preaching focused on Jesus, who is the fulfillment of the Messianic promises and that Israel had, thus far, missed this fact. The resurrection proves that He is the Messiah, and thus that He is the Son of God.

Either way, the result is ultimately the same. Looking ahead for an answer which is correct would tend to favor “Jesus” –

vs22. But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.

vs27. But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

In verse 22, the name “Jesus” is inserted for clarity. It would appear that the verse is dependent on verse 20 giving the name which has not yet been otherwise provided. In verse 27, it clearly says that Paul preached in the name of Jesus.

If “Jesus” is the original, the error in translation may have simply come from a scribe seeing the word “Christ” in verse 22 while looking at the wrong line of the manuscript (a common error) and wrote that into this line now. Again, however, nothing is ultimately lost in either. Jesus is the Messiah, and the Messiah is Jesus. What transpired, and how Saul proclaimed his message, was in a particular way in Damascus, but both paths of discussion are covered by him in his writings elsewhere.

Life application: The means of preparing manuscripts in the New Testament Greek was far different than that of how the Hebrew Old Testament was prepared. The Greek scribes were surely less concerned about precision than they were about getting the word out to as many as possible as quickly as possible.

If small errors crept into the manuscripts, it would seem as if all hope of proper doctrine is lost. However, in comparing the many manuscripts, it is very easy to identify where the error was originally entered into the text. As such, and due to the huge number of Greek texts, along with other early writings from those texts (such as lectionaries), the New Testament is to be considered far more reliable than any other ancient writing.

The places where error has crept in do not destroy any major theology in the faith. Those points of contention are all dealt with in other parts of the New Testament. We

have a sure and faithful word. Be confident of this. What we are to know with absolute clarity is there for us to know, and it is known with absolute clarity.

*Glorious God Almighty, may we always be confident in our faith in Jesus. Help us never to stray from our faith, and help us never to get sidetracked by those who desire to tear apart Your precious word. It has been given, and it is sufficient for us in our life, hope, and doctrine. Thank You for Your wonderful word. Amen.*

**Then all who heard were amazed, and said, “Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?” Acts 9:21**

Following the translation of the KJV, the tense of the verbs in the NKJV doesn't give the sense of the Greek at all. A better translation that more closely follows the original will be used –

“And all those hearing were amazed and were saying, ‘Is this not the *one* having ravaged those in Jerusalem calling on this name? And he had come here for this, that he might bring them, having been bound, to the chief priests.’” (Berean Literal Bible)

The last verse noted Saul immediately preaching the Christ in the synagogues, noting that He is the Son of God. With that, the narrative continues with, “And all those hearing were amazed.”

Who “all those” are is not stated. It is certain from the words that the preponderance of them are nonbelieving Jews. However, it also seems to appear from the words of this verse that those nonbelievers didn't have any real animosity with those who professed Christ. They may have even continued on harmoniously together while simply disagreeing on the part about Jesus.

As for Saul, his conversion had taken place. From there, it is speculated (see commentary on the previous two verses) that he went to Arabia, received his revelation from the Lord, and returned to Damascus where he then immediately began his preaching. It can be certain, based on his time as a Pharisee, that his knowledge while preaching was precise and irrefutable.

His words would leave no doubt as to the message he was conveying. Not only did he preach that the Christ (Jesus) is the Son of God, but he would be able to fully support his

words with Scripture. Because of this, those who were hearing him “were saying, ‘Is this not the one having ravaged those in Jerusalem calling on this name?’”

The knowledge of Saul’s past actions had become well known among the Jews of Damascus. He was intolerant of those who professed faith in Christ, and he treated them violently. The Greek word, *portheó*, translated as “having ravaged,” is found only here and then twice in Galatians 1. It is a word indicating to destroy, lay waste, or make havoc of. Saul (Paul) will later use this same word to describe his own actions –

“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to destroy it.*” Galatians 1:13  
(see also Galatians 1:23)

The very name (Jesus, the Christ) that they had proclaimed, and which Saul desired to lay waste, is the same name that he now openly proclaimed. It was beyond their comprehension that this was occurring. And not only had he tried to eliminate this name in Jerusalem, but they continued, saying, “And he had come here for this.”

Saul was willing to travel beyond the borders of Israel to destroy any and all who avowed the name of Jesus. And he had come to Damascus for this very purpose. And now, here he is in Damascus proclaiming the very name that he had worked to destroy. And this wasn’t just a personal rage against Christ. It had the approval of the leadership, and he was a Pharisee. Hence, he had come under authority “that he might bring them, having been bound, to the chief priests.”

With the full weight and authority of the priesthood (it is plural to most likely indicate those who served as high priest in the past and who still wielded authority as well as the current high priest) Paul was commissioned to bring an end to the faith. The incredible nature of his open profession of this name now mystified any and all who heard. There may even have been a degree of skepticism in their minds as to whether this was a ploy to flush out those who believed.

Life application: One of the unique things about the truly converted in Christ is that there is often a sudden and dramatic break from their ways of the past. For nonbelievers who see this change, there may be the idea that their friend has gone bonkers (which is actually not untrue, because the new believer has gone bonkers for Christ – see 2 Corinthians 5:13).

As for other believers, when they come to Christ, there may be joy, skepticism, wariness, and so on from non-believing friends or family. It all depends on who the person was. For example, if he was a scam artist, it could be skepticism that he is using his “newfound faith” as a means of enriching himself. However, after a while, the true fruit of his conversion will be seen for what it is.

There is such an amazing degree of freedom in Christ that it is often inexpressible. To know that the weight of the debt of one’s sin is erased can be beyond words. And so, actions step in and fill the void. This is a marvelous period in the new believer’s life, but it must also be tempered with the understanding that sound theology and right doctrine does not come through a sudden conversion. Instead, it must be developed over time.

And so, it is both important to not quench this new and excited faith, but it is also important to not let this young believer start spouting off doctrine that is unsound. It is also why Paul instructs us concerning those who are young in the faith, saying that an overseer should not be a “novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6, 7).

When you see a new believer who has gone bonkers for Christ, rejoice in his conversion and yet be willing to temper his new faith with the understanding that there is a lot to be learned in order to be an effective communicator of proper doctrine. In other words, fan the fire while also not adding too much fuel to it at one time.

*Lord God, help us to be sound mentors of those who come into the faith so that they are properly disciplined in order to effectively communicate their newfound faith to others. May we not quench their zeal, while at the same time, may we help them to keep from running ahead and falling into ruin. Yes, help us in this, O Lord. Amen.*

**But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ. Acts 9:22**

The previous verses indicated that Saul (Paul) preached Christ in the synagogues and those who heard were amazed because they knew of his previous life. With that context, it now says, “But Saul increased all the more in strength.”

The word translated as “strength” is an imperfect verb, saying something like, “But Saul was strengthened all the more.” The idea here is that as he preached, the effects of



what he said became more and more evident and his case was meticulously built up. It may also include the thought of his own moral character increasing with each presentation of the gospel and proper doctrine. But it appears this is most expressly referring to his argument from Scripture. This thought is bolstered by the next words, saying, “and confounded the Jews.”

Again, the verb is imperfect, showing that it was an ongoing process. He “was confounding the Jews.” He didn’t just come up with an argument about his doctrine that was pulled completely out of context and say, “See this shows that what I am saying is true.” Such a presentation would be easily revealed as false. On the contrary, he was clearly taking things in context, he was being strengthened in his presentation by doing so, and he was confounding those who could not refute what he was saying.

Because Saul was a Pharisee, he was fully versed in the content of Scripture. He had just been looking at it through the wrong lens until his eyes were opened. Once he realized that it truly is all about Jesus, the ancient passages opened up in a new and irrefutable way. This is the idea of what is being said while debating the Jews “who dwelt in Damascus.”

Saul was willing to spend the time needed while using his newly acquired spiritual implements of warfare against those he was once allied with. This, instead of physical arms and implements that he once used against his now fellow believers. The irony is palpable. And these spiritual implements were fully capable of “proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.”

This (proving) is a new word in Scripture, *sumbibazó*. It is formed from the words *sun* (together with) and *basis* (a step and thus a foot). As such, it gives the sense of walking in accord. Saul is taking Scripture and identifying it with Jesus and there is found to be a complement (a walking together) between the two. Vincent’s Word Studies explains this work more fully –

“The verb means to bring or put together: hence to compare and examine, as evidence, and so to prove. Used in the literal and physical sense in Ephesians 4:16. In Colossians 2:2, of being knit together in love. In 1 Corinthians 2:16, of instructing, building up, by putting together.”

As for the words, “the Christ,” they are used as an appellative. Too often people assume Jesus Christ is a name, but it is a title. Jesus is the Christ, meaning the Messiah, or – more precisely – He is “the Anointed One.” Saul’s handling of Scripture clearly and

poignantly demonstrated that this is the case. Jesus is the fulfillment of all that Scripture is pointing to.

Life application: When evangelizing certain people groups, especially Jews, you must use a common reference in order to establish a baseline for what you are presenting. Jews, as a people, have already rejected the New Testament. Very few will say, “Let me see what the New Testament says,” and then readily accept it, although it has been known to happen.

Rather, if you are going to convince a Jew that Jesus is the Christ, you will need to be well versed enough in the Old Testament to show them directly from their own Scriptures that He is the fulfillment of what is presented there. And this may be true with Muslims and others as well. Though many Muslims believe that both testaments of Scripture are corrupted, many do accept (or are simply unsure) that the Old Testament is valid. By taking time to show them what the Old Testament says about the coming Christ, you can then use the New to show them that He fulfills what was prophesied.

For others, it is possible to take the Jews’ rejection of Jesus and use that as a basis for the fact that Jesus really is what Scripture proclaims. By showing that the Jews’ failure to see what is perfectly evident right in their own Scriptures was prophesied in advance (and explained in the New Testament), one can clearly demonstrate that Scripture is self-validating. In other words, even the Jews’ national rejection of Jesus confirms the truth of Scripture. From there, showing that Jesus is the reason they were exiled and punished gives the basis for believing that He truly is the Messiah of Israel.

Don’t give up if someone initially rejects your gospel presentation. If he is willing to continue listening, try another avenue and press on. The main thing to remember is that all of Scripture points to Jesus. As long as you are proclaiming Jesus, you are speaking of what the Bible is pointing to. Keep on telling about Jesus!

*Lord God, what a wonderful treasure of love and delight is found in Your word. You are conveying to us the words of life and restoration, and it is all based upon what You have done through the giving of Your Son. Thank You for Jesus who truly is making all things new! Amen.*

**Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. Acts 9:23**

The previous verse indicated that Saul (Paul) was able to prove to the Jews in Damascus that Jesus is the Christ, confounding them. With that, Luke presents their reaction, beginning with, “Now after many days were past.”

Without knowing a complete chronology of what Saul did and where he traveled, it is impossible to know for certain what “many days” means, but Saul may indicate what it means in his words of Galatians 1 –

“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called *me* through His grace, <sup>16</sup> to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

<sup>18</sup> Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.” Galatians 1:15-18

Saul leaves out details that will next be seen in Acts, but Acts provides details that Saul does not refer to in his letter to the Galatians, though he does refer to them elsewhere. In verse 9:26, it does say that he will go to Jerusalem, and so the two appear to match. Thus, the “many days” appears to be a period of about three years. It is after this lengthy period of confounding the Jews that “the Jews plotted to kill him.”

Notice the parallel here to that of Stephen in Acts 6 –

“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. <sup>9</sup> Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. <sup>10</sup> And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. <sup>11</sup> Then they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.’ <sup>12</sup> And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him*, seized him, and brought *him* to the council. <sup>13</sup> They also set up false witnesses who said, ‘This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; <sup>14</sup> for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.’” Acts 6:8-14

Saul, like Stephen before him, confounded the Jews with his wisdom, and the Jews plotted to kill him just as they plotted to kill Stephen. The difference is that Saul is now on the receiving end of what he once participated in.

Life application: Paul's letters repeatedly speak of suffering by those who are in Christ. In 2 Timothy 3:12, he states this explicitly, giving the reason for it, saying, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

This is not the kind of thing that you will normally hear during a Sunday sermon. There are preachers that convey this message, but for the most part other things – happier things – are often focused on. That is too bad because Paul's words are given to prepare faithful followers of the Lord for such events. Without hearing them analyzed, those in the church who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be unprepared for it and may wonder why something so strange would happen to them.

Life in Christ is one of hope. It is one of faith in what lies ahead. This life may or may not be filled with blessing, and it is one – if lived faithfully – is sure to see suffering. The devil wants nothing more than to rob the joy and the testimony of Christians away from them. Or he will misdirect them through false teachings of prosperity and wealth so that they will be ineffective in a godly, faithful walk.

Be content with what you have, be encouraged in the Lord, and be steadfast with your eyes firmly fixed on Him. Put on the whole armor of God and be prepared for your day, each day, by carrying with you the thought that what Christ promises for the next life will be worth whatever you face in this one.

*Heavenly Father, help us to walk contentedly before You all our days. Whether we see blessing and abundance or suffering and loss, may we keep our eyes on Jesus and our hearts and affections directed to You through Him. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Acts 9:24**

It was previously seen that the Jews plotted to kill Saul (Paul). That now continues with, "But their plot became known to Saul." Luke states this as a fact but without explaining how it became known. The odds are that if it was divinely revealed, Luke would have noted that as he does elsewhere. Hence, it was probably through someone having heard about it and then having passed it on. Regardless of this, Luke continues by saying, "And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him."

This would explain the plot having been discovered by Paul. He had been there three years and walked about in freedom. Eventually, the Jews decided to do away with him,

he heard about it, they realized he had heard, and so they began watching the gates in case he attempted to escape.

In 2 Corinthians 11:32, Paul provides more information about this event, saying, “In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me.”

It is unknown what the connection between the Jews and the governor was, but he was either a Jew or he was sympathetic to the words of the Jews, and so he ensured guards were posted in order to apprehend Saul on their behalf.

Life application: Paul faced difficulties, but the Lord brought him through them in order to ensure His message got out as it should. When Paul’s ministry was complete and he had served his time, his life ended, and others continued carrying on the message. This will continue until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in according to God’s plan. When that occurs, the Lord will call His church home.

We can expectantly await that day without getting anxious and without trying to predict when it will be. The Lord is simply not going to tell us when the rapture will occur. The best thing to do concerning rapture date setters is to ignore them.

There is work to be done, learning should go on, and the days will continue to pass as they always have until then. So why fritter away your time with idle speculation? Live your life in hopeful anticipation, but with the notion that just as today might be the day, today might also not be the day. Live your life with both in mind.

*Lord God, the working out of Your plan for the church has been in progress for thousands of years. It may come to its completion today, or it may go on for quite some time. We will hope for the former but prepare for the latter. Help us to be responsible with our time as we wait upon the Lord. Amen.*

**Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.** Acts 9:25

Because of the plot to kill Paul, and because the gates were watched day and night, we now read, “Then the disciples took *him* by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.” The action of the verse is missing in this translation. Young’s gives a better sense –

“and the disciples having taken him, by night did let him down by the wall, letting down in a basket.”

Because of this, Young’s will be used to understand what is going on. The words, therefore, begin with, “and the disciples having taken him.”

It wasn’t just a sudden knee-jerk reaction, but a carefully planned event. They were able to secure what was needed, they were able to have an appropriate location for what they planned, and they had taken Paul and readied him. From there, it says, “by night did let him down by the wall.”

Rather than “by the wall,” as if they used the wall to sort of help the process of rappelling down, it says, “through the wall.” This is understood from 2 Corinthians 11:33–

“but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.”

During the night when no one would be able to see what was going on, the disciples were able to help Paul with his escape in this manner. The sense is that there was either a window directly in the wall of the city that could be barred up during a siege, or the sides of the house rose above the wall of the city and there was a window in the wall that would allow for this to take place. Both are seen in walled cities of antiquity. Luke then finishes the thought with, “letting down in a basket.”

The Greek word is *spuris*. It is a large basket such as was seen in Matthew 15:37 during the feeding of the four thousand by Jesus. It would have been plaited or braided, and it could have been made of rope or possibly wicker.

Because of its size, some translations add in a descriptor and say, “large basket.”

Life application: In 1 Corinthians 11, the whole paragraph concerning Paul’s adventure says –

“If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. <sup>31</sup> The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. <sup>32</sup> In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of

the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; <sup>33</sup> but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.”

-1 Corinthians 11:30-33

Paul ties in the lowering of him down in this manner with his “infirmity.” In other words, he was unlike the spies of Israel who went into Jericho. There it says –

“Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house *was* on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall. <sup>16</sup> And she said to them, ‘Get to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you. Hide there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go your way.’” Joshua 2:15, 16

These two spies were young (Joshua 6:23) and capable of rappelling down the wall by themselves. Paul was not. He was infirm and had to be let down in a basket, probably something that he was lovingly razzed about over the subsequent years. The tone of his words somewhat points to a state of ridicule over the event.

Despite the humor, the point is that Paul was assisted by others in his ministry in a way that seems unimportant to it, and yet it could not have continued without this happening. As such, the most seemingly innocuous assistance at one point in time may turn out to be something of the greatest importance later in time.

Therefore, we should not dismiss our seemingly small and relatively unimportant help in the church. What you do may not be noticed, it may not appear huge or grandiose, but consider the fact that if you don’t do the things you do, that may have the greatest impact on other things that are visibly great to people’s eyes. Well, if those things didn’t get done without you, then aren’t your efforts a critical part of what was finally realized?

Be content that you and your efforts, like the unnamed disciples that helped Paul because of his infirmities, are ultimately having the greatest impact in the lives of others.

*Lord God, when we go out to a nice restaurant, it wouldn’t be a great experience if the dishes were to come out with food from someone’s previous meal still on them. The clean dishes had to get that way somehow. The things that seem unimportant actually have great value in the finished product. Help us to understand this concerning our own lives in the church. May our small contributions have a great and lasting effect. Amen!*

**And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. Acts 9:26**

The previous verse had Saul (Paul) being let down through the wall of the city of Damascus in a large basket. We now see where he went after leaving there. Luke records, “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem.”

As was noted in verse 9:19, Saul probably was converted, immediately went to Arabia, returned to Damascus and preached, and then was forced to leave “after many days.” From there, he went to Jerusalem. However, some say that he was converted, stayed in Damascus for an extended period, left there, and went to Arabia. After his time in Arabia, he then went to Jerusalem.

That is less likely and does not fit with Paul’s words of Galatians 1 where he says –

“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called *me* through His grace, <sup>16</sup> to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

<sup>18</sup> Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.” Galatians 1:15-18

The two accounts fit more naturally with 1) conversion, 2) immediate trip to Arabia, 3) return to Damascus for “many days” (meaning Arabia and Damascus totaled three years – Galatians 1), and then 4) trip to Jerusalem. This, not the other scenario, properly reconciles Acts and Galatians. Now, while having finally returned to Jerusalem after such a long time, it says, “he tried to join the disciples.”

Nothing is said here of how he did this, nor is it explained in Galatians. But it may be as simple as having gone to wherever they met, knocked on the door, and tried to sit down and fellowship with them. However, it says, “but they were all afraid of him.”

Imagining the scenario just mentioned, we could see a couple of the disciples coming to the door and saying, “Yeah, we know who you are. You’ve come to spy on us and have us arrested.” There was terror in seeing him and remembering what he had previously done. Continuing on with that thought, it next says, “and did not believe that he was a disciple.”



Paul probably protested that he had been converted and was a changed man, but the fear of the past wouldn't allow them to believe that he was sincere. Rather, they probably thought it was a ploy to get them to let their guard down, and then they would all be rounded up and arrested. This is all speculation, but it fits the idea of what Luke records.

The next few verses do not contradict what is now recorded. Here, the word "disciples" is used. In the next verse, and in Galatians 1, the word "apostles" is used. As such, the two accounts can be reconciled as the same visit without any difficulty. That will be seen when those verses are looked at.

Life application: The verses of Acts 9 are a long series of narrative style writing. Throughout the entire chapter, whether the focus is on Saul or Peter (coming later in the chapter), nothing is prescribed. This is generally how Acts is written. It is a recorded account of what occurred in the early church.

There are several healings (and raising the dead in one case) in Acts 9, which are then misapplied by modern churches and used as examples of how to heal others, claiming that all we need is faith to do what the apostles did.

The problem with this is that nothing in Acts 9 is prescriptive. Nobody takes the account of Paul being let down in a basket through a window in the wall as something that we should be doing. And yet, it is in the same narrative format as Peter's healing of Tabitha later in the chapter (Acts 9:36-43).

Let us remember the context of passages when we evaluate them and let us remember the style of writing that is used. What is the purpose of what is being said? Why did the Lord include a particular story? How is it relevant to the greater story?

Be sure to ask such questions. The answer to them will then remind you that what is stated is not telling us to do the same thing, nor is it giving us instruction on how to do those things. It makes as much sense to use Peter's healing of Aeneas (Acts 9:33-35) for a class on healing as it does to use the story of Paul's escape from Damascus to have a class on basket weaving.

Stick to what is reasonable, and don't get sidetracked by people who claim what is clearly not theirs to claim. For right doctrine, consult the epistles.

*Heavenly Father, Acts is such a wonderful book. Thank You for how it confirms the things later referred to in the epistles, so that we have a sure and reasonable account of what occurred and why these stories given in Acts will later help with the explanation of right doctrine in the epistles. Each book has its purpose. So, help us to use them accordingly. Amen.*

**But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Acts 9:27**

The previous verse noted Saul's coming to Jerusalem and trying to join the disciples, but they were all wary of him because of his past. With that, Luke continues, saying, "But Barnabas." It is unknown how there came to be a connection between the two that allowed Barnabas to accept him while no others did.

One speculation is that they previously knew one another. As Barnabas was originally from Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and Saul is from Tarsus, it is possible they received schooling together. It also could be that Barnabas had actually been to Damascus and had met Saul (Paul) during his time there. Or Barnabas may have been informed of Saul's conversion by someone else who was fully aware of the situation. Regardless of what brought the two together, Barnabas sided with Saul and "took him and brought *him* to the apostles."

Here is where Paul's words of Galatians 1:18, 19 fill in the missing information –

"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother."

Paul told those in Galatia that he only encountered Peter and James. It could be that the other apostles had gone out to see how things were going elsewhere. This has already occurred in Acts 8 where Peter and John went to Samaria after the Samaritans had believed. For this or whatever other reason, these are the only two that Saul encountered at the time. After being brought to the apostles, it says, "And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road."

The "he" here appears to be Barnabas. It is he who gave the overall narrative which would have been explained in detail by Saul. As for having seen the Lord on the road, it is an obvious place to start. In Acts 9:2, Saul was going to Damascus to arrest any who

were of the Way (Greek: *hodos*). Now it says in this verse that while he was on the road (Greek: *hodos*), he encountered the Lord. The similarity between Saul's encounter and that of Balaam recorded in Numbers 22 may have come to the apostles' minds while hearing his words.

The Lord was standing in the way (Hebrew: *derek*) of Balaam and his donkey. Eventually, the Lord appeared to him and said, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out to stand against you, because *your way* [Hebrew: *derek*] is perverse before Me" (Numbers 22:32).

Peter will later refer to the account of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15), showing that he was fully aware of the story. As such, the apostles have past precedent from Scripture to demonstrate that the Lord does directly intervene in such a manner in order to bring about a desired change in an outcome. With this in mind, Luke continues with the explanation of Saul's conversion, saying, "and that He had spoken to him."

A calling was made, and a conversation continued during that calling. Barnabas relayed this to the apostles, and Saul probably gave a full and exacting account of what was said to him in order to convince them that what occurred was true and reliable. With that, the words of the verse finish with, "and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."

In order for Barnabas to relay this to Peter and James, he had to have been aware of it from someone other than Paul. Throughout Acts, Saul is almost always noted as being accompanied by others. It appears that he was unable to venture out alone, maybe because of a physical affliction such as bad eyesight.

Because of this, it is unlikely that Saul traveled from Damascus to Jerusalem alone. As such, it leads credence to the thought (above) that Barnabas had either personally met with Saul in Damascus or that he had personally talked with someone who had accompanied him back from Damascus. No matter what, Barnabas was fully qualified to testify to the truth of the matter and that Paul had been a bold witness for the name of Jesus in Damascus.

As for the words "preached boldly," they come from a new word in Scripture, *parrésiazomai*. It will be seen seven times in Acts and then again in Ephesians 6:20 and 1 Thessalonians 2:2. It is derived from the word *parrésia*, meaning freedom, openness, etc. Hence, this word means "to be frank in utterance, or confident in spirit and demeanor" (Strong's).

Paul's words were not just a show, but they were words of confidence that what he proclaimed was absolutely true and verifiable. Having been a Pharisee, he had the knowledge necessary to make the connections from Scripture that fully supported the notion that Jesus is Lord and that He is the fulfillment of all that the Hebrew Scriptures proclaimed.

Life application: You, or someone you know, may feel unacceptable to speak out concerning Jesus because of what occurred in the past. You may have belittled Christians or harmed them in some way. Because of this, you may feel unworthy of doing anything within the church except sit in the pew and listen. But this is exactly the opposite of what the Bible reveals.

The change that occurs in a person is intended to be a complete change. Where you belittled others, you can now build up. Where you harmed others, you can now provide healing. The past is gone. As Paul says –

“Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

God has saved you through the giving of His Son. The internal change that has taken place can, and should, be used to help others in the same way. Be willing to open up about your past. Tell others who you were then and who you are now, and give them confidence that they too are acceptable to God because of what Jesus has done.

*Lord God, even the very best of us were totally corrupt before You. We had no chance of ever standing in Your presence. But then came Jesus. Our lives are changed, and we have put on garments of righteousness – His righteousness – in order to be acceptable to You. May we never hold back from telling others about this glorious transformation. Thank You for the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.** Acts 9:28

The previous verse saw Barnabas defending Saul, noting how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Barnabas' words were obviously effective, because it next says of Saul, “So he was with them at Jerusalem.”

In other words, the word of Barnabas was sufficient to convince them that Paul was no longer a threat but rather a true brother in Christ and a defender of the faith. As such, Luke notes that Saul was “coming in and going out.”

The words mean he had freedom of access among the believers. As noted, only Peter was there as an apostle along with James the Lord's brother. Any disciples that were there came to accept that Paul was truly converted, and so Paul's going out and coming in was as a member of a family. Also, Galatians 1:18 notes that this time in Jerusalem lasted for fifteen days. The reason for such a short visit will be explained in the verses to come.

Life application: Barnabas' words of recommendation for Paul were sufficient to convince Peter and James that he was converted. From there, he was accepted. On the other hand, if someone were to bring a charge against another, the Bible requires two or three witnesses. The testimony of one is not sufficient.

This is important to remember because people may have an agenda, they may get angry at others, hurt by others, or simply have a misunderstanding with others. In this, it is easy to make a charge against someone that is untrue. Accepting a false charge from one person can cause permanent damage and it can even divide an entire church. Remember this and never allow a root of bitterness to arise within the church. Be sure there is suitable proof of a matter before you accept the words of anyone.

*Lord God, we pray for peace in our congregations as we come together to worship You. If there is someone with an ax to grind, we pray that their false charges not become a point of division. Help us to weed out that which is untrue so that we can fellowship in joy with those we meet together with. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. Acts 9:29**

The previous verse noted that Saul (Paul) was with those at Jerusalem, and he was coming in and going out. With that remembered, it now says, "And he spoke boldly." The verb is a present participle. It says, "speaking boldly." He spoke and he continued to speak in order to convey the truth of what he now knew. As such, his words were "in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Saul had become a defender of the name he once tried to destroy. Many of those in Jerusalem would surely have known him personally, and this would have had a great effect on them in one way or another. Some might have been curious about the change while others may have assumed he had flipped out. No matter what they thought, however, his words were surely based on Scripture. His life as a Pharisee gave him a great and detailed knowledge of the word.

As the word is what reveals Jesus, it is evident that when He came, if He was truly the Messiah, the word would bear out this fact. All Saul needed to do was to show how Scripture foretold what these people had seen firsthand.

This may not have been evident at first. It wasn't to those who knew Jesus personally. As it says in Luke 24 –

“Then He said to them, ‘These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me.’<sup>45</sup> And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” Luke 24:44, 45

This is just what Saul is doing with those of Jerusalem who were aware of the things Jesus did. He was attempting to open their minds so that they too might understand the Scriptures. However, people will argue against the obvious. As it next says, Saul “disputed against the Hellenists.” The NKJV, following the error of the KJV, leaves out a word. The Greek reads, “he was both speaking and disputing with.”

Saul would engage the Hellenists, those Jews who spoke the Greek language, and he would dispute with them concerning the matter of Christ. By this time, the Greek-speaking Jews were as much at odds against the issue of Jesus being their Messiah as were the Hebrew-speaking Jews. Saul engaged both in order to reveal to them that Jesus truly is the Messiah who had been prophesied. However, the Hellenists were as unwilling as the Hebrew-speaking Jews to accept the message. Because of this, Luke notes that “they attempted to kill him.”

The Greek word, *epicheireó*, means “to take in hand,” thus it would rightly be translated as “to undertake.” They set forth a plan to kill him, and then they undertook to follow through with the plan.

The irony here is that Saul stood and guarded the garments of those who stoned Stephen, and now this same man stood defending Jesus as the Christ – just as Stephen did – and he was now facing being killed by his own Jewish brethren as well. This is seen in the use of the word “disputed.” The only other time it is used in Acts is in verse 6:9 –

“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.<sup>9</sup> Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), **disputing** with Stephen.” Acts 6:8, 9

This verse now (9:29) is the last time the word is used in Scripture, and it reveals the truly ironic nature of what has taken place. God's word will be proclaimed. When Stephen could no longer do so, a man who was on the opposite side of his disputing was called by the Lord to continue with the task.

Life application: There is a time to dispute a matter and then there is a time to let a matter go. Some people simply want to hear themselves speak. It doesn't matter how cogent of an argument you put forth, they will continue to ignore the truth and spout off the party line of whatever it is they believe.

Stephen and Paul were willing to dispute with their people in order to convince them concerning Jesus, but it cost Stephen his life, and it threatened to do so to Paul as well. There is nothing wrong with dying for what you believe, but there is a time when you might as well just close your mouth and shake the dust off your feet. Until such people decide they could be wrong, they will never give an inch.

A good way to set the parameters for disputing is to ensure you are talking apples to apples. If someone constantly brings in matters that have nothing to do with the issue at hand, then you are truly wasting your time. You must dispute the same issue for there to be any sound resolution.

For example, if you are making a case about Jesus and you are doing so from the Greek New Testament, a person may say, "But Jesus spoke Hebrew. He was actually thinking this..." That is apples to oranges. Greek is what the New Testament was written in. If you cannot agree to have your basis for a dispute by even using the same language, then there is no reason – at all – to continue with your disputing.

Be wise, be discerning, and be patient with those you are speaking to about Jesus. But also, don't be a time waster with know-it-alls. You will never win your argument, and you will be wasting your own valuable time in the process.

*Lord God, help us to be strong in our defense of Your word, but may we never waste time in the process. And so, help us to use wisdom to know when to speak and when to refrain from continuing with our words. Be with us in this, O God. Amen.*

**When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus. Acts 9:30**

The last verse revealed that the Hellenists had determined to kill Saul (Paul). With that, Luke now records, “When the brethren found out.” These words show that either Saul had already heard the threats and ignored them or that someone simply heard, and it became more widely known among the brethren.

The first option is not unlikely. Saul had a defiant streak in him that will be seen again and again in Acts. A good example of this is found in Acts 21 –

“And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. <sup>11</sup> When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.”’  
<sup>12</sup> Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> Then Paul answered, ‘What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’  
<sup>14</sup> So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, ‘The will of the Lord be done.’” Acts 21:10-14

However, the second option is also something that occurs elsewhere in Acts –

“And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. <sup>13</sup> Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. <sup>14</sup> They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, ‘We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. <sup>15</sup> Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near.’  
<sup>16</sup> So when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. <sup>17</sup> Then Paul called one of the centurions to *him* and said, ‘Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him.’ <sup>18</sup> So he took him and brought *him* to the commander and said, ‘Paul the prisoner called me to *him* and asked *me* to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you.’” Acts 23:12-18

One way or another, the word concerning a threat to his life would get around and either Saul would ignore the danger, or he would have someone work on his behalf to get him out of it. In this case, it next says, “they brought him down to Caesarea.”



Instead of staying in order to continue to challenge these belligerent and threatening Hellenists, Saul leaves Jerusalem and travels to Caesarea. A trip from Jerusalem to anywhere else is always considered traveling “down.” As for the location, this is Caesarea Maritima which is a port by the sea. It was built by Herod the Great around 22-9BC. Its ruins are still there today including the great aqueduct and the amphitheater along with many other areas of note. A short video on the location that is well worth watching can be seen [HERE](#).

Another point about these words, “and they brought him down,” is that Saul is almost always seen being conducted by others. This could be chalked up to simply protecting his life from the Hellenists. However, due to the frequency of such comments, it appears that Saul was not suited to traveling alone. Instead, when Acts is taken as a whole, it seems to appear that he required assistance getting from one place to another. Regardless of this, though, it was certainly a testament that they had accepted Saul and it validated that they believed he had truly become one of them. With that, it next says they “sent him out to Tarsus.”

This is where Saul was from, and it had now been an extended period since he had been there. A period of at least four years, and maybe more, had gone by since his being in Tarsus. The narrative will return to Jerusalem after this verse, but Saul’s time away is referred to by him in Galatians 1 –

“Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup> And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which *were* in Christ. <sup>23</sup> But they were hearing only, ‘He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried* to destroy.’ <sup>24</sup> And they glorified God in me.” Galatians 1:21-24

While in Tarsus, he certainly would have evangelized others, and he went into these other regions as well. During this time, he probably took up his old source of employment which was making tents. It is something he could do anywhere, and it would pay for his travels as he went. During his time in Syria and Cilicia, he obviously had made converts. This can be deduced from Acts 15:41. There, it records details of the second missionary journey and refers to churches not mentioned on the first missionary journey –

“And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; <sup>40</sup> but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. <sup>41</sup> And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.” Acts 14:39-41

It is probable that these churches were established by Saul before he is reconnected with the details provided by Luke in Acts.

Life application: Even when out of the main picture of Acts, it is seen through a careful study that Paul was always staying active in his evangelism. It is not uncommon to hear someone say today, “I just need to get away from it all for a while.” This is even seen among Pastors who take a “sabbatical” in order to unwind. Such a notion was unheard of to Paul. There was no unwinding but rather a constant focus on his life’s mission.

Paul evangelized while in prison. He evangelized while traveling. He evangelized at the synagogues on the Sabbath and to both Jews and Gentiles throughout the week. It didn’t matter where he was or what secondary thing he was engaged in, he was telling people about Jesus. With prosperity, we have forgotten what it means to be focused. When enough time for a vacation is earned, we drop every remembrance of what we have been focused on and redirect to time away. How blessed we are that we can do this, but how unfortunate if we don’t carry the message of Jesus along with us.

Regardless of where we are going and what other things we are doing, let us not forget to continue to let people know our allegiance to Jesus and then share why we hold to it. As we travel, we may be the only ones the people we encounter will ever talk to about Jesus. If not we, then who?

*Lord God, how faithful You have been to us. We called on You when we heard the gospel, and You saved us. Now, it is our turn to tell others about this same wonderful message of hope. May we get about it and tell! People need to hear this good and precious news. So be with us and prompt us to do so. To Your glory! Amen.*

**Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.** Acts 9:31

In the last verse, Saul (Paul) was sent out from Caesarea to Tarsus. With him now sent off, the narrative continues with the focus on the immediate area, beginning with, “Then the churches.” Some manuscripts here identify it as one church – “And the church.” Either way, the individual churches form one church as long as they are under Christ, the Head. But the distinction between individual churches is not inappropriate and is seen throughout the rest of the Bible, even into Revelation where Jesus addresses the seven churches.

For now, these churches (forming one church) are found “throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria...” The land of Canaan, the original area of Israel’s land grant, is the main area of focus at this time. The words “had peace and were edified” should read “had peace, being edified.”

The first verb is imperfect and the second is a present participle. These things were happening, and the time of edification was a part of what resulted in the peace they experienced. Of this word, edified, Charles Ellicott says –

“The passage is noticeable for the appearance of the word ‘edified,’ or ‘built up,’ in the sense in which St. Paul had used it (1Corinthians 8:1; 1 Corinthians 14:4), as describing orderly and continuous growth, the superstructure raised wisely upon the right foundation.”

Along with that, it says, “And walking in the fear of the Lord.” Rather than being a new sentence, these words are a continued part of what brought the state of peace. Along with being edified, the churches were walking in the fear of the Lord. This speaks of a sense of reverent fear of the Lord, not a sense of terror or trembling fear. Just as a child is admonished by his father and he has a sense of respect for him, so the church is built up in the knowledge of the Lord, growing in a sense of respect and humility before Him. With that understood, it next says, “and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.”

The word translated as “comfort” signifies “close beside.” Helps Word Studies says it “is used of the Lord directly motivating and inspiring believers to carry out His plan, delivering His particular message to someone else.” The context will decide what is being conveyed, whether it is a warning, an exhortation, an encouragement, etc.

In this case, and because it is tied in with edification and fear of the Lord leading to peace, it is probably a mixture of exhortation – meaning the words of the apostles building them up into a fuller knowledge of Christ, and encouragement – meaning a state of feeling secure, confident, and hopeful in the faith that was espoused to all of the believers.

In this state, it concludes with, “they were multiplied.” These words certainly mean the number of believers, but it may go beyond that to the state in which the believers existed. A small church that doesn’t have great growth can still be multiplied in knowledge and in their state of blessing. A large church with new members coming in all the time may have a love for the Lord, but may not have the same sense of importance concerning doctrine.

In other words, one may be multiplied in doctrine and instruction while the other is multiplied in people filling the seats. The words now do not limit the meaning and it is probable that they were being multiplied in both ways.

Life application: If one goes back to the previous verses, it almost seems as if the statements made in this verse came about because Paul was no longer among them. When he was there several years earlier, they were not in a state of peace. When Paul returned, they – at least at first – were wary of him. His zeal for the Lord also brought about difficulties with the Hellenists who then tried to kill him.

But their animosity toward Paul would naturally lead to that same feeling toward others who Paul identified with. As such, the Lord had Paul removed from the area in order for them to grow without him. This would give Israel a chance to accept this message or reject it apart from him. At the same time, he would be out among the Gentiles evangelizing them.

Eventually, it would be seen that Israel would not accept Jesus in the time allotted by God (see Luke 11:29-32). This was a period of forty years (a day for a year based on Jonah's proclamation to Nineveh). By the time this period was over, the Gentiles would be ready to take the helm of carrying the gospel forward.

Everything finds its proper place, and God continues to work out His plans according to His infinite wisdom. We do not need to fret or fear that things are not working out as they should. They are. We just need to continue to trust that God is in control. He is doing things that we may not even realize. In the end, we will see the wisdom of it all.

*Lord God, how precious it is to know that You are leading things. If it were up to us, it all would have fallen apart eons ago. But things are getting done because You are directing things to a good end. Help us to trust this when things don't appear that way from our perspective. We have a sure place of trust in Your guiding hand. Thank You for that. Amen.*

**Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all *parts of the country*, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. Acts 9:32**

The previous verse told of the peace and edification of the believers in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. They were walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit while being multiplied. With that remembered, the narrative now returns again to Peter. "Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all *parts of the country*."

Rather than “went,” the verb is a present participle. He was passing through all parts of the country. Luke is describing it as he is going. As for the traveling itself, it can be inferred that this is what the apostles did, both from the previous verse where the content and expanding nature of the church were noted as well as from Galatians 1 where Paul noted that he only saw Peter and James the Lord’s brother.

The inference to be made is that the apostles traveled about Israel strengthening the churches and instructing them while using Jerusalem as their home base. Peter is now doing this, carrying his knowledge of the Lord throughout the land. During this trip, it next says “that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda.”

Of this town, Albert Barnes (1798-1870) notes the following –

“This town was situated on the road from Jerusalem to Caesarea Philippi. It was about 10 or 12 miles southeast from Joppa, and belonged to the tribe of Ephraim. It was called by the Greeks Diospolis, or city of Jupiter, probably because a temple was at some period erected to Jupiter in that city. It is now so entirely ruined as to be a miserable village. Since the Crusades, it has been called by the Christians George, on account of its having been the scene of the martyrdom of a saint of that name. Tradition says that in this city the Emperor Justinian erected a church.”

Today, Lod is considered a part of the Central District of Israel, being situated between the lower Shephelah on the east and the coastal plain on the west. In 2019, it had a population of a bit more than 77,000. It is a mixed city with about 30% Arabs. It is a major junction for roads and railways.

As for its biblical history, it appears four times in the Old Testament. Each reference is without any great specificity. Its name is defined by Jones’ Dictionary of Old Testament Proper Names as “Contention.” It is at this place that Peter has made a stop during his travels.

Life application: In Lod, Israel today there is a Greek Orthodox church. The closest Messianic synagogues noted on the map are in Tel Aviv. This means that the message of Jesus is sorely needed there. While you’re praying for the lost, be sure to pray for those in Israel. There they are, right in the middle of the land of the Bible, and yet the knowledge of Jesus is severely lacking.

The traditional orthodox churches are pretty much all rites and rituals, but there is generally little concern for, or even an understanding of, the gospel. Messianic

synagogues are growing in Israel, but the Arab churches appear to be in a bit of decline. On the brighter side, there are Messianic believers that put out great music in Hebrew and there is a radio station that broadcasts from Israel.

With the internet available pretty much everywhere, there is access to sermons, studies, and music. Direct your prayers for the Lord to bring about those seemingly chance occurrences where a finger will push a wrong button and click on something Christian-related. Pray that something even as cumbersome as a flat tire or an accident might lead to someone meeting a believer who is willing to share his faith.

Just like in the other countries of the world, people in Israel need to hear about Jesus. Pray that the Lord will open those doors and bring the word to many.

*Lord God, today we lift up the people in Israel – Jews and Gentiles alike. We pray that they will be curious about the biblical history of where they are and that they will seek out and find Jesus as they look. Make this the day where many wonderful meetings through time and circumstance will bring this about. According to Your wisdom, we pray. Amen.*

**There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. Acts 9:33**

The previous verse saw Peter going throughout the country and eventually came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. Now, Luke continues, saying, “There he found a certain man named Aeneas.”

This is all that is stated about the meeting between the two. He may have been in the streets, he may have been staying with a believer, or he may have been in a house where Peter stayed the night. He may not have been a believer at the time. If he was, Luke probably would have called him a brother. However, Luke may be simply tying him in with “the saints” of the previous verse. Despite this, it is certain that he has been told about Jesus already because, in the next verse, Peter will call him by name, implying they have already conversed.

The meaning of his name, Aeneas, is hard to pin down. It may be a Greek name, coming from the verb *aineo*, meaning to tell about or speak of. Or it may be from the adjective *ainos*, horrible. Charles Ellicott states –

“The Greek name (we note the shortened vowel *Ænēas* of the later form of the word), perhaps, implies that he belonged to the Hellenistic section of the Church. Had the fame of Virgil’s poem made the name of the Trojan hero known even in the plains of Palestine?”

There is the possibility, however, that his name comes from the Hebrew noun *'ayin*, fountain, or eye. With these various possibilities, it is unsure what the meaning of his name actually was, but it was likely tied to one of these roots. Therefore, the meaning may be Praise, Horrible, or Man of the Well (Fountain). Of him, Luke next says, “who had been bedridden.”

Rather, it is a present participle. He was “lying on his bed.” Luke continues to provide the narrative as if it is happening as if we are watching. The word translated as bed, *krabattos*, signifies the mattress of a poor man, showing that not only was he confined to a bed, but that he was financially ruined as well. And this had continued on for “eight years.”

As usual, Luke is very careful to provide the details in an exacting manner. The words are not unimportant because they discount any hint of deception as might otherwise be the case with a charlatan. This man had lain on a poor bed, unable to rise at all for eight years. Anyone who knew him or saw him would know this to be a fact. Luke then adds in a medical note, saying, “and was paralyzed.”

It is a word, *paraluó*, found twice in Luke, twice in Acts, and once in Hebrews 12 –

“Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the **feeble knees**,<sup>13</sup> and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.” Hebrews 12:12, 13

It comes from two words signifying “to loose beside.” As such, it can mean either paralyzed or enfeebled. In this case, it is most likely paralyzed simply because he was bedridden for eight years, but it could be that he just couldn’t rise because he had permanently torn his quad muscle while on a vacation. As such, he just lay helpless. Whatever the reason, Luke’s description is sufficient to explain that the man was incapable of proper functioning.

Life application: The miracles of the Bible always have a reason. One is to bring glory to God. Another is to validate the ministry of the individual who is performing the healing.

The miracles that are performed never have the purpose of enriching or making well-known and famous those performing them.

Further, there is no longer a need for such miracles because the Bible is written. It stands as the witness and testimony to the validation of the ministry of Jesus and those who were appointed by Him. As the Bible says that we live by faith and not by sight, that is an indication that those miracles that do happen now are miracles that require faith to believe.

In other words, we do not need faith to believe a true healing like Aeneas if we see it. We would have known him, seen his condition, and then seen his healing. We would, therefore, have no reason to disbelieve.

But if we have a person who is in need of healing and we pray for it and it occurs without a showy display by a charismatic preacher, we will have to have faith that it was our prayers that brought it about. As Hebrews says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Nobody should ever try to dismiss the miraculous. If God wants to heal, He can and He will. And this is what we are to pray for. But let us not get duped into the fake miracles, signs, and wonders of those who are looking to profit off of such things. Be wise, be circumspect, and be ready to pray for God's hand to perform the miraculous. If it comes about, have faith that He heard your prayers and has responded accordingly, thanking Him for His goodness.

*Glorious God Almighty, thank You for the hope we possess in You because of the work of Jesus. We have a hope that You can and do heal in this life, but that You may not choose to do so for Your own reasons. But this life is short, and so we know that the true and everlasting healing lies not too far off. Someday, things will be perfect, and they will be so forever. May that day be soon! Amen.*

**And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Then he arose immediately. Acts 9:34**

The previous verse told of Aeneas who was bedridden for eight years, being paralyzed. Now, Luke continues with, "And Peter said to him." Nothing has been said about this man being a believer. Rather, all it said was that Peter "came down to the saints in Lydda" in verse 32. Without any definitive answer to this either way, it continues with the words of Peter, saying, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you."



Peter addresses him by name and then notes the Source of the healing. It is “Jesus the Christ.” The article is appropriately rendered here. Jesus (Hebrew: Yeshua) was not an uncommon name at the time in Israel. Therefore, to definitively identify Him, Peter calls Him “the Christ,” meaning “the Messiah.”

This is not unlike the account in Acts 3 where the man lame from birth was healed –

“Then Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’<sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.” Acts 3:6, 7

Notice the differences though. In Chapter 3, Peter called him Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Being in Jerusalem, it would have been well known that Jesus of Nazareth was believed to be the Messiah by many. Therefore, to ensure that He was definitively identified, the place He was known to herald from was given. Here, that is unnecessary as someone in Lod would probably have no idea about where Jesus was identified with.

Instead, He is called Jesus the Christ. Secondly, nothing is said of Peter grabbing him and helping him up. The man had been bedridden for eight years, not his whole life. So, Peter knew that he would know what it was like to be strengthened in his legs and to walk. Therefore, he simply gives the command, saying, “Arise and make your bed.”

The command for healing has been given, and a command to prove the healing and its long-term effects is stated. The idea is that not only is Aeneas healed, but that the bed was no longer needed except for times of sleeping. Hence it is to be folded up and taken away as a testament to the event. With that stated, it next says, “Then he arose immediately.”

Aeneas must have felt the strength return to his legs and so without a moment of hesitation, he arose. It can be assumed that he immediately took care of his bed as directed and was happy to do so.

Life application: Nothing about the mental state of Aeneas is given. This is unlike what is recorded concerning the healing by Paul in Acts 14. There it says, “Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed,<sup>10</sup> said with a loud voice, ‘Stand up straight on your feet!’ And he leaped and walked” (Acts 14:9, 10).

The information concerning Aeneas was already supplied in the previous verse where it says of Peter, “There he found a certain man named Aeneas.” The indication is that something transpired between the two because, in this verse, Peter called him by name. Both men were at least prepared to be healed by the words of Peter or Paul.

What can be certain, however, is that if Aeneas was coming to faith, that faith came in full upon his healing. But what if Peter never was called to heal him? What if he left and Aeneas remained upon his bed? Would his state be something that proved God didn’t care? The answer is, “No.”

The healing of our physical bodies is a great thing. This is why we go to doctors. But a person who is permanently disabled is loved by God in the same way as someone who is whole. What God desires is a right heart within.

God is often glorified through sickness. Our weaknesses and failings allow us to rely on His grace. Also, our testimony of patience in suffering can actually lead people to want to know why we have such faith.

Such things as these are found in Scripture and they show us that sickness, oppression, and even torture or death can be used by God for His glory. It is our faith in His hand upon our lives that He is most pleased with. In the end, we shall receive a reward for this. As believers, we have a sure hope in Jesus Christ. Our faith in Him will receive its reward in due time. And so, let us be people of faith.

*Lord God, help us to accept suffering, affliction, trials, and the like with grace. And we know already, because Your word tells us it is so, that Your grace is sufficient for us. We can live with a thorn in our flesh, but it will never be something that can remove Your hand of grace from upon us. Thank You that we are secure in Christ! Amen.*

**At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. Acts 9:36**

While Peter was still in Lydda, Luke now brings a new development into the narrative at a new location, beginning with, “At Joppa.”

Joppa (Hebrew: Yafo) is a port city found four times in the Old Testament and ten in the new. The name comes from *yaphah*, to be fair or beautiful, and so it means Beautiful. It is the city from which Jonah went in order to obtain a ship going to Tarshish. For the city today, Wikipedia says of this location –

“Jaffa, in Hebrew Yafo (Hebrew: יָפוֹ, Yāfō (help·info)) and in Arabic Yafa (Arabic: يَافَا) and also called Japho or Joppa, the southern and oldest part of Tel Aviv-Yafo, is an ancient port city in Israel. Jaffa is known for its association with the biblical stories of Jonah, Solomon and Saint Peter as well as the mythological story of Andromeda and Perseus, and later for its oranges. Today, Jaffa is one of Israel's mixed cities, with approximately 37% of the city being Arab.”

Today, the population of Joppa is about 46,000. It is in this location that Luke continues, saying, “there was a certain disciple named Tabitha.” This is an Aramaic name coming from a word meaning “gazelle.” Hence, her name means “Gazelle.” Of her, Luke next says, “which is translated Dorcas.”

Dorcas (Greek Dorkas) means the same thing, Gazelle. That comes from a Greek word meaning “to see clearly,” because the gazelle is an animal with bright, large eyes. Having two names is not uncommon in the Bible. In her case, being in Joppa which was a port town, there would be many Greek-speaking people. Therefore, to accommodate both, she was probably known by either her Aramaic name (the language of Israel at the time) or by her Greek name (the standard language of trade and commerce in the Roman Empire at the time). Of her, Luke next says, “This woman was full of good works.”

The meaning is obvious, but Charles Ellicott gives insight into Luke’s writing style by saying this of her –

“The form of the expression may be noticed as characteristic of St. Luke, and his favourite formula for conveying the thought of a quality being possessed in the highest degree possible. So we have ‘full of leprosy’ in Luke 5:12, ‘full of grace’ and ‘full of faith’ in Acts 6:5; Acts 6:8. (Comp. also Acts 13:10; Acts 19:28.)”

In the case of Tabitha, Luke uses the word *agathos* to describe her works. It is a common word signifying that which is intrinsically good. It is what finds its origin in what is provided by God, and it finds its empowerment from Him. For example, Jesus speaks of a tree that bears “good fruit.” One can see the root of the modern name Agatha in it.

Along with this, Luke continues, saying of her, “and charitable deeds which she did.” The verb is imperfect showing that her good deeds were ongoing – “which she was doing.” It wasn’t that she was known for something good that she had done, but she was known for her constant doing of good things. The Greek word used to describe these good deeds signifies beneficence or alms. They were deeds of charity that defined her as a person who was doing what she did without any strings attached.

Life application: Luke is careful to refer to Tabitha in two ways: full of good works and charitable deeds. One can be full of good works that are self-serving, and one can be full of charitable deeds that are sloppy or not well thought out. However, when one does good things and is charitable as well, it shows a person who is careful, methodical, and who is generous simply because it is his or her nature.

The Bible's inclusion of this description of Tabitha tells us that her conduct was right in the eyes of Luke, but it also tells us that it is right in the eyes of God who inspired Luke to write these things. She was being evaluated and the record of her life has been documented.

Likewise, we are also being evaluated, and the attitude and conduct we put forth are being remembered. Someday, we will have our life and actions judged –

“Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup> each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. <sup>14</sup> If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” 2 Corinthians 5:9, 10

If our purpose for doing things is amiss, our rewards will be diminished. And if the quality of our works is shoddy, the same will be true. Let us strive with our hearts set on the Lord in order to perform well and to produce that which is exemplary. In this, the Lord will be pleased and will return to each of us a full reward.

*Heavenly Father, help us to be faithful and careful stewards of the time and talents You have given to us. And Lord, we are flesh and bone. Give us strength to meet our desire to perform and give us the inner drive to meet the strength You have provided. May there be a full display of careful attention to our deeds and actions before You. Amen.*

**But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid *her* in an upper room. Acts 9:37**

The verse now is speaking of Tabitha (Dorcas) of the previous verse. It noted that she was full of good works and charitable deeds. Luke now continues with, “But it happened in those days.”

Without going ahead, “those days” means that it was during the time that Peter was in the vicinity. The narrative was focused on him and Aeneas. What is happening now is to be assumed (and later made explicit) that this is during that time period “that she became sick.”

Luke, a physician, doesn’t give any specifics. This shows that no determination was made how this happened. Otherwise, he would have given his usual careful observations. Rather, he gives the main point that some malady had overtaken her. She was “sick and died.”

Her death is given as a recorded fact. There is no reason to assume anything other than this occurred. Those who argue that this was a swoon or the like do so against the plainly stated facts. Further, to argue for this when they were not present is to argue that the account is factual and simply needs to be tweaked to allow for their own presuppositions and biases concerning the matter.

Further, it is the height of arrogance to make a claim about the narrative that is contrary to what is plainly stated when they were not there. Being dead is a state that is not hard to determine, and people have identified it for all of human history. If there are exceptions where a misdiagnosis was made, the burden of proof is on the one making the claim to prove it. As this cannot be done, the record of her death must stand as it is written. With that in mind, it next says, “When they had washed her.”

This was a traditional part of the burial process. It is a demonstration of care and respect for the person’s memory as she is prepared for her final internment. Matthew Poole says, “They washed the dead, and anointed them, to fit them for their burying, and especially to show their hope of the resurrection; which some think St. Paul alludes unto, 1 Corinthians 15:29.”

This is actually an important point. Matthew Poole’s note about anointing the dead is correct, but nothing is said of that here. It is actually a clue that they have a hope that has not yet been expressed in the account. That will be seen in the coming verses.

People tend to the corpses of their dead all over the world. It may be there is a sense of hope in an afterlife (such as the Egyptians) or for some other reason but including 1

Corinthians 15:29 is not correct. That is not at all the intent of Paul's words. He clearly says in the same passage "that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption" (1 Corinthians 15:50).

The bodies that believers now possess are destined to return to the dust of the earth, just as the early Genesis account tells us. When Daniel was told that many of those who sleep in the dust will be raised, it confirms this. The bodies that we now possess will not be the bodies we will possess at the resurrection. The washing of Tabitha was a note of respect and a point of closure for those left behind. With that noted, the verse ends with "they laid *her* in an upper room."

This would be out of sight of any who came by the house except for those who would purposefully go up to view her one last time. The custom in the Middle East was to always bury a person as quickly as possible, usually within the same day. Any chance to pay one's last respects would have to come within that short timeframe.

Life application: Unless the rapture happens, we are all going to die physically. This is a part of the way things are at this time. There is not a moment of guarantee that when we wake up in the morning, we will be alive by evening. And there is no guarantee that going to bed will be followed by getting up the next morning.

We must be prepared, right now, to meet our Maker. As Jesus is the One who makes reconciliation with Him possible, it is our responsibility to receive His offer of peace and reconciliation now. And more, it is our responsibility to tell others about what God has offered. Our date with death's destiny is assured. When it will come is known to God alone. Let us be wise and be prepared for that day and let us prepare others – as best as we can – for that day as well.

*Lord God, thank You that because of Jesus Christ, we have the sure, certain, and blessed promise of the resurrection to eternal life that You have promised to all those who believe. May we be responsible to tell others about this joy that we possess while we have the time. Prompt us in this, O God. Amen.*

**And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring *him* not to delay in coming to them. Acts 9:38**

In the previous verse, Tabitha is said to have died. With that remembered, Luke next records, "And since Lydda was near Joppa." The verb is a present participle, "And Lydda being near Joppa." Luke is describing the narrative as if it is ongoing. Understanding that,

he continues with, “and the disciples had heard that Peter was there.” Again, the verbs are present tense, “and the disciples having heard that Peter is there.”

Tabitha has died, it is understood that Peter is in Lydda and Lydda is not that far away. Luke is weaving his words together to join his reader in the narrative as it continues. The sadness of the situation, the loss that has been experienced, and the immediate pressing nature of the situation is highlighted by the use of his words.

Because of this state, Luke next records, “they sent two men to him.” Many scholars tie in the coming internment with the urgency of the request while, at the same time, denying that Peter was being called for the purpose of a hoped-for miracle. In other words, an example of the reasoning is that Peter’s presence was needed “to comfort those that were concerned in the great loss of so good a woman” (Matthew Poole).

If this was the case, it would hardly matter if Tabitha was buried or not. Comfort can be provided if a body is above ground or in the grave. It is obvious that they have hope that Peter can, in fact, appeal to the Lord for a miracle. It would make no sense to rush Peter to Joppa unless this was the possible outcome. But the next words give just that sense of urgency, saying they were “imploring *him* not to delay in coming to them.”

The verse ahead will clearly show that Tabitha was not someone Peter knew well, if at all. And yet, he is being summoned to come quickly. However, just a few verses ago, it said –

“And Peter said to him, ‘Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.’ Then he arose immediately. <sup>35</sup> So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.” Acts 9:34, 35

The word had gone out all around the surrounding area that Peter had accomplished this miracle. It was understood from Jesus’ ministry that He had not only healed but that He had also raised the dead. The anticipation is that Jesus, through the apostleship of Peter, might again perform such a miracle.

Life application: Luke’s words are meticulously recorded to show an ongoing narrative, one thing often leading to the next. This is certainly the case here. The final note concerning the healing of Aeneas going out in a great manner was provided for just this reason, meaning it was intended to lead into the next section of the narrative.

Likewise, if you come to the end of this passage about Tabitha and look it over, you will see a connection to the next section. This is not uncommon in Scripture and such clues show that what is being detailed is not a haphazardly recorded account, but a purposeful compilation intended to lead us through the narrative to a more perfect understanding of what God has done in order to establish His church.

Pay attention to such cues because they will help provide a clearer sense of why things are occurring at the times they occur. Acts is a vital part of God's word, even if it is not prescribing things for us to do. It is showing us that God's hand was with His church as it began, and thus we can know that His hand continues with His church today.

The miracles, for example, helped establish a sense of surety within the church until the word was written. Those same miracles can provide us with the exact same sense of surety now that the word has been received.

*Lord God, we can look to the wonderful things You have done for Your people in the past as are recorded in Your word. Now, we can have faith that what is provided there is true and reliable, and we can have confidence in the future concerning Your guiding hand being with us. Thank You for the surety Your word provides us as we continue forward in time, awaiting the fulfillment of all the things it promises are yet ahead. Amen.*

**Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought *him* to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. Acts 9:39**

In the previous verse, the saints in Joppa sent two men to Peter in Lydda imploring him to come with them to Joppa. Now, that continues with, "Then Peter arose." It is a present participle. The Greek reads, "Then Peter, having arisen."

The narrative Luke presents brings the reader into it, carefully allowing it to unfold as it is being read. Peter was willing to go with them. Therefore, in having arisen, he "went with them." His willingness to go with them would have alleviated any unnecessary delays as they could take him directly to the location without the possibility of him getting lost on the way or in the city.

As for the journey, it would not have been too long because the cities were near one another. The current driving distance is 16 miles. Assuming they had animals, it would be a few hours of riding at most. Even walking at a normal pace takes about 4 hours to go



that distance. Luke next records, “When he had come, they brought *him* to the upper room.”

There is a sense of urgency here. Nothing is said about stopping to have a meal, wash their feet, or any of the other things that normally would occur after traveling 15+ miles. Instead, Luke notes that he is immediately brought to where Tabitha had been laid. Next, whether they were already in the room or whether they came up with him, it notes, “And all the widows stood by him weeping.”

Tabitha had been a faithful soul and a caring provider to many. That alone would have endeared her to others. Her death would have been a source of loss to anyone who was close and shared in her life. But these women were also the recipients of her good deeds. This is seen in the next words. They were “showing the tunics and garments.”

It is improbable that they carried up a display of the things she had made. Rather, it appears that they were showing her works as they wore them. In essence, “She made these just for me.” This is implied in the Greek which is in the middle voice. The middle voice is used to denote that the subject is both an agent of the action and somehow concerned with it. In other words, these ladies were most probably modeling the garments for Peter to understand the greatness of the efforts put forth by Tabitha.

The types of clothing noted by Luke include the *chitón*, which is a garment worn close to the skin. It could be an undergarment, a shirt, a coat, and so on. The second is the *himation*. This is a garment worn over the *chitón*, such as a robe. It would often be made of wool, having openings for the head and arms. It would be a more loosely fitting garment. Of these, Luke notes that they were clothes “which Dorcas had made while she was with them.”

The word translated as “which” means “as many as,” and the verb is imperfect. It gives the sense of it being a continuous habit of making. It’s not just that she made them for these ladies, but she went out of her way to make them anytime a need arose. A literal translation of this last clause would be “as many as Dorcas was making while she was with them” (YLT).

The care she had for those she tended to is evident in all that is documented about her by Luke.

Life application: Paul was torn between departing and being with the Lord and staying to minister to others –

“But if I live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup> For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better. <sup>24</sup> Nevertheless to remain in the flesh *is* more needful for you.” Philippians 1:22-24

Tabitha (Dorcas) obviously was one of the saints and was therefore free from this body of death. However, those behind certainly wanted her back. Paul notes that her state with Christ would have been “far better” if she did not come back. And yet, that was the desire of those who had lost her.

Elsewhere, Paul says, “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.” Death is a part of the human existence. Until the rapture people will continue to die. The mourning we experience as believers is one of personal loss, not one of permanent loss.

If we can remember this, our times of loss should at the same time include a sense of joy for the one who has departed. Jesus Christ came to provide us with hope. To understand this more fully, take time today to read the account of the death of Lazarus in John 11. There, we see the surety of our hope because of who Jesus is.

In Christ is victory over death. If we can remember this and keep it with us at all times, it should help us in two major ways. The first is to spur us on to a more perfect desire to tell the unsaved about Jesus and to keep them in prayer for their hearts and eyes to be opened. The second is that when death enters into our sphere of life, if it is a believer who has died, we can have confidence that they are now in a “far better” state than remaining with us.

*Heavenly Father, help us to be attentive to the terminal state of existence that we as humans live in. May we carefully remember that our days are short and that without Jesus, there is no hope for those who depart this life. Give us hearts that are caring about this so that we will not be negligent in our responsibilities concerning proclaiming the good news of Jesus. Amen.*

**But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.**  
Acts 9:40

The previous verse spoke of the widows weeping and showing to Peter the tunics and garments that Tabitha (Dorcas) had made. With that, the words of this verse are given.

The NKJV does not do a great job with the verbs, so Young's translation will be used. It says –

“And Peter having put them all forth without, having bowed the knees, did pray, and having turned unto the body said, 'Tabitha, arise;' and she opened her eyes, and having seen Peter, she sat up.”

With that noted, it says, “And Peter having put them all forth without.” Peter excused those who were in the room in order to have his full attention devoted to the matter at hand. Jesus did this with the young girl as is recorded in Matthew 9:25, but we see in Mark 5 that the parents, Peter, James, and John were with Him. This is also confirmed in Luke 8. In this case now, however, Peter is alone. From there, it says, “having bowed the knees.”

After having solitude, he takes a position of humility before the Lord. There is no arrogance or pretentiousness in him. Rather, he is as one who is seeking the Lord from the heart and in a state of reverence. With that, it says he “did pray.” In the account of the girl from the gospels, Jesus simply spoke forth His words, and the girl was raised. In John 11, at the raising of Lazarus, Jesus prayed to the Father, but it was an open prayer intended to be heard for others to perceive and understand the intimacy that exists between the Father and the Son as well as the authority that the Son possessed.

Peter yielded himself to God through prayer, not claiming any authority of his own. With that, it next records, “and having turned unto the body said, ‘Tabitha, arise.’” Though recorded in Greek, these would have been the same words as spoken by Jesus in Mark 5. He said, “*Talitha cumi*,” meaning, “Little girl, arise.” Peter would surely have spoken Aramaic and said, “*Tabitha, cumi*.” The closeness of the words is remarkable but coincidental. Next, after Peter's spoken words, it says, “and she opened her eyes.”

As dead people do not open their eyes, the miracle that was hoped for has been realized. She is brought back to life by the power of God and through the petition of Peter. With that noted, the verse finishes with, “and having seen Peter, she sat up.”

Not only was she brought back to life, but she was also brought back to a state of vigor that allowed her to rise up on her own. The power of God is realized in the miracle.

Life application: Peter's words, “Tabitha, arise,” were words of confidence. This is the same person who asked to come out to the Lord on the raging waters of the Sea of Galilee. There it said –

“So He said, ‘Come.’ And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he saw that the wind *was* boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’”

-Matthew 14:29, 30

Peter took his eyes off the Lord and looked at the dangers surrounding him. His faith faltered, and he began to sink. In this account, Peter removed the distractions of the women and their sadness and focused on the Lord through prayer.

We can, and should, learn from this. Hebrews 12:2 implores us to fix our eyes on Jesus. If we don't do this, we will be ineffective in what we determine to do as believers because we will always be distracted by the things of the world. When our eyes are set on Jesus, our attention is likewise going to be set on Him. And when that is the case, our priorities and our determination will be properly focused. May we consider this all the days of our lives. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus!

*Lord God, even the most confident of us are just one step away from sinking among the raging waves of life if we don't keep our eyes on Jesus. But with Him as our focus, we can be confident that the path we are taking is correct, and that it will lead to the right and proper end. What happens along the way is temporary and will pass, but the goal on which we focus – Jesus our Lord – is eternal joy in His presence. Help us to remember this all our days. Amen.*

**Then he gave her *his* hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.** Acts 9:41

The previous verse detailed the restoration of life to Tabitha (Dorcas). With that having occurred, it next says of Peter, “Then he gave her *his* hand.” The verb is an aorist participle, saying, “And having given her his hand.”

It is speculated that this is noted because up until this time nothing has been said of physical contact between the two. If there was, Peter would have been ceremonially defiled according to Jewish law. That is found in Numbers 19:11, which says, “He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days.”

This is unlikely because it also says in Numbers 19:14, “This is the law when a man dies in a tent: All who come into the tent and all who are in the tent shall be unclean seven days.” The tent in that passage is to be equated to an enclosed area which is just where Tabitha's body had been laid. The prophets of the Old Testament also went into the dead

in the same manner as Peter, and they had physical contact with them while dead. That is seen in 1 Kings 17 (Elijah) and 2 Kings 4 (Elisha). But more to the point, in Christ, the types of defilement that are seen under the law are fulfilled and the law is set aside.

Regardless of this, Peter extended his hand to her. In doing so, he “lifted her up.” The order of events was different when Jesus restored life to the twelve-year-old girl. In Luke 8, it says –

“But He put them all outside, took her by the hand and called, saying, ‘Little girl, arise.’<sup>55</sup> Then her spirit returned, and she arose immediately. And He commanded that she be given *something* to eat.<sup>56</sup> And her parents were astonished, but He charged them to tell no one what had happened.”

-Luke 8: 54-56

Jesus first took the hand of the girl. He then directed her to arise. Peter directed her to arise and then took her hand. The difference is possibly because the life itself flowed from the Lord to the little girl whereas this is to show that the life of Tabitha was restored through Jesus and not from Peter. Only after her restoration does he take her hand to help her up. Next, it says, “and when he had called the saints and widows.”

The distinction between saints and widows is certainly not intended to mean the widows were not believers, but that they are the ones who were most affected by the charitable deeds of Tabitha. She tended to those who were unable to support themselves and were dependent on others for their needs. Having noted this, it is to these previously mournful souls that Peter “presented her alive.”

The miracle had been wrought, Tabitha was restored to those who had been mourning her loss, and the joy of her presence was probably accompanied by a great amount of praising the Lord for His tender mercies upon them all.

Life application: There are many people who say they believe in Jesus and yet they don't accept the early Genesis account as literal history. This generally extends to Genesis 11 where they begin to accept it as true and literal, as if God suddenly started telling us the truth about what was happening at that time.

There are people that say they are believers and yet they do not accept the idea of predictive prophecy. In other words, the prophecies in the Bible that are fulfilled were written after they occurred.

There are people who claim to be Christians, but they dismiss the miracles, healings, and raising of the dead as fabricated stories.

A lot of these categories overlap too, meaning it is the same group of people in two or even all three of the categories. Some only fall into one of them. But all of them show a lack of faith in God, and they do not accept the “Jesus” who is presented in Scripture. Jesus held to the absolute authority and truthfulness of the Genesis account including the story of man’s creation (Mark 10:6), the killing of Abel (Luke 11:51), the flood of Noah (Matthew 24:37, 38), and so on.

Jesus refers to prophecies that were written long before His coming, and which were either fulfilled in His coming (such as Luke 4:18) or that would be fulfilled in the future (such as Mark 13:14). The number of such prophecies is rather extensive.

And more, Jesus is said to have performed miracles, healings, and the raising of the dead. After His ascension, these continued on through the apostles who were empowered by the Lord to do so, such as in the raising of Tabitha in Acts 9.

Although it is possible to be saved and hold to these erroneous views, it is both illogical and contradictory to do so. And to then teach these things to others will lead to the presentation of a false Jesus and thus a false gospel.

Where is your faith? If you cannot trust the word that tells of Jesus, you are not demonstrating faith in the Jesus who is presented in Scripture. Have faith, accept the word, and trust that what is presented is literal and truthful.

*Lord God, help us in our times of unbelief or in our failure to accept Your word as it is given. May we stand approved before You as those who trust that Your word is literal, and it is true. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.** Acts 9:42

Over the past verses, the death and raising of Tabitha have been recorded. The last verse said that Peter “presented her alive.” With that noted, the main purpose of her being brought back to life is given. As it says, “And it became known throughout all Joppa.”

The restoration of her life was not, first and foremost, to bring happiness to those who had experienced loss. Nor was it so that she could continue doing good works for the people of Joppa. It was also not to relieve her of the state of death. Paul’s words

concerning that state have already been noted where he says that to depart and be with Christ “is far better” (Philippians 1:23).

Rather, the miracle was primarily for people to hear about it and then to accept that the Lord had accomplished it. And that is what occurred. As it next says, “and many believed on the Lord.” Rather than “in the Lord,” Luke says, “on (or upon) the Lord.” He, Jesus, is the object of the belief. Thayer’s Greek Lexicon identifies this as “a direction toward a person or thing, ‘after verbs of trusting and hoping.’”

The people have looked to Jesus and placed their trust in Him based on their knowledge concerning the miracle that has been accomplished. Any other reason for Tabitha’s raising is secondary to this. But more in their trusting of Jesus, the Father is then glorified. In John 12, Jesus said –

“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify Your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, *saying*, ‘I have both glorified *it* and will glorify *it* again.’” John 12:27, 28

A main purpose of Christ’s coming was to bring glory to God. The Father acknowledged this and said He had glorified His name, and He would do it again. That then follows with Jesus’ words to the apostles –

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do, because I go to My Father. <sup>13</sup> And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. <sup>14</sup> If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it*.” John 14:12-14

And this is now what has occurred. The people heard of what Peter had done in the name of Jesus (this is not explicitly stated, but it is implied because of Peter’s prayer) and they believed on the Lord. In believing in Jesus, the Father is glorified in the Son.

Life application: What has come about in Christ Jesus, both during His ministry and in the acts of the apostles in His name, is satisfying to God. Everything about the exaltation of Christ was by the design, and with the approval, of God. Christ Jesus’ preeminence in all things was God’s intent from the very beginning.

Jesus Christ is the means by which God receives glory in all things. Jesus is the Word, the Creator. God receives glory through His creative acts. Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word,

the Redeemer. God receives glory through His redemptive acts. And so on. Such things about God are revealed to us through Christ Jesus. He is the focal point for us to understand God, fully and completely. Further, it is through Jesus Christ that God will ceaselessly and endlessly reveal Himself to us.

Those who believe that they are “good with God” but who do not have Jesus Christ are as far from God as the greatest sinner. Jesus Christ is the One to heal the fracture between God and man. The Bible has been given to provide us with a written record of what God has done in and through Christ. The miracle of Tabitha’s raising is a testament to God’s approval of Jesus. Jesus is the means by which God receives glory. Have faith in Jesus Christ, and God will be pleased with you.

And more, read the Bible from this perspective. Remember, it is the word that is telling us about Jesus. Cherish this word and look for Jesus in it. When you do, God is pleased that you are doing so.

*Lord God, how precious it is to know that by faith in Jesus we are pleasing to You. In Him is reconciliation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal hope. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord who makes these things possible. Yes, thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner. Acts 9:43**

This is now the last verse of Chapter 9. The previous verse noted the extent that the news of the miracle of raising Tabitha had traveled, saying that it had “gone throughout all Joppa.” With that, it now says, “So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa.”

The meaning of “many days” is impossible to determine. It could have been weeks, months, or even years. The same expression was seen in verse 9:23 and it was a period of around three years. It is simply an indeterminate amount of time that means Peter stayed and conducted his affairs.

During this time, one can imagine Peter evangelizing those who had not received Jesus, providing doctrine and actual accounts of the work of Jesus, and performing or assisting in baptisms of those who had come to faith in the Lord. These and other things would have eventually led to this location becoming a hub for the word to go out. It is at this location that Jonah attempted to escape from the Lord, and as ships came in and went out, there was always the chance of the word being conveyed to those who were on them. While there in Joppa, it says that Peter stayed “with Simon, a tanner.”



It is the same name as Peter, who is “Simon Peter.” The Greek word translated as tanner is *burseus*. It will be seen three times in Acts 9 and 10, all associated with this person. In Chapter 10, it will note that his house is “by the sea.” Having a tannery meant a lot of refuse that needed disposal. Being by a flowing river or the sea would be an ideal spot. Further, the salt water of the sea would assist in the treatment process.

As for the job itself, being a tanner, the man would carry around an odor with him. If the tanning was accomplished on site, the whole place would have a really bad stench tied to it. Records of the Jews show that it was considered a lowly, contemptible profession.

The job itself cannot be equated, as some scholars do, with a job that was impure according to the law. That would be dependent on the types of hides he tanned (e.g., see Leviticus 5:2), the way they were obtained, and so on. None of these things are mentioned, and so any such thought would have to be inferred. In the law, the use of hides is explicitly noted –

“And the priest who offers anyone’s burnt offering, that priest shall have for himself the skin of the burnt offering which he has offered.” Leviticus 7:8

Further, the hides of animals were used in the construction of the Tabernacle of Meeting, and they are noted as coverings for people in the Bible, such as John being “clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist” (Matthew 3:4). These and other references show that being a tanner may have been a stinky, lowly profession, but it was not necessarily something that caused defilement. It was a part of the normal lives of people within the society.

The fact that Peter is with this person, however, does appear to bear on what will transpire in Acts 10. Peter was a Jew who was raised under the law. He saw the law completed in Christ, but he did not yet understand the full extent of what that meant or the scope of its effects. He understood that the legalistic and societal judgments of the Jews were obstacles to interpersonal relationships. He certainly remembered Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, and he was willing to live with a person who was considered contemptible to many. But that is only a step forward toward what he will next learn.

Life application: There are plenty of jobs people do that others might look down on. Treating wastewater might come to mind – “Eeeew, who would want to do that?” Cleaning public toilets would for sure be something many would not dare to do – “Yuuuuck, I’m glad I don’t have to do that!” Picking up trash and cigarette butts

probably doesn't seem too appealing to the folks who are coming into the local store to get their morning coffee – "Egad, I'm glad I'm not him. Off to the office, I go."

Each of these jobs may seem rather unappealing, but someone must do them. One thing is for sure, if the wastewater doesn't get properly treated in the nation for one week, the incidents of disease would begin to multiply and would quickly get out of hand. If the public bathrooms were never cleaned, people would be reticent to even go out, lest they had a need to use one! And if things weren't picked up around the local shops and malls, they would quickly begin to look like third-world nations, or maybe San Francisco or some other liberal city. Rats would quickly move in, and from there disease could easily start to spread.

The people that do these things perform hugely important functions that others look down on with contempt. But without their efforts, society would quickly begin to collapse. When you drive down the road and smirk at the guy blowing off a parking lot, remember that your lawn also needs to be mowed and your drive needs to be blown off. Simon was a tanner and yet Peter stayed with him. Maybe you can spend some time with people you think you're better than. You might find out that they are, in many ways, above you. A little humility in life goes a long way.

*Lord God, there are innumerable jobs to keep a society going. Some don't pay so well. Some are stinky or dirty. Some are hot and miserable to be accomplished. But each person that does his job is someone who was created in Your image. If he is a believer, then he is way ahead of the richest and most powerful person who has not come to Christ. Help us to make right judgments about the people we see and come into contact with each day. Yes, help us with this. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 10

**There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, Acts 10:1**

The final verse of Chapter 9 told of Peter staying in Joppa at the house of Simon the tanner. Now, Chapter 10 begins with the words, “There was a certain man in Caesarea.” Caesarea has already been mentioned twice in Acts. It was first noted when Philip is said to have preached in cities until he came to Caesarea (8:40). It was also mentioned in verse 9:30 where it noted that the brethren brought Saul down to Caesarea and sent him off to Troas.

The direction of Acts is going to shift greatly in Acts 13, from the ministry of Peter to that of Paul. But before that happens, the introduction of Gentile converts is to now be noted. This will begin the shift from Jew to Gentile, from Jerusalem to the rest of the world, and from the focus of Peter’s ministry to that of Paul’s. Of this change, Charles Ellicott rightly notes concerning this man –

“His admission into the Church, even if it were not the first instance of the reception of a Gentile convert as such, became, through its supernatural accompaniments and (in the strict sense of that word) its ‘prerogative’ character, the ruling case on the subject. Whether it were earlier or later than the admission of the Gentiles recorded in Acts 11:20, we have no adequate *data* for determining.”

The man now to be referred to is “called Cornelius.” Some place the name Cornelius (Greek: *Kornélios*) as being Latin, coming from *cornu*, or horn. Abarim defines that as coming from the Greek *keras*, or horn. And that, in turn, comes from the Hebrew *qeren* also meaning horn. They say, “The name Cornelius probably stems from an adjective and a diminutive form combined, and means **A Bit Like A Horn** or, slightly more striking: **Of The Little Horn.**” For brevity, it means “Little Horn.”

Of this man, Luke next says he is “a centurion.” Ellicott says of this –

“Caesarea was at this time the usual residence of the Roman Procurator of Judaea, and was consequently garrisoned by Roman troops. Greeks, Jews, and Romans, probably also Phoenicians and other traders, were mingled freely in its population.”

Concerning his rank, Cambridge gives a full description of his minimal scope of authority, saying, “This was not a distinguished office. He was commander of the sixth part of a

cohort, i.e. of half a maniple. The name must have been given to such [an] officer when his command was over a hundred men. The Roman legion in these times was divided into ten cohorts, and each cohort into three maniples, so that the nominal strength of the legion would be 6000 men.”

Based on this, Cornelius is just a moderately positioned soldier. He has men over him and he is the leader of about one hundred under him. This is defined by the word “centurion.” In Greek, it is *hekatontarchés*, coming from *hekatón*, one hundred, and *archó*, to rule. Hence, he rules over a hundred. Of this ruling position, Luke says it was “of what was called the Italian Regiment.”

He is an Italian in a unit that is part of a greater unit forming the tenth part of a legion. The word translated as regiment was used in the gospels in regard to those stationed in Jerusalem at the time Jesus was crucified (see Matthew 27:27). Noting him as being of the Italian Regiment is probably expressly stated to identify the entire regiment as being from Italy and not hired or conscripted natives from other areas. This regiment may have been designated to provide protection for the Roman proconsul who ruled in the area.

Life application: Without even reading ahead in the story, it is obvious based on how the structure of the Bible, including Acts, is laid out that this person now being mentioned will become the focus of attention for a certain amount of time.

As he is a Gentile, he is outside of the covenant given at Sinai. He would be considered an unclean Gentile to the Jews. As a soldier, he is not in any special category within Roman society. He is just a person who follows orders and who would also give orders depending on his position. But his orders would only be to those who were also soldiers. As a centurion, he is in a very moderate position of authority. It would be easy to blame him for problems that occurred under his authority, and it would be rare for him to be given a great notice even if his soldiers were exemplary in their conduct.

In other words, Cornelius is just a run of the mill guy who is living a pretty average life but with nothing exceptional in it to make him stand out among a crowd. He would fit the description provided by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1 rather well –

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*.<sup>27</sup> But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;<sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which

are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,<sup>29</sup> that no flesh should glory in His presence.” 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

Those who are in high positions will feel secure in who they are, thinking they are great and in God’s good favor. Their concern is not how to please God because they feel they must already be pleasing to Him. Those who live mediocre lives will normally understand that their position in society is not great. Therefore, they may more often be inclined to want to be pleasing to God. It is such people who will then be more willing to try to find out what it is that God finds pleasing.

When the gospel meets up with such a person, and when it is responded to, he has no place for boasting. Instead, he gives God the glory for what he has been freely offered. This is what God finds pleasing. When we trust in Him and not ourselves, He can, and He will be, satisfied that we have placed our hopes in the right place. If you want to be pleasing to God, don’t revel in your own goodness, but His. Be grateful for the gospel and glorify God through Jesus Christ whom He has sent to reconcile us back to Himself.

*Lord God, how wonderful it is to have been called back to You through the gospel. You have done all that is necessary to reconcile us to You. Thank You for that! All glory belongs to You. We receive the gift! We believe the gospel! We accept Jesus! Amen.*

**a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. Acts 10:2**

Cornelius was just introduced into the narrative. He was in Caesarea and was a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment. Luke continues his words concerning him, saying that he was “a devout *man*.” The Greek simply reads, “devout.” It is a new word to Scripture, *eusebés*. It signifies pious, God-fearing, devout, etc. The word carries a different sense than that used in Acts 2:5 and 8:2, *eulabés*.

That word denotes someone who properly takes hold of what is known, such as the law of Moses. This word in verse 10:2 is more like someone who properly esteems or reverences. Cornelius may not have known the true God, but he knew He was there, and he revered Him as such. Thus, he was pious.

That alone sets him off as an exceptional person considering his profession. But more, Luke continues to describe him. As he does, and unlike the NKJV rendering, he will use present participles to do so. He says, “and one who feared God.” Rather, “and fearing God.”

Luke is bringing the reader into the constant state of how Cornelius lived. It is a common word that signifies awestruck or being terrified of. The same word is used when Paul was converted. The people didn't believe that his conversion was true. As such, verse 9:26 says they were afraid of him. Cornelius was truly afraid of the God he knew was there and understood, as humans should, that he was accountable to Him for his actions. This is the sense that is to be derived from the words. This would then explain his piety. He wanted to please God with his life and works. But more, Luke says this was the case "with all his household."

Even without the revelation of Scripture, Cornelius understood the importance of conveying the right attitude concerning God to his whole household. For example, Proverbs says –

"Train up a child in the way he should go,  
And when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6

Verses such as this in the Old Testament, and many written by Paul in the New, are things that Cornelius understood intuitively. He shared his piety and fear of the Lord with his household, knowing that they too would have to give an account for their actions before God someday. Luke next says of him that he was one "who gave alms generously to the people." Rather, "giving many alms to the people."

The verb is singular. Thus, this is not speaking of the whole household just mentioned, but of Cornelius. The word translated as alms is also a general word found thirteen times in the gospels and Acts. For example, it was used in Acts 3:2, 3:3, and 3:10 when referring to the beggar that was healed by the Lord through Peter.

One can infer that Cornelius was the kind of person to drop money in such a person's hand. He might see a boy without a shirt and hand him one, and so on. He has a streak of pity and compassion for others that did not go unnoticed. And more, Luke also says of him that he "prayed to God always." Again, it rather says, "imploring God always."

The word is *deomai*. It signifies having a want for oneself. It may be a need, a request, and so on. It is used, for example, in Luke 5:12 –

"And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on *his* face and **implored** Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.'"

It seems likely that his imploring of God was for mercy –

- He was a devout man. He truly cared that his actions and heart were pleasing to God. Hence, he understood that there was a disconnect between him and God that needed to be appeased.
- He feared God with all his household. He was truly afraid of God, knowing that he would be judged for what he did in this life.
- He gave alms generously to the people. He didn't know how to mend the rift between him and God and so he did what he could with his limited knowledge in order to attempt to mend it from his level upwards.

Because of his albeit limited understanding of God, he implored Him, probably with words like, “O God, I know you are there. I know that You are holy and terrifying. I am a vile creature in Your presence, and I need Your mercy lest I be swept away in the final judgment.”

He was less worried about his earthly life than he was about the judgment that he knew would come after it.

Life application: Cornelius knew what all people instinctively know. But instead of dismissing it and going on in life without a care, figuring it was all hopeless anyway, he held fast to what he was certain was true. It is the state of humanity that Paul writes about in Romans 2 –

“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law <sup>13</sup> (for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; <sup>14</sup> for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, <sup>15</sup> who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*) <sup>16</sup> in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.” Romans 2:12-16

When you witness to people about Jesus, you will come across some who know that they are already in big trouble with God. They just don't know what to do about it. For such people, all you need to do is tell them about the grace of God in Christ and they will get it. They will straight away be drawn to this good news.

Others have hidden away this obvious knowledge of God. They may say, “I’m a good person,” or “I’m not as bad as Hitler.” Such people see themselves as a standard, or at least as a point of reference in relation to others. They fail to see themselves in the light of God’s perfection. For such a person, you must first get them to understand that God is perfect and infinitely holy. In order to do this, you present them the law. In seeing that they have not met God’s standards of perfection, they can then be explained about the grace of God in Christ.

Until someone sees himself in relation to the awesome perfection and holiness of God, they will never see the need for a Savior. Be sure to evaluate the person you are giving the gospel to. Amend your presentation based on questions you ask them. Once they realize their state, whatever it may be, then explain how that state is corrected through the cross of Jesus Christ.

*Lord God, may we be alert to the state of those around us. Help us to carefully consider how their lives are being lived, and then help us to direct them to the cross of Jesus accordingly. In the end, no sinner is too far from its cleansing power, and no person is good enough to avoid the judgment that it signifies. Help us to rightly explain to all about their great need for Jesus. Amen.*

**About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!” Acts 10:3**

The first two verses of Chapter 10 described the man, Cornelius, and the caliber of person he was. He was truly a man who desired to be pleasing to God, and he desired to be granted His mercy. That can be inferred from the description of him. Now the narrative will reveal that God has read his heart. This begins with the words, “About the ninth hour of the day.”

This would be at 3 pm. It is the time of Israel’s evening sacrifice, and it is the hour that Christ died on the cross –

“Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. <sup>45</sup> Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, ‘Father, ‘into Your hands I commit My spirit.’ Having said this, He breathed His last.”

-Luke 23:44-46



For a fuller description of the significance of this time, refer to the comments in Acts 3:1. There is nothing to suggest that Cornelius was either a proselyte or that he was following the customs of the Jews by praying at this hour. Rather, the previous verse clearly said that he “prayed to God always.” The importance of the hour is to connect it with other events that occurred at this hour in Scripture. Like days of the year, times of the day often bear significance and are used repeatedly to reveal patterns. Next, Luke records, “he saw clearly in a vision.”

The word translated as vision is *horama*. It was used once by Matthew after the transfiguration. All eleven other uses are found in Acts. It is something that is gazed at, and it is normally supernatural in nature. Cornelius is not asleep, but rather it is as if he is looking through a portal into another dimension. In his vision, he saw “an angel of God coming in.”

The sense of the verb is wrong. The word translated as “coming in” is an aorist participle, “having come.” Cornelius was praying and then there was someone there. As for the word *aggelos*, or angel, it means a messenger. It can refer to a supernatural being or a human. It is someone sent carrying a message. In this case, he is being sent from God. With that, the verse finishes with, “and saying to him, ‘Cornelius!’”

Again, it is an aorist participle, “and having said to him, ‘Cornelius.’” The sense is that Cornelius was in prayer and may have had his eyes closed or was mentally fixated on his prayer. Suddenly, and without any motion, someone came in and has spoken his name. This is what sets up the reaction coming in the next verse.

Life application: With another interesting and divinely appointed event recorded, it is good to be reminded that the verses in Acts are descriptive in nature. What is recorded about Cornelius’ meeting prescribes nothing. It is simply a record of what transpired, and there is a reason that it has come about.

Without getting too far ahead, the events that took place were necessary to cause the subsequent events to come about. This is especially so with Peter’s trance that will also be recorded in this chapter. But the coming of the messenger to Cornelius is needed to support and confirm what Peter needs to know.

Peter was a Jew, and he was learning about the significance of Christ’s work. He will learn more about it in his encounter with Cornelius. Now, this information is known. It is recorded in Scripture, and there does not need to be a repeat of it in every jungle or grassland, or in every Buddhist or Islamic city. We should neither expect visions and

trances, nor are they necessary. The word is recorded, it tells us what we need to know, and it is sufficient for our learning and instruction.

Be wary of anyone who claims they have had an encounter with an angel or with the Lord Himself. Millions have been deceived by such people. Think of Mormonism! Today, there are over sixteen million Mormons. And there have been Mormons for almost two hundred years. Their religion is based on a lie spoken by Joseph Smith concerning an angelic visitation.

This is not an exceptional thing either. Consider the Seventh Day Adventists! There are about twenty-five million members in about ninety-five thousand churches. It is one of the fastest growing and most widespread churches on the planet. And yet it is based on the false visions of Ellen G. White.

There is no need for such things because we have the word of God. Hold fast to it. Trust in Christ alone as He is revealed in Scripture. And save your time concerning that sensational video, movie, or book. You are wasting it if you dive in. Instead, dive into the Bible daily. Get your fill of God's word!

*Glorious God Almighty, thank You for Your precious word. Help us to be rightly focused on what it says and keep us from people that would direct our attention away from it and to that which is of no value. Your word is a light to our feet. It is a lamp for our path. Help us to use it as the illumination for our walk in Your presence for all our days. Amen.*

**And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, "What is it, lord?"  
So he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. Acts 10:4**

The previous verse is where Cornelius saw in a vision an angel of God having come to him. Now, Luke records, "And when he observed him, he was afraid."

Both verbs are aorist participles. "And having looked intently on him and having become afraid" (BLB). The word translated as "observed," *atenizó*, is one that indicates being completely fixed in staring at something. It is giving full attention to what is seen. One can see hints of the word "attention" in it. Cornelius was praying and, all of a sudden, this messenger was there. This caught his full attention and brought him to a state of terror.

With this state over him, it next records, that he “said, ‘What is it, lord?’” The word *kurios* is used. It can be used in a reference to the Lord, meaning Yehovah. It can be used as a title of respect to one greater than another, as in, “My lord, what can I do?” It can be used as a title of general respect, such as, “Sir, what is it?” And etc.

In this case, Cornelius understands this a divine messenger, “What is it, lord?” This seems to be the case because of the terror just noted. If it was a senior from his military chain of command, he would have simply said, “Yes, sir, I am almost done praying.” With his state of terror, and with his question spoken, Luke next says, “So he said to him.”

This is now the messenger speaking to Cornelius. He has come for a reason, he has been asked about what his coming is for, and so he now gives a reply, saying, “Your prayers and your alms have come up.”

The same word used to describe the alms the beggar asked for in Acts 3:2 and that also described the charitable deeds of Tabitha in Acts 9:36 is used here. These alms are derived from compassion that is directed to the poor and needy. Those, along with his obviously heartfelt prayers, are said to have ascended. The meaning is that they were as an offering burned on an altar that had then become a fragrant aroma. These are then specifically noted, “for a memorial.”

This is the third and last time that the word *mnémosunon*, or “memorial,” is seen in the Bible. The word signifies a reminder. It is something that is worth remembering such as in Matthew 26:13 and Mark 14:9, both of which speak of the same event –

“Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a **memorial** to her.” Matthew 26:13

In this case, the prayers and deeds of Cornelius were something worthy of remembrance, as it says, “before God.” Taken together with the word “ascended,” it is as an offering on an altar that is described in Leviticus. They were a true and complete sacrifice that would otherwise be acceptable to God. They were not enough to save him, however. This is evident based on the rest of the passage.

However, they demonstrate that his heart was set in the right direction. Charles Ellicott states the matter well, as long as it is understood that apart from faith in Jesus (which will come as the chapter continues) his deeds cannot justify him, only his faith can –

“If we ask, in the technical language of a later theology, how they could be accepted when they were offered prior to a clear faith in Christ, and therefore before justification, the answer is that ... He was believing in the Light that lighteth every man, though as yet he did not identify that Light with its manifestation in Jesus as the Christ (John 1:9). He had the faith which from the beginning of the world has justified—the belief that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).” Charles Ellicott

The ellipsis in the quote from Ellicott removes something that may lead to a false sense of what is being said.

Ellicott is close in his analysis, but it must be understood that when he says, “he had the faith which...justified,” it must mean a potential justification, not actual at this time. People all over the world have faith, they do good deeds, and they really believe there is a God that we must answer to. The issue isn’t that they believe this. The issue is, first and foremost, that sin must be dealt with. Abraham was surely the same person before and after the note in Genesis 15:6. But he had to have faith in God’s provision first.

Abraham believed in the Lord (YHVH), and He credited it to Him as righteousness. Cornelius believes in God, in a general sense. Now, in Acts 10, he will be introduced to the Lord (Jesus who is YHVH) and he will believe in a specific sense. This is what brings justification. Sincere people can believe in a false gospel or a false messiah and not be saved. Cornelius has faith and it is now going to be directed to the One who can mediate that faith before God in an acceptable way. That will become explicitly clear in verse 10:43.

Life application: We must never waffle in our theology and say that someone has faith that can save apart from Christ. A person can have great faith and misdirect it and not be saved. Only when the faith is directed to Jesus, the Lord God incarnate, can a person then be saved.

Those of the past who knew of the Lord’s promise of Messiah, such as Job, had the appropriate faith because they had faith, and they believed in the right Person to come. Now, all must believe in the right Person who has come. This may seem like splitting hairs, but it is not. The resolution to man’s problem, meaning sin, must be dealt with. The only One who can deal with it is Jesus who is the Christ (Messiah).

Jesus is the Lord (YHVH). Any other “messiah” is not the Lord (YHVH) and is thus a false messiah. With more revelation has come more precise responsibility. Only through the name of Jesus can man be saved.

*Lord God, help us to not error in our wording and thus lead others astray through misunderstanding. May we carefully think through our presentation of the gospel and then give it in a manner that will convict and then heal the person who hears it. Help us in this, O God, that people will come to a right and saving knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.*

**Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter.** Acts 10:5

In the previous verse, Cornelius was told that his prayers and alms had come up for a memorial before God. Because of this, he is told, “Now send men to Joppa.”

The encounter and the directions are not unlike that which were given in Chapter 9 –

“Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, ‘Ananias.’

And he said, ‘Here I am, Lord.’

<sup>11</sup> So the Lord *said* to him, ‘Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. <sup>12</sup> And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.’” Acts 9:10-12

This time, however, instead of a believing Jew receiving instructions to go to an unbelieving Jew to have his eyes opened, it is a Gentile being told to send men to a believing Jew so that the sender may have his heart rightly turned to God. It is obvious, even before the next clause, that it is Peter who is to be summoned. The account of him in Joppa was just referred to in the last verse of Chapter 9. That thought is confirmed with the words, “and send for Simon.”

Here, his original Jewish name is given. It is what he was known as until Jesus designated him Peter as is recorded in the gospels (see Matthew 16:17-19, Mark 3:16, and Luke 6:14). After that, Luke records, “whose surname is Peter.”

Whatever “surname” meant in the past, it now means a hereditary name common to all members of a family. In this case, his surname would be his father’s name, Bar-Jonah, or

“son of Jonah,” seen in Matthew 16. Hence, this more rightly reads, “who is named Peter,” or “who is called Peter.”

Cornelius has been directed to specifically call for Simon who is called Peter. This is to avoid any confusion between him and the man he is staying with, Simon the tanner. Rather than this messenger telling Cornelius the message of Jesus, the responsibility is given to an apostle of Jesus. But more, it is given to Simon Peter. There is a reason for this that will be explained later in the passage.

Life application: A responsibility was laid upon the apostles. That expanded to the disciples as the apostolic age continued and eventually ended. The message of Jesus Christ is a message that has been given to us to share. Angels do not convey it to men, and it would be contradictory for us to think that such would be the case.

Paul says that “faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). It is true that someone may pick up a Bible or a tract with the gospel and read it and then come to faith. But someone had to translate the Bible, it had to be published, it had to be purchased, it had to be given, and so on.

The responsibility for people to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ rests upon us. Just before Paul’s words of Romans 10:17, he said –

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> And how shall they preach unless they are sent?”

-Romans 10:14, 15

People need to hear the word. The word will not get out unless people get involved in the process. Yes, it is good to support preachers, but it is equally as good for any and all saved believers to also join in the process. As the psalm says, “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so” (Psalm 107:2). Open your mouth and speak. Carry a Bible and pass it on. Have tracts available to share. Be a participant in the great thing God has done and continues to do, even to this day. If not you, then who?

*Lord God, how marvelous it was on the day we heard the good news about what Christ had done for us. Someone took the time to share that news, and we were blessed to be included in Him because of it. Help us to carry that thought with us always. Help us to be responsible with our time and abilities by now being included in those who share this wonderful message of hope and truth. Amen.*

**“He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.” Acts 10:6**

Cornelius is still receiving instruction from the messenger from God. He was just told to send men to Joppa and to find Simon whose name is Peter. It now continues with, “He is lodging with Simon, a tanner.” This gives the reason for specifying “Simon whose name is Peter.” Normally, one would go to a residence looking for the occupier of that residence.

In this case, Simon the tanner opened his house to Simon Peter. Without identifying which Simon was to go, they both may have had to make the journey, just to be sure. Ananias was not an apostle, and yet, he was summoned to go to Straight Street and place his hands on Paul. Without this explicit instruction, they may have thought the Lord purposefully wanted a tanner to meet with a Gentile because he was used to interacting with Gentiles, or whatever.

As noted in the commentary on Acts 9:43, being a tanner was not necessarily something that caused defilement. It was a part of the normal lives of people within the society. Even if some Jews found it an unclean lifestyle, that was their problem, but it was not necessarily an issue with the law.

In the modern world, people may look down on garbagemen, but that doesn’t mean a thing about the person. The position may be filled by the greatest guy in town. And so, this cannot be used as an indication that “the Jewish law was losing its hold on Peter” (Vincent’s Word Studies). Rather, it meant that Peter was willing to stay with a person who was looked down upon by others and who may have stank to high heaven.

Next, it says, “whose house is by the sea.” This would easily identify where to go, and which tanner was being referred to if there was more than one in town. Being by the sea was a convenient place for tanning as noted in the earlier commentary referenced above. Lastly, it says, “He will tell you what you must do.”

These words are left out of various texts. Of this omission, Cambridge says –

“These words are not in the oldest MSS. In Peter’s own account of the visit to Cornelius (Acts 11:14) we have ‘who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved;’ and this is one of the numerous instances found in some later texts of the Acts where an attempt has been made to form a complete narrative in the earlier chapters by

gathering together and adapting statements which appear in their proper place in later chapters.”

Cambridge immediately assumes that “older is better,” and that the omission demonstrates that this was an insert in one text to reconcile the two accounts. However, it could just as easily be that the omission was an error in the earlier text and that text was then rejected because of it. Unless there is definite proof of one or the other, the addition of a footnote in the Bible translation is a useful tool to let the reader know the disparity between the various texts. Either way, no information is lost because Chapter 11 includes it. So, it was either stated twice or it was stated only once, but it was – in fact – stated.

Life application: Be sure to read the footnotes if your Bible includes them. And when you buy a new Bible, look for one that includes footnotes. There are many important points that are noted in them that will help the true student of the Bible to determine what is going on and to then help them think those things through clearly.

When you come to a footnote you are not fully understanding, then you can read up on that passage in longer commentaries. Eventually, you will usually find a suitable resolution to the issue you are trying to resolve.

*Heavenly Father, may we be faithful and careful stewards of Your word, always thinking it through, contemplating it, and meditating upon it. It is too precious to simply ignore. It is light, and it conveys life. May we treat it with the highest care and respect all our days. Amen.*

**And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually. Acts 10:7**

The previous verse had the messenger saying to Cornelius that Peter was lodging with Simon the tanner and that Peter would be the one to convey to Cornelius what he was to do. With that, Luke next records, “And when the angel who spoke to him had departed.”

In verse 10:3, it said the messenger had come in a vision. Now it says that he had departed. This tells us that he really was there, even if it is in a manner we cannot readily understand. One cannot come and then depart unless he is present at some point, and yet a vision is normally something that is thought of as being a one-sided event, actually only occurring in the perception of the one having the vision.



But this isn't really so. In 2 Kings 6, there is an account of the Syrians coming to make war against Israel. One of the servants of Elisha saw the army and was afraid, but Elisha told him, "Do not fear, for those who *are* with us *are* more than those who *are* with them" (2 Kings 6:16). After that, Elisha prayed, asking the Lord to open his servant's eyes. When he did, it said, "And behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:17).

Thus, there is a realm that exists, and which can be perceived when the Lord allows it to be so. Cornelius was allowed to see into it in order to receive the words of the messenger. Now that time is ended and so it says that "Cornelius called two of his household servants."

In verse 10:2, it said that Cornelius was "a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household." This would have included these two because they are a part of his household. Luke next continues with, "and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him continually."

It is the same word used to describe Cornelius himself in verse 10:2. This was a respectful, reverent soldier that was assigned under Cornelius who was obviously highly trusted and who would understand the weight of the matter that would be taking place as it unfolded. Of these words, Charles Ellicott says, "It is obvious that all such facts are interesting as throwing light on the character of Cornelius, and showing that, to the extent of his power, he sought to lead those over whom he had any influence to the Truth which he had found precious as leading him to a higher life."

Despite being pagan, Cornelius understood his accountability before God. But it wasn't something he just carried around inside of him without instilling that in others. Rather, to his utmost, he expected this conduct of those who he held close to himself in his household and in those under his charge.

Life application: Although it is impossible to tell the level of godliness of Cornelius in comparison to all of the other people on the earth who were alive at his time, we could pick an arbitrary number on the bell curve based on the description of him in Acts. Assuming he was just as described, and he was described this way because he was exceptional, then we might pin him in the top five percent of people who were devout and god-fearing.

Supposing that this is so, we could then say, “Well, if anyone had a right to boast before God, it would be him.” And yet, Paul says of Abraham, the father of those who believe – “What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ <sup>4</sup> Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.” Romans 4:1-4

As godly and devout as Cornelius was, he was – like Abraham – wholly in need of God’s grace. God is not grading humanity on a bell curve. He is evaluating man based on His infinite perfection. Because of this, all people stand condemned before Him (John 3:18). We must be imputed His perfection, or we must be forever separated from Him, because of His perfection. It is Jesus Christ, and He alone, who makes this possible.

Cornelius will be told what he must do. The choice is up to him. Will he depend on his own supposed righteousness, or will he set that aside and believe the gospel which highlights his own insufficiency before God? To accept that Jesus Christ died for our sins is to admit that we have sinned. God cannot fellowship with a person who denies his obviously fallen state. But even if someone does acknowledge that he is a sinner, God cannot fellowship with him merely because of this. Such a person must accept the remedy to his state. That remedy is Jesus. Be sure that people know. In knowing, and in accepting what they now know, only then can God receive them.

*Lord God, thank You that, because of Jesus Christ, we have forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. We may be devout without Jesus, but never enough that we can be accepted by You. Rather, we need His perfection, and You have offered it to us by grace. May those we talk to be willing to accept the premise, have the faith needed, and then be reconciled to You. Help us to share this life changing word. Amen.*

**So when he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa.** Acts 10:8

In the last verse, Cornelius had called his servants and a devout soldier. With that remembered, it now says, “So when he had explained all *these* things to them.” The word translated as “had explained,” signifies to completely bring forth and thus to thoroughly explain. This means that Cornelius didn’t just tell them, “You three are to go to Joppa and fetch a guy named Peter.” Instead, he told them the entire substance of what occurred including the vision, the visitation, the words of the messenger, and so on.

This shows that Cornelius was on the friendliest of terms with his servants and his soldier. They deserved no explanation, but they were provided with it. It is another hint of the caliber of the man who deemed those around him deserving of more than just an arrogant, commanding attitude. Understanding this, and only after fully declaring the matter, it next says that “he sent them to Joppa.”

As it was the ninth hour (3 pm) when he was given the vision, it shows the truly obedient nature of Cornelius to get about the task without delay. It also shows his true desire to get about hearing what Peter would have to say. Nothing is said of them leaving in the morning, but that they called, and he sent them out.

Life application: Paul, citing the Lord, says –

“‘In an acceptable time I have heard you,  
And in the day of salvation I have helped you.’  
Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.”

-2 Corinthians 6:2

The prayers of Cornelius had been heard, and he had been told that the day of salvation had come. He didn't delay in getting about the business that had been set before him. There are people that really want to hear the word. Their hearts are already primed for responding favorably to the gospel. Others might be so far from the Lord that the gospel is the last thing one would expect they would want to hear. And yet, at the right moment, it is presented to them, and tears of joy flood their faces as they realize the significance of what Jesus had done for them.

We cannot know what type of reaction we will receive when we share the gospel, but we will never know if we don't... share the gospel. Today may be the only day we ever come across a particular person. We should probably get about what we have been called to do lest we are later filled with regret over our negligence.

Let us be ready and willing, at all times, to share the wonderful news that Jesus has come!

*Lord God, we can look around the world and think we have plenty of time to do this or that but then find out it is too late, and our window of opportunity is closed. How sad is the regret in such times. And how much more so when we have failed to share the good news about Jesus. Help us not to be dilatory in our sharing of the gospel, O God. Amen.*

**The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Acts 10:9**

The previous verse noted that Cornelius sent his servants and one of his soldiers off to Joppa. With that noted, it now says, “The next day.” At this point, it may seem that these messengers actually started their journey the next day, but this is not likely.

They had immediately left the house of Cornelius, eventually stopped for the night, and are now continuing on the journey. Depending on where the starting and stopping points are in the cities, the journey is 35-40 miles, or even more. This would take 10-13 hours to walk at a normal pace. If they had donkeys, it could go a little quicker. If they had horses, they would have to tire them out to meet the time stated in this verse if it was on the same day of their departure. For now, it continues with, “as they went on their journey.”

The verb is a present participle, “as they are journeying on the way.” Luke is taking us through a methodical set of steps concerning what occurred to show us how the Lord perfectly timed everything that will transpire. In this journeying, it next says, “and drew near the city.”

It is another present participle, “and are approaching the city.” Again, Luke is drawing the reader directly into the events as they unfold. They have left Caesarea. They are journeying on the way. They are approaching the city. Now, at that same time as these things are coming to their conclusion, it says that “Peter went up on the housetop to pray.”

The timing of the two events coincides at this moment. The people who have been sent by Cornelius, because of the visitation of a messenger when he was seeing a vision are coming near the city just as Peter is going up to the housetop to pray. The housetop was most likely unoccupied at this time. If it was a sunny day, the sun would be high. Unless there was a purpose in going up there, people would more likely remain in the shade.

But more to the point, the housetop was a place people would go for various reasons, including worship. This is seen, for example in these passages from the Old Testament –

“And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah shall be defiled like the place of Tophet, because of all the houses on whose roofs they

have burned incense to all the host of heaven, and poured out drink offerings to other gods.” Jeremiah 19:13

“Those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops;  
Those who worship and swear *oaths* by the LORD,  
But who *also* swear by Milcom.” Zephaniah 1:5

Despite these people improperly worshiping the Lord or other gods, these verses show us that the housetops were used for “getting closer to God,” just as the people would go to the high places for worship throughout all of the Old Testament. The idea is that of being elevated and in the open so that God could supposedly be more accessible. With Peter now having gone to the housetop, Luke records that it is “about the sixth hour.”

This would be right at midday. This shows that the journey most probably began on the day before. Unless they got up extremely early in the morning when it was still pitch black, they could not have arrived this quickly at Joppa. Hence, they immediately left Caesarea, they traveled until evening, and then they resumed travel again the next day. This is all to be considered in how the events will come together at the same time.

Life application: Don’t be afraid to read various versions of the Bible. One can really miss out on the actual feeling of what is happening if the translators are wrong in their wording, choice of verbiage, the tense of verbs, and so on.

Luke is purposefully drawing his readers into the narrative, leading them as if they are following along as the events take place. Using the past tense in place of the present tense may still convey the same general idea, but it loses the flavor of what is presented. Being captivated by one version, especially when it is wrong in such ways, means you may miss out on the delight of the moment.

So, feel free to read several versions as in a parallel Bible. You are sure to get a fuller appreciation for what is said. If you have a real question that develops between the versions, then you can research more fully to find out what is nagging at you. Most Bibles convey the same overall thought, and so the passage is clearly understood, but the subtleties can make a difference in how you might enjoy what is being presented.

*Heavenly Father, help us to be attentive to the little differences in translations of Your word. We might get a different sense from one than from another, even if they convey the same overall meaning. Help our study of Your word to be a delightful experience where we find real intimacy with You through Your wonderful word. Amen.*

**Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance** Acts 10:10

The previous verse noted Peter going up to the housetop to pray at about the sixth hour. Now, it says, “Then he became very hungry.”

It is a word found only here in Scripture, *prospeinos*. It is a compound word signifying “toward” and “hunger.” Therefore, it signifies “hungering further,” and thus “very hungry.” This is not without purpose because it next says, “and wanted to eat.”

That is the usual thing that happens when one gets hungry. However, satisfying a hunger can be immediate, such as when grabbing an apple to eat, or it can take longer, such as waiting on a cook to prepare something. Peter has been praying, he got hungry, and so he obviously told someone that he would like to eat because it next says, “but while they made ready.”

The verb is a present participle, “they were preparing.” Nothing is said about anyone else in the narrative, so an answer to who “they” is must be mentally inserted by the reader. Whoever “they” are, they were preparing something for him to eat. As they were doing this, it next says, “he fell into a trance.”

Rather, the Greek reads with the same word found in Acts 8:16, saying, “an ecstasy fell upon him.” In Acts 8:16, it referred to the idea of the Holy Spirit falling on those of Samaria. It will be seen again in that context in Acts 10:44 and 11:15 when referring to the conversion of Cornelius and those with him. HELPS Word Studies says that the specific word used, *epiptó*, comes from *epi*, on or upon, and *pipto*, to embrace (with affection) or to seize (with more or less violence, literally or figuratively).

In this case, it is a trance that has fallen upon Peter. It is not the same word, translated as “vision,” that described what happened to Cornelius in verse 10:3. This word, *ekstasis*, was seen in Acts 3:10 when describing the amazement of the people when the crippled beggar had been healed. It signifies a displacement of the mind. Thus, it is bewilderment or ecstasy.

Peter has entered into a different and bewildered state. It is in this state that he will start to understand particular points of theology that he never had considered before. Unfortunately, in his learning, he will afterward not always apply what he has learned.

This is particularly noted in Galatians 2. For now, Peter has had a trance fall upon him for his learning, for our learning, and as a descriptive account of how it came about.

Life application: What Peter will see and be told in the verses ahead is rather clear, and it stems from symbolism going back to the book of Ezekiel, and it carries with it information that could only be conveyed to a person like Peter after the finished work of Jesus on the cross in fulfillment of the Law of Moses.

Despite being a descriptive account, it is clear and unambiguous in what it conveys. Some people ignore what is given here entirely. Others accept about fifty percent of the lesson and stop there. But what will be presented is so clear and obvious that it truly takes a full-blown case of cognitive dissonance to reject the lesson.

Pay heed to what is coming in the verses ahead, set aside any presuppositions that you may have about various matters, and carefully think about what is presented. In doing so, the difference between works of the law and the grace of Jesus Christ will become perfectly evident. It will also reveal the extent of this grace in relation to the people of the world.

*Lord God, even the most studious of us may fail to understand what You are saying in Your word, simply because we have a presupposition or a bias about a particular doctrine. Help us to set such things aside and look to what You are conveying to us. Help us not to insert into the text what we want to see, but to draw out from it those things You want us to see. May it be so, to Your glory. Amen.*

**and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.** Acts 10:11

Taken with the previous verse, the words form a complete thought – “Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance <sup>11</sup> and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.” With this noted, the words can now be looked into, starting with, “and saw heaven opened.”

Rather, the first verb is present tense to more poignantly bring the reader into the narrative – “and beholds heaven opened.” It isn’t that he went into a trance and saw. He went into a trance, and he beholds. It is right there before him as he looks. While beholding this marvelous scene, it next says, “and an object.”

This is all happening while he beholds. This thing, described here as an object, takes hold of his vision. The word simply means a vessel by which something is contained. In this case, the object is “like a great sheet.” The word is *othoné*, and it is found only here and in verse 11:5 where Peter explains to others what he saw. It is fine linen, and thus it refers to a sheet or a sail. It is a piece of linen, obviously square (as will be seen), and extremely large.

Some speculate that this may be a tallit, a fringed prayer shawl used by Jews. If it were such an item, and because Peter is a Jew, he would have certainly said so when later describing it. Rather, it appears to simply be “like” a great sheet, and thus something specifically used for this purpose. Of this object, it next says that it was “bound at the four corners.”

This now gives a better sense of what the object may be. As noted, the word used to describe it is a sheet or a sail. The Weymouth New Testament uses the word sail –

“The sky had opened to his view, and what seemed to be an enormous sail was descending, being let down to the earth by ropes at the four corners.”

This is probably what is being conveyed. Peter bar Jonah (his full name as seen in Matthew 16:17) was a fisherman and well acquainted with sailing. He had just been called from Joppa where centuries earlier Jonah had sailed aboard a ship going to Tarshish. As he was by the sea at Simon the tanner’s house (Acts 10:6), he would have daily seen ships coming and going. When describing this object in Acts 11, it would be much more normal for him to use this description with those he talked to – “I saw this thing descending like a huge sail!”

The description of it being a sail would then fit more readily with the typology of what will later be described for other reasons as well. Of this great object like a sail, it next says it was “bound at the four corners.”

The word translated as “corners” means “beginnings.” It is the very extremity of the sail, and this is what would naturally be done to a sail. The billowing square sail of a ship is what catches the wind and impels it forward as it is bound by its corners. This is just what the word was used to indicate in ancient Greek as noted by Vincent’s Word Studies–

“Dr. J. Rawson Lumby suggests that the word, ‘applied to loose, bellying sails of ships,’ may indicate that the form of vessel which appeared to Peter ‘recalled an image most



familiar to his previous life - the wind-stretched canvas of the craft on the Lake of Galilee' ('Expositor,' iii., 272)."

The verse finishes with the words, "descending to him and let down to the earth." The number four in Scripture is defined by Bullinger as the number of creation. It is the world number and especially the city number. This object bound at the four corners descended down to the earth. As such, it would indicate the four corners of the earth noted elsewhere in Scripture, such as in Isaiah 11:12. It is a way of describing the totality of a location, such as a city or a country, or even the earth itself.

As this has descended from heaven, its origin is in heaven. Due to its great size and the fact that it has four corners, and that it has descended to the earth, it is emblematic of the entire earth. These things can be deduced even before the next verses are given.

As a point of interest, the word used to describe this sail has a kindred noun, *othonion*. That is seen in the gospels when referring to the linen strips used to wrap Jesus' body. That word is not used, but it is an interesting connection to help understand the word that is being used by Luke.

Life application: At times, the Bible provides information in typology, metaphor, and comparison, and asks us to think through what is being said. It can be an imperfect science to interpret these things, but the more we read the Bible, the more clearly such things begin to be understood.

The consistency of the Bible in its use of various literary devices, especially combined with the life or circumstances of those who are highlighted in the passages, can give us even more assurance of what is being conveyed. For example, Peter is being used to convey imagery to the church at this time. Who he is, what he did, and the surrounding passage all give us clues as to what the imagery is conveying.

From there, we can then make logical deductions about what is being expressed. In other words, read your Bible, think about what it says, and remember these things as you continue. When an interesting passage comes before you, then you can take your store of information and make such conclusions. Be careful, however, because some people can make anything mean anything by incorrectly analyzing what is being described. Don't just jump on the first commentary's explanation but be willing to research the matter fully in order to get the best hint of what is being expressed.

*Lord God, thank You for the wonders and delights that are found in Your word. They give us a lifetime of things to study, contemplate, and consider. Someday, we long to see the word fully explained to us so that we can behold the marvel of all that it contains! Thank You for this precious gift, Your wonderful word. Amen.*

**In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.** Acts 10:12

The previous verse referred to the “object like a great sheet [sail]” descending to Peter from heaven to the earth. That now continues with, “In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth.”

The translation is not acceptable. It is stated without exception, saying, “all the quadrupeds of the earth.” It is a new word, *tetrapous*, that signifies “four” and “foot.” It will be seen here, in Acts 11:6, and then in Romans 1:23. Every four-footed animal that is to be found on earth was included in this display. That is followed by, “wild beasts.”

This word, *thérion*, is not included in some manuscripts, but it is found in Peter’s description of the account in Acts 11:6. It is possible a scribe either missed it in this verse, or it was purposefully inserted to reconcile the two accounts. Either way, the word comes from the word *théra*, signifying a trap used for hunting. Thus, this is a generic word for any wild animal. Next noted are “creeping things.”

The Greek word is *herpeton*. It also is a new word, and it signifies any crawling animal, reptiles, and especially a serpent. It is comparable to the Hebrew word *remes* first found in Genesis 1:24. The Greek word is the etymological root of our modern word herpes which is a disease that creeps. Finally, it says, “and birds of the air.”

Rather, the Greek reads, “and the birds of the heaven.” There is no qualifier saying, “clean birds.” Rather, it can be assumed that all birds of the heavens are included in the scene before him.

Though getting a bit ahead of the narrative, what is being seen is a picture of the cleansing of the Gentiles through Christ’s work. The sail is the means by which the message goes forth, signifying movement on the seas, even to the furthest parts of the world.

The sail being made of linen provides its own picture of purity. All that are noted upon it are cleansed by the blood of Christ, apart from deeds of the law, and are deemed as acceptable to God because of Him.

The sail having four corners signifies that the gospel will go forth to every part of the earth, the four corners representing the entire earth. And the animals, regardless of the kind, are included in the scope of the transmission of the gospels.

Under the law of Moses, animals were specifically divided into clean and unclean. The two main records of this are found in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. To fully understand the typology, please refer to the appropriate Superior Word sermons on these passages.

Israel was set apart under the law and was permitted to eat only certain foods derived from a select list of animals. Gentiles have no restrictions on them concerning dietary laws. This goes all the way back to Genesis 9 –

“And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move *on* the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. <sup>3</sup> Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.” Genesis 9:2, 3

The law was introduced as a tool for Israel, and Israel alone, to conduct its affairs. The Gentiles were never placed under that law, and no dietary restrictions, apart from drinking blood (Genesis 9:4), were placed upon the people of the world. With the law fulfilled by Christ, it was set aside. The Gentiles who ate unclean animals are no longer considered unclean. This will be made explicit in the coming verses.

The descending of this object from heaven to the earth was to signify to Peter that a mystery was being revealed. That mystery is then explained by Paul –

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— <sup>2</sup> if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, <sup>4</sup> by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), <sup>5</sup> which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: <sup>6</sup> that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, <sup>7</sup> of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.” Ephesians 3:1-7

Despite Paul being the one through whom the mystery of the church is conveyed to the Gentiles, it is the same mystery that is first revealed to Peter, and which will be confirmed by Peter in Acts 10. Once again, as has been seen several times in Acts, the same working of God, meaning the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is given by both Peter and Paul. The focus of the ministry for that gospel (meaning Peter's toward the Jews and Paul's toward the Gentiles) is the only difference. It is one gospel to all people.

Life application: The Chinese people have a saying, "If it moves on the earth, if it is found in the oceans, or if it flies in the sky, we will eat it." This is a truth found throughout the Gentile world to some degree or another. No dietary restrictions exist except those that are self-imposed or that may be imposed by a particular nation or by some false religion.

For example, Islam and Hinduism restrict the eating of certain foods. Also, there are things that are just culturally not considered acceptable. Various bugs have always been eaten in parts of Asia, and even the Levitical law allowed for the consumption of locusts.

However, until recently, it was considered socially unacceptable in the western world to eat bugs. It was not prohibited, but it was something looked down on as boorish and objectionable. With the modern green movement, bugs are in, and beef is out. This is not a dietary law. Rather, it is just an attempt to manipulate the populace for a perverse agenda.

Despite this, the vision that Peter is seeing is exactly what is found in the Gentile world. The old saying, "You are what you eat," is on full display here. Gentiles eat snakes, bugs, and lobsters (to their delight by the way), while Jews do not. And so, what is being seen is more than just the acceptance of Gentiles into the plan of God, but the acceptance of what they eat as well. The two are not to be disassociated from one another.

And yet, heretical cults and false teachers will use Acts 10 to say that the typology only points to the cleansing of Gentiles, but not the cleansing of foods. This is incorrect and it is dispelled both in the coming account of Acts 10, throughout the Pauline epistles, and the book of Hebrews as well. Don't be fooled by perverse people with an agenda to push you under the constraints of the Law of Moses! Pass the whale blubber and bacon, and enjoy the freedom God has given you in Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Lord God, how precious it is to know that by faith alone in Jesus and in His fulfillment of the law we are pleasing to You. He lived out the law, He shed His blood, dying in fulfillment of it, and He rose again, setting aside its ordinances so that we are justified*

*not through our deeds, but through His. In Him, reconciliation and forgiveness of sins have come! Now, we have a blessed and eternal hope. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord, O God. Amen.*

**And a voice came to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” Acts 10:13**

The previous verse showed that “all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth” were in the object that was like a great sheet. With that remembered, it next says, “And a voice came to him.” The source of the voice is not stated, but it is certainly the Lord Jesus. This is most probable based on his reply in the next verse and what is stated between the two. And the words conveyed to Peter begin with, “Rise.”

Rather, it is an aorist participle – “Having arisen.” Peter was obviously still laying or kneeling as during his praying. And so, the voice lets him know that once he has gotten up, he is to take a particular action. After this, and calling him by his given name, the voice continues with, “Peter; kill and eat.”

This is obviously in response to his state of being “very hungry,” as was seen in verse 10:10. The voice instructs Peter to look upon the vast multitude of animals without distinction and to take whatever he desired for himself.

In this, Peter is clearly being shown that the dietary laws of the Law of Moses have been annulled. He is being returned to a time when Israel did not have the law and lived under the general command of God to Noah –

“And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move *on* the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. <sup>3</sup> Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.” Genesis 9:2, 3

The importance of this is not to be missed because if the dietary laws are annulled, then the entire Mosaic Code is annulled. It is a single body of law, no part of which could be left unfulfilled without guilt being imputed –

“For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” Matthew 5:18

If the dietary laws are annulled, thus meaning that the Law of Moses is annulled, then it means that the law has been fulfilled. Those of Israel who accept the completion of

Christ's work are brought out from the bondage and yoke of the law, and into a new and as yet unexplained dispensation. Those who are not of Israel, and who had never been under the law, are imputed the righteousness of the law's fulfillment because of Jesus.

This is all being seen, or at least hinted at, in the details provided in this one verse. The voice is from heaven, indicating that it is of God. It is in connection with the presentation of unclean animals to Peter, indicating they have been divinely sanctioned to be eaten, and it is given in typology of the people who already eat such animals because they are not, and never were, under the law of Moses.

Life application: The Lord would not present supposedly unclean animals to Peter and admonish him to eat them if it were a violation of His own law to do so without a particular reason for doing so. Hence, without going forward in the text, it is clear and explicit that these animals are no longer to be considered unclean.

And yet, there are innumerable teachers of the word, and even entire denominations, that adamantly state Christians are bound to the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law. If this is so, then they are also bound to every other precept of the law – without exception – and they must fulfill them perfectly. They have set aside the grace of Christ, and they have fallen back on a system that was never effectual in removing sin, except in the anticipation of its own fulfillment by Jesus.

Be sure to get what the meaning of grace is. It is not, "I have done and so now you must do." Grace is unmerited favor. Salvation is solely and absolutely a work of the Lord. It is true that there are things we are told to do under the New Covenant, but these things are to be accomplished because of our state in salvation, not as a means of either earning it or maintaining it.

*Lord God, thank You for the grace You have bestowed upon us through the giving of Christ Jesus. All that stood against us is now taken away because of Him. Praise You, O God, for what You have done! Amen.*

**But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." Acts 10:14**

In the previous verse, the voice from heaven said, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." This was concerning the vision he was seeing of the animals, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. With that remembered, it next says, "But Peter said."

This is in response to the voice from heaven. One would think, “I just heard a voice from heaven, and it is instructing me to do something. I will be obedient.” Such will not be the case. The idea was so repugnant to an observant Jew that Peter cannot process what he is being told to do. And so, in response, he says, “Not so, Lord!”

Whether Peter feels this is a test of his faithfulness to the law, or whether he simply cannot participate in something so contrary to what he has always known and held as sacred, he balks. In this, he uses the common word *kurios*. It can mean anything from “Sir” to “Lord” and even implying the Lord God. As the voice is from heaven, he must mentally assume he is addressing the Lord God. And this is more likely based on his next words, which say, “For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.”

The words “common or unclean” are rightly explained by Albert Barnes –

“That is common – This word properly denotes ‘what pertains to all,’ but among the Jews, who were bound by special laws, and who were prohibited from many things that were freely indulged in by other nations, the word ‘common’ came to be opposed to the word ‘sacred,’ and to denote what was in common use among the pagans, hence, that which was ‘profane,’ or ‘polluted.’ Here it means the same as ‘profane,’ or ‘forbidden.’

Unclean – Ceremonially unclean; that is, what is forbidden by the ceremonial law of Moses.”

In his response to the voice, Peter is paraphrasing words that he would have heard in the synagogue over the years. In Ezekiel 4, a part of a discourse between the Lord and Ezekiel says the following –

“Also take for yourself wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt; put them into one vessel, and make bread of them for yourself. *During* the number of days that you lie on your side, three hundred and ninety days, you shall eat it. <sup>10</sup> And your food which you eat *shall be* by weight, twenty shekels a day; from time to time you shall eat it. <sup>11</sup> You shall also drink water by measure, one-sixth of a hin; from time to time you shall drink. <sup>12</sup> And you shall eat it *as* barley cakes; and bake it using fuel of human waste in their sight.”

<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord said, “So shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, where I will drive them.”

<sup>14</sup> So I said, “Ah, Lord God! Indeed I have never defiled myself from my youth till now; I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has abominable flesh ever come into my mouth.”

<sup>15</sup> Then He said to me, “See, I am giving you cow dung instead of human waste, and you shall prepare your bread over it.” Ezekiel 4:9-15

The Lord was instructing Ezekiel to do something that would make him ceremonially unclean under the Law of Moses. This is seen, for example, in Leviticus 5:2, 3 –

“Or if a person touches any unclean thing, whether *it is* the carcass of an unclean beast, or the carcass of unclean livestock, or the carcass of unclean creeping things, and he is unaware of it, he also shall be unclean and guilty. <sup>3</sup> Or if he touches human uncleanness—whatever uncleanness with which a man may be defiled, and he is unaware of it—when he realizes *it*, then he shall be guilty.”

Though ceremonially defiled, such a state of uncleanness simply required the appropriate sacrifices to restore him. Ezekiel thought it was repugnant to do this and he also balked at the Lord’s words. But Ezekiel was being used as a sign of what lay ahead for the people of Israel, and so, despite the clean foods he was instructed to eat, he was told to cook them in a manner that was ceremonially unclean. Because of Ezekiel’s concerns about being in a state of uncleanness among the people, the Lord gave him the allowance of using cow dung.

The text of Ezekiel 4 makes it clear that the one speaking to him was the Lord (YHVH) God. Peter, certainly knowing the account in Ezekiel, would also know that the voice from heaven was also the Lord. As he knew at this point that Jesus is the incarnate Lord, the voice would be that of Jesus. In the case of Peter, the instruction would have been a direct violation of the Law of Moses. However, the Lord is going to convey to Peter that the Mosaic Code was no longer applicable to his life. Being in Christ meant something new was available to him.

Life application: Some years ago, a fad known as “the Ezekiel diet” came out. It can still be found on the internet and people have profited off it because it sounds biblical – “See, this is what was recorded for Ezekiel and so it must be good.” The same is true with the account in Daniel 1 concerning a diet that was decided upon there.

This is irresponsible, and it wholly ignores the context of what happens in Ezekiel. The Lord specifically tells Ezekiel why He was mandating the diet and what it meant –

“Moreover He said to me, ‘Son of man, surely I will cut off the supply of bread in Jerusalem; they shall eat bread by weight and with anxiety, and shall drink water by measure and with dread, <sup>17</sup> that they may lack bread and water, and be dismayed with one another, and waste away because of their iniquity.’”



This was not a diet that was intended to make people healthy. It was a diet that was the result of famine, lack, and affliction. It was a diet that would eventually cause the people to “waste away.”

Instead of getting caught up in fad things derived from a misuse of the Bible, live your life for the Lord, enjoy the blessings He has showered you with, and don't allow people to sucker you into making them rich because of their twisting of Scripture. Have discernment. When people attempt to peddle things to you in the name of God or because of Scripture, they are the ones who will be home eating steak and potatoes while you are eating grass and tiny amounts of grain.

*Lord God, give us discernment as we live out our lives before You. Help us not to get drawn into fads and novelty lifestyles that will enrich others but do nothing of value for us. May we be thankful for the blessings You have lavished upon us, and may we enjoy those blessings without feelings of guilt because they came from Your open hand of grace. Amen.*

**And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.”** Acts 10:15

In the previous verse, Peter replied to the voice from heaven, saying, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” With that, it next says, “And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time.”

The translation is correct. There is no definite article before “voice.” But also, there is no verb and so the action must be supplied. It literally reads, “And a voice again for a second time to him.” It is not unlike the account of Elijah in 1 Kings 19 –

And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

<sup>10</sup> So he said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.”

<sup>11</sup> Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, *but* the LORD *was* not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, *but* the LORD *was* not in the earthquake; <sup>12</sup> and

after the earthquake a fire, *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

<sup>13</sup> So it was, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice *came* to him, and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 1 Kings 19:9-13

The Lord has a way of clearing the mind of biases, presuppositions, fears, anxieties, and so on by repeating Himself in order to make a point. In the case of Peter, he spoke out a directive, Peter balked at what was said, and now a voice from heaven comes forth a second time, saying, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.”

Peter will have to consider what is said, and he will. But what is being referred to is more than just the eating of meat, even if the eating of meat is a part of what is being conveyed. The object like a sheet descended from heaven. Hence, God has sent it. The animals are God’s creatures, and their disposition is up to Him. That was clearly revealed to Noah in Genesis 9 when Noah was told that every moving thing that lives shall be food for man.

Nothing is stated about impurity, and thus all animals were considered clean according to consumption. But something happened at the giving of the law. The Lord directed that certain animals were to be considered unclean. And so, the question must be asked, “What made the animals unclean?” If they were clean for consumption until the giving of the law, then it was the law itself that made them unclean.

This is true with sin. Until the law was given, sin could not be imputed. But when the law was given, Paul says, “sin revived and I died” (Romans 7:9). He says also, “for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). No person since Noah has ever been imputed sin for eating a particular animal except those of the nation of Israel. This is because only the nation of Israel was given the law.

Now, God has said to Peter that such animals are cleansed. The question then must be asked, “For who?” They were not cleansed for the Chinese. The Chinese had no law from God declaring them unclean. The same is true with all nations, except Israel. Therefore, it is for Israel that God has cleansed them through the fulfilling and annulling of the law. As such, Peter is told that he must not call them unclean. Of this, Vincent’s Word Studies clarifies the matter –

“The thought goes deeper than merely styling ‘common.’ Lit., do not thou defile. Do not profane it by regarding and calling it common. Rev., ‘make not thou common.’”

The point is, and it is obvious, that if the law made these unclean, and that they are not to be considered unclean any longer, then the law is no longer in effect for Peter. He has come to Christ, and in him (meaning Peter), the law no longer has the power to make the animals unclean. Therefore, what God has declared to him as acceptable, he is to no longer proclaim unclean.

This cannot be considered the case for those of Israel who have not come to Christ. They are bound to the Law of Moses until they come to Him. Therefore, the law is their standard and it is the gauge by which they will be judged. For Peter, he is no longer under the law, and therefore he cannot be judged by the precepts of the law. As this is so, he is not to then use the precepts of the law to make his own judgments concerning the matters contained in the law. In doing so, he then calls unclean things that are considered clean by God.

Life application: It is the law by which God declared foods unclean. In Christ's fulfillment of the law, He has brought the law to an end for all who believe. Therefore, to call something unclean according to the standard of the law for something that is not unclean under the New Covenant is to then 1) call into question the efficacy of the work of Christ; 2) reintroduce the law as a means of personal justification; and 3) bring the curse of the law back upon oneself (for a Jew) or upon oneself (for a Gentile) when a precept of the law is violated.

Using circumcision as a benchmark for the entire law, Paul says –

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. <sup>2</sup> Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. <sup>3</sup> And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” Galatians 5:1-4

The question for all people is, “Where do you want to hang your hat?” You can trust in the law and be judged by the law, meaning every single precept found in the law, or you can trust in Christ's fulfillment of the law and be freed from the law. This was one purpose of the law. It was to show us what God expects in order to be right with Him. In seeing the enormity of the burden the law carries, it was to then lead us to Jesus.

Hence, to say that we will live according to the law's standard is to claim a self-righteousness equal to God. It is self-deceiving and it can only lead to condemnation. To trust in Jesus is to trust in God's provision, thus giving all glory to God, not to self. Be

wise, be discerning, and be ready to both enjoy the foods God has given us and also to not judge those who eat something we may find unpalatable according to a standard that does not exist –

“Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed *are* pure, but *it is* evil for the man who eats with offense.” Romans 14:20

Trust in Christ’s finished work and, please, pass the bacon.

*Lord God, thank You for the freedom we possess because of Jesus Christ our Lord. Help us to never set an obstacle between ourselves and You by assuming we can be “holier” than Jesus by accomplishing deeds of the law. Instead, may we find our holiness and perfection before the law in His fulfillment of it. To Your glory. Amen.*

**This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.** Acts 10:16

The previous verse brought to Peter’s ears the voice from heaven, saying, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” This was in response to Peter’s balking at the voice concerning his dietary scruples. With that remembered, it now says, “This was done three times.”

The Greek includes a conjunction to begin the verse – “And this was done three times.” What was done is not specified, whether it was the presentation of the object like a sheet with all the animals, whether it was the command and Peter’s balking at it which was then followed by the Lord’s note of cleansing, or whether the entire process took place three times. The latter is probably the case, however.

If the entire process, including Peter’s balking at the Lord’s word, is what is referred to, the event is remarkably similar to Moses’ three protestations before the Lord in Exodus 3 and 4 –

The Lord’s directive:

“Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10)

Moses’ protestations:

“Then Moses answered and said, ‘But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, ‘The Lord has not appeared to you’” Exodus 4:1

“Then Moses said to the Lord, ‘O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I *am* slow of speech and slow of tongue’” Exodus 4:10

But he said, “O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send” Exodus 4:13

Moses was called to lead the people of Israel into the dispensation and observance of the law which included isolation from the Gentile world. Peter is being told he is to lead them out of the law observance and into fellowship with the Gentile world.

The three-fold repetition of the event is to ensure that Peter is fully aware that this has been decided and that it is the course that must be taken. The number three in Scripture “points us to what is real, essential, perfect, substantial, complete, and Divine” (Bullinger). This is a fitting description in all ways concerning what is now to occur. Peter is being pointed to God’s real, essential, perfect, substantial, complete, and Divine revelation concerning the grace of God in Christ. With this settled, it next says, “And the object was taken up into heaven again.”

The lesson has been taught, the message has been conveyed, and it has been given to Peter first to confirm a particular pattern that will be revealed before the chapter is complete. It is not to convey one gospel to the Jews and one to the Gentiles. Rather, it is to establish the matter that there is one gospel to both. Peter is the key to this particular revelation.

The Lord personally spoke to Peter in John 21, three times prompting him to tend to His sheep –

So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?”

He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”

He said to him, “Feed My lambs.”

<sup>16</sup> He said to him again a second time, “Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?”

He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”

He said to him, “Tend My sheep.”

<sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, “Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep. <sup>18</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry *you* where you do not wish.” <sup>19</sup> This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”  
-John 21:15-19

Now in Acts 10, Peter is beginning to find out that the sheep Jesus was referring to includes the Gentiles.

Life application: The matter of calling the supposedly unclean Gentiles to faith in the Lord is not merely speaking of the people. It is also referring to the ending of the dietary restrictions within the Law of Moses. How can we know this is absolutely the case? It is because anyone who had eaten something unclean under the law was considered defiled for a particular amount of time as defined by the law. But what will transpire in the coming verses will reveal that these “unclean Gentiles” are accepted by God without reference to the required timeframe set by the law.

As this is so, and the point will be explained again as Acts 10 continues, it demonstrates that the law was only a tutor for the people of Israel to understand their need for Jesus. Remember this as you interact with those who claim what is happening in Acts 10 only speaks of accepting the Gentiles, but it does not change adhering to the dietary laws set forth within the Law of Moses. In Christ’s New Covenant, there are no dietary restrictions. Nothing is unclean to those who understand the cleansing power of Jesus Christ. As Paul says of such things –

“To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. <sup>16</sup> They profess to know God, but in works they deny *Him*, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.” Titus 1:15, 16

This is the lesson Peter is now learning. Don’t be like the Judaizers of the world! Understand that in Christ, the flesh counts for nothing. This is a temporary body that exists within a temporary system. God is not concerned about what goes into your stomach. He is watching our actions and reading our hearts as we live out our lives before Him.

*Glorious God Almighty, You have set us free from the constraints of law so that we can worship You in Spirit and in truth. Help us to live out this freedom in holiness and in obedience to Your precious word. May we not fall back on a law that could save no one, but rather, help us to live for You according to the New Covenant set forth through the finished work of Jesus. Amen.*

**Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. Acts 10:17**

Peter's vision ended in the previous verse with the object being taken up into heaven again. Luke next records, "Now while Peter wondered within himself."

The word translated as "wondered" is stronger, meaning totally perplexed. This is the last of four times it is seen. Two of its other uses in Acts were in Acts 2:12 and Acts 5:24. HELPS Word Studies says it "refers to 'one who goes through the whole list of possible ways, and finds no way out.'" In other words, Peter was perfectly perplexed as to "what this vision which he had seen meant."

Because he is working it out in his mind, he may have thought it was just a delusion because he was overly hungry, or maybe he got too much sun on the roof, or maybe it really was a vision. If it was, then there must be some connection that he had not yet made.

The answer to his state of confusion was, literally, just about to knock on the door. The vision was real, and the Lord was going to tie it into the stream of events that were coming to pass at that moment. As it next says, "behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house."

Here is a word found only this one time in Scripture, *dierótaó*, translated as "made inquiry." It comes from *dia* (through) and *erótaó* (to ask). As such, one gets the sense of the men arriving at Joppa and then asking their way through the streets until they finally found the right house. Once that was ascertained, they came to it "and stood before the gate."

The word "and" is not in the Greek. It simply shows the events as they took place –

"having made inquiry for the house of Simon, stood before the gate."

Luke masterfully leaves the reader ready for the next action to take place, setting the actions of those sent from Cornelius to align perfectly with the ponderings of Peter. The timing of the events shows that God was in total control of the events that took place so that they would come to pass together at the same moment.

Life application: There are things that happen in life that we often call chance or coincidence. Or we may brush them off with the words, “What synchronicity!” But we often go no further. However, for those who know the Lord, such events can be looked at with a different view.

We can ascribe them to the working of God in our lives to bring about a good end in whatever matter we thought was, at first, total calamity. This doesn’t mean we should go looking for signs and ascribing goofy things like getting \$7.77 change back at 7-11 to be a sign that the rapture will happen next Tuesday. There is a difference between seeing the Lord’s hand working out a good end for a certain matter and the type of thinking that is just plain goofy.

And more, the rapture is not dependent on events that occur in our lives, as if the Lord is using us as an instrument of His will to bring it about. That is a “me” centered theology and it is quite harmful.

On the other hand, if we have calamity today and suddenly something amazingly good replaces it, we can ascribe that to the Lord’s kind hand upon our affliction (think of Job 42), and praise Him for His tender care of us. That is a “Him” centered theology because it always ascribes events from the top down, not the bottom up.

Let us remember this. In such times, we have not erred by giving Him the glory, even if it was mere chance (if you believe in that). But in ascribing things in a bottom-up manner, when such events do not take place, you have erred. You have brought disgrace upon the name, and you have made yourself look foolish. In all things, and in all ways, glorify God, not yourself, for the events that take place in your life, whether good or bad. In the end, and because of Jesus Christ, good will ultimately come to pass.

*Lord God, help us to not error in our thinking by making events that happen around us all about us. Rather, when we see the marvelous occur, may we rightly ascribe it to Your hand and be grateful for Your grace and mercy upon us. In all things, may we remember to glorify You above all else. Amen.*



**And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there.** Acts 10:18

The last verse had the men who were sent from Cornelius arriving at the gate of Simon's house. With that, the next words are given. The NKJV doesn't do a great job in its translation of the verbs in this verse. Therefore, the BLB will be used. Notice the difference –

And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. NKJV

And having called out, they were asking if Simon who is called Peter is lodged here. BLB

With that noted, the verse begins with, "And having called out." Those who had arrived at the gate had called out. In their having called out, a response was obviously received, either from a window or from someone directly coming out to them. Either way, Luke has the reader involved in the action that is ongoing because he next notes, "they were asking."

The verb is imperfect, giving the sense of continuance. In this case, it probably isn't, "They asked and continued to ask," as if the people inside didn't understand the first time. Rather, it is probably, "They asked and were waiting for a response." That sense of continuance is then explained in the coming verse where Peter will gather himself from his pondering about the vision. For now, the question they put forth was "if Simon who is called Peter is lodged here."

Again, as in verse 10:5, both names are given. This is to ensure that the right Simon is summoned. The house belonged to Simon the tanner, and it would be normal for someone to come looking for him, maybe to get a hide tanned or to pick one up. And so, to avoid any confusion, the men were instructed to ask for Simon who is called Peter.

Along with this, the certainty that the correct Simon is summoned will also be confirmed by the Spirit speaking to Peter in the next verse. Everything about the account is precisely stated, and the verbs are carefully used by Luke to give us an intimate look into the events as they occur.

Life application: Why is Peter being summoned when it is Paul who is the apostle to the Gentiles? That doesn't seem to make sense unless one takes in the whole account of

what is going on. Like the Greek language, which is very precise, the overall narrative is also very precise.

There is a reason why Peter is called, and it is not to tell Cornelius that he has to wait for someone named Paul to show up and give him the Gentile gospel. It is because Peter's gospel is the same gospel as Paul's. Only the prime focus of Peter's gospel is to the Jews. And yet, he wasn't called only to the Jews. Likewise, Paul wasn't called only to the Gentiles. Even the poorest of scholars can figure that out when taking things in the proper context.

Unfortunately, there are those who evaluate the word in an unscholarly manner. In this, they come to unfounded conclusions, ignoring the overall message and focusing on division rather than unity of thought. Despite this, the word must be rightly divided. It is a unified whole. Therefore, any division is for a logical analysis of Scripture, not to divide the overall message.

Be sure to keep things in context and be sure to avoid people who proclaim a false gospel, which is no gospel at all. Jews and Gentiles are saved in the exact same way – by faith in the finished work of Jesus and in nothing else.

*Lord God how blessed we are to be saved in the simplest manner of all which is by faith in the finished work of Christ. Anything else would make it too complicated for most to understand. And even the simple gospel eludes so many. Help us to not add to or divide this precious offer of life, the gospel of our salvation. Amen.*

**While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are seeking you. Acts 10:19**

The previous verse noted that those sent from Cornelius asked whether Peter was lodging at the house. That was occurring even while Peter was coming out of his vision –

From the BLB translation –

- a. And while Peter was perplexed in himself what the vision that he had seen might be, behold.
  - b. The men having been sent from Cornelius, having inquired for the house of Simon, stood at the gate.
  - b. And having called out, they were asking if Simon who is called Peter is lodged here.

a. And of Peter thinking over the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are seeking you.

One can see how Luke carefully gives an “a b b a” pattern to show that these things were occurring at the same time. With this noted, the verse now begins with, “While Peter thought about the vision.”

The verb is a present participle, “And *while* Peter, thinking about the vision...” Depending on the text, the word translated as thinking either means to ponder or to ponder thoroughly. Either way, Peter was mulling over what had happened at the same time that the travelers were arriving and asking whether Peter was there. It is at this time, while Peter is trying to figure out the meaning of the vision, that it next says, “the Spirit said to him.”

Nothing is said about how this occurs, whether audibly or internally, but it appears to be similar to that of Acts 8:29 where the Spirit told Philip to go near the chariot of the Ethiopian Eunuch. A message was conveyed that was clear enough for Peter to know that it was real, saying, “Behold, three men are seeking you.”

The fact that the Spirit said this while he was pondering the purpose of the vision is a clear indication that these three have something to do with it. It is similar to that which was prophesied by Isaiah many centuries earlier concerning the millennium, saying –

“It shall come to pass  
That before they call, I will answer.” Isaiah 65:24

Peter had not yet asked the Lord what the meaning of the vision was, and yet he is being given directions that will explain what the vision means.

Life application: Peter’s vision, the coming of these Gentiles to meet him, and the Spirit speaking to Peter are all things that are leading to the inclusion of Gentiles in the body of believers. These were necessary steps to establish a baseline of what is allowed and acceptable within the church. Their inclusion in the word is thus also necessary so that subsequent generations of believers would know these things as well.

And that is the purpose of the Bible. It is to tell us of the things God has done within the stream of time so that we can know what is right and proper. This includes the inspiration of these men of God to relay what was to be written down. Once it was, such revelation is no longer needed. We now know that Gentiles were accepted. We now

know that meats are not what God is focusing on and that we are free to eat anything set before us. And so on.

This is why it is so important to know your Bible. In knowing what it says, we can live our lives in the freedom offered to us because of the finished work of Christ. The Bible is not a book of bondage, but of life and fellowship with God. May we see it as such and not use it as a tool to unnecessarily impose bondage on ourselves and those we instruct.

It is true that there are confines we are to remain within, but these are still confines of freedom, meaning freedom from sin. Sin is bondage (John 8:34, Romans 6:6), and so to be kept from sin is its own type of freedom. If we can view the word from this perspective, our lives will be happy and prosperous in the Lord.

*Heavenly Father, may we find joy in Your word each day. Help us to be faithful and careful stewards of it. And, Lord, help us to apply its precepts to our walk each day. Thank You for Your precious word. Amen.*

**Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.”**  
Acts 10:20

Peter was just informed by the Spirit with the words, “Behold, three men are seeking you.” The Spirit’s words now continue, saying, “Arise therefore.”

Peter was obviously still sitting or lying on the roof wondering about the vision when the Spirit spoke to him. But with the arrival of the three men, the time to ponder had ended and he was called to get up. The connection to the vision he sought was soon to be revealed. Continuing His words, the Spirit next said, “go down.”

Rather, the verb is an aorist participle, “having gone down.” It is making a future assumption that he has already obeyed and that the next step is about to come to pass. In other words, “Once you have done this, then you are to next do this.” The next thing to do is then stated, which is, “and go with them.”

This has nothing to do yet with intermingling with Gentiles. There was nothing wrong with a Jew walking along with a Gentile. Rather, this is to assure Peter, in advance, that these men’s intentions are proper and nothing untoward is going on. He can be confident that what they have come for is appropriate, and that it surely has something to do with the very vision he received and was even at that moment pondering. Therefore, he should be “doubting nothing.”

Because this has been explained to him in advance, he shouldn't be at all concerned about the course of events, as if it is either out of the will of God, or that it is the wrong path to take in relation to the vision. Rather, it is exactly what has been planned for. This is then confirmed by the words, "for I have sent them."

In reading the entire account, and without understanding the way things work, one could be a bit confused about this statement. In verse 10:3, it says that "an angel [messenger] of God" came to Cornelius and spoke to him, directing him concerning what he should do. Then, in verse 10:4, it said "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God."

Now, it says that the Spirit had sent these men. As the Spirit is God, there is no contradiction here. The works of God, within the Godhead, are clearly and unambiguously seen in this exchange.

Life application: The Jehovah's Witnesses deny that Jesus is God. They also deny the deity of the Holy Spirit, saying that the Spirit is an "active force" but not a member of the Godhead. Some accept the deity of Jesus but say that this is God working through modes (modalism) where Jesus is the Father and the Spirit is the Father (or any slight variation on this concept), and that He is expressing Himself in these various ways – somewhat like an actor going behind a screen and putting on a different mask for a different part of the show.

These are heresies. They do not fit what the Bible teaches. Each member of the Godhead is separate as a "Person" and yet is one in essence in God. To divert from this is to run off on an avenue that can only lead to further heresy. And because there are so many forms of diverting from what is orthodox, there are innumerable little heretics, influenced by Satan, pulling people away from the truth of how God presents Himself in Scripture.

One must be clear, precise, and extremely careful with one's knowledge. A small divergence can turn into an entirely convoluted approach to how theology is understood and presented. If anyone comes to you and presents a doctrine that diverts from standard orthodoxy, warn him once and then a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. And most important of all is what John says concerning the Father/Son relationship –

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. <sup>8</sup> Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.

<sup>9</sup> Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup> If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; <sup>11</sup> for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

-2 John -7-11

Keep away from those who twist the roles of the Father and the Son within the Godhead. They are not to be greeted once they have been shown what is right and who then reject correct doctrine.

*Lord God, may we be clear, concise, and careful in how we present what You have already revealed in Your word. Help us not to get sidetracked by those who think they know it all, but who are actually twisting and manipulating Scripture to tear us away from a right understanding of who You are. Be glorified in our worship of You – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

**Then Peter went down to the men who had been sent to him from Cornelius, and said, “Yes, I am he whom you seek. For what reason have you come?” Acts 10:21**

In the previous verse, the Spirit had told Peter to go down and go with the men who were at the gate and to not doubt. Now, the thought continues with, “Then Peter went down to the men.”

With immediate compliance to the word, he descended from the roof and proceeded to the gate. There, he met the men “who had been sent to him from Cornelius.” These words are not found in most manuscripts. John Gill notes that the clause “is not in Beza's most ancient copy, nor in the Alexandrian copy, nor in the Vulgate Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions.”

Despite this, it is already understood that this is who he is meeting. Whether the words are original or not, it does not leave any void in one’s understanding concerning those whom Peter had gone down to meet. With this understood, Luke next records, “and said, ‘Yes, I am he whom you seek.’”

These words are in response to verse 10:19, which said, “While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are seeking you.’” Peter already knew that he was being sought. This was probably told to him again by those who met the three at the gate (as is seen in verses 17 & 18).

Therefore, he was certainly fully prepared to find out what was so important that God had given him a vision and that the Spirit had expressly spoken to him about the events that were now taking place. And so, probably very excitedly, he asked them, “For what reason have you come?”

The vision had left him with more questions than answers. The Spirit’s directives had certainly hinted to him that the answers were to be found in the arrival of these three men, and so the question must have burst out of him like the breach of a dam. The inquisitive excitement of the moment will find its fulfillment in the verses ahead.

Life application: Peter wanted to know what the word of the Lord that had been conveyed to him meant, and so he asked those who had been sent (albeit indirectly) by the direction of the Lord to interpret the meaning of the matter.

The Lord does not give His word in a manner that cannot be determined, even if it takes a process to find out what that meaning is. Peter had to go through a process in order to understand what was being conveyed and so will we, but it is worth the time and effort to find out why things are the way they are in the word of God.

And so, when you come to an interesting passage or story in Scripture and think, “I wonder why the Lord included that in the Bible?”, don’t just ignore it, but ask Him – “Lord, what is the meaning of this passage.” Then think about it, ask about it, and try connecting it to other things going on in Scripture. Eventually, you will come across a commentary, a sermon, or a personal insight that may bring you to understand that passage.

The Lord wants His word known and understood, and He will reward those who diligently seek it out.

*Lord God, thank You for the many treasures laid up in Your word. It is a never-ending well of wonder and delight. The more we know and understand it, the more new insights it continues to provide. How great is Your word that gives us a lifetime of new and precious detail to consider! Amen.*

**And they said, “Cornelius *the* centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews, was divinely instructed by a holy angel to summon you to his house, and to hear words from you.” Acts 10:22**

In the preceding verse, Peter came down and met with the men who were sent by Cornelius, asking “For what reason have you come?” Luke now continues with, “And they said, ‘Cornelius *the* centurion.’”

The word “the” is inserted by the translators. More correctly, it says, “Cornelius, a centurion.” He is identified by his name, previously unknown in the area of Joppa, and he is identified by his rank within the Roman army – being a soldier of low to mid-rank and with authority over a hundred men. Despite his not being a well-known figure, being a man who is not in any high position of authority, and certainly being a Gentile, the messengers continue with the words, “a just man.”

The word signifies one who has judicial approval. Such a person conforms to God’s being, such as his standard of what is right, and molds himself to God’s will. As such, he is upright. Peter may have had his memory called out at this time to the account found in Luke 7 –

“Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup> And a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. <sup>3</sup> So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. <sup>4</sup> And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, <sup>5</sup> ‘for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue.’”

-Luke 7:1-5

The centurion described there understood even what those of Israel failed to understand, and the account continues with –

“Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, ‘Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. <sup>7</sup> Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>8</sup> For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, “Go,” and he goes; and to another, “Come,” and he comes; and to my servant, “Do this,” and he does *it*.’



<sup>9</sup>When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, 'I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!' <sup>10</sup>And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick." Luke 7:6-10

This centurion understood the power and authority of Jesus and also understood his own lowly position before the Lord. He could be described in a similar manner to Cornelius who is now presented to Peter. Continuing with that description, it next says, "one who fears God."

It is the same word used to describe him in Acts 10:2, *phobeó*. It signifies to be alarmed, and thus to be afraid, to greatly fear, and hence to reverence. The description of the centurion by Luke in verse 10:2 is also understood to be a right description by those under him. They also continue, saying, "and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews."

The meaning is general in nature. If "all the nation" knew of Cornelius, it would have included Peter. Hence, the words mean that those of Israel who had encountered him or heard of him were aware of his noble character. This is the same as the Centurion in Luke 7. That centurion had built a synagogue for the people.

Therefore, whenever his name was brought into a conversation, the people would have said something like, "That guy, that centurion, he is a marvelous friend of Israel." The same would be true with those who had heard of Cornelius. Along with this, these men continue by saying that Cornelius "was divinely instructed."

The word translated as "divinely instructed" is *chrématizó*. It originally signified "to transact business." HELPS Word Studies says, "to admonish on the basis of a valid standard (what has true worth); used of God admonishing (warning) people – based on *what has real value to Him*."

Another example of this word, that carries the same sense as here, is found in Hebrews–

"By faith Noah, **being divinely warned** of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith."

-Hebrews 11:7

As for Cornelius' instruction, it was "by a holy angel." It is the same word used in verses 10:3 and 10:7 when describing this messenger from God, but the men have affixed the word "holy" to the description. Though not included in the narrative, this would have been from the lips of Cornelius, acknowledging that the messenger was holy. This would be in accord with the description of verse 10:3 which acknowledged it was "an angel of God." Next, continuing their words to Peter, they say it was this angel from God who was sent "to summon you to his house."

This may have seemed unusual, suspicious, out of place, or whatever else to Peter. For all he might have known, it could be a setup to have him arrested for evangelizing. As such, the voice from heaven during his vision had said, "Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them" (Acts 10:20).

The way, with all of its possible contingencies, had been paved so that Peter would be fully aware that this was a divinely appointed meeting and that he should not hesitate to respond favorably to their request. With that understood, the verse ends with, "and to hear words from you."

The word is *rhéma*. It signifies a word or a saying of any kind. Hence it is an utterance made on a topic. Cornelius was told that Peter would tell him "what he must do" (Acts 10:6). Therefore, the words to be spoken will be in relation to his relationship with God and how to positively affect it so that he might be saved. The hope of Cornelius' life of piety was about to be realized when he is given the gospel concerning Jesus Christ.

Life application: First, this verse, along with verse 10:2, completely blows away the Calvinist doctrine that says that man does not have free will to seek out God.

Secondly, Cornelius is described very highly earlier in the chapter as well as in the words of this verse. And yet, his noble character falls short of the glory of God. Without hearing and responding to the gospel, he would remain as condemned as any sinner on the planet. One cannot work his way to heaven because the disconnect (an infinite gap between God and man) already exists.

This gap must be bridged, and it cannot be bridged by finite man. Hence, the incarnation where the infinite unites with the finite in the Person of Jesus is man's only hope of reconciliation. The importance of this cannot be missed. Jesus wasn't just a good man. He wasn't just a man who lived out His life well before God. He is the sinless Man, and He is God. Only through His imputed perfection can we be restored to God.

Thank God that He has done this thing for us. Take time today to contemplate the incarnation, the perfect life of Jesus, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. God Himself was willing to enter into our fallen stream of human existence in order to reconcile us to Himself. Ponder this. Maybe you will ask as David asked –

“LORD, what *is* man, that You take knowledge of him?  
Or the son of man, that You are mindful of him?” Psalm 144:3

At this point, who knows the answer to this? But for those who come to God through Jesus Christ, we will have eternity to search it out. Thank God for Jesus Christ our Lord!

*Heavenly Father, thank You for our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Then he invited them in and lodged *them*.**

**On the next day Peter went away with them, and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him. Acts 10:23**

In the last verse, the messengers sent from Cornelius explained the reason for their coming to Peter. With that, it now says, “Then he invited them in and lodged *them*.” The word translated as “invited” is an aorist participle. “Then having invited them in, he lodged them.” The word translated as lodge is one that signifies entertaining a stranger. It was used in 10:6 where it said Peter was lodging with Simon the tanner.

The meaning is that Peter welcomed them into the house without question and entertained them. Despite being Gentiles, they were treated well and with proper respect. From there, it says, “On the next day Peter went away with them.”

Some translations drop the name Peter and add in an extra thought, saying, “on the next day, having arisen, he went forth with them.” The differences are small but are noted here to avoid confusion based on what translation is being read. The main point is that Peter was willing to both entertain the men and then to go with them, exactly as he was instructed to do in his vision while on the housetop. With this noted, it next says, “and some brethren from Joppa accompanied him.”

These words are more fully explained by Peter in Acts 11:12 –

“Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover, these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house.”

As there were six with Peter, that means ten men traveled together to the house of Cornelius. It is a common thing in Acts and in the epistles for people to be noted as traveling together. In this case, Peter probably excitedly told those he knew what had happened concerning the vision and the divinely timed coming of the men. They would certainly want to be a part of whatever was going to come about in Caesarea. Along with that, they would be witnesses to the event and could testify to what they saw. As such, the group departed Joppa on the road to Caesarea.

Life application: Although we shouldn't expect visions and trances to guide our movements today, it is still right to pray for the Lord to direct our steps and actions as we go forth. Along with that, we should submit ourselves to be used by Him when the opportunity arises. Asking Him to do this will set our minds on what is important. It also demonstrates that we are willing to include Him even in our general daily lives as we set out.

If we have an important or delicate matter to attend to, it may be wise to have one or more people join in. This is not simply an Old Testament or early church precept, but it is something that Paul writes of in his epistles as well –

*“This will be the third time I am coming to you. ‘By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.’” 2 Corinthians 13:1*

Along with making that statement, Paul opened the letter to those at Corinth noting that he was accompanied by Timothy. Having one or more people come along at such times can give credence to a matter, keep false accusations from arising, and it can also provide needed moral support. So be sure to think things through before setting out, and act with wisdom when dealing with important issues.

*Lord God, give us wisdom as we deal with others. Things may appear simple or innocent, and yet they may be complicated or planned by those who have a devious agenda. And so, Lord, be with us and help us to plan out our steps each day. And may we have the wisdom to include You in our prayers before we do. Help us to remember such things, O God. Amen.*

**And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. Acts 10:24**

The previous verse saw Peter heading to Caesarea along with some brothers from Joppa and his three escorts from Cornelius' house. With that remembered, it now says, "And the following day they entered Caesarea."

The traveling took part of the day, they would have lodged for the night, and they would have arrived at the house of Cornelius after entering Caesarea. Upon their arrival, it next says, "Now Cornelius was waiting for them."

It was obvious that he was on pins and needles as he waited. One can see him sitting in a chair in his house, getting up, walking back and forth, sitting back down, fidgeting his feet, and getting up to walk back and forth again. Whatever plans may have existed before the vision, they would have been put on hold so that he would be at home when Peter arrived. Next, it says, "and had called together his relatives."

Cornelius wasn't one to hold his faith quietly. He knew that God had called him to this meeting, and he wanted his family to be there when it occurred. He knew that if God called, He had a purpose that extended beyond himself. And more, it says he also called his "close friends."

The word translated as "close" is new to Scripture, *anagkaios*. It means "necessary." Of this word, Vincent's Word Studies says, "The word originally means necessary; hence of those who are bound by necessary or natural ties; blood-relations. But as relatives or kinsmen is expressed by συγγενεῖς, this must be taken in the sense of intimate friends, a meaning which it has in later Greek writers."

Ultimately, the word means "what one cannot do without" or "indispensable." Cornelius wanted to share the coming experience with those who were so closely knit to him that they were either family or the extended type of family that comes from a soul-to-soul bond, somewhat like what we read concerning David and Jonathan in the book of 1 Samuel –

"Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." 1 Samuel 18:1

This same sentiment is noted concerning David and Jonathan several more times, demonstrating the true bond that had developed between the two. Cornelius had such friends and wanted to share the events to come with them as well, knowing it meant something important would occur in their lives.

Life application: Are you saved? Have you believed the gospel? If so, how affected are you by that good news? Have you shared it with your family? Have you shared it with your friends? Have you shared it with your coworkers? Have you shared it with anyone?

Your life in Christ means that you have moved from death to life. You were condemned and destined to be forever separated from the goodness of God. Now, you are saved and will spend eternity in His presence, discovering who He is and being granted a type of existence that you cannot even fathom at this point. If those around you have not heard this good news, doesn't that move you at all?

You may be the only person who ever takes the time to tell these people about what God has done for them in Christ, if they are willing to believe. If not you, then who? Have a heart, have compassion on their pitiful state, and be willing to share this wonderful news of life with those who are in need of hearing it. To the glory of God, may it be so.

*Lord God, our lives are short, and time is moving along quickly. We do not have "tomorrow" except in hope. We may not arrive there. And so, help us to be wise and share the good news about Jesus while we have Today. Help us in this Lord. Grant us the desire and the ability to speak this wonderful news. Amen.*

**As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*.** Acts 10:25

Cornelius was waiting for the arrival of Peter and those who came with him, and he had called his relatives and close friends to join him. Now, it says, "As Peter was coming in."

The Greek is more specific and appropriately reads, "And when it came to pass that Peter entered." While reading, Luke almost gives the sense of the events as if they are occurring. There is motion and response being conveyed. The idea here is that Peter had not fully entered the house because, in verse 10:27, it will note that he fully enters. It is at this moment that "Cornelius met him."

One can see how excitedly he anticipated the coming of Peter, knowing that he held the key to the promised words of the messenger that had been sent from God. And in this state of excited confusion, it next says, "and fell down at his feet and worshiped *him*." Even as Peter was in the act of entering the house, Cornelius simply dropped to his knees and made obeisance to him. The word is *proskuneó*.

Using HELPS Word Studies as a guide to define the various ideas it conveys, it is from *prós*, “towards,” and *kyneo*, “to kiss.” It thus signifies to kiss the ground when prostrating before a superior; to worship, ready to fall down/prostrate oneself; to adore on one's knees; to “do obeisance.” HELPS also notes that, on Egyptian reliefs, worshipers are represented with an outstretched hand throwing a kiss to the deity, and so it has been (metaphorically) described as “the kissing-ground” between the worshippers (the Bride) and Christ (the heavenly Bridegroom). The word suggests the willingness to make all necessary physical gestures of obeisance.

With these thoughts in mind, it can be seen that Cornelius may possibly think that Peter is the promised Messiah of Israel. Living in the land and being a man who feared God, it may be that he had heard of the promise of a coming Messiah. The messenger did not describe Peter, but simply said, “He will tell you what you must do” (10:6).

This is not unlike the question proposed to Jesus –

“Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” Luke 18:18

Cornelius has been told that Peter will tell him what he must do, meaning that he has the answer to man’s problem. Possibly assuming that he has been sent by God, Cornelius fell at his feet and worshiped him. This is speculation, but it is well-grounded in the action he has taken. Although it is true Peter has been sent by God, meaning first by Jesus who is God as an apostle, and then by the Spirit who has directed him through the trance on the rooftop, he is neither the Messiah nor is he worthy of worship.

Life application: Cornelius was excited about hearing the good news. Not knowing the details of who Peter was, there was the assumption that he was worthy of special obeisance. That will be corrected in the coming verse. But the excitement of Cornelius to receive the good news is what is focused on in this verse.

He is not alone. There are people all over the world who are seeking out God in one way or another. This tells us that many really want to know the truth. Until the truth of God in Christ is presented to them, they are susceptible to being led astray. The Jehovah’s Witnesses are great at getting out and knocking on doors. If someone is presented with their false message before someone shares the true gospel, they very well may accept it.

From there, the process of brainwashing is quick and efficient. Few ever leave their cult. How sad it is to think that we could lose a family member, a close friend, or a coworker to them simply because we were unwilling to share our own faith. Lives are ruined by them because others have simply failed to act.

Be quick but precise, and be open to repeating your faith until it sinks in. There are others who are doing just that, but what they share is darkness, not the light of Christ. So be ready to share now, while you can!

*Lord God, help us to speak out about our faith in Jesus. He is the only answer to the sin problem that infects us all. Without meeting the true Jesus, our sin will never be dealt with. And so, help us to be responsible with the faith we possess so that the truth of God in Christ is shared! Amen.*

**But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself am also a man.” Acts 10:26**

In the previous verse, as Peter was in the process of coming into the house, Cornelius met him, fell down at his feet, and worshiped him. Peter would have none of this and corrected him immediately. As Luke notes, “But Peter lifted him up.”

One can see him bending down and grabbing Cornelius by an arm, and carefully pulling him out of such a position. This is unlike Jesus who readily accepted such worship –

“When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. <sup>2</sup> And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.’

<sup>3</sup> Then Jesus put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” Matthew 8:1-3

That was the first such recorded incident in Matthew (aside from the Magi worshipping him when he was a child). This continues time and again in the gospels, and it continued after the resurrection as is seen in Matthew 28 –

“Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. <sup>17</sup> When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy



Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Matthew 28:16-20

The worshiping of Jesus continues after His ascension and it is explicitly noted that the angels of heaven worship Him in Hebrews 1 –

“But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says:  
‘Let all the angels of God worship Him.’” Hebrews 1:6

These recorded incidents have been given to show us the nature of Jesus the Man. In contrast to Him, Luke next records Peter’s words, “saying, ‘Stand up; I myself am also a man.’”

In this, Peter’s words do not contrast himself to Jesus by indicating that Jesus is not a man, but to indicate the type of Man He is. Jesus is the God/Man, the Messiah. Cornelius does not yet know this, but he will be schooled on it in the verses ahead.

Life application: When the Jehovah’s Witnesses translate Matthew 28:17, they say, “When they saw him, they did obeisance, but some doubted.” As noted in the previous commentary, the word is *proskuneó*, and it can mean to do obeisance. But the context of Matthew 28:17 must come from an analysis of the rest of Scripture.

If it was common in the New Testament for people to be noted as paying obeisance to others, there might be a question about how to translate the word. But it is not a word that is carelessly tossed around in such a manner. It is plainly evident that the act recorded in Matthew 28 (and in Acts 1 after the resurrection) is an act of worship. The same word is found in Luke 4:8 –

“And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.””

Jesus understood the act of worship being extended to Him, and He allowed it to continue because He is the Lord God. A right analysis of Scripture makes that perfectly clear. Hiding the word *proskuneó* by the translation “obeisance” does nothing to hide the truth of what is occurring. The context of the matter fully supports the idea that Jesus is God, that He allowed Himself to be worshiped, and the New Testament writers agreed with this.

We serve God when we serve Jesus, and we worship God when we do so through Jesus. He is the incarnate word of God who has come. Let us praise God for His goodness to us in the coming of Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Lord God, the words of Scripture tell us the most wonderful story of all. How incredible it is that You have done what You have done to bring us back to Yourself. Thank You for the coming of Jesus Christ who has bridged the gap. We now are reconciled through Him! Thank You for what You have done, O God. Amen.*

**And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.**

Acts 10:27

Cornelius had just fallen before Peter. That was followed by Peter correcting him for doing that. From there, it now says, “And as he talked with him.”

The contents are left unstated, but it was probably a general greeting accompanied by the normal personal things people say when they first meet. Being a present participle (literally: And talking with him), they engaged in conversation as they proceeded, such as, “We had a really nice trip. On the way, we stopped for the best falafel I’ve ever had. And now we are here to discover what the Lord intends for us to know.” Whatever was said, it continued as “he went in.”

This shows that Cornelius first met Peter outside of the house. Once Peter had raised him up, the conversation began, and they continued to talk even as they were entering. As they did, it notes that Peter “found many who had come together.”

One can think of the verse that says, “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Cornelius diligently sought after God (contrary to the Calvinistic idea about man being unable to seek after Him). When he received his vision, he then wanted to share it with as many of his family and friends as he could. In other words, one can imagine his words to them, “I have told you for years about our need to consider God in all our ways. Now, I have been told that He has a message to share with me from a man in Joppa. That man will arrive today, and I want you to be there to hear his message as well. Please, please come and hear what he has to say!”

This is the situation that now exists as Peter and Cornelius enter the house. Remembering that Peter is a Jew and that this would otherwise be considered culturally inappropriate, he will next inform this gathered audience of the reason he has nevertheless entered.

Life application: Peter has walked into the house of supposedly “unclean” Gentiles. A doctor will enter a room with sick people that others would not dare to enter. A fellow soldier will throw himself on top of a grenade that will surely kill him in order to save his brothers in arms. What exceptional thing are you willing to do to bring life to others? The examples of the doctor and the soldier may involve actions by those who are unbelievers, and yet they will risk their lives for others. This is their calling, and it is their honor to act.

We have a calling placed upon us that is intended to save, but it is not physical life we are considering. Rather, the message we possess – meaning that of the gospel – is the only message that can bring a person who stands already condemned before God (see John 3:18) to one who stands approved before God. And yet, are we too shy to share it? Are we embarrassed to share it? Are we too busy to share it?

What excuses do we need to drop in order to be obedient to the call that we have been given? Let us consider them, let us refine our thoughts, and then let us act by spreading this wonderful message. Cornelius called “many” to hear the message. Peter was willing to go into “many” despite the cultural barrier that would have otherwise prevented him from doing so. Consider this and redirect! Speak out the word of salvation!

*Lord God, thank You for those who have been willing to accept danger in order to help save those who needed them in their time of distress. May they be a reminder to us that we can also help by bringing the saving message of Jesus to those who live out their lives in a permanent state of distress. We are all one heartbeat away from where eternity will place us. May we be willing to make a difference in where that eternity will be spent by them. Amen.*

**Then he said to them, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Acts 10:28**

Peter has now fully entered the house of Cornelius and is before all those gathered together. With that context remembered, it next says, “Then he said to them.”

It is Peter who speaks, thus setting the tone for what must be conveyed. A change from the normal way things were within society has taken place that must be explained. This will then set the tone for the rest of what is conveyed. Peter now explains that change, saying, “You know how unlawful it is.”

What he will convey is not actually a point of Mosaic law but rather of Pharisaic law. However, because of their traditions and standards, the thought permeated society to a wide degree. Those who diverged from such implicit laws were considered lowly and contemptible. The unlawful matter that Peter is referring to is “for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation.”

The word translated as “keep company” signifies to join to. Both it and the word translated as “go to” are in the verse where Philip was told to come near and join with the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch –

“Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and overtake this chariot.’” Acts 8:39

Hence, the Spirit had already shown that what Peter is saying is incorrect. It is a misapplication or even a twisting of what God allows. Further, the word translated as “another nation,” *allophulos*, is found only here in the New Testament. It speaks of one who belongs to another tribe or race, a foreigner. The utterly ridiculous nature of this is seen time and again in Scripture. Innumerable examples can be found where exactly that occurred.

David had men of other nations as his chief men, such as Uriah the Hittite. He also spent time among the Philistines while Saul was king. Solomon entertained the Queen of Sheba, inviting her into his palace and associating with her.

The prohibitions found in the Law of Moses were to separate Israel from the nations of Canaan and their idolatrous and immoral practices. But the very same passages that speak of those things, such as Leviticus 18, actually include the thought of associating with foreign people –

“Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. <sup>25</sup> For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants. <sup>26</sup> You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit *any* of these abominations, *either* any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you <sup>27</sup> (for all these abominations the men of the land

have done, who *were* before you, and thus the land is defiled), <sup>28</sup> lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that *were* before you. <sup>29</sup> For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit *them* shall be cut off from among their people.”

-Leviticus 18:24-29

Further, the pilgrim feasts of Israel clearly invited foreigners to be enjoined to the people of Israel in their times of celebration –

“You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who *is* within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who *are* among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. <sup>12</sup> And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.” Deuteronomy 16:11, 12

In those words, the *ger*, or stranger, means an alien or foreigner. The law Peter is now conveying is one that is not Scriptural but cultural. Despite that, it permeated the thinking of Jewish society. This will be seen in chapter 11 –

“Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. <sup>2</sup> And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, <sup>3</sup> saying, ‘You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!’” Acts 11:1-3

One can see that the congregation of believers was astonished at what Peter had done and was clearly upset by his actions. As for Peter and why he has done this, he explains it to those in Cornelius’ house, saying, “But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.”

The word “me” is emphatic and is given as a complete contrast to the words “You know.” In other words –

You know how unlawful it is ... To me, however, God has shown.

This takes the reader back to the trance Peter was in and the words, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” Peter came to understand that the foods that were deemed acceptable to the nations to eat were not something that defiled those

people. God had pronounced to Noah in Genesis 9:3 that every moving thing that lives was acceptable as food.

Israel was given a dietary law that did not void that pronouncement by God to Noah (meaning the people of the world). Rather, the law added restrictions to Israel, but it did not end the freedoms of the people of the world. Hence, the people of the world could not be considered common or unclean by eating those things, even if Israel could. Therefore, it was the law – a law that had been fulfilled and ended by Christ – that made them unclean for Israel.

Therefore, the addition of the laws of the Pharisees twisted what God had said, but it was not something that God ever intended, as is evidenced in His word.

Life application: The Pharisees added to the law of God. This is one of the main things Jesus rebuked them for. And he did it time and again. The same is true with denominations, churches, pastors, preachers, and teachers – and even lay people – to this day. We add our own pet peeves to what we find acceptable or unacceptable when we teach others about supposed Christian morality. This is legalism and it is as harmful as ignoring precepts found in the word.

Churches set their own arbitrary standards of morality. No dancing. No skirts on women above the knees. Men must wear ties in church. No soft drinks. No pork (heaven forbid!). Such teachings are damaging because they stem from man, not from God. We cannot go unscathed when this occurs. Churches will become legalistic and increasingly demanding. Eventually, a standard of conformity exists that demands allegiance to the leader and not to God.

Be careful to evaluate all things. If a church has cultural standards, respect them. In other words, if you go to an Arab church in Nazareth, you want to be sensitive to the cultural mores of the congregation. If you attend a Korean church in Sarasota, Florida, the same is true. Those cultural mores are not the same as church doctrines. If the church sets forth unbiblical doctrines, then head for the door. Be wise in understanding the differences and be respectful to the congregants if their practices are cultural but not unbiblical. Of this thinking, Vincent's Word Studies says –

“It is interesting, in this connection, to note the ‘Honour all men’ of 1 Peter 2:17. It is obvious that the pride of class, resting on mere differences of culture, and showing itself in acts and words of contempt, is, from one point of view, even less excusable than that

which at least imagined that it rested on a religious basis, while from another, it is less inveterate, and therefore more easily curable.”

*Lord God, may we never add to Your word that which You have set forth for Your people. If Your word says something is acceptable, then we are not to condemn it. If Your word prohibits something, then we are not to tolerate it. If Your word does not address the issue, then give us the wisdom to determine what is proper based on a right understanding of the rest of Your precious word. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?” Acts 10:29**

Peter, having gone into the house of Cornelius, said to those inside, “You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” With that, he next says, “Therefore I came without objection.”

Here is a word found only once in Scripture, *anantirréto*s. It is an adverb meaning without hesitation or promptly, but it carries with it the sense of without opposition or objection. The matter was set forth and Peter immediately agreed to come, based on Cornelius’ request. This was obviously initiated by the trance in which he heard the voice and saw the vision. Based on that, and based on the words of the messengers of verse 10:22, he knew that this was a matter that God had determined to come about. And so, he says, that he came “as soon as I was sent for.”

They left on the next day, obviously meaning that the day was expired enough that a stay at the house of Simon the tanner was necessary before actually departing. On the next day, they left and started the journey to Caesarea. Now that he had arrived, he immediately asks for clarification of the summons with the words, “I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?”

Verse 10:22 explained the reason sufficiently for Peter to depart with the messengers. If there was anything else that they knew, it is certain that they talked about it on the way to Caesarea. And so, what Peter is asking for is a more detailed explanation directly from the mouth of Cornelius. This will allow the entire event, from the first moments until the present, to be brought out in front of all of those gathered with him. Whatever God had wanted to occur would be completely expressed in the presence of all, thus providing an entire house filled with witnesses.

Life application: There are times in recorded Christian history, even in recent history, where a multitude of people have gathered together and claimed Spirit-led revelation. In fact, it happens in many churches every Sunday. Visiting one of those churches, it is obvious that what occurs does not match what is prescribed in the Bible. As such, the events cannot be of the Spirit.

One could then say, “Well then, how can you say that what is recorded in the Bible is any different? Where is the proof?” Obviously, there is no proof. However, there is sufficient evidence within Scripture to establish that what is recorded there is reliable. Anyone who truly determines to find out if Scripture is telling the truth will find out that it is. The finest minds of the last two thousand years have studied this book and found it reliable. And more, those who have vehemently tried to oppose it in order to have it proven false have failed to do so.

There will naturally be an element of faith required in accepting the message of the Bible and the reliability of accounts like this particular event recorded in Acts 10, but this is not a blind step of faith into the unknown. Rather, it is a step of faith into God’s revealed light that has been carefully recorded and upheld throughout the millennia.

On the other hand, those gatherings mentioned above that do not match with Scripture cannot be reliably trusted, no matter how many people are involved. Mass psychosis occurs among people all the time. It happens among secular populations, among adherents to various religions and cults around the world, and it happens within uninformed or purposefully manipulated bodies of those gathered under the umbrella of Christianity.

There must be a standard by which those things are based, and that standard must be the basis of the faith. As Jesus is the basis of the faith, and as the word of God is the instrument by which God explains Jesus, then such events must be based upon an accurate analysis of the word of God in order to be true.

A simple example of this is the speaking of tongues. Scripture defines what tongues are, meaning a known language. Scripture says –

“If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in turn, and let one interpret. <sup>28</sup> But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.” 1 Corinthians 14:27, 28



If a gathering does not match these parameters where tongues are spoken, then it is not led by the Spirit. That is perfectly simple to determine. Determining whether something is of God or not is to be conducted in this manner.

The modern Pentecostal movement, which was spawned by the Azusa Street revival, was filled with speaking in tongues by the entire audience. As this does not conform to what Paul said as he was led by the Spirit to write Scripture, and as Pentecostal gatherings to this day continue to not match what Scripture says, then it is obvious that this is a false movement based on something other than the Spirit of God.

Be wise, be discerning, and learn your Bible – in context.

*Glorious God Almighty, thank You for Your word. By knowing it and applying it to our lives, we can be kept from false teachers and false gatherings of people who claim special powers and gifts. We have a record of how the church was established and of the miracles that took place when it was. What more do we need? We can now live by faith in what You have done. Thank You that Your word is sufficient for our lives, doctrine, and the practice of our faith. Amen.*

**So Cornelius said, “Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, Acts 10:30**

The previous verse noted Peter’s words which questioned Cornelius as to why he had been sent for. With that, it now says, “So Cornelius said, ‘Four days ago I was fasting until this hour.’” Some texts (and thus some translations) say, “Four days ago to this hour, at the ninth hour.” As such, there is nothing noted about him fasting and the explanation of the hours of the day is slightly altered.

Either way, the point is that Cornelius is recounting that it was four days prior to the current day when the events that started the matter began to occur. Regardless of the text used, it literally says, “from the fourth day.” Cornelius is reckoning backward from the day in which he is now speaking.

Whether he fasted or not doesn’t change the overall message. One would think that the note about fasting would more likely be dropped out by accident than inserted without justification, but either way, Cornelius continues, saying, “and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house.”

This would be in accord with his nature which was described in verse 10:2. There it said that he “prayed to God always.” It was during the time while he was in prayer, that he says, “and behold, a man stood before me.”

Verse 4:3 said, “About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in.” His words to Peter about it being the ninth hour are supported by this. And more, the angel (Greek: messenger) is now described as being a man. This does not mean he is not an angel. The angel Gabriel is described as a man in Daniel 9:21.

As such, it could be an angel, or it could be a man (such as Enoch or Elijah who stand before the Lord to this day). Either way, the text clearly identifies him as a messenger of God. And more, Cornelius says he was “in bright clothing.”

The word here is not the same as that used for Jesus’ garments at the transfiguration. It was used, however, to describe the “gorgeous robe” that was placed upon Jesus in Luke 23:11 during His trial before Herod. The word is *lampros*. It signifies that which is radiant. It is used by James to describe a person dressed in fine clothes, and it is used five times in Revelation to describe various things (see Revelation 15:6, 18:14, 19:8, 22:1, and 22:16).

Life application: Cornelius’ description of the garments of the messenger from God is the same used of the seven angels who are “clothed in pure bright linen” in Revelation 15:6 and of those who are the bride of the Lamb in Revelation 19:8. There it says that they are arrayed in “fine linen, clean and bright.”

As such, this does not answer if the messenger from God is an angel or a man. Either way, he came to Cornelius with a message that changed his life, and it has been documented to show us how the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church was brought about. It is true that the Ethiopian eunuch has already been included in it, but Peter was not there to validate that. The account now includes Peter to specifically ensure that it is fully agreed upon that Gentiles can be included in the church and that they are not bound by adherence to the law before being accepted by the Spirit.

What is wonderful to consider is that someday the redeemed of the Lord will be clothed in magnificent garments. This signifies the righteousness of Christ that has been imputed to us. When we consider what lies ahead, we must consider that it was all because the Lord first acted to redeem us. May we never forget that we have been brought back to God by God in the giving of His Son for us. Let us remember the great cost that was

needed for our reconciliation. May we forever and ever hail the Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, for what He has done.

*Lord God, thank You that You have brought us back to Yourself. May we never assume that it is because of our goodness, but because of Your great love, grace, and mercy that we have been reconciled to You. Thank You. Great things You have done! Hallelujah and amen.*

**and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. Acts 10:31**

The previous verse began Cornelius’ explanation of how it came to be that he had summoned Peter to come and speak to him. He noted the coming of the man in bright clothing. The man stood before Cornelius “and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard.’”

In verse 4, at the time of the visitation, it said, “your prayers.” Now, Cornelius says, “your prayer.” No contradiction needs to be assumed here. Rather, Cornelius is most likely focusing his mind on the single most important aspect of his prayers, meaning how to be righteous before God.

Cornelius, as previously noted in earlier commentaries, understood that there was a disconnect between him and God. He understood his sinful nature, he grasped God’s perfection and realized that He could not abide with his sin. He also knew that condemnation was his default position. This can all be deduced from Cornelius’ attitude, habits, and lifestyle. He sought out the truth that could set him free from the burden his soul felt laid upon him.

Because of this heart attitude, and because this was certainly his most consuming thought and his most constant prayer, he notes it in the singular. This prayer was issued again and again, making it one prayer repeated many times. With this surely being the reason for his words, he continues with the words of the messenger, saying, “and your alms.”

It is the same word spoken by the messenger. Cornelius repeats this portion exactly as it was conveyed to him. Together, his prayer and his alms “are remembered in the sight of God.”

In verse 10:4, the messenger said, “have come up for a memorial before God.” Cornelius uses terminology that explains rather than repeats the words of the messenger. His

prayers had ascended as a memorial before God. As such, they are remembered in the sight of God. A memorial is something to bring to remembrance. To be “before” someone is to be “in the sight of” that person.

Cornelius has clearly explained the matter to Peter. For those who would say his words are not the words of the angel and are a fabrication, the fact is that those same people would say of an exact repeat of his words, “Luke just copied the words from verse 10:4. This is just a fabrication.” But the words spoken by Cornelius now are reasonable, they fully explain the matter, and they are how any normal person would explain the events they had experienced a few days earlier.

Life application: In Isaiah, there is an excellent connection to the words of Cornelius as spoken to Peter –

“Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened,  
That it cannot save;  
Nor His ear heavy,  
That it cannot hear.  
<sup>2</sup> But your iniquities have separated you from your God;  
And your sins have hidden *His* face from you,  
So that He will not hear.” Isaiah 59:1, 2

Sin is what keeps our prayers from being heard by God. As all people have sinned, there is a disconnect between us and God that keeps our prayers from being heard. In the case of Cornelius, he had faith that God existed. He also knew that if the infinite gap that stood between us and God was to be bridged, it would have to be from the top down.

This is the prayer that God can hear because it removes us (meaning our attempts at reconciliation) from the equation. This is why Jesus gave this parable to Israel –

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ <sup>13</sup> And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

-Luke 18:10-14

The tax collector removed himself from the equation as far as reconciliation is concerned. He threw himself at the mercy of God and begged His forgiveness. God can deal with such a person. The arrogant Pharisee placed himself before God as if they were equals, expecting God to see his self-righteousness and reward him. God cannot deal with such arrogance.

This explains the worthy or unworthy manner in which one takes the Lord's Supper as explained in 1 Corinthians 11. The purpose of taking the Lord's Supper is "to proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (vs. 26). It is an acknowledgment that Christ had to die for our sins, and only because we are in Christ are we found acceptable to God. The fact is, that without Jesus, there is nothing in us worthy of salvation or even an explanation from God about anything. But thanks be to God for Jesus Christ who alone makes us worthy. Yes, thanks be to God for our Lord Jesus.

*Lord God, praises alone belong to You. Without Your glorious hand of reconciliation and restoration through Jesus, we would be utterly swept away. But because of Him, we have been brought near to You. Thank You. We praise You forever and ever because of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you.'**

Acts 10:32

In the previous verse, Cornelius noted the words of the messenger sent from God, saying, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God." The words of verse 10:32 now continue his thought. They follow closely after the words of verses 10:5, 6 –

(10:5, 6) "Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. <sup>6</sup>He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do."

(10:32) "Send therefore to Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, he will speak to you."

Cornelius is carefully explaining exactly what occurred so that Peter is fully aware of what transpired and of what is expected of him. To get a full sense of the meaning of the words, please refer to the commentaries on Acts 10:5, 6.

Life application: There is a great division among people about how the Bible is to be translated. Cornelius does not explain to Peter word for word what the messenger said to him. However, he carefully gives the substance of what the angel has said.

In Bible translations, some demand an exact and literal rendering of what is said in the originals (literal translation). Doing this can make the translation unintelligible to the reader because various words and idioms do not convey the same meaning as they did in the original.

Some think that a dynamic equivalence is the best way to go. That is having the “quality of a translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors” (Eugene Nida). The meaning is “sense for sense.”

The original audience received the words of the writer, and their minds had a sense of what the meaning was. Likewise, when translated into another language, the desired goal is for the translation to carry the same sense.

For example, “He was killed with the mouth of the sword” (Hebrew thought) becomes “He was killed with the edge of the sword (English thought).” Another example might be that of 1 Kings 18:21, “Until when are you leaping on the two branches?” That becomes “How long will you falter between two opinions?” The first is an idiomatic expression that means nothing to an English reader. Hence, a literal translation really says nothing to the mind. In dynamic equivalence, the original words are not conveyed, only a sense of what they mean is.

There are many (almost innumerable) other types of Bible translations, each claiming it is the “best and most reliable.” But the fact is that any translation can only go so far in its ability to convey the true meaning of what is said. Before Bibles were common, plays about the gospel message helped explain the Bible to people. That would be a sort of verbal paraphrase to convey meaning. Is that wrong? Obviously not. We watch movies about Jesus all the time.

In church on Sunday, a reliable pastor will read a passage of Scripture and then take the time to describe it in one of various ways, such as from a moral, a historical, a prophetic, or a typological explanation. Is one “more right” than another? Not if the word is

properly explained. We should not get so caught up in a single translation or a single way of instructing from the Bible that we dismiss other ways of transmitting the message.

This will lead to arrogance, judgmentalism, finger-pointing, and congregations that are actually unbalanced and unhealthy. If you don't know that, go sit in a King James Only congregation for a couple of Sundays. The Bible will give you exactly what you are willing to take from it. If you don't read it, it will give you nothing. If you read it in one fallible translation, you will think of its contents only from that perspective.

If you read many translations, you will get a broader view of what is being said. You will be able to more accurately evaluate what is going on and what the meaning of various literary styles will convey. If you study the original languages, you will become even more proficient in the nuances of what is being conveyed. If you study the land from which the narratives are penned, you will gain even greater insights into the original intent of the authors. And so on.

Be careful to always handle the Bible with the utmost care and respect. But also understand that because it comes from the mind of God, what is being conveyed can be explored and explained in a multitude of ways, none of which are incorrect. But they may be insufficient in fully explaining all of what the original intent may mean. Above all, pray to the Lord for guidance, insight, and wisdom in His word when you read it. And you cannot get those things unless... you actually read it.

*Heavenly Father, what a joy and a blessing it is to receive Your word each day, to drink from it as the coolest of water, to revel in it as the greatest treat, and to share it as the most precious gift. What a treasure it is that we possess when we have Your word. Thank You for Your precious word. Amen.*

**So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.” Acts 10:33**

In the previous verse, Cornelius continued his reason for having Peter called, as he conveyed the words of the messenger from God. Now, he finishes this side of the conversation, beginning with the words, “So I sent to you immediately.”

This is exactly what happened as was stated in verses 10:7, 8 –

“And when the angel who spoke to him had departed, Cornelius called two of his household servants and a devout soldier from among those who waited on him

continually. <sup>8</sup> So when he had explained all *these* things to them, he sent them to Joppa.”

Not even waiting for the next day, he had immediately followed through with the words spoken to him. With that, he next says to Peter, “and you have done well to come.” The words more appropriately read, “and you did well, having come.”

Cornelius acknowledges Peter’s presence, demonstrating gratefulness through the words conveyed. It is the same formula used when Paul addressed those at Philippi –

“Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.”

-Philippians 5:13,14

After his compliment to Peter, he begins his finishing thought, saying, “Now therefore, we are all present before God.”

Cornelius acknowledges on behalf of all assembled his understanding of God’s omnipresence and ability to discern the hearts of those assembled. Even if his understanding of the nature of God was limited, he had deduced enough to know that God was fully sovereign over His creation, including His creatures, and that He had expectations of man who walked in His presence. His words convey the idea that God was attending the meeting with the same attention that He had when He created the universe. Having noted this, he finishes with, “to hear all the things commanded you by God.”

The Alexandrian text, used by many translations, says, “to hear all the things having been commanded you by the Lord” (BLB). Determining which is original, God or Lord, is difficult. If Cornelius was either aware of Jesus, or if Peter had told him he was a messenger of Jesus as they entered in verse 10:27, then saying “Lord” would make more sense. If Cornelius was not yet aware of Jesus yet, then saying “God” would make more sense.

The coming verses do not really clear that up and could be taken either way, but because Jesus is God, it doesn’t change the overall narrative greatly. God sent Jesus to accomplish His mission. The command rested upon Jesus, and He fulfilled it, including giving His commands to the people. Peter was fully aware of this, and he had been given



his further commission during the trance which was specifically tied to his speaking to Cornelius.

Peter will explain the ministry of Jesus going back to the time of John's baptizing, including the words "that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout Judea." However, this doesn't necessarily mean that Cornelius was aware that Jesus was the Messiah. All it means is that he had likely heard about Jesus in some fashion. This is certain because it will go on to say –

"Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead." Acts 10:40, 41

If the resurrection was not known to all the people, then it means that not all the people knew that Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah. As such, the story in Cornelius' mind may be that another failed messianic figure had come among the people. The extent that Cornelius had of who Jesus was cannot be known. But what he will need to know will be fully presented as the verses continue.

Life application: It is rare to come across a person who has never heard of Jesus, even people in other cultures around the world usually have some limited knowledge of Him. This is no different than most people having heard of Buddha or Muhammed. Just because someone has heard of a person, it doesn't really tell you much about the extent of that person's knowledge.

In the US today, knowing there was a "Jesus" who started Christianity is almost universal. And yet, even in supposed Christian churches, there may be very little knowledge beyond that about who He is or what is expected by Him. Our responsibility as saved believers in Jesus is to explain the meaning of Jesus' coming and what it means to the state of humanity.

Once the truth of Jesus has been explained, there is still the necessary instruction that not only is He God and that He is the focus of the gospel, but it should be explained that He is the only path of restoration with God. This is not a part of the gospel itself, but it is an important point about Jesus that should be explained. If not, there may remain confusion in people's minds about the exclusivity of what Jesus has done. This should not be the state of anyone who has accepted the simple gospel.

The sooner sound discipleship is introduced, the chances will be all the better that this person will rightly repeat the message of Jesus to others. And so, be prepared to give the important basic points about the faith that will keep that individual, and those he next talks to, from heading down erroneous paths of thinking.

*Lord God, help us to be clear in our presentation of who Jesus is and what He means to the state of all people before You. Give us wisdom in our presentation of Him, and help us to be strong in our stand concerning those points about Him that must be conveyed for a new believer to be solidly grounded in his thinking about the faith. Amen.*

**Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. Acts 10:34**

Cornelius just completed his explanation for calling Peter. With his words stated, it now says, “Then Peter opened *his* mouth.”

As has been seen already in Acts, this is a way of saying that Peter prepared to speak and then engaged in speech. The thoughts in his head are now to be expressed verbally through his mouth. With that, Luke next notes, “and said: ‘In truth I perceive.’”

Peter has made a logical deduction based on the events that have occurred over the past few days. The object like a great sheet has descended from heaven in a trance; he had seen the creatures of the earth on display: he had been told to rise up, kill, and eat. And so on.

Along with that, he now knows that God had sent a messenger to Cornelius telling him to fetch Peter and have him explain all that he was to do. When the messengers from Cornelius arrived, the Spirit had told Peter to go with them without hesitation. Everything was synchronized and purposefully presented to inform Peter of a truth that he now fully perceives, which is, “that God shows no partiality.”

Here is a word found only once in Scripture, *prosópoléemptés*. It comes from *prosopon*, the face, and *lambanó*, to receive. Thus, it means “an accepter of a face (individual), i.e. (specially), one exhibiting partiality -- respecter of persons” (HELPS Word Studies). This is something that Jesus was known to the leaders of Israel for –

“Then they asked Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth: <sup>22</sup> Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?’” Luke 20:21, 22

In that account, the leaders used the same two words, *lambanó* and *prosopon*, separately. Peter now simply unites them into one word to make the same point. However, Peter cannot necessarily be considered dull for not having grasped something that he should have. These leaders were a part of the Jewish society, and they were referring to Jesus' actions as they saw them within the Jewish society. Jesus had even spoken to a Gentile woman, saying, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).

Because of this, Peter and the others may have (and the indication we can receive from the words of his vision is that this is certainly the case) thought that what Jesus meant was limited to those of Israel. But Peter now sees something fuller has sprung out of the New Covenant. This was not an easy lesson to learn because time and again Israel had been warned about intermingling with Gentiles to some degree or another. Eventually, their leaders took that even further than the law and their writings intimated.

In Deuteronomy 23:1-8, certain prohibitions on accepting people into the assembly are noted. Other incidents like this are noted in the law. During the time of the historical writings, intermingling with Gentiles caused troubles to arise among the people. A perfect example of this is Solomon's intermarriages with Gentiles as noted in 1 Kings 11–

"But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, *and* Hittites— <sup>2</sup>from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.' Solomon clung to these in love. <sup>3</sup>And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. <sup>4</sup>For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of his father David. <sup>5</sup>For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. <sup>6</sup>Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as *did* his father David." 1 Kings 11:1-6

After Israel's first exile, a heavy stress is laid upon this notion as is recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah, where these men implored the people to maintain the purity of the race and culture, even forbidding such marriages and forcing the ending of what they perceived

as illegitimate marriages. Ezra 10 is dedicated to this idea of defilement and purity. Take time to read that today.

Because of this, and because of later more strenuous prohibitions laid upon the people to not even enter the houses of Gentiles, this was something that Peter had to be fully trained out of by the messenger from God to Cornelius and the trance from God on Simon the tanner's housetop.

With the coming of Paul's ministry, and as is recorded in Acts and his epistles, this idea of Gentile inclusion is most perfectly fleshed out. But it is being first expressed in this account of Peter and Cornelius. There is a reason for this that will be dealt with as Acts 10 continues.

Life application: James addresses the idea of showing favoritism in James 2:1-7. It could be argued that he is only referring to this within the Jewish community because he is addressing "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (James 1:1). Further, he uses a term, synagogue, used only among Jews concerning their gathering together (James 2:2). Paul never uses this term when referring to the gathering of the churches in his letters.

As such, this account of Peter and Cornelius, Paul's interactions in Acts, and also Paul's letters are invaluable in understanding the equality of Jew and Gentile in the New Covenant. Paul, writing to those in Rome, and using a noun cognate to the one used by Peter above, says that God does not show favoritism when referring to both Jew and Gentile.

He also breaks down the barrier between classes within society, such as that of masters and slaves in Ephesians 6, Colossians 3 & 4, 1 Timothy 6, and Titus 2. It is also the subject of the letter to Philemon. Paul speaks of the unity of acceptance in the gospel concerning males and females as well –

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:26-29

These and other such references tell us that all people are on equal standing before God, and that those who are in Christ are on equal standing in Him. This does not mean

we all possess the same rights in this earthly life, however. By Paul noting that slaves are to heed their masters, it implies that there are slaves.

By noting the physical differences between men and women and the cultural differences between Jew and Gentile (Galatians 3:28), it means they are different, even if no distinction in Christ exists. Because of that, when Paul says elsewhere that women are not to teach or have authority over men, it is because of these differences. Thus, there is no contradiction in Paul's words.

Think about these things and remember that God's word has defined the Christian parameters for our earthly lives. For our eternal position in Christ, He has accepted all as being on the same level. Any and all are open to receiving the gospel and being saved by the precious blood of Christ. Thank God for Jesus Christ.

*Lord God, how good it is to be a part of what You have done in Christ. Each of us is acceptable to You regardless of our gender, societal class, culture, or any other earthly distinction. We are acceptable to You because of Jesus! Thank You for Your care of Your people even when we don't always care for one another. Help us to drop all such things and be willing to share the message with all we encounter. Amen.*

**But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.**

Acts 10:35

The previous verse said, "Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.'" That is immediately followed up by Peter, saying, "But in every nation."

Of these words, Bengel rightly states, "It is not an *indifferentism of religions*, but an *indifferency* (impartiality) *as to* the acceptance of *nations*, that is here asserted." What is to be said does not include people simply because they faithfully pursue their personal religion, but it is inclusive of those of any nation who faithfully pursue God as he is revealed to people.

Hence, Job can be included in this. Rahab and Naaman likewise are noted in this category in the Bible. However, it cannot be said of someone in Islam or Buddhism today. They are excluded from the thought until a change is made in their mind (a repenting) to turn to the truth of God that has been revealed.

It doesn't matter if it is a person in Pakistan, Tanzania, Russia, Japan, or any other nation – which is the thought that was expressed to Peter in the descent of the great object filled with the various beasts, birds, and so on. With this understood, Peter next says, “whoever fears Him.” To be more precise, it says, “the *one* fearing Him.”

This is an upward acknowledgment of God, and it is an action directed toward Him. God is looking at those who are fearing Him in the knowledge of Him that has been made available to the person. Of Cornelius, it said that he was “one who feared God” (Acts 10:2). Paul speaks of this in Romans 2 –

“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law <sup>13</sup> (for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; <sup>14</sup> for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, <sup>15</sup> who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*) <sup>16</sup> in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.” Romans 2:12-16

Job did not possess the Law of Moses, and yet he had a law written upon his heart that led him to seek out the true God as He had been thus far revealed. He anticipated restoration with Him through the promised Messiah, and he was noted as a son of God (Job 1:6) through this. Peter continues with “and works righteousness.”

Again, it is a present participle, saying, “and is working righteousness.” This is a horizontal acknowledgment of God, and it is seen in actions directed toward others according to a standard that is pure and faithful. God is looking at those who are fearing Him and who are then expressing that fear of Him in a manner that is appropriate. Of Cornelius, it said that he “gave alms to the people and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2). Someone may give alms to the people, but he may not be doing it because of an acknowledgment of God. Instead, he may be doing it to simply get ahead in life. That is self-serving and unacceptable.

Likewise, of Job, it says that he was “one who feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). Job confessed that –

“I *was* eyes to the blind,  
And I *was* feet to the lame.

<sup>16</sup> I *was* a father to the poor,  
And I searched out the case *that* I did not know.  
<sup>17</sup> I broke the fangs of the wicked,  
And plucked the victim from his teeth.” Job 29:15-17

Like Cornelius, these things were done because he feared God. And this is the heart of the Law of Moses, as spoken by Jesus –

“So he answered and said, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’” Luke 10:27

This is the thought now being expressed. With that noted, Peter finishes with, “is accepted by Him.” In the Greek, it is an adjective connected to a present tense verb – “is acceptable.” The incorrect translation would cause a rather significant theological problem. Rather, the full clause rightly says, “is acceptable to Him.”

John Gill rightly says, “though God accepts of such who fear him, and work righteousness from a right principle, and to a right end, without any regard to their being circumcised, or not circumcised, or to their being of this or the other nation, yet their fear of him, and working righteousness, are not the ground of their acceptance; but are to be considered as descriptive of the persons, who are accepted by him in Christ; for there is no acceptance of persons or services, but in Christ Jesus.”

Such a person is “acceptable” to God, but only in Christ can he be “accepted” by Him. One cannot do an end around God in Christ. Job anticipated the coming Messiah through his limited knowledge of what God was doing. Cornelius is now on the “after” side of the coming of Jesus. God has heard his prayers and seen his deeds and has sent Peter to take him the necessary further step to Christ Jesus.

The entire account bears this out. It is not that Cornelius was accepted by God, but that he is acceptable to God because of his rightly directed heart and his actions which displayed that heart. Now, Peter has been summoned to take that heart that acknowledges God and direct it to the Messiah, who alone can remove his sin and make him accepted by God.

Life application: A wrongly translated word can make a world of difference. The NKJV, following after the KJV, has introduced an error that makes it appear that Cornelius has

been accepted by (or with) God apart from Jesus. From there, an explanation of what the true meaning is must be constructed, as John Gill did above.

The error of translation can be overcome by a continued reading of the passage which reveals Cornelius was saved after hearing and accepting the gospel. But it is far too often the case that people will take a verse, such as this one now being analyzed, and make up an entire commentary or sermon about how people are saved by their right heart towards God and their good works towards others if they have never met Jesus. And it would all be based on a mistranslation that has been copied again and again from eons ago –

- is accepted with him. (Tyndale Bible of 1526)
- is accepted vnto him. (Coverdale Bible of 1535)
- is accepted with hym. (Bishops' Bible of 1568)
- is accepted with him. (Geneva Bible of 1587)
- is accepted with him. (King James Bible)
- is accepted by Him. (New King James Version)

As a side note, the word “accepted” can also be an adjective, such as “he is handsome in the accepted sense.” However, the meaning when combined with “is” changes it to a verb. As such the meaning is changed as well. Be studious and be ready to question both people’s commentaries and their translations. In the end, no person will be saved apart from what God is doing in Christ. There are no loopholes, no end-arounds, and no acceptable “Plan B’s.” It is Jesus who saves. Thank God for Jesus!

*Heavenly Father, thank You for our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ. May we never waffle in our convictions or in our proclamations concerning Him. May we take His words of John 14:6 as true, literal, and unchangeable – “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Thank You, O God, that You have made this way possible! Amen.*

**The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all— Acts 10:36**



Peter is responding to the reason why Cornelius had summoned him. He just noted that those who fear God and work righteousness are acceptable to Him. He continues now, beginning with, “The word.”

Peter is now going to convey the divine utterance of God, the word, that came to those of Israel. He understands more fully now that this divine declaration was not to be limited to Israel at all, but that it is a word that is to extend beyond its borders to all people. With that, Peter continues by sharing what the word is. It is that “which *God* sent to the children of Israel.”

This is exactly what the law and the prophets indicated. There was the law, but it was spoken in a manner that indicated there must be One who would come and fulfill it. From there, the prophets spoke of this coming One, hinting at His ministry and how He would accomplish the things set before Him. Within the prophets was also the promise of a New Covenant. That New Covenant was promised to the people of Israel –

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—” Jeremiah 31:31

In reading this, one might assume that the covenant was limited to Israel and Judah, but that would be a myopic view of the matter. Rather, though it is made with the house of Israel and Judah it was never intended to be limited to them. Rather –

“And now the LORD says,  
Who formed Me from the womb *to be* His Servant,  
To bring Jacob back to Him,  
So that Israel is gathered to Him  
(For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD,  
And My God shall be My strength),  
<sup>6</sup>Indeed He says,  
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,  
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,  
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Isaiah 49:5, 6

This is the word that Peter is now conveying to Cornelius, explaining that God was “preaching peace through Jesus Christ.” The translation is correct, cleaning up the faulty rendering of the KJV which says, “by Jesus Christ.” It is God in Christ who preached

through Jesus. Jesus is the means of God transmitting the message. One can see the human united with the divine in this. It is a necessary point of doctrine that Jesus Christ is God rather than just a created being. God has accomplished all things through Jesus directly. And thus, Peter says, “He is Lord of all.”

The words are their own independent part of the divine declaration. Jesus Christ is not just the Lord over Israel but over all people. The message that God in Christ preached through Jesus is a single, unified message that issues to all people. One must remember that Peter had just said in verse 10:34, “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.” What is being expressed by him concerning the word, the divine utterance of God, is as much of a surprise to him as it might be to Cornelius.

It may be true that Peter knew there is only one God, but he assumed that the message of peace was one limited to Jews alone. He now perceives that this is not the case. The Mosaic Covenant was with Israel alone. The New Covenant, though being made with Israel and Judah, extends out to all who will accept God’s offer of peace through Jesus.

Life application: The substance of the gospel is to be found in Peter’s words of this and the coming verses. It teaches that Jesus is God incarnate. It teaches that Jesus died for sins. It implicitly teaches that Jesus was buried, and it teaches that God raised Him on the third day. This is the exact same message that Paul will express in 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4. It is the reason that Paul then says, while speaking of Peter and the other apostles –

“Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

-1 Corinthians 15:11

This is the one and only gospel given by which men must be saved. Luke is providing a description of what Peter said for us to understand that what God has determined sets the boundaries for salvation, whether it is for that of a Jew, for that of a Gentile, or for that of national Israel. The message is the divine declaration of God that tells us of His incarnation in the Person of Jesus Christ.

*Lord God, thank You for the wonderful thing You have done. You have spoken forth Your message concerning the coming of Christ, and He spoke forth the good news to the world. We have a full and complete explanation of this through the words of the apostles, telling us of this wonderful thing. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: Acts 10:37**

Peter just said in the previous verse, “The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all.” He now continues his words to Cornelius, saying, “that word you know.”

It is now a different word than the previous verse:

The word (*logos*) which *God* sent to the children of Israel  
that word (*rhema*) you know

The first is the message (the declaration of God) itself. This now refers to the contents of the message. One can say, “It is the gospel that saves. This is the word God has sent.” The question may then be, “But what is the gospel?” In response, the actual gospel is given – “This is the gospel: Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, Jesus was buried, and Jesus rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

The first is the message, the second is the contents of the message. In the case of what Peter will next say, the words begin with events prior to the crucifixion, explaining the work of Jesus. From there, they meet up with the culmination of His work. It is this that forms the substance of the gospel. Hence, the gospel is inclusive of the fact that Jesus is God. When saying, “Jesus died for our sins,” it must be rightly understood who Jesus is. One must believe in the right “Jesus” for the gospel to be properly conveyed. Understanding this, Peter continues, saying, “which was proclaimed throughout all Judea.”

More precisely, it says, “that came throughout all Judea.” Peter is essentially saying, “Cornelius, surely you have heard what came about in the land of Judea. You may not know all the details, but that’s ok, I’m here to explain them to you.” His words now are the beginning of the explanation of what the message (*rhéma*) is. From there, he continues with, “and began from Galilee.”

Again, more rightly it says, “having begun from Galilee.” Galilee is not a great distance from Caesarea. With so much of Christ’s ministry there, it was likely that Cornelius would have heard something of what had transpired, maybe even from news about the centurion described in Matthew 8. He may not have a full sense of all that transpired, but he must have surely heard some of the events that took place. These things were “after the baptism which John preached.”

The word translated as “preached” is not the same as in the previous verse. This means to proclaim or herald a message. John heralded repentance to Israel in preparation for the coming of Messiah. Peter includes John the Baptist’s ministry in his words, clearly assuming that even a Roman centurion in Caesarea would have heard about his proclamation. There would have been a national stir that the Messiah was coming and that His forerunner was telling them that it was so.

Peter is ensuring that Cornelius was fully aware of the fact that Jesus was prophesied to come, that He was heralded as that coming One, and then he will next describe the nature of the One who came.

Life application: If God united with humanity in order to redeem man. And if that Man, Jesus, went to the cross to die for the sins of humanity, does it make any sense at all that God in Christ would lie when He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”?

The answer is, “No.” If God, who cannot lie, has spoken that Jesus is the only way to be reconciled to God, it would make no sense at all for Him to then provide another avenue of reconciliation. In fact, it would be the stupidest thing in the history of creation to have Jesus crucified if there was another avenue available. What would be the point of His death if there was?

People who say, “I believe that Jesus died for our sins, but there are other paths to God as well,” are not thinking clearly. We must evaluate the circumstances and decide what is true and what is not true. There cannot be truth in the words of John 14:6 if we believe there is another path available to be reconciled to God. And if the words of John 14:6 are not true, then Jesus isn’t God. The person they say they believe died for our sins is not the Person that uttered His words of exclusivity.

Let us always think such matters through to their logical end. God has spoken through Jesus. What He has said is, and it will not change. From that, let us consider how very important it is to speak the gospel to others. It is the only message that can save.

*Heavenly Father, how good it is to know that You have given us a path to reconciliation. It is remarkable that You have done so. Why should we then assume that it is one of many paths? Even one is surprising, and it is the most incredible thing that has ever come about. Jesus Christ died for our sins. How can we shame that act by believing that there is any other path to restoration with You? May we never presume to even consider it. Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. Acts 10:38**

Peter is in the middle of his explanation to Cornelius about the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. He continues now with, “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth.”

In these words, there are a couple of intentional connections to the previous verses. The word “anointed” is the Greek word *chrió*. It is the root of the word *Christos* (Christ) used in Acts 10:36. Thus, Peter is making a verbal confirmation that Jesus is the Christ because he was anointed by God as such. Further, Ellicott notes the grammatical parallel between the words “Jesus of Nazareth” in this verse and “word” in verses 10:36 and 10:37 –

- The word [*logos*, divine utterance] which God sent
- That word [*rhéma*, the contents of the utterance] you know Jesus of Nazareth

The utterance of God and the meaning that it conveys is parallel with the Person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Again, as has been seen in previous verses in Acts, the location is affixed to His name because Jesus was not an uncommon name. To define who is being referred to more explicitly, the name of His town, Nazareth, is affixed as a part of the title.

Of the anointing received from God by Jesus of Nazareth, it was “with the Holy Spirit.” In the Old Testament, the act of anointing a priest or a king or even an object (such as the pillar Jacob raised in Genesis 31) was accomplished to signify being set apart to God. It would also typologically anticipate the spiritual anointing of God upon Christ.

In the prophets, the noting of being anointed becomes a point of messianic anticipation as the words obviously point to One who was yet to come and who would accomplish marvelous things or fulfill promises made by the Lord to the people. This is the idea that carried on to the time when Jesus came and fulfilled those prophecies, such as –

“So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup> ‘The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,

Because He has anointed Me  
To preach the gospel to *the* poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to *the* captives  
And recovery of sight to *the* blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;  
<sup>19</sup>To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.'

<sup>20</sup>Then He closed the book, and gave *it* back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. <sup>21</sup>And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'" Luke 4:16-21

The gospels clearly tie the baptism of Christ in with this anointing. He was already holy and sinless, but the act of baptism became the visible and explicit act of God acknowledging Him as the One especially set apart and anointed to fulfill the messianic promises.

With this noted, Peter continues with, "and with power." The power here obviously refers to more than just something a person might be born with or that a person might develop through exercise. It is referring to abilities that are clearly divine in nature, being bestowed by God, such as healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, and even raising the dead. With this anointing, and with this power, Peter next says, "who went about doing good."

The words "went about" are literally "went through." It signifies the scope of His ministry, going through the land in order to do that which was for the benefit of those whom He encountered. There was never a secondary agenda to profit, gain fame, or wield authority over others. Rather, He carefully demonstrated an attitude of selfless care for those around Him, tending to them as a Shepherd over His flock. Also, Peter says, "and healing all who were oppressed by the devil."

The layout of the words is explained by Vincent's Word Studies, saying, "The and (καὶ) has a particularizing force: doing good, and in particular, healing." In other words, the healing was a particular point of the "doing good" that highlights the ministry of Jesus. And this is well described throughout the gospels.

Peter's note of the healings being for those "oppressed by the devil" shows that the troubles of this life find their root in his crafty works against man. The word translated as "oppressed" is found only here and in James 2:6. It is a word that signifies "powerfully

bringing someone down (denying them the higher position or blessing they should enjoy)” (HELPS Word Studies).

The point is that if the devil has the ability to oppress man, and Jesus has the ability to heal them, then Jesus has power over the afflicter of man, meaning the devil. This now ties the thought of Jesus’ baptism into His anointing. At the time Jesus was baptized, it said in Luke –

“When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. <sup>22</sup> And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.’” Luke 3:21, 22

After that was recorded, the genealogy of Jesus, going all the way back to Adam, and then to God who created Adam, was given. Thus, it was a confirming note that this Person was to be the One to restore what was lost through the devil’s cunning, but who was promised at that time (see Genesis 3:15). Immediately following that, in Luke 4, the account of the devil tempting Christ was given as is recorded in Luke 4:1-13.

The devil could not defeat the resolve of Christ Jesus the way he had done to Adam. Christ had gained mastery over the devil and was thus able to heal those oppressed by the devil, as Peter next notes, “for God was with Him.” This is exactly what is recorded by Luke –

“Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, <sup>2</sup> being tempted for forty days by the devil.”  
-Luke 4:1, 2

God’s Holy Spirit filled Jesus, demonstrating God’s approval of Him and His being with Him. Peter is clearly revealing the interactions of the Godhead in his presentation of who Jesus is.

Life application: The power that man needs to be free is found in Jesus. The devil already has authority over all people as is stated in Scripture. But Jesus overcame the devil, defeating Him for any and all who will simply come to Him by faith. It was in violating God’s law that the devil gained authority over man. The introduction of the Law of Moses highlights this fact. But in Christ’s fulfillment of the law, a New Covenant was introduced.

In this New Covenant, there is freedom from the imputation of sin (2 Corinthians 5:19) and the bestowal of God's grace upon us. The Bible gives only two positions for the state of man, we are born under the authority of the devil, and we stand condemned. It is our default position. Jesus offers humanity to receive what He has done and move back to God through Him. Once that occurs, it becomes man's new default position.

As sin is no longer imputed to those who are in Christ, the default position is set forever. The devil can never again break the bonds between God and man. This is the marvelous offer of peace and reconciliation that God presents to man. Be sure to accept this offer and then share what has occurred in you with others. Be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ our Lord today.

*Lord God, thank You for Jesus. In Him, there is hope. In Him, there is reconciliation. And, in Him, there is peace and fellowship with You once again. May we never take lightly the wonderful thing You have done in the sending of Jesus. Hallelujah for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Acts 10:39**

The presentation concerning Jesus Christ by Peter to Cornelius continues with these words, saying, "And we are witnesses of all things."

Peter explains that those who were with Jesus now stand as witnesses to the events that occurred. This was what was stated by Jesus just prior to His ascension –

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Acts 1:8

This is also a part of Paul's presentation of the gospel, noting it as a confirmation of the events that occurred –

"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen



asleep. <sup>7</sup> After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time." 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Peter acknowledges this fact to support his words concerning the life and work accomplished by the Lord. With that noted, he continues, saying, "which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem."

The point of stating this is that Jesus' ministry clearly fulfilled the messianic expectation of the Jewish people. Peter was a Galilean and a large portion of Jesus' ministry, as recorded in the synoptic gospels, is focused on the area of Galilee. John's gospel gave a much greater amount of detail in the land of Judea and especially in Jerusalem.

Despite having been clearly presented to the Jewish people as their Messiah, they rejected Him. As Peter says, "whom they killed by hanging on a tree." The second verb is an aorist participle, and the clause more correctly reads, "whom they killed, having hanged upon a tree."

Two technical points about this clause should be noted. The first is that the KJV unjustifiably adds in the word "and," saying, "whom they slew and hanged on a tree." That causes it to read as two separate actions, something that is not supported by the text, nor by the gospels. However, some older manuscripts (and thus some translations) have the word "and" prior to the two actions, saying, "And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross" (NASB 1977). In this, an increased force is placed upon the entire clause. As Vincent's Word Studies says, "They added this crowning atrocity to other persecutions."

In this, the KJV is to be wholly rejected as a failed translation, but the NASB and other such translations are quite possibly the correct renderings of the clause, assuming the Greek text they use is the original.

The point of either Greek text is quite clear though. Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. There were sufficient witnesses concerning Him and His deeds in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem to testify to the people of His rightful claim to being the Messiah. And yet, despite these things, they killed Him by hanging Him on a tree.

Peter has not yet explained what Jesus' death signifies, but he has stated it as a fact. If the account were to end there, Cornelius would have to say, "What a sad story. Another failed Messiah." But this is not the end of Peter's discourse. More is to come.

Life application: Crucifixion is how Jesus was killed. He did not die as the kings whom Israel fought in the book of Joshua. At times in that book, it says that they were put to death and then hanged. For example –

"And afterward Joshua struck them and killed them, and hanged them on five trees; and they were hanging on the trees until evening." Joshua 10:26

In Jesus' case, He died while being hanged on a cross. It is the instrument of His death. In that death, He fulfilled the final portion of the law and the prophets, setting it aside and ushering in the New Covenant. It is for this reason that Paul says –

"But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." Galatians 6:14

The cross death of Jesus was considered a shameful death. And yet, Paul says that it is his only point of boasting for righteousness. Let us consider that and remember it as we interact with others. We should be willing to bear the disgrace of Jesus' death so that others may bear the glory of His resurrection. May it be so today and always in our lives.

*Lord God, surely the story of the cross of Jesus is the most wonderful story of all. Thank You for what transpired there and what it means to the people of the world. Today, we pray that we will be able to properly represent our Lord Jesus in all we say and do. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, Acts 10:40**

Peter just noted concerning Jesus, saying, "they killed by hanging on a tree." With that, he now says, "Him God raised up on the third day." The translation of the NKJV does not match the text used by their translators. Rather, they have added in the word "on" without italicizing it. Instead, the Greek of their source text reads "This [One] God raised the third day."

However, some manuscripts include the word *en* or "in" by saying, "This [One] God raised up in the third day." Either way, the meaning is obvious. It is not "three and then rise," as if he rose on the fourth day, but "on the third day." This is carefully recorded

both as Jesus' word prior to the resurrection and in Acts and the epistles after the resurrection –

“Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, <sup>23</sup> and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up.’ And they were exceedingly sorrowful.”

-Matthew 17:22, 23

In all, the resurrection on the third day is noted thirteen times. With that clearly and unambiguously stated by Peter now, and with it confirmed in those other instances, Peter next says, “and showed Him openly.”

The Greek implies more than the translation, saying, “and gave Him to become manifest.” The meaning is further explained in the next verse. He was not shown openly, as if everyone would behold Him, but he was made manifest to those whom God determined should see Him. Being manifest means fully presented before them as an undoubtable proof that it was Him, that it was His same body (personage) even if glorified, and that He had prevailed over the agony of the cross. Those who saw him are clearly identified in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (see commentary on the previous verse).

Life application: Today, it is as common as snowflakes in a blizzard for people to claim that Jesus rose “after” three days. This is based on a faulty understanding of Matthew 12–

“But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup> For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah *is* here. <sup>42</sup> The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon *is* here.’”

-Matthew 12:39-42

By the misunderstanding of Jesus' words, it is claimed that Jesus rose after three days. As it is as obvious as lies from a politician that Jesus rose on a Sunday, it has become fashionable to claim that Jesus was crucified on a Thursday. Some even claim it was a Wednesday. First, the “sign of Jonah” is not that Jonah was in the belly of the great fish. The sign of Jonah is his preaching –

“And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day’s walk. Then he cried out and said, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’” Jonah 3:4

That is stated by Jesus in Matthew 12:41 but it is also more explicitly seen in Luke 11 where the note about the great fish is entirely omitted. Further, the term “three days and three nights” is an idiomatic expression found in Esther 4:16 and it means any part of those days, as the text there clearly indicates. As such, the account of Jesus’ resurrection being “on the third day” as noted thirteen times in the New Testament does not at all contradict Jesus’ words in Matthew 12. Rather, it shows a lack of proper study by those who try to reconcile something that needs no reconciliation. In other words, don’t believe everything you hear until you check things out for yourself. Study, pray, and contemplate. There are no contradictions in the Bible, just issues that are presented for every level of scholarly study. Think of a tall bookshelf. There are shelves where little children can reach and there are shelves that only those who have grown can reach. The Bible presents things easy enough for children to understand, and it presents things so complicated that the smartest scholars still search them out.

Revel in the marvel of this amazing treasure, be ready to explore it daily, and then apply its teachings to your life. Do these things for best results! 😊

*Lord God, thank You for this remarkable treasure that we call the Holy Bible. It is a marvel of wonder and delight. May we be willing to expend the necessary time to understand its every detail and nuance. Give us the desire to devote our days to seeking out its treasures. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. Acts 10:41**

With Peter continuing his explanation concerning Christ Jesus to Cornelius, he just said that God had raised Him from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen. With that, he now clarifies what that means, saying, “not to all the people.”

To be seen by all the people was neither necessary nor would it be in accord with their conduct toward Him, having nailed Him to the cross (see Acts 2:23). Further, it would not be in line with Jesus’ words to the leaders as recorded in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. That parable ended with –

“But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’” Luke 16:31

Further, He had told them directly that they should not expect such a sign as is recorded in Luke 11:29-32. They had asked for a sign, but He had told them that no sign would be given “except the sign of Jonah.” The sign of Jonah was his preaching to the Ninevites.

In other words, for Jesus to reveal Himself to the entire nation would then exclude what God desires from His people, meaning faith. If one has sight, then faith is excluded. Jesus even told this directly to the apostles when speaking to Thomas –

“Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed.’” John 20:29

And even with the sight of their eyes, Jesus told them (in Luke 16:31 above) that in His resurrection they would still not be convinced. Therefore, it would have served no purpose for Him to reveal Himself to the people openly. In fact, it would have been counterproductive. Instead, He was seen only by a select few. As Peter says, “but to witnesses chosen before by God.”

It is a word found only here in Scripture, and it is a perfect participle, “having already been chosen.” The word is *procheirotoneó*. It signifies extending out the hand before. HELPS Word Studies says, “(‘God's *hand extended before*’) illustrates how *God, the Creator*, plans out all the *physical scenes* of our lives before the foundation of the world (cf. Ps 139:16; Is 43:13 - 45:7). For example, the Lord’s hand determined who would be *the initial witnesses* of Christ’s resurrection.”

The idea of those select people seeing Jesus is that of being preordained to do so. For whatever reason, He determined these people, and no others, would be actual witnesses of the resurrection. But it was a sufficient number (see 1 Corinthians 15:3:3-8) to accomplish His purposes. Along with this thought, Peter continues with specific details concerning his words, saying, “*even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.”

There are three instances noted concerning this, Luke 24:30; Luke 24:42; John 21:13. The result of these occurrences is to absolutely solidify that Jesus Christ rose as a tangible, physical person. He was not an apparition, a spirit, or a hallucination of the mind. Rather, He ate with these people, they handled Him, and they spoke with Him.

Along with these instances are those of the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 (more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time) and the words of Luke in Acts 1 at the ascension. Such occasions provided enough substance to validate Christ's resurrection and ascension while still leaving the matter to require faith by the nation of Israel. And from there, the testimony of those who saw Jesus after the resurrection now extends to all people of the world. The faith of Cornelius is an early testimony to this.

Life application: The note concerning those who ate and drank with Jesus is an important one. It was first documented in the gospels, and then it is repeated in Acts. Jesus physically and bodily arose from the dead. It is rather incredible to believe that there are people who claim that Jesus did not rise as a physical being even though they claim to believe in the Bible.

The Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, deny a literal, physical resurrection of the Lord. They say, "Jesus' own words showed that he would not be resurrected with his flesh-and-blood body" (JW.org). This is completely contrary to the words of the gospels, such as –

"And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!' <sup>27</sup> Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.'" John 20:26, 27

In order to deny this, they submit the following commentary. Take time to carefully go through their words and see how many errors in thinking and in theology you can find. The analysis is a typical example of taking verse after verse out of context in order to deny the fundamental truth of who Jesus Christ is:

BE ADVISED, THESE OFFSET COMMENTS ARE FROM THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND THEY ARE UNSOUND DOCTRINE. THEY ARE GIVEN FOR INSTRUCTIONAL PURPOSES ONLY.

-----  
**After Jesus' Resurrection, Was His Body Flesh or Spirit?**

**The Bible's answer**

The Bible says that Jesus "was put to death in the flesh but made alive [resurrected] in the spirit."—1 Peter 3:18; Acts 13:34; 1 Corinthians 15:45; 2 Corinthians 5:16.

Jesus' own words showed that he would not be resurrected with his flesh-and-blood body. He said that he would give his "flesh in behalf of the life of the world," as a ransom for mankind. (John 6:51; Matthew 20:28) If he had taken back his flesh when he was resurrected, he would have canceled that ransom sacrifice. This could not have happened, though, for the Bible says that he sacrificed his flesh and blood "once for all time."—Hebrews 9:11, 12.

### **If Jesus was raised up with a spirit body, how could his disciples see him?**

Spirit creatures can take on human form. For example, angels who did this in the past even ate and drank with humans. (Genesis 18:1-8; 19:1-3) However, they still were spirit creatures and could leave the physical realm.—Judges 13:15-21.

After his resurrection, Jesus also assumed human form temporarily, just as angels had previously done. As a spirit creature, though, he was able to appear and disappear suddenly. (Luke 24:31; John 20:19, 26) The fleshly bodies that he materialized were not identical from one appearance to the next. Thus, even Jesus' close friends recognized him only by what he said or did.—Luke 24:30, 31, 35; John 20:14-16; 21:6, 7.

When Jesus appeared to the apostle Thomas, he took on a body with wound marks. He did this to bolster Thomas' faith, since Thomas doubted that Jesus had been raised up.—John 20:24-29.

-----

What is presented to you in these words by the Jehovah's Witnesses is a purposeful manipulation of the word of God. Don't be misled by the verses they cite. Think about what is presented and carefully consider what is said. In the end, either Jesus rose physically from the dead or He did not. And thanks be to God, He did. Jesus defeated death so that we too may live.

*Lord God, may we be prepared to speak out and correct attacks against Your word. Help us to be sound in our thinking, well versed in Your word, and capable of defending the fundamental truths that it presents. May we do this to Your glory and to the correction of the evil doctrines presented by those who have an agenda to tear people away from the truths You have so clearly presented to us. Amen.*

**"And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. Acts 10:42**

The previous verse conveyed Peter's words, saying, "to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead." Peter will now explain what that thought means, tying the two verses together. The resurrection proves that Jesus was (and is) sinless. This is because, as Paul says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

As this is an absolute truth concerning all of humanity who descend from Adam via a human father, then it secondly proves that Jesus is truly God, born of God the Father. He is the God/Man. We may not think this through to its logical end when we consider the resurrection from the dead, but it is clearly implied. Jesus is both without sin and He is God. With that understood, Peter says, "And He commanded us to preach to the people."

Peter is surely noting what Jesus said after the resurrection, such as that found in Mark 16:15 –

"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.'"

Such verses as that, and even just prior to the ascension in Acts 1:8, indicate that the apostles were given a commission to convey what they knew, and it was to extend beyond the borders of Israel. As Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." In this preaching, Peter continues that it was to include more than just the simple gospel, but what the gospel implies. As Peter next says, "and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead."

The word translated as "testify" is stronger than to simply witness or testify (*marturomai*). Rather, it is a word already used twice in Acts which goes a step further, *diamarturomai*. By adding the prefix *dia* (through), it means to thoroughly testify and to even solemnly charge. In other words, conveying the gospel also conveys the necessity to further explain what accepting or rejecting the gospel implies, if the situation so requires it.

That which is to be testified is explained by the next words of the clause. It is Jesus who was ordained by God to be the Judge of both the living and the dead. This was stated clearly by Jesus in John 5 –



“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son,<sup>23</sup> that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

<sup>24</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. <sup>25</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. <sup>26</sup> For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, <sup>27</sup> and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.” John 5:22-27

This thought is expressed elsewhere in the epistles and in Revelation. Jesus, because He came into the world without sin, lived without sinning, died for the sins of the world, and rose again (proving that He remained sinless), is given the authority to judge both the living and the dead. His life gives Him the authority to judge all sin, and His death gives Him the ability to extend that to those who are dead.

In saying that Jesus died for the sins of the world, it means this is true potentially. Any sin that has been committed is potentially atoned for by His death. However, it only actually applies to those who come to God through faith in His provision which is found in Jesus. As Jesus said in John 5, those who believe in Him shall not come into judgment. Their sin has been judged in Him. In this, they have passed from death into life.

However, those who fail to believe remain dead in their trespasses. As such they will be judged for condemnation. It is Jesus who holds the authority to conduct this process because it is Jesus who has prevailed over death. He is the God/Man.

Life application: Some may hear the simple gospel and readily accept it. Others may have questions or simply reject what is presented. In such a case, the one who tells about Jesus should be ready to fully testify to what it means to turn from Jesus. One cannot come to God apart from Jesus. Those who come to Jesus will come to God covered by His atoning sacrifice. They will be found acceptable before God.

But even those who don't come to Jesus will still come to God before Jesus. This is because Jesus is the One ordained to judge all humanity. When they are raised and stand before the Great White Throne, it will be with Jesus as the witness that they rejected Him. And in the rejection of Him, they will be found guilty and judged as such.

People need to understand this. When Jesus said that He is the Way, He meant it. No human will come before the Father without coming through Jesus. The terms have been

set, the Standard has been given, and if a person does not meet that Standard (meaning Christ's perfection), he is a goner. Only in being imputed Christ's righteousness can eternal life and reconciliation be provided. This is what we need to be prepared to tell those we speak to. In Jesus is life. Apart from Him is death. He is the God/Man.

*Glorious God Almighty, how grateful we are for the offer of reconciliation You have provided for us in the giving of Jesus. May we be willing to always open our mouths and speak out the good news to those we come to meet. And, Lord, may we be ready and willing to tell what a rejection of the gospel means to those who turn it down. Help us to be bold in our proclamation, O God. Amen.*

**“To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.” Acts 10:43**

In the last verse Peter continued words to Cornelius, saying, “And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead.” Peter's words now continue with, “To Him all the prophets witness.”

It is referring to Jesus, and it is something that Scripture elsewhere explicitly teaches. For example, there is the account after the resurrection where Jesus spoke to the two as they walked on the road to Emmaus –

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ <sup>27</sup> And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Luke 24:25-27

Likewise, in Acts 3, Peter said to the crowd gathered before him –

“Yet now, brethren, I know that you did *it* in ignorance, as *did* also your rulers. <sup>18</sup> But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.” Acts 3:17, 18

These are just a few of the references to this, both from Jesus' words and from those of the apostles. One important point from the witness of the prophets is that of Gentile inclusion in the work of Messiah. Though Peter does not express the thought at this time, it is a truth that both points to the work of Jesus and the calling of the Gentiles –

“Indeed He says,  
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,  
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,  
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Isaiah 49:6

Of these words of the prophets, Peter next says, “that, through His name.” The translation is correct. The word *dia*, or through, is used. It signifies that what will next be said will come about based on an action that is “through” the name of Jesus.

Of this, Vincent’s Word Studies says, “As in the Lord’s prayer: not simply the title, but all that is embraced and expressed by the name: Christ’s ‘entire perfection, as the object revealed to the believer for his apprehension, confession, and worship’ (Meyer).” Peter next says that the means of this “through” action is based upon “whoever believes.”

The Greek reads “everyone believing.” Notice that Peter, who is now speaking to Gentiles who are outside of the covenant people Israel, does not say “who observes,” “who is circumcised,” “who joins himself to,” or any other prescription where some type of self-expressed work must be performed. Rather, Peter levies upon these people an act of faith alone, saying, “everyone believing.” And the object of this faith is, “in Him.”

This is just what Jesus says in John 3:16. It is what is repeated time and time again in Acts and in the epistles. There is no other requirement levied upon the individual than belief in Jesus. If giving up a certain diet was required, Peter would have stated this now. If observance of the Law of Moses was required, Peter would have stated this now. And so on. But he does not. He simply says that everyone believing in Him. With that, and based upon believing in Him, the words are completed with “will receive remission of sins.”

The word is *aphesis*. It signifies “something sent away.” As such, it is a note that the sins of the believer are “sent away” and thus they are pardoned, forgiven, let go, and so on. This is the heart of the gospel. It is a note that God has entered into the stream of human existence and, through the giving of His Son, has allowed those who accept the payment to be given remission of sins. This allowance is appropriated by faith in Jesus, and it is granted to everyone who is believing in Him.

Life application: What is the common denominator concerning these Gentiles gathered together? For the sake of the narrative, it is that they are all sinners. Peter implicitly tells

them this by saying that they need to believe in Jesus in order to have remission of sins. In his words, he carefully explains how this remission is provided.

Again, as noted above, Peter said nothing of law observance. He said nothing of actively working out a set plan that must be pursued by the sin-laden soul. Rather, the set plan is one that calls out for belief in the Person of Jesus who had accomplished the work of God, who had then been hanged on a tree, and who was then raised by God on the third day.

This is what God requires. Nothing more. This will be perfectly evidenced in the next verse. Peter does not say, “You must believe in Jesus and turn from your sin.” That cannot even be inferred in his words. He says that remission of their sin comes through faith. Thus, turning from sin is an act that is to be based upon remission, not for remission. If this were not true, then it would be the act of the individual that brought about the remission. This would then totally destroy the purity of the gospel, and it would negate the idea of Ephesians 2:8-10 –

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God,<sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast.<sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Paul places the “good works,” which would include turning from sin, after the belief, not before. Be sure to get this, remember it, and properly present it when speaking to others about their need for Jesus. This is the gospel. Come to Jesus, believe in Him, and be saved.

*Lord God, help us to remember to keep ourselves and our actions out of the gospel message. It is all about Jesus and what He has done. May we never presume to add to this wonderful message, but to maintain its purity when we speak to others. It is about Jesus, it is through Jesus, and it is by faith in Him that the gospel is realized in us. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord! Hallelujah and amen.*

**While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. Acts 10:44**

Peter completed his words to Cornelius in the last verse with the words, “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will

receive remission of sins.” The words were direct, and they included nothing else. And yet, it now says, “While Peter was still speaking these words.”

There was nothing of what was said to Israel in Acts 2:38 –

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Peter was speaking to Israel who had just crucified their Messiah. There was nothing for these Gentiles to repent (meaning change one’s mind). There was no need for these Gentiles to be baptized in water in order to outwardly demonstrate that they had changed their minds. Instead, the inference that must be derived from the narrative is that when Peter had said, “whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins” that they had, in fact, believed.

And yet, it was not a belief that required an outward validation, such as them saying, “Yes, I believe.” Rather, it was an inward belief alone. By simply hearing Peter’s words and then by believing in their hearts (the heart in the Bible is the center of our moral being and the place where our volitional choices are made), it says that “the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.”

This means that they heard the word as spoken by Peter. They had faith in what that word said. They then were endowed with the Holy Spirit. This is the process Paul states in Romans –

“So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17

From there, the process continues in Ephesians 1 –

“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13, 14

The process, then, is – hear the word of God, have faith in the word which is then manifest in the heart (trusting), and at that moment, the sealing of the Holy Spirit is accomplished.

In the case of Cornelius and those with Him, there is a difference to this process though. As Vincent's Word Studies rightly notes, "The only example of the bestowment of the Spirit before baptism."

It is the epistles that set doctrine and explain that which is normative for this dispensation. The account now in Acts is a descriptive account. It prescribes nothing, but simply tells what has happened. As the epistles tell what is prescriptive, what is normative, and what can thus be expected, the account now in Acts obviously serves a particular purpose.

That purpose is explained in the words of Jesus to Peter –

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:17-19

Peter was the apostle selected by Jesus to confirm that access to heaven is granted to the various people groups reflected in Acts – Jew (Acts 2), Samaritans (Acts 8), and Gentiles (Acts 10). He is the only one recorded as being present at all three instances where the Holy Spirit came upon the believers. Thus, it is he who was given as the witness to confirm the events.

He was there in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost. He was there to tell those who did not believe what they must do in order to receive the Spirit – repent, be baptized for remission, and then receive. He held the "keys" to heaven in regard to what they must do in order to be granted remission and given access to God's paradise.

He was there in Acts 8. The people had already believed the message, but did not receive the Spirit –

"Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, <sup>15</sup> who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>16</sup> For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."

Until Peter came, the confirmation – meaning the coming of the Spirit – was not given. Peter had the “keys” to heaven, meaning the validation that these believers had been received.

And now in Acts 10, the process is repeated. Remember that the Ethiopian eunuch had already received Jesus. He was saved based on that faith, but Peter was not present. As such, a demonstration of Gentile salvation was still required for Peter who held the “keys” to heaven. That demonstration is now realized.

Acts 2 – for believers: faith in Jesus / visibly receive the Spirit. For those Jewish nonbelievers: follow the words of Peter concerning repentance and baptism because they had first rejected Jesus. From there, receive the Spirit.

Acts 8 – receive the word and believe. Wait for Peter to validate the event. With the laying on of hands, they visibly received the Spirit.

Acts 10 – Peter preaches the word concerning Jesus. Gentiles hear the word and believe in their hearts. The Spirit is visibly received.

And so, the question is, which of these three accounts is normative? Which one is to be expected in the future? The answer is, “None of the three accounts is normative.” Peter has now validated that all – Jew, Samaritan, and Gentile – have been saved by faith and faith alone in the work of Jesus Christ. He had also told those of Israel who had rejected Jesus that they had to repent (change their minds) about their rejection, openly acknowledge this, and they too would receive the Spirit.

That is never needed again, except by those who first reject Jesus, because only Israel had rejected their Messiah. Now, when a person rejects Jesus and he later changes his mind (repents), he receives the Spirit upon belief. For those who have never rejected Jesus, the formula of the epistles (noted above) is what is normative and what now occurs.

No outward display of the Spirit is necessary, nor is it to be expected, because the proof has been provided to Peter, it was witnessed as required by Scripture, and it is now documented in Scripture. Hence, these examples are the recorded proofs necessary for those who believe the gospel to know that they too are saved upon faith alone in the work of Jesus Christ.

Life application: What has been presented in Acts concerning salvation clearly demonstrates that there is one (and only one gospel). It also clearly demonstrates that this gospel is open to all, Jew and Gentile, through faith alone.

Now, our doctrine is to be obtained from the epistles. The varied descriptive accounts in Acts are intended to lead us to the stabilizing instructions found in the epistles. The words of Jesus in Acts 1 are being realized with the reception of the Spirit by Cornelius and those with Him –

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

The word went first to Jerusalem, then to Judea and Samaria. Now, it begins to go “to the end of the earth” with the inclusion of these Gentiles in the presence of Peter. With this baseline established, the word will continue to go forth, but without the necessity of Peter verifying what has occurred. The “keys” to heaven have been used for Jew, for Samaritan, and for Gentile.

*Lord God, what a marvelous thing You have done through the giving of Jesus! Thank You that we can be included in Your family through a simple act of faith in His completed work. How grateful we are. And we shall praise You forever and ever because of what You have done. Glory to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.*

**And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.**  
Acts 10:45

The previous verse said, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.” With that, a response from the Jews who had come with Peter comes forth. Luke records, “And those of the circumcision.”

The meaning is, “the Jews who believed.” Being circumcised was not the only requirement to being a Jew, but it was one that could not be overlooked. That goes all the way back to Exodus –

“And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘This *is* the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it. <sup>44</sup> But every man’s servant who is bought for money, when



you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. <sup>45</sup> A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it. <sup>46</sup> In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones. <sup>47</sup> All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. <sup>48</sup> And when a stranger dwells with you *and wants* to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. <sup>49</sup> One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you.” Exodus 12:43-49

These believing Jews, meaning believers in Christ had witnessed both the true circumcision of and a partaking in the Passover by these Gentiles –

“Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?” Romans 2:26

“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” 1 Corinthians 5:7

Though these Jews probably did not even consider the coming of the Holy Spirit in this light, it is exactly what has transpired. These strangers, not of Israel, had now become as natives of the land, having been brought into the commonwealth of Israel by a mere act of faith. In the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them, it says they “were astonished.”

A short questionnaire to consider:

Were any of these Gentiles circumcised before this? Probably not, but that is not even a consideration in Luke’s narrative.

Had any of these Gentiles observed a single precept of the Law of Moses prior to the coming of the Spirit? Probably not, but that is not even a consideration in Luke’s narrative.

Did these Gentiles eat their regular, non-kosher, food before hearing Peter? It is certainly the case.

Did any of these Gentiles go through the purification process outlined in the Law of Moses to be cleansed according to the law for having eaten defiled food? See answer to second question above.

Were any of these Gentiles of illegitimate birth according to the law, or were any of them descendants of Ammon or Moab? Who knows? But that is not even a consideration in Luke’s narrative.

Such questions could go on and on. But the obvious answer is that these people received the Spirit regardless of those points of law or any other points of law found in the Law of Moses. They simply believed and were accepted. They joined the commonwealth of Israel *apart from* the Law of Moses. This explains the words of Paul from Romans 2 above –

“Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law.” These Gentiles, by faith in Jesus, had kept every precept of the Law of Moses through His fulfillment of it. As Leviticus 18:5 promises life to the man who does so, it means that they have now attained that life, proven by the coming of the Holy Spirit. And the astonishment of these Jews wasn’t just one or two of them but “as many as came with Peter.”

This was so unexpected that every single Jew who was in attendance was utterly floored at what had transpired. The word translated as amazed has been seen several times in Acts already. It signifies “remove from a standing position.” Today we might say (as just noted) that they were utterly floored. The thought is the same. They were beside themselves at the event their eyes had beheld, “because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.”

Note the choice of wording, “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” A gift cannot be earned. This does not mean there aren’t conditions in receiving it, but it is something granted apart from any sort of merit.

There may be a condition that everyone who receives a new car must show up at the ribbon cutting ceremony. That is not a work. Rather, it is a necessary condition. A person may need to be over 55 in order to receive a certain gift. Again, that is a necessary condition. The gospel says, “hear, believe, and you will receive.”

The Spirit is not given apart from hearing. There must be a transmission of the message. The Spirit is not given apart from believing the gospel. There must be an inner acceptance of the message that has been spoken. These are necessary conditions. These Gentiles met the necessary conditions, and they were given the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In this case, it was a visible reception of the Spirit. This is not a necessary evidence. Rather, it was a sign of confirmation for Peter and those with them to know, with all certainty, that the Spirit had been given. The account is descriptive; it prescribes

nothing. It is simply what happened in order for these witnesses to bear this truth to those already in the church.

With Luke's completion of the book of Acts, the witness is now recorded. Such outward displays are not only no longer necessary, but they would actually be counterproductive to the normal process of salvation among believers today. Believers are to live by faith, accepting the words of Scripture apart from visible signs and demonstrations of the Spirit.

Life application: Along with the short questionnaire above, a note from Paul in Galatians 3 is also intended to wake people up to the heresy of the Judaizers and today's modern Hebrew Roots movement adherents –

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? <sup>2</sup>This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? <sup>3</sup>Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? <sup>4</sup>Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain?” Galatians 3:1-4

Those in the church in Galatia had believed the gospel and they had received the Spirit. They were saved and they could never get any more saved than they were at that time. And yet, along came the Judaizers telling them that they had to observe the law of Moses and be circumcised in order to be saved. But they already were circumcised by the Holy Spirit! But they had already been saved! But they had already met the requirements of the law through Jesus' fulfillment of it! But they had already observed the Passover!

What more could they do? Anything they added to what Christ had done in order to be right with God could only be wrong with God! It would be a flagrant shunning of the work of Christ and an attempt to be more righteous on their own. This is why Paul calls them foolish. They were setting aside the grace of Christ and setting about to establish their own righteousness.

Today, consider what things you are attempting to add to your supposed righteousness before God. Are you trying to merit God's favor through tithing? Do you feel that if you don't tithe you are a bad Christian? Or has someone told you it is so if you don't?

If so, you are trying to merit what you have already been given when you believed. Think each thing you do through. Determine if it is in obedience to the gospel or is it in addition to the gospel? Those things that will exalt you above the cross are to be eliminated. Those things that glorify the cross are to be held fast to.

And how can you tell? You must know the word. Read it! Think on it! And then, apply it to your life! In all you do, do it to the glory of the Lord who saved you through a simple act of faith.

*Heavenly Father, what a heavy burden You have taken from us. We no longer need to wonder if we will stand approved before You or not. We know that because of our faith in Jesus, we are approved. THANK YOU FOR JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD! Amen.*

**For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.**

**Then Peter answered, Acts 10:46**

The previous verse told of how astonished those of the circumcision were when the Holy Spirit had been poured upon the Gentiles at Cornelius' house. A verbal manifestation accompanied the pouring out. As it says, "For they hear them speak with tongues and magnify God."

The NKJV has the wrong tense for the verbs. It more correctly reads, "For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and magnifying God" (BLB). It is this translation that will be used. First, "they were hearing them speaking in tongues."

Being an imperfect verb, it means that they heard them speaking in tongues and this continued on. It was a display probably not unlike that which occurred in Acts 2 –

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Acts 2:4

This was the sign to those who were there at the first, and it is a sign to them now that the same Spirit had approved of these Gentiles in the same way. It is to be remembered that the word *glóssa*, or "tongue," simply means a known language. It is normally a language naturally acquired, so these Gentiles were speaking as if the languages they were uttering were commonly known to them.

The symbolism is that of the reversing of the dividing of languages at Babel in Genesis 11. Not only had the Jews spoken in various tongues as the Spirit gave utterance, but even these Gentiles had now been imparted this gift.

Along with that, it says they were “magnifying God.” The word is *megalunó*. It was used in Acts 5:13 where it noted that the people held the apostle in “high esteem.” It signifies to make great or to declare great. Thus, a word such as extol would be fitting. With this noted, the verse ends with, “Then Peter answered.”

It is a Hebraism already seen in Acts. It is a way of saying that Peter then spoke. He is not answering a question, but he is responding to a situation. Peter has seen the display of the Spirit as poured out on the believers, and so he will next answer with a question for the Jews who are present to consider.

Life application: It is to be remembered that in Acts 2, tongues were spoken. Nothing is said of anyone speaking in tongues since then. As Jews were added to the number, nothing is said of this. In Acts 8, all it notes when the Samaritans had hands placed on them by Peter was that they “received the Holy Spirit.” However, nothing is said about what that meant. Later, when the Ethiopian eunuch believed and was baptized, it said nothing about the Spirit interacting with him.

These are internal clues that the accounts are descriptive and are not to be taken as normative. They simply tell the story concerning the development of the early church. The signs, including the tongues now, are given to confirm acceptance by God in Peter’s presence. With him are a suitable number of witnesses to confirm that the event took place.

As this is the case, there is no reason to assume that anyone after these events recorded in Acts would ever need to speak in tongues. The confirmations have been received, they are recorded in the word, and we now have to accept or reject these things based on faith. When we have sight, faith is excluded. But God expects us to have faith. Hence, we can logically conclude that signs are not needed, nor are they given any longer.

The sensationalism of charismatic churches is just that, sensationalism. It is not grounded in sound theology, and it is harmful to a proper walk with the Lord right from the outset of being told about Jesus.

*Lord God, help us to be clear in our thoughts concerning our relationship with You. Why should we need sensational theology when what Jesus has done is the very essence of*

*what is sensational! Thank You for Jesus who has done the incredible to reconcile us to You. Amen.*

**“Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?” Acts 10:47**

The previous verse told of the Gentiles who had just listened to Peter give the gospel, having spoken with tongues and magnified God after having received the Holy Spirit. With this stunning event witnessed by Peter and the Jews, Peter then answered, “Can anyone forbid water.”

The Greek reads “the water.” Of this, Vincent’s Word Studies says, “Note the article: the water; co-ordinating the water with the Spirit (see 1 John 5:8), and designating water as the recognized and customary element of baptism.” This is in accord with Jesus’ words as are explicitly stated in Matthew 28:19, 20 –

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” Amen.”

Jesus spoke these words after the completion of His work in fulfillment of the law. He spoke to them in relation to the New Covenant in His blood, a covenant that clearly and explicitly includes Gentiles (see 1 Corinthians 11:25 and 2 Corinthians 3:6). The command by Jesus to “baptize” is not referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit, but to water baptism. This is obvious because “making disciples” and “teaching them to observe” are instructions for those who are to also perform the water baptism.

Of this, Bengel states the obvious, something which people to this day ignorantly overlook, saying, “He does not say, ‘They now already have the Spirit; therefore they can do without the water.’”

Rather, the water is given because of having received the Spirit, and the Spirit is received by faith. Hence, this is not a work in order to be saved, but it is a command for those who have been saved. To not receive water baptism is to remain in a state of disobedience to the Lord Jesus, even after salvation has been realized. Peter continues to confirm this, saying, “that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?”

It is as if Peter had forgotten the words of Jesus cited above, noting that this was for “all the nations.” Jesus had distinctly stated that His salvation now was to go forward to all people, not just Israel. He repeated this in Acts 1:7, 8

The ministry of Jesus during His first coming was to Israel. The reason for this is that Israel alone was given the Law of Moses. It would make no sense for Jesus to preach to the people in Thailand. They had not been given the law. However, the effect of His work, once completed, spread out to all men on earth because His work had negated the power of law that brought about sin in Adam. His ministry to Israel was a necessary and logical step that had to be accomplished before salvation could go forth to the Gentiles –

“I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,  
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.” Isaiah 49:6

The Gentiles, as witnessed by Peter, had seen the light of Christ and they had accepted His completed work by faith. In their faith, they had received the Holy Spirit. As a testament to that fact, and in obedience to the Lord who saved them, they are now given the opportunity to receive the water as a sign of the New Covenant into which they had entered.

Life application: Peter, the apostle to the Jews, gave the same gospel to those gathered with Cornelius that Paul will later give to the Gentiles. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, would enter the synagogues first in each town he visited, and he gave the same gospel to the Jews that he presented to the Gentiles. This is because there is one gospel, just one.

Peter acknowledged that the Gentiles should receive the water as a sign of their salvation and entrance into the New Covenant. Paul will do the same with each person he brings to Christ as well. But Paul also said words that are torn out of their proper context by those who deny the usefulness of water baptism. His words are –

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.” 1 Corinthians 1:17

In this, there are those that claim Paul is denying the need for water baptism. This is false. Read the next verse of Acts and see what occurs there. Then consider if they align with Paul’s words of 1 Corinthians 1:17.

The Bible is reduced to a few scraps of unintelligible paper when it is improperly handled by hyperdispensationalists. Stay away from such heretics who diminish and refuse to properly teach the will of the Lord who laid His commands before us.

*Lord God, thank You for the salvation we have received in Jesus Christ our Lord. May we be as willing to be obedient to Him in our state of salvation as He was to You in order to obtain our salvation. Amen.*

**And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days. Acts 10:48**

Peter had just asked those with him (obviously meaning the Jews who came with him), if any could forbid the water, meaning baptism. This was because the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit just as the Jews had. With that noted, it next says, “And he commanded them to be baptized.”

This is parallel to Paul’s words of 1 Corinthians 1:17 –

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”

Peter’s main mission was to preach the gospel. He did this, and he now instructs those with him to perform baptism upon the new Gentile believers. Paul, likewise, had a main mission of preaching the gospel. This does not mean that neither Paul nor Peter baptized others. It means that this was not their main focus. As in Acts 6, there is an area of focus for the apostles and there are responsibilities that devolve to others –

“Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. <sup>2</sup> Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; <sup>4</sup> but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’” Acts 6:1-4

With this obvious truth understood, Peter continues with, “in the name of the Lord.” Some texts say, “in the name of Jesus Christ.” The latter would be nearly in accord with



Acts 2:38. The difference is the preposition. In Acts 2:38, it is *epi* (upon) the name of Jesus Christ. Here, it is *en* (in).

As for this verse in Acts 10, regardless of which is the correct rendering, it does not contradict Jesus' words of Matthew 28:19. The actual baptism, when performed, is "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The meaning here in Acts 10 of "in the name of the Lord," or "in the name of Jesus Christ," is not so much for the actual rite of baptism but for the designation of the baptism.

In other words, there was the "baptism of John" found in Acts 1:22. That wasn't a baptism into the name of John. Rather it was a baptism designated by the ministry of John. It was a baptism of preparation for the coming Messiah. The baptism now mentioned by Peter is *en* (in) the name of the Lord (or of Jesus Christ). And yet, when performed, if done properly and in obedience to the words of Jesus, it is done *eis* (into) the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

As such, there is no contradiction. When one is baptized in the name of the Lord (or in the name of Jesus Christ), it is a designation of the type of baptism. When that type of baptism is performed, it is to be into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Peter did the commanding, the Jews with him performed the rite, and the Gentiles would have been obedient to the command. With that complete, the verse and the chapter end with, "Then they asked him to stay a few days."

This obviously occurred as will be seen in the opening of chapter 11. Peter was not to call common what God had cleansed. He had seen the realization of his trance in the conversion of the Gentiles to the faith of Jesus Christ.

Life application: A lot of heresies or really bad doctrine can be cleared up with a careful, thorough reading through the book of Acts. Mostly, understanding the nature of the writing is of paramount importance. Acts is a descriptive account of what occurred. It prescribes almost nothing, but it does provide a clear look into what establishes sound doctrine because of what is considered normative and what is not. Determining the difference takes careful study, but the result is a student of the Bible that is properly trained in what is right for his life and practice within the faith.

Be sure to not jump on a particular bandwagon because it sounds convincing. And this is especially so with people who use one particular, faulty, translation to come to unfounded conclusions. A careful study of where error in translation occurs will help clear up a lot of the muddy waters of unsound theology.

*Most glorious and gracious heavenly Father, how we thank You for what You have done for us. We are undeserving of the least of Your favor, and yet You lavish goodness upon us daily. And even when we were Your enemies, You sent Christ Jesus to reconcile us to You. Thank You for what You have done, and may Your glorious name ever be praised as we walk in Your presence. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 11

**Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. Acts 11:1**

The last verse of Chapter 10 ended with the baptism of the new believers and then a note saying, "Then they asked him to stay a few days." This was referring to Peter. With that, Chapter 11 starts with, "Now the apostles and brethren."

More appropriately, it reads, "Now the apostles and the brethren." They are two distinct categories. Of these two groups, it next reads, "who were in Judea."

The sense of the Greek is "throughout Judea." Also, the verb is a present participle. Thus, it reads, "Now the apostles and the brothers being in Judea." In other words, the word spread throughout all of the believers, and Luke is writing it as if it is happening. What must be the case is that the Jews who were with Peter left immediately to tell of what had occurred. As they traveled from Caesarea, they stopped at the houses of believers and shared with them news of what happened. As it next says, they "heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God."

The clear and obvious meaning is that these were uncircumcised, non-proselyte Gentiles. They had never observed a day of the Mosaic Law in their lives, their stomachs were filled with the morning's bacon, they had not received any ceremonial purifications, and so on. They were, to the Jews, essentially unclean dogs. The thought of what occurred may have been repugnant to them and yet it occurred. Therefore, it was not – nor could it be considered – repugnant to God. While this message is being conveyed, it is to be remembered that Peter remained in Caesarea, living for a span among these Gentiles.

Also, note how Luke phrased his words. These Gentiles "had also received the word of God." What does this mean? The books of Moses? No, of course not. Does it mean that they were instructed in the law, the history of Israel, and the prophets? Nothing specific is said of that in Luke's analysis of what Peter said.

Go back and read Acts 10:34-43. Other than the last sentence which merely confirms that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophets, the words are about Jesus and His ministry. The implication of the vision given to Cornelius, as well as the trance in which Peter was in, is that Jesus' ministry is the fulfillment of those prophets and what He has done is now also offered to the Gentiles. It is a new direction, a New Covenant, and it is based

on the word of God which is the testimony of Jesus. As Paul says in Romans 10:17, “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Life application: What is it that you find out of place in your church? Do you get queasy when someone comes to church after having worked all night at a dirty job and is still wearing his dirty uniform? What about someone who is from a different culture and whose mannerisms are different than everyone else? Maybe someone shows up at church with biker’s clothes on. Maybe he doesn’t (perish the thought!) wear shoes. Maybe he wears sandals and kicks them off while in church. Well, maybe he grew up on the beach and never really left it.

The point is that people are different. As long as the people that come into a church building are respectful of the way the church is normally run, why should you worry about appearances? If someone comes in and is noisy or belligerent in his behavior, that is a different issue. However, if he is a believer, he is in the same state as the Jews before Cornelius’ conversion, and the same as Cornelius and those with him after their conversion. In other words, God has accepted him. As this is so, how can you not do so as well?

Once unbiblical legalism creeps into a church, the church will become arrogant and self-serving. As stated in an earlier commentary, this is not necessarily the same as a cultural standard. If you go to a church filled with people from the Philippines, they will have a way of worshiping that may be different. There is nothing wrong with that. As long as you respect their cultural distinctions and enjoy their fellowship, stick it out and enjoy the Baluts. If not, then go find another church. They have a right to worship the Lord in a manner that satisfies their cultural standards.

Be accepting of those who are different when they come into your midst. At the same time, be respectful of the ways of others when you go into their midst. Seek harmony, not division, within the body of believers.

*Lord God, how wonderful it is! The grace You have bestowed on us means that we can rest in what You have done. Works for salvation are excluded. We have the door to heaven opened to us by a simple act of faith. Thank You, O God, for the wonderful thing You have done. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him,**  
Acts 11:2

Previously, it was noted that the apostles and brethren in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. Exciting news indeed. With that noted, it now says, “And when Peter came up to Jerusalem.” It had previously said that Cornelius had asked Peter to stay a few days (Acts 10:48). It is after this unstated amount of time that Peter now went up to Jerusalem. This is where the apostles stayed and tended to the affairs of the believers.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, it next says “those of the circumcision contended with him.” The words seem out of place. As the only non-circumcised believers so far mentioned were either in Ethiopia or Caesarea, every other believer is, by default, a circumcised Jew. Therefore, there must be a reason why they are singled out as “the circumcision.”

The reason for the contention is not stated until the next verse, and so it is getting ahead in the analysis to debate exactly what that means, but it is necessary now. There are several possibilities for Luke recording it this way:

1. They are those mentioned in Acts 10:45 who went with Peter and saw the conversion of the Gentiles. There, they are called “those of the circumcision.” Peter stayed while they left, returning with the news throughout Judea even to Jerusalem.
2. It is referring to any Jew (born as a Jew or converted to Judaism) who had converted to faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and they are simply being noted in a different category than the other Jews.
3. They are those Jews who had converted to faith in Jesus but who were adamant about the necessity for continued observance of the law and of the rites of conversion, such as circumcision.
4. Luke is now using the term in a new manner, setting a distinction between any circumcised person and any non-circumcised person. This distinction is set to define who is a Jew and who is a Gentile, regardless of how they conduct their life, even if the matter of circumcision in a non-believing Jew needs to be more fully explained later.

In short, and which will be evaluated again in the next verse, they believe Peter defiled himself by going in with those who were uncircumcised. Understanding this, the first option is wrong. Those who went with Peter were privy to the details of his trance, and they were certainly aware of what had transpired afterward. It is not sound to think they would argue against Peter concerning a matter they were also intimately involved in.

The second option is incorrect because it would make an improper distinction between those Jews who believed and those who did not. The issue is physical circumcision, not the spiritual circumcision of the heart referred to elsewhere in Scripture.

The third option is a distinction that seems to be referred to elsewhere, such as in Galatians 2 –

“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; <sup>12</sup> for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. <sup>13</sup> And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.”  
-Galatians 2:11-13

This is seen in Acts 11:2 as well. Thus, it appears that a distinction is being made by separating Peter and those with him from a group that is adamant about adherence to the law by calling them “the circumcision.” But that is a point of theology based on their status as circumcised Jews, not a separate category altogether. This is certain because Peter is specifically noted as an apostle to those who are circumcised in Galatians 2 –

“But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed *to be something* added nothing to me. <sup>7</sup> But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as *the gospel* for the circumcised *was* to Peter <sup>8</sup> (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), <sup>9</sup> and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup> *They desired* only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.” Galatians 2:6-10

Understanding this, and also understanding that the term can later be applied to the third category, but at this early date before the matter is settled, the answer to who “the circumcision” is that Luke is referring to in Acts 11:2, the fourth option is correct. It is a term that is now being used in order to distinguish between any person who is circumcised according to the cultural standards of Israel, expressly setting them apart from the Gentile world. This is certain because Paul says this in Colossians 4 –

“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), <sup>11</sup> and Jesus who is called Justus. These *are my* only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me.”

-Colossians 4:10, 11

Paul makes a distinction between who is circumcised as a Jew and who is not, meaning they are Gentiles, in his epistle. A separate category of who is a “true Jew” is defined by Paul in the book of Romans, but that is a theological argument which is still based on the physical mark of circumcision in relation to the spiritual “circumcision of the heart” that is also required to be in a right standing with God.

Life application: The physical circumcision of the Jewish people sets them apart from the Gentile world. Just because most Jews do not believe in Messiah, and thus they are not currently in a right standing with God, it does not mean that they are not Jews. They are just not completed Jews. They remain separate from God in one manner (failure to enter into the New Covenant), but they remain united to God in another (bound to Him through the Mosaic Covenant).

The lack of faithfulness of the Jewish nation (meaning Israel) to come to Jesus Christ does not negate God’s having covenanted with them through Moses. His words to them will be performed. They will be brought into the New Covenant.

However, until they do come to Him through Jesus, they will continue to suffer the consequences of their agreement to the Mosaic Code. They are bound to it, even if they do not adhere to it. God bound Himself to it as well. Israel’s unfaithfulness in no way negates God’s faithfulness. This is the main error in thinking for most of the church. Both Israel and the church will eventually learn that God’s promises and His election will stand.

*Heavenly Father, how faithful You are. When we fail You, it is a mark against us. But You will never fail us. Your faithfulness reaches to the skies and Your love and tender mercies to the objects of Your affection are never-ending. Thank You for Your tender care of Your unfaithful creatures. Amen.*

**saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” Acts 11:3**

In the previous verse, it noted that when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him. It now explains that with the words, “You went in to

uncircumcised men.” Rather, the Greek reads, “men having foreskin.” Vincent’s Word Studies says of this, “An indignant expression.”

The word, *akrobustia*, is first seen here. It signifies the foreskin. It is used at times by Jews when referring to Gentiles. Figuratively, it signifies a person being outside of God’s covenant. This is because of the mandates given to Abraham all the way back in Genesis 17. This was later brought into the Mosaic law, as well as is seen in Leviticus 12:3, saying, “And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.”

After this, the word will be used nineteen more times, all by Paul in his epistles. His uses of it will mostly contrast those who are circumcised and those who are not. One of the most poignant times is when he uses the word six times in Romans 4:9-12 –

*“Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. <sup>10</sup> How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. <sup>11</sup> And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, <sup>12</sup> and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.”*

What happened with Cornelius and those with him is just what Paul is referring to in Romans 4. The blessing of God in Christ came upon the uncircumcised just as the declaration of righteousness bestowed upon Abraham came upon him while he was still uncircumcised. Not considering this, those of the circumcision were highly upset at Peter, noting that he had gone in to be with these men “and ate with them!”

They knew that uncircumcised men would also be eating food that was not considered clean according to the laws and customs of the Jews. He might as well have brought a pound of bacon home with him and started eating it right in front of them. They were aghast at his complete shunning of what it meant to be a Jew.

Life application: Those who promote the Hebrew Roots movement, along with other cults and sects of supposed Christians, will deny the obvious meaning of what occurred when Peter stayed with these Gentiles and ate with them. If asked about such verses, long explanations of how Peter would have brought his own food, or that he would have



had special food prepared for him, or some other ridiculous notion that is clearly not indicated by Luke's words, will be proposed.

But the text and its meaning are clear. Peter did not adhere to the customs or dietary restrictions of the Jews. He had been in the trance, he had heard the voice from heaven, it had been presented three times, and then he had seen the Holy Spirit come down upon the Gentiles. He realized what Jesus meant concerning the words He spoke when He walked among them –

“Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, <sup>19</sup> because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, *thus* purifying all foods?” Mark 7:18, 19

Rather than an elaborate explanation of how Peter remained undefiled in his diet, which is obviously not the case, it is more probable that he sat down, had a meal, and while eating asked, “Wow, this is really good! What is it?” The answer may have come back, “Pork chops, do you want more?”

Think about the entire context of what happened from Acts 10:1 until this point. We are free from the constraints that were levied upon the Jews. Why on earth would anyone want to be put back under that yoke, except to prove how holy he was? What an affront to the finished work of Jesus Christ! We find our true righteousness, sanctification, and holiness in Him alone.

*Lord God, thank You for what Jesus has done. In Him, there is full and forever purification that could never come through the Law of Moses or from any other supposed demonstration of piety. Religion cannot bring us closer to You. Only Jesus can do that. Thank You for Jesus who has made us acceptable before Your glorious throne. Amen.*

**But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying:** Acts 11:4

Those of the circumcision were in a snit towards Peter about what had occurred in Caesarea. They said to him, “You went into uncircumcised men and ate with them.” With that, it now says, “But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying.”

This translation by the NKJV is hardly reflective of the Greek. Rather, the Greek reads, “Now Peter having begun, set forth to them in order, saying” (BLB). Peter opened his mouth and began his response to them. Once he did, he set forth the events as they

occurred. The verb is imperfect, reflecting the ongoing nature of his speaking out the chronology of events. He started explaining and he continued by sequentially relaying how things happened.

By doing this, he would be able to convince them of the appropriateness of his actions more precisely. This is because they will be able to see it in the same manner as God ordered the things to occur. Peter had his own doubts, but they were dispelled by how things transpired. By the time he arrived at Cornelius' house, he felt reassured that his entry into it was exactly the right thing to do.

By speaking out the matter just as it had been presented to him, they could logically follow along as if they were there, right next to him, watching how God orchestrated everything. As such, even a hardened Jew, if he accepted Peter's story as true, would be fully convinced that Peter's actions were wholly acceptable.

Life application: By looking at this verse in parallel with other translations, one can see how carefully some translations follow the original Greek, some paraphrase it, and some practically plagiarize what others have already put forth without ever checking with the original.

For this commentary, forty-six versions were looked at. Of them, thirty-one follow the Greek order exactly or pretty closely. Eleven follow the same pattern as the NKJV (noted above), and the rest are essentially paraphrases that do not reflect the Greek very well at all. One can almost see where the original error in thought came in and who went with it. In this case, the oldest Bible referred to, and which started the divergence in translation, was the Bishop's Bible of 1568.

First, remember the correct sequence of the Greek from the BLB –

“Now Peter having begun, set forth to them in order, saying”

The translation that less properly follows the Greek (the Bishop's Bible of 1568) reads –

“But Peter rehearsed the matter from the begynnyng, and expounded it by order vnto them, saying:”

From there, whoever was assigned this portion of Acts on the KJV translation team simply copied that and updated it to more modern English –

“But Peter rehearsed *the matter* from the beginning, and expounded *it* by order unto them, saying,”

From there, the NKJV did this again –

“But Peter explained *it* to them in order from the beginning, saying:”

This is just a simple exercise in finding out why translations are the way they are, and it can be extremely helpful in better learning the original intent, if desired. Seeing error in something can help in directing the mind to what is correct. If such things don't matter to you, then enjoy whatever translation you are reading, but be sure to not assume it is the only correct version. Just because you enjoy the style of the translation you are reading, it doesn't make it right.

Consider this carefully because even though Acts 11:4 doesn't carry any heavy theological weight, other verses do. A single mistranslated verse, or a single verse taken out of its proper context, can lead people down entirely incorrect paths of doctrine. Never stop studying this precious word. It is a lifetime of joy for those who seek out what God has set forth for us!

*Lord God, what a delight it is to read Your word and to contemplate it. Thank You for those who have diligently and faithfully translated it for us over the millennia. We are the recipients of their efforts, and for that, we are grateful. How wonderful it is to have modern, reliable versions to help us understand what You have set for us. Amen.*

**“I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me. Acts 11:5**

In the previous verse, it noted that Peter began his response to the circumcision, putting everything in order as it occurred. That order now starts with, “I was in the city of Joppa praying.”

Peter begins with his location. As it was in a different city than where Cornelius was, it is important that he conveyed this to his audience. In this, they would be able to see that what occurred was based on events that actually took place more than a day apart in order for the immediate events surrounding Peter to occur simultaneously. While in Joppa, he next notes his state, saying, “and in a trance I saw a vision.”

The words are explanatory. Luke recorded what Peter saw as a trance without using the term “vision.” That is seen in Acts 10 –

The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. <sup>10</sup> Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance <sup>11</sup> and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. <sup>12</sup> In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. <sup>13</sup> And a voice came to him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.”

<sup>14</sup> But Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.”

<sup>15</sup> And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” <sup>16</sup> This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again. Acts 10: 9-16

It is while in a trance and seeing the vision that Peter next explains the contents of the vision, saying, “an object descending like a great sheet.”

One can refer to the comments on Acts 10:11 to understand the meaning of this and to see that what Peter saw was probably a “great sail.” Translating the Greek word as “sail” is acceptable, and it is the most likely meaning of Peter’s words. Next, Peter says this great object was “let down from heaven by four corners.”

The Greek has two slight differences. First, the verb is a present participle, “being let down.” Secondly, it says, “from the heaven.” With that noted, the words of this clause are again explained in the Acts 10:11 commentary. There is rich symbolism and Peter would have grasped its intent after pondering what he saw. The verse next ends with, “and it came to me.”

It does not specifically say this in Acts 10, but it is implied. Peter is on the earth, the great object descended from the heaven, it was intended for him to see, and the voice that spoke was directed to him. Hence to say “and it came to me” is correct from his perspective.

Life application: The personal witness of an individual to the changing power of events in one’s life can lead others to follow the same path as well. In the case of accepting Jesus because of the gospel, there is no need to embellish the events that took place at all.

The focus is to be on the power of God, not on the individual. Unfortunately, humans find it satisfying to make events about us. This is not a healthy way of presenting why we have received Jesus. First, it is not the point of salvation. The ultimate point of salvation is for God to receive the glory.

Secondly, we are fallen beings and we are bound to fail. When we do, those who were impressed with the change in us might become disheartened in their seeking out the reason for our conversion. But if we keep the focus of our conversion on Jesus at all times, then our failings will not diminish the power of God in our lives, they will actually highlight it.

If we needed a Savior, and if we continue to need a Savior, it means that we are dependent on the Lord at all times. If we act as if our salvation has brought us to a state where we are no longer in need of Jesus' guiding hand in our lives, we will not be bringing the glory to Him as we should.

Let us keep our personal testimony about Jesus focusing on Him at all times. As Paul says, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" 1 Corinthians 10:12. We are always dependent on Jesus. Let our speech and attitude reflect this.

*Lord God, how good You are to us. You saved us and You keep on saving us. When we fail You, there is always the assurance that we are Yours and that You are there to forgive us and lead us back to Yourself. And so, Lord, help us to consider this and draw near to You at all times. Thank You for Your tender care of us. Amen.*

**When I observed it intently and considered, I saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. Acts 11:6**

Peter just described the object descending like a great sheet [sail] that came down from heaven. He now explains what was in it. The translation of the NKJV does not get the verbs right, and each category is preceded by an article. A more proper rendering is, "at which having looked steadfastly, I was considering, and I saw the quadrupeds of the earth, and the wild beasts, and the creeping things, and the birds of the heaven" (CG).

Peter's words, "at which having looked steadfastly," are not found in Acts 10. He is describing his own personal mental state at the curious sight that had been presented to him. He obviously was quite curious about what he was seeing. With that state of mind, he continues with, "I was considering."

The verb is imperfect. He didn't just consider and then move on. Rather, he was engaged in an ongoing thought process. During his considerations, he then notes what was presented to him, saying, "and I saw the quadrupeds of the earth, and the wild beasts, and the creeping things, and the birds of the heaven."

This is a close repeat of the words of verse 10:12. He is carefully recounting what was first presented to his sight at that time. Each category is stated with an article to show that these were not a couple of animals of each category, but rather an innumerable – even all-inclusive – number of them. Peter is seeing a world full of otherwise unclean animals interspersed with whatever few clean animals there are in relation to the whole.

Life application: We tend to place a high value on animals we are favorable towards. In the US, people love their dogs. When a photo of a Chinese meat market is seen that includes caged dogs waiting to be sold for food, activists get out and protest at the horror of such a thing.

And yet, those same people will go to the local steakhouse for dinner and have a big meaty steak. Are dogs more important than cows? In the end, Peter is being asked to consider things from God's perspective. This is His world, and He has ordained all things to be eaten by man.

During the time of the law, this was changed for one group of people to teach the world a lesson about the coming Messiah. Outside of that, the people of the world are all in need of a Savior. Are we going to pick and choose which are acceptable for evangelism and which are not? Or are we going to direct our attention toward how God sees things?

Let us not get caught up in personal or cultural biases and condemn others because of what they eat. Let us also not decide that some people or some people groups are not to be included in our evangelistic efforts. God sent Jesus into the world for all people. Let us have that attitude as we conduct our affairs.

*Lord God, the only difference between those who have been saved and those who have not yet been saved is the act of acceptance of the gospel message. Other than that, we are all sinners in need of a Savior. Help us to remember this and not get smug in our state of salvation. Someone took the time to tell us about Jesus. Now, help us to do the same. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' Acts 11:7**

Peter saw the object from heaven descend. In the previous verse, it described the many animals and birds seen in it. In fact, it was a world full of all animals. With that, it now says, “And I heard a voice saying to me.”

This is just what is recorded in Acts 10:13. A voice came to him, and he heard it. The message from that voice is next stated, saying, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.”

More correctly, the verb is an aorist participle, “Having risen, Peter, kill and eat.” In other words, “Once you have gotten up, then you are directed to kill and eat.” The words are also in accord with verse 10:13, being cited word for word exactly as they were recorded there. Peter is being meticulously careful to relay exactly what he saw and heard to those who were there before him.

Life application: We are being provided a careful look into what occurred as if we are the audience there before Peter. Luke could have just said, “Peter carefully explained everything that happened while he was in Caesarea.” Instead, he attentively details for a second time all that occurred.

Because of this, we need to be sure to understand the message that is being conveyed. It is a message concerning the law and grace. How anyone can go through all of this detail twice, and still think it is appropriate to put himself back under the constraints of the Law of Moses is simply unimaginable. We are provided the same freedoms granted to Noah and all who followed him, even until the time of the law when only Israel was placed under the law. All other people continued to have the freedom to eat anything set before them.

Israel was given the law. Israel could not meet the demands of the law. Not even a single person of Israel could meet the law’s demands. And so, God Himself entered into the stream of time and human existence in order to fulfill the law. Why would anyone set that aside and claim that he was going to do what Jesus had done, improving upon His completed work? It is a slap in God’s face! Rest in Christ, trust in Christ, and be freed from the yoke of the law through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

*Lord God, thank You for Jesus who has opened the way for restoration with You. Yes, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**But I said, ‘Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.’ Acts 11:8**

The previous verse referred to the voice saying to Peter, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” In response to that, Peter now says, “But I said, ‘Not so, Lord!’” These are just the words Peter spoke. He recognized the authority in the voice and responded with the word “Lord,” thus confirming that authority. And yet, he appealed for it not to be.

He was a Jew and was observant to their laws as set forth by Moses. To confirm this, he continues with, “For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.”

Here Peter makes a few small changes to what he said, but the substance is the same:

“For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” Acts 10:14

“For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.” Acts 11:8

He acknowledges to those he is speaking that he clearly presented himself as a law-observant Jew to the voice from heaven. If this was a test of his faithfulness to Moses, he would have passed with flying colors. Hence, they had no reason to question his careful attention to that particular matter. He will continue to explain what occurred in the verses ahead, defending his actions based on the circumstances that surrounded them.

Life application: At this point, the people who understood how the law worked must have been wondering what was going on. James, an observant Jew at the time of Christ, did understand the ramifications of sinning under the law –

“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.” James 2:10

The voice from heaven had directed something that would be considered a point of stumbling under the law. How could it be that the voice could direct an observant Jew to do something like this unless it was just a test of his faithfulness to the law? They must have rationalized in their minds that this was surely the case.

But as the narrative progresses, it will become evident that what was directed was an object lesson concerning Gentile inclusion in the New Covenant. As Gentiles were never under the law, and as they are included in the New Covenant apart from the law, then it must be that the New Covenant is not based upon law observance.

For them, this would be a difficult thing to even imagine. But it is they who must adapt to what is being conveyed. When the author of Hebrews writes about the state of the



law after the introduction of the New Covenant, he is clear and precise in what that means. And yet, to this day, both Judaizers and others who supposedly claim to be Christians adamantly reintroduce law observance into their flawed theology. But Hebrews says otherwise –

“For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, <sup>19</sup>for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, *there is the* bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.” Hebrews 7:18, 19

“In that He says, ‘A new *covenant*,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” Hebrews 8:13

“Previously saying, ‘Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and *offerings* for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure *in them*’ (which are offered according to the law), <sup>9</sup>then He said, ‘Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.’ He takes away the first that He may establish the second.” Hebrews 10:8, 9

The words are written, and they do not reflect well on those who have rejected the grace of God in Christ. His lifeless body on the cross of Calvary is a testament to the law’s fulfillment and ending. His resurrection is a confirmation that it is so. A New Covenant now exists. Trusting in personal righteousness before God based on law observance disgraces the Lord’s cross, and it rejects the significance of His resurrection. Be wise, give up on your self-righteousness and come to God through Jesus.

*Lord God, Thank You for the burden that has been lifted from us because of Jesus. We were without hope, stuck in a state of constant fear of death. But now, we have the victory in Him! Thank You for allowing us to return to You covered by His precious blood. Praises to You forever and ever! Amen.*

**But the voice answered me again from heaven, ‘What God has cleansed you must not call common. Acts 11:9**

In the previous verse, Peter explained his response to the voice from heaven, saying, “Not so, Lord! For nothing common or unclean has at any time entered my mouth.” Now, Peter continues with, “But the voice answered me again from heaven.”

The Greek is more precise, saying, “But the voice answered a second *time* out of the heaven.” Peter is giving an exacting sequence of what occurred so that his hearers will

mentally participate in what he has already personally experienced. With this noted, Peter next quotes the voice from heaven, saying, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.”

The wording in the Greek is just the same as Acts 10:15. This is exactly what was said, and Peter repeats it without any changes at all.

Life application: The voice from heaven has specifically said that God has cleansed these animals. The uncleanness of the animals, however, caused a perception of uncleanness in the Gentiles among the Jews. However, if God had cleansed the animals, the Jews could not use this precept as a point of considering the Gentiles unclean, even if other things could still cause that perception.

With this understood, how did God cleanse the animals? Were they not considered clean for Noah? The answer is, “Yes, they were.” Genesis 9:3 explicitly says, “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.” So, what is it that made the animals unclean? It was the prohibition for Israel to eat them as contained within the law.

If God has cleansed them (meaning for the Jews), it means that the law is no longer in effect. The prohibition came from the law, causing uncleanness before the law when the prohibition is violated. The cleansing came from the fulfillment and ending of the law through Christ’s work, including His sacrificial death.

Paul says, “for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). There can be no knowledge of sin if the law does not exist. As this is so, and as the animals are now deemed as cleansed because of the fulfillment of the law, then the Jews could no longer consider the Gentiles as “unclean” because of their diet.

But this then brings in a new kind of declaration of uncleanness. If the Gentiles are not unclean because of a precept of the law which is now ended in Christ, and if these same Gentiles come to Christ through the gospel, then they are wholly sanctified to the Lord because of that fact. And so, if a Gentile is wholly cleansed before the Lord because of Christ, what is the state of a Jew who has not come to Christ? He is wholly unclean before the Lord.

Such a person is still bound to the law because of his rejection of Christ. As such, he stands guilty before the law – in every precept. But more, he still bears the stain of Adam’s sin. In God’s eyes, he is wholly defiled. Paul explains this in Romans 2:25-29. The law was given by God to highlight sin in man, not to remove it from man. Jesus’

fulfillment of the law, because of His perfection before the law, is what purifies man. This is what the law was intended to reveal –

“Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

-Galatians 3:24, 25

Thank God for Jesus who has done it! In coming to Him, we find a new freedom. Sin no longer has mastery over us. Yes, thank God for Jesus!

*Lord God, it is beyond our ability to fully grasp the magnitude of what has been done in the coming of Jesus. We can think about it and understand one point after another about what He did, but with every new thought, there is more to consider beyond what we have learned. Everything is so perfectly complete in Him. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.*

**Now this was done three times, and all were drawn up again into heaven.** Acts 11:10

Peter had just noted that for a second time the voice had said, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” Having said that, he continues by saying, “Now this was done three times.”

It may or may not be a coincidence that the next verse will specifically note that three men from Cornelius will arrive at the door. Not only was the event seen three times, confirming that it was a purposeful and determined incident, but having three Gentiles arrive just then may confirm to Peter that he should pay heed to the vision. As for the great object filled with the animals of the earth, Peter next says, “and all were drawn up again into heaven.”

In Acts 10:16, the word *analambanó* was used. It means “to take up,” such as when Christ was taken up into heaven in Acts 1:2. Luke now uses the word *anaspaó*. That signifies “to pull up,” or “to draw up.” It is used only one other time, also by Luke –

“Then He answered them, saying, ‘Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?’”

-Luke 14:5

One might challenge the reliability of the text because of this, claiming that the use of two words shows an inconsistency. But there is no reason for this. Luke was the one to

describe the events of Acts 10 as they were conveyed to him. Peter is now the one to describe what he saw in Acts 11. Rather than demonstrating an inconsistency, it shows that the use of the words is a recounting that is being described as anyone would do it, using words familiar to the mind at the time.

Of the words of Jesus just cited from Luke 14, the same thought is found in Matthew 12 using a completely different set of words to describe what he said –

“Then He said to them, ‘What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift *it* out?’”

-Matthew 12:11

Rather than an inconsistency, we have a personal eyewitness being relayed by two different sources using words that are appropriate to their mental state at the time. Any person might at one time say, “I saw the object pulled up to heaven.” The next time he describes the event, he might say, “I saw the object drawn up to heaven.” What is seen here is the recording of a natural discourse as it would normally occur.

Life application: Someone trying to tear apart the Bible would naturally claim that the use of various words when describing a single account shows an inconsistency. And yet, that same person would say, “Those two accounts are just copied, one from the other,” when they were identical. There is no winning with someone like that.

God has allowed man’s moods, predispositions, and current state of mind to enter into His word as it was conveyed by those who wrote it out. It is thus a living and active word that reflects more than just a set and rigid state of mind. Rather, it demonstrates to us a beauty all its own.

When a person plays a song on a guitar, it would become stagnant and boring to play the exact same notes every single time. Rather, a great player will take the original song and follow it while also adding in various personal notes. As such, it will be uniquely played even while it is the same song that has been played all along.

The Bible allows for something comparable when similar accounts are relayed to us. And yet, despite this, the exact intent of God is conveyed through His inspiration. We have the very words of God that reflect the very heart of His chosen instruments for conveying that word. Rejoice in the beauty of this word all your days. When you read the psalms of David, you can know that David is the author, even though you can also

know that God is the ultimate inspiration and Author behind what is written. Think about this and revel in this precious and sacred word.

*Heavenly Father, our hearts rejoice at the beauty of Your word. It is a treasure to come to and to consider from day to day. We are filled with hope, inspiration, joy, and more as we move from page to page. We can be angry at that which angers You. We can be molded into godly people through it. There is so much life and beauty in Your word. Thank You for this precious word. Amen.*

**At that very moment, three men stood before the house where I was, having been sent to me from Caesarea. Acts 11:11**

After Peter explained that the object with all the animals in it had been drawn up into heaven, he now says, “At that very moment.” Though the intent is the same, the Greek more closely says, “And behold, immediately...”

Exactly as the vision ended, the next event occurred. Because the two events are connected, as he later discovered, it highlights the purposeful intent of the vision coming at the exact time it did. The next event is that “three men stood before the house where I was.”

As noted in the previous commentary, it seems that there may be a connection between the three times the vision repeated itself and the three men coming. Peter would possibly have made this mental correlation. Whether this is the case or not, the three times the event occurred were certainly provided to ensure to him that God had determined the matter and it was set. God determines what is clean and what is unclean. When He does, the matter is settled. With this stated, the verse finishes with the note that the men were at the house, “having been sent to me from Caesarea.”

The length of such a trip meant that the arrival could have come at any time. Peter had no idea if they left long before sunrise or if they left the day before. They may have made one stop or four. All he knew was at the exact moment the vision was complete, these Gentiles had shown up at his door. The connection was obvious, and he is explaining it as such to those before him.

Life application: There are certainly times in our lives when something happens, and we struggle to understand why things occurred as they did. It may be the loss of a job, the death of a loved one, or a flat tire on the way to Bible class.

At such times, our confusion about the matter may cause frustration, sadness, or other feelings that burden us. And yet, in due time, the event brings about some other event that perfectly suits our life. If that thing didn't happen, then this thing would not have happened. Such things may be "time and chance" as Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 9:11, or there may have been a greater purpose that God intended all along.

Either way, we cannot change time and chance, and we cannot know what God has planned. So, we should do our best to take life as it comes and have gratitude towards God in all things. One thing is for certain: He has a grand plan that is being brought about and we, because of our faith in Jesus, are a part of that plan. So, let us be convinced that our lives are being directed toward that good end.

Because we are in Christ, He is carefully tending to us each step of the way. Let us be confident in that. David had that attitude. He may not have had all the information concerning a given matter, but he handed the events of his life over to the Lord –

“Wait on the LORD;  
Be of good courage,  
And He shall strengthen your heart;  
Wait, I say, on the LORD!” Psalm 27:14

Let us have a like-minded attitude. Let us wait patiently on His guiding hand in all things.

*Lord God, thank You for directing our steps on the path of life. We may not always know where the next step will lead, but we can be confident that, ultimately, they all are getting us to the wonderful goal which You have promised Your people. Thank You that our path is known to You and that You are directing us on it according to Your wisdom. Amen.*

**Then the Spirit told me to go with them, doubting nothing. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.** Acts 11:12

The previous verse told of the three men who were sent from Caesarea and who came and stood before the house where Peter was. This happened at the very moment his vision had ended. With that, it next says, "Then the Spirit told me to go with them."

Peter has been telling of the events before the men came. Now in a supportable defense against those who were accusing him, he notes that his actions were Spirit-directed. Peter had a vision that he may or may not have immediately understood, nor clued him

in to what was going to happen, but the arrival of men from Cornelius would prove direct confirmation. Along with that, he was to be “doubting nothing.”

The meaning is that he was to accompany them without any misgivings, although some manuscripts change the word from the middle to the active voice. In this, the sense is changed to “make a distinction,” meaning that he should not discriminate against those who had come to collect him. Either way, the directive is given by the Spirit and Peter was to go with the men without any qualms. From there, it next says, “Moreover these six brethren accompanied me.”

The words are clearly intended to show that it wasn’t just Peter who had gone with the Gentiles, but that the whole group had. That these six men accompanied Peter would argue any possible criticism for Peter staying with Gentiles. As such, there were many more witnesses than required by the law to substantiate everything that he was saying. And more than just going with them, Peter was completely obedient to the situation as directed by the Spirit because he next says, “and we entered the man’s house.”

Here, Peter changes the accusation of verse 3 where the plural was used, “uncircumcised men.” Rather, he says in the singular “the man’s house.” It wasn’t as if he was having a party with a bunch of uncircumcised men. Rather, he was called to a specific house owned by a certain man. The number of people in the house was irrelevant and the status of the man was as well. Peter was given a clear and specific set of instructions and he followed through with them accordingly.

Life application: Peter clearly ate with the uncircumcised, as is indicated in verse 11:3. He did this in Antioch as is recorded in Galatians 2:11 as well. And yet, in the very next verse, Galatians 2:12, he withdrew himself from their fellowship when the Jews who came from James showed up. He failed to conduct himself as he had previously been instructed to do by the Spirit.

His weakness caused harm to the purity of the gospel and Paul called him out on it. However, it became a later lesson to those who were troubled by the Judaizers in Galatia. And it should be a continuing lesson for those who are troubled by the false teachers of the Hebrew Roots movement today.

God can take our faults and our failings and turn them around for good. So don’t beat yourself up too much when you have a moment of doubt or weakness. Like Peter, turn back to the straight path and live out your freedom in Christ as you should. And when

you have the chance, you can tell others about how you failed. Sometimes people need to hear that they are not alone in falling into temptations.

In the end, each of us has our own failings, but Jesus is greater than them. If you are in Christ, He has already forgiven you. So, press on and do what is right henceforth.

*Lord God, thank You for the forgiveness we possess because of what Jesus has done. In Him, we have a surety that goes beyond our failings because He has prevailed. We know that nothing can separate us from You again, but we may need reminders at times that it is so. Help us to be refreshed in this thought often so that our walk before You will be one of joy. Amen.*

**And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, Acts 11:13**

Peter just explained that the Spirit had told him to go and not doubt, and that six men accompanied him. Upon arriving at Caesarea, they all entered his house. With that stated, he now explains what occurred with Cornelius, beginning with, “And he told us how he had seen an angel.”

Rather, it is “the angel,” or “the messenger.” What Peter had heard as a rumor from the men sent to collect him from Joppa is now a definite claim by Cornelius. And further, the angel was “standing in his house.”

The words are from an aorist participle. More correctly, it reads, “having stood in his house.” The angel was there, and he was clearly positioned in the house. The thought of the words is not unimportant. If an angel, a messenger from God, had stood in the house of Cornelius, it could not be that Peter could then refrain from entering the house as if it was defiled. And more, it could not be that those gathered together could charge him with wrongdoing either.

A messenger from God is a holy messenger. To refuse entry after such an appearance would be as if Peter was claiming a holiness greater than the angel himself. Grasping this truth, Peter next continues, saying, “who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa.’”

Again, it is an aorist participle. It more appropriately reads, “having said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa.’” The narrative is very direct and clear in how it is presenting each word. The angel gave very specific instructions as well. Cornelius was in Caesarea and yet the



angel is directing him to send men to a city quite some distance away with a particular intent. That intent was “and call for Simon whose surname is Peter.”

This clearly settles the matter that Simon Peter is the object of the discourse and that his actions were wholly in accord with the will of God. To identify a particular person in a particular city in a vision from God can mean nothing other than his presence is needed, it is called for, and what will afterward transpire is wholly in accord with the will of God.

The narrative will continue, but it will do so with the understanding that Peter is the key point of focus and that what he does is fully acceptable to the Lord, even if it was somehow unacceptable to those he was speaking to.

Life application: Peter was specifically called to go into the house of a Gentile. This occurred after a vision that specifically showed him that God had declared all the animals and birds clean before him. The law had set up barriers between Israel and the people of the world for a set and specific purpose, and those barriers were now removed with the completion of Jesus’ work.

In Job, it asks –

“How then can man be righteous before God?  
Or how can he be pure *who is* born of a woman?” Job 25:4

In and of ourselves, this is impossible. However, because of Jesus, it is not only possible, it has come about. God is looking for people of faith. He is not at all concerned about deeds accomplished by people who are unclean before Him. Their deeds, no matter what they are, are unacceptable to Him because the people are already defiled.

However, for those who are cleansed by the shed blood of Christ, God can now look upon us and have a relationship with us. Our deeds, when done in faith concerning the Lord, are acceptable to Him. A new standard is introduced, and it is one that places us in a completely different category than we ever were before.

Being “in Christ” is to be united to God, once and forever, as adopted sons of God. Let us remember this as we live out our lives. We may fail Him, but He is no longer counting such things against us. However, He is reckoning our deeds of faith to an account that will bring eternal rewards. Think about this and be pleased to rest in the wonderful

position you have now been granted. God has accepted you. Thank God for Jesus who has made this possible!

*Most glorious and gracious heavenly Father, thank You for what You have done. We were Your enemies and yet You sent Jesus. We stand in awe of Your great love with which You have loved us. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’ Acts 11:14**

Peter’s previous words were citing what he was told by Cornelius. He had seen an angel in his house who directed him to call for Simon Peter who was in Joppa. Now, Peter continues relaying Cornelius’ words, saying, “who will tell you words.”

Peter is being called to specifically speak to Cornelius. One might wonder why the angel didn’t just tell him what he needed to know, but that would be overlooking the purpose and intent of Acts. Acts is given to show how the early church was established. It was also given to confirm the message and authority of the apostles. Peter was given a particular position among the apostles which was to verify those who were accepted into the church.

In other words, a plan had been set forth, the parameters were laid out in advance, and the gospel was being proclaimed within those parameters. As for Peter speaking to Cornelius, it is exactly that “by which you and all your household will be saved.”

The words of Peter were to be the good news of salvation, the gospel. Upon conveying them, those who believed would be saved. As for the term, “you and all your household,” this does not mean that Cornelius’ salvation would lead directly to the salvation of his household as if his faith was sufficient to cover everyone.

Rather, this is a new line of thought not directly introduced in chapter 10. There, it said –

“Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. <sup>6</sup> He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.” Acts 10:5, 6

However, it said this previously –

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, <sup>2</sup> a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household.” Acts 10:1, 2

The family was already a family that feared God. The saving of the household spoken of now is a salvation that was based upon the faith they already possessed. It just needed to be directed properly towards the One whom God had offered for this very purpose, meaning Jesus Christ.

This will be similar to the account in chapter 16 where Paul says something similar to the jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). After saying this, it then says, “Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household” (Acts 16:34).

Paul and Silas were not telling him that his salvation would result in their salvation, but that the necessary condition for any of them was to believe. Those who did, meaning all his household, were saved.

Life application: Since the Bible’s completion, there is now a way that man is saved that has been detailed in Scripture itself. We are to go out and tell others about Jesus. In hearing the word, and in believing that word, people will be saved.

This is explicitly stated in various verses, such as Romans 10:14-17 and elsewhere. As this is so, and as this is God’s word, there should be no reason to believe any story where someone claims that the message was conveyed any other way. Visitations by Jesus, angels, or any other such thing are not now how God tells us about salvation. It does not come through dreams or visions. Rather, it comes through people getting out and doing what the word instructs us to do.

It is our right, our responsibility, and our honor to convey this word to others. Don’t suppose that God will “get the message to them some other way.” You are the means of getting it to them if you are obedient to the word. If not you, then who? Be willing to speak!

*Glorious God almighty, thank You for the simplicity of the gospel. We don’t have to learn long and difficult points of theology to direct others to You. We have a simple gospel that conveys the simple message that any can understand. Help us to be willing to speak it out to others so that they may be saved. To Your glory, we pray! Amen.*

**And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.**  
Acts 11:15

Peter has explained how he wound up at Cornelius' house in Caesarea. Once there, he now tells what transpired, saying, "And as I began to speak."

Though it is a very short explanation of the events in the house, it is not incorrect. The use of the word "begin" as recorded by Luke does not necessarily mean the starting of the action, but the action itself. In Luke 4:21, Jesus said, "And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'" Peter's discourse began immediately after Cornelius had finished explaining why he had summoned Peter. After Cornelius' words, it then said –

"Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. <sup>35</sup> But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. <sup>36</sup> The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all— <sup>37</sup> that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. <sup>39</sup> And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. <sup>40</sup> Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God *to be* Judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.'" Acts 10:34-43

Peter had no idea that the Spirit would come upon the believers while he was speaking. He was probably prepared to continue speaking for a lengthy span, but his words were cut short once the substance of the gospel had been presented and the hearts of those attending had accepted what was presented. Thus, to say, "And as I began to speak" is an all-inclusive statement of his short discourse. With that, he next says that "the Holy Spirit fell upon them."

This is exactly what is recorded in Acts 10. There it said, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word." In the middle of his

discourse, and certainly before he had finished his thoughts – and yet at the time when the substance of the gospel was given – the Holy Spirit fell upon those who were listening.

Peter's words noted the death, burial (implicitly stated because Jesus rose on the third day), and resurrection of Christ. This is the exact same gospel referred to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 and which Paul testifies is the same gospel preached by Peter and the other apostles (1 Corinthians 15:11). And the same effect occurred as that which came upon those in Jerusalem, just as Peter says, "as upon us at the beginning."

The reference is to the event of Acts 2:3. The believers were gathered together, and the Spirit sat upon each of them. With that, it then said, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." In Acts 10:46, it said, "For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God."

The same gift came upon the Gentiles as had come upon the Jews at Pentecost. The event occurred apart from any law observance or rite of the Jews such as circumcision, and apart from the act of baptism. It simply happened when they heard the gospel and believed. God had shown no favoritism of Jews over Gentiles. He graciously accepted these people apart from any work of any kind.

Life application: If one reads the substance of what occurred as is recorded in this short commentary on Acts 11:15 and then takes to heart what it means, several truly insidious heresies could be done away with in that person's thinking.

One is that of the need for law observance in order to be saved. Another is the notion that Jesus is not God. Another is that Jesus was not actually a human who could suffer. Another is that there are two gospels, one for Jews and one for Gentiles.

These false teachings have as their main goal to distract from the truth of who Jesus Christ is or to tear apart the scope and importance of what He has done. Each of them will lead people astray to a false Jesus and thus a false gospel. Be attentive to what people are saying, check their words against what is presented in Scripture, and be sure to make a right analysis of what is recorded there. And the only way you can do that is to continue to read and contemplate what Scripture says. Be sure to read your Bible!

*Heavenly Father, we are accepted because of the giving of Your Son for us. We stand in awe of the marvel of Your goodness toward us, and we thank You for the coming of*

*Jesus. May Your glorious name be praised forever and ever! Hallelujah to You for Your goodness toward us and Your kind care of us. Amen.*

**“Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ Acts 11:16**

Peter just noted that, even as he began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon the believers at Cornelius’ house. He then said, “as upon us at the beginning.” With that, he next says, “Then I remembered the word of the Lord.”

Peter had seen the salvation of these uncircumcised Gentiles. They heard the word, they obviously believed, and then the Holy Spirit fell upon them. This was the same as when the Jews had received the Spirit. As such, it is a confirmation that the fulfillment of the Feast of Pentecost is not merely a particular day in the calendar year, but a particular event that occurs in a believer’s life.

The fact that it first occurred on a particular day was to show the believers at that time that the feast had found its fulfillment in the giving of the Spirit. But this was not a one-time thing. It was the beginning of an ongoing event. Peter suddenly realized this, and so he continues with, “how He said.”

Peter is now remembering something that Jesus said, and he then processed the Lord’s words in a fuller and more complete way, which is, “John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

This comes from Jesus’ words just prior to the ascension –

“And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ *He said*, ‘you have heard from Me; <sup>5</sup> for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’” Acts 1:4, 5

Jesus was speaking to those gathered with Him at the Mount of Olives. This was to Jews who had followed Him and believed. They had seen His crucifixion and His resurrection. It was they who had received the Holy Spirit. Now, a group of people who were not Jews had likewise heard, believed, and been given the Holy Spirit in an outward display. Pentecost did not just apply to Jews then. Rather, its significance continued on with the acceptance of Gentiles as well.

But more, this was even without the baptism of repentance that came to Israel at the call of John. These Gentiles had not repented because there was nothing to repent of. They were never under the law, and they had never needed to turn back to Moses or turn back to the Messiah they had rejected. They simply heard the word concerning Jesus and they believed unto salvation. Peter will next explain the logical conclusion of this to those gathered before him.

Life application: The feasts detailed in Leviticus 23 are not “Jewish” feasts. They are also not “the feasts of Israel.” They are “the feasts of the Lord.” They are then laid out in order by the Lord –

The Sabbath.

The Passover.

\*Unleavened Bread.

Firstfruits.

\*Weeks (beginning with Pentecost).

Acclamation.

Atonement.

\*Tabernacles.

(\* indicates a pilgrim feast)

These deal with the work of the Lord and/or the state of the believer in Christ. The Sabbath is the rest offered to God’s people upon belief in Christ’s work (Hebrews 4:3). The Passover deals with the believer’s redemption from sin by the work of Jesus (1 Corinthians 5:7). Unleavened Bread anticipates the state of the believer in Christ because of Christ’s redemptive work (1 Corinthians 5:8). Firstfruits deals with the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20). Weeks anticipates the acceptance of believers despite their sinful nature (Acts 2:1, Romans 16:5, and 1 Corinthians 16:15). Acclamation anticipates the incarnation of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:48, 49). Atonement is fulfilled in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24, 25). And Tabernacles anticipates Christ dwelling in a “tent” of flesh and the believers’ walk in this life “tenting” with Him (2 Corinthians 5:7).

The only thing these feasts had to do with Israel were anticipatory annual celebrations of the Lord’s coming. Like all things under the law, they were shadows given so that when He came, the world could see Him and His work as the fulfillment of them (see Colossians 2:15, 16). In Christ is the substance, and in Christ is found the realization and fulfillment of what these annual celebrations only anticipated.

In other words, Peter is just now more fully realizing what people all over the world still fail to realize today. The work of Jesus Christ is a unified work that extends to all – Jews and Gentiles. There is one salvation and one gospel –

“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, <sup>15</sup> having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, <sup>16</sup> and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. <sup>17</sup> And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” Ephesians 2:14-18

If someone comes to you with any other doctrine, tell him, “Beat it heretic, I’m following Jesus, not the law and not just ‘one’ of His gospels, but His one and only gospel.”

*Lord God, it is so wonderful that all are saved in the same manner – by simple faith in the full, final, and forever work of Jesus Christ our Lord. Thank You that we do not have to observe the law, be circumcised, or do any other such thing. All we have to do is to believe in what Jesus has done. From there, help us to demonstrate our gratitude by being observant of His will. May it be so for all our days. Amen.*

**“If therefore God gave them the same gift as *He gave us* when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” Acts 11:17**

Peter had just recalled the words of Jesus concerning the giving of the Spirit. As those at the house of Cornelius have been given the Spirit, Peter asks a logical rhetorical question concerning that fact, beginning with, “If therefore God gave them the same gift.”

In other words, Peter acknowledges that the Spirit is a gift given by God. It is not something earned, nor is it something bestowed by the apostles. Those gathered in Acts 2 had received the gift apart from any merit. Those in the house of Cornelius had likewise only heard the gospel and they had obviously believed what was said. In their belief, the gift was given to them as well. Peter confirms this to those with him, saying, “as *He gave us* when we believed.”

Belief is the only condition set forth for the reception of the Spirit. It was true for the disciples, and it was true for the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. As God is the Source,



and as the requirement for bestowal of the Spirit had been met, then what the apostles may have thought about Gentiles in the past is now wholly irrelevant. God had accepted them and therefore the matter was settled. Peter then continues with a specific note about where the belief was directed, saying, “on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Anyone can believe anything. Nothing stops a person from believing that Buddha is the path to enlightenment. But this does not make it true. Someone may believe the world is flat, but if it is not true, then it is wasted faith. Incorrect belief is not always a major issue, but sometimes it is. A person may wake up believing it is Thursday when it is actually Wednesday. If his routine doesn't change between those days, it doesn't really matter. But a person may believe a bottle of water is safe, drink it, and get a serious intestinal infection.

In the case of restoration with God, one's belief must be properly directed. If it is, then apart from any merit of words, societal class, wealth, or any other distinction restoration is made. All other aspects of the person's life are irrelevant. Cornelius and those with him met God's standard for reception of the Spirit and God gave them the Spirit. The matter was settled. Because of this, Peter finishes with, “who was I that I could withstand God?”

This is the point of the discourse. In verses 11:2 and 11:3, it said –

“And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, <sup>3</sup> saying, ‘You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!’”

Peter carefully explained what happened, finishing his words with a logical rhetorical question about the matter. In essence, he is saying to them, “What on earth could it matter if I stayed with these Gentiles and ate with them? God has accepted them. Am I going to fight against that? Not a chance.”

Life application: So, who is it that baptized the believers with the Spirit? In Matthew 3, John the Baptist said –

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Matthew 3:11

Now in Acts 11, Peter said it was God who did this. But Jesus gives more explicit meaning to that saying –

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”  
-John 14:26

And yet, Jesus then says –

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” John 15:26

What is obvious from these and other verses is that the giving of the Spirit is a result of the work of the Father and the Son and that they are distinct despite being one. But more, reviewing statements about the Spirit elsewhere in Scripture tells us the same thing about Him. There is a distinction clearly made between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And yet, they are each fully God.

This is the doctrine of the Trinity. It is not something to be taken lightly. If this doctrine is taught in Scripture, and if it defines the very nature and workings of God, then it is to be heeded carefully. And more, as this is the presentation of God as it is revealed in Scripture, and as He is the One who accepts people by restoring them to Himself, then we should consider this carefully as well.

First, John tells us that if we do not accept the Son, we also do not have the Father (see 1 John 2:23). This is not merely speaking about the humanity of Jesus. It is speaking of Him as the God/Man. Logically, if we deny this, then we also do not have the Spirit because the Spirit comes from the Father and/or the Son (as evidenced above). And if one does not have the Spirit, then he is not restored to God.

Secondly, though we may not like someone very much, we need to remember that if he does have the Son, he also has the Father. And if this is so, then God has accepted him by sealing him with the Spirit. As such, we should not attempt to fight against God by rejecting that person. If God has accepted him, we need to consider that and accept him as well.

But a note of warning from John is also given –

“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup> If

anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; <sup>11</sup> for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

-2 John 1:9-11

The doctrine of Christ is that God has united with human flesh in order to redeem man. The Father is God, and the Son is God. They are distinct and yet they are One. This also extends to the Spirit even though it is not specifically stated by John in these verses. One who does not accept the doctrine of Christ does not have God. As such by greeting him, we are validating his incorrect belief. In doing so, you are sharing in that person's evil deeds. There should be no fellowship with such a person.

Be attentive to these things. God has set forth who He is and what His nature is like so that we can avoid error. Let us hold fast to the truth of God in Christ and not be swayed by those who have a perverse agenda through distorting God's stated revelation of Himself.

*Lord God, You have made the gospel so very simple, and yet it is hardly proclaimed correctly in the world today. How much more is this the case with the weightier doctrines laid out in Scripture? May we be carefully attentive to Your word and how it reveals You to us. Help us in our understanding and give us hearts that are directed to a fuller and more complete understanding of who You are. Amen.*

**When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.” Acts 11:18**

Peter just noted that the Gentiles had been given the same gift as the Jews by simple belief. Because of this, he asked how he could withstand God by not accepting them. The obvious but unstated answer was that he could not. As such, it now says, “When they heard these things, they became silent.”

The clause in the Greek begins with an aorist participle and a conjunction, “And they, having heard these things, became silent.” In other words, they held their tongues in accusation against Peter. They had accused him of wrongdoing in verse 11:3, saying, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” That is what they now are silent over. Because of how Peter described the events, and especially with the note concerning the coming of the Spirit upon the Gentiles, there could no longer be any accusation against Peter. He stood innocent of any transgression. As such, and in this state of understanding, it next says, “and they glorified God.”

The verb is now aorist. Once they ceased their accusation, they next broke forth in acknowledgment of the works of God. What else could they do? The Gentiles had received the Spirit in the middle of Peter's words, cutting off the need for anything else to be said. The simplicity of the gospel had been conveyed, the Gentiles believed what they heard, and the Spirit came upon them. The work of Jesus Christ was proven to be all-sufficient for the conversion of a person who had never spent a moment of his existence living out the Law of Moses. The fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah had come to pass –

“Indeed He says,  
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,  
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,  
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Isaiah 49:6

This is openly noted by them in their next words, saying, “Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.” It must be remembered what transpired at the house of Cornelius. Peter spoke, the Gentiles heard, the Gentiles believed (with no record of them saying a single word), and the Holy Spirit came down upon them. That is all that Luke recorded, and that is all that God, therefore, wants us to know.

It also needs to be remembered what the word “repentance” means. It signifies “to change the mind.” As such, the words “repentance to life” mean a changing of the mind leading to salvation (eternal life as noted in John 3:16). The speaking forth of the gospel, when accepted, leads to a changing of the mind about God. If these believers thought that they needed to do good stuff in order to be saved, they no longer needed to believe that. If they believed that praying to Artemis was what was needed, they changed their mind about that. And so on.

The word “repentance” here does not mean “stopping sinning and making oneself right.” It means “to change the mind” and nothing more. Until these now-saved people are instructed on what it means to be pleasing to God, they cannot change in the right direction. One must first come to believe in the finished work of Jesus and be saved. He is what we change our minds to accept. He is God's provision for restoration. This is what Peter conveyed to the house of Cornelius in Acts 10:43, saying, “To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins.”

These Gentiles changed their mind about God and what He expects, they believed in Jesus as the One to provide restoration, and they were saved. Deal done.

Life application: The gospel is an amazingly simple thing that God has laid out for us. And yet, it is one of the most mis-explained or totally ignored things imaginable. Paul details in 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4 –

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

How can we add to that and not cause damage to the message? We cannot. Let us present this life-changing news in the simple form in which it is presented in Scripture. We can talk around it as Peter did in Acts 10 by providing other truths about Jesus, but we must clearly provide the substance of the gospel without addition or deletion. It is by faith in this provision of God that man is saved. Let us thank God for the simplicity of this glorious message!

*Yes, Lord God, how thankful we are to You for what You have done for us. You have saved us through the giving of Your Son. He died to pay our sin debt, He was buried, and He rose again. All glory to You for this wonderful word of restoration. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.** Acts 11:19

With the matter of Gentile inclusion clearly established and settled based on Peter’s words to those in Jerusalem, the narrative now takes on a new and significant direction. The direction and focus of Acts will now begin to head out into the world beyond the borders of Israel and, eventually, the gospel will predominantly be seen to go forth to the Gentiles. In order to reveal this, the account will also go back to events that occurred in previous chapters so that the narrative catches up with events that occurred there, such as in Acts 7, 8, and 9.

With that understood, the words begin with, “Now those who were scattered.” This takes the reader back to Acts 8:1 –

“Now Saul was consenting to his death.

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

This was referring to the events that took place among the Jews and it occurred “after the persecution that arose over Stephen.”

This goes back even further, to Acts 7 and the account of Stephen’s stoning. The persecution that is recorded in Acts 8:1 is based upon that. Also, rather than “persecution,” the Greek word here signifies “tribulation.” It is a wholly different word than that used in Acts 8:1. The persecution led to tribulation. Because of this, these Jews were not only scattered within the borders of Israel, but they continued on and “traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.”

The first location, Phoenicia, is introduced here. The name is believed to come from the Greek word *phoinix*, meaning a palm tree, most especially the date palm. Albert Barnes describes the location, saying, “Phoenice, or Phoenicia, was a province of Syria, which in its largest sense comprehended a narrow strip of country lying on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, and extending from Antioch to the borders of Egypt. But Phoenice Proper extended only from the cities of Laodicea to Tyre, and included only the territories of Tyre and Sidon. This country was called sometimes simply ‘Canaan.’”

The next location, Cyprus, is also introduced here, although the name of the inhabitants was mentioned in Acts 4:36. The origin of the name is uncertain. Again, Barnes describes it, saying, “An island off the coast of Asia Minor, in the Mediterranean Sea.”

Finally, this is also the introduction of Antioch. Albert Barnes again describes the place, saying, “There were two cities of this name, one situated in Pisidia in Asia Minor (see Acts 13:14); the other, referred to here, was situated on the Orontes River, and was long, the capital of Syria. It was built by Seleucus Nicanor, and was called Antioch in honor of his father Antiochus. It was founded in 301 b.c. It is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but is several times mentioned in the Apocrypha and in the New Testament. It was long the most powerful city of the East, and was inferior only to Seleucia and Alexandria. It was famous for the fact that the right of citizenship was conferred by Seleucus on the Jews as well as the Greeks and Macedonians, so that here they had the privilege of worship in their own way without molestation. It is probable that the Christians would be regarded merely as a sect of Jews, and would be here suffered to celebrate their worship without interruption.”

With these locations noted, the verse finishes with the thought that those scattered were “preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.” Although true to some extent, this is not so much because they “had the common prejudices of the Jews, that the offers of salvation were made only to the Jews” (Barnes), but that they probably had no idea that Gentiles would even be included in God’s offer of Christ Jesus.

In other words, it is true that the Jews had these prejudices, but without even knowing something is available to others, those prejudices would not even arise. Peter found out that Gentiles could be included, and he set aside any such prejudices. These Jews were as of yet uninformed as to what God was going to do for the Gentiles. Therefore, they simply went about telling their own fellow Jews that the Messiah had come.

Life application: The narrative in Acts is marvelously structured to show how events unfolded, but the events are placed in a manner that allows us to go forward with certain events and then go back to older events to see how other things occurred while those first set of recorded events were happening.

In this, we can get a marvelous sense of how the narrative is simultaneously unfolding in several directions. As you read Acts, consider such things and think about why each section is placed where it is. Like all of Scripture, God is slowly and methodically revealing to us what His plans are for the people of the world. At the same time, He is showing us why trouble has come upon Israel during this dispensation and where He would lead things during their time of exile.

Everything is carefully and meticulously placed to help us see how the great story of man’s redemption through the Person and work of Jesus Christ has come about, is coming about, and will continue to come about. Luke’s record of Acts is a wonderful part of this. If we pay heed to how he has laid things out, we can get a marvelous sense of the structure of this beautiful plan.

*Lord God, thank You for the careful detail You have placed in Your word to help us know and understand why things are the way they are. You have set a plan for man’s redemption, and it is so beautifully and methodically detailed for us to see. Give us insight into Your word so that we can more fully grasp every nuance that You have placed there for us to understand what is going on. Thank You, O God. Amen.*

**But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. Acts 11:20**

The last verse spoke of those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen. They traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. While they went, they preached, but only to the Jews. However, it now says, “But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene.”

In other words, these men had been in Jerusalem, but when Stephen was stoned and the great time of tribulation came against the saints, some of the people who were scattered to the cities previously mentioned were Jews who originally came from Cyprus and Cyrene.

As such, they would speak the native languages and they would be able to effectively relay the word about Jesus to people in those areas. And more, they would be more comfortable having conversations with the native people, including Gentiles. Having noted that, it next says, “who, when they had come to Antioch.”

This is referring to the same location named Antioch in the previous verse. These Jews who spoke either Greek or the native language of the area (or both) had returned home or were in an area where they could easily converse with the local population. With that noted, the next words are highly debated, and the meaning depends on which Greek texts are correct. It says they “spoke to the Hellenists.”

The issue is that some manuscripts say Ἑλληνιστάς (Hellénistés) meaning Greek-speaking Jews while others say Ἕλληνας (Hellénes) meaning Gentile Greeks. As noted, the previous verse said that those scattered spoke to the Jews only. The words of this verse are set in contrast to that thought. And so, it could be assumed that these people were speaking to the Gentiles. This is how Vincent’s Word Studies takes it –

“The express object of the narrative has been to describe the admission of Gentiles into the church. There would have been nothing remarkable in these men preaching to Hellenists who had long before been received into the church, and formed a large part of the church at Jerusalem. It is better to follow the rendering of A. V. and Rev., though the other reading has the stronger MS. evidence. Note, also, the contrast with the statement in Acts 11:19, to the Jews only. There is no contrast between Jews and Hellenists, since Hellenists are included in the general term Jews.”

Albert Barnes agrees and even says, “The connection would lead us to suppose that they had heard of what had been done by Peter, and that, imitating his example, they preached the gospel now to the Gentiles also.”



However, this is an incorrect idea because the account is backing up to the dispersion that took place after Stephen's stoning. The event with Peter (Acts 10) came later in time even though it is recorded earlier in this passage in Acts 11. The two accounts are now meeting up after both events have occurred –

Stephen was stoned resulting in persecution and a scattering of the people. After this:

- Some of those scattered went as far as Antioch and spread the good news.
- The events of Chapters 8, 9, and 10 (and Peter's explanation in Acts 11) were ongoing at the same time.

As such, this does not mean that these Jews who were scattered didn't speak to the Gentiles, which is the matter in question, but that the reasoning used by Barnes is incorrect.

John Gill, on the other hand, says, "which when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians; or Hellenist Jews, who were born and brought up in Greece, and spoke the Greek language; though the Alexandrian copy, and the Syriac version, read 'Greeks', as if they were native Greeks, and properly Gentiles, to whom these ministers spoke the word of the Lord; but the former seems most likely."

A logical argument is made for either rendering, but it appears that without the knowledge of Cornelius' conversion, these Jews would have been unlikely to speak to Gentiles directly. In fact, Paul is sought out by Barnabas in Acts 11:25. From there, he and Barnabas travel quite a bit as is recorded in Acts 13, but nothing is said of preaching to Gentiles until Acts 13:42. Before that, only interaction with Jews is made. It is in Acts 13:44-48 that this is recorded –

"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. <sup>45</sup> But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. <sup>46</sup> Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> For so the Lord has commanded us:

"I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,  
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

<sup>48</sup> Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."

As this is the case, the most likely translation now in Acts 11 is that this is referring to the Greek-speaking Jews, not the Gentiles. In other words, the Jews are given every chance possible to come to Christ as a nation. The majority of those in Israel had rejected the word. From there, the account will show that the majority of Jews outside of Israel will also reject the word. At that time, the account will show that the Gentiles, in contrast to the Jews, will come flooding to the good news of Jesus, setting up the Gentile-led church for the long period that has continued since. As for now, the verse finishes with the note that these people of the scattering caused by Stephen's stoning were "preaching the Lord Jesus."

The words more precisely read, "proclaiming good news - the Lord Jesus" (YLT). The word is going out from Israel to the Jews of the diaspora. This appears to be the main point of the narrative at this time.

As noted above, it is believed by many scholars that this is speaking of a conversion of the Gentiles, and that is a possibility. However, the internal markings of what has occurred and what will continue to occur appear to show that it is only the Greek-speaking Jews that are being referred to at this point. Either way, the main point is that word is going forth outside of the borders of Israel.

Life application: One of the key things to take away from these words is that God used the stoning of Stephen to expand the preaching of the gospel. Surely Stephen would approve of this, knowing that the ending of his life would be a way of bringing many others to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

We should be willing to have this same heart for the lost. How far are we willing to go in order that others might be saved? This is something we should ask ourselves. Our temporary afflictions, whatever they may be, can be used for great gain in the spreading of the gospel. So, let's look for ways to have this come about. It is the most important thing that can occur in another person's life. Without this good news, there is only bad news ahead for them.

Let us consider this always. Stephen would certainly agree. He would tell you, "Don't worry about this life. God has a plan that is so marvelous you just won't believe it. Trust Him and He will do great things with you and for you."

*Lord God, use us now while we are here! May we be vessels ready to be poured out in whatever way You choose for the furtherance of Your good news. Help us to see the lost*

*and to have pity on them. And then prompt us to act so that they might hear and respond while there is time. To Your glory, we pray this. Amen.*

**And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.** Acts 11:21

The previous verse noted that those of the scattering that occurred after Stephen's stoning who were from Cyprus and Cyrene "spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus." As noted then, there is a dispute as to whether this was referring to Greek-speaking Jews or Gentiles. What seems likely is that it was speaking of Greek-speaking Jews. Either way, however, it now says, "And the hand of the Lord was with them."

This is referring to those who preached about Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and they were able to effectively communicate the good news, bringing others to salvation. That is explicitly noted with the words, "and a great number believed and turned to the Lord."

Whether Greek-speaking Jew or Gentile, there was an extensive harvest of those who believed in Antioch. The church grew quickly because of the efforts of those who were a part of the scattering.

Life application: There are many Hebraisms brought forward from the Old Testament into the New. In reading and understanding the Old, the New is much livelier and much more easily understood. An example of this is the term "the hand of the Lord." This is found many times in the Old Testament where the "hand" is equated to power. In this case, it is the effective power of the Lord to bring about a change.

An example of this is found in Exodus 14:31 –

"and Israel seeth the great hand with which Jehovah hath wrought against the Egyptians, and the people fear Jehovah, and remain stedfast in Jehovah, and in Moses His servant" (YLT)

This is translated by others as –

"Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses."

There are an innumerable number of such terms used in Scripture to help us see how the Bible portrays things. The finger of God, the arm of the Lord, walking in the way of the Lord, and on and on. Such terms, when understood, can help us to more clearly see how God is revealing things to us.

As you go through the Bible next time, maybe take the time to highlight such things. As seen in the translation of the NKJV, some of these Hebraisms are rendered in order to accommodate our understanding, but many are left equivalent to the Hebrew idiom. So, pay heed to them and think about why God chose to express Himself in these various ways. This is a great tool to help you understand the Bible more clearly.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for Your precious word. It is a light to our understanding. It is a beacon to call us to You. It is a guide for our walk in this life. And it is a book of hope and joy for us to revel in. Indeed, O God, thank You for Your most precious word. Amen.*

**Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. Acts 11:22**

Verses 19-21 spoke of the preaching of the word in Antioch. As noted, there is a debate about whether the word was preached to Gentiles or only to Greek-speaking Jews. Either way, the previous verse said that a great number believed and turned to the Lord. With that stated, it now says, "Then news of these things."

This is referring to the expansion of the church even as far as Antioch. This still does not answer the question as to who was evangelized, but it was a source of great news either way because word of it "came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem."

Be it Jew or Gentile, the fact is that the word had gone out and was being multiplied outside of the borders of Israel. This is what is known and what has been conveyed to the people's ears in Jerusalem. With this good tidings having come to them, they then responded, as it next says, "and they sent out Barnabas."

Barnabas was introduced into the Bible in Acts 4:36 where it said several things about him that would make him an obvious choice to go. First, his name means Son of Encouragement. His real name being Joses, tells us that he was called Barnabas because it fit his character. Thus, he would be well-suited to the task of encouraging those believers he encountered.

Secondly, he was a Levite. By nature of their tribe, Levites were teachers of the law and those who were set aside to give instruction and help to others within the Jewish community. Therefore, he would be well-suited to such work outside of Israel. And this is especially so because it also says he was from Cyprus. As such, he would certainly be fluent in Greek and the native tongue of the area as well.

And so, it was he who was selected “to go as far as Antioch.” The wording means that he was not just sent “to” Antioch, but “until” Antioch. In other words, he wasn’t just sent to one location, but to wherever the reports had come back from. Those who were scattered told of Jesus here and there. Barnabas was chosen to go to those various locations and encourage and strengthen them, as will be seen in the words to come.

Life application: One of the things about evangelism is that it needs to be followed up with both instruction and encouragement. If someone was traveling and went to a church or a crusade meeting where he heard the gospel, he may respond by believing and receiving the Lord. However, if there is no follow-up, he may return to his hometown and settle back into his old life, never becoming productive in his salvation.

Or he may assume all churches are the same and go to an Episcopal church where homosexuals are ordained as priests and think that is normal. He may even stop at the local Jehovah’s Witnesses and get led astray by their nonsense. Hence, it is always good to follow up with those who have received the Lord and instruct them to get into the Bible and read it. Also, they should attend a sound church that accepts the Bible as the literal word of God.

Barnabas was sent out to further instruct those who had accepted the message of the Lord, ensuring that what they heard was correct and in accord with what is sound and proper. If this is not done, a person can get so far from their moment of salvation that he actually can forget he was saved. Take time to read 2 Peter 1:1-9 to see how this can come about. Verse 9 explicitly says that it is so. However, the good news is that God does not forget. The salvation of that individual is not in question as is also perfectly clear from verse 9.

*Lord God, help us to be responsible to tell others about the saving message concerning Jesus. And Lord, help us to follow up with that by telling the important precept that those who call on Jesus should learn what that means, growing in Your word and in a closer relationship with Him each day. May we be responsible in this. Amen.*

**When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. Acts 11:23**

In the previous verse, Barnabas was sent out to go as far as Antioch. With that, it next says, “When he came and had seen the grace of God.”

The meaning is clear. These were people who were once unsaved but who had come to believe the gospel. The grace of God through the giving of Jesus had been realized in them and they were now reconciled to Him forever. Because of this, “he was glad.”

As seen in verse 20, it is unclear whether these were Gentiles or Greek-speaking Jews. Other than just one word which varies in Greek texts, it is only an assumption that this is speaking of Gentiles. As such, it would be unwise to say “Gentile conversion” was the reason for Barnabas’ rejoicing.

Rather, his rejoicing is in the conversion of people outside of the borders of Israel, simply through the preaching of the word. Whether they are Jews or Gentiles, the conversion itself is the source of rejoicing. In this state, it next says, “and encouraged them all.”

The verb is imperfect, showing its ongoing nature. It more appropriately says that he “was encouraging them all.” The translation of this word mostly varies between “encourage” and “exhort.” In this case, translating it as “encourage” captures the thought because a pun is being made.

In Acts 4:36, he was called “Son of Encouragement” using the Greek noun *paraklésis*. Here, he is said to encourage them using the verb form of the same word, *parakaleó*. This was certainly one reason why he was sent in the first place, and it shows that he lived up to the name he was given. With that in mind, it next notes that his ongoing encouragement for them all was “that with purpose of heart.”

The word translated as “purpose” has been seen three times so far, in Matthew 12:4, Mark 2:26, and Luke 6:4. Each time, it was used to describe the consecrated bread (the showbread) set before the Lord at the tabernacle/temple. The idea here is that Barnabas was setting something before them as an object to be attained.

He was fully aware of people’s tendencies to become idle in life, be it in going to work, keeping up the roof on a house so it remained strong, or pursuing holiness before the Lord. Unless man is vigilant in tending to things, those things can get overtaken by other

matters. In no time at all, doing what is right and/or necessary can be overlooked or even forgotten.

Because of this, Barnabas' encouragement was that "they should continue with the Lord." The Bible is filled with failure in this regard. Saul, the first king of Israel, started well, but he failed to continue with the Lord. The same is true with Solomon and other kings as well. And the same is true with Israel as a nation. Time and time again, they failed to set the Lord before them, and they suffered because of it.

So pronounced was this that the proper knowledge of how to serve him was entirely forgotten –

"Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.' And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. <sup>9</sup>So Shaphan the scribe went to the king, bringing the king word, saying, 'Your servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of those who do the work, who oversee the house of the LORD.' <sup>10</sup>Then Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, 'Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.' And Shaphan read it before the king." 2 Kings 22:8-10

The priests of Israel, those responsible for maintaining and teaching the Law of Moses, as well as the king of Israel who was supposed to write out his own copy of the law and read it all the days of his life (Deuteronomy 17:18-20), didn't even know the law existed. They had failed to be attentive and to set the Lord before themselves. As such, the nation went into one time of apostasy after another. Eventually, they were exiled. After their exile, they failed to see Jesus for who He is, and they were destroyed and exiled again.

Barnabas was there to encourage them to not allow their new faith in the Lord to get set aside, but to hold fast to it all their days.

Life application: Solomon, who wrote out the Proverbs, said –

"Because of laziness the building decays,  
And through idleness of hands the house leaks." Ecclesiastes 10:18

People may be attentive in one area, but lazy in another. But priorities must be set and maintained. It is more important to be attentive to the house than it is to be attentive to football scores. However, it is more important to be attentive to the Lord and His word

than anything else. We all must set our priorities and then determine to follow through with maintaining them.

If we fail in this, we will not lose our salvation, but we may be the cause of our own family members never even coming to the Lord. What a sad day it will be when someone who is saved at a young age and then fails to follow through with it finds that his own children died apart from the Lord because of his negligence.

Let us be wise and consider our state before the Lord and then set Him as our chief priority all the days of our lives. Eternity is forever and it begins right now, so be attentive to the long term, even while walking in this short, futile world.

*Glorious Heavenly Father, today we pray that You will keep us from backsliding or simply walking away from the commitment we made to You. We are prone to such things, so we ask You to personally intervene in our lives, reminding us of our duty to You above all else. May we be wise in this short walk before You. Amen.*

**For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Acts 11:24**

The previous verses referred to Barnabas' travels to go as far as Antioch and build up those who had made a commitment to Jesus. It noted that he encouraged them all "that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord." Now, it continues with, "For he was a good man."

The word used to describe him is *agathos*. It signifies a general goodness in something or someone, such as in a good tree, a good gift, or a good person. It is that which is intrinsically good. In Matthew 19:17, Jesus used this word to argue against it in comparison to God –

"Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

Jesus said this in response to a question regarding eternal life. If someone merits eternal life, then he must be intrinsically good in comparison to the standard which grants eternal life. In other places, such as in Luke 23:50, the same word is used concerning a person to indicate a goodness in him that is in accord with a particular standard. Hence, it is no contradiction to say that there is "none good" in comparison to meriting eternal



life while saying there is a person who is good and righteous because he acts in some particular manner.

In the case of Barnabas, he is noted as a good man “full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” He is an encourager, a good thing. He is filled with the Holy Spirit, a good thing. He is filled with faith, a good thing. Having been saved by Jesus, he is also deemed as good in comparison to the standard of eternal life. This is not because he has merited it, but because Christ has merited it for him. The standard of eternal life, Christ, is imputed to him.

The reason for this high compliment, something not especially common in Acts, is probably to show that the argument between Barnabas and Paul that will be recorded in Acts 15 is not because of a flaw in Barnabas’ character, but it was simply a negative part of human interaction that is unavoidable at times.

In compiling the book of Acts, Luke is writing out a history of what has already taken place. Hence, his note concerning Barnabas now was certainly written even after the events of Acts 15 occurred. He is being careful to ensure that the character of Barnabas is fully established as that of a good man even before he introduces the negative events that have already happened between him and Paul. This is especially needed because Paul is the main focus of the narrative after that.

Establishing Barnabas’ character in a good light early on is important because of this. As a final note of the success of the ongoing ministry, it next says, “And a great many people were added to the Lord.”

The words are in the singular – “And a large multitude was added to the Lord.” This would be in addition to those mentioned in verse 11:21, which said, “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” With those who traveled spreading the good news, and with Barnabas following up and encouraging those who were saved, the numbers continued to increase so that there was a sizeable multitude who had come to know about God’s salvation in Jesus Christ.

Life application: It is common for people to piously repeat Jesus’ words concerning being “good” from Matthew 19:17 and deny that what has been said about someone being a “good person” is true. But as noted above, goodness is a comparative thing. Therefore, the question should be, “What is the word ‘good’ being used for?”

If it is to compare a person to God, then the obvious answer is, “There is none who is good.” Paul says in Romans 3:12 –

“They have all turned aside;  
They have together become unprofitable;  
There is none who does good, no, not one.”

What is the context of Paul’s words? He is making a comparison to God, such as in Romans 3:5, where he says, “But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say?” All have sinned, so in comparison to God, we are not “good.” But more, Paul is citing the Psalms which say –

“The fool has said in his heart,  
*‘There is no God.’*  
They are corrupt,  
They have done abominable works,  
There is none who does good.” Psalm 14:1

David was writing about the atheist (the fool has said... there is no God). Paul cites this verse, along with other verses, to make a point about the law versus grace (as in Romans 3:19, 20). Further, the word Paul uses in Romans 3:12, *chréstotés* [good], is completely different than that found in Acts when describing Stephen. It gives the sense of “meeting real needs in God’s way.”

Unfortunately, Calvinists take Paul’s continued words of Romans 3 and apply them across the board to all people in all situations and come to the illogical conclusion that man does not have free will to choose Christ, something completely contradictory to what the Bible says elsewhere.

What is good? It is a comparative word that needs to be taken in its proper context. Be sure to think about what is being conveyed when someone speaks about goodness. If someone is being likened to God or absolute moral perfection, then be sure to correct their thinking. However, if they are making a point about someone being good in relation to a certain task, a set standard of measure, or something similar, then the words are wholly acceptable and shouldn’t be dismissed based on a verse that has been taken out of its intended context.

*Glorious Heavenly Father, thank You for the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. Without that, we could never come into Your presence. But because He has*

*accomplished all things according to Your standard, we can come before You. In Christ, our righteousness is from You, and from You alone. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. Acts 11:25**

The description of Barnabas as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, has been made. It then noted that a great multitude had been added to the Lord. With that stated, it next says, “Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.”

With the work at Antioch showing such great success, Barnabas’ attention is next directed to Saul. Ellicott notes that it “indicates the assurance that Saul would approve of the work which had been going on at Antioch, and the confident belief that he [Barnabas] was the right person to direct and organise it.”

The idea of Saul (Paul) needing to approve of the work at Antioch makes no sense. Telling people about Jesus is what the disciples were instructed to do. Whether Saul approved of that or not is irrelevant. Further, and has already been noted, it cannot be satisfactorily determined if the Gentiles had even been evangelized in Antioch at this point. That is wholly dependent on the change of one word in various manuscripts.

What seems likely is that Barnabas simply extended his efforts to where Paul was located. He was sent out to encourage and strengthen those who had been scattered after the stoning of Stephen. Saul had been sent away by the apostles because of his own persecution by the Jews (Acts 9:30). Therefore, it should be expected that he would search for Paul, just as he sought out the others who had been sharing the message of Jesus.

This seems more likely based on the word Luke uses and which is translated as “search.” It is a word only found elsewhere in the account in Luke 2 where Jesus was temporarily lost to Joseph and Mary –

“When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know *it*; <sup>44</sup> but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day’s journey, and sought Him among *their* relatives and acquaintances. <sup>45</sup> So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him.” Luke 2:43-45

The word signifies “to search up and down.” It is a word, *anazéteó*, that carries with it the idea of difficulty in the task. Barnabas’ mission was to seek out these people of the scattering and to encourage them in their sharing of the news about Jesus. Having no idea about Saul’s status or condition, he set out to find him and see how he was faring. Rather than seeking Saul’s approval, he is seeking Saul’s effectiveness in evangelism in the area he had gone to.

The Pulpit Commentary notes that this occurred ten years after the crucifixion. It is uncertain how that date was determined, but they continue with a note that “From Seleucia to the port of Tarsus would be about a twelve hours' sail; or, by land, a journey of about eighty miles would bring him to Tarsus from Antioch.” Barnabas was on a mission to find Saul and so he either traveled by ship or by land to find him.

Life application: Barnabas was sent forth to encourage others in their efforts. The narrative shows that he not only did so but that he was quite effective in the job set before him. Being a good encourager is a noble trait, but there is a truth that lies behind it as well. Solomon says –

“As iron sharpens iron,  
So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” Proverbs 27:17

Regardless as to Barnabas’ ability to encourage, there needs to be someone to encourage as well. Only when the two meet up can the strengthening take place. And so, as you go out today, think of someone you haven’t talked to in a while and give him a call or an email (or even stop by for a visit) and provide a bit of encouragement. It may be just what this person needs. If so, it isn’t going to happen unless the two of you come together.

And the benefit of this is that just as you will sharpen that particular person, you will be sharpened in turn. Such things will naturally go in two directions at the same time. Give it a try and you will find that you are also a recipient of the very encouragement you intended to pass on to another.

*Lord God, time is short, and days are often filled with busy work. But there are things we can do that will bless and benefit others if we just take the time to reach out. And so, Lord, help us to extend ourselves out to people who come to mind, letting them know that they are appreciated and also encouraging them in their lives. Help us in this so that we will be people of encouragement to those who may need it. Amen.*

**And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Acts 11:26**

The previous verse showed that Barnabas had departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. Now, the narrative continues with, “And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.”

Remembering that Saul (Paul) was sent out of Jerusalem by the apostles, Tarsus was not the place where he otherwise would have been. They may have said something like, “When things have quieted down, we will send for you.” As such, he remained in Tarsus. Being a tent maker, he could pull up stakes without any trouble and move on in a moment.

Therefore, once Barnabas had come and told him of the work being done in Antioch, Saul would have been in full agreement to join him and return with him. It might seem odd that Paul would just drop everything and head off to Antioch, but the matter makes complete sense when it is looked at from this perspective. With that understood, it next says, “So it was that for a whole year.”

Again, being a tent maker meant that Saul could work anywhere. Being a Roman, he could travel with complete freedom, and he had nothing restraining him. And so, to leave Tarsus and move for an entire year to Antioch would be as simple as going on a five-day vacation. With the size of the city and the large number of people there, it would be a great place to continue with both evangelism and discipleship.

And more, at some point during that year, it is likely that the events of Acts 10 and 11 took place, and so even if it was only Greek-speaking Jews that were told about Jesus to start with, eventually it would become known that the Gentiles had also been converted, receiving the Holy Spirit. As such, it next says that during this year “they assembled with the church.”

Rather than “with,” the preposition is “in.” However, this does not mean a particular building. That is not the sense or meaning of the word “church.” The word simply means “an assembly.” It refers to the people, not an edifice. Translating the word as “assembly” gives a more literal sense. As such, it would read, “they gathered together in the assembly.” In this gathering, they “taught a great many people.”

One can see that Saul immediately became a leader in the instruction of the people. His background as a Pharisee would have made him unusually suited to such a position. He

had all of the theology of the Scriptures carefully sorted out in his mind so that when Christ came, and when he had put his biases against Christ away, he could clearly see how Jesus was the fulfillment of everything that had been spoken of.

His instruction would have been an invaluable part of the growth and maturity of the assembly at Antioch. His depth of understanding may have been the exact reason Barnabas specifically traveled to find him. Barnabas may have had questions arise that he wasn't suited to answer. When such an occasion came about, he may have said, "I know just the guy to answer this." It is all speculation, but it fits with the narrative. With this noted, it next says, "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."

The word translated as "called," *chrématizó*, is not a usual word for naming someone. It gives the sense of transacting business or making an answer. HELPS Word Studies defines it as "'a legal agreement for transacting business' – properly, to admonish on the basis of a valid standard (what has true worth)." To get the sense of its meaning, Paul uses it in Romans 7 when referring to an adulterous wife –

"So then if, while *her* husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man." Romans 7:3

As such, the word "designated" gives the appropriate sense. Hence, "And the disciples were first designated as Christians in Antioch." The word "Christian" simply means a follower of Christ. With this understanding, it is often held that Luke means that the term was used as a sort of pejorative, such as, "Look at those stupid 'Christians.'"

Hence, the idea is that the term is one which was only considered lowly and derogatory, even disgracefully when used by others. This is an unfounded claim. Seeing the three uses of the word will clarify what the intent is –

"And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." Acts 11:26

"Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a Christian.'"  
-Acts 26:28

"Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter." 1 Peter 4:16

There is nothing to suggest that the term here is used exclusively by those outside of the body of believers. It is simply a statement of fact. Just as today a Presbyterian is identified as such, and just as a Baptist is identified as such. It is true that those outside may have used the term in a negative way – “Look at those holy-roller ‘Christians’ over there.” However, to a believer in the Greek-speaking world, the name is the only logical and proper title.

The word *Christos* is transliterated into “Christ,” and it has the same meaning as Messiah. Both mean “Anointed One.” As the majority of believers moved from Hebrew-speaking to Greek-speaking Jews, and even Gentiles, such as would be the case in Antioch, the title “Christian,” or “Christ-follower,” would naturally and gladly be used. There would be no hint of derision, but only a welcome bearing of the word.

For those on the outside who were not at enmity with the believers, it would be a name to be used without either derision or exaltation. And for those who disliked believers, it would probably have been a title of derision. This is how any name is given. For a family – “Those ‘Garretts’ are a bunch of yahoos.” For a nationality, “I really respect those ‘Americans.’” For a type of car – “A ‘Ford?’ No way Jose! That means ‘Found On Road, Dead.’ I would never own a ‘Ford!’”

The use of the word would bear either a positive or negative stress based on who was using it. To understand this even more clearly, one can think of the word used today that has the Hebrew equivalent, Messianic. With the increase in Jewish believers since the 1960s, the term “Christian,” which has been used as a pejorative by the Jewish people for the past two millennia, is no longer a suitable word to identify oneself with among the Jews. Therefore, to remove any negative connotations, the term “Messianic” has been adopted.

This word bears the same meaning as “Christian,” but being in the Hebrew language, it does not carry with it the same negative connotation by most. And yet, there are times when it is used negatively, such as, “Those ‘Messianics’ are nothing but trouble.” Despite this, it is a term used by believing Jews as a badge of honor.

Life application: The word “church” in Scripture does not mean a building. Far too often, however, that is exactly what comes up in our modern thinking – both within the body and by those outside of it. But the church is a body of believers that meets together, not a building. Hence, one can be in a church while on the beach, while in a gymnasium, or even attending online with others. The church is comprised of those who are gathering.

Remembering this will help us to have our focus on the One who has brought about the gathering in the first place. We are not going to a building to hear certain music, to see a fancy light show, or to have “the best latte” in town. We attend a church gathering to hear the word explained, to find comfort in fellowship, and – above all – to honor the Lord Jesus who has brought us together unto Himself. As such, we are Christians, followers of Christ, who are gathered to worship the crucified and resurrected Lord of all.

*Most glorious and gracious heavenly Father, thank You that we can bear the title of Christian because we are followers of Christ Jesus. There is no greater honor than this. Help us to never be ashamed of this title and to never be afraid to avow that it applies to us. Even in this world where it is becoming a title to be rallied against, may we gladly bear the reproach of the world for the sake of our Lord. Help us to stand firm in this. Amen.*

**And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Acts 11:27**

The previous verse noted Paul’s coming to and staying at Antioch, the location where disciples were first called Christians. With that noted, it next says, “And in these days prophets came.”

The Greek reads “came down.” It is considered a descent from the particular place these prophets have left. As for being “prophets,” the word used indicates one who speaks by the inspiration of God. Their utterance can be to either foretell events or to forthtell, such as in explaining the word of God. It is the same word used by Paul in Romans 12:6 and elsewhere as an office of the church. Paul places them next to the apostles in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11.

The foretelling of events is used to confirm the word of God at times. It will also confirm the prophet as a true prophet. Jeremiah, for example, made specific prophecies that came about. Thus, this validated him as a true prophet, and it also validated the word he spoke forth. But more, it continues to validate his word even now. If there is a future prophecy still awaiting its fulfillment in the book of Jeremiah, we can have every reasonable expectation that it will come to pass.

As for these prophets, nothing is said about what the extent of their prophesying was. One of them will give a specific future prophecy in the verses to come, but the rest may simply be men who spoke forth the word, much as a preacher does today. We can only speculate due to the brief description given by Luke.



As for their “coming down,” it was “from Jerusalem to Antioch.” Antioch is north of Jerusalem, so modern thinking is that they would have gone up to Antioch. Likewise, there are times when someone will leave Jerusalem and actually go to a higher elevation. Our thinking would be that such a person was “going up.” However, in Scripture, a trip from Jerusalem is always down. A trip to Jerusalem is always up. This is because it is the city of God. Hence to go from Jerusalem is to go down from the presence of God.

Life application: There are an innumerable number of people today who claim prophetic visions, utterances, and revelations. They speak out things over people, claiming that God is speaking through them. This has been going on all along in the church and it has caused irreparable harm to countless millions.

So the question is, are there prophets and prophecies today? The answer is both Yes and No. There are prophets who forthtell the word of God. These men evaluate the word and speak it forth in a manner that explains it to others. However, there is no need to call such a person a prophet. That only muddies the waters for no good purpose.

As for prophecies, there are still many, many prophecies in the Bible that are yet to be fulfilled. They have been recorded, they are from prophets whose words have been validated, and they will certainly come to pass. However, there is no reason at all to assume that people are receiving divine revelation today. The word is written. It includes everything we need for right doctrine and proper living in the presence of God. To add to that would be to detract from the word itself.

Those who have claimed divine revelation have only confused the church and set it on bad paths. Joseph Smith (Mormonism) was not a prophet. He was a false prophet, as were all of the supposed Mormon prophets. Ellen G. White (Seventh Day Adventists) was not a prophetess, she was a false prophetess. Juanita Bynum (still active and getting rich off the uninformed) is not a true prophetess. And so on.

Such people give out false prophecies for various reasons that are always harmful to others, and they detract from the soundness of the word of God. We have God’s word, it gives us all we need to live out our lives in a proper manner, and it tells us of what is coming – even through the end of the ages. And so, what more do we need? Learn the word! Don’t trust in that which is false. Set your eyes on the truth found in Scripture.

*Glorious God almighty, thank You that we have a sure word. It has confirmed itself innumerable times throughout history, and it continues to do so even to this day. We*

*don't need anything sensational from the lips of false teachers to excite us. Rather, we have the most exciting word of all in the pages of Scripture. Thank You, O God, for Your wonderful word! Amen.*

**Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Acts 11:28**

The previous verse noted the prophets who had come down from Jerusalem to Antioch. Luke continues that thought now, saying, "Then one of them, named Agabus." This person, Agabus, is said to be one of the prophets. His name may come from the Hebrew *agav*, or love. But it seems more likely it comes from the Hebrew word *khagav*, meaning a grasshopper or locust. This was considered a clean insect that could be eaten by the Jews according to Leviticus 11:22. The word is used four more times in the Old Testament to indicate a comparison in size (Numbers 13:33 & Isaiah 40:22), a heavy burden (Ecclesiastes 12:5), and a devourer of the land that has been sent by the Lord (2 Chronicles 7:13).

As for Agabus, Luke next says that he "stood up." Rather, it is an aorist participle. It more appropriately reads, "having stood up." In other words, Luke sets him apart from the other prophets in order for him to make a prophecy. Agabus, having stood up, then "showed by the Spirit."

The word translated as "showed" is a verb that speaks of a sign, *sémainó*. In other words, he "signified" by the Spirit. He gave a word that was to be taken as a sign that something would come to pass. This coming event was "that there was going to be a great famine."

The reason for reporting this now will be seen in the coming verses, but other reasons which go unstated are that the New Covenant church, not Israel under the law, is given the word by the Spirit. It also shows that the famine which is coming could be prepared for by the church, both spiritually and physically, so that it would be able to continue and flourish. As for the famine itself, it is next said to be coming "throughout all the world."

The Greek word *epi*, or upon, is used. The famine will come "upon all the world." In saying "world," it is to be understood that this is referring to the known world, meaning the Roman Empire at this time. As Souter states, it is "the land that is being *inhabited*, the land in a state of habitation, the inhabited world, that is, the Roman world (*orbis terrarum*), for all outside it was regarded as of no account." Souter's evaluation of this is

further confirmed by the next words, which say, "which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar."

Claudius Caesar ruled over the Roman Empire. Hence, the focus is on that part of the world at large. The prophesied famine could be an isolated one and yet still be a fulfillment of this prophecy because a lack in one area of the empire would cause a disruption over the entire empire. This is something that occurs throughout the world today.

One nation may have a time of famine which then extends out even to countries that are not facing a famine because the supply lines of other things become disrupted. Despite this, Albert Barnes gives a highly detailed explanation of four famines that came upon the Roman Empire during the reign of Claudius –

-----  
In the days of Claudius Caesar - The Roman emperor. He began his reign in 41 a.d., and he reigned for 13 years. He was at last poisoned by one of his wives, Agrippina, who wished to raise her son Nero to the throne. During his reign no less than four different famines are mentioned by ancient writers, one of which was particularly severe in Judea, and was the one, doubtless, to which the sacred writer here refers:

(1) The first happened at Rome, and occurred in the first or second year of the reign of Claudius. It arose from the difficulties of importing provisions from abroad. It is mentioned by Dio, whose words are these: "There being a great famine, he (Claudius) not only took care for a present supply, but provided also for the time to come." He then proceeds to state the great expense which Claudius was at in making a good port at the mouth of the Tiber, and a convenient passage from thence up to the city (did, lib. ix. p. 671, 672; see also Suetonius, Claudius, cap. 20).

(2) a second famine is mentioned as having been particularly severe in Greece. Of this famine Eusebius speaks in his Chronicon, p. 204: "There was a great famine in Greece, in which a modius of wheat (about half a bushel) was sold for six drachmas." This famine is said by Eusebius to have occurred in the ninth year of the reign of Claudius.

(3) in the latter part of his reign, 51 a.d., there was another famine at Rome, mentioned by Suetonius (Claudius, cap. 18), and by Tacitus (Ann., John 12:43). Of this, Tacitus says that it was so severe that it was deemed to be a divine judgment.

(4) a fourth famine is mentioned as having occurred particularly in Judea. This is described by Josephus (Antiq., book 20, chapter 2, section 5). "A famine," says he, "did oppress them at the time (in the time of Claudius); and many people died for the lack of what was necessary to procure food withal. Queen Helena sent some of her servants to Alexandria with money to buy a great quantity of grain, and others of them to Cyprus to bring a cargo of dried figs." This famine is described as having continued under the two procurators of Judea, Tiberius Alexander and Cassius Fadus. Fadus was sent into Judea, on the death of Agrippa, about the fourth year of the reign of Claudius, and the famine, therefore, continued probably during the fifth, sixth, and seventh years of the reign of Claudius. See the note in Whiston's Josephus, Antiq., book 20, chapter 2, section 5; also Lardner as quoted above. Of this famine, or of the want consequent on the famine, repeated mention is made in the New Testament.

-----

Life application: Context is the main thing to consider when evaluating a passage. To take an idea out of its intended context will lead to a false understanding (a pretext) of what is actually being said. Because of the use of the Greek word translated as "world" in this verse, one could then say that "the Bible is only speaking of the Roman Empire" at other times as well.

In such an evaluation, all kinds of false ideas about who is to be evangelized, the duration of the evangelization of the gospel, and so on, will arise. Paul uses the same term translated as world in Romans 10:18 saying that the gospel has gone out to "the ends of the world." Therefore, the logic might be that the words of Jesus about preaching to all nations have been fulfilled. But Paul's point concerns the Jews having heard the word concerning Jesus and why the message would go out to the rest of the world after their national rejection of Him.

By taking thoughts like this out of their proper context, incredibly bad theology has arisen concerning the sharing of the gospel (or even if there is only one gospel), end times events, and so on. There is a job to do, it is to be done over the face of the entire planet and to all people groups and all nations, and it is inexcusable that people sit on their hands and avoid their responsibilities simply because of such poor interpretation of Scripture.

Context is king, so keep things in their intended context. Be sure to stay away from any teaching that puts the burden on someone else or some other timeframe for the gospel to be shared. It is our responsibility to share the gospel, the one and only gospel, with all people at all times. As for national Israel, they will eventually accept it as well. The book is written, and it will come to pass. As for individuals, speak! They need Jesus.

*Gracious and merciful God, thank You for Your wonderfully good news, the gospel, that comes through faith in the full, final, and forever work of Jesus Christ our Lord. Praise to You forever and ever for what You have done. We are reconciled to You through Him! Hallelujah and amen.*

**Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. Acts 11:29**

The previous verse referred to the prophecy of the famine coming “throughout all the world” during the days of Claudius Caesar. With that noted, it now says, “Then the disciples.”

This is a united effort that is coming about by those who have been ministered to. Being disciples implies being trained by others. What these disciples will do is next stated as “each according to his ability.”

The verb is imperfect showing an ongoing state. Also, it more precisely says, “according to the prospering of each.” The word translated as “prospering” is found only here. It signifies “to be good for passing through,” and thus it speaks of ability. Today we might say, “Good to go!” It reflects the state of the individual in relation to his financial needs and abilities. Of those who were good to go, they “determined to send relief.”

This is more of a shortened paraphrase. The words literally read, “to send for ministry.” There will obviously be a need when the famine comes and because there is advanced warning of it, there is the ability to prepare for it in advance. This is not unlike what Joseph did for Pharaoh in Genesis. The ability presently exists, and it can be used for a need that will arise at a time when the ability to tend to it will no longer exist. With that understood, this charitable ministry is intended to go “to the brethren dwelling in Judea.”

It is not said why this ministry is being sent. It is possible that Agabus told them the need would be greater in Jerusalem. It may be that the apostles constantly expended themselves in the service of others and relied on others for their daily bread. It may be

that there was already a fund in Jerusalem that existed, and which would be quickly used up in a time of famine.

Whatever the reason, it was understood that there was a need in Jerusalem and that the disciples felt the burden of helping them because of the blessing they had already received from the mother church, such as in the sending of Barnabas, Agabus, and others. Hence, the need is identified, and it is met according to the ability of the disciples.

Life application: What is said in this verse is not unlike what Paul says in 1 Corinthians –

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: <sup>2</sup>On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. <sup>3</sup>And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup>But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.” 1 Corinthians 16:1-4

There was a need, promises were made, and Paul was ensuring that the promises would be kept by reminding those at Corinth of what was said. These were disciples that had obligated themselves to tend to the mother church in Jerusalem. And Paul explains why this was good to do in Romans 15 –

“For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup>It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.”

-Romans 15:26, 27

Those in Jerusalem had expended themselves on behalf of the church in spiritual matters. Paul was correct in saying that they should, therefore, be tended to in their material needs. Today, there are really only two verses for the care of those who tend spiritually to others, neither of which has a thing to do with “tithing.” That is an Old Covenant concept that should never be taught in the church. Rather, Paul says –

“Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.”

-Galatians 6:6

“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup> So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”

-2 Corinthians 9:6, 7

That pretty much sums up the obligation of those who are ministered to by others. Share in the good you have and give freely but without compulsion. Rather, give according to your own purposes.

If you ever feel pressured to give, then you should wait until you don't feel pressured. If you cannot give, then why would you? The Lord knows your heart. If you desire to give but are financially unable, then it makes no sense to do so. Instead of money, you can still offer prayer, encouragement, or help in the kitchen. Never feel compelled by others to do what is not coming from a cheerful and willing heart.

*Lord God, thank You for those who tend to us in spiritual matters. Please bless them with a special blessing today. We are grateful for what they do, but we are also grateful to You for making it all possible. Thank You for Jesus who has led the way in all good things for us. Praises to You for what You have done, O God. Amen.*

**This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.**

Acts 11:30

The previous verse noted that the disciples in Antioch determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. With that, it now says, “This they also did.”

As they determined, so they followed through with it. It is a complementary note concerning the matter. With that, it next says, “and sent it.”

Rather, it is an aorist participle without any preposition, “having sent it.” In other words, they determined to take the action, and then they did so, but the action of sending it leads into the rest of the words of the thought which says, “to the elders.”

This is the first time the word *presbuteros*, or “elder” is used in Acts in relation to the body of believers. It essentially signifies “a *mature man* having seasoned judgment (experience)” (HELPS Word Studies). However, for the Jewish nation and even the church, it is more fittingly applied to the office of a person in a trusted position. Today, we use the words elder, pastor, overseer, and so on to describe a person who is in such a position.

These people, whoever they were, were considered mature and competent to handle the gift properly and with due care. It may have been the apostles, or it may have simply been men of maturity who were selected for the task, somewhat like the deacons in Acts 6. Either way, the words “having sent” – see explanation of the aorist translation above – now connect with the final words of the verse, saying, “by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”

These two were deemed of the highest integrity and were, therefore, chosen for the task of delivering this money to Jerusalem. As this is not a visit that was based upon a doctrinal matter, it is probably not a visit that Paul later refers to in Galatians 2. It seems that these two men simply took the money, delivered it, and then returned to Antioch as is recorded in Acts 12:25.

To understand several views on the matter of Paul’s visits to Jerusalem, the Pulpit Commentary on Acts 11:30 lays out the different possibilities quite well.

Life application: This verse in Acts refers to “elders.” As noted, this could be referring to the apostles. It could also be referring to others who were considered trustworthy. Paul will later give specific details concerning the offices within the church. This will be in 1 & 2 Timothy and in Titus. There he will use various terms to explain the offices.

It is not inappropriate to use terms such as pastor, deacon, elder, overseer, bishop, and so on. However, it is also acceptable for people who fill such positions to simply say, “Call me Tom.” We should not look down on those who accept the bestowal of a title, especially when it is referring to the position he fills. But it is also ok for a person who fills such a position to ask that he not be titled as such in regular conversation.

In the end, having a title is simply a part of the regular working of any company or organization. It helps identify who does what. But those who fill the position shouldn’t let it go to their head. We all have jobs to do and if we can do them without a lot of hoopla attached to them, that is a good thing. So, don’t get too legalistic either way on the matter. Allow people to use titles to honor others and allow people who hold such positions to decline being called by the title as well. In the end, adherence to the word and having a heart for the Lord is what is of the greatest importance.

*Lord God, You have asked us to give double honor to those who deserve it because of the positions they fill. At the same time, help us to not exalt such people in a manner that is inappropriate. In the end, we are all servants. Help us to serve with hearts of humility and with a desire to exalt You above all else. Amen.*



## CHAPTER 12

**Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church.** Acts 12:1

Acts 11 ended with a note concerning Barnabas and Saul carrying the gift from Antioch to Jerusalem. Chapter 12 begins with, “Now about that time.”

The word translated as “time,” *kairos*, signifies a season or an occasion. It is not easy to determine if it means “about the time of the famine” mentioned toward the end of the chapter or “about the time that Barnabas and Paul traveled.” Either is possible, but the use of the word *kairos*, as well as the words of verse 12:20, seem to point to the time of the famine. Verse 12:20 refers to the food supplied to the people of Tyre and Sidon.

A time of famine would certainly bring about a trying situation between people that required attention, and so “about that time” may be referring to the time of famine. However, this is only speculation. Regardless of this, it is at some point connected to one of the two events that it next refers to “Herod the king.”

This is referring to Herod Agrippa I, also simply called Agrippa. He was the son of Aristobulus and the grandson of Herod the Great. Because these events shortly preceded his death, it is believed that this is AD43/44, about a decade after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Hence, the church has been functioning for about ten years at this point. It is at this time that Herod “stretched out *his* hand.” The word “hand” is plural, “hands.” Also, it more correctly reads that he “laid on his hands.”

The meaning is “to wield power or authority.” When one lays his hand upon someone or something, it is to accomplish a task. In the case of a king, he will work to a particular end on behalf of his kingdom, his subjects, alliances with other kings, and so on. His actions can be taken in a positive or negative light, depending on who he is laying his hands to, on, for, upon, or against. In this case, he has laid on his hands, “to harass some from the church.”

The reason for this will become clearer in the verses ahead, but Cambridge, citing Josephus, gives us an advanced note as to why he would do this. It was because the Jews were opposed to the message of Jesus the Messiah and Herod wanted to be considered a devout Jew. They say –

“Agrippa, according to Josephus (xix. 7. 3), was anxious to be esteemed a devout Jew: ‘He loved to live continually at Jerusalem, and was exactly careful in the observance of the laws of his country. He therefore kept himself entirely pure, nor did any day pass over his head without its appointed sacrifice.’ Such a man might easily be roused, by the Jews whom he was so anxious to please, to the perpetration of cruelties upon the Christians.”

Life application: When you read the Bible, think about what is being conveyed. In Matthew 26:50, it says, “Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” Likewise, in Luke 21:12, it says, “But before all these things, they will *lay their hands on* you and persecute *you*, delivering *you* up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake.”

The same word used in both verses is used in Acts 12:1. The context shows us the meaning, even if we have not heard the expression before. But understanding the context and what is being conveyed is only a part of the words. In this context, we can know that to “lay hands on” signifies to manhandle, but we should also think about the word “hand.”

The hand is something that has a purpose. The hand has fingers (Exodus 8:19). The hand is at the end of the arm (Psalm 136:12). The hand grasps (Ecclesiastes 1:14). The hand rests upon others for healing (Luke 13:13). And so on.

As you read the Bible, don’t always just read it as a narrative before you. At times, stop and consider the individual things, like the hands, that are presented. Think of them in relation to other times they are similarly used. In doing this, you will get a better understanding of what is being conveyed. There is so much richness in the word. The more you contemplate it, the fuller your mind will be with the beauty of how it is presented. Take time to meditate on it. It is well worth your effort to do so.

*Lord God, Your word is rich and wonderful and beautiful. Thank You for every detail. Our lives are enriched when we read it and contemplate all it presents. Thank You for this glorious word that You have given to us. Yes, thank You for this treasure of our hearts. Amen.*

**Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. Acts 12:2**

Acts 12 opened with the note that Herod the king had stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. With that noted, it next says, “Then he killed James the brother of John.”

This is then James the son of Zebedee recorded in Matthew 4 –

“Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, <sup>22</sup>and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.” Matthew 4:21, 22

He is known in early writings as James the Greater. James the Less is James, the son of Alphaeus noted in Matthew 10:3 when the apostles were designated by name. The only mention of him in Acts outside of this verse is that he is noted among the apostles after the ascension of the Lord –

“And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son* of James.” Acts 1:13

No reason why he was selected to be killed is given, but it does show that he was prominent enough and outspoken enough to be noticed and brought forth. So, despite not having anything recorded concerning his apostolic work, it is certain he was faithful and productive. It is a good indication that Acts is structured around Peter and Paul for a reason. Even if the other apostles did a great deal of work, the ministries of Peter and Paul are given special attention, showing the shift from the Jewish people to the Gentiles. Of James, it notes that he was killed “with the sword.”

Because of this, it is certain that this was a Roman and civil execution. Like John the Baptist, there is an obvious political element to what occurred. Being death by a sword, it could be either decapitation or being thrust through. Either way, the description of his death comes down to two words. This is in complete contrast to Stephen who was given almost an entire chapter of the events surrounding his stoning.

As for his death, it appears that this is something hinted at by what Jesus said in Matthew 20 –

“Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.

<sup>21</sup> And He said to her, ‘What do you wish?’

She said to Him, ‘Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.’

<sup>22</sup> But Jesus answered and said, ‘You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’

They said to Him, ‘We are able.’

<sup>23</sup> So He said to them, ‘You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but *it is for those* for whom it is prepared by My Father.’”

-Matthew 20:20-23

James certainly participated in the sufferings of Christ. But more, in a sense, the request was granted. James is noted as the first apostle to be martyred now in Acts. It is known that John was the last surviving apostle. Thus, the two sons of Zebedee were granted two positions of honor in their lives and deaths as chosen apostles of Jesus.

Life application: If the mother of James was alive at this time, she may have questioned God’s goodness in allowing her son, who had done so much in his ministry, to be killed in such an ignoble way. Or she may have understood that this was an honorable death in the eyes of the Lord. As tragic as it may be for someone to lose a family member, we cannot impute wrongdoing to God when it occurs.

The fact is that we are all going to die. Paul goes further and says –

“But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, <sup>11</sup> persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me. <sup>12</sup> Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” 2 Timothy 3:10-12

We have been told this, it is included in God’s word, and therefore, it should not be a surprise to anyone when a faithful, godly believer is persecuted in some manner. This doesn’t mean God is uncaring. It means that God is receiving glory through the right conduct of His people. It is also a sign to those who engage in the persecution that His judgment upon them will be just and deserved when it comes.

We need to consider our earthly bodies less and look to what is promised. Our time now is in a fallen world where we can expect things to occur that may seem bad from our perspective. But in seeing how they fit into what lies ahead, they are not really “bad.” What God does, and what He allows in our lives, will always lead to what is good. Trust this as you consider the events of the world around you. Look at all things from an eternal perspective and you will be much better off as you trudge through this life of difficulty, trial, and woe.

*Lord God, help us to maintain an eternal perspective on things and not get too caught up in the temporary, transitory things that will have their end. We know that good is promised for us, and so whatever happens now must be leading us to the good that lies ahead. Thank You that we can know this and cling to it while we are here in this life of difficulty. Amen.*

**And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Acts 12:3**

The previous verse noted the killing of James with the sword. Now, it continues, saying, “And because he saw that it pleased the Jews.” The meaning is clear. This doesn’t mean all the Jews collectively, but those who represented the nation. It is referring to the Jews who were in the powerful positions and whose favor would more fully establish his political relations with them, along with his own power within the realm. Because these leaders were happy that Agrippa had done away with one of the leading apostles, “he proceeded further to seize Peter also.”

The Greek is actually in the form of a Hebraism, saying, “he added to lay hold of Peter also.” It is a way of showing an increase in a proposition, whatever it may be. In this case, it is the proposition of eliminating the apostles for the sake of cementing political status and power.

The apostles had been a thorn in the side of the leadership for about ten years. Therefore, having the ruling governmental authority over them harass and destroy this group was a welcome occasion for the leading Jews. And because this pleased the Jews, while also solidifying his own position and power, Agrippa decided to continue with his attack against them. As Peter was a chief figure among them and one who had spoken boldly against the ruling council, he was probably personally called out by name by the Jews as the next suitable target. Ellicott agrees with this being a matter of politics, saying—

“This was throughout the ruling policy of the Herodian house. The persecution did not spring from any fanatic zeal against the new faith, but simply from motives of political expediency.”

Likewise, Cambridge further clarifies this relationship between the two by citing Josephus –

“This Josephus notices (*Antiq.* xix. 7. 3), for, comparing Agrippa with the Herod who ruled before him, he mentions that the latter ‘was more friendly to the Greeks than to the Jews,’ in which matter he says Agrippa ‘was not at all like him.’”

With the event explained, the timing of it is next provided, saying, “Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread.”

The meaning is that this is during the time of the Passover and the pilgrim feast of Unleavened Bread which accompanies it. Luke unites the two in one thought as he did in his gospel. This is evident because the Passover actually precedes and leads into Unleavened Bread. Notice, however, that Luke unites them using the commonly used terminology for both that had been adopted in Israel –

“Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover. <sup>2</sup>And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might kill Him, for they feared the people.

<sup>3</sup>Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. <sup>4</sup>So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them. <sup>5</sup>And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. <sup>6</sup>So he promised and sought opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude.

<sup>7</sup>Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. <sup>8</sup>And He sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.’” Luke 22:1-8

As it is now the time of the Passover, it would be especially pleasing to the Jews. They had crucified Jesus at this time, and it was certainly welcome that Peter had been seized at the same time of year. However, one can see the backroom dealing of the Jews and Agrippa in the words of the coming verse which will be analyzed in the next commentary.

Life application: Some people refuse to talk to others about religion and politics. Some will talk about religion but not politics, or vice versa. The fact is that Christians are obligated to speak out about Jesus in order to be considered faithful servants of the Lord. This doesn't mean that all must be evangelists and stand on the street corner, but we should be willing to speak about Jesus when the occasion arises or when questioned about our faith.

But it is also true that we live in a world where earthly governments rule. It is the policy of some sects, such as the Roman Catholic Church, to participate in the running of governments, dictating to them what should and should not be done. It is the policy of some sects and cults to never engage in any political activity at all, not even voting. This is the policy of the cult known as the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Both approaches are flawed. Governments that are led by religion will inevitably become religiously tyrannical. Governments that have no representation of faithful Christians will become wholly immoral and destructive against any who are spiritually aligned with Christ.

As this is so, it is incumbent on faithful Christians to engage in voting and even in running for political office. By doing so, their views can be expressed and protected. Paul was a Roman citizen and he appealed to his citizenship unashamedly. He attempted to convert public officials, kings, and others in governmental positions. These things are undeniable as revealed in Scripture. Therefore, it is to the benefit of both the general population and the working of the government in which one lives to be active in both religious and governmental affairs.

Have a right balance in your thinking concerning these things. And above all, do not listen to those who claim an ultra-piety that says, "I am not of this world." In this, they rip the words of Jesus (John 15:19) out of any proper context in order to absolve themselves of any responsibility for the events of life.

Rather, Paul clearly shows – both in his actions and in his writings – that we are in this world, and we must conduct our affairs in this world, but that we also have a better hope than this world. We cannot deny either without having an unbalanced approach to the lives that we live – in the here and now and in the hope of the future that lies ahead.

*Lord God, how good it is to know that even though we are in this world and have lives to lead, we also have a hope that transcends this earthly life. Our true hope is not in a leader, a bank account, a form of government, or a retirement that provides a false*

*sense of safety and security. None of these things can ever come close to the glory that lies ahead when Christ comes for His people. How we long for that day, and may that day be soon! Amen.*

**So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.**

Acts 12:4

So far in the ongoing narrative, Peter has been seized by Herod during the Days of Unleavened Bread. With that noted, it now says, “So when he had arrested *him*.” The words here more appropriately should be translated, “So having arrested him.” There is motion in the words of Luke, one thought building upon the next. Herod had arrested Peter. With that action complete, it next says that “he put *him* in prison.”

The reason for this is coming in the next clause. All it said of James is that he was killed with the sword. Regardless of the events surrounding the killing of James, only his death by the sword is recorded. However, the fate of Peter is explained in greater detail. Luke masterfully builds up a sense of excitement with his words to lead the reader to each subsequent thought. Peter is now put in prison, and then it next says that Herod “delivered him to four squads of soldiers.”

Like the first clause, these words are from an aorist participle and more rightly should be translated, “having delivered him to four squads of soldiers.” Luke continues to carefully align his words to bring the reader right into the narrative. As for the large number of soldiers, this certainly seems like total overkill, but Luke is undoubtedly recording it for a particular purpose. To understand it, one must go back to Acts 5 –

“Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, <sup>18</sup> and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. <sup>19</sup> But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, <sup>20</sup> ‘Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.’

<sup>21</sup> And when they heard *that*, they entered the temple early in the morning and taught. But the high priest and those with him came and called the council together, with all the elders of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

<sup>22</sup> But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, <sup>23</sup> saying, ‘Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one



inside!’<sup>24</sup> Now when the high priest, the captain of the temple, and the chief priests heard these things, they wondered what the outcome would be.<sup>25</sup> So one came and told them, saying, ‘Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!’” Acts 5:17-25

This certainly supports the theory that the leaders of Israel personally asked Herod to seize Peter and do away with him as he had done with James. Peter had been arrested and yet was freed from his incarceration. They may have accepted it was an angel who released the men, or they may have reasoned that they were somehow broken out at night.

Regardless of how they had escaped, they did. Because of that, when Herod seized Peter, the Jews probably said, “Be careful to guard this guy well. He is a slippery fellow and has escaped from our own dungeon.” This is all conjecture, but Luke’s careful attention to this detail supports the theory. Hence, Herod had a large contingent set aside “to keep him.”

Four squads, or four quaternions, of soldiers would be sixteen men. Hence, if the shifts were divided into four, there would always be four soldiers monitoring him. It is readily apparent that Peter was considered a particularly important prisoner to be watched because he was known to have escaped in the past.

Were this not so, Luke would have simply overlooked any mention of it at all. A prison is a place of incarceration that generally holds lots of people. It is also normally well-guarded. To assign four quaternions of soldiers to guard him, and for Luke to especially note this, is certainly exceptional. As for the reason for not dispatching Peter off to the next world immediately, it next says that Herod was “intending to bring him before the people.”

The words “to bring him before” are more precisely rendered, “to lead him up.” The idea is that he would be brought out of prison and “up” to the elevated place where a tribunal would be held and where the death sentence would occur in the presence of the people. And this was to occur “after Passover.”

These words also give a very good indication that the Jews were involved in the seizing of Peter. They had seized Jesus and they delivered Him up to Pilate for sentencing, probably thinking that he would wait and have a trial at some later point. This is based on the words of Matthew 26 –

“Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, <sup>4</sup> and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him. <sup>5</sup> But they said, ‘Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.’” Matthew 26:3-5

Pilate set about to have an immediate trial, even as the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread was getting started. And exactly what they said might occur came about. These leaders had to actively call out for Jesus’ crucifixion to stir the crowds against Him. This led to ten years of one problem after another as His followers kept claiming He was the fulfillment of all the symbolism of the feasts and thus the Messiah.

With this thought in mind, one can see that the leaders were almost certainly in cahoots with Herod, giving their recommendations on what to do with Peter. They did not want another problem to arise like that which had occurred with the killing of Jesus.

Life application: Luke is a careful chronicler of all that is taking place. But it must be remembered that God is the One who inspired the narrative to be recorded as it is. The careful attention to detail, all the way through Acts, is a testament to Israel’s rejection of Jesus as their Messiah. His rejection then explains the destruction of the nation along with their two thousand years of justly deserved exile.

However, the fact that they have been under the curses and punishment of the law, instead of God just destroying them and being done with them forever, gives clear and reasonable proof that He is not done with them as a people. The regathering of them into the land from which they were exiled is an openly visible proof that the Lord is set to do all that His prophetic words concerning Israel are said to be coming.

The idea of “replacement theology” is so utterly ridiculous when looked at from how things are in the world. God spoke, His word promises, and He will fulfill. There is absolutely no reason to think that the church has replaced Israel. Rather, there is every reason to be certain that it has not. And more, as this is so, and because Israel is once again restored as a people and a nation, it is a sure sign that the other prophecies concerning the coming of the end times must also be ready to find their fulfillment.

Let us live out our lives with this in mind. Let us not hold too tightly to this world. Some wonderful day, and it may be soon, the call will be made, and the church will be removed from the hour of trial that is set to come upon the whole world. Let us anticipate that moment more and more with each moment that passes!

*Heavenly Father, we look to the coming of our Lord Jesus and our being gathered to Him. May that day be soon. And Lord, until that day, may we be about the business that You have set before Your people. May we be willing to share the good news with all that come into our lives. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.** Acts 12:5

The previous verse referred to the arrest and incarceration of Peter, noting that it was intended that he should be brought forth before the people after the Passover. With that noted, it now says, “Peter was therefore kept in prison.”

An important conjunction is missing from the translation. Also, there is a necessary article before prison. It more appropriately reads, “Peter, therefore, indeed, was kept in the prison” (YLT).

As this was noted to be “*during* the Days of Unleavened Bread” (Acts 12:3), it could be that he was actually seized before the Passover, and the inserted word “during” would mean that it is that general timeframe, or it could be that it was on some day during the feast. As such, it could be from a couple of days to more than a week that Peter was held. Luke does not provide the specifics on this. Regardless of the duration, Luke next notes the attention of those in the church concerning his situation, saying, “but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.”

The words are very poorly translated. The word translated as “constant prayer” is an adverb that means “fervently.” The idea of continuance comes from an imperfect verb and a present participle. Thus, the entire thought should read, “and fervent prayer was being made by the assembly unto God for him” (YLT).

The sense is that the church was literally pouring out its heart in a continuous fashion for Peter. There were probably shifts of people that came together and wholeheartedly sought the face of the Lord for his deliverance. It is a beautiful note of the unity of the assembly and of the love they possessed for Peter. It also reveals that the church had no design to go in and bust Peter out of the pokey.

Rather, they prayed for the Lord’s hand to intercede in whatever fashion He determined, be it a miraculous release as had occurred in the past or to soften the heart of Herod and bring about a change in his designs. This fits well with Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 1:9-11 –

“Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, <sup>10</sup> who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, <sup>11</sup> you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift *granted* to us through many.”

Life application: The Bible always exalts the power of prayer, even if not all prayers are answered in the manner of the one who is praying. It is certain that God already knows exactly what is going to happen regarding whatever matter is lifted up to Him, but it still asks us to pray. Further, Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 1 (above) clearly indicate that he believed that prayers change the outcome of events.

How can this be if God already knows the outcome? The answer is that He factors in the prayers of His people. Even if He already knows who will pray and who will not. This is not contradictory at all. He knows, we do not. An unspoken prayer is a prayer that will not be responded to. A spoken prayer will be responded to according to His will. And the outcome will be as God designed by taking the entire process according to His eternal counsel.

And this is the same thing as the salvation of an individual. Despite the Calvinist doctrine that God must regenerate a person in order to believe (which is nonsense) a person who does not have faith in God’s provision will not be saved. A person who does will be. Just as there is nothing contradictory in praying in order to affect God’s will, there is nothing contradictory in believing and being saved.

And yet, the same people who deny free will in salvation will pray for the lost, they will pray for healing, they will pray for blessing and favor, and they will pray for the other desires of their hearts. That... that is contradictory thinking.

We must act, both in believing God unto salvation and in praying to God for what we desire. And so, act!

*O God, we are grateful to You for hearing our prayers and for responding according to Your infinite wisdom. How unimaginable it is that You would hear our prayers and respond to the faith we possess! You have all power and all knowledge. You are infinitely glorious. And yet You would look upon us and care for what we desire and attend to our faith. How truly great You are, O God. Amen.*

**And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. Acts 12:6**

The previous words noted Peter having been kept in prison while those of the church prayed constantly for him. With that, it now says, “And when Herod was about to bring him out.”

However long he was in prison, be it a day or more than a week, the time had arrived when the next day would see Peter’s trial, surely resulting in his execution at the hands of Herod. Despite this, it next says, “that night Peter.”

The Greek is more specific, “the night, that.” In other words, not only was Herod about to bring Peter forth, but this was on no other night than the one before the day he was to be brought forth. This highlights the importance of the events. Nobody had come to Peter’s rescue during his incarceration, and he had a few hours left before his time was set to expire. And yet, it says, he “was sleeping.”

One would think sleep would not come easily at such a time, but Peter was fast asleep. This can be deduced from the words of verse 12:11. The events that are set to come about are so incomprehensible that Peter thought he was still in a deep sleep. For now, Luke’s minutely detailed account notes that while he was sleeping, he was “bound with two chains.”

Rather, the Greek is a perfect participle, saying, “having been bound with two chains.” This is the state he was in all along and it continued right up to the present moment. The impossibility of his situation is highlighted by this. If Peter were able to free himself from one chain, there would still be a second to deal with. And more, though it does not say how he was bound to the chains, it does note that it was “between two soldiers.”

The Greek reads, “between to guards.” It is true that they are identified as soldiers elsewhere, but the soldiers are acting as guards at this time. Of this, Albert Barnes says, “Peter was bound to the two. His left hand was chained to the right hand of one of the soldiers, and his right hand to the left hand of the other. This was a common mode of securing prisoners among the Romans. See abundant authorities for this quoted in Lardner's Credibility, part 1, chapter 10: section 9, London edition, 1829, vol. i. p. 242, 243, etc.”

Whether bound to the guards as noted by Barnes or bound to chains attached to the walls or floor, the situation is beyond any reasonable hope. If Peter were to free himself from the chains, the clinking sounds would be unmistakable as the guards were right there with him. But more, Luke continues, saying, “and the guards before the door were keeping the prison.”

Even if Peter were to free himself from his chains and then overcome two guards who were bound by their lives to not allow him to escape, there were still two more guards who would hear everything and be ready to overcome him in a moment. The utter impossibility of Peter gaining his freedom through natural means is perfectly evident by noting the description of his situation that has been so carefully detailed by Luke.

Life application: How could Peter be in a deep sleep while the prospect of his execution was only moments away? Many scholars look to the psalms as proof that Peter was satisfied with his position in the Lord and with his coming fate. Some cite the psalms, such as –

“I lay down and slept;  
I awoke, for the LORD sustained me.” Psalm 3:5

“I will both lie down in peace, and sleep;  
For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.” Psalm 4:8

“Remember His marvelous works which He has done,  
His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth,” Psalm 105:5

*“It is vain for you to rise up early,  
To sit up late,  
To eat the bread of sorrows;  
For so He gives His beloved sleep.”* Psalm 127:2

It is true that we can derive comfort from the psalms in our times of distress, sadness, woe, anxiety, and so forth, but those words do not change the situation in which we find ourselves. They only give us comfort in and through them. However, Peter had something more, didn't he? He states in his 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle –

“And we have more firm the prophetic word, to which we do well giving heed, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, till day may dawn, and a morning star may arise -- in your hearts.” 2 Peter 1:19 (YLT)

Peter had a prophetic word from the Lord Himself that was an absolute guarantee that his day had not yet come –

“Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry *you* where you do not wish.’ <sup>19</sup>This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’” John 21:18, 19

Though it is not known how old Peter was at this time, he was probably not yet an old man. Only about ten years had passed since Jesus’ ascension. But more, based on how James was executed, it can be inferred that Herod’s means of execution for Peter was not what he was set to receive. The stretching out of his hands implied that he would follow Christ in crucifixion. As such, he would have accepted Jesus’ words and realized that he had nothing to worry about, at least on this evening.

Whether this is a stretch of the situation or not, and it is probably not, it is a lesson for us to consider. The Bible has given us future prophecies that are fixed in their meaning. We may not have all the details concerning them, such as exact timing, and so on, but they are events that the Lord has promised through His word that they will come about. As they tell us of the surety of glorification and eternity in His presence, what do we really have to worry about?

The prophecies are promises from God, who cannot lie. They are fixed and they are set. In due time, they will be realized. So be of good cheer and hold fast to what the word says.

*Glorious Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us a sure and reliable word that tells us what lies ahead. Because of this, everything that happens in this world, no matter how distressing or evil, will come to an end. We shall be brought into Your presence, and we shall see Jesus, the Hope of our hearts and the Savior of our souls. What more could we ever hope for! Thank You for our sure hope, O God. Amen.*

**Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, “Arise quickly!” And his chains fell off *his* hands. Acts 12:7**

The previous verse noted the condition of Peter's incarceration, having been bound with two chains between two soldiers and with guards before the door who were keeping the prison. Next, it says, "Now behold, an angel of the Lord stood by *him*."

The KJV and several other versions incorrectly say, "the angel of the Lord." However, as in Acts 5:19, there is no definite article before "angel." Hence, this is not a particular angel, nor is it the Lord. Rather, it is an unspecified angel sent by the Lord to accomplish a mission.

This angel came into Peter's cell in a miraculous manner where he stood by Peter. It next says, "and a light shone in the prison."

The word translated as "prison" is not the same as previously. Rather, it is a word found nowhere else in Scripture. However, according to Greek scholars, it was a common word in classical Greek, *oikéma*. It literally signifies a tenement, but it was used by those of Athens in a euphemistic manner for being in prison. Today, we say "pokey," "stir," "hoosegow," "jail," "clink," "cooler," "jug," "lockup," "pound," "glasshouse," "caboose," "slammer," "big house," "cell," and so on, in this manner. Choose your favorite!

When the angel appeared, the area lit up. Whether it was an external light or simply light radiating from the angel is not stated. All it says is "and light shone in the pokey." However, the accompaniment of light with the appearance of angels is found elsewhere and signifies the divine presence regardless of how it is transmitted. With that, it next says, "and he struck Peter on the side."

The word translated as struck can be anything from a gentle knock to a lethal blow. In this case, one can see him, like a friend, using the palm or the back of the hand and gently but firmly tapping on him to bring him from his obviously deep state of sleep. From there, it says, "and raised him up."

This word can mean to rise or to awaken. Certainly, this means he woke him up because of the next words of Luke, "saying, 'Arise quickly!'"

Once awake, the angel then asked Peter to get up in a hurry. There could be no delays in his actions due to the current situation. With that, it next says, "And his chains fell off *his* hands."

This was obviously miraculous in at least a couple of ways. First, they came off at the very moment the angel instructed him to arise. Also, the sound and motion of the chains



went undetected by the guards, as did the shining of the light and the stirring of Peter. With Peter free from the chains, the narrative will continue with miraculous events in the coming verses.

Life application: A natural explanation for the events that are occurring will only go so far. The guards fell asleep. That would be all four of them. If so, we would have to assume the angel must have used a type of gas to put them to sleep. The angel got the keys and went in and got Peter up. The gas was strong enough to make everyone sleep but not strong enough to keep Peter asleep. The angel took the keys from the jailors to get in and used them on the chains. Etc.

These are all possible explanations, but then it means that the actual words of the account were falsified. If so, the account is essentially true, but the details were not as it is written. Or is it a total fabrication? In other words, there is only so much of what is said that can be considered believable without accepting miraculous and divine intervention.

But this has already been the case in Scripture many times. God intervenes at various times and in various ways to bring about the outcome of things. Angels appear and disappear. The Lord appears and disappears as well. Such accounts require faith.

Quite often, naturalistic explanations for things are made, but in seeking such an explanation, it argues that at least the substance of the account is true. Otherwise, there would be no point in trying to explain it.

If the account is true, and if we have a reliable record of how it occurred (such as this account told by Peter and recorded by Luke), then we must either believe the words as they are written, or we need to suppose that Peter was either lying or not remembering correctly. But such an event would hardly be remembered incorrectly.

Let us consider these things and accept that what is written is true and accurate. Think about the arguments of naysayers. In the end, their position will always be untenable. Either the Bible is true, or it is not. If not, then why would we bother with it? But if it is, let us accept what it says and have faith that it is accurately portraying the events it describes.

*O God, we are so thankful for Your word. There are things in it that are often hard to understand, but we can accept them by faith because we know that You can do all*

*things. Help us in our doubts and give us a depth of faith that will withstand the many accusations that come against Your word. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Then the angel said to him, “Gird yourself and tie on your sandals”; and so he did. And he said to him, “Put on your garment and follow me.” Acts 12:8**

An angel of the Lord had just come to Peter, woke him up, and told him to arise. With that, the chains fell off his hands. Next, it says, “Then the angel said to him, ‘Gird yourself.’”

The clothes worn at that time consisted of an outer garment and an inner garment. When relaxing or sleeping, the outer garment would be taken off and the inner garment (the *xitōn*, or tunic) would be loosened by undoing the girdle that bound it. Hence, to “gird” oneself meant to tighten up this inner garment.

By doing this, it would make it possible to travel much more easily. To not be girded would mean the tunic could trip a person up when walking quickly or running. This is seen, for example, in these words from 1 Kings 18 –

“Then the hand of the LORD came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.” 1 Kings 18:46

Hence, the angel’s admonition to gird himself up implies that they would be leaving and heading out. He also said, “and tie on your sandals.”

The Greek word is *sandalion*. It was, like today, a shoe that protected the sole but with an open top. The sole could be made of wood or leather. Generally, it would be bound around the ankle and leg with string or straps to keep it secure. In compliance with the angel’s words, Luke notes, “and so he did.”

Remembering that Peter was just asleep, he would have been groggy. And so, noting the act of compliance tells us that nothing in the process was missed. Remembering also that Peter is between two guards, it can be assumed that the angel’s words were only heard by Peter or that the guards had been put into some sort of trance. In the Old Testament, such a state was noted a couple of times.

For example, in the account of Lot in Genesis 19, the people outside of his house were right there by the door, and yet they could not find it –

“But the men reached out their hands and pulled Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. <sup>11</sup> And they struck the men who *were* at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they became weary *trying* to find the door.” Genesis 19: 10, 11

The mental state of the people of Sodom was confused and their senses were blinded to keep them from properly perceiving what was happening and what they were seeing. With something like this quite possibly occurring with the guards, Luke next says, “And he said to him, ‘Put on your garment and follow me.’”

This is now what is called a *himation*. It is a cloak or robe that was often fabricated from wool. It had openings for the head and arms and fit loosely over the *xitōn*. In telling Peter to put this on, it could only mean they were leaving. He would be prepared to be outdoors when dressed in this manner.

Life application: There are times when we need to relax or sleep. But even at those times, we should be prepared to act. Peter was set to go even though he was in prison. His girdle was ready, his sandals were handy, and his outer garment was also nearby.

If we replace those things with the idea of the gospel, we can then equate our remembering it and having it handy for any situation that arises. The word should never be far from our lips, just in case there is a sudden need to share it. We should have it ready at the store, in class, while at work, or when on a picnic.

We never know when someone will suddenly enter into our life who needs to hear about Jesus. So always be ready. As Paul says –

“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; <sup>16</sup> above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. <sup>17</sup> And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; <sup>18</sup> praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” Ephesians 6:14-18

Be ready! People need Jesus and you just may be the person to share Him with someone today.

*Lord God, help us to always carry with us the sense of urgency that comes with knowing all people are one heartbeat away from eternity. With this thought in mind, we will always be ready to share the good news about Jesus. Keep us focused on this most important news, the good news of the gospel. Yes, help us with this. Amen.*

**So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. Acts 12:9**

In the previous verse, the angel that had come to Peter instructed him to gird himself, put on his sandals and his outer coat, and follow him. With that, it now says, “So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision.”

The NKJV does not give the proper sense of the verbs. What is much closer is a bit more cumbersome, but it more accurately portrays the nuances of the account penned by Luke. It says, “And having gone forth, he follows, and he did not know that what is happening through the angel is real, but he thinks he sees a vision” (CG). This will be the translation used for the commentary.

After being instructed to follow the angel, it next says, “And having gone forth.”

Nothing is said about how they went forth. If the angel materialized inside the prison and then freed Peter, did he just start walking out between the soldiers guarding the inside and outside of the cell? Luke simply says he (the verb is singular) went forth. Obviously, the angel was leading because it next says of Peter that “he follows.”

The account is fantastic because there are guards right there, and yet they do not perceive what is happening. As noted in the previous verse, they must have been given some type of spiritual blindness so that they could not even perceive what was going on around them. So profound is this type of blindness that it affected an entire army, as is recorded in 2 Kings 6:8-23.

In this account in Acts, the supposed spiritual blindness imposed upon the soldiers has allowed Peter to escape from the prison, even while heavily guarded. But so incredible is the event that, speaking of Peter, it next says, “and he did not know that what is happening through the angel is real.”

Peter was certainly groggy from his sleep. He was suddenly brought out of his sleep, given hurried instructions, and then led out of a seemingly impossible situation without

any harm coming to him. Obviously, it would be hard for the mind to grasp such a thing. And yet, he perceives that it is happening. Trying to reconcile the two in his mind, it next says, “but he thinks he sees a vision.”

Luke’s use of imperfect and present tense verbs is marvelous, bringing the reader directly into what is happening in Peter’s mind as he walks right through the once hopeless situation without any hindrance at all. He is being freed with each step he is taking, and nothing is there to restrain him from taking another step and then another. The Lord has a purpose for him yet. It appears his execution is not going to take place after all.

Life application: It is the Lord who has total control over everything that occurs. If He does not want someone to die, that person will not die. He has His own purposes for keeping people around or for allowing them to perish. As such, we cannot blame Him when someone does die. That person’s life was lived, the Lord gave him life, and the Lord determined the ending of his life was acceptable.

Likewise, if a person is set to die (such as Peter) and does not, there must be some purpose that still exists for his continuance. Using the example of a jammed gun or an explosive that fails to detonate will get the point across. The highly unlikely event takes place, and the person lives. Was it just random chance? Was it divine intervention? We cannot know with certainty, but the Lord does.

As time unfolds, we might see the person who should have died to go on to become a great evangelist and say, “The Lord spared him for this purpose.” Or we might see that same person working in the local supermarket and think, “Boy was he lucky. He sure didn’t use his chance very well.” But are we the ones to decide that? Maybe the person in the store told someone about Jesus and that person went on to be a famous preacher.

We cannot know the stream of events that go off into the future in a million divergent paths. And so, we must simply trust that each event that happens does so to meet the Lord’s plans. And this is not meant to be a fatalistic “What does it matter then?” thing. Rather, we should look at the world with a sense of true awe and wonder, and ask the Lord that we too may be included in what He is doing in a beautiful and unique way.

Our immediate circumstances may seem minimal and unimportant, but we should never think this is so. If we are saved because of Jesus, we are having an impact that will be seen for what it truly is someday. We will stand back and see the wonder of what God

has done, and we will be both awed and satisfied with what we see. Who you are and what you are doing is important. Trust this because it is so.

*Wonderfully glorious heavenly Father, thank You for Jesus who gives us true purpose and meaning. Without Him, our lives are temporary and futile. But because of Him, we are a part of a marvelous plan that has true and eternal significance. Help us to realize this and to rejoice that we are an important part of what You are doing. Thank You for Jesus who has made this possible. Amen.*

**When they were past the first and the second guard posts, they came to the iron gate that leads to the city, which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and went down one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. Acts 12:10**

Peter was led by the angel but thought what was happening was simply a vision. With that, the event continues with the words, “When they were past the first and the second guard posts.”

More rightly, the Greek reads, “And having passed through a first guard and a second.” It is debated what is being expressed here. Vincent’s Word Studies gives two possibilities, saying, “...some assuming that the first was the single soldier on guard at the door of Peter’s cell, and the second, another soldier at the gate leading into the street. Others, that two soldiers were at each of these posts, the two in Peter’s cell not being included in the four who made up the watch.”

No matter what, Peter was led out from being chained between two soldiers and then two guards after that. Despite this, he went out wholly undetected. After passing the guards, it next says “they came to the iron gate that leads to the city.”

It is probable that the sense here is not that the prison was outside of the city, but that the iron gate was the outer gate of the prison itself. In departing this gate, one would then enter the city.

What is certain is that Luke’s description of this gate would have been something anyone of the day could go look at and verify if his words matched the actual state of things. His minute care to include such details is a common aspect of his writings, and it was something that provided sure validation that what he wrote was reliable. Next, referring to the gate, it says, “which opened to them of its own accord.”

Of all translations, the KJV uniquely and incorrectly says, “which opened to them of his own accord.” One could say this is a poetic way of speaking of the gate, but because the word gate and its accompanying adjective are both feminine, the translation is decidedly incorrect. It should read “opened to them of its own accord.”

As this gate would be locked and bolted, being the final obstacle intended to keep prisoners from escaping, this is nothing other than a divinely orchestrated miracle. However, it opened, it was something that could not be attributed to mere chance. Not only would it have required the proper keys to open, but the timing of its opening by itself also is a validation of the miraculous nature of the event. Next, Luke records, “and they went out and went down one street.”

The word translated as “street” signifies a narrow alley or lane found in a city. The root of the word gives the sense of flowing motion. Hence, it would be a lane that was usually filled with the rush of people as if a moving body. Peter’s deliverance is complete at this point. He was delivered from the guards, from the prison itself, and he was at a distance safe enough to be left to himself. With that accomplished, the verse finishes with, “and immediately the angel departed from him.”

As there was no continued need for supernatural assistance, the angel’s task was complete, and he departed without any further ado. Peter was rescued to serve the Lord another day.

Life application: We may know of someone who was in a car crash or some other disaster who alone survives out of those involved. In such an event, we may say, “We are so blessed he was saved.” However, the families of the others who died might say in their minds, “So we weren’t blessed? What kind of blessing from God is this?”

Another example may be the coming of a tornado that destroys a line of houses but completely skips over one house, leaving it totally unharmed. We might say, “They were so blessed.” Again, the other owners may feel offended and say, “Why weren’t we given God’s blessing?”

This is looking at the issue in the wrong way. Just because someone has deliverance, such as Peter, it doesn’t mean that he is more favored of God than those who were executed the next day. It is just that there was a purpose for Peter’s continued existence that necessitated his being spared.

For those who suffer in a catastrophe, we should ask, “Do you thank God for each meal, taking it as a blessing?” Or “Do you thank God for each promotion, taking that as a blessing?” If not, then you are failing to acknowledge God’s hand in your life. If so, then you are doing what is right and good. But what if we miss a meal? Do we curse God and blame Him for that? If we are not promoted, do we revile Him?

The same logic applies to greater-sized blessings or losses, such as losing a home or having only one person out of seven saved from a car accident. It is right in all circumstances to acknowledge the Lord’s blessing while also not imputing wrong to Him for the things that we don’t like.

One’s personal blessing does not necessarily equate to a particular favor that is above those who did not receive it. Therefore, let us simply be grateful for every good blessing that comes our way, no matter how small or how great it is. We cannot know the works of God from beginning to end. Therefore, we should acknowledge what we do know and not attempt to find a design that matches our presuppositions concerning those things we cannot know.

*Glorious God, we are grateful to You for each and every blessing that comes our way. Help us to properly express that, especially so others can see our gratitude and know that we have given the credit where it belongs. And, Lord, when trials come, help us to remain grateful even through such times as well. Amen.*

**And when Peter had come to himself, he said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and *from* all the expectation of the Jewish people.” Acts 12:11**

Peter was just led out of the prison, through the iron gate, and down one street. At that time, the angel departed from him. It now says, “And when Peter had come to himself.”

The meaning is clear. Peter was overcome by the events that occurred. From being roused from sleep to being delivered all the way out of the prison was probably a matter of mere minutes. During the whole process, he did not have time to consider what was happening, but just rushed on through one stage of the process after another, obediently following the directives of the angel.

Now, with the angel gone, he will have to think for himself. That has caused his mind to stop racing and he can finally think about each step that has occurred and what he is to



do next. With that state of mind now attained, “he said, ‘Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel.’”

As if in a dream, he participated in the events from the time of his waking until now, but – at least mentally – he really wasn’t an active participant. Rather, he was being led while in the groggy state of having just arisen. As this was so, the idea of an angel leading him was more like the reflection of a person while dreaming. He now realizes, though, that this was a real angel and the events he participated in really came about. That is seen in his next words, saying, “and has delivered me from the hand of Herod.”

This is what was preeminent on his mind even while sleeping. The thought of waking and facing the trial was what he fell asleep to, and it is what his mind probably tried to process, even during his slumber. Even if he felt he would be freed from actual execution because of the promise of Jesus from John 21 that he would die as an old man, he would still have to go through the events of the trial for that to happen.

But no trial would take place now. He was delivered from the hands of Herod, “and *from* all the expectation of the Jewish people.”

The meaning of this is certainly not “all the Jewish people.” Rather, it refers to those who were opposed to the work of the apostles, especially the leadership who had rejected the message of Christ from the beginning. That is seen in the opening words of chapter 12 –

“Now about that time Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church. <sup>2</sup> Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. <sup>3</sup> And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread.” Acts 12:1-3

They hated the message of the apostles, they were pleased to see it start coming to an end through the death of James, and they were looking forward to more blood for the message to finally be ended. To them, the death of Peter would be a great step in this process.

Life application: One can see in the words of this verse the personal nature of things that could only have been relayed to Luke by Peter himself. The knowledge of how he felt as the events unfolded was known to him alone. Thus, what is recorded here can be taken as personal eyewitness. As far as Peter could be considered reliable, the narrative here must be considered equally so.

And yet, Paul says that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. This is a remarkable aspect of Scripture. Luke investigated and interviewed. He checked and he verified. He noted and he composed. And yet, through all of that, we have a word that was divinely inspired by God. Everything that Luke did to compose the book of Acts was a part of the process of bringing us this word.

And this is true with all Scripture. The things that occurred and the process of compiling each book was all considered by God to bring about this wonderful treasure that we now hold in our hands. Let us consider this as we contemplate the marvel of God's written revelation to us.

May we carefully consider this word. May we never be flippant or dismissive of what it conveys to us. Rather, let us treasure it in our hearts, contemplate its pages, and be willing to share its message with all who come to learn of its sacred contents.

*Glorious God, thank You for Your precious and sacred word. What an honor and a joy it is to consider it and to treasure it in our lives. It is the word that tells us of Jesus. Thank You that we possess the very words of life in the pages of Your holy Bible. Amen.*

**So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. Acts 12:12**

Peter had just collected himself enough to know that what had taken place was real, not a vision. With that, it now says, "So, when he had considered this."

In realizing he was really free and that the things he would do going forward were not just a part of an ongoing dream, he had to consider what steps he should take. As such, he determined to first let the other believers know he was ok. As such, "he came to the house of Mary."

This may have been the house closest to where the angel departed from him and where trusted believers resided. He would have known his coming there would not jeopardize his freedom. Of this particular Mary, she is noted as "the mother of John whose surname was Mark." Concerning this name, Charles Ellicott provides the following details –

"Here we may note (1) that as being mentioned by St. Peter as his "son" (1 Peter 5:13) he was probably converted by him; (2) that he was cousin to Barnabas, probably through his mother, and was therefore at least connected with the tribe of Levi (Acts

4:36), and possibly belonging to it; (3) that the fact that Mary's house was the meeting-place of the Church indicates comparative wealth, as did Barnabas's sale of his estate; (4) that the absence of any mention of Mark's father makes it probable that she was a widow; (5) that the Latin name of *Marcus* indicates some point of contact with Romans or Roman Jews."

Although Ellicott's first point may be pressing the term "son," the other details seem likely. Paul calls Timothy a true son in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2) and then says of Titus that he is "a true son in *our* common faith." Despite that, Ellicott's other details seem probable. As for the names John and Mark, this doesn't mean that both names were conferred as legal names, but they were both used when referring to him. Most likely the Jews would have used John while the Greeks would call him Mark. This is common with many in the New Testament.

Of the house of Mary, it next says, "where many were gathered together praying." This follows logically after the words of verse 12:5 where it noted "constant prayer was offered to God for" Peter. It could be that some were awake and praying at any given time of the day or night. As those gathered got tired, they'd go lie down. When they got up, they would get back to prayers.

Life application: Peter could have just headed out of Jerusalem right away and had a letter sent back to the believers that he was ok. Instead, he weighed out the options and decided to let those who were certainly distressed over his situation know that he was fine.

Today, we have telephones and internet connectivity. Therefore, we can convey such things more readily. But when the power is out or a phone isn't handy, we should try to find some way of letting people know we are ok when they are concerned about us. Peter was careful to do this, knowing it would be a great relief to all. And more, they could change their prayers of petition to prayers of thanks and praise.

Let us walk through this world attempting to always be level-headed. When we keep our wits about us, we will have less stress and anxiety, and we will also be able to help those around us who may need the same calm assurances we have. By fixing our eyes on Jesus, this is possible. In Him, we can have the confident assurance that all is well.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the peace of life that comes from knowing Jesus. In Him, we can let all our other cares pass by without them negatively affecting us. And so, help*

*us to keep our wits about us. In this, we can be a testimony to others of the peace we possess in our souls. Amen.*

**And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer.**

Acts 12:13

In the previous verse, Peter arrived at the house of Mary, the mother of John and who is also called Mark. The account said many were gathered together and were praying. With that, it now says, “And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate.”

Note: Some manuscripts do not include Peter’s name here, simply saying, “he.”

Once arriving at the house of Mary, it notes that Peter knocked on the door of the gate. The word translated as door is the common word that signifies a portal or entrance, such as a door or gate. The word translated as “gate” is *pulón*. HELPS Word Studies defines it as “the passage which led from the street through the front part of the house to the inner court.” As such, Vincent’s Word Studies explains the use of both words together –

“The small outside door, forming the entrance from the street, and opening into the *πυλών* [*pulón*], or doorway, the passage from the street into the court. Others explain it as the wicket, a small door in the larger one, which is less probable.”

With Peter’s knocking, it next says, “a girl named Rhoda came to answer.” The word translated as “girl” often signifies a slave. For example, Paul uses it five times in Galatians 4 to describe a bondwoman. However, Vincent’s argues against this meaning here, noting that her prompt recognition of Peter’s voice and her joyful haste makes this unlikely. He continues by arguing that she was probably a disciple gathered for prayer.

But that is an argument that does not hold up well. Slaves are fixed parts of a home and have an intimate knowledge of the comings and goings of all guests. This is evident from Mark 14 –

“Now as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came. <sup>67</sup> And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, ‘You also were with Jesus of Nazareth.’” Mark 14:66, 67

Further, as the Bible shows several times in the New Testament, slaves are noted as believers. Their status doesn’t change simply because they come to the faith. Vincent’s

also notes that “the record of her name” is another reason to believe she was not a slave. That also is not a good argument. Onesimus is mentioned by name throughout the epistle of Philemon. Further, the name of the servant in John 18:10 is explicitly stated as Malchus. Such a note shows careful attention to detail by the one writing out the events.

As for her name, Rhoda means “Rose.” As today, naming someone after a plant, flower, animal, and so on was not uncommon in the past. In Scripture there are several such names like Tamar (Palm Tree), Hadassah (Myrtle), Deborah (Bee), Tabitha/Dorcas (Gazelle), and so on.

Life application: The historical writings of the Bible detail events that really happened. Luke took the time to note a slave girl by name, and to this day she is having an impact on those who read the account and think about who she was.

Another slave girl is noted in 2 Kings 5:2-4. No record of her name is given, and yet this slave had such a profound impact on the biblical narrative that the events she initiated were even mentioned by Jesus in Luke 4:27 – Naaman came at the suggestion of a slave girl. At the same time, there are kings who are mentioned in the Bible whose names and deeds are lost to history, other than the fact that they were defeated in battles, such as the king of Jericho (Joshua 6) and the king of Makkedah (Joshua 10).

In the end, what really matters isn’t how much money we have, how great a position we have, or even if our name is remembered by others after we are gone. What matters is how we conduct our lives before the Lord God. He remembers the name of Naaman’s slave girl even if it was never recorded in Scripture.

As we are remembered by Him, we should endeavor to be remembered by Him as people of faith and of faithful deeds. We shall rise to receive our just due for the lives we have lived. Remember this and walk humbly and in a circumspect manner before the Lord all your days.

“O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.

<sup>2</sup>You know my sitting down and my rising up;  
You understand my thought afar off.

<sup>3</sup>You comprehend my path and my lying down,  
And are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup>For *there is* not a word on my tongue,  
*But* behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.

<sup>5</sup>You have hedged me behind and before,  
And laid Your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup>*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
It is high, I cannot attain it.*” Psalm 139:1-6

*Lord God, help us to remember that You are aware of our every deed. We easily forget this and go about doing things we shouldn't. Or we may fail to do those things we should. But with our minds remembering that You are there, we can then remember to always act responsibly. Help us in this, Lord. May we live our lives rightly all our days. Amen.*

**When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate.** Acts 12:14

In the previous verse, the girl named Rhoda came to the door of the gate to answer when Peter knocked. Now, it says, “When she recognized Peter's voice.”

It is obvious from these words that Peter was well-known within the house. Even without seeing his face, she knew it was him. This is in accord with Peter's words of 1 Peter 5 where Peter calls Mark “my son.” There was a longstanding intimacy between Peter and Mark that extended to the whole family and the church that met in their home. This also included Rhoda. When she heard his voice, it next says that “because of her gladness she did not open the gate.”

Some commentaries attempt to work in an additional explanation as to why she didn't open the gate. Specifically, they say that she didn't because of the persecution that they had previously experienced at the time when Saul was arresting those of the church and then the newer persecution of the killing of James and the arresting of Peter.

Although these things certainly occurred and probably made the believers wary, Luke explicitly tells us that Rhoda was overjoyed at the voice of Peter and simply neglected to open the gate, wanting to share the news with everyone. As it says, she “ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate.”

Rhoda simply got caught up in the moment and rushed inside without attending to the door. The simplicity, excitement, and innocence of the event demonstrate the true love that Rhoda felt for Peter. It is not unlike the reaction of Rebekah in Genesis 24:28 and even the reaction of Rachel when she met Jacob in Genesis 29. The emotions simply overwhelmed those involved and off ran the young ladies to share the good news.

Life application: What is the best news of all? Are you willing to share it with those you know and even with those you don't know? And just how willing are you? Do you grudgingly plod along the path of life and remember it only after being reminded that it is your duty to share it? Or do you skip along the road, joyfully anticipating the next person you can talk to about the goodness of God in sending His Son to bring us life?

Paul admonishes us to have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. That means we should always be ready to share this good news. And so, let us comply with this simple and necessary part of our responsibilities. The young maidens Rebekah, Rachel, and Rhoda all ran to share the good news they knew about. Let us be young in heart like them and do likewise!

*Lord God, time is short. Help us to be about Your business while there is still a chance to let people know about our hope that may end through death, disaster, or rapture at any moment. So convict us now about what we need to do. To Your glory. Amen.*

**But they said to her, “You are beside yourself!” Yet she kept insisting that it was so. So they said, “It is his angel.”** Acts 12:15

Rhoda ran into the house and announced that Peter was outside. Now, Luke records the surprised gathering's response, saying, “But they said to her, ‘You are beside yourself!’” The Greek implies someone who is crazy, which is exactly how we would state this today, “You're crazy.”

The word is a verb, *mainomai*. One can see the root of the word maniac and mania. To get the sense of its meaning, it is also used twice in Acts 26 along with its cognate noun *mania*, signifying insanity –

“Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad [insanity]!’

<sup>25</sup> But he said, ‘I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.’”

Hearing Rhoda's words, this is the only thing they could conclude. Otherwise, why didn't she just let him in when she went to the door? Despite their dismissal of her claim, Luke next records, “Yet she kept insisting that it was so.”

Rather than “kept insisting,” the word signifies confidence and more appropriately reads, “Yet she confidently affirmed.” She was adamant that the person's voice was

surely that of Peter. In response to this, and probably to rib her a little, we read, “So they said, ‘It is his angel.’”

This may be a claim based on what is said in Hebrews 1:14 when referring to angels –

“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”

However, there is no reason to assume that those speaking to Rhoda actually believed that Peter’s angel would come knocking at the door. It seems that they are poking fun at her because of her adamant affirmation that it was really Peter at the door.

Life application: While the debate as to whether Peter was standing at the door and knocking to come in was going on, Peter was... well, he was standing at the door. The simplest method of determining what the truth of the matter was would be to go to the door and open it.

Likewise, Jesus told the church of Laodicea that He stood at the door and was knocking –

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” Revelation 3:20

What is He talking about? He is noting that the person on the inside is not only given a knock to alert him that someone is outside, but this person has also been explicitly told who is outside. And more, Jesus is speaking about an individual as opposed to the entire church. While the church may be lost, the person can still be saved. In other words, the Lord is using these metaphors to relay a truth.

God wants fellowship with someone who has failed to come to Him. He initiates the action, alerting him that He is there, and He then identifies Himself so that there can be no doubt about who He is. When the heart of the person is willing, he opens the door – meaning he allows the Lord in. The terminology is simple and explicit.

Further, it shows the simplicity of the process. Opening a door takes little effort. The action occurs and the fellowship is realized. Faith is the key. When a favorable response is made, and the door is opened, the Lord then says that He will come in to him and dine with him. The words clearly demonstrate that the Calvinistic doctrine of “irresistible grace” is false. God does not regenerate people in order to believe, causing them to believe, which then saves them. That is not only an illogical doctrine, but also unbiblical.



Instead, when the response is favorable and the door is opened, the Lord promises that He will dine with that person. The imagery here is that of close fellowship and intimacy. To dine with someone brings a state of closeness that is almost unmatched in human experience. To further bolster this, Jesus notes that the person will also dine with Him.

In this, there is the idea of intimacy and fellowship that the Lord is conveying. It is something only possible with the Lord through receiving Christ, allowing Him into one's heart. The words in Revelation speak beautifully of the transmission of the gospel to a dead church. Who will respond?

Although it is fashionable to belittle those who say, "Christ is knocking on the door of your heart," this is the exact symbolism that is being conveyed. Christ initiated the process, He identifies Himself through the message, and if a response is made, salvation is realized.

But the point is that someone must convey this message to the person. Rhoda is trying to tell those inside that Peter is at the door. We need to tell others that Jesus is awaiting our response. Be sure to tell people that He is there, right there at the door. It will be up to them after that, but your job is to ensure they at least know this wonderful news.

*Lord God, give us the strong desire to tell the good news about Jesus. Time is passing quickly, and our days are short. So, Lord, may we be willing to tell of this wonderful news of salvation while there is time. Yes, may it be so. Amen.*

**Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished.** Acts 12:16

The previous verse noted the insistence by Rhoda that Peter was at the door. With that remembered, it next says, "Now Peter continued knocking."

It is almost a comedy at this point. Peter has knocked. Rhoda came to the door and probably asked, "Who is it?" Peter responded. Rhoda freaked out with joy and instead of opening the door, she ran inside to tell everyone. Nobody believed Rhoda (poor Rhoda!). Finally, Peter must keep knocking while the people are inside debating if Rhoda is crazy, if it is Peter's angel, or who knows what else. The danger to Peter is unknown, but he was still within the city, and he was supposed to stand trial shortly. With that, relief finally comes, saying, "and when they opened *the door* and saw him."

We can imagine those inside thronging to the door and fighting to be the one to grab the handle and unlock it, wondering what to make of Rhoda's words. With the door open and Peter obviously standing there, it says, "they were astonished."

The word used has been seen seven times already in Acts. This is its eighth and last time. It will be seen one more time in 2 Corinthians 5:3 where Paul states, "For if we are beside ourselves, *it is* for God; or if we are of sound mind, *it is* for you." It literally means, "to stand aside." Hence, one can think of being beside oneself in amazement, and thus astonished. Rhoda wasn't crazy, after all.

Life application: Unlike this event concerning Peter, when Jesus comes knocking, be sure to let Him in.

*Lord God, how blessed was the day when You came into our lives. Now, help us to be prepared to share the good news with those we meet on the path of life. You will knock and anticipate them opening the door, but that will only happen if they first hear the word about You. May we do our part to help fill the halls of heaven with those who have heard and opened the door. Amen.*

**But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place. Acts 12:17**

The previous verse noted that those inside Mary's house opened the door and were astonished to see Peter there. Now it says, "But motioning to them."

Rather, it is an aorist participle, "But having motioned to them." The word *kataseiό* is introduced here and will only be seen four times, all in Acts. It means to shake the hand up and down to attract attention as if signaling. In this case, Peter first motioned "with his hand to keep silent."

It is a gesture common throughout the world. When someone is trying to get others to be quiet, they will make hand motions, usually accompanied by some stern facial gesture. Those inside probably started to explode with joy and words of welcome, not realizing that Peter had escaped. He would have to quiet them down and then quietly convey to them what had occurred. That begins with the words, "he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison."

As there was no article before the word “angel” in the previous verses in this account, it was an unknown divine messenger who assisted Peter in his escape. However, Peter credits the action to the Lord, as is fitting. This is noted in Hebrews 1:14 which says that angels are “all ministering spirits sent forth.” The obvious implication is that they are sent forth by the Lord God. Thus, Peter rightly ascribes the deliverance to the Lord. Next, it says, “And he said, ‘Go, tell these things to James.’”

This is James, the son of Alphaeus, also known as the brother of the Lord. In Galatians 2:9, he is noted by Paul as one of the pillars of the church. He will preside over the council in Jerusalem in Acts 15. As with other clues in Acts, this shows us that this James had become the leader of the church at this time. Peter specifically singles him out now rather than any of the other apostles. Only after mentioning James does he add “and to the brethren.”

Though not explicitly stated, the implication is that James held the administrative reigns of church matters. No reason is noted, but he was obviously qualified to handle the affairs of the church in a better manner than the apostles. After his words to those in the house, the verse finishes with, “And he departed and went to another place.”

With the news conveyed, and certainly for the safety of those inside, Peter departed. With this note, the record of the apostleship of Peter in Acts is all but over. He will be mentioned by name in the next verse and then only once again, in Acts 15 during the council at Jerusalem. From this point on, Saul (who is Paul) will become the focus of the Acts narrative until the end of the book.

Life application: The record of Acts thus far has focused mostly on the state of the Jews in relation to the gospel. However, an underlying tone of the account has also carried a strong acceptance of the message by Gentiles. This will increase immensely with the narrative moving to Paul. At the same time, there will be an underlying tone of some Jews remaining faithful to the gospel while the nation itself turns away from it more and more.

Paul will speak of this state of affairs in Romans 9-11. There he will note that “at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5). This is referring to Jewish believers. As the epistle is written for the church at any time, it is a clear indication that there has been and will be a remnant of believing Jews throughout the church age. And this has been seen all along.

With the coming of the end times, the number of Jewish believers is exploding. Israel is now back in the land they were exiled from, and the prophecies concerning them as a nation are set to be fulfilled. Let us praise God for His faithfulness to this disobedient nation because of His faithfulness to the covenant He made with them.

And in seeing His faithfulness to a covenant that is ready to vanish away, we can be certain of His faithfulness to us in the New Covenant that will never vanish away when they as a nation enter into the New Covenant. We have an eternal hope because of what He has done in the giving of Jesus for us. Consider what it means! Eternal life is promised to us because of Jesus. Thank God for Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Glorious Heavenly Father, our hearts are filled with joy because of what You have done for us through the giving of Jesus. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord and our certain hope of eternal life in Your presence. Yes, thank You for this sure hope. Amen.*

**Then, as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers about what had become of Peter.** Acts 12:18

In the previous verse, Peter declared all that had occurred in bringing him out of prison. He then left the church house and departed to another place. Now, the narrative turns to events back at the prison, beginning with, “Then, as soon as it was day.”

It is unknown how long it was from the time of Peter’s being freed until the day came. All it said was that during the night Peter was sleeping when the angel came to deliver him. One would think if it was early morning, just before dawn, Luke would have stated this. Depending upon the times set for each watch, the guards may have been changed at midnight or three am. And so, it can be guessed that maybe Peter had several hours before the day came. All that is certain is that at daybreak “there was no small stir among the soldiers.”

Imagine the chaos, the fear, the possible accusations, and so on that came upon the soldiers. Allowing a prisoner to escape was punishable even up to death, and that death would not be long coming. As such, there would be the greatest consternation “about what had become of Peter.”

He was there in the cell. He was shackled. He was between two soldiers. Outside the cell were more soldiers guarding the door. That was followed by a second guard post and then an iron gate. The impossibility of an escape would have left those inside absolutely stunned at not finding him. And yet, he was not to be found.

Life application: Imagine you are suddenly facing the prospect of death within mere moments. If death was the penalty, these guards would probably not leave the prison before being executed. What if you were suddenly taken captive in a restaurant and the gunmen were executing everyone? What if you were on a ship that was sinking far out at sea, and you had only moments to live? What if you were in Hawaii and a volcano erupted, with lava completely encircling you and coming closer by the minute?

We have no idea about the future. Despite our attempts at controlling the events around us, there is no reason to assume we will be alive in an hour. All we have is the anticipated hope that it will be so. If the knowledge that our time is now up arrives, what will be our final thoughts? “I shouldn’t have yelled at the children last night.” “I wish I could have told dad I loved him.” “I wish I had talked more about Jesus to those around me.”

We cannot control every instance that arises, but we can be attentive to seeking peace with those around us. When we depart for work in the morning, we should be good to those we are leaving, just in case our time has expired. We should also attempt to be somewhat prepared for what will happen to our property and money. Otherwise, it could cause even more trouble for those we would otherwise want to spare such grief.

Time is fleeting, and our final moments shouldn’t be filled with regret. So, from time to time, make a mental note to press yourself to do what is necessary to keep that regret from setting in, just in case. Above all, be sure to redeem the time and tell those around you about Jesus. You may be the one influence in their lives that can make an eternal difference in what happens to them.

*O God, we can’t be sure of even the next few moments of our lives. And so, Lord, as we continue on, help us to be about Your business. Help us to remember to tell those around us the good news that this temporary and futile life can be replaced with something eternal and joy-filled if only Jesus is included. Whenever our end comes, may it be with the knowledge that we did what we could to share this good news. Amen.*

**“But when Herod had searched for him and not found him, he examined the guards and commanded that *they* should be put to death. And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*.” Acts 12:19**

The previous words told of the stir that had arisen among the soldiers. Now, it says “But when Herod had searched for him and not found him.”

The verbs are aorist participles – “And Herod, having searched for him and having not found.” Luke is recording the events as they occurred.

One can see Herod being apprised of the situation and personally coming to the prison and looking it over, seeing if there were any rooms that Peter could have been secreted away in. Maybe there was a trap door, or maybe there was a hidden chamber. He was probably both embarrassed and perplexed at what had transpired and wanted to personally look things over before making any determination as to what he should do.

These words contain the last implied noting of Peter in the account. He was searched for and not found. Peter will not be mentioned again until Acts 15. Next, and speaking of Herod, it says, “he examined the guards.”

Again, it is an aorist participle, “having examined the guards.” The Greek word, translated as examined, signifies a process of distinguishing a matter from “down to up.” In other words, one starts at the very bottom, or beginning, of a matter and thoroughly checks every detail until the top is reached. Such an examination leaves nothing out.

In other words, the lives of the guards are at stake. It would make no sense for them to simply let Peter go, even if he offered them vast sums of money. However, if a gang had abducted the families of the soldiers and threatened to kill them unless they freed Peter, they may have acquiesced.

The examination would consider every imaginable thing that could have prompted the soldiers to do what they did. With the examination complete, and surely with no reasonable explanation for Peter’s disappearance, it next says that Herod “commanded that *they* should be put to death.”

The Greek reads, “commanded *them* to be led away.” The supposition is death, and this is what is generally accepted as what occurred. However, without knowing Herod’s command, it could simply be for punishment or for a set duration of incarceration. The word is used in Matthew 27:31, at Jesus’ trial, saying –

“And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His *own* clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified.”

As can be seen, the word “crucified” is affixed to the verb. As such, it provides a definitive explanation for what occurred. This is not the case with these soldiers. The

leading away could be for a future trial. The probability is that they were executed, but an adamant stand on this is unjustified.

With this thought complete, it now says of Herod, "And he went down from Judea to Caesarea, and stayed *there*." Of this, Albert Barnes says, "This journey of Herod is related by Josephus (Antiq., book 19, chapter 8, section 2). He says that it was after he had reigned over all Judea for three years."

Herod stayed in Caesarea until his death which was not much later. That will be recorded in the verses to come. The word translated as "stayed" is *diatribó*. One can see the obvious etymological root of the modern word "diatribe." It is a compound word coming from words meaning "through" and "rub."

In the case of staying, it signifies "to wear through time." One can think of being in time (*dia*/through) and rubbing it away. In the case of a diatribe, one can think of thoroughly rubbing away someone through a verbal attack. As for Herod, he tarried in Caesarea after his arrival there.

Life application: As noted, it is more than probable that the soldiers who had guarded Peter were executed. It may seem unfair to someone that Peter escaped while these soldiers were taken out and punished or even executed. But God determined that Peter should be spared. It is His right to dispose of His creatures according to His wisdom. He is the Creator, and we are merely a part of His creation.

But more, if Peter had done his job, which he surely did, he at least attempted to tell the soldiers about Jesus. In fact, he had just witnessed to Gentiles in Acts 10 and re-explained what occurred in Acts 11. He was fully aware of their need for Jesus and of Jesus' willingness to accept them. It may be for this very reason that Peter was incarcerated at this time.

And so, someday, we might be in glory and find out that one or more of these soldiers was saved because Peter opened his mouth and spoke out the words of life concerning Jesus. It is a great lesson for us. We have no idea who around us will die before we see them again. What a day of regret to hear that the person we were sitting so close to won't be around any longer. We had the opportunity and every reason to speak, and yet we chose not to.

Let us consider this and be sure to act accordingly. Let us speak out the wonderful words of life to those we come across!

*Yes, Lord God, we have a responsibility to speak out the gospel to those we encounter. May we do so with joy and with a sense of urgency. The day is almost spent, and the time is short. Help us to speak while it is day. Night is coming when that opportunity will have passed. Give us wisdom in this, O God. Amen.*

**Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country.** Acts 12:20

The previous verse ended the narrative concerning Peter and it continued that of Herod. It just noted that he had gone down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. Luke next records, "Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon."

The Greek more precisely reads, "Now Herod had been very angry with the Tyrians and Sidonians." These are the people to the north of Caesarea. Albert Barnes gives a good description of them –

"These were cities of Phoenicia, formerly very opulent, and distinguished for merchandise. They were situated on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, and were in the western part of Judea. They were therefore well known to the Jews. Tyre is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament as being the place through which Solomon derived many of the materials for building the temple, 2 Chronicles 2:11-16. It was also a place against which one of the most important and pointed prophecies of Isaiah was directed. ... Both these cities were very ancient. Sidon was situated within the bounds of the tribe of Asher Joshua 19:28, but this tribe could never get possession of it, Judges 1:31. It was famous for its great trade and navigation. Its inhabitants were the first remarkable merchants in the world, and were much celebrated for their luxury. In the time of our Saviour it was probably a city of much splendor and extensive commerce."

As for the term "very angry," that comes from a word found only here in Scripture, *thumomacheó*. It comes from *thumos*, an outburst of wrath, and *machomai*, to engage in battle, fight, and so on. The sense is that he was so miffed at them that he was contemplating hostilities with them. Understanding Agrippa's fierce anger, it next says, "but they came to him with one accord."

Both cities joined in diplomacy to quell the wrath of Agrippa. It would do no good for them to have Agrippa as an enemy. Rather, it would be harmful to their existence, as



will be seen. Therefore, it next says, “and having made Blastus the king’s personal aide their friend.”

The name Blastus is found only here. It is believed to be derived from *blastanó*, to sprout or bud. If so, perhaps it indicates that he was raised as a slave in the house of Herod, having sprung up in that role. Or he could be a friend or a trusted officer of the Roman empire. Nothing is stated, so one can only guess. The words “the king’s personal aide” are more of a paraphrase. The Greek reads, “who is over the bed-chamber of the king.”

This was a highly trusted position because of its intimate nature. If an attack against the king took place, this would be a good place for it to occur. As such, only the most faithful of servants or officers would be entrusted to serve in this capacity. A comparable position is found in Esther 2 –

“In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king’s gate, two of the king’s eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. <sup>22</sup> So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai’s name. <sup>23</sup> And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.” Esther 2:21-23

The word translated as “doorkeepers” in those verses implies that they were attendants to the door of the king’s bed-chamber. As for Blastus, obtaining an alliance with him would be a way of obtaining the ear of the king. In accomplishing this, “they asked for peace.”

Rather than trying to bribe Blastus to attack his king, they entreated him to seek peace for them. If they had tried to bribe him and failed to draw him to their side, it would have only further incited the king. War might be the result. But even if not, they would certainly suffer great harm “because their country was supplied with food by the king’s country.”

Agrippa’s area of rule included rich and fertile land that was close, it was sufficient for their needs, and without it they would need to reach out through trade with other countries that would have Tyre and Sidon at their mercy. Herod’s blocking of their food supplies would be a catastrophic situation for them. Hence, appealing to the king through seeking peace was by far the best option for them.

Life application: Whether those of Tyre and Sidon had read the proverbs or not, they acted in accord with Solomon's words –

“As messengers of death *is* the king's wrath,  
But a wise man will appease it.” Proverbs 16:14

Agrippa was certainly not happy with them, but instead of getting him further riled up, they sought to appease him. Though most places don't have kings anymore, we do have those appointed over us who can certainly cause grief if we get on their wrong side. Paul speaks of this in Romans 13:1-6.

Attempting to live at peace with those appointed over you is a good way to avoid trouble. And yet, there is a time to oppose the conduct of the wicked. For most today, that is through grassroots movements leading to election day. If these people are not properly serving their constituents, they need to be voted out.

Unfortunately, when most people have taken the immoral path, they will elect leaders suited to their immoral ways. When this occurs, as it is in much of the world today, there is little that can be done without violence ensuing. There is often no easy answer to the dilemmas Christians may find themselves in, but we must always carefully consider our position with the Lord Jesus first and foremost.

The wicked will only grow worse as society devolves into the end times. We need to not be a part of their depraved journey to perdition.

*Lord God, help us to always do the right and moral thing, even if the rest of the world has taken a trip down Immoral Avenue. Help us to always remember our allegiance to You and to act in accord with our position as Your redeemed people. Amen.*

**So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them.** Acts 12:21

The tenses of the verbs as given by the NKJV are lacking. It should read: “And on a set day, Herod having arrayed himself in royal apparel, and having sat upon the throne, was making an oration unto them” (CG). This will be used to analyze the verse.

The previous verse referred to the conflict between King Herod and the people of Tyre and Sidon, and how those cities were attempting to reconcile their differences. Having noted that, this verse begins with, “And on a set day.”

Here, the word *taktos* is used. It is found only here in the New Testament. It is a day that is arranged or appointed. It is apparently not speaking of a day appointed between the two parties, but a day appointed as a festival. Vincent's Word Studies says –

“According to some, it was in honor of the emperor's safe return from Britain. Others think it was to celebrate the birthday of Claudius; others that it was the festival of the Quinquennalia, observed in honor of Augustus, and dating from the taking of Alexandria, when the month Sextilis received the name of the Emperor - August.”

Albert Barnes is one to believe it was the birthday of Claudius, stating –

“This was the second day of the sports and games which Herod celebrated in Caesarea in honor of Claudius Caesar. Josephus has given an account of this occurrence, which coincides remarkably with the narrative here. The account is contained in his ‘Antiquities of the Jews,’ book 19, chapter 8, section 2, and is as follows: ‘Now when Agrippa had reigned three years over all Judea, he came to the city Caesarea, which was formerly called Strato's Tower; and there he exhibited shows in honor of Caesar, upon his being informed that there was a certain festival celebrated to make vows for his safety. At which festival a great multitude was gotten together of the principal persons, and such as were of dignity throughout his province.’”

With that noted, the words continue with, “Herod having arrayed himself in royal apparel.” Turning again to Josephus, he writes the following:

“He put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of wonderful contexture, and early in the morning came into the theater place of the shows and games, at which time the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the first reflection of the sun's rays upon it, shone after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently on him.”

Of this surprising account, Luke next records, “and having sat upon the throne.” The word translated as throne is *béma*. Rather than a royal throne, this is an elevated throne where judgments are made. One might more literally translate it as a tribunal chair where justice is administered from. And this is essentially what they had sought from Blastus in the previous verse. The account is methodically taking the reader through each step of what took place. While on this elevated throne it next says he “was making an oration unto them.”

Here is another word unique in the New Testament, *démégoreó*, or “oration.” Elsewhere in classical Greek, it is a word used to denote popular harangue. Thus, he spoke to the people in their common language and with the intent of impressing his words upon them in a manner they would readily accept.

Life application: The citing of Josephus here is intended to fill in information that is not found in the Bible, but it is not intended to be considered inspired. As it agrees with Scripture in the overall picture being presented, it can be considered an acceptable reference.

However, there are times when what Josephus says does not align with the Bible. Therefore, one should not assume that what he says is to be taken at face value at all times. When the Bible and Josephus conflict, it is common for scholars to side with Josephus. That shows a bias against the Bible. But the same could be said of someone who dismisses the account of Josephus.

But if two accounts are given and they don’t align, either one is right or the other is, or both are wrong. It cannot be that both are true. And so, at times, we must decide where we will hang our hats. As the Bible has proven itself fully reliable in other areas, the wise choice would be to go with Scripture.

Keep this in mind as you read extra-biblical sources. Don’t be led off onto strange paths. If the Bible is the word of God, then it is fully trustworthy. Study to show yourself approved and think on the word at all times. Let it fill your mind with its wonderful goodness.

*Lord God, help us in our pursuit of understanding Your precious word. Give us insights into the difficult portions of it so that we will be grounded in our faith. And, Lord, help us to live our lives in faith as we consider Your word in relation to our lives and to the world around us. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And the people kept shouting, “The voice of a god and not of a man!” Acts 12:22**

The previous verse noted that Herod sat on his throne and gave an oration to the people. Now, in response to his words, it says, “And the people kept shouting.”

It is correct. The verb is imperfect, indicating that they shouted and continued to shout. And what they cried out was, “The voice of a god and not of a man!”

Various ideas on who shouted this can be considered. As this was a particular set day, it may be assumed that not only those of Tyre and Sidon were there but also people of Israel as well. Or it could be that only those of Tyre and Sidon were in attendance. Either way, the reaction to his speech was that he was more than just a mere mortal but was rather a god.

This is confirmed by the words of Josephus as well –

“And presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another (though not for his good), that he was a god; and they added, ‘Be thou merciful unto us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a king, yet shall we henceforth own thee as a superior to mortal nature.’”

In the account of Josephus, it is implied that there were people of Israel in attendance, meaning they called out that his was the voice of a god as well. This is more likely the case based on the coming words of verse 12:24. The words of that verse provide a stark contrast between the words of verses 12:22 & 23. They also continue to explain the rejection of the words of the true God and their subsequent destruction and dispersal from the land.

As there is no article before “God” in the Greek, it signifies that this is probably speaking in the general sense of a divine being and not necessarily the Creator God. Regardless of that, the people before Herod are giving glory to that which is not God.

Life application: As humans, we have it in our nature to exalt others in an unhealthy manner. It has always been this way, but in modern times it has grown into various obsessions for many. Movie and TV personalities are just people. They have the ability to act well. But because we allow them into our homes each day, we begin to think of them as being greater than others. And yet, if acting is their only real ability, that is a rather pathetic person to idolize. It means that they aren’t really who they present themselves as.

Likewise, we may see a person who is very wealthy and equate that with high intelligence or outstanding effort. Hence, we seek after their words as if they are specialists in all areas. A notable example of this is Bill Gates. He got rich off computer technology. And yet, because of his wealth, he is sought out for advice in matters of health, climate, and other areas of which he has absolutely no expertise at all. In fact, he is a harmful person with a perverse agenda in many ways.

Physical strength or beauty leads to an immense amount of idolatry in our society. And yet, these are the most fleeting of all commodities. One car accident can destroy the body or mar the face of someone we idolized.

All such things are temporary, they are futile, and focusing on them is harmful. Let us think about Jesus, contemplate Him at all times, and worship God alone through Him. He is our Mediator. He is our Savior. He alone is the God/Man. He is Jesus.

*O, Glorious God, forgive us for having idols set up in our hearts and in our minds. May we turn our eyes away from such things and focus on You. Nothing here can satisfy for more than a moment, and then it is gone. But in You is satisfaction forever and ever. May we look to You alone with eyes of love, thanks, and praise. Great are You, O God. Amen.*

**Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died. Acts 12:23**

The previous verse had those in the audience of Herod call out, “The voice of a god and not of a man!” With that, we now read, “Then immediately.”

These words do not mean “instantaneously” as in it happening right before the eyes of the people, but what occurred came about without delay. For example, Matthew 21:19 uses the same word, saying –

“And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, ‘Let no fruit grow on you ever again.’ Immediately the fig tree withered away.”

However, that is explained in Mark, saying –

“Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. <sup>13</sup> And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. <sup>14</sup> In response Jesus said to it, ‘Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.’” Mark 11:12-14

...

“Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. <sup>21</sup> And Peter, remembering, said to Him, ‘Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away.’” Mark 11:20-21

The same is true here, as will be seen. For now, what happened was that “an angel of the Lord struck him.” The rendering is correct. The KJV says, “the angel of the Lord,” but there is no article before “angel” in the Greek. Hence, it is a messenger of death sent to dispatch Herod off to the pit “because he did not give glory to God.”

This is also attested to by Josephus, and he also explains the word “immediately” used in the previous clause, saying of Herod, “he did neither rebuke them the people nor reject their impious flattery. A severe pain arose in his belly and began in a most violent manner. And when he was quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, in the 54th year of his age, and the 7th year of his reign.”

This is not an uncommon occurrence in Scripture, meaning where death or disease is ascribed to the hand of the Lord or is directed (or allowed) by the Lord, either by His messenger or even by the hand of Satan, as was the case with Job. In this case, and because of his failure to give God the glory He alone is due, Herod was struck in a most terrible manner. As it says, “And he was eaten by worms and died.”

Again, the word “immediately” is seen to mean “right away” but not necessarily “instantly.” It was not a scene like a gory horror movie where he was consumed by worms in front of the people praising him. Rather, he was struck with pains in his belly caused by worms and his death came about according to Josephus five days later. The account is not unlike that of the wicked king Jehoram in 2 Chronicles 21 –

“And a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying,  
‘Thus says the LORD God of your father David:  
Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or in the ways of Asa king of Judah, <sup>13</sup> but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot like the harlotry of the house of Ahab, and also have killed your brothers, those of your father’s household, *who were* better than yourself, <sup>14</sup> behold, the LORD will strike your people with a serious affliction—your children, your wives, and all your possessions; <sup>15</sup> and you *will become* very sick with a disease of your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day.’  
<sup>16</sup> Moreover the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabians who *were* near the Ethiopians. <sup>17</sup> And they came up into Judah and

invaded it, and carried away all the possessions that were found in the king's house, and also his sons and his wives, so that there was not a son left to him except Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons.

<sup>18</sup> After all this the LORD struck him in his intestines with an incurable disease. <sup>19</sup> Then it happened in the course of time, after the end of two years, that his intestines came out because of his sickness; so he died in severe pain. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning for his fathers.”

-2 Chronicles 21:12-19

Herod's grisly death may have been speedier than that of Jehoram, but both men died in severe pain. In this, one can see that the Lord was demonstrating to His people, Israel, that their leaders were accountable for their conduct before Him. Thus, all of the people were likewise accountable to Him.

Life application: At times, the Lord allowed wicked kings to reign seemingly without any repercussions at all. At times, He removed them speedily and violently for their conduct. What may appear as random and without consistency was to teach the people lessons about their need for something better than a temporary, earthly rule.

Some good kings reigned for long periods, while others died more quickly. Likewise, some bad kings reigned for long periods and died in peace, while others like Herod died in great pain. The many different circumstances each taught Israel a lesson if they would just pay heed. Whether good or bad, whether a short rule or long, all the kings eventually died, demonstrating that they bore sin because death is the consequence of sin.

And more, the conduct of the kings during their times of rule led to the conduct of the people. When good kings reigned, the people would generally turn to the Lord, but as soon as a crummy king came in, the people would fall away from the Lord. This was to teach Israel that they were like sheep following their leader either to fair pastures or to a place of destruction.

In both lessons, and so many more, the history of the kings of Israel was recorded to teach them (and thus us) that we need a perfect king – one without sin and one who judges in perfect righteousness. Nothing else will do. And more, we need a Savior who can both forgive our sins and keep us from transgressing God's commands. On our own, this is impossible. But because of the work of Jesus, it is not only possible, but it will also come to pass for those who are His.



Let us consider these lessons and look to Jesus for our hope, our direction, and for our conduct before God.

*Glorious God, thank You for the lessons found in Your word. If we just apply them to our lives, we will live properly in Your presence because we will have Jesus in our lives to direct us. Thank You for Jesus Christ who alone will lead us in the manner that You require. Yes, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**But the word of God grew and multiplied. Acts 12:24**

The words of this verse are set in total contrast to the events of the previous verses –

- Herod the king looked flashy and spoke to the people from an elevated seat. When he did, the people kept shouting, “The voice of a god and not of a man!” With that, he was struck by an angel of the Lord because he didn’t give glory to God and he died, having been eaten by worms.
- While the word of God may not seem flashy to the masses, it speaks to us from the highest heaven. It is the voice of God in written form. When we cherish it and apply it to our lives through the reception of the gospel, we ascribe glory to God. We affirm its sacred contents. In this, we find life. We go from being corruptible to incorruptible.

With that noted, the words now begin with, “But the word of God grew.” The verb is imperfect. It grew and continued to grow. The sense of the word is that of growing like a plant or a child. Essentially, it conveys the idea of becoming greater in size. While Herod’s “voice of a god and not a man” ceased forever, the word of the true God increased in its reach. Further, Luke says it also “multiplied.”

The verb is also imperfect, it multiplied and continued to multiply. The word signifies growth in number. Not only did the word continue to grow up, but it grew out. While Herod lay in the ground, turning back to the dust from which he came, the word of the true God expanded to soul after soul, bringing them to spiritual life and vigor.

It should be remembered that Herod was the one who put James to death. He was also set to put Peter to death. Instead, God made James and Peter alive in Christ. James’ physical death is a temporary impediment to his walk with the Lord. Herod’s physical death is a permanent one. And while the blood of James helped expand the growth and

multiplication of the word of God to others, the death of Herod brought a swift and decisive end to the cult of the word of Herod.

Life application: On several occasions, Paul writes about the insignificant state of man. We tend to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to. Heeding Paul's words will help us realign this incorrect thinking –

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” Romans 12:3

“And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.” 1 Corinthians 8:2

“For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” Galatians 6:3

Obviously, these and other such verses have a context that must be maintained, but the main intent of each is that of considering ourselves in the proper light. God is God. We are created. Whatever we are, whatever capabilities we have, whatever traits we possess, and so on, all these things came from God. As this is so, we should glorify God with who we are and not allow our minds to become puffed up like Herod. With such an attitude, catastrophe is the certain result.

*Glorious God, thank You for who we are. You have created each of us to be unique and precious. And yet, what we possess is only because You have allowed it to be so. And so, as we are grateful for the lives we live, may we use them to bring glory to You. Help us to never be tempted with self-exaltation, but to walk humbly before You all our days. Amen.*

**And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.** Acts 12:25

The previous verse noted the growth and multiplication of the word of God. Now we come to the final verse of Chapter 12, beginning with, “And Barnabas and Saul.”

Despite Barnabas being mentioned first, the focus of the book of Acts, from this verse forward, will be the ministry of Saul (Paul). Obviously, the content is given to reveal the workings of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the further growth and multiplication of the

church, but Paul will be the main instrument of focus till the end of the book. Noting him now is a way of reminding our thoughts of his inclusion in the narrative and preparing our minds for the details that lie ahead concerning his ministry.

The last mention of Barnabas and Saul was in verse 11:21 (also the last verse of that chapter) –

“Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. <sup>30</sup>This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.” Acts 11:29, 30

Of these two, it now says they “returned from Jerusalem.” With these words, one can see that the contents of verses 12:1-24 were an insert into the narrative that is not necessarily chronological but rather categorical. It was given to show various aspects of what occurred, especially related to Peter. With that now complete, the narrative returns to its mainstream of thought where Saul (Paul) will become the main focus (as noted above) and Peter will no longer be the focus. He will appear for a few words in Acts 15, but that is it.

This is clearly showing that the move is away from focusing on Israel and the Jewish people and is going to be more and more towards the nations and among the Gentiles. A careful noting of all that Paul does during these chapters will show that almost everything said and done by Peter will be repeated by Paul. This was highlighted in the introduction to Acts and it will now become more and more evident as the narrative continues.

As for Barnabas and Saul, it next notes, “when they had fulfilled *their* ministry.” This is referring to the citation from Acts 11 above. They were chosen to deliver relief to those in Judea. That task is now complete and so they are returning from Judea to Antioch, as can be deduced from the first verses of the next chapter. Of them, it says, “and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.”

Rather, the verb is an aorist participle. It rightly reads, “having taken with them John whose surname was Mark.” This is the same person mentioned in Acts 12:12 who was a cousin to Barnabas. See the notes on that verse to get a fuller picture of him. Of this note concerning Mark, Charles Ellicott says –

“The choice is, of course, partly explained by his relationship to Barnabas, but it shows also that he entered heartily into the work of the conversion of the Gentiles; and owing,

as he did, his own conversion to Peter, it would naturally be regarded as a proof of that Apostle's interest in it."

Ellicot's thoughts are, quite possibly, the opposite of the truth. As was noted in an earlier commentary, there is not substantial proof that the Gentiles at Antioch had been evangelized. Various source texts disagree on whether it was Greek-speaking Jews or Gentiles. In the Acts narrative, Peter has seen the conversion of the house of Cornelius. Other than that, and the noting of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, the focus has been almost solely on the conversion of the Jews.

However, once the missionary trip of Barnabas and Saul gets started, a few key verses must be considered –

"So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. <sup>5</sup> And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant."

-Acts 13:4, 5

"Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem." Acts 13:13

"Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.'" Acts 13:46

"Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. <sup>38</sup> But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work." Acts 15:37, 38

John Mark will be taken on the mission trip that Barnabas and Saul went on. It will first note that this team "preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews." Immediately after that, it will detail the conversion of a Gentile man named Sergius Paulus.

It is unknown why John Mark departed. It simply says that he "had not gone with them to the work." It can be speculated on all day why this was so, but the noting of his departure came directly after the conversion of the Gentile Sergius Paulus. As such, it may be that John Mark found this inappropriate and rebelled against any further

evangelism. For now, the main thought is that the narrative has finally turned more specifically to the coming ministry of Saul who is Paul.

Life application: As you read the Bible, it is often the case that an introduction or a seeming side note in the narrative will be made that seems out of place. But shortly that detail becomes the main focus of the narrative. A good example of this is found at the very end of Genesis 22 in verses 22:20-24.

Something that seems completely irrelevant to the narrative that precedes it is introduced. From there, the main narrative continues in Genesis 23. But then in Genesis 24, one name of the listing at the end of Genesis 22 suddenly comes into focus – Rebekah. The narrative of her then fills Genesis 24.

As you read the Bible, make mental notes of these seemingly unrelated verses. In considering them, you will often be given great treasure to consider later in the narrative. There could even be information early in the Old Testament that waits until the New Testament to be revealed, but when it is seen, it gives us the sure understanding that the Bible has a single overall Author, even if it has come through many men of God.

Pay heed and rejoice in the wonderful words that are given. It all serves a great purpose for us to consider.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for this marvelous word You have given us. It is so precise and detailed, and it fills us with excitement with each turn of the page. There are mysteries to be uncovered and details to be revealed if we just think about them as we continue through the narrative. Yes, Lord, thank You for this precious word. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 13

**Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. Acts 13:1**

The previous verse ended Chapter 12 with Barnabas and Saul returning from Jerusalem and having taken along John Mark. With that, it now says, “Now in the church that was at Antioch.”

This is where Barnabas and Saul had been sent from, and it is where they had now returned to. The detail provided here is setting up the narrative in a way that will henceforth highlight the ministry of Paul. To do that, there must be a separation of him from the main body to highlight what he will do. That begins to come about with the words that in Antioch “there were certain prophets and teachers.”

The words here indicate two classes. It may be that some prophets were also teachers, but they are two distinct offices. Paul notes this in 1 Corinthians 12 in a list there –

“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.” 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

Of these two offices now noted in Acts, the individuals named are:

Barnabas. This is Barnabas who has already been seen several times and who traveled to Jerusalem with Saul and then returned with him.

Simeon who was called Niger. The name Niger is Latin, and it means “Black.” He is only mentioned here in Scripture, and it can be inferred that he was especially dark-skinned. The designation was probably given to him so that he would be distinguished from other people named Simeon. Being dark may mean that he had an African heritage, or it could simply be he was dark-skinned because of working outdoors as was the case with the Shulamite in the Song of Solomon –

"I *am* dark, but lovely,  
O daughters of Jerusalem,  
Like the tents of Kedar,  
Like the curtains of Solomon.  
<sup>6</sup>Do not look upon me, because I *am* dark,  
Because the sun has tanned me.  
My mother's sons were angry with me;  
They made me the keeper of the vineyards,  
But my own vineyard I have not kept." Song of Solomon 1:5, 6

Lucius of Cyrene. Of this person, Vincent's Word Studies states –

"Attempts have been made to identify him with Luke the evangelist; but the name Lucas is an abbreviation of Lucanus, and not of Lucius. It is worth noting, however, that, according to Herodotus (iii., 131), the physicians of Cyrene had the reputation of being the second best in Greece, those of Crotona being the best; and that Galen the physician says that Lucius was before him a distinguished physician in Tarsus of Cilicia. From this it has been conjectured that Luke was born and instructed in medicine in Cyrene, and left that place for Tarsus, where he made Paul's acquaintance, and was, perhaps, converted by him (Dr. Howard Crosby, "The New Testament, Old and New Version"). But, apart from the form of the name (see above), the mention of the evangelist's name here is not in accord with his usual practice, since he nowhere mentions his own name, either in the Gospel or in the Acts; and if the present passage were an exception, we should have expected to find his name last in the list of the worthies of Antioch. Of the five here named, four are known to be Jews; and therefore, probably, Lucius was also a Jew from Cyrene, where Jews are known to have abounded. Luke the evangelist, on the contrary, was a Gentile. Nothing certain can be inferred from Romans 16:21, where Lucius is enumerated by Paul among his kinsmen. If συγγενεῖς, kinsmen, means here, as is claimed by some, countrymen, it would prove Lucius to be a Jew; but the word is commonly used of relatives in the New Testament. In Romans 9:3, Paul applies the term to his fellow-countrymen, 'my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites.'"

There are other reasons for not accepting this person as being Luke. First, there are various "we" sections in Acts, meaning that the author is personally including himself in the narrative. The first such section begins in Acts 16:10. Such is not the case now in Acts 13. Second, and again, it has not been perfectly determined if Gentiles are even included in the church at Antioch at this point. And third, there is no note of Luke being either a

teacher or a prophet elsewhere. He is noted as a doctor (physician), however, in Colossians 4:14. There, it says, “Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.”

Manaen. Of him, it says, “who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch.” The word translated as “who had been brought up” is *suntrophos*. It is rendered by some as “foster-brother.” Others say, “close friend,” “member of the court,” “comrade,” and so on. The word comes from two roots signifying “together” and “nurse.” Hence, he is a fellow nursling. As such, it can mean either a foster brother or something similar, such as being brought up in the same court.

Saul. This is Saul of Tarsus who will soon be almost exclusively known by his given name, Paul.

Life application: It is important to know the details of what is going on in the Bible. Seemingly small and irrelevant details, such as Luke being a Gentile, can make a large difference in the minds of those who read and teach the word.

For example, it has been argued that Luke must be a Jew because of what it says in Romans 3:2 where Paul notes that it is to the Jews that “were committed the oracles of God.”

This is what is known as a category mistake. Luke and Acts were not yet a part of the canon of Scripture. Paul was speaking of the Old Testament which pointed to Christ. It further means that they were entrusted with these oracles, not necessarily that they had all been written by Jews. Job was a Gentile, and he may (we do not know) have been the author of his book.

Regardless of Job, the New Testament is not the Old, and Paul’s words do not apply to what is being referred to in Romans 3:2. And yet, despite Paul’s clear and obvious words here, people will still make up false analyses concerning Luke to justify their presuppositions. This is a very bad way of handling the word of God.

Paul mentioned various Jews in Colossians 4 (above), noting that they were the only ones of the circumcision, or Jews, who were with him. One plus one will always equal two. In the case of Luke, because he was not a Jew, he was – by default – a Gentile. In ignoring this, a faulty sense of what God has done and is doing in the Bible will result. As such, we must hold close to the word, never abusing what it conveys because of a sense of pride or arrogance concerning something like “only the Jews brought us the word of God.”



If the Bible teaches that Luke was a Gentile, which it does, but you are stuck with a presupposition that he was a Jew (or a proselyte to Judaism), get over it. Luke was a Gentile.

*Lord God, help us to accept what Your word teaches, and then to be obedient to it. It is too precious to be trifled with because we don't agree with it in our own minds. Who are we to argue against what You have done. Help us to accept it as You have given it to us so that our doctrine will be pure. Amen.*

**As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”** Acts 13:2

Chapter 13 began with a note concerning the prophets and teachers at Antioch, naming each. The last one named Saul (who is Paul) will become the central point of focus concerning the ministry from this point on. Although still veiled, that begins to be revealed with the words of this verse which begins with, “As they ministered to the Lord.”

The verse begins with a conjunction. Also, the verb is a present participle. It rightly should read, “And as they were ministering to the Lord.” Here, the verb translated as “ministered,” *leitourgeó*, is introduced. It will be seen two more times, once in Romans and once in Hebrews.

It signifies being a public servant. Thus, by analogy, it signifies “to perform religious or charitable functions (worship, obey, relieve) – minister” (Strong’s). It is a word commonly used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament when referring to the work of the priests and the Levites. Its use in Hebrews 10:11 is specifically referring to the service of the Old Covenant priests. It is the basis for our now commonly used word “liturgy.” Along with serving in this capacity, it says they also “fasted.”

Again, it is from a present participle. They “were fasting.” The word signifies abstaining from food, but the implication is that it is for religious reasons. It is during this time of ministration and fasting that “the Holy Spirit said.”

In other words, a message from God is conveyed to the men mentioned in verse 1. We are not told if one of them received this message and then passed it on to the others or if all received the same message. But the text is clear that God spoke to them for a specific purpose, saying, “Now separate to Me.”

In the Greek, there is an alliterative particle, *dé*, that is in the text, but which is ignored by most translations. It is intended to give emphasis or urgency to a statement. It is included to provide an underlying affirmation of the surrounding words. The Weymouth New Testament brilliantly translates these words as, “Set apart for Me, now at once.”

And this message, whether received by one or by all, is intended for all. The verb translated as “separate” is plural, “you all separate to me.” It is the same word, *aphorizó*, Paul uses to open his letter to the Romans (and elsewhere) –

“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God.” Romans 1:1

The word itself comes from *apo* (away from) and *horizó* (to set boundaries). One can see the etymological root of the word “horizon” in this word. The holy spirit is directing the setting apart of “Barnabas and Saul.” In other words, they have been counted among the prophets and teachers of Antioch, but now they are being called for a special purpose, which is – as the Holy Spirit states – “for the work to which I have called them.”

Of these words, Cambridge says, “...we may perhaps be warranted in concluding that the whole course of this first great missionary journey was pointed out also by the Spirit. There is no notice of a deliberation in the Church about the best way for the Apostles to set forth.”

This is surely the case. The Holy Spirit has called, and so it can be expected that He will also direct. And this is just what is later seen on these missionary journeys, such as –

“Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. <sup>7</sup> After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. <sup>8</sup> So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ <sup>10</sup> Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Acts 16:6-10

Though the specifics of the calling are not yet seen in this verse, when they are, it must have been the greatest of comfort to these men that they were being sent out knowing that God had called and would, therefore, direct.

Life application: It is a common question for people to ask if fasting is required for believers. The answer must be, “No.” Though it is referred to in Scripture, and even though Jesus speaks of it as something that was commonly done, His words were to Israel, under the law. As such, those verses cannot be considered prescriptive for the church.

Likewise, in Acts, fasting is mentioned, but Acts is a descriptive account of what was occurring. It prescribes nothing. On the other hand, in the epistles – from where we are to derive our doctrine on such matters – fasting is never explicitly directed. It is mentioned once in 1 Corinthians 7:5, but it is not a prescription. Rather, it is an allowance.

The other two times fasting is mentioned are in 2 Corinthians 6:5 and 11:27. Both are involuntary fasts. Paul was forced to fast because of a lack of food. Other than these three references, fasting is never addressed, and it is certainly not prescribed. As this is true, any fast you conduct – for whatever reason – is between you and the Lord, between you and your doctor, or between you and your spouse (see 1 Corinthians 7:5).

If fasting is something that interests you, study up on it. A water diet, meaning a diet that consists of only drinking water for a set amount of time, is something that has benefitted many. The longest recorded water fast was by Angus Barbieri (1939 – 7 September 1990). He was a Scottish man who fasted for 382 days, from June 1965 to July 1966. He went from an immensely overweight and unhealthy person to a slimmed-down, healthy person in this manner. His fast, and many others, can be seen on YouTube or through general internet searches.

Study up on fasting, but: 1) It is not required according to a proper study of the New Testament. 2) It should never be mandated by a Christian leader. 3) If it is mandated by someone, you should consider not fellowshiping with that person any longer as this may lead to a form of tyrannical authoritarian leadership. 4) You will have to give up bacon. In the end, the plusses and minuses must be personally weighed.

*Lord God, thank You for the freedoms we have in Christ. What a joy it is to know that we are sealed with Your Holy Spirit, and You are as close to us now as will ever be the case. Because of this, help us to open up to You, removing all walls and hindrances, and learning to fellowship with You intimately all our days. Amen.*

**Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.**

Acts 13:3

In the last verse, the Holy Spirit had instructed Barnabas and Saul to be separated for a particular work that He had called them to. With that remembered, the next words state, “Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.”

Rather, and more precisely, each of the first three verbs is an aorist participle. It should read, “Then having fasted, and having prayed, and having laid the hands on them, they sent them away” (CG). This will be the translation used for analysis. As such, it first notes of these prophets and teachers, “Then having fasted.”

Again, as with the previous verse, fasting by these men is noted. This must have been in addition to the fasting that was previously mentioned. In other words, this seems like all of them together held a special fast for this particular ordination. Combined with the fast itself it adds, “and having prayed.”

A special time of both fasting and prayer was held to seek the favor of the Lord, to acknowledge His will in what was taking place, and to unite all these men together in a closer bond. Of this, Albert Barnes states –

“The gospel had been preached to the Jews, to Cornelius, and to the Gentiles at Antioch. But there had been no solemn, public, and concerted plan of sending it to the Gentiles, or of appointing a mission to the pagan. It was a new event, and was full of danger and hardships. The primitive church felt the need of divine direction and aid in the great work.”

This follows from the assumption that this is specifically a Gentile evangelizing missionary journey. But as has been previously noted, there is nothing definitive yet to claim that the primary focus was for this purpose. Rather, the next verse will indicate just the opposite. It is not until verse 46 that it will definitively note proselytizing of the Gentiles.

Regardless of this, it next says, “and having laid the hands on them.”

Very few translations include the article before “hands,” saying something like, “and laid hands on them.” Though maybe a bit trifling, in this case, the article should be rendered. In both testaments, to lay hands on someone is often to be taken in a negative way –

“In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king’s gate, two of the king’s eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.” Esther 2:21

“Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. <sup>46</sup> But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.”

-Matthew 21:45, 46

At other times, noting the laying on of hands is for the purpose of healing (see Matthew 9:18, etc.). Here, it is a specific rite that is being conducted, noted elsewhere as “the laying on of the hands” for the purpose of ordination –

“Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.” 1 Timothy 4:14

This is what is being conveyed. There has been a period of fasting, prayer, and the laying on of the hands. With that complete, “they sent them away.” The Spirit called, the favor of God has been petitioned, and the rite of acknowledging the consecration of these men has been made. This certainly included prayers for continued guidance, safety, and prosperity. With those things settled, they were released to the leading of the Holy Spirit’s direction.

Life application: The words here are not prescriptive. In other words, they do not instruct us with the notion that each missionary selection should be conducted in the same manner. If that were so, we would expect that the Holy Spirit would first say, “Now separate to me Clint Peckinpah and Sam Eastwood for the work to which I have called them.”

That should not be expected, nor will it occur. In other words, to use Acts in a manner that prescribes something, the same events should take place as had taken place in Acts. As this is not the case, it is not logical that any of the other events must take place in the same manner either. And yet, it is right that missionaries, like deacons and elders, be carefully selected.

There should be a process by which the selection takes place, and then there should be an open acknowledgment of it having occurred. From there, it is right for churches to pray for the success of the missionaries. And “success” does not necessarily mean “coming back alive.” It means that the will of the Lord is served, in whatever manner He

directs. His will should be the first and main focus of any such endeavor. If it is, then whatever occurs will be defined as a success.

For example, if a missionary goes forth and many people come to Jesus, but the missionary is arrested for drugs or for sexually exploiting a child, this was not a successful labor. It is certain that not only were a few harmed by such a person's actions.

On the other hand, if the missionary only leads one to Christ but faithfully serves the Lord in all ways, even dying in the process, it was overall worthwhile. Such things must always be evaluated by how the Lord is glorified. And this should extend to all things in our lives. Let us always be God-conscious. In doing so, our lives will always be properly directed.

*Lord God, please keep us from wandering away from You in our thoughts and actions. We are so very prone to this. And so, Lord, be with us and guide us all our days. Help our lives to be lived honorably before You, bringing glory, not shame, upon Your magnificent name. Amen.*

**So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.** Acts 13:4

In the previous verse, those in Antioch fasted and prayed. They then laid "the hands on" Barnabas and Saul and sent them away. The narrative continues with, "So, being sent out."

Rather, the participle is aorist. Also, there are two introductory conjunctions. It more correctly says, "They, indeed, therefore, having been sent out."

Luke uses a word new to Scripture, *ekpempó*. It signifies to send out or send forth. This is just what occurred. They had been purposefully called to depart from one place and to go forth as directed. And this was, as Luke records, "by the Holy Spirit."

As can be seen, it was not only that the Holy Spirit had called them (verse 2), but He also is directing them. Their movements are according to His will as He leads. Further, the written record set forth by Luke, which he was inspired to document, is a record of those movements and events also specifically directed by the Holy Spirit.

Everything about what we are reading is a carefully directed and documented set of events intended to show us God's workings in the establishment and expansion of the

church. It is also a clear and unambiguous record of why the focus of the gospel diverted away from the Jews and toward the Gentiles. Consider this as the chapter continues to unfold. For now, that record continues with their travels as “they went down to Seleucia.”

The name Seleucia comes from Seleukos, a Syrian king. The name is found only this once in Scripture but traveling through here appears to be implied again in Acts 14:26 and Acts 15:30,39. Of the city, S.M. Christie notes –

“The seaport of Antioch from which it is 16 miles distant. It is situated 5 miles North of the mouth of the Orontes, in the northwestern corner of a fruitful plain at the base of Mt. Rhosus or Pieria, the modern Jebel Musa, a spur of the Amanus Range. Built by Seleucus Nicator (died 280 BC) it was one of the Syrian Tetrapolis, the others being Apameia, Laodicea and Antioch. The city was protected by nature on the mountain side, and, being strongly fortified on the South and West, was considered invulnerable and the key to Syria (Strabo 751; Polyb. v.58). It was taken, however, by Ptolemy Euergetes (1 Macc 11:8) and remained in his family till 219 BC, when it was recovered for the Seleucids by Antiochus the Great, who then richly adorned it. Captured again by Ptolemy Philometor in 146 BC, it remained for a short time in the hands of the Egyptians. Pompey made it a free city in 64 BC in return for its energy in resisting Tigranes (Pliny, NH, v.18), and it was then greatly improved by the Romans, so that in the 1st century AD it was in a most flourishing condition.”

As Seleucia is the port from which those at Antioch would head out, they first went there “and from there they sailed to Cyprus.”

Cyprus is a large island in the eastern Mediterranean and, due to its high mountains, is said to be close enough to the coast to be seen on a clear day. Used here is another new word in Scripture, *apopleó*. It literally signifies, “to sail away.” The word is only used by Luke. He will use it four times in Acts along with various other words that refer to sailing. In their sailing away from Seleucia, they sailed to Cyprus. Of this location, Howson says –

“Four reasons may have induced them to turn in first to this island: (1) Its nearness to the mainland; (2) It was the native place of Barnabas, and since the time when Andrew found his brother Simon, and brought him to Jesus, and ‘Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus,’ family ties had not been without effect on the progress of the Gospel. (3) It could not be unnatural to suppose that the truth would be welcomed in Cyprus when brought by Barnabas and his kinsman Mark, to their own connections or friends. The Jews were numerous in Salamis. By sailing to that city, they were following

the track of the synagogues; and though their mission was chiefly to the Gentiles, their surest course for reaching them was through the proselytes and Hellenizing Jews. (4) Some of the Cypriotes were already Christians. Indeed, no one place out of Palestine, except Antioch, had been so honorably associated with the work of successful evangelization.”

His reasons are well stated except for the comments that “their mission was chiefly to the Gentiles.” That must be presupposed, and it is not borne out by the narrative. As of this point, nothing has been said of evangelizing the Gentiles. The only clue that it is so is what was stated at Paul’s calling in Acts 9 –

“But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.’” Acts 9:15

But even these words include three categories. The reason for bearing the Lord’s name before Gentiles is not stated. Since the words of that verse, nothing about Paul evangelizing Gentiles has been noted. So far, he has only been seen having contact with Jews.

Life application: Interestingly, the Holy Spirit is mentioned four times in this chapter. The first time was in verse 2 where the calling of Barnabas and Saul was made. The next is verse 4 where they are being sent out. In verse 9, it says that Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, will rebuke a Jew who is with a high-ranking Roman official. The final time will be in verse 52 where it will note that the disciples, which includes Gentiles, are “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”

Watching how this chapter unfolds, and then continuing to watch how the rest of Acts unfolds, it becomes perfectly clear that we are being shown why there is a transition from the Jews to the Gentiles in the furtherance of the gospel. There will be great hostility by the Jews towards the notion that Jesus is their Messiah. On the contrary, there will be an opening of arms towards Him by the Gentiles.

This same state has continued for two thousand years. Only in the most recent of times has that begun to change. The past fifty years have seen a great increase in the number of Jews who have accepted that Jesus is their Messiah. But out of church history, that is an insignificant number. For the gospel to extend to all nations on earth, it was necessary for the Gentiles to spread it. God knew this and He has given us the book of Acts to show this transitional phase from Jew to Gentile. Paul is the key to its coming about.



Be attentive to this as Acts continues and you will more rightly understand why the Jewish nation, Israel, was not used for this purpose. And yet, God has not fully abandoned them. When the time is right, they will again become a central point of focus in carrying this spiritual banner that has for so long been carried by the Gentiles. That is something that is beginning to occur before our very eyes.

*Lord God, Your infinite wisdom is so perfectly revealed in Your word. Every detail of redemptive history is seen to be under Your control. As this is so, we can know that the steps we take to share the gospel must also be fully known by You. That sure takes the pressure off us as we go forth, knowing that You already know those who will come to saving faith in Jesus. Help us to get out and to speak this message clearly so that our efforts will be fruitful. Yes, use us according to Your wisdom. Amen.*

**And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant. Acts 13:5**

Barnabas and Saul left Antioch, went down to Seleucia and from there sailed to Cyprus. Once there, it now says, “And when they arrived in Salamis.” This is the chief city on the island. The name is believed to have possibly come from *salos*, meaning the tossing of the sea in a tempest.

The city itself is on the east end of the island. It is the nearest port on Cyprus from Seleucia. Once they arrived there, it next says that “they preached.” The word more correctly means “proclaimed.” Also, the verb is imperfect, signifying that they not only preached, but they continued to do so, they “were proclaiming” at the synagogues. This is why the Holy Spirit had sent them, and so this is what they did. And what they proclaimed was “the word of God.”

In other words, it doesn’t say specifically that they preached the gospel as in Acts 8:25. Rather, these men, being Jews were proclaiming the word of God. The reason for this was that their proclamation was “in the synagogues of the Jews.”

Barnabas and Saul went right to Scripture and from there proclaimed what they knew concerning how it pointed to Jesus, using the Jews’ own writings as the basis for what they spoke. The plural, synagogues, testifies to the large number of Jews on the island. In fact, Vincent’s Word Studies notes –

“Augustus, according to Josephus, made Herod the Great a present of half the revenue of the copper-mines of Cyprus, so that numerous Jewish families would be settled in the

island. In the reign of Trajan [98-117AD], upon the breaking out of a Jewish insurrection, the whole island fell into the hands of the Jews, and became a rallying-point for the revolt. It is said that two hundred and forty thousand of the native population were sacrificed to the fury of the insurgents. When the rebellion was extinguished, the Jews were forbidden thenceforth, on pain of death, to set foot on the island.”

Because of the large number of Jews and the many synagogues they had built, one would think it would be a fertile field for the good news about Jesus. However, nothing is noted concerning bearing any fruit from their labors at this time. As for the ministry of these two men, it next says, “They also had John as *their* assistant.”

It was Barnabas and Paul who had been designated to conduct this missionary journey. For whatever reason, whether he was asked to come or whether he volunteered to go, John traveled with them and acted as an assistant to them.

Until verse 13, nothing more will be said of John or in what manner he helped these two men. He will depart from them in verse 13 but will join Barnabas on a second trip to Cyprus in Acts 15.

As for the effectiveness of this journey, it seems purposeful that Luke does not record any conversions by the Jews. Even if any were converted, the lack of such references highlights the fact that there was certainly not a widespread acceptance of the message. This will continue to be seen as events on the island continue to be chronicled by him.

Life application: Nothing is said about how long it was from the time of the arrival of Barnabas and Saul on the island until the time they first began proclaiming the word of God. Luke’s record simply goes directly from their arrival to their proclaiming the word.

These two certainly didn’t set up an office and start to hire helpers. They also didn’t open a storefront ministry. Instead, they went to the synagogues and started telling them what they knew. This is the implication we get from Luke’s direct and brief notes.

Sometimes churches get so detailed in developing ministries that they never become productive in the most important part of what should be done. It is fine to open a food bank or a clothing ministry in a poor area, but in doing this, it normally becomes the focus of attention. Instead of proclaiming Jesus, He only becomes a part of the ministry. And quite often, He is not even a major part of it.

The proclamation of the gospel needs to be brought forward as the main purpose of what is being done. If it is not, then the ministry has lost its focus. And so, from time to time, be sure to ask yourself, “Why am I doing this thing on Saturday morning?” Or maybe, “Why do I keep helping out at this store?” After asking this, remind yourself that the main purpose of what you are doing is to share the good news about Jesus.

Handing out breakfast will satisfy someone for a couple of hours. Selling a shirt to pay the rent at the charity store will keep the store selling more shirts. But these things must have the set and ongoing purpose of sharing Jesus, or they have missed the point of being started in the first place.

*Glorious Heavenly Father, help us to keep our priorities rightly focused at all times. We may start a ministry with the intent of telling people about Jesus, but has that main purpose been lost in the business of keeping the ministry going? If so, help us to redirect our attention back to sharing the good news about Jesus. May this always be our heart’s desire. Amen.*

**Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, Acts 13:6**

The last verse covered the arrival at, and evangelization of, Salamis on the island of Cyprus. Next, Luke’s words continue with, “Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos.”

The city of Paphos is first noted here. It will be seen only one more time, in verse 13:13. The meaning of its name is not certain. It is a maritime city located on the southwest coast of Cyprus, meaning they traveled the entire breadth of the island, eventually arriving there. Of this city, John Gill states –

“Paphus, a city on the sea coast, in the island of Cyprus, formerly famous for the sacred rites of Venus, and the verses of the poets; which fell by frequent earthquakes, and now only shows, by its ruins, what it formerly was: so Seneca (y) says, ... ‘how often has Paphus fell within itself?’ that is, by earthquakes: the ruins of many goodly churches and buildings are to be seen in it; and the walls of a strong, and almost impregnable tower, situated upon a hill in the middle of the city, supposed to be the habitation of Sergius Paulus; there is also shown, under a certain church, a prison divided into seven rooms, where they say Paul and Barnabas were imprisoned, for preaching the Gospel.”

While in Paphos, it next says, “they found a certain sorcerer.” The word translated as “sorcerer” is *magos*. It is the same word used to describe the Magi that came at the time of Jesus’ birth. The verb form of the word is used of Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8:9 as well.

It is an astrologer and by implication a magician. The word finds its origin in Persia. The Old Testament term *Rab-mag*, found in Jeremiah 39:3 & 13 is its etymological root. Of this *magos*, it next records that he was “a false prophet.”

The word is *pseudoprophétés*. Jesus is cited five times in the synoptic gospels using this term when speaking of the false prophets. It will also be seen in 2 Peter, 1 John, and three times in Revelation. It means exactly as it is translated. This guy is a supposed prophet, but his prophecies were false. Next, it says of him that he was “a Jew.”

Being a Jew is not surprising. The designation simply identifies his line of descent, but it does not signify any connection to the God of Israel. This is true throughout the Old Testament where there were innumerable false prophets in the land.

Being of Israel, or being a Jew, in no way identifies a person as being faithful to God. In fact, when Jesus mentions the false prophets in the gospels, His words are spoken to Israel, thus identifying them as Jews as well. Concerning this false prophet, it next says, “whose name was Bar-Jesus.”

The word *bar* before the name signifies “son of.” It is the Aramaic equivalent of the Hebrew *ben*. Hence, his name is “son of Jesus.” At this time in Israel’s history, the name Jesus was a common one. Another example of this name is found in Colossians 4:11 where Paul writes of “Jesus who is called Justus.” Once Jesus the Messiah came, the name quickly stopped being used among the Jews.

Life application: It is a good time to review the source fallacy known as the genetic fallacy. This fallacy, also known as a source fallacy, fallacy of origins, or fallacy of virtue, “is a fallacy of irrelevance in which arguments or information are dismissed or validated based solely on their source of origin rather than their content. In other words, a claim is ignored or given credibility based on its source rather than the claim itself” (Wikipedia).

It has become as common as hearing barks in a dog kennel for people to ascribe some sort of special ability, talent, or especially spiritual or biblical insight to a person because he is Jewish. In other words, “Oh, he is a great Bible teacher. He is Jewish and understands Hebrew.”

This type of thinking is fallacious, and it is dangerous. It is the kind of thinking that probably landed this false prophet, Bar-Jesus, in the job he was in. It is the kind of thinking that has elevated various Bible teachers, who actually have no idea what they are talking about, to almost superstar status.

The fallacy also extends to preachers who are the sons of famous preachers – “He must really know his stuff; his dad is Superstar Stanley.” It extends to possessing a certain degree – “He has a doctorate in systematic theology. He must really know his stuff.” It extends to certain abilities – “He knows both Hebrew and Greek.” And so on.

These things do not necessarily equate to a knowledge of the Bible. Innumerable people in the pulpit have doctorates and yet they teach aberrant doctrines. Being trained in, or even fluent in, the biblical languages is great, but that does not equate to sound doctrine. Having a title, possessing a degree, or knowing a language does not mean a person is trustworthy in providing biblical instruction.

Remember this as you listen to teachers. Evaluate what they say based on how it aligns with Scripture. And guess what? You cannot do that if you do not know Scripture already. Do you want to avoid Bad Doctrine Drive? Do you want to stay off the Heresy Highway? Here is how you do it: Set your navigation device onto Bible Boulevard. Get on it and stay on it. Learn every detail of it. In this, you will do well.

*O God, stir up in us the great desire to learn Your word. Help us to know it well enough that we will not get sent down wrong avenues of falsity by those who would attempt to exercise control over our spiritual lives. May we focus our eyes and our hearts on Jesus as we learn this precious word that reveals Him to us. Amen.*

**who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. Acts 13:7**

Previously Bar-Jesus the false prophet was noted. He is still the subject as this verse begins, saying, “who was with the proconsul.”

The word translated as proconsul, *anthupatos*, is introduced here. It essentially means “instead of the highest officer.” He stood as the highest official in place of the authority over him that remained in Rome. Of this position, Albert Barnes notes –

“The exact accuracy of Luke in this statement is worthy of special remark. In the time when Augustus united the world under his own power, the provinces were divided into

two classes. Augustus found two names which were applied to public officers in existence, one of which was henceforward inseparably blended with the imperial dignity and with military command, and the other with the authority of the senate and its civil administration. The first of these names was "Praetor"; the other was 'Consul.' What is to be accounted for here is that the latter is the name given by Luke to Sergius Paulus, as if he derived his authority from the senate. The difficulty in the ease is this: that Augustus told the senate and the people of Rome that he would resign to them those provinces where soldiers were unnecessary to secure a peaceful administration, and that he would himself take the care and risk of the other provinces where the presence of the Roman legions would be necessary."

In the verse, the word "who" refers to Bar-Jesus. The meaning is that he had the ear of the proconsul and was connected to his court. This proconsul's name was "Sergius Paulus." The Greek reads, Sergiō Paulō. The name Sergiō [Sergius] comes from Latin as does the second name, Paulos. This name, Paulos, is the same Greek as that of Paul, meaning "Little." Concerning him, Vincent's Word Studies notes –

"Di Cesnola relates the discovery at Soli, which, next to Salamis, was the most important city in the island, of a slab with a Greek inscription containing the name of Paulus, proconsul."

Of this man, it says he was "an intelligent man." The word translated as "intelligent" signifies understanding derived from correlating facts. In this case, he may have been intelligent, but he was also lacking discernment as is evident by the presence of Bar-Jesus. He had been beguiled by this charlatan and so his intelligence was being frustrated by him. However, he was also open to making comparisons, thus demonstrating wisdom. That is seen in the words, "This man called for Barnabas and Saul."

The verb is an aorist participle, "having called for Barnabas and Saul." The thought is preparing the reader for the next words. Somehow, the knowledge of these two became known to him. He heard that they were proclaiming the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews (verse 13:5) and was obviously curious about the report. This curiosity may have been heightened by the fact that Bar-Jesus attended to him, and he wanted to know if what these two had to say supported or refuted the prophecies he had heard. For whatever reason, he reached out to them "and sought to hear the word of God."

It is highly unlikely he was looking to hear words of salvation. He had a false prophet handy who was certainly feeding him sensational words to keep him spellbound. It is probable that Bar-Jesus was not unlike the description of Simon in Acts 8 –

“But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, <sup>10</sup>to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the great power of God.’ <sup>11</sup>And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.” Acts 8:9-11

It is likely that Sergius Paulus was probably anticipating more sensational doctrines, magic tricks, and prophecies. And so, he called for these two.

Life application: There is a difference between intelligence, wisdom, and faith. Each has its own place, but they are not always in harmony with one another. Intelligence is the ability to evaluate circumstances and come to conclusions. The matter may involve making money, building a clock, discerning how to sail the oceans, or whatever.

Intelligence takes the surrounding information and puts it together to make things happen so that the desired outcome is realized. For example, a person may have the intelligence to build a marvelous clock that will allow others to sail the oceans while being able to determine their position with perfect accuracy.

However, such a person may not have wisdom concerning his invention. He used his intelligence to make this amazing clock, but then he is duped into giving it to someone who takes the invention and gets rich off of it. He failed to use wisdom in how his intelligence had been employed.

Faith is an even higher aspect than either of these. Intelligence and wisdom will only get one so far, but faith – when it is properly directed – will lead to proper use of the intelligence as well as a right directing of the wisdom. This is what will be seen when Sergius Paulus faces the power of God in the verses ahead.

When you see people that are intelligent, it does not mean that they are wise. And when you see a man of wisdom, it does not mean he has properly directed faith in the employment of his wisdom. And yet, there are people that are not intelligent but who have properly directed faith. They have demonstrated wisdom and have done so by directing it toward the true Source of where all logic and wisdom resides.

Pay heed to the people around you, and evaluate them first and foremost based on their relationship with God as He has presented Himself in Scripture. In this, you will be able to discern who is truly the wisest of all.

*Lord God, Your word tells us that not many wise according to the flesh have been called. It is the humble soul who realizes his lowly state before You, regardless of intelligence or wisdom, that You find pleasing. Help us to be people of faith, rightly directing everything we are to You. Only in that will our other qualities find their true purpose. Amen.*

**But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Acts 13:8**

In the previous verse, Sergius Paulus called for Barnabas and Saul seeking to hear the word of God. With that remembered, it now begins with, “But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated).”

As has been seen, it is not uncommon for people to have more than one way to designate them. In the case of this man, he was “Son of Jesus,” but his given name is Elymas. Thus, his name would more fully be stated as “Elymas, the son of Jesus.” The name Elymas is hard to pin down, especially because it is a transliteration into Greek. Despite this, it may mean “Wise.” If so, he may have let his skills, abilities, and wisdom go to his head because of the meaning of the name. The thought might be, “I am Wise and hence I embody wisdom.” Concerning Barnabas and Saul and their message, it next says that Elymas “withstood them.”

The word gives the sense of opposition in a 180-degree contrary position. He was like a wall that refused to be moved. It was obvious that Sergius Paulus was highly affected by the word of God that was proclaimed and sat listening in rapt attention. In seeing this, it next notes that Elymas was “seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.”

Elymas could see that the influence of the word of God would diminish his own influence over Sergius Paulus. And so, as the two men spoke, he would inject his own words, “That’s balderdash!” “Barnabas, you don’t know what you’re talking about!” And so on. The word translated as “turn away” signifies a total corruption or twisting of something. He attempted to pervert the sound teaching of Barnabas and Saul hoping to maintain his control over the proconsul.

Life application: The tactic employed by Elymas is as common as aisles in a Walmart. If someone posts a theologically sound sermon or study on the internet, those who wish



to draw attention to their own crummy doctrine will post an endless stream of negative comments in order to draw attention away from the word of God and towards themselves or their perverted doctrine.

This happens on live streaming as well. Right during a sermon, people will sign on and start bad-mouthing what is being presented. At times, however, it may be that the person who has signed on has a legitimate argument against the bad doctrine that is being presented. And so, how does one tell what is right and what is not?

The only way to do so is to READ AND KNOW THE BIBLE before such attacks come. It is so easy to be led astray by fine-sounding arguments when you are not already grounded in the word. Another thing to do is to watch out for fallacious thinking. But one cannot know what fallacies are being presented unless the fallacies are known. So, it is good to read up on them.

For example, someone may say, “Look at him, his appearance is terrible. Who would listen to him!” That is an immediate (and fallacious) appeal to the source. It doesn’t matter what someone looks like. He can be Chinese, shabby, wearing a top hat, or sitting in a bland room with nothing but a white background. What matters is the message and whether it is correct or not.

Be careful to know your Bible, understand fallacious arguments, and prepared to defend why you believe what you hold to. These things are important, so be sure to spend the necessary time in knowing your subjects properly.

*Lord God, thank You for leading us to teachers and preachers who rightly handle Your word. But Lord, we have to know Your word well enough to know that we are not being duped in the process. And so, we have our part to do as well. Give us the strong desire to know Your word, and then when You direct us to teachers, we will know when they are properly dividing it. Amen.*

**Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him**  
Acts 13:9

The previous verse revealed the opposition of Elymas the sorcerer who was seeking to turn Sergius Paulus away from the faith. With that, it now says, “Then Saul, who also is called Paul.”

This is the first time that Saul is called Paul in Scripture. From this point on, it is the only name he will be called by apart from when citing past events in his life. As noted when Sergius Paulus was introduced in Acts 13:7, the name is the same for both. In Greek, it is *Paulos*. The name means Little. However, it is derived from *pauó*, signifying cause to cease, stop, finish, etc. Thus, it could refer to “the Stopper.”

Abarim Publications takes the similar-sounding Hebrew *pa’a* along with the connecting letter L (lamed) to form a name that sounds like Paul and defines it as “A Small Whisper That Propagates Into A Roaring Multitude.” Despite the name “Paul” originally being of Latin origin and not connected to the Hebrew, the name provided by Abarim well defines the effect Paul’s works have had on the world at large.

What appears to be likely is that the similarity between the name Saul and Paul was close enough that Saul decided to use this name henceforth. As such, it would be a bond of affiliation with Sergius Paulus and a memorial to the first recorded Gentile convert of his.

Some commentators disagree with this, noting that it was common for Jews to have two names (as has been seen repeatedly in Acts), but the fact is that he was called Saul up until this point and he is henceforth referred to as Paul.

This moment is a definitive moment in the life of Paul, and this first recorded Gentile conversion serves as a point on which the Acts narrative clearly turns. That will become more perfectly evident in Acts 13:46, but the conversion of Sergius Paulus – which is coming in the verses ahead – sets the tone for the future actions of Paul and his determined evangelization of the Gentiles.

As for Paul, it next says he was, “filled with the Holy Spirit.” Rather, it is an aorist participle in the passive voice – “having been filled with the Holy Spirit.” Luke is penning the account in a lively manner, showing the sequence of events as they had occurred. In this case, the events caused by Elymas were so distressing that Paul leaned wholly on the guidance of the Spirit. He opened himself up and allowed the Holy Spirit to direct him in what he would do.

With that noted, it next says that Paul “looked intently at him.” Rather, this is also an aorist participle, “having looked intently at him.” However, the voice changes from the passive (having been filled) to the active (having looked intently). Having opened himself up to the filling of the Spirit, he then prepares to engage Elymas.

Life application: It is a good time to be reminded that the filling of the Holy Spirit is a passive, not an active, occurrence. When Paul says, “be filled with the Spirit” in Ephesians 5:18, it is in the middle voice. This means that the subject (the one being filled) is both an agent of an action and somehow concerned with it.

A way to look at this would be for one to step out of the way concerning the matter and let the matter continue without active effort. One might say, “The books he writes sell themselves.” The person has written a marvelous novel, now the novel takes on its own ability to act. In the case of being filled with the Spirit, a person will know the power of God and receive the gospel. That will then lead to the reception of the Spirit.

However, in our lives, we may later rely on ourselves to get things done. But when the time comes for the Lord to lead, we step out of the way and allow Him to fill us and take the reins. In the case of the passive voice, such as is recorded with Paul above, he yielded himself and the Spirit filled him.

So how do we allow this? We do so through knowing the word, praising God, fellowshiping with others, etc. We have our part in the process. When prepared in this manner, we can then allow the Spirit to fill us and take the helm as we encounter the waves that buffet us. A wine glass will not fill itself. It must stand ready to receive the wine. The filling is externally accomplished. Be ready to receive by being in a position that the reception is possible.

*Lord God, may we learn to step out of the way and allow Your Spirit to fill us at all times. Help us in this so that we will be vessels properly prepared for the purpose. May we know Your word, be in close fellowship with You, and allow ourselves to be filled with Your Spirit. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? Acts 13:10**

In the previous verse, Paul was preparing to speak to Elymas, looking intently at him. With that, it next says, “and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud.”

Paul lays into Elymas with heavy words of accusation. Using the word “full” to begin the description is the same way we speak even today. It implies that there is no room for anything except that which a person is full of. In this case, it is first “all deceit.” The word signifies bait. In other words, Elymas used bait to hook his prey and thus deceive.

Because of the use of this word, it means that Elymas wasn't just one who deceives. But more, he is one who intentionally does so. Accompanying that, Paul adds in "all fraud."

This is a word found only here in Scripture, *rhadiourgia*. The original sense was "ease in doing." Therefore, it signifies recklessness because the person is always ready to turn and act, whether it is good or bad. In this case, it is in a highly negative way. Fraudulent intention defined his actions at all times. Because of this, Paul – under inspiration of the Spirit – calls out "you son of the devil."

There is no article before "devil" in the original. Hence, he is the son of a devil. Remembering that Elymas is also known as Bar-Jesus, it is an ironic pun. Bar-Jesus means "Son of Salvation," and yet the Spirit, through Paul, makes a complete and ironic contrast to that saying he is the son of a devil. The word *diabolos* [devil] is defined by HELPS Word Studies as "literally someone who 'casts through,' i.e., making charges that bring down (destroy)." Elymas brings destruction instead of salvation. And more, Paul speaks, saying, "you enemy of all righteousness."

The words are based on the previous descriptions. As Elymas is "full of all deceit and all fraud," then he can be filled with nothing else. As he is a "son of the devil," then that is how his character is defined. In other words, in Hebrew thought, the term "son of" defines the nature of a person. In 2 Samuel 12:5, David uses the term, "son of death" to describe someone who has done a despicable thing –

"And the anger of David burneth against the man exceedingly, and he saith unto Nathan, 'Jehovah liveth, surely a son of death is the man who is doing this'" (YLT).

Likewise, Jesus called Judas a "son of perdition" in John 17:12 –

"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."

Using the term "son of" in these cases defines the very nature of the person. Saying that Elymas is a "son of the devil" defines his nature. Today, we would use the term "spawn of a devil," or "spawn of Satan" to convey the same intent. Or, more specifically, we would say, "Like father, like son." Because of his completely unholy character, Paul next says, "will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?"

It is an obvious reference to Isaiah 40 –

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the LORD;  
Make straight in the desert  
A highway for our God.  
<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be exalted  
And every mountain and hill brought low;  
The crooked places shall be made straight  
And the rough places smooth;  
<sup>5</sup> The glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
And all flesh shall see *it* together;  
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.’” Isaiah 40:3-5

John proclaimed the coming Messiah and the straight ways of the Lord. Jesus came and revealed that straight path, but Elymas – by his word – caused those who would seek the Lord’s straight ways to turn from them, as the word *diastrephó* implies. It signifies to twist or turn thoroughly.

Life application: Remembering that Luke specifically said that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit, this tells us that the words of Paul were carefully guided by the Spirit. Every one of them was given to describe the object of them (meaning Elymas) adequately and fully.

Today, we have the inspired word of God fully expressed to us in the pages of the Bible. In other words, what is recorded there can be described just as Paul was described – “filled with the Holy Spirit.” As this is so, every word in Scripture is given to tell us exactly what God wants us to see and to know in the areas it refers to. If we want to know what an unrighteous person is like, all we need to do is go to Scripture. If we want to know how the Bible anticipates the coming Messiah, Scripture will tell us.

If you want to know if you are pleasing to God or not, you will find out by going to Scripture. In examining it, we can find out if we are pleasing to God in the matter of salvation. Have we trusted the gospel alone, through faith? If so, then we have pleased God for salvation. From there, we can find out if we are pleasing to God in our salvation. Are we living according to what the epistles tell us in that regard? If so, then we will receive rewards. If not, then we will suffer loss, but we will not lose our salvation (1 Corinthians 3:15).

The Bible is God’s word to us. Let us consider it at all times and apply it to our walk before the Lord all our days.

*O, Glorious God, You have breathed out Your word in a way that we can know exactly what to do so that we may be pleasing to You. Give us the wisdom to learn it and live by it all our days. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Acts 13:11**

Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, had just verbally come against Elymas. Now, to confirm that his words were those led by the Spirit, he will utter a divine punishment against him. That begins with, “And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you.”

The meaning is “the chastisement of the Lord.” Saying “The hand of the Lord” is a device known as anthropomorphism. It is ascribing human traits to the divine working of God. In this case, the word *epi*, or upon, is used. But the meaning of its use is derived from the context. In this case, it means that the Lord is as a foe to him. The word is used in this manner, for example, in Matthew 10:21 –

“Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.”

This thought is expressed in the Old Testament where the hand of the Lord is upon a person for strengthening and power (such as Ezekiel 1:3), or it is against him indicating disaster is upon him (such as in Psalm 81:14). In the case of Elymas, the obvious meaning is that the Lord’s hand was set as a foe against him. And so, he will now be punished. That is indicated in the next words, “and you shall be blind.”

As noted before, the Holy Spirit is speaking through Paul, and the punishment He determines is the same as that which came upon Paul when he was made blind for three days (Acts 9:9). So complete was Elymas’ blindness to be that it next says, “not seeing the sun.”

One can see a similarity to what occurred with Paul. It says in verse 9:3 that light shone around him from heaven. In verse 22:6, it notes that this great light came about noon. The meaning is that the light from heaven was more radiant than the sun itself. In this, the Lord alerted Paul to the error of his ways, blinding him.

Now, the same punishment has come upon Elymas, even if the manner in which it occurred is different. Paul simply spoke out the word to Elymas, but when he did, his

words indicate that what occurs is a corrective punishment. This is seen in the continued proclamation, saying, “for a time.”

The meaning and intent of this is that the Lord, even in His judgment, has granted mercy. The punishment will not be permanent, and it is – like that of Paul’s blindness – intended to give Elymas the opportunity to view his conduct in a different manner and in hopes of him changing his mind about the life he has been leading. With that understood, it next says, “And immediately a dark mist fell on him.”

Rather, it is two separate nouns and more correctly reads, “and fell upon him mist and darkness.” The word translated as “mist” is *achlus*. It signifies a dimness of sight, as if a cataract. It is found in the writings of various classical poets and authors. At times, it is used metaphorically of a mist of the mind. Exactly what came upon Elymas is uncertain, but its effect was total, and it was also immediate, as it says, “and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.”

These words reveal the suddenness and the scope of what occurred. Elymas had sought “to turn the proconsul away from the faith” (13:8). He acted as a guide on the path, leading Sergius Paulus in the direction he determined, but which was contrary to the straight ways of the Lord. Now, God had frustrated his efforts, causing him to be blind and unable to even direct himself. The contrast is stark and ironic.

Life application: Within the Bible itself certain claims about it are made in various ways and at various times. One of the most memorable is from Psalm 119:105 –

“Your word *is* a lamp to my feet  
And a light to my path.”

The sense is that our lives are like a journey. The way we go and the path we are on is confusing and dark. We cannot truly know if we are taking the right way or not without a guide. Parents teach their children, and the children learn from them. Schools educate young minds and form those minds in various ways. But the Bible alone can light up our path of life to reveal where we should place our spiritual feet. The path becomes knowable because of the words of Scripture.

Elymas did not follow the word of the Lord and his walk in life was confused, even if he thought he was walking properly. When the Holy Spirit spoke through Paul, the physical blindness that came upon him was simply a reflection of the spiritual blindness in which

he existed. The punishment of the Lord was intended to show him this and bring him to the right path.

Nothing is stated as to whether Elymas came to the truth or not, but he was given the opportunity to hear the word and see its effective power spoken forth by Paul. And we too have such an opportunity. We can see the lives changed by the power of the word. Alcoholics become sober. Brawlers become gentle, kind souls. Adulterers find new love and faithfulness in their marriages.

These things testify to the power of the word. Let us consider it and cherish it all our days. It truly is the light and the lamp that we need to know the proper place where each step we make should be.

*Glorious God, we thank You for Your word. It illuminates our path, and it leads us on our trek back to You. May we hold it close in our lives, thinking about it and applying it to our walk every moment. To Your glory, may it be so. Amen.*

**Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.** Acts 13:12

In the previous verse, a dark mist fell on Elymas and he wasn't able to lead himself any longer. Now, it will explain the reaction to what occurred. The structure of the NKJV deviates too much from the structure of the Greek. It should more rightly read, "Then the proconsul having seen what had been done, did believe, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord" (CG).

Therefore, we begin with, "Then the proconsul." This is Sergius Paulus, introduced in verse 13:7. He has been described as an intelligent man. Despite that, he had been led astray into the false doctrine of Elymas. Now that Elymas has been overwhelmed by the power of God, Sergius Paulus' intelligence can be properly directed. And so, the narrative continues with, "having seen what had been done."

It is obvious that the differences in opinion about the proper ways of the Lord were argued right in the presence of Sergius Paulus. Hence, the blinding of Elymas demonstrated an immediate eyewitness event to the fact that Elymas was not at all what he claimed to be and that his doctrine was false.

Further, it was verifiable proof that the power of God was to be found in the message of the gospel. As such, Sergius Paulus "did believe."



The verb is a perfect participle meaning: 1) it is a completed action and 2) its results continue to the present. His faith in the gospel had been settled and he was added to the faith, once and for all time. And this was in conjunction with his “being astonished.”

He had seen the verifiable proof of Paul’s words with his own eyes, and his heart was overwhelmed by it. The word translated as “astonished” is *ekpléssó*. It is a word signifying to strike out of one’s senses. There is a sense of fear mixed with amazement in the word where one will gape in astonishment. And this astonishment was “at the teaching of the Lord.”

Ellicott notes that the use of the genitive case “is, probably, that of the object, *the teaching which had the Lord, i.e., the Lord Jesus, as its main theme.*” In other words, Paul was doing his job and he was teaching about the Lord Jesus, meaning the gospel. An obvious exclamation to that would be, “Duh, what else would he be doing!” This is what he was called to do.

Of this account, the Pulpit Commentary says, “We cannot, perhaps, conclude positively from this that Sergius was baptized and became an avowed Christian, though the usual language of the Acts rather leads us to infer it.” From there, they proceed to cite scholars who adamantly argue why he was not converted and cite some that take the opposing view.

The argument is ridiculous. First, it is rather certain, based on the renaming of Saul to Paul at this time, that the name change is based on the events now recorded. He was Saul and from this point on he is Paul. But more, to argue against the conversion of Sergius Paulus is to argue against the words of Paul in his epistles –

First, Paul’s citing of the gospel:

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...” 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4

Next, he says what happens when that is believed: “In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Luke records that Sergius Paulus believed. He records it in the perfect tense. And this was “at the teaching of the Lord,” meaning the teaching about the Lord. To argue against the salvation of this man is as ridiculous as using beach sand as an additive to a bowl of ice cream. The purpose of the account is to demonstrate that the gospel was presented, it was presented with power, and the one hearing and seeing believed and was saved.

Life application: Sergius Paulus was given a visual demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit in silencing the opposition of Elymas. This should no longer be expected within the church. The reason for this is obvious. The word concerning what occurred has been recorded. Luke sufficiently explains how the early gospel was communicated and about the signs that accompanied it through the hands of the apostles.

Now that the apostolic age has ended, and with the completion of Scripture, there is no longer a need for such demonstrations of power. As Paul says elsewhere –

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” Romans 1:16, 17

The word of God carries the power of what it records because it is a true, literal, and accurate account of what it details. It calls for faith in what it proclaims. Having sight, such as seeing what happened to Elymas, does not require faith. Jesus’ words to Thomas show this –

“Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed.’”

-John 20:29

With Scripture’s completion, we are asked to believe what it proclaims. The Spirit has inspired accounts of Jesus’ miracles as well as the miracles of the apostles. What more do we need? Nothing. What more should we expect? Nothing.

Have faith and believe.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for Your precious word. Help us to be reliable in reading it, reliable in attending Bible studies that explain it, and reliable in attending church that glorifies You through the proclaiming of it. What we do reveals where our priorities lie.*

*May our priorities be centered on Your word first and foremost because Your word tells us of Jesus! Amen.*

**Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. Acts 13:13**

The NKJV is not in accord with the Greek. Instead, the BLB translation will be used –

“And those around Paul, having sailed from Paphos, came to Perga of Pamphylia. But John, having departed from them, returned to Jerusalem.”

The last verse indicated that the proconsul believed the word concerning Jesus. He was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. With that matter now complete, the narrative continues, saying, “And those around Paul.”

This is a new way of referring to those on the missionary journey. Saying “around” is a way of designating a person as the main figure in the narrative. Until now, Barnabas has been mentioned first. Now, Paul begins to take the lead role. Barnabas will be mentioned first again twice in chapter 14, but the overall focus of the events will now be on Paul’s ministry before the Lord. Hence, Luke places Paul first here. As such, the narrative continues with, “having sailed from Paphos.”

This is the location where Sergius Paulus was, as noted in verse 13:6. Having crossed the entire island of Cyprus, they departed from this final city and “came to Perga of Pamphylia.”

This is an area north and a bit west of Paphos on the mainland. Today, it is the area of Antalya, Turkey. Albert Barnes describes the location –

“Pamphylia was a province of Asia Minor, lying over against Cyprus, having Cilicia east, Lycia west, Pisidia north, and the Mediterranean south. Perga was the metropolis of Pamphylia, and was situated, not on the seacoast, but on the river Cestus, at some distance from its mouth. There was on a mountain near it a celebrated temple of Diana.”

There is no record of evangelism in Perga at this time, but they will preach there in chapter 14. For now, and with no reason being given, it next says, “But John, having departed from them, returned to Jerusalem.”

This departure was unexpected and, to Paul, inexcusable. That can be inferred from Acts 15 –

“Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. <sup>38</sup> But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.” Acts 15:37, 38

As such, it is not as if John had received news of a death and needed to return home. Rather, something caused him to no longer want to be with the company as it traveled. It could be that he missed home, it could be that the pace the others kept up was too much for him, etc.

Looking at the surrounding text, the only things that may provide a clue are:

1. The conversion of Sergius Paulus, a Gentile. John may not have liked this. Adding credence to that would be the changing of Paul’s name from Saul. John is also called Mark and many others had names that accommodated the people of the nations, but Paul’s name was taken directly from his encounter with a Gentile.
2. Paul has taken the central role in the events, at least according to Luke’s record.

If only these events from the text are considered, it would be enough to assume that either John did not like the prospect of evangelizing Gentiles, or he was jealous that Paul had now taken the lead in the party over his own cousin. For one of these reasons, or for some reason that is not elsewhere hinted at, he forsook the company and returned to Jerusalem.

Life application: It is believed that John (Mark) is the same person Paul will later refer to in 1 Timothy 4:11, where he says, “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.” If this is the same person, it shows that there was eventually a reconciliation between the two.

If, as speculated, John didn’t like the thought of evangelizing Gentiles, he eventually outgrew that. Even if this was not the reason for his departure, it is still a truth that the Jewish believers had to accept. The message of salvation was not limited to them. The scriptural promises of Israel being the head of the nations probably seemed more confusing than ever. How would that come about if the Gentiles were evangelized?

Change can be a difficult thing. It is something that we will often fight against or run away from. But time eventually discloses that despite our protestations, what we initially want may not be what is going to come about. With that understanding, we can then yield to the events and begin to accept them and even participate in them.

Wars decide new borders. Elections decide changes in government. Economic changes determine what companies will flourish and which will flop. We have to accommodate ourselves to these types of things and learn to become productive parts of them. If we don't, we will simply be harming ourselves. Such events come to pass and there is no point in having a pity party when they do. Change is a part of life that we must accept. And as long as we do so while honoring the Lord with our lives, we will be living responsibly in those new environments.

*Heavenly Father, we are often overwhelmed with change and find it hard to process. This is especially so when our lives are negatively affected. Give us wisdom and maturity to accept things that occur, and help us to be productive and prosperous in our new surroundings. Yes, be with us Lord God as we cling to You through such times. Amen.*

**But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. Acts 13:14**

The previous verse spoke of Paul and those with him going to Perga. At that time John departed from them. Now, it continues, saying, "But when they departed from Perga."

More literally, it reads, "And they, having passed through from Perga." In other words, it is speaking of the area that is traversed between Perga and the next location. They left Perga, traveled through the land and "they came to Antioch in Pisidia." Rather, it should read Antioch of Pisidia. Albert Barnes explains the place and the reason, saying –

"Pisidia was a province of Asia Minor, and was situated north of Pamphylia. Antioch was not in Pisidia, but within the limits of Phrygia; but it belonged to Pisidia, and was called Antioch of Pisidia to distinguish it from Antioch in Syria - Pliny, Nat. Hist., 5, 27; Strabo, 12, p. 577 (Kuinoel; Robinson's Calmet). The city was built by Seleucus, the founder of the Antioch in Syria, and was called after the name of his father, Antiochus. He is said to have built 16 cities of that name ("Life and Epistles of Paul," vol. 1, p. 122)."

This area was inland to the north of Pamphylia and Antioch lay at the very northern end of it. Of this area, Cambridge makes an interesting comment –

“Dean Howson (Life and Epistles of St Paul, i. 175) suggests that it was perhaps in this journey that St Paul and his companion were exposed to those ‘perils of robbers’ of which he speaks 2 Corinthians 11:26. Pisidia was a mountainous district rising gradually towards the north, and the quotations given by Dr Howson from Xenophon and Strabo shew that there was a great deal of brigand-like life there even in these times, from which Paul and his company may have been in danger.”

Once they arrived in Antioch, it next notes, “and went into the synagogue.” Again, an aorist participle is used, “and having gone into the synagogue.” Each step is detailed methodically by Luke to give the sense of the journey’s motion for the reader to join in. Once in Antioch and having gone into the synagogue, it next records that it was “on the Sabbath day.”

The words in Greek more precisely state, “*on the day of the Sabbaths.*” This is what Paul refers to in Colossians 2 when arguing against observing Sabbath days and other things fulfilled through the work of Christ –

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, <sup>17</sup> which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” Colossians 2:16, 17

It is a way of designating the day as the Sabbath as a recurring Feast of the Lord (see Leviticus 23:2). Now, having arrived at the synagogue and entered it on this feast day, it says they “sat down.” Like going into a church, the people would go in, sit and await the word from the leader of the synagogue or whoever was designated to begin conducting the Sabbath affairs.

Life application: As noted above, Paul clearly argues against the observance of sabbaths in Colossians 2. The entire passage there refers to the work of Christ ending the Law of Moses. The words hinge especially on verse 2:14 when speaking of the abolishment of the law –

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, <sup>14</sup> having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”  
-Colossians 2:13, 14

The words “having wiped out the requirements” is speaking of the Law of Moses. To wipe out something indicates its removal, like chalk on a chalkboard. To take something out of the way means it was an obstruction that has now been removed. And the metaphor “having nailed it to the cross” specifically speaks of the death of Jesus Christ, the embodiment of the law. In His death, the law is abolished (see also Ephesians 2:15).

The reason for this detail is that people will argue that the word “sabbaths” in Colossians 2:16 is not referring to the weekly Sabbath. This is entirely incorrect. It is, as noted in the commentary above, the plural term used to speak of the fifty-two weekly Sabbaths. The same plural terminology is found in the Old Testament concerning the weekly Sabbath over 100 times.

Exodus 31:31 for example, while speaking of the weekly Sabbaths, refers to them in the plural. The Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ. Hebrews 4:3 says that we rest in Him now. Therefore, a Christian is to not let anyone judge him for not observing a Sabbath Day.

As a point of doctrine: There is no such thing as a Sunday Sabbath. The Sabbath is a Saturday, and only a Saturday. Christian tradition eventually started to claim that worshiping on the Lord’s Day (Sunday) had replaced the Saturday Sabbath. The claim is that this day of worship was now the “Sunday Sabbath.” This is incorrect. There is one Sabbath, and it is a Saturday. It is fulfilled in Christ. He is our Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:3).

As such, don’t allow anyone to pull a fast one on you and steal the prize from you. Rest in Christ, trust in Christ, and stay away from law observance, including the Sabbath day observance.

*Lord God, help us to accept Your word as it teaches us its progressively revealed truths. We are free from the law, we are free from the bondage it imposes on us, and we are at liberty in Christ who has accomplished all things for us. Now, help us to be obedient to faithfully follow You through the New Covenant that came at such a high cost. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.” Acts 13:15**

In the previous verse, Paul and those with him had gone into the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia on the Sabbath day and sat down. Now the narrative continues, saying, “And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets.”

Of these words, Ellicott brilliantly brings the narrative to life, not only explaining the meaning of the words before us but of the words of the coming verses –

“After the reading of the law and the prophets.—The order of the Sabbath lessons was fixed as by a kind of calendar, the Law—*i.e.*, the Pentateuch—being divided into fifty-three or fifty-four *paraschioth*, or sections. These, probably, came into use soon after the return from Babylon. To these were afterwards added special lessons, known technically as the *Haphtaroth*, from the prophets. We are enabled, by two curious coincidences, to fix, with very little uncertainty, the precise Sabbath on which the mission-work at Antioch opened. The opening words of St. Paul refer to Deuteronomy 1:31 (see Note on Acts 13:18) and this was the lesson for the forty-fourth Sabbath in the year, which fell in July or August; the corresponding second lesson from the prophets being Isaiah 1:1-27, from which he also quotes. He starts, as was natural, from what the people had just been listening to, as the text of his discourse.”

The reading of the Law and Prophets is still read in this manner. Once it was read, it next says, “the rulers of the synagogue sent to them.”

This is specifically referring to Paul and his associates. It is probable that these rulers had become aware that Paul was a Pharisee, trained in Scripture. Barnabas was a Levite. As such, the rulers would be interested in spoken comments from one of them on what had just been read. Another possibility is noted by Ellicott –

“The elders apparently saw strangers taking the position of teachers, probably in the garb of Rabbis, and it belonged to their office to offer such persons an opportunity of addressing the people.”

Either way, whether through earlier introduction or by their choice of seating within the synagogue, it was alerted to them that they were men skilled in the law. That is indicated in the next words, “saying, ‘Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.’”

The Greek is in the imperative – “Speak!” It is a complete allowance and a firm suggestion for them to feel free to discuss what was read and to give any insights they had. The words of response will begin in the next verse and will continue until verse 41. In his words, Paul will clearly explain the coming of the Messiah, what his mission was, and how that then ties into justification before God apart from the Law of Moses.



Life application: Suppose you were to have one chance to talk to a Jewish believer about Jesus being the Messiah, would you be able to do so? What if you were asked about a particular part of Scripture that he was curious about? Remembering that the Jews who are not believers in Jesus do not hold to the New Testament, could you satisfactorily explain the passage and how it anticipates Him?

It is obviously impossible to ignore the New Testament when explaining how Jesus fits into the Old Testament passage because the New Testament is what explains who Jesus is and the things He did, but there must be a connection to the Old Testament's relevance concerning Him for the curious Jew to logically put the two together.

But this cannot be done if you are not familiar with the Old Testament. Therefore, be sure to read it and think about it. Ask yourself, "How does this point to Jesus." Someday, you may be just the person who is able to satisfactorily show a Jew how Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture. Be ready with a response! Know the Old Testament as well as the New!

*Lord God, give us the strong desire to know Your word and to be ready at all times to share it with others. We may not have all the answers, but we can at least be prepared enough to get them headed in the right direction. Give us the desire to know Your word more each day. May we be prepared for such times, O God. Amen.*

**Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: Acts 13:16**

Note, the NKJV does not give the proper sense of the verbs. Instead, it more precisely reads, "And Paul, having risen, and having motioned *with* his hand, said, 'Men, Israelites, and those fearing God, hearken:'" (CG)

In the previous verse, the rulers of the synagogue had read from the Law and Prophets. Once complete, they addressed Paul and his companions asking if they had any exhortation for the people. With that, it now says, "And Paul, having risen."

Luke, in his customary way of using participles to show the process of movement as it occurred, indicates that Paul is the one to respond to the address of the rulers. In arising, he is assuming the position for providing instruction as requested. With that, Luke continues, saying, "and having motioned *with* his hand."

It is the same word used concerning Peter in Acts 12:17, *kataseió*. It means to shake the hand up and down to attract attention as if signaling. In this case, Paul is alerting the people that he is not simply getting up to stretch or to go out for some fresh air. He is indicating that he is happy to accommodate and bring a word to those in attendance. He motioned with his hand and then “said, ‘Men, Israelites.’”

It is the same opening made by Peter in his first major discourse in Acts 2:22. It has been seen two more times since then. It is a fraternal address between Israelites asking for attention to what will then be said. With that, Paul also says, “and those fearing God.”

These are not proselytes who had been circumcised and reckoned among Israel. Instead, they are known as proselytes of the gate. It expresses those who were interested in the teachings of Israel and had come to respect and fear the God of Israel, giving up on their own pagan ways in part or in whole. To those gathered, Paul next says, “hearken:”

It is the common word *akouó*, which is easily identified as the etymological root of our word “acoustics.” It signifies to hear. In this case, the verb is imperative. As such, “hearken” gives the proper sense. “I have words to convey, ‘Listen up!’”

Life application: Not all are skilled in oration and speaking in front of a lot of people can be intimidating, but it is not impossible. If you are asked to speak to others and are a bit reticent to do so, a quick prayer under your breath to the Lord asking for His peace is a good place to start. Also, confidence in your knowledge of the subject to be conveyed is a plus.

Therefore, don’t speak beyond what you know. Just stick with the most important points and maintain a light, happy attitude. This can be practiced. Using a mirror is a good way of getting comfortable with speaking.

Even if you are never asked to speak publicly, you still should be ready to convey the gospel to those you encounter. You may be the only person who ever takes the opportunity to do so.

Finally, as one last fallback, you can always hand out tracts. “I have something to share with you and this can convey it better than I can. Please take the time to read it.”

In the end, be prepared to share the gospel in some manner. You may be the one person who can make an eternity-changing moment in a person’s life.

*Lord God, may we not be too timid to share the wonderful news of Jesus. Help us in this. Others have taken the time to share it with us, and this has gone on since the beginning of the church. May we be a responsible part of that unbroken line of faithful people who have carried the good news about Jesus to the world. Amen.*

**“The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. Acts 13:17**

Paul had just given his opening greetings to those gathered in the synagogue. With that complete, he now begins his discourse on what was read in the law and the prophets, beginning with, “The God of this people Israel.”

Paul immediately identifies his thoughts with the God of Israel. Everything he says will be in accord with that. This is important because when he proclaims Jesus later in verse 23, his words will be in line with what was presented already in Scripture by their God. It would make no sense for Paul to come in and start talking about Krishna. Nor would it make any sense to begin with the God of Israel, but then proclaim Him in a manner that is not in accord with Scripture.

Therefore, Paul begins by acknowledging the God of Israel, and then he will continue speaking about things that are in accord with the Scriptures that testify to their God. This is seen in his next words. The God of Israel “chose our fathers.”

Paul gives a brief summary of the history of the establishment of Israel as a people. This is similar to the approach that Stephen took in Acts 7. As both men were being guided by the Spirit in their utterances, it shows that this is an important way of communicating the gospel to the Jewish people. To take them back in their own history, and to then weave together events that ultimately point to Christ, is a sound method of proving the truth of Jesus as being their Messiah.

In this case, the choosing of the fathers is certainly referring to the call of Abraham, the selection of Isaac over Ishmael as the son of promise, and the continued defining of the line as being through Jacob and not Esau. From there, history continued with Israel sojourning in Egypt.

Any Jew would be intimately familiar with these things, and their minds would fill in all of the unstated blanks as Paul continued. It is next from the time in Egypt that Paul continues, saying, “and exalted the people.”

Immediately, the mind of his audience would skip to the time of affliction while in Egypt. Joseph died and another ruler came up who treated them harshly and with cruelty. It is during this time that God promised he would attend to their plight and give them the relief He had promised would come. That promise was made centuries earlier at the time of Abraham. This was “when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt.”

The thought of the promise made by the Lord to Abraham would come right into the minds of those hearing Paul speak –

“Then He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is* not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.’” Genesis 15:13, 14

This is the time that Paul is referring to in his words to the people. And at that set time, known already to the Lord, he then exalted the people, “and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it.”

Using anthropomorphism, Paul’s words speak of the power of the Lord. It is as if the arm of the Lord was used to brush aside every obstacle that stood in their way as they were safely brought forth behind them. This was promised before the Exodus by the Lord –

“Therefore say to the children of Israel: ‘I *am* the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.’” Exodus 6:6

Paul is taking Israel’s own history, a history carefully recorded in their sacred writings, and he is using them to tie their history into what was to come in Christ Jesus.

Life application: Jehovah’s Witnesses claim to follow the same God as that presented in Scripture, using those Scriptures and claiming His name to proclaim their religion. But, as stated above, it makes no sense to claim to follow the God of Israel (Jehovah), but then proclaim Him in a manner that is not in accord with Scripture.

The God of Israel is the One who led the people out of Egypt with an outstretched arm. He did it personally, accomplishing everything necessary to save the people. No other god was with Him in His exalted work –

“So the LORD alone led him,  
And *there was* no foreign god with him.” Deuteronomy 32:12

Acknowledging that their redemption was the work of the Lord alone is seen again and again in Scripture. The same is true with the coming salvation of the people through Christ. The Lord promises that He alone will bring it about –

“I, *even I, am* the Lord,  
And besides Me *there is* no savior.” Isaiah 44:1

Again, this thought is expressed again and again in Scripture. The Lord alone will accomplish the work. And then, according to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, He creates a being who does all the work for Him. It is both illogical and it is perverse. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the only possible fulfillment of these types, pictures, patterns, and prophecies.

The Lord God of Israel came in human flesh and accomplished the work for His people. But the only way one can be certain of this and not be led astray by falsity is to check these things out. And the only place where one can do that is in the word.

As this is so, there are two possibilities to getting this right: 1) learn after something is heard, or 2) know what is right before a claim is made. Either way, the place to learn whether a claim is true or not is Scripture.

As this is so, it is best to at least be familiar with the Bible in advance. Then when something complicated comes up, it will be easier to begin a more in-depth study. Hence, you are implored to read your Bible daily, check out claims that are made concerning it, and hold fast to that which is clearly presented by the Lord.

*Lord God, thank You that we have access to the word that tells us of You and of Your great workings in human history on our behalf. We can know what is right and what is wrong by simply checking things out. So, Lord, give us wisdom to do just that. Help us to be responsible in our lives in this manner. To Your glory, we pray, Amen.*

**“Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness.**  
Acts 13:18

In the preceding verses, Paul was asked to address the synagogue they were visiting. He agreed and immediately began speaking about the history of Israel. In the previous verse

he noted their being brought out of Egypt by the Lord. Now, he turns to a sad, but continuously repeated part of their history, that of burdening the Lord, beginning with, “Now for a time of about forty years.”

It is referring to the time in the wilderness when Israel almost constantly complained and rebelled against the Lord. Those forty years cover everything from Exodus 12:37 where they began their departure from Egypt until they were set to cross over the Jordan in Joshua 3:14.

Paul notes this was about forty years. Some events are precisely dated such as the departure from Sinai after spending about a year in that location (Numbers 10:11). Other events are recorded without specific dating, but even then very exacting inferences can be made. The account of this period is carefully and methodically detailed in Scripture. One central theme of the entire period is that “He put up with their ways in the wilderness.”

Here is a word found only once in Scripture, *tropophoreó*. It signifies enduring or putting up with, and thus to bear their ways. It comes from *tropos*, signifying a manner or way, and *phoreó*, signifying “to have a burden, i.e. (by analogy) to wear as clothing or a constant accompaniment -- bear, wear” (Strong’s).

Of this word, Ellicott notes, “The Greek word so rendered differs by a single letter only from one which signifies “to nurse, to carry, as a father carries his child.” Many of the better MSS. versions and early writers give the latter reading, and it obviously falls in far better with the conciliatory drift of St. Paul’s teaching than one which implied reproach. The word is found in the Greek of Deuteronomy 1:31 (“bare thee, as a man doth bear his son”), where also some MSS. give the other word, and suggests the inference, already mentioned, that this chapter, as well as Isaiah 1, had been read as one of the lessons for the day.”

Other scholars mention this as well. Barnes says, “It is furthermore not probable that Paul would have commenced a discourse by reminding them of the obstinacy and wickedness of the nation. Such a course would rather tend to exasperate than to conciliate; but by reminding them of the mercies of God to them, and showing them that He had been their protector, he was better fitting them for his main purpose - that of showing them the kindness of the God of their fathers in sending to them a Saviour.”

Rather, this is exactly what Paul is doing. Moses, after almost forty years, noted to the people that they had been borne by the Lord despite their rebellion. He went on in

Deuteronomy to carefully detail Israel's future rejection of the Lord and the punishments they would suffer because of it. Paul is not attempting to conciliate. Nor is he attempting to exasperate. He is simply laying out the facts that Israel, to this day, refuses to acknowledge. He will carefully and methodically follow this line of thought until he concludes.

It is in the use of this word that Paul is reminding them of their constant turning from Moses and from the Lord who chose Moses to lead them. It is a theme he will weave into his words, demonstrating that they have repetitively done the wrong thing in relation to the Lord's will. As such, he is hinting that they are prone to do the wrong thing now and turn from the offering of the Lord Jesus as their Messiah.

Life application: The history of Israel is a snapshot of our own lives before the Lord. We have strayed from Him, we have done wrong and turned away, and yet the Lord is ever faithful to keep His covenant. Despite being under the curses of the Old Covenant, the Lord has maintained Israel to this day, just as He promised.

While they have been unfaithful, He remains faithful. The theology that says that God is through with Israel and that the church has replaced them is a failed theology because it looks at what is happening from a human perspective. The sense is, "Israel failed, they rejected the Lord, and He has rejected them. They got just what they deserve." If this was true, it would mean that His word cannot be trusted because He covenanted with them and spoke out promises that would have then failed.

It is from this perverse thinking that one would then say, "Israel was rejected by the Lord, and so we too can lose our salvation." That puts the onus, the responsibility, and the work on us, not on God who has sent Jesus. If a person can lose his salvation, at any time after being saved, then he was never truly saved. God simply gave them an offer of eternal insecurity and essentially said, "Work hard, maybe you will make it. It is, after all, up to you to do so."

This is a complete misunderstanding or twisting of numerous points of theology in order to make "self" the central message of salvation. It is a shunning of the full, final, and forever work of Jesus on the cross, and it is to be rejected. When God speaks out salvation, it is an eternal decree. God cannot lie. He has spoken. Israel the nation has been kept for its own day of salvation, and if you have called on Jesus, you have been saved for your day of glorification – despite yourself.

*Glorious Heavenly Father, how can we be so perverse as to think that what You offer by grace is up to us to merit once it has been bestowed? Help us to think clearly about what You have done and to consider the eternal nature of what You have decreed. And then, Lord, help us to hold fast to this and rejoice in what You have done, are doing, and will continue to do in our lives. Great are You, O God. Amen.*

**“And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment. Acts 13:19**

The previous verse said that God put up with Israel for about forty years in the wilderness. With that, it next says, “And when He had destroyed seven nations.”

Israel was given the land by God. And more, they were instructed to go in and subdue it, eradicating every breathing soul. The reason for this was clearly stated several times and in several ways. And detailed instructions concerning this task were provided. As for the number of nations in the land, the number and naming of the listed nations vary several times in the biblical record. Paul is making a note of the list as it is recorded in Deuteronomy 7. There, along with the charge to destroy them is given –

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, <sup>2</sup> and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them *and* utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. <sup>3</sup> Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. <sup>4</sup> For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. <sup>5</sup> But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their *sacred* pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire.” Deuteronomy 7:1-5

Those seven nations were, as Paul next says, “in the land of Canaan.” This is the promised inheritance. It is a promise made at the time of Abraham, and it was repeated to Isaac and then again to Jacob –

To Abraham: “Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’” Genesis 13:7



To Isaac:

“Then the LORD appeared to him and said: ‘Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. <sup>3</sup> Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father.’” Genesis 26:2, 3

To Jacob:

“And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: ‘I *am* the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.’” Genesis 28:13

It is this land that was subsequently destroyed, meaning its inhabitants, at the time of Joshua –

“So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land rested from war.” Joshua 11:23

After that time, Paul notes that “He distributed their land to them.”

Great detail is provided in the book of Joshua concerning the division of the land. It includes notes about the borders, the names of the cities within those borders, etc. At the end of this land division, it then says –

“These *were* the inheritances which Eleazar the priest, Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel divided as an inheritance by lot in Shiloh before the LORD, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. So they made an end of dividing the country.” Joshua 19:51

Finally, Paul notes that this process was “by allotment.” This is a word found only this one time in Scripture, *katakléronomeó*. It is derived from words signifying “according to” and “assign by lot.” HELPS Word Studies says, “to arrive at (get *down* to) God's will, through the prayerful *use of lots*.”

Some manuscripts have a single letter change in this word which would then signify “he gave as an inheritance.” And it is true that the Lord gave the land as an inheritance to Israel, but this was accomplished through the use of lots. Either way, the land was

promised to the fathers, it was again promised to the nation, and they entered and possessed the land. The actual division by lots is noted in Joshua 18:10 –

“Then Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD, and there Joshua divided the land to the children of Israel according to their divisions.”

Life application: In Numbers 14, the people rebelled against the word of the Lord and set their hearts back on the land of Egypt. In this, the Lord sent them into exile in the wilderness. He could have simply destroyed them and gone in a new direction, but He had covenanted with them, and He is not like man. He remained faithful while they were faithless.

Eventually, their set time of punishment ended, and they entered the land. That entire process, from Numbers 14 until Joshua 3 was a typological picture of Israel’s rejection of Jesus (the Lord) when He came. The Lord could have destroyed them and gone in a new direction (replacement theology), but He had covenanted with them, and He is not like a man. Again, He remained faithful while they were faithless.

The church is not a new direction. It is the acceptable continuance of God’s direction, based upon the cutting of a New Covenant. That covenant was promised in Jeremiah 31, and it was promised to Israel and Judah. The Gentiles are grafted in by faith, but the covenant parameters were set. As such, replacement theology isn’t just wrong, it is a woefully inept doctrine that fails to understand the nature of God and of His interactions with humanity.

We may not be happy with the Jews for whatever reason is floating around in our minds, and the Lord is certainly not happy with them as they continue to reject His offer of Jesus. But this does not negate His faithfulness to the covenant made with them. Having that set and understood in our minds will keep us on the proper path of what He is doing in this beautifully laid out redemptive plan.

*O God, thank You for Your faithfulness to us, even when we are unfaithful to You. If we have come to You through the New Covenant, we are saved. It is “deal done” because You are the One who set forth the parameters. How blessed we are to know that You do not change, and by this, we know that we are saved forever! Amen.*

**“After that He gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. Acts 13:20**

The previous verse referred to the subduing of the land where the seven nations were destroyed and then the division of the land by allotment. Paul's next words say, "After that." There is a rather large difficulty in reckoning the number four hundred and fifty found in this verse. For now, an evaluation will be made based on the text of the NKJV.

As for the meaning of the words "After that," it would have to mean, "After the time of warfare to remove the inhabitants and division of the land." It is after that time that "He gave them judges."

Although Joshua is not called a judge, his role certainly fits that position. Regardless of that, the period of the judges is carefully recorded in the book of Judges, beginning with Othniel and ending in the book of 1 Samuel with Samuel the prophet being the final judge of Israel before the time of the kings. From there, Paul's words continue with, "for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet."

This counting causes difficulty because of what it says in 1 Kings 6:1 –

"And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which *is* the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD."

The two numbers, that of Paul and that of the record in 1 Kings 6:1, do not seem to match. From the exodus until entry into Canaan was forty years. It took about another seven years to subdue the land. It was at this time the divisions of the land were made.

If it was four hundred and fifty years from the land division to the time of Samuel, and then you add on the forty years in the wilderness, the seven years until the land division, the time of Saul's reign (forty years – Acts 13:21) and the time of David's reign (forty years – 1 Kings 2:11), and then the building of the temple commencing in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, it is about five hundred and ninety years from the exodus until the time of the building of the temple.

Because of the difficulty, some translations make the period inclusive of what Paul has said since verse 17 where it spoke of Abraham. As such, the translations read –

"All this took about 450 years. After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet." BSB

In other words, the period is not speaking of the time from the division of the land until the time of Samuel, but of the time from Abraham to the time of the judges, which then went from Othniel to Samuel. The problem with that is that Paul does not mention the making of the covenant, just that the fathers were chosen. Also, the time interval would have to begin with Isaac, not Abraham. However, Isaac was never even mentioned by Paul.

A seemingly reasonable explanation, which includes the extrabiblical note of the time of Joshua's rule, comes from Jamieson-Faucet-Brown –

“But taking the sense to be as in our version, that it was the period of the judges itself which lasted about four hundred fifty years, this statement also will appear historically correct, if we include in it the interval of subjection to foreign powers which occurred during the period of the judges, and understand it to describe the whole period from the settlement of the tribes in Canaan to the establishment of royalty. Thus, from the Exodus to the building of the temple were five hundred ninety-two years [Josephus, Antiquities, 8.3.1]; deduct forty years in the wilderness; twenty-five years of Joshua's rule [Josephus, Antiquities, 5.1.29]; forty years of Saul's reign (Ac 13:2); forty of David's and the first four years of Solomon's reign (1Ki 6:1), and there remain, just four hundred forty-three years; or, in round numbers, ‘about four hundred fifty years.’”

This would align with Paul's statement, made in a general manner to his audience. However, it still bears a conflict with the dating of 1 Kings 6:1, unless that date is only speaking of the time when Israel was not under foreign rule. And more, it should be unnecessary to include the writings of Josephus to conclude what Paul is referring to because his words are now included in the Bible.

The resolution to the problem comes by taking the timeframe in relation to the expressly stated years of servitude and peace as is recorded in the book of Judges. When this is done, the period is exacting. Those timeframes are listed in verses such as that found in Judges 3:14, which says, “So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years.”

In a paper published by Floyd Nolen Jones in 2007, he adds up all such periods and they come out to four hundred and fifty years.

Life application: Study the Bible enough and you can bet a resolution to difficulties in the Bible will eventually be realized.

This is the paper as submitted by Dr. Jones:

-----

450 or 480 years – Acts 13:20 and 1 Kings 6:1

The most bothersome “contradiction” in Scripture is that of the presumed conflict between the 450 years of Acts 13:20 with the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1. However, such is a mirage – the two actually have nothing to do with one another. Acts 13:20 concerning the length of the period from the judges until Samuel the prophet is no more than Paul’s affirming of the Hebrew Scriptures. He is merely giving a summary total, without any regard to overlap, of all the years of servitude and peace as recorded in the Book of Judges (as well as Eli’s judgeship, for it says “until Samuel the prophet”), thus:

$8+40+18+80+20+40+7+40+3+23+22+18+6+7+10+8+40+20 + 40$  for Eli in 1 Sam. 4:18 = exactly 450

As already explained (Chronology, pp. 72-76), each period of oppression was overlapped by the time of peace that followed Israel’s deliverance by a judge. The relevant passages in Acts 13 reads:

Acts 13:17 The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.

18 And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.

19 And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot.

20 And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred & fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.

21 And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

22 And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

Although these verses are given in the historic chronological order, verse 19 gives neither the length for the span of the war with the Canaanites nor the time required for the distribution of the land among the 12 tribes. Thus, when taken alone, it is of no actual chronological value. Even verse 21, which gives the span of Saul’s reign as 40

years, does not tell us the length of time covering from when Samuel actually became established as a prophet until the people desired a king. Indeed, verse 22 does not give the number of years for the reign of David.

From these observations, as well as the context of Acts 13:14-43, it becomes obvious that the main purpose of Acts 13:17-22 is not that of furnishing chronological data. Moreover, the giving of Saul's reign as being 40 years is probably because it is not recorded in the Old Testament (although it can be determined: see footnote 2, page xiii in my Chronology).

This straightforward solution to the conundrum reveals that the 450 years have no chronological significance and has no bearing whatsoever on 1 Kings 6:1. The problem between the two passages never actually existed and was always only a matter of perception – or the lack thereof.

Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D. – 2007  
-----

This information was obtained from [floydnojenjonesministries.com](http://floydnojenjonesministries.com).

When facing difficulties in the Bible, study the Bible more. It is a self-validating treasure of marvel and wonder.

*Lord God, we can know Your word is true through a careful study of it. Although there are things we may not understand, we can still have faith that those things that are difficult do have a suitable resolution, even if we have not yet found it. Thank You for Your precious word. Help us to contemplate it all our days and to grow in our knowledge of You through it. Amen.*

**“And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. Acts 13:21**

In the previous verse, Paul mentioned the giving of judges to Israel for about four hundred and fifty years. With the time of the judges ending, the time of the kings began. Paul explains that beginning with the words, “And afterward.”

Samuel was the final judge of Israel. Israel was a theocracy with the Lord as their King at this time. The judge was appointed to lead the people under the authority of the Lord.

However, Israel desired a change in this arrangement, and so after this time of judges, “they asked for a king.”

To anyone who knew the recorded account of this act, it would be a reminder of the people’s rejection of the Lord. For Paul to bring this up is not a lesson in the right attitude of the people. Rather, it is a reminder of exactly the opposite –

“Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, <sup>5</sup> and said to him, ‘Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.’

<sup>6</sup> But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, ‘Give us a king to judge us.’ So Samuel prayed to the LORD. <sup>7</sup> And the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. <sup>8</sup> According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also. <sup>9</sup> Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them.’” 1 Samuel 8:4-9

After this, Samuel instructed the people on the additional burdens they would face with a king over them, warning them. And yet, the record says –

“Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, ‘No, but we will have a king over us, <sup>20</sup> that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.’

<sup>21</sup> And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated them in the hearing of the LORD. <sup>22</sup> So the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Heed their voice, and make them a king.’” 1 Samuel 8:19-22

With that remembered, Paul next says, “so God gave them Saul the son of Kish.” The name Saul means “Asked for.” It is thus a biblical pun. The people asked for a king and the Lord gave them a king as they had asked for. His father was Kish. The name comes from *qosh*, a snare. Hence, his name means Snaring. This very well may be a pun as well. Israel had ensnared itself in asking for a king.

After Saul’s initial conquests, Samuel called to renew the kingship (1 Samuel 11:14), and so the people were called together at Gilgal. During this coronation, Samuel reminded them of their wickedness in asking for a king. This was acknowledged by the people –

“Now therefore, stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes: <sup>17</sup> *Is* today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the LORD, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness *is* great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking a king for yourselves.”

<sup>18</sup> So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.

<sup>19</sup> And all the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves.” 1 Samuel 12:16-19

This is what Paul is implicitly reminding those gathered in the synagogue. Though not apparent yet, he will tie all of this in with the people’s rejection of Jesus. For now, he continues this verse with, “a man of the tribe of Benjamin.”

This is to be implicitly understood as a mark of the Lord’s disfavor if for no other reason than that the Messiah was promised to come through Judah, not Benjamin (Genesis 49:10). Benjamin’s blessing by Jacob was that he was a ravenous wolf that devours the prey and divides the spoil. It is not at all unlike the reign of Saul. But more, Benjamin was the smallest tribe, having been almost utterly wiped out by the other tribes for its defense of the horrifying actions of the people of Gibeah as is recorded in Judges 19 and 20. With that, Paul finishes the verse with “for forty years.”

This is not recorded in the Old Testament, although Paul’s stating it means that it was understood to be so. Various chronologies have been provided and explanations have been made to justify Paul’s words. One explanation is that the times of Samuel and Saul have been combined. Hence the words of the previous verse “until Samuel the prophet” mean that the reigns of Samuel and Saul are combined into forty years. Others have developed timelines showing how Saul could have reigned forty years. In the end, Paul has stated a literal time that was accepted within the synagogue as factual.

Life application: The Bible records actual events from Israel’s past to reveal God’s purposes and intent for the time of the New Covenant. The time of the judges was one of constant apostasy and then turning back to the Lord. The people’s asking for a king that would rule over them was to be taken as a rejection of the Lord as well.

And yet, some judges and kings directed the people to the Lord, exalting Him above their own reigns. Others turned from the Lord in varying degrees. Each of these stories is given as a lesson for us to see something about Israel’s need for the Messiah to come and rule. Without knowing what is recorded in the Old Testament, we have a void in our



understanding of why we need the Lord as our Head. The proclivities of man necessitate it and the biblical stories of the Old Testament highlight this fact.

Be sure to read the Old Testament as well as the New. In it, you will find the state of man in need of God's Messiah. In His coming, we see how Jesus fulfills each and every need.

*Lord God, thank You for the giving of Your Son so that we can have an eternal Leader who can reveal to us the extent of Your greatness for all ages to come. In Him, we have all of who You are in a form that we can see and understand. Yes, thank You for the sending of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**“And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the *son* of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’ Acts 13:22**

The previous verse referred to the reign of Saul. With that remembered, it now says, “And when He had removed him.” It refers to Saul who had disobeyed the Lord in two critical matters. The final one cost him the kingship. The account is found in 1 Samuel 15, and it is summed up with these words –

“And as Samuel turned around to go away, *Saul* seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. <sup>28</sup> So Samuel said to him, ‘The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, *who is* better than you. <sup>29</sup> And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He *is* not a man, that He should relent.’” 1 Samuel 15:27-29

From there, Paul continues with, “He raised up for them David as king.” Israel had asked for a king, rejecting the Lord as king over them. Therefore, He gave them what they asked for. In Saul's disobedience, but still in agreement with the will of the people, the Lord continued a kingship over Israel. But this time, it would be in accord with the prophecy of Jacob that the scepter (the rule of a king) would not depart from Judah until Shiloh came.

Shiloh is an anticipatory appellation for the coming Messiah. In raising up David, this prophecy would come about. The name David means Beloved. Of David, Paul next says, “to whom also He gave testimony,”

The meaning is “about David also the Lord gave testimony.” In other words, the Lord spoke words concerning David that defined his character and the Lord’s attitude toward it. The Lord spoke, “and said, ‘I have found David the *son* of Jesse.’”

The words mean that the Lord searched out David, knowing all that his life was and would be. The sum of what could be found in David is what the Lord “found” concerning him. He was the proper choice by which to continue the redemptive narrative. Despite David’s many faults, he was a man of great character in his dealings with the Lord and with those around him.

The name Jesse means My Husband. But it also means Yehovah Exists. As such the name Jesse contains the weighty notion that human marriage reflects divine revelation. In considering these names in the surrounding Old Testament accounts, great hints of God’s workings in relation to the coming Messiah become evident. As for David, the Lord says he is “a man after My *own* heart.”

Paul takes two Old Testament verses and combines them to give a full description of the character of David. The first concerns what God was looking for in a king when addressing Saul –

“But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him *to be* commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”

-1 Samuel 13:14

The second is a reference to David from the psalms –

“I have found My servant David;  
With My holy oil I have anointed him.” Psalm 89:20

Taken together, the two thoughts show that David is what the Lord searched for after first giving what Israel asked for. Because of whom David was, and because that included being a man after the Lord’s own heart, the Lord knew that he was one, as it next says, “who will do all My will.” The sentiment is found in the continued words of Psalm 89. In verse 21, it says, “With whom My hand shall be established.”

In other words, the Lord’s will, His hand, would be realized in the person of David, who would establish that will in all his doings. Unlike Saul who rejected the word of the Lord, when the Lord spoke, David complied. In the times he did not, such as in his adultery

with Bathsheba, his heart was convicted, and he returned fully to the Lord. Thus, the will of the Lord was wholly established through David.

Life application: The Lord “found” David in a certain condition, a certain state, before Him. As noted, this means that the Lord looked upon David, from beginning to end, and knew that he was a man whose very character defined what was good and right in his overall attitude and conduct.

The Lord has also “found” you out. He already knows everything about who you are, from beginning to end. However, you do not. This sentiment is expressed by David –

“O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*.

<sup>2</sup>You know my sitting down and my rising up;  
You understand my thought afar off.

<sup>3</sup>You comprehend my path and my lying down,  
And are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup>For *there is* not a word on my tongue,  
*But* behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.

<sup>5</sup>You have hedged me behind and before,  
And laid Your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup>*Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me;  
It is high, I cannot *attain* it.” Psalm 139:1-6

David understood that the Lord knew everything about him from beginning to end. As he knew this, he directed his life toward the Lord’s ways. Now that you know this is true about you, you can also demonstrate the wisdom of David and direct your ways to the ways of the Lord. What God has “found” in you does not have to simply be who you have been in the past, but who you can be in the future.

In turning to the Lord and living for Him now, what the Lord has “found” already about you is that you are a person who is willing to turn wholly to Him and follow in His ways. If you don’t do this, then that is what the Lord has “found” about you. Contemplate this and understand that you can be “found” by the Lord in a manner that pleases Him from this point on. He already knows what you will do. Do what is right, and in your doing, you will be found a person after His own heart.

*Lord God, You already know everything about us. We can only direct the future by our conduct as we express it from moment to moment. May what You know about us be*

*something that shows we are people who live after Your heart from this moment forward and for all our lives. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“From this man’s seed, according to *the* promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior— Jesus— Acts 13:23**

Paul has been speaking about the history of Israel. In the previous verse, he noted the raising up of David because of having removed Saul as king. In his words, he said that God had found David a man after His own heart and a man who would do His will. With that, Paul now continues with, “From this man’s seed.”

The meaning is that a direct descendant of David is who is being referred to. The word “seed” as understood from Scripture indicates a direct connection between one entity and another, just as when a stalk of wheat bears seed. That seed bears the characteristics of the stalk from which it came. It will be none other than a seed of wheat. And more, if it is a particular class of wheat, it will remain in that same class.

Because this Seed is from David, it remains a fixed part of the line of David in nature and in attributes. The Seed being referred to is next said to be “according to *the* promise.” The inserted word “the” does not belong there. Nor is the word “his” found in many translations. The words should be rendered just as the Greek, “according to promise.” It is not a specific promise, but a succession of promises all related to the same unchanging nature of God.

This Seed was promised in Genesis 3 as the “Seed of the woman.” He was promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David. He was promised through the words of the prophets in a multitude of ways, all of which were in accord with one another. It is this one overall promise that Paul refers to now. With that understood, Paul then explains the fulfillment of this promise. It is that “God raised up for Israel.”

The promise that began in Genesis, and which was the hope of all people who anticipated a return to paradise as indicated there, eventually became the hope of Israel. This was not only as a hope of the people in general, but the hope of its specific fulfillment through them as a people.

Eventually, it became the hope of the house of David, being promised to him personally in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. This promise is also recorded later in the psalms and in the prophets. Paul, speaking to those in the synagogue now, confirms that the promised seed has come, noting that to them God has raised up “a Savior—Jesus.”

His words, however, would cause an immediate conflict in the thinking of these Jews. How could Jesus be the Savior of Israel if Israel isn't saved? Their minds were attuned to the idea that Jesus would deliver Israel from her enemies, gather them back to the land of Israel, and lead them as the head of the nations. And yet, they were sitting in a synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia some years after Jesus had come.

It won't be until verse 13:38 that he will exactly explain what Jesus came to save them from. And then in verse 13:39 he will continue that thought with words that would trouble any Jew unless he understood what their history under the law was intended to reveal. Until he gets there, Paul will continue to explain the proofs that verify Jesus truly is the promised Seed of David.

Life application: Heresies are points of doctrine that destroy the message of salvation by changing the fundamental tenets of what God has revealed in Christ. For example, God has revealed that in the Godhead there are individual "persons" in one essence. Scripture reveals that the Father is God. It reveals that the Son is God. It also reveals that the Holy Spirit is God. And yet, they are not the same "person." We may not understand the concept, but to deny it as a fundamental tenet of the faith is heresy.

Despite teaching that Jesus (the Son) is God, the Bible also teaches that Jesus is a Man. To deny this would then be heresy. But going further, Jesus is not just a Man who was created by God, directly and immediately in Mary's womb. Rather, He is a man who descended from Adam. From there He descends from a long genealogy recorded in Luke 3. He also descends from others as is recorded in Scripture. He is the Seed of these people. Lot, for example, is not in the direct genealogy of Jesus as recorded in Luke 3, but he is still an ancestor of Jesus as the pages of Genesis reveal.

Jesus is also said to be the "Seed of David" here in Acts and elsewhere, such as in Romans 1:3 and 2 Timothy 2:8. Because this is so, to deny His humanity is derived from these people is to teach heresy. A person does not need to know these things to be saved. Salvation comes through belief in the gospel. However, if a person is told, in advance, that these things are not true when the "gospel" is proclaimed, he will not be saved. He has believed in a false Jesus.

It is important to be exact when speaking of the nature of Christ. God has carefully and meticulously revealed Him in Scripture. And so, let us carefully and soberly consider what is recorded there.

*O God, we stand in awe of what You have done for us. You set forth a plan and You have meticulously brought it about in human history, finally revealing the purpose of that plan when You sent Jesus. We are the recipients of the glory and splendor of what You have done for us. Thank You, O God. You have done it all, and now You ask us to just believe that it is so. And we do! Thank You for the coming of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**“after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. Acts 13:24**

Paul is in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. He has been addressing those gathered on the Sabbath, telling them about God’s plan of salvation. In the previous verse, he specifically introduced Jesus as the Savior. He now notes that Jesus’ ministry began “after John had first preached.”

This is referring to John’s preaching which immediately preceded the ministry of Jesus. It was not that John preached before the coming of Jesus at His birth, but before the designated time for His ministry to begin.

The significance of this was that John didn’t preach like the other prophets, as if the Messiah was coming at some unstated point in the future. Rather, his words indicated that the Messiah was right at hand and ready to appear. This was, as Paul continues to note, “before His coming.” The Greek literally reads “before the face of His entrance.”

It is a Hebrew expression indicating an appearance, the face representing the person’s presence. In this, a new word is used, *eisodos*. It is essentially the opposite of *exodus*. It indicates an entrance and extends to a means or place of entrance. Because Paul is connecting John’s ministry to that of the coming of the Messiah, he is indicating that the two events are inextricably linked. The herald had come and then the One he proclaimed had immediately followed. As for John, his proclamation was “the baptism of repentance.”

The meaning is that John called the people to repent. In his calling, those who agreed with his proposition were then baptized to outwardly acknowledge the inner change that had taken place. It was a symbolic act of repentance. The word “repent” must be defined to understand what is being said –

“A word compounded of the preposition μετά, after, with; and the verb νοέω, to perceive, and to think, as the result of perceiving or observing. In this compound the preposition combines the two meanings of time and change, which may be denoted by

after and different; so that the whole compound means to think differently after. Μετάνοια (repentance) is therefore, primarily, an after-thought, different from the former thought; then, a change of mind which issues in regret and in change of conduct. These latter ideas, however, have been imported into the word by scriptural usage, and do not lie in it etymologically nor by primary usage. Repentance, then, has been rightly defined as ‘Such a virtuous alteration of the mind and purpose as begets a like virtuous change in the life and practice.’ Sorrow is not, as is popularly conceived, the primary nor the prominent notion of the word. Paul distinguishes between sorrow (λύπη) and repentance (μετάνοια), and puts the one as the outcome of the other. ‘Godly sorrow worketh repentance’ (2 Corinthians 7:10).” Vincent’s Word Studies

It was this changing of the mind that John was called to proclaim. The Messiah was soon to appear and there was to be a national preparing for His arrival –

“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup> and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’ <sup>3</sup> For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying:

‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the LORD;

Make His paths straight.”” Matthew 3:1-3

This call for the people to change their minds was “to all the people of Israel.” Jesus came to the people of Israel. His ministry was to the nation of Israel. No Gentiles were a part of the nation. He had come to fulfill the law and then initiate a New Covenant. This covenant was to be “with the House of Israel and with the house of Judah” as stated in Jeremiah 31:31.

As such, what Paul is conveying to those at the synagogue is a restating of the process of preparation for Israel to enter into this New Covenant based on their lives under the Law of Moses. As the Gentiles were never under the law of Moses, what Paul says here does not apply to them. It is simply a restating of the facts as they occurred just as the Messiah was ready to come forth. That was prophesied by the prophet Malachi –

“Remember the Law of Moses, My servant,  
Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel,  
*With the* statutes and judgments.

<sup>5</sup> Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet  
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

<sup>6</sup> And he will turn

The hearts of the fathers to the children,  
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,  
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” Malachi 4:4-6

Commentaries quite often shove Paul’s words here in Acts 13 into their “Gentile” theology concerning entry into the New Covenant, meaning “how to be saved.” But this is entirely inappropriate. Christ has come. And more, the Law of Moses was never in effect for any Gentile at any time or place in human history. The entrance of Gentiles into the New Covenant was anticipated by Isaiah, and it is something that was only available after the work of Christ was accomplished –

“And now the LORD says,  
Who formed Me from the womb *to be* His Servant,  
To bring Jacob back to Him,  
So that Israel is gathered to Him  
(For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD,  
And My God shall be My strength),  
<sup>6</sup>Indeed He says,  
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,  
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,  
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Isaiah 49:5, 6

Israel had to repent because they were under the law. To be brought out of that state, they needed to be in the right condition for that to occur. Now, with Christ’s work complete, salvation is solely by faith in what He has accomplished.

Life application: Remember the basics of the gospel –

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” 1 Corinthians 15:3:4

By faith in this message, one is saved. At that time, the Holy Spirit is given as a seal, a guarantee, of that salvation –

“In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of



promise, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13, 14

The process is of God. The work is accomplished by Jesus. Belief in this results in eternal salvation. Nothing can be added to this message without causing damage to its purity.

*Glorious God, we stand in awe of what You have done. You have brought us from darkness into the wonderful light of Christ. Thank You for restoring us to Yourself. And thank You for Your word that reveals these things to us. We can have confidence in our walk and hope concerning our future because of what You have provided for us. Hallelujah! Amen.*

**“And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘Who do you think I am? I am not *He*. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.’ Acts 13:25**

The previous verse referred to John’s preaching a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. Paul continues now with, “And as John was finishing his course.”

Paul uses the term *dromos* or “course” for the first time in Scripture. It signifies a racetrack where runners on foot competed in the Greek games of old. It will only be seen again in Acts 20:24 and 2 Timothy 4:7, both of which give us the same sense as he now uses –

“But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my **race** with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:24

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the **race**, I have kept the faith.” 2 Timothy 4:6, 7

Paul equated the ministry of John the Baptist to such a course and noted that as he was coming to the end of it, “he said, ‘Who do you think I am? I am not *He*.’”

Paul again uses a new word, *huponoeó*. Literally, it signifies “to think under” and thus privately. As such, it means to suppose or conjecture. The people were thinking privately about who John might be. He was aware of it and asked them to consider what he would reveal. As for what Paul has said, his words of the previous verse and this one now

follow the narrative of Luke 3 closely. In the previous verse, it mentioned the preaching of repentance to Israel. That was seen in Luke 3:3. It continued with instruction after that. Then, it next says –

“Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ *or* not.” Luke 3:15

The question was proffered. From there, John’s denial of being the Messiah is not explicitly spoken in the same manner that Paul speaks to those in the synagogue. Rather it is implied in John’s response to the people’s question which Paul states as, “But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.”

Rather, the word is “sandal” in the singular. John is saying that he was unworthy to undo even a single sandal on the feet of the Messiah, much less both of them. This follows Luke’s narrative –

“Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ *or* not, <sup>16</sup> John answered, saying to all, ‘I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.’” Luke 3:15-17

Untying the feet of one’s master would have been the most menial of all tasks. As today, it would be considered degrading to be told to remove the shoes of someone as he sat and relaxed. John, however, knew that even such a lowly assignment was above his right to perform. It is a surprising statement when considering Jesus’ words to the people –

“But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. <sup>27</sup> This is *he* of whom it is written:

‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,  
Who will prepare Your way before You.’

<sup>28</sup> For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” Luke 7:26-28

John was highlighted by Jesus in this manner and yet he knew his unworthy state before the Lord. It makes the rest of the narrative of Israel's interactions with Jesus all the more relevant and striking. Their rejection of John was like their rejection of all the prophets who came before him. Their rejection of Jesus, of whom all those prophets spoke, was intolerable and inexcusable.

Life application: In considering our position in relation to Jesus, there is a dichotomy that needs to be considered. He has given His life for us and there is a bond of closeness that arises from that where we can speak to Him now in the most intimate way. He is nearer to us than any blood relative and He should be dearer to us than our own spouse or children.

And yet, we must also consider the absolute magnificence, splendor, and holiness of the Lord as well. We stand before the perfection of God when we stand before the Lord Jesus. He is our Creator, Sustainer, and continued life. Our conduct before Him should be that of reverential fear and always conducting our lives in a circumspect manner.

Even if those who are "least in the kingdom of God" are greater than John the Baptist, we are no more worthy than he was to untie the strap of one of His sandals. Let us remember this and share our lives and intimate thoughts with Him as our nearest and truest love, and yet let us honor Him with the due respect that is owed to our God. All glory to Jesus, our All in all.

*Glorious Lord Jesus, we stand in awe of You. We were created by You, we exist because You allow it to be so, and yet You came to die for us so that we could be reconciled to God through You. How great You are. How magnificent, splendid, and beautiful! Glory to You in the highest, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**"Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. Acts 13:26**

Paul had just spoken of John the Baptist's denial of being the Messiah, instead pointing the people of Israel to the One who was coming after him. Paul now proclaims that this One has come. His words begin with, "Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham,"

The words are surprisingly widely translated, dividing the three designations into two or three categories. Literally, the words read, "Men, brothers, sons *of the stock of* Abraham." This is probably how Paul intended. He is speaking to the men of the

synagogue. He refers to them next as brothers. And then, he notes their lineage being traced back to Abraham as a particular point of note because of what he will say in verse 13:32 concerning the promise made to the fathers, a promise that first came to Abraham.

He is carefully defining them so that they pay heed to the details of what he will say. The importance of heeding or not heeding will make all the difference in their eternal future. Therefore, he speaks precisely so that they will be without excuse in their decision concerning the matter presented. Next, he adds another category, saying, “and those among you who fear God.”

An important question arises here: Is this another descriptor of those he just addressed or is it a separate category altogether? In other words, is this a way of saying, “You sons of Abraham who fear God,” or is it “and anyone who is not a son of Abraham but who fears God” as in verse 13:16? Notice the difference between the two verses:

13:16 – and those fearing God

13:26 – and those among you fearing God

The reason this is important is that these are words of warning to his people as much as they are words heralding the good news concerning Jesus. The two are actually inseparable. To reject the good news will lead to being handed the results of that rejection.

The confusion continues with the next words to some degree. They say, “to you the word of this salvation has been sent.” In this, the words are directed to whoever is hearing, be it Jew or Gentile. However, some manuscripts say, “to us.”

In this, it may or may not change the meaning. It still could mean that God’s salvation has been sent to both Jew and Gentile, but it also may be that he is saying that God’s salvation was sent to the literal descendants of Abraham who fear God as opposed to Abraham’s literal descendants and those Gentiles who fear God as well.

In Acts 10:2, the same term is used when referring to Cornelius. He was a man “that feared God.” Because of this, it is hard to be dogmatic, but even if it extends to proselytes of the gate who are in attendance, the result will ultimately remain unchanged. If those proselytes were to reject the message of Paul and continue with observance of Moses, they would – henceforth – be separated from what God is doing in Christ.

This is to be seen quite clearly in verses 13:38 & 39 –

“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; <sup>39</sup> and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

Whether Paul’s words include the proselytes of the gate, or whether they are solely directed to the Jews at this point, an absolute distinction is made between “everyone who believes” and “the law of Moses.” To follow the law will mean that you are not included in everyone who believes. That then means no justification and thus eternal separation from God. This is because, as Paul says in Galatians –

“...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” Galatians 2:16

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’ <sup>11</sup> But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God *is* evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’ <sup>12</sup> Yet the law is not of faith, but ‘the man who does them shall live by them.’” Galatians 3:10-12

Life application: Faith in Jesus Christ saves. Nothing else will do.

*Heavenly Father, help us to be people of faith, trusting in the merits of Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. And then, Lord, help us to be faithful people, working out our salvation in righteousness and holiness all our days. May our walk be in accord with the honor bestowed upon us when we first believed. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*. Acts 13:27**

Paul just mentioned that the word of salvation had been sent to his people, the sons of the family of Abraham, and to those among them who feared God. Now Paul explains the purpose of the mission going forth, beginning with, “For those who dwell in Jerusalem.”

Paul brings the attention of the matter back to where it began. Jerusalem was the seat of power in Israel. It was where the temple was, where the high priest ministered, where the oracles of God and the genealogical records were maintained, and so on. It is the focal point of God's dealing with the people, even if events in Jesus' ministry occurred elsewhere in the land. Paul next says, "and their rulers."

The rulers of the land determine its direction. This is a precept found both implicitly and explicitly throughout Scripture. All people are individually responsible for their actions, but the rulers of a land direct how the land, meaning the nation of the land, will be determined in the eyes of the Lord. In the case of Jerusalem, being the seat of power, what occurred there was because of what the rulers determined. In the case of their Messiah, Paul continues, saying, "because they did not know Him."

This does not mean:

1. That they didn't know who Jesus was as an individual. The gospels are replete with the rulers' interactions with Him. There was certainly not a ruler in Jerusalem who didn't know who He was.
2. That the rulers didn't know His claim to be the Messiah. He told them, but they didn't listen (John 10:25). Many of the people either proclaimed Him the Christ or learned through interacting with Him that He was the Christ.
3. That there wasn't sufficient evidence that He was the Christ. He had performed many miracles, fulfilled ancient prophecies, and walked in sinless perfection before them.

In saying that the rulers did not know Him, it means that they willingly failed to recognize Him for who He truly is. He even said this explicitly in John 10:40, saying, "But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." And more, Paul demonstrates that they were wholly without excuse in this, saying, "nor even the voices of the Prophets."

Being the stewards of the oracles of God, they had direct access to every prophecy ever recorded in their Scriptures. These were both exacting and readily available to them. In fact, when Herod wanted to know where the Christ would be born, this is exactly what He did –

“When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

<sup>5</sup> So they said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> “But you, Bethlehem, *in* the land of Judah,  
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;

For out of you shall come a Ruler

Who will shepherd My people Israel.”” Matthew 2:3-6

As such, these rulers of Jerusalem were completely without excuse. Again, Jesus told them this explicitly in John 5 –

“Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is *one* who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. <sup>46</sup> For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.” John 5:45, 46

And again, not only did Israel have the voice of the prophets, but he notes that these were the prophets “which are read every Sabbath.” Rather, the verb is a present participle. They “are being read every Sabbath.” The process continues even to this day.

It wasn’t as if the oracles of God were sequestered away and taken out only when a person claimed to be the Messiah, at which time the sages poured over the Scriptures hoping to remember what they said and where to find out the needed details to confirm or disprove a claim. Rather, they were read every Sabbath in synagogues throughout the land and even throughout the dispersion, as evidenced by Paul’s commenting on a Sabbath day reading now in the synagogue in Pisidia of Antioch.

With this marked stain upon those in Jerusalem who had personally seen, interacted with, and rejected their Messiah, Paul next says that they “have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*.” This is the height of irony. The very people who had the oracles of God before them, and who had interacted with the living fulfillment of those oracles, rejected Him and condemned Him. Paul says that they were so blind to their own Scriptures that they could not even see what was plainly before them.

Life application: The point of Paul’s words is that those in the synagogue were about to be on a sort of trial, just like those in Jerusalem. They were Jews, they had the oracles of God laid out before them, and they had eyewitness testimony of who Jesus is and what He did while among the people. And more, the oracles before them in the synagogue

not only told of the things that transpired up until the time of Jesus' rejection and crucifixion, but they also even told of those things.

In other words, when Paul finishes, they would be just as responsible for their acceptance or rejection of Jesus as were the leaders of Israel who were in Jerusalem. And that same type of trial continues to this day.

The word of God contains the same message today that it did two thousand years ago. We have the exact same witness and testimony that those in the synagogue in Pisidia of Antioch had because we have Luke's record of it. We also have the rest of the New Testament which is now written and on permanent record before us.

And yet, despite it being read in churches all over the world, many are just as blinded to what it says as the Jews in the synagogue Paul is speaking to. They open up the word, read what it says, and say something ridiculous like, "Jesus is not God." Or they might say, "Jesus is loving and love wins, we will ordain a homosexual to be a leader over us."

The very oracles that tell us what God expects of us are ignored, manipulated, or dismissed as archaic writings with no bearing on how we should conduct our affairs before God now. Those with such attitudes will receive their just condemnation. Let us hold the word close to our lives, live in accord with its precepts, and be willing to never waffle in our convictions concerning what it proclaims. God has spoken. Let us consider this soberly.

*Lord God, help us to accept Your word for exactly what it is, Your unchanging, infallible, and complete revelation to us concerning the redemption of mankind. May we never trifle with it. Instead, help us to hold it in the highest reverence while we walk in Your presence. It is our light and our guide to return us to You. Thank You for Your precious word. Amen.*

**"And though they found no cause for death *in Him*, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. Acts 13:28**

The previous verse contained Paul's continuing words concerning Jesus, noting that those in Jerusalem and their rulers fulfilled Scripture in condemning Jesus. With that, Paul continues, saying, "And though they found no cause for death *in Him*."

The verb is an aorist participle, and the word "though" is not in the Greek. The words are more closely rendered, "And having found no cause of death." Jesus was put on trial in a



manner that was in violation of the Law of Moses as well as the later codes of the Jewish people. In fact, it has been noted that as many as eighteen violations of law occurred during His trial. Despite even having false witnesses presented, there was nothing found in Him that was worthy of condemning Him. Even a charge that He committed blasphemy was completely subjective and could not in any way align with the Law of Moses' statutes and judgments.

Further, this charge of blasphemy could not stand the scrutiny of Pilate. Therefore, they went to him with a different charge, pitting Jesus against the Roman authority and claiming His actions were seditious, something the gospel records completely refute. Despite all of this, Paul simply states that "they asked Pilate that He should be put to death."

Jesus was a threat to the leadership of Israel. It was quite apparent that He was approved of God, and they knew He was who He claimed to be. This is not explicitly stated in the gospels, but it is perfectly evident at every turn of a page. They, however, were not looking to cede their power, status, and authority to anyone. Also, they did everything in their power to frustrate Jesus' work every step of the way.

Eventually, Jesus became such a threat to their positions within the nation that they illegally set about to have Him done away with. In this, they had no authority to put Him to death and so they appealed to Pilate to do so. Despite Pilate not desiring to be a part of the matter, the rulers of Israel manipulated him to the point that he conceded to allow the execution of Jesus.

Of the words of this verse, Charles Ellicott does a magnificent job of tying the entire scenario of what Paul says together with references from the gospels –

"And though they found no cause of death in him.—Technically, the Sanhedrin had condemned our Lord on the charge of blasphemy (Matthew 26:66), but they had been unable to prove the charge by any adequate evidence (Matthew 26:60), and finally condemned him by extorting words from His own lips. When they came before Pilate they shrank at first from urging that accusation, and contented themselves with stating in general terms that they had condemned Him as a malefactor (John 18:30); though afterwards, as if seeking to terrify the wavering governor, they added that by their law He ought to die because He made Himself the Son of God (John 19:7), and that by making Himself a king He spake against the emperor (John 19:12)."

Life application: Despite all that occurred in the illegal trial of Jesus, the death of Jesus was preordained by God. And more, John confirms that even the high priest of Israel prophesied of this fact –

And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all, <sup>50</sup> nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.” <sup>51</sup> Now this he did not say on his own *authority*; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, <sup>52</sup> and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.” John 11:49-52

The death of Jesus was necessary for the people of the world to be reconciled to God. However, this does not in any way mitigate the crimes committed by the Jewish leaders. They were responsible for their actions which were contrary to the law of God, despite the overall matter being in accord with the will of God.

This should give us comfort when we see wrongs committed against Christians, or even if they are committed against us because we are Christians. God’s ultimate purposes are being met, even through our trials, whether the events are contrary to God’s law or not.

As an example, a missionary may be martyred for his faith by a bunch of Hindus. This is against the law of God and those Hindus will be punished for what they have done if they fail to come to Christ. However, many may see the death of this missionary and convert to Christianity, maybe even one of the perpetrators. The expansion of God’s kingdom has occurred, and His ultimate will for this to come about has been met, even though the details were contrary to His law.

This is what happened with Joseph when he was sold by his brothers to Egypt, and it is something that occurs elsewhere in the Bible. God takes the wrongdoings of man, and He turns them into wonderful things that ultimately bring Him great glory. So, when evil comes upon you or others, trust that God is in control, and He is working out something far greater than any of us could ever imagine.

*Lord God, how grateful we are to know that You are in total control of all things. We need not worry one iota about what lies ahead because we know that through good or bad or life or death, our salvation and eternal destiny are set because of what Jesus has done for us. Thank You, O God, for Your kind hand upon our eternal destiny. Amen.*

**“Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb. Acts 13:29**

In the previous verse, Paul noted that the rulers of Israel asked Pilate to have Jesus put to death, even though they found no cause for death in Him. Paul now continues with, “Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him.”

This is an all-encompassing statement of what occurred. It includes Christ’s rejection by the rulers, His being apprehended, tried, beaten, handed over to Pilate, scourged, offered gall, crucified, mocked, given sour wine, and so on. The Jewish Scriptures are filled with hints of these things. And even though some of them were written about the trials or afflictions of others, such as David, they bear a dual fulfillment in anticipation of Christ Jesus.

Of the words “all that was written,” Bengel rightly says, “They could do no more (*nothing beyond* what was written). In Jesus all things that were written were fulfilled.” All that was done to Jesus is just what was prophesied about Him. Without leaving anything out, and without their adding anything not recorded, what happened to Christ Jesus is the exacting fulfillment of what was written beforehand. After that, Paul says, “they took *Him* down from the tree.”

This was approved by Pilate once it was confirmed that Jesus was dead. The body was taken down by Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:46). Nicodemus joined him (John 19:39) and together they prepared the body for burial according to the custom of the Jews. After this, Paul says, “and laid *Him* in a tomb.”

This was also accomplished by Joseph and Nicodemus –

“Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. <sup>42</sup> So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation *Day*, for the tomb was nearby.” John 19:41, 42

Even these actions were prophesied in advance. These things, recorded in the four gospels, exactly fulfill a vast array of prophecies found in Scripture. Paul carefully detailed all of this to ensure that those who heard it would be fully aware of things they may not have heard before. From there, it would be their responsibility to check out what was said. If they simply dismissed his words, or if they were just too lazy to determine if what he said was true, the responsibility for their failure would rest solely with them.

Life application: There are many who dismiss the things written about Jesus as fables, but it is beyond credulity to think that the Scriptures that were maintained and built upon for well over a thousand years were somehow not speaking of what the gospels later detail. Everything was written precisely and with the minutest detail to let Israel, and now us, know that Jesus Christ is the exacting fulfillment of everything that was written.

Each person is expected to check these things out. In accepting the word is what it claims to be, we should then be prepared to defend it and explain what we have learned. There are many who will simply refuse to believe. There are also people who have been told the stories aren't true, but who are curious to check them out anyway. It might be you who they come to who will start that process, so be ready! Let us share all we can about this wonderful story concerning what God has done in the sending of Jesus to bring us back to Himself.

*Thank You, Lord God, for the precision of Your word. It is so carefully structured and meticulously detailed that we have every assurance that Jesus is truly the Christ. And through tears of joy in our confidence of this fact, help us to share the good news with others as well. Jesus! Jesus has come! Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### **But God raised Him from the dead. Acts 13:30**

Paul has been speaking on the Sabbath to the Jews in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia. He just spoke of the fulfillment of all that was written concerning Jesus, at which time they "took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb." But that is not the end of Paul's speech. Rather, those words lead to his next thought, the greatest words ever spoken, saying, "But God raised Him from the dead."

Paul first and foremost proclaims this because of what it signifies about Jesus Christ. The wages of sin is death. Though this is stated by Paul in Romans, it is not something foreign to the Hebrew scriptures. It is implied in the Lord's words to Adam at the very beginning—

"Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Genesis 2:16, 17

God could have just not put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden. Or He could have allowed the man to eat of it. If there was something inherently wrong

with the fruit of the tree that would negatively affect the man, He could have changed either the fruit or the man to make it acceptable to eat.

But these things were not the issue at all. The issue was obedience to the Lord's command. In other words, the issue was the giving of law. God gave Adam a command. In violating that command, death would result. If the law had not been given, nothing would have happened to the man. The same is true with any other tree. God could have made a list of the trees man could eat and which ones he could not eat.

Acceptable:

Durian

Pomegranate

Apple

Fig (but only June 6<sup>th</sup> through August 27<sup>th</sup>)

Unacceptable:

Cherry

Star Fruit

Fig (from August 28<sup>th</sup> to June 5<sup>th</sup>)

Jack Fruit

Violating the law, not the nature of the fruit itself, is what brings death. In eating the fruit, which is contrary to the law, the disobedient act calls for the set punishment to be rendered. Jesus was under the Law of Moses, the Lord's set standard for Israel. In that law, a provision is made for absolute obedience to bring life. That is found in Leviticus 18–

“You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I *am* the LORD.” Leviticus 18:5

It is said by various scholars that Leviticus 11:44 contains the central theme of the book of Leviticus, “...you shall be holy; for I am holy.” This is an acceptable postulation. With that in mind, Leviticus 18:5 certainly contains the main logical reason for it.

It is such an important verse, that it is what is revealed in the thought of Genesis 2 & 3, and it is substantially repeated several times in both the Old and New Testaments. In Genesis 2, as noted above, the Lord gave a command which promised death if disobeyed. The implication then is that life would result through obedience.

In Genesis 3, because of man's disobedience to the Lord's law, access to the tree of life, by which man could live forever, was denied. Death entered the world. In Leviticus 18:5, a promise is made that through obedience to the Law of Moses the man shall live. Many pass this off as meaning "live happily," have a "higher life," possess "true life," etc. This is not at all what is being relayed here. It is a promise that if a man keeps the requirements of the law, he will live and not die. On the flip side, if one does not keep the requirements of the law, he will die and not live.

The Lord dwelt among Israel. Access to Him was restricted because of the sin-nature of man, but also because of the law itself. However, in fulfillment of the law, access would naturally be granted once again. It could not be otherwise. The law is given to give life. If life is promised, then it must be granted.

If one doesn't die, then he continues to live. If he lives forever, then he has eternal life. This is the implication of the words, and it is solidified by the using of a definite article in front of the word "man." The text actually doesn't say "if a man does." It says, "if the man does." This verse anticipates Christ. He is the Man who, in fact, did keep the ordinances and judgments of the Lord. Thus, God raised Him from the dead. He now possesses eternal life.

This is because in His fulfillment of the law, the law was made obsolete. It was annulled and set aside. As the law is done away with, there is nothing to ever bring about death again.

This is exactly explained in the book of Romans and elsewhere in the New Testament as well. Christ fulfilled the law, and thus the law is fulfilled. In Him, life is granted. If you are looking for access to restored paradise, and to the Tree of Life, you need to look no further than Jesus Christ. He is "The Man who did."

Nehemiah 9:29 refers to Leviticus 18:5 after the people's return from the punishment of exile. Ezekiel 20 repeats it three times showing that failure to keep the Lord's law is what resulted in that punishment. Paul then cites the same verse twice, in Romans 10:5 and in Galatians 3:12, to show that Christ, who fulfilled the Law of Moses, is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes in Him. It is faith in His completion of this law that grants eternal life. He did the work; we must do the believing.

The second point that Paul is making in his words to the synagogue is the contrast between Israel's rulers and God. Paul just said in verse 13:27 that "those who dwell in

Jerusalem, and their rulers, ... did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets.” Now, in verse 13:30, Paul says that “God raised Him from the dead.”

The contrast is clear. The stewards of the law did not know their Messiah, but God knew Him. And more, those stewards of the law obviously did not know the law, but Jesus did. And, in turn, they then did not know the Giver of that law, but Jesus did. This is all to be understood from Paul’s words to those at the synagogue, and thus to us who are reading the recorded words.

Life application: It is violating God’s law that brings about death. And the more law that is given, the more burdensome the weight is. Take the example above concerning the list of fruit. That is but a few of the fruits in the world. Suppose the list included every fruit on the planet and it was equally long in what was acceptable and what was unacceptable. Any slip-up would be a violation of the law.

Now suppose that the restrictions for the fig – about certain times of the year making the fruit acceptable or unacceptable – applied to every fruit. And more, each fruit had a different set of days that were ok or that were forbidden. Imagine the weight of the law! And now, let us add in a set time of the day when each fruit cannot be eaten. The burden increases with each law added. This is what Paul is telling the people in Galatians 3:19. The law “was added because of transgressions.” Later, he says that “the law was our tutor *to bring us to Christ*” (Galatians 3:24).

If all men fell in Adam because of one law, imagine the burden of meeting God’s perfect standard! Now consider the magnitude of what the words “But God raised Him from the dead” mean! Jesus! God’s grace is found in the giving of Jesus for our sins. He prevailed over the huge burden of the law. Why would any person on this planet want to go back under the Law of Moses where only death, condemnation, and eternal separation from God are found? Let us consider carefully where we will hang our hats. Let us come to God through Jesus Christ our Lord because God raised HIM from the dead!

*Lord God, thank You for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ! Hallelujah and Amen.*

**“He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. Acts 13:31**

The previous verse contained the most wonderful words ever recorded. Paul had told those in the synagogue, “But God raised Him from the dead.” Wonderful words of

victory, indeed! Now, he continues with what occurred after that, saying, “He was seen for many days.”

Paul bears conviction in his words. Even though he did not personally share in the events he now conveys to those in the synagogue, he had seen the risen Lord and knew that what he had been told by those who saw Jesus after the resurrection was true. The “many days” Paul refers to is explicitly stated by Luke as he opened the book of Acts –

“The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, <sup>3</sup> to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Acts 1:1-3

Paul next states who those were who were blessed to share in these post-resurrection events, saying that it was “those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem.”

Paul’s words focus on the apostles. It is true that the women saw Him immediately after the resurrection and many others did as well. In fact, Paul expands on these events in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 –

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.”

As these things are stated as a fact in 1 Corinthians, one might wonder why Paul focuses on “those who came up with Him from Galilee.” The answer is found in this same paragraph –

“Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. <sup>27</sup> For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*. <sup>28</sup> And though they found no cause for death *in Him*, they asked



Pilate that He should be put to death. <sup>29</sup> Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb.” Acts 13:26-29

The events that occurred in the rejection and crucifixion were led by those in Jerusalem and by the rulers of the nation. But they were the stewards of the law. As they chose to reject the One who had fulfilled their law and enacted a New Covenant, Christ revealed Himself after the resurrection to those who had been appointed to administer this New Covenant. It is the same theme found throughout Scripture: Law vs. Grace.

Jerusalem, emblematic of the law, was now to be replaced by a new form of worship –

“The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you *Jews* say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.’

<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. <sup>24</sup> God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.’” John 4:19-24

This new form of worship was to enter not merely as being at a physical location (meaning at a temple in Jerusalem), and yet it was to include a kingdom, nonetheless. In Luke 22, Jesus participated in the Passover. There it notes that His twelve apostles were with Him (Luke 22:14). Later in the chapter, it says –

“But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. <sup>29</sup> And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed *one* upon Me, <sup>30</sup> that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Luke 22:28-30

It is these (minus Judas who hung himself) that Paul focuses on in his words to those in the synagogue. The apostles had a message to convey. As for the audience now, they were of Israel, and they had a choice to make, just as those in Jerusalem and their rules had. It is these apostles who were appointed to herald this New Covenant, and “who are His witnesses to the people.”

Someone had to tell what Christ Jesus had done. Those in Jerusalem rejected Him, but those who continued with Him in His trials did not. They would be the ones to judge Israel. As for the direction Paul and those with him were set to take, that will be referred to later in this chapter, specifically in verse 13:47.

Life application: There is no contradiction in the idea of those who come to Jesus, who worship in spirit and truth, while at the same time there is a kingdom that will be judged by the twelve apostles that will also be set up. The nation of Israel is not the entirety of what God is doing. The New Covenant allows for the inclusion of Gentiles, but the nation of Israel still has messianic prophecies that are to be fulfilled in the millennium.

As such, there is one New Covenant that is based upon a single gospel. How God structures things within that New Covenant is entirely different than what existed under the Law of Moses. Just because Israel will be at the head of the nations someday, that has no bearing on how the gospel is now received. Any who come to Christ, Jew or Gentile, must do so through faith in what He has done, as is revealed in the gospel mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15 above. As Paul says in that same chapter while speaking of Peter and the others, “Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed” (1 Corinthians 15:11).

Hear the gospel! Accept what it says through faith! Believe and be saved! Call on Jesus today!

*Glorious Heavenly Father, how good it is that You have opened the door for the whole world to be saved through the work of Jesus Christ. Those who were never under law are brought into the commonwealth of Israel. And those of Israel who believe are brought out from under the law. All are saved by Your grace through faith in the finished, final, and forever work of Jesus Christ our Lord. Thank You for the gospel, O God! Amen.*

**“And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers.**  
Acts 13:32

Paul just referred to the fact that Jesus was seen for many days after His resurrection and that the apostles have become His witnesses to the people. With that, he now continues, saying, “And we declare to you glad tidings.”

The words literally mean, “And we preached to you the gospel” as was seen, for example, in Acts 14:21 and elsewhere. The gospel is the good news, and it is “that promise which was made to the fathers.”

Of these words, Barnes says, “The promise here refers to all that had been spoken in the Old Testament respecting the advent, sufferings, death, and resurrection of Christ.”

This is certainly not merely speaking of the “fathers” as noted in verse 13:17 which includes those to the time of the captivity in Egypt. Rather, it is inclusive of any of the faithful line of people who anticipated the Messiah and from whom the people of Israel descended. This is certain, for two main reasons. The first is that Paul will speak of the deity of Christ, the incorruptibility of Jesus, the resurrection of the Lord, the forgiveness of sins, etc.

These things may have been hinted at simply because of how the Lord structured both the recorded history of the world in His word as well as how He structured the rites and rituals found in the Levitical portion of the law, but to clearly demonstrate them, Paul will cite David in the Psalms, Isaiah, Habakkuk, etc.

What was promised in veiled terms to Adam, Noah, Abraham, and so forth became more and more specific through the later prophetic utterances. Eventually, the word carried so much specificity in it that when Jesus came, it should have been evident to Israel that He was what those prophecies were pointing to – He and none other. This is now what Paul proclaims to those in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia.

Life application: It is true that the Bible says so many things that anyone can make up almost anything from its pages and create a false religion or doctrine from it. That has happened from the very beginning (see the book of Galatians, for example, to see this even in Paul’s time), and it continues to this day.

Many false religions began in recent history that are based on a manipulation of Scripture. Even within the very recent past, this is so. David Koresh used Scripture to identify himself as “the Lamb of God” spoken of in Revelation. The problem with this rests on the fact that those who followed such people 1) do not know Scripture well enough to avoid such falsity, and 2) remain unwilling to check out what Scripture says to determine if what they are being told aligns with what the Bible proclaims.

Be sure to know the Bible well enough to avoid being drawn into such traps when they come before you. But more, be sure to tell others to do this as well. Continuously speak of the importance of knowing Scripture personally. One’s knowledge of the word is what will keep a person on the straight path concerning what God has done, is doing, and will do for His people. God is telling us the story of Jesus Christ. Let us not get diverted from that basic and all-important point.

*O God, thank You for Your word. It is there to keep us from the traps and snares set before us and to lead us to the true and right understanding of who Jesus is. Give us both the wisdom and the desire to hold it closely, read it daily, and to contemplate its riches always. Thank You, O God, for this precious and sacred word. Amen.*

**“God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm:**

**‘You are My Son,**

**Today I have begotten You.’ Acts 13:33**

Paul just proclaimed to those at the synagogue, “And we declare to you glad tidings.” He then went on to say, “that promise which was made to the fathers.” With that, he now explains his words, saying, “God has fulfilled this.”

The word he uses is found only here in Scripture, *ekpléroó*. It means more than just fulfilled, but that it is completely fulfilled in every detail. In other words, God made promises that were to be realized in the coming of the Messiah. In the sending of Jesus, they are not just fulfilled here or there, but entirely. He is the fulfillment of every messianic expectation that God had laid before His people. Understanding this, Paul continues with, “for us their children.”

The Greek is very precise and emphatic. It reads, “to the children of them, to us.” Some manuscripts say, “to our children.” As such, it seems that one of the scribes attempted to align Paul’s words with those of Peter when he spoke to those in Jerusalem –

“For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

Of this change, Cambridge rightly says, “...this weakens the language greatly, for what the audience whom St Paul addressed would desire was a fulfilment for themselves. Their children would inherit what they received, but a promise to be fulfilled to their children would not move them so much as one of which they were to be sharers themselves.”

The focus is on the fulfillment of the promises by Jesus and that it is now available to be appropriated by the people of Israel. This is confirmed in Paul’s next words, saying, “in that He has raised up Jesus.” The KJV adds in the word “again” in this clause, saying, “in that he hath raised up Jesus again.”

The reason they appear to have done this is probably that it puts the focus on the resurrection rather than the incarnation. In other words, Jesus was “raised up” by God at the incarnation. He was then “raised up” by God again at the resurrection. However, by not italicizing the word “again,” the KJV translators have illegally added to Scripture a presupposition, even if that presupposition may be correct. The translation is therefore not acceptable.

With that noted, Paul will next go to the Hebrew Scriptures to demonstrate that what he is saying is something that was anticipated in the coming of Jesus. The messianic expectations are fulfilled in His resurrection.

Concerning that thought, Albert Barnes rightly states, “He does not say that every part of the promise had reference to his resurrection; but his being raised up completed or perfected the fulfillment of the promises which had been made respecting him.” That is validated next in Paul’s citation from Scripture. To introduce the thought, he starts off by saying, “As it is also written in the second Psalm.”

Here, some manuscripts simply say, “in the first Psalm.” Cambridge explains the variation, saying, “What we now call the first psalm was formerly regarded as an introduction to the whole and not counted in the numbering. The quotation which follows is, according to the present order of the Psalms, taken from Psalm 2:7.”

Either way, the ordering of the psalms as they are now laid out goes back to an undetermined time in antiquity. It has remained in that state since. The actual quotation of Paul says, “You are My Son.”

Paul indicates that the Father/Son relationship referred to in the psalm is a messianic expectation. Someone may attempt to deny that, but the other words of the psalm confirm that it is so. In Acts 4, Peter cites the psalm while speaking to the people of Israel, clearly presenting it as a messianic psalm. And more, it was understood that way by the people when Peter cited it. Therefore, it was to be taken as an axiom that Paul’s citing of these words was messianic as well. With that, he continues with, “Today I have begotten You.”

Albert Barnes poignantly notes concerning these words –

“It is evident that Paul uses the expression here as implying that the Lord Jesus is called the Son of God because he raised him up from the dead, and that he means to imply that it was for this reason that he is so called. This interpretation of an inspired apostle

fixes the meaning of this passage in the psalm, and proves that it is not there used with reference to the doctrine of eternal generation, or to his incarnation, but that he is called his Son because he was raised from the dead.”

He may be correct in this, although the words “raised up” in this verse may speak of the entire earthly life of Jesus from incarnation through resurrection. That will be explored further in Acts 13:37.

Despite that, and even if Barnes is correct, this does not negate the Sonship of Jesus as defined through either eternal generation or the incarnation. It is simply a point of Sonship that is derived from the resurrection. Paul states this elsewhere as well –

“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God <sup>2</sup> which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup> *and* declared *to be* the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

-Romans 1:1-4

When the Lord spoke out the Psalm, He declared “Today.” It is an affirmation that the event was proclaimed and thus it was so. Christ Jesus is the Son of God, but the affirmation points to resurrection which confirms that it is so. He is the Son within the Trinity. He is the Son through the incarnation.

The resurrection proves that these things are so because only the Lord (Yehovah) could accomplish those things necessary to fulfill the Law of Moses. And more, only the Lord Jesus was first born without sin, meaning that God is His Father and that He is the God/Man. Though these things were already true, the resurrection proves that they are so. No other man could resurrect as He did. As Peter said in Acts 2 –

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— <sup>23</sup> Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; <sup>24</sup> whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.” Acts 2:22-24

It is not possible that a man bearing sin could resurrect. Likewise, it was not possible that a sinless Man could be held by death. This is what Paul is now conveying to the people in the synagogue.

As a point of theology, for those who are in Christ, the sin debt has been paid. We are now deemed sinless before God. As such, it is not possible that death can hold Christ's redeemed.

Life application: Regardless of the intent of the KJV translators concerning the addition of the word "again" as noted above, it is not their place to do this without noting that it is an added word. Their failure to italicize that word after adding it into Scripture has changed the word of God. If they felt there needed to be clarity, that is what italicizing additions is for.

Further, that is the purpose of Bible commentaries. They are given to explain what is going on in Scripture, clarify difficult passages, etc. Translators are not given this right unless they clearly identify words they have added to Scripture. Without doing this, their presuppositions replace the word of God as it has been given.

This is something the Jehovah's Witnesses have done in verses, such as Colossians 1:16, in their failed New World Translation. It is inappropriate, and it is the mark of a poor translation. In this case, the King James Version has perfectly failed to give a suitable rendering of the Greek. But this is not unique to that translation. It is often sloppy, inconsistent, contradictory, and just plain wrong.

Be careful to read many translations as you study the Bible. It is fine to read the Bible and enjoy the poetic nature of what is written. And this is often the case with an archaic translation like the KJV because it is soft on the ears. But that does not mean the theology to be derived from the translation is correct. So be on guard and diligently study the word.

A small error like the one noted above will not lead you down a false path, but it is nonetheless an illicit addition. If you read the KJV, be sure to annotate this in the margin. And be sure to read other, better, translations as well to get a fuller understanding of what God's word says.

*Lord God, we can know Your word is true through a careful study of it. Although there are things we may not understand, we can still have faith that those things that are difficult have a suitable resolution, even if we have not yet found it. Thank You for Your*

*precious word. Help us to contemplate it all our days and to grow in our knowledge of You through it. Amen.*

**“And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus:**

**‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’” Acts 13:34**

In the previous verse, Paul cited the second psalm concerning God’s declaration that the Messiah is the begotten Son of God. With that remembered, he now continues with, “And that He raised Him from the dead.”

The words introduce another proof that Scripture anticipated and foretold the resurrection of the Messiah. In this, one must remember that to be resurrected, a person must first have been dead. Considering that, there must have been a reason for Christ’s death.

Paul has already said that the people and the rulers rejected Jesus and that they asked Pilate to put Him to death. He will later note that Christ died for forgiveness of sins. Thus, there are both the deeds of man as well as the foreknowledge and providence of God tied up in the crucifixion of Jesus. Concerning the resurrection from the dead, Paul continues by saying, “no more to return to corruption.”

In these words, Paul uses the same term that was introduced by Peter in Acts 2:27, *diaphthora*. It was seen again in Acts 2:31. Now it will only be seen four more times, all in Acts 13. It signifies thorough corruption and decay. Paul says that because Jesus has resurrected, He will never again see the prospect of this type of corruption. But more, Albert Barnes correctly states the matter, saying –

“...the body of Christ never in this sense saw corruption. The word is therefore used to denote ‘death, or the grave, the cause and place of corruption.’ The word is thus used in the Septuagint. It means here simply that he should not die again.”

Hence, the point of Paul’s words is to say that Christ went to the place of corruption, even though He did not corrupt while there. And, further, he will never go to that place of corruption again. The victory over the grave is total. Next, Paul says, “He has spoken thus.”

Paul will cite Isaiah 55:3, and yet he says “He has spoken” while referring to God. Thus, it is a proclamation concerning the divine inspiration of the writings of the prophet. God



was speaking through him concerning the coming Christ, saying, “I will give you the sure mercies of David.”

This is an almost exact citation from the Greek translation of Isaiah, and it more literally says, “I will give to you the holy of David, the sure.” The meaning must be inferred. Thus “the holy [blessings] of David, the sure [blessings].”

Those things that were promised to David speak of eternal kingship and rule. For example, the Lord said to David directly –

“And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.” 2 Samuel 7:16

The psalmist likewise repeated this sentiment, and it is what Isaiah was referring to –

“I have made a covenant with My chosen,  
I have sworn to My servant David:  
4 ‘Your seed I will establish forever,  
And build up your throne to all generations.’ *Selah.*” Psalm 89:3, 4

The promises to David are repeated elsewhere, such as in Psalm 132:11, 12. These verses presuppose a resurrection because elsewhere Scripture refers to the sacrificial death of the Messiah. If the Messiah died, and yet the sure mercies of David belong to the Messiah, then the resurrection is implied in them. Paul’s words to the synagogue are direct, logical, and are irrefutable when taken in the greater context of Scripture.

Life application: In the commentary above, it was noted that there are both the deeds of man as well as the foreknowledge and providence of God tied up in the crucifixion of Jesus. Despite this, it does not mean that God actively caused the people of Israel to reject Jesus or crucify Him.

God’s plan included both, but that was because God already knew the outcome of what would be done by the people. Therefore, Israel cannot say, “By rejecting and crucifying Jesus, we were fulfilling God’s plan and thus are without guilt.” Rather, if they were honest in their words, they would say, “By rejecting and crucifying Jesus, we acted exactly as the Lord knew we would. We are guilty and our actions testify against us.”

God’s foreknowledge does not in any way negate our responsibility to act or not act on a matter in a proper manner. This is true with salvation, it is true with not shooting

Adolph Hitler, even if we knew he would grow up to be a bad person, and so on. We must act as people who are responsible for our actions at all times.

Understanding this, the Calvinistic concept of not having free will to choose Jesus and then call on Him to be saved is shown to be both irresponsible and utterly ridiculous. We must act, we are responsible to act, and God is not going to “regenerate” us to act to believe the gospel message. Despite being corrupt, depraved beings, we can still see the good in what God has done, desire that avenue by accepting Jesus, and then be given the seal of that act when we believe.

We are responsible for hearing the word and for accepting it. So, believe the good news! Accept what God has done and be saved. Jesus rose! His rule is everlasting, and He is mighty to save. Yes, call on Jesus today.

*Lord God, You already know everything we will ever do. And yet, Your word says that You save us upon belief in what Jesus has done. There is a lot of baggage that people have heaped upon their salvation over the past millennia. And yet, You have saved them, knowing what they would do after You saved them. This demonstrates the amazing greatness of Your salvation. Thank You for the cleansing flood of forgiveness that covers all such things. Yes, thank You, O God, for Jesus. Amen.*

**“Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*:**

**‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’ Acts 13:35**

Paul is quoting Scripture to the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. He just said to them that God raised Jesus from the dead, no more to see corruption. This was considered certain because, as he cited from Scripture, it says, “I will give you the sure mercies of David.” With that, he now continues with another citation of Scripture, introducing his thought with, “Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*.”

The word translated as “Therefore” signifies “on this account” or “because.” In other words, because the Lord promised the Messiah that He would receive the sure mercies of David, there must be a natural result of that, even if He was to first be crucified. And so, to firmly establish this, he repeats the thought concerning what will transpire after His crucifixion, saying, ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’”

Though the meaning is the same, the Greek literally reads, “You will not give Your Holy One to see corruption.” This is a citation from Psalm 16 –

“I have set the LORD always before me;  
Because *He is* at my right hand I shall not be moved.  
Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;  
My flesh also will rest in hope.  
<sup>10</sup> For You will not leave my soul in Sheol,  
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.  
<sup>11</sup> You will show me the path of life;  
In Your presence *is* fullness of joy;  
At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore.” Psalm 16:8-11

Paul cites a portion of the same words that Peter cited in Acts 2. After that, Peter more fully explained those words. The same will be true with Paul in the verses to come. They both clearly explain how what they cited is relevant to the surrounding argument.

Life application: If you go back and read the comparable verses in Acts 2 and the words now in Acts 13, you will also notice, as stated above, that both Peter and Paul do not merely cite Scripture and expect those who hear it to know what they are saying, but they fully explain what they have cited.

Some verses seem obvious in their meaning, and some have become so cliché through use that we think of them as actually applying to our circumstances at any given time. However, this is problematic because the surrounding context of what is said in those verses has nothing to do with what is the supposed intent when they are cited to us. Thus, a pretext is the result.

We must be very careful when citing Scripture to ensure the context is applicable, or that we can fully explain why what is cited logically pertains to our surrounding discourse. If we cannot do this, then our citing of those words is inappropriate.

As a simple example of this, consider 1 Corinthians 2:9 –

“But as it is written:  
‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,  
Nor have entered into the heart of man  
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’”

It is as common as beans in a taco to cite this when talking about our future state in heaven. And yet, by going back and reading the surrounding context, we find that these

words have nothing to do with that. Rather, they deal with the wisdom of God being displayed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Nobody could have conceived what God would do in Christ's coming, nor could they have conceived of the glory that it conferred upon us because of what He has done. Be sure that context is maintained at all times. In so doing, you will be in the sweet spot concerning what you are saying.

*Lord God, help us to be responsible in our citing of Scripture so that those around us will have a right understanding of what is being communicated by You. May we never coopt verses that sound appealing to then make unfounded claims from Your word. This can edify no one. So, help us to be careful in dealing with Your precious and sacred word. Amen.*

**“For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; Acts 13:36**

Paul just cited Psalm 16:10, claiming it refers to the coming Messiah. That said, “You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” Having stated this, he will now defend that notion. He will follow the same logical reasoning as Peter did in Acts 2.

The words of this verse are a bit difficult to understand in the Greek, but an exacting literal translation, which will be used below, is, “for David, indeed, his own generation having served by the will of God, did fall asleep, and was added unto his fathers, and saw corruption” (YLT). With this in mind, Paul begins with, “for David.”

David is the author of Psalm 16 as noted in the psalm's opening statement. Because of this, it cannot be that he is referring to himself in those words. Rather, he must be prophesying concerning the coming Messiah. This is because, as Paul continues, “indeed, his own generation having served.”

David was the king for a certain amount of time, forty years according to 2 Samuel 5:4 and 1 Kings 2:11. And more, 2 Samuel 5:4 noted that David was thirty years old when he began to reign. Hence, he lived to be seventy years old. Of the timeframe of his kingship, Paul says that it was “by the will of God.”

God set David on the throne of Israel, and God determined when he would die. It was set according to the foreknowledge of God, and it came about according to His plan. After that time, Paul next says that David “did fall asleep.”

The meaning is that he died. To fall asleep is a biblical euphemism for this. It implies that there is a continuance of the soul even if the body has died. It thus speaks of the eternal nature of the soul. Once he fell asleep, Paul next says, “and was added unto his fathers.”

Though David was buried, the thought of being added to the fathers has a dual thought involved in it. Being added to the fathers means that his soul has joined them in the pit (Hebrew: *sheol*) where they will remain until the resurrection. But it also means that his physical body is committed to the grave where the others who had gone before him also went. In the case of his physical body, Paul next says, “and saw corruption.”

This proves that David’s inspired words of the psalm could not be speaking of him. He died, he was buried, and his body saw corruption. There was no resurrection involved in the process. When the resurrection takes place, it will not be in the body he had because that has returned to the earth. As such, David’s words must refer to someone else, specifically, the Messiah. That will be seen in the next verse.

Life application: For the Christian, there is always the hope of the rapture. But that hope has gone unfulfilled for two thousand years. Those who are alive at that blessed moment will be changed from their earthly bodies to spiritual bodies. However, for those who die before that time, we should not feel any less excited for them. They have shed this earthly body of corruption.

Their souls have been separated from the pains, trials, sorrows, and troubles of this life and they are in the capable hands of their Lord, awaiting the moment when the call is made for them to rise and be granted their eternal, spiritual body. Though we may suffer the pain of separation, we should not mourn as the world mourns.

In Christ, there is the absolute certain hope that they will be raised. And so, let us rejoice, even in our sorrows. The redeemed of the Lord shall rise. Nothing can stop that from happening. And so let us thank God for what He has done in the giving of Jesus!

*Lord God, how grateful we are for the sure and blessed hope we possess concerning Your promises to us. We have eternal life because of Jesus. And so, even if we have trials in this life, help us to not be consumed by them. Instead, may we hold fast to the joy set before us as we await the time of our glorification. Thank You, O God, for what You have granted to us. Amen.*

**“but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. Acts 13:37**

While speaking in the synagogue, Paul just noted that by the will of God David served his own generation, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption. Therefore, his words concerning God's Holy One not seeing corruption could not have been referring to him. They were, instead, a prophecy of the coming Messiah. Paul now proclaims that the prophesied Messiah has come, fulfilling David's words. Paul's words begin with, "but He."

The Subject is Jesus, specifically noted in verse 13:23, and who has been the main Subject of Paul's words since –

"From this man's seed, according to *the* promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus."

It is this Jesus "whom God raised up." In the Greek, three words translated as "raised up" are used in this chapter. Each carries a specific meaning not fully perceived because of the translation. Notice the progression of his words –

- From this man's seed, according to *the* promise, God raised up [*agó*] for Israel a Savior—Jesus. Acts 13:23 (to bring forth). God brought forth a Savior for Israel according to the promise.
- But God raised [*egeiró*] Him from the dead. Acts 13:30 (To arouse or awaken). God aroused Jesus from the state of death despite being put to death.
- God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up [*anistémi*] Jesus. Acts 13:33 (To stand up or raise up). God raised up Jesus according to the promise both among Israel in His incarnation and which is then confirmed in raising Him out of the dead in the resurrection.
- And that He raised Him [*anistémi*] from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: Acts 13:34 (To stand up or raise up). God raised Jesus, standing Him up from His place and position of death.
- but He whom God raised up [*egeiró*] saw no corruption. Acts 13:37 (To arouse or awaken). Unlike David, God aroused Jesus without seeing corruption.

Under inspiration of the Spirit, Paul has carefully spoken his words to ensure that every point about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is fully understood. He doesn't need to include the words "from the dead" in this verse because it is understood from

the context of the previous verse. Jesus' arousal is contrasted to David's non-arousal. David remained in the grave and corrupted. On the other hand, Jesus "saw no corruption."

The incorruptible nature of Jesus is what is highlighted by Paul now. The importance of this point will be made manifest in his next words to the people of the synagogue, and thus to all people because his words are now recorded in Scripture.

Life application: Word studies, such as the one above, will help alleviate misconceptions about what is being said. Three different words have been translated in the same manner by the NKJV. Although there is nothing wrong with this, without knowing what each Greek word is saying, a misunderstanding of the overall picture may arise in our minds.

Therefore, when time permits, it is always a fun and rewarding thing to do a careful word study of a passage. This is especially so if you are set to lead a class on a particular passage. The time you spend analyzing such things will be well worth the effort you put into it.

*Glorious God, may we be willing to carefully handle Your word, ensuring that what we convey to others about it is correct and well thought out. Help us to not hurriedly come to conclusions that may not be grounded in reality. Rather, give us the desire to study this precious word thoroughly in order to explain it properly to others. Amen.*

**"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; Acts 13:38**

Paul proclaimed to those in the synagogue that Jesus, who God raised up, saw no corruption. It is because of this work of God that Paul now explicitly states the purpose of this, beginning with, "Therefore let it be known to you."

Q: Who is speaking?

A: Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Q: Who is Paul speaking to?

A: Jews in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia.

Q: As Paul is the Apostle to the Gentiles, is his proclamation limited to them?

A: No, refer to Acts 9:15 – “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.’”

Q: So, you are saying that his apostleship to the Gentiles is merely the focus of his gospel, but that it is the same gospel as that of the other apostles?

A: Yes. There is one and only one gospel. We are not heretics here. See 1 Corinthians 15:11.

Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ. There is one Christ and one work of Christ that is effectual for all people. The Jews that Paul is addressing in Antioch of Pisidia may or may not have even heard of Jesus. If they had, they would need to have their thinking about Him corrected (repenting, meaning changing their mind about Him). If they had not, which can be assumed, then there is no repentance necessary, as will be seen from the text itself.

With this understood, Paul next says, “brethren.” Rather, the Greek reads, “men, brethren.” It is the same formula used many times so far in Acts. Paul is addressing the congregation. If women were there, they are included under the masculine. He uses this term to demonstrate the bond that binds them as members of the nation and culture of Israel, and that he is a part of that nation.

Israel is the nation through which the Messiah would come, and so he stands making his fraternal appeal to them about Jesus, who is that Messiah. With that, he continues, saying, “that through this Man.”

Paul’s words at this time focus on the humanity of Jesus, but it is an incorruptible humanity as was clearly detailed in the preceding verses. As such, the implication is that Jesus is also God, whether Paul has explicitly stated this or not.

Only a sinless Man is incorruptible, and only the God/Man could be sinless due to the biblically understood doctrine of original sin. If He were not both God and Man, He would have inherited sin and He would have remained dead, corrupting as all other men do. With this understood, Paul says that through this incorruptible Man “is preached to you the forgiveness of sins.”

Paul has completed his gospel presentation with these words, even if his words are not yet finished. It is the EXACT SAME gospel he preaches elsewhere to the Gentiles –



- Christ died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3 / Acts 13:38).
- Christ was buried (1 Corinthians 15:4 / Acts 13:29).
- Christ rose again (1 Corinthians 15:4 / Acts 13:30, 33, 37).

Paul has not said a single word about repentance to his audience, except as it applied to John the Baptist's preaching prior to the coming of the Messiah (Acts 13:24). Now that the Messiah has come, and with His work complete, Paul has given this congregation the simple gospel. They must now decide whether to accept the proposition or reject it.

This is the gospel, the one and only gospel, that is acceptable for the saving of man. The address by Peter in Acts 2 where the call to repent was given was a necessary condition for them because they had just rejected Jesus. They had to change their mind about what they had done to be saved. This congregation before Paul is under a completely different set of parameters, and thus they are given the gospel with no further stipulations added.

If those in this congregation reject Paul's word, then they will – by default – have to repent (change their minds) about Jesus if they later accept Him. Currently, however, that is not a part of Paul's appeal. As for the nation of Israel, they must nationally repent of their rejection of Christ. But everyone, Jew or Gentile, must accept or reject the simple gospel.

Life application: Some people would rather remain heretics, accepting and teaching what is false concerning the gospel, than admit that they have been wrong about their thinking. This is true with many sects and cults. When speaking to a Jehovah's witness about the deity of Christ, a tenet implied in the gospel as noted above, they would normally rather remain unconverted than admit they are wrong.

The same is true with the erroneous doctrine of the Seventh Day Adventists, Judaizers, hyperdispensationalists, Mormons, etc. There is a point where the callousness of the heart takes over and prevents a person from accepting what the Bible is clearly presenting. It is a sad place to be, but it is our human nature to want to go down with the ship. Let us not be found in such a position.

Instead, when we are faced with a clear teaching about a doctrine, be it a minor doctrine such as the timing of the rapture, or something major like the deity of Christ, let us be willing to admit our fault in thinking and so be renewed in our minds.

Above all, let us thank God for the simplicity of the gospel that has come at the high cost of the giving of Jesus Christ for our sins. He died for our sins, He was buried, and He rose again! Praise God for what He has done in and through Jesus Christ our Lord!

*Glorious Lord Jesus, thank You for what You have done for us. We are lost. We are on the road to condemnation. And yet, You came to redirect us to the heavenly highway if we will simply believe the gospel message. May we submit our hearts and lives to You through accepting this wonderful message of restoration. Amen.*

**“and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. Acts 13:39**

In the previous verse, Paul stated, “through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins.” This is the heart of the matter. Jesus didn’t come to exalt Israel over Rome. He didn’t come to give the people ease and comfort. He didn’t come to do a thousand things that people think of when they think of their earthly lives and how the Messiah could make them better. Rather, Paul focuses on the forgiveness of sin. This aligns with John’s words from his first epistle –

“He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” 1 John 3:8

Like Paul, John highlights the problem, sin. But he also identifies the source of the problem, the devil. Complete clarity of why the story of the fall of man in the very first pages of Scripture is realized. Everything about what is recorded after that is a part of God’s workings to highlight this, to show that it must be resolved for harmony to be restored between Him and man, and how He would bring that about.

Paul now calls that fact forward, saying, “and by Him.” This is speaking of Jesus. He is “this Man” of the previous verse. He is the One “whom God raised up and saw no corruption” of the verse before that. Paul is revealing to the Jews, and also any Gentiles in attendance, the purpose of Jesus’ coming.

As this is his argument, then it means that everything referring to the Messiah in their Scriptures will support his words. The historical stories, the prophecies, the songs, the genealogical listings, the love stories, and all else are anticipating this great role of the Messiah and those things will in some way be connected to this fact. The words of Scripture cannot be disassociated from the overall purpose of Scripture. And so, to

highlight this in the fullest and most poignant manner, Paul continues by saying that “everyone who believes.”

The word *pas* is a word of totality. It can refer to people, geographical locations, the words of Scripture, and so on. In this case, it is being used to identify people. This is obvious because Paul just said, “through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins.” Thus, it is identifying the category – human beings. In saying “everyone who believes,” it thus extends beyond the Jews to all people without distinction. No matter who hears the words, all are included in the action which is that they are “justified from all things.”

The word Paul uses, *dikaioó*, is connected to the idea of the forgiveness of sins from the previous verse. Simply, it means “approved.” However, it carries with it a legal and authoritative sense. As the words are connected to forgiveness of sins, Paul is saying that through Jesus, all charges against a person, and the punishment that should be meted out because of them, are cleared.

The slate is wiped clean and total forgiveness is realized. Without Jesus, there is defeat because of sin. But with Him, there is victory and vindication. With this stated and revealed to the ears of his audience, Paul next provides a contrast to Jesus. In doing so, he will highlight exactly what was stated above: that everything in Scripture is ultimately anticipating the great role of the Messiah. He does this by saying that the word of Jesus provides man’s needed justification “from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

Bengel is correct in saying that the words about Jesus, “in Him,” are the antithesis of “the law of Moses.” Moses is the standard set forth by God for justification. That is stated explicitly in Leviticus 18 –

“You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I *am* the LORD your God. <sup>5</sup>You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I *am* the LORD.” Leviticus 18:4, 5

The law was given, and it promised life. With it set before Israel, it was then provided about fourteen hundred years to be worked out. The record of the people, both individuals and as a collective, was carefully kept so that Israel could see they needed something else, something even greater than the law to live. The law only brought about the realization of more sin and thus, more condemnation.

Therefore, Paul is not only speaking to the Jews sitting there, but he is speaking to the Gentiles who were curious about the religion of the Jews. If they had the words of promised life for obedience to their laws set before them, and if that law was unable to bring about a state of justification to them, then the Gentiles would be crazy to ignore Paul's words and place themselves under the law.

- The law is the standard.
- The law is unable to provide what it offers because the law only highlights sin.
- Jesus provides what the law cannot provide because He had no sin and committed no sin under the law.

Because Jesus fulfilled the law through obedience to it, including His death, He embodies the law. In other words, in Him is life – the life promised in Leviticus 18. Through faith in Jesus, that life is imparted to the believer because justification is imputed to him. Forgiveness is realized, the slate is clean, and eternal life is the result. This is the gospel that Paul is meticulously explaining to the ears of his audience.

Life application: If only those who follow the Judaizers and Hebrew Roots Movement cults would think through what Paul is saying to those in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, they would run as quickly as they could to Jesus. They would shun what these heretics offer, which highlight sin, condemnation, and death. Instead, they would hold fast to Jesus which means justification from sin, a declaration of righteousness, and life.

Jesus! It is all about Jesus. In Him and in Him alone comes the forgiveness of our debts and a return to paradise. Who cares about how “holy” you appear because of your dietary restrictions, the days you observe, or the feasts you participate in? These are just shadows and types of the coming Christ. They can never make a person holy. But Jesus can and He will. Just come to Him by faith. This is what God asks of you.

*Heavenly Father, forgive us for attempting to earn what You have already offered. Forgive us for our arrogance and pride in trying to do better than what You have done. The perfection of Christ and of His work is all we will ever need to be right before You. So, Lord, help us to hold fast to Him and to Him alone as we await our renewal. And may that day be soon! Amen.*

**“Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you:**

Acts 13:40

Paul has spoken of Israel's history, the coming of Christ, the treatment Jesus received from the hands of Israel, and the good news that this was all a part of God's plan for the redemption of the world. Because it is this way, it is through Him that forgiveness of sins is received and that, through faith in Him, justification that could not come through the Law of Moses is received.

Having said that, there is an obvious point that has not been explicitly stated even if it is implied. If Jesus has initiated a New Covenant, and if that is now in effect for the forgiveness of sins, then the Mosaic Covenant is annulled in Him. The offering of forgiveness of sins through the sacrificial system, including the Day of Atonement, is no longer effectual. Because of that obvious point, Paul next says, "Beware therefore."

This is not a threat, but a solemn warning. Paul has shown that what he has stated was prophesied in advance and recorded in Scripture. He will next demonstrate that even the consequences for rejection of God's offer of Christ Jesus had been prophesied. As this is so, then those who reject that offer are continuing to fulfill prophecies that were written concerning this new and exclusive path to salvation. That is made perfectly clear from his continued words, "lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you."

Paul began his talk to the people with the selection of Israel and their being exalted while dwelling "in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out." Immediately after that, he then said, "Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness."

That was a time of the rejection of the Lord's deliverance. It resulted in the death of every man, twenty and above, who perished for their lack of faith. Paul is now tying the account of Jesus directly in with that as he closes out his speech. The words are as bookends on his speech. The Lord exalted Israel in their own type of Egypt, being under the bondage of the law. He brought them out with an uplifted arm via the cross of Calvary. And yet, the nation has already rejected this offer for the most part.

But this was known by God, and it was spoken of in advance through the prophets. Paul's words are telling the people that just as Moses had to fashion a fiery serpent in the wilderness and hold it up for any who looked to it to live, even while national Israel was being punished and perishing, so each Jew would have to do the same with the cross of Christ. They could individually look to the cross and be saved.

To support this, he will next cite the prophet Habakkuk to close out his discourse to those at the synagogue.

Life application: Paul has spoken his gospel message to those in the synagogue. This included Gentiles as will be explicitly stated in verse 42. He has given them the gospel; the same gospel was extended to all who heard. There were not two separate speeches to the two categories of people conveying two separate gospel messages (hyperdispensationalism).

The consequences for national Israel's rejection of Christ Jesus are implied in his words, and they will receive their just punishment for this rejection. However, Paul's appeal has been to individuals of the Jewish nation as well as to those Gentiles who were in attendance. Now each will have a choice to make. Will they accept the gospel he presented and be saved, or will they reject it and perish?

This same offering has continued to be extended to all people, Jews and Gentiles, for the past two thousand years. Each person who has heard it will either accept it and be saved, or reject it and perish. God is not forcing this upon people, choosing them apart from their free will (Calvinism). This will be evident in the citation from Habakkuk.

Likewise, Paul has shown in his words that the law is ineffectual to save while Jesus' offering is fully effectual to do so. His words imply that the Law of Moses is now no longer in effect for forgiveness of sins. To remain under this law (Jews), or to place oneself under it (Gentiles) as taught by the Judaizers, Adventists, Hebrew Roots Movement, etc., is thus a rejection of Jesus and a point of condemnation.

Further, Paul has noted that "everyone who believes is justified from all things" (Acts 13:39). This is a clear refutation of the doctrine of Arminius and those who follow him concerning loss of salvation. To be justified from all things is to have all things removed from penal consequences. Those who are so cleansed are also no longer under law, but grace. As this is so, then there can be no further imputation of sin. Salvation is eternal.

By simply paying attention to the words of Paul, the correction of defective doctrine or even heresy can come about. Don't be a heretic! Come to Jesus, drop the foolish things that keep you separate from the truth of the gospel, and live out your life in the contented bliss of knowing that you are not just saved, but that you are also living out your salvation in the proper manner.

Again, come to Jesus! Believe the word! And walk in soundness of doctrine, thinking through the various principles that are presented in Scripture.

*Lord God, how simple the plan of salvation is. You have sent Jesus and made the offer of salvation through Him. And yet, we seem to desperately try to muddy up those pure waters with all kinds of crazy ideas. Help us not to do this, but to follow Jesus in the purity of the gospel and in the assurance of our salvation for all our days. Amen.*

**“Behold, you despisers,  
Marvel and perish!  
For I work a work in your days,  
A work which you will by no means believe,  
Though one were to declare it to you.” Acts 13:41**

After giving his gospel presentation, Paul next provided words of warning to his hearers, saying, “Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you.” With that, he now cites the substance of Habakkuk 1:5. His words follow that of the Greek translation. The Hebrew of this verse says –

“Look among the nations and watch—  
Be utterly astounded!  
For *I will* work a work in your days  
*Which* you would not believe, though it were told *you.*”

With that noted, the words of Paul as recorded by Luke begin with, “Behold, you despisers.” Of this, Barnes notes –

“The change from this expression to "ye despisers" was made by the Septuagint translators by a very slight alteration in the Hebrew word - probably from a variation in the copy which they used. It arose from reading בוגדים bowgadiym instead of בגימם bagowyim. The Syriac, the Arabic, as well as the Septuagint, follow this reading.”

Paul, using this commonly accepted translation now equates the words of Habakkuk concerning Israel’s mindset at the time of the Babylonian invasion to that of the coming of Christ. The Lord told Israel that the Chaldeans would come upon Israel and prevail, but Habakkuk prophesied that they would never believe it. The Lord elsewhere in Scripture also prophesied of the coming of Christ. But in His coming, it was known the same disbelieving attitude would prevail. Paul is warning his hearers not to let that happen to them as well.

Next, he says, “Marvel and perish!” Rather, the Greek text reads, “And marvel, and perish.” The first word is common and signifies to wonder at, marvel, be amazed, etc. It

has already been used four times in Acts at various key points. The second word, here translated as “perish,” signifies to vanish or be removed from sight. The sense is that in their disbelief, calamity would come upon them which would catch them completely off guard and result in their being reduced to nothing.

The Lord had told them in advance what was coming in the arrival of the Messiah. The prophecies were so exacting that all they needed to do was pay attention and accept what He told them at face value. But they wanted something different than what Jesus came to do. The result of their rejection of him would be like that of the destruction of Israel by the Chaldeans. That is understood from the substance of the next clauses. And so, Paul continues with, “For I work a work in your days.”

Israel, even to this modern day, fails to understand that their state in the world is completely directed by the hand of the Lord. A single read through the book of Jeremiah reveals this time and again. They are given the word of the Lord and they simply ignore it. And then, when the prophecies of destruction come about, they stand there gawking in amazement as if it was the most incredible thing they could imagine.

Israel during the Babylonian exile acted as if the exile was some type of accident that would be quickly corrected, but the Lord told them that it was His plan and to settle down and build houses where they were. They could not imagine that their situation was a result of their actions. But the Lord’s guiding hand was over them, and they remained in exile for the exact period that He spoke out to them. After that time, they were allowed to return according to the Lord’s word working through king Cyrus.

Paul knew that the substance of the situation was so much the same as at the time of these prophets that he was able to cite Habakkuk as if it was written specifically for his time frame and the current state of Israel. As such, Habakkuk’s warning to the people is now Paul’s warning to them. It is, “A work which you will by no means believe.”

In failing to come to Jesus, it demonstrates a failure to believe in the word of the Lord. But that same word of the Lord promised the destruction of the temple, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the exile of the people from the land of Israel. It was prophesied in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, it was prophesied by Jesus in the synoptic gospels, such as in Luke 21:20-24, and now it is implicitly prophesied by Paul. And yet, even though such prophecies were made, when the events occurred, the people of Israel would not believe that it was the Lord who had done it. That is seen in the next words, “Though one were to declare it to you.”



The word translated as “declare” is first seen here. It will only be seen again in Acts 15:3. It means more than to simply declare but to declare completely. It is the clearest and most complete declaration that can be made. In other words, even if the most exacting details were put forth for the ears of Israel, they would not believe it. And this is just what happened. It had been declared to them and yet in its coming about, they stared at their situation and wondered what could possibly have caused it. At the same time, they completely rejected any notion that it was somehow their own fault.

This may sound incredible, but it is exactly what has taken place for the past two thousand years. Ask a Jew why they are not in their homeland and why they have been hated and persecuted, and they will give one of a billion reasons for it. They may even, at times, say, “The Lord was angry with us for XX reason.” But they will never say, “It is because we rejected the Messiah, Jesus, at His coming. It is our fault and we have gotten exactly what we deserve.”

Only with the modern “Jews for Jesus” and other messianic movements have some of them started to come to Jesus and acknowledge that their woes have been self-inflicted wounds. The words of Paul firmly describe the situation that would come upon Israel, and Israel has exactly fulfilled these words of the Lord as spoken out by Paul.

Life application: As noted above, on rare occasions Jews may say, “The Lord was angry with us and so we have been exiled and punished.” When this is admitted, the reason is not, “It is because we rejected Jesus our Messiah.” Rather, they will say something like, “It is because we did not properly observe the Sabbath,” or “It is because we did not faithfully perform the works of the Torah.”

In fact, one Jew in the recent past claimed that if every Jew on earth would properly perform the Sabbath observance, Messiah would come and would restore Israel to all its glory. In other words, anytime the Jewish people admit that their situation is their fault, they also claim that the resolution to their situation is up to them through their personal deeds. It is a self-based righteousness that they believe will heal them.

This then comes to the core of Paul’s words throughout His epistles. Time and again, Paul warned against the doctrine of the Judaizers. In fact, the book of Galatians is almost entirely focused on this one issue. These people had come to Galatia and had introduced a false gospel, that of adherence to the law for righteousness. Why would they do this?

The reason is exactly what Paul is saying right now in Acts 13. They had rejected the Messiah and His full, finished, and forever work. They sought to obtain a righteousness

of their own, apart from His work. Paul's citation of the prophetic words of Habakkuk wasn't just fulfilled in the destruction of the temple and the exile of the people. It was being fulfilled with each rejection of his words to the Jews and with each attempt of the Judaizers to subvert the gospel from within.

And it has continued to be the case both among Israel and within the church ever since. Anytime someone follows a path of attempting to merit righteousness before God by his own efforts, instead of complete and total trust in the merits of Christ alone, he is a part of Paul's prophetic words. Be on guard! Watch out for those who would pull you away from the purity of the gospel. Read it again and see where you are included in the equation –

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4

Where is your work included in this? Where are your deeds included in this? What boasting do you have in this? Rather, Paul says when speaking of this gospel message, “Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.” Oh! There you are! There is your part! As it says, “and so, you believed” (1 Corinthians 15:11). That is what God expects of you. He has done the work through Christ Jesus. For confirmation of that, take the time to go and read John 6:29. Believe and be saved. Anything else will only lead to a sad end.

*Lord God, how grateful we are to know that You have done everything necessary for us to be restored to You. We are not included in what was needed to be done in order for us to be saved. That has been accomplished by Jesus. Now, we just need to believe this simple truth. Christ has done it all! He alone has secured salvation for His people. And we are His people if we simply believe. Thank You, O God, for the simplicity of the gospel. Amen.*

**So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.** Acts 13:42

In the previous verse, Paul cited Habakkuk, equating the destruction of Israel, and the exile of the people during the Babylonian captivity, to what would come upon them because of their rejection of Jesus. That has ended the discourse of Paul to those in the synagogue. With that, Luke next records, “So when the Jews went out of the synagogue.”

The words are from a present participle and more closely read, "So when the Jews were going out of the synagogue." Literally, what is said next will occur as this was taking place, showing the eagerness of those who will be mentioned.

Also, it should be noted that the inclusion of the words "the Jews" and "the Gentiles" is not in some texts. As such, the thought is briefer in those translations, saying, "As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath" (ESV). The idea remains basically unchanged. The time in the synagogue came to its end, and even while those inside were on their way out, it says that "the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them."

The tense of the verb is imperfect. They asked and they continued to ask. One can see how excited they were by the news that had fallen on their ears. These people were proselytes of the gate, Gentiles who were curious about the religion of the Jews and they stood and listened while the synagogue was in session.

As long as they had attended, be it for one week or an extended period of time, they had heard that Moses was the key to salvation and that adherence to the law was necessary for that to come about. It meant that they had to do the work. No wonder they remained proselytes at the gate! There was no assurance of salvation. Instead, there was the constant yoke of bondage that the law imposed upon them. Now, Paul had said that was over and that a new path had been opened for any, be it Jews or Gentiles, to come to God. And it was God who had done the work in Christ. The news would have been the most wonderful burden-lifting thing they could imagine!

And more, it was the law and the prophets under this law that testified to this truth. It wasn't as if Paul was starting a new religion. He was saying that what he was proclaiming was an extension of, but also a new direction to, what the God of Israel had been doing. So excited were they that they asked to have him speak on "the next Sabbath."

Here, there is scholarly (and some translational) debate as to the meaning of the words. Does this mean they wanted to gather on the next Sabbath or during the week leading up to the next Sabbath? For example, Smith's Literal Translation says, "to have these words spoken in the sabbath between." This implies that they were hoping to hear it themselves before the Sabbath. If this is correct, it would mean they may have had many questions that could not be asked while the synagogue was in session.

Either way, there is great eagerness among the Gentiles concerning the news about the coming of Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah.

Life application: When one is predisposed to law observance, the idea of a Savior that has done all the work is repugnant. Where is the glory for oneself! Simply trusting in the merits of another doesn't highlight to a person how great he perceives he thinks he is. This is why so many people love to go back to the law and observe various aspects of it. It demonstrates a false self-righteousness that considers itself worthy before God based on personal deeds.

But watch closely in whatever church you attend. Even if there is no return to the law of Moses, there are innumerable other ways where people and congregations show the world how supposedly holy and worthy they are.

There are those who hold to the social gospel, where taking care of others in one way or another elevates them to supposed holiness through good deeds. The grace of Christ is at best an afterthought and is often not even discussed. There are doctrines that say that "good works stem naturally from saving faith."

In other words, if you are not doing good things, you are not saved. It is an after-the-fact imposition of someone else's laws, whatever they may be. The obvious problem with this is highlighted by the simple question, "What 'works?'" Who chooses if a person is doing what proves salvation? The reason this is an obvious question to ask is that the Bible does not specify any works that would highlight such salvation. This error is an unbiblical and dangerous doctrine.

What God expects of us is what Paul has presented to those in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, which is to believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. After that, whatever we do is to be done in faith that we are saved and that we will receive our rewards based on that salvation. This is not to "prove" that we are saved. The Holy Spirit's sealing of us when we believed is all the proof we need of that. God has given it and He knows who He has given it to. The Bible says it is received when we believe, and we are to trust that it is so.

From beginning to end, and at all points in between, we are saved by grace, and we continue to be saved by that same grace. All glory belongs to God alone for what has been done.

*Thank You, O God, for what You have done in and through Christ for us. We are the recipients of Your offer of grace through simple faith that You have done it all for us. What more could we add to the finished, full, final, and forever work of Jesus Christ our Lord? Nothing! And so, thank You for what You have done. Amen.*

**Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. Acts 13:43**

The previous verse showed that Paul had finished his discourse with those in the synagogue and that when the synagogue was ending, he was surrounded by those who wanted to hear more. That continues, beginning with the words, “Now when the congregation had broken up.”

The words should read as the Greek, “Now when the synagogue had broken up.” What was probably the case here is the same as happens in churches around the world. There is a time when people talk on the way out the doors. They may ask whoever spoke to give them a little more insight into what they had heard. They may want to set up a meeting during the week to get to know someone else better, or whatever. That is what happened in the previous verse. Now, even after the synagogue was entirely dismissed, it says that “many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas.”

The word “devout” is incorrect. It is not an adjective, but a present participle verb – “many of the Jews and worshipping proselytes.” Paul and Barnabas were no longer at the synagogue but were probably on their way to get something to eat or maybe turn in at their place of lodging, and yet, they were being thronged by those who attended the synagogue. What had been heard made such an impact on them, positively or otherwise, that they could not let the matter rest without discussing it further. In their response to the crowd, it next says, “who, speaking to them.”

In other words, this is referring to Paul and Barnabas. They have preached the message of God’s grace to the people. They have noted the insufficiency of the Law of Moses to justify anyone (Acts 13:39), and they have given the warning of what will happen if this message of grace is ignored. Hence, their main admonition to this curious group is to continue in that grace. Luke confirms this, saying that Paul and Barnabas “persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.”

In essence, “Grace has been proclaimed to you. It is the saving grace of God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself apart from deeds of the law. Now, you are expected to believe that simple message and to continue in it henceforth.”

As this is what they implored the people, we too should remember what that message was –

- Jesus died for the sins of the people (Acts 13:28, 29 & 38)
- Jesus was buried (Acts 13:29, etc.)
- Jesus rose again (Acts 13:30, 34, & 37)

This is the gospel. This is the only gospel. It is a gospel that is directed to Jews and to Gentiles alike. No other gospel can restore man to God. Continue in the grace of that glorious message.

Life application: One point about Paul’s speech to those in Antioch helps settle a matter concerning the gospel he gives in 1 Corinthians 15. There, Paul uses the term “according to Scripture” to define certain things –

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

It is obvious that the words “died for our sins” is qualified by “according to Scripture.” Paul is saying that Scripture itself testifies to the fact that Jesus would be crucified for the sins of His people. However, what do the words qualify in the second clause? Is it that He was buried and rose again or is it that He was buried and rose again the third day? In other words, is Paul simply supplementing the main thought “buried and rose again” with the words “the third day” or are the words “the third day” a part of what is necessary to be heard and believed?

The answer is surely the former. Paul is never recorded as having mentioned the third day in Acts 13 when he presented the gospel to those in Antioch of Pisidia. It is true that there are types and shadows of a third-day resurrection given in the Old Testament, such as in Genesis 22, but the words “the third day,” despite having significance to the narrative, are not a necessary inclusion of a gospel presentation. This is evident from what is said in Acts 13 and elsewhere.

Remember this simple gospel message and beware of anyone who would try to corrupt it in any way. Paul and Barnabas asked their hearers to continue in the grace of God. Please! Forever and always do likewise. Trust in Christ, rest in Christ, and be filled with the knowledge that you are saved by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Nothing else will do. Continue in this always.

*O God, how wonderful it is to hear the words of release! We have an infection in us, sin. It is debilitating, it is deadly, and it is terminal. And yet, You have provided the cure. It*

*can no longer harm, it can no longer kill, and in our healing, we have been granted eternal life. And it is all by the work of Another! Jesus has done it all. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord through whom Your grace is bestowed upon Your people. Hallelujah and amen!*

**On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.**

Acts 13:44

In the previous verse, it was noted that after the synagogue meeting, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas who spoke with them. Now, the passage continues with, “On the next Sabbath.”

The verb is a present participle and more rightly reads, “On the coming Sabbath.” This appears to then give the sense that Paul and Barnabas spent the entire week talking to the people who had followed him on the previous Sabbath. Others as well certainly joined them to hear what they had to say. By the end of the week, the news had spread enough that “almost the whole city came together.”

This does not mean that they came together in the synagogue. In fact, it may be that they met in an open area around the synagogue, in the street, or somewhere else. The point is that the people came out because of what Paul and Barnabas had to say.

This is in contrast to the regular meetings of the synagogue which had Jews and some proselytes each week. But the difference is that the message of Paul and Barnabas was not of the bondage of the law, but the freedom from the law found in Jesus Christ. And yet, it is a message directly from Scripture itself. Therefore, these people came “to hear the word of God.”

First, the Old Testament points to Jesus. Paul could easily speak of how the words of Scripture show this. But in speaking about Jesus as the fulfillment of those Scriptures, the apostles were led by the Spirit, just as Jesus promised. Therefore, as the Spirit gave them utterance, so they spoke out the word of God.

What they taught was not just words of the past that led to bondage, punishment, and even exile – as testified to by the synagogue of the Jews being in a foreign land, but of freedom, exaltation, and a home in Christ anywhere and at any time, because those who worship Him do so in spirit and in truth. No wonder the whole city came out to hear this message. It was a complete contrast to what the Jews taught, even if the same Scriptures were used.

Life application: The message of Jesus is not one that requires those who proclaim it to put on dress shirts and a tie and walk around in a stuffy manner. It is not one that says, “If your appearance doesn’t conform to a set standard, you are not qualified to teach it.”

One does not need to sit in a synagogue, a formal classroom, or in a church setting to seek out the message it conveys. It is a message that can be acted out on a stage, presented in a movie, read directly from the word on the beach, or pondered over in the confines of one’s own house.

Those who teach it can do so in homes, garages, or gymnasiums. There are no set times or days that those who come together are obligated to. There are no dietary restrictions for snack time when gathered. Those who follow Christ are not bound to the legalistic standards of others. If the precept is not taught in Scripture, it is not required.

Don’t add to the word through legalism. Don’t detract from it in all it proclaims. Instead, cherish the word, hold fast to it, and ponder it as the greatest treasure. The time you spend in it will never be wasted. So, spend a lot of time in it!

*Glorious Heavenly Father, how precious is Your word. How wonderful it is to read it and to meditate upon it. It brightens up our day, illuminates our evenings, fills our hearts with joy, and leads us to a greater understanding of who You are and the care You have for Your people. Thank You for this precious word! Amen.*

**But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Acts 13:45**

The previous verse noted that almost the whole city had come together to hear the word of God. With that remembered, it now says, “But when the Jews saw the multitudes.” There are two points to consider here. The first is obviously the sheer number of people who have gathered. What a difference this would have been to the few proselytes who had come to the synagogue to learn of their legalistic rituals and consider placing themselves under the bondage of the law.

The second point is that the word translated as “multitudes” is *ochlos*. It refers not only to the great number, but the implication is a great number of common people. As Strong’s says, “by implication, the rabble.”

The Jews had a few proselytes that were interested in their legalistic instructions and who were probably wealthy enough to buy favor. On the other hand, Paul and Barnabas



had an immense crowd of common rabble who came to hear about the gift of God, His grace that could not be purchased.

What would have been the most galling of all to them is that their message then meant that this throng of people was on the same standing as the Jews. And yet, they had done nothing to merit it. They had not suffered through the history the Jews had endured, they had not been kept from delightful foods such as bacon or pork chops, they had not ever observed a Passover or a Day of Atonement, and yet Paul and Barnabas were saying that Jesus was their Passover, and He was their atoning sacrifice. It would be infuriating to them to hear such things. Therefore, “they were filled with envy.”

The word is *zelos*. Probably a better translation of it would be “jealousy” or even “indignation.” The word signifies burning emotion as if boiling over. Like the Pharisees who dealt with Jesus, they would have indignantly thought that they alone merited God’s favor –

“Then the Pharisees answered them, ‘Are you also deceived?’<sup>48</sup> Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?<sup>49</sup> But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” John 7:47-49

Those in the synagogue looked at the law as a means to an end. They were the stewards of that law, and they were also its teachers. And more, they were “Jews by nature,” God’s chosen and set apart people. They were not “sinners of the Gentiles” (Galatians 2:15). As such, they were surely filled with their own prideful and selfish indignation. Because of this, Luke continues to refer to them, saying, “and contradicting.”

The word is *antilegó*. It is formed from *anti*, against, and *legó*, to say. Thus, this means that they were actively speaking against the words of Paul and Barnabas in a contradictory manner. When Paul spoke of grace, they would have spoken of their works. When Paul spoke of salvation in Jesus, they would say, “But the law demands condemnation for those who don’t obey.” And more, Luke next says, “and blaspheming.”

The word signifies to speak lightly or profanely about sacred things. Their words spoke against Jesus, and Luke calls this blasphemy. They refused to respect the name of Jesus who was clearly shown by Paul one week earlier to be Israel’s Messiah. The Scriptures testified to it, and they refused to accept what Paul said concerning Jesus’ fulfillment of the Scriptures. Thus, their words are to be considered blasphemy. Therefore, “they opposed the things spoken by Paul.”

Not only had Paul provided his evidence on the previous Sabbath within the walls of the synagogue, but he now openly proclaimed them to those outside of it. This was too much for the Jews to bear. If what Paul said was true, it would mean their traditions and religion were no longer acceptable to God. It is reminiscent of the words of the Jews when contemplating how to deal with Jesus –

“Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, ‘What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. <sup>48</sup> If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation.’” John 11:47, 48

And like those Jews at Jesus’ time who then said that it was expedient for one man to die, these Jews wanted to again crucify the name of Jesus before these Gentiles.

Life application: To this day, the majority of the Jews in the world have rejected Jesus. Many of them don’t care about religious matters at all. Their lives are based on their Jewish nature, not on a relationship with God in some formal manner. However, most of those who go beyond the secular and involve themselves in the religious life of their people have an attitude just like those of the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia.

They feel that they merit God’s favor because of who they are as a people (His chosen), for what they do to please Him (such as being circumcised in the flesh), and for what they don’t do (“Pork chops, heaven forbid!”). Their religion is not one of grace but of works. And yet, the first father that they look to, Abraham, neither had the law, nor did he do anything to receive God’s declaration of righteousness. He simply believed the word of the Lord.

As this is so, and as the law came after Abraham’s justification, the law cannot be what pleases God, even if it is His personal standard of holiness. David understood this. Despite being a man under the law, a law that demanded the imputation of sin for a violation of it, he also understood that there was a state of blessing that could be obtained apart from the law –

“But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, <sup>6</sup> just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

<sup>7</sup> ‘Blessed *are those* whose lawless deeds are forgiven,

And whose sins are covered;

<sup>8</sup> Blessed *is the* man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.” Romans 4:5-8

The lesson of the Bible is that only when one trusts in the Lord and accepts His word at face value by believing what He says can he be pleasing to God. And the Lord has shown that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:4). If one cannot accept that, then he cannot be pleasing to God.

The gospel is so simple. Let us not add to it. Jesus has pleased God on our behalf. By faith in His work, we are reconciled to God. What can we add to that? Nothing! Only after that are our deeds considered acceptable to Him. Let us maintain the purity of the gospel when conveying it to others.

*O God, thank You for Jesus our Lord. He has done all that is necessary to satisfy You. Now, we can trust in His merits and also be pleasing to You. May we never try to diminish the glorious work He has done by telling others that they need to “do” to be pleasing to You. Rather, they need to simply believe in His doing! Amen.*

**Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. Acts 13:46**

The previous verse noted the jealousy of the Jews at the turnout that had come to hear Paul and Barnabas speak. With that, they began “contradicting and blaspheming.” Now, a reaction to that is stated by Luke beginning with the words, “Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said.”

The Greek contains an aorist participle and only one conjunction. More rightly, it reads, “And speaking boldly, Paul and Barnabas said.” They were not going to take any guff from the Jews who came against the good news of the gospel.

These Jews had heard what occurred, they had been shown right from Scripture that those events were prophesied in advance, and they had rejected what was presented to them. In response to that, both Paul and Barnabas united their voices in agreement, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first.”

Jesus’ ministry was to the house of Israel. He stated that explicitly in the gospels –

“These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup> But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’” Matthew 10:5, 6

That sentiment is repeated in Matthew 15 –

“Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed.’

<sup>23</sup> But He answered her not a word.

And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she cries out after us.’

<sup>24</sup> But He answered and said, ‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’

<sup>25</sup> Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Lord, help me!’

<sup>26</sup> But He answered and said, ‘It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw *it* to the little dogs.’

<sup>27</sup> And she said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.’

<sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered and said to her, ‘O woman, great *is* your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed from that very hour.”

-Matthew 15:21-28

It was to Israel that Jesus first came. However, there are times when He ministered to the Gentiles, demonstrating that His word was both intended and effectual for the Gentiles. But there was a priority to be given to Israel as the stewards of the law and the bearers of the name of the Lord. After His crucifixion, He made the inclusion of the Gentiles in the continued ministry explicit –

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Matthew 28:18-20

As the apostles went forth, they followed this same pattern, first going to the Jewish people as directed by Jesus in Acts 1:8 –

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

That set pattern has been meticulously followed in Acts. In two separate instances in Acts 8 and 10, the message has gone directly to Gentiles. But the pattern has been adhered to as the gospel has gone from Jerusalem then Judea, and to Samaria. Eventually, it continued to go further as the apostles have gone out to confirm what the Jews of the diaspora from the various nations saw in Acts 2. The idea of the gospel going to the Jews first is also stated by Paul in Romans 1:16.

This is what Paul and Barnabas have done. They first presented the word to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia. They will continue to do this as they go from town to town, first seeking out the synagogue. However, in Antioch, those in the synagogue have rejected the word and so Paul and Barnabas continue, saying, “but since you reject it.”

The words are plainly spoken to the Jews so that there can be no misunderstanding. In other words, there is probably as much of an implied questioning of them as there is a statement of fact rendered against them, “You have rejected the word. If we are incorrect about this, speak up now.” With no anticipated argument otherwise, the apostles continue, saying, “and judge yourselves.”

The Jews have rendered their own decision against themselves. Just as was the case in Jerusalem at the crucifixion of Jesus –

“When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather *that* a tumult was rising, he took water and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, ‘I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see *to it.*’

<sup>25</sup> And all the people answered and said, ‘His blood *be* on us and on our children.’”  
-Matthew 27:24, 25

The nation had called for the judgment of God to be brought against itself because it had made the judgment against itself. Paul and Barnabas are not in Antioch to convert the nation of Israel but to convince those Jews who will accept the gospel to separate themselves from the nation. These particular Jews had rejected their advances and had judged themselves “unworthy of everlasting life.”

The offer was made, it was that of forgiveness of sins through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and – if accepted – it would have moved them from

condemnation to salvation. In being saved, they would have received everlasting life. In rejecting this salvation, their condemnation remained, just as Jesus said –

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

-John 3:18-21

In having decided this, there was no longer any point in continuing with evangelizing these Jews. But because there was a giant crowd of Gentiles there who were hungry to receive the message, Paul and Barnabas next say, “behold, we turn to the Gentiles.”

They had fulfilled their obligation to tell the good news of Jesus to the Jews first. They had presented Scriptural evidences and the historical account of Jesus’ works to them. They had, during their presentation, given them the simple gospel of salvation. Despite their efforts, their message was rejected. And so, to continue with the work directed for them to do in Matthew 28, they would continue speaking their message in Antioch to the Gentiles.

Their words now do not mean, “We only turn to the Gentiles from now on.” Rather, their main focus of attention will be the Gentiles who are so willing to hear their words. When they get to another city, they will again go directly to the synagogue and begin the process again, speaking to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles.

Life application: As can be easily determined from this passage, the gospel spoken to the Jews is the same one that has been (and will continue to be) spoken to the Gentiles. The difference between the ministry of Peter and that of Paul is one of focus, not content. They both have the same message, but Peter’s focus was on the Jews, particularly within the borders of Israel, but also in the areas where he traveled (see Galatians 2).

Paul, on the other hand, was skilled in international matters. He was a citizen of Rome, he spoke many languages (1 Corinthians 14:18), and so forth. Therefore, he was selected by Jesus to personally go further than just to the Jews. Peter was not without interaction with the Gentiles, as was minutely detailed in Acts 10, but the primary focus of his ministry was to the Jews.

Understanding this simple precept, and accepting it at face value, will save the student of the Bible from being drawn into truly devious teachings that have crept into the church. Such teachings attempt to divide the offering of Jesus into separate categories with separate messages. These doctrines are heretical because they introduce a false gospel, which is no gospel at all. Be careful to guard yourself against such insidious teachings.

Jesus! It is all about Jesus. The message is for all the world, and it is the only saving message. Hold fast to the gospel that has been offered to Jews and to Gentiles for the saving of the soul and for obtaining everlasting life.

*Lord God, how good it is to share in Your offering of Jesus. To think that we were on the path to destruction, and You intervened to bring us back to Yourself. All we need to do is simply believe the word in order to be saved. Thank You for this simple and glorious message of reconciliation. Amen.*

**“For so the Lord has commanded us:  
‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,  
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Acts 13:47**

In the previous verse, Paul and Barnabas chided those at the synagogue, noting that henceforth they would turn to the Gentiles. With that noted, their words continue with, “For so the Lord has commanded us.”

The apostles, in their turning to the Gentiles, are not without authority to do so. They are acting at the command of the Lord. But instead of citing the words of Jesus in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19 about making disciples of all nations, they appeal to the Hebrew Scriptures.

The reason for this is that these Jews have already rejected the idea of Jesus being their Messiah and they have blasphemed His name. To cite Jesus’ words as their authority would simply bring scoffing from the Jews. Instead, they turn to the great prophet Isaiah as they had done on the previous Sabbath. Their citation clearly calls for the word of God to go forth to the nations, saying, “I have set you as a light to the Gentiles.”

The words are cited from Isaiah 49:6 –

“Indeed He says,  
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,  
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,  
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Isaiah 49:6

Paul and Barnabas directly equate the words of Isaiah to the coming Messiah. Even if the words of Isaiah were referring to himself at the time, something that could be debated, it was understood that they also had a messianic fulfillment. Thus, their clear intent is that the Messiah would not only come to accomplish His work for Israel but that it would extend to the entire world. That is seen in the next words of the quote, which read, “That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.”

The same phrase is found in Acts 1:8. The Greek is singular and so it should read, “That you should be for salvation to the uttermost part of the earth.” The intent of the words of Isaiah is absolutely clear. The Messiah’s work was to extend beyond the borders of Israel, even to the most remote region on the planet, wherever that may be. This is precisely what Jesus instructed the people just prior to His ascension –

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

The work of Jesus Christ was first sent to the people of Israel, but its scope was always intended to extend to the entire world. The logical order of evangelism was followed as directed by Jesus, and it is carefully documented in Acts by Luke, showing that His directives were meticulously followed. With the rejection of the word by the Jews at Antioch of Pisidia, the word was to continue to be proclaimed to those who would hear it.

This same pattern will continue to be followed by Paul as he moves from city to city. Those Jews who accept his gospel presentation will be saved. Eventually, the whole Jewish community will have made their decision, and then Paul will continue by evangelizing the Gentiles. One body will grow out of both classes in each area where a church is established.

Life application: One of the heretical sects that has arisen in the recent past ridiculously teaches that the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 refer to the evangelization of the



nations by Israel during the tribulation and even millennial period. The reason for this is that it includes words concerning baptism. This heretical cult doesn't believe that baptism is a necessary thing for Christians to do.

And yet, the same group participates in the Lord's Supper, another mark of inclusion in the New Covenant. The thinking is convoluted and depraved. The same Lord who commanded the Lord's Supper based on His death, burial, and resurrection, also commanded that believers be baptized based on His death, burial, and resurrection.

The words of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13, when taken together with Jesus' words in Matthew 28, Luke 24, and Acts 1, clearly reveal that the evangelization of the nations during this timeframe is exactly what Jesus was referring to. As this is so, then baptism is a set and expected part of the believer's walk before the Lord.

Don't be led astray by those who may have a purposeful agenda to destroy the work of the Lord and obedience to it by His people because of an agenda against the Jewish people. The Jews rejected Jesus, they have been punished for their rejection of Jesus, and the message has continued on among the Gentiles during that time of rejection. The Old Testament Scriptures anticipated all of this.

In failing to understand (or intentionally rejecting) the whole picture of what is spoken of in the Old, it is no wonder that such aberrant cults arise. Believe in the Lord Jesus, receive baptism as a sign of that belief, and actively participate in the Lord's Supper as a memorial of the sacrificial work of the Lord until He returns for His people, just as the Lord has commanded.

*Lord God, may we clearly think through what You have presented to us in Your word. The Old Testament gives instructions that are more fully revealed and explained in the New. May we take the time to be aware of what Your word says in both testaments so that we can make reasonable conclusions about our walk before You all our days, glorifying You through obedience to Your word. Amen.*

**Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. Acts 13:48**

In the previous verse, Paul and Barnabas cited to the Jews the words of Isaiah, demonstrating that the gospel going to the Gentiles was anticipated even in their own Scriptures. Now, Luke continues by saying, "Now when the Gentiles heard this."

This is the great throng of Gentiles that were mentioned in verses 44 & 45, there called “almost the whole city.” They were obviously listening to the words spoken between the apostles and the Jews of the synagogue. They were elated that these men who brought the good news of Jesus’ salvation had identified them as also being recipients of God’s favor in Christ. With that, it next says, “they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord.”

Both verbs are imperfect and demonstrate that the words didn’t just bring about a sudden rush of emotion which then ended. Rather, “the Gentiles were rejoicing and were glorifying the word of the Lord.” They began to rejoice and continued to do so. They also glorified the word of the Lord and they continued to do so.

With this going on in their hearts, some of the most abused words in Scripture concerning the doctrines of election and predestination are next cited by Luke, saying, “And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”

What one believes about these doctrines will immediately set forward in the mind what that person believes is being conveyed. It is obvious that the Pulpit Commentary sides with the Calvinistic view –

“This can only refer to the predestination or election of God, viewed as the moving cause of their faith.” Pulpit Commentary

Both election and predestination are mentioned by Paul. Thus, they are valid doctrines. The way in which they are explained is the issue. Paul mentions election in Romans 9 and 11. He speaks of the elect elsewhere as well. He refers to predestination in Romans 8 and Ephesians 1.

Those who side with Calvin will, like the Pulpit Commentary, say that God was the force behind both their belief and their salvation unto eternal life. Essentially, their argument is that God chose them to be saved, He caused them to believe, they believed, and they were saved.

On the other hand, there is the view that man has free will to believe or to reject what has been presented. Those who believe are the elect. Essentially, the argument is that God seals them with the Spirit upon belief, a cause of their own movement, and they are then saved by God.

There is quite a bit more involved in this but going with those two main views as the initial bias in the words presented in this verse of Acts, even translations reflect what is presupposed. Notice the difference in a few translations –

- and all who were chosen for eternal life became believers. NLT
- and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. KJV
- And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. NKJV
- and all those who had been appointed (designated, ordained) to eternal life [by God] believed [in Jesus as the Christ and their Savior]. Amplified
- Everyone who had been chosen for eternal life then put their faith in the Lord. CEV
- Everyone who had been prepared for everlasting life believed. God’s Word
- Meanwhile, all who had been destined to eternal life believed, ISV
- and all who were pre-destined to the Life of the Ages believed. Weymouth
- and did believe -- as many as were appointed to life age-during. YLT

The order of the words in Greek is only followed by one version listed here, YLT. The Greek reads, “And believed, as many as were appointed to life eternal.”

To put the word “appointed” before “believed” automatically biases the mind that the appointment came first, whether that is the case or not. To say as the Weymouth, “were pre-destined,” may be true based upon Paul’s noting that there is a doctrine of predestination, but without proper explanation, and placing it before “believed,” biases the mind even further.

Of these words, Albert Barnes goes through each instance of the word *tassó*, or “appointed,” and concludes that “The word is never used to denote an internal disposition or inclination arising from one’s own self. It does not mean that they disposed themselves to embrace eternal life.”

He continues with his thoughts, saying, 1) “they were disposed or inclined to this from some other source than themselves;” 2) “They were then inclined by an influence from without themselves, or so disposed as to embrace eternal life. ... It was not a disposition or arrangement originating with themselves, but with God.” 3) “It was nothing but God's disposing them to embrace eternal life.”

In other words, he is convinced that these people had no choice in their salvation. They were moved by God, they believed, and then they were saved. But without citing every instance of the word, we can see that his analysis is flawed. For example –

“Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.” Acts 15:2

It was “determined” that Paul and Barnabas were to go up to Jerusalem. Does that mean that this was done without the will of Paul and Barnabas? Absolutely not! It was a decision that was rendered based on a difficulty that had arisen. Also –

“So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.” Acts 28:1

Here, a day was appointed for people to come and hear the word of the Lord. Nothing is said about the disposition of the people, whether they had to come or not, whether the meeting would be held even if Paul lost his left arm that morning, and so on. It is simply an appointment that is set forth for something to occur.

In the case of those believing, God had set forth an edict, “Believe in my Son and you will be granted eternal life.” Those who believed were then appointed to eternal life. How can we know that this is correct? It is because the words of Acts 13:48 are not isolated from the surrounding context. They are a part of what was occurring right among the people, and they are set in contrast to what was said in Acts 13:46 –

“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.’”

The contrast is not to God’s pre-ordaining these Jews to condemnation apart from their will, but rather in accord with their will. They judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life. The Gentiles believed and thus judged themselves worthy.

Further, the word “believed” in Acts 13:46 is in the active voice. The people actively believed. However, the word “appointed” is in the middle voice. The Greek middle voice denotes that the subject is both an agent of an action and somehow concerned with the action. Hence, these people were disposed to believe based on what they heard. God initiated the action through the word. The apostles spoke forth the word. The people

heard the word and then believed. There is no hint of the Calvinistic doctrine of forced salvation to be found in the words of this verse.

Life application: Context matters. There is a surrounding context to the words of this verse that drives the meaning and intent of what is being said.

Proper translation matters. There is an order in which the words are presented in the original Greek text. Realigning those words may not be appropriate if they will bias the reader or provide a false sense of what is being presented.

Theology matters. Obtaining proper theology on a subject means taking it from the entire body of Scripture. In other words, the immediate context is important, but the overall context is the final decider of what is being presented. As an example, the Bible does not say the following –

- “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever is predestined apart from his free will and then believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

The Bible also does not say –

- “And Enoch walked with God after being regenerated to believe Him; and he *was* not, for God took him.”

Such words cannot even be inferred from what is said. Nor can they be inferred from the surrounding text or, more especially, the overall context of the Bible. Rather, they are clear and precise statements that are like an almost innumerable list of other such statements found in Scripture that tell the reader of the Bible that he has a responsibility to respond to the call of God in his life.

*Lord God, thank You that You have offered us Jesus Christ as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And more, You have given us the choice to believe or disbelieve. Your greatness is displayed in this. You do not force Yourself upon Your people but appeal to them, asking us to reason with You and do what is right. Thank You for this. Amen.*

**And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. Acts 13:49**

By citing Isaiah, Paul and Barnabas have noted that the message of Christ was to be a light to the Gentiles, leading to salvation to the ends of the earth. In their stating this,

the Gentiles of Antioch of Pisidia “were glad and glorified the word of the Lord.” From there, it noted that those who believed were appointed to eternal life. Now it says, “And the word of the Lord.”

This certainly has the full meaning of “The Lord God of Israel who has come in the person of Jesus Christ.” In other words, it was the “word of the Lord” through Isaiah that made the Gentiles rejoice. And it was the word concerning the Lord Jesus, as the fulfillment of the words of Isaiah, that brought them to salvation. Hence, “the word of the Lord” is the full message of the God of Israel.

If one of the people listening said, “Why do we need to be saved?” Paul or Barnabas could tell them about the fall of man in Genesis. If one of them in the audience said, “But all paths lead to God,” one of the apostles could speak about the exclusivity of salvation because it is the work of God and not of man. As this is so, then God – who is not fickle – would not accept any other path than that designated by Him.

The word of the Lord from the Hebrew Scriptures would provide the baseline for understanding what the situation of man was and what God was doing about correcting it. The word of the Lord concerning Jesus would explain what God had brought about in fulfillment of that plan. With this in mind, it next says that this word of the Lord “was being spread.”

The word used here, *diapheró*, signifies “to carry through.” For example, when the head of John the Baptist was brought before Herod, the word *pheró* was used. It was carried to him. The prefix *dia* signifies “through.” This is what happened in Acts 5. The early persecution of the church did not dissuade the gospel’s proclamation. Rather, it enhanced it. The apostles dug in and continued to proclaim the word. In Acts 5:16, it says –

“Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.”

This also happened after the death of Stephen, the persecution at that time only increased the spread of the gospel –

“At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” Acts 8:1

As the leaders of Israel persecuted the early church, it spread. Now with the opposition to the message of Paul and Barnabas by the Jews in Antioch, the gospel has continued to spread in a great new way, going forth to the Gentiles. These men carried the word through each area they went which was “throughout all the region.”

Of this, Charles Ellicott notes, “This clearly involves a considerable period of active working. It was not in Antioch only, but in the “region” round about, the border district of the three provinces of Phrygia, Lycaonia, and Galatia, that the new faith was planted.”

Life application: Just when people think they have their fingers pressed upon God’s people and His word, they find that their actions have increased the spread of the gospel. If people are willing to be chased from their homes for being Christians, they will continue to be Christians where they are chased to. When they get where they are going, they will be more, not less, willing to share their faith.

This has been proven true throughout history. For those who truly believe the word, there will only be an increased passion to share their message when asked who they are and what brought them to where they are. It is true that this happens with false religions and false sects of Christianity as well, but this is something that must come about because of the fallen state of the world.

Mormonism flourished in the US because of the religious protections provided for those who practiced it. This is also true with numerous other aberrant cults that arose around the same time. But the true message of the gospel also was allowed to expand as well. People have choices to make, and they are responsible for what they believe. The onus is on man to think through what is presented, to accept what is right, and to be saved in believing what is true.

The very nature of how the gospel is communicated calls out for man’s response – “Believe and be saved. But be careful what you believe.” There is one message of salvation that is found in the one gospel message.

*Lord God, just when the world thinks it has stopped the message of Jesus from going any further, it finds out that it has not only gone further, but it has flourished. Your word has stood the test of time, and it has spread to the uttermost part of the earth. It is so wonderful to be a part of Your glorious plan of the ages. Thank You for Jesus who has made this possible! Amen.*

**But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. Acts 13:50**

The previous verse noted that “the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.” Because the gospel is a message of freedom, and because Satan and his followers hate freedom, blowback from the apostle’s efforts was inevitable. This had repeatedly been the case since the first proclamation of the gospel by Peter in Acts 2. With the successful efforts of Paul and Barnabas in the region, the resulting antagonistic attitude of the opposition grew. Luke now records who was behind it, beginning with, “But the Jews.”

The contrast between Paul and Barnabas, who are both Jews, and “the Jews” noted here is bold and striking. Despite being Jews, Paul and Barnabas have a message to convey that goes beyond the Jewish people. The Jews do not. Their message is one of bondage. If there are those who are not Jews who accept their message, they are brought into a position of subservience, not freedom.

On the other hand, the message of Jesus allows people to remain who they are in a manner that is not seen in the message of the Jews. The gospel calls for a change in heart toward God, and it is offered to anyone of any station in life. This is not the case with the Jews as is seen in the next words. They “stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city.”

The Jews did not go out into the streets and alleys and proclaim freedom from sin. Instead, they established themselves in a city, brought their religion with them, and allowed the prominent and wealthy to join them, thus gaining influence at the higher levels. Though a bit long, the words of Charles Ellicott explain this situation –

“The fact stated brings before us another feature of the relations between Jews and Gentiles at this period. They ‘compassed sea and land to make one proselyte’ (Matthew 23:15). They found it easier to make proselytes of women. Such conversions had their good and their bad sides. In many cases there was a real longing for a higher and purer life than was found in the infinite debasement of Greek and Roman society, which found its satisfaction in the life and faith of Israel. (See Notes on Acts 17:4; Acts 17:12.) But with many, ... the change brought with it new elements of superstition and weakness, and absolute submission of conscience to its new directors, and thus the Rabbis were often to the wealthier women of Greek and Roman cities what Jesuit confessors were in France and Italy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Here we get the darker



side of the picture. The Jews stir up the women of the upper class, and they stir up their husbands. The latter were content apparently to acquiesce in their wives accepting the Judaism with which they had become familiar, but resented the intrusion of a new and, in one sense, more exacting doctrine.”

It is these Jews, with a finger on those who were politically established and who possessed great wealth, that “raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas.” Here, Luke uses a word, *epegeiró*, for the first of two times in Scripture. It signifies “to rouse upon.” In other words, their influence is used upon the minds of the people to stir them up against the message that has been conveyed. In their arousal, it is to a state of persecution against Paul and Barnabas.

The type of persecution the apostles faced is not stated, but exacting examples of such persecution will be seen as Acts continues. Quite often, it will be because of the Jews who oppose them.

A notable example of this is found in Acts 19. In that chapter, there was a great disturbance that resulted from Paul’s sharing of the gospel. In proclaiming Jesus as God, it means that idols are false gods. Because of this, a state of friction arose in Ephesus because of the great idol that was worshipped there. Smaller images of the great statue of Diana were made for people to purchase. But if the gospel flourished, these idol makers would lose their source of revenue. Hence, those who made them stirred up the masses. There it says –

“And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people.” Acts 19:33

The Jews used the situation in Ephesus as a pretext to silence the spread of the gospel. But even more, this may be the same Alexander who continued to harass Paul as noted in 2 Timothy –

“Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. <sup>15</sup>You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words.” 2 Timothy 4:14, 15

If this is the same Alexander, he not only wanted to silence the gospel because he had rejected it, but he also profited off the sales of these idols. That could be inferred from his being a coppersmith. It is this same attitude that caused the Jews to stir up those in

Antioch against Paul and Barnabas. From there, Luke notes they “expelled them from their region.”

With the message widely spread in the area, and with the Jews exerting their influence over those in power, the Lord knew that it was time for the apostles to move on. What initially seems like a defeat will prove to be another victory as Chapter 14 opens. The apostles will move on and bring the message to another area where a great multitude will again receive their message.

Life application: The Jews brought their situation upon themselves. Exactly as the Law of Moses said would occur, they went into an extended period of punishment for their rejection of Jesus. But it should not go without noting that this included Paul too. He was as opposed to the message of Jesus as anyone. And yet, the Lord, through His grace and mercy, brought Paul to Himself –

“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to destroy it*.<sup>14</sup> And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

<sup>15</sup> But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called *me* through His grace,<sup>16</sup> to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,<sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.” Galatians 1:13-17

This is further explained by Paul to Timothy –

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting *me* into the ministry,<sup>13</sup> although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.<sup>14</sup> And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” 1 Timothy 1:12-14

Paul was given grace and mercy, and he used it to the glory of God from that moment on. And despite his anger at the state of his people in rejecting Christ Jesus, he understood their attitude because he had shared in it. His first allegiance was always to Jesus, but he also remained troubled in his heart over the state of his people (See Romans 9:1-3).

This should be our attitude as well, both to the Jews and to the Gentiles who have rejected Jesus. We should be angry at their state of rebellion and their active resistance to the gospel. But we should also be troubled in our hearts at their pitiful state of condemnation. In other words, we should be willing to go in both directions.

We should strive against them as they attack the message while striving with the gospel's proclamation in hopes that some may be saved. Let us do our best to be responsible with our state in Christ in this manner. Hold fast to the truth of the gospel proclaiming it and allowing it to have the effect that God intends for it at any given time and place.

*Help us, Lord God, to never be shy about being Christians. May we faithfully proclaim that we are saved believers of Christ who will stand on His gospel no matter what. Those who oppose it will receive what they are due. And those who accept it will be granted Your mercy and forgiveness. May our words go forth! From there, they will do as You have purposed. Help us to be responsible and to speak out so that this can happen. Amen.*

**But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium.**

Acts 13:51

In the last verse, Paul and Barnabas were expelled from the region of Antioch of Pisidia. With that, Luke next records, "But they shook off the dust from their feet."

This was obviously a way of demonstrating their displeasure with those who had expelled them, revealing that even the dust on the apostles' feet that was associated with those of Antioch was detestable. It is what Jesus instructed His apostles in Israel to do, if necessary, while proclaiming the kingdom of God, as is testified to in the gospels –

"Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. <sup>5</sup> And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them." Luke 9:4, 5

This is recorded in Matthew and Mark as well. Matthew's words explain the matter further –

"Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. <sup>12</sup> And when you go into a household, greet it. <sup>13</sup> If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return

to you. <sup>14</sup> And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. <sup>15</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!" Matthew 10:11-15

Quite often, this act of Paul and Barnabas is directly associated with the words of the Lord in those gospel passages, such as –

"The act was one of literal obedience to our Lord's commands (see Note on Matthew 10:14), and may fairly be regarded as evidence that that command had come to the knowledge of Paul and Barnabas as well as of the Twelve." Charles Ellicott

Actually, there is nothing to suggest this, for several reasons. One is that if this were "literal obedience to the Lord," then other such instances where they failed to do this would be considered "literal disobedience to the Lord." Further, the surrounding context of Jesus' words demonstrates that this was never to be taken as a command during the church age, such as other words found in Matthew 10, and which are also summed up in the other gospels as well –

"These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: 'Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup> But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' <sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. <sup>9</sup> Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, <sup>10</sup> nor bag for *your* journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.'" Matthew 10:5-10

If Paul and Barnabas were following the command of the Lord from the gospels, they would not have been going to the Gentiles, they would not have been carrying money, which they obviously did in order to sail on ships, etc. Rather, Jesus' words were to the twelve apostles and were directed to the ministry within Israel while still under the law.

With Jesus' work completed, a new dispensation had entered. The shaking of dust off of their feet was obviously a sign that was known and practiced at the time, and which Jesus directed his apostles to employ for those who saw them do it as a witness against them. The same is true with Paul and Barnabas. This is all the more evident because, in Acts 18, Paul uses a different method of employing the same general thought –

“When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus is the Christ*. <sup>6</sup> But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and said to them, ‘Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’” Acts 18:5, 6

This was a similar sign of displeasure that was directed to his Jewish audience. It was something they would have fully understood from their own Scriptures –

“Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. <sup>13</sup> Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, ‘So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied.’”

-Nehemiah 5:12, 13

If Jesus’ words were still in effect, Paul and Silas would have needed to shake the dust off of their feet at that time as well. But verse 13:51 is the only instance in Acts where this is recorded. The use of such gestures is simply a way of demonstrating frustration at the circumstances that have arisen. In this case, it was shaking off the dust of the feet “against them,” meaning the Jews, the devout and prominent women, and the chief men of the city mentioned in the previous verse.

Of this, Ellicott rightly says, “It was in itself, however, the language of a natural symbolism which every Jew would understand.” Even more, anyone – Jew or Gentile – would understand with only a moment of thought.

If this were a sign as commanded by the Lord, it would then include all of the inhabitants of the city as noted in the Matthew citation above. But the city was also filled with new believers. The action was not directed against them. It was merely an open gesture of displeasure to those who had been so rude to them. With that, it next says that they “came to Iconium.”

The name in Greek is Ikonion. Strong’s supposes the name is derived from *eikon*, meaning “image,” and thus it means “Image like.” On the other hand, John Gill says –

“It was called by the Syrians, ‘Ik-ona’, which signifies ‘the bosom of sheep’; the country round about it being famous for feeding great numbers of sheep; and here afterwards was a church of Christ, a bosom for his sheep.”

Of this location, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century theologian Albert Barnes provides these words –

“This was the capital of Lycaonia. It is now called Konieh, and is the capital of Caramania. ‘Konieh extends to the east and south over the plain far beyond the walls, which are about two miles in circumference ... Mountains covered with snow rise on every side, excepting toward the east, where a plain, as flat as the desert of Arabia, extends far beyond the reach of the eye’ (Capt. Kinneir). ‘Little, if anything, remains of Greek or Roman Iconium, if we except the ancient inscriptions and the fragments of sculptures which are built into the Turkish walls.’ ‘The city wall is said to have been erected by the Seljukian sultans: it seems to have been built from the ruins of more ancient buildings, as broken columns, capitals, pedestals, bas-reliefs, and other pieces of sculpture contribute toward its construction. It has 80 gates, of a square form, each known by a separate name, and, as well as most of the towers, embellished with Arabic inscriptions ... I observed a few Greek characters on the walls, but they were in so elevated a situation that I could not decipher them’ (Capt. Kinneir).”

Today, the name is Konya. It is a major city in Turkey, being the sixth most populous and having over two million residents.

Life application: Understanding the dispensational model for interpreting the Bible is crucial to possessing proper theology. When someone claims that the words of Jesus in a particular section of the synoptic gospels still applies today, just take them to the surrounding verses and ask them, “Then why aren’t you doing this also.” There will almost always be obvious indicators that Jesus was speaking only to Israel about matters that pertain solely to them.

To tear verses out of their context, and then shove them into church-age doctrine, is damaging for several reasons. Probably the main reason is that an inevitable contradiction in theology will arise. What is prescribed in the epistles is based upon the finished, final, and forever work of Jesus Christ. What is presented in the gospels is not. In those gospels, He was still in the process of fulfilling the law, and his apostles and disciples were a part of that until His work was complete.

Once the law was fulfilled and set aside, Jesus gave them new instructions and poured out His Spirit on them to lead them in a new direction. This includes Paul. These instructions are now found in the epistles.

Having said this, dispensationalism can be taken too far, wrongly dividing the church age further than intended. This mainly comes from a lack of scholarship in understanding the

symbolism and typology of the Old Testament, something that pointed to the work of Jesus. This was not “Jewish” symbolism, but “Christ-centered” symbolism. By misunderstanding this, heretical teachings have arisen that further, and incorrectly, divide the church.

Be careful what you assimilate. Everything must be taken in its proper context. When this does not occur, you are assured of having unsound doctrine.

*Glorious Lord Jesus, thank You for Your work under the law to free man from law and to bring us into the state of grace that brings us back to our heavenly Father. For those who have come to You, we are safe and secure forever from condemnation. Thank You, Lord, for what You have done. All glory to Your magnificent name! Amen.*

**And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Acts 13:52**

In the previous verse, Paul and Barnabas “shook off the dust from their feet” against those who expelled them from the region. They were now set to continue elsewhere with the evangelization of those they encountered, but they had made a life-changing difference in many while in the region of Pisidia, as testified to in the final words of Chapter 13 which begin with, “And the disciples.”

This is not referring to Paul and Barnabas but to the converts in the area, both Jew and Gentile. The word translated as “disciples” is *mathétés*. It signifies a learner or a disciple. It is thus not referring to Paul and Barnabas who provided the instruction, but to those who received it. That it is a word that refers to both Jews and Gentiles is most poignantly revealed in Acts 15. There, when referring specifically to the Gentiles, it says –

“Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. <sup>7</sup> And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up *and* said to them: ‘Men *and* brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup> So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, <sup>9</sup> and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup> Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples [*mathétés*] which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? <sup>11</sup> But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.’” Acts 15:6-11

The noun *mathétés* is not used after Acts 21, but the verb from which it is derived, *manthanó*, is used by Paul in nine of his epistles. If one learns, he is a disciple. The idea is that those now referred to by Luke are those in the region of Antioch of Pisidia, both Jews and Gentiles, that had received the gospel of Jesus Christ. With that noted, Luke records that they “were filled with joy.”

This is the exhortation Paul will later write to those in Thessalonica and elsewhere, saying, “Rejoice always” (1 Thessalonians 5:16). These disciples apparently didn’t need the exhortation but were simply filled with joy because of the freedom they now found by being in Christ. Along with that, Luke completes the verse and the chapter, saying, “and with the Holy Spirit.”

Again, this is as stated elsewhere by Paul, such as –

“Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; <sup>17</sup> for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”  
-Romans 14:16, 17

As for the whole thought of being “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit,” the verb is both imperfect and it is in the passive or middle voice. The meaning is that they were filled and continued to be filled (the imperfect tense), and they were both agents of the action and yet concerned with the action (middle voice).

In other words, the Spirit acted upon them as they interacted with God through the knowledge they possessed. The joy and the filling came about by the mutual relationship that was occurring in their lives.

Life application: Why is it that we may be lacking joy and the filling of the Spirit? It is because we have lost focus on what it means to be saved. When we are saved, at that moment in time, it becomes the main issue of our life. We let go of our sin, acknowledging it before God and placing it on Christ. The burden and the debt were lifted from us, and we experienced the knowledge that God had done this for us, apart from any effort.

That brought the joy and the filling of the Spirit. Eventually, we allowed this current life to overtake our thoughts. We struggle at work, we fight with family or friends, our faithful dog dies, or we have our car repossessed. In this, we are no longer filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. Why? Because it is no longer the central focus of our existence. This is not how our life is to be conducted.



Rather, the most important event in our life occurred the moment we came to Jesus. Since that time, and forevermore, nothing will come to pass that can exceed the weight and marvel of what took place. The problem isn't that the moment is over and gone forever. Rather, our focus has turned from that key and pivotal event.

Instead of having the attitude that existed then, our eyes, our attention, and thus our lives are redirected to that which is of less value, and we are consumed by the world once again. Rather than "Work is such a burden, but it is nothing compared to Jesus," we collapse under our own misery.

Rather than "My wife says she is leaving me, but Jesus will never leave nor forsake me," we have placed this temporary and earthly relationship above the Lord. Rather than "I miss Fido so much, but Jesus gave him to me for a span and I am so grateful for those years," our thoughts are consumed with this loss as if the dog is more important than the relationship we have with God in Christ. This is true with any earthly relationship or possession.

The key to joy is not focusing on what this world offers, no matter how great it was or how great it might be. The key to the joy the Bible speaks of is to know that God saved us, He is there with us, and we are guaranteed to have a restoration that is beyond anything we can imagine at this point. God has done it, God is with us now as we await its completion, and God will bring us to that state of completion, without fail.

This is the heart of joy in the Lord. And this is why so many Christians are so miserable in their walk with Him. They either have had their eyes redirected from what Jesus has done, or they believe that what Jesus has done is conditional. Who can have joy and be filled with the Holy Spirit at such times? Rather, **FIX YOUR EYES ON JESUS** and be **ASSURED OF YOUR SALVATION** because the word assures you of it. Be **FILLED WITH JOY AND WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT** all your days. To the glory of God who is with you as you continue this walk to glory.

*Heavenly Father, forgive us for diverting our eyes from Jesus and looking back to this temporary, fallen, and even dirty existence. We have the purity of Christ before us, and yet we cling to that which is hopeless and miserable. And, Lord God, forgive us for questioning Your word and the salvation that You have granted to us. It is no longer about us, but about Jesus, when we call out to You through Him. Forgive us for such a faithless attitude. Redirect us and reassure us, and we will be sound in Christ once again. Amen.*



## CHAPTER 14

**Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.**

Acts 14:1

Paul and Barnabas had been expelled from the region of Antioch of Pisidia. Following that, they went to Iconium. With that remembered, Luke next records, “Now it happened in Iconium.” The distance from Antioch of Pisidia to Iconium is about 100 miles. It is apparent that once there, they immediately sought out the next place to spread the message of the coming of Christ, because it next says, “that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews.”

The first and most obvious thing to discern from this is that the words of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:46 were not stated concerning the future after leaving Antioch –

“It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.”

Rather, they meant that they would turn to the Gentiles in that area and have nothing further to do with evangelizing the Jews at the synagogue in Antioch. Paul’s first evangelism, wherever he went, was to the Jews. His ministry to the Gentiles is one of predominant focus, not exclusivity. His first attempt, however, was to convince the Jews of the coming of their Messiah in the coming of Jesus.

Going to the synagogue was a logical place to start their efforts because there were both Jews and Gentiles who gathered there. This was seen at the synagogue of Antioch, and it will be the case again in Iconium in the words which begin with, “and so spoke that a great multitude.”

Iconium, being a sizeable city, obviously had a large synagogue. It was a marvelous place to first herald to the people the good news about Jesus. And even if many Jews rejected the message, it would still be heard by the proselytes who attended. From there, they could pass the word to others in the Gentile community. This is obvious because the great multitude was comprised “both of the Jews and of the Greeks.”

The Greek is simpler, saying, “both of Jews and Greeks.” The term “great multitude” may indicate that before the Sabbath Paul and Barnabas had already started to evangelize

whoever they came across, telling them to come to the synagogue on the Sabbath. Or it may be that there were often a large number of Greeks who attended. Either way, the effect of their words was that a great multitude of both Jews and Gentiles “believed.”

This is the standard word used throughout the New Testament to indicate saving faith in the gospel, *pisteuó*. Among seemingly innumerable other times, it was used by Jesus in John 3:16. It is what is said of the believers in Acts 2:44, Acts 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, and so on. It is the word of saving faith of Romans 10:9, 1 Corinthians 15:2 & 11, and Ephesians 1:13.

Because of this, there is absolutely no reason to suggest that the word means anything other than “belief unto salvation” for those Jews and Greeks now being referred to. A few points about this are necessary to understand the importance of the event –

1. The message spoken by Paul and Barnabas was the gospel and its effects were exactly the same for Jews and for Gentiles, meaning that belief alone is the requirement for salvation.
2. Like in Antioch of Pisidia, there is no record of tongues or other signs having come upon the believers.
3. Baptism is not mentioned here or in Antioch, showing that it is not a necessary part of salvation. And yet, it would be an argument from silence to say that the new believers were not baptized. It would be a false inference.

These and other points of doctrine are clear indicators that the continued record of Acts is a descriptive account of what occurred. Not everything that happened is recorded, but those things that are recorded are there to reveal truths about the effectiveness of the gospel alone to save.

Further, the events are not normative. If they were, for example, it would be required for every evangelist who entered a new city to go to the local synagogue in order to speak to the Jews. That cannot be inferred from the narrative, nor would it be logical to make this conclusion. Further, the epistles say nothing of such an approach.

Life application: Quite often, what is not said in an account can teach us as much as what is said. Nothing that is essential for doctrine will be left out, but not everything left out is necessarily unimportant.

As noted above, there is nothing about baptism or speaking in tongues recorded here. It simply says that Paul and Barnabas spoke and the people believed. This is perfectly in

accord with Paul's words elsewhere in the epistles, such as "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

It is faith that saves. If speaking in tongues was a necessary proof of salvation, it would be incompetent of Luke to not record tongues being spoken in each instance of salvation recorded in Acts. But he only records such signs at key points in the ongoing narrative. This is true with baptism as well.

Despite this, the requirement to be baptized as spoken forth by Jesus does not need to be recorded unless it is a formal part of the salvific process. As it is not always recorded, it is obviously not. And yet, the absence of recording the event does not mean that it did not happen. Rather, it can be assumed that it did because it was a command of the Lord. This is no different than the absence of recording the taking of the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is commanded by the Lord, and it was practiced by Paul constantly, as can be inferred from his words in 1 Corinthians 11:25, 26. And yet, it is never mentioned in Acts. Hence, it is a command of the Lord that was obviously carried out by Paul among his converts, and yet it is not something that necessarily needs to be highlighted.

Consider these things and ponder what God is doing, why certain things are recorded regularly, why things are only highlighted at certain times, and why some important things are not even mentioned. Remember that Jesus' commands are applicable to all when they are spoken in the proper context, such as the Lord's Supper and baptism. Remember that the epistles set forth doctrine for the church. Also remember that Acts is a descriptive account that sets forth a normative practice at times, but not at all times. As such, care must be taken to know when things logically follow and when they do not.

*Lord God, help us to think clearly about how You have presented Your word. May we consider what You are saying and why You are saying it. Also, help us to overcome our biases and presuppositions so that we will be properly grounded in what is right. May Your hand guide us in such matters, and may You be glorified through our lives as we adhere to Your word. Amen.*

**But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. Acts 14:2**

Paul and Barnabas are in Iconium, having gone together to the synagogue of the Jews. In speaking there, it said in the previous verse that a great multitude both of Jews and Greeks believed. Now, the narrative continues, saying, “But the unbelieving Jews.”

The word translated as “unbelieving” is *apeitheó*. It signifies “to refuse to be persuaded.” It is, therefore, the withholding of belief. It is a word that is often translated as disobedient. But in the case of the word of the Lord, the two thoughts are really synonymous. To not believe the word of the Lord is to be disobedient to the word of the Lord, even if there is no command involved. This is because the word of the Lord is fixed.

If something is certain to be the word of the Lord, such as the message Paul and Barnabas are conveying, then to not believe is to disobey. To believe, but not act is also to disobey. To believe and to act is to be obedient. If something is presented which is not the word of the Lord, the Book of Mormon, for example, to believe is to be disobedient to the Lord.

The parameters are already set, such as Galatians 1:6-8. There, we have been told that any other gospel than the one preached by the apostles, and which is now recorded in Scripture, is anathema. Therefore, we are to reject it. In the case of these Jews in Iconium, they have heard the true gospel and they have been disobedient by not believing it. Because of this, they “stirred up the Gentiles.”

Here is a word used for the second and last time in Scripture, *epegeiró*. It signifies “to rouse upon.” In other words, their influence is used upon the minds of the people to stir them up against the message that has been conveyed. The only other time it was used was in Acts 13:50 where the same thing occurred –

“But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up [*epegeiró*] persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.”

The apostles gained a foothold among the Gentiles through the presentation of the gospel, and the Jews – probably out of jealousy – then troubled the minds of the Gentiles, twisting the words of Scripture against the truth. As it next says, “and poisoned their minds.”

The word translated as “poisoned” signifies “to harm.” The Jews damaged the minds of the Gentiles. They had believed and then they were told what they believed was false. This is just what Paul writes about in 1 Thessalonians 2 –

“For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans, <sup>15</sup> who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, <sup>16</sup> forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up *the measure of* their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.” 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

In that case, they forbid Paul and his companions from speaking to the Gentiles. In this case, they have called into question what was spoken to the Gentiles. But the same attitude is behind both. As for the poisoning of the minds of the Gentiles, Luke next records that it is “against the brethren.”

The attack is personal. Rather than directly attacking the message, they have maligned the integrity of the believers in some way. Maybe they said they were unqualified. Maybe they said they were heretics. Whatever the reason, personal attacks were levied against them. The next verse will show that the Lord was with them. He was there to defend the word that was being carried by His apostles.

Life application: Nothing has changed in the past two millennia. There are those who attack those who carry the true gospel, and there are those that defend it. Sometimes, it is necessary for someone who is rightly teaching the Bible to include a verbal attack against the false teacher as well, explaining why the person is not to be trusted. In such cases, that attack should be based upon a deviation from the word.

In other words, an unjustified attack is known as an ad hominem fallacy. The words mean “to the man.” Such attacks are directed at the person instead of their doctrine. This is improper. One might say, “Pastor Joe is a false teacher. He lives in a million-dollar house and drives a Mercedes Benz.”

Those things are irrelevant. They say nothing about the doctrine of the person. Unless the amount of wealth a person has or the lifestyle he leads is somehow connected to his false teaching, it is simply a red herring intended to harm the person without any reason behind it. However, if the doctrine of Pastor Joe is incorrectly centered on money to make him rich, and if that can be substantiated, then calling this out is justified. All such things must be based on the word. If they are, then what is wrong is properly highlighted.

This was seen in the previous chapter where Luke recorded that “the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city.” He was highlighting that the intent of the Jews was to maintain control over the wealth and influence of these people. From the context, it can be inferred that they already had this control, and they simply didn’t want to lose it.

Have care in how you deal with such things. Once one enters into fallacious attacks or diversions, the argument is tainted. Ask yourself, “Does this have any bearing on the word?” If it does not, do not bring it up, or do not allow it to affect you if others have brought it up.

*Lord God, help us to think clearly and rationally as we evaluate Your word and how it is presented by others. Also, help us to rightly defend it, not getting caught up in improper discussions or misdirection away from what is right. May we consider all things in light of what You have presented in Your word, allowing it to be the standard for our thoughts and conduct. Amen.*

**Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. Acts 14:3**

In the previous verse, it noted that the Jews of Iconium stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned the minds of the brethren. With that, Luke continues with the words, “Therefore they stayed there a long time.”

Unlike in Antioch of Pisidia, it appears the Jews in Iconium were not as quickly riled up as those in Antioch. And so, Paul and Barnabas stayed. These Gentiles had believed (Acts 14:1). As such, they were counted as saved and in need of proper instruction and discipleship, just as the Lord had instructed. Without being threatened, they stayed and provided just that.

It is certain that if they were expelled, but a church had been set up first, Paul would have written to them instead. This is what happened in Galatia, for example. The Judaizers went in and poisoned the minds of the believers. Because of this, Paul wrote to them words of correction. It also will happen in Antioch of Syria in Acts 15. In that case, a council will be held to resolve the matter. No matter what, Paul did his utmost to ensure that those he evangelized received proper instruction. As for their time in Iconium, Paul and Barnabas were “speaking boldly in the Lord.”



The Greek reads *epi*, or “upon the Lord.” Their words were reliant upon the Lord. The word translated as “speaking boldly” has only been seen thus far in Acts 9:27-29 when referring to the words of Paul –

“But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. <sup>29</sup> And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.”

The word signifies to be frank and confident in what is said. This would obviously be the case if they were reliant upon the Lord for their words. It was as if the Lord was speaking through them. This is poignantly seen in the next words, “who was bearing witness to the word of His grace.”

The words are in the singular and the reference is to Jesus. The Greek literally reads, “the [One] testifying upon the word of the grace of Him.” Paul and Barnabas were reliant upon the Lord and so the Lord testified through His word of grace. That testifying was accomplished by “granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.”

This was for the set purpose of establishing the truth of the gospel among these believers because their minds had been poisoned by the Jews. The Lord promised that His apostles would be given everything they needed to accomplish their task. The book of Acts bears this out. When it was necessary to establish their authority or to continue their work, the Lord worked miracles through them. But this was not an authority that came at their will. Instead, it came from His.

In the case of those at Iconium, there was a need for this to come about, and the Lord worked accordingly, validating the ministry of Paul and Barnabas and the reliability of His word as expressed through them.

Life application: Notice that the words above say that the Lord was “granting signs and wonders to be done.” There are times when the apostles healed or raised the dead. And there were times when they could not do these things. The gifts were at the will of the Lord, and they came to provide validation of the work of the Lord or the fact that His word was being properly expressed through these apostles.

Today, this type of thing is wholly unnecessary. There is no need for a validation of the Lord because the word of the Lord has been given. It would be contradictory to both the word and to the process of salvation, which is by grace through faith, to provide such things today.

There is also no need for a validation of the veracity of a ministry or a preacher today. The word provides for those things as well. If those who are listening to a teacher or preacher want to know if what they are hearing is true or not, they simply need to go to the word and study up.

Unfortunately, that takes time, effort, and contemplation. These are things that people do not want to give. It demonstrates a failing in the hearer, not in the process as given by the Lord. It is so much easier to say, "I got a sign from the preacher," or "I received a prophetic word from Pastor Providence." That is easy, it takes any burden off the individual, and life can go on in ignorant bliss. But, again, this is contradictory to the word itself.

This does not mean the Lord does not work the miraculous in response to prayer, but the results will always be left for the faithful to accept, by faith, that it was the Lord who accomplished what occurred.

Those who believe the Lord is working in overt miracles, signs, and wonders today have failed to think through the process of what God is doing in the world. Why would He give his word just to go around the word He has given? He would not. There is a purpose for these demonstrations of His workings in redemptive history, and they find their end in the completed canon of Scripture, the Holy Bible. Learn the word and you will do well, avoiding the pitfalls and traps that have brought harm to innumerable souls.

*Thank You for Your word, O God. It is just what we need to convey the message of the gospel to the world, and it is fully sufficient to do so. You are working through people who are willing to expend themselves for this purpose, and You are validating Your presence among those who believe through the word You have provided. What more do we need to accomplish this awesome task? Only for You to be with us in the process. And we know You are. Your word tells us it is so. Amen.*

**But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. Acts 14:4**

After the Jews poisoned the minds of the brethren, the previous verse noted that Paul and Barnabas stayed in Iconium for a long time speaking boldly. Along with their words, the Lord granted them signs and wonders to be done by their hands. With that, it next says, “But the multitude of the city was divided.”

The Greek word is *schizó*, a schism. This shows that the signs and wonders were not enough to convince those who simply refused to believe. And more, those who believed did so based on hearing the word of God, as Acts 14:1 plainly noted –

“Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.”

It is obvious that the signs and wonders, then, were given to edify those who believed, but they also were intended as a sign to those who did not believe, something that actually hardened their hearts as happened with Pharaoh in Egypt and as is seen elsewhere. This is what Paul poignantly indicates in 1 Corinthians 11 –

“Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. <sup>23</sup> Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those who are* uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? <sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. <sup>25</sup> And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.” 1 Corinthians 11:22-25

Because of the faith of those who believed, and because of the hardness of those who refused to believe, “part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles.” This is not at all unlike what will occur in Thessalonica –

“And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. <sup>5</sup> But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.” Acts 17:4, 5

The Jews have a knack for placing themselves carefully within a society in order to influence its workings. This is not just in the times of ancient Rome, but it has continued,

even until today. As Lionel Blue said, “Jews are just like everyone else, only more so.” In other words, whatever they put their hand to, it will be just like others, but with a boost of steroids added in. This trait resulted in their ability to divide Iconium, and it was based on their rejection of the name of Jesus. It was a division that began in their own land as He walked among them –

“So there was a division among the people because of Him. <sup>44</sup> Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him.” John 7:43, 44

Life application: There are innumerable people who believe that God continues to provide signs and wonders in the world today, coming to people in their sleep and telling them they need Jesus, or appearing to people in the deep recesses of the jungle and telling them that missionaries are coming who need to be listened to.

These stories are as common as lies from the left, but are they based on reality? It has been clearly shown that the signs and wonders that Paul and Barnabas exhibited did not convert the Jews, nor did they convert the Gentiles who sided with the Jews. Rather, they are a sign to them and will stand as a testimony against them. But those who believed did so based on the word of God that was spoken to them.

This is exactly how Paul says people are converted today. Sharing the gospel and the word is the means, the mode, and the method by which man can be saved. The Bible, the word of God expressed on pages of paper stamped with ink, is the sign to the world that condemnation already exists in humanity. It is the word that documents how we got in this mess, it is the word that explains what God has been doing to get us out of it, and it is the word that reveals His coming in human flesh in the Person of Jesus to make it possible for man to be saved.

To claim that God is going around His completed word to effect His purposes is self-defeating. It means that the very purpose that the word was compiled for isn't effective in accomplishing what it was intended to do. Those who spread these falsities diminish the work of God in Christ, they diminish the work of God through the word, and they are trusting in the words of man rather than the words of God. It is not a good place to be.

All men, saved and unsaved, will stand before God for judgment. Those who are unsaved will have the Bible to speak against them. Those who are saved will have the Bible to judge their faith and their deeds. On that day, the word of God alone will be the standard. Why would anyone believe that it is any different now? Have faith in the word, speak out the word, and share the gospel with those who are perishing. God has

chosen this method for man to be saved. Trusting that He will show up in someone's sleep is simply punting to Him the ball you should be carrying.

*O God, help us to think clearly about how we handle Your word and what our responsibilities are in relation to it. Help us not to get drawn into the lies and deceit of those who make things up out of their own heads. Instead, help us to have confidence in Your word and to stand on it as it is written. In this, we will be effective in doing what You have instructed us to do. Amen!*

**And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, Acts 14:5**

The previous verse revealed a division within the city where a part sided with the disbelieving Jews and a part sided with the apostles. That now comes to a head, saying, "And when a violent attempt was made." Here, a new and rare word comes into Scripture, *hormé*. It will only be seen again in James 3:4 where the pilot of a ship desires to turn it by use of a rudder. It signifies a violent impulse.

One can see the heated anger of those opposed to the message of the apostles. They were certainly yelling out just as people yell out today, "How dare you say there is only one way to God!" The inability of man to yield himself to another in order to be saved is almost ubiquitous. These people could not accept what Paul and Barnabas had been teaching because they could not accept that they were so fallen that they needed God Himself to intervene in their salvation. And this sudden, violent impulse was "by both the Gentiles and Jews."

This is how it has continued since the time of the apostles. All around the world, the masses have rejected the simplicity of the gospel and the doctrine that says, "Jesus is sufficient to save. Come to Jesus and you will be saved." It is fought against by Jews, and it is fought against by Gentiles. If one stood in the halls of the US government today and proclaimed, "There is one and only one way to be saved," the chambers would fill with angry cries of scorn and derision. This is the case now, and it was the case in Iconium. As it says, "with their rulers."

The rulers could just see their supposed power fleeing away as a portion of their city bowed the knee to Jesus and not to them. Those who had accepted the gospel had been freed from the bondage and oppression they faced. There was a complete change in them that told these rulers they had lost their supreme authority to direct the minds

and affairs of the Christians. And so, this angry multitude gathered together and with a sudden impulse came “to abuse and stone them.”

The sense is, “You are condemning us with your words of exclusivity. You are taking away our positions of power and authority. You are proclaiming a complete break from the way things have been. And we don’t like it.” They had rejected the grace of Christ and they were set to remove those who had proclaimed it. This is how it was for Paul and Barnabas. This is how it was for those who followed them in their newfound faith. And this is how it has continued to be anywhere the true gospel is proclaimed. It is a message of total inclusivity for any who believe, and it is a message of total exclusivity, for those who fail to believe.

Life application: There are those in the church who diminish the pure gospel, which is by faith alone through grace alone, claiming that one must make Jesus the Lord of his life before he can be saved (Lordship salvation), or that one must demonstrate works to prove that he is saved. If there are no works, that person is not saved (Calvinism and others in varying degrees). There are those who say one must repent of sin before a person can be saved (adding works to the gospel).

To trust in the pure gospel by faith is to simply say, “I believe that Jesus died for my sins” (implying the person has sin and is acknowledging that), that He was buried (with my sins), and that He was raised because of my justification (Romans 4:25). I accept this and believe that I have been granted God’s forgiveness.”

For those with such views as mentioned above, they cannot believe that “grace” means “grace” and that “faith” alone truly saves, even if they say they believe this. And so, they attack those who hold to the simple gospel by using pejoratives such as “easy believism.”

As also noted above, the inability of man to yield himself to another in order to be saved is almost ubiquitous. And more, it is considered so objectionable that even those who were saved by grace through faith in the first place then add works into their own gospel presentations. “Yes, it worked for me, but it certainly won’t work for others.”

As is clearly the case, “easy believism” is anything but. It is the hardest thing of all to accept. This is why the crowd rushed upon Paul and Barnabas. They held to a religious expression that says, “There is more than one way to be saved and it includes my goodness or my deeds that will impress God. He wouldn’t dare condemn someone as important as me.”

This is a lie of the devil, and it has been effective in every religious expression ever devised by man. Only when one understands that man is inherently flawed, fallen without the possibility of fixing the situation on his own, and needing to trust solely in the merits of Christ, can he be saved. This is the message of God in Christ, and it is the most difficult of all things for man to accept. There is nothing easy about belief. The Bible testifies to this from the first pages to its last.

But this is what God asks of you. Trust Him first, then give up your sin. Trust Him first, then do good works. Trust Him first, then make Him Lord of your life. Everything has an order and the order for salvation starts with God's grace being worked out in you through your faith. Trust.

*Lord God, may we stand firm on the simple gospel. You have done the work; people need to simply believe that it is so. May we never add to the purity of what You have proclaimed. People need Jesus first. Everything else follows after that. Thank You for the simplicity and beauty of what You have done for us. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.*

**they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region.** Acts 14:6

Note: the NKJV doesn't do a great job of translating this verse. Instead, it should read, "having become aware, they fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region" (CG). This will be used for the commentary.

With trouble brewing in Iconium and a violent attempt made by both the Gentiles and the Jews to stone Paul and Barnabas, the verse begins with, "having become aware."

Without telling the details, we see that Paul and Barnabas somehow were apprised of the plotting of those opposed to their message. Because of this, "they fled to the cities of Lycaonia."

Of this area, Charles Ellicott provides a remarkable description –

"The very name Lycaonia, interpreted traditionally as Wolf-land (the local legend derived it from Lycaon, who had been transformed into a wolf), represented but too faithfully the character of the inhabitants. The travellers were also losing the protection which a Roman citizen might claim in a Roman province, Lycaonia, which had been annexed in

A.D. 17 to the Roman province of Galatia, having been assigned by Caligula to Antiochus, King of Commagene. So wild a country was hardly likely to attract Jewish settlers; and there is no trace in St. Luke's narrative of the existence of a synagogue in either of the two cities. For the first time, so far as we know, St. Paul had to begin his work by preaching to the heathen. Even the child of a devout Jewish mother had grown up to manhood uncircumcised (see Note on Acts 16:3)."

This is the only time that the area of Lycaonia is mentioned in Scripture. As stated by Ellicott, the name comes from *lukos*, a wolf. Even to this day, the name inspires movies about people that have transformed into wolves. Of this area, two main cities are named, "Lystra and Derbe."

Both names are introduced here. The meaning of the names isn't certain. Along with visiting these cities, the apostles also evangelized "the surrounding region." Charles Ellicott continues his narrative of the area, saying –

"Of the two towns named, Lystra was about forty miles to the south-east of Iconium, Derbe about twenty miles further to the east. The former, which lies to the north of a lofty conical mountain, the Kara-dagh (=Black Mountain) is now known as Bin-bir-Kilisseh, i.e., 'the thousand and one churches,' from the ruins that abound there. The addition of 'the region that lieth round about' suggests the thought that the cities were not large enough to supply a sufficient field of action. The work in the country villages must obviously—even more than in the cities—have been entirely among the Gentiles. Among the converts of this region, and probably of this time, we may note the names of Timotheus of Lystra (see Note on Acts 16:1), and Gaius, or Caius, of Derbe (Acts 20:4)."

Of the actions of these apostles, it is common to read commentaries that say their travels are in accord with Matthew 10:23 –

"When they persecute you in this city, flee to another."

This sounds appealing. The apostles were persecuted in Iconium and so they took the words of the Lord to heart and went to evangelize another city. Unfortunately, this fails to consider the continued words of the same verse from Matthew –

"For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes." vs23



The entire context of the passage from Matthew refers to Israel. The continued words of Matthew 10:23 clearly indicate that Israel was the subject of the command. Therefore, it is wholly inappropriate to use this verse in Acts as a fulfillment of the apostles' obedience to the command of Matthew 10:23. Rather, they are doing what the Lord instructed as is recorded in Acts 1:8 –

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

These men had been sent out as missionaries and they are doing what missionaries are to do in the context of the church age. As apostles, they bore an additional set of gifts and abilities as the word was being established. Now that it has been compiled, the word is the tool to be used for the evangelization of the nations.

Life application: On the morning of preparing this commentary, a video was received entitled “Iranians Meeting Jesus in Dreams, Experiencing Radical Transformation.” If this were true, there would be no need to evangelize. But the Bible says otherwise.

How convenient it is to say that Jesus is popping into people's heads at night and converting them. It sure takes the pressure off those who are too timid (or too lazy) to do what the Bible instructs.

God has given us the tools we need to evangelize the world, He has empowered us to do so, and yet we sit and watch videos that are contrary to the very message that we are supposed to be proclaiming. Someday, all will have to stand before the Lord and give an account of what they did with their time.

Those who make up false stories of visions, dreams, and conversations with Jesus will have to face Him someday. Be wise and discerning. Get out and tell others about the good news of Jesus Christ. This is how people are evangelized. It will not come about any other way.

*Heavenly Father, help us to be reasonable in our approach to Your word. May we not take liberties with it that are contrary to its message. Rather, help us to accept it as written, follow through with what is instructed, and be willing to share the good news with those we encounter. It is what You have instructed. May we be obedient to Your word. Amen.*

## **And they were preaching the gospel there. Acts 14:7**

In the previous verse, Paul and Barnabas were said to have fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region. With that in mind, Luke next records, “And they were preaching the gospel there.” The Greek is just three words. Two of them are a finite verb and a participle that together denote continuance. The exact order would read, “And there they were preaching the gospel.”

These men went to this area and these cities, and while there they didn’t just preach, but they continued to do so. The words then give the state of the situation that will continue through verse 23. It is not indicated how long their time of preaching was, but it was long enough to encounter great difficulty, make many disciples, establish a multitude of churches, and even return to other cities in the area to strengthen them.

The chapter shows the tireless efforts of Paul and Barnabas, all summed up in these few words.

Life application: There are many ministries that get started and that quickly fade away. Churches may decide to set up a pancake breakfast ministry in the poorer part of town, helping the people there. Things take off quickly but eventually flatten out. The people who are served will come to expect their pancakes as if it is their weekly due.

With that, those in the ministry get frustrated and eventually it shuts down. There are many reasons for such a failure, but the main point of a ministry that comes from a church is not feeding people pancakes. Anyone can do that, and they can do it for whatever reason they want.

A ministry that is done by a church, or by church people, should have the main goal of sharing the gospel. Paul and Barnabas did not bake pancakes. The narrative says they preached the gospel. This is what needs to be done. The way that occurs may need to be adjusted to the local circumstances. But if the good news is not shared eventually, then what is the point of the ministry?

And more, Paul and Barnabas didn’t just preach the gospel. They continued to do so. There needs to be a determination that even if the initial effort doesn’t bear any fruit, the work will continue. There is a time to move on, and that has been seen and will continue to be seen in the book of Acts, but there also must be a realization that some things take time. Without an extended effort, there will be no fruit on the tree.

Feeding people pancakes is fine, but it cannot be the main goal of a successful church ministry. Whether openly and boldly, or slowly and methodically, sharing Jesus must be the ultimate goal. If that is done, and even if the first convert comes after a long time, the ministry will be considered a success.

*Lord God, help us to have the attitude that whatever we do, we will do it so that You will be evident in the doing. May our lives, our actions, and our words ultimately be dedicated to the set goal of bringing others to You. Help us with this. Even in a world that is set against You and Your offer of peace, help us to have this mind. To Your glory. Amen.*

**And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked.** Acts 14:8

Upon arrival in the cities of Lycaonia of Lystra and Derbe, Paul and Barnabas were preaching the gospel there. With that noted, Luke continues with the words, "And in Lystra."

The events that will now take place in Lystra are surely what Paul refers to, being remembered by him many years later when he wrote his second letter to Timothy –

*"But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, <sup>11</sup>persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me." 2 Timothy 3:10, 11*

Timothy would have known these things because this is the general area he came from, as will be noted in Acts 16 –

*"Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, *the* son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father *was* Greek. <sup>2</sup>He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium." Acts 16:1, 2*

There it says Timothy was a disciple, and so he was probably converted during the events of Acts 14. As for the events at Lystra, the details begin with the next words, saying, "a certain man without strength."

The word is *adunatos*. It signifies “without power,” and it is quite often translated as “impossible.” At times it is used concerning Christians whose faith is not yet very firm. In this case, it is a man who had no power “in his feet.”

In other words, there was a disconnect between his brain and the feet which left him without any power of locomotion in that regard. This is further explained by the next words that say he “was sitting.”

The verb is imperfect, thus denoting a regular and continued state. He was helpless in this regard and thus sat while life went on around him. The reason for his helpless state is that he was in this condition all his life, being “a cripple from his mother’s womb.”

This is the same condition, using the same word, *chólos*, as the man who was healed by the Lord through Peter and John in Acts 3 –

“And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple.” Acts 3:2

In this state, even from before his birth, Luke next notes that he was one “who had never walked.” The words are not said of the man in Acts 3, but they are implied to some extent. There, it said that he was carried to the temple each day to beg. In Acts 4:22, he was then noted to be over forty years old.

Walking is a real thing that people do, and it is also a metaphor commonly used in Scripture to speak of one’s conduct before the Lord. One of many examples of this would be Ephesians 2 –

“And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, <sup>3</sup> among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” Ephesians 2:1-3

As this is so, we can guess that metaphor is being conveyed in these two men. The man of Israel was over forty and had to be carried. EW Bullinger defines the number as “a period of probation, trial, and chastisement—(not judgment, like the number 9, which stands in connection with the punishment of enemies, but the chastisement of sons, and

of a covenant people). It is the product of 5 and 8, and points to the action of grace (5), leading to and ending in revival and renewal (8).”

This is an exacting description of Israel. Like the Jew in Acts 3 who was healed after forty years of life, they have always been in a state of probation, trial, and chastisement. During this entire time, they have been carried by the Lord because they could not properly walk before Him. Their conduct has been defiled. And yet, He has preserved them and will heal them as a nation someday.

Likewise, the Gentile in Acts 14 has also been lame from birth, never having walked. And yet, the Lord will now be attentive to him through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas.

The care of Luke to document these relevant facts is to be noted. Through his meticulous writings, the state of things among both the Jews and the Gentiles is clearly and precisely detailed for us to see patterns develop. These then provide an explanation for the expansion of the church beyond Israel and into the rest of the world.

Life application: The history of Israel is one of being called by God, accepting that call, imperfectly living life with the Lord, and then eventually rejecting Him. And yet, despite the rejection, there is the promise of being called back to the Lord and wholly restored someday.

It is a pattern that speaks of the eternal salvation of Israel, despite their personal failings and apostasies. If people can come to the realization that national Israel is being given as a template for individual salvation, there would never be a question in their minds about the doctrine of eternal security.

Man is called by God when the gospel is preached. Those who accept the gospel are saved. Even in their salvation, they live imperfect lives before the Lord. Some are even dismissed from the congregation, or they walk away from Him entirely. For examples of this, refer to 1 Corinthians 5:4, 5; 1 Timothy 1:18-20; and 2 Peter 1:9.

There are those who are to be cast out of the church for wholly inappropriate behavior, there are those whose feet get so far off the path that their faith is shipwrecked, and there are those who are cleansed from their past sins and yet have forgotten it was so. Despite these things, the Bible teaches that they have been saved and they will not lose that state, even if their earthly lives face incredibly unhappy times.

Israel was handed over to their own depraved ways for judgment. And yet, the Lord has kept them as a people and has brought them back to the land of Israel to restore them to Himself. This is just what Paul says is to happen to the wayward man in 1 Corinthians 5. This state of eternal security is not because either Israel or that man deserves it, but because God has spoken it. It is His name that is on the line, and so He will perform. He says this explicitly in Ezekiel 36 –

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “I do not do *this* for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went.”” Ezekiel 36:22

If you are somehow convinced that a person can lose his salvation, you are in error. Your understanding of the character of God, the eternal nature of His decrees, and the sacredness of His covenant-keeping are deficient. Look to Israel with the right eyes and your faulty view of these things will be corrected.

*O God, our minds are often confused about what You are doing and why. And this isn't because we have not been given the information to figure it out. Instead, it is there to understand. But we have biases, presuppositions, and a failure to fully explore Your word. Help us to be more attentive to what You are telling us in this precious word. In this, we will have a confident and settled walk before You all our days. Amen.*

**This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, Acts 14:9**

The verbs of the verse are not well translated. The verse should read, “This *man* heard Paul speaking, who having looked intently at him and having seen that he has faith to be saved” (CG). This will be used for the commentary.

The previous verse said that “in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting.” He was noted as a cripple from birth who had never walked. With that, the narrative continues, saying, “This *man* heard Paul speaking.”

The tense of the word translated as “heard” varies in manuscripts. Some have it as an aorist verb, some as an imperfect verb, and so on. Either way, the crippled man listened to Paul as he was speaking, probably on several separate occasions. Paul noticed this, probably realizing that the man was truly and attentively focused on what was being said. In response to the heartfelt focus toward what he was saying, it next says of Paul, “who having looked intently at him.”

Just because the man was a cripple, Paul did not neglect focusing on him. Rather, it probably captured his attention even more, realizing that the man was truly convicted in his heart at what he had been hearing. Because of this, Paul returned a fixed and focused attention on him as he sat there. With his eyes having so alighted upon him, it next says, “and having seen that he has faith.”

The words here must be taken in the context of what has been said. Before this man was introduced in the previous verse, it said, “And they were preaching the gospel there.” Paul and Barnabas were not carrying out a healing ministry. Rather, they were preaching the gospel concerning Jesus. This is key to understanding what the man’s thoughts must have been.

Paul was speaking about the salvation that comes through the finished work of Christ. He could tell that the man understood his words and accepted them as truth. This is faith. That faith then led to him believing the message in his heart. This can be deduced from the words “that he has faith.”

Faith and belief are not the same thing in the Bible. Concerning the difference, HELPS Word Studies provides these words –

“Faith (4102/*pistis*) involves belief but it goes *beyond* human believing because it involves the personal revelation (inworking) of God. Faith is always God's work. Our believing has eternal meaning when it becomes ‘*faith-believing*’ by the transforming grace of God.

Reflection: Demons believe (and shudder) . . . but they do not have (experience) faith!”

The account of this man tells us that he had faith. But it is faith in what? Some commentaries cite similar examples in the gospels, such as –

“For she said to herself, ‘If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.’<sup>22</sup> But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, ‘Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.’ And the woman was made well from that hour.” Matthew 9:21, 22

“And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’

They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.'

<sup>29</sup> Then He touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you.'"

-Matthew 9:28, 29

These and other similar accounts clearly indicate that the people anticipated healing. This is because this was an expected indicator of the ministry of the Messiah. The idea of being saved from sin was not what they were thinking of. Rather, they were considering physical restoration whether they were considering the issue of sin or not.

On the other hand, Paul and Barnabas are proclaiming the gospel which focused first and foremost on the issue of sin, from which man needed healing. As such, commentaries and translations need to consider this when presenting the final words of the verse, which say that he had faith "to be saved."

The Greek word is *sózó*. It can mean saved, heal, preserve, rescue, make whole, etc. The context will determine what the meaning is. For example, in the account of Matthew 9:21, 22 above, the woman was clearly anticipating physical healing. On the other hand, the word is used in Matthew 27:42 where it twice says, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save."

In that, it is not speaking of healing, but of saving one's physical life. The scribes and elders may have been thinking of Lazarus or another person who was saved from physical death, and yet, there Jesus hung supposedly unable to save himself. In Acts 2:21, Peter spoke to Israel at Pentecost and said –

"And it shall come to pass  
*That* whoever calls on the name of the LORD  
Shall be saved."

Peter then went on to explain that those words from the prophet Joel were anticipating salvation from sin and the saving of one's soul. It is this, not physical healing, that Paul and Barnabas were proclaiming, meaning the gospel. Hence, rather than having faith to be healed, the translation should say the man had faith "to be saved."

What happens afterward in his physical healing is only a bonus to the salvation from sin that he experienced. This is quite different from what occurred with the man in Acts 3. Peter and John spoke to the man but never mentioned anything about the gospel or cleansing from sin. That may have occurred later, but it was not a part of what Luke recorded. Rather, the healing was first and foremost a physical one.



To understand the difference more fully, go back and read the Acts 3:16 commentary. In short, in Acts 3, it was not the man's faith that healed him. Instead, Peter and John healed him based on "the faith" which is established by Jesus Christ. One might say, "The church is established upon the faith found in (as the basis of) the name of Jesus."

In the account now in Acts 14, it is the man's faith in the gospel, leading to belief, that has saved him from sin. In his commentary on these words concerning this crippled man, Albert Barnes says –

"He had heard Paul, and perhaps the apostle had dwelt particularly on the miracles with which the gospel had been attested. The miracles performed also in Iconium had doubtless also been heard of in Lystra."

There is nothing in the account to substantiate this. The only thing said is that these men preached the gospel. This man heard, believed, and the door to salvation was opened to him. As a witness to this, the events that will follow are then recorded. The physical healing is only a sign of the more perfect spiritual healing that has occurred.

Life application: When talking to others about Jesus, in noticing their amount of attention based on how their eyes are fixed or their other facial responses, one can then adjust his approach and words, directing them accordingly.

This is what Paul did. He was speaking out the gospel, he noticed a man's facial expressions, and he realized that the man had faith in what was being said. With that, he more fully directed his attention to that man.

Be attentive to such things. If you are not having an effect with your words, redirect them. There is one gospel, but there are many ways to present it. Keep working with your presentation to bring about understanding in your audience. Salvation might be just a few words away for those who are listening.

*Lord God, thank You that You have offered us Jesus Christ as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And more, You have given us the choice to believe or disbelieve. Your greatness is displayed in this. You do not force Yourself upon Your people but appeal to them, asking us to reason with You and do what is right. Thank You for this. Amen.*

**said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.**  
Acts 14:10

In the previous verse, it noted that Paul was observing the cripple as he spoke. As he did, he saw that he had faith to be saved. With that noted, Luke now records that he “said with a loud voice.”

This wasn't just Paul stopping what he was doing and quietly walking over to the cripple and helping him up. There is no hint of physical contact as occurred with the cripple in Acts 3 –

“Then Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’<sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.” Acts 3:6, 7

Rather, Paul spoke the words of faith, “Stand up straight on your feet!” These were words of faith by Paul because he had to possess the faith necessary to proclaim them, being certain that the impulse within him was truly of the Spirit. In his exclamation, a new word to Scripture is introduced, *orthos*. It signifies straight as in upright. A different word *eythos* means straight horizontally.

The word will be seen only one more time, in Hebrews 12:13 where it will be used in a moral sense, referring to “straight paths.” The sense is “paths of moral uprightness.” As for the word itself, one can see the etymological root of our modern words such as orthodox, orthopedic, orthodontist, etc. Paul commands the man to go from his position of being crippled to being fully healed. With that, the narrative records the joyous words, “And he leaped and walked.”

Rather, the second verb is imperfect. He leaped up and was walking. There is the idea of continuance in the words. One can see the high level of excitement as he walked around on legs that had never done so before. It was an entirely new experience for him, and he soaked it in with each new step he took.

Life application: In the healing of this man, there is a hint of the doctrine of justification which occurs when one is saved, meaning by faith through grace. The man had faith to be saved, as the previous verse indicated. He was not vertically “straight” but was helpless and incapable of saving himself.

However, through faith in the message of Jesus, he was made morally straight. The sin, meaning the moral cause of his helpless state, was removed. At that moment, he was

made straight, meaning morally upright. As noted above, the word is used that way in Hebrews 12 –

“Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, <sup>13</sup> and make straight [*orthos*] paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.” Hebrews 12:12, 13

At this time, the man was completely straightened out. Nothing was lacking in his ability to move about freely using feet that had never been used before. But more, the healing wasn't just for a moment. Rather, with the use of the imperfect verb, the action continued. As nothing is recorded elsewhere to suggest that this man later went back to his former state, the imperfect nature of the action continues in our minds to this day.

In type, he is a person who has gone from being completely bound by sin (total depravity) to one who is completely free from sin (morally upright). This is the power of Christ in a person who has accepted the gospel.

Christ's purification isn't just something that partly cures. Rather, the scope of His healing is total. As this is so, we have yet another picture of eternal salvation. The man's sin debt is paid for, he is brought to a state of restoration before God, and henceforth, he is no longer imputed sin (2 Corinthians 5:19). As this is so, the effect is total, it is continuous, and it is permanent.

If you have called on Jesus, believing the gospel, this man's healing is a picture of what happened in your life. The depraved state has been replaced with one of moral purity. As this is so in how God sees you, there are a few things you can do:

1. Be assured that God's perfect work is complete in you. Your salvation was secured, and it remains forever secured. **BE CONFIDENT!**
2. Rejoice always (1 Thessalonians 5:16) that God has saved you and perfectly healed you as you await the day of Christ's coming for you. **REJOICE!**
3. Live in a manner worthy of your salvation. As you are deemed morally upright, live in a morally upright manner. **WALK THE STRAIGHT PATH!**
4. Tell others about the healing and the cleansing power of Christ in your life. You were a cripple from birth and now you are whole. **TELL!**

Do these things, and your life will be way more content than it would otherwise be. You are the redeemed of the Lord. Show it henceforth!

*Lord God, we were broken and useless. And yet, through simple faith in Your gospel, we were saved, healed, and made whole. We can walk in liberty from this day forward. Help us never to return to the law which only brings a curse. Help us to be confident in our salvation, and help us to walk morally right before You each day. And, Lord, help us to open our mouths and tell others about what You have done. Thank You for Jesus who has brought about such a marvelous change in our lives! Amen.*

**Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!”**

Acts 14:11

The wording of the NKJV does not give the proper sense of the verse. It should more closely read, “And the crowds, having seen what Paul did, lifted up their voice, Lycaonially, saying, ‘The gods, having become like men, came down unto us’” (CG). This will be used to evaluate the verse.

In response to Paul’s authoritative words for the cripple at Lystra to stand up straight and walk, the man did just that. With that, the crowds were obviously amazed. As such, Luke records their reaction, saying, “And the crowds, having seen what Paul did.”

Paul was preaching the gospel to a crowd of indeterminate size. However, when people preach, there will be different levels of attention being paid by those in the area. Some may listen intently, some may be curious and listen while fiddling around with their children, and some may just be passing by without paying much attention. Therefore, the actual crowd in the area could have been larger than those closely heeding Paul’s words.

However, with Paul stopping his preaching, calling out to a cripple to be healed, and the cripple suddenly being healed, everyone would stop and observe what was going on. This is especially so because the healed cripple walked and continued walking, as the verb indicated. While doing so, every eye would be on him as he stepped and rejoiced, probably lifting up his voice with each step. In response to this amazing sight, the crowd followed suit, as Luke next notes, saying that they “lifted up their voice, Lycaonially.”

The word translated here as Lycaonially is an adverb. To get the closest sense, this word was coined for the commentary. The point is that Paul was surely speaking in Greek. That can be inferred from the change to the native dialect. As they started shouting in their own language, it revealed a couple of things.

First, it is natural when suddenly amazed or stupefied for someone to return to his natural, default language. This is something seen anywhere one travels. It is how spies were identified during WWII. Those suspected of spying were tested in various ways, including suddenly surprising them to see if they reacted in their native language.

Second, it made it more likely that those who didn't speak Greek would be able to hear and understand the magnificence of what the apostles had to say, thus increasing the state of arousal of all in the area.

For these, and whatever other reasons, it is evident that neither Paul nor Barnabas spoke in the Lycaonian tongue. This can be deduced from the delay in their petitions coming up in verse 14. As such, it explains what Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 14:18, where he says, "I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all."

The tongues Paul refers to were not supernaturally given for him to evangelize wherever he went. Rather, he would normally speak the lingua franca of the empire, Greek. The tongues he refers to in 1 Corinthians are the many languages and dialects that he had learned throughout his life. As for the ongoing narrative, Luke next continues, noting that the people were "saying, 'The gods.'"

Those of the crowds around them had either not heard Paul's speech or they had not paid attention to it. They were caught up in the belief that there were many gods instead of the one God that Paul proclaimed. Because of this, and because of the miracle that had occurred which they assumed had been accomplished by Paul personally, they thought he and Barnabas must be a couple of those many gods, saying, "having become like men."

The notion of gods assuming the form of man was not an uncommon theme in Greek writings, and it is found in many cultures of the world. Even today, the Japanese believe that their emperor is of divine descent. At the end of WWII, Hirohito had to give up his claim to divinity, but this does not mean that his line is not still considered divine.

And more, there are people who follow supposed gods around the world elsewhere today. For example, Kumari, or Kumari Devi, is supposedly the Living Goddess. This is a tradition of worshipping a particular virgin as a manifestation of the divine female energy (Shakti) in Dharmic religious customs. Others claim to be the Messiah, the Mahdi, or other divine manifestations of a god. This has been the case throughout human history. As for those in Lystra, they believed that Paul and Barnabas were gods who, as they said, "came down unto us."

This is another aspect of the divine that is almost universally understood. The gods are above, and those on the earth are below. The symbolism itself permeates Scripture. There is the heavenly, which is above, and there is the earthly below. The gods coming down, then, is a part of the universal conscience of man going all the way back to the Garden of Eden where the Lord was in the garden with Adam and Eve. It is a state that is anticipated to be restored someday –

“And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.’” Revelation 21:3

This is what those in Lystra believed had happened with the coming of Paul and Barnabas. They assumed that the divine gods had come among them, having missed the intent of the apostles’ words that proclaimed the One true God. Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed Christ and they were His sent ones to bring them out of pagan darkness and into His light.

Life application: The account of Paul and Barnabas here in Acts 14 gives a clear indication that the tongues (meaning languages) he speaks of in 1 Corinthians 14 are not supernatural gobbledygook supposedly spoken by charismatics today. Those are false tongues intended to bring glory to self and inclusion in a body that is unsound in its theology.

Those utterings are not “divinely inspired,” nor are they “the tongues of angels.” They are nonsensical gibberish that distract from the beauty of what God has done in the giving of Jesus for all nations, tribes, and tongues of the world. True tongues will always be a known language. At the time of the apostles, some were given divine utterances as a validation of the coming of the Spirit.

With the completion of the Bible, divinely inspired tongues are no longer necessary. The record has been given, the details confirm the word, and we now must learn the language of those we intend to evangelize. Nothing else will do. If you want to know the biblical languages, get to work and study. If you want to be a missionary in a foreign land, you will need to learn the language of the land you go to. Again, nothing else will do.

*Lord God, there is a world full of people who need Jesus. Give us the desire and the ability to get the word out to them in a manner so they can understand that He is the*

*answer to our deepest needs. May we be willing to expend ourselves to further this wonderful gospel message while there is time to do so. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.**

Acts 14:12

In the previous verse, those in Lystra who had seen the miraculous healing of the crippled man had raised their voices and exclaimed that the gods had come down to them in the likeness of men. With that remembered, it now says, “And Barnabas they called Zeus.”

The verb is imperfect and more rightly says, “And they were calling Barnabas Zeus.” They proclaimed him Zeus and kept telling everyone that came around that he was Zeus. The name translated as Zeus is found only here and in the next verse, *Dzis* (vs. 12) and *Dzios* (vs. 13). Strong’s defines the name as, “Zeus, the Greek god of the sky in all its manifestations, corresponding to the Roman Jupiter and to the leading god of the native Lycaonians.”

Along with this name for Barnabas, it next says, “and Paul, Hermes.” This name, *Hermés*, is found only here and in Romans 16:14 when referring to one of the congregants by that name. Strong’s defines the name as, “Hermes, the messenger and herald of the Greek gods, or rather the corresponding Lycaonian deity.” The name may come from the verb *ereó*, to speak or say. He would correspond to the Roman god Mercury. This name is applied to Paul “because he was the chief speaker.”

It is clear that Paul was the main orator. As this is so, these people probably thought that he spoke on behalf of Zeus as a herald might call out a proclamation while the royal figure who issued the proclamation stood by.

Those in Lystra were set in their minds that the gods had truly come among them. Giving them names only helped establish this supposed truth in their minds.

Life application: Simple logic can nail down that there is only one God. It can also tell us that this one God has a plurality within Himself. A monadic “god” would have no ability to reach out beyond himself. These things can be deduced by simply thinking through what are known as the First Principles. Take time to consider them.

They are not intended to be a tool for evangelism. The gospel is that tool. God has made the gospel extremely simple, and we will only taint the message by adding superfluities.

However, it is good to be able to explain complicated matters to those who ask. And so, make yourself aware of these First Principles, consider them, and be ready to defend what is logical and orderly, because God is the author of logic and everything He does is purposeful and with order.

The First Principles as outlined by Dr. Norman Geisler are as follows:

1. Being Is (B is) = The Principle of Existence
2. Being Is Being (B is B) = The Principle of Identity
3. Being Is Not Nonbeing (B is Not Non-B) = The Principle of Noncontradiction
4. Either Being or Nonbeing (Either B or Non-B) = The Principle of the Excluded Middle
5. Nonbeing Cannot Cause Being (Non-B>B) = The Principle of Causality
6. Contingent Being Cannot Cause Contingent Being ( $B^c > B^c$ ) = The Principle of Contingency (or Dependency)
7. Only Necessary Being Can Cause a Contingent Being ( $B^n \text{ ---} > B^c$ ) = The Positive Principle of Modality
8. Necessary Being Cannot Cause A Necessary Being ( $B^n > B^n$ ) = The Negative Principle of Modality
9. Every Contingent Being Is Caused by a Necessary Being ( $B^n \text{ ---} > B^c$ ) = The Principle of Existential Causality
10. Necessary Being Exists ( $B^n$  Exists) = Principle of Existential Necessity
11. Contingent Being Exists ( $B^c$  Exists) = Principle of Existential Contingency
12. Necessary Being Is Similar to Contingent Being(s) It Causes ( $B^n \text{ ---similar ---} > B^c$ ) = Principle of Analogy

Doctor Geisler's First Principles are either undeniable or they are reducible to the undeniable. Hence, any attempt to deny them will validate them. This is evident from an analysis of them –

1. Being Is (B is) = The Principle of Existence

To say “There is no being” is self-refuting. One must exist in order to make the claim.

2. Being Is Being (B is B) = The Principle of Identity

To say “Being isn't being” is self-refuting. One must be a being in order to make a claim about not being a being.

3. Being Is Not Nonbeing (B is Not Non-B) = The Principle of Noncontradiction

If being exists (see Principle #1), then it cannot be non-being. The principle is self-evident and undeniable.



4. Either Being or Nonbeing (Either B or Non-B) = The Principle of the Excluded Middle  
Either I exist (asking the question means I do) and thus I am being, or I do not exist. If I am being, then I am not non-being. The principle is self-evident and undeniable; there is no wiggle room.

5. Nonbeing Cannot Cause Being (Non-B>B) = The Principle of Causality  
Something cannot come from nothing (and we cannot have an infinite regress in matter or being). This is proven by Einstein in his Theory of General Relativity. The principle is undeniable.

6. Contingent Being Cannot Cause Contingent Being ( $B^c > B^c$ ) = The Principle of Contingency (or Dependency)  
This would lead to an infinite regress of causes which is disproved by Relativity – Time, Space, and Matter came into existence simultaneously and are dependent upon each other. The principle is undeniable.

7. Only Necessary Being Can Cause a Contingent Being ( $B^n \text{ ---} > B^c$ ) = The Positive Principle of Modality  
A being that cannot Not exist must, therefore, exist if contingent beings exist. The principle is reducible to the undeniable.

8. Necessary Being Cannot Cause A Necessary Being ( $B^n > B^n$ ) = The Negative Principle of Modality  
The principle is undeniable. Only one Necessary Being can exist. Any being which exists apart from a Necessary Being is contingent and could Not exist. It is self-evident.

9. Every Contingent Being Is Caused by a Necessary Being ( $B^n \text{ ---} > B^c$ ) = The Principle of Existential Causality  
The fact that there are contingent beings (I think, therefore I am, and I am not necessary) necessitates a Necessary Being. We exist, therefore a Being that cannot Not exist must exist. The principle is undeniable in and of itself.

10. Necessary Being Exists ( $B^n$  Exists) = Principle of Existential Necessity  
Contingent beings exist (see next principle); therefore, a Necessary Being must exist. The principle is reducible to the undeniable.

11. Contingent Being Exists ( $B^c$  Exists) = Principle of Existential Contingency

The principle is undeniable. To say “I (a contingent being) don’t exist” is self-refuting. I do exist (Principle 1), which is self-evident.

12. Necessary Being Is Similar to Contingent Being(s) It Causes ( $B^n$  ---similar ---> $B^c$ ) = Principle of Analogy

Nothing can exist which doesn’t reflect the nature of the Necessary Being. To state something doesn’t is self-refuting. The principle is undeniable.

Based on these 12 First Principles “belief in God” is “rationally justifiable.” Further, “belief in God is rationally required.” To not believe in God, then, is both irrational and illogical. Unless these principles, which are undeniable, can be logically denied (please do so if you can!), then there are no “reasons to think that belief in God is not rational.”

Further, there are no “reasons to think [that] belief in God is not required.” In other words, belief in God is both rational and required. The reciprocal must then be true. To deny God is both irrational and illogical. It is a form of arrogance that is revealed in one who cannot face the logical, orderly, and harmonious universe in which we live, and which is clearly guided by an unseen hand. After all, *ex nihilo nihil fit* – out of nothing, nothing. There must have been a Being (who is God) who has brought all things into existence.

However, to bring this to the simplest and most basic of human levels for those who simply want to argue against what is self-evident, all we need to do is look at the reaction of anyone – be it a fully developed believer in “God,” or a self-purported atheist – who faces a major disaster in his life. Let us go with the death of a child. When the child is run over in front of the parent, whether in a Hollywood movie or in real life, the very first reaction from any of them is inevitably and invariably to cry out “O GOD!”

The Necessary Being of these great thinkers of the past has infused even the most depraved soul with a purposed knowledge of Himself deep in the recesses of their minds. Though we can actively shut Him out most of the time, when we face our most primal moments, we turn back to Him for an answer to the horror which we have faced, thus demonstrating that we do, in fact, find Him both rational and required in a world of confusion and chaos.

*Lord God, help us to think rationally about You and what You have done. Our emotions should not be a basis for our faith in You, but a result of it. They should also not drive our theology, but they should result from it, exclaiming, “How great You are, O God, for what You have done for us. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord.” Amen.*

**Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes. Acts 14:13**

In the previous verse, those at Iconium had proclaimed that Barnabas was Zeus and Paul was Hermes. Having been designated gods by the masses, it now says, “Then the priest of Zeus.”

In other words, this is the man who was designated to mediate between the people and their god. He would consult the supposed deity, offer sacrifices to him, lead the form of worship necessary to supposedly appease him, and so on. For those who worshiped Zeus, this would be the most important person in their Zeus-directed spiritual lives. Of him, it next says, “whose temple was in front of their city.”

This is more of an explanation of the Greek than a translation. Also, the tense of the verb is incorrect. Rather, it simply says, “that, being before their city.” Taken together, the two clauses would then read, “Then the priest of Zeus, that, being before the city.” It surely means that the temple itself, or an idol in the image of Zeus, was there before the city and it is where he ministered to Zeus. It is probably a temple though based on the next words, saying that he “brought oxen and garlands to the gates.”

Rather, the verb is an aorist participle, “having brought oxen and garlands to the gate.” He had arrived with his objects of ceremonial worship and sacrifice, and he was ready to use them in honor of these supposed “gods” who had come among them.

As can be seen, if the priest had oxen and garlands, it is likely he had charge of an entire complex dedicated to Zeus, including the necessary altars, lavers, a spot for keeping the instruments of worship, animals, and so forth. Now, believing that his god had come down among them, he is bringing garlands to adorn them and oxen to butcher to them. That is seen in the words that he was “intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.”

The order of the words by the NKJV gives the sense that he intended to sacrifice and was bringing the multitudes along for the ride. Rather, the Greek more closely reads, “with the crowds was desiring to sacrifice.”

In other words, it wasn't just the priest who wanted to sacrifice while the crowds watched. It is the crowds who proclaimed Paul and Barnabas gods. It is they who obviously ran to the priest outside the city to tell him the news. It is they who now, along with the priest, were in a frenzy to sacrifice to these men. The same crowd who had

heard the gospel had forgotten that good news and conjured up another idea in their minds about what had taken place.

Life application: What has occurred at Iconium is not that unusual. People can easily get crossed thoughts in their heads about the message of Jesus. This can happen directly, as it did with Paul and Barnabas, where a person starts attending a church because a preacher's message convicted them. In their minds, they then substitute the message about Jesus with the one who gave the message. The preacher becomes the object of their worship in some fashion.

This can also happen when someone knows that the Bible can change lives, having seen it in others. They then substitute what the Bible says with the King James Bible itself. The book becomes the object of their idolatry. This may sound laughable, but there is an entire cult built around the King James Version of the Bible. The same is true with the Greek Septuagint, the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Scriptures, and so on.

To them, the writings as a text, not what the writings say, take the preeminent spot in the lives of the people. This is also true with denominations, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Roman Catholic Church, the Mormons, and so forth. There is an idolatrous fixation on the communicating body rather than on the One who is supposed to be proclaimed out of the sacred writings.

Remember the simple words of Scripture and keep them in your mind always, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2). He is to be the Source of our lives, worship, prayer, attention, and hopes. In all things, and at all times, let us honor God through the honoring of Jesus Christ our Lord. To the glory of God above all else, let us do this.

*Heavenly Father, forgive us for diverting our eyes from Jesus. We look to the left and to the right in an innumerable number of ways, missing the target when we do. Instead, help us always to fix our eyes on Him. May our hearts be directed toward Him, and may our souls be filled with You because of what You have done through Him. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out Acts 14:14**

In the previous verse, the priest of Zeus brought oxen and garlands to the gate of the city intending to sacrifice with the multitudes. In response to this come Luke's next words,

saying, “But when the apostles.” There is this sudden realization that whatever had been occurring around them was not at all what they had thought.

The people were crying out in the local language and the apostles probably thought they were excited about the gospel message. But now, seeing what is taking place, they have come to the realization that their thinking was entirely incorrect. Instead of calling out for Jesus, the multitudes were crying out for a sacrifice to their “gods” who had come among them. In response to this, the words continue with, “Barnabas and Paul.”

Here, Barnabas is placed first in the account. Paul was speaking and Barnabas was probably more closely paying attention to the events around them. When the realization of what had begun to transpire came to their minds, he probably shouted something out to Paul and started their actions in motion. This is speculation, but it fits with the word order of Luke. Together, when they “heard this, they tore their clothes.”

The word “tore” is an aorist participle. It says, “having torn.” They first did this and then their actions continued. It was an open display to catch the people’s attention, and it is a sign of the greatest distress and even anguish. The first time it is mentioned in Scripture is when the brothers of Joseph had sold him off to the Midianite traders to be taken down to Egypt. Reuben was unaware of it –

“Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph *was* not in the pit; and he tore his clothes. <sup>30</sup> And he returned to his brothers and said, ‘The lad *is* no *more*; and I, where shall I go?’” Genesis 37:29, 30

So great of a mark of distress is this that the high priest of Israel was forbidden to ever do it, for any reason –

“*He who is* the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes.” Leviticus 21:10

The reason for this prohibition is that he was distinguished by the office of high priest. This was elsewhere explicitly noted in the mentioning of the anointing oil that was poured on him. He alone was allowed to wear the garments of the high priest. These two things in particular distinguished him as Israel’s high priest.

As seen, first and foremost he was commanded not to uncover his head. Specifically, this meant that he was not to allow his hair to be loosed, meaning be unkempt. This was a

sign of mourning, and he was never to demonstrate such an attitude. He was, above all, to always be holy to the Lord.

Further, he was not to tear his clothes. To do so, as noted above, was an indication of distress or anguish. As the intercessor between the Lord and the people, his conduct in one of these ways would give either a sense of utter despair to the people, or that he was impugning the Lord's fairness, justice, or ability to control any given situation. It is ironic that this primary command to the high priest of Israel was openly disobeyed in the presence of the incarnate Lord (Jesus) who gave the command –

“And the high priest arose and said to Him, ‘Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?’<sup>63</sup> But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, ‘I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!’

<sup>64</sup> Jesus said to him, ‘*It is as* you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’

<sup>65</sup> Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, ‘He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy!’<sup>66</sup> What do you think?’” Matthew 26:62-66

Jesus was placed under oath by the high priest. Because of the position of the high priest, He was bound by the Law of Moses, which He gave to Israel, to tell the truth. He did, and therefore He remained without guilt in the matter. And yet, the high priest was guilty of violating a precept of the very law that he said Jesus was guilty of violating. There is a lot of irony that runs through the Bible that is truly amazing when such things are put in their proper light.

With this background concerning the tearing of garments, one can see what a great display of grief is occurring with Barnabas and Paul tearing theirs. Whether those in Lystra understood the significance of the act or not could be debated, but a “god” would never have done such a thing. So even if the act was cultural and isolated from the understanding of its full significance, it would still have been comprehended on some level. After this, it says they “ran in among the multitude, crying out.”

The word translated as “ran in” is *eispédaó*. It literally means “to leap in,” or “to spring in.” They were probably standing on something to elevate them. This would allow them to speak to the people while being seen. In their horror at the scene, and after having

openly torn their garments, they jumped into the crowd crying out. What they were crying out will be seen in the next verse.

As a side note, some translations of the word *eispédaó* rather use the prefix *ex* instead of *eis*. Thus, it would say they sprang out into the crowd. If your translation says this, make a mental note of the difference, but the overall intent remains the same because the word is followed in the Greek in either text with the word *eis*. And so, they either sprang in, into the crowd, or they sprang out, into the crowd.

Life application: Making note of the unusual things that occur in the Bible, like the tearing of garments, can be a great exercise in discovering other truths that are recorded there. As noted above, the high priest of Israel violated the very law that he was charged with while charging Jesus with violating the law. Jesus could have called him out on this, but He silently took His trial and the resulting punishments without protest.

This shows us the nature of the love of God for the people of the world. The highest official in Israel, and the one who was to mediate between God and the people, was guilty of violating the very law that he was charged with overseeing and mediating. This is true with every high priest who ever lived under the law. How imperfectly the Law of Moses could satisfy the appeasement of God who is infinitely holy!

And yet, despite these things, even the high priest was given grace each year on the Day of Atonement. And the Day of Atonement was given as an anticipation of the coming of Christ. All the symbolism of the sacrifices of the law looked to His coming. And there He stood, being judged by the very people who were given the charge of that law.

Now think of yourself. You were also to be condemned because of the sin in you. And yet, Jesus took all that you have done wrong upon Himself, if you will just believe. God asks you to acknowledge your sins, admit that you cannot save yourself, and place your trust in Him. In this, you will be justified from all things that the law could never justify a person from. Be pleased to commit your eternal soul to God through Jesus. You will prevail because He has prevailed!

*Lord God, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord who has done all things for us to be reconciled to You. Yes, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the**

**living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them,**  
Acts 14:15

Barnabas and Paul were thoroughly distressed at the events taking place in Lystra. Therefore, they tore their clothes and leaped into the multitude, crying out “and saying, ‘Men, why are you doing these things?’”

It is most likely that the apostles speak their words in the Greek. They had certainly been preaching in Greek, but when the people were so astonished at the miracle they saw, they began speaking in their own language. Barnabas and Paul now attempt to bring them back to their senses by speaking in Greek.

By asking a question rather than making a statement, the effect is even more pronounced. A question asks the mind of the hearer to stop and think. From there, a response is expected. By speaking in Greek, it will beg for a response in Greek. This should begin to quell the excitement of the crowd while the minds adjust to the question and the answer that is provided.

From there, they next say, “We also are men.” In other words, and quite obviously, “We are not gods.” However, the people had assumed that the gods had come down among them in the form of men, and so to further dispel that thinking, the words continue with, “with the same nature as you.”

The word is *homoioipathés*. It is found only here and in James 5:17. It is a compound word coming from *homoios*, meaning resembling, equal to, etc., and from *paschó*, signifying to feel heavy emotion, especially suffering. Together, they give the sense of one who is like in nature and able to go through the same experiences with the same results occurring that would come about in another. The use in James provides the sense of the word –

“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. <sup>18</sup> And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.”

-James 5:17, 18

In telling the people this, they are adamantly stating that they are not gods, nor could they be gods. They are simply men like any other men. They have come from another area, not heaven. With that, they continue, saying, “and preach to you.”



Here, they use the word *euaggelizó*. It is the announcement of the good news. Anyone can come and preach anything on a street corner, but the apostles have come to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. It is He who has come down from heaven, not they. They are simply His sent ones telling others of what has transpired. And more, they tell the people “that you should turn.”

The word means just that. They are on one path, and they are to turn from it. It is not a literal, physical turning, but a figurative one. Their lives are headed in the wrong direction and the apostles have come to redirect them. And what is it that they are to turn from, that is next proclaimed with the words, “from these useless things.”

The obvious meaning is what they were doing right then and there. They were in the process of worshiping the created rather than the Creator. They were inventing a religious expression from their own minds and preparing to bow down to the objects of their invention. They had taken myths from the past concerning the Greek gods and brought them alive in their own minds in the physical manifestation of Barnabas and Paul. But these two apostles were telling them that this was wrong and that they were to turn from that “to the living God.”

“The living God” is an expression that goes back to Deuteronomy 5 where Moses reminded the people of the events at Sinai –

“Now therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God anymore, then we shall die. <sup>26</sup> For who *is there* of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we *have*, and lived? <sup>27</sup> You go near and hear all that the LORD our God may say, and tell us all that the LORD our God says to you, and we will hear and do *it*.”

-Deuteronomy 5:25-27

This term, the living God, continues to be seen throughout the Old Testament and is brought into the New with the proclamation of Peter that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). The words of the apostles are intended to direct the minds of these people to this living God and then explain how He came in the flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ. Those in Thessalonica heard this message and they got it. Paul referred to this when he wrote his first epistle to them. His words mirror what they are trying to teach those at Lystra now –

“For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true

God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”

-1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10

With this understood, the apostles next state that it is this living God “who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them.” This sums up the creation and it dispels the Greek notion of there being many gods, each having power over one part of the creation or another.

For example, they had Uranus, the personification of heaven. Zeus was the king of heaven and earth and of the Olympian gods. Gaia was the personification of the earth. Poseidon was the god of the sea and of water generally. He is also the god of earthquakes and horses. But there was also Pontus, the personification of the sea and the oldest Greek divinity of the waters. These and numerous other gods were supposedly running the show in the various levels of creation and how it is manifested.

On the other hand, the apostles proclaim one true and living God, asking the people to turn from their pagan ways to a full and mature understanding of who He is and of what He has done in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Life application: Though we traditionally don't ascribe deity in the way that those of Lystra did, there are groups of people who worship various gods in the world today. There are those who do believe in Gaia or the god of the sun or other gods. But there are also temptations to deify people, such as politicians, even in our own hearts. We need to not ascribe the all-powerful workings of God to a man. Rather, we elect people to serve over us and to direct us for a temporary time in a fallen world.

We also create gods of money, sex, friendships, or even ease and convenience to relieve the course of our lives. We must be careful to never place anything or anyone to the level of devotion or worship. We should not let things of this creation consume our thoughts or our time in an unhealthy manner. Rather, let us always focus on Jesus, direct our hearts and minds to Him, and serve the living God by honoring the Son. This is what is right and proper. In this, we will have pursued the right and good path that God has set before us.

*Lord God, help us to conduct our lives in a manner that exalts You at all times. May we never find our hope or life's purpose in something that is a part of the created order itself. Instead, may our hopes, our desires, and our constant attention be directed to You*

*alone. Only You can truly satisfy our every need. And so, help us to look to You always. Amen.*

**“who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Acts 14:16**

In the previous verse, Paul and Barnabas spoke against those who were preparing to sacrifice to them, attempting to correct their faulty thinking by saying there is one God, the living God, who made all things. With that, they continue speaking of Him, saying, “who in bygone generations.”

The meaning is that up until this point in time, God had set forth parameters by which something had been the case, but which would no longer be the case. With the introduction of the gospel, a new order and direction had come into play. What was the case before is next explained, saying, “allowed all nations.”

There is an article before the word translated as “nations.” But more, it should say, “the Gentiles,” as it is translated often elsewhere, such as Matthew 6:32 –

“For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.”

The reason it should be translated this way is that the words of the apostles do not include Israel. Rather it is a general statement concerning all of the nations outside of Israel. That is seen in the next words where it says, “to walk in their own ways.”

God allowed the nations to conduct their own affairs under the dispensation of government while Israel was set under different parameters, meaning the dispensation of the law. They were not allowed to walk in their own ways –

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, <sup>16</sup> in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong *your* days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.” Deuteronomy 30:15-18

Verses such as this in Deuteronomy set forth the parameters for the conduct of Israel. However, and more directly to the matter that is being relayed to those at Lystra, the Lord's words to the people of Israel through Ezekiel clearly and unambiguously set Israel apart from how the Lord conducted His affairs with the Gentiles –

“What you have in your mind shall never be, when you say, ‘We will be like the Gentiles, like the families in other countries, serving wood and stone.’”

-Ezekiel 20:32

In God's previous dealings with humanity, there was a complete contrast between how He dealt with the nations and how He dealt with Israel. It is true that God judged the nations for their wicked conduct bringing them to an end as He saw fit, but they were not imputed sin without law. This is explained by Paul in Romans 2:12 where he notes that “as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.”

The law was given to Israel. It was not given to any nation under the heavens except Israel. Thus, Israel's judgment would be greater because of the imputation of sin that came from being under law. With that understood, the apostles will continue to appeal to the crowd, making their defense concerning the nature of God in relation to the people of the world.

Life application: The thoughts that are being explained to these Gentiles by the apostles are quite clear when properly translated and considered. The law, rather than giving freedom from sin, only increases sin. It is true that the nations without the law would perish apart from the law, but the guilt of Israel was far greater than the other nations because they had the law and still did not obediently follow the Lord –

“If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD, <sup>59</sup> then the LORD will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues—great and prolonged plagues—and serious and prolonged sicknesses. <sup>60</sup> Moreover He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you. <sup>61</sup> Also every sickness and every plague, which *is* not written in this Book of the Law, will the LORD bring upon you until you are destroyed. <sup>62</sup> You shall be left few in number, whereas you were as the stars of heaven in multitude, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God. <sup>63</sup> And it shall be, *that* just as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you and

bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess.” Deuteronomy 28:58-63

This was the burden laid upon Israel. They were to be an object lesson to the world that all people, Jews and Gentiles, needed something greater than law. What we all need is grace. That is the grace that comes through the giving of Jesus Christ.

Wanting to go back under the law is as nutty as putting square tires on a bicycle. It is contrary to the smooth and even path set forth by God in Christ. Don't be nutty! Trust in God's grace, live by God's grace, and be set in your mind that you will find that alone sufficient to bring you back to Him. Nothing else will do.

*Lord God, help us to rightly contemplate what You have done in the sending of Jesus. He has accomplished everything necessary to bring us to a right standing before You. What more could we add to that? Help us to trust that Your grace is sufficient and to rest our souls in what You have done through Him. Yes, Lord God, thank You for the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**“Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”**  
Acts 14:17

The apostles are in the process of telling the Gentiles at Lystra about God, the Creator. In the previous verse, they said, “who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.” With that, the words continue, saying, “Nevertheless.”

Despite not giving the Gentiles the revelation of the Law of Moses nor being selected as His covenant people to bring in the Messiah, “He did not leave Himself without witness.”

The Law of Moses, the utterances of the prophets, the use of the Urim and Thummim, and so forth are known as special revelation. God specifically revealed Himself or His intentions through these things. What was revealed in these ways would not have been attained any other way. However, despite not having these things, God still did reveal Himself to the Gentiles in a general way. This general revelation witnesses to the workings of God, testifying to His nature and to the fact that man is accountable to acknowledge Him and seek after Him.

Paul writes of this in Romans 1. It is something that man understands, and yet he suppresses that knowledge, thus bringing wrath upon himself –

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,<sup>19</sup> because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them.<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.”

-Romans 1:18-20

The apostles, appealing to this precept, next explain some of the ways that man can generally understand God and what He must be like, even if in a limited sense, saying, “in that He did good.”

Rather, the verb is a present participle, “doing good.” It isn’t that He did good and then it ended, but it is ongoing even to this day. Within the creation, we know that there is goodness, David testified to this in the 19<sup>th</sup> Psalm by noting that what God has done in creation for the benefit of man is something that reveals God’s glory –

“The heavens declare the glory of God;  
And the firmament shows His handiwork.  
<sup>2</sup> Day unto day utters speech,  
And night unto night reveals knowledge.  
<sup>3</sup> *There is* no speech nor language  
*Where* their voice is not heard.  
<sup>4</sup> Their line has gone out through all the earth,  
And their words to the end of the world.” Psalm 19:1-4

This goodness that David writes about is next explicitly explained by the apostles, saying that He “gave us rain from heaven.”

Again, the verb is a present participle, and the noun is plural, “giving us rains from heaven.” The words are intended to wake the people up to the state of things. It’s not, “Rain came 47 years ago, and we had crops and fruit trees to sustain us.” It is, “The rains come each year at the set time. The calendar returns to the time when the rains were here before and they are here again. The cycle of life is predictable, and what happens provides just what we need to again have what we had before.”

This cycle of life gives evidence of order and harmony. It also gives evidence that God is attending to the needs of His creatures. He has set things in order, and they continuously provide for man’s needs. As such, these rains bring about “fruitful seasons.”

Man exists because God created a world where man can exist. The house was prepared, and then the guests were invited in. Within this world, however, is more than simple sustenance. God could have created a single type of food that would sustain man. Although this would have been acceptable to keep him going, it wouldn't have had the excitement that comes through the stimulating of taste buds.

But God has sent the rains to moisten the land, and then from the land have come an incomprehensible number of delightful things to satisfy man's tastes and yearnings. From the king of all fruit, the durian, to the harvests of the field such as barley, spelt, lentils, and wheat. There is corn, there are potatoes, and there are taro plants.

As one travels throughout the world, different plants are seen – various fruits, various vegetables, and various grains. The world is filled with tastes that excite, delight, and satisfy. All of this gives witness to the wisdom and goodness of God on man's behalf. This is all the more evident because the tastebuds of man can process these many tastes, identifying them and allowing man to rejoice over them. As the apostles note, saying "filling our hearts with food and gladness."

It is reminiscent of the 104<sup>th</sup> Psalm, and it could be those words that were on the minds of the apostles –

"He sends the springs into the valleys;  
They flow among the hills.  
<sup>11</sup> They give drink to every beast of the field;  
The wild donkeys quench their thirst.  
<sup>12</sup> By them the birds of the heavens have their home;  
They sing among the branches.  
<sup>13</sup> He waters the hills from His upper chambers;  
The earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works.  
<sup>14</sup> He causes the grass to grow for the cattle,  
And vegetation for the service of man,  
That he may bring forth food from the earth,  
<sup>15</sup> And wine *that* makes glad the heart of man,  
Oil to make *his* face shine,  
And bread *which* strengthens man's heart." Psalm 104:10-15

Instead of appealing to the law and the prophets (special revelation) as was done while evangelizing the Jews, the apostles appeal to the created order (general revelation) to evangelize the Gentiles. But the result is the same. Both lead to the need for a Messiah

in the lives of man. It is this Christ who has been the focus of Barnabas and Paul's words to lead the Gentiles to a right understanding of God.

Life application: As David noted in the psalm, the creation testifies to the glory of God. But one might say, "But my son got stung by a scorpion and died. How can God who is supposedly good make something that is harmful and bad?"

The question fails to understand the entirety of the biblical narrative. It was not God who brought these things about, but man. What has happened is a result of man's turning from God and the entrance of sin into the world. The supposed "bad" that occurred is simply the lack of a good thing. Man was in Eden. All was good at that time. Only after man disobeyed came the curse upon the land, including thorns and thistles, bee stings and shark bites, killing and adultery, and so forth. This was not the original intent for man. These have come as a result of our failing to rightly fellowship with God.

But God promised that these things would not be permanent. He would send the Messiah to restore all things to perfection. Isaiah prophesies of a time on earth when things will be glorious for man for a thousand years. But beyond that, Revelation goes further and reveals the details of eternal glory for the redeemed of mankind.

Restoration is ahead, and it is available to those who accept God's offering of pardon and renewal that has come in the giving of Jesus Christ for the sin of man. With sin dealt with, and only after it has been fully dealt with in the redemptive process, can man experience the fullness of what God promises for His people. Everything is working toward that time.

We, however, must live through these difficult and trying times. But God is with us in them, and He will get us through them. Trust in this and be thankful to God who has provided the remedy to restore us to idyllic perfection someday. Be patient and wait for it. It will be worth it!

*O God, how grateful we are for the promise of restoration that lies ahead for Your redeemed. And yet, we know that we have the sealing of the Spirit now that guarantees our future redemption. Thank You that we have this sure and firm hope. Thank You, above all, for Jesus Christ who has made this possible. Amen!*

**And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them. Acts 14:18**



The apostles have made their appeal to the multitudes before them at Lystra. They have told them about the nature of God and how He has left a witness of Himself in the created order. Despite their appeals, it next says, “And with these sayings.”

Rather, the Greek reads, “And these things saying.” The word “saying” is a present participle verb, not a noun. They were speaking to the people, and even while they continued to appeal to them to be reasonable in their thinking, “they could scarcely restrain the multitudes.”

One can imagine the scene. Someone thought these were the gods having come down among them. And so, they prepare a sacrifice. Even while the apostles are appealing from reason for them to not do this, the crowds remain unreasonable, totally caught up in their vain imaginations. The thought can be summed up in the idea of being in a darkened state, without knowledge, and then acting on a false view of how things really are.

Because they were in this state, and because they were unwilling to believe the words of the apostles, they could scarcely be restrained “from sacrificing to them.”

The crowds had become so deluded in their own thinking that they were willing to ignore the words of the supposed “gods” that they were about to sacrifice to. Though that thinking is wholly illogical, it is as common among readers of the Bible as it could be.

Life application: The attitude of the people, as noted above, was based on either a lack of information, thus acting on a faulty understanding of what was occurring, or it stemmed from a sort of cognitive dissonance where the people simply went ahead with what they believed, even though they had been clearly shown that it was the wrong avenue to pursue.

To understand these two possibilities, one can use any faulty view of a particular matter. For simplicity’s sake, we can use King James Onlyism to explain what is wrong. King James Onlyism is the misplaced belief that the King James Version of the Bible is the only inspired and authorized version.

Using this to look at the two possibilities, the first can be corrected by gaining the knowledge necessary to correct one’s thinking. Suppose someone is told, “You should only read the King James Version. It is inspired by God and all other versions came as an

attempt to lead people away from God.” As stupid as that sounds, it is what is commonly taught in this cult.

A person could say, “Ok, I have been told this. Now I will check it out to see if it is true.” In checking it out logically and methodically, he finds out that the KJV is riddled with translational errors so that it contains contradictions, incorrect theological presentations, and so forth. The matter has been investigated and found to be false.

The second possibility, that of cognitive dissonance, is actually harder to resolve. A person is told that the King James Version is the only Bible that should be read. He simply trusts what he is told and allows this thinking to become the predominant thought in his mind from week to week. Eventually, he deceives himself into believing this lie that he has never checked out. Finally, he is presented with a list of errors found in the King James Version, including those of Acts 14:18. (There are at least four translational errors in this one verse in the original KJV. The NKJV cleared up two of them.)

In being presented with the error and shown from the original Greek where the error lies, the man’s mind mentally denies what he sees and it conjures up an excuse to suit his thinking, “Well then, the original Greek is wrong. I know God inspired the KJV, and so the text from which it is derived is obviously in error.” As crazy as that sounds, this is the view of those who are in this cult. They deny the reasonable and go forward in their state of delusion.

This is what occurred right before the eyes of Barnabas and Paul. They had provided the truth and the people had failed to check it out with what is logical and reasonable. But more, when they were presented with evidence, from the source of the events that had transpired (meaning the healing of the crippled man by the Lord through the word of the apostles), they simply continued to believe what their own minds had conjured up.

The Bible is showing us, in its own pages, that we are to think. We are to use logic and reason because God is both logical and reasonable. He has endowed these traits in us, and He expects us to use them along with our faith to make a right determination about who He is, what He has done, and what He continues to do in the world around us.

Be aware of how your mind works and be aware of how your own thoughts can deceive you if you are unwilling to accept that it may be wrong. This is an important lesson from Acts 14 that you should consider.

*Lord God, help us to think clearly and reasonably in how we approach You, Your word, and our interpretation of the world around us. We are to be people of faith, but we are not to be people of blind faith. You have revealed Yourself to us through Scripture, so our walk is to be in Your revealed light, not helplessly groping around to find our next step. Thank You for Your word. Now help us to consider it properly, all the days of our lives. Amen.*

**Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul *and* dragged *him* out of the city, supposing him to be dead. Acts 14:19**

In the previous verse, it was seen that the apostles could scarcely restrain the crowds from sacrificing to them, even after appealing to them concerning who God is and who they were in relation to Him. With that noted, the truly fickle nature of the minds of the people is now revealed. Luke begins with, “Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there.”

The meaning of “Antioch” is “Antioch of Pisidia” where they had recently departed. It appears that these Jews had learned that the apostles had left their areas and gone on to Lystra. These people had made a trip there in an attempt to bring the apostle’s message into disrepute. To do this, they had made a journey of about 130 miles for this purpose.

It is rather astonishing to consider, but it is not uncommon. Great pains are commonly taken to destroy the truth of the gospel as is found in Scripture. With the arrival of these Jews noted, it next says, “and having persuaded the multitudes.”

Think of the effectiveness of the lie! Think of the fickleness of the people’s minds! In just the previous verse, the apostles were scarcely able to convince this same multitude that they were not gods, and they were not to be sacrificed to. Now, the false words of the Jews have convinced this same crowd of their own false message.

With that, Luke next records, “they stoned Paul.” Rather, it is an aorist participle, “having stoned Paul.” This action leads to the next. The people were brought to such a frenzy in their thinking by these Jews that they completely rejected the words of the apostles and decided to stone their supposed messenger god Hermes of verse 14:12.

It should be noted that not all of the people were involved in this. As was previously seen, Timothy was from this area. And more, Paul and Silas will return to this area in

Acts 16 to visit “the brethren,” demonstrating that there were other converts there as well.

As for the events now, having stoned Paul, they “dragged *him* out of the city.” The event now became a point of “boasting” by Paul, as is noted in 2 Corinthians 11 –

“Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I. <sup>23</sup> Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool— I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. <sup>24</sup> From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep.” 2 Corinthians 11:22-25

Paul wasn’t really boasting in this, but he was making a point about what he had suffered for the gospel, not being inferior to those who would attempt to destroy his gospel message. As for those in Lystra, they dragged Paul out of the city, “supposing him to be dead.”

Dragging him outside of the city was a way of saying, “This man does not deserve a burial, nor will we allow his corpse to rot in our gates, thus infecting and smelling up our city.” It was an expedient way of disposing of a malefactor. He would be left to rot and be eaten by the beasts dwelling outside the city walls.

As for Paul, there is no reason to assume that he died and was restored to life. The word “supposing,” combined with the words of the next verse shows that they simply made an incorrect assumption. If Paul had died, Luke would have carefully chronicled this as he does elsewhere. Rather, he was stoned, and the people assumed they had finished him off without carefully checking. Such an event is not unknown and many people who were supposed dead have continued to live on.

Life application: The Jews of Antioch and Iconium traveled a long way to destroy the message of the apostles. This may seem unlikely or even improbable, but it is not so. Throughout the history of the church, there have been people who have gone across continents and even over the sea to destroy the gospel message.

This continues today. For every teacher of the true gospel, there are people who will follow in their footsteps bringing along a false message. Missionaries will go to the deepest jungles of the Philippines, risking their lives to tell about the freedom that is in

Christ. Following closely on their heels are the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. They see where a fellowship has been established, and they immediately jump in and supposedly "correct" the thinking of these people.

The importance of having the word, properly teaching the word, and having people continue reading and sharing the word cannot be understated. Satan is using real people with twisted messages to destroy whatever hope he can in humanity. The freedom of the grace found in Christ and His gospel will be quickly converted into bondage, works, and legalism unless those who share the message do their part to warn those they evangelize.

Be sure to tell people that you talk to that they need to get into the word. Offer to help them understand it. Be ready to give of yourself to protect the purity of the gospel.

*Lord God, what a precious message You have given to us. The gospel is a door into eternal fellowship with You. And yet, there are those who would exchange this freedom and restoration with bondage and legalism. Some will even deny the glory of Jesus in order to bring people into a cult of lies. May we be willing to defend the truth of the word and of our Lord Jesus who is revealed in it. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. Acts 14:20**

Note: The NKJV does not accurately translate the verbs, so the sense of action is lost. It should read, "However, the disciples having surrounded him, having arisen he entered into the city. And on the morrow, he departed with Barnabas to Derbe" (CG). This will be used to evaluate the verse.

The previous verse told of the Jews from Antioch and Iconium coming to Lystra. They got the crowd to side against Paul, and they stoned him and dragged him out of the city, supposing he was dead. Now, Luke continues with, "However."

Despite having been stoned, something that would be considered a curse in Israel, the disciples decided to go out to Paul, maybe planning to have a funeral and bury him. Once there, it says, "the disciples having surrounded him."

It is of note that Barnabas is not mentioned at this time. Because of the nature of the situation, he was probably secreted away in the house of one of the disciples.

As for their surrounding him, this seems to indicate just what was supposed. They probably went forth from the city to pray over his dead body and then give him a decent burial. It was a kind gesture demonstrating that they really were converted and cared about the one who had brought them the message of life found in Christ. And yet, despite their certain grief, Luke continues with, “having arisen he entered into the city.”

The lack of detail from Luke surely indicates that Paul was not dead. He may have been knocked out, but Luke seems to purposefully shy away from any supernatural explanation for Paul’s ability to stand. Nothing is said of the disciples praying over him, helping him stand, praising God for a miracle, or any other such thing that Luke is normally so meticulous to include.

If anything, the miracle is in the fact that Paul hadn’t died, that he didn’t need help up, that he could walk into the city, etc. It was as if the rocks that came at him were entirely ineffective in bringing harm upon him. Nothing is said of broken teeth, lumpy bumps on his head, sore muscles, or the like.

It is such a rare thing for Luke to overlook details like this that it causes the mind to wonder what type of force field was set up to protect him. Whatever happened, Paul obviously was fine and was able to sleep soundly in the very city whose occupants had just stoned him hours before. With that noted, the narrative continues with, “And on the morrow, he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.”

Because of the fickle nature of the people, the animosity stirred up by the Jews, and the resulting lack of evangelistic opportunities at that time, heading out of the city seemed to be the prudent thing to do. It will not be long, however, before they return to Lystra.

As for the name Derbe, its meaning is not known. This is the second of three times the city is mentioned. The last will be in Acts 16:1.

Life application: What occurred with Paul was obviously not unexpected. If it was, he and Barnabas would probably have said, “This is getting a bit too rough, let’s head back home.” Instead, they seem to accept that the opposition, even to the point of a stoning, was part of what was to be expected. And more, they saw it as being worth the cost.

To this day, missionaries suffer such calamities in their mission fields. It may be as a direct result of their teaching, or it may be that they are in an area so poor or wild that they are targets simply for the goods they have carried with them. And yet, they press on with their work, considering all such things as loss for the excellence of the

knowledge of Jesus Christ their Lord. They are willing to suffer the loss of all things, counting them as rubbish, for the mere chance to bring others to Christ as well.

Such people are to be commended, treated well when they are on home visit, and prayed for as they continue their work sharing the most important news ever published.

*Lord God, thank You for our missionaries who have gone forth to share the word of Christ with a world that is still living in darkness. Bless their efforts, and may their lives be used for Your glory. Through life or death, they are Yours. So be with them and give them resolve in their hearts and comfort in their minds. Amen.*

**And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, Acts 14:21**

In just the previous verse, it noted that Paul and Barnabas departed to Derbe. This was after Paul had been stoned by the inhabitants of Lystra. Once arriving in Derbe, Luke now records, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city.”

Without timidity because of what happened in the nearby city of Lystra, the men went forth and preached the gospel. Nothing is said of entering a synagogue, so there was probably no synagogue in that town. Beyond that, Luke leaves out any of the finer details and simply notes their going forth and preaching the gospel. And this was not without a positive result as is evidenced in the next words, saying, “and made many disciples.”

Rather, it is a present participle verb, saying, “and having disciplined many.” They not only had converts, but they also stayed long enough to disciple those who had accepted the message of the gospel. It is evident that to these men, sharing the gospel and obtaining converts was only the beginning of the matter. They carefully ensured that those who were converted were disciplined.

If this were not the case, these convert’s new life in Christ would quickly devolve into something other than what the Lord intends for those who are saved. One cannot live according to life in Christ unless he knows what is expected. With that noted, and without telling how long this process took, the narrative continues with the note that “they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.”

In reverse order of their travels as far as Lystra, the apostles returned by way of the three cities they had previously been at. Noting the circumstances in which they left each city will help provide clarity concerning the boldness of their return travels:

Lystra – “Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul *and* dragged *him* out of the city, supposing him to be dead. <sup>20</sup> However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” (Acts 14:19, 20)

Iconium – “But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles. <sup>5</sup> And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them, <sup>6</sup> they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region.” (Acts 14:4-6)

Antioch of Pisidia – “But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. <sup>51</sup> But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium.” (Acts 13:50, 51)

The purpose of their return to these three hostile cities should be obvious, and it will be detailed in the verses ahead. For now, it is simply a remarkable note that the apostles were fearless in their desire to not only evangelize places that had not been previously evangelized but to return to places that were evangelized and yet where there was brutal hostility to their message.

Life application: Wherever you are, if you are a faithful believer, you should consider yourself in a mission field. Quite often, Christians are admitted to the hospital for some life-threatening physical disability or disease, and yet they are willing to share their hope in Christ during such an event. In this, they demonstrate that the physical danger to their lives is not even comparable to the spiritual danger to the lives of those around them.

Believers may sit in a restaurant and tell of the hope they possess, letting the waiter or waitress know that even though they are servants to the table, they have importance. The server may be in a second job just trying to pay the bills, and yet the message of Christ says, “Your spiritual state is more important than even your current lack of money.” Letting him know there is hope beyond the struggles of this life can be of life-changing value for him. And be sure to leave a good tip.



These are but two examples of how you can tell others about Jesus in your daily life. Think of it! You can hand a tract to the checkout clerk at the store. You can explain what Jesus means to you at the paint store while getting a gallon to touch up your house. You can share Jesus any time and with anyone.

Have you told the lawn guy who tends to your house about Jesus? The pest control person? The mailman you see every day? Keep the word on your tongue and be willing to share it. Paul and Barnabas risked their lives to share it and then to reaffirm it in very hostile places. You can do it in a friendly atmosphere!

*Lord God, how grateful we are for the salvation You have granted to us. And that didn't just come about as we walked down the road by ourselves. Rather, we heard the word spoken, we read a tract that someone shared with us, or maybe we were saved after reading the Bible. However we heard the message, it came through the efforts of someone else getting that word to us. Help us to now go and do likewise. Amen.*

**strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”**

Acts 14:22

The previous verse noted the effective preaching of the apostles in Derbe and then their subsequent return to Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe. Of their time in these cities, it notes, “strengthening the souls of the disciples.”

This includes a new word in Scripture, *epistérizó*. The word signifies the process of strengthening the understanding that precedes by building upon it. One might say, “to further support.” There is a knowledge that exists. By building upon that knowledge, with further instruction, the original basis of the faith is strengthened and built upon. The word will be seen three more times, all in Acts. Next, the narrative continues with, “exhorting *them*.”

This is a common word that is widely translated based on the context. It can mean to implore, beseech, encourage, comfort, and so on. It is an action that is close and personal. In this case, the apostles are imploring these disciples “to continue in the faith.”

One must ask, “Is this referring to the faith possessed by the disciple (their trust in the gospel) or is it the faith that is the basis (the substance) of what the apostles taught and in which they then trusted?” The answer is most certainly the latter.

To the apostles, what difference does it make if these disciples have faith if it is not in the faith that has been taught? If they went back and placed their faith in Zeus and Hermes again, that would be a pointless waste of everyone's time. Rather, the term is being used in the objective sense, just as it is elsewhere, such as –

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

-1 Timothy 5:8

Paul wrote those words to Timothy, a person who is certainly included in the words of Acts 14:22 as he is from the area of Derbe and Lystra, as will be seen in Acts 16. That this is an objective faith, and not merely the personal faith of the believer is seen in the next words. In their exhorting these new believers, they explained to them, saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

The Greek more literally reads, “and that through many tribulations *it is* behooving us *to* enter into the kingdom of God.” By placing the words “We must” before “through many tribulations,” the NKJV makes it seem as if the kingdom of God is earned. However, by changing the structure to correct that, the sentence then requires the addition of the word “to” before “enter.” This then almost makes it seem like it is a necessity to experience tribulation before entrance can happen, which is not the case.

The verb translated as “enter” is aorist. It signifies a completed action at a particular time. Before that time, something will necessarily occur as stated by the apostles.

The word translated as “must” is a verb signifying that which is necessary or inevitable. As such it is translated as should, ought, must, and so on. The same general thought is expressed later by Peter –

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 1:6, 7

Peter says, “if need be.” There is a purpose for all things that come upon man. They come according to God's sovereign decisions. In the book of Job, Satan afflicted Job terribly, but he did so only as allowed by the Lord. There was, in fact, a need for this trial in his life, and there is always a reason for that which occurs in our lives as well.

For some, they are temporary. Job was afflicted and then restored. However, others may face a particular affliction (or afflictions) for their entire lifespan. Here in Acts, the apostles are not telling these disciples that they had to earn entrance into the kingdom of God (a necessity), but that tribulations will necessarily occur in this life, which must be lived first, to enter the kingdom of God.

This is certainly the case. Paul and Barnabas were saved, and yet they include themselves in the exhortation as indicated by the first-person pronoun “us.” They were not saying, “We must go through tribulation in order to enter into the kingdom of God,” but surely, “We must inevitably go through tribulations before entering the kingdom of God.”

The difference may seem like splitting hairs to some, but to misunderstand this will lead to the thought of our earning what has already been earned by Christ for us. Both thoughts are expressed by Paul in Colossians 1 –

“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; <sup>10</sup> that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; <sup>11</sup> strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. <sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1:9-14

Paul speaks of longsuffering with joy. It is something that he assumes will necessarily come upon believers. He speaks of the inheritance, something that is granted but not yet received in actuality. And then he speaks of having been delivered and conveyed into the kingdom at the same time. In other words, we are in the kingdom, but we are also awaiting it as an inheritance. This is the substance of the words of the apostles now.

Life application: The apostles now in Acts are speaking to disciples about the kingdom of God. It is something that Paul refers to numerous times as well in his epistles. One cannot have a kingdom without a king. In the case of the kingdom of God, it is referring to that of Jesus Christ.

There are numerous teachings that deny that Christ is our King. This is done in order to justify various heretical doctrines. One of them is hyperdispensationalism. It improperly divides the dispensations that God has set up as He works out the redemptive narrative in human history saying that the church age began with Paul, not with Acts 2, and then saying that the seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation are directed solely to the Jews of the end times.

No such distinction as this exists. Paul and Barnabas have been sent on a missionary journey. There is no set time when they suddenly started the church as this false doctrine would claim. There is simply a slow and gradual diversion from the prime focus being on Jews to it being on Gentiles.

Hyperdispensationalism is so arbitrary and unsound that one could say, "It was on the walk between Lystra and Derbe that the church began." There is not even a breath of a hint of this. Rather, the focus has been on one gospel throughout the entire Acts narrative. The book records the rejection of Jesus by the Jews while at the same time, there has been a wholehearted acceptance of it by many Gentiles.

Eventually, the nation of Israel will no longer be a consideration in the church age, but this does not mean they will not be a consideration later. And it does not mean that those Jews who were saved early on are not a part of the church. Rather, it means exactly the opposite. Someday, the church will be removed from the picture at the rapture. After this occurs, the narrative will again focus on Israel as a nation in their land.

The world is being prepared for this right now. Unfortunately, because of various nutty doctrines, such as hyperdispensationalism and replacement theology, many who are left behind (nonbelievers) will not understand when the events take place. This is too bad, and it could have been avoided if proper doctrine was taught in advance, even if initially rejected by those who heard it.

*Lord God, please help us to learn Your word and understand it properly. Keep us from false teachings and false teachers who are untrained or incorrectly trained in proper theology. Lead us to those who will properly instruct us on what is occurring in the biblical narrative. Please hear our petition according to Your great mercy. Amen.*

**So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14:23**

The previous verse indicated that the apostles strengthened the souls of the disciples, exhorting them that tribulations could be expected. With that, the narrative continues with, “So when they had appointed.”

The word is a new one to Scripture, *cheirotoneó*. It comes from *cheir*, the hand, and *teinó*, to stretch. Thus, it signifies to stretch out the hand for voting. It is an election by popular vote. If this is the intent now, and it certainly seems like the best intent for the word, then it should be translated as “chosen,” rather than “appointed.” However, some scholars argue that such a vote would be unlikely and that the apostles would rather appoint elders, thus stretching out their hands toward them as in the act of commissioning. The only other use of the word is found in 2 Corinthians 8 –

“And we have sent with him the brother whose praise *is* in the gospel throughout all the churches, <sup>19</sup> and not only *that*, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and *to show* your ready mind.” 2 Corinthians 8:18, 19

It does not seem unreasonable that the apostles would allow for a vote. The people would not want such a matter forced on them, and they would know best whose life was the most suited to such an office. Therefore, these elders were either “chosen” or “appointed.” This process was conducted for “elders in every church.”

The word is *presbuteros*, and it is where the word presbyter is derived from. It signifies a mature man who is experienced and has seasoned judgment. In the Bible, the office is always male. The feminine singular, *presbytera*, is not to be found in Scripture nor can the selection, appointment, and ordination of females be inferred from Scripture.

As for the establishment of this office of elder at each church, it was a necessary point that is fleshed out further in the pastoral epistles. A church body needs someone to guide it and to bear the responsibility of keeping the doctrine sound and the people properly trained. Without this, the church would become a rudderless ship, floundering in a sea of whatever strange teachings came along. But with a sound leader, the chances of the church maintaining the right course would be far better. Once these elders were selected it says they, probably meaning both the apostles and the church as a whole, “prayed with fasting.”

This is an obvious thing to occur in such a situation. These people had no idea if they would ever meet again. A church was being left in the care of men who did not have the completed Bible to guide them. Their training in the doctrines of Christ was, by today’s

standards, extremely limited. Such prayer and fasting would have been to acknowledge this and to petition the Lord to favor their efforts into the future. With this then complete, it next says, “they commended them to the Lord.”

The word signifies to commit in a very close and personal way. It is as if the care of these elders is transferring from the apostles directly to the Lord, just as these apostles were set apart to the Lord in Acts 13:2. They are now the leaders who would shepherd or pasture the flocks. Therefore, they would need the hand of the Lord upon them in their duties. Of this word translated as “commended,” Albert Barnes notes the following –

“The word is the same as in Acts 20:32; Luke 23:46. It implies the confiding trust of one who commits what is very precious to him to the keeping of another. So in 2 Timothy 2:2 it is used of the *depositum fidei*, the treasure of truth which Timothy was to commit to faithful men. Here it implies an absolute trust in God as ordering all things for His Church and those who love Him.”

This thought is then intensified by Luke’s added words about their relationship with the Lord, saying, “in whom they had believed.”

The verb is pluperfect or “more than perfect.” These men “had believed,” and this is the state in which they then conducted their lives since that defining moment. These were not just capable men of the town, known for their great administrative or oratory skills. Rather, they were men who had – first and foremost – believed the gospel message. Whatever other skills were noted that made them the ones to be chosen to lead the church, their status as believers was the primary issue for even being considered for leadership. Without this necessary qualification, no other attribute or skill could even be considered.

Life application: Of the prayer and fasting mentioned in this verse, Charles Ellicott states the following –

“It is a legitimate inference, from this recurrence of the act, that Paul and Barnabas recognized it as an established rule or canon of the Church that these two acts should jointly serve as a preparation for the solemn work of appointing men to spiritual functions. Without prayer such an appointment was a mockery, and fasting served to intensify prayer.”

Ellicott finds it a legitimate inference that this should be “an established rule or canon of the Church.” Although that may seem reasonable, it dismisses the fact that Acts is a

descriptive account of what occurred in the establishment of the early church. It is true that one can often see what is normative from such repeated actions in the early church, such as baptism. However, it must be remembered (as noted above) that these men may never again have had anyone to guide them in their leading of this church, and they had no completed Bible for their instruction.

Instead, they were left solely to the care of the Lord and their own heart for Him as to how they would conduct their affairs. Today, we have seminaries set up to train and instruct leaders. We have churches that are already established and that have evaluated potential candidates, for extended periods of time. And, above all, we have the Bible as the rule and guide of our faith.

The instructions for selecting and ordaining elders are set forth there and nothing is said of fasting. As such, this is not to be considered a rule or canon for the church, even if it is a sound practice. With the lengthy process of preparing a person for church leadership, there is nothing wrong with ordaining an elder, praying over him, and then having a large celebration to acknowledge the many years of preparation that have readied him for that day.

If the Bible does not mandate something we cannot add to it without becoming legalistic. With each legalistic addition, there is a greater chance that more legalism is soon to follow. This cannot be tolerated. There is freedom in the church to express itself as a church in the local cultural setting. There is freedom in a church to meet when it wants to meet. There is freedom in a church to celebrate whatever days or events it chooses. In all things, the Lord is to be the primary consideration, everything else is secondary. And the Bible tells us the will of the Lord for the church.

*Lord God, help us to never deviate from what Your word commands. Also, help us to never legalistically add to what Your word does not include. May we use our freedoms in Christ and in the church wisely and to Your glory. Yes, Lord! May all that we do be done to glorify You. Amen.*

**And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. Acts 14:24**

The previous verse told of the selection of elders in every church, commending them to the Lord. From there, they obviously moved on, as it next says, “And after they had passed through Pisidia.”

This is the opposite movement of what occurred in Acts 13 –

“Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.” Acts 13:13, 14

The apostles are certainly retracing their steps and ensuring they would meet any who had converted in order to bolster their faith. That this is the opposite movement is seen in the next words, saying, “they came to Pamphylia.”

As can be seen, this is the same area where John had departed from them quite some time ago. The detail of this stop will be more fully explained in the next verse.

Life application: Though nothing of substance concerning conversion was recorded during their previous trip through Perga in Pamphylia, the apostles are careful to have returned there. It may be that there were no converts or very few converts. However, even if there were no converts, they may still be able to break through to some who were close to conversion on the previous visit.

Even if it was just a stop that needed to be made on the journey home because it was a logical stop on the road, they will take the time to speak out the word, as will be seen next. It is never a futile thing to repeat the gospel to those who have heard it previously and turned it down. Some people have taken years to come to the Lord, hearing the message many times before the thought clicks in their minds.

Be willing to expend yourself in repeating this wonderful message to those who have previously rejected it. One can never tell when the right moment for the heart to be stirred will arise.

*Lord God, others were patient with us as they waited for our hearts to be changed. Some of us may have heard the gospel many times before accepting it. Should we be less willing to share it with others? Rather, help us to be patient and to share this wonderful word of life as much as it is needed to obtain the right response. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.**  
Acts 14:25



The previous verse refers to the apostles passing through Pisidia and coming to Pamphylia. With that short note to cover whatever happened in that area, it next says, “Now when they had preached the word in Perga.”

This is something that they may or may not have done when passing through the first time. In Acts 13, it said –

“Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.” Acts 13:13, 14

Scholars either ignore the reason why this area was not previously evangelized, or the comments are generally in line with the thought that they could tell there was no visible fruit and so they simply ignored the area. But the context of the passage may explain itself. One cannot know if there is “visible fruit” unless he first goes forth and preaches.

The most likely reason is that they did, in fact, preach to the people in Perga, but because there was no synagogue mentioned, it means the only preaching that occurred was to Gentiles. John Mark may have not appreciated this and got bent out of shape and departed. Or it could be that without any synagogue, they decided to go directly to where a known synagogue was, which was in Antioch. If this was so, then maybe the opposite occurred. John Mark may have said, “Why aren’t we preaching here instead of heading off to Antioch?” Not appreciating the situation, he packed up and left.

Either way, it is in Perga that John Mark became disaffected. With that remembered, it now notes definitively that this time they did preach in Perga. With that noted, it next says, “they went down to Attalia.”

Perga was not on the coast. Rather, it was upriver. The location of Attalia is described by Cambridge –

“A seaport of Pamphylia, at the mouth of the river Catarrhactes. ... The Apostles had sailed, as they came from Paphos, directly to Perga, which they reached by coming some way up the river Cestrus. Now they go by land from Perga to the seacoast at Attalia, where there was more likelihood of finding a vessel in which they could sail into Syria.”

Of the city itself, it is next described by Albert Barnes –

“Attalus Philadelphus, king of Pergamus, whose dominions extended from the northwestern corner of Asia Minor to the Sea of Pamphylia, had built this city in a convenient position for commanding the trade of Syria or Egypt. When Alexander the Great passed this way, no such city was in existence; but since the days of the kings of Pergamus, who inherited a fragment of his vast empire, Attalia has always existed and flourished, retaining the name of the monarch who built it. Its ancient site is not now certainly known. ... It is probable that it is the modern Satalia.”

This is the last stop of the missionary journey before returning home. Nothing is recorded of evangelizing here. It may simply have been used as a transit city to return home, at least as far as Luke’s records indicated.

Life application: Nothing is said of evangelization on the way from Perga to Attalia, nor of the time spent in Attalia. Nothing will be said of the trip from Attalia back to their home station. But this does not mean that the apostles didn’t preach to the people. Just as with Perga where nothing was recorded in Acts 13, to say that no evangelization took place is what is known as an argument from silence.

This is a logical fallacy where the failure of the source (in this case, Luke) to mention a given fact, or facts, becomes the ground for an inference. Such an inference is then turned into a conclusion that the supposed fact is untrue, or the supposed event never occurred.

In this case, the fallacy would be, “Because nothing is spoken of concerning evangelization of the people in Attalia and on the ship back home, the apostles failed to tell any of those people about Jesus.” The only facts we have are what Luke has recorded. Paul and Barnabas may have had many converts in Attalia, and it may be that the entire ship converted to Christianity on the way home. Luke is recording what the Holy Spirit inspired him to write. That is what we need. Everything else is silent and we cannot add to the historical record by making unfounded claims either way.

The point is that just because nothing is recorded concerning such things, we cannot use that silence to say, “I don’t need to tell people about Jesus at a particular time because Paul and Barnabas decided to not speak about Jesus at a particular time.”

We need to be willing to speak about Jesus all the time. Whether on a ship, on a bus, or at a stop awaiting the next part of the journey, we should look for an opportunity to open our mouths and speak. Let us do so, to the glory of God who has given us mouths to speak with. We are the redeemed of the Lord. Let us speak out the good news!

*Most glorious Heavenly Father, we have been saved by the precious blood of Christ. May we not fail to tell others of this wonderful gift of healing and hope. Give us hearts to speak forth Your saving gospel message to any and all that we encounter on the path of life. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. Acts 14:26**

The previous verse told of the apostles preaching in Perga. That was followed by their going down to Attalia, a port on the coast. With that noted, it next says, “From there they sailed to Antioch.”

This is Syrian Antioch from which the apostles first departed in Acts 13:3. Unless this is a note of completion that ignores various stops the ship may have made, this is a direct trip even up the river to where Antioch was. It is possible the ship made stops or even completed its journey at Selucia and then the apostles traveled up the river to Antioch. The details of any such traveling are simply being left out of the record. No matter what, the record of the missionary trip is complete with these words.

With the journey home behind them, it next says that this is “where they had been commended to the grace of God.”

That was recorded in Acts 13:3 –

“Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.”

Luke is reminding the reader that everything recorded is for the purpose of revealing what had occurred since that time and that it was a journey that these men were specifically commissioned to accomplish. They had fulfilled their assignment as witnessed by his written record. From there, it next says, “for the work.”

These words are based upon what is stated in Acts 13:2 –

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”

The work they had participated in was an assignment first directed by the Holy Spirit. As God knows the end from the beginning, and as they were directed by the Holy Spirit, it can also be deduced that they were led by the Holy Spirit. Even the departure of John

Mark from them is to be considered as an important point purposefully directed by the Holy Spirit to later be included in the Acts narrative by Luke.

It is this journey “which they had completed.” Their actions bear witness to their completion of what was directed. The recorded aspect of it, which is now included in the Bible, is a sufficient witness to that fact. With this note of completion, Barnabas is no longer to be considered an apostle. He was an apostle, a sent one, from Antioch, but only Paul was a sent one from Jesus. With this thought, the next verse will continue with the post-missionary journey details.

Life application: As noted in the previous verse, there are many things that may have occurred that are not recorded in the narrative by Luke. A preacher or teacher might attempt to justify divine protection of his missionaries by saying, “Do you see how God protected these two men throughout the entire journey? Neither one ever got sick on the entire trip. God will divinely protect you as well.”

This is both an argument from silence and an illogical conclusion concerning his own missionaries’ coming travels. For all we know, Barnabas was prone to sea sickness and was sick for the entire journey anytime he was on a ship. Paul may have eaten something bad in Iconium and been in bed for five days. We have no idea about such things, and we should never come to faulty conclusions based on what is not said.

There are times when what is not said is telling, but those things must be logical inferences that are in accord with the surrounding text. We must always be very careful to not insert fallacious thinking into the Bible. Rather we should only deduce what is right and logical. As an example, it says this in Deuteronomy 16:11 –

“You shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who *is* within your gates, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who *are* among you, at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide.”

It is notable that the wife is missing from the list. Moses says you, your son, your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, but nothing is said of the wife.

What seems obvious is that this is not saying that the wives were to stay home and take care of the pets. Rather, it is a way of acknowledging her importance within the

household. The words take the reader back to the very beginning of man's time on earth—

“And Adam said:

‘This *is* now bone of my bones

And flesh of my flesh;

She shall be called Woman,

Because she was taken out of Man.’

<sup>24</sup> Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Genesis 2:23, 24

Rather than being an oversight by Moses, it appears he is reiterating the fact that the man and his wife are one. In mentioning him, she is implicitly mentioned as well. Therefore, there is no reason to include her in the list. It would be unthinkable for him to observe the feast without her. Thus, all were to attend, including the unstated wife. This is a logical deduction that is supported by the previous biblical narrative, as well as other such passages.

Let us always be attentive to what the word is saying, what the word is not saying, and what can be logically deduced from the omissions and what cannot be. The word is too important to manipulate or twist for our own agendas or perverse desires.

*Exalted Heavenly Father, we have a pure and precious word that has been granted to us to lead our lives and direct our feet. Help us to treat it with the utmost care and never twist what is presented into something other than what You intend for us to see. Help us to be responsible in this manner. Amen.*

**Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.**

Acts 14:27

In the previous verse, Paul and Barnabas had left Attalia and returned to Antioch from where they had begun their missionary journey. Having now arrived, it says, “Now when they had come and gathered the church together.”

Luke omits any details between arriving on the ship and the gathering of the church. The effect is to show the importance of the event and to give a sense of immediacy, even if the two arrived on a Wednesday and the church didn't meet until Saturday or Sunday. In this, he is highlighting the mission and not the life of the missionaries.

It is this same congregation that had sent them forth with fasting, prayers, and the laying on of hands in Acts 13:2, 3. It is unknown if letters were sent back to the church or if this is the first time any word concerning them had come since John's departure in Acts 13:13. With their return, however, there would be excitement to hear what the Lord had done through them, knowing that it was the Holy Spirit who originally called for them to be sent.

Once the church was gathered together, it next says, "they reported all that God had done with them." Rather, the verb is imperfect, saying, "they were reporting all that God had done with them." They probably started right from the beginning as they arrived downriver at Selucia and just kept talking the audience through the entire journey.

Of certain note would be the animosity of the Jews along the way concerning the message of Jesus being the Messiah. And yet, there was also another remarkable detail that would hopefully bring great encouragement to the church, but which may also have brought a measure of concern or even jealousy to a portion of it. That begins to be seen in the words, "and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles."

There is no article before "door." It more closely reads, "and that He had opened to the Gentiles *a door of faith.*" The meaning is obvious. Unlike the Jews who were required to circumcise, even before the introduction of the Law of Moses, the Gentiles were not given such a requirement. This then once again set Israel's circumcision apart as a cultural identity, but not a requirement for salvation. It is the state in which Abraham was admitted into fellowship with God in Genesis 15, before he was circumcised –

"And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.'<sup>5</sup> Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.' And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'<sup>6</sup> And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness."

-Genesis 15:4-6

Circumcision was mandated for this covenant group of people years later in Genesis 17. Eventually, it was mandated under the Law of Moses. But the Gentiles had now been admitted apart from circumcision, and thus, apart from the Law of Moses and without the cultural identifier of physical circumcision.

In addition to this, the term “a door of faith to the Gentiles” brings in an entirely new dynamic that has not yet been seen, demonstrating that the missionary trip was not “to the Gentiles” in the minds of the church, only in the mind of God. The evangelism of Paul and Barnabas never noted Gentiles on the island of Cyprus. Not until Sergius Paulus called for them to speak was any contact with the Gentiles noted. Rather, only preaching in the synagogues was.

This was such a remarkable event that it was deduced at that time that this is when Saul’s name was changed in the narrative to Paul. The purpose of his apostleship was apparently becoming clear to him.

Upon arriving on the mainland, it wasn’t until Acts 13:46 that Paul and Barnabas exclaimed to the Jews, “but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.” It can be seen that this was the defining transitional moment when it was realized what God was doing and why these two had been sent. A door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles and these men were there to usher them through it via their preaching.

This will become perfectly evident as Chapter 15 begins and the word of these events reaches the ears of the Judaizers. What occurs there and after will become the basis for the writing of the book of Galatians.

Of the term “door of faith,” Charles Ellicott notes the following –

“This is noticeable as the first occurrence, as far as the chronological order of the books of the New Testament is concerned, of a very characteristic phrase. It would seem to have been a favourite metaphor of St. Paul’s (comp. 1Corinthians 16:1; 2Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3), and comes in here, probably, as a fragment from his speech. From this point of view it is interesting to note the recurrence of the phrase in Revelation 3:8, both St. Paul and St. John, representing as they did different sections of the Church (Galatians 2:9), agreeing in the thought that the door of the Father’s house was now opened wider than it had ever been before, and that no man might shut it.”

His words are well stated and they, again, demonstrate that the door is faith and that it is referring not to Jews of the end times. Rather, it is an offering to Jews and Gentiles during this dispensation known as the church age. The Law is fulfilled in Christ, and thus works are excluded. It is faith in the accomplished work of Jesus Christ alone that allows entrance into the kingdom.

Life application: The transition of stewardship of the faith is being made from Jewish leadership to Gentile leadership in these chapters of Acts. Eventually, that transfer will be complete and the nation of Israel will be dispersed and without any standing in what God is doing in the redemptive narrative.

And yet, Jews are not excluded from what He is doing. Rather, they are on the same level as the Gentiles, as is evidenced in verses such as Galatians 3:28. Despite this, it does not mean that God is through with Israel as a nation. Rather, Paul explains that issue in Romans 9-11. As a very simple example of what is occurring, we could say that the Hatfield family is given the stewardship of an apple orchard. For a McCoy to be a part of the farm, he needs to join the Hatfield family.

However, the Hatfields eventually have their stewardship taken away from them and it is transferred to the McCoy family, but with a proviso that the Hatfields will again, someday in the unknown future, be granted the stewardship again. In the meantime, any Hatfields – still remaining Hatfields – may enjoy partaking in the stewardship transferred to the McCoys if the preconditions for inclusion are met.

This is what is happening now in the transition of stewardship from Jew to Gentile in Acts. In the past, Gentiles who wanted to participate in what God was doing under the law had to join Israel, becoming a part of them. Under the new stewardship, the commonwealth remains the same, but the stewardship is granted to a new entity. Those of Israel who do not accept the current provisions are not a part of that commonwealth, even though they are of Israel the nation. Those of the Gentiles who accept the provisions are included in the commonwealth even though they are not a part of Israel the nation.

Keep the boxes straight, understand that God is in charge, and accept that His choices in these matters are what is important. What we like or do not like is wholly irrelevant. This is God's world, it is His offering of salvation, and we are obligated to what He is doing at any given time in the process of living through His dispensations.

*Lord God, we are so thankful to You for allowing us to be a part of what You are doing in the world. You have sent Jesus Christ to save us from this life of corruption and death, giving us a new hope that we shall dwell in Your presence for all eternity. Thank You for what You have done for us, O God. Amen.*

**So they stayed there a long time with the disciples. Acts 14:28**



The previous verse detailed the first coming together of the church after the return of the apostles. They gave a report of all that God had done with them, also noting that He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. With that remembered, it next says, "So they stayed there."

This refers to Paul and Barnabas. After giving their report, they remained in Antioch. With that understood, the next words are as debated as where government officials think the people's money should be spent. Luke records that they stayed there "a long time."

The Greek reads, "no little time." The indefinite nature of the words leave much to be guessed at. Without knowing how long the missionary journey was, there is no way to know how long the stay after it could have been. Some think this stay was a year, others say two or three or even five. Some say the missionary journey was probably two years. Others say the methodical nature of Paul would mean it was as much as four.

As usual, Barnes provide his thoughts, they are as acceptable as any other, remembering that the duration of the missionary journey would change the length of the stay now recorded –

"If the transactions recorded in this chapter occurred, as is supposed, about 45 a.d. or 46 a.d., and the council at Jerusalem assembled 51 a.d. or 53 a.d., as is supposed, then here is an interval of from five to eight years in which we have no account of them. Where they were, or what was their employment in this interval, the sacred historian has not informed us. It is certain, however, that Paul made several journeys of which we have no particular record in the New Testament, and it is possible that some of those journeys occurred during this interval. Thus, he preached the gospel as far as Illyricum, Romans 15:19. And in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, there is an account of trials and persecutions, of many of which we have no distinct record, and which might have occurred during this interval." Albert Barnes

No matter what, they didn't just stay in Antioch and pick flowers. Rather, the verse and the chapter end with the words, "with the disciples."

This obviously could allow for Barnes' thoughts because it might be that one was with the disciples constantly while another traveled, or they each came and went as they decided. Nothing is specifically stated and so those matters cannot be known. However, those in Antioch were instructed and built up in the Lord. But what is more than probable is that during this time many Gentiles began to join the church.

The precedent had been set on the missionary journey and it meant that Gentiles could come in, joining the church, and not even need to be circumcised. This thought then will establish the basis for the opening verses of Chapter 15.

Life application: We cannot be dogmatic about what is left unstated. Inferences can be made, but unless there are set parameters in the surrounding text, our guesses are only that. In the case of the indeterminate time mentioned in this verse, we must not be overly dogmatic about our viewpoint. This is true with other points of doctrine as well.

There is a set and specific amount of information to derive our theology from. Quite often inferences must be made, and that is fine. And more, the more we know the rest of the word, the better our inferences might be. But if they cannot be pinned down exactly, we should always note that what we state is inferred. In this, we will be responsibly conveying the truth of the matter to those we instruct.

In all things, let us not purposefully twist or distort what Scripture says to form an opinion. The word is too precious to allow that to occur. Eventually, all things will be revealed. Until that day, certain things will remain undetermined.

*Lord God, thank You for the chance to contemplate things that are not explicitly stated in Your word. We can form conclusions and modify them as we consider other things that come to mind. There is no end to the chance to grow in this precious word because of this. It is alive and it feeds our minds. The more we study it, the more our minds will grow in the knowledge of who You are and of what You are telling us. Thank You for this precious word! Amen.*

## CHAPTER 15

**And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Acts 15:1**

Acts 14 ended with a note that Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch with the disciples for a long time. What becomes certain now at the start of Chapter 15 is that their doctrine was noticed by the Judaizers and spoken against. Gentiles had begun to enter the church and yet remained uncircumcised. That is evident by noting Luke’s opening words of the chapter which begin with, “And certain men.”

The word “men” is inserted. They are identified by an indefinite masculine pronoun. It could rightly be translated, “And some.” Inserting men is fine because the pronoun is masculine, but Luke is certainly being imprecise, demonstrating that these were people with no standing or authority to do what they will do. He does not identify them as “brethren,” nor does he describe any ranking or authority as he did in Acts 6:7 (for example) when he said –

“Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

What is meant by this is that these priests, the stewards of the Law of Moses, had placed themselves under a new authority. They had gone from Moses to Christ. As for these men now being mentioned by Luke, no names are given, implying that they are just a group of men with obviously no authority to direct matters. This is in contrast to Paul and Barnabas who are called apostles in Acts 14:14, even if Barnabas’ apostleship was temporary and under the authority of the church at Antioch. Of these unnamed men, Luke says that they “came down from Judea.”

Rather, the verb is an aorist participle, “having come down from Judea.” Because of the use of the participle, one thought will lead to the next. For now, it is noticeable that it doesn’t say that they were from Jerusalem, of the Levites, of the priests, or sent by the apostles. There is no hint of any authority at all, whether in the church or of the leadership of Israel. Instead, these men – seemingly converted to Christianity – were merely from Judea without any recognizable qualifications. And even if they once had standing, such as the priests mentioned above from Acts 6, they have no recognizable standing with the church. All that is given is that they have come from Judea. And yet Luke next says, “and taught the brethren.”

Imagine someone coming from Washington DC, a nobody with no authority at all, who knocks on your door and says, “I am here from Washington DC to explain to you why you cannot possess a gun.” Will you listen to him? What authority does he actually possess? This is what Luke is trying to get his audience to think about by the way he has structured his words.

Some people, who obviously have no authority at all, have been introduced into the narrative. Luke has not even called them “brothers” as is so often the case in Acts. The only thing that identifies them is that they are from Judea. And yet, they are now teaching a congregation without recognizable authority. And what do they say? Luke next records their words as, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Rather, the Greek more poignantly states the matter using negatives – “If you are not circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you are not able to be saved.” There is a mark of total exclusion in their words. And more, they don’t simply say, “If you are not circumcised, you cannot be saved.” Rather, they say, “According to the custom of Moses.”

This is not an identifier with Abraham as the father of the Hebrew people as recorded in Genesis 17. Rather, it is an identifier with the Law of Moses received at Mount Sinai. In other words, these few words, spoken by these anti-Christian Judaizers, heap the entire Law of Moses, with all of its many rules and regulations, directly on the shoulders of the Gentile believers.

With no standing other than where they were from, these unnamed have thrown the congregation into an uproar. It is true that Moses was told by the Lord before the introduction of the law that those who participated in the Passover were to be circumcised, as is recorded in Exodus 12:44-48. However, that was later codified into the law itself in Leviticus 12:3 for all born under the law. Thus, this supposed teaching of these unidentified men has set aside the grace of Christ and brought the Law of Moses back to the main center of attention.

Life application: In the example above concerning someone coming from Washington DC, it is obvious that the place where he came from does not give him any authority at all. He is a nobody that has no power. And yet, because of where he is from, you might say to yourself, “I’d better listen to this guy. He is from D.C. and so he must know what he is talking about.”

Now transfer that exact same thought to your life in Christ and see if you, or someone you know, are guilty of making the same error in the past. Have you ever turned on the TV or the internet and seen someone who is from Israel (or simply some Jew) tell you that you shouldn't be eating pork or that you must support Israel in order to be saved? If not, this may sound ridiculous to you, but both of these teachings are heard among the Judaizers of today.

Maybe you heard from someone who is in the Seventh Day Adventists say that unless you observe the Sabbath you cannot be saved. Have you been told by someone in the Church of Christ that you must be baptized in the Church of Christ in order to be saved? Have you ever heard that unless you are under the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, you can't be saved? Each of these is a claim made by people today.

The list goes on and on of people claiming what saves and that if you don't do what they tell you then you cannot be saved. Who are these people? What authority do they possess? The only source we have for such matters today is the Bible. It is the authority by which God has spoken out these matters and there is no other. This is because it is the word of the Lord through His chosen prophets, apostles, and authors.

If the word does not agree with what they say, then they are false teachers. And this goes directly to the heart of whether extra-biblical revelation is still given today. Because if it is, then the Bible is not the final source for such matters, and we are left in a sea of absolute chaos.

The Seventh Day Adventists believe that Ellen G White, their founder, received extra-biblical revelation. Likewise, Mormonism makes the same claim concerning Joseph Smith. The Roman Catholic Church believes it has authority over the word and it accepts that extra-biblical revelation is valid. People believe Jesus speaks to them in dreams and visions. If we accept one word of extra-biblical revelation, then we must accept them all because there is no standard to determine which is true and which isn't, because the authority of the Bible is not absolute.

Think these things through. Either God has spoken and that is it, or we have no sure word by which to guide our lives in Christ. Be grounded in the word, reject anyone who teaches contrary to what the word says, and ignore anyone who claims a dream or vision from God. People like that have been around since the very beginning of the church and they are still out there today. The challenge of Acts 15:1 is the first main internal challenge the church faced, and the church is still facing it to this day.

*Lord God, how evident it is that we need to know what the word says. Without that, we are possibly placing ourselves under the whims of anyone who claims some type of authority that is not granted by You alone. Your word is truly to be our guide, and so may we be competent in our pursuit of knowing it more from day to day. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. Acts 15:2**

The previous verse told of the Judaizers coming to Antioch and telling the brethren that unless they were circumcised, they could not be saved. With that remembered, it next says, “Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them.”

The first word, translated as dissension, *stasis*, was used concerning Barabbas in Luke 23:19 and translated as insurrection or rebellion. It is the etymological root of our current word, *stasis*, which is used at times to refer to a civil war. The sides were drawn up and there was no agreement to be found between them. Paul will say to the Galatians these words –

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? <sup>2</sup> This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? <sup>4</sup> Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain?” Galatians 3:1-4

The answer to the question for the Galatians to consider was obvious. They had heard the gospel, they had received the Spirit, and they were saved. Why would they need to then be circumcised if God had accepted them as they were? But as would happen later in Galatia, this is what the Judaizers were trying to get those believing Gentiles in Antioch to do. Obviously, Paul and Barnabas would not budge an inch. The Spirit had accepted the Gentiles as they were. Unless the Spirit was fickle and the giving of the Spirit was not a sound guarantee, there was nothing necessary to be added to His work.

The next word, translated as dispute, *zétésis*, is translated elsewhere as controversy, speculation, and so on. It signifies “a searching.” The YLT translates it as disputation. It is as if they had set forth a formal debate in order to settle the matter. They presented

why they believed what they believed in order to convince others. But a resolution was not forthcoming. Hence, “they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem.”

This is the logical avenue to take in this case. There was an unresolved dispute, the apostles had been set forth as those who were to speak on behalf of the Lord, and so the matter would rightly be elevated to them. Paul, even though appointed an apostle, would certainly have agreed to this because he knew that:

1. God is not fickle. He had called Paul to this ministry and had given him sufficient instruction to know that what he was doing was right and appropriate. As this is so, He would not suddenly call out Paul’s stand as incorrect and requiring amendment.
2. The Lord had approved of the actions of Paul and Barnabas through “signs and wonders” (Acts 14:3, etc.). Thus, He would certainly be among the apostles to support the work that had already begun and which was approved by Him.
3. At whatever point in the timeline it had actually occurred, the conversion of Cornelius and those with him was prior to this time. The Spirit had come down upon those Gentiles without any hint of law observance. Peter and those with him were witnesses to this fact and he would have to acknowledge this, thus making a logical and indisputable defense for Paul’s position.

Along with this, Albert Barnes provides further reasons for why these Judaizers would also surely be happy to have a trial in Jerusalem. He says –

-----

- (1) That Jerusalem would be regarded by them as the source of authority in the Christian church, as it had been among the Jews.
- (2) most of the apostles and the most experienced Christians were there. They had listened to the instructions of Christ himself; had been long in the church; and were supposed to be better acquainted with its design and its laws.
- (3) those who came from Judea would not be likely to acknowledge the authority of Paul as an apostle: the authority of those at Jerusalem they would recognize.
- (4) they might have had a very confident expectation that the decision there would be in their favor. The question had not been agitated there. They had all been Jews, and it is certain that they continued as yet to attend in the temple service, and to conform to the Jewish customs. They might have expected, therefore, with great confidence, that the

decision would be in their favor, and they were willing to refer it to those who resided at Jerusalem.

-----  
These points are validated by the next words, which note that they were going up to Jerusalem “to the apostles and elders.”

If the Lord had established a New Covenant and there was a new direction in the redemptive events taking place among the people, it would be appropriate to go to the body that was designated by Him to conduct the affairs of that body. There would be no need to go to the stewards of the Mosaic Covenant because they had missed the train on what God was doing. And so, it was to the body who were assigned to the affairs of the New Covenant that the men went up to Jerusalem “about this question.”

The word translated as question is *zétéma*. It is found four times, only in Acts. It is from the same root as the word translated above as dispute. This refers to the underlying idea behind the dispute. It is intended to probe the principle at stake. In order to obtain a resolution, the matter will be fully explored and contemplated.

Life application: God provided revelation to the people under the law as He saw fit. An explanation of this was given as the first words of Hebrews were penned –

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*.” Hebrews 1:1, 2

This was needed during the time before and during the law. The reason for this is that the Old Testament was not yet complete. Prophets spoke to instruct the people. But the words of many of them were recorded. Eventually, the Old Testament was complete and the prophetic word ceased. The time after the final words of the Old Testament were received is known as the intertestamental period.

With this body of literature complete, the people waited for the Messiah. God again spoke to the people at the time of the coming of John the Baptist. However, the record of that is found not in the Old Testament, but rather the New. The Old Testament stood as its own witness and it was sealed as complete.

With the coming of Christ and the completion of His work, God moved among the people once again. This, as in the completion of the Old Testament, would eventually end. With the completion of the New Testament, there is – like during the



intertestamental period – no longer a need for the prophetic word in visions, dreams, or other various ways.

And so, we must each question where we will set our doctrine. Is it in the completed canon of Scripture or are we still seeking out more information? The surest way to run off course is to deviate from what God has conveyed to us in His word. Israel continuously failed to discover this, and the church in large part has failed to pay heed. Be content that God has provided all we need to rightly conduct our affairs and know what He expects as He has detailed in Scripture. Hold fast to the word! The apostles have spoken and the word is compiled.

*O God, it is such a blessing to our souls to know that Your word is written and that it is sufficient for us to know what You expect of us. We can easily ignore those who claim a word from You today, knowing that we have THE WORD from You. With this knowledge, we are sure to be kept from going astray. Thank You for this precious gift. Amen.*

**So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. Acts 15:3**

Based on the dispute that had arisen between the Judaizers and Paul and Barnabas, it was determined that Paul and Barnabas, with certain others, should go up to Jerusalem to obtain a resolution to the matter. With that, it now says, “So, being sent on their way by the church.”

The Greek is more precise, saying, “They, indeed, therefore, having been sent forward by the church.” Here, the word *propempó* is introduced. It carries one of two meanings. The first is sending forward with necessities for the journey included. All the provisions would be supplied for the travel. The second meaning is to accompany the traveler part or all of the way.

It is debated which is intended here, and the intent might be both. It would be unheard of to send them without supplies for the journey. At the same time, it would be a mark of respect to have a delegation accompany them as they traveled. This was seen as far back as Genesis 18:16 –

“Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way.”

With this, it next says, “they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria.” Rather, the verb is imperfect. It says, “they were passing through.” They didn’t just hurriedly pass through, but took their time, ensuring that they would stop along the way and greet the believers who lived in those areas. As they went, they had great news to share with them. They were “describing the conversion of the Gentiles.”

In this, the second and last use of *ekdiégeomai* is found. The first was in Acts 13:41 –

“Behold, you despisers,  
Marvel and perish!  
For I work a work in your days,  
A work which you will by no means believe,  
Though one were to declare it to you.”

The word signifies to completely recount a matter. It is the strongest and clearest declaration of the events that have occurred. With this recounting of what had taken place among the Gentiles, it next says, “and they caused great joy to all the brethren.”

Again, the verb is imperfect, “and they were causing great joy.” Each place they went and with each recounting that was made, joy was springing forth from those who heard. Those in Phoenicia were first evangelized by Stephen, as recorded in Acts 11 –

“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.” Acts 11:19

Those in Samaria were noted in Acts 8, beginning with –

“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. <sup>5</sup> Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. <sup>6</sup> And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. <sup>7</sup> For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. <sup>8</sup> And there was great joy in that city.” Acts 8:4-8

It is these groups, previously established by those coming from Jerusalem and Judea as they traveled, that are now being told the good news that the command of Jesus from Acts 1:8 was being brought about –

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Life application: Even today, the custom of attending those heading out on a journey continues. We will often go along with travelers to the airport, train depot, or bus station. If they are taking a ship, we may take them to the port and wave them off as they sail away.

This is something we should especially consider doing for those who are going off as missionaries. Their last moments before leaving the friendly land of their departure will be remembered while they are gone, and it will be a note of encouragement while they are in their mission field.

And be sure to write to them from time to time, letting them know they are appreciated. They are doing a job that was directed by the Lord over two thousand years ago, helping bring the command to its conclusion. The locations where missionaries go can be fraught with difficulties and perils, so remember them, pray for them, and extend kind words to them from time to time.

*Lord God, how good it is to be a small part in helping the missionaries who are doing Your labors in the world today. We pray for them and ask that Your hand of grace and blessing will be upon them as they continue the jobs set before them. Thank You for our missionaries. Amen.*

**And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.**  
Acts 15:4

In the previous verse, Paul and Barnabas were on their way up to Jerusalem passing through Phoenicia and Samaria describing the conversion of the Gentiles. With that, this verse begins with, “And when they had come to Jerusalem.”

Jerusalem is the focal point of the religious life of the church at this point. Those in authority were there and they oversaw the affairs of the church. It is for this reason that the company had been sent to Jerusalem. The matter to be decided was of the utmost importance because it dealt with the very heart of the gospel, which is salvation by grace through faith.

If it was determined that the Gentiles had to observe the Law of Moses before being saved, or after being saved in order to continue to be saved, it would essentially mean that Christ's coming was for naught. It would have been a pointless gesture that changed nothing. As such, they went to Jerusalem to see what the leaders determined, and "they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders."

The sense is that there would have been a meeting of the church body that worshiped in the various individual locations around Jerusalem and maybe even in Judea. Mentioning the apostles would then be referring to those who were designated by the Lord for the apostolic ministry. This would have included Matthias, who was selected by lot in Acts 1. The specific naming of the elders would be those who presided over the individual bodies throughout the area.

To get a sense of the gathering, one might think of a corporate board meeting where there are stockholders, the corporate board, and then the heads of the individual offices. These have all come together to determine a matter set forth before them. Once gathered, Paul and Barnabas would then be asked to speak. With this, it next says, "and they reported all things that God had done with them."

Their words would have spoken of their time in Antioch, the words of the Holy Spirit, saying, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2). The details of their long and productive missionary journey, their time back in Antioch teaching the disciples, and finally the assault by the Judaizers throwing the believers into confusion while they were still in Antioch.

It is most likely that at this point that the words of the next verse will come forth. Paul and Barnabas would have spoken of freedom in Christ, the conversion of the Gentiles, the signs and wonders that had come about through their ministry, etc. But for such joyous things and such great freedom, there will always be those who want to steal those things away.

Life application: The events taking place in Acts 15 have a great bearing on everything that will follow in the church age. If the determination sided against the stand of Paul and Barnabas, the church would have become a chaotic offshoot of Judaism, like the many sects that were in Israel at the time. It would have been a religion of bondage and legalistic standards heaped on top of the words of Moses, just as all of the other sects had become.

But this is not unusual even in today's world. There are many cults and sects within Christianity that return to Moses in part or (supposedly) in whole. They demand observance of those things Christ came to fulfill. Others make various demands on individual freedoms.

For example, some fundamentalist churches teach that men should not wear beards, as if that has any bearing on a relationship with Christ. Such things only damage the freedom of worship that has been ordained by God through the giving of His Son.

Let us hold fast to the words of Scripture, allowing what it does not forbid, and forbidding what it does not allow. Those things on which it is silent are not something God determined we need to fret about. If you are unhappy with the way an individual church meeting gathers, don't attend there. But if it is not doing anything contrary to Scripture, let them be. Let the word be the rule and guide for what you do, and you will do well.

*Lord God, may we hold fast to Your word, letting it fill us with right thinking and proper instruction. May we not legalistically add to it, and may we never consider that it gives us license to do that which is wrong. Rather, help us to be steadfast in holding to Your word at all times. To Your glory, we pray this. Amen.*

**But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses."** Acts 15:5

The previous verse had Paul and Barnabas reveal to those gathered in Jerusalem all that God had done through them. This was a ministry that started with evangelizing the Jews. This continued at each city they traveled to, but it eventually went almost solely to the Gentiles, such as was recorded of the evangelism in Antioch of Pisidia –

"Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> For so the Lord has commanded us:

"I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,  
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

<sup>48</sup> Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." Acts 13:46-48

In such instances, these Gentiles believed the word they heard without a single note of law observance. In fact, the only substantial mentioning of the law was essentially a note revealing the inadequate nature of the law to perfect anything –

“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; <sup>39</sup> and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

-Acts 13:38, 39

Despite this, and despite the obvious nature of God’s grace being the reason for sending Jesus Christ, the verse now says, “But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up.”

A margin note in some texts makes these words a part of the narration of Paul and Barnabas. In other words, it is still them speaking about the events that occurred including the coming of the Judaizers to Antioch which precipitated the journey to Jerusalem. However, it appears more natural that this is not their narration of the past, but a renewed attack against the doctrine of Paul and Barnabas during the gathering.

As such, while the assembly was seated, these men rose up to speak. This is what Paul did in Acts 13:16 when he was asked to speak to the synagogue there. These Pharisees have risen up to state their voice. Here, it clearly says that these were believers. They had heard the word of faith and they had received it as such. Despite this, they began by saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them.”

If they had stopped with these words and explained them as referring to the circumcision of the flesh according to the instructions given to Abraham, they may have been able to convince the gathering that it was necessary as a sign of that covenant. However, there was already a sign of entrance into the New Covenant, which even the circumcision of Abraham anticipated.

Abraham believed and was deemed as righteous (Genesis 15:6). Later, the Lord instructed him and all with him to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant (Genesis 17). But those things, when properly understood, only anticipated the coming of Christ. As such, faith is what saves. After faith comes, the rite of baptism is then administered as an ordinance. It is an outward sign of the inner change that has taken place. This is not related to circumcision - which only applied to men - but rather baptism is a whole new ordinance for both men and women, which is a type of death, burial, and resurrection in Christ.

Circumcision did not save Abraham and water baptism does not save a believer. But bringing up the circumcision of Abraham may have helped flesh this matter out more fully. That did not happen, but the epistles will more fully explain such things. Despite this, the circumcision of the flesh is not all that is on the mind of these Pharisees. As they next say, “and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.”

This goes back to the same false doctrine that was introduced in Acts 15:1 –

“And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’”

To more fully understand the weight of this teaching, refer to that commentary. In short, these words would heap the entire Law of Moses, with all of its many rules and regulations, directly on the shoulders of the Gentile believers. It would also mean that their conversion, meaning their belief in the gospel message, was insufficient to save them. They were still condemned, and they would have to be brought into the bondage of the law to be free. The thought is contradictory and twisted.

This is what Paul wrote about in his later letter to those in Galatia –

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? <sup>2</sup> This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? <sup>4</sup> Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain?” Galatians 3:1-4

If the Gentiles had received the Spirit after believing, it was a clear indication that God had approved of them, and they were saved. Deal done. Paul and Barnabas have presented their words to the council in Jerusalem, and it is as if what they have conveyed meant nothing at all. To these Judaizers who have arisen, it is as if the work of Jesus Christ that began in them was only partially effective, but they had to continue to work towards their salvation.

Life application: The words of the Pharisees do not mean that they were not saved. But it does mean that they have completely misunderstood what happened when they believed the gospel message. God’s grace was poured out on them, but they thought that it was an initial act of grace only. To them, this allowance opened a door that they

needed to keep open on their own merits. But this is contrary to the words of the Lord that will be spoken later to John –

“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.” Revelation 3:8

It also is contrary to the words of Jesus during His earthly ministry –

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

<sup>18</sup> He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” John 3:16-18

The work of Jesus Christ isn't merely an initial act of grace but an eternal one. Today, because of the decision of the council in Jerusalem, and also because of the words of the epistles, what the Pharisees have proposed in Acts 15 is heretical and to be condemned even when some teach it today, such as the heresies in the Hebrew Roots movement. At the time, this was a necessary step for the church to take so that such issues could be completely understood and recorded.

Unfortunately, to this day people reinsert the law into their Christian theology. Do not allow this to be imposed upon you! Live in Christ and by the grace of Christ. Trust in His merits. God was fully pleased with the work of Christ, evidenced by the resurrection. Why would you assume that God is any less pleased with you when you have trusted in the work of Christ?

*Thank You, O God, for the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord. Praise to You forever and ever for what You have done through Him. All glory, power, majesty, and honor to You, O God! Amen.*

**Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. Acts 15:6**

In the previous verse, some of the Pharisees rose and stated that it was necessary for the Gentiles to be circumcised and observe the Law of Moses. With this idea put forth, Luke continues with, “Now the apostles and elders.”



The words more correctly read, “Now the apostles and the elders.” They are two distinct categories that are being highlighted which are clearly separate offices at this time. Together, they “came together.”

Rather, the verb is imperfect and in the passive voice, they “were gathered together.” At someone’s direction or maybe through prayer and the leading of the Spirit, they were gathered together. And this occurrence was “to consider this matter.”

More literally it says, “to see about this matter.” They were going to look at it, evaluate it, and then decide what should be done. For those, like Paul, who understood the magnitude of the decision, it would shape the entire future of the church and set off the importance of the cross accordingly.

If the challenge by the Pharisees prevailed, the cross would become no more than an added key in the process of opening the door of entry into law observance under Judaism. The shed blood of Jesus Christ would be considered entirely ineffectual for salvation. This is because the Law of Moses had a high priest. It also had sacrifices, including the annual Day of Atonement.

If the Law of Moses had to be kept, it means that these Gentiles would be obligated to observe those sacrificial rites, thus placing the blood of bulls and goats over the blood of Christ. Further, it would thoroughly diminish innumerable passages found in their own Scriptures that pointed to God’s saving grace apart from the law.

For example, in Numbers 21, this short passage is seen –

“Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. <sup>5</sup> And the people spoke against God and against Moses: ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For *there is* no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.’ <sup>6</sup> So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. <sup>7</sup> Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.’ So Moses prayed for the people. <sup>8</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.’ <sup>9</sup> So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.” Numbers 21:4-9

This account was partially given to show that faith, apart from the Law of Moses, healed the people. Jesus then spoke of it, equating what occurred to His own work –

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:14-17

Though the book of John was not yet written, the account of Jesus’ words was certainly known. But even if this were not true, the account stood as a witness of God’s acceptance of faith apart from law observance. If the apostles and elders could not see this matter through correctly, the entire point of faith alone in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sin would be nullified.

Life application: We don’t need to read the account any further to know that the right decision will be made concerning the issue at hand. This is because if God is behind the message of Jesus, that message will ultimately prevail. He would not have sent Christ into the world if He knew the offer would not continue to be properly considered.

We might say, “But there are Judaizers all over the world today, standing against the truth of the cross and reinserting the law. See, the message has failed.” This is incorrect. Now, with the completion of Scripture, the truth of God in Christ and the fully effectual work of the cross is recorded there. This council in Jerusalem is a part of that body of literature, and it stands as a witness to what God had determined.

The fault is not in God, nor is it a lack in the word of God. Rather, the fault is in those who ignore, misunderstand, or purposefully twist the word. God has made proper Christian theology and set doctrine fully obtainable. Now, it is up to each person to consider what the Bible says and to follow it, in context, according to how it is presented.

This is our immediate task, our daily task, and our lifelong task. We are to learn this word and then continue to consider it always. Hold fast to the word. It is our personal love letter from the God of the universe to keep us safe and close to Him until the day He brings us to Himself.

*Glorious Lord God, how precious is Your word. How sacred are its contents. How immutable are the truths it contains. Help us to cherish Your word because it is what tells us about Your love for us in the giving of Jesus. May our hearts be carefully obedient in applying its precepts to our lives for all our days. Amen.*

**And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up *and* said to them: “Men *and* brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. Acts 15:7**

In the previous verse, it noted that the apostles and elders came together for the purpose of resolving the matter concerning what to instruct the Gentiles. With that, Luke records, “And when there had been much dispute.”

It is the same word used in verse 15:2, *zétésis*. It is translated elsewhere as controversy, speculation, and so on. It signifies “a searching.” It is as if there was a formal debate of the matter, and those who were listening were thinking through what was being presented. It is during this course of events that “Peter rose up *and* said to them...”

Rather, as an aorist participle, it rightly reads, “Peter, having risen up, said to them.” One thing follows the other. By rising, it would indicate that he was prepared to speak. Thus, the audience would direct their eyes and attention to him, attending to what he would say.

It is of note that these are Peter’s final recorded words in the book of Acts. It is the last time the name “Peter” is used in the book, and it is for the purpose of explaining salvation by grace through faith apart from the Law of Moses. His words will continue through verse 11 and they will refer to this idea of salvation by grace not only for the Gentiles but for the Jews as well. Understanding this, once risen, he began, saying, “Men *and* brethren.”

This is the same formal greeting used quite a few times already in Acts. It indicates that not only are they responsible adults, but they are brethren within the faith. It implies that, as brethren, a right attitude concerning his words should be considered. Next, he continues, saying, “you know that a good while ago.”

More appropriately, it reads, “you know that from early days.” In other words, what he will present is a fact that happened early in the establishment of the church. A precedent had been set and it was not to be dismissed or forgotten. It was a lesson that

would bear on answering the question that was now being investigated. From there, he continues with, “God chose among us.”

The meaning is probably twofold. First, it is the selection of Peter to be the one to verify what God was doing as the church began. He was the main figure to speak to the people and witness the events of Acts 2. When the Samaritans were evangelized in Acts 8, the Spirit did not come upon them until Peter arrived to verify the matter. And then in Acts 10, it was Peter who was called to evangelize those in Caesarea.

Second, this selection of Peter to be the one to verify these things was at the mouth of the Lord Jesus –

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’” Matthew 16:17-19

The Lord directed Peter to be the one to validate these things, Peter did validate them, and he is now reminding the church of the things that occurred. With that, he refers to the events of Acts 10, “that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.”

This was the purpose of Peter’s designation by Jesus. It was to confirm to the church what had been witnessed. When he refers to what occurred in Acts 10, he provides essentially the same formula as stated by Paul in Romans. The Gentiles hear the gospel and then believe. Paul says –

“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,  
Who bring glad tidings of good things!’

<sup>16</sup> But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘LORD, who has believed our report?’ <sup>17</sup> So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

-Romans 10:14-17

As for Peter in Acts, he will continue with his words, reminding them of a simple fact that has somehow escaped them.

Life application: Remembering that Paul was a Pharisee, a member of the group who has now been set against Paul in this dispute, it shows how deeply ingrained in us presuppositions and biases can become.

Paul had to literally be called out of that by the risen Lord. He was so adamant about law observance that he could not see beyond his own position. Once called, however, he was able to rightly process his calling. It was apart from any merit at all. Grace was bestowed upon him, and he responded accordingly.

The Pharisees are now being reminded of this as well. Until this point, they probably looked at Paul as an aberration, but their attitudes, not his, will have to be corrected. And how is that accomplished? It is through the words of Peter who witnessed the events that occurred when he was directed to the house of Cornelius.

In other words, it all comes back to the word of the Lord. That word, given to Peter, is now recorded in Scripture. We do not need a visible demonstration of the Spirit coming down upon the Gentiles. We do not need a vision from the Lord calling us to recognize Him and turn from our ways as Paul did.

These things are recorded. The precedent has been set, and the confirmation of them has come through Peter who was told that he would be the one to settle them. Even Paul's ministry was implicitly approved by Peter as is recorded in Galatians 1 –

“Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup> (Now *concerning* the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)” Galatians 1:18-20

These things are now recorded. They are sealed. And they provide our guidance and instruction in the word. If you see someone being bullheaded about their presuppositions and biases, there is no need to ask God to give him a sign. The word has been given. If you see a Muslim that doesn't know Jesus, there is no need to believe Jesus will pop into his room at night and convert him. The word has been given and it is our job to tell him what it says. Etc.

Go to the word! This is what God has provided to us for our understanding of Him and what He expects, for our doctrine, and for our daily conduct. Be sure to go to the word!

*Lord God, the world – even among Christians – is looking for a show of Your hand in things to direct us. Instead, You have already given us all we need to see that Your hand is in the events around us. The word is given, and it is sufficient. Help us to realize this and to not look to what is hyped up or sensational. May we rely on the precious word that is filled with the knowledge that You are among us. Amen.*

**“So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us, Acts 15:8**

The translation of the NKJV is far enough off that it is not sufficient for analysis. The words are better translated, “And the heart-knowing God bore witness to them, having given the Holy Spirit as also us” (CG). This will be used for the analysis.

It is Peter speaking in his final words of the book of Acts, having arisen to address the issue of law observance for the Gentiles. Peter had just said, “that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.” With that, he now continues, saying, “And the heart-knowing God.”

It is a noun used for the second and last time in Scripture, *kardiognóstés*. It is not found among any other Greek writers. It is a noun literally meaning “heart knower,” coming from the words *kardía*, meaning “heart,” and *ginōskō*, signifying to “experientially know.” Thus, God is “the one who knows all the inner workings of every person’s heart, i.e. all their moral preferences (convictions)” (HELPS Word Studies).

Peter’s words reflect those of Paul’s later writings concerning the reception of the gospel –

“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): <sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Romans 10:8-10

It is God who looks upon the heart, knowing whether the word that has been heard truly was accepted or not. Further, it is the heart-knowing God who “bore witness to them.”

God was in the room with Peter, evaluating the hearts of those who were listening to his words concerning Jesus. At that time, Peter gave them the gospel concerning Christ's death, burial, and resurrection –

“And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. <sup>40</sup> Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, *even* to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.” Acts 10:39-41

The burial is implied in the words “arose from the dead.” As such, it is exactly the same gospel message that Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15 –

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that He was seen by <sup>[a]</sup>Cephas, then by the twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.”  
-1 Corinthians 15:3-8

With that, Peter then clearly states how God bore them witness, saying, “having given the Holy Spirit.” The Gentiles listening to Peter were given the gospel. They heard, they believed, and they received. This is exactly what Paul will say occurs with Gentiles after hearing the exact same gospel –

“In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13, 14

With that, Peter states a note to confirm that what was presented to the Gentiles, and how it was received, is exactly the same as to the Jews. He finishes the thought with, “as also us.” It is the exact same idea that Paul will say in 1 Corinthians 15 –

“For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than

they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was* with me. <sup>11</sup> Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

-1 Corinthians 15:9-11

Life application: There is one gospel, not two. The gospel that Peter (and all the apostles) proclaimed is the same gospel that Paul proclaimed. To say otherwise is heretical. Don't be a heretic. Accept and then go forth proclaiming the one and only gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

*Lord God, help us to never be lured into heretical doctrines taught by unschooled, perverse, or manipulating people. May we hold fast to what is right and proper, glorifying You through how we conduct our lives in Your presence. And may we be willing to share this good news with all who come our way. To Your glory! Amen.*

**“and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.**

Acts 15:9

Peter had just noted that God acknowledged the Gentiles who believed by giving them the Holy Spirit, having read their hearts. This was just the same as the Jews who believed, apart from any law observance. With that, he now says, “and made no distinction.”

The thought here is that of some sort of class. The Greek word is *diakrinó*. It signifies to thoroughly judge a matter and thus to completely separate. God makes no distinction in types or categories of men when He reads their hearts. Skin color, marital status, age, societal status, wealth, etc. are all irrelevant to Him. One human heart is just like any other. The sentiment is reflected in Acts 10, just prior to Peter beginning his speech to the Gentiles –

“Then Peter opened *his* mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. <sup>35</sup> But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.’” Acts 10:34, 35

In this case, Peter continues his words, saying, “between us and them.” The distinction being made, then, is between a Jew under the law and a Gentile not under the law. There is absolutely no distinction in God's eyes between the two when the gospel is considered.



Despite this, there is a difference. A Jew under the law was obligated to the law. A Gentile not under the law was not. Paul addresses these things in Romans. This is why Peter will say what he says in the next verse. For now, however, the matter is one not of difference, but of distinction. The gospel is presented, the offer is thus made, and God will evaluate people based on that alone. In believing, He is then “purifying their hearts.”

The tense is wrong. The verb is an aorist participle, “having purified.” These Gentiles had their hearts searched, they had believed, and their hearts were purified. The idea is expressed well by Jeremiah –

“The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*,  
And desperately wicked;  
Who can know it?  
<sup>10</sup> I, the LORD, search the heart,  
I test the mind,  
Even to give every man according to his ways,  
According to the fruit of his doings.” Jeremiah 17:9, 10

The wicked heart of the unregenerate that is willing to call out for cleansing through the hearing of the gospel is purified. The word used to describe this purifying, *katharizó*, is the same word spoken to Peter in his vision –

“But Peter said, ‘Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.’  
<sup>15</sup> And a voice *spoke* to him again the second time, ‘What God has cleansed [*katharizó*] you must not call common.’ <sup>16</sup> This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.” Acts 10:14-16

The “unclean” Gentiles had been purified just like the supposedly “clean” Jews, thus signifying that the Jews were actually unclean. The law never purified them in the manner that is needed before God.

And this purification was, as Peter says, “by faith.” It was an internal act for the Jews who believed. It was an internal act for the Samaritans who believed, and it was an internal act for the Gentiles who believed.

God, without making any distinction, saw that they believed and He gave His Spirit. No works of the law were associated with what occurred. The words of Peter now are exactly mirrored by Paul in Romans 3 –

“Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup> since *there is* one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.” Romans 3:29, 30

It is also the very thought that Paul had to correct Peter on when he made an error in his ways while in Antioch –

“We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, <sup>16</sup> knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” Galatians 2:15, 16

Life application: When reading the Bible, we may come to a thought similar to what is presented in this verse and make an erroneous conclusion if we don't stop and think through what is being conveyed. A good example of this comes from Galatians –

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Galatians 3:26-29

Because of these words, it has been inferred that everyone in the church has the same rights as anyone else. For example, this verse is used to justify the ordination of women because “there is neither male nor female” in Christ. This is a failure to understand the difference between the words “distinction” and “difference.”

God has made no distinction between any of these (or other) categories, as was noted earlier. However, God still recognizes the differences. First, Paul could not have written these words if there are no longer any differences. The fact that he says there is neither Jew nor Greek means that the categories still exist.

Paul explicitly addresses Jews and Gentiles in separate thoughts in Romans and elsewhere. Likewise, Paul specifically addresses slaves and their responsibilities to their masters several times. He specifically addresses the responsibilities of men and of

women elsewhere as well. He is addressing different categories of people in whom God has found no distinction for salvation.

When the differences, which are still recognized by God, are ignored, only chaos will result. It is our responsibility to always recognize what God recognizes, such as our responsibilities as males or females, and to not recognize what God has not found distinct. Thus, we are to be willing to present the gospel to all without recognizing any differences that would bias us against doing so.

*Heavenly Father, may we be willing to think through what is presented in Your word and responsibly handle the duties that have been set before us. May we not allow what You have forbidden, and may we not overlook anyone because of our own biases. You have made no distinction, nor should we. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**“Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? Acts 15:10**

Peter had just said that God made no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles, purifying the hearts of both by faith. With that, he continues with, “Now therefore, why do you test God?”

The verb is a present infinitive and gives the sense of “why are you testing God?” They were standing there and actively working against what God was doing. Because of this, Peter is reminding the people of their own history. Instead of accepting the will of God that was openly expressed to them, Israel turned and imposed their own will on a situation or matter. An example of this is recorded in Psalm 95 –

“Today, if you will hear His voice:

<sup>8</sup> ‘Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion,  
As *in* the day of trial in the wilderness,

<sup>9</sup> When your fathers tested Me;  
They tried Me, though they saw My work.

<sup>10</sup> For forty years I was grieved with *that* generation,  
And said, “It *is* a people who go astray in their hearts,  
And they do not know My ways.”

<sup>11</sup> So I swore in My wrath,  
‘They shall not enter My rest.’” Psalm 95:7-11

The author of Hebrews cites this psalm, directly equating it to Israel's rejection of Christ and remaining under the Law of Moses. And now, this is just what the Pharisees were trying to impose on the Gentiles. Paul used the same terminology in 1 Corinthians 10:9, saying, "...nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents."

At that time, the people "spoke against God and against Moses" (Numbers 21:5). Paul warned against doing what is inappropriate, showing that as God was with Moses, He was now fully revealed through Christ with the introduction of the New Covenant.

Peter's admonition concerning testing God is directly tied to a rejection of what God had done to the Gentiles in the giving of the Spirit. This testing was being accomplished "by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples."

The yoke he is referring to is the Law of Moses. It is the subject of the discourse, and it was the purpose for calling the council. It is what Paul says of the law in Galatians 5 –

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. <sup>2</sup> Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. <sup>3</sup> And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." Galatians 5:1-4

Paul's words are clear, concise, and specific. The law is a yoke, a burden, that stands against grace. So intolerable was the Law of Moses in this regard, that Peter next says it is a yoke "which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?"

It is an all-inclusive statement. Israel was given the law and no person within Israel could bear up under the weight of the yoke that rested on them because of it. The law promised that the person who did the things of the law would live (Leviticus 18:5). And yet, the people, without exception, had died. Elijah was taken out before he died, but that does not mean he was sinless under the law. No person born under the law could meet the demands of the law. Thus, all died.

Despite this, these Judaizers were standing there, rejecting the grace of the Lord Jesus. And more, they were trying to impose upon the Gentiles, who had already been accepted by God, the same yoke that they had been under and were unable to bear. The perverse nature of such an attitude could not stand.

Life application: Of the words of Peter, Cambridge says the following:

“So St Paul (Galatians 5:1) calls the ceremonial law ‘a yoke of bondage.’ Christ uses the word “yoke” for his own precepts, knowing that a yoke was needed for men’s guidance, but He calls it ‘easy’ (Matthew 11:30).” Cambridge

This is not what Paul says, nor is it what Peter is saying. Cambridge has done what far too many scholars do. They have divided the law into a moral law and a ceremonial law. No such distinction is found in the law. The Law of Moses is a codified whole. There are moral parts to the law, and there are ceremonial parts to it as well. But these are internal distinctions that form a single law.

To say that Jesus only fulfilled and set aside the ceremonial law part of the Law of Moses, and not the moral part, would mean that believers today were obligated to the entirety of the Ten Commandments, but no sound Christian or theologian would agree that we must observe the Sabbath. Paul argues against that several times in his writings. The author of Hebrews clearly signifies that the Sabbath is fulfilled, and we have entered our rest in our coming to Christ.

The law, the entire Law of Moses, is fulfilled. It is set aside, it is annulled, it is obsolete, and it is nailed to the cross. This does not mean, however, that we are not obligated to be obedient to what is morally right. Such moral precepts are stated throughout the epistles. These explain our obligations and expectations under the New Covenant.

However, in not doing these things, sin is not imputed because we are not under law but under grace. Our failure to meet the expectations of the New Covenant expectations will not result in a loss of salvation but in a loss of rewards. All of this is explained by Paul.

Be careful to not make the mistake of those who try to shove you back under “part” of the Law of Moses. It is fulfilled and it is over. We now live under a much better dispensation, that of grace. Thank God for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Yes, O God. Thank You for what You have done for us in the giving of Your Son to remove from us the curse of death and eternal separation from You. We have been granted life, eternal life, through receiving the gospel. Christ has done it all! Thank God for Jesus Christ our Lord who has brought us back to You. Amen.*

**“But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.” Acts 15:11**

The NKJV, following the rendering of the KJV, changes the order of the clauses, thus obscuring the intent of the wording. Young’s renders it thus –

“...but, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we believe to be saved, even as also they.”

One can see how dramatically different the two thoughts are. Young’s will be used for analysis. Peter had just challenged the Judaizers with the words, “Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” With that remembered, he now says, “but through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Peter is making an absolute contrast between the law and grace. The law is of works; grace is unmerited favor. The two are mutually exclusive. The law puts a yoke on the necks of those under it; grace is burden-free. One under law attempts to be justified by works; one who trusts is saved through grace.

But even the thought of grace must be qualified to ensure that the proper means of grace that Peter is referring to is understood. Thus, he added the words *kuriou Iesou Christou* – “the Lord Jesus Christ.” Grace is the subject; the Lord Jesus Christ is the means. With that, Peter continues with action and its result, saying, “we believe to be saved.”

This is exactly what Paul writes about in detail in his epistles, such as –

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Ephesians 2:8, 9

Why this translational difference is important: \*\* One can see that the NKJV changes the formula, removing belief as part of the process of salvation. Rather, it makes it a mere hope of the subject.\*\* Surprisingly, the Catholic Public Domain Version, though paraphrasing the verse, gives the proper sense of what is being conveyed –

“But by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we believe in order to be saved, in the same manner also as them.”

Again, grace is the subject, the Lord Jesus Christ is the means, belief in Christ is the activator of the process, and salvation is the result. This is just what Paul conveys in Ephesians 2:8, 9. With this understood, Peter next says, “even as also they.”

Peter has been speaking as a Jew to his Jewish brethren. Not one of them was saved by law observance. And yet, they were attempting to impose law observance on the Gentiles who were not even given the law! Their thinking was twisted and perverse.

It is an amazing set of words to consider because it is the last recorded words of Peter in the book of Acts. He sets forth the gospel, the one and only gospel, that is identical in thought to that of Paul. With this, his words in Acts are ended.

Life application: In Peter’s words, several points of incorrect doctrine are laid to rest. He has proclaimed the gospel that saves. It is identical to the gospel that Paul proclaims. This refutes the heresy known as hyperdispensationalism which proclaims there are two gospels, one to the Jews and one to the Gentiles, among other errors.

Peter has proclaimed that salvation (for all) comes by grace through faith, apart from any works of the law. He has gone further with this by indicating that the Gentiles were not under the law and were not to be put under the law. This refutes the heresy of the Judaizers, today known as the Hebrew Roots movement.

Peter’s words were improperly translated by the KJV, thus showing that it is not the only infallible translation of the Bible.

The words of Peter in these past few verses implicitly help to dispel the false teachings of the Seventh Day Adventists, the Church of Christ, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others – especially the Roman Catholic Church – who teach a system of works leading to (or guaranteeing) salvation.

Think about the goodness of God in sending Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. And then think about how depraved the human heart is to constantly want to add to this simple offering. Be on the lookout for any teaching that would attempt to rob you of the freedom, surety, and eternal hope you can (and should) possess because of your faith in the all-sufficient work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Yes! Lord God, we are so very thankful to You because of Your wonderful love for us in the giving of Jesus to bring us back to You. Help us to never add to the simplicity of the gospel. May we confidently trust in the full, final, and forever work of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!*

**Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.**

Acts 15:12

In the previous verse, Peter completed his words in support of Paul's position that the Gentiles were not to be placed under the yoke of the law. With that, Luke next records, "Then all the multitude kept silent."

The verb is imperfect. They were silent and they continued in silence as the next part of the hearing was presented. The group had gathered and listened to Peter explain what had occurred in Caesarea and what he had learned from that experience. He realized that the law was not a means to an end. Rather, it was a step in the process of learning what God would do in Christ.

With his words completed, and with it understood that his position was that the Gentiles were not bound to adherence to the Law of Moses, the attention of the audience was redirected. They held their peace so that they could hear directly from those who had evangelized the Gentiles. In this, they remained silent "and listened to Barnabas and Paul."

Unlike in Antioch in Acts 15:2, Luke places Barnabas first. Despite Paul being called as an apostle, Barnabas was certainly more closely associated with the church in Jerusalem than Paul. Thus, he is highlighted now.

Further, Paul probably voluntarily yielded his speech to whatever Barnabas had to say because he was a Pharisee. As it was the party of the Pharisees who demanded law observance for the Gentiles in verse 15:5, Paul probably wanted to avoid any hint of a personal dispute between himself and those he was once so closely identified with. Together, Barnabas and Paul were "declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked."

The Greek more precisely reads, "declaring what God had done – signs and wonders." Thus, there is an emphasis on how God was working through their ministry. They went out as directed by the Holy Spirit, and as they followed the Spirit's leading, God worked through them. That is reflected, for example, in Acts 14:3 –



“Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by [literally “through”] their hands.”

That thought is then more fully expressed with the final words of the verse, saying, “through them among the Gentiles.” More literally, the entire thought says –

“...declaring what God had done – signs and wonders – among the Gentiles through them.”

God accomplished the work, the signs and wonders, among the Gentiles. Barnabas and Paul were merely the instruments through which these things came about. This is perfectly in accord with the thought expressed in verse 14:3 which was just noted.

The point of this is that these signs and wonders were accomplished by God just as freely as they had been accomplished among the Jews, both by Jesus during His earthly ministry and through the apostles after His ascension. And all this occurred apart from the Law of Moses.

God had granted these things to be done among people who had never heard of the law and who were saved apart from the law. And more, those under the law who saw them had rejected what was done by God through Barnabas and Paul, clearly demonstrating that the law was not a part of what God was doing. Rather, it had become a hindrance to it.

Life application: Acts 14:3 said that the Lord (meaning the Lord Jesus) had accomplished the signs and wonders through the hands of Barnabas and Paul. This verse now says that God had accomplished these signs and wonders. What this implies is that Jesus is God. Unless one simply dismisses the literal meaning and sense of the words, no other conclusion can be deduced from what is said.

This is not an isolated instance either. The deity of Jesus Christ is a concept and a precept that is on prominent display throughout Scripture. Don't allow anyone to steal the truth of the word from you through cunning and deception. Accept that God is not fickle and that His word is not convoluted. Scripture clearly presents the fact that God came in the flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ. Hold fast to this fundamental truth.

*Lord God, Your word is sure, and it is certain. We don't need to even wonder about the deity of Jesus Christ. It is such a clear teaching that we should only wonder why people would attempt to deny it. We honor You, O God, when we honor the Son. May we*

*always hold this truth close and remember the greatness of what You have done in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, “Men *and* brethren, listen to me: Acts 15:13**

In the previous verse, the words of Barnabas and Paul concerning their evangelism of the Gentiles were recorded, God having worked through the apostles with signs and wonders. With that, it now says, “And after they had become silent.”

It is certainly referring to the words of Barnabas and Paul as well as the voices of anyone else who may have had questions or comments. In other words, the dialogue has wound down and now a decision must be rendered by the council. With that, “James answered, saying.”

It is generally (though not universally) agreed that this is James, the son of Alpheus, also known as the brother of the Lord. He was the one singled out by Peter in Acts 12:17. Later, in Galatians 2:9, he is noted by Paul as one of the pillars of the church. The words here in Acts indicate that he is presiding over the council. As with other clues in Acts, it reveals that this James was the accepted leader of the church at this time.

Without the matter being explained in Acts, and though not explicitly stated, the implication is that James held the administrative reigns in church matters. He was obviously qualified to handle the affairs of the church in a better manner than the apostles. As such, he now addresses the assembly, saying, “Men *and* brethren, listen to me.”

As the assembly fell silent, and as James now addresses them to sum up the deliberations, it is certain that he is the overseer of the church at this time. His coming words will show that he was a man of understanding in Scripture and one who was able to come to a sound conclusion. With his conclusion, he will also render a judgment for the church to adhere to.

Life application: As noted above, nothing is said in Acts about how James came to be the leader of the church at this time. That would seem to be a glaring omission unless one understands that it is irrelevant to the purpose of the book. Acts has been written with various main themes and purposes in mind, but one of them is not how to structure the church.

Surprisingly, the epistles give scant information on how to do so as well. The pastoral epistles provide relevant information on some key points, but nothing is said about meeting times or places, order of worship, frequency of various events to be held, what to do with church resources (with but a few exceptions such as provision for widows in 1 Timothy 5), etc.

Individual churches are given great latitude in how they operate. The primary role of the church is certainly to bring forth the word of God to people, both the saved and the unsaved. The word is what explains the defect of sin in man and the sending of Jesus to bring him back to God through the forgiveness of sin. Once reconciliation between the two has been made, it is then time to properly instruct believers in the word.

Churches that get too far off from this main idea will eventually devolve into nothing more than a social meeting or a congregation that is constantly trying to earn what Christ offers for free. Be sure that where you attend the word is read and explained at every gathering.

*Lord God, help us not to get misdirected from the main goal and purpose of the church, which is to get out the word concerning Jesus. You have sent Him to bring the world back to You through Him. Unless that is expressed and explained, we are not competently handling our time. Guide us, O God. Help us to get the good news out! Amen.*

**“Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. Acts 15:14**

The words of the NKJV give a completely different sense than what the Greek is conveying. Placing the two side by side, the variation becomes noticeable:

- Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. (NKJV)
- Simeon has declared how first God visited to take out of nations a people upon His name. (CG)

The difference is a great one. God did not visit the Gentiles, as if that was the only purpose of Christ’s Advent. Rather, God visited. In His visit, it was His intent to take out of Gentiles a people upon (meaning fitting for) His name. This translation will be used to evaluate what is said.

In the previous verse, after the gathering had become silent, James began to speak. His words now begin with the name of the subject of his words, "Simeon." This and 2 Peter 1:1 are the only times that this spelling of the name is referring to Simon Peter. And even 2 Peter 1:1 is disputed based on various manuscripts. If James is referring to Simon Peter, using "Simeon" instead of "Simon" is not inappropriate that this form would be used because James is a Jew of the land of Israel and speaking to those in a gathering in the land. Even if not inappropriate, it is highly unusual.

However, and this may be a complete stretch of the intent of James' words, there is another Simeon in the New Testament who did exactly what James will next convey. Those words spoken by Simeon will be explained accordingly. For now, James continues with a note that Simeon, "has declared how first God visited."

The word translated as "visited" signifies just that. It comes from two words signifying "upon" and "to inspect." By extension, it carries the thought of "being concerned with." When one visits, it is to be concerned about the one visited.

James is equating the coming of Jesus Christ to God's visitation. He concerned Himself in the narrative of human existence in a particular way. The terminology is found throughout Scripture. When God visits, it is a manifestation of His workings at a particular time and place. This is seen, for example, in Ruth –

"Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread." Ruth 1:6

It is of note that by saying "how God first visited" there is the implication of a first advent to be followed by a second advent. If this were not the case, then the word "first" would be superfluous.

Of this visitation of God, James specifically says it is "to take out of nations." The word translated as Gentiles, *ethnos*, signifies "nations," and it usually excludes Israel. This is not always the case, though. For example, the word refers to Israel in Luke 7:5 –

"And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, <sup>5</sup> 'for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue.'" Luke 7:4, 5

As there is no article before the word *ethnos* here, it is more rightly translated as “nations” rather than “the Gentiles.” This is because God visited in the Person of Jesus Christ to be a light to both Israel and the Gentiles, meaning all nations. This was for the purpose of obtaining “a people upon His name.” As noted earlier, the word translated as “upon” signifies fitting for His name. It is the Greek word *epi*. It is that which fits, such as skin (the epidermis) fits upon a person.

Also, as noted above, there is another Simeon that is noted in the New Testament who did exactly what James says would be the case. In Luke 2, this is recorded –

“And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name *was* Simeon, and this man *was* just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup> And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. <sup>27</sup> So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, <sup>28</sup> he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

<sup>29</sup> ‘Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,  
According to Your word;

<sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen Your salvation

<sup>31</sup> Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

<sup>32</sup> A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles,

And the glory of Your people Israel.’” Luke 2:25-32

As he prophesied these words over Baby Jesus, and as his prophecy would have been well known to the apostles gathered at this time – certainly having become a part of the annual Passover story among the believers – this is not an impossible interpretation, especially considering that the name Simeon is used only one other time when referring to Simon Peter. There, it by his own hand in an epistle. Jesus addressed Simon Peter as Simon many times but never recorded as Simeon. In total, the name Simon is used about seventy-five times in the New Testament.

The prophecy of Simeon is exactly what James is now saying, referring to both the Gentiles and Israel. The prophesied work of this Baby would be for the salvation of both.

Thus, the meaning, regardless of which person James is referring to, is that God had sent Jesus on His first advent to take a particular people out for Himself from among the nations, inclusive of Israel. This is the church, a group of people comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, which would be separate and distinct from national Israel.

Life application: Very few translations of the Bible give the proper sense of what is conveyed in this verse. To see this, you can go to this link to compare what is said in a great many translations: <https://biblehub.com/parallel/acts/15-14.htm>.

The literal translations tend to get this right. But, surprisingly, the two catholic translations do as well. This is not uncommon. Despite having extremely flawed biblical theology in the Roman Catholic Church, their translations are often very literal and precise. Even when not literal, their paraphrasing will often be an exacting representation of the intent of the Greek.

Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater! Read multiple translations and compare them with the original. In this, you will find that many beloved translations, like the King James Version, are extremely faulty in their presentation of the original languages. This is so much the case that the inevitable result will be a flawed sense of the original, leading to incorrect theology.

Take time to consider the word! Ponder what is being said! Hold fast to what is good in translations and reject that which is flawed. In this, you will show yourself as one who truly cares about the words of Scripture and how they can direct your steps in understanding what God is doing in the world.

*Lord God, what an absolute joy it is to search out Your word. It is so rich and beautiful. It is filled with treasures waiting for us to dig up and consider. Help us to cherish this marvelous word all the days of our lives. To Your glory, we pray this. Amen.*

**“And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: Acts 15:15**

James, speaking to the assembly in Jerusalem, just noted how God first visited to take out of the nations a people for His name. He now continues, saying, “And with this the words of the prophets agree.”

James has noted what occurred. He has indicated that it is ongoing since the coming of Jesus. But to demonstrate that his conclusion will not simply be a reasoned deduction or best guess as to what he will determine, he supports what he will say with words already prophesied hundreds of years earlier.

By saying “prophets” in the plural, even when he will only cite one prophet, he is indicating that the prophetic writings are a unified whole, inspired by God. What Jeremiah says may be different in content than what Amos says, but they are from the

same source and are harmoniously in agreement in thought. With that understood, he next says, “just as it is written.”

As is normally the case, the verb is perfect – “as it has been written.” The words are complete, finalized, and recorded for all time.

Life application: If we treat the Bible as James has done, we would be more fixed and determined to treat it as the complete and unchanging holy document that it is. The Greek perfect verb is always a true perfect and cannot be substituted for the simple past. There is a sense of absolute completeness that will not be added to or amended.

This is how the word of God is. God has spoken. Those words have been written. With the final words of the final book penned, the Bible has been completed. The completed Bible has become the final authority for all matters pertaining to life and godliness in Christ.

Think of the many cults, denominations, and churches, and even individuals active today that claim a word from the Lord, a vision, a dream, etc. What is it that tells us they are false? Only the Bible can do so. If revelation from God is an ongoing process in the church today, then the Bible is not the final word for believers. Think of the mayhem that this line of thinking has brought forth!

Let us not get diverted by anyone who claims an authority over Scripture, such as the RCC. Let us not get misled by anyone who claims additional revelation beyond Scripture. Rather, let us hold fast to the word of God. Even if those people’s claims were true, we have lost nothing in the end. But if they are not, we have been diverted from the soundness of God’s fully revealed word. It is sufficient, so stand on it alone and you will do well.

*O God, because of our failure to rightly divide what is said, there is already enough confusion in the church over what You have inspired in Your word. How much more confused we would be if we accepted that You are still breathing out words to direct us. Rather, help us to hold fast to Your word alone, and then to spend our time meditating on it and maintaining context as we evaluate it. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**‘After this I will return  
And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down;  
I will rebuild its ruins,  
And I will set it up; Acts 15:16**

James just noted that the words of the prophets agree with the idea that God first visited to take out of nations a people for His name. With that, he now cites Amos 9:11 & 12 to confirm this. As is often the case in the New Testament, the quote is from the Greek translation, not the Hebrew. Further, there is even a bit of deviation from the Greek in verse 15:16.

That verse begins with, “After this I will return.” Rather, the word translated as “this” is a plural demonstrative pronoun. It reads, “After these things I will return.” The reference is to what is said in the earlier verses of Amos 9. They speak of Israel’s destruction and exile. In those verses, the Lord says –

*“Are you not like the people of Ethiopia to Me,  
O children of Israel?’ says the LORD.  
‘Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt,  
The Philistines from Caphtor,  
And the Syrians from Kir?’” Amos 9:7*

In essence, the Lord is saying to Israel, “You are just like any other people. Other than your relationship with Me, you are just people.” To show them this, He was going to take a different direction, working among the Gentiles of whom they thought they were better. Because of their sinful state, rejecting the Lord, they would enter a time of punishment, being scattered among the nations. It is “After these things” that the Lord will return.

The meaning of that is that He will revisit Israel. It is as if he had departed from them and was now returned to them. His attention was on their destruction, but it would be changed to their re-establishment and prosperity. It is at this prophesied time that it next says, “And will rebuild the tabernacle of David.”

The tabernacle is a booth or temporary shelter used during the Feast of Tabernacles. This was a feast where the people gathered in Jerusalem, meeting to acknowledge that the Lord was Israel’s protector. They had been brought out of Egypt, having been rescued from their bondage. They were wholly dependent on the Lord and were living in close and intimate contact with Him.

The “tabernacle of David” is specifically speaking of the royal house of David. Despite being the king, he too would have participated in the annual festival, dwelling in a tabernacle in this intimate fellowship with the Lord. What is being conveyed is that the



rule and authority of Israel under the House of David would be restored to Israel, but it would be in a way that resembled the tabernacle, or booth.

Thus, it refers to the Person of Jesus, the Messiah who is the Greater David. For example, the verb form of the word is used when speaking of Christ in John 1 –

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

The noun form is used when referring to the intimate dwelling together of God and man in Revelation 21 –

“And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.’” Revelation 21:3

It is the intimate fellowship between the House of David and the Lord that would be rebuilt. Understanding this, the next words read, “which has fallen down.”

The Davidic line of kings ceased at the time of the Babylonian exile. From that time on there was no Israelite king from the line of David, in the sense of leading the nation. The line of kingship in the house of David was prophesied to end by Jeremiah –

“‘As I live,’ says the LORD, ‘though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet on My right hand, yet I would pluck you off; <sup>25</sup> and I will give you into the hand of those who seek your life, and into the hand of *those* whose face you fear—the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and the hand of the Chaldeans.’” Jeremiah 22:24, 25

However, the line of David itself was not cut off. After the exile, it continued on as is testified to in Haggai –

And again the word of the LORD came to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying, <sup>21</sup> “Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying:  
‘I will shake heaven and earth.  
<sup>22</sup> I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms;  
I will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms.  
I will overthrow the chariots  
And those who ride in them;

The horses and their riders shall come down,  
Every one by the sword of his brother.

<sup>23</sup> 'In that day,' says the LORD of hosts, 'I will take you, Zerubbabel My servant, the son of Shealtiel,' says the LORD, 'and will make you like a signet *ring*; for I have chosen you,' says the LORD of hosts." Haggai 2:20-23

The royal line was cut off in Coniah, but it was re-established after the exile to Babylon in Zerubbabel. It is Zerubbabel who is listed in Jesus' genealogy in Luke 3:27, continuing this royal line leading to Israel's Messiah.

This does not mean, however, that Zerubbabel was the rebuilt tabernacle signifying the rule of the House of David. Israel had no Davidic king again. Rather, they were ruled by other nations. Even when Herod ruled over Israel this is true. He was neither of the line of David nor was he the final authority over Israel. His rule fell under the jurisdiction of Rome.

With this understood, the words of the prophet being cited by James continue with, "I will rebuild its ruins." Again, it is referring to the tabernacle of David, meaning the intimate fellowship with the Lord of the kingship of Israel over the people. The wording is speaking of a time when Davidic rule would again be realized in the land. This has never occurred since the time of Coniah whom Jeremiah referred to.

Of these words, Albert Barnes rightly states, "The ruins thereof - Heb. 'close up the breaches thereof.' That is, it would be restored to its former prosperity and magnificence; an emblem of the favor of God, and of the spiritual blessings that would in future times descend on the Jewish people." This is what James is saying would occur. With that, the words of this verse end with, "And I will set it up."

As with the previous clause, it is still referring to the tabernacle of David. There is a time prophesied that will come when the Davidic rule will again be established over Israel. It must be remembered that the words "After these things" set the tone for what is being debated in the council. It is based on these words of the prophet now being cited by James. That is based on the words of verse 15:14 that God first visited to take out of nations a people for His name.

In other words, the things being cited from Amos are not referring to the time leading up to the coming of Jesus and His spiritual rule over the church at this time, but to the second coming of Jesus and a literal rule over Israel. This is important to understand. Equating these words with the church is a completely false notion that is not supported

by the words of Amos nor by the rest of Scripture. This will be seen more clearly with the evaluation of the next verse.

Life application: It is true that much of the church rejects a literal re-establishment of Israel and a millennial reign of Christ. These things are spiritualized forming the doctrine of replacement theology which says the church has replaced Israel and that everything spoken of in the past was referring not to Israel's future, but to the current state of the world where Christ rules the church.

This cannot be. The surrounding words of Amos do not support this, nor do the rest of the words of Moses and the prophets. Even the New Testament cannot be seen to agree with this. If God has rejected Israel as a nation, it means the words of the covenant made between the Lord and Israel cannot be trusted. If that is true, then the words of the New Covenant cannot be trusted either. The same Lord who established the Mosaic Covenant is the Lord who has established the New Covenant.

Have faith that despite Israel's failings, the Lord will never reject them as His people. Likewise, despite your failings, the Lord will never reject you because of what He has done through Christ Jesus. When the terms of the covenant are met, the deal is done. If you have believed the gospel, you have been saved, once and for all time.

*Lord God, thank You for the lesson of Israel. Despite their continued unfaithfulness, You have remained faithful to them. We can learn from this that despite our unfaithfulness, You will always remain faithful to us. Thank You for this assurance in our hope of eternal life. Thank You! Amen.*

**So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,  
Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,  
Says the Lord who does all these things.' Acts 15:17**

In the previous verse, James began his citation of the prophet Amos. That now continues with, "So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord."

The Hebrew of this verse from Amos reads, "That they may possess the remnant of Edom." However, the Greek translation reads as James has cited. The name of Edom and the word "man" are very similar in the Hebrew. Thus, the Septuagint translators seem to have understood the extended meaning of what lay ahead.

Further, this word translated as "mankind" is a plural noun, men. There is no reason for the NKJV to have changed it from the earlier rendering of the KJV except, most likely,

political correctness. The singular is to be rejected. In the Greek, the masculine stands for all.

Despite this, the meaning seems clear. The previous portion of the quote began with, “After these things.” James has shown that there is a time when Israel will again be exalted under Davidic rule, meaning under Jesus their Messiah. That will occur after certain events take place.

He now says what those events will be. Until the time when that comes about, there is an opportunity for the rest of mankind to seek the Lord. Amos had talked about the punishment of Israel for rejecting the Lord leading up to the restoration of Israel.

Hence, the restoration comes after the time of punishment. But during that timeframe, the redemptive plan won’t just be put on hold, waiting for Israel to get its act together. Rather, while Israel is being punished according to the Mosaic Law which they agreed to remain under when they rejected Jesus, the nations (the rest of mankind) would be seeking the Lord. That is next further explained with the words, “Even all the Gentiles.”

It is the same word as in Acts 15:14, *ethnos*. Unlike in that verse, there is an article before the word. Rather than “nations” as was argued to be the better rendering there, this is rightly translated as “the Gentiles.” The reason is that even if there are Christian nations, it is not nations that are being called through the gospel, but individuals.

As nations have come and gone, the salvation of the Gentiles has remained unaffected. When the Lord calls for His people, they will rise, even if the nations they belonged to disappeared millennia earlier. James next continues the quote from Amos saying that it is these saved believers of this dispensation “who are called by My name.”

The words are reminiscent of James 2:7 where he uses the same Greek word –

“Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?”

Though James wrote to the Jews of the church, they are still members of the church. Being called by the name of the Lord means that the name of the Lord rests upon the person. Those who call upon the name of the Lord through faith become those who are called by the Lord’s name. With this understood, James finishes the citation with, “Says the Lord who does all these things.”

It is the Lord who called Israel and covenanted with them. It is the Lord who faithfully blessed Israel when they sought Him out. It is the Lord who punished Israel according to the covenant made between them. It is the Lord who sent Jesus to initiate a New Covenant. It is the Lord who, when rejected by Israel, fulfilled the words of the prophecy concerning Israel's second exile and punishment. It is the Lord who called out a people for Himself from the Gentiles during Israel's time of having rejected Jesus. It is the Lord who will once again return Israel to His favor and exalt them when they call upon the name of the Lord. Everything comes back to the wisdom and hand of the Lord.

As noted in the previous commentary, this must be the interpretation of these verses. The words of the citation from Amos cannot be referring to the replacement of Israel by the church. This is absolutely certain from the continued words of Amos 9, which close out the book of Amos –

“Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD,  
‘When the plowman shall overtake the reaper,  
And the treader of grapes him who sows seed;  
The mountains shall drip with sweet wine,  
And all the hills shall flow *with it*.  
<sup>14</sup> I will bring back the captives of My people Israel;  
They shall build the waste cities and inhabit *them*;  
They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them;  
They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them.  
<sup>15</sup> I will plant them in their land,  
And no longer shall they be pulled up  
From the land I have given them,’  
Says the LORD your God.” Amos 9:13-15

In saying that He will bring back the captives of Israel (of which Amos 9:1-10 are the focus), it means Israel the people and none other. There is no provision for exile for the people of the church. There is no land grant bestowed upon the church. Israel, the nation, will be replanted in Israel the land.

And more, this cannot be referring to their first exile. This is because of the final verse of the book of Amos –

“I will plant them in their land.  
And no longer shall they be pulled up...” Amos 9:15

There is no time in history that this has occurred. After the first exile, they were pulled up a second time, something prophesied by Isaiah even before the first exile –

“It shall come to pass in that day  
*That* the Lord shall set His hand again the second time  
To recover the remnant of His people who are left,  
From Assyria and Egypt,  
From Pathros and Cush,  
From Elam and Shinar,  
From Hamath and the islands of the sea.” Isaiah 11:11

Life application: Replacement theology is a failed system of biblical interpretation because it does not take into consideration the whole counsel of God. Nor does it rightly divide the word. But even during the time when Israel was deep in her second exile, at a time when there was seemingly no possibility that the nation would ever again be restored, John Gill (1697-1771) said the following concerning Amos 9:15 –

“...by which it appears that this is a prophecy of things yet to come; since the Jews, upon their return to their own land after the Babylonish captivity, were pulled up again, and rooted out of it by the Romans, and remain so to this day; but, when they shall return again, they will never more be removed from it; and of this they may be assured; because it is the land the Lord has, "given" them, and it shall not be taken away from them any more; and, because he will now appear to be the ‘Lord their God.’”

Likewise, Adam Clarke (1762-1832) says of this verse –

“Most certainly this prophecy has never yet been fulfilled. They were pulled out by the Assyrian captivity, and by that of Babylon. Many were planted in again, and again pulled out by the Roman conquest and captivity, and were never since planted in, but are now scattered among all the nations of the earth. I conclude, as the word of God cannot fail, and this has not yet been fulfilled, it therefore follows that it will and must be fulfilled to the fullness of its spirit and intention. And this is established by the conclusion: ‘Saith the Lord thy God.’ He is Jehovah, and cannot fail; he is Thy God, and will do it. He can do it, because he is Jehovah; and he will do it, because he is Thy God. Amen.”

Despite the wave of poor theology concerning the reestablishment of Israel, these voices cried out, “The Bible is to be taken literally! God has spoken and His word cannot fail.” Now, what will you proclaim? The men who could not have foreseen the

reestablishment of Israel with their earthly eyes, wholly trusted the Lord, focusing their spiritually attuned eyes on what He had spoken.

Today, even today after the reestablishment of Israel to their land – exactly as the Lord prophesied would take place – much of the church refuses to accept that what was written has been fulfilled. They must receive their judgment for their lack of discernment and faith concerning God’s word. But they will remain saved despite their wholly tainted theology. This is the greatness of God who saves us despite ourselves.

Whether you like the Jewish people or not, something much greater is at stake in the world today. That something is the integrity of the word of God and the promise of God that He would never fully reject His people, Israel. He will bring them into the New Covenant. Have faith in this. Don’t be silly but be steadfast in your acceptance of the truth of God’s precious word.

*Lord God, how could it be that You would reject Israel when You covenanted with them? If that were so, You could also reject us when we fail You. Our salvation would be up to us. But no! You have spoken and it is done. Thank You for the wonderful assurance we possess in Christ. Thank You, O God. Amen.*

**“Known to God from eternity are all His works. Acts 15:18**

The previous verse cited Amos, concluding with the words, “Says the Lord who does all these things.” With the end of the citation, James now speaks, saying, “Known to God from eternity are all His works.”

As a note for clarification, the wording of the previous verse and of this verse are not the same in various texts normally used by more modern versions. The difference is more noticeable when they are taken together and placed side by side –

“SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD,  
AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,  
<sup>18</sup> SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS known from long ago.” (NASB)

“So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD,  
Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,  
Says the LORD who does all these things.’  
<sup>18</sup> “Known to God from eternity are all His works.” (NKJV)

As can be seen, the NASB and other translations make the verse a part of the citation of Amos with words added as a part of the citation by James. On the other hand, the NKJV, et al., have more words in James' additional thoughts which form a separate sentence altogether.

Going with the latter thought for commentary purposes, the meaning is that everything God has done or will do has been known from beginning to end by God, even since the very beginning. This thought is fully supported throughout Scripture, but an example from each testament will show this –

“Remember the former things of old,  
For I *am* God, and *there is* no other;  
I *am* God, and *there is* none like Me,  
<sup>10</sup> Declaring the end from the beginning,  
And from ancient times *things* that are not *yet* done,  
Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand,  
And I will do all My pleasure,’” Isaiah 46:9, 10

“All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

-Revelation 13:8

As the words of Amos agree with the thought that the Gentiles were to be a part of what God was doing before the raising up and rebuilding of the “tabernacle of David,” meaning re-establishment of the Davidic rule, then it would be wrong for the apostles to judge against that by demanding that Gentiles observe the Law of Moses.

God had poured out His Spirit upon the Gentiles in the presence of Peter apart from the law. Paul and Barnabas had seen many converts and the Lord had worked signs and wonders through them on behalf of the Gentiles apart from the law. As these things were indisputable, it would be working contrary to God to suddenly stop this work of the Lord and impose a law upon them that had been fulfilled and set aside by the work of Jesus.

Life application: Various commentaries on Acts 15:17, 18 make a claim that “the best texts” support their translation which varies in content from the other texts. That is a subjective claim. Who is to determine the “best text” when they have no idea which is original?



Rather, unless their view is supportable by the original, which isn't available and cannot be known, they need to simply state that there is a variation in source texts and state why they support one over the other. If this is not done, then a bias in the mind of the reader of the commentary will arise.

This is not a sound approach when explaining the Bible. This same thought carries through to one version or another. Even if the same source texts are used for two translations, it is inappropriate to say "This is the better version" without providing a full explanation as to why it is so. If it is true, that is fine, but to arbitrarily make the claim without support will lead to bias in the mind of the one being instructed.

Be careful to not inject subjective thoughts into your teaching. This is important because if those thoughts are found to be incorrect, it will often be too late to undo those biases in the minds of students who have moved on.

*Heavenly Father, help us to look at Your word with a passion and desire to know it more each day. And if we are going to instruct others in what we have learned, help us to do so from an objective point of view, telling what we know is certain and not being dogmatic about what is uncertain. Be with us in this, O God. Amen.*

**"Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, Acts 15:19**

The NKJV follows enough of the errors of the KJV to make it unsuitable for analysis. It should read, "Therefore, I judge not to trouble those from the Gentiles [who] are turning to God."

James had just stated, "Known to God from eternity are all His works." With that, he will now begin to express his judgment of the matter at hand, starting with, "Therefore." It is the conjunction *dio*, coming from *dia* (through, or across to the other side) and *hos* (which). Thus, it signifies "through which thing."

James has reviewed the matter from the beginning to the end, taking in all of the reasonings provided. Based on those things, he has concluded and will now render what he has determined, saying, "I judge not to trouble those from the Gentiles."

Here, James uses a verb found nowhere else in Scripture, *parenochleó*. It signifies to annoy or harass. It is as if the Judaizers were being instigators in a poking contest, treating those who have come to Christ as if their faith was insufficient and

untrustworthy in and of itself. “Look at our circumcision! This makes us way better than you. If you don’t get circumcised, your faith is definitely not genuine.”

The words of James indicate that the view of the Judaizers was, in fact, a view that had caused, and would continue to cause, trouble among the Gentiles. It would be a hindrance to some, and it would become a burden upon all. James, as a law-observant Jew, knew this. He was fully aware of the yoke of the law that rested upon his people, and he would save the Gentiles from being burdened with it as well.

But more, and without need to repeat what was presented by Peter and also by Barnabas and Paul, it was a burden that God Himself had not imposed upon the Gentiles when they first believed. Rather, He had saved them apart from any works of the law. James graciously, and without pointing any accusing fingers, is implying that to add the law to what had occurred among the Gentiles could only diminish and disgrace the work of Jesus Christ.

This is implicit. However, Paul will eventually make it explicit in his writings. As this is understood, even if unsaid, James says that this applies to all Gentiles who “are turning to God.” The verb is a present participle. They were turning to God from moment to moment as the work continued on. By adding in legalistic standards, this momentum would begin to flounder and eventually capsize in a sea of turmoil.

Life application: The attitude of the Judaizers in the world today is just like those at the time of the council in Jerusalem. The Hebrew Roots Movement, the Seventh Day Adventists, and all others who reinsert the Law of Moses in varying degrees have an arrogant, haughty attitude of their superiority over those who do not conform to their unbiblical and high-handed form of legalism.

Their doctrine looks down on others who live by faith alone in what Christ has done, claiming it is insufficient to please God. But this attitude extends also to those who claim that “good works stem naturally from saving faith.” Without ever defining what “good works” means, the attitude of these people is that if you aren’t doing stuff to prove you are saved, then you are probably (or certainly!) not saved.

This can be targeted, such as those who do not tithe, or it can be general, such as “you are not living in accord with what I believe a Christian should be doing.” Such fallacious thinking denies the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone. It adds works as an afterthought, but still something necessary to signify Jesus really saved the person.

Don't be misled either way. Stand firm on the simple gospel. If you have believed the gospel, you don't need to worry about what other people think. Having said that, it is biblically right and good that you should mature in your Christian walk. You should be growing in Christ and in holiness. But this is not to prove you are saved. It is to be a demonstration of your gratitude to the One who has saved you. Jesus died to save you. Live for Jesus henceforth!

*Heavenly Father, how thankful we are for the simple gospel of our salvation. You have done the work; we are the recipients of that. Henceforth, may we live our lives for Jesus, growing in our knowledge of Him, deepening our faith in You because of Him, and walking rightly in a world that is constantly trying to pull us back from You. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**“but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. Acts 15:20**

In the previous verse, James said that believers should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God. The meaning was to not require them to be circumcised and observe the Law of Moses. With that stated, he continues with a short list of things that would bring about defilement within the church and which should thus be abstained from. He says, “but that we write to them.”

More precisely, it merely says, “but to write.” It is something that is general in nature to be written down and conveyed to anyone at any time the matter arises. In this decision, there is a new word in Scripture, *epistelló*. It signifies to send by letter. One can see the root of the word epistle in it.

This was needed to avoid any confusion and to firmly set what was decided. Knowing the propensity of man to add or take away from such a matter, James wisely directed that the decision would be written down as an authoritative word from the council. Understanding that, he continues with, “to abstain from things polluted by idols.”

The original reads, “to abstain from the pollutions of idols.” The word translated as “pollutions,” *aligéma*, is found only here in the Bible. It is also not found in any classical Greek literature. It is a word associated with defiled food. This then doesn't merely mean practicing idolatry, but to abstain from anything that is connected to the service of idols, such as partaking in sacrifices and offerings, etc.

James does not go into the depth of the Law of Moses concerning this. Rather, it is a general statement set forth as a guideline for right living among believers. He is clearly distancing the decision of the council from the weight of the law in his words.

In general, anything that could be considered as being connected with idols should be abstained from. This, however, will be clarified by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8 & 10. James continues with his short list, saying, “*from* sexual immorality.”

The word in Greek is *porneia*. It signifies “*selling off* (surrendering) of sexual purity, *promiscuity* of any (every) type” (HELPS Word Studies). Quite often, it is associated with idolatry. James gives this general word, never mentioning the very strict laws associated with such things as set forth in the law of Moses. As such, it was another clear indication that the Law of Moses had no bearing on the decision.

The next item is “*from* things strangled.” Rather, the words are singular, “and the strangled.” It is another new word in Scripture, *pniktos*. It signifies something killed without letting the blood out. Vincent’s Word Studies extends the thought to animals killed in snares. This is an inference, but it is probably the case.

The laws within the Law of Moses are detailed and explicit on how to treat the blood of animals sacrificed or simply slaughtered for meat. James, once again, gives a general statement concerning the matter, completely distancing the decision from the Law of Moses. Finally, and in connection to the previous thought, he says, “and *from* blood.”

Once again, a general statement is made concerning a matter that is carefully detailed in the law. It is stated many times and in exacting ways what was to be done with the blood. James’ decision completely separates the matter from the Law of Moses. But its main intent was surely to have the people consider why they were drinking blood in the first place. Several reasons surely were behind the matter.

One is that to drink blood was, and even today in some cultures is, intended to assimilate the power of the one whose blood was being drunk into the person drinking. Another reason is idolatry where the blood of an animal that was sacrificed was consumed by the offerer as a way of fellowshiping with their god or gods.

Also, the shedding of blood has almost universally been considered a means of atoning for sin. This is seen in cultures around the world. But Christ’s blood is the only effectual sacrifice for the atonement of sin. This then is an object lesson concerning the nature of Christ’s sacrifice as much as anything else.

Luke's narrative provides a description of what occurred, but James' letter is prescriptive in nature. However, this must be considered with what will later be included in the canon of Scripture. In other words, just because James' words are prescriptive at the time, if they are later qualified in Scripture, it renders the decision as a prescription that is temporary in nature.

And more, these things were not a matter of salvation, but of life after salvation. Thus, they have no bearing on the gospel which is by grace through faith.

Life application: Of the words of this verse, Charles Ellicott writes –

“The grounds on which the measure thus defined was proposed are not far to seek. (1) It was of the nature of a compromise. The Gentiles could not complain that the burden imposed on them was anything very grievous. The Pharisee section of the Church could not refuse admission to those who fulfilled these conditions, when they had admitted the proselytes of the gate on like conditions to their synagogues, and had so treated them as no longer unclean. (2) The rules on which stress was now laid found a place among the seven precepts traditionally ascribed to Noah, and based upon the commands recorded in Genesis 9:5. These were held to be binding upon all mankind; while the Law, as such, was binding on Israel only. These, therefore, had been thought sufficient for the proselytes of the gate before, and were urged now as sufficient for the Gentile converts by the teacher who represented the most rigid type of Judaism.”

His words concerning admission into the church must be highlighted. The matters conveyed by James do not address the issue of salvation but of life within the church. A violation of the sexual immorality issue addressed above is found in 1 Corinthians 5. The person was a saved believer in Christ, but he was in violation of the mandate concerning sexual immorality. Therefore, Paul explained that he was to be cut off from the fellowship of believers.

And yet, he clearly indicates that this person was saved and would remain saved, even if he continued in his present lifestyle. Also, as noted above, some of the matters in James' decision are more fully clarified by Paul, demonstrating to us that the decision in Acts is now a descriptive account of what was determined necessary at the time to maintain proper order and decorum within the church.

The later writings, meaning the epistles, are set forth for the doctrine of the church. It is to them that we should turn when matters of dispute arise among believers.

As a final note, certain cults, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, will not accept blood transfusions because of this verse. Drinking blood and the transfusion of blood are completely different issues, and one cannot be conflated to mean the same as the other. The decision is as stupid as a football bat and is to be rejected outright.

*Lord God, help us to rightly divide Your word, applying precepts that pertain to the time in which we live. Those things that are set aside or obsolete are no longer binding on us. But those things that You have given for our right conduct within the church are matters that we should carefully attend to. Help us in this so that we will be pleasing to You in all ways. Amen.*

**“For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” Acts 15:21**

In the previous verse, James listed several things that the Gentiles should refrain from to live holy lives in the Lord. In each instance, it was more than apparent that James was distancing his ruling from law observance, the very issue that had brought about this council in the first place. Now, to nail that coffin shut once and for all, he continues with, “For Moses.”

The word “for” explains the reason for the statement to follow. Although most explanations of James' words limit this verse to an explanation of the giving of the prohibitions to the Gentiles stated in the previous verse, it surely goes beyond that to his entire statement which began in verse 15:13.

As for the word “Moses,” It is not referring to the man, but to the teaching of the man, the Law of Moses. The law is now being set against the doctrine of the church in the matter at hand. The two are incompatible. The law (Moses) is of works; the gift of God in Christ (the gospel) is of faith (15:7). The law is a yoke and a burden; the grace of Jesus Christ is freedom to live in His righteousness (15:10). Of this law, James next says it “has had throughout many generations.”

More literally, it reads, “from ancient generations.” It is a way of saying, “All the way back, and until this day, this has come about.” The point is that the thing he will next describe never changed a thing. Israel was to be a light to the nations, bearing the name of the Lord.

And yet, that never came about. They remained a small, isolated group of people. They were at war and at enmity with those around them for their entire history. The only thing the law did was to further isolate them and cause a wall of division to grow between them and those around them. James himself is relaying this because it is what had been the case.

Now, the Gentiles were coming to know the true God in ever-increasing numbers. It was in a manner that provided freedom, not bondage. How could imposing on the Gentiles a law that they were never under bring them anything but the same as Israel had faced?

With this thought in mind, he continues with “those who preach him in every city.” This is not limited to the cities of Israel. Rather, it means every city where there was a synagogue, especially those where Gentiles had come to listen and maybe even become proselytes. Within the Law of Moses that was read there, the prohibitions that James had just set forth could be found.

Therefore, those who attended the synagogue wouldn’t need instruction on the prohibitions given by James. They were already observing Moses, which was stricter than what he had decreed. And more, the law was “being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” As this was so, and as the Jews would be opposed to the idea that the Law of Moses was now set aside in Christ, it would be appropriate for the Gentiles to abstain from those things James mentioned in the previous verse so that the Jews would not needlessly take offense at the acceptance of these Gentiles.

In other words, and stated from the opposite side, the Gentiles who had come to Christ were given these prohibitions as a means of evangelizing the Jews, not the other way around. The Jews in the synagogues were bound under the Law of Moses. The Gentiles had come directly to Christ without ever having been under the law. How could a Gentile be anything but an offense to Jews if the Jew thought the law was still binding?

And so, if a Gentile said, “I have been accepted by the Messiah of Israel,” living according to these prohibitions now stated by James would be the least he could do to demonstrate that he was living in that saved state in a holy manner. Once the Bible was complete, that would become the standard for all people to live by. The epistles would provide the necessary explanation of how to be saved and then how to live rightly in that salvation.

Life application: James has, through his words which agree with the statement of Peter and the words of Barnabas and Paul, shown the total superiority of life in Christ over the

Law of Moses. He has given the Gentiles a reasonable set of standards to live by so that those Jews who were under the law could see that Christians lived in a reasonable manner while not being burdened with the innumerable laws found within the Mosaic Code.

Further, he has placed salvation chronologically before the requirement for right conduct, as it should be. And he has shown that the conversion of the Gentiles by grace through faith came in the exact same manner as it did for the Jews. And more, the fact that these Gentiles were considered saved, and yet expected to live to a certain standard in order to not offend the Jews, meant that the Gentiles were actually being witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ to those unsaved Jews.

It is this state of things, meaning the Gentile-led Christian church, that would continue from this point on in the church age. Peter will no longer be seen in Acts. Rather, Paul – the apostle to the Gentiles – began to take center stage in Acts 13. That will continue until the end of the book of Acts. The banner is now passing from Jew to Gentile in carrying the message of the One true God to the nations of the earth.

*Lord God, You are the God of the surprising! When we fail You, instead of bringing about our end, You make a path for restoration available back to You. When the world is to be destroyed by water, You save it through an ark that prevails over the flood. While the law is found to bring only condemnation, You have sent Jesus to remove that obstacle from us. Every step of the way, You are the God of the surprising! Thank You, O God, for Your wonderful hand of tender care toward us. Amen.*

**Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. Acts 15:22**

James has just completed his short speech, rendering his decision concerning the matter and explaining why. With that, the narrative now continues, saying, “Then it pleased.”

The word translated as “pleased” gives the sense of forming an opinion by using one’s personal perspective. Thus, it more closely reads, “Then it seemed good to the apostles and elders.” The decision had been rendered, and now it needed to be sent out for all the churches to know what that judgment was so that the issue would not cause further dissension.



This was the mutual consensus of the apostles and elders who had gathered together as noted in verse 15:6. But more, the matter was agreeable “with the whole church.” The entire body was mentioned in verse 15:4. They had heard the words of the Pharisees and would be curious about what the council’s decision was.

Having heard the decision and the idea of sending that decision out among the churches, the matter seemed good to all in the congregation. This is seen in the next words. It seemed good to all “to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.”

Rather, the clause begins with an aorist participle and should be rendered, “having chosen men out of them, to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.” In other words, the choosing of these men is the prime issue. They chose the men to convey the matter. It was obvious that Paul and Barnabas would be returning to Antioch with the decision. But it is the representatives of the council – arriving along with Paul and Barnabas – that would be the ones who would affirm it to the churches.

This is an important point because if Paul and Barnabas stopped at other churches, or even in their return to the church at Antioch, and conveyed the decision, without someone sent from the council to confirm their words, the Judaizer could follow on their heels and say, “that’s not at all what the council said.” If they did this, the matter would be in the same state as when it was first raised.

The choice of the messengers by those in Jerusalem is the primary issue because it will avoid any such dissension. This is not calling the veracity of Paul and Barnabas into question. The decision was rendered in their favor.

Rather, the importance of this is to ensure that those mentioned in verse 15:1 would be silenced. There were “certain *men*” who came down from Judea. They had obviously gone without approval, and their intention was to divide the fellowship and bring in the legalism of law observance. With this understood, the narrative next names those chosen saying, “Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas.”

The first name, Judas, called Barsabas, is spelled with one final b in some texts and two in others. And so, it is rendered either Barsabbas or Barsabas. If two b’s are correct, it is assumed that he may be a brother of the person named in Acts 1:23, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed Justus. If this is so, then Judas, like his brother, could have been a follower of Jesus from early on. If so, he would probably be well-known among the churches. This is speculation, but it is quite possible.

Silas is seen here for the first of quite a few times, both in Acts and in the Epistles. The name Silas could be derived from the Hebrew *shaul*, the same name as Saul. Thus, it would mean *Asked For*. Or, it could be related to the Hebrew word *salal*, meaning to cast up highways. If so, then it would mean *Highway Maker*.

It cannot be known for certain if one of these words, or some other, is where the name comes from. He is, however, also known for the Latin version of his name, Silvanus, which is found in several epistles of Paul and Peter. Thus, the name could simply be a contraction of that name.

Of these two men, the verse next says that they were “leading men among the brethren.” The verb *hégeomai* is used. It is one leading the way, going before others as the chief. One can see the root of our word hegemony. They were responsible individuals who would be well respected among those they encountered along the way. In verse 15:32, it will note that they were both prophets and men able to exhort and strengthen others.

Life application: If a commanding general were to have a meeting of his commanders in the field, giving them a decision and sending them back to their troops with the decision, one would expect these men to accurately convey what the general decided. However, if it was known there were spies who were out causing division, they could come along behind the various field commanders and tell the troops that what was conveyed was incorrect.

Thus, sending out known staff from the command to affirm the general’s orders might be needed. This would not be done to question the integrity of the various commanders, but to reassure those under the commanders. Today, modern communication makes such a thing less necessary. Face-to-face communication around the world is possible. But the idea remains the same, even in the church.

Obviously, if the church is following the word of God and not books of discipline or other such things, the matter would be less likely to occur. But even varying interpretations of the Bible are as common as cots in a barracks, and so ensuring that what is decided on a matter is properly conveyed to those who will hear it is important.

The devil loves to divide people and congregations, so be aware of this and always do your best to not get caught up in the “he said, she said” mentality. If a matter

concerning what someone says arises, check directly with that someone. What may seem small or trifling can cause great dissension.

*Heavenly Father, be with us and keep us from divisions and dissensions that are harmful to the fellowship. And, Lord, we pray that those who would otherwise come into the fellowship and purposefully try to tear it apart be kept from us. Give us wisdom and discernment in such things, just in case such people do come. Thank You, O God. Amen.*

**They wrote this letter by them:**

**The apostles, the elders, and the brethren,**

**To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:**

**Greetings.** Acts 15:23

Note: The NKJV clears up a lot of the errors of the KJV, but it still doesn't reflect the Greek as well as it should. The original reads:

“Having written through their hand these things:

‘The apostles, and the elders, and the brethren.

To those in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia –

Brethren, those from *the* Gentiles,

Greetings!” (CG)

This will be used for the commentary.

The previous verse noted the choosing of men who were then to be sent to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. The men were Judas, who was also named Barsabas, and Silas. With that having been stated, it next says, “Having written through their hand these things.”

The meaning is not that those carrying the letter also wrote it, but that it was written with the consent of those who will next be named and then transmitted through the hands of those who were selected to carry it, namely Judas and Silas. What likely happened is that one person was chosen to write it, probably James, who did so with the full approval of those named. Whatever is the case, it is the oldest such letter within the church. Luke probably copied directly from the original or a copy of the original.

At this point, it would be good to note that there are differences in this opening address in some manuscripts. Going to the more modern versions which often use these variations and comparing the two side by side, one can spot the differences. With this understood, the contents of the letter begin with, “The apostles, and the elders, and the brethren.”

It is an acknowledgment that the letter has come from the council in Jerusalem where the apostles were based and that it has the concurrence of the elders of the churches there as well as the understanding and agreement of those within the overall church. This would be perfectly in accord with the words of the previous verse that said, “Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church.”

There is complete harmony among all of the believers, at least for the sake of the letter, concerning the contents of what will be stated. Remembering that Jerusalem is the very heart of where temple worship was still being conducted, the letter’s contents will be an ironclad argument against the requirement for law worship by any Gentile, ever. This will be seen as the letter continues. For now, it next says, “To those in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia.”

Of these words, Cambridge appears to be correct in saying, “As we have no mention of this decree of the synod of Jerusalem in St Paul’s Epistles, we may suppose that the agitation on the subject, begun at Antioch, had spread only into Syria and Cilicia, and that the authoritative decision of the mother church quieted the controversy there, while it did not arise in the same form in other places.”

Equally insightful, Albert Barnes notes that by including Syria and Cilicia, which have not been noted before, it is “showing that churches then existed in Cilicia as well as Syria, which owed their existence, in all likelihood, to Paul’s labors during the interval between his return to Tarsus (Ac 9:30) and his departure in company with Barnabas for Antioch.”

These reasonable inferences can be derived from just a few short words in the opening of this most important letter. The address next continues with, “Brethren.”

It is an acknowledgment that those being addressed are in full and right standing within the church. They are equals in Christ, meaning without distinction, even if differences exist. The obvious difference is that it is Jews who are writing, and their message is to “those from *the* Gentiles.”

The reason it is understood that no distinction exists between the two is found later in Paul’s letter to the Galatians –

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you

are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:26-29

However, this is implied in these opening words of the letter with the use of the term "brethren." With that, the opening salutation ends with the word, "Greetings!"

It is the Greek word *chairó*. It signifies "to rejoice." However, it is a salutation common in Greek. As such, the word in this context is variously translated as "Greetings," "Hail," "Rejoice," "God Speed," etc. The word sets the welcoming tone for the main contents to follow. There is an obvious state of brotherly fellowship that is communicated in the letter's opening statement.

Life application: As noted above, translations do vary in this verse. Putting translations side by side, the differences become evident. Note that in the original, the letters were all drawn together with little or no capitalization, punctuation, line change, and so forth. The form of the first translation is to suit a modern reading of such a letter. The second would actually be closer to the way it was originally laid out, despite any textual differences –

"Having written through their hand these things:  
'The apostles, and the elders, and the brethren.  
To those in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia –  
Brethren, those from *the* Gentiles,  
Greetings!'" (CG)

"...and they sent this letter by them, 'The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.'" (NASB)

Which is actually closer to the original is debated, but the differences do not substantially change anything doctrinally.

As for the offsetting of each clause through a line change, some translators find this type of change appalling. Even if the translation is 100% correct, they feel that the form of the original must be maintained. An example of this is that the psalms were originally written in a continuous line and block format familiar to the Hebrew writings.

For example, the preface to the LSV says, "The LSV may be the only English translation of The Holy Bible entirely formatted with justified typographic alignment throughout. This

same format is maintained in poetic literature. While some readers may prefer paragraph breaks in narrative and line breaks in poetic portions for the purpose of readability, it was the decision of the translators to mimic the style of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek autographs in presenting God's word as a continuous text block. This decision wasn't arbitrary. In formatting the text this way, the LSV sets itself against the modern push for more and more formatting within the text, in favor of simplicity. Furthermore, the modern trend even extended to differentiating the words of Christ in red letters, as if God's word should be divided in such a way. The LSV is the polar opposite, regarding the entirety of Scripture as God-breathed, with its different genres of literature resting on a level playing field."

The ridiculously stupid nature of this type of thinking is highlighted in several ways. First, just three paragraphs later in the same preface, it says –

"For ease of readability, the LSV includes the double pipe ("| |") caesura mark to separate phrases within poetic portions of Scripture. The caesura mark was extensively used this way in ancient Greek, Latin, and English poetry. Verse numbers, periods, colons, semicolons, question marks, exclamation marks, and em dashes generally stand in for caesura marks in these passages if they are followed by a capital letter."

The translators admit that there are purposeful markers within the text that naturally break the flow of the reading for the mind of the reader. Why shouldn't such marks be variously employed for the modern reader in his own language?

But more poignantly, as noted above, there is almost no punctuation or capitalization in the original manuscripts. To use the logic of the LSV stated in the first cited paragraph, they should do exactly the same thing and have everything follow a simple block format with no other markings, including capitalization or punctuation. It would be insane for an English reader to even bother reading such a translation, and so these changes are made.

A third hint of the ridiculous nature of their commentary is that between the Old and New Testament in their version, a painting is included in the hard copy translation. Where is that found in the original manuscripts? As nice as the painting is, was that painted by God as breathed out through His Spirit? Obviously not. It is a hypocritical thing to say one thing and do another.

As for the text itself with the various formatting differences, at what point does it become "wrong" to make a translation more understandable for the reader? This is the

fallacy of the beard and the LSV translators entered into it just when the beard was enough to tickle the faces of baby readers who first pick it up. Others have the beard a bit longer and can tickle even toddlers. While others choose for the beard to be fully grown and mature.

Don't get legalistic! Get into the word! How it is formatted is something each reader will find suitable to his own needs. So, look through the next Bible you want to read, see if it will help you in your reading, and buy that one.

*O God! Hallelujah for Your word! You have allowed us to translate it, format it for clarity, add red letters to honor the words of Christ Jesus, use colors to differentiate various parts of the text, and so on. We can offset, use block formats, use different fonts, and more, just to make Your word come alive in a way that we can appreciate. Thank You, O God, for this latitude You have granted to us. Thank You for Your precious word. Amen.*

**Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “*You must be circumcised and keep the law*”—to whom we gave no *such* commandment— Acts 15:24**

The previous verse cited the introduction to the letter to the Gentile brethren in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. The main content of the letter begins with this verse. Of note is that some manuscripts (and thus some versions) drop out the highly important words of this verse concerning law observance and circumcision –

“Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions.” ESV et al

“Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘*You must be circumcised and keep the law*’—to whom we gave no *such* commandment.” NKJV et al

Although the words are missing here, anyone who reads the full content of the chapter will know exactly what is intended. Whether the words were added by one text for clarity or dropped out of the other for some unknown reason, the intent of the overall passage remains unchanged. Having noted that, the verse begins with, “Since we have heard.”

The council immediately distances itself from any connection to those who had brought the false message of circumcision and law observance presented in Acts 15:1 –

“And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’”

The council heard about this but had not directed it. That will be explained more fully as the verse unfolds. For now, the words continue, saying, “that some who went out from us.”

Those in the council openly acknowledge that the source of the trouble was “from us,” but no further explanation is given. In other words, because the letter is addressed to Gentiles within the church, it could simply mean “from Jews.” That is probably the way it should be taken, meaning in a general sense and not from either the apostles or elders in Jerusalem. Next, it notes that these unsanctioned people, “have troubled you with words.”

These men, whoever they were, did not come with either a letter of authority or with a demonstration of signs and wonders that may have substantiated the message of true apostles. They spoke as if they possessed authority within the church but their words were not on behalf of the church. Instead, they brought forth doctrines that had no basis or standing within the doctrines set forth for Gentile converts.

In fact, to this point, the matter had not even been established by the apostles and elders. As such, their message was without any basis at all. Because of this, the letter continues, saying that their words were “unsettling your souls.”

Here is a word found nowhere else in Scripture, *anaskeuazó*, translated as “unsettling.” Of this word, Vincent’s Word Studies says –

“Only here in New Testament, and not found either in the Septuagint or in the Apocrypha. Originally, it means to pack up baggage, and so to carry away; hence, to dismantle or disfurnish. ... From this comes the more general meaning to lay waste, or ravage. The idea here is that of turning the minds of the Gentile converts upside down; throwing them into confusion like a dismantled house.”

Where there was order and harmony at the teaching of Paul and Barnabas, there was suddenly upheaval and turmoil because of the false message of these men. This is



perfectly evident from the words of Acts 15:2, “Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them.”

The Gentile converts probably stood there watching as the two sides sparred over the issue, which, according to these false teachers, was that “*You must* be circumcised and keep the law.”

This is the message the false teachers had carried as was previously cited from Acts 15:1. If their teaching was true, it would mean that salvation was conditional and up to the works of each person. There would be no security in trusting in the works of Jesus. Hence, it would relegate the cross of Christ to a door that He might have opened, but which would need to be kept open by the power of the individual.

And more, if the door was shut again, it would then be up to the individual, not Christ, to reopen it. The utterly ridiculous thought presented by these heretics would mean that “Christ died in vain” (Galatians 2:21).

Of these aberrant heretics who carried their false doctrine to the Gentiles, the letter next says, “to whom we gave no *such* commandment.” Again, Vincent’s Word Studies provides the intent of the statement –

“The word originally means to put asunder; hence, to distinguish, and so of a commandment or injunction, to distinguish and emphasize it. Therefore implying express orders, and so always in the New Testament, where it is almost uniformly rendered charge. The idea here is, then, “we gave no express injunction on the points which these Judaizers have raised.”

These Jews went forward without any such authority or charge. They had appointed themselves as the arbiter of what God was doing and then they sent themselves out to express their self-appointed authority to others. The council has, through their concise words, completely removed themselves from these false teachers and their doctrine. Their letter, which is now included in Scripture, testifies to the matter as much today as it did when it was written.

Life application: The world is filled with exactly the type of people that are described in the letter from the council. They have a certain genealogy or heritage that allows them to appear as if they are specialists in their field, not because of proper training and endowed authority, but because of who they are in relation to some unimportant aspect of their existence.

For example, a person may be related to a famous preacher or teacher who rightly handled the word of God. Along comes his son, we'll call him Dandy Andy. He does not rightly handle the word and he has never established himself in the manner expected of a proper handler of the word. And yet, because of who he is in relation to his dad, he is given an ear and becomes a famous and yet unsound teacher of the word.

Another example would be someone who is Jewish. For no other reason than that, he is given an ear. He knows just enough of the word to be able to make illogical connections about what is going on in the world. However, he is a skilled writer and so he writes books about world events, tying them in with his unsound understanding of the Bible. Because the books are tingling to the ear, supposedly based on Scripture, and because he is Jewish, he becomes famous and is sought out as a renowned "scholar" of the Bible.

Why do these things happen? The answer is, "Because those who listen to these people are 1) not willing to learn Scripture and find out if what they are being sold is sound or not; 2) starstruck by the figure, joining in to be a part of what is exciting and novel; or 3) find the message pleasing to the ears, sensational, and exciting."

For these, and certainly other reasons, countless people are pulled away from what is sound. Entire denominations of people have followed false teachers, and their false messages have continued on for generations, simply because the word is ignored.

Read the word! Meditate on the word! Be prepared to evaluate the message of those you encounter against the word! In this, you will keep yourself from harm.

*Lord God, we are so very thankful to You because of Your wonderful word. It is a guide for our lives, a light for our path, the illumination of Your intent for us, and a solid rock we can stand on against the wiles of false teachers. Help us to treat this word with care. It is what reveals Your heart in the giving of Jesus. That is what we need to pursue. And so, help us to do so all the days of our lives. Amen.*

**it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Acts 15:25**

After explaining the main purpose of the letter in the first sentence, which was the issue of refuting the Judaizers concerning circumcision and adherence to the Law of Moses, the letter now continues, saying, "it seemed good to us."

In other words, it means that the decision was made and was mutually agreed upon to take the appropriate action necessary to rectify the situation. That occurred, as it next says, “being assembled.”

Rather, this is more of a paraphrase. The Greek is an aorist participle, more simply reading, “having come.” This state of having come was “with one accord.” It is a single word, an adverb, now seen for the eighth time, all in Acts. It literally signifies “unanimously.” The entire council consisting of the apostles, elders, and then with the agreement of the church, were united in thought concerning the resolution of the matter.

And it could be no other way. If they were being led by the Spirit to effect the purposes of God for the church, then what was decided had to be in this unanimous fashion. God is superintending over the process of what will be the standard for the rest of redemptive history concerning the Gentile-led church age. This is because the events are now recorded and included in His word.

If the decision was not unanimous, then that would have been stated and explained. But because this was not the case, it is fully apparent that what is recorded here is exactly what God wanted. Though this is a descriptive account of the events that took place, it is a fully explanatory record of what God intends concerning the matter. The only deviation from it is to be taken by subsequent words found in the epistles that may clarify or set aside whatever is decided upon now. For the time being, the church was given its instructions and they were to be what was taught concerning circumcision and law observance.

As for the contents of their unanimous decision, that continues with the words, “to send chosen men to you.” Again, an aorist participle is used, “having chosen men to send to you.”

The decision was rendered, and it will be explained in the verses to come. However, to demonstrate to all who would hear the decision that it was from the council and no longer a point of debate, there would be men sent from the council itself to confirm the source and the content. These were being sent, as it next says, “with our beloved Barnabas and Paul.”

Again, as seen on several occasions, Barnabas is noted before Paul. It is true that Barnabas had a closer and more longstanding affiliation with the church in Jerusalem than Paul, but more, it is certainly Paul with whom the Judaizers had the biggest beef. He

was the spokesman for the missionary journeys. He was also out in the front in matters dealing with the Gentiles, having been selected by the Lord to be the apostle to the Gentiles, etc.

Therefore, to place Barnabas first in the letter from the church is another implicit confirmation of the rightness of what Paul has been conveying. The order then is from the council, in a written letter, and confirming the letter's authenticity by men chosen by the council concerning what has been conveyed, meaning acceptance of the stand presented to the council by Barnabas and Paul.

Calling these two men "beloved" is a note that not only are they teaching what is proper, but they are doing so with the full blessing and spirit of fellowship by the council itself.

Life application: Later councils in church history may or may not have been led by the Spirit of God in rendering decisions. And there may or may not have been a unanimous agreement to what was ordained out of those councils. But that is because the canon of Scripture was eventually decided upon and settled. It is to the Bible, meaning the word penned by men chosen by God to write it down through His Spirit, that such matters were (and still are) to be decided.

If the decisions rendered at such councils are in accord with the word, that becomes evident by an evaluation of the word. If they are contrary to the word, the same is true. The word would reveal it.

Even today, councils are held in many denominations, usually called synods, conferences, or something similar. The surest way to tell if they are being led by God is to see if they are being held in accord with the word of God. If the Spirit of God breathed out the contents of the Bible, and if a matter is being debated that is contrary to the word of God, then that council – by default – cannot be led by the Spirit of God.

It may be that a faction or an individual is rightly standing on the words of Scripture concerning a matter at the gathering, and that is fine, but if the debate is, for example, over the matter of ordaining homosexuals, then God's Spirit cannot be guiding the matter. He has already spoken concerning the issue.

Think this through when you see members of your church or denomination conducting affairs in a manner contrary to the word. God's position in such deliberations is already stated in the Bible. It is fixed and it is unchanging. To debate contrary to the word is to invite His wrath and condemnation, nothing else.

*Lord God, Your word is written. Help us to get that through our heads and to accept what it says as the authoritative word to conduct our affairs in all things. May we never be so presumptuous as to make decisions contrary to what You have laid out before us in this sacred and precious treasure. Help us to think clearly on this matter. Amen.*

**men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 15:26**

In the previous verse, the council explained that they were sending along chosen men to accompany Barnabas and Paul. With that, it next refers to these men, saying, “men who have risked their lives.”

The Greek states more clearly what is almost unclear in some English translations. This is not referring to the chosen men accompanying Barnabas and Paul, but to Barnabas and Paul. It is they who went forth carrying the gospel to both belligerent Jews and to areas where Gentiles were hostile to strangers. They faithfully carried the message even to the point of being chased out of cities (such as in Acts 13:50-52), being stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19, 20), etc.

The council had been apprised of these things and the distrust of Paul that once existed had been turned into a wholehearted appreciation for his tireless efforts. Barnabas was already known as a faithful believer, but his status was certainly elevated greatly because of the hardships he was willing to endure. For both of them, the council notes that these things occurred “for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

They had gone forth according to the calling of the Spirit upon them, they had continued steadfastly in faith, and they had returned to Antioch and continued to work tirelessly as servants of Jesus Christ. The council recognized this and acknowledged it openly to any and all who were to receive their letter.

Life application: If we really have a deep-seated faith in the hope set before us in Jesus Christ, then why would we shy away from proclaiming it? A life of daily work, a good meal, annual vacations, relative ease and security, etc. is almost an intoxicant. It can keep us from striving to do more than we may otherwise be willing to do for the name of Jesus Christ.

This doesn't necessarily mean our faith is lacking, but it sure can affect how we exercise our faith. This is why the author of Hebrews wrote out his strong exhortation –

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1, 2

Sin can ensnare us, ease can dull our senses, fear of the future can misdirect us, etc. If we fix our eyes on Jesus and lay such weights aside, we will be more purposely fixed to do what we should be doing. This has to be a constant mental state of life. It isn't easy because of everything that comes at us in our daily walk, but if we just keep tuning our minds back to the prize at the end, we will do well.

Focus on Jesus! Don't be fearful, distracted, or misdirected. Instead, have faith that what lies ahead will replace everything that we give up right now. And what it is replaced with will be so far above what we may lose now that we will never consider the temporary losses we may face. Be assured of this! Eyes on Jesus!

*Glorious God, help us to fix our eyes on Jesus at all times. May we have unbroken concentration as we press ahead in our hope of what He has set before us. This temporary world has many enticements and distractions, but these things will all fade into obscurity someday. Help us to think clearly about the sure and reliable promises we possess in Christ. Amen.*

**We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth.** Acts 15:27

Note, the Greek more appropriately reads, “We have sent, therefore, Judas and Silas, and they through word are telling the same things” (CG). This will be used for the commentary.

The previous verses have referred to the selection of men to accompany Barnabas and Paul, noting that Barnabas and Paul had risked their lives for the name of Jesus Christ. With that, the note continues with, “We have sent, therefore, Judas and Silas.”

These are the “chosen men” just referred to in verse 15:25. Designating them by name is certainly to ensure that nobody else could later claim they were also sent. The council is already aware of the cunning tricks of the devil and they are being precise and careful, ensuring that the intent of the council is properly conveyed by people who have been

duly recognized to convey it. That is attested to in the next words, saying, “and they through word are telling the same things.”

The point of this is that there is both a written testimony and a verbal confirmation of it by those who are specifically named in their communique. The use of the present participle, “are telling,” means that they can be trusted to continue to repeat the same message at any time they are asked to. It is as if their words are being spoken by the council at the moment they come off the lips of Judas and Silas.

Life application: The process of conveying the words of the council is comprehensive in nature. By handling the matter as they are, they are leaving nothing open to misunderstanding. Barnabas and Paul have presented their stand concerning law observance no longer being necessary.

They have shown how it is by grace through faith that a person is saved. That message has been conveyed to the leadership in Jerusalem. The council has heard the matter thoroughly and unanimously agreed with the stand of Barnabas and Paul. They have written down their resolution which is to be conveyed to the church in various locations. They have sent men along to confirm what has been written down and to provide continued testimony and instruction concerning the matter.

Along with that, Luke – under inspiration from the Holy Spirit – has made a detailed and exacting record of these events, a record that could have been challenged the moment he published it if it were not correct. All of this has been done to put the matter once and forever to rest. And yet, two thousand years later, people are still arguing against the plain, obvious, and precise decision rendered by the council.

They reinsert the law, demand adherence to it in various ways, including circumcision, and completely ignore what is written for us as guidance from God concerning the matter. How important is it to know the word of God? The evidence is right in front of each of us. A rejection of what has been determined and recorded is a rejection of the word of God. And a rejection of the word of God is a rejection of God who has given us His word.

Pay attention to what is said and taught. Check what you are instructed. Verify what has come to your ears. The devil is hard at work in the church today, directing his false doctrines and robbing people of either being saved or of being productive in their salvation. Pay heed to the word!

*Lord God, help us to be wise concerning Your word. May we not trust anyone until we have verified what is presented. Convincing-sounding arguments are only convincing if they are checked against the source and match what it says. Great oratory skills cannot replace adherence to Your word. Give us wisdom in this, O God. Amen.*

**For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: Acts 15:28**

The previous verses contained the contents of the letter sent from Jerusalem to the churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. They have explained the overall reason for sending the letter and who was bringing the approved decision of the council in support of the position of Barnabas and Paul. Now, the specific directives that will be levied upon the church are to be noted in the next two verses. That begins with the words, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit.”

For the third time since verse 15:22, the word *dokeó* is used. It signifies “what seems to be.” In verse 15:22, it seemed good to the apostles, elders, and the whole church in Jerusalem to send word to the churches concerning the council’s decision. In verse 15:25, it seemed good to send chosen men along with Barnabas and Paul. Now, it says it seemed good to the Holy Spirit what will be presented as guidelines for the Gentiles.

This word, *dokeó*, is where the modern term dogma is derived from. The decision of the council, the words of this letter, are what seemed good to the Holy Spirit. This is based on the promise that the Spirit would guide the decisions of the apostles as indicated by Jesus in John –

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. <sup>13</sup> However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. <sup>15</sup> All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you.” John 16:12-15

It is obvious to the council that the Holy Spirit had accepted the Gentiles. That was evidenced as far back as Acts 8, confirmed in Acts 10, and had been reaffirmed repeatedly as reported by Barnabas and Paul. That is not what is being conveyed here. Rather, the words are based on what will be said. With this understood, the letter continues, saying, “and to us.”



This reflects what was referred to in verse 15:22 mentioned in the second paragraph above. The decision of the council was agreed upon and that decision was to be conveyed to the Gentiles. Said plainly, they were being obedient to what the Holy Spirit had set forth through the inspiration process. Understanding this, the words continue with, “to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.”

In other words, there are things now to be set forth that the Gentiles were to follow through with. As noted in a previous commentary, these are written now, but there is nothing to suggest that they could not later be modified with proper instruction. Such modification will be seen in the epistles when Paul gives an explanation concerning foods sacrificed to idols, what to do with sexually immoral members of the church, etc.

For the time being, these few judgments are given to avoid any conflict that might arise between Jewish and Gentile believers. As Cambridge says, “They put forward therefore this unerring guide as the warrant for their decree. And as they at the suggestion of the Spirit were laying aside their longstanding prejudices against intercourse with Gentiles, they claim that the Gentiles in their turn should deal tenderly with the scruples of Jews.”

The council’s words call the judgments necessary. Albert Barnes gives three logical reasons for this –

1. In order to preserve the peace of the church.
2. to conciliate the minds of the Jewish converts, Acts 15:21.
3. in their circumstances particularly, because the crime which is specified - licentiousness was one to which all early converts were especially exposed.

The things to be mandated now seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and yet Paul further clarifies them as he is led by the Spirit. This means that they are temporary measures awaiting further, more precise, attention. As Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles, it is fitting that those clarifications should come through him.

Life application: Of the words of this verse that say, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us,” Charles Ellicott states, “The words have since become almost a formula for the decrees of councils and synods, often used most recklessly when those decrees bore most clearly the marks of human policy and passion.”

Because of this, Bishop Wordsworth says, “It cannot be held that councils of the Church now are entitled to adopt the words of the text in the framing of canons.”

This is true to an extent. But what is that extent? There must be some measure by which an individual, a church, or a denomination can claim that something seems good to the Holy Spirit. There is, and that measure is the completed word of God. It is as common as bees in a hive for denominations today to claim that they are being led by the Holy Spirit at their annual conferences. The pope, likewise, will often toss in the supposed presence of the Holy Spirit when referring to his decisions or those of the gathering of the Roman Catholic church.

But such decisions cannot “seem good to the Holy Spirit” if they are in conflict with the completed word breathed out by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the measure and the standard by which any decision concerning man’s spiritual conduct before God must be the Bible.

This is another of the many reasons why it is untrue that people are receiving revelation from God today. People constantly claim that they are being given prophetic utterances, directions from God directly into their heads, inspiration concerning calculations about the timing of the rapture and other end-time events, and so forth. Unless in agreement with Scripture, these cannot be true. The only time such words concerning God are true is if they can be validated by going to Scripture.

Be immovable in your thinking about these things. If God has said in His word that “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority,” then no calculation concerning the timing of the rapture will ever be of God. He has said we won’t know. Therefore, such information cannot be derived even from the Bible itself. As God has forbidden homosexuality in the word, then it cannot be that God will condone it in the church today.

The Bible is the standard. It is the breathed-out word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit. And it is sufficient for the conduct of our lives as we live them out in the presence of God.

*O God, help us to think clearly and rationally concerning Your word. Help us not to fall into the error of thinking anything which is contrary to what is recorded there. It is not for us to claim what Your word has not allowed. And so, Lord, may we hold fast to Your word alone for our conduct, doctrine, and walk before you. Amen.*

**that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.**

**Farewell.** Acts 15:29

The letter from the council just noted that there were “necessary things” that should be laid upon the Gentiles. Those necessary things are now listed, starting with, “that you abstain from things offered to idols.”

This thought responds to the “things polluted by idols” found in verse 15:20. It is a new word in Scripture, *eidólouthutos*. It is a compound word coming from words signifying “idol” and “to sacrifice.” The idea is the slaying of animals to idols. In eating the meat from such an idol, it is as if one is participating in fellowship with the idol. As such, it is essentially what the fellowship (peace) offerings designated under the Law of Moses were for. Instead of to the Lord, however, it is to an idol.

This precept is explained and amended by Paul later in 1 Corinthians 8 and 2 Corinthians 10 where he uses this same word six times. Paul explains there that idols are nothing and so if someone eats meat sacrificed to an idol, understanding that the idol had no effect on the meat and it is just being consumed as regular food, he has not done wrong.

In his instruction, he brings this matter back to the thought of conscience. If one’s conscience is defiled because of the idol, he should not eat the meat. Likewise, if it would defile another’s conscience, he should not eat the meat. However, if it is understood that the idol is nothing and the meat is just meat, there is no defiling of the conscience. Thus, the meat is perfectly acceptable to eat. Understanding that, it next says, “from blood.”

The Greek simply says, “blood.” The word “from” is implied for the first clause. As for the word blood, this was the last item listed in verse 15:20. As explained there, the main intent of this was to have the people consider why they were drinking blood.

As the life is in the blood, such a practice is usually intended to assimilate the power of the one whose blood was being drunk into the person drinking. Another reason is idolatry where the blood of an animal that was sacrificed was consumed by the offeror as a way of fellowshiping with their god or gods. Hence, it was a part of the ritual of “things offered to idols” just mentioned.

Also, the shedding of blood has almost universally been considered a means of atoning for sin. This is seen in cultures around the world. But Christ’s blood is the only effectual sacrifice for the atonement of sin. This then is an object lesson concerning the nature of Christ’s sacrifice as much as anything else. After this, it next says, “from things strangled.”

Rather, it simply says, “strangled things.” This was stated in verse 15:20 and was a measure so as to not give offense to the Jews who would bleed out any meat that was to be consumed. To not do so would cause offense to them. Hence, it was given as a way of alleviating that. The list ends with “and from sexual immorality.”

Rather, it says, “and sexual immorality.” This word began the list in verse 15:20. It is a subject Paul refers to and explains in detail, explaining it in six of his epistles. Of these things, the letter says, “If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.”

Note that the council does not command these things, as if they were a matter of law. It also does not say, “You cannot be saved if you don’t do these things” as was stated by the Judaizers in Acts 15:2. There, they had said, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

The council clearly understood the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. The word “repent” is not used by them, as if they had to “repent in order to be saved” as is falsely claimed throughout the world today. It is necessary to know what one is doing wrong before he can change his mind about what he is doing wrong. The council takes it as an axiom that they are writing to saved believers. Only now are they telling them what is good for sound living in Christ.

With these prescriptions laid out for the Gentiles, the letter ends with, “Farewell.” It is a word found only here in Scripture in some manuscripts, *rhónumi*. However, it is also found in Acts 23:30 in many manuscripts. It is a perfect imperative literally meaning “Be strong.” As it is a perfect imperative, it gives the sense of “you have been strengthened and so remain strengthened.”

Life application: The council has written to believers who may or may not have previously received any of this instruction. Paul and Barnabas likely told them not to be sexually immoral. If they did, it is still unknown which of the other prohibitions they had previously conveyed to those they had talked to. And yet, these Gentiles were saved.

Suddenly, they are now told things that they may have not been previously told. Does that mean they were not “really saved” until they started obeying the precepts laid down by the council? Of course not! And more, if they decide to obey only three of the four, does that mean they will lose their salvation? Of course not. The council never even hints at such a notion.

The issue of salvation is not the same as that of learning what one is to do after he is saved. And yet, the categorical boxes are constantly overlapped by people during their evangelistic efforts. It is as common as shells in the ocean for people to tell about Jesus, explain that He died for our sins and that all we need to do is to believe that message to be saved, citing Ephesians 2:8, 9, and then to say, “And so you need to repent of your sins and He will save you.”

This is a huge problem because the person, at this point, may not even know what sins he is committing. In fact, unless he is disciplined, he may never know what things he is doing to offend God. And yet, the person evangelizing him has just added turning from every sin in the person’s life as a condition for salvation. It is totally unscriptural, and it is not the gospel.

A person is saved by believing that Christ died for His sins, was buried, and rose again. That is what saves. The sin in the person’s life is forgiven upon belief. Now, after that has occurred, the person can start to learn what he has done wrong or what he needs to keep from doing.

For example, that saved person may have never had sex in his life. So, he doesn’t need to “repent” of that, meaning change his mind about fornication. But more, the person who led him to Christ never gave him a copy of the Bible and never told him that having sex outside of marriage is wrong. And so three weeks later, he has his first encounter with a woman. Is he saved? Did he lose his salvation?

Think this through. In such matters, one can only do what he is instructed to do. Keep the categorical boxes separate so that confusion in thinking does not arise.

*Lord God, help us to never taint the pure gospel by adding to it. Rather, help us to tell people what it takes to be saved. And then, Lord, help us to instruct the saved about what it means to live a holy life in Your presence. May we do these things so that the people of the church are built up soundly in You. To Your glory, we pray! Amen.*

**So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter.** Acts 15:30

With the contents of the letter from the council having been recorded by Luke, the narrative continues, saying, “So when they were sent off.”

In the selection of those to go with Barnabas and Paul, preparations had to be made for their journey. With those taken care of, it can be assumed that some of the council saw them part of the way out of the city, or even out of the gates and for a short distance. It is a common gesture and would not have been missed on such an important journey.

Eventually, those remaining in Jerusalem would give their final goodbyes and turn back while the company making the journey would continue. Having been sent off in this manner, Luke next says, “they came to Antioch.”

The narrative brings them right back to where all the trouble began as was recorded in Acts 15:1. However, instead of leaving with a dilemma to be resolved, they are returning with an answer from the council concerning the matter.

It is certain that those of the church were anxiously waiting to hear how things went and were probably asking about the council’s decision. Instead of answering one person at a time though, it next says, “and when they had gathered the multitude together.”

The Greek is more succinct, “and having gathered the multitude.” Everyone was brought together for the word to be spoken forth at one time. By doing it this way, there would be vindication for Barnabas and Paul because the letter and the witnesses were there to validate the matter. That is seen in the final words of the verse, saying, “they delivered the letter.”

One can imagine anyone who sided with the Judaizers looking aghast at the hearing of the decision. And yet, if saved, they were saved by the blood of Christ, not adherence to the law. Their legalistic demands would now be exposed for what they were.

Life application: To this day, when someone challenges the legalism of the Hebrew Roots Movement adherents or that of fundamentalists in churches that heap up rule upon rule not found in Scripture, there are arrogant and even angry faces and accusations hurled out against them.

Sides are drawn up and churches are divided over such things. But there is a standard by which these matters can be determined, the Bible. One good way of exposing legalism is to simply ask, “Where does it say that in Scripture?”

For example, some churches impose petty little laws on the congregation. Your hair is too long, you should not be dancing, we do not approve of musical instruments in this church, etc. In such cases, ask them where Scripture imposes such a rule. The only one

of the three mentioned that is even partially addressed is the length of a person's hair, but even that is subjective. Paul, when addressing the issue, never gives a length. If the matter is not defined, then there is a reason for it.

The point is that we need to be prepared to challenge such nonsense. The way that is done is to know what the word says. There is freedom in Christ. He did not come to bind His people with a laundry list of pet peeves, nor did He come to provide His people with eternal insecurity.

Rather, those things that are not defined in Scripture are simply not important to our walk before the Lord. Don't allow yourself to get bogged down in legalism. Stand firm on the freedom we are granted in Christ. Remember that such people abounded even during the time of the law. Jesus strongly rebuked such arrogance. How much more offensive is such an attitude when the grace of God has been poured out on His people through the giving of Jesus!

*Lord God, thank You for the freedom we possess in Christ. Help us not to get caught up in legalism and strange teachings that do not profit our walk before You. Rather, may we live holy lives, guided by the words of Scripture without adding to them. Where there is freedom, may we live it out accordingly. Amen.*

### **When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. Acts 15:31**

In the previous verse, it noted that the letter from the council at Jerusalem was delivered to the multitude who had gathered from the church at Antioch. With that, it next says, "When they had read it."

Those of the church were certainly excited about what decision had been made and their ears would have been open and alert as each word was read off the scroll. Upon its completion, they certainly would have been quite relieved for several reasons. First, and simply from a human perspective, the prospect of going through the pain of circumcision was now removed.

But more, it meant that, as Gentiles, the circumcision they had received, meaning that of the heart, put them on the exact same level as the Jews without ever having to join the Jewish nation, giving up their own unique culture and identity in the process.

It also meant that they had a freedom that Israel under the law had never previously possessed by not being brought under the yoke of the law. By this time, Paul would have

instructed the Gentiles that the entire period of the law was simply a tutor to lead people to Christ. Instead of law, they needed something better, they needed Christ. But they already had Christ. How could it be that they should need to go back to that which never truly profited Israel?

This is the lesson that Paul later had to explain in detail to those at Galatia in his epistle to them. But those at Antioch had certainly been with Barnabas and Paul long enough to already know this fundamental truth.

Because of these reasons, and certainly many others, it says that “they rejoiced over its encouragement.”

Here, a pun is most likely being conveyed by Luke. In Acts 15:22, it said, “Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.”

With these words, Barnabas is placed before Paul and the chosen men who were sent with Barnabas and Paul. Therefore, it is likely (though still supposition) that Barnabas was the one who stood reading the letter from the council. The pun is in his name and in the word translated as “encouragement.” Both are from the Greek word *paraklésis*. As such, Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement (Acts 4:36), is living out his name toward those at Antioch as their hearts were encouraged by the contents of the letter he bore and read to them.

Life application: Of the meeting of the council in Jerusalem, Albert Barnes says, “This council has been usually appealed to as the authority for councils in the church as a permanent arrangement, and especially as an authority for courts of appeal and control. But it establishes neither, and should be brought as authority for neither.” After coming to this conclusion, he gives four long and well-thought-out reasons for this. What he says can be read in his commentary, but the overall thought of his words can be summed up with the single thought that what is recorded here in Acts is not a prescriptive account. It prescribes nothing for future councils.

Rather, it is a descriptive account of what occurred. The form, structure, type of authority, and makeup of the council cannot properly apply to later councils. The apostolic age has ended. What occurs now in councils around the world is not in the least bit comparable to what occurred in Acts 15.



Now, instead of doctrinal issues being handled as occurred in Acts, a total reliance on the contents of Sacred Scripture, meaning the Holy Bible, is to be considered. The presence of the Holy Spirit is in the pages of the Bible because it is the Holy Spirit who breathed out its words through those who wrote it (see 2 Timothy 3:16 & 2 Peter 1:19-21).

Therefore, if the considerations of and decisions rendered by a council are not in accord with the words of Scripture, they are, by default, not guided by the Holy Spirit; they are not of God. If they are not of God, they are, by default, of the devil. This is a lesson that must be considered as councils, conferences, and the like are held by churches and denominations. What is happening in the world today, such as in the ordination of women, homosexuals, etc. is not of God. The Holy Spirit is not among these gatherings, and only unholiness and apostasy will be the result.

Hold fast to this sacred and precious word for the guidance of matters of the church and the Holy Spirit will guide that church through its times of difficulty. And the same is true with your personal life as well.

*Heavenly Father, how could we expect You to bless our actions in our personal lives or in the churches we attend if we are not acting in accord with Your word? Help us to think this through clearly and never deviate from its precepts. In them, there is life and the straight path. Apart from them is unhappiness and loss. May we do all that we do to Your glory alone. Amen.*

**Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. Acts 15:32**

The letter from the council has been read to the congregation at Antioch. Having heard it, they rejoiced over its encouragement. With that, it next says, “Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also.”

These are the two men who had been sent from the council to confirm the words of the letter, having accompanied Barnabas and Paul to Antioch. The term “prophets” in this verse is obviously not given in the sense of the Old Testament prophets that foretold the future or spoke forth a new word of the Lord. That may or may not be something they did at other times, but in this context, calling them prophets is tied to what is stated in the next words. It says they “exhorted and strengthened the brethren.”

The verb form of the word used in the previous verse, *paraklésis*, which was translated as “encouragement,” is used here, *parakaleó*. Thus, it is more appropriately rendered “encouraged.” The other word, translated as “strengthened,” was introduced in Acts 14:22. It signifies to support, confirm, make stronger, etc.

In other words, there had been confusion thrown into the congregation by the events that took place. Trust in the words of Barnabas and Paul may have been diminished because of the Judaizers, something that definitely happened to the church in Galatia as Paul records in his epistle to them. These two prophets, rather than foretelling the word of the Lord, forth-told it.

They gave them encouragement that the message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, apart from any works of the law, was correct. They encouraged the church to stand fast in their faith and even built them up with additional words, strengthening them, as it next says, “with many words.”

Rather, the words in the Greek are singular and should read “with much discourse.” They added either instructional lessons as may be seen today in a Bible study, or they may have spoken forth in the form of a sermon or homily, building the believers up in the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

Life application: Because the council has wisely sent along Judas and Silas, the decision rendered by it would certainly have gone unchallenged by any Judaizer still lurking around the believers in Antioch. Today, we do not have the apostles around any longer to render such a letter and then send along people to confirm what was said.

However, we do have the full, final, and sure word of the apostles and other men who wrote out the word of God for our instruction. There is no need to have Judaizers throw a congregation into upheaval if the congregants are properly instructed in the word of God. Thus, it is imperative to not just give life application sermons and Bible studies that are not based on the Bible.

Rather, the word of God is to be opened, analyzed, and explained in detail. If this is not done, the same confusion in the congregation that arose in Antioch, Galatia, and elsewhere is sure to arise in whatever congregation these false teachers come to. Be firm on what the gospel says. Do not give an inch to such cretinous fellows. Instead, proclaim the freedom and liberty that is found in Jesus Christ, not works of law or man that can never profit. Yes, hold fast to the true and only gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Glorious God Almighty, how thankful we are for the surety of the word. If we simply read it and properly apply it to our lives, we will not be misdirected by false teachers. You have breathed it out to us, and You want it to be known by us. So, Lord, help us as we open it and study it all our days. Thank You for the surety of the word that You have given to us. Amen.*

**And after they had stayed *there* for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. Acts 15:33**

The previous verse said that Judas and Silas encouraged and strengthened the brethren at Antioch. With that, it now says of them, “And after they had stayed *there* for a time.”

No specific time is stated, but it was long enough to accomplish whatever goals were intended to be met but not recorded in Luke’s narrative. The main goal, that of encouraging and strengthening was certainly fully met. Confidence in the teachings of Barnabas and Paul would have been realized and even bolstered, and anyone who was found to be harming the congregation would have been weeded out and expelled.

With the time for their return having arrived, it next says that “they were sent back with greetings.” Rather, the Greek reads, “they were sent away with peace.”

It is a Hebraism signifying a blessing for peace to be upon them. The traditional words in Hebrew are normally *shalom aleichem*, peace unto you. Some form of blessing such as this would have been pronounced over them as they were sent “from the brethren to the apostles.”

Here, some manuscripts state, “to those who had sent them.” The meaning is basically unchanged. Either way, these two men had fulfilled their task, they had confirmed the gospel Barnabas and Paul had proclaimed, it being the same gospel as that of those in Jerusalem, they had refuted the falsities of the Judaizers, and they had encouraged and strengthened the church at Antioch.

Life application: It is hard to imagine how people can continue to teach such heretical ideas as that of the Judaizers, meaning adherence to the Law of Moses, or those of hyperdispensationalists, meaning the teaching that there are two gospels – one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles – after going through this account in Acts. But they are out there, ready to destroy the faith of congregations and bring them into the bondage of heresy.

Variations of these heresies abound as well. So be sure to read your Bible, study proper theology, and apply right doctrine to your walk before the Lord. Don't be duped by those with pious-sounding arguments about how holy they are because of what they do. Rather, remember that you are made holy because of what Jesus has done.

And that holiness is bestowed upon all in the same way. It is through faith in the finished, final, and forever work of Jesus Christ. Any who come to Him, Jew or Gentile, is saved by simple faith in what He has done. Hold fast to this precious message of salvation.

*Lord God, thank You for the simple gospel that saves. Thank You that Jesus has done it all. Now, all we need to do is believe. Yes, thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there.** Acts 15:34

The previous verse said, while speaking of the emissaries from Jerusalem, "And after they had stayed *there* for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles." Now, a verse that is not found in many manuscripts says, "However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there."

The context of the previous verse was based on verse 15:32 which spoke of Judas and Silas. As it said in verse 15:33 that "they were sent back," it would be assumed that it also spoke of Judas and Silas. However, in verse 15:40, it will say that Paul chose Silas to join him on a second missionary journey.

Because of this, it is believed by many that the words of this verse now were a later insertion to explain why Silas was available to join Paul. Some believe it to be a margin note that crept into the text. It is not found in the Syriac, Arabic, and Coptic versions. On the other hand, the Latin Vulgate says, "It seemed good to Silas to remain, but Judas went alone to Jerusalem."

Supposing it belongs there, the plural of the previous verse could indicate that others came from Jerusalem with Judas and Silas, and together they left while Silas remained behind. However, that would seem to fly in the face of verse 15:27 where the council only mentions Judas and Silas.

Supposing it doesn't belong, no contradiction between verses 15:34 and 15:40 should be assumed. Verse 15:36 will say, "Then after some days." There is nothing to suggest the

timeframe. It could be a few weeks or a year. It is a statement that could mean almost any amount of time. Therefore, Silas could have returned to Jerusalem and decided to go back to Antioch during those days, weeks, or months.

No matter what, either one text added a thought which is spurious, or a part of the true text was dropped out that does not affect any point upon which the overall narrative or any set doctrine hinges. If it is included in a version, it should be footnoted with a comment concerning why it is not in other versions. If it is not included in a version, it should be footnoted why it is not.

Life application: God has allowed man to copy and pass on His original word. God is not fallible and the word He originally breathed out is perfect because it comes from Him. However, man is fallible. Anytime man is involved in something such as this, a process of corruption will result because of man's inability to maintain the perfection of the original.

We cannot reasonably look at such differences in texts and say, "This cannot be the word of God." Rather, we can look at the whole and feel confident that it is the word of God, but that man has been graciously allowed to transmit it, causing contamination of it. And yet, God has preserved His word in a sure enough form that it still can be rightly considered His word.

It is certain that if a copy of a manuscript of Shakespeare's work was found and it had spelling errors, transpositions, margin notes, missing words or sentences, etc., anyone who evaluated it would say, "This is a copy of Shakespeare's work." In fact, it would be ridiculous to say otherwise. And yet, naysayers of the Bible demand perfection of transmission to be a part of the process of conveying His word. If such perfection does not exist (which it could not because of the nature of man), then to them it somehow cannot be God's word. The thinking is biased and flawed.

This is the trap that too many Christians have fallen into, thus believing that God has somehow preserved His word in an exacting manner that is 100% infallible in one particular version or another. They then choose a version, claim that the version they have chosen is God's only infallible word, and condemn all others as being of the devil. This leads to a cult-like mentality and very poor theology.

But this claim has been made time and again over various versions in various languages. Rather than look at the matter from this viewpoint, we should look at the massive number of texts available as a blessing by which comparisons can be made to weed out

obvious errors that have entered the various texts. This is responsible and it is certainly what God intended so that His word would be safely transmitted in a form that carries with it the essential information we need to share with others.

*Lord God, do we have a sure word? We sure do. Thank You for Your precious word, O God. Amen.*

**Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. Acts 15:35**

The previous verse contained the disputed words, “However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there.” Whether that verse is original or not, the words now are without dispute, but the translation of the conjunction will depend on how one views the matter. If those words are accepted as original, the words of this verse will say something like, “Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch.” If they are not accepted, then translators will say something like, “Paul and Barnabas, however, remained in Antioch.”

The conjunction can be rendered either way depending on the context. Whichever is correct, Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch after the matter of the Judaizers was settled. However, with it settled, Luke now returns to placing Paul’s name first – Paul and Barnabas. Together, they remained in Antioch “teaching and preaching the word of the Lord.”

As elsewhere, the word translated as “preaching,” *euaggelizó*, signifies to proclaim the good news. It is less a formal sermon and focuses more on evangelizing. They continued sharing the gospel which is the word of the Lord for salvation. Along with them, it also says, “with many others also.”

The meaning is that the church was filled with people who were willing to go out and tell others the good news about Jesus. With the approval by the council that Gentiles did not need to adhere to the Law of Moses after coming to Christ, the church was able to go forth and evangelize the gospel in the purity with which it was originally intended, meaning salvation by grace through faith in the full, finished, final, and forever work of Christ Jesus.

The idea comes through a bit more clearly when it is translated in the same order as the Greek –

“And Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and proclaiming good news -- with many others also -- the word of the Lord.” (YLT).

In Young’s translation, one can see that he punted on the conjunction, translating it as “and.” In doing this, it allows for either option concerning the previous verse being genuine or not. He also, rightly, offsets the words “with many others also” giving a greater force to them. The church was highly evangelistic.

The reason for this being so important to highlight is because this may have been the time when the sad events of Galatians 2 took place –

“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; <sup>12</sup> for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. <sup>13</sup> And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before *them* all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?’”

-Galatians 2:11-14

Others disagree and say this cannot be the time when these events took place, instead placing them in Acts 18:22. This is less likely because Paul says that Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. However, Paul and Barnabas are never mentioned as being together again after Acts 15. Further, this probably did not occur as is supposed by the Pulpit Commentary, which says –

“But it is quite inconceivable that Peter, with all the influence of the Jerusalem Council fresh upon him, and after the part he himself took in it, and when his own emissaries, Silas and Judas, had just left Antioch, should act the part there ascribed to him. Nor is it within the region of probability that, so soon after the council, any should have come ‘from James’ to unsay what James had said and written at the council. We may with much confidence place Peter's visit to Antioch before the council.” Pulpit Commentary

The reason this view is unlikely is that Paul says in Galatians 2:9 –

“...and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”

The only record of Paul and Barnabas being together in Jerusalem before the council in Acts 15 is in Acts 11 & 12 at a time when this issue had not yet come to light. The point of the council was to determine the acceptability of the message that Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed to the Gentiles. That was decided, as indicated in Galatians 2:9, at the council.

And more, apart from the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 and the conversion of the household in Acts 10, the main conversion of the Gentiles only began to occur after Paul and Barnabas were called by the Holy Spirit to their first missionary journey in Acts 13:2. Therefore, it is most probable that Peter's great failings, along with those of Barnabas, occurred at this point in Acts 15, shortly after the council had taken place.

Peter came to Antioch, realized the freedom that came from faith in Christ, ate with Gentiles, probably enjoying pork chops, bacon, and ham for the first time in his life, and then withdrew from this fellowship because he was unsure if the Jews who came from James would accept his move so far away from the restrictions of the Law of Moses.

Life application: If the timeline suggested here is correct, and the words of Galatians 2 fully support that it is, it shows how quickly we can backpedal from the truth and soundness of proper doctrine when faced with a little bit of external pressure.

Peter had spoken boldly in the council of Acts 15 concerning Gentile conversion and their not needing to adhere to the Law of Moses. This, by default, meant that the law was set aside in Christ. And yet, he peevishly backtracked from this fundamental truth when it personally affected his appearance before those who may condemn his departure from the customs of the Jewish people.

If this can happen to Peter so quickly, it can happen to any of us if we allow our guard to come down. Stand firm on the freedom of the gospel, do not allow anyone to bring you under the yoke of the law or of legalism. There is freedom in Christ and we must proclaim it as such.

*Thank You, O God, for the freedom we possess in Christ. May we never fail to speak out just what Your word proclaims. Help us in this because it is so easy for us to get distracted or to not want to deal with conflict that may arise over one issue or another. Help us to stay on the right and sound path at all times. We pray this so that You will be glorified through our conduct. Amen.*



**Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see how they are doing.*” Acts 15:36**

The previous verse noted that Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word. With them there, it next says, “Then after some days.”

There is no indication of how long this is. Charles Ellicott notes, “The commonly received chronology of the Acts makes the interval between the Council of Jerusalem and St. Paul’s second missionary journey somewhat more than a year.” How this was determined is unknown, but it seems likely that the time is certainly more than a few months based on the word “remained” in the previous verse and “some days” in this one.

After this extended but indeterminate time, “Paul said to Barnabas.” Paul is the one to initiate the idea and it is reflective of the type of man he was because he next says, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city.”

The Greek word is an aorist participle. Literally, “Having turned back, indeed, let us look upon our brethren in every city.” Paul is concerned about those he previously evangelized wondering about their state and desiring to meet up with them again. This is all inclusive of the cities where the two of them had gone. Paul truly cared about these people and the churches that had been established among them because they were “where we have preached the word of the Lord.”

Everything came back to the knowledge of Christ with Paul. It certainly burned within him that not only were converts made, but that they were living in accord with the word they had heard. To him, if their ministry were to be considered effective, it would mean that it continued to make new converts whose faith was based on the truth of the word. The Judaizers had followed along after them as they went to new locations. How much more could they infect the churches when there was a long interval without any teaching support! As such, he adds a final note, saying, “*and see how they are doing.*”

The Greek is more succinct, “how they are.” Taking the first clause and the last, the main focus of Paul is more clearly seen – “Having turned back, indeed, let us look upon our brethren in every city – how they are.” He cared about the brethren who had received the word of God, and he cared about them in every city they had been to. His heart and desire were geared toward the converted lives in Christ to be established and

flourishing. The thought is expressed throughout his epistles, a few examples of which are –

“For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, <sup>10</sup> making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. <sup>11</sup> For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— <sup>12</sup> that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.” Romans 1:9-12

“...besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.” 2 Corinthians 11:28

“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, <sup>16</sup> do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: <sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, <sup>18</sup> the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”

-Ephesians 1:15-18

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, <sup>5</sup> for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ.”

-Philippians 1:3-6

These, and other such verses, reveal the caring nature of Paul. He was not just an evangelist who passed through with the gospel. Rather, for those who heard and accepted it, he became a father to his children, a teacher, and a mentor. The connection to those he preached to remained, even after he had physically departed from them.

Life application: It is the job of an evangelist to evangelize. There is nothing wrong with a person sharing the gospel and moving on. Likewise, there are those who are geared toward remaining in the same place and who preach and teach, even if they have never gone out to evangelize the community in which they live.

There are those who establish a church, pass the reins on to another, and move on to establish another new church. There is nothing wrong with any of these approaches. We

have all been given certain abilities that can be used to glorify God. Paul did all three of these examples just mentioned and so much more. Even if we don't do all of the things Paul did, we can still do our part and learn from his example. Above all else, the things he did were intended to glorify God through Jesus Christ.

If we can make that the main focus of what we do, our time will be well spent, even if it is simply checking people out at the grocery counter, fixing someone's plumbing, or writing out insurance policies. Whatever we do, it should become evident to those we encounter that we are people of integrity and caring because we are people in Christ. Let us have this attitude in all we do.

*Lord God, may our lives be used as instruments of honor to the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Help us to be willing to live in a manner that others can see the difference in us and want to know why we possess the joy that is in us. May it be so, to Your glory. Amen.*

**Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.** Acts 15:37

In the previous verse, Paul suggested to Barnabas that they go back and visit the brethren in all the places they had previously preached to them, desiring to see how they were doing. With that, it now says, "Now Barnabas was determined."

Using the word "determined" is agreed by many scholars to be too strong for the statement. The Greek word focuses on the planning of an action rather than the desire behind it. Thus, something like, "Now Barnabas was minded to," gives the sense.

It was his intention to take Mark. Based on what will be said in the next verse, this intention will turn into determination. But the initial act is what is being referred to here, and that intention was "to take with them John called Mark."

This is Barnabas' cousin who went with them on the first missionary journey but who then departed from the trip upon arriving at Perga in Pamphylia –

*"So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. <sup>5</sup> And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant."*

-Acts 13:4, 5

*"Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem." Acts 13:13*

This is all that was stated about John at the time. No reason was given for his departure, but the fact that he left the missionary work early will now become a source of contention between Paul and Barnabas.

Life application: Each person will find offense in different areas of life. What one might find trivial, another may find the same matter inexcusable. Some of this may be cultural, at times it may be how one is personally geared towards stress, forgiveness, honor (of self or for another), etc.

As an example of a cultural offense, one could make dinner plans with a family in Malaysia. If a time is set for 5 pm, an American will normally be ready at the scheduled time, awaiting his guests. When 5 pm comes around, and the guests don't arrive, he may be perplexed. By 6 pm, he may be worried. By 8 pm, he will consider that any chance for the dinner to come about will be gone. The food will be put away and the night will be over.

And yet, the family arrives at 9:30 pm with big smiles on their faces, ready for dinner while Andy American stands there in his night clothes wondering what has just taken place. No explanation is given by the family as to the delay. And they are as surprised at there being no food for them as the American is that they even showed up at such a late hour.

Who is in the wrong? It depends on the perspective of the one standing on either side of the door. The culturally accepted norm for an American is that when dinner is set for 5 pm, anyone showing up more than 10 minutes late and without an excuse and an apology is the offender. For a Malay, 5 pm really means 9, or 10, or even 11 pm. No excuse is needed, and no apology should ever be expected.

Paul and Barnabas will have an issue arise based on the events taking place in the verses now being analyzed. Who is right and who is wrong? What good or harm will come from what occurs? Take a broad view of what transpires and consider the matter from both sides as the words are evaluated.

Then take time to consider a similar event that may have occurred in your own life. Is there something that could have been done to avoid the outcome? Or did the outcome eventually lead to something good even though it was not a happy thing at the time?

Life is filled with events that we often cannot resolve, and which may turn out negatively. And yet, God can use them to bring about something good in another area.

Think about such things and consider them. You may be surprised at what you eventually see has arisen.

*Lord God, help us to consider things that occur in our lives that were either beyond our control or that we were unwilling to resolve. May we evaluate what eventually took place and try to see how You have brought something good out of what took place. When we do, we will surely find that Your guiding hand has brought about something far better than what first occurred. We know that You have a great plan that even includes our temporary failings. Thank You for Your guiding hand in all things. Amen.*

**But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Acts 15:38**

The previous verse noted that Barnabas had determined to take John Mark along on the missionary journey that Paul and he were planning. With that, it now says, “But Paul.”

An immediate contrast has arisen in the direction they should take concerning the matter. At this point, anything is solvable, but beginning with this note of dissension a red flag is thrown up concerning what will come of the matter. As for Paul, he “insisted” concerning his point of view.

The Greek is an imperfect verb signifying “to account as worthy.” In other words, it might be said, “Paul found it worthy to make his case.” The verb, being imperfect, means that he didn’t just speak up, but that he continued to speak. Barnabas would give his thoughts and Paul would counter with his. It is like two grindstones spinning against one another, rubbing each other down.

Paul’s argument was “that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia.” The wording is important. First, the word translated as “had departed” is *aphistémi*. It signifies to depart, but it is connected to the word we translate as apostatize. That is probably how Paul took it based on the rest of what is said.

Second, the word translated as “the one” actually ends the verse in the Greek text, thus placing it in the emphatic position. It strongly marks out John as an irresponsible partner. One can see Luke interviewing Paul and saying, “So, tell me what happened between you and Barnabas?” In response, Paul would have said something like, “I saw it worthy to tell him that he who withdrew from us in Pamphylia and who didn’t go with us to the work... we shouldn’t take THAT ONE!”

When this was recorded in Acts 13:13, no note of why John had departed was given and Luke provided nothing negative in his recording of the event.

However, it can now be determined that John's departure was something that Paul had considered unacceptable. He had carried the thought of it with him ever since. It can only be speculated upon, but because John was Barnabas' cousin, Paul may have not said a word about the matter to Barnabas. But now that they were faced with the prospect of another journey where the same thing could happen again, it was intolerable to Paul that John should be included in the plans. This is because he "had not gone with them to the work."

Paul saw the missionary trip as work, not an adventure. He saw it as something that was necessary for the saving of souls, and he was willing to expend himself in the process. John Mark, for whatever reason, did not share this same drive. The event came shortly after the conversion of the Gentile Sergius Paulus and Paul's acceptance of the name Paul, which is used from that time on.

Mark may have taken offense at the thought of evangelizing Gentiles, a task that Paul seemed wholly devoted to undertaking. It is speculation, but it fits with the chronology of what occurred as well as the decision rendered by the council concerning Gentiles. Whether this or something else, whatever motivated him, John was not grounded enough to remain in the mission field. Paul found that unacceptable.

Life application: What appears to be the case is that Paul has kept a matter that truly upset him pent up within himself. There are times that this is necessary, such as information that is considered personal and confidential between clergy and those they tend to. However, if there is a matter that is festering between friends or those who are closely connected within the church, keeping something like this pent up may turn into a disaster as it continues to seethe below the surface.

Paul has allowed a matter to continue in this fashion for an extended period of time. Only now that the issue of John joining the trip has come into focus has Paul been faced with it becoming an issue. If he had talked with Barnabas about it over the many months of their travels, things would have been handled differently now.

When you have something that is bothering you that could later erupt, it is best to not hold it in. Barnabas probably had no idea that Paul was so offended by the matter. That seems apparent from his suggestion of bringing John along again. He was probably

caught totally off guard by Paul's words. This could have been avoided, and it will lead to a real eruption between the two of them.

Prayer and conversation are key points that have been lacking over this matter. Don't allow the same to happen to you if it is within your ability to correct perceived offenses early on.

*Lord God, there are really annoying people out there who go out of their way to upset others. But, for the most part, offense comes about unwittingly and unintentionally. When an offense has taken place, help us to attempt to work it out with Your wisdom, through adherence to the word and with prayer. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; Acts 15:39**

The previous verse revealed Paul's insistence that John Mark should not be taken along with him and Barnabas on the next missionary journey. With that, it now notes, "Then the contention became so sharp."

The word translated as contention is *paroxusmos*. This is the first of two times it will be seen in Scripture. It signifies a paroxysm; a provocation that literally jabs someone to the point where he is forced to respond. Words such as provoke, incite, and so on will give the active sense of the matter. The other use of the word is in Hebrews 10:24 where it is used in a positive sense where believers are implored to motivate one another toward love and good works.

As for Paul and Barnabas, one would say something that cut so deeply the other couldn't let it go and responded with his own cutting words. It is the type of argument that leads to words that may never be forgiven and wounds that may never heal. Because of this, it says "that they parted from one another."

Of this, Matthew Poole dubiously equates this to the parting of Abraham and Lot as is recorded in Genesis 13, claiming they kept the unity of the Spirit. The words now do not bear this out. Their fellowship was torn apart, and the Spirit would have to deal with them individually as they proceeded in their own directions. Because of this, it next says, "And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus."

Barnabas was from Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and it is where he and Paul set forth on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:4). Thus, it is the natural direction that he should go to have

the most impact on his next missionary travels. Taking along John Mark shows Barnabas' ability to overlook whatever Paul perceived as a permanent factor of disqualification.

This is the last time that Barnabas is mentioned in Acts. The record Luke lays down from this point on, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, is directed to the ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. Any further record of future impact that Barnabas may have had on the church is left to secular history. In Scripture, he will be directly mentioned two more times. The first is in 1 Corinthians 9 –

“My defense to those who examine me is this: <sup>4</sup>Do we have no right to eat and drink? <sup>5</sup>Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as *do* also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? <sup>6</sup>Or *is it* only Barnabas and I *who* have no right to refrain from working? <sup>7</sup>Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?” 1 Corinthians 9:3-7

He will also be mentioned again in Galatians where Paul notes that he was led astray, just as Peter was, by the Judaizer who came to Antioch. That is an event that probably occurred during the events of Acts 15, although some see it as having occurred during Acts 18, something less likely. Of the events now taking place, John Gill says –

“...thus as soon almost as peace was made in the church, a difference arises among the ministers of the word, who are men of like passions with others; and though it is not easy to say which was to blame most in this contention; perhaps there were faults on both sides, for the best men are not without their failings; yet this affair was overruled by the providence of God, for the spread of his Gospel, and the enlargement of his interest; for when these two great and good men parted from one another, they went to different places, preaching the word of God.”

Life application: Regardless as to whether Paul and Barnabas ever reconciled again or not, the Spirit inspired Luke to record the events in Acts for us to consider what occurred. There was a sharp dispute between two men who had expended themselves for the gospel and who would continue to do so.

This is a fallen world. We all have limitations and buttons are bound to get pushed. When they are, our response may set us at odds with one another, even to the point of never fellowshiping together again. And yet, Paul does not later hint at the events that occurred or claim that Barnabas is not to be trusted. Rather, his comments in 1



Corinthians 9 (noted above) indicate that Barnabas was a trustworthy, selfless worker for the Lord.

Somehow, those in Corinth will hear about Barnabas even if there is no record of him traveling there in Acts. This means that Paul probably spoke well of him to the Corinthians, describing the person he had traveled with on his first missionary journey. In other words, just because they could not agree on working together any longer, Paul continued to speak highly about Barnabas. Let us consider doing this as well should we divide from another over some difference in opinion.

*Heavenly Father, we are limited beings. We don't have all the information, we only have so much power and stamina, we may get riled up or offended by events that occur, etc. Because of this, differences are bound to arise between us. When such times come, give us wisdom and discernment in how to handle such things. May we not spitefully hurt others simply because we can. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God.** Acts 15:40

The great dispute that led to the parting of Paul and Barnabas came about in the previous verse. Because of it, Barnabas and Mark sailed to Cyprus. Continuing that thought, it next says, “but Paul chose Silas and departed.”

Here, Silas is reintroduced into the narrative. The dispute over whether verse 15:34 is authentic or not was discussed at that time. It could be that he stayed in Antioch all along, or it could be that he returned with Judas to Jerusalem and came back to Antioch later. Regardless of that matter, he was approved by Paul for his conduct and reliability and so Paul chose him to accompany him on his second missionary journey. In their departure, it next says, “being commended by the brethren.”

This is a blessing bestowed upon them as they headed out. The congregation met, prayed over them, and commended them to the task set before them. Because of what is said here, many scholars take the incredible stand that this means they took Paul's side in the dispute that had arisen between him and Barnabas. That is an argument from silence, and it ignores the fact that the narrative is focused on the ministry of Paul.

For all we know, the church could have had a party with balloons, falafel, and herbal tea for Barnabas and John Mark. After that, they could have heaped blessings upon them and sent them off with a ten-piece band playing the 126<sup>th</sup> Psalm. The point is that the

contents of Acts is highlighting the ministry of Paul now, just as it had highlighted Peter from Acts 1-12.

There is a transition from Jew to Gentile taking place. Paul is the one to effect that transition as it occurs, being the apostle to the Gentiles. Barnabas was mentioned because he was relevant to the account in relation to Peter and then to Paul. Now that he is not connected to Paul any longer, there is no need to focus on what has happened to him. As for Paul and Silas, they were commended by those at Antioch “to the grace of God.”

It is of note that some Greek texts say, “to the grace of the Lord.” As Jesus is God, and as God bestows His grace through the Lord, the change in texts does not change the significance of what is said. The blessing upon them is given and they will depart to carry on the work set before them.

Life application: It is fine to speculate on matters such as the blessing of the church upon Paul and Silas, but it is not appropriate to take sides where the Bible does not do so. As noted, that is an argument from silence, a fallacy. A fallacy is a belief that is mistaken because it is based on an unsound argument. There is a failure to properly reason out what is taking place. When a conclusion is made, the argument is rendered invalid because of this error in thinking.

There is an almost innumerable list of fallacies used by people. Take time to brush up on them and then try to avoid such errors in your words. This is important because once a fallacy is introduced, the rest of the argument has no further standing on that particular point. And it may be that particular point that the entire argument stands or falls on.

*Lord God, help us to be reasonable in our thinking, discerning in how we present our thoughts and logical in evaluating arguments that arise. May this especially be so when we consider Your word. Help us not to insert fallacies into our perceptions about what You are telling us. Instead, give us wisdom to think things through in a right and clear manner. Amen.*

**And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Acts 15:41**

The previous verse noted Paul’s choosing of Silas to join him on his second missionary trip. Upon their departure, they were “commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord.” Now, that continues with, “And he went through Syria and Cilicia.”

The singular shows that the journey is currently conducted by Paul while Silas is merely there as an assistant. This is probably like Acts 13:5 where John was noted as their helper. This will continue in Chapter 16, noting Paul as the main subject. At times, it will say “Paul and his companions.” However, Silas will begin to take on a more prominent role, being noted alongside Paul, while in Philippi.

As for the region they are going through, Syria and Cilicia, those are, along with Antioch, the areas noted in the letter from the council earlier in this chapter –

“The apostles and elders, your brothers,  
To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:  
Greetings.” Acts 15:23

As these areas are not where Paul and Barnabas had gone on their first missionary journey, and yet they are areas that had churches as evidenced by the letter and the travels of Paul now, it is probable that these churches were either established during the dispersion of the Jews at some unrecorded point or, more likely, by Paul.

If by Paul, it may be during the time when he had left Jerusalem after visiting the apostles as is recorded in Acts 9:26. In Acts 9:30, Paul returned to Tarsus which is in Cilicia. It was quite a bit later when Barnabas went to bring him to Antioch as is recorded in Acts 11:25. Therefore, during that period, Paul may have gone to the synagogues in the surrounding areas and spoke about Jesus, establishing churches that included Gentiles.

This appears to be the case as is recorded in Galatians 1:21 where Paul says he “went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.” This can be also assumed because of the council’s letter which specifically addresses the Gentiles in those churches. It is evident that Judaizers had gone to those churches and countered the true gospel they had at first received.

Therefore, with Silas as a representative of those in Jerusalem, it was a wise time to personally go to those churches and spread the truth of the matter that had been resolved. Salvation is by grace through faith, and law observance has no part in one’s standing before Christ. It is this message they carried, “strengthening the churches.”

In other words, the churches had certainly been put into a quandary when the Judaizers had shown up and started teaching their false gospel of works of the law in order to be saved. Now, to shore them up and strengthen them, Paul had determined to bring them

the true gospel once again, establishing that word with the authority and backing of those in Jerusalem.

Life application: Acts 15 has now come to an end. The main message of this chapter is not unlike the overall substance of the book of Galatians. But it is a message that permeates both Paul's writings and the rest of Scripture as well. It is that man under law is at enmity with God but in the coming of Jesus Christ, there is grace.

From the first verse of the chapter to the last, this is the preeminent theme –

“Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.’” Acts 15:1

“Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup> No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”  
-Acts 15:10, 11 (Peter's final recorded words in Acts)

Acts 15:23-29 provide the decision of the council, excluding any hint of law observance.

He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Acts 15:41

Interspersed throughout these select verses is the constant theme that salvation is by grace through faith and that works of the law are excluded from the process of salvation. Stand fast on this precept and stay away from any teacher, church, or denomination that imposes some type of works as a needful requirement to be pleasing to God. Rather, God is pleased with faith in the works of His Son –

Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

-John 6:28, 29

*O God, how grateful we are for Your grace. Thank You for Jesus Christ who has made it possible for us to receive it by faith. Help us to never add to the purity of the gospel. May our deeds be deeds of faith because of who we are in Christ. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 16

**Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, *the* son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek.**  
Acts 16:1

Acts 15 ended with a note that Paul went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Though he was accompanied by Silas, the verse spoke only of Paul. Chapter 16 begins with the singular as well, saying, “Then he came to Derbe and Lystra.”

Notably, the record of the journey of Barnabas and John is omitted by Luke. With the decision of the council established concerning Gentiles, the focus has turned to Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. As for this location, it is the area where Paul and Barnabas had fled in Acts 14:6 after having been chased out of Iconium. This is the area Paul referred to in Acts 15:36 –

“Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are doing.’”

Instead of Barnabas, it is Silas who is with him this time. While in this area that Paul had previously evangelized, it next says, “And behold, a certain disciple was there.” The wording does not indicate whether Timothy was in Lystra or Derbe. However, Lystra is the nearest antecedent, and it is named again in relation to Timothy in the next verse and in 2 Timothy 3 –

“But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, <sup>11</sup>persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me.” 2 Timothy 3:11, 12

Being a disciple means that he was probably converted by Paul on his previous missionary trip or that someone who was converted had later spoken to him about Jesus. Paul will call him a “son in the faith” or a “faithful son” in his epistles which may be an indication that Paul was a father to him through conversion.

In Philemon, Paul will say, “my son Onesimus, who I have begotten *while* in my chains,” when referring to Onesimus’ conversion. Therefore, it is possible that Timothy was one

of the converts of Paul and Barnabas. Whatever the case, he is now referred to for the first time in Scripture with the words, “named Timothy.”

The name comes from the Greek words *timé*, price or honor, and *theos*, God. Thus, the name means something like (passively) Honored of God or (actively) Honoring of God. Other similar variations are given such as Dear of God, etc. Of him, it next says, “*the* son of a certain Jewish woman.”

This will be an important distinction that Paul will deal with in just two more verses. For now, it says of his mother that she was one “who believed.”

The meaning is certainly that she was a believer in Christ. Nothing indicates how this came about, but being around of Derbe and Lystra, it is likely that the message carried by Paul and Barnabas had made it to her ears either directly or indirectly. This faith is referred to by Paul in his first letter to Timothy –

“I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as *my* forefathers *did*, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, <sup>4</sup> greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, <sup>5</sup> when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.”

-1 Timothy 1:3-5

Noting that his mother is a Jew is important because it next says, “but his father was Greek.” Nothing is said of the father’s connection to either Judaism or Christianity. If such a connection existed, Luke would have noted it as he meticulously tends to highlight such things. Despite this, the faith of his grandmother and his mother was strong and that was instilled in Timothy either for his conversion or as an example to him to remain strong after his conversion.

Life application: There are faithful women noted in Scripture that were set as examples to their households. One of them is Abigail, the wife of Nabal. While he was an uncaring drunk, she saved him and his household from being killed by David through her faithful deeds, eventually becoming the wife of David after the death of Nabal. Likewise, Proverbs 31 describes the conscientious conduct of the woman of faith, describing someone Solomon was intimately aware of.

Faithful women such as Mary and Tabitha are noted in Luke’s writings. Though the history of Scripture predominantly is centered on men, women are carefully noted

throughout its pages as well. Paul highlights the importance of women in an obvious way in his writings –

“For man is not from woman, but woman from man. <sup>9</sup> Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. <sup>10</sup> For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of authority on her head*, because of the angels.

<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, neither *is* man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. <sup>12</sup> For as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes* through woman; but all things are from God.” 1 Corinthians 11:8-12

God is revealing the history of the redemption of humanity through the pages of the Bible. As the man is the head of the house, the focus is naturally on the line of man throughout its pages. But within the greater story, we are reminded that women play an integral role in this process. Women should not be upset that certain restrictions are placed upon them in the church. They are created differently, and limitations are set because of these differences. And yet, there is an honor upon women that cannot be denied. Any noted figure in the church, even the humanity of Jesus, came through the woman.

When the biblical model is adhered to, things will work properly, and proper respect will be granted. Let us remember this and adhere to the order which God has ordained according to His wisdom.

*Lord God, thank You for the differences that exist between men and women. Together, we form a unit that is ordained by You that is lacking when it is not properly adhered to. Help us to follow the guidelines set down by You so that we will not err in our lives as we live in Your presence. Amen.*

**He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Acts 16:2**

In the previous verse, Paul had arrived at the area of Derbe and Lystra. Upon his arrival, the words introduced Timothy. Of him, it next says, “He was well spoken of.”

This is referring to Timothy, the main subject of the previous verse, not of his father who was mentioned in reference to him, just as his mother also was. The word translated as “well spoken of,” *martureó*, simply means “witnessed to” or “testified of.” The idea of the witness of him being positive is understood from the context.

This positive testimony concerning him was “by the brethren.” This is something Paul will later note is required of those who serve as elders and deacons when he writes his first epistle to Timothy. For example, of deacons it says, “But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being *found* blameless” (1 Timothy 3:10).

During the time of Paul’s absence from this area, Timothy had earned a positive reputation within the church. But his reputation went beyond just his own local gathering. Luke records that Timothy was positively spoken of by those “who were at Lystra and Iconium.”

Nothing is said about how this came about, but there are possibilities to consider. Timothy might have had work that took him between Lystra and Iconium. If so, he might have faithfully attended whichever church he was nearest to when they gathered.

It may also be that when questions arose within the church in one area, they may have sent to the other area to say, “What about this issue from Ruth chapter 3? What do you think this is telling us?”

In such a scenario, Timothy may have considered the matter, spoken to the church, and was then sent off by them to the other church to give his reading on the matter. This is not speculation without support. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3 –

“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,<sup>15</sup> and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 3: 14, 15

Timothy’s great understanding of the Scriptures may have made him a sought-out commodity in these churches as they continued to grow in the faith. Whatever the reason for the positive witness concerning him, it is obvious that Paul immediately was drawn to him in a bond that would grow from this time forward.

Life application: Timothy was well-versed in Scripture even from childhood. Because of this, he was well-grounded in his life and conduct. Scripture can have a wonderfully positive effect on us if we are just willing to read it and apply its lessons to our lives. This is true even with verses that are filled with judgment and doom, such as –

“As the thief is ashamed when he is found out,  
So is the house of Israel ashamed;



They and their kings and their princes, and their priests and their prophets,  
<sup>27</sup> Saying to a tree, 'You *are* my father,'  
And to a stone, 'You gave birth to me.'  
For they have turned *their* back to Me, and not *their* face.  
But in the time of their trouble  
They will say, 'Arise and save us.'  
<sup>28</sup> But where *are* your gods that you have made for yourselves?  
Let them arise,  
If they can save you in the time of your trouble;  
For *according to* the number of your cities  
Are your gods, O Judah.  
<sup>29</sup> Why will you plead with Me?  
You all have transgressed against Me, says the LORD.  
<sup>30</sup> In vain I have chastened your children;  
They received no correction.  
Your sword has devoured your prophets  
Like a destroying lion." Jeremiah 2:26-30

In reading passages like this, along with its surrounding words of judgment, too many people conclude that the God of the Old Testament is an angry, judgmental God. But this is not the case. In understanding the entire context of the history of Israel, including their covenant relationship with the Lord, they will see that it is Israel, not the Lord, who is at fault. The wrath and punishment are meted out because they have violated the relationship between the two.

But understanding such things necessitates knowing all that Scripture says. From the broader view, the goodness of God, His covenant faithfulness, His holy nature, etc. are seen. This is how God is. The negative aspects of the relationship between the Lord and Israel are self-inflicted wounds on their part, just as getting a spanking or being grounded is a self-inflicted wound to an unruly, disobedient child.

Timothy could see this because his life was centered on Scripture since his youth. It is not too late for you to learn such things now. No matter how old you are, you can learn Scripture quickly if you just apply yourself. Audio Bibles can fill your time when you are too tired to read. You have YouTube and a multitude of other ways to access answers that may arise in your studies.

If you are trying to save money on a broken washing machine, you will go to YouTube and find a link that will show you how to repair the part you need to fix. If you can do

this for a washing machine, you certainly can find an answer to something much more important that you don't understand from the book of Jeremiah.

Don't waste your life on vapor! Spend your time in the word. Read it, think about it, contemplate its lessons, and search for answers that arise. Which will it be today – a football game or time in the word? The choice is yours. Where do your priorities lie?

*Lord God, help us to rightly align our priorities to those things that will be pleasing to You, that will edify us in Your word, and that will have eternal reward. May we not fritter our lives away on that which is just smoke and vapor. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek. Acts 16:3**

The words now continue to refer to Timothy who was introduced in Acts 16:1. Of him, it next says, "Paul wanted to have him go on with him."

Nothing says how this came about. It could have been Paul wanting to take more people as assistants. It might be Paul recognizing Timothy's character and ability to share the gospel. It even might be Timothy who initiated the idea, asking if he could accompany them on their journeys. The reason is less important than the fact that Paul agreed with Timothy's character and that his presence would benefit their journey. Because of this, Luke next records, "And he took him and circumcised him."

This seems to fly in the face of Paul's letter to those in Galatia. In that letter, Paul completely dismisses the necessity for circumcision. He says –

"Yet not even Titus who *was* with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised." Galatians 2:3

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. <sup>2</sup> Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. <sup>3</sup> And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. <sup>5</sup> For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love." Galatians 5:1-6

This event appears to contrast with the decision of the council recorded in Acts 15. The entire point of calling the council was because the Judaizers wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised according to Moses and to observe the law. That was rejected by the council. As these things are true, there must be a reason for the circumcision of Timothy. And sure enough, that reason is given in the next words, “because of the Jews who were in that region.”

The Jews were opposed to Paul every step of the way. Timothy being uncircumcised would only exacerbate the problems Paul faced. Timothy, and in turn Paul and those with him, would be faced with more strife and hostility than would otherwise arise because of the enmity of the Jews. The precept follows with Timothy as it was stated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 –

“For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; <sup>20</sup> and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law; <sup>21</sup> to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; <sup>22</sup> to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. <sup>23</sup> Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with *you*.”

-1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Paul’s thoughts concerning the circumcision of Timothy, while leaving Titus and all other Gentiles uncircumcised, came down to the issue of Timothy’s maternal heritage. His mother being a Jewess. This would mean nothing in and of itself “for they all knew that his father was Greek.”

Timothy was not circumcised because of this. His father was a Gentile and Timothy was raised without being circumcised. And yet, he was raised knowing the Scriptures, customs, and ways of the Jews. Paul’s *modus operandi* was to always go to the synagogue of the Jews first. This would not have been possible for Timothy, and indeed the entire cohort, if Timothy was uncircumcised.

The whole thought comes down to, “What is the most productive way of evangelizing the people we meet?” As Charles Ellicott rightly says, “The act was spontaneous, and men may rightly concede as a favour, or as a matter of expediency, what they would be justified in resisting when demanded as a matter of necessity.”

Timothy's Jewish mother offered him an exceptional chance to be a participant in the evangelization of the Jews. But without circumcision, that could never occur. On the other hand, Paul completely resisted the circumcision of Titus because there would be no benefit for him, for Paul, for the sake of the Jews, and most importantly, for the preaching of the gospel. In fact, it would negate the gospel. Such is not the case with Timothy. There was nothing of harm and everything to be gained from performing this expedient measure upon him.

Life application: The key point of what is seen in this verse is the furtherance of the gospel. Even today, there are males born to Jewish mothers that have not been circumcised. They have a right to perform aliyah, moving to Israel, because of their maternal heritage, but if they were not circumcised, this would be a problem.

The same would be true with that person being a believer in Christ and wanting to evangelize the Jews. This is his burning desire, but if he were not circumcised, it would immediately put up an almost impenetrable wall between him and the Jews he talked to. And so, without ever considering law observance, being circumcised would be the natural course of action to take in order to meet the Jews he was evangelizing on their own level.

The fact is that Timothy was saved already. He had not observed the law. He was admitted into the fellowship of believers. He surely participated in the Lord's Supper. He was probably baptized upon belief (though this is not stated, it can be inferred). Therefore, his uncircumcised state has nothing (zero, zip, nada) to do with his salvation or continued salvation. That alone tells us all we need to know.

Now that he is going out into the mission field with Paul, an expedient measure is taken to help with their evangelistic efforts. It is for this, and for no other reason, that Timothy is now being circumcised. Don't be led astray by people who use this verse (and they are out there) to "prove" you must be circumcised in order to be saved. Timothy was already saved. Nothing can be added to the fully efficacious work of Jesus Christ in making that happen – not in Timothy and not in you.

*Heavenly Father, may we think clearly and rationally about our state in Christ. May we never attempt to "add" to our justification through our own works. Help us to stand on the purity of the gospel that we are saved by grace through faith in the finished, final, full, and forever work of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. Acts 16:4**

In the previous verse, Timothy was taken and circumcised by Paul. With that now accomplished, the narrative continues, saying, “And as they went through the cities.”

Rather, the verb is imperfect, “they were going through the cities.” There is a sense of ongoing action as the team travels from city to city. They have already been through the areas of Syria and Cilicia as was seen in Acts 15:41. They had come to Derbe and Lystra in Acts 16:1. So they are continuing on from there. Verse 16:6 will note Phrygia and the region of Galatia, so it is the general area that they are now going through.

Anywhere there was already an established church, they made sure to stop because, as it next says, “they delivered to them the decrees to keep.” Again, the verb is imperfect, saying, “they were delivering to them the decrees to keep.”

In each city where there was a church, they were careful to stop and provide the judgment that had previously been rendered. The narrative may imply that a sufficient number of certified copies of the edict had been prepared and that each church was given its own.

Even if not, the decrees were transmitted to them in a suitable manner. The word translated as “decrees” is *dogma*. It is now seen for only the second time, the first being in Luke 2:1. Of it, Albert Barnes states –

“It properly means a law or edict of a king or legislature. In this instance it was the decision of the council in a case submitted to it, and implied an obligation on the Christians to submit to that decision, since they had submitted the matter to them. The same principles, also, would be applicable everywhere, and the decision, therefore, at Jerusalem became conclusive.”

As for providing copies or maybe making a copy from a single original, with Silas accompanying the team, he stood as a representative of the council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:22). And so, he could vouch for its contents “which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.”

The council was the final human authority on such matters at this time. As such, their decision stood as a witness against any Judaizers that would come in and try to bully the Gentiles into being circumcised and observing the Law of Moses. This was necessary as

is evidenced by the trouble that had come about in Antioch. It is the same trouble that Paul agonizes over in his letter to those in Galatia.

At such an early time in the church, the heresy of law observance was at the forefront of issues that were infecting the minds of believers. Personally carrying the contents of the council was, therefore, a matter of critical importance for ensuring the purity of the gospel.

Life application: There is no council of apostles and elders in Jerusalem today. When the apostles were all dead, that was the end of the authority of this body in deciding matters concerning the church. This is a clear and poignant point that tells us of the importance of Scripture for the guidance of the church.

Despite the claims of the Vatican's "Holy See," no set council or body has been bestowed the authority over such matters when the body of believers in Jerusalem faded away. And none is needed. The writings of the apostles were saved and compiled into the New Testament. It now stands as the sole authority for deciding matters concerning the faith.

No pope, council, conference, synod, or congregation has the right to make any ruling that does not comply with what is stated in Scripture. If a matter is raised that is not addressed in Scripture, then there is freedom to decide how to handle it. But that decision should not be considered as authoritative and binding, as if it is on the same level as Scripture.

Care must be taken to keep Scripture alone as the divinely inspired authority for matters of the faith. Anything else is to be considered as a guideline for those who meet in a church, but it is a guideline that can be changed as the situation demands. Scripture, on the other hand, cannot be.

This is an important lesson we must learn. Because there is no "council in Jerusalem," and because God has not left the church to run willy-nilly in every direction, we can – and must – conclude that He has given us a suitable standard by which we can determine necessary matters of the faith. That standard is the Holy Bible.

*Glorious God Almighty, may we carefully consider how important it is to maintain the Bible in its proper place in our lives. It is the final authority for all matters relating to our relationship with You. Help us to never trifle with its sacred contents, but to carefully consider it and obediently apply it to our lives. Amen.*

**So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.**

Acts 16:5

The previous verse noted that Paul and his companions went through the cities and delivered the decrees of the council. With that, it now says, “So the churches were strengthened in the faith.”

The verb, being imperfect, gives the sense of continuance. Thus, it more appropriately reads, “So the churches were strengthening in the faith.” In other words, it wasn’t just that they were strengthened for the moment and then may have started to slide backward. Rather, because of the decrees of the council, they felt a freedom that encouraged them, and they continued strengthening as time passed by.

This would be especially so when considering that the matter that was resolved dealt with them personally. Being Gentiles, any Scripture that they possessed would have highlighted the role of Israel and the Jewish people. To impose upon them the Law of Moses and circumcision would be to rob them of their culture and identity while leaving them among their own culture and people.

But with the decision of the council, they would remain within the Christian faith but still be just who they were within their culture. The demands of the Judaizers would have robbed them of this. It would have started with circumcision, gone onto law observance, and soon enough they would be told how they still didn’t fit in because they didn’t speak or act like the other Jewish people.

This is no stretch of the analysis at all. This even happened among the Jewish people as was evidenced in Acts 6 –

“Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.” Acts 6:1

If this type of prejudice arose among the Jews just because they didn’t speak Hebrew or Aramaic, how much more would this become an issue with the Gentiles? The legalistic demands on them would never end. But with the encouragement of the letter and the words of these missionaries, they would continue to strengthen day by day in their faith. And more, others would see and be encouraged to join. As it says, they “increased in number daily.”

With each passing day, and with the freedom from the fear of death found in Christ and freedom from the bondage of the law, the churches would realize that every answer to the longing of the human soul was to be found in a rightly established faith in Christ. This would appeal (and for two thousand years has appealed) to those who “through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:15).

Life application: Even today, reading the Old Testament might leave a non-Jewish person wondering what part or role they could have in the redemptive plans of God. If all there was of Scripture was the Old Testament, no answer to the problem of sin would have come, but more, only a total identity with national Israel – conforming to their standards and cultural practices – would bring about any state of communion with God as He is presented there.

But more, there would only be identity with a group of people who had CONSTANTLY failed to measure up to the strict demands of their God. Yes, His grace and mercy upon them are evident, but so is His wrath and indignation. The bondage of the Jewish people, which they failed to realize hung over them, would be evident to anyone who properly studied their Scriptures.

As such, anyone joining them would have to be a person who was filled with the pride of saying, “I can do what they have failed to do. I can please God through adherence to His law.” When this occurs, as it does to this day with such people, their religion is one based on self. Despite the supposed piety of saying, “I follow the God of Israel and keep His Torah,” there is nothing pious in the statement. The actions are based on self.

Only when one submits to Christ and says, “Jesus Christ has made me right with God,” is there any true freedom at all. He has done it, He continues to do it, and He will carry us through to the very end. It is all about what Jesus has done. Put self aside! Trust in the work of Jesus. And then, forever and ever, praise the glorious name of Jesus Christ our Lord – to the glory of God.

*Lord God, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord who alone has the power to save us and to keep on saving us, despite ourselves. Yes, O God, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. Acts 16:6**



The previous verse noted the strengthening of the churches that Paul and his team visited and how their numbers increased daily. With that, it now says, “Now when they had gone through Phrygia.”

Phrygia was mentioned along with many other areas in Acts 2:10 at the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Those from there who had come to faith in the Lord at that time would surely have gone back and met together, telling others about their faith in the Lord. Phrygia was the largest of the provinces of Asia Minor. Bithynia was to its north, Pisidia and Lycia were to its south, Galatia and Cappadocia were more easterly, and Lydia and Mysia were in a westerly direction.

Paul and his company traveled throughout this district, probably helped by a listing of the locations where believers were - as recorded and maintained by those in Jerusalem. This is speculation, but it is likely. With that, it next says, “and the region of Galatia.”

Rather, the word translated as Galatia is an adjective, “and the Galatian region.” This was, as noted, east of Phrygia. Of this area, Albert Barnes says –

“The region was formerly conquered by the Gauls. They settled in it, and called it, after their own name, Galatia. The Gauls invaded the country at different times, and no less than three tribes or bodies of Gauls had possession of it. Many Jews were also settled there. It was from this cause that so many parties could be formed there, and that so much controversy would arise between the Jewish and Gentile converts.”

The area will be noted again in Acts 18:23 and then the district will be noted in 1 Corinthians, Galatians, 2 Timothy, and 1 Peter. It is the location where the church of the Galatians that brought so much frustration and heartache to Paul is located. As Gentiles, they had turned from the faith of Christ and to the imposition of circumcision. As such, they were making themselves debtors to the whole law (Galatians 5:3).

For now, and with their travels through the region complete, it next says, “they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit.” Nothing is said of how this occurred. Some think it was by direct revelation, such as speaking to Paul. However, Luke will normally detail such intimate occurrences.

It could be that they could not find safe travel, guides to lead them, enough resources to effectively set out, or whatever. They knew they were being led by the Spirit and so obvious hindrances to their forward motion would indicate being frustrated to proceed by the Spirit. This is only conjecture, but Luke’s careful recording of such things seems to

necessitate that this is what is meant. What they were unable to do was “to preach the word in Asia.”

This may make the thought above even more specific. It could be that they started into the area and simply had no effective evangelization at all. This would mean the area was not yet ready to accept what they would later openly acknowledge. Whatever the situation, this is not Asia as we think of in modern times. It is an area of the Roman empire already mentioned in Acts 2:9. Barnes notes that it is the area of proconsular Asia, also called Ionia. Again, he provides more detailed information on the area –

“Of this region Ephesus was the capital; and here were situated also the cities of Smyrna, Thyatira, Philadelphia, etc., within which the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 1-3 were established. Cicero speaks of proconsular Asia as containing the provinces of Phrygia, Mysia, Caria, and Lydia.”

Life application: The area of Asia will be evangelized later in Acts, being noted many times before the book closes out. It will also be mentioned in 1 & 2 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, 1 Peter, and Revelation. For whatever reason, the team was unable to evangelize the area at this time. More frustrations on where to go will arise in the next verses, but eventually, a different direction for them to travel will be made evident.

The Lord is all-knowing, and He knows what is best, when it is best, and every detail associated with how to proceed at such times for the best result. Therefore, if you are encountering a time of frustration in proceeding with something concerning evangelism, it may simply not be time for it to happen. Instead, look for another opportunity and wait on the Lord’s timing for what you had initially planned.

There are many places that were once unwilling to hear the gospel message that later accepted it wholeheartedly. There are missionaries who died while on the mission field with no converts. And yet, that occurs in areas where great success eventually was realized. Events like this show us that God is in control of what is going on and that His will is being worked out through us and our actions.

So don’t get frustrated if you seem to be hitting a wall in your efforts. The mission team that Paul was leading certainly faced impenetrable walls as they went. And yet, they picked up and moved on, knowing that the Lord was guiding their steps. Remember this, and don’t let setbacks stop you altogether. The Lord will lead as you continue. We can be sure of this, even if we cannot be sure of the “what and when” of the events ahead.

*Glorious Lord, we know that You have planned out the paths to be taken so that the whole world will be evangelized. It has been a long and often difficult track for many, but Your plan is being realized. As this is so, help us in our own efforts to know which way to turn so that Your will for us will be realized in our actions. Amen.*

**After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them.** Acts 16:7

In the previous verse, Luke recorded that Paul and his company had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia. However, the Holy Spirit had stopped them from preaching in Asia. With that remembered, it now says, “After they had come to Mysia.”

The meaning is not that they came “into Mysia,” which was a province of Asia minor. Rather, the word *kata* is used. It signifies “over against.” They had come as far as (over against) Mysia. Mysia was a district in northwest Anatolia that adjoined the Sea of Marmara on the north and the Aegean Sea to the west.

From this point in their journey, it then says that “they tried to go into Bithynia.” Bithynia was a region, a kingdom, and a Roman province also located in the northwest area of Asia Minor. It bordered the Sea of Marmara, the Bosphorus, and the Black Sea. Mysia was to its southwest. The men attempted to go into this region, “but the Spirit did not permit them.”

In the previous commentary, various suggestions of what this meant were given. This does not appear to be an active manifestation of God, such as when the Egyptians were actively hindered from coming near Israel by the pillar of cloud as those fleeing passed through the Red Sea.

Rather, what seems likely is that they simply were unable to successfully travel through this area for some unknown reason. They were hindered in their travels and took it as a sign from God that it was not His intention for them to go into this area yet. Rather, there were other areas He would have them evangelize first. This appears certain from the contents of verse 16:9.

As a side note, some manuscripts say, “the Spirit of Jesus” rather than “the Spirit.” If that is the true original, then it is a unique phrase, found only here in Scripture. If it is not original, it may have come from a margin note that later found its way into those manuscripts. Such a rare phrase is not unheard of. For example, the phrases “the Spirit

of Christ,” “the Spirit of His Son,” and “the Spirit of Jesus Christ” are also seen in the New Testament.

The inclusion of the name of Jesus, if a later insertion, may have come about to avoid anyone thinking, “These men were hindered by an evil spirit.” To clarify the matter, a scribe may have made an insertion with the name Jesus which was later assumed to be part of the original. As always, such things should not cause the reader to assume that we have a fallible word. Rather, it should encourage us to contemplate the matter and think about why such things have come about.

Life application: To understand the difficulty of accurately translating a verse from the original to English, or how an insertion for clarity could later be thought of as original, we can take a very simple sentence from the Bible, Genesis 1:1, and make a comparison of a few translations. First, the original says –

*b’reshit bara Elohim eth ha’shamayim v’eth ha’arets*

a direct translation would be –

“In beginning created Elohim the heavens and the earth.”

Note that the two uses of *eth* in the Hebrew are not translatable. Rather, the word is an untranslatable mark of the accusative case, being generally used to point out more definitely the object of a verb or preposition.

A few translations of this verse are –

- In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. (KJV)
- In the beginning, God created the universe. (ISV)
- In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (NIV)
- In the beginning God created heaven, and earth. (Douay-Rheims)
- In [the] beginning God created the heavens and the earth, (LSV)
- In the beginning God (Elohim) created [by forming from nothing] the heavens and the earth. (Amplified)
- In the beginning God formed the heavens and the earth. (SLT)

These are but a few of the variations of this verse. Notice how the KJV says “heaven” instead of “heavens.” Later, they will translate the exact same word as “the air” (Genesis 1:26, etc.), “the heavens” (Genesis 2:1, etc.), or some other variant. Being a plural word,

their translation is wrong in Genesis 1:1. Further, the word “the” before beginning is not in the Hebrew and should be italicized as is normal with that translation for inserted words.

The word *elohim* at times means “gods” as in something other than the true God. Thus, the Amplified Bible both translates the word and includes it in parenthesis for clarity. It also explains the meaning of the word *bara* as an act of creation *ex nihilo*.

The SLT says “formed” without any explanation. Therefore, one might assume that the matter already existed, and God simply formed the universe from that preexisting matter. But another word, *yatsar*, is used to describe such a process, such as in the forming of man from the dust.

By looking over the differences in such translations, one can learn quite a bit about what is going on in the minds of the translators. But remember, this is a very simple sentence. Imagine how varied translations can be in longer or more complicated verses! Don’t rush into judging translations until you have studied and thought through what is going on.

The study of Scripture is something that we can and should spend our whole lives pursuing. Be pleased to spend your time wisely and consider what God is telling us in this precious word! Study! Consider! Seek out! There is so much treasure to be found here.

*Thank You, O God, for the wonderful word You have given us. And thank You for those who have taken the time to translate it so that we can have a sense of what the original languages are telling us. Help us to consider this word all our days, pondering its secrets and learning from its truths. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

### **So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. Acts 16:8**

The previous verse revealed the inability of the missionary team to enter Bithynia because the Spirit would not allow them to. With that, it next records, “So passing by Mysia.”

Rather, the verb is an aorist participle, “So having passed by Mysia.” This doesn’t mean that they avoided the area altogether, but that they did not preach there. From their previous location, they had to travel through Mysia to get where they next headed, which is that “they came down to Troas.”

Their travels took them from an area of the highlands to the coastal area where the well-known seaport of Troas was. Troas, or Alexandria Troas, is a city on the northeastern coast of the Aegean Sea which is the western boundary of Asia Minor. Of this area Albert Barnes notes –

“This was a city of Phrygia or Mysia, on the Hellespont, between Troy north, and Assos south. Sometimes the name Troas or Troad, is used to denote the whole country of the Trojans, the province where the ancient city of Troy had stood. This region was much celebrated in the early periods of Grecian history. It was here that the events recorded in the Iliad of Homer are supposed to have occurred. The city of Troy has long since been completely destroyed. Troas is several times mentioned in the New Testament, 2 Corinthians 2:12; 2 Timothy 4:13; Acts 20:5.”

From this area, it is possible to sail off to other areas, and that is exactly what will be needed as the missionaries are led by the Spirit.

Life application: As noted in the commentary of the previous two verses, the hindrances placed before the group are not fully explained by Luke. It can only be speculated concerning what it means that the Holy Spirit kept them from preaching in the province of Asia or that the Spirit did not permit them to go into Bithynia. For all we know, there may have been some sort of problem in the region of Asia, such as an uprising or a time of mourning for a leader that had died. Maybe there was an arbitrarily applied lockdown because of a pandemic.

Whatever the case, and the speculation could go on indefinitely, the group understood that the timing of the surrounding events precluded them from preaching in this area. As they were being led by the Spirit and their feet had arrived in this area at that particular time, they knew that the Lord had other intentions for them.

If you are a believer in Christ, then you are “in Christ.” By default, the things that happen around you are as they should be. It is our job to respond to the events as they come and attempt to discern what God’s will for us is. This can be difficult because it won’t be written on signposts. Rather, throughout your day, talk to the Lord. Acknowledge His presence and ask Him to guide you accordingly.

Whatever happens will ultimately be known to the Lord. Nothing occurs that He is not aware of. But this doesn’t mean we are not to act. The more we include Him in our thoughts, prayers, and actions, the better off we will be in our own minds concerning what occurs.

At times, Paul sat in a Roman prison. He could say, “Well, this isn’t where the Lord wants me.” But that is not at all what he said. And more, he didn’t give up while sitting there. He continued to rely on the Lord and tell people about Jesus. He accepted that he was exactly where the Lord intended him to be. Just because he may not have liked his surroundings, it doesn’t mean he didn’t accept them as the will of the Lord.

Keep close to the Lord at all times. Include Him in all you do. And be sure to acknowledge His will as being a part of where you are at any given moment.

*Lord God, help us to live in Your presence acknowledging that You are with us and directing us at all times. Our denial of this doesn’t mean it isn’t true. It would just mean that we have failed to accept that You are with us. But You are. And so, Lord, help us to realize this and remain faithful to You no matter what. Amen.*

**And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Acts 16:9**

Note: The verse as presented by the NKJV misses the mark. A far closer rendering, that of the Literal Standard Version, will be used: “And a vision through the night appeared to Paul—a certain man of Macedonia was standing, calling on him, and saying, ‘Having passed through to Macedonia, help us.’”

The previous verse told of the company of missionaries arriving at Troas. Once there, it now says, “And a vision through the night.” One can only speculate, but it appears that this is the very night that they arrived in Troas. No sooner had they arrived than a vision of the night “appeared to Paul.”

As the leader of the company and as the apostle to the Gentiles, the vision was directed to Paul. This is not unlike what happened to Peter previously in Acts 10 when he had a vision calling him to Caesarea to preach to the house of Cornelius. In the case of Paul, the vision concerned “a certain man of Macedonia.”

The group was currently in the province of Asia, but the call is from a Grecian province in Europe to the west. Of the area, Albert Barnes says –

“Of Macedonia - This was an extensive country of Greece, having Thrace on the north, Thessaly south, Epirus west, and the Aegean Sea east. It is supposed that it was populated by Kittim, son of Javan, Genesis 10:4. The kingdom rose into celebrity chiefly

under the reign of Philip and his son, Alexander the Great. It was the first region in Europe in which we have any record that the gospel was preached.”

Of this man of Macedonia, Luke records that he “was standing.” The first verb is imperfect and the second is perfect. The idea is that he was standing and remained standing. While standing, he was “calling on him.”

One can think of Paul looking out into the vision and seeing a man who is standing, and the guy is beckoning to him, maybe waving his arms or folding his hands as if pleading. In this state of beckoning, he was “saying, ‘Having passed through to Macedonia, help us.’”

In other words, he is essentially saying, “You are over there. You should be over here. Once you have passed over to this side, you can help us.” How the man is identified as a Macedonian is not stated. It could be that the summons to Paul was from the west, and so as he looked out over the water toward Macedonia, he identified the man as Macedonian. Or it could be his clothing or speech identified him. However it came to him, Paul understood who he was and the substance of his words.

Life application: With only the Hebrew Scriptures, combined with their personal knowledge of the Lord, the missionaries went forth to proclaim the gospel. As such, it is not unexpected that visions would appear to lead the men concerning what they were to do. This is true with Peter, Ananias, and Paul.

The contents of the Bible were not yet compiled. Therefore, at times it was needed for the Lord to personally intervene in the lives of these men, directing them according to a set and determined plan. With the Bible now complete, we have the necessary instructions to follow through with the task of spreading the gospel.

Although we should not expect visions to direct our feet, we can be certain that the Lord is directing them, nonetheless. Those things He wants us to succeed at will succeed. Those things which are not supposed to occur will not come to pass. Our job is not to sit and wait for visions, but to be obedient to the word. The Lord will take care of the details according to His infinite wisdom.

*Lord God, we know that when we are living according to Your will, You will lead our steps and keep us on the path that You would have us take. Help us to act by directing our efforts toward accomplishing our part of the Great Commission. Give us wisdom, boldness, and the opportunity to be a part of continuing the growth of the church until the day it is complete and You call us home. Amen.*



**Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:10**

In the previous verse, Paul had seen the vision of a man of Macedonia pleading with him to come over there and help them. With that, Luke now records, “Now after he had seen the vision.”

The words don’t mean “sometime after.” Rather they give the sense of, “Now when he had seen the vision.” As soon as it occurred the next event took place. That is seen in the next word, “immediately.”

As the vision was in the night, it can be assumed that Paul excitedly told the others about what he had seen, and they started planning to make the necessary arrangements to go where they had been called to. With that, the first “we” section of the book of Acts begins. Until this point, it has been a narrative about others, such as “Paul and Barnabas did this,” or “they went to Troas.” However, the words now go to the first-person plural, saying, “we sought to go to Macedonia.”

The obvious conclusion is that Luke had joined them in Troas. Nothing is said about how this came about. It could be that he was living there at the time, or maybe Paul had sent word to him to join the group there. However it occurred, Luke has become a part of the ongoing narrative. Together with the others, they were “concluding that the Lord had called us.”

Paul was certain that the vision wasn’t just a dream. Rather, like Peter’s vision before, he understood it to be of divine origin, having been directed by the Lord. It is worthy of note that some manuscripts (such as the Alexandrian, Vulgate, and Ethiopian) say “God” instead of “Lord.” As Jesus is God, the change doesn’t affect the narrative substantially.

As for the use of “us” in these words, it clearly indicates that Luke was immediately considered a part of the team and he was an integral part of the calling that took place. This not only identifies him as a chronicler of the events of Acts, but he was also an evangelist in his own right. This is seen in the fact that he was a part of those called “to preach the gospel to them.”

There are several things that become obvious when considered. The efforts of the men in the Asian provinces were frustrated. It can be certain that wherever they were, they attempted to share the gospel without any success or that they knew their efforts were not fruitful in their evangelization at that time.

With each movement of the team, it was as if their feet were being led until they came to Troas. Upon arrival there, they were suddenly directed by Paul's vision. At the same time, Luke had joined them. And with the vision of the calling of the man from Macedonia, it foreshadowed the presence of the Lord in that area. Thus, the providence of God is behind each step of the journey.

Life application: The events occurring in Acts are a descriptive account of what occurred. This includes Luke's inclusion of himself in the narrative at this time. Nothing has been prescribed for the reader to do or to apply to his own walk with the Lord. The fact that Paul had a vision does not mean that visions are to be expected in our own lives to direct where we should go or what we should do.

In fact, supposed visions in more recent times have led to some of the greatest apostasies of the faith. The visions of Joseph Smith and Ellen G. White have led millions of people into false religion. The only conclusion that can be made is that their visions were either made up lies or that they were of satanic origins. They cannot be of God because they contradict the writings found in Scripture.

This is true with innumerable other visions that people have claimed and continue to claim to this day. Where will you put your trust? It is so easy to be led astray by convincing-sounding people who claim to have a pipeline to the divine. But the fact is, you already have one. It is the Bible.

God has given His word, and He has provided what you need to know concerning your walk before Him. It is sufficient. Stick to the word and don't bother with the claims of others who say they have more than the word to offer you. Such things are unnecessary and unhelpful. Be assured of this.

*Lord God, thank You for Your word. It is sufficient to guide us on our path as we walk in Your presence from day to day. Help us to spend our time wisely by searching out its treasures and rightly applying its precepts. Surely in this, we will be pleasing to You. Thank You for Your precious and sacred word. Amen.*

**Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, Acts 16:11**

The previous verse had the group of men, including Luke as evidenced by using "we" and "us," seeking to head to Macedonia. Next, it says, "Therefore, sailing from Troas."

Rather, the Greek more literally reads, “Having set sail, therefore, from Troas.” Luke is writing as if the journey had begun at a certain time from which he will continue the narrative. From this point, it next says, “we ran a straight course to Samothrace.”

Luke introduces a word to Scripture, *euthudromeó*. It will be seen here and in Acts 21:1. It comes from *euthus*, straight of direction, and *dromos*, to run a course. It is a nautical term where a ship sails before the wind. Having set out, the ship first arrived at Samothrace. This is to the northwest and would have been stopped at for the night before traveling on the next day. Of this location, Albert Barnes states –

“This was an island in the Aegean Sea not far from Thrace. It was populated by inhabitants from Samos and from Thrace, and hence called Samothracia. It was about 20 miles in circumference, and was an asylum for fugitives and criminals.”

With that first leg noted, it next says, “and the next day came to Neapolis.” The name signifies “New City.” This was a maritime city of Macedonia on the Thracian coast. It was about sixty-five miles from Samothrace and about ten miles from Philippi, it being the harbor of Philippi.

Life application: Without any recorded delay, the missionaries set out for Macedonia. They were ready and willing to go when called. Today, we generally have those we report to for our jobs, whether they are for secular or religious duties. We need to be prepared to do as we are asked if it is not in violation of the word of God or the set laws of the country in which we live.

As those under the authority of another, they are relying on us to fulfill our obligations accordingly. The missionaries were under the authority of the Lord, but we are as well. The Bible says elsewhere that we are to obey the ruling authorities of those governing us (Romans 13:1) as well as our masters (today we have employers as noted in Colossians 3:22, etc.).

As the word instructs us in this manner, it lays upon us the responsibility to do so. When we do, we will be working responsibly and honoring the Lord who has so instructed us through His word.

*Heavenly Father, we have authority figures over us that we are responsible to. Help us to be obedient to Your word by being obedient to them. It isn't always easy but help us in this so that we will be model citizens and employees as we live out our lives in Your presence. Amen.*

**and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days.** Acts 16:12

The trip to Macedonia began in the previous verse with the group sailing from Troas to Samothrace and then to Neapolis. They now continue the journey with the words, “and from there to Philippi.” Of this city, Albert Barnes notes –

“The former name of this city was Dathos. It was repaired and adorned by Philip, the father of Alexander the Great, and after him was called Philippi. It was famous for having been the place where several battles were fought during the civil wars of the Romans, and, among others, for the decisive battle between Brutus and Antony. At this place Brutus killed himself. To the church in this place Paul afterward wrote the Epistle which bears its name.”

Concerning the location, Luke next says, “which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia.” This clause has been called into question by deniers of Luke’s historical accuracy, noting that Amphipolis was the chief city. Due to the unusual construction of the Greek, several possibilities arise. First, Albert Barnes notes the following –

“This whole region had been conquered by the Romans under Paulus Aemilius. By him it was divided into four parts or provinces (Livy). The Syriac version renders it "a city of the first part of Macedonia," and there is a medal extant which also describes this region by this name. It has been proposed, therefore, to alter the Greek text in accordance with this, since it is known that Amphipolis was made the chief city by Paulus Aemilius. But it may be remarked that, although Amphipolis was the chief city in the time of Paulus Aemilius, it may have happened that in the lapse of 220 years from that time Philippi might have become the most extensive and splendid city. The Greek here may also mean simply that this was the first city to which they arrived in their travels.”

Charles Ellicott adds his thoughts to this, saying –

“...it was not the chief city of any one of the four sub-divisions of the Roman province of Macedonia, that rank being assigned to Amphipolis, Thessalonica, Pella, and Pelagonia. As there is no definite article in the Greek, it is possible that St. Luke simply meant to say it was a chief town of the district, the epithet *Prôte* (= first) being often found on the coins of cities which were not capitals. The more probable explanation, however, is that he uses the Greek word translated “part,” in the sense of “border-land,” as in the LXX. of Ezekiel 35:7, Ruth 3:7, and that it was the *first* city of that frontier district, either as the most important or as being the first to which they came in the route by which they

travelled. This was precisely the position of Philippi, which, together with Pella and other towns, had been garrisoned by the Romans as outposts against the neighbouring tribes of Thrace.”

As the Greek is unusually worded, it seems likely that Luke was making a general statement concerning Philippi that it is either the first of their main stops or that it is the main city of a lesser district. As Luke will now turn to describe people, locations, and events in Philippi, the former option seems the most likely. They have arrived in Macedonia, and this is the first main area of their evangelistic efforts.

Of this city, Luke next says, “a colony.” Concerning the Roman idea of a colony, Vincent’s Word Studies provides a highly detailed explanation of what this means –

“The colony was used for three different purposes in the course of Roman history: as a fortified outpost in a conquered country; as a means of providing for the poor of Rome; and as a settlement for veterans who had served their time. It is with the third class, established by Augustus, that we have to do here. The Romans divided mankind into citizens and strangers. An inhabitant of Italy was a citizen; an inhabitant of any other part of the empire was a peregrinus, or stranger. The colonial policy abolished this distinction so far as privileges were concerned. The idea of a colony was, that it was another Rome transferred to the soil of another country. In his establishment of colonies, Augustus, in some instances, expelled the existing inhabitants and founded entirely new towns with his colonists; in others, he merely added his settlers to the existing population of the town then receiving the rank and title of a colony. In some instances a place received these without receiving any new citizens at all. Both classes of citizens were in possession of the same privileges, the principal of which were, exemption from scourging, freedom from arrest, except in extreme cases, and, in all cases, the right of appeal from the magistrate to the emperor. The names of the colonists were still enrolled in one of the Roman tribes. The traveller heard the Latin language and was amenable to the Roman law. The coinage of the city had Latin inscriptions. The affairs of the colony were regulated by their own magistrates, named Duumviri, who took pride in calling themselves by the Roman title of praetors (see on Acts 16:20).”

Luke finishes the thought, saying, “And we were staying in that city for some days.” It is this indeterminate amount of time that Luke will provide various details in the verses ahead.

Life application: For every difficult statement in the Bible, there are an innumerable number of people who have spent their time diligently trying to prove it wrong. In the case of this verse, there are several likely options to dismiss the claims of naysayers. If you hear someone call a part of the Bible into question, don't just drop your faith and walk away from the Lord.

Rather, spend your time reading other commentaries. If the Bible was not trustworthy, these great men of the past would not have spent so much time defending it. After a short amount of time, it would have been dismissed and forgotten. But the Bible continues to share the message of faith while all the detractors of the past have returned to the dust. They will be forgotten while the Bible will be vindicated as the sure word of God until His coming.

Hold fast to what it says and be assured that your faith is not in vain. It is not a faith based on a dubious word. Instead, it is one grounded on a sure and reliable word. In pursuing the words of Scripture, you are not blindly stepping into the darkness. Rather, you are stepping into God's revealed light. The path is illuminated, and you shall find your way without getting lost.

*Lord God, we thank You for the sure word we possess. And we thank You for those who have gone before us and who have provided us with competent analyses of what Your word says. We can have full confidence in this precious and sacred word. And we do! Thank You for Your word that guides us as we walk this path of life. Amen.*

**And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there*.**

Acts 16:13

In the previous verse, Luke noted the group's arrival in Philippi, saying that they "were staying in that city for some days." He now begins to detail things that occurred during that time, saying, "And on the Sabbath day,

It could be that there was a local synagogue and that these men went there as was the usual custom. Not being mentioned by Luke does not mean it didn't occur.

Understanding that, Luke next says of this particular Sabbath, "we went out of the city." In these words, is a very small change in some Greek texts –

Pylēs – (city) gate.

Poleōs – city.

The meaning is unchanged because by going out of the city gate one goes out of the city. With that noted, it is also seen that Luke continues to include himself in the narrative, meaning that he and all the team went together “to the riverside.” As noted, there may have been a local synagogue and this visit to the river is coming after a visit to it. However, Charles Ellicott notes the following based on a variation in some Greek texts –

“...where an oratory (i.e., a place of prayer) was established. The word, which was the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew ‘house of prayer’ (Matthew 21:13), is used in this sense by Josephus ... and was current among the Jews at Rome. Where they had no synagogue, and in a military station like Philippi there was not likely to be one, the Jews frequented the river-banks, which made ablutions easy, and often succeeded in getting a piece of ground assigned for that purpose outside the walls of the city.”

Whether this is simply a visit to a riverside or to a specific place, it was a place “where prayer was customarily made.” It is these words in the Greek that are again slightly different in some texts. Regardless of whether it was a specific place for prayer or a place to simply stop and pray, the fact that it is by a river is the main point. Of this, the Pulpit Commentary says –

“The river is not the Strymon, which is a day's journey distant from Philippi, but probably a small stream called the Gangas or Gangites, which is crossed by the Via Eguatia, about a mile out of Philippi. The neighborhood of water, either near a stream or on the seashore, was usually preferred by the Jews as a place for prayer, as affording facility for ablutions.”

It is at this place by a river, and which was set aside for prayer, that Luke says, “we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there*.” The Greek more literally reads, “having sat down, we were speaking to the women having gathered there.” They were gathered and then continued in their discourse for some time. Charles Ellicott provides a well-reasoned explanation for Luke’s careful detail of this situation –

“The fact that there were only women shows the almost entire absence of a Jewish population. Possibly, too, the decree of Claudius, expelling the Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2), was enforced, as stated above, in the colonia, which was as a part of Rome, and as Jewesses would not be likely to have settled there without their husbands or brothers, it is probable that the women whom St. Paul found assembled were, like Lydia, proselytes who desired to remain faithful to their new faith, even in the absence of any settled provision for their instruction. Women thus placed would naturally

welcome the presence of strangers who, probably, wore the garb of a Rabbi, and who showed when they sat down (see Note on Acts 13:14) that they were about to preach. We note that here also the narrator speaks of himself as teaching. (See Note on Acts 16:10.)”

Life application: Everything recorded in the Bible is given to tell us something about what God wants us to know. Sometimes, that even includes what is not said, such as referring to women but not to men as in this verse. If there was a synagogue, there was no fruit that came from a visit to it. If there was only this place of prayer, noting only the women tells us something else. Ellicott’s analysis would make sense based on the situation in the Roman Empire at the time.

We can’t be dogmatic about what the Bible is silent on, but we are being told to focus on the details and consider them. This is what we should be doing as we read the Bible. Stop and ask “why” from time to time. Think about what is being said (or omitted). If you cannot think of any reason for a particular statement, then read some commentaries. There is usually a suitable answer or two that may help explain why things are recorded.

Keep studying! The Bible is a treasure waiting to be uncovered with every page.

*Lord God, thank You for these delights to our minds that are found in Your word. With each verse, we have things that we can consider and then add to our ever-growing knowledge of Scripture. Help us to be faithful in our study and contemplation of this precious gift You have given to us! Amen.*

**Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. Acts 16:14**

Note: The tenses of the verbs used by the NKJV are not in accord with the Greek. An accurate rendering is, “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of *the* city of Thyatira, worshiping God, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to attend to the things being spoken by Paul” (BLB). This will be used.

In the previous verse, the group of missionaries went to the riverside of the city at Philippi, sitting down and speaking to the women who met there. Next, Luke records, “And a certain woman named Lydia.”



As often happens in Scripture, a figure is introduced, highlighting him or her. Even though there was an unknown number of women gathered, as evidenced by the previous verse, one is especially highlighted. Her name, Lydia, is believed by some to be connected to the Ludim recorded as early as Genesis 10:13. The Ludim were descended from Mizraim, the son of Ham. From there, Lydia would mean something like From Lud.

Abarim provides details on how this came about, saying, “Someone from לוד (Lud) would be called לוּדִי (Luday). A female Ludite would be called לוּדִיָּה (Ludyah), which transliterated into Greek would form Λυδία (Luddia). That name transliterated into Latin forms our familiar name Lydia.”

The name Lydia was apparently popular among the Greeks, and so it may or may not be that she was named this because she was a descendant of the Ludim.

Of this woman, possibly from this ancient people group descending from Ham, it next notes she was “a seller of purple.” Purple, or *porphura* in Greek, was considered a highly valuable color. It was very difficult to obtain, coming from shellfish. A person wearing such a color would normally be quite wealthy. It was the color often worn by royalty. HELPS Word Studies notes that there were three familiar shades of purple in the ancient world: deep violet, deep scarlet, and deep blue.

Being a dealer in this fabric meant that she would be well-connected and of good means. She is next noted as being “of *the* city of Thyatira.” This was a city found in the old district of Lydia which was in the Roman province of Asia. It will be mentioned three more times in Revelation 1 and 2. Albert Barnes notes the following –

“This was a city of Lydia, in Asia Minor, now called Akhisar. The art of dyeing was early cultivated in the neighborhood of Thyatira, as we learn from Homer (Iliad, iv. 141), and as is confirmed by inscriptions found in that city - a circumstance which may be referred to as confirming the veracity of the statements of Luke even in his casual allusions.”

Of this woman, Lydia, it next says she was “worshiping God.” Being a present participle, it indicates that this was her regular conduct. Being a Sabbath, and being present with others who met, it may be that she was a proselyte. However, this may not be the case.

In Acts 10, it said that Cornelius was a devout man who feared God. This does not mean he was a proselyte. Like him, Lydia may have simply gone and worshipped God without knowing anything directly about Him from a Jewish context. However, with the arrival of these missionaries, it notes that she “was listening.”

The verb is imperfect. She listened and continued to listen. Her ears were attentive to what was being said, taking it in and processing it. During this time, Luke notes that, “The Lord opened her heart.”

Of this, the Cambridge commentary states, “St Luke recognizes that without this the word would have made no entrance.” There is no reason to assume this at all. They equate the reception of the word to an active participation of the Lord in opening her heart. This is completely contrary to what Paul writes elsewhere, such as, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Rather than an active zapping of the heart of Lydia by the Lord as suggested by Cambridge, it is a passive action resulting from hearing the word of the Lord. The Lord opened her heart through the message proclaimed. This is perfectly evident from Luke’s next words. He says that her heart was opened by the Lord “to attend to the things being spoken by Paul.”

It clearly says through the use of an imperfect verb that she was listening and continued to listen. It then says that her heart was opened by the Lord. How? Through listening to the word of God being spoken forth. The word of God is an extension of who God is. He is presenting Himself through the word. If Paul and the others accurately presented the word of God to Lydia, which is what occurred, then the Lord was speaking through them. Thus, her heart was passively opened by the Lord through the process.

Life application: The Calvinistic thinking that God must actively and supernaturally intervene in each person who comes to Him dismisses the notion that the word of God is sufficient to do what it is purposed to do. Further, it dismisses the fact that the word of God is, in fact, a supernatural tool, given by God. To them, the word is insufficient to do what it was given to do. But the word itself says that it is sufficient –

“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;  
It shall not return to Me void,  
But it shall accomplish what I please,  
And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.” Isaiah 55:11

The claim of Cambridge that without the Lord’s personal intervention in the process the word would have made no entrance is exactly the opposite of what is said by Jesus to the Jews in John 5. First, He says –

“Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved.” John 5:34

The point of Jesus speaking was for those who heard to be saved. He makes that perfectly obvious in His statement to them. A few verses later, He says –

“But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe. <sup>39</sup>You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. <sup>40</sup>But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” John 5:38-40

Jesus ties their rejection of Him to their failure to accept the word, not God’s failure to actively change their heart through external stimulation.

God does not provide a zap with a cosmic defibrillator to suddenly jump-start a person’s heart, opening it so that His word will suddenly be palatable to a person. The word is like a defibrillator all by itself. It provides all the zap a person needs to be opened so that they can respond to the call of God.

Some hearts, however, are un-zappable because they are predisposed to dismissing what the word says. The Calvinistic model of regeneration fails because it dismisses the purpose of why the word was given, and it dismisses the power of the word to do what it is set forth to accomplish.

Whether you are saved or not, if your life is currently not geared towards the things of God, you need to have an attitude change. With that, pick up the word, read it, and receive the necessary zap to get you into the game or back into the game. The word is active and alive. It is ready to change you and mold you to the image of God in Jesus Christ. Let it do so!

*Lord God, thank You for the wonderful word You have given us. It will make a difference in our lives if we simply allow it to do so. It is that powerful and it is that wonderful! Help us also to convey it properly so that others may hear and be saved. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” So she persuaded us. Acts 16:15**

In the last verse, Lydia heard the word. The Lord, through that hearing of the word, opened her heart to believe. With that recorded, the next words immediately jump into obedience to the Lord's command given in Matthew 28 concerning baptism –

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Matthew 28:18-20

In compliance with that command, Luke next records, “And when she and her household were baptized.” What is apparent, without it being recorded, is that she explained to her household the words that she had heard and accepted. In turn, they likewise believed. In their belief, those who believed were baptized according to the command of the Lord.

The word translated as “household” simply means “house.” It is a general word that can mean a person's literal house where he dwells; the family in a home; the house of God, meaning the temple; a genealogical house, such as the house of David; etc. This can extend to any in one's house, such as servants.

This is important to know because nothing is said about what “household” means in relation to Lydia. If she had children, nothing is said of their age much less hers. Maybe she had no children. Maybe they were grown up. It could be her and her husband, a married son with two children, and two servants. The account leaves no hint of her situation.

The reason this is important is because, incredibly, scholars have used this verse as a justification for infant baptism. This, despite there being no evidence that children were even in the house. There is not an instance in Scripture where baptism is conducted apart from belief by an individual. Any such notion must be inserted into the text.

Further, in saying that her household was baptized does not mean that “all” of her house was baptized. If she dwelt with ten people or two, nothing is said of who was included in the rite. It cannot be assumed that everyone she dwelt with was baptized. It is a general statement without being further defined.

With that considered, it next says, “she begged *us*, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord.’” The words here are telling. Unlike the faulty analysis that the verse

justifies infant baptism, the words now do reveal something quite clearly. Paul had spoken, she had believed, and immediately after belief, baptism is recorded.

The implication is clear. When she avowed her faith in the Lord, it is obvious that Paul or one of the others then told her something like, “As a sign of your faith, it is commanded by the Lord that you be baptized.” Luke’s recording of this act of baptism as the very next words after her belief indicate nothing less. And her words now fully confirm this. She was told to be obedient to the command, she followed through with it, and then she appealed to that act of obedience by saying, “If you have judged me faithful to the Lord.”

Luke is precisely communicating that what occurred was an act of obedience to the Lord’s command to be baptized. This is what is precisely being intimated in the account as it is presented. Though the account is descriptive, it follows directly upon the prescriptive words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 28:19 noted above. She believed, she was faithful to the Lord to obey His prescription, and now as a hoped-for sign that this was sufficient to demonstrate her faithfulness, she next says, “come to my house and stay.”

She immediately felt the bond of faith and was then willing to extend herself to those who so willingly gave of themselves to share the word of truth with her. She felt the onus was on her to respond by welcoming them into her home as guests. With that, Luke records, “So she persuaded us.”

Again, Luke has included himself directly into the narrative, demonstrating that he was there and observed what had occurred. His precise wording, despite being a descriptive account, has markedly pointed out that baptism is something that is prescribed by the Lord, and it is to be instructed for those who, by faith, come to Him.

Life application: It is not just what has been said in the conversion of Lydia that is telling. Things that have not been said give us insights into doctrine as well. There is nothing recorded, which certainly would have been if it occurred, concerning the speaking of tongues by Lydia. Though this has been recorded elsewhere, it has also been left out of other accounts. This tells us that speaking in tongues is something that occurred for special reasons in specific circumstances but that it is not something to be expected upon belief.

Also, Luke did not record what Paul said when he spoke, but it is certain he spoke the gospel concerning Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Luke records nothing about

baptism being mentioned by the missionaries. And yet, it is certain that the matter was raised. The record of her being baptized proves this. Logical inferences can and must be made concerning these things.

When you are presented with a false gospel, you should be able to spot it. After hearing it, you should then question the person presenting it concerning where what they say is to be found in Scripture. If it is not openly stated, and if it cannot be logically inferred, then it is to be rejected.

The same is true with other doctrinal matters. If someone presents an argument for infant baptism based on a verse such as this one from Acts, be prepared to logically explain why the thinking is faulty. Just because something is not explicitly stated, it does not mean that it is incorrect. However, making inferences from the text must be supportable. If they cannot be defended, they are to be rejected.

The more well-versed you are with Scripture, the more soundly you will be able to logically defend what is right and appropriate. Keep reading the Bible, keep studying it, and keep meditating on it. This is how you will be able to settle yourself into sound doctrine.

*Lord God, may we be careful about what we accept concerning various teachings that are presented to us. Help us to fully consider what we have heard, compare it with Scripture, and make logical deductions or inferences based on what we know. Help us not to get caught up in strange doctrines that are not in accord with Your word. Amen.*

**Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.**

Acts 16:16

Note: The verbs in the NKJV don't give the sense of the Greek. A closer rendering would be, "Now it happened of us going to the prayer, a certain girl, having a spirit of Python, met us, who was bringing her masters much gain by fortune-telling" (CG). This will be used for the analysis.

In the previous verse, Lydia asked Paul and those with him to stay at her house. The events that now take place occur during that time. Luke's words say, "Now it happened of us going to the prayer."

The meaning of “the prayer” is argued whether it means a specific place of prayer, such as “to the place of prayer,” or if it is simply a way of saying they were going out to pray as we might say, “we are going to the church” or simply, “we are going to church.” Either way, the point is that they were heading out and were going for the purpose of prayer. On their way, it next says, “a certain girl, having a spirit of Python, met us.”

The Greek word *pythón* is seen only here. It comes from Putho, the region where the famous oracle of Delphi was located. Thus, it is a spirit of Python. Of this spirit, Vincent’s Word Studies gives a detailed explanation –

“Python, in the Greek mythology, was the serpent which guarded Delphi. According to the legend, as related in the Homeric hymn, Apollo descended from Olympus in order to select a site for his shrine and oracle. Having fixed upon a spot on the southern side of Mount Parnassus, he found it guarded by a vast and terrific serpent, which he slew with an arrow, and suffered its body to rot (πυθεῖν) in the sun. Hence the name of the serpent Python (rotting); Pytho, the name of the place, and the epithet Pythian, applied to Apollo. The name Python was subsequently used to denote a prophetic demon, and was also used of soothsayers who practised ventriloquism, or speaking from the belly. The word ἐγγαστρίμυθος, ventriloquist, occurs in the Septuagint, and is rendered having a familiar spirit (see Leviticus 19:31; Leviticus 20:6, 27; 1 Samuel 28:7, 8). The heathen inhabitants of Philippi regarded the woman as inspired by Apollo; and Luke, in recording this case, which came under his own observation, uses the term which would naturally suggest itself to a Greek physician, a Python-spirit, presenting phenomena identical with the convulsive movements and wild cries of the Pythian priestess at Delphi.”

Of this girl, it next says, “who was bringing her masters much gain.” As such, this made her a valuable asset to them. The source of the ability to make a profit from her was less important to them than the profit they made. How that source was able to make this profit through her was “by fortune-telling.”

The Greek verb is only found here, *manteuomai*. The word is derived from the word *mainomai*, raving mad, or to speak as a madman. One can see the root of the modern word mania or maniac. Of this word, Cambridge states –

“The word is only found here in the N. T., and wherever it occurs in the LXX. it is always used of the words of lying prophets (Deuteronomy 18:10; 1 Samuel 28:8; Ezekiel 13:6; Ezekiel 13:23; Micah 3:11); so that here we are constrained to take it in the same sense ‘by pretending to foretell the future.’”

This is an incorrect analysis. The account in 1 Samuel 28 is that of the witch of En Dor. There, the text is clear that the prophet Samuel was raised. Whether the witch raised him or whether the Lord allowed it to happen can be debated. She certainly seemed surprised when it occurred. Also, when the practice is forbidden in Deuteronomy 18, it makes no distinction between a lying prophet or one who truly taps into the supernatural realm –

“There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, *or one* who practices witchcraft, *or* a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, <sup>11</sup> or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.” Deuteronomy 18:10, 11

These words of Deuteronomy simply forbid the practice, but they do not speak as to whether these things are false or not. In this case here in Acts, the words of the girl will be true. How she determined what to say can be debated, but what happens as a result of her continued words demonstrates that the spirit she possessed, had possession of her.

Life application: Whether such a spirit is real or not is less important than the fact that the matter is not of God. If it is the act of a charlatan, it is not of God. If it is a true evil spirit, it is not of God. Debating which spirit is real and which is false is pointless. What matters is that we are not to seek out such things. Their purpose is to direct people’s attention away from what is good. This is why the law of Moses forbids them. Likewise, Paul warns against associations with such things as well. For example, he says –

“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? <sup>15</sup> And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup> And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.” 2 Corinthians 6:14-16

Our allegiances are to be directed to Jesus Christ. Our thoughts are to be centered on Him and His word. To mix our lives with any other supposed spiritual realm, whether true or false, can only lead us away from a sound walk with Him. The Lord, through Isaiah, says it beautifully –

“And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people seek their God? *Should they seek the*



dead on behalf of the living? <sup>20</sup>To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, *it is because there is no light in them.*”

-Isaiah 8:19, 20

Let us pay heed! Let us focus on God’s word. In this, we will do well.

*Heavenly Father, help us to keep our focus on that which is right and proper. May we not get distracted by those things which can never profit our walk with You. In all things, may our lives be filled with You and Your goodness. Amen.*

**This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.” Acts 16:17**

In the previous verse, the girl with the spirit of Python was introduced. Of her, Luke now continues with, “This girl followed Paul and us.”

Depending on the Greek text, the verb is either an aorist or a present participle – “having followed” or “following.” The narrative is being carefully described by Luke to show the action as if it is occurring while being read.

In his words, Luke continues with the first person, including himself with the others. It is apparent that he wasn’t just with the group, but that they were often together as they headed out for prayer and evangelism. As they went, the girl had followed them, “and cried out, saying.”

Now, the verb is imperfect. She cried out and kept crying out. One can imagine how annoying it would be to have someone constantly following behind and yelling out the same thing as they continued along. In this case, Luke says that she was crying out, “These men are the servants of the Most High God.”

Luke doesn’t give the reason for her constant crying out. Nor can we infer from the words where the emphasis of them was. Placing the stress on various words within the statement changes the meaning and intent of what was being said –

- THESE men are the servants of the Most High God. This might be the girl’s way of ridiculing the men.
- These MEN are the servants of the Most High God. As everyone around was probably aware of her spirit of Python, she may be comparing her known abilities

to the unproven abilities of the men, as if the feminine had proven itself whereas they had not.

- These men are the SERVANTS of the Most High God. In this, she could contrast the authority she supposedly possessed in herself with the lowly nature of being a servant to someone else, even if it is the Most High God.
- These men are the servants of the MOST HIGH God. Such a statement would contrast her proven abilities to a supposed God above all gods, challenging Him to prove himself.

One of these, or any other of such stresses can change our perception of the intent of what is being conveyed. Without hearing the words or having a suitable description it is hard to be dogmatic. Likewise, the overall purpose for her calling these things out cannot be known for sure. Albert Barnes gives several possible reasons –

1. That as she prophesied for gain, she supposed that Paul and Silas would reward her if she publicly proclaimed that they were the servants of God. Or,
2. Because she was conscious that an evil spirit possessed her, and she feared that Paul and Silas would expel that spirit, and by proclaiming them to be the servants of God she hoped to conciliate their favor. Or,
3. More probably it was because she saw evident tokens of their being sent from God, and that their doctrine would prevail; and by proclaiming this she hoped to acquire more authority, and a higher reputation for being herself inspired. Compare Mark 5:7.

A fourth reason could be that a war waged within her and, unlike Barnes' second reason, she may actually have been hoping that Paul and Silas would expel it from her. No matter what, she annoyingly followed after them repeatedly crying out her message.

As for the message itself, she was calling out that they were servants of the Most High God “who proclaim to us the way of salvation.”

Again, this could be mocking, provoking, being dismissive, etc. Without knowing the emphasis in the words and in her voice, it is very hard to know exactly what her intent was. No matter what, the message she proclaimed was the truth regardless of how she presented it in her crying out.

It is of note that in the Greek, there is no article before “way.” More rightly, it says “a way of salvation.” It appears that the spirit within her does not want it to be known that there is a single avenue to salvation.

Life application: It is often asked if a believer can be possessed by a demon. Although the Bible does not directly answer the question, the answer still seems obvious. If a person is in Christ, that person cannot be possessed by a demon. The thoughts are incompatible. Having said that, believers can certainly be afflicted by the devil and his demons. That is made clear in many verses, two are –

“...give no place to the devil.” Ephesians 4:27

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” Ephesians 6:11

Such verses would be pointless if we could not be afflicted by the devil. In order to keep from being so afflicted, it is our responsibility to apply the word of God to our lives. In doing this, we will be prepared and protected against him and his demons. But we cannot do this without knowing the Bible.

KNOW YOUR BIBLE.

*Glorious God Almighty, thank You for the surety of our salvation in Christ. And thank You that we are secure from being possessed by the enemy because of that. And thank You for Your word that can keep us from even being afflicted by him when we apply its precepts to our lives. How grateful we are to You. Amen.*

**And this she did for many days.**

**But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour. Acts 16:18**

Note: The verbs are completely off in the translation by the NKJV. They follow four of the five translational errors of the KJV. For this study, the BLB will be used: “And she continued this for many days. And Paul having been distressed and having turned, said to the spirit, ‘I command you in *the* name of Jesus Christ to come out from her.’ And it came out that hour.”

In the last verse, the slave girl with the spirit of Python had been following Paul and those with him, crying out that they were servants of the Most High God who were proclaiming the way of salvation. With that noted, Luke next records, “And she continued this for many days.”

The verb, being imperfect, is rightly translated as “continued.” She just followed along and annoyingly kept calling out the same thing. As noted in the previous verse, the emphasis in her voice may have been mocking, provoking, dismissive, or in some other manner that finally took its toll on the men. It seems to have really been bothersome to Paul though because Luke next records, “And Paul having been distressed and having turned, said to the spirit.”

The use of participles brings life and motion to the event. Luke brings us into the event as it has started, preparing our minds for what next is to transpire.

As for the words “having been distressed,” they come from the Greek word *diaponeomai*. This is its second and last use in the Bible. The first was found in Acts 4:2 where the priests, captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon Peter and John as they preached in the temple.

The word gives the sense of being thoroughly worn out, as if a piercing fatigue. Paul was just done with it, and so he decided it was high time to end her annoying proclamations. Therefore, he called out, “I command you in *the* name of Jesus Christ to come out from her.”

The words leave no other option than that the girl was, in fact, possessed. Paul could not have commanded a spirit to come out of her that did not exist. As an apostle, he was given this authority and he obviously knew that the power had been endowed upon him at this time to exercise it. And so, proclaiming that his authority was endowed by Jesus Christ, he commanded the spirit to come out from her. With that, Luke next records, “And it came out that hour.”

It is a way of saying, “right away.” There was no need to conduct a ceremony, wait till the next day to do a checkup and then certify compliance, or any such thing. At the spoken word of Paul, the spirit departed from the slave girl and the annoying proclamations ended.

Life application: Acts is a descriptive account of events that occurred as the church was being established. Nothing is prescribed in this account, and no precedent for future exorcisms has been established through Luke’s recording of the events. Paul was given apostolic authority to do certain things at certain times. However, the ability to do these things was not unlimited.

Paul could heal at times. At other times, he could not do so. Paul was able to restore a dead person at one point, but it does not mean he could do so at any point. Likewise, he was given the power to drive out this spirit of Python, but this does not mean he always had this power. And more, these abilities were apostolic in nature. Nothing is said that these powers were to continue after the apostles were dead.

With the word of God compiled, we have the written record of what occurred at the church's establishment. We can either accept that the events recorded are true or we can dismiss them as fairy tales. But we should not expect that they can be repeated by us. There is no need for them. The witness of the word is sufficient to establish the power and authority of Jesus Christ. Let us accept it and know that even when we have trials and troubles, sicknesses and sadnesses, we can know that they are temporary and will someday be behind us.

*Lord God, we have confidence in our walk before You because we have the written record of who You are, of what You are capable of, and what You have done to establish the church which has continued for two thousand years. These things give us the full assurance that the promises recorded in it will come to pass. We are secure in You. Thank You for this wonderful reassurance! Amen.*

**But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities. Acts 16:19**

The previous verse told of Paul commanding in the name of the Lord for the spirit of Python to come out of the girl. That came about as commanded. Now, Luke next records, "But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone."

The word translated as "profit" is *ergasia*. It is a singular noun meaning work, trade, craft, business, etc. As such, the word as used by Luke indicates the result of the work, thus the profit. This is another sure indication that the spirit really had hold of the girl. If she was just faking her words, she could continue to do that without any change having taken place in her. But she is now unable to do what she had previously done. Being a slave girl, her profit belonged to her owners. They were now deprived of that.

They looked at her ability as a source of income, just as they would a plumber or a chairmaker. She was no longer able to conduct her affairs as she previously had, and this meant they would have to look elsewhere to replace whatever money she brought in. As this was so, it became a legal issue for them. Therefore, "they seized Paul and Silas."

These were obviously the two main perpetrators in their eyes. The others who accompanied them, such as Luke and Timothy, were not deemed responsible for what had occurred. Having laid their hands on these two, it next says, “and dragged *them* into the marketplace.”

The marketplace is called the Agora. It was not just a marketplace, but the center of social life as found in all Greek cities. Charles Ellicott notes –

“In Philippi, as a colonia, reproducing the arrangements of Rome, it would answer to the Forum, where the magistrates habitually sat. What had taken place would naturally cause excitement and attract a crowd.” It is to this location that they were dragged “to the authorities.”

Of this, the Pulpit Commentary next states –

“Philippi, being a colony, was governed by Roman magistrates called duumviri, corresponding to the two consuls at Rome. But we learn from Cicero that in his time the duumviri in the colonies were beginning to be called praetors, a [title] previously used only at Rome ('De Leg. Agrar.,' 34), and to be preceded by lictors... Two inscriptions have been found in which the duumviri of Philippi are mentioned.”

Life application: Today in various countries, pastors and preachers are being arrested for disturbances as they go about spreading the gospel. Some of them are deserved. Other than bringing attention to self, there are those who stand in marketplaces and other areas and yell at people while telling them they are going to hell. Nothing of value is brought about by such actions. They set about to incite people and the conflicts that arise are sometimes of their own making.

Some go into areas that are privately owned and expect that they will be free from arrest when they pass out tracts. But privately owned malls and businesses are allowed to set policies for the conduct of those who come into their establishments.

However, there are those who go into the public square where freedom of speech has fewer restrictions, and they are not in violation of any codes or ordinances. And yet, they are treated as offenders and arrested. If the same treatment is not given to all others who are doing the same thing, then they have a legitimate case for redress against the authorities.

If you are planning on evangelizing in various areas, be sure to know what the laws of the area you are going to are. If you are arrested, it very well may be your own fault. If so, you should not be held as a martyr for the faith. Rather, you are just like any other miscreant who needs to be penalized for your actions. Be sure that what you do is not going to bring discredit upon the name of the Lord who you are supposedly trying to exalt.

*Lord God, give us the wisdom to know when and where it is appropriate to share our faith in You. Help us not to work in a manner contrary to bringing You glory through the preaching of the gospel. Rather, may our actions be seen as faithful people who are willing to expend themselves to bring the good news to those who truly need it. Amen.*

**And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; Acts 16:20**

In the previous verse, Paul and Silas were dragged into the Agora where the authorities sat. With that, Luke next records, “And they brought them to the magistrates.”

Of the word translated as “magistrates,” Vincent’s Word Studies says –

“Their usual name was *duumviri*, answering to the consuls of Rome; but they took pride in calling themselves *στρατηγοί* [*strategoi*], or praetors, as being a more honorable title. This is the only place in the Acts where Luke applies the term to the rulers of a city.”

Luke’s careful recording of this shows his minute attention to detail. Philippi was a Roman colony. Therefore, it is likely that these were army officers who exercised both military and civil authority. Once brought before these men, they then stated their case, saying, “These men, being Jews.”

This was probably a special poke at them, and it may explain why Luke and Timothy were not nabbed. Though Timothy was circumcised by Paul because his mother was a Jew, he probably looked like any other Gentile in his conduct, dress, and demeanor. Luke was a Gentile. Hence, they would have been overlooked concerning what occurred. But Paul and Silas were Jews.

Around this time, the Jews had been banished from Rome by Emperor Claudius. No distinction between sects of Jews was made. Thus, even though they were followers of Christ, they fell under the greater umbrella of being Jews, as it is even today. As such, a more reliable case could be made against them than if Luke and Timothy were included

in the matter. As for the accusation against Paul and Silas, the claim by their accuser is that they “exceedingly trouble our city.”

It is a word found only here in Scripture, *ektarassó*, coming from *ek* (out of) and *tarassó* (to agitate or stir up). Thus, it signifies to exceedingly trouble or agitate. The men are being accused of something leaning towards insurrection as if they wanted everyone agitated to the point where rioting or chaos would ensue. Although that is hardly the case according to the words of Luke, it would be a charge sufficient to get these men tossed into prison.

If Claudius found it acceptable to expel the Jews from Rome, and because this was a Roman colony, it would be simple and expedient to label these Jews as public agitators and have them punished for their perceived wrongdoing.

Life application: The believing Jews at this time were given grief in two directions at once. They received grief from their own countrymen in abundance. But they also received grief from those who found the Jewish people offensive for whatever reason.

Now, two thousand years later, this trend continues. Those Jews who have come to Jesus tend to get grief from their own countrymen at times. But there are many “Christians” who ridiculously reject their conversion as if God has abandoned Israel to the point where Jews are completely cast off from God’s grace.

Obviously, some Jewish converts have taken advantage of the situation by using their Jewishness to heavily profit from the broader Christian faith, claiming they are somehow specialists in Scripture simply because of their Jewish heritage. This becomes problematic for those who point out their faulty doctrine. Suddenly, it is they who are then attacked as if they are antisemites for daring to point out where these Jewish people are wrong.

To avoid such errors in thought, we all need to have at least a basic understanding of critical thinking. But mostly, we should be well-versed in Scripture. If so, we will not be duped by people who claim special insight into Scripture, but who are just opportunists trying to profit off the lack of biblical knowledge of others. At the same time, we can identify those teachers who are sound and stand behind them when they are erroneously accused of something simply because of their culture or heritage.

*Lord God, please keep us from making incorrect judgments about people simply because of a particular trait they possess. Help us to evaluate all people based on how they*



*present themselves in whatever subject they are being evaluated on, be it knowledge of Scripture or how they perform their jobs as a plumber or professor. Help us to always consider people fairly. Amen.*

**“and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.”** Acts 16:21

In the previous verse, Paul and Silas were taken to the magistrates and were accused of exceedingly troubling the city. Now, that continues, saying, “and they teach customs.” Rather, the word is *kataggelló*. It signifies to openly declare or proclaim.

The missionaries weren’t teaching yet but were proclaiming Christ in anticipation of converts. Hence, they were being charged with open incitement of the people. As for the word “customs,” it is *ethos* and signifies “*an unwritten custom; behavior based on tradition (a habit) fixed by the religious social life of a nation*” (Helps Word Studies).

The accusation is shrewdly made. Those who brought Paul and Silas forth did so because they had lost their source of revenue. They didn’t care diddly about what was being proclaimed. Rather, they were vindictively seeking to have the source of their loss punished. By making this accusation, they were making a claim that could be legally applied. With that, their words continue, saying, “which are not lawful for us.”

Again, the thought is mistranslated. The verb is singular. Rather than “are,” it reads, “which it is not lawful for us.” The thought, being presented in the singular, is tied to the next words, “being Romans.”

Being a Roman colony, the worship of the citizens was restricted. Rome normally did not interfere in the private religious practices of the people they subjugated, but they did regulate what Roman citizens could apply to their religious life. Albert Barnes, citing Cicero, says, “No person shall have any separate gods, or new ones; nor shall he privately worship any strange gods, unless they be publicly allowed.”

It is this charge, therefore, that is being levied against Paul and Silas. They were supposedly infecting citizens of Rome by proclaiming something unlawful for Romans “to receive or observe.”

The word “receive” gives the sense of welcoming with personal interest. The word “observe” signifies “to do.” The claim is that those things which could not be

entertained by Roman citizens were being proclaimed to have them invited into their regular lives, making them a part of their religious practices.

Life application: The excuse used in this verse is still used constantly by those who reject the gospel. When evangelizing someone, you might be told, “My family would never accept this,” or “My culture is set, and we cannot accept such a teaching.” Such statements are as common as mangos in Malaysia. But they are normally just excuses intended to divert attention away from the main issue.

If the gospel is properly preached, it includes the idea that sin is the problem. When someone hears that Christ died for his sins, it 1) means that he is a sinner, and 2) that Jesus has solved the problem for him.

The first idea is often repugnant to some. “I’m not a sinner.” Some people simply don’t want to admit their state of imperfection. The second idea is often repugnant to others. “I can take care of my own issues so that God will like me.” They may admit having sin, but they also want to be their own savior. To yield oneself to another is to admit that the problem is bigger than the individual can handle.

Either way, the fallback is to ignore or misdirect from the main issue. To do this, the matter is obfuscated by introducing family, social, cultural, or national customs as a reason that they don’t want to continue the conversation. One must be ready to directly address this type of issue if a successful gospel presentation is to come about.

Keep bringing the matter back to the main issue. Until someone realizes that sin is the problem and that he cannot fix it on his own, the matter cannot be resolved. Jesus is the answer. Keep proclaiming Jesus.

*Lord God, there is a need in all people for the cleansing power of Jesus’ blood. Without His death, our sin remains unatoned for. There is nothing we can do to make up for our state. When we try, we place ourselves as our own redeemers. That is a sad place to be. Help us to properly explain to people that without Jesus, there is no hope. But with Him, eternal peace in Your presence is to be found. Amen.*

**Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods. Acts 16:22**

In the previous verse, the claim against Paul and Silas was that they taught customs that were not lawful for Romans to receive or observe. Now, Luke continues, saying, “Then the multitude rose up together.”

These words set the tone for what is about to happen. Luke uses a word found only here in the Bible, *sunephistémi*. It comes from two words signifying “together” and “to set upon.” Hence, we are being told that all who were there listening to the charges against them rose up as one.

Remembering that this is a Roman colony, the people would be zealous to uphold the law that had been broken by rushing to punish the offenders. That is seen in the next words, “against them.”

The entire crowd of Roman citizens came against these “Jews” who had come to bring their illegal influences upon their supposedly superior society. However, in the irony of the day, and much like mob thinking throughout history, they were proceeding to violate the law in their zeal to protect their law. This wasn’t just the common citizens, however. Instead, it next says, “and the magistrates.”

It is those mentioned in verse 16:20 to whom Paul and Silas were first brought to. It is these men who were bound by the law to protect those within their jurisdiction, until a proper trial had been held, who also joined in the moblike attack against Paul and Silas. Of these men, it says they “tore off their clothes.”

Rather, the use of a participle translates as “having torn off their clothes.” The action is taken and awaits the next action in the narrative which is “and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods.” Here, the verb is imperfect, “and were commanding to beat them with rods.” It wasn’t just one magistrate that called out for it, nor was it a single call.

Instead, the use of the plural verbs indicates that all the magistrates were complicit in the act of tearing off their garments and of calling repeatedly for the lictors to come and beat them. The word *rhabdizó* is introduced here. It signifies to beat with rods. It will only be seen again in 2 Corinthians 11:25. There, Paul is probably partially referring to this event here in Acts 16 –

“From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods [*rhabdizó*]; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; <sup>26</sup> *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my*

*own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; <sup>27</sup> in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— <sup>28</sup> besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. <sup>29</sup> Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?"* 2 Corinthians 11:24-29

Life application: It is often questioned why Paul did not appeal to his Roman citizenship to avoid being punished in this illegal manner. The words of the verse seem to explain the matter. They were brought before the magistrates and were accused as “Jews” (verse 19:20). Luke records the words of accusation and then he notes the onrush of the multitude against Paul and Silas.

The indication is that there was not even time to appeal to the magistrates before the subsequent events took place. They were attacked, had their clothes torn off them, and were beaten. In such an instance, there is little chance of any appeals of Paul and Silas either being heard or listened to. This is especially so with the illegal involvement of the magistrates.

This same type of thing will occur later in Acts while Paul is in Jerusalem. The difference will be that two groups of people will be present, the Jews who would not see reason (like the Romans now in Philippi), and the impartial Romans who were charged with controlling the crowds. As there is only one type of crowd without any impartial restraining force here, Paul and Silas fell to the unjust actions of the crowd.

This is a problem with having law. Unless there is an impartial and reasonable system to regulate it, things will inevitably get out of hand. If those who are charged with upholding the law fail to do so, mob rule will result. If those who are charged with upholding the law participate in violating the law, the rights of those under the law will be ignored.

Both have occurred in the recent past. In 2020, riots throughout the United States were allowed to continue without restraint, bringing destruction, loss, and death to its citizens. In early 2021, the government planted instigators within rallying citizens to foment an uprising. Those citizens, since then, have had no reasonable say in the events that have subsequently transpired.

The point of these examples is that when something curious occurs, like when Paul and Silas are illegally beaten, look to the surrounding text to get a sense of why this is so.

Paul and Silas were identified within a Roman colony as “Jews.” In Acts 18:2, it will be noted that all the Jews were commanded to depart from Rome. As a colony, the same prevailing disdain for Jews would arise.

In this case, an entire multitude has arisen as one, the magistrates were there inciting the crowd by tearing off their clothes, and the lictors are being ordered to beat these men by those magistrates. If you wonder why Paul and Silas were beaten, or if you wonder how hundreds of US citizens who did nothing wrong are still sitting in government prisons awaiting trials on charges that came about by events instigated by the government, you will see that nothing changes in the human heart when law is involved.

Man is being taught a lesson in the pages of Scripture. The law, because it is administered by fallible humans, and because it is set forth to regulate fallible humans, is like an enemy to man. What humanity needs is the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Human systems, no matter how well-intentioned, will never produce a perfect society. Thus, we as Christians await our eternal home where righteousness will rule forever and ever. May that day be soon.

*Lord God, the world is fallen and broken. Without Your intervention in our affairs, only chaos and death will be the eventual result. This is proven again and again in both Scripture and history. May the day be soon when Your glorious kingdom will rule forever and ever. Yes, may that day be soon. Amen.*

**And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Acts 16:23**

In the previous verse, Paul and Silas had their clothes torn off them and they were beaten with rods. With that, it next says, “And when they had laid many stripes on them.”

The fact that they were Romans was not yet known. It is probable that even if they called out that they were, they had no chance to be heard. The onrush was too sudden and the turmoil because of the rushing crowd was too great. They were manhandled, stripped, and then the lictors came and immediately started beating them with the rods. The description “many stripes” means that there was an enormous number of them.

This can be determined by Paul's Jewish heritage in relation to what he says in his epistles. First, Paul acknowledges that he was beaten by the Jews with rods in 2 Corinthians 11:41, saying, "From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one."

This was the standard punishment under the law where it says –

"If there is a dispute between men, and they come to <sup>[a]</sup>court, that *the judges* may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, <sup>2</sup> then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge will cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, with a certain number of blows. <sup>3</sup> Forty blows he may give him *and* no more, lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight." Deuteronomy 25:1-3

Normally, to ensure the law was not violated, one less than forty was given. This is why Paul says, "forty *stripes* minus one." Though not a part of the law, it was a safeguard to ensure the law was not inadvertently desecrated. In 2 Corinthians 11:23, he noted that he was "in stripes above measure." His words may be referring to this beating at Philippi which would then mean "above the measure of the law." That is only an inference, and he may be talking about a cumulative measure over his lifetime. However, he does note this in 1 Thessalonians –

"For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. <sup>2</sup> But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict." 1 Thessalonians 2:1, 2

In his words to those in Thessalonica, he is referring to this account in Acts 16. Saying that they "were spitefully treated" is probably his way of conveying two thoughts. The first is that they were Romans and yet were subject to punishments that were not allowed without being first condemned. The second thought is that of what the Law of Moses says concerning being beaten with rods, "lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight."

The Jewish law concerning rods had a reason behind it, which was to avoid shame and humiliation. The Romans had no such law. Therefore, there was no regard to humiliating a fellow human in this manner. Paul's words to the Thessalonians seem to convey that what Moses forbade, the Romans meted out to him and Silas with glee but also illegally.

With that, Luke next records that “they threw *them* into prison.” It will be noted in verse 16:33 that the jailer will wash their stripes. This means that not only were they beaten relentlessly, but their wounds were not treated in any manner before being cast into prison.

Though it is unstated, it is unlikely that they received their clothes, meaning their outer garments, back. Such a mob would probably have taken them and torn them to pieces or ran off with them. Hence, the need to wash their stripes would have been even more necessary. Though speculation, it is quite possible. With that, Luke continues, saying, “commanding the jailer to keep them securely.”

The idea here seems twofold. First, though punished, it would ensure that they would not continue to teach their customs any further. Second, it is likely that they were looking for a reason to have an actual trial where they could be subject to further Roman punishment under the law. The jailer was given full charge over them, he was liable to Rome for the security of those under him, and there would be little hope for Paul and Silas to escape either the prison or future punishment.

Life application: What happened to Paul and Silas was unfair according to the laws of Rome. And yet, the Lord allowed it to happen. It is not uncommon for bad things to happen to believers, just as they would happen to anyone in the world. Quite often, this is the case even when they have done nothing wrong.

One of the first things to come out of believers’ mouths at such times is, “Why did God allow this to happen to me?” This assumes that believers should somehow be immune from the evils of the world. But the Bible never speaks in this manner. As long as we are in this world, we are subject to the same evil events that happen to anyone. We may get in an accident, get robbed, lose a child, fall on an escalator and break our back, or one of an infinite number of other tragedies that befall people around the world.

We cannot blame God for such things. It is a fallen world. Our interactions in this world mean that we are subject to the same troubles as anyone else in the world. Our response to such things should be to get closer to the Lord, not distance ourselves from Him. We should long for the home He has promised to us, not dwell in our misery in this place that is not truly our home.

Keep this in mind. Whenever trouble comes, as is sure to occur, we should lean on the Lord even more. Hold fast to the promises that are yet ahead and don’t hold fast to that which is fleeting, fallen, and fading away.

*Lord God, please be with us as we walk in this darkened world. Though troubles are sure to come, guide us and remind us of Your presence with us. In this, we will be comforted in our afflictions and able to bear them as we look forward to our true home. Amen.*

**Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.** Acts 16:24

In the previous verse, after Paul and Silas were beaten with many stripes, they were thrown into prison and the jailor was told to keep them secure. Now, Luke says, “Having received such a charge.”

It is referring to the jailor. His job was to obey the magistrates without questioning the propriety or impropriety of the situation. If he was told to keep them securely, this is what he was to do. Therefore, “he put them into the inner prison.”

Luke’s noting of this is to highlight the degradation suffered by Paul and Silas at the hands of the people of Philippi. To understand this, one needs to understand the layout of the Roman prison. Of the arrangement of the prisons in the Roman empire, Vincent’s Word Studies quotes Rev. John Henry Newman’s “Callista,” saying: “The state prison was arranged on pretty much one and the same plan through the Roman empire, nay, we may say throughout the ancient world. It was commonly attached to the government buildings, and consisted of two parts. The first was the vestibule, or outward prison, approached from the praetorium, and surrounded by cells opening into it. The prisoners who were confined in these cells had the benefit of the air and light which the hall admitted. From the vestibule there was a passage into the interior prison, called Robur or Lignum, from the beams of wood which were the instruments of confinement, or from the character of its floor. It had no window or outlet except this door, which, when closed, absolutely shut out light and air. This apartment was the place into which Paul and Silas were cast at Philippi. The utter darkness, the heat, and the stench of this miserable place, in which the inmates were confined day and night, is often dwelt upon by the martyrs and their biographers.”

Remembering that Paul and Silas were uncondemned Romans, the treatment would be absolutely insufferable. However, after the terrible beating they received, they were probably in no shape to even talk, much less argue over their treatment. Only after a period of sitting and resting could they muster the strength to hold a conversation. In this tragic state and place, it next records, “and fastened their feet in the stocks.”



The Greek literally reads “upon the wood.” Vincent’s Word Studies notes that it was an instrument of torture having five holes, four for the wrists and ankles and one for the neck. In this case, only the feet are noted as being fastened.

Life application: To get an understanding of what Christians around the world endure regarding punishment and even martyrdom, take time to read the testimonies in the Voice of the Martyrs. They can be read online, and their magazine can be ordered for those in the church to read. The amount of agony and humiliation suffered by believers in the world today is beyond the comprehension of most of those in the church.

And yet, these people are willing to suffer in these ways rather than deny their affiliation with the exalted name of Jesus. Unlike them, churches and denominations in the Western world are filled with people who presume to openly and flippantly violate Scripture. They ignore the doctrines and teachings set forth in the word of God, they claim prosperity and ease, they welcome perversion of every sort, and they gladly follow society as it morally spirals out of control.

Should bearing the title of “Christian” start to cost those who attend such churches, it is unlikely that even a small percent of them would continue to do so. Are you ready to lose everything to be faithful to the title that you claim, that of being a Christian? Western society is heading in that direction. You should be prepared now to take your stand and hold fast to your faith. It may be that you will have to decide where your allegiances truly reside.

*Heavenly Father, help us to stand strong and remain faithful to Jesus through whatever trial or test that may arise. This life is really not that important when we have eternity ahead of us because of what He has done. So, Lord, strengthen us when it is needed. May our lives be faithfully lived out, regardless of the cost we must bear. Amen.*

**But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Acts 16:25**

Note: The NKJV clears up the major errors in the translation of the KJV, but it still lacks the precision of the Greek. The BLB gives a clearer sense of the Greek – “Now toward midnight, Paul and Silas praying, were singing praises to God. And the prisoners were listening to them.” This will be used for the analysis.

In the previous verse, Paul and Silas were taken to the inner prison and had their feet fastened in the stocks. Despite this, it now says, “Now toward midnight.”

It is unknown what time Paul and Silas were arrested, but it was most likely during the day. The magistrates were available and there was a sizeable crowd around at the time. Whenever Paul and Silas were taken to the prison, it is now surely several to many hours later. Luke's noting that it is closing in on midnight suggests this. And yet, instead of sleeping, it next says, "Paul and Silas praying, were singing praises to God."

The verbs detail the situation. The word "praying" is from a present participle while "were singing" is from an imperfect verb. In other words, the singing of praises to God is part of what is considered praying. One act, not two, is described here. Also, the word translated as "singing praises" is *humneó*. It signifies a hymn. Thus, some translations further expand on the thought saying, "singing hymns of praise" to God, or something similar to that.

Nothing is said about what they were singing, but being Jews, it may be something from the Psalms. Or it may also have been songs that were composed in the early church. What seems likely is that they were singing in Greek because the next words say, "And the prisoners were listening to them."

If they were singing in a foreign language, these words would be unnecessary. Luke's specific recording of this seems to indicate that not only did they hear their singing, but the words were understandable. The word Luke uses is found only here in Scripture, *epakroaomai*. It gives the sense of attentive listening.

If Paul and Silas were singing in Hebrew, the prisoners would hear, but they wouldn't be listening attentively. But a message to God in the form of a hymn of praise which is also an act of prayer, would be something the others would listen to and assimilate if it was in Greek or even Latin (as this was a Roman colony).

The inclusion of this note by Luke seems to explain what will be said in verse 28. When there was a chance to escape, not only did Paul and Silas remain, but apparently all of the prisoners did so as well. The personal conviction of the prisoners based on the conduct of Paul and Silas seems to be what Luke is hinting at with his words in this verse.

Life application: Though nothing is said of any conversions in the prison, there seems little doubt that Paul and Silas spoke to the others who were incarcerated. As the evening moved along, the words of evangelism turned into a prayer that was accomplished through hymns of praise to God.

Someday, when the saints are gathered together, it seems likely that among them will be various unnamed people who sat together with Paul and Silas in a filthy Roman prison in Philippi. For all we know, Paul and Silas could have been singing the words of Psalm 146 to them –

“Happy *is he* who *has* the God of Jacob for his help,  
Whose hope *is* in the LORD his God,  
<sup>6</sup>Who made heaven and earth,  
The sea, and all that *is* in them;  
Who keeps truth forever,  
<sup>7</sup>Who executes justice for the oppressed,  
Who gives food to the hungry.  
The LORD gives freedom to the prisoners.” Psalm 146:5-7

He who is freed in Christ is the freest man of all regardless of whatever physical restraints lay upon him. Be sure to tell those around you about the magnificent workings of God in Christ. No person is too lowly or too lost to hear this good news.

*Lord God, turn our hearts, softening them to the plight of those in this world. People are bound in chains of addiction, greed, lust, hatred, and perversion. People are also bound in chains and prisons. All of them need the freedom that only Jesus can provide. Help us to be bold and speak out the words of release and freedom. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.** Acts 16:26

It was about midnight in the prison while Paul and Silas were praying, singing hymns of praise to God, as the other prisoners were listening to them. With that, it next says, “Suddenly there was a great earthquake.”

Comments from scholars are divided on whether the earthquake was a divine occurrence or not. For example, the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary says of this event, “in answer, doubtless, to the prayers and expectations of the sufferers that, for the truth's sake and the honor of their Lord, some interposition would take place.”

That actually makes no sense at all. Nothing was said of expectations from prayer. They were sitting in prison and singing to God. There isn't even a hint of anything like, "O God, get us out of here," or "Vindicate your servants, O God."

Earthquakes happen. They are a part of the natural cycle of things, and one simply occurred at a time when the Lord knew Paul and Silas would be in prison. Further, if release from prison is what they were praying for, then the events of the coming verses would not have taken place.

As for the coming of the earthquake, Luke continues with, "so that the foundations of the prison were shaken."

The point of these words is to show that this was not like the event that occurred in Acts 4:31 –

"And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness."

The event in Acts 4 was a localized occurrence and a sign to those in the house that God had heard and responded. The event in Acts 16 is a major earthquake that affected everything in the area. It shook up the very foundations of the prison. To assume that God had decided to send a cataclysmic earthquake to simply respond to the prayers of Paul and Silas would be no different than someone making the same claim today.

In other words, if an earthquake or other natural disaster affects an entire city, there will naturally be some seemingly miraculous events that take place. Within the past few months before typing this commentary, there was a massive earthquake in Turkey and the news was filled with such reports. As for the shaking of the prison, that leads to Luke's next words, "and immediately all the doors were opened."

In such a large quake, this would not be unheard of. As the foundations of the earth are moved, those things dependent on the foundations, such as doors, walls, etc., will be affected as well. Things became unhinged, loosened, and shaken free. This is what happened with the prison where Paul and Silas were held. Along with that, Luke next says, "and everyone's chains were loosed."

Depending on how the prison was set up, this is also not at all improbable. When one thing got out of place, anything connected to it may have also been affected. If the

chains were attached to bolts set into the floor in a row, the floor would be weakened in a line where they were set. This is how stones are often cut into slabs. By drilling holes in a straight line and then exerting pressure in those holes, slabs are broken off. Likewise, in an earthquake, such a straight line of bolts could easily cause the floor to crack, releasing the bolts and thus the chains.

This is all speculation, but it is given to show that what occurred is not at all impossible. Of these events, Albert Barnes says, "The design of this was, doubtless, to furnish them proof of the presence and protection of God, and to provide a way for them to escape."

Again, this is really a stretch, especially considering what transpires in the coming verses. The miracle was not that there was an earthquake. However, it was certainly propitious and known to God that Paul and Silas would be in this prison when there was an earthquake. By using the two events that have aligned in this manner, God will be glorified through what transpires.

Life application: Natural disasters happen all the time. They come in the form of tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanoes, plagues, and more. In the recent earthquake in Turkey, dozens of seemingly miraculous events took place. People were saved under falling buildings, having just enough room to survive until rescuers could come. One guy, Hakan Yasinoglu, survived 278 hours before being rescued. Many such reports came out in the news.

This is true with natural disasters in countries all over the world. People are spared, and the reasons may be as simple as time and chance (Ecclesiastes 9:11). What we as Christians do with what happens is what is important. Paul and Silas will be faced with choices in their sudden release, and they will respond in the manner that is most appropriate to the situation.

Will we glorify God for our being spared? Like all events that happen in our lives, we are asked to be people of faith. When propitious events take place, we should glorify God for them. When disaster occurs, we should glorify God through it. We have lives to live. Let us live them in the constant awareness that we belong to the Lord and that whether through life or death, He is directing our steps.

*Lord God, we cannot know why things happen as they do, but we can be faithful through whatever occurs, thanking You, praising You, or calling out in our mourning to You. Help us to always remember You as the events of our lives unfold. May it be so. Amen.*

**And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.**

Acts 16:27

Note: The NKJV botches many of the verbs in this verse. The BLB translation will be used to evaluate it. It reads, "And the jailer having been awoken and having seen the doors of the prison open, having drawn his sword was about to kill himself, supposing the prisoners to have escaped."

In the previous verse, there was an earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison, opening the doors and loosing the chains. With that, it now says, "And the jailer."

This individual will be a key figure for the next few verses. He is the one who was given charge over Paul and Silas as well as the other prisoners who were incarcerated. With the coming of the earthquake, it next says, "having been awoken and having seen the doors of the prison open."

Luke's use of participles leads the reader quickly from one event to the next, each dependent on the preceding event. He was awoken and he then saw the doors of the prison open. The adjective translated as awoken, *exupnos*, is found only here in the Bible. It is literally translated "out of sleep."

He was roused out of sleep and saw that the prison was no longer secure. With this, his heart surely sank. Being responsible for those under his charge, he would be held accountable for their escape, even if an earthquake was involved. Rather than face such disgrace, it next says, "having drawn his sword."

Luke, still using participles, leads the reader from thought to thought. He is prepared to take action after having drawn his sword. Luke says that he "was about to kill himself." The verb is imperfect. He has drawn his sword and is probably thinking of his life, his wife, his children, or whatever memories he wanted to consider one last time. Standing there holding the sword and maybe pondering what purpose his life held if it had all come to this. He was given charge over prisoners, and he stood there "supposing the prisoners to have escaped."

The verb translated as "to have escaped" is in the perfect tense. He supposes they are long gone, and he was not quick enough to have gotten up and stopped them. How could things have gone south so quickly?

Life application: Luke masterfully carries the reader from one point to another and then leaves the mind hanging for a moment before bringing us, along with the jailor, to the sudden realization that life has come to its end. He is writing this way for a reason. He wants whoever reads his narrative to think through what value life really holds.

If we simply evolved from the slime and are going back to dust, then life really has no meaning. The jailor may not have believed in evolution, but he had no knowledge of the true God. Whatever god or gods he believed in gave him no hope. Now that fate had turned against him, his life would end without any true purpose.

This is the state that the verse leaves us to consider. But in the desperate shadows of life, there is a beacon of light for those who will receive it. That light is about to shine on the heart of this supposedly doomed jailor.

Are you ready to tell someone about Jesus today? Without Him, the person you pass by on the street will have as much hope in his last moment as this jailor possesses as he stands at the jail door with a sword pointed at his stomach.

Open your mouth and speak. People need Jesus.

*Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord who gives us hope in this dark, fallen world. Amen.*

**But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.”**  
Acts 16:28

In the previous verse, the jailor was prepared to kill himself, having drawn his sword for that purpose. With that obviously seen by Paul, Luke next records, “But Paul called with a loud voice.”

One might question why Paul could see the jailor, but the jailor didn’t notice Paul. The answer is that the jailor has come into the cell area from the outside. There would have been no lights as there are today. There would have been no reason to provide lamps at night. And so, the cells would have been pitch black.

Based on what is said in verse 29, even if he had his own torch, it wasn’t sufficient to light the area. Rather, it was only light enough so that he could notice that the cells were open. He surely assumed everyone had skedaddled while he slept. It would have been

an obvious inference on any other occasion. The poor lighting would not have been able to pierce into the darker recesses of the cell where the prisoners were.

With his eyes straining to look into the pitch dark, his soul would have become even darker, losing hope of life itself. In that state, the sword would have been drawn and readied for its final plunge. But before that could happen, Paul called out with a loud voice, “saying, ‘Do yourself no harm.’”

Paul’s voice was certainly intentionally loud to arrest the suicidal thoughts of the man. The abruptness and loudness of his voice would have shocked the jailor enough to halt any action with the sword. With that happily effected, he continued his words, saying, “for we are all here.”

Nothing is said of how many were in the prison. The word “all” generally implies more than two people. That makes at least three. But verse 25 had said “the prisoners were listening to them.” The plural indicates at least two others. Therefore, at a minimum, there were four prisoners but there could have been even more.

But the point is made, there were at least four people whose chains had been loosed and whose doors were opened. And yet, they remained in the prison. The obvious question is, “Why would the other prisoners also have remained.” Though the narrative doesn’t say, the answer Luke intends to convey is obvious.

Luke purposefully noted that Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. Unless there is a specific reason that he penned this fact, it is an otherwise irrelevant bit of information. Yes, it makes for great sermon material and allows later writers to make grand statements about the happiness one can experience even in terrible times. But that can be deduced in many other ways.

Luke included those words to introduce the next clause, “and the prisoners were listening to them.” This would be an even more irrelevant statement than the previous one except for the continued narrative. Paul and Silas had such a profound effect on the other prisoners that when they were freed from their bonds, they had chosen to remain in the cell rather than escape.

It can be deduced that even if they wanted to escape, Paul and Silas had convinced them that the life of the jailor would be in jeopardy and to not leave. It can be further surmised that these prisoners may have even been converted in the previous hours as



they lay chained in the darkness. Whether this is the case or not, Paul and Silas at least had enough sway to convince them of their need to stay. And they did.

Life application: The general tenor of the words in Acts 16 has been played out time and again since it was recorded. Christians have patiently waited on the Lord through trials, troubles, tribulations, and testing. They have praised him through storms while those around them have seen and desired a faith like theirs.

An example of this is seen in the life of John Wesley. The familiar story is cited from the [Methodist.org.uk](http://Methodist.org.uk) website –

-----

“John and Charles Wesley set out for America in 1735, enthused at the idea of preaching the Gospel to Native American people. During the voyage the ship was struck by a terrifying storm. John was afraid. He prayed with the English passengers, one of whom brought him a baby to baptise in case they were all about to die.

Shortly afterwards he was at another service with a group of German Moravians when a huge wave engulfed the ship and water poured down into the cabins. While the English passengers screamed in terror, the Moravians continued singing - men, women and children seemingly untroubled.

Later he asked one of the Moravians if they hadn't been afraid. He replied that not even the women and children had been afraid. None of them were afraid to die. John knew that they had something he didn't, an absolute trust in God. They were prepared to lose their lives because they knew that God was never going to let them go. John was deeply impressed.

His time in America was unsuccessful in many ways, and he and Charles returned home after two years. All the time John was nagged by the thought that he did not have full faith in God. But this was about to change.”

-----

Just as the faithful patience and singing of Paul and Silas brought a change in the prisoners with them, the faithful endurance and singing of the Moravians were able to pull at the soul of John Wesley.

Let us consider this as we face terrible times. Our faithful composure and even elation at our salvation may be all that is needed to convict lost sinners who see. From there, the gospel can be proclaimed to the saving of their souls.

*Glorious heavenly Father, we have the absolute assurance of eternal life in Your presence because of the finished, final, full, and forever work of Jesus Christ. Help us to act with that assurance when times are tough. May we be as lights in the darkness to those who need to find their way back to You. Amen.*

**Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.**

Acts 16:29

Note: The NKJV follows the six translational errors of the KJV for this verse and cannot be salvaged. A more precise reading would be – “And having called for lights, having rushed in, and having become terrified, having fallen down before Paul and Silas...” (CG).

The translation requires the words of the following verse to be fully appreciated. Together there is a constant stream of verbs, mostly participles, revealing one action following another.

Paul had just called out loudly to the jailor, saying, “Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.” With those words called out, the sequence of actions by the jailor commences, beginning with, “And having called for lights.”

The word is plural, *phōta*. The use of the singular by the KJV, which is followed by the NKJV, robs the intent of what is occurring. It is certain that the jailor carried in his own torch or other such source of light. However, as was seen in verse 27, it was insufficient to see anything other than the fact that the prison doors were open. Having seen this, he assumed that the prisoners had escaped.

Now, he calls for lights to be brought. Despite the prisoners having called out, he could not know if this was a trap. If he walked into the cell alone and with insufficient lighting, would he be overwhelmed? That would be contrary to the loud call made by Paul, but if they were still bound in their chains, his suicide outside of the cell would still leave them bound. But if they could get him into the cell, they would have a better chance of getting free by possibly 1) using keys if he had them, 2) using his sword to pry at the locks, or 3) using his life as leverage to get freedom.

Therefore, he cautiously called for lights. The meaning is that he would not only have sufficient lighting but also the guards who held the lights. Only then would it be safe to enter. With that, it next says, “having rushed in.”

The word translated as “rushed in” is *eispédaó*. It was seen in Acts 14:14 and it literally means “to leap in,” or “to spring in.” This shows that the jailor surely thought it was a trap. He rushed in expecting to be pounced upon by those inside the cell. But with the area now lit and seeing the prisoners all there, without any chains restricting them and yet having not attempted to escape, he was floored. As it next says, “and having become terrified.”

The obvious thought to be deduced from this is that the jailor had heard the conversation between Paul and Silas and probably with the other prisoners as well. This will become more evident when the words of the next verse are presented. But for now, this is a valid assumption.

The jailor had surely heard the words that Paul and Silas spoke concerning salvation, judgment, etc. He may not have paid much attention, but he was aware of the general sense of what they were saying. Now, realizing that these men’s words were backed up by their actions, he felt the weight of judgment having fallen upon him and it terrified him.

The jailor wasn’t terrified of the threat of being overwhelmed by prisoners any longer. Rather, he was terrified that his life had almost ended by his own hand, and he was not ready to meet his Maker on the terms determined by Him. Therefore, he was overwhelmed by the moment, terrified of looming judgment, and now hoping for mercy from the Creator. This begins to be seen in the next words, “having fallen down before Paul and Silas...”

The man who has custody of the prisoners assigned to him now places himself under them and into their care. He is about to place his request before them, hoping that they will have a suitable answer to the terrifying dilemma that is facing him, and which has been brought to light by the events that have just taken place.

Life application: The active nature of Luke’s writing brings the reader directly into what is occurring. Step by step, the thoughts are presented to have us carefully consider each event as it occurs before moving to the next one.

Likewise, a proper translation of the word “lights” rather than “light” makes an amazing difference in what one will perceive concerning what is happening. If Luke had said “light,” it would mean that the jailor stupidly walked into a darkened prison area without his own light. Calling for a light would mean he needed it to see anything at all.

But by calling for lights, it does not exclude him having already brought his own. He just needs more lights and more guards to prepare for whatever lies ahead. As noted above, the KJV and the later NKJV provide six errors in translation in this single verse. The NKJV also changed the translation of the KJV from “sprang in” to “ran in.” Both thoughts are acceptable, but “sprang in” is closer to the original than “ran in.” It was as if the guards leaped into the cell, ready to pounce on whoever was in there waiting to attack them.

All these nuances help us to rightly discern what is being said. Thus, our conclusions will be closer to what Luke truly intended to convey. There is a need in the human soul that cannot be fixed by us. Each of us is just one heartbeat away from having that need forever removed from us.

Be sure to get out and tell people what they need to know. From there, each person can then decide if what he or she has heard is acceptable to them. At least they will have this chance. But if we don’t speak, they may never have it. Go forth and speak!

*Heavenly Father, how desperately we need to be reconciled to You! Thank You that You have sent Jesus to bring this about. May we not withhold the precious words of restoration from those we meet along life’s path. Help us to be faithful in this. Amen.*

**And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Acts 16:30**

Note: As with the previous verse, the verbs here are thoroughly botched by the NKJV. A literal rendering would be, “and having brought them out, he was saying, ‘Sirs, what is necessary of me to do, that I may be saved?’” (CG). This will be used for the evaluation.

In the previous verse, Luke carefully described the jailor’s actions after he had refrained from killing himself. That verse and this verse now are one continuous thought. Taken together, they read – “And having called for lights, having rushed in, and having become terrified, having fallen down before Paul and Silas, and having brought them out, he was saying, ‘Sirs, what is necessary of me to do, that I may be saved?’”

One can see how Luke has carefully used participles to lead to the final thought, revealing it as if it is the most important question ever uttered. In this verse, Luke begins with “and having brought them out.”

He had just fallen on his face before Paul and Silas, utterly terrified at the events that had occurred, knowing that if Paul had not called out as he did, he would now be dead. The thought of this overwhelmed him. With them now out of the prison cell, and with his thoughts collected, Luke now changes from participles to an imperfect verb, rendered as “he was saying.”

Being imperfect, there is a sense of progression. Thus far, each event has been completed but with the anticipation of another event to follow. This question now progresses forward anticipating a final resolution. With that, the jailor begins his question with the word “Sirs.”

The Greek word is *Kyrioi*. A more formal English word would be “Lords.” In the use of this word, he has elevated his captors above himself, stating a title of respect that is spoken towards masters or those of higher power or authority.

What seems evident is that the jailor had at least a partial idea about what had transpired in the public square that had led to the imprisonment of Paul and Silas. Along with that, he may have heard some of what Paul and Silas were speaking about before he fell asleep. They may have recounted the events of the past days to the other prisoners, explaining what had brought them to the point of incarceration.

In whatever manner he heard the rough details, he now understood that what he had heard was true. And so, he completes his question with, “what is necessary of me to do, that I may be saved?”

The jailor could not have asked this question unless he already knew that they proclaimed how to be saved. When he had put away his sword and gone into the cell and found the prisoners unbound, he realized that what he had heard was true. There was no hidden agenda, no pretense, and no falsity in them. Rather, whatever he had heard was now confirmed in his mind to be true.

As for his question, the word translated as “to do” is *poieó*. It signifies to make, manufacture, construct, etc. It is an action that leads to a result. When a tree bears fruit, it puts forth of itself so that it will produce seeds to continue the cycle of life. When a

person gives to the poor, he is looking for a resulting change in their miserable state. Similarly, the jailor is looking to do one thing so that another thing may come about.

With his question presented, it is worthwhile to compare the words of the girl with the spirit of Python from verse 16:17 and his words now –

- These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us a way of salvation.
- Sirs, what is necessary of me to do, that I may be saved?

As noted earlier, the jailor had heard at least some of what had transpired, and which resulted in the incarceration of the apostles. This certainly included the words of the girl. Whether he had heard of her or not, it seems he had heard what she had proclaimed. But more, their response to him will show that he had already heard about Jesus, at least to some degree. This will be seen in the next verse.

Life application: The prison cell where Paul and Silas were would have been filthy and stinky. Despite this, the guard fell before them in the cell. Once he had gained his composure, only then did he bring them out. Having brought them out, he then addressed them as superiors.

The actions of Paul and Silas brought about a mark of total respect by the jailor. So much was this the case, that he humbled himself before them in the confines of the dirty jail cell.

One can see from this that it is not expensive clothing, material possessions, or a high position in this world that makes a person truly worthy of respect. Rather, each person must be judged as an individual. Some people of wealth or power do not deserve the respect one would offer to a dog. Others who are in lowly jobs or humble circumstances may be the most honorable people in town.

Do not rush to judgment by looking at mere appearances. Rather, be willing to evaluate people based on their character and conduct, and then proceed from there.

*Lord God, help us to treat people properly. May we not look at the externals and come to erroneous conclusions. Instead, may we be willing to look at each person and see what their true makeup is. Our impartiality will demonstrate that we are also people of character. This is especially important because people who are curious about Jesus will*

*make their judgments based on us. May our actions lead them to want to know You more. Amen.*

**So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Acts 16:31**

In the previous verse, the jailor had brought Paul and Silas out of their cell and then asked them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The words recorded by Luke speak volumes. First, he notes, “So they said.”

The use of the third person plural tells us that both Paul and Silas responded. Their voice and the substance of their response are united in thought. They were in complete agreement concerning the matter, saying, “Believe.”

In the Greek, as in the English, their first word excludes any work at all. They simply instruct him to believe. They don’t bring up their culture or heritage by introducing the Law of Moses. They don’t ask for anything, nor do they tell him he must vow, offer, or sacrifice anything. They simply tell him to believe.

The next word, *epi*, is rightly translated, on or upon. It is the same one that was used in Acts 3:16. At that time, it was noted that Peter had healed the man because of the faith found in (based upon) the name of Jesus. Here in Acts 16, Paul and Silas instruct the jailor to believe upon the One they will name, meaning He is to be the foundational subject of his faith. They then say that this belief is to be upon “the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The jailor had just called the two men *kurioi*, lords. They now immediately subordinate themselves to the One Lord – Jesus Christ, the Kurion. Ultimately, there is one Lord that all other lords are subject to, whether they acknowledge it now or not.

What is evident, without it being said, is that their words elevate Jesus above all these other lords because they ascribe salvation to him. If Caesar could save, they would have said so. If any other “lord” could save, they would have said so. But by directly responding to the jailor with a single named Lord, it means that He – by default – is above all other lords.

It should be noted that some manuscripts leave off the word Christ. The word has the same meaning, Anointed One, as the Hebrew word Messiah, even if it has a different signification to the Jews than it would to the Greeks. However, in this case, that seems to be irrelevant because it is accompanied by the name Jesus.

This seems to tell us that the jailor had already been made aware of who Jesus is. If this were not the case, there would have been a much fuller explanation recorded by Luke. Otherwise, the jailor's obvious question would have been, "Who is the Lord Jesus?"

The next verse will indicate that more explanation is given, but it seems likely by the direct response of these men that the jailor had already been made aware of Jesus' name through either direct conversation or through listening while Paul and Silas talked with the other prisoners. Therefore, it is not a strong argument to say that the word Christ isn't original based on its signification to a Greek.

Once someone has been instructed on who Jesus is, meaning being the Christ, the term is applied to Him as a fixed appellation from that point on. This is evidenced by its use hundreds of times by Paul in his epistles that are written to Gentiles.

But more, because the name Jesus was a common name at the time, there may have been many lords (meaning masters) named Jesus in Israel. But there is only one Messiah. To say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus" would not carry the same weight as saying, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." It identifies the Person, and it explains who He is.

A more comprehensive explanation of what Christ means would necessarily be needed to complete the thought. That would include that He is God incarnate, that He died for the sins of the world, that He was buried, and that He rose again. This fuller explanation was probably something that the jailor was already exposed to, at least partially, through the words of Paul and Silas as they talked about their faith to the other prisoners.

Therefore, whether the word Christ is original or not is not something to be so cavalierly dismissed as is done by scholars. With that, Luke next records, "and you will be saved."

This is the completion of the thought in response to his question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He wanted to know what would bring him personal salvation and they provided the necessary answer. The only requirement for him to be saved is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. But with that explanation out of the way, they continue their words with a fuller explanation, saying, "you and your household."

This is an important addition. Jesus is not just the Savior of a certain group of people, nor is He the Savior of a limited number of people. He is the Savior of all who come to Him. Their response to the jailor is in line with what the messenger had said to the house of Cornelius –



“And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, <sup>14</sup> who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’” Acts 11:13, 14

Neither the messenger noted in Acts 11, nor Paul and Silas in Acts 16, mean that the household is saved through the master’s faith.

Peter’s words to the house of Cornelius were to be the good news of salvation, the gospel. Upon conveying them, those who believed would be saved. The term, “you and all your household,” does not mean that Cornelius’ salvation would lead directly to the salvation of his household as if his faith was sufficient to cover everyone. Earlier in Acts 10, it had said –

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, <sup>2</sup> a devout *man* and one who feared God with all his household.” Acts 10:1, 2

The family was already a family that feared God. The saving of the household spoken of was to be a salvation that was based upon the faith they already possessed. It just needed to be directed properly toward Jesus Christ. Likewise, Paul and Silas are not telling the jailor that his salvation would result in his family’s salvation, but that the necessary condition for any of them to be saved was to believe. Those who did, meaning any in all his household, would be saved.

Life application: For such a simple set of words, there is a great deal of underlying meaning in what has been conveyed. The main substance of it, however, is that there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, who is capable of saving. The simplicity of the response to the question excludes any other possible option.

But more, the words clearly indicate that one must believe in the right Jesus. Paul conveys this thought elsewhere, saying –

“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!” 2 Corinthians 11:3, 4

There is not another Jesus who can save. There is also no other gospel that can save. In Galatians 1:6-8, Paul says any other such notion is anathema. Let us be precise when we give the gospel so that the message is clearly understood. Once it is, if the person believes the message, he will be saved. For those who have believed in a false Jesus or a false gospel, explain to them what was in error and ask them to reconsider what they have believed. It's important.

*Lord God, help us to properly convey the gospel so that those who hear it will have the chance to accept our words and be saved. May we be precise in our explanation so that those to whom we speak understand the importance of our words. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.**

Acts 16:32

In the previous verse, the instructions concerning salvation were presented to the ears of the jailor, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." It was noted that this doesn't mean that his household would be saved if he believed. Rather, it means that the opportunity is available to any in his household if they too believe. It is not something limited to the master of the house.

In confirmation of that thought, the next words are provided, saying, "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house." If, as is wrongly assumed by some, his salvation also meant the household's salvation, there would be no need for the apostles to also speak to those in his house.

However, that is what took place. The message of Jesus was communicated to all of them. Those who would believe were then saved. As an advanced happy note, verse 34 will confirm that all his household believed. As for the words, "they spoke the word of the Lord to him," the guard already knew that these men proclaimed the way of salvation. The fact that he came to them asking how he could be saved meant that he understood they knew the answer.

As noted at that time, it is probable that he had already heard some of their words concerning the Lord, maybe while they were talking to each other or maybe while talking to the other prisoners. Something gave him the knowledge that they proclaimed salvation. He may have disregarded it thinking, "Ha, they are the ones in prison." However, because of their willingness to stay in the cell, even when it was opened by the earthquake, he realized that they were men of integrity.

Their actions had led to his reconsideration of the matter. Their conduct and words had now brought them out of prison and to his home. And their witness of the Lord Jesus had brought the message of salvation to him and his household.

Life application: One of the truly damaging rites of churches is that of infant baptism. It gives a false sense of security to the family concerning salvation. If you doubt this, talk to a dyed-in-the-wool Roman Catholics or Lutherans about their prospects of heaven. Inevitably, they will bring in the fact that they were baptized into the church, as if that somehow makes them pleasing to God.

The thinking permeates those of many denominations, and it is a point of hope and even seemingly hopeful surety that they possess eternal life. Unfortunately, it is a misdirected hope. Infant baptism is as effective in securing salvation as is giving a baby a bath in Epsom salts. It is a showy but meritless ritual that has no basis in biblical Christianity.

Infant baptism puts the cart before the horse and provides a false sense of security that is damaging to a true and heartfelt relationship with Jesus Christ. In the coming verses, the matter of salvation and what is to come after it will be seen.

*Lord God, thank You for Your precious word that gives us the necessary information for us to know that we need to be saved, how that can come about, and what to do once we are saved. Your word is our vital instruction manual for our spiritual lives. And, above all, thank You for Jesus Christ who is the focal point of it all. Yes, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his *family* were baptized.** Acts 16:33

The wording of the verse is more rightly rendered, “And having taken them in that hour of the night, he washed from the wounds, and he was baptized, and all his, immediately.” (CG)

This will be used for the evaluation. In the previous verse, it was noted that Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to the jailor and to all who were in his house. With that complete, it next says, “And having taken them in that hour of the night...”

Remembering that it was “at midnight” that the apostles were singing in the prison when the earthquake occurred, one can assume that this is now between 12:30 and 2:30 depending on how long the intervening events took place. There was absolutely no

hesitation in getting from the prison to the house. Even if the jailor lived on the prison premises, he had rushed to the house and excitedly gathered everyone in the house together to hear the news about Jesus.

Only after telling them about the message of salvation, does it next say, “he washed from the wounds.” The word *louó* is used. It means to bathe the entire person. The meaning is that their bodies were covered in blood from their beating. He didn’t just tend to the wounds, but he cleaned them up from their wounds.

It is a tender act that must be rightly considered. They were met in the prison by the jailor who wanted to know how to be saved. He then brought them to his house and had them tell everyone the good news. After they had told them the good news, he – at the same hour of the night – treated their wounds. It is a kindhearted act of care upon those who only a short time earlier were considered enemies of the people and thus enemies of the state because it was a Roman colony. And yet, he now has called them lords and ministered to them in this fashion. With that, it next says, “and he was baptized, and all his, immediately.”

This is in obedience to the word of the Lord as given in Matthew 28:19 –

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”

There was no delay in administering this rite, but it was conducted, as it says, immediately. Along with obedience to the word of the Lord, there are several other things to consider in what is said. The word translated as baptize signifies to submerge. The literal sense is to dip under the water, coming from *baptó*, to dye or dip. There is a full covering with the fluid.

Further, the entire household was baptized, but that will require the words of the next verse to fully understand. And more, nothing is said about where they were baptized. What seems likely is that the same place where the family normally took their baths was used for their place of baptism, possibly a public bath house nearby.

Understanding this, and it is speculation, Luke is telling these things for a reason. The jailor had just bathed Paul and Silas from their wounds, meaning washing the blood off them. It then notes that immediately after this occurred, the next thing that happened was that they were baptized, probably in the same water that had just been used to cleanse Paul and Silas.

If the supposition is correct, and it appears to be so based on Luke's record, one can see the beautiful exchange that has taken place. Using the same word, *louó*, just used for washing Paul and Silas, the author of Hebrews says this –

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, <sup>21</sup> and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed [*louó*] with pure water.”

-Hebrews 10:19-22

Paul and Silas had been cleansed from their physical wounds that were received in the administration of their duties as missionaries. That is being set in apposition to the cleansing of the jailor and his household from their deeper wounds of sin and enmity with God. Paul and Silas were cleansed from their own blood; the others were baptized as a sign of being cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. The specific order in which Luke records these events, summed up by the word *parachréma*, or immediately, appears to be his way of showing us the juxtaposition between the two events.

Life application: If you are being taken into the emergency room for surgery, it may be because your life is in danger. But if you are a Christian, this is only your physical life, which is going to end someday anyway. But those around you may have never heard the word concerning Jesus. They are going to die someday too, but without Jesus, there is no hope for them. So, if you can wait a moment for the surgery, wouldn't it be the perfect time to say, “Stop for just a minute, I need to tell you about something more important than getting me to the operating table.”

This is basically what has happened in this verse from Acts. Paul and Silas were covered in their own blood and in need of care concerning their wounds. And yet, they first took the time to tell the others what they needed to know so that they could be saved. They gave their audience the true washing with pure water (a metaphor for the word of God) that they needed for their souls to be healed. Only after that did Paul and Silas receive their needed washing for their physical healing.

Let us consider this lesson and pay heed to what we are being told. The most important words of all must be conveyed for others to be saved. May we set our priorities and speak early and often about Jesus!

*Glorious God, help us to rightly prioritize our thoughts, placing the important things first. And then, may we act on those things first as well. And the most important thing of all is for us to share the gospel. Give us the wisdom to speak while we can, so that those who hear may be saved. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household. Acts 16:34**

In the previous verse, the jailor washed the wounds of Paul and Silas and then he and his family were baptized. With that, it now says, “Now when he had brought them into his house.”

More precisely, it reads, “brought up.” From wherever the baptism took place, they ascended to his house. As noted in the previous verse, it appears that the jailor and his family took Paul and Silas to a bathhouse or some other place where they normally bathed. With that complete, he then brought them up to his house. There, and now reassured of their state before God, it says “he set food before them.”

The Greek reads, “he set before [them] a table.” This would have been the first meal Paul and Silas had eaten in quite a while and it would have been a joy to partake of for several reasons.

The delight of being out of prison and properly tended to physically would have been a relief. Also, having food after such a long and tedious day would have been invigorating. But mostly, they would have been filled with praise to God for the acceptance of the gospel by the jailor and his household. Whatever was set before them would have been more enjoyable than that of a meal prepared for a king. Along with that, it next says, “and he rejoiced.”

This is referring to the jailor. Considering that he had almost died by his own hand and apart from God only a short time earlier, he would be renewed not only in spirit, but in his heart and soul as well. Life had taken on a completely new direction, an eternity-changing direction, for him. Of him, it next says, “having believed in God with all his household.”

The word translated as “with all his household” is found only here in the New Testament. However, it is found in the Greek translation of Exodus 1:1 and is also seen in other ancient writings. Being an adverb, there is no single English word that matches the intent. Further, it is more rightly united with the verb “rejoiced.” It is the final verb

that explains the reason for the joy. The order of the Greek is, “and rejoiced all-householdly, having believed God.”

The verb translated as “having believed” is a perfect participle in the singular masculine. Thus, some translations assume this is only speaking of the jailor saying, “he having believed in God.” But this is incorrect. The word “household” is a masculine word. Thus, it is referring to the entire household in the singular.

The importance of this is that it totally refutes the idea of salvation coming to those of the house through the jailor’s faith alone. Rather, each person in the household believed. Further, it negates any hint of infant baptism having been conducted. Each person individually believed and was then baptized.

As such, though these verses are descriptive, they continue to settle doctrine based on what is normative. Each person must individually believe in Jesus to be saved. Likewise, each person who believes in Jesus should then be baptized as an outward demonstration of the inner faith that has come about.

Life application: The book of Acts is a descriptive account of what has occurred. For the most part, it does not prescribe anything for us to apply to our lives. However, at times it does develop a normative pattern concerning what occurred. Every person in Acts who believes is subsequently baptized.

But even without this normative pattern, it is a command of the Lord that baptism be conducted. Somehow, the cult of hyperdispensationalism has entered the church and it has caused real damage to sound doctrine within the faith. It inappropriately divides the gospel. It also results in disobedience to the Lord’s direct command to baptize.

Be on guard against these people. Hold fast to what is sound and easily discernible from Scripture. Such unhealthy doctrine will only lead you away from a happy and proper relationship with the Lord Jesus.

*Glorious Lord God, may we be willing to follow up our faith in Jesus with obedience to His command concerning baptism. May we not get pulled astray by unsound teachings such as relying on infant baptism for our security in salvation or refusing baptism after salvation. Rather, may we be confident in our doctrine and willing to follow through with our responsibilities in our faith. Amen.*

**And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, “Let those men go.”**  
Acts 16:35

In the previous verse, Paul and Silas were served by the jailor, and they along with the household rejoiced. Luke now continues with, “And when it was day.”

One can assume that after eating, everyone finally got a chance to sleep. For Paul and Silas, that had not come all night. For the jailor and his household, they probably slept until the earthquake and then were awakened after that. With whatever late-night sleep they got, at whatever the normal hour for beginning the day arrived, it next says that “the magistrates sent the officers.”

It is speculated that the earthquake may have alarmed the magistrates, thinking it was judgment from the gods that they had allowed the multitude to rise up against the missionaries without a trial. Then the magistrates also joined in by having the men beaten with rods. This is not unfounded speculation. Luke notes that the magistrates did this “when it was day.”

Luke’s precision of record-keeping would have indicated if it were mid-morning, noon, or some easily recognizable time. Rather, it appears that as soon as the day was getting started, the magistrates made this their first point of business.

As for those they sent, the Greek word is *rhabdouchos*. Literally, rod-bearers. These were probably the same men who had beaten Paul and Silas the day before by order of the magistrates. As for their duties, Vincent’s Word Studies explains –

“They preceded the magistrates one by one in a line. They had to inflict punishment on the condemned, especially on Roman citizens. They also commanded the people to pay proper respect to a passing magistrate, by uncovering, dismounting from horseback, and standing out of the way. The badge of their office was the fasces, an axe bound up in a bundle of rods; but in the colonies they carried staves.”

It is these rod-bearers that have come, saying, “Let those men go.” Vincent’s notes that the order of the Greek indicates contempt, “those men.” Whether of contempt or hurried fear, the order is given to release them at an early hour of the day.

Life application: A guilty conscience will work on a person throughout the night. But that is not a bad thing. It is the person who has done wrong and yet sleeps soundly that is the real problem. Once a conscience is seared over having mistreated others, anything is



possible. Millions of people who just wanted to live out their lives have been snuffed out by people without any conscience toward their wrongdoing.

Those in government and unelected positions of power around the world commit crimes against the masses and yet dine with joy and sleep contentedly. As believers, we need to constantly refresh our hearts and minds concerning how we talk to and treat others.

Each person is an individual and, whether we agree with them or not, it is right that we should feel remorse when we wrongly treat another. That is what the hours of the night can be used for. Let us evaluate our treatment of others and attempt to keep our consciences from becoming seared to things they should be softened to.

*Lord God, help us to interact properly with those we encounter. We will inevitably have times when we disagree with others and say things that we later regret. May we never allow our consciences to become hardened towards our actions that are wrong. Instead, may we consider such things and determine to not continue along those paths. Amen.*

**So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace.” Acts 16:36**

In the previous verse, the magistrates sent the rod bearers, telling them to release Paul and Silas. With that, it now says, “So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul.” The word translated as “keeper of the prison” is the same as that translated as jailor in verse 16:27. This is referring to the same man who was baptized by Paul.

It seems that Paul and Silas were returned to the prison cell prior to anyone arriving in the morning, probably to keep the jailor out of hot water with the authorities for having people who should be in prison not kept there.

Once he had received the permission to release the men, he carried those words with him to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent to let you go.” This is per their instructions as just conveyed to him by the rod bearers. With that, he adds his own words of encouragement, “Now therefore depart, and go in peace.”

Rather, the verb, being an aorist participle, reads, “Now, having gone out, depart in peace.” The words mean that the men are in the prison. The jailor is telling them that once they have left the jail, they are free to go without any further requirements, such as reporting to the magistrates in the agora for a hearing. This was obviously done in the presence of the rod bearers because of what occurs in the coming verses.

The events of the previous day have been considered as settled and the matter is over in the minds of the magistrates.

Life application: In such a situation as occurred with Paul and Silas, what would you do with the news that you were to now be released?

The answer is surely dependent on many factors. If you are in a foreign land that is unsympathetic to the plight of foreigners, the best thing to do would be to accept the beating without making any fuss and to then get out of the prison as quickly as possible, not making any waves.

If you were in an area where your title, position, or standing within the community allowed it, you might consider speaking to someone about the treatment you had received. If you were in your own country bearing the rights of a citizen and your rights were violated, you may want to take even stronger action.

Paul will respond according to his own situation in the coming verse, and there is nothing wrong with the avenue he will pursue. Likewise, it is never wrong to pursue what is proper if your rights have been violated. Too often, Christians misuse Scripture and peevishly act as if they should never stand against injustice. Others claim it is inappropriate to vote, as if that is mixing in affairs of the state by people who are “citizens” of heaven.

That is a ridiculous stand. It is certain those same people pay taxes, apply for driver’s licenses, and register their newborns according to the laws of the land in which they live. The old adage, “Don’t be so heavenly minded that you are no earthly good” is appropriate. The rights of Paul and Silas have been violated. Wait and see how they respond to their release as Luke details it in the words ahead.

*Lord God, You have placed us in the world to interact with the world. We are born into various countries with certain rights and responsibilities within those countries. Why would we not use those rights to further Your kingdom? Your word provides abundant evidence that this is just what we are to do. So, Lord, help us to fulfill our responsibilities as citizens of the land in which we live while also fulfilling our responsibilities to You. Amen.*

**But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.” Acts 16:37**

In the previous verse, the jailor told Paul that the magistrates had sent word to let them go. With that, Luke now records, “But Paul said to them.”

As noted in the comments of the previous verse, the rod bearers were obviously with the jailor when he gave them the news of their release because the address is now in the plural. Paul is speaking to the jailor and the rod bearers. In his response, he says, “They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans.” The word “openly” is more appropriately translated as “publicly.” They were shamed before other citizens and even non-citizens in a manner that was considered wholly intolerable to the laws of Rome.

Of this, Charles Ellicott says –

“By the Lex Porcia (B.C. 247), Roman citizens were exempted from degrading punishment, such as that of scourging. It was the heaviest of all the charges brought by Cicero against Verres, the Governor of Sicily, that he had broken this law.”

As Paul uses the plural, *us*, it indicates that Silas was also a Roman. It would be wholly inappropriate to speak the plural in this manner if it were not so. How Silas obtained his citizenship is unknown. However, in Acts 22:28, we find that Paul was born a Roman citizen. That carried an exceptional mark. Others became citizens in various ways, but to be born a Roman meant that his father was a citizen before him as well.

In having beaten Paul and Silas, three extremely serious charges could be raised. The first is that it was a violation of Roman law to do so. Second, Paul notes that they were beaten publicly. Third, and certainly most egregiously, they had been disgraced in this manner without any trial having been held. They were stripped of their clothing while at the same time, they were stripped of their rights as Romans. Further, along with these disgraces, Paul says, “*and* have thrown *us* into prison.”

Vincent’s Word Studies, citing a scholar named Hackett, says “that almost every word in this reply contains a distinct allegation. It would be difficult to find or frame a sentence superior to it in point of energetic brevity.” Paul’s noting of their being thrown into prison carries with it the cumulation of all the injustices explicitly stated, along with those that went unstated.

They would have been deprived of food. They would not have been properly treated regarding the wounds they received. They were bound like animals in the filth of a Roman cell. These and other injustices would have all come together in their incarceration, heaping up guilt upon those who had allowed the events to occur. Because of this, Paul now contrasts the word “openly” by saying, “And now do they put us out secretly?”

The magistrates had violated the law in an open and disgraceful manner. No matter what reason they had for releasing them from prison so early in the morning, it certainly carried with it a desire to secretly hide away what had occurred. Paul was adamantly not going to allow that to happen. Thus, he says, “No indeed!”

Throughout the ages, the same idea has been communicated in various abrupt but poignant ways. In modern English, we might say, “No way Jose,” “I think not,” or “Not gonna happen.” The succinct nature of the words provides its own emphasis. Such is the case with Paul’s words. With that uttered, he next says, “Let them come themselves and get us out.”

Of this demand of Paul, Albert Barnes provides five valid points to consider –

1. Because they had been illegally imprisoned, and the injustice of the magistrates should be acknowledged.
2. because the Roman laws had been violated, and the majesty of the Roman people insulted, and honor should be done to the laws.
3. because injustice had been done to Paul and Silas, and they had a right to demand just treatment and protection.
4. because such a public act on the part of the magistrates would strengthen the young converts, and show them that the apostles were not guilty of a violation of the laws.
5. because it would tend to the honor and to the furtherance of religion. It would be a public acknowledgement of their innocence, and would go far toward lending to them the sanction of the laws as religious teachers.

Life application: As noted in the previous verse, it is ridiculous for Christians to not use the rights allowed to them within their society when they are unfairly treated. For example, Christians are expected to pay taxes. Taxes are used for the various social and legal protections provided by the law. Christians are required to conform to the laws, rules, regulations, and statutes of the land in which they live. These things are imposed on all citizens of a nation to ensure things run smoothly and to ensure people are

treated fairly while also being held accountable when they do not conform to the standards of society.

To submit to such things as these, but then not use those same rights and benefits when it is opportune to do so – such as in voting – is, frankly, foolish. If a citizen will be directed in these things by whoever is elected to office, but he is unwilling to vote when he has the right to do so, it means that he may be setting himself up to lose the very protections that he is granted.

This is the state of the United States today. Those on the left are actively working to take away the rights of citizens in general and those of Christians in particular. And yet, weak-kneed, unthinking Christians fail to use their rights and to exercise their responsibilities within the nation they live. When those rights are taken away from them, they will only have themselves to blame. Paul would find such peevishness and absurd self-piety appalling, as is evidenced by his remarks recorded in Acts 16:37.

*Heavenly Father, may we use right thinking concerning our lives within our society. If we fail to do so, we will be overcome by tragedy when we find we have squandered our responsibilities and lost our rights as citizens of the nations in which we live. Help us not to be reckoned as peevish examples of folly and foolishness. Amen.*

**And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. Acts 16:38**

In the previous verse, Paul refused the notion that he and Silas were to be released secretly. Rather, he demanded that the magistrates come and personally release them. Luke now continues with, “And the officers told these words to the magistrates.”

A different word is translated as “words” here than in verse 16:36. There it was *logos*, the expression of a thought to the jailor – “let those men go.” Now, the word *rhéma* is used. It signifies an utterance or saying. Paul had thoroughly conveyed the situation in verse 16:37, and the sayings which he spoke forth have been transmitted to the magistrates by those who received them – “they have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison.”

It is those sayings that were carried back to the magistrates by those who were sent. This is now the second and last use of the word *rhabdouchos*, or rod-bearer, in Scripture. They had been sent to tell Paul and Silas they could leave. With Paul’s refusal, they have

carried their report back to the magistrates. Upon hearing these sayings, it next says of the magistrates that “they were afraid.”

Rather than Paul and Silas, it is the city’s magistrates who are the offenders. They were now liable for what had occurred under their direction and authority. This certainly came as an enormous shock to them “when they heard that they were Romans.”

It probably never dawned on them to even stop and ask. A complaint was made against them, noting that they were Jews. Further, the one complaining said that these Jews were teaching “customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans.” A contrast was made between “these Jews” and “us Romans” by the accusers. And so, without doing what they should have done, they shamefully treated Paul and Silas, Roman citizens.

Life application: If you are in a position of authority, the best thing to do is to try to seek out the details of a matter clearly and precisely. Sometimes, something seemingly convincing may not be that way at all. To assume without verification can lead to all kinds of trouble. Enmity between friends can arise. Divisions in the church may crop up. Jobs can be lost. One might become legally liable for making such a hasty and incorrect decision.

It is best to step back from a matter, do a careful check of the relevant details, and then act. Keep this in mind. Things that may seem small or unimportant may carry more weight than you realize.

*Lord God, help us to use wisdom in how we interact with others, especially when there may be a point of conflict or trouble that arises. A little bit of due diligence can go a long way, so help us to remember this and apply it to our daily lives. Give us discernment and right thinking in this, O God. Amen.*

**Then they came and pleaded with them and brought *them* out, and asked *them* to depart from the city.** Acts 16:39

The NKJV does not properly translate the verbs. For this verse, the following will be used – “And having come, they consoled them, and having brought *them* out, they were asking *them* to go out from the city” (CG).

With the demand by Paul in verse 16:27 having been communicated to the magistrates to come and usher Paul and Silas out of the prison personally, it now says, “And having come, they consoled them.”

The word translated as consoled has a wide variety of significations, and so the context will determine what is said. Various translations say besought, pleaded, apologized, placated, appeased, appealed, etc. One can put themselves in the place of these magistrates to consider what occurred.

They certainly did not want to come to the prison, but under the circumstances, they really had no choice. They had violated the rights of Roman citizens and could have been held liable for what had transpired. Despite the utterly humiliating state they found themselves in, they came to the prison and probably fell all over themselves with apologies, reassurances, promises of restitution, or whatever else would come to the minds of people in such a situation. Hence, they were trying to console or placate Paul and Silas.

With that noted, it next says, “and having brought *them* out, they were asking *them* to go out from the city.” The main reason for this request would probably be to allow the magistrates to save face. One can see them having placated Paul and Silas enough to not bring charges against them. But even if they didn’t, the magistrates were afraid that others might find out about their wrongdoing if the two of them stayed. They would be humiliated and may lose their jobs simply because word would eventually get around. One can imagine the magistrates saying, “Please, just go. We don’t want any more trouble.”

Along with this, but still tied into it, would be the thought that there could be more trouble stirred up if some of the mob later came across Paul and Silas. Still not knowing Paul and Silas were Romans, more trouble could arise from their taunts or actions. This would eventually necessitate the intervention of the magistrates. At that time, the truth would come out and things would devolve for the magistrates from that point on. Therefore, getting these two to depart would be the happiest resolution for them.

Life application: Paul and Silas had to decide what was the best course of action to take. They could have stirred up the masses and gotten the magistrates in trouble, but who would that have helped?

They had converts in the city, including the jailor who was probably standing right there listening to the entire conversation. He would evaluate his own walk with the Lord by the actions of Paul and Silas.

In being gracious to their persecutors, he would learn to be gracious in his own actions. He would probably be more willing to speak about Jesus as well. Instead of fighting for his own gain in life, he would learn a valuable lesson about priorities.

Paul and Silas could come back at any point and there were others from their group who could stay and continue the work. Each thing had to be considered and weighed out accordingly. We too should look at the whole situation when something arises and consider what will bring the glory to God while maintaining or strengthening the faith of those who are involved. Let us consider this as we go forth each day.

*Lord God, give us wisdom in our dealings with others. May we always strive to find the right balance in our actions so that people will see that we are people of integrity and who are rightly directed to follow You as we continue on life's path. May it be so, O God. Amen.*

**So they went out of the prison and entered *the house of Lydia*; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.** Acts 16:40

Note: This translation will be used for the analysis: “And having gone forth from the prison, they came to Lydia, and having seen *them*, they exhorted the brothers and departed” (CG).

Paul and Silas had been asked to depart from the city by the magistrates. In response to that, it now says, “And having gone forth from the prison, they came to Lydia.” The meaning is that they came to Lydia’s house. The reason for going to Lydia’s house goes back to verse 16:15. There, she implored the men to stay with her and they were persuaded to do so. Upon arriving there, it says, “and having seen *them*.”

The meaning is that Paul and Silas saw the others who had accompanied them. Lydia and others may have been there as well. The words are not specific, but it at a minimum means the brothers. That is seen in the next words where it says that “they exhorted the brothers and departed.”

Luke returns to the third person here. Thus, it means that Paul and Silas exhorted the brothers, and they left without Luke joining them. From the account, it can be inferred that Luke stayed in Philippi. He will be with them again in Acts 20.

As for Timothy, it is uncertain what he did at this time. He may have remained in Philippi and then met up with Paul and Silas in Berea, or he may have gone with Paul and Silas to



their next stop of Thessalonica, simply not being mentioned while there. Either way, he will specifically be noted as with Paul and Silas in Berea in verse 17:14.

Life application: Luke appears to have stayed in Philippi, making it his home base for evangelism. As he was not considered a part of the trouble that arose with the magistrates, he was a good candidate to remain there and work with the church. This is speculation, but the next time he will be mentioned, it will be connected with Philippi, so this is a good guess.

The Lord is working things out according to a plan that is far greater than any single person. What we may see as an unhappy occasion may turn out to be a more effective chance to evangelize. This is certainly the case now. Paul and Silas will depart and head to their next location. There, a church will be established. With brothers already established in Philippi, there will be a greater chance for further evangelism there. There will also be the chance to grow in the faith there as well.

Don't look at setbacks as events that are out of control. It may be true from our perspective, but it never will be from God's. Trust that. You are a part of something that is bigger than you, and God is working out His plans accordingly.

*O God, there are times when it feels like our wheels are spinning and we are not getting any traction at all. At such times, help us to focus on the bigger picture. Your word is going out around the world and churches are faithfully teaching it. Our lack of progress does not mean that the whole world has stopped. And so, may we pray for the others as we await our forward movement once again. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 17

**Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Acts 17:1**

As Acts 16 ended, Paul and Silas were noted as having departed from Philippi. It may be that Timothy or others accompanied them, but this is unstated. With their departure, Acts 17 now begins, saying, “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia.”

Of these two cities, Albert Barnes notes the following –

“Amphipolis - This was the capital of the eastern province of Macedonia. It was originally a colony of the Athenians, but under the Romans it was made the capital of that part of Macedonia. It was near to Thrace, and was situated not far from the mouth of the river Strymon, which flowed around the city, and thus occasioned its name, around the city. ... The position of Amphipolis is one of the most important in Greece. It stands in a pass which Traverses the mountains bordering the Strymonic Gulf, and it commands the only easy communication from the coast of that gulf into the great Macedonian plains, which extend, for 60 miles, from beyond Meleniko to Philippi. The ancient name of the place was ‘Nine Ways,’ from the great number of Thracian and Macedonian roads which met at this point. The Athenians saw the importance of the position, and established a colony there, which they called Amphipolis, because the river surrounded it.

Apollonia - This city was situated between Amphipolis and Thessalonica, and was formerly much celebrated for its trade.”

After having passed through these two cities, it next says that “they came to Thessalonica.” Again, Albert Barnes provides a description for us to consider –

“This was a seaport of the second part of Macedonia. It is situated at the head of the Bay Thermaicus. It was made the capital of the second division of Macedonia by Aemilius Paulus, when he divided the country into four districts. It was formerly called Therma, but afterward received the name of Thessalonica, either from Cassander, in honor of his wife Thessalonica, the daughter of Philip, or in honor of a victory which Philip obtained over the armies of Thessaly. It was inhabited by Greeks, Romans, and Jews. It is now called Saloniki, and, from its situation, must always be a place of commercial importance. It is situated on the inner bend of the Thermaic Gulf, halfway

between the Adriatic and the Hellespont, on the sea margin of a vast plain, watered by several rivers, and was evidently designed for a commercial emporium.”

Of Thessalonica, it says, “where there was a synagogue of the Jews.” The account doesn’t say why the two passed through the other two cities without stopping, but it could be that there was no synagogue. This even seems likely because, in the text used by the NKJV, there is an article before the word synagogue, thus it is “the synagogue.” Thus, it would explain why they simply passed through the other two cities.

However, it may be that the two arrived in Thessalonica on a Friday and decided to attend the synagogue on a Saturday. Without knowing why this city was chosen, only speculation can be made.

As for the distances between the cities, it was about 33 miles from Philippi to Amphipolis. It was then about 30 miles from Amphipolis to Apollonia. From there, it was about 37 miles from Apollonia to Thessalonica. Each is about one day’s journey, and so it could be that this is how they went, arriving at Thessalonica late on the third day. It is only speculation, but the distances make this a possibility. If so, the journey was in three parts and so it is recorded as such.

Life application: The difficulties and trials of Philippi are behind the missionaries. They may have wondered why things happened as they did, but later understanding came to them. Paul explains this in his first letter to those at Thessalonica –

“For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain. <sup>2</sup> But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.” 1 Thessalonians 2:1, 2

Those in Thessalonica had been evangelized because Paul and Silas had been treated shamefully at Philippi. What was certainly considered evil to them turned out for good for those at Thessalonica. And Paul would certainly not trade a single stripe on his back once he realized how things turned out. Each new convert was seen to be worth the troubles they had faced. And with a church up and running at Philippi, things were moving forward for them as well.

Trust that God’s plan is unfolding as it should. Despite the enormous trials we may face, He is not unaware of them, nor is He not caring about them. Our patience and trust will

be rewarded someday. God will not leave anything unremembered. So, stand fast in Him and in the surety that you are just where He wants you.

*Lord God, how good it is to know that You have it all under control. For sure, we can trust this and be confident that what You have purposed will come about. As glory is said to be ahead of us, why should we be overwhelmed with the troubles of today. Help us to keep an eternal perspective as we live out our lives. Amen.*

**Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, Acts 17:2**

The previous verse noted that Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia and had arrived at Thessalonica, noting that there was a synagogue of the Jews there. Now, the narrative continues with, “Then Paul, as his custom was.”

Rather, the verb is a perfect participle. Though a little clunky, it more rightly reads, “And Paul, as customized.” He was habitual in this regard, always following the same pattern which was that he “went in to them.”

As seen elsewhere, such as in Acts 13 and 14, Paul made it his habit to go into the synagogue of whatever city he traveled to. Being a rabbi, he would be respected for his training and sought after concerning his knowledge. This is no different than visiting pastors in churches today. They may be tested to check their doctrine, asked specific questions about various matters, and even asked to say a word at times. As for Paul in Thessalonica, it next says, “and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them.”

Paul’s reasoning would be concerning Christ Jesus. He certainly took the time to carefully show all the key details concerning what the ministry of the Messiah would be. The word translated as “reasoned” is *dialegomai*. It comes from *dia*, through, and *legó*, to say. According to HELPS Word Studies, it “is the process of *giving and receiving* information with someone to *reach deeper understanding* – a “going back-and-forth” of thoughts and ideas so people can better know the Lord (His word, will).”

As for these reasonings, it was not just something made up in his own head or that was passed down from other rabbis as tradition. Rather, he reasoned with them “from the Scriptures.” As Scripture is inspired by God, it is the ultimate source for people to know the Lord. Many of the things prophesied about the Messiah can only be clearly understood after the coming of Jesus. Even today, those who reject Jesus cannot clearly understand what is being conveyed concerning the role of the Messiah.

Thus, one may carefully reason from Scripture, aligning what it says with what Jesus has done. In this type of exchange of thoughts, if a person is willing to accept what is presented, there will be the illumination of Scripture so that it is properly understood. This is what Paul strove to do over those three Sabbaths at the synagogue in Thessalonica.

Life application: Paul took his time and reasoned from the Scriptures in order to bring understanding to those he spoke with. One cannot reasonably reason from Scriptures if those Scriptures are manipulated. It is the job of a translator to do what? Yes, you in the third row. Correct! The job of a translator is to translate.

In the case of the verb of this verse, often translated as “his custom was,” which is a noun and a verb, a verbal form was used to get a clearer sense, “And Paul, as customized.” The meaning here is not that much different and anyone would get the sense of what was being said from either translation. However, can you see any marked and purposeful change between these versions of Acts 17:2 -

According to his usual practice, Sha’ul went in; and on three *Shabbats* he gave them *drashes* from the *Tanakh*, (CJB)

And as he did *bekvius* (regularly), Rav Sha’ul joined their minyan, and on *shloshah Shabbatot*, he gave them *drashot* from the *Kitvei HaKodesh*, (OJB)

And according to his practice, Sha’ul went in unto them, and for three *Shabbathoth* was reasoning with them from the Scriptures. (Hallelujah Scriptures)

Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures,

Some of the differences are the use of Jewish wording to convey the same idea, making it simpler for a Jewish person to understand. That is an acceptable way of making something more understandable for a target audience. Obviously, if a person was never Jewish, it would be pointless to try to learn all new terminology just to understand what the Bible is saying.

However, in all three of these Jewish Bibles, there is a purposeful manipulation of the name Paul. As noted above by the person in the third row, the job of a translator is to translate, not manipulate. Paul’s Hebrew name, Saul, is stated 21 times in Acts 1-12. In those same chapters, the name Paul is never stated. However, in Acts 13-28, the name

Paul is mentioned 132 times, whereas Saul is mentioned twice and only as an explanation of past events.

There is a reason for this that is completely obliterated by these manipulated Bibles. To change the name Paul to Saul as they have done is to change Scripture. As noted above, one cannot reasonably reason from Scriptures if those Scriptures are manipulated. God has revealed the redemptive narrative in His word. This includes the renaming of Saul to Paul.

When people with a set and perverse agenda purposefully twist what He has presented, it undermines the very intent of what God has put forth. The changing of Paul's name is not an irrelevant issue. It is a key and central point of doctrine when rightly studied and understood. Further, combining a study of the uses of Peter's name in relation to Paul's name gives an even deeper understanding of what God is presenting. These things can no longer be rightly understood, studied, and discussed when the Scriptures have been so thoroughly distorted.

Don't get caught up in the "Hebrew Hype" that all things Jewish are better than what has been presented for the past two thousand years. God has given us His word. When it is translated, the translator is to translate, not manipulate. Pay heed to this. Study to show yourself approved. And don't get sidetracked by those who purposefully try to sway you away from what is proper.

*Heavenly Father, Your word is far too precious to be marginalized, twisted, manipulated, trifled with, or distorted. Keep us from unsound translations of it and keep us from unsound teachers of it. May we carefully and tenderly consider this precious and sacred word all our days. Amen.*

**explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." Acts 17:3**

The translation is more closely rendered, "opening and presenting that the Christ must suffer and rise from the dead, and that this is the Christ – Jesus, whom I proclaim to you" (CG). This will be used to evaluate the verse.

The previous verse noted that Paul spent three Sabbaths in the synagogue of Thessalonica reasoning with them from the Scriptures. That included "opening."

The word translated as “opening” is used for the last time in the Bible. It signifies to open fully. It can be a literal opening, such as the opening of the womb in Luke 2:23, but its uses in Scripture are more directed toward perception. Its other uses include the opening (restoration) of the ears and tongue of a man in Mark 7:34; the spiritual opening of the eyes in Luke 24:31; the opening of Scripture for understanding in Luke 24:45; the opening of the heavens for Stephen’s spiritual discernment in Acts 7:56; and the opening of Lydia’s heart in Acts 16:1.

The meaning here is certainly to be taken in the sense of spiritual discernment as in Luke 24:45, which says, “And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” In this case, however, it doesn’t mean that these men will believe what Paul presents, but he is taking Scripture and he is opening it for their understanding, if they will believe. In this, he was opening “and presenting.”

This Greek word comes from two words signifying “beside” and “lay.” The idea is to set forth, set before, demonstrate, present, and so on. Paul is taking the Scriptures and drawing out the intended meaning and presenting it before his hearers, demonstrating “that the Christ must suffer.”

This was obvious and needed proof for his case because of his knowledge of who the Christ is. The Jewish idea of the Christ, meaning the Messiah, was a champion before God. He was to be a man to lead the people, free them from oppression, and set them above the nations. All of these things are true, but the manner in which they were to come about, and the order of events in how they would come to pass, was obscured and misunderstood by them.

In the case of the true Messiah, He was to first suffer “and rise from the dead.” The people anticipated a Messiah, but they misunderstood what the purpose of the Messiah was to be, because they misidentified what their major shortcoming before God was, meaning the issue of sin.

They assumed that the provisions within the law made them acceptable before God because they never considered the temporary and instructive nature of the law. They considered it as a means to an end, not a steppingstone to a fuller and more complete relationship with God.

Therefore, Paul had to go back to the basics concerning what Scripture was saying, then explain the role of the Messiah in His suffering and resurrection. When One came and fulfilled these roles, they would then know “that this is the Christ.”

Their Scriptures clearly anticipated that the Messiah would experience these things. The Psalms, the prophets, and the writings all hinted at this. Some of it was in pictures or typology. Some of it was poetic in nature. Some of it was allegorical. But it all was there and had to be dealt with. This is what Paul opened and presented to the synagogue. And this was all fulfilled in one Man. As he says, “Jesus, whom I proclaim to you.”

The New Testament fills in much of the relevant detail concerning Jesus. Where He was born, what tribe He was from, His descent from David, and so forth. However, those things were not yet written down, or they had at least not yet been widely distributed if they were written down. Paul could make such claims to the people, but it would not be as effective as conveying to them what was explicitly known.

That is why it says that he focused on the suffering and resurrection of Jesus. Those things were right in their own Scriptures and the people would have heard at least this much concerning Jesus. Paul could add the other details during his discourse, but the main presentation would have been on the role of the Messiah as fulfilled by Jesus.

The claims had been made based on events they would have heard of, they fit what Scripture said, and Paul opened those Scriptures to them so that the two could be harmonized in the minds of those in Thessalonica.

Life application: Today, we have the full record of what transpired in the life of Jesus along with the details of His genealogy, place of birth, and so forth. There is nothing wrong with using these things in an evangelistic presentation. However, the gospel focuses on the problem and its solution. The problem is sin. The solution to that is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

We can type up long lists of fulfilled prophecies and give numerical calculations about what the chances are of any one person fulfilling them. But these things cannot bring a person to salvation. If those things are never mentioned, a person can still be saved through a simple understanding that he is not right before God and that God has taken the necessary steps to resolve the matter.

Don't get sidetracked in your zeal to convince others about Jesus. It is good to have all of the impressive facts and figures about Scripture to help convince people about the surety that Jesus is the fulfillment of it. But one must be presented with the main problem and its solution during the presentation or the presentation is a failure. Always share the gospel when explaining who Jesus is.



*Lord God, may we be precise when talking to others about their need for Jesus. There is a problem in us, sin, and there is a resolution to that problem which is found in the giving of Your Son for us. May we never exclude this most important aspect of man's need and of what You have done about it when telling others about Jesus. Amen.*

**And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. Acts 17:4**

A more literal rendering than that of the NKJV needs to be used – “And some of them were persuaded and joined themselves to Paul and to Silas, along with a great multitude of the worshiping Greeks, and not a few of the leading women” (CG).

Paul has been in the synagogue at Thessalonica for three Sabbaths discussing the matter concerning Israel's Messiah. He has just said, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” With that, it now notes, “And some of them were persuaded.”

Some translations say, “believed,” but this is not the word *pisteuo* found in verses such as John 3:16. Rather, this word, *peithó*, means to urge or to persuade. It is the root of the word *pistis*, or faith. They were persuaded, having faith that what they were told was true. Even if the meaning is that they believed, it is based on Paul's teaching and urging. In this, they were persuaded, “and joined themselves to Paul and to Silas.”

It is a word found only here in Scripture, *proskléroó*. It signifies to assign by lot, to associate with, or to follow as a disciple. The basis of the word is *kléroó*, to assign by lot. Hence, it is to share common lot with another.

They have accepted the message that Jesus is the Christ and have thrown their lot in with those who proclaim Him. This has been referring to the Jews in the synagogue. However, they are not the only ones who have been so persuaded. It next notes, “along with a great multitude of the worshiping Greeks.”

Calling them “worshiping Greeks” means that they were proselytes to some degree or another. They had already accepted that the God proclaimed in the Jewish Scriptures was the true God and had worshiped Him as such. However, they have now been convinced, right from those same Scriptures, that Jesus is the fulfillment of them. He, in fact, is the promised Messiah. As a note of the universality of the message, it next says, “and not a few of the leading women.”

These would be influential women who were probably connected with ranking families within the community. They may have been proselytes, or they may have been the wives of some of the proselytes who came and they wanted to identify with their husbands. The main point is that the women were not excluded from this fellowship and these women were influential in their circles. Thus, they would become a means of attracting others as they developed in their own faith.

Of the status of women in Macedonia, the Pulpit Commentary says –

“Popular prejudice, and the verdict of Grecian wisdom in its best age, asserted her natural inferiority. The Athenian law provided that everything which a man might do by the counsel or request of a woman should be null in law. She was little better than a slave. To educate her was to advertise her as a harlot. Her companions were principally children and slaves. In Macedonia, however, monuments were erected to women by public bodies; and records of male proper names are found, in Macedonian inscriptions, formed on the mother's name instead of on the father's. Macedonian women were permitted to hold property, and were treated as mistresses of the house.”

Life application: In 1 Thessalonians 1:9, Paul says to those in the congregation, “...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” This would obviously be people other than those who were mentioned in Acts 17:4. What can be inferred is that Paul and Silas talked to others throughout the week. Their soul-focus (pun intended) was not just on those at the synagogue, but it extended to pagans as well.

Though it was Paul’s practice to teach at the synagogue, it was also his passion to speak about Jesus to anyone at any time. It is a good lesson for us all. Our interactions with others regarding Jesus do not have to be limited to our time at church. Rather, we should be ready and willing to interact with people at all times. When the opportunity arises, let us open our mouths and speak!

*Lord God, may we never withhold the precious, saving message of Jesus. Rather, give us the boldness to always tell others about His goodness. May You be glorified in our willingness to share the gospel often and with zeal. Be with us as we do! Amen.*

**But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. Acts 17:5**

The verbs of the NKJV just don't get it. A closer rendering is, "But the unbelieving Jews, having become envious, and having taken to them certain evil men of the market-loungers, and having gathered a crowd, were setting the city in uproar. And having assailed the house of Jason, they were seeking them to bring out to the people" (CG).

The previous verse noted that some of the people were persuaded to believe based on Paul's reasoning from Scripture, including a great multitude of the Greeks and not a few of the leading women. With that, there would instantly be a church of no small size formed in the city. This would obviously steal attention away from the synagogue. As this is so, the same thing that has happened to Paul previously comes about once again, saying, "But the unbelieving Jews, having become envious."

Paul had reasoned with the Jews from Scripture. They refused to believe the words of their own writings as they pointed to Jesus. But with so many believing, the congregation of the synagogue would suddenly be significantly reduced. This would obviously mean less attention for them, less revenue coming in, etc. That immediately elicited feelings of jealousy. Because of that, they schemed against Paul and Silas. As it says, "and having taken to them certain evil men of the market-loungers."

The word translated as market-loungers, *agoraios*, is found only here and in Acts 19:38. It is derived from *agora*, the market which is the central hub of the city. Thus, it signifies "relating to the marketplace." As these are defined as evil men, it is assumed that it means they hung around the market where the magistrates were and sought to stir things up, looking for whatever opportunity they had to do so. One can think of a gaggle of lawyers that hangs around the courthouse today. With such a vulgar bunch now aligned with them, the words continue with, "and having gathered a crowd."

This is a word found only once in Scripture, *ochlopoieó*. It is derived from two words signifying crowd and to make. Thus, it gives the sense of raising a public disturbance. With this accomplished, it goes on to say they "were setting the city in uproar."

With probably no care at all about the cause of the Jew's discontentment, nor any clue about those they were riling the masses up against, they just went forth agitating the people into a frenzy. Once such an event begins, it will usually take on its own legs and mind. This was the hope of the Jews who had been deprived of their usual Saturday crowds. Next, it says, "And having assailed the house of Jason."

Paul's connection to Jason (Greek: *Iasón*) is seen in verse 17:7. From that verse, it appears that this is where Paul and Silas stayed while in the city. It may be that this is the

same Jason as is found in Romans 16:21, where Paul calls him one of “my countrymen.” However, the name was not an uncommon one. It belonged to the hero of the Argonauts of Greek legend. It was also the name of a noted tyrant and of an apostate high priest of Israel seen in the book of 2 Maccabees.

James Strong places his name as coming from the word *iaomai*, to heal, saying it means “about to cure.” Because of its similarity to the Greek spelling of the name Joshua or Jesus, it may have been adopted by Jews of that name as a Greek equivalent. Of this person, along with Paul and Silas, it says, “they were seeking them to bring out to the people.”

They were probably thinking on just the same lines as those in Philippi. “Let’s get them out into the public while the mob is stirred up and they will get a beating, maybe imprisoned, and maybe even kicked out of the city.”

Life application: This same type of treatment was seen on Paul’s first missionary journey. It was also just seen in Philippi. The Bible is carefully demonstrating the continued theme that the Jews in general were in the process of rejecting their Messiah. This was the case in the land of Israel, and it is continuing throughout Acts.

As such, we are being shown the reason that the Gentiles became the predominant force in furthering the gospel. The rejection of the gospel by Israel did not mean the end of the faith. It meant a new direction was taking place. God didn’t send His Son into the world just to have that marvelous news die off.

But more than this, it isn’t that the main focus of the gospel went to the East or to the South where those who descended from Ham settled. Rather, it has been carefully directed to the area where the sons of Japheth settled. It is from this line of the sons of Noah that the gospel would most completely be accepted and transmitted to the world.

These things do not mean, nor should it be inferred, that the Jews are not welcome to share in the gospel, nor does it mean that the others of the lines of Shem or Ham are not welcome into the church as believers. Rather, it only means that the sons of Japheth are the line by which the most effective acceptance, understanding, and transmission of the gospel would take place.

Further, this also does not mean that the Jewish people have been replaced by the church. Rather, the prophecy of Noah found in the blessing of his sons in Genesis 9 only implies that the Gentiles of Japheth would carry the spiritual banner for a certain

amount of time. Eventually, that will revert to the line of Shem, meaning the nation of Israel. Their unfaithfulness to the Lord does not negate His faithfulness to the covenant that He made with them.

God is using the most opportune avenue of sending forth the gospel during this dispensation. He has directed it accordingly, and all who hear the message and believe will be saved. Someday, the church will be taken out at the rapture. At that time, the banner will return to the line of Shem and the care of the Jewish people.

*Lord God, Your wisdom is beyond our ability to grasp. But You have given us clues of what You are doing and how You are doing it right in Your word. We are in awe of how You have laid out the world and the ages, bringing all things together to form a body of people for Your own. Thank You for allowing us to be a part of that. Help us to continue to share this message while we can. Amen.*

**But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Acts 17:6**

In the previous verse, a mob had set the city in an uproar and attacked Jason’s house, seeking to bring Paul and Silas out to the people. However, it now says, “But when they did not find them.”

Paul and Silas were probably out instructing others or evangelizing at the time. This did not pacify the mob though. Instead, “they dragged Jason and some brethren.”

It is the same word used by Luke in Acts 8:3 –

“As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.”

The men were forcibly taken and hauled off. Fortunately, the crowd was not in such a heated rage as to kill them. However, they did drag them “to the rulers of the city.”

This is a marvelous set of words that confirm Luke’s careful attention to the details of the surrounding situation. Luke uses the word *politarchés*. Of this, Vincent’s Word Studies says –

“Another illustration of Luke’s accuracy. Note that the magistrates are called by a different name from those at Philippi. Thessalonica was not a colony, but a free city..., and was governed by its own rulers, whose titles accordingly did not follow those of Roman magistrates. The word occurs only here and Acts 17:8, and has been found in an inscription on an arch at Thessalonica, where the names of the seven politarchs are mentioned. The arch is thought by antiquarians to have been standing in Paul’s time.”

Other scholars place the dating of this arch to the time of Vespasian, a few years after the time of Paul’s visit to Thessalonica. Either way, the accuracy of Luke concerning the title is incontrovertible.

Next, once the men were dragged before these city rulers, it says they were “crying out, ‘These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.’”

Another new word in Scripture, *anastatoó*, is seen here. HELPS Word Studies identifies its root as *anistémi*, to raise or rise up. Hence, it would signify turning something over, from up to down. It is obviously a complete exaggeration, except as any Jew would be aware. The incident at Philippi was only three Sabbaths earlier, and the city leaders would not have been the ones to convey the events to those in Thessalonica, as they were in the wrong and would want them forgotten.

Thus, if any word had gotten to the city, it would have been because of some Jewish person recognizing them from some other synagogue or even from a visit to Israel. The previous verse clearly places the blame for the incitement on the Jews. And so, it is most likely that they alone fabricated the matter. It may be that Paul and Silas had told them they had been persecuted during their various travels. Once the message about Jesus was rejected by them, they could have turned around and bitten at the missionaries like rabid dogs.

Life application: The message of the good news about Jesus is a simple and direct matter. Man has sin, God sent His Son into the world to pay our sin debt, and if a person believes that, he will be forgiven. In this act of forgiveness, a new birth occurs. Life is bestowed and reconciliation is realized.

What is it about this simple offering of love by God that is so offensive to the world? Man has a problem, God offers to resolve it without any strings attached, and all the person needs to do is believe. It seems generous and gracious enough that if someone didn’t believe, he would just tell the person speaking to him, “Yes, that’s great. Thank

you for telling me. Your words are kind and generous, but I just don't believe what you say."

That would be a normal and understandable note of rejection. However, the world bizarrely doesn't just provide a "No thanks." Rather, Christians have been killed and persecuted constantly since the coming of Jesus. It is almost incomprehensible. If someone was dying of thirst and another person offered water to save his life, you would not expect that person to fight against the offer and even kill the one with the water. And yet, that would be comparable to the attitude of people in relation to hearing and rejecting the gospel.

The reason for this is sin. Man does not want to acknowledge that he is a sinful being. Further, when confronted with sin, man does not want to admit that he can do nothing about his sinful state. It means that his life, his destiny, and his relationship with God are totally out of his hands. This is unpalatable to people. Unless they can come to the end of themselves and admit that they stand condemned without Jesus, a feeling of enmity will always exist. The more boastful and proud a person is, the more likely he is to hate the message of Jesus.

Obviously, there are other lesser reasons for people to despise the gospel. They may already have their own god or gods. Being told that those gods are not gods can be a real problem. But even something like that ultimately goes back to the sin issue. It is good to understand this. If you are ever faced with such enmity because of your faith, you at least will have a sense of why.

Be prepared to defend your faith but also be prepared to receive grief for doing so. It is to be expected. Sin is a strong master.

*Glorious God, we know that You have done all that is necessary to bring us back to Yourself. Thank You for Jesus who has made this possible. We are grateful for the life You have granted to us because of His work. May we be willing to share this message with all people, even if it means we may face persecution in the process. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**"Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus." Acts 17:7**

In the previous verse, Jason and some of his guests were dragged out of his house to the rulers of the city. There, the accusation was “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.” Their words now continue with, “Jason has harbored them.”

The Greek word simply means “received,” but with the full intent of being received under one’s roof as a guest. However, the intent very well may be the stronger “harbored,” as if they were hiding enemies of the state. That is certainly what is being conveyed in the next words, “and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar.”

To form a charge against these men, of which Paul and Silas would be included because of the word “all,” a different tact had to be followed in Thessalonica than in Philippi. Because Philippi was a Roman colony, the accusation was the teaching of customs not lawful for Roman citizens to observe.

Thessalonica was not a colony, but it still fell under the authority of Rome. If Caesar had issued an edict, it would apply in any location under Roman rule. As such, they not only say that these men were acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, but the specific charge is that they were “saying there is another king—Jesus.”

It is the same accusation made against Jesus when He stood before Pilate. Of this, Vincent’s Word Studies, citing Merivale, says –

“The law of treason, by which the ancient legislators of the republic had sought to protect popular liberty from the encroachments of tyranny, ...was gradually concentrated upon the emperor alone, the sole impersonation of the sovereign people. The definition of the crime itself was loose and elastic, such as equally became the jealousy of a licentious republic or of a despotic usurper.” (Merivale, “History of the Romans under the Empire”).

The words of those who believed could easily be taken out of context just as the words of Jesus were. Proclaiming a kingdom meant one was proclaiming a king. But the kingdom spoken of concerning Jesus at that time was a spiritual, not a temporal kingdom. Despite being apples and oranges, those making the charges have taken all the fruit and tossed it into one basket for their accusations.

Life application: It is not difficult to twist the intent of people’s words and actions to say something that was never the original thought. In the past, getting a few miscreants to make something up would add to the accusation. That happened with Jesus at his trial before the Sanhedrin. It is what occurs in this verse with the believers in Thessalonica.



Today, this is even easier to do. Deepfake voices and videos are becoming more difficult to tell from reality. Add in a few left-leaning government operatives who want someone silenced and the charges seem more probable by the moment. It has happened to citizens of various nations, and it has even happened to President Trump.

Once the left has assumed total control, which is not out of probability at this point, false charges will be made against anyone who will not fall in line with their demented ideology. True Christians, who are not demented, will be targeted for their stand on what is right, moral, and proper. If the rapture has not occurred before that time, we will not be spared from the wicked machinations of the government. Be prepared to stand on your faith in Christ and never cave in your morals and principles. The time is coming, so be prepared now.

*Glorious Lord God, the world has tried to quiet the message of the gospel since the very beginning. That will only grow in the world as it slides into total wickedness and enmity with You. Give us strength, wisdom, and the necessary fortitude to stand on Your word and on the faith that we profess in Jesus Christ. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.**  
Acts 17:8

In the previous verse, those who came against the believers charged them with “acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there was another king – Jesus.” With that, it now continues, saying, “And they troubled the crowd.”

In stirring up those standing there, they would have more effect in their hopes of bringing harm to the believers. The word “crowd” is singular, giving the sense of a hive mind where everyone will act as a unified whole. In other words, verse 17:5 noted that a mob was gathered. This then “set all the city in an uproar.”

With this expanding frenzy, the whole multitude has become alarmed. It is the common tactic of incitement that builds from something small to something ubiquitous. Along with the multitude, it next says, “and the rulers of the city.”

The city rulers see the excitement of the crowd and, being rulers, they knew they could easily become the object of the crowd’s displeasure. Were that to take place, they would be subject to harm or even death. This is what occurred “when they heard these things.”

The Jews of the synagogue started the trouble because of their envy. Enlisting miscreants to join them and stir up the masses, a general frenzy broke out. From there, the multitude began to fear the commotion. That led to fear by the rulers. From a little plan, a large turmoil has developed.

Life application: If the words of this account in Acts seem difficult to believe, just remember the events of January 6, 2020. The US government placed operatives in the midst of a peaceful group of protestors. They incited the people to act against the government. From there, the leaders in the capitol complex became exceedingly fearful and were quickly ushered out of the capitol building.

Just what the Jews instigated in Thessalonica is what the US government instigated against an entire party of people in the nation. This is a very simple way of gaining control over others. It has been used in communist rebellions many times in the past century.

All people should be extremely careful about joining large crowds that are being whipped into a frenzy. If you are a part of those who are to be targeted, your mere presence at the event may wind up with you being charged with sedition and rebellion. Be obedient to the rules of your land, but do not trust your government to do what is right.

*Lord God, it is so good that we have a hope that transcends this world. There is nothing here for us of any true value. We long for the day when we live for eternity solely under the loving care of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May that Day be soon. Amen.*

**So when they had taken security from Jason and the rest, they let them go. Acts 17:9**

In the last verse, the evil men who had gathered a mob were said to have troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city by their sayings. With that, it next says, “So when they had taken security.”

The Greek word is *hikanos*. It is a noun meaning “sufficiency.” Like bail today, they took a sufficient sum to ensure proper conduct on the account of a person and his guests, and to sufficiently meet any charges that may be brought against the individual. In this case, it was “from Jason.”

As he was the owner of the house where those who were the brunt of the accusations, meaning Paul and Silas, were staying, he was held accountable for a certain sum. Along with him, it next says, “and the rest.”

This would be the “some brethren” mentioned along with Jason in verse 17:6. Because they were all in the same quarters with Paul and Silas, it could be that they were complicit in any wrongdoings. Until the matter was investigated and sorted out, there would be a particular sum held to protect the interests of the city. With that complete, it says, “they let them go.”

Like bail today, once the deposit was made, it was considered sufficient to ensure compliance for any future matters.

Life application: There are those who fall under the umbrella of Christianity but who refuse to participate in society in any meaningful way. Some refuse to participate in the military. If the reason is as a conscientious objector, that is one thing. But if it is only because of not participating in affairs of government, that is another. Some will not vote. Some will refuse any public office.

However, if one of these people is arrested, you can bet your bottom dollar they will pay the necessary bail to be released. They will also pay taxes, toll fees, entrance fees at national monuments, etc. The incorrect nature of such thinking is totally contradictory. Be sure to consider the lessons found right in Scripture.

If you are a member of a particular society, there is nothing at all wrong with participating in that society, including military service, government service, and exercising civic responsibilities such as voting. Think clearly. Be a responsible, active participant in those things that daily affect your life. If you don't, when things go bad for you, you will only have yourself to blame.

*Lord God, may we be shining examples of faithfulness to You all our days. If that can be done while in service to the nations in which we live, may it be so. May we not isolate ourselves from our surroundings in this world where You have placed us. What a difference we can make if called to do so! And so, may we do so to Your glory. Amen.*

**Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. Acts 17:10**

In the previous verse, security was taken from Jason and those with him and they were released. Now, it continues, saying, “Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away.”

This may have been something mentioned by those who held their bail. Part of the conditions may have been to get Paul and Silas out of Jason’s house, or it could be that they were to hand them over to the city leaders; but to avoid that, they sent them away. It could also just be that they knew Paul and Silas were targets of the Jews and wanted to keep them from being harmed.

The latter reason, because it is so similar to Paul’s other interactions with disbelieving Jews, seems most likely. However, regardless of the reason, Paul and Silas were immediately sent away, “by night.”

The Greek reads, *dia nyktos*, through night. Under the cover of night, they were sent out of the area. This is not unlike what occurred in Acts 9 –

“Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. <sup>24</sup> But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. <sup>25</sup> Then the disciples took him by night and let *him* down through the wall in a large basket.” Acts 9:23-25

In sending Paul and Silas away, it next says that it was “to Berea.” The name Berea comes from the word *peran*, meaning “over,” “on the other side,” or “beyond.” Thus, it is the region beyond the coastline. Of this location, Wikipedia says –

“Berea was in southwestern Macedonia. The city's foundation stood where Veria, or Kar-Verria, in Greece is today. It is a unique position [and] has had a variety of terrain surrounding the city since then.

Berea sat at the base of Mount Bermius, which is part of the Vermio Mountains and provides an ample supply of water for the city and the region. The main sources of water were the Haliacmon and Axios Rivers, which supported apple, peach and pear orchards. The area is prosperous with a hydroelectric dam on the Haliacmon powering the area's industrial sector.”

With that noted, it next says, “When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.”

This is Paul's standard way of entering into a new city, at least as far as Luke's focus is concerned. Nothing else is recorded concerning their arrival and time in Berea until he goes to the synagogue. It shows that Paul's main focus was to first bring the word to his own people and any proselytes who were there. From that point, he could then continue to branch out in his evangelistic efforts.

It also shows that, despite repeated attacks from his own people, he was willing to continue to evangelize them. It reflects the attitude of his words to those in Rome. Paul desperately wanted his own countrymen to come to a saving knowledge of Christ. He was willing to expend himself and even place his life in danger to do so.

Life application: It would be an argument from silence to say that Paul did not speak to any Gentiles before going into the synagogue in Berea. Luke's focus for the narrative is to show that Paul was always willing to go into the synagogue and share his faith with them as his top priority.

However, if Paul and Silas arrived in Berea on a Tuesday, they would have several days until the Sabbath to talk to others. It is unlikely they would have said, "No, we have to wait to give the good news to the synagogue first." Rather, they would have spoken to whomever as the occasion arose. The focus of the narrative is to highlight Paul's modus operandi, not to give a complete record of everything he and Silas did.

As you read the Bible, be sure to contemplate why things are recorded as they are. A single turn of the page can be a jump ahead in time of weeks, months, or even years. Innumerable things are skipped over because they are not relevant to the narrative. Consider the main focus of what God is conveying to you and think about His reasons for doing so. This is a great help in understanding why things are laid out as they are.

*Heavenly Father, may our time in Scripture be a time of fellowship with You, understanding Your mind as it is revealed to us, and as a light and guide for our own lives as we draw nearer and nearer to You. Help us to consider Your word as being a guide for humanity to understand You and our relationship with You. Thank You for the coming of Jesus, O God, who then makes all this clear and understandable. Amen.*

**These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Acts 17:11**

The previous verse detailed Paul and Silas having traveled to Berea and their going into the synagogue of the Jews upon their arrival. With that remembered, it next says, “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica.”

The NKJV, following after the KJV, omits a necessary conjunction. It should read, “And these,” “Now these,” or something similar. “And these were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica.” As for the word “fair-minded,” it is *eugenes*, translated as noble, but signifying “well born.” Using “fair-minded” is more of a paraphrase than a translation, even if the thought is properly conveyed.

These people in Berea were brought up properly and told not to just trust what they first heard but were to instead check for themselves. In other words, they were not gullible, but they were also not dismissive. In Thessalonica, some of the Jews were persuaded but there were a great many Greeks who came to believe.

As Paul had clearly reasoned from the Scriptures, and as the majority of the Jews there did not believe, it indicates their dismissive attitude toward what was clearly presented in their writings. On the contrary, concerning those in Berea, it next says, “in that they received the word with all readiness.”

The words “in that” are not in the original and should be italicized. It simply says, “they received the word with all readiness.” They obviously listened to Paul and absorbed what he said, not being dismissive of what he presented. That is the first part of the necessary equation for being noble. The second part is that after hearing, they then “searched the Scriptures.”

The word searched should read examined. It is the Greek word *anakrinó*. It signifies to examine, investigate, or question. This is unlike Jesus’ words of John 5:39 –

“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”

There, the word is *ereunaó*. It signifies to search or seek. In Berea, Paul told them what the Scriptures said. There was no need to search. Rather, if Paul said, “The prophet Isaiah said xxx,” they would go to Isaiah and examine if Paul was correct or not.

They were not dismissive of hearing, but they were also not gullible in accepting. After hearing, they went to the source of their faith and they checked out if what Paul had said matched what God had told them in the law, prophets, and writings. This shows

care about getting to the truth of the matter. It also demonstrates a willingness to not be haughty or arrogant in matters they had not previously considered, dismissing things as if they already knew it all. And more, they did it “daily.”

After hearing Paul’s words on the Sabbath, they didn’t just say, “We’ll hear more next Sabbath,” which is exactly what is implied concerning those at Thessalonica –

“Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.” Acts 17:2

Rather, those in Berea decided to come back each day, probably either before or after a long day of work, and they continued to search and contemplate what Paul had said. This shows a caliber of person who truly wants to know the truth of the word. They did this “*to find out* whether these things were so.” Of this, Albert Barnes gives four sound reasons for their actions –

1. That it is proof of true nobleness and liberality of mind to be willing to examine the proofs of the truth of religion. What the friends of Christianity have had most cause to lament and regret is, that so many are unwilling to examine its claims; that they spurn it as unworthy of serious thought, and condemn it without hearing.
2. the Scriptures should be examined daily. If we wish to arrive at the truth, they should be the object of constant study. That man has very little reason to expect that he will grow in knowledge and grace who does not peruse, with candor and with prayer, a portion of the Bible every day.
3. the constant searching of the Scriptures is the best way to keep the mind from error. He who does not do it daily may expect to ‘be carried about with every wind of doctrine,’ and to have no settled opinions.
4. the preaching of ministers should be examined by the Scriptures. Their doctrines are of no value unless they accord with the Bible. Every preacher should expect his doctrines to be examined in this way, and to be rejected if they are not in accordance with the Word of God.

Albert Barnes is correct in his analyses and each of us would do well to pay heed to the lesson of those in Berea.

Life application: If there is a God, and there is every logical reason to believe there is, then the most important thing a man can ever do is learn about Him. If God has

revealed Himself through some sort of communication, then it is man's responsibility to consider what He is saying.

God has revealed Himself through creation, communicating things about Himself through a process we call general revelation. God has generally revealed Himself to us so that we can consider Him and His nature. David touches on this in the 19<sup>th</sup> Psalm. Paul writes about it in Romans. The book of Job and elsewhere convey this to us as well.

The wise person will consider what God has done and be grateful to Him for the provision He provides, the beauty He offers, the order and harmony of things that allow us to use the creation for our benefit, etc.

But God has done more than offer a general way for us to consider Him. He has also specifically revealed Himself to us through His word. We call this special revelation. God has purposefully and specifically revealed Himself through speaking to and through prophets, communicating to us what we need to know to have a close and personal relationship with Him.

The wise person will go beyond simply acknowledging this and will determine to read this word, study it, defend it, proclaim it, and so on. The wise person will make this word the central focus of his life because Jesus is the central focus of this word. Jesus is God's special revelation par excellence. He is the point, purpose, and meaning of all aspects of God's word. Therefore, to properly know God, one must know Jesus Christ. And to know Jesus Christ, one must know the words of the Bible that tell us of Jesus Christ. Read your Bible. Know your Bible. Find Jesus in God's precious and sacred word!

*Glorious Lord God, help us to use our time wisely, searching out who You are and what You are like through the ways You have revealed Yourself to us. May we not squander our time in futility, but consider You at all times, especially when we intimately fellowship with You through Your word. Yes, may it be so, to Your glory. Amen.*

**Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. Acts 17:12**

The NKJV changes the structure of the second clause so that it does not reflect the Greek. The verse more precisely reads, "Many, indeed, therefore, of them believed, and of the prominent Greek women, and men, not a few" (CG). This will be used in the evaluation.



The previous verse noted the eagerness of the Bereans to examine the Scriptures daily to find out whether the words of Paul and Silas were true or not. As a result, it now says, “Many, indeed, therefore, of them believed.”

Though a little clunky in the English translation, the words carefully provide the result of what was just stated –

They “searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.”  
“Many, indeed, therefore, of them believed.”

Instead of just hearing Paul on the Sabbath and then going home like the Thessalonian synagogue, these people went each day to search out what they had heard. Because of their diligent effort, the result was exactly what one would expect. The Scriptures pointed to Jesus. Jesus had come. In comparing what Scripture prophesied with what Paul proclaimed, they came to the obvious conclusion that the words of Paul were correct and that the gospel was true. From there, it next says, “and of the prominent Greek women.”

The word translated as prominent is the same as that used in Acts 13:50. It is affixed to the women, not to the men next to be mentioned, just as it was in Acts 13 –

“But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.”

The word itself is derived from two words signifying “well” and “form.” Thus, it means well-fashioned or well-formed. HELPS Word Studies notes that it “is used in Koine Greek of a person who *properly uses influence*, especially by serving in a high (respected) position.”

Many translations incorrectly affix the word to both the women and the men. But the intent is that these women were influential, perhaps connected with ranking families in the society. Along with them, it next says, “and men, not a few.”

These were probably mostly proselytes, but there could be some that were talked to by Paul and Silas during the week and who then came to the synagogue to continue to hear what they had to say. Whoever these people were, it says that they believed.

The main point of the words is that there was a large number of both Jews and Greeks who believed, including influential women among them. This can all be attributed to the leadership of the synagogue. Unlike Thessalonica, there was a true desire to search out Scripture that had to have come from one man or a few men who truly desired to know the truth concerning the words of Scripture. Without being named, it is a testimony to the integrity of the person or people who led the synagogue.

Life application: The leadership in a church will direct its heart for the word. If a pastor is passionate about the Bible, those who attend will be as well. Those who are not passionate about it will simply not attend. Instead, they will go looking for a church that suits their preferences. However, those who stay and continue will do so because they appreciate his zeal for Scripture. Thus, they will naturally be geared toward doing their own daily studies, talking about the word, sharing the word, etc.

If you love the Bible and are looking around for a church to attend in your area, you should not be satisfied until you find one that will fill your desire. If you start attending a church that is weak in this area, you may eventually find your zeal for the word waning. Don't let this happen to you. Keep close to the word, attend where it is properly taught, and keep the fire alive by doing your own reading each and every day. It is your roadmap along life's highway, so use it to keep you going in the right direction!

*What a wonderful and precious word You have given to us, O God. Thank You for it. Help us to always stick close to it and to grow in our knowledge of its contents as each new day arrives. Yes, Lord God, thank You for Your magnificent and superior word. Amen.*

**But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the crowds. Acts 17:13**

In the previous verse, it said that many in Berea believed. Now the narrative continues, starting with, "But when the Jews from Thessalonica." Berea is said to be 45 miles southwest of Thessalonica. Today, that would be a quick drive, but at the time of Acts, it would take a couple of days to travel the distance.

We are not told how the word got back to those at Thessalonica, but it is probable Paul and Silas stayed at Berea for some time once converts had been made. The word about the conversion of people would naturally be passed along and nothing sinister should be inferred. However, for the most part, the Jews in Thessalonica had rejected the gospel and caused the city to get stirred up. With this remembered, it next says they "learned that the word of God was preached by Paul at Berea."

The NKJV skips over a necessary conjunction. It more rightly says, “learned that the word of God was preached by Paul also in Berea.” This would have gotten their dander up. They probably thought that with Paul and Silas having been run out of town, that would be the end of their preaching. However, not only were there believers in Thessalonica because of them, but they were also now making converts in Berea.

The Jews’ sphere of influence was dwindling because of the evangelism of these men. And so, with apparently nothing better to do than to cause trouble elsewhere, it next says that “they came there also and stirred up the crowds.” Rather, the verb is a present participle. The clause reads, “they came there also, stirring up the crowds.”

The word translated as stirring up, *saleuó*, is found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament where it refers to the stirring up of the oceans. This is what these people were like. They went among the multitudes and were stirring them up and causing trouble because of their jealousy concerning the success of the gospel.

The irony of the matter is that they were working against the Messiah whom they said they were waiting for. But a Messiah who came to die for the sins of the people meant that they were sinful people. In their arrogance, they rejected this premise. Their idea of a Messiah is one that would welcome them in their state of supposed superiority and elevate them above the world of Gentiles among whom they dwelt.

Life application: Today, it is easier to cause trouble for others than ever before. If someone proclaims a message that offends others, he can be hounded by those who don’t like what they hear.

For example, if you are a preacher in a church who has made such enemies, they can hack your church website and fill it with vile material. They can give poor ratings or reviews on various sites that provide evaluations of companies, products, churches, restaurants, etc. They can say harmful things on YouTube videos. The inventiveness of people to harm others is almost limitless. One must be prepared to take such things in stride and continue to proclaim the truth of the gospel with proper theology and sound doctrine.

There is often little you can do about such people, so you must be consistent and demonstrate that they are the miscreants by your continued proper proclamation of the word of God. It was not easy for Paul and Silas, it was not easy for those who spoke against the abuses of the church throughout the past millennia, and it is not easy today.

These things must be expected. But press on as best you can. The Lord is building his church despite such agitators.

*Lord God, be with Your people through the many trials that arise. When sound pastors and preachers are attacked because of their sound doctrine and proclamation of the gospel, reassure them in their hearts and lives. Bless the work of their hands because it is the work You have set forth for them to do. Be glorified in Your people, O God. Amen.*

**Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away, to go to the sea; but both Silas and Timothy remained there.** Acts 17:14

In the previous verse, the Jews from Thessalonica came to Berea and stirred up the crowds there. With that remembered, it next says, “Then immediately the brethren sent Paul away.”

It is obviously Paul that the Jews had the problem with. Thus, in order to calm things down, the believers there knew it would be expedient to remove him from the area. His life, or at least his freedom, would be in jeopardy if he remained. And so, sending him out of the area was the proper avenue to take. This they did without any delay. However, they didn’t just walk him out of the city on a trek down the best Roman road. Rather, in conducting him, it was “to go to the sea.”

There is a slight variation in the reading of texts here. Some read *heós* (ἕως) while others read *hós* (ὡς). With this variation, the text will either read “as it were to the sea” or “as far as the sea.” In the first, it would be a feinting maneuver where they pretended to go to the sea but then conducted him on the road to Athens. If the latter, it would mean they took him all the way to the sea where they would sail to Athens.

However, even the first could read, “even to the sea.” This appears more likely as there is nothing said of any stops between Berea and Athens. But the distance between the two is so great that not mentioning such stops seems unlikely. Either way, however, these men conducted Paul either from Berea to the sea and then to Athens by ship, or they pretended to go to Athens by ship and then accompanied him all the way to Athens.

The important point of this is that they would be far enough away from the miscreant Jews to not have them hounding him from town to town. The distance between the two is somewhere around four hundred miles. With this having taken place, it next says, “but both Silas and Timothy remained there.”

This makes it obvious that Paul was the object of the Jews' disfavor. These two men could stay and continue to teach those in Berea without the trouble that Paul brought. They would also be close to Thessalonica and could quickly travel there to check on the church.

As for Timothy, he has not been mentioned since Acts 16:1. However, it is obvious that he came with Paul as he traveled. This is certain at least as far as Philippi. However, it is likely that he went with Paul and Silas all the way, but he was not mentioned because Paul and Silas were the main focus of the narrative until this point. With Paul gone to Athens, Timothy is now mentioned in a prominent role along with Silas.

Life application: Although it is speculation, the words of this verse give us an indication that Paul required others to be with him. He speaks of an affliction that he had in 2 Corinthians 12. One speculation is that his eyes were poor. Whether this or something else, it is seen throughout Acts and even in his epistles that he is normally accompanied by others. In this verse, he is conducted by others out of the city and even to Athens.

Supposing it is true that he had an affliction that necessitated others to tend to him. Is that a cause of shame? To Paul, it obviously was not. His reliance on others allowed them to tend to him. Thus, both benefitted through the interactions that these people willingly participated in.

Quite often, we want to carry the heavy loads of life all by ourselves, but the Bible would teach us otherwise. Solomon speaks of this –

“Two *are* better than one,  
Because they have a good reward for their labor.

<sup>10</sup> For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.

But woe to him *who is* alone when he falls,  
For *he has* no one to help him up.

<sup>11</sup> Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm;

But how can one be warm *alone*?

<sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him.

And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Let us be willing to allow others the honor and privilege of helping us out when the need arises. At the same time, let us not be a burden on others by having them carry our loads unnecessarily. Taking advantage of others is never a good thing. So, let us have

balance in our lives as we interact with others, blessing them according to our abilities and our limitations.

*Lord God, thank You for those people who come into our lives and bless us with their presence, help, and encouragement. May we be prompted to reach out today and give them a word of thanks and blessing for their kindness toward us. Amen.*

**So those who conducted Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed. Acts 17:15**

Paul was just conducted out of Berea either to the sea and then to Athens, or pretending to go to the sea and then to Athens by land. Either way, it now says, “So those who conducted Paul.”

Rather, the verb is a present participle, “So those conducting Paul.” Luke writes as if they are in the process of traveling to the next city. As for the word translated as “conducting,” it signifies to set in order or to appoint. It is as if they were given charge over Paul, seeing to his every need, including what it next says. They “brought him to Athens.”

Athens is considered the intellectual capital of Greece. The word is the plural of Athéné, or Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom – who was reputed to have founded the city. Once Paul and those with him had arrived in Athens, it next says, “and receiving a command.”

Rather, it should be translated, “and having received a command.” Once they had arrived in Athens, they were then given new instructions which were “for Silas and Timothy to come to him.” With Paul safely in Athens, he wanted to set about evangelizing the city. At the same time, he probably wanted these two out of Berea for the time being as well.

This would allow things to settle down. Therefore, he sent back word with those who had conducted him for Silas and Timothy to now come to Athens as well. And more, he asked that it be done “with all speed.”

One can see the eagerness of Paul in these words. If he truly was in need of care, this would be one reason for their coming quickly to him. But even if it was merely his desire to have a team to evangelize, it is evident that he wanted it to come about quickly. With this note from him, his conductors who are now his messengers “departed.”

Life application: Who these men were who conducted Paul is left unstated in the narrative. However, we will have eternity to get to know them. All the redeemed of the Lord throughout all the ages will be joined together in the presence of God. We will know them in a way that we cannot even imagine now.

There will be time to learn about them and their lives and to share in the details of the things we did as well. When we are asked about our own lives by such people, will we be able to say, “I also helped conduct the message of the Bible along to others”?

We have this one life to live before we come before the Lord. May we not come before Him with empty hands. Instead, may our lives be presented to Him as faithful offerings of having told others about Jesus, having helped with missionary causes, having praised him with our lips and our actions, etc.

The Lord set us here for a reason, let us become useful vessels for His use while we remain.

*Lord God, help us to use our time wisely. May our lives be spent in worthy pursuits, and may our actions be glorifying of You at all times. We shall stand before You someday. And so, may it not be with regret. Prompt us in our hearts and in our souls to be faithful servants while we have the time to do so. Amen.*

**Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Acts 17:16**

In the last verse, Paul was brought to Athens and then he had asked for Silas and Timothy to be sent to him. With that remembered, it now says, “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens.”

The verb is a present participle, “And Paul, waiting for them in Athens.” As for this time of waiting, nothing is said about how long he waited for Silas and Timothy. But nothing is said of them meeting him in Athens either. In Chapter 18, it will note Paul leaving from Athens and going to Corinth. Only while in Corinth does it then say that Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia. As for his time alone in Athens, it next says “his spirit was provoked within him.”

It is a new word in Scripture, *paroxunó*. It will only be seen again in 1 Corinthians 13:5. It comes from two words signifying “alongside” and “a sharp edge.” Hence, literally “to cut

alongside.” Figuratively, it signifies to become emotionally provoked. As He was checking out the city, he was stirred up inside “when he saw that the city was given over to idols.”

Here is another new word, found only this once in Scripture, *kateidólos*. It gives the sense of “full of idols.” The word applies to the city itself, not the inhabitants. Of this state, G.S. Davies records the following –

“We learn from Pliny that at the time of Nero, Athens contained over three thousand public statues, besides a countless number of lesser images within the walls of private houses. Of this number the great majority were statues of gods, demi-gods, or heroes. In one street there stood before every house a square pillar carrying upon it a bust of the god Hermes. Another street, named the Street of the Tripods, was lined with tripods, dedicated by winners in the Greek national games, and carrying each one an inscription to a deity. Every gateway and porch carried its protecting god. Every street, every square, nay, every purlieu, had its sanctuaries, and a Roman poet bitterly remarked that it was easier in Athens to find gods than men” (G. S. Davies, *St. Paul in Greece*).

Life application: Paul was provoked in his very being by the idolatry he saw around him. As noted by G.S. Davies, these weren’t just idols of Greek gods, but there were idols of winners in the Greek games which were then marked with inscriptions to deity. Is it any different in our world today?

We have idols of sports figures, Hollywood movie stars, famous people like astronauts, politicians, etc. Anytime we allow our attention to be taken off of the Lord and affixed somewhere else, we are caught up in idolatry. This includes those in churches when they bow to statues of Mary and the saints. We can even make an idol out of the Bible, placing a version of it above our love for the Lord.

We need to be careful to never allow anything to take away our heartfelt allegiance to the Lord. If something is consuming too much of your time, distracting you from thinking about the Lord, step away from it and refocus your mind on Him. Talk to Him as you go out and as you come in. Think about Him as you look at the beauty of what He has created. Thank Him for the beautiful flowers and the favorable weather. Praise Him in the storms of life. Let your mind be always filled with the Lord.

*Lord God, help us to remember to fix our eyes on Jesus. May our hearts be directed to You and may we be appreciative of the lives You have given us by speaking to You in our walk each day. Help us not to get distracted by the idols of this world, but to be always attentive to You and Your goodness. Amen.*



**Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there.**

Acts 17:17

The NKJV, though cleaning up the KJV in some areas, is still not salvageable. For this commentary, the following will be used: “Therefore, indeed, he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and those worshipping, and in the marketplace on each day with those meeting *him*” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul’s spirit was provoked within him because the city of Athens was given over to idols. Because of this, it next says, “Therefore, indeed.”

The intensity of the matter is seen in this. Luke takes Paul’s situation and highlights it. He will then explain what Paul’s response to the idol-filled city was, beginning with, “he was reasoning in the synagogue.”

This is the same thought as that of verse 17:2, which said, “Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.” The imperfect verb shows a continuing effort. He didn’t just go in, give his thoughts, and sit down. Rather, he continued to reason with those in the synagogue. In this, his reasoning was “with the Jews and those worshipping.”

This was his usual habit. He would reason with those who already knew Scripture about their need for Jesus. His reasoning there would be just as with those in Thessalonica and Berea. He would be “explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ’” (Acts 17:3).

However, this was not his only time of discourse. The intensity of wording at the beginning of the verse is more fully realized in his efforts that went beyond the synagogue. That is seen in the next words, “and in the marketplace on each day.”

Paul took no time off but went into the agora and spoke out against the idolatry that filled the city. His spirit was so moved within him, that he could not constrain himself to simply talk to those in the synagogue, waiting for them to be moved by (or rejecting of) his words. This speaking in the marketplace wasn’t just to Jews and proselytes, but “with those meeting *him*.”

Being the public meeting place, even if he was originally only speaking to those who came from the synagogue, others could hear. In hearing, if they were interested in listening, they could then engage in the conversation as well. This will be seen in the next verse.

Life application: It isn't known who Paul initially spoke to in the marketplace, but it may have just been people he reasoned with on the Sabbath at first. In other words, "Meet me at the agora and we can have some tea and talk more about what you heard today." By speaking to them in public, it would provide a chance for anyone to hear his words.

This is a good way of getting new people to listen to what you have to say. If it is a nice day and you have the opportunity to have a Bible study in a park, on the beach, or in some other public place, people will naturally slow down and listen as the teacher speaks. That may spark curiosity and a desire to know more.

Consider this avenue. It is non-confrontational like street preaching because anyone listening is leaning into a group meeting, and so the event is passive. Street preaching, on the other hand, is actively targeting people.

Despite the non-confrontational nature of such a meeting, there are some who will be offended by you exercising your rights in public. They may be the ones who get confrontational, so be prepared for that as well. Paul faced this, and you might, but it is still a great way of passively getting people interested in the Bible.

*Lord God, the church isn't just a building and a set time to meet. The church is comprised of people wherever they are and whenever they meet. Help us to be willing to teach, instruct, and lead others to You at any time and in any location. May the church grow because we are willing to put forth effort among those we encounter. Amen.*

**Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?"**

**Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. Acts 17:18**

In the previous verse, it noted that Paul met in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. That would surely be those he met with in the synagogue. But while meeting them, others became curious about what he was saying. That is seen beginning with the words, "Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers."

Athens was the place where the great philosophers gathered to contemplate the various issues that affected man such as God or gods, nature, the state of man, reason, etc. They thought that the search for wisdom was the highest form of existence. This is what Paul alludes to in 1 Corinthians 1 –

“For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Albert Barnes gives a detailed description of the Epicureans and Stoics –

“Of the Epicureans - This sect of philosophers was so named from Epicurus, who lived about 300 years before the Christian era. They denied that the world was created by God, and that the gods exercised any care or providence over human affairs, and also the immortality of the soul. Against these positions of the sect Paul directed his main argument in proving that the world was created and governed by God. One of the distinguishing doctrines of Epicurus was that pleasure was the summum bonum, or chief good, and that virtue was to be practiced only as it contributed to pleasure. By pleasure, however, Epicurus did not mean sensual and groveling appetites and degraded vices, but rational pleasure, properly regulated and governed. See Good's "Book of Nature." But whatever his views were, it is certain that his followers had embraced the doctrine that the pleasures of sense were to be practiced without restraint. Both in principle and practice, therefore, they devoted themselves to a life of gaiety and sensuality, and sought happiness only in indolence, effeminacy, and voluptuousness. Confident in the belief that the world was not under the administration of a God of justice, they gave themselves up to the indulgence of every passion the infidels of their time, and the exact example of the frivolous and fashionable multitudes of all times, that live without God, and that seek pleasure as their chief good.

And of the Stoics - This was a sect of philosophers, so named from the Greek στοά stoa, a porch or portico, because Zeno, the founder of the sect, held his school and taught in a porch, in the city of Athens. Zeno was born in the island of Cyprus, but the greater part of his life was spent at Athens in teaching philosophy. After having taught publicly 48 years, he died at the age of 96, that is, 264 years before Christ. The doctrines of the sect were, that the universe was created by God; that all things were fixed by Fate; that even God was under the dominion of fatal necessity; that the Fates were to be submitted to; that the passions and affections were to be suppressed and restrained; that happiness

consisted in the insensibility of the soul to pain; and that a man should gain an absolute mastery over all the passions and affections of his nature. They were stern in their views of virtue, and, like the Pharisees, prided themselves on their own righteousness. They supposed that matter was eternal, and that God was either the animating principle or soul of the world, or that all things were a part of God. They fluctuated much in their views of a future state; some of them holding that the soul would exist only until the destruction of the universe, and others that it would finally be absorbed into the divine essence and become a part of God. It will be readily seen, therefore, with what pertinency Paul discoursed to them. The leading doctrines of both sects were met by him.”

The incorrect doctrines of both sects are addressed by Paul in his writings. As for them, it next says that they “encountered him.”

The word is *sumballó*. It signifies “to throw together.” Hence, the meaning is to be derived from the surrounding context and can signify encounter, discuss, engage, ponder, etc.

In this case, Paul is in the agora talking about faith in Christ, certainly highlighting His suffering and resurrection. While talking with those he met, the Epicureans and Stoics, who were probably there doing their own debating, would have heard Paul and wanted to know what he was discussing. As such, the word “engaged” is probably the intent, but the verb being imperfect gives the sense of “were engaging him.” In the process of engaging with him, it next says, “And some said.”

Again, the verb is imperfect, “And some were saying.” It is obvious that in hearing Paul’s words and comparing them to their own ideas about life, death, suffering, and so forth, they were both curious and yet somewhat contemptuous. Therefore, they questioned, “What does this babbler want to say?”

The word translated as “babbling,” *spermologos*, is found only here. It literally translates as “seed-picker.” One can think of a crow picking up seeds, flitting about, and squawking without any sense of rhyme or reason. Figuratively, it would be a person who is talkative and opinionated and who picks up scraps of knowledge and sets them forth in a willy-nilly fashion. As for the verb, the mood is optative and so the thought is something like, “What is this seed-picker desiring to say.”

In other words, what Paul is saying isn't making sense to them. To them, he was putting out irrational ideas. Suffering? Resurrection? What he was saying wasn't forming any cohesive thoughts in their minds.

Because of this, others who heard and had an incorrect idea of his discourse spoke up. It literally reads, "and others." This means "other than the Epicureans and Stoics." They were saying, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods."

Here is another word found only here in Scripture, *kataggeleus*. It signifies a herald. To them, Paul was seemingly speaking about two things. Therefore, they used the plural word, *daimonion*, or gods. These two things are explained by Luke's next words, "because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection."

What this probably meant to them is that Paul was preaching Jesus as a "god" as well as "the Anastasis," as a god. The word *anastasis* signifies "a standing up," thus "the raising" or "the resurrection." Hence, they think that Paul's proclamation of Jesus' resurrection not as an action but as a second god. In other words, "He is preaching the Jesus and the Anastasis," rather than "Jesus who was resurrected." Hence, the word *daimonion*, the plural term for heathen gods or demons is used.

Life application: In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul spends a great deal of time explaining the resurrection. This is based on the words of verse 12, "...how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead."

This would have probably been introduced by some who followed the Greek philosophers or who were later influenced by them after first believing. For example, the Epicureans didn't believe the gods exercised any care or providence over human affairs and they denied the immortality of the soul. As such, they believed that the soul and body died together.

Likewise, some of the Greek philosophers believed in Pantheism, the universe is a manifestation of God. Others believed in Panentheism; God is in all of creation. The Bible, in both testaments, refute both of these. Paul spends considerable time explaining the nature of God, speaking against such notions.

God is before all things. He is the Creator of all things, but He is not "all things," nor is He "in" all things in the sense that would allow the creation to be worshiped, nor can we assume that the divine is in us. Rather, we can think of a painter making a painting. His

hand is in the painting, but the painting is not the painter, nor is the painter in the painting, except as an expression of Himself.

To understand the intricacies of what God is like, we must first grasp what Scripture says, contemplating it carefully. From there, we can make logical deductions about Him. But we must also be careful to not incorrectly assume that metaphors, anthropomorphisms, etc., about God that are given in Scripture are to be taken literally.

For example, because of how metaphor is used, some people demand that the earth must be flat. They have incorrectly assigned metaphors found in Scripture to their idea of the world. That can occur in our ideas about God as well. Understanding Scripture from a proper context and contemplating philosophy, science, and other disciplines can help us logically think about what God is like. Spend your time wisely and contemplate God carefully. You will be better off when you do.

*Lord God, may our ideas about You come first and foremost from Scripture. With an understanding of it, our minds will then be properly directed to consider the various disciplines of study that we come across in our lives. Instead of fitting You into science, we can understand science in relation to You. Help us to put You and Your word first and all else will find its proper place. Amen.*

**And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? Acts 17:19**

The previous verse noted the questioning of the Epicureans and Stoics concerning Paul. Along with them, others perceived that Paul was proclaiming foreign gods. That now continues, saying, “And they took him.”

More literally, “And they took hold of him.” The sense is that of personal initiative in the act of seizing someone or something. At times, it can be a forceful seizing of someone. At others, it is a purposeful act of helping someone along. This is another indication that Paul was dependent on others for assistance. In this case, it was especially so because it involves ascending a hill. As it next says, “and brought him to the Areopagus.”

The location in Greek is the Areios Pagos and is directly translated as the Hill of Ares. Ares is the Greek God of war, also called Mars. The word *pagos* means a rocky hill. Of this location, Vincent’s Word Studies, also citing another source, says –

“The Hill of Mars: the seat of the ancient and venerable Athenian court which decided the most solemn questions connected with religion. Socrates was arraigned and condemned here on the charge of innovating on the state religion. It received its name from the legend of the trial of Mars for the murder of the son of Neptune. The judges sat in the open air upon seats hewn out in the rock, on a platform ascended by a flight of stone steps immediately from the market-place. A temple of Mars was on the brow of the edifice, and the sanctuary of the Furies was in a broken cleft of the rock immediately below the judges' seats. The Acropolis rose above it, with the Parthenon and the colossal statue of Athene. ‘It was a scene with which the dread recollections of centuries were associated. Those who withdrew to the Areopagus from the Agora, came, as it were, into the presence of a higher power. No place in Athens was so suitable for a discourse upon the mysteries of religion’ (Conybeare and Hewson).”

At times, the name Areopagus may be used to indicate the hill itself or as name for the court that met there. This is like Hollywood indicating both a location as well as the industry that has formed at the location. The reason for taking him there is next explained. Those who conducted him were “saying, ‘May we know.’”

The word used is *dunamai*. It signifies ability or power. Thus, there is a polite but seemingly almost sarcastic tone in their words, “Are we able to know?” Paul was in the agora teaching. These people heard him and were perplexed by what he was saying because their form of life and conduct, as well as their personal beliefs, were contrary to the idea of sin and atonement as well as death and resurrection. This can be seen by what has already been presented –

Because:

“What does this seed-picker want to say?”

“He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods.”

Therefore:

“Are we able to know what this new doctrine?”

Because of this state of curiosity, they continue with “what this new doctrine *is* of which you speak?”

There is no hint of them having brought Paul there for a trial or to make an accusation against him. Rather, verse 21 will indicate that those who brought him, along with those who were already at the Areopagus, had a different intent altogether. Paul is being asked to more fully explain what he had been talking about while in the agora.

Life application: If you were asked to explain your faith in Jesus at Princeton University, would you be able to do it? If so, you would surely be challenged by some, belittled by others, and entirely dismissed by many. How would you handle such a crowd?

Like Paul, you may be asked to defend your faith at some point, explaining the hope that you possess. As you are speaking, you may hear, "I have been told the Bible is unreliable." Would you have an answer to that? While you are talking about Jesus and the resurrection, someone else may be asking about the flood of Noah. "How can you believe such a ridiculous story?"

You should expect this because it is the standard thinking of people in the world today. In some cases, you can turn the question into another question. "Did you know that the theories of creation and evolution are 'theories' because they have not been proven? Is it more reasonable to believe that God created the universe or to believe that the universe created itself?"

At other times, you may want to make firm proclamations about your faith. "I believe in Jesus Christ because He is the Subject of the Bible. What is presented in its pages concerning the nature of man, the problem with humanity, and the resolution of that problem is exactly detailed there. And more, Jesus is the only acceptable explanation for the resolution to it."

Think about such things. Practice them in your head. Watch videos or read books concerning creation. Consider how Jesus is anticipated or explained in your reading of the Bible each day. Prepare your mind for the times when you are questioned about these things. No time spent learning about them will be wasted time. Life is short. Spend yours getting to know this wonderful Creator and Redeemer and then be prepared to tell others about Him!

*O God, it is a world filled with unclear thinking about who You are and our standing in relation to You. But these things are revealed in Scripture. So, Lord, help us to be prepared to give a defense for the hope that we possess. May we not stand unprepared when we are asked or challenged concerning our faith. Amen.*

**"For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." Acts 17:20**



In the previous verse, Paul was taken to the Areopagus and asked what the new teaching he was presenting meant. Now, those same people say, “For you are bringing some strange things to our ears.”

The clause is almost impossible to directly translate because the words “strange things” come from a present participle, *xenizonta*. The word *xenizó* signifies to receive as a guest and thus to be strange. The people speaking to Paul use this verb which we will normally use as an adjective.

If one takes the word startling as a verb instead of an adjective, it can almost give the sense, such as, “He was startling his friend.” But because the word is plural, it would need to say, “For are startlings you bring to our ears.”

The sense is that what Paul is speaking to them actively causes their ears to respond through surprise. Because of this, they continue, saying, “Therefore we want to know what these things mean.” Again, the words are complicated because of the use of four verbs. A literal translation would be, “we desire, therefore, to know what these things wish to be.”

Most English translations get the point across well without being literal. The people confronted Paul wanting clarification for the things he had been saying. With that, an explanation concerning their curiosity will be given in the coming verse.

Life application: It is hard to imagine at times, but there are many people who have never heard the gospel. There are even many who have never heard of Jesus. In the West, that is less common, but even here this is true. When you meet someone who has never heard of Jesus and you begin to tell them about Him and what He did, you can often get a response like that of those in Athens.

People get confused or even bewildered as you try to explain. Some from foreign cultures may have never heard the word “sin” before. It may exist in their own language, but they think of it in a different way than believers will. Until they can properly understand the word, you are at a bit of a roadblock in what you can say.

So be ready to take the time to explain something carefully that most people just take for granted. Eventually, and with care, people will get what you are saying, but it may take a bit of time and effort. Don’t get discouraged. Rather, take it as a challenge and enjoy the process as you introduce precious souls to the wonderful saving message of Jesus.

*Lord God, help us to be clear and precise in how we present the gospel. Open our minds to what we should say so that the words are properly set forth. From there, the choice must be made, but at least we have done our part in telling others about this glorious message of reconciliation and redemption. Amen.*

**For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. Acts 17:21**

The translation is more succinct, saying, “Now all Athenians and the visiting strangers passed time in nothing else but to say or to hear some newer thing” (CG).

The verse now explains the words of the previous verses. The people who had been listening to Paul asked about his teaching and noted that what he said was strange to them. Luke now explains the reason for their curiosity, saying, “Now all Athenians and the visiting strangers.”

Luke leaves off any article before Athenians, lumping them all into one category and denoting their character in general. They, along with the visiting strangers to Athens, would gather to ponder things, talk philosophy, challenge one another’s intellect, etc. Luke describes their attitude next saying, they “passed time.”

The word used here signifies having opportunity or leisure. Thus, their lives are being spent in trivial pursuits. Luke continues by saying the spending of this leisurely time was “in nothing else but to say or to hear some newer thing.”

Of this, Ellicott notes, “Theophrastus (c. 8) uses the self-same word in describing the questions of the loquacious prattlers of society, ‘Is there anything new? . . . Is there anything yet newer?’” Other quotes and observations along these same lines are found in the writings of classical authors concerning the Athenians.

This is why they were so curious about Paul’s words. They had itching ears and needed them scratched. Hence, when they heard Paul speaking, they knew they had the opportunity to continue to whittle away their time in the pursuit of new wisdom.

Life application: In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon describes himself in somewhat the same manner as Luke describes those in Athens. For example, he says –

“I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this

burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised.” Ecclesiastes 1:12, 13

Again, he says –

“As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep,  
Who can find it out?  
<sup>25</sup> I applied my heart to know,  
To search and seek out wisdom and the reason *of things*,  
To know the wickedness of folly,  
Even of foolishness *and* madness.” Ecclesiastes 7:24, 25

Solomon pursued many things as evidenced in his writings, but through much of his life he failed to properly align his pursuits with the knowledge of the Lord. This is not uncommon in the world. How many people are “news junkies.” Many people go from one news site to the next looking to satisfy a craving for something new.

This is true with people who watch one prophecy report after another. They are never satisfied with having heard things, but immediately go to hear more. As long as it tickles their ears, they are happy. The problem with this is that such people generally have very little biblical knowledge, nor do they especially care about what the Bible actually says. Paul writes about this attitude –

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; <sup>4</sup> and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” 2 Timothy 4:3, 4

As for both Solomon and Paul, they each give the remedy for this type of attitude –

Solomon:

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:  
Fear God and keep His commandments,  
For this is man’s all.” Ecclesiastes 12:13

Paul:

“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, <sup>15</sup> and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation

through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

<sup>16</sup> All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Don't spend your time in foolish pursuit. Rather, learn the word of God by reading it daily and applying it to your life. In the end, the latest news and the newer things aren't really new at all. It is a trap to entice you away from what is good and proper –

“Is there anything of which it may be said,

‘See, this *is* new’?

It has already been in ancient times before us.” Ecclesiastes 1:10

*Lord God, may we not be foolish in our pursuit of vain things. Rather, help us to remain focused on You and in growing in the knowledge of Your word. When our days are over in this life, we will enter our eternal state. On that day, may You be pleased with the lives we have lived in anticipation of what lies ahead. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; Acts 17:22**

A more literal translation would say, “And Paul, having stood in *the* midst of *the* Areopagus said, ‘Men, Athenians, I recognize *that* in all things you are super-spiritual” (CG).

In the previous verse, Luke explained that Athenians and the foreigners who came to Athens spent all their time telling or hearing something new. With that thought being understood by Paul, it now says, “And Paul, having stood in *the* midst of *the* Areopagus.”

Of this, Ellicott says, “The Court sat in the open air on benches forming three sides of a quadrangle. A short flight of sixteen steps, cut in the rock, led from the agora to the plateau where the Court held its sittings.”

Paul was standing in the midst of this court where all of those professing to be wise would be gathered to hear whatever presentation was brought forward. In this case, it is the apostle Paul bringing the message of the incarnation and life of Jesus Christ to their ears. To begin, he “said, ‘Men, Athenians.”

As in Hebrew, when men are present, the masculine is used. However, later in the chapter, it will be seen that the court was not only attended by men. Having made this formal address, he next continued with, “I recognize *that* in all things you are super-spiritual.”

The word translated as super-spiritual is *deisidaimonesteros*. It is found only here in Scripture. HELPS Word Studies says – “(from *deidō*, ‘to dread’ and *daimōn*, ‘a deity’) – properly, religious (superstitious) fear, driven by a confused concept of God – producing ‘sincere’ but *very misdirected* religion. Indeed, this is *the mark of heathenism*.”

The word is variously translated as over-religious, very religious, remarkably religious, too superstitious, etc. Rendering it super-spiritual eliminates the often-negative connotation of superstition, and it more correctly addresses the state of mind of what he will say in the coming verse.

The Athenians, like the supposedly super-spiritual people of today, obviously thought that there were many gods or that all paths led back to God. Such thinking is confused concerning God, what He is like, and what He expects. Paul, being an apostle of Jesus, was there to present to them the truth of God. His words will take from their own writings and he will present them in a manner that clearly expresses concepts that the Hebrew Scriptures had presented since the first verses of Genesis.

Life application: One of the most common things you will encounter when witnessing to others about God is a state of mental confusion concerning who He is and what He must be like. By following the pages of the Bible, one can develop a clear understanding of these things.

For example, it says in Genesis 1:1 that God created the heavens and the earth. Just a momentary stop before proceeding to the next verse – to think about that statement – allows the reader time to deduce that God is therefore before creation. Because time defines the progression of the aging of the creation (meaning that time started when the material universe came into existence), then God must be outside of (before, above, not limited to, etc.) time.

Further, and because of what that conveys to us, if God created matter, then He is not associated with matter. Thus, He is Spirit (John 4:24) and He exists in an eternal state where time does not exist. When the Lord said to Moses, “I AM THAT I AM” in Exodus 3:14, He was proclaiming His eternality. But more, He is a Necessary Being who cannot not exist.

Thinking on this, and then considering the rest of Scripture in light of this, including the things said about Jesus, we can more fully appreciate innumerable things about God. However, we must be careful to never apply incorrect ideas about Him to our theology. If our thoughts do not align with Scripture, then we must put them aside.

If you are saved, you are saved. Your incorrect ideas about God will not change that. However, what you set forth for others in your words, or in what you write, may affect their chance of ever being saved. Be careful to always consider God from how He has revealed Himself. Don't try to be smarter than God. That which is considered orthodox has been carefully contemplated for millennia.

The chances of you or someone you follow suddenly having a correctly aligned epiphany about God that nobody else has had are very unlikely. But this is how cults get started. So, be careful to not get drawn down strange paths of theology.

*Lord God, Your word is so very wonderful. It is a revelation of Yourself to us, and we can know so much about You if we think about You in relation to it. And, for sure, we can know that anything that is said about You that is not in line with the pages of Scripture cannot be correct. So, Lord, help us to stay on the right path as we seek out who You are. Amen.*

**“for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:**

**TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.**

**Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:**

Acts 17:23

The translation of the NKJV clears up many of the errors of the KJV, but it still is not literal enough. The verse reads, “for passing through and analyzing your venerations, I found even *a* platform on which had been inscribed: GOD UNKNOWN. Whom, therefore – not knowing – you worship, Him I proclaim to you” (CG).

The previous verse opened Paul's speech at the Areopagus, noting that he perceived the men of Athens were super-spiritual. He continues now by giving his reason for stating that, saying, “for passing through.”

He is referring to his walk through the city of Athens. While he was in the process of doing so, he explains, “and analyzing your venerations.”

The word translated as “analyzing” is found only here and in Hebrews 13:7. It comes from two words signifying “upwards” and “to gaze upon.” Thus, it means to attentively look at something and examine it while doing so.

The word translated as “venerations” is a single Greek word, *sebasma*, a noun used only here and in 2 Thessalonians 2:4. It is derived from *sebazomai*, to revere or be in awe of. It has almost no comparable English word. It covers not only an idol that is itself the object of worship, nor is it merely an icon that represents something worshiped. Rather, the word encompasses both thoughts and more.

Paul is using a word to describe all of the monuments that are venerated within the city. However, if the verb “venerate” is changed to a noun as the object of veneration, then it conveys the sense. Being plural to cover all that Paul is referring to makes it “venerations.” Most translations paraphrase the words and say, “objects of worship.” It speaks of idols, icons, statues, altars, memorials, etc. Anything that is worshiped would fall under this broad word.

While perusing all of these things around Athens, he says, “I found even *a* platform.” The word is *bómos* and it is only found here in Scripture. It is from the same root as *basis*, a step which then also speaks of a foot. Thus, it refers to a stand, podium, or platform. The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses this word to describe the altar that was built in Joshua 22, but there is no reason to assume that this was an altar in the traditional sense. Of this platform, Paul notes, “on which had been inscribed: GOD UNKNOWN.”

The Greek reads with an adjective and a noun: AGNŌSTŌ THEŌ, UNKNOWN GOD. The words “to” “the” “an” etc. are often added for supposed clarity, but the fact that the platform was set apart with the words inscribed on it means that verbs and/or articles are unnecessary. The platform itself reflects the “to” part of the equation. If the word “an” or “the” is added to “UNKNOWN,” then it signifies that something is actually known about that GOD.

Of this inscribed platform, Vincent’s Word Studies says –

“Under these circumstances an allusion to one of these altars by the apostle would be equivalent to his saying to the Athenians thus: ‘You are correct in acknowledging a divine existence beyond any which the ordinary rites of your worship recognize; there is such an existence. You are correct in confessing that this Being is unknown to you; you have no just conceptions of his nature and perfections.’”

Because of this, and with Paul's thoughts thus expressed, he next says, "Whom, therefore – not knowing – you worship." The word translated as "not knowing" is translated from the verb *agnoeó*. The *a* prefix signifies negation and the word *ginóskó* means "to know." Because it is a present participle, it says, "not knowing."

The meaning is that though they know there is a God because of general revelation in the created order, they also know He is entirely unknown to them. Hence, He is GOD UNKNOWN. There is nothing that can be known about Him beyond what can be contemplated through His creation, and thus there is an infinite disconnect between the two. Unless He Himself makes the first move, nothing more can be known about Him. However, Paul has now arrived at Athens and he is going to tell them about this God who has, in fact, made that first move. Thus, he says, "Him I proclaim to you."

The word translated as "proclaim" is *kataggelló*. It is the verb form of the noun used in verse 17:18. There, they said that Paul was a herald of "foreign gods." Now, he takes their words and turns them around saying that he heralds GOD UNKNOWN to them.

Life application: Studying the Bible is fun. Study your Bible.

*Most Glorious and Marvelous God. To much of the world, You are unknown, frightening, confusing, or maybe ignored. But to those who have read Your word and accepted its message, You are intimately close, comforting, and ever-present on our minds. We rejoice in You because we know Jesus who has revealed You to us. Thank You, O God, for the close and personal relationship we possess because of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**"God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Acts 17:24**

Again, as with the previous verse, the NKJV cleans up the mess of the KJV, however, it is still not literal enough. The words read, "The God, having made the universe and all things in it, He – of heaven and earth being Lord – dwells not in handmade temples" (CG).

The previous verse noted Paul's reference to the platform inscribed with GOD UNKNOWN. He then said that he would proclaim that unknown God to those in Athens. He now begins that proclamation, saying, "The God."

The Greek reads, "The God, the having..." The first article does not need to be translated, but the second defines Him as "The God" who will next be described. As seen



in the last verse, the pronoun there was neuter – this [One]. Now, the words of this verse are masculine. Of this, Charles Ellicott says –

“The masculine form of the pronoun and participles throughout the sentence presents an emphatic contrast to the neuter pronoun of the previous verse.”

Paul informs those in Athens that the God he proclaims is not feminine. He is referred to in the masculine. This is something that they could not have known without it being specifically revealed by Him. To those in Athens, He was GOD UNKNOWN. Now He is no longer completely unknown. They know at least something about Him. Paul next says that He is the God “having made the universe.”

The word *kosmos* is almost always translated as world. But that can have various meanings. One is “the inhabitants of the world.” That, for example, would be what is referred to in John 3:16. It can also refer to worldly affairs, the world itself, or the universe.

Paul, being a Jew who is perfectly aware of the Genesis 1 creation narrative, would not limit his words to the world alone. That he goes beyond the world itself is evident from what he will say in the rest of the verse. Understanding this, he continues with, “and all things in it.”

This could be taken as referring to the things of the world itself or of the universe. The latter is certainly what is on Paul’s mind –

“Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; <sup>15</sup> and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth’; and it was so. <sup>16</sup> Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. *He made* the stars also. <sup>17</sup> God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup> and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that *it was good*. <sup>19</sup> So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.” Genesis 1:14-19

Regardless of how sizeable the people of Paul’s time considered the universe, it was vast enough from their perspective to know that it extended beyond the world itself. With Paul’s words noting that the God he was proclaiming created all of these things, he next says, “He – of heaven and earth being Lord.”

This tells us that Paul was certainly referring to the universe. First, he notes “heaven.” Depending on the context, the Greek word signifies the visible heavens, the atmosphere, the sky, the starry heavens, and the spiritual heavens. This is certainly referring to at least the visible heavens, the starry heavens, and the spiritual realm, summed up in the singular “heaven.” The way this can be determined is by considering his continued words.

He next notes “earth” using the word *gḗ*. It can refer to a particular land, the ground, or the earth as a whole in contrast to the heavens. Paul is referring to the physical earth as a whole as evidenced by the contrasting thought “of heaven.” He has introduced his audience to the God proclaimed in Genesis 1:1 –

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

The God he proclaims is Lord of heaven and earth because He is the Creator of those things. The word *kurios* signifies “absolute ownership rights” (HELPS Word Studies). These things are His and He has the right to direct them and dispense with them according to His will. Of this God, who is the Lord of heaven and earth, Paul then makes an obvious statement. He “dwells not in handmade temples”

This tells us that Paul was not only referring to heaven as the visible heaven and the starry heaven but also to the spiritual heaven. Temples are intended to provide the link between the physical and the spiritual. Thus, Paul’s words are certainly inclusive of that.

The meaning of his words is obvious. If God created everything, then nothing can contain Him. He is greater than that which He created. It is a truth pulled right out of the Old Testament from when Solomon dedicated the temple in Jerusalem –

“But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!” 2 Chronicles 6:18

Paul is using his vast knowledge of Scripture, along with his understanding of the nature of God, to reveal what the true God is like to those in Athens. He will continue with this for only a few verses and then He will tie all of this into the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Life application: The Bible is what reveals God to us in a specific and special way that goes beyond what we can learn about Him from the world around us. Does knowing the

Creator in this way matter to you? If so, then be sure to read your Bible. If not, you need to redirect your thinking. The Bible is the one source that we have for knowing and understanding these things.

For example, many churches are getting away from the masculine that is used in Scripture. This is not just inappropriate. Rather, it is an offense to God. God does not have parts. He is not a male in the sense that we understand. However, the word shows us that His characteristics are revealed in a masculine manner. To deviate from this is to mar what God has set forth in His word.

Be careful to check Bible translations before you buy them. Make sure they haven't gone down PC Path onto Heresy Highway. The manner in which God has revealed Himself is not up to us to pick and choose. Likewise, if you are in a church where they have gone down this path, pack your bags and move out. There can be no compromising with those who have compromised. Stand fast on the word and hold fast to what is proper.

*Lord God, help us to hold fast to the faith that has been handed down to us from the beginning. May we never compromise on what the Bible proclaims. Instead, may we be firm and fixed in our resolve to always put You first. Help us in our walk so that we may bring glory to You. May it be so, O God. Amen.*

**“Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. Acts 17:25**

The words more correctly read, “nor is he attended by humans’ hands, further needing anything, He giving to all life, and breath, and all things” (CG).

Paul is in the process of proclaiming the true God to those in Athens. He just noted that being Lord of heaven and earth, he does not dwell in temples made with hands. With that noted, he now continues, saying, “nor is he attended by humans’ hands.”

The verb translated as “attended,” is *therapeuó*. One can see the root of our modern word therapy. It signifies to heal, care for, attend to, etc. Most translations say “serve.” But there is a suitable word translated as serve used elsewhere. That gives the idea of serving, such as in ministering, worshiping, accomplishing tasks, and so forth.

In the case of this word, it would be as if God has a need that must be attended to. To avoid confusing the two, saying attended provides the proper meaning. Paul is saying that there is nothing lacking in God that would need man’s attention.

As for the words “humans’ hands,” the Greek adjective *anthrópinos* is introduced here. In this case, it is plural. Rather than “men’s hands,” it is more rightly translated as “humans’ hands.” Thus, it is contrasted with the divine nature of God. From there, Paul says, “further needing anything.”

The word translated as “further needing,” *prosdeomai*, is found only here. It is a present participle signifying to want more or to need more. God needs nothing. The thought is expressed by the Lord in Psalm 50 –

“I will not take a bull from your house,  
Nor goats out of your folds.  
<sup>10</sup> For every beast of the forest *is* Mine,  
And the cattle on a thousand hills.  
<sup>11</sup> I know all the birds of the mountains,  
And the wild beasts of the field *are* Mine.  
<sup>12</sup> “If I were hungry, I would not tell you;  
For the world *is* Mine, and all its fullness.” Psalm 50:9-12

This should be obvious. God is. He is the Source of all things. As this is true, then there is nothing that he needs from man. Paul then explains this in the simplest terms, saying, “He giving to all life, and breath, and all things.”

The words life and breath appear almost synonymous, but there is a difference. The *zóé*, or life, is the state of being alive. It further applies to both physical and spiritual life. It is the existence we possess because it is sustained by God’s self-existence.

The breath, or *pnoé*, was seen in Acts 2:2 when the rushing wind came upon the believers gathered in Jerusalem. This is its second and last use. It signifies both breath and breeze. It is the respiration that occurs because there is life within a being. God gives those things to us, so how could He need something from us to sustain Him?

As for “all things,” the Greek reads *ta panta* – the all. Not only does God provide us with life and breath, but He provides all things necessary for those things to continue. Food, oxygen, water, intelligence, etc. Everything that allows man to live and to continue living is provided by God. As this is so, there is nothing that He needs from us for His continuance.

This does not mean that man is not to serve Him. This is where translating the word *therapeuó* as attended rather than served becomes evident. Man is to serve God. This is seen throughout Scripture. In Revelation 22:3, it says –

“And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.”

God does not need this from us as if He would be troubled, sick, or die if we did not provide it. Rather, He is glorified in our worship and service of Him. This is the purpose of creating. God shares His goodness with His creatures, and it is right that His creatures return to Him the glory He is due. This is not because there is a lack in Him that must be filled, but that the natural result of sharing is that there is a mutual reciprocity that should take place.

Life application: If you don't thank God for the good things you receive, He is not lessened by that. He is not harmed by it either. But when we thank God for each blessing, it demonstrates an appreciation that He is the Giver and we are appreciative of what He has provided.

This is why we should spend our time singing out His praise, telling others of His goodness, contemplating His majesty, etc. Through these things, we are returning to Him the glory that He is due from us.

*Lord God, You are great and greatly to be praised. We are thankful to You for every good and kind blessing that comes from Your open hand of grace. Dwell in our praises and be glorified upon our lips. You are great and greatly to be praised, O God. Amen.*

**“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, Acts 17:26**

In the previous verse, Paul noted that God needs nothing and that it is He who gives to all life, breath, and all things. He now continues, saying, “And He has made from one blood.”

The verb is not a participle. Rather than “has made,” it simply says, “made.” Also, some texts omit the word blood. The thought is still the same and the point is that God created one man from whom all others have descended. This is found in the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2. It is stated explicitly in Malachi 2:10 as well –

“Have we not all one Father?  
Has not one God created us?  
Why do we deal treacherously with one another  
By profaning the covenant of the fathers?”

The meaning is that all differences that exist in men now are the result of a natural process but that all men are of the same human stock, regardless of color, size, national heritage, etc.

Despite the Hebrew sense of superiority over others, which is evident in Jesus’ words to those in the synagogue in Nazareth in Luke 4 and Paul’s words to the mob of Jews in Acts 22, they understood from their Scriptures that all men were created from one first man. Any superiority the Jews felt would have to be for some other reason. The Greeks, however, felt that they were intrinsically superior to the barbarians around them, as if they were created differently than others. Paul is telling them that from the perspective of humanity, this was not the case. With this noted, he next says, that from this one man came “every nation of men.”

This is recorded in the Table of Nations found in Genesis 10. The general breakdown found there continues to this day. An initial division of the descendants of Noah took place and that set the general parameters that have followed since that time. A study of the Table of Nations is one of the most important tools in understanding the breakdown of the people groups of the world, even to this day. With these families identified, they began to disperse in order “to dwell on all the face of the earth.”

This is seen, for example, in the line of Japheth where it is recorded, “From these the coastland *peoples* of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations” (Genesis 10:5). This is repeated with the other sons of Noah as well –

“These *were* the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands *and* in their nations.” Genesis 10:20

“These *were* the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands, according to their nations.” Genesis 10:31

Of these people groups and the places where they settled, Paul next says that God “has determined their preappointed times.” There is a slight variation in some texts here –

prostetagmenous  
protetagmenous

One means “assigned.” The other means “before appointed.” The meaning of the first would be that a people were assigned a land, probably after settling there. Once in that land, it became their assigned possession and that is their station where they belong. If they were preappointed, it would indicate that God has chosen the time and place where each nation, and thus each person, would most likely seek out God, as is indicated in the coming verse.

The difference in the idea presented between these two spellings is not small. Both, however, show that there is a set plan that was determined by God concerning the settling of the nations and the boundaries in which they are to reside. That is seen in the final words of the verse, “and the boundaries of their dwellings.”

The word translated as “boundaries,” *horothesia*, is found only here in Scripture. It conveys the idea of fixed boundaries. These things would be established by customs, laws, national interests, cultural expressions, and languages. It is such things that cause nations to be set and fixed. This is the plan of God in order to keep the world from doing what it did by reuniting as one, as is recorded in the Tower of Babel account in Genesis 11.

The dwellings of the people are regulated by a set plan of God to keep them separated. The wisdom of this is seen in the error of thinking that arose when all men sought to work together as one. In such a situation, the only One to work against would obviously be God Himself. For the sake of keeping that from happening, God has directed the peoples and nations through the division of tongues and the attitudes that arise among those of similar speech.

Life application: In understanding the Genesis account of the Tower of Babel and then reading Paul’s words in Acts 17, it is perfectly evident that what is occurring in the world today – concerning the movement of vast numbers of people across set borders – is an attack against the set limitations that God has instilled in man through their division by various languages.

That is also being challenged by universal translators where people of various languages can communicate in real time with one another. With the removal of the constraints assigned by God, the inevitable result will be another Tower of Babel scenario. In order to effect this, governments and non-governmental bodies are uniting through a set plan,

using tools such as climate change, to destroy the fabric of the nations as set forth by God.

The people of Genesis 11 didn't trust God and united as one against Him. They wanted to be like God and so they built a tower to reach the heavens. This united them as one, and replaced God with their own set authority. This is the purpose of the globalist movement today. With the various languages no longer being an issue to divide, and with the movement of peoples to destroy national identities, a uniting against God and His set order is taking place.

Every perversion being publicly condoned, every attack on the family structure, every denial of creation (for example teaching and promoting evolution), every attack on the climate (as if it must be controlled by man because there is no God to do it), etc., is set forth by the globalists to destroy what God has ordained for man. This is perfectly evident when such things are directly approved of when they most fully express the opposite of what the Bible presents.

What is happening in the world is the natural result of rejecting God and ignoring His word. With modern technology, this has become possible. The people of the world are being directed by a satanic attack against God's set order for humanity. The path is set and it can only end in one possible way. The Bible describes it in the pages of Revelation. Hold fast to God and His word. This is the only safety humanity can possess in a world of ever-increasing wickedness.

*Lord God, how wise You are to have directed the world as You have. And how foolish we are to attempt to reject Your ways and to pursue our own reckless paths. This is true as individuals, as nations, and as the mass of humanity is united against You. May we wisely hold fast to You in this time when the world is being prepared to destroy itself through rejection of You. Amen.*

**“so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; Acts 17:27**

More literally, the verse reads, “to seek the Lord, if perhaps, indeed, they might feel for Him and might find Him, although He is not far from each one of us (CG).”

In the previous verse, Paul spoke of the creation of man and that God has pre-appointed the times and boundaries of their dwellings. He now continues this thought, saying, “to



seek the Lord.” The meaning is, as many Bibles paraphrase it, “so that they should seek the Lord.”

In other words, rather than seeking a united power against the Lord as during the time of the Tower of Babel, the peoples were divided by languages and these nations were established and dispersed so that they would seek out the Lord instead. It should be noted that many manuscripts say “God” here instead of “the Lord.”

Either way, because the Lord is God, the meaning is not substantially changed. The thought here is expressed in Romans 1:19, 20 –

“...because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.”

God has made Himself manifest in the created world. It is obvious that the universe did not simply explode itself into existence. Nor is it eternal, as if it had always existed. These things can be deduced without the Bible. And more, it is evident that God didn't just create a bowl of soup which then evolved into the various types of life on the planet. This is evident without the Bible as well.

However, with man united as one, their greatest desire is to eliminate God from the picture. On the other hand, as nations develop, there is a chance of them being governed in a manner that will allow their people to think through matters concerning God and pursue Him. Job was such a person.

But more, he was not alone. It notes in Job 1:6, “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord.” This is not speaking of angels. Rather, it is referring to those people among whom Job associated and who believed in the Lord as handed down to them from the time of Noah.

This would not have been the case if the nations remained united. The Lord knew this and dispersed them. In doing this, Paul next says, “if perhaps, indeed, they might feel for Him and might find Him.”

The meaning of the words is obvious. In seeking after the Lord, he may be found through His general revelation of Himself. Paul gives a sense of this in Romans 2 –

“...for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, <sup>15</sup> who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*) <sup>16</sup> in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.” Romans 2:14-16

The Mosaic Law is special revelation. But people know that it is wrong to steal. Even without the law being stated, they may willingly restrain themselves from stealing because of this. There is a moral conscience in man that tells him he should seek after God who has instilled this consciousness in him.

This is clearly evident because societies all over the world have laws against stealing. Only when a society has completely departed from the conscience instilled in them by God will it no longer enforce laws concerning stealing. Communism is designed to steal the people’s efforts away from them. Liberal governments allow looters and thugs to steal from stores that put forth the effort to gather and resell merchandise.

Even if man cannot be saved by general revelation, he can live a happy and content life, given to him by God, when he feels for Him and finds Him. Understanding this, Paul finishes with, “although He is not far from each one of us.”

Paul is surely tying this thought back to the abundant idolatry found in Athens, and indeed in the whole world. Instead of seeking God who is ever present with us and who has filled the universe with order and harmony so that it is evident it was done by a Designer, man makes up gods of his own. He bows down to them and worships them. These things, of man’s own imagination and production, become his gods.

What is near to us in what God has done, and which is so obviously created by Him, shows us that He is there.

Life application: Despite our knowing that God is right here with us, we want to bring our own gods closer, thus pushing the knowledge of Him out of our minds. Paul speaks of this in Romans 1 as well -

“...because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and changed the glory of

the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.” Romans 1:21-23

Because of this, an obvious cycle of degradation in man takes place, especially leading to sexual sin, but also all other sorts of immoral and destructive behavior. Take time to read Romans 1:24-32 to see what Paul says concerning this. While you are reading, compare the cycle of depravity to the world around you.

As the nations unite globally, and as power and authority are solidified more and more, what Paul writes about is becoming global as well. In the past, this cycle of perversion would cause a nation to finally collapse through war, disease, or internal destruction. When that happened, the ideas of that nation would end. Having nations separated allowed this to occur again and again without the whole world collapsing together.

However, that no longer needs to be the case. As the world unites, there can be only one inevitable result, global destruction. This is what the book of Revelation says is coming, but it is not limited to that book. Isaiah also speaks of such things. What was once not possible has now become inevitable. Pay heed and be ready to tell others about the goodness of God in Jesus Christ.

*Lord God, how desperately we need to get the word out about You before it is too late. Help us to continue to tell others what they need to know before the time comes when the whole world falls under the deceiving influence of the antichrist. May we be wise in how we spend our time, O God. Amen.*

**“for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ Acts 17:28**

Paul has stated that God has ordained the boundaries of the nations so that people should seek the Lord, and in feeling for Him, He might be found. He said this while noting that He is not far from each of us. He now explains that saying, “for in Him.”

The word “in” can have various connotations. One of them is to be inside of something else. It can also mean being the product of, such as “In His act of creating, God displayed infinite wisdom.” Further, it can be used to help define something else. For example, “In seven days, I will finish this job.”

Paul is probably saying this in the sense of being the product of, but because of that, it would be inclusive of the thought of being inside of or surrounded by. We are the product of His hand and thus “we live.”

The word means exactly that. It is experiencing the gift of life given by God. We are the product of His act of creation, but we are also being sustained by Him, as it says in Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1. For example –

“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup> And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” Colossians 1:16, 17

God created and He sustains. Further, Paul continues, saying, “and move.” The word signifies the act of moving. It is translated as wagging in Matthew 27:39. In Revelation, Jesus tells the church at Ephesus that He will remove their lampstand unless they repent. However, the word also is used figuratively to indicate the arousal of passions. Ellicott seems to rightly argue that this is the intent here.

This is the only time Paul uses the word. Its other two uses in Acts are by Luke. One is in the sense of provocation and another refers to stirring up sedition. If the first word, live, refers to the physical existence of man, this one would speak of his emotional nature. Remembering that the purpose of Paul’s words is based on the previous verses where man is to seek after God, this makes complete sense.

First, man is created by God and our lives are the product of His hands. Thus, we have a responsibility to search out the One who so fashioned us. Second, our emotions are a part of who we are, and they are to be directed to conduct that would support our seeking after Him. Third, Paul continues with, “and have our being.”

The words are an unnecessary paraphrase. It is a single word meaning “are.” Therefore, an equivalent idea is “and exist.” Not only do we have life as a product of His hand, but our continued existence, from moment to moment is fully known to Him and dependent on Him. This is reflected in Jesus’ words –

“Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. <sup>30</sup> But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

-Matthew 10:29-31

The existence of the sparrow is known to God, the state of the hair on our heads – which is a part of our existence – is known to God, and the number of our days is known to God –

“Since his days *are* determined,  
The number of his months *is* with You;  
You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass.” Job 14:5

Paul’s words indicate the total dependence of man on God. Thus, man should acknowledge that He is reliant on Him and seek Him out. His nearness makes this possible and it is thus man’s duty to perform. With that noted, Paul next goes outside of Scripture to make his point, saying, “as also some of your own poets have said.”

When he says, “your own poets,” he is not referring to Athenians specifically, but Greek-speaking Gentiles whose work was known and quoted among the people. By quoting such a poet, it would lead the Athenians to know that he wasn’t just a wandering Jew, but an educated man who knew Greek literature.

As for the word “poet,” it is introduced into Scripture here, *poiétés*. It signifies a doer or a performer. In this case, because Paul will cite poetry, it refers to a doer of poems. As Paul notes poets in the plural, he is indicating that what he will cite is found in more than just one poet. It was a well-known thought used again by another. The poets are Aratus and Cleanthes. Paul cites their words, saying, “For we are also His offspring.”

In other words, these Gentile writers understood that man is the product of a greater being. The being they ascribe their life to may not be the God of the Bible, but the premise of being the product of a divine being was understood by them.

Aratus was from Cilicia where Paul was from. He lived from 315-240 BC. Cleanthes was from Behram, Turkey, living from 331-232 BC. Concerning this line of poetry, Barnes writes –

“This precise expression is found in Aratus (‘Phaenom.’ v. 5), and in Cleanthus in a hymn to Jupiter. Substantially the same sentiment is found in several other Greek poets. ... Aratus passed much of his time at the court of Antigonus Gonatas, king of Macedonia. His principal work was the ‘Phoenomena,’ which is here quoted, and was so highly esteemed in Greece that many learned men wrote commentaries on it. The sentiment here quoted was directly at variance with the views of the Epicureans; and it is proof of Paul’s address and skill, as well as his acquaintance with his auditors and with the Greek

poets, that he was able to adduce a sentiment so directly in point, and that had the concurrent testimony of so many of the Greeks themselves. It is one instance among thousands where an acquaintance with profane learning may be of use to a minister of the gospel.”

The specific lines of poetry from Aratus state –

“From Zeus begin; never let us leave  
His name unloved. With Him, with Zeus, are filled  
All paths we tread, and all the marts of men;  
Filled, too, the sea, and every creek and bay;  
And all in all things need we help of Zeus,  
For we too are his offspring.”

- Aratus from Phenomena

Cleanthes’ words are almost identical and are in a hymn to Zeus. Paul’s point is that truth can be found in other religions and philosophies and it can be used for the benefit of evangelizing. However, this does not mean that the religion itself is true.

In verse 23, he referred to a Greek altar to show that he was not introducing foreign gods. He does the same here by supporting his knowledge of God with words from Greek writers. They may have been confused about who this God is, but they could not say he was introducing a foreign one. Rather, he is clarifying what was stated by them.

Life application: When evangelizing someone of another religion, asking what that person believes is a good way of helping him process what you are telling him. This is because most people really have no idea about their own religion. They do things because that is what they were taught to do.

This is no different than evangelizing someone who has been in church his whole life but has never been told the simple gospel. Such people go to church and do stuff. But they have no idea as to why they do what they do. It is just a part of their cultural life and so they continue with it.

However, without knowing Jesus, those people cannot have a close and personal relationship with God. Introducing them to what Jesus has done will make this possible. There will no longer be a need to “do” stuff because Jesus has done it all. Be sure to get out and tell people about Jesus – our great Doer!

*Lord God, thank You that Jesus has done it all! He has accomplished everything necessary to reconcile us to You. Now, all we need to do is to believe. May we use wisdom in how we spend our time, and may we get out and tell others about this good news. To Your glory. Amen.*

**“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.**

Acts 17:29

A more literal translation is “Therefore, being the offspring of God, we ought not to think gold, or silver, or stone – an engraving *of* craft and device *of* man – the Divine to be like” (CG).

Paul just finished the last verse in agreement with a quote from a Greek poet, saying, “For we are also His offspring.” With that, he now continues with, “Therefore.”

Saying this confirms that what he just quoted from the poet is true. In essence, “As this is so.” Because it is granted as such, he says, “being the offspring of God.” Paul is initiating a logical conclusion: this, therefore this. Because we are God’s offspring, it is logical that we bear His image.

The word translated as offspring is *genos*. It signifies family, race, nation, kind, etc. Thus, it means that there is an affinity between what is being referred to. Without citing Scripture, he is stating the essence of the Genesis creation account concerning man –

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ <sup>27</sup> So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Genesis 1:26, 27

Paul expects that his hearers would understand. When a cat reproduces, another cat is the result. When an elephant bears, another elephant is produced. He has already told his audience that God made man. Thus, when acknowledging that we are His offspring, it doesn’t mean that we are gods, but that we bear a semblance to Him.

As this is so, he continues with, “we ought not to think gold, or silver, or stone.” These are inanimate things. They have no life or breath in them. They cannot think, they

cannot act, nor can they respond when spoken to. Anything that takes place in their use is because man acts first. That would include “an engraving *of* craft.”

The word translated as “engraving” is first seen here. It signifies a stamp, impress, mark, etc. It is used seven other times, all in Revelation and all referring to the mark of the beast. The word translated as “art” is also first found here. It signifies a skill, art, craft, trade, etc.

It should be evident on the surface that when a man of craft engraves something, he was the one to make the first move. The thing did not call out for being shaped into an image. But more, what is produced has no qualities of the man apart from a physical image. And because God’s image in man is not the physical image of man, as can be deduced from his words of 17:24, 25, then to assign such qualities to God would be absurd. And more, Paul continues with, “and device *of* man.”

The word translated as “device” means a thought or contemplation. As God cannot be seen, it would be ludicrous to think that man could devise something that could be formed into an object representing Him. Again, in Paul’s mind, he is giving the substance of what Scripture has already revealed –

“Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, <sup>16</sup> lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, <sup>17</sup> the likeness of any animal that *is* on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, <sup>18</sup> the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that *is* in the water beneath the earth. <sup>19</sup> And *take heed*, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and *when* you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage. ... <sup>23</sup> Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you. <sup>24</sup> For the LORD your God *is* a consuming fire, a jealous God.”

-Deuteronomy 4:15-19 & 23, 24

Isaiah 44:9-20 gives a brilliant description of the folly of such idolatry and the irrational nature of man who would suppose that producing something in this manner could produce a divine being. Such things are completely opposed to the nature of God. Therefore, no one should consider as such “the Divine to be like.”



The word Paul uses is a neuter adjective, not a masculine noun. The word is *theios*. It is that which manifests the characteristics of the nature of God. HELPS Word Studies says it “ties God's essence to His *self-manifestation, permitting all people to know Him* by observing His *attributes*.” As God manifests Himself through creation, we can deduce things about His divine nature from observing the creation. However, we cannot ascribe the divine to what is created.

To understand this, think of a watchmaker. We can look at a carefully constructed precision watch that was fashioned by a man and we can tell a lot about the man. However, we cannot turn around and attribute the man’s qualities to the watch. The watch was produced by him and it bears the mark of his intelligence, patience, meticulous nature, etc. But the watch itself possesses none of those things. When we ascribe divine attributes to the creation, we err in our thinking.

Life application: Take the time to read Isaiah 44:9-20 and think about how offensive our conduct as humans must be when we do what is recorded there. Imagine what the watchmaker would think if you picked up a watch and started praising it, not him, for its intricate gears and beautifully polished crystal, thanking it for its perfect rhythm and soothing sound as it whirrs in your ears. He would think you had gone absolutely bonkers and he would be offended as well.

This is how God looks at man when he does something even more outlandish by ascribing the qualities He alone possesses to carvings of wood, stone, gold, and so forth. Let us be carefully on guard to give God alone the glory for the magnificent things He has done.

We should look up to Him as greater than our character (morally, spiritually, intellectually, etc.), rather than down to created things, as if they bore His nature. Israel was rebuked for its false gods because they had the special divine knowledge of God presented to them. Paul probably pitied these pagans because they lacked it, even if they should have known better. In his pity towards them, he admonishes them about what is right. In the verses ahead, he will explain the importance of this to them.

*Heavenly Father, help us not to have idols in our hearts but to always find our sufficiency and hope in You. May we be careful to always glorify You for who You are and for what You have done. We thank You and praise You for Your marvelous glory as it is revealed to us in so many ways. Praises to You, O God. Amen.*

**“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, Acts 17:30**

A closer translation would be, “Therefore, indeed, having overlooked these times of ignorance, God now commands all men everywhere to repent.”

Paul has been speaking about the nature of God, contrasting what He is like to what man may suppose. In the previous verse, Paul noted that He is not like gold, or silver, or stone that can be shaped by art and man’s devising. Now, he takes this line of thought and begins to redirect it toward what God expects, saying, “Therefore, indeed.”

In the previous verse, Paul said, “therefore.” He now states it again, stressing it to ensure the thought is offset in the minds of his audience –

“For we are also His offspring.”

“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God...”

“...we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.”

“Therefore, indeed, having overlooked these times of ignorance...”

Paul is shaping his argument to lead to a conclusion. Before he gets there, he is ensuring that those listening will carefully process what leads up to it. Understanding this, he continues, saying, “having overlooked.”

It is a word found only here in Scripture, *hupereidon*. It essentially means to take no notice of or to disregard. Vincent’s Word Studies says, “to suffer to pass unnoticed.” This does not mean that it is either condoned or accepted. But God has allowed man to do what he has done without telling them otherwise that what they are doing offends Him.

Unfortunately, some older translations say, “God winked at.” Depending on how one takes the translation, that can mean a variety of things not intended by the apostle. For example, the KJV used the word “wink” five more times, and they are all with a negative connotation that has nothing to do with what Paul is saying here.

Paul is saying that God has simply not paid attention in a particular manner to what the nations were doing. While Israel was given the law and explicitly told to not conduct themselves in such a manner, punishing them when they did not obey, God allowed the

nations to do what they willed without any warning of the consequences. Thus, without a law to direct the nations, Paul refers to this as “these times of ignorance.”

The article and noun are both plurals, “these times.” In the Bible, there are various dispensations that God has used to work out His redemptive plans. While the nations were doing as they saw fit without any particular direction from God, He had called and made a covenant with Abraham.

From there, He chose a particular line of Abraham’s descendants to continue His redemptive intentions. This led to Israel and eventually the time of the law. The law was given for a fixed and particular set of purposes leading to the coming of the Messiah. In His coming, He fulfilled the law that was given to Israel alone.

With that, the law was set aside and a New Covenant was introduced. This New Covenant was with Israel and the House of Judah, but – unlike the law – it was not limited to them. Rather, it is inclusive of all peoples, allowing them to come into the commonwealth of Israel. Because of this, Paul next says, “God now commands all men everywhere.”

What God is now doing is no longer limited to the nation of Israel and the Jewish people, nor is it limited to the land of Israel or the city of Jerusalem, as if people were responsible to go there to meet with the God of Israel. It is a new direction where anyone at any location can be accepted. However, there is an expectation laid on the people who have carried such incorrect notions about God. That is “to repent.”

The Greek word is *metanoéo*. It signifies to change one’s mind, to think differently, to reconsider. Paul has been speaking about the nature of God. He has noted what God is like and what God is not like. For those who have misunderstood the nature of God, he is telling them that they must change their mind about Him and think differently. Jesus, while responding to the woman at the well in John 4 provides the meaning –

“The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you *Jews* say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.’

<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship

Him. <sup>24</sup> God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.’” John 4:19-24

This is what people are to change their minds about. They are no longer to live under incorrect ideas about what God is like and how He should be worshiped. Rather, they are to change their minds and accept this special revelation of Himself that is proclaimed through the New Covenant. Paul will explain in the next verse how the people can be sure that what he says about God is true.

Life application: Paul never introduced the idea of sin into his discourse. He has only told the people where their thinking is wrong. Elsewhere, he says –

“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.” Romans 3:19, 20

The people of Athens (and by extension the people of the world) had no law from God about idols that could bring about the imputation of sin. Paul states that explicitly in Romans 5:13, saying that “sin is not imputed when there is no law.” Therefore, Paul could not have been telling the people to repent of sin. And, indeed, he was not telling them this. He was telling them to repent (think differently) concerning their faulty ideas about God.

Today, people use the word “repent” in a completely incorrect manner. They equate it to the active ending of something, such as sin. “You must repent of (stop doing) XXX in order to be saved.” That is not the gospel. One is saved by grace through faith and that is in believing the gospel which says that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

Only after being saved will stopping incorrect behavior have any meaning. Be sure to present the gospel without adding the baggage that is often heaped upon people. To add to the gospel is to present a false gospel.

*Glorious Lord God, You have done everything necessary for us to be saved. All we need to do is accept that by believing in the full, final, forever, and finished work of Jesus. May we present this to others clearly and without addition so that they understand what they*

*need to do. Faith! You are looking for faith in Your faithless creatures. What more can we add to what Jesus has done? May we never presume to do so. Amen.*

**“because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” Acts 17:31**

Paul just finished his words about the nature of God by saying that He “now commands all men everywhere to repent.” Paul now provides the reason for this, saying, “because He has appointed a day.”

The verb is not a participle. It simply says, “because He appointed a day.” In understanding the foreknowledge of God, it is known that the future is laid out before Him. The entire timeline of human history is known and events are set to occur at predetermined moments. God knew when the flood of Noah would commence. He knew the day He would part the Red Sea or appear on Mount Sinai before Israel.

The day Christ would be crucified was set by God. This is true with all things. There is nothing that God does not know will occur because He knows how all things will turn out. This includes a particular day “on which He will judge the world.”

The Greek more closely reads, “in which He is about to judge the world.” The word *melló* “signifies the very point of acting” (HELPS Word Studies). Understanding this, there are actually various days of judgment, all combined into the singular “day.”

There is the judgment of sin (the cross of Jesus) for believers when they believe the gospel. There is the Bema seat of Christ where believers will be judged for rewards and losses. There is the tribulation period where it is said in Revelation that judgment has come upon the world. There is the judgment of the nations where the sheep will be separated from the goats. There is the Great White Throne judgment of Revelation. These and other such judgments have been set by God and they will come about at the pre-appointed time. And this will be done “in righteousness.”

There is a set standard by which all things will be judged. That standard is the Lord God Himself. This is seen in Psalm 92:15 –

“To declare that the LORD is upright;  
*He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.*”

Jesus referred to this in John 7:18 –

“He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.”

Jesus was making a general statement about accusations levied against Him, but He was also proclaiming that His doctrine was not His own, but from God. Thus, the righteousness of the Lord is found in Jesus Christ. Paul, understanding this, next says that God’s righteous judgment will be “by the Man whom He has ordained.”

There is no article before “Man.” The words more appropriately read, “by a Man whom He appointed.” Paul defines the coming judgment as being brought about by a Man. He has not yet spoken directly of Jesus at the Areopagus, but he had spoken of him earlier as noted in verse 17:18. He is now proclaiming what God has done by appointing a Man, meaning the man he had previously spoken of, to accomplish His will.

The word translated as “ordained” or “appointed” is *horizó*. It is where our word “horizon” is derived from. If one thinks of approaching time as a horizon, with each moment, a new horizon is seen. Thus, it speaks of designated limits or boundaries.

God has “horizoned” every moment of time and thus all of the scenes and moments of life have been known to Him even before He created. As HELPS Word Studies notes, “This guarantees God works each in conjunction with His eternal purpose.” With this concept stated, Paul next turns to the proof that this will come about, saying, “He has given assurance of this.”

The noun translated as “assurance” literally means “faith.” But it is a set faith, not the act of faith. Therefore, it should read “an assurance.” God has provided the necessary evidence that what He says is true, reliable, and will come to pass. And that is confirmed by an assurance “to all.”

Humanity now has a witness that the God of Israel is the true God and that what He has spoken forth, as is recorded in the Scriptures, is true. As this is so, then all must pay heed. The sign has been given and it is intended that all people must pay heed.

This is why Paul, in just the previous verse, said that God overlooked the times of ignorance by all other nations. They did not possess the necessary revelation of God to necessitate His attention in a particular manner. However, with the coming of Jesus that is no longer the case. All men will be held accountable just as Israel was held

accountable in the past. The necessary revelation of God has been provided and it now pertains to all people. He has proven this “by raising Him from the dead.”

Rather, being an aorist participle, it reads, “having raised Him out of the dead.” It has been accomplished and it is the necessary sign to all people that the judgment of God will come at its pre-appointed time.

Jesus said this to Israel –

“For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to *them*, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. <sup>22</sup> For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup> that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” John 5:21-23

He continues to express this thought again in John 5:24-30. The statement was made and in order for it to be an assurance that can be trusted, God confirmed His words by having raised Jesus out of the dead.

Life application: Everything about future history for the world is tied up in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If the resurrection is true, then it is the sure sign and confirmation to the world that what God has said elsewhere in Scripture – both before and after Christ’s coming – is true. If the resurrection is not true, then another path than what Scripture presents will come to pass.

As the judgment of the world in righteousness is said to be committed to Jesus Christ, then those who hear this message must decide whether they will accept it or not. But more, as believers have accepted that this message is true, and as it has been provided as the sign to the world of its need of Jesus’ salvation, then it is incumbent on the church to get this word out. Without Jesus, only condemnation will result. The sign has been given. It is the assurance to the world that God’s righteous judgment awaits.

*Lord God, may we turn our hearts once again to our need to share with others the message of hope and redemption that is found in Jesus Christ. Without accepting Your offer of reconciliation through Him, only condemnation lies ahead. May our hearts be softened to the plight of the world and may we be ready to share the gospel with all before that day comes. Amen.*

**And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this *matter*.” Acts 17:32**

Paul, while speaking to those at Athens, noted that God had appointed a Man through whom He would judge the world in righteousness. To confirm this was so, Paul noted that God had raised this Man from the dead. Having said that, Luke next records, “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead.”

There is no article before either resurrection or dead. Therefore, one must infer what is the best way of taking this –

- The resurrection of the dead
- A resurrection of the dead
- The resurrection of a dead
- A resurrection of a dead

As the adjective translated as “dead” is plural, the last two would seem to make no sense. One might assume from the plural that this is a resurrection of more than just the Man Paul has mentioned. And yet, Paul has not spoken of any resurrection beyond that of Jesus. Therefore, the plural may be a general way of expressing any resurrection at all.

Most translations go with the first, “the resurrection of the dead.” Several translations say, “a resurrection of the dead.” Only the Weymouth with a bit of a paraphrase for clarity says, “a resurrection of dead men.” Despite being a lone voice, this seems to be the intent. It is the thought of any resurrection at all that suddenly brings about a change.

Since verse 17:22, Paul’s words were going along without interruption, but now it says that “some mocked.” Rather, the verb is imperfect. More correctly, it says, “some began to mock.” In other words, it was at this moment that their attentive ears turned to interruptive jests, which is just what the Greek word implies.

One can see them raising their hands and casting them forward in a dismissive manner and shouting out, “Yeah, right.” If they had tomatoes, they would be tossing them at this point. This would have been most laughable to the Epicureans. In verse 17:18, Albert Barnes was cited noting that, “They denied that the world was created by God, and that the gods exercised any care or providence over human affairs, and also the immortality of the soul.”



Because of their presuppositions about such things, it would be especially incredible for them to accept the words of Paul. However, Luke continues, saying, “while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this *matter*.’”

The thinking of the Stoics was not especially opposed to Paul’s line of reasoning, although it was considerably different from what the gospel presents. In Acts 17:18, Barnes noted that they “prided themselves on their own righteousness.” As this is so, they may have been at least sympathetic to Paul’s words because he had just said in the previous verse that God “has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness.”

One does not need to pride himself in his own righteousness if there is no judgment for righteousness. Rather, if this life is all there is, then righteousness is a rather unimportant trait to pursue. Therefore, it is likely that the Stoics would at least be willing to consider the matter further.

Having said that, the logic of Paul’s argument was such that it could have touched anyone in a positive manner. His words were precise and carefully presented. Anyone willing to set aside what they think they already knew, soberly considering if what Paul said was possible, could be positively influenced by his words.

Those who were at least willing to entertain the possibility of a resurrection from the dead would also be willing to hear him again when the mockers had quieted down and departed for lunch.

Life application: Quite often when talking to others about God’s judgment or some other major doctrine that personally affects people, you will hear something like, “Well, I don’t believe that” or “I don’t think God would do that.” Without being argumentative or flippant, a good response to that is, “If it is true, then what we think doesn’t matter.”

God is God. He is sovereign over all things. He has the absolute right to judge His people and to dispense with His creation as He sees fit. People may mock the resurrection as the definitive proof of God’s impending judgment, but if it is true, their jeers will not change a thing. Paul writes about exactly this attitude in 1 Corinthians –

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written:  
‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.’

<sup>20</sup> Where *is* the wise? Where *is* the scribe? Where *is* the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The cross is a sign that God is serious about judgment. The resurrection proves that judgment has either been meted out on Christ for those to whom it applies or that it lies ahead for those to whom it does not apply.

The gospel says that those who believe are imputed God’s righteousness and they are no longer the objects of His wrath. Those who do not believe remain under the sentence of condemnation. Therefore, if the resurrection is true, all the mocking and disbelief in the world will not change a thing. Use reason and logic with people as you talk to them. In the end, it doesn’t matter what we think. All that matters is what is true. People need to research the matter of the resurrection. It is the dividing line by which all humanity will be judged.

*Lord God, You have done everything necessary to secure our salvation and restore us to You. May we never waffle on our presentation of the gospel. Rather, may we be bold and speak out the truth of what You have done. Jesus Christ died for our sins, He was buried, and He rose again. It was prophesied before it happened, it is testified to by reliable witnesses, and it is documented in Your word after it occurred. May we not fail to get this message out! Amen.*

**So Paul departed from among them. Acts 17:33**

As simple as the sentence is, the translation is lacking in three ways. It says, “And so, Paul went out from their midst.”

The previous verse described the mocking reaction of some of those who heard Paul. Others had said they would hear him again on the matter. With that, it next says, “And so, Paul.”

Some texts omit the word “And” and simply say, “So Paul...” The Greek text used by the KJV and the NKJV includes it, even if they failed to translate it. With that, it next says that he “went out.”

The word translated as “went out” means exactly that, to go or come in or out. Saying Paul departed, as with the KJV and NKJV, gives an incorrect sense of the matter. How long Paul remained at the Areopagus we don’t know. Another speaker may have taken up the center position while Paul retreated from it. What he did was to go out “from their midst,” not depart entirely.

This takes the reader back to verse 22, which said, “Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus.” But he was already at the Areopagus, having arrived there as stated in verse 17:19, “And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus.” Eventually, he was given the opportunity to speak to the forum. At that time, he went into the midst of them.

Now, it is not that Paul departed, but that he has moved out of the place of speaking. He could not have departed from among them because the words of the next verse would then make no sense.

Life application: Translation matters. This short sentence will not change the world if it is incorrectly translated, but it can give the mind an incorrect sense of the flow of movement of the apostle. Here are some variations in the translation of this verse. See how widely different they are and consider how each will affect your thought about what has taken place –

NIV - At that, Paul left the Council.

NLT - That ended Paul’s discussion with them,

BSB - At that, Paul left the Areopagus.

Holman CSB - Then Paul left their presence.

CEV - When Paul left the council meeting,

GWT - With this response, Paul left the court.

Mace New Testament - upon which Paul left the assembly.

ESV - So Paul went out from their midst.

Catholic Public Domain Version - So Paul departed from their midst.

NASB - So Paul went out from among them.

NKJV - So Paul departed from among them.

Weymouth New Testament - So Paul went away from them.

Amplified Bible - So Paul left them.

CSB - So Paul left their presence.

Worsley New Testament - So Paul went out of the assembly.

NET Bible - So Paul left the Areopagus.

CG - And so, Paul went out from their midst.

Haweis New Testament - And so Paul departed from the midst of them.

SLT - And so Paul went forth from the midst of them.

A Faithful Version - And so Paul went out from among them.

Aramaic Bible in Plain English - And so Paulus went out from among them.

ANT - And so Paul departed from among them.

GNT - And so Paul left the meeting.

New Heart English Bible - Thus Paul went out from among them.

Darby - Thus Paul went out of their midst.

BLB - Thus Paul went out from their midst.

Worrell New Testament - Thus Paul went forth out of their midst.

Depending on the source text, the Greek has either seven or eight words in it. Despite that, there are 27 different translations presented here. And this was only from checking 46 Bibles and having provided a personal translation. There are hundreds of versions that were not checked, each with its own nuances and translational preferences. If punctuation and capitalization were considered, there would be even more variations.

Some of these are so off that they are simply paraphrases. Others are incorrect in one way or another. And yet, most convey the sense well enough to be understandable. Don't limit yourself to a single version of the Bible. Rather, read a version in the morning and one at night. When you finish, grab another and start over again. Take time to consider what you read each day and reflect on the precious word that God has given us. In all things, be sure to thank God for it. What a treasure it is!

*Heavenly Father, You have allowed Your creatures to translate Your word. Quite often, we have done a sloppy job of that. And yet, You have allowed it. Help us to be studious and careful about what we accept until we have really checked things out. Be glorified in our study of Your precious word. Amen.*

**However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them. Acts 17:34**

More appropriately, the verse reads, “But some men, having joined him, believed: among whom also, Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman *by* name Damaris, and others with them.”

The previous verse noted that Paul had gone out of the midst of the Areopagus. The meaning was that he no longer was in the place of speaking, not that he had left the forum entirely. The results of his words were a bit of mocking while some wanted to hear him again. However, there were some who were more profoundly affected. That is seen in the next words, “But some men, having joined him, believed.”

The word translated as “joined,” is *kollaó*. It signifies to cling to or adhere to. Thus, it would be to stick like glue. HELPS Word Studies notes it is used “frequently in ancient medical language of the uniting of wounds.”

It is a touching scene. These people had probably been to the Areopagus many times, sitting and listening to one philosopher after another step forward and present his thoughts on creation, existence, the state of man, the afterlife, and so forth. And yet, they sat listening, unaffected by what they heard. They could see through the vain babblings, knowing that things just didn’t fit with what they could instinctively know or logically deduce about the operation of things around them.

And yet, when Paul stepped forward to speak, they suddenly came alive in their spirit. That came by the simple act of belief. What does the word say? Paul explains it in Ephesians 1 –

“In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13, 14

Those now being referred to in Acts 1) heard the gospel of their salvation, 2) believed, and therefore, 3) were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. They came alive in Christ and they knew that the words had changed them. In their excitement, they clung to Paul, certainly with the greatest of joy.

One could argue that the gospel, as stated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4, was not properly presented. But this is not so –

Christ died for our sins. Paul has noted that God overlooked the times of ignorance. The meaning is that what was done was wrong in God's eyes. It was sin, even if that was not responded to by God in judgment. Paul noted that the people needed to repent of their ignorance, but he tied that in with Christ's death. He did not need to explicitly say this because it is inferred in the words, "He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). If Christ was raised from the dead, it meant that He first died. If He died, there was a purpose for that death.

Even if Paul did not explicitly state these things, those who listened to him were able to sufficiently deduce from what he was saying that God had made an avenue to reconciliation with Himself through the death and resurrection of Jesus. But more, it is possible that Paul explicitly said these things and Luke simply didn't record every word Paul said, rather focusing on the main lines of thought. It would be an argument from silence to say otherwise.

With the belief in Paul's message confirmed in some of his hearers, it next says, "among whom also." The reason for this is to show that his words were not limited to those who first asked him to speak, meaning the Epicureans and the Stoics. Though some of them may have believed, at least two are noted by name who were not of them. The first is "Dionysius the Areopagite."

The name is derived from the Greek god of wine-making, orchards and fruit, vegetation, fertility, festivity, insanity, ritual madness, religious ecstasy, and theater, also known as Bacchus by the Romans.

Ellicott notes, "As the constitution of the Court of the Areopagus required its members to have filled a high magisterial function, such as that of Archon, and to be above sixty, the convert must have been a man of some note." Further, the Pulpit Commentary states—

"The earliest notice we have of him in ecclesiastical writers is the well-known one of Eusebius, 'Eccl. Hist.,' 3. 4, in which he says, 'We are told by an ancient writer, Dionysius the pastor of the diocese of Corinth (ob. ), that his namesake Dionysius the Areopagite, of whom St. Luke says in the Acts that he was the first who embraced the faith after St. Paul's discourse in the Areopagus, became the first bishop of the Church in Athens.'"

There are false writings ascribed to Dionysius that are known to be later forgeries. Along with him, it next says, "and a woman *by* name Damaris." James Strong connects the

name to the Greek word *damazó*, meaning to tame or subdue. Thus, he defines it as maybe meaning Gentle. Abarim defines it as Wife or Domesticated.

Chrysostom says in his writings that she was the wife of Dionysius. This is quite possible based on her name. It could be that she took the name Damaris to reveal her new nature under Dionysius. It would be a reasonable explanation for mentioning her by name. Not only was a member of the Areopagus a believer, but his wife also joined him in belief as well.

Along with these two, Luke next records, “and others with them.” These could be of the Epicureans and Stoics or others who sat around waiting to have their ears tickled. Rather than the ears being tickled, their hearts were pricked.

Life application: In reading the narrative, and then comparing it to Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8, there is no difference in the wording. It simply says, “Then Simon himself also believed.” The Bible does not level any other requirements on salvation than this. When the gospel is presented and someone believes, it means that the person is saved. It is not our job to go around questioning this.

However, it is our responsibility to speak to those who are not living in accord with the faith they profess. This is especially so in the church. When someone is obviously violating what is right and proper, it should be addressed. 1 Corinthians 5 speaks of this, giving an obvious example of how to handle the matter.

Let us carefully consider the goodness of God who saves us through the simple act of faith, and then may we be willing to maintain uprightness and purity of the faith among those we associate with. This is important for the continued health of the church.

*Heavenly Father, it is wonderful to know that we are saved by grace through faith in the completed work of Christ. Thank You that we now have restoration with You. May we now do our part in living for You in sincerity and truth all our days. To Your glory. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 18

**After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. Acts 18:1**

Note: The order of the words in the NKJV doesn't follow the Greek. It should read, "And after these things, Paul having departed from Athens came to Corinth" (CG).

Paul has spoken at the Areopagus and a few converts were noted from his time there. Now, with that complete, Chapter 18 begins with, "And after these things."

With his efforts complete, a new direction will now take place. Nothing is said of the length of time he was in Athens, but whenever it was time to move on, Luke next records, "Paul having departed from Athens came to Corinth."

Depending on where he started from and arrived at, it was about fifty miles by land. Thus, it would take about two days to make the trip. If he sailed, it would have been a day's journey. At the time of Paul, it was a Roman colony. There was a synagogue there and it was a city of great commerce. Verse 18:11 says that Paul stayed in this new location for a year and a half. Of the city, Albert Barnes states the following –

"Corinth was the capital of Achaia, called anciently Ephyra, and was seated on the isthmus which divides the Peloponnesus from Attica. The city itself stood on a little island; it had two ports, Lecheeum on the west, and Cenchrea on the east. It was one of the most populous and wealthy cities of Greece, and at the same time one of the most luxurious, effeminate, ostentatious, and dissolute. Lasciviousness here was not only practiced and allowed, but was consecrated by the worship of Venus; and no small part of the wealth and splendor of the city arose from the offerings made by licentious passion in the very temples of this goddess. No city of ancient times was more profligate. It was the Paris of antiquity; the seat of splendor, and show, and corruption. Yet even here, notwithstanding all the disadvantages of splendor, gaiety, and dissoluteness, Paul entered on the work of rearing a church; and here he was eminently successful. The two epistles which he afterward wrote to this church show the extent of his success; and the well-known character and propensities of the people will account for the general drift of the admonitions and arguments in those epistles. Corinth was destroyed by the Romans 146 years before Christ; and during the conflagration several metals in a fused state, running together, produced the composition known as Corinthian brass. It was afterward restored by Julius Caesar, who planted in it a Roman colony. It soon regained its ancient splendor, and relapsed into its former dissipation and licentiousness. Paul arrived there in 52 or 53 ad."



As noted by Barnes, the church at Corinth will be the recipient of two epistles. The state of the city reflects the state of the church that sprang from it. There were many problems that had to be addressed and corrected, but Paul's love for those at Corinth is perfectly evident in his words to them.

Life application: Paul tirelessly moved from one place to the next, understanding where he was needed or when he had accomplished his mission. For whatever reason, his time in Athens was short. On the other hand, he will spend a considerable time in Corinth. We may not leave our own area for evangelizing, but we can still look for opportunities in our area that will be fruitful. However, there is also nothing wrong with consistency.

Just because there is not a lot of fruit evident in a particular area, it does not mean you are not having an effect. Faithfully showing up on a regular schedule brings a familiarity of your face to those you interact with. Eventually, they are going to have the troubles and trials that all people run into. At those times, they are more likely to reach out for advice or help. This can take many months or even years, but it is likely to come.

From there, and depending on how things turn out, others will see the outcome and the ball can begin to roll. Growth in converts can increase quickly at such times. But it took faithful consistency for it to come about. If you are looking to minister to others, talk to the Lord about your efforts and ask Him to direct you. Be patient and yet be forward enough to ensure those you encounter are aware of why you are doing the things you are doing.

Nothing you do for the Lord will go unrewarded by Him. So just keep at it, remembering that if you are doing what He would expect of you, that He is pleased with your efforts.

*Lord God, sometimes it may seem like our wheels are spinning and we are not getting any traction in our spiritual life. But if we are pursuing You and doing what You would approve of, then it must be acceptable to You. And so, Lord, help us to contentedly press on with our efforts. Direct our steps according to Your wisdom and be glorified in how we serve You. Amen.*

**And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. Acts 18:2**

In the previous verse, Paul departed Athens and went to Corinth. Now it says, "And he found a certain Jew."

Rather, being an aorist participle, it reads, “And having found a certain Jew.” Luke is preparing the next thought through the use of the participle. With the knowledge that Paul has come across this individual, Luke next records, “named Aquila.”

Rather than a verb, the word is a noun and would more rightly read, “*by name Aquila.*” On the name, Ellicott says, “The name presents some interesting associations. Strictly speaking, the Greek form is *Ahyllas*, but this is undoubtedly the transliterated form of the Latin *Aquila* (= Eagle). The name appears in a yet more altered form in *Onkelos*, the traditional writer of one of the Targums, or Paraphrases of the Law, then current among the Jews. In Aquila, one of the later translators of the Old Testament into Greek, himself also born in Pontus, and possibly ... identical with Onkelos, we get the Greek form again.”

This individual, Aquila, is seen at other points in Paul’s writings as being his friend, such as in Romans 16:3; 2 Timothy 4:19; and 1 Corinthians 16:19. Aquila means Eagle. Despite being a Jew by birth, he became a convert to Christianity. It next says that he was “born in Pontus.”

Being an adjective and a noun, it would most closely be translated as a Pontian native. Pontus was mentioned in Acts 2:9 as one of the locations where the Jews had gathered from while in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Thus, it could be that he was a convert at that time. It was a province of Asia Minor, situated north of Cappadocia. It was bound on the west by Paphlagonia. Together, Pontus and Cappadocia constituted one Roman province. Peter directed one of his epistles to this area in 1 Peter 1:1.

Of Aquila, it next says, “who had recently come from Italy.” Here is an adverb found only this once in Scripture, *prospatós*. That comes from the adjective, *prospatos*, also found only once in Scripture. That word literally means “freshly killed.” Therefore, in Hebrews 10:20, it describes “‘the new road’ Christ has *successfully inaugurated (the NT era) by the sacrifice of Himself.*” (HELPS Word Studies). Therefore, this adverb signifies lately or recently.

The reason for his having left Italy will be explained in the next few words. For now, it continues by saying, “with his wife Priscilla.” The name Priscilla is a diminutive form of Prisca. She will be called Prisca in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 2 Timothy. Prisca is a Latin name meaning Ancient or Longevity.

With these two noted, it next says, “because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome.” Literally, it says, “because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to

be separated from Rome.” Of this, the Pulpit Commentary says, “Suetonius mentions the fact, but unfortunately does not say in what year of Claudius's reign it took place. His account is that, in consequence of frequent disturbances and riots among the Jews at the instigation of Chrestus, Claudius drove them from Rome.”

With that note, scholars then assume that it was because of the spread of Christianity, taking Chrestus as a variant spelling of Christ. In other words, it was because of the new faith in Christ that was being proclaimed. The assumption then is that conflicts arose between the Jews and the Romans as well as between believers and nonbelievers. In order to regain control of the situation, the Jews were expelled from Rome.

This is defended by variant spellings of the name of Christ that has been found elsewhere. Because of this, lengthy commentaries are then written to defend this scenario. This is possible as Aquila and Priscilla were believing Jews. However, these commentaries ignore the words spoken to Paul in Acts 28 – at Rome – which tend to reveal a curiosity by the Jews about Christianity because they had heard about it but were not well-schooled in what it proclaimed.

It seems unlikely that those Jews, having returned to Rome at a later date, would be willing to entertain Paul's words if they had been kicked out of Rome because of Christianity some years earlier.

What seems likely is that Chrestus was a Jew who stirred up the other Jews for some unknown reason, causing them to be separated from Rome. Regardless of the actual reason for the expulsion, it occurred. Having been expelled from Rome, Aquila and Priscilla left Italy together and Paul found them in Corinth where Luke next records, “and he came to them.”

Having found them, he joined with them. The reason for this will be explained in the next verse. It is the start of a new friendship for Paul as he continues his missionary work, establishing the gospel and continuing to develop churches into places of sound doctrine and a right understanding of the work of Jesus Christ.

As for the verse itself, based upon the evaluation of it, a more literal rendering of it would be, “And having found a certain Jew, *by* name Aquila, a Pontian native, recently having come from Italy, also Priscilla his wife – because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to be separated from Rome – he came to them.”

Life application: Like with the life of Joseph, for whatever reason the Jews were separated from Rome, good came out of what would have otherwise been considered evil to Aquila and Priscilla. Together with Paul, they were able to live and work as they developed their lives in Christ. They will travel to Ephesus with Paul and, as noted above, Paul will refer to them in his epistles, even as late as his second epistle to Timothy.

We may find events that arise in our lives troubling, but later we find out that what happened was actually for a good reason. As believers, this will always be the case, even if we never discover the reason for it in this life. We are sons of God through adoption. As this is so, we must believe that He always has the best in mind for us.

Therefore, when things seem completely upturned and contrary to what we think is best, let us place the matter in the Lord's hands and faithfully acknowledge that we trust Him to do what is right. In this, we will be demonstrating faith in Him and His intentions for us. It may be difficult to do but let us strive to have this attitude at all times.

*Lord God, we know that because of Jesus, You have the very best intention for us. Help us in times of weakness, trouble, and trial, to stand fast on this thought and to remain confident of Your presence in our lives. Thank You that we have a sure and eternal hope because of Jesus. Yes, thank You for Your loving hand upon us. Amen.*

**So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. Acts 18:3**

A more literal translation would be, "And because being of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade" (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul found Aquila and Priscilla. Now it records, "And because being of the same trade."

It is a word found only once in Scripture, *homotechnos*. One can look at the word and get a sense of its meaning. It signifies being of the same trade or craft. Alfred Edersheim, in his commentary on Jewish social life, noted that Jewish guilds always kept together, whether on the street or in a synagogue. Because of this, he would have easily come upon Aquila and Priscilla. In meeting them, they obviously found each other agreeable, and so "he stayed with them and worked."

Luke doesn't dwell on the reason for this, but it is evident that this was their means of living. Paul didn't sponge off of those he evangelized. Instead, he worked with his own hands. He says as much elsewhere –

“I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. <sup>34</sup>Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. <sup>35</sup>I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” Acts 20:33-35

Also –

“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, <sup>9</sup> not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

<sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” 2 Thessalonians 7-10

Paul also refers to his work in 1 Corinthians 4:12 and 1 Thessalonians 2:9. His work in this manner should not be surprising as a large number of Jews throughout history have had particular skills that they possessed and worked with. Jesus Himself is noted by the word *tektōn*, translated by most as a carpenter, but which very well may have indicated a stonemason. As for Paul and Aquila, it next says, “for they were tentmakers by trade.”

The word is *skénopoiōs*, and it is also only found here in the New Testament. It comes from *skéné*, tent, and *poieó*, to make. As for the work itself, Ellicott says –

“The calling was one which St. Paul had probably learnt and practised in his native city, which was noted then, as now, for the rough goat's-hair fabrics known to the Romans, from the name of the province, as Cilicium (= sack-cloth). The material was one used for the sails of ships and for tents, and on the whole, though some have supposed that leather was used for the latter, it seems more probable that this was the material which St. Paul worked at. It may be added that Pontus, from which Aquila came, was also famous for the same manufacture, the material in each case being furnished by the goats which fed upon the slopes of the Taurus, and the mountain ranges of that province.”

Vincent's Word Studies disagrees with this and says, "Not weavers of the goat's-hair cloth of which tents were made, which could easily be procured at every large town in the Levant, but makers of tents used by shepherds and travellers. It was a trade lightly esteemed and poorly paid." Even if the job was one looked down on, this did not appear to bother Paul in the least.

Life application: It is common in today's churches that the pastor is paid entirely by the church. This includes his housing and many other fringe benefits. However, smaller churches may have pastors that might not live very well or who have to work other jobs to pay the bills. But there is nothing wrong with this. If one truly loves preaching, then having an extra job or two throughout the week should be considered a blessing and an honor. As Paul says –

"Now godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. <sup>8</sup> And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content." 1 Timothy 6:6-8

The idea of working in a trade is not unique to the Christian faith, Maimonides says that "the wise generally practice some of the arts, lest they should be dependent on the charity of others." Likewise, Vincent's Word Studies notes, "It was a Rabbinical principle that whoever does not teach his son a trade is as if he brought him up to be a robber. All the Rabbinical authorities in Christ's time, and later, were working at some trade. Hillel, Paul's teacher, was a wood-cutter, and his rival, Shammai, a carpenter. It is recorded of one of the celebrated Rabbis that he was in the habit of discoursing to his students from the top of a cask of his own making, which he carried every day to the academy."

The roots from which the church sprang did not feel it was abasing to do such menial tasks. If Paul could do it and still work tirelessly in the mission field, it should be a badge of honor for pastors, preachers, evangelists, and missionaries to work with their own hands as well.

*Lord God, Your word says that in having food and clothing it should be a source of contentment. We may need a dose of this ourselves in a world where we have to have more and more all the time. Help us to be productive, not feeding off of others, and willing to toil to whatever extent is necessary for this to come about. May it be so, to Your glory. Amen.*

**And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. Acts 18:4**

The verse more literally reads, “And he was reasoning in the synagogue on every Sabbath, persuading both Jews and Greeks” (CG). The previous verse noted the fact that Paul and Aquila were tentmakers. It may seem a sudden diversion to go from that thought directly into this one, but it really isn’t.

Luke is conveying to his reader that Paul didn’t just lounge around all week waiting for the Sabbath. Rather, when he was not involved in telling people about Jesus, he faithfully worked with his hands to support himself. When he wasn’t working, however, Luke records, “And he was reasoning in the synagogue.”

The verb, being imperfect, reveals the ongoing nature of the matter. He made this his usual practice. He worked when it was time to work and then he went to the synagogue and reasoned with those there “on every Sabbath.”

The Sabbath is the Jewish day of rest. It is the end of the week, falling on Saturday. When Paul wasn’t making tents, he was taking the day off and going to the synagogue, reasoning with those there and “persuading both Jews and Greeks.”

As the synagogue was open on the Sabbath, that is the time when the Scriptures could be opened and searched out. It was the time when the Jews were gathered, along with any proselytes and even any Greeks Paul may have encountered and told about Jesus. The word used to describe the Greeks means any Greek speaking person, not just proselytes.

Nothing is said about this synagogue being like those in Berea. There, they were said to have “searched the Scriptures daily” to find out if what Paul was saying matched what the word of God said.

Despite this, at least in Corinth they reasoned once a week when the synagogue was opened.

Life application: It is not uncommon for Jews and Judaizers to point at verses like this one and say, “See, Paul always kept the Sabbath and so should you.” That is not a well-thought-out argument and it does not pass the smell test. First, the place where the scrolls of Scripture were kept was at the synagogue. Therefore, it was necessary to meet

there on the Sabbath. But Paul would also have met there any other days when they were open, as was evidenced already with the synagogue in Berea.

Second, the Book of Acts is a descriptive account of what occurred. It does not prescribe anything. As this is so, it is an illegal move in hermeneutics to impose a standard on believers based on what is recorded there. It is true that one can determine from some accounts what is normative and likely to be continued apart from Acts, but going to the synagogue on the Sabbath, though recorded time and again, cannot be considered a normative practice if that is the only day that the Scriptures can be reasoned over.

Third, and most importantly, Paul clearly refutes this inane argument numerous times in his prescriptive epistles. He does this in Romans 14:5, throughout the book of Galatians, Colossians 2:16-19, etc. If you want proper instruction on what is prescriptive, go to the epistles. If you don't want to get drawn away into the cult of works, know what is said in those epistles and stay away from Judaizers and Hebrew Roots Movement adherents, along with any others who would impose mandates from the Old Testament Scriptures.

*Heavenly Father, You have given us freedom to worship You in spirit and in truth. Please keep us far from those who would put us back under the bondage of legalism and false worship. Thank You that we have an intimate connection with You, anytime and in any place, because we are in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

**When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus is the Christ*. Acts 18:5**

The words of this verse should read, "And when both Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the Spirit, fully testifying to the Jews: Jesus is the Christ" (CG). The previous verse noted Paul having reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, persuading both Jews and Greeks. With that stated, Luke now records, "And when both Silas and Timothy came down."

Paul was in Corinth, living with Aquila and Priscilla. He had gone to the synagogue and reasoned with those who attended each Sabbath. However, with the coming of Silas and Timothy, there is a notable change in the dynamics of what takes place. These two had come down "from Macedonia."

The actual movement of Silas and Timothy is a bit hard to follow. Although unlikely, they may have met Paul and returned to Macedonia or they may have remained in Macedonia. The last time the two of them were mentioned were in Acts 17:14, 15 while



they were in Berea. It is probable that both remained in that area until this point. Once they found that Paul had gone to Corinth, they went there to meet him.

It is believed that 1 Thessalonians was probably written around this time and was then carried back to Thessalonica with whoever accompanied Silas and Timothy. The letter would have been spurred on by the report received by Paul from these two. It is of note that there are some similar thoughts presented in 1 Corinthians 15 and in 1 Thessalonians 4 concerning the return of the Lord and the glorification of the saints. Similarities concerning spiritual gifts are also notable between the two epistles.

With the arrival of these two, it next says that “Paul was pressed in the Spirit.” This seems to indicate that the arrival of Silas and Timothy is what urged Paul to a more direct approach concerning his words about Jesus. He had been in the synagogues reasoning from Scripture, but now with his two companions at hand, he became more emboldened than ever to simply proclaim Christ.

It seems that up to this point, he had tried to reason with his audience, but now he felt that they simply needed to hear the proclamation. Enough reasoning from Scripture had taken place and it may have devolved into an academic study rather than a gospel presentation. Their arrival seems to have changed this. This is probably because of the words of Silas and Timothy about the state of the believers in Macedonia.

In other words, those in Macedonia had readily accepted the words of Paul and they had also remained strong in their faith after his departure. Paul was pressed in his spirit to have the same zeal grow within this congregation as well. The word used to describe this is *sunechó*. It signifies to press together, confine, compel, afflict, etc. The actual meaning will depend on the context. However, it conveys a very strong emotion or feeling.

In this state, it next says he was “fully testifying to the Jews.” The word *diamarturomai* means more than to testify, but to testify all the way through. Paul bore witness and fully defended his stand on the matter that “Jesus is the Christ.”

Some translations, such as the KJV and others, unfortunately read “Jesus was Christ.” Jesus was, is, and ever will be. Saying “was” completely eradicates the idea of the eternal nature of what is presented. The verb is present tense in the Greek and should be rendered as such. And more, various translations, the KJV included, leave off the article by saying, “Jesus was Christ.”

The definite nature of the proclamation by Paul indicates that Jesus wasn't just a Christ, but the Christ. He is the fulfillment of the messianic expectations and the One who had fulfilled them all. He continued in that position at the time of Paul's words, and He continues in that position to this day.

Life application: The subtleties of the word require careful study. Although most translations get the point across about what is being conveyed, they can easily be twisted if someone really wanted to press a matter. Saying "was" in this verse can lead someone to make a faulty statement about the nature of Christ. This is especially so when it is claimed that the translation is perfect and exactly as God intended (as claimed by KJV adherents).

The thought can be rectified by reading other statements in the Bible, but not everyone is going to be so diligent to study the word. This is why there are so many aberrant cults and sects out there. People trust without verifying. When this happens, anything can be injected into their minds concerning what the word is conveying. Read the word! Study the word! Be willing to spend your time researching things from the word that catch your eye.

Don't implicitly trust. Instead, verify! Show yourself approved. With this, the Lord will be pleased.

*Great and awesome God, Your word is so very precious. Help us to seek it out and contemplate it day and night. Even when we are working or on a vacation, we can still think about what Your word told us during our morning study. There is always time to think about what You are telling us. Thank You, O God, for Your precious word. Amen.*

**But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and said to them, "Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." Acts 18:6**

The verbs are in the wrong tense in the NKJV. The verse reads, "And they opposing and blaspheming, having shaken out the garments, he said to them, 'Your blood upon your head. I am clean. From now, to the Gentiles I will go'" (CG).

In the previous verse, it noted that Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and so he testified to the Jews about Jesus being the Christ. Now Luke continues saying, "And they opposing and blaspheming."

The word translated as opposing signifies strong opposition such as opposing the entire makeup of something, organized resistance such as a particular battle array during warfare, people being opposed to something in both principle and in practice, etc. Because the verb is plural, it reveals that this was not an isolated instance. Rather, it was a concerted effort that was brought against him.

The word translated as blaspheming, *blasphémeó*, signifies the refusal to acknowledge good or to speak profanely of sacred things. In this case, they opposed Paul's message by treating his word about Jesus with contempt. The Jews took Jesus' sacred name and the gospel and vilified them. Because of this, Paul's response was, "having shaken out the garments."

To understand the meaning of this act, a short passage from Nehemiah will explain –

"Then I said, 'What you are doing *is* not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? <sup>10</sup> I also, *with* my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury! <sup>11</sup> Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them.'

<sup>12</sup> So they said, 'We will restore *it*, and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say.'

Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. <sup>13</sup> Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, 'So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied.'"

-Nehemiah 5:9-13

The act by Paul would have been perfectly understood by them. He was symbolically asking the Lord to shake them out of their offered inheritance among the saints. This act is not unlike that directed by Jesus in the synoptic gospels. When the message was rejected in a particular city, He told His disciple to shake the dust off their feet and move on. They were symbolically indicating they would have nothing further to do with such a group of people. Along with Paul's symbolic act, "he said to them, 'Your blood upon your head.'"

This would also have been perfectly understood by his hearers. In Matthew 27, at the crucifixion of Jesus, it said –

“Then the governor said, ‘Why, what evil has He done?’

But they cried out all the more, saying, ‘Let Him be crucified!’

<sup>24</sup> When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather *that* a tumult was rising, he took water and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, ‘I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see *to it*.’

<sup>25</sup> And all the people answered and said, ‘His blood *be* on us and on our children.’

<sup>26</sup> Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered *Him* to be crucified.” Matthew 27:23-26

The idea then is that of blood guilt. The Jews who condoned the crucifixion of Jesus had His blood guilt upon them. Those in Corinth had their own blood guilt upon them because of sin. By rejecting the offering of God through the giving of Jesus, their blood guilt remained. This is what Jesus was referring to in John 8 –

“Then Jesus said to them again, ‘I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.’

<sup>22</sup> So the Jews said, ‘Will He kill Himself, because He says, “Where I go you cannot come”?’

<sup>23</sup> And He said to them, ‘You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. <sup>24</sup> Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins.’” John 8:21-24

Understanding this, Paul next proclaimed, “I am clean.” The meaning is, he did not bear any responsibility for their blood guilt. It was his task to share the message of Jesus. He did that but they rejected the offer of reconciliation. He could not force the matter upon them. As such, their guilt remained while Paul was clean in regard to their coming torment. This is not unlike the word of the Lord to Ezekiel –

“Again, when a righteous *man* turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. <sup>21</sup> Nevertheless if you warn the righteous *man* that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul.”

-Ezekiel 30:20, 21

With his proclamation of being clean stated, he then turned to the most degrading thing that could alight upon their ears, saying, “From now, to the Gentiles I will go.” The words are similar to those of Acts 13 –

“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. <sup>47</sup> For so the Lord has commanded us:

“I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,  
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.”” Acts 13:46, 47

The Jews had counted themselves unworthy of eternal life through acceptance of God’s offer of reconciliation. Paul, still adamant that this was the true message, said he would now carry it to the Gentiles. The implication is that the Gentiles who received the word would be accepted by God while these Jews would be rejected. The word would be unconscionable to them. But it was already a word spoken out by Jesus concerning Gentiles –

“Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, <sup>6</sup> saying, ‘Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented.’

<sup>7</sup> And Jesus said to him, ‘I will come and heal him.’

<sup>8</sup> The centurion answered and said, ‘Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>9</sup> For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this *one*, “Go,” and he goes; and to another, “Come,” and he comes; and to my servant, “Do this,” and he does *it*.’

<sup>10</sup> When Jesus heard *it*, He marveled, and said to those who followed, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! <sup>11</sup> And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>12</sup> But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ <sup>13</sup> Then Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.’ And his servant was healed that same hour.” Matthew 8:5-13

As for Paul’s words now, they don’t mean that he wouldn’t go to the Jews at all anymore. Rather, he would no longer go to them in Corinth. He had proclaimed, they had rejected, and he was through with them.

Life application: The opposing and blaspheming of Jesus by the Jews continues to this day. His name is generally held in contempt by Jewish society and especially so among the more religious sects. However, this does not mean that we shouldn’t at least attempt to evangelize them.

As will be seen in the coming verses, just because the Jews of Corinth rejected the message of Jesus, this was not a universal rejection. Some will hear and heed. So be sure to tell the good news to any person that may come across your path. The Lord will deal with those who reject Him. There is no need to feel the guilt of not at least trying on that day.

*Precious Lord God, so many are opposed to the wonderfully good news of Jesus. Sometimes, it seems like it isn't worth the effort to engage a certain group or family because of their resistance to You, but we don't know if there is a tender heart among them unless we step forward and speak. So, Lord, help us to do this. It is never a wasted effort. Yes Lord, embolden us for the task. Amen.*

**And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain *man* named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Acts 18:7**

The translation is more correctly rendered, “And having departed thence, he came to *the* house of someone by name Justus, worshiping God, whose house was adjoining the synagogue” (CG).

Paul had just notified the Jews that he would henceforth go to the Gentiles. True to his word, it next says, “And having departed thence.”

He left their presence, knowing that he had done his duty by going to his Jewish brethren first, and also knowing that he was wasting his time by staying with them any longer. Therefore, in having departed from there, “he came to *the* house of someone by name Justus.”

The name Justus is Latin for Just (or Upright, as in being or straight). The name is used by Jews in Acts 1:23 and Colossians 4:11. Some manuscripts say, Titus Justus. It is then said that he is the same person referred to in 2 Corinthians and/or Galatians. There is no reason to make this leap as both names were not uncommon at that time. Regardless of that, it notes of him that he was “worshiping God.”

It is the same word used five times already in Acts, including of devout women such as Lydia in Acts 16. The meaning is that Justus was either a proselyte or he was a convert to Christianity. The main point concerning him is that he is a Gentile. Paul had gone straight from the Jews to engaging the Gentiles, including entering a Gentile house.

In this, he was clearly demonstrating his convictions that the Gentiles were not to be considered “common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). Concerning the location of the house of Justus, it next says, “whose house was adjoining the synagogue.”

It is a word found only here in the Bible or any other ancient Greek literature, *sunomoreó*.

It signifies to border on or be next door to. What is probably the case is that the ministry was moved to the house of Justus, but Paul continued to live with Aquila and Priscilla. There would be no need for Paul to cut himself off from them just to make a point about going to the Gentiles. Rather, he was simply moving his ministry to a location where the Jews could see his freedom each time they went to the synagogue.

It is a purposeful act on the part of Paul that his teaching would continue within earshot of them, but in a place that they would have been loath to enter because of their attitude concerning Gentiles.

Life application: Despite his statement that he would go henceforth to the Gentiles, he still left the door open to evangelizing the Jews, even in the area of Corinth. He will continue to engage the Jews, having both positive and negative interactions with them. He knew that he could not beat his faith into someone else. He had said what he had to say. They were belligerent against his words, and so he moved on.

This is a good lesson for us as well. We may be extremely passionate about a family member or a friend that we want to see come to Christ. If they have been told the gospel and turned it down, you have done your job. In continuing to harp on someone about their need for Christ, it is not unlikely that you will alienate the very person you hope will convert.

State your words, offer to be there to answer questions in the future, and then be a proper example to them of what you have told them about by living as a faithful Christian, praying for them as it comes to mind. You cannot beat your faith into them, but you can act in a manner that may – someday – remind them of their need for Jesus. When their lives hit a bump or a brick wall, you can reengage them in a manner that may be just what they need at that moment. If you had alienated them through constant nagging, that would not come about. So be patient and be a positive representative of Jesus in the meantime.

*Lord God, help us to be wise in our evangelism of others, including those close to us. Help us to faithfully proclaim the gospel and then allow those who hear to make up their minds accordingly. Give us the wisdom to understand that it is not up to us to convert their hearts. It is our job to present the gospel that can. From there, they have a choice to make. Give us wisdom in this regard. Amen.*

**Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. Acts 18:8**

In the previous verse, Paul moved his teaching to the house of Justus who lived directly next to the synagogue. With that remembered, it now continues with, “Then Crispus.”

The name Crispus means Crisp in its original sense which is Curly or Bent. Abarim explains –

“The name Crispus is identical to the Latin adjective *crispus*, curled (of hair), or uneven and wrinkled. From this adjective comes the verb *crispo*, to curl or to cause to swing — hence our English word crisp for curly potato slices; a crispy leaf is not a leaf that crunches and crackles but a leaf that's curled up on the edges. Our adjective, in turn, comes from the Proto-Indo-European root ‘s)ker-’, to bend or turn, from which also stems the verb κείρω (*keiro*), to shear or shave off (as ostensibly used in ACTS 18:18).”

A pun is likely being made by Luke. In the previous verse, Paul entered the house of Justus (Just or Upright as in being straight). Now, Curly is being noted. He is next noted as “the ruler of the synagogue.” Despite having the article before “ruler,” it does not mean he was the only ruler. Synagogues have more than one at times, as is seen in the gospels where the same word is used, such as –

“Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea. <sup>22</sup> And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet <sup>23</sup> and begged Him earnestly, saying, ‘My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live.’ <sup>24</sup> So *Jesus* went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him.” Mark 5:21-24

Therefore, he may have been one of several rulers or he could have been the only ruler. If one of several, the use of the article would be to distinguish him from any other person who had the same name. Of him, the NKJV says that he “believed on the Lord.”



It is incorrect. Most translations say something similar to this, but there is no preposition in the Greek. It simply says, “he believed the Lord.” What may be the case is that he had heard the word about Jesus and he, like a Berean, checked the word directly. This seems like a sound conclusion because his conversion is specifically mentioned after the note concerning Paul’s entrance into the house of Justus. If he had heard directly from the Lord, Luke would certainly have included that. Rather, “faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). He heard, he verified, and he believed the Lord who gave the word.

Therefore, the pun continues. Next door was Justus who was straight. Now, Curly has been made just, having been straightened out. Isaiah prophesied of such things –

“Every valley shall be exalted  
And every mountain and hill brought low;  
The crooked places shall be made straight  
And the rough places smooth;  
<sup>5</sup>The glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
And all flesh shall see *it* together;  
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” Isaiah 40:4, 5

Along with Crispus, it also says, “with all his household.” As in Acts 10 and Acts 16, the whole house has believed. This does not mean that everyone is saved through one, nor can that be inferred. It means any who believed were saved. It is the belief that is highlighted and which is then responded to: belief = salvation. Because of this new faith in the household of Crispus, it next says, “And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed.”

This is a testimony to the fact that one conversion can lead to many. It does not mean that the belief was in the faith of Crispus. However, it does indicate that the faith of Crispus led to belief in what had been proclaimed concerning the gospel. In other words, seeing the faith of another, especially one who would otherwise be diametrically opposed to what was presented – as indicated by the opposition and blaspheming of the Jews of verse 18:6 – led these people to consider and accept the gospel.

How this happened is not stated, but one possibility is that Crispus was a known figure. Upon his conversion, he took time to explain to those Corinthians who knew him that he had checked his own Scriptures and realized that they foretold exactly what Paul proclaimed. His faith led to the trust of those Corinthians in the truth of the matter and thus to their conversion as well. From there, it says, “and were baptized.”

This means first Crispus and his household who believed and then also those Corinthians who also believed. This is recorded in 1 Corinthians 1 –

“I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. <sup>16</sup> Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”

-1 Corinthians 1:14-17

Paul personally baptized Crispus and Gaius along with the household of Stephanas. What can be inferred is that Crispus may have then had the honor of baptizing his own household.

Life application: The ridiculously inane teaching of hyperdispensationalists is that Christians today do not need to be baptized. 1 Corinthians 14:17 is used as one of their crazy “proofs” that this is so. Twisting Paul’s words, they say that Paul was not sent to baptize, stopping right there and using those words as validation of their nutty theology.

Paul’s point was not that believers did not need to be baptized. Throughout Acts, Paul baptizes people as do others. Conversion after conversion, when someone believes, he or she is then noted as being baptized. It sets up a normative affirmation that baptism is something that was both practiced and accepted as proper because it is in accord with Jesus’ words of Matthew 28:18-20.

Paul’s baptism of Crispus, Gaius, and others demonstrates that baptism was appropriate, but that was not his main line of work. His job was that of an apostle. Someone had to baptize the first converts. Being several in number, Paul did some and it is likely that those who traveled with him did others. From there, the now-converted and baptized Crispus could baptize others. This would leave Paul free to continue his apostolic ministry without interruption.

A problem with the thinking of the hyperdispensational heretics is that it clearly says that the Corinthians who believed were baptized. As this is so, and as they are Gentiles, then there is no logical point in Scripture or in church history where this was no longer the case. In other words, who is the decider of when the practice of baptizing was to end. There is no point for it to be so and there is no instruction in Scripture to override the clear words of Jesus in Matthew 28. The thinking is crass and illogical.

Don't get duped into ridiculously presented arguments like those of hyperdispensationalists. They take verses out of their intended context, form pretexts, and then run with them. This is similar to those who use Jesus' words concerning the law and claim we are still required to observe Moses when He said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets" (Matthew 5:17).

"See! You must observe the law and the prophets!" No! Rather, Jesus continued speaking, "I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." And fulfill it He did. Now, His work can be imputed to anyone who will believe and accept that fulfillment on his behalf. For those who do not, they will not be saved. They can wallow in their own mire of law observance and be rejected by God for their insolent pride against His offer of grace.

*Lord God, help us to think clearly on issues of such great importance as those presented in this commentary. May we never be duped by those who wish to pull us away from either salvation by grace through faith or from obediently following the Lord Jesus via the rite of believer's baptism. These things are not hard to discern, but they are easily twisted by those who hate what You have set before them. May we not be included with such people. May our hearts be directed toward You in faithful obedience. Amen.*

**Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; Acts 18:9**

In the last verse, Paul spoke, people believed, and then they were baptized. With that, it next says, "Now the Lord spoke to Paul."

This is something that has occurred and will continue to occur in Acts. Sometimes it is the Lord personally appearing, and sometimes it is through a messenger. It has happened to others, such as Stephen, Peter, and Cornelius. At the time of his conversion in Acts 9, the Lord appeared to Paul. In Acts 16:9, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia calling for them to come and help them. Now, it specifically says that the Lord spoke to Paul "in the night."

This is the same as the vision from the man of Macedonia. It was specifically recorded as being at night. Likewise, this time it is also "by a vision," or more literally, "through a vision." It can only be speculated just what is being conveyed here, but it is the same word used several times already in Acts. Strong's defines it as "something gazed at, i.e. A spectacle (especially supernatural)."

The Lord appeared to Paul in a recognizable way where he knew it was Him. In His appearing, He then said, “Do not be afraid.” The deduction is that the Lord said this because Paul was afraid and he needed to be reassured that he would bring about the effect the Lord intended. This is answered in the next verse: Do not be afraid / for I am with you.

The obvious question would be, “Afraid of what?” The answer is addressed in the next words where the Lord says, “but speak.” The word is a present imperative. It is a command to speak. Translations vary, but the intent is understood – be speaking, continue speaking, speak out, etc. Paul may have thought that the converts he had were all that would come about and from this point on, there would be little fruit.

The city was pagan and filled with idolatry and immorality. He might have thought he was insufficient to the task of any further evangelization. However, the Lord is instructing him to speak. This is also answered in the next verse: Speak / for I have many people in this city. Paul is being reassured that his words will meet the Lord’s intended effect. This appears to be what Paul is referring to in 1 Corinthians –

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. <sup>2</sup> For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. <sup>3</sup> I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. <sup>4</sup> And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Paul admits his weakness, fear, and trembling. He obviously felt insufficient to carry on the task set before him. He again admits that this is the case in his second letter to them, asking the question for all to consider –

“Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. <sup>15</sup> For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. <sup>16</sup> To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? <sup>17</sup> For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.” 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

In those words, Paul asks the question rhetorically as a way of showing the immense responsibility laid upon the one who shares the gospel message. It is a two-edged sword that will lead some to life and some to death. The words when transmitted will lead to either eternal life or eternal damnation.

Who would take such a responsibility lightly? Who would even be willing to speak such words, knowing what the result could be? Paul implies here that it is the grace of God alone which enabled him to pronounce the eternal destiny-deciding words. He felt insufficient, but the Lord bolstered his confidence with this night vision. Continuing His words, He says to Paul, “and do not keep silent.”

Not only was he commanded to speak but he is exhorted to not be silent. One can speak and then take a break, but the Lord tells Paul to do otherwise. He is to both speak and not stop speaking. His words will be effective and the Lord will be with him in the process.

Life application: Today, we do not need such a vision from the Lord. The Bible is complete. The trepidation Paul experienced is something that others may experience. A missionary goes off to Thailand, for example. Upon arrival, the question may be, “How can I be effective in the task set before me?” If that person has read the account of Paul in Acts, he will know that if the Lord is with him, exactly what is intended by Him will come about.

The very words recorded in Acts and the epistles are given to remind us that such fear is unfounded. It is because these things are recorded there that we should not expect visions from the Lord. He has sufficiently demonstrated that His plans are being worked out. Because we have the Bible, we can know that even in our insufficiency, the Lord’s guiding hand is with us and it is fully sufficient to get the job done.

*Lord God, because we have Your word, everything we need to proceed in life is documented and available to us. Nothing is lacking for us to accomplish what is set before us except to read and know what the word says. If we apply its contents to our own walk before You, we will be set for every challenge. Thank You for Your precious word. Amen.*

**“for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” Acts 18:10**

The Lord has come to Paul in a vision at night and told him to not be afraid, but to speak and not keep silent. His words now continue with, “for I am with you.”

The words are especially emphatic, “For I AM with you.” There is absolute assurance that Jesus is with Paul and will be with him. As noted in the previous verse, this is said in support of what was said there: Do not be afraid / for I am with you. The Lord acknowledges that he is with Paul and that his efforts will not lead to disappointment or harm. The Lord next explains to Paul how he knows he will be safe, saying, “and no one will attack you to hurt you.”

The meaning is correct, but it more literally says, “and no one will set upon you to harm you.” The Lord already knows, in advance, that Paul will not be molested while evangelizing and teaching. With this understood, the Lord next says, “for I have many people in this city.”

The Greek literally reads, “for people are to me many.” This then is not an explanation of how Paul knows he will be safe, as if those people will protect him. Rather, they are words supporting the words of the previous verse: Speak / for I have many people in this city.

In other words, these are not only people who have been saved, but people that the Lord knows will be saved. Paul is not to be disheartened over having a minimal effect in his evangelistic efforts, especially toward his Jewish brethren. Instead, he is to be certain that his words will be welcomed by the Gentiles and there will be a great harvest.

Concerning these words, Albert Barnes rightly contrasts Paul’s efforts in Athens with those in Corinth. He also gives several other well-thought-out points to consider –

We may learn from this:

1. That God has a purpose in regard to the salvation of sinners.
2. that that purpose is so fixed in the mind of God that he can say that those in relation to whom it is formed are his.
3. this is the ground of encouragement to the ministers of the gospel. Had God no purpose to save sinners, they could have no hope in their work.
4. this plan may have reference to the most frivolous, the most guilty, and the most abandoned, and ministers should not be deterred by the amount or the degree of wickedness from attempting to save them.

5. there may be more hope of success among a dissolute and profligate population, than among proud, cold, and skeptical philosophers. Paul had little success in philosophic Athens; he had great success in dissolute Corinth. There is often more hope of converting a man openly dissolute and abandoned, than one who prides himself on his philosophy, and is confident in his own wisdom.

Life application: Looking at the first ten verses of the chapter, the despondency of Paul, leading to the need for the vision of the Lord, can be seen.

- Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.
- He stayed with Aquila and Priscilla and worked, thus he had to support himself.
- He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. Unlike in Berea, there was only a weekly, not a daily, interest in searching Scripture.
- Only when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia was Paul finally compelled to testify that Jesus is the Christ.
- They opposed him and blasphemed.
- Paul set up next to the synagogue, and Crispus and his household believed, but with the opposition to the message, the synagogue would remain unavailable to him.
- A harvest among the Greeks was coming about, but Paul certainly mourned over his “countrymen according to the flesh” (Romans 9:1-3).
- Jesus came and informed him that there was a great harvest to be expected in the city. The implication is that the transition from Jew to Gentile was increasing and this was to be expected. It would be the direction of the church henceforth.

Paul was expending himself in a city of pagans after having left a city filled with idolatry and empty philosophy. His own people of the flesh had all but rejected his efforts of evangelism. Those few converts from his class and ethnic group were slow in coming. But he had himself required a divine visitation in order to be converted and so he shouldn't be surprised by the lack of converts. He must have been concerned about the direction of how things were going. But the Lord came and assured him that what was taking place was exactly as he should expect.

Even though Jesus had told him he was to go to the nations (the Gentiles), Paul always went to the synagogues first, but the increasing disdain for his message surely affected him. However, knowing Jesus' words, he was discovering that what was transpiring was the new norm. God's plan extended beyond anything he had anticipated.

The influx of Gentiles was now understood to be a long-term proposition. With this knowledge becoming solidified in him, he will continue to become more effective and much bolder in his ministry. The church being built was according to the Lord's plan and therefore his efforts were worthwhile and not a waste of time or energy.

*Lord God, we can learn so much from studying and contemplating Your word. When we may feel ineffective and our efforts for You seem to be gathering little attention or bearing little fruit, You are there, using them according to Your wisdom. Help us to continue with our tasks, even if they seem small or unimportant. If they are done for You, we know that You will use them in the most effective way. Thank You that Your word reveals this. Amen.*

**And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.**  
Acts 18:11

The last two verses detailed Paul's vision of the Lord. He was informed that he was to keep on speaking and he was given reassurance that all would be ok. With that, it now says, "And he continued *there*." The word is *kathizó*. It literally means "to sit down." Figuratively then, it gives the sense of dwelling, remaining, abiding, etc. It corresponds to the Hebrew word *yashav* which carries the same general meanings.

It is as if he sat in the overseer's chair, monitoring, leading, and teaching the church. The Geneva Bible says that in former times the bishop's seat was named from this. It shows that Paul not only dwelt there, but he 'rested' there. Instead of being depressed, anxious, or fearful, he was now in a relaxed state.

He understood that God was working in a new direction that did not have to be either exclusively Jewish or even have a majority of Jews. Rather, he was now accustomed to the fact that Gentiles were taking the predominant role in the church. This content state of "sitting down" is next said to be for "a year and six months."

A year and a half allowed for the church to get established and for doctrine to begin to set in. This also allowed for the establishment of sister churches in the area. There is another church close by, in Cenchrea, that is mentioned in Romans 16 where it says –

"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, <sup>2</sup> that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also." Romans 16:1, 2



It is also implied in 2 Corinthians 1:1 as well, where it says, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia." Cenchrea is in Achaia. It is during his time in Greece that Paul wrote his epistles to those in Thessalonica as well. Thus, they are the earliest dated letters found in the New Testament.

This year-and-a-half lasted until the next verse where things were no longer so restful. That will be described in verses 12-17. Then, in verse 18 it will say, "So Paul still remained a good while." In other words, Paul's total time at Corinth was actually longer than a year and six months. The only place that he is recorded as staying at longer is in Ephesus which Acts 20:31 says was for a period of three years.

During this first year and a half, it next says that he was "teaching the word of God among them." Paul not only evangelized and started churches in the area, but he took careful time to instruct the new believers in the word of God. He also had Crispus, the synagogue ruler, which surely would have been a real help for the long-term health of the church.

Life application: The church at Corinth became a highly dysfunctional church after Paul's departure. There was a lot of division along with many other problems. It's hard to imagine that not being the case without the epistles to refer to. They help remind, correct, admonish, and encourage us today.

Without those, it would be easy to divide up over pet peeves, misremember what was said, etc. Now, however, we have the epistles. When problems arise, it is generally because the epistles are either ignored or they are misinterpreted or intentionally misused. All members of the church should be familiar with them. Reading from Romans to Philemon, which are Paul's named epistles, only takes a very short time. Even a slow reader can read them in no time at all.

From there, they should be read again at least a couple of times a year. If the pastor is competent, he should be referring to them constantly in his writings or in his Bible studies and sermons. The more they are referred to, the more familiar the congregants will be with what is in them. When conflicts in doctrine arise, they should be referred to and any disputes should be laid out for consideration.

The problem with such things is not that there is insufficient information in the word to direct the church. The problem is that the word is neglected or mishandled. Keep studying the word, keep referring to it, and be aware of what it says. God has given it to

us to keep the church healthy and away from those who would take the church down unfriendly avenues.

*Glorious Lord God, may we make the Bible a priority in our lives. In holding it close to our daily lives, referring to it, considering it, carefully analyzing it, and cherishing it, we will avoid many pitfalls in our walk with You. Help us to be diligent in our pursuit of Your precious and sacred word. Amen.*

**When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, Acts 18:12**

The previous verse noted that Paul continued in Corinth for a year and six months, teaching the word of God among the people. Now, it says, “When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia.”

Rather, the verb is a present participle, “And Gallio being proconsul of Achaia.” Gallio is described by Albert Barnes –

“Gallio, who was now deputy of it, was brother to L. Annaeus Seneca, the famous philosopher, who was preceptor to Nero; his name at first was M. Annaeus Novatus, but being adopted by L. Junius Gallio, he took the name of the family. According to his brother's account of him (s), he was a very modest man, of a sweet disposition, and greatly beloved; and Statius (t) calls him Dulcem Gallionem, "the sweet Gallio", mild and gentle in his speech, as Quintilian says.”

Luke notes that at this time he was the proconsul of Achaia. This is the first mention of Achaia in Scripture. It was a Roman province that contained almost all of Greece. Ellicott says, “This word, in its largest sense, comprehended the whole of Greece. Achaia proper, however, was a province of which Corinth was the capital. It embraced that part of Greece lying between Thessaly and the southern part of the Peloponnesus.”

During Gallio's time as proconsul, Luke notes that “the Jews with one accord rose up.” The action described is from a word found only here in Scripture, *katephistemi*. It is a word that is also not found in the Greek Old Testament nor in any ancient Greek writers. It gives the sense of standing against another. Older Bibles incorrectly say “insurrection.” However, an insurrection is against a ruling body, not a guy you disagree with. As it next notes, “against Paul.”

As has been the case several times in Acts, the Jews' jealousy at Paul's success, and their inability to refute his words concerning the coming of Messiah, had them all steamed up. A similar event occurred in Daniel 6 where the governors and satraps rose up against Daniel, thronging king Darius. As for Paul, remembering that his letters to those in Thessalonica were written during his time in Greece, one can see the bitterness that had arisen between the two parties in his first letter to them –

“For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they *did* from the Judeans, <sup>15</sup> who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, <sup>16</sup> forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up *the measure of* their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.” 1 Thessalonians 2:14, 20

The greater number of Jews had rejected the message of Jesus being the Messiah while the Gentiles had openly embraced it in ever-increasing numbers. What the Jews had been unable to do for many years with established synagogues, Paul had done in a short amount of time. And more, Paul did not mandate any type of conversion to Judaism. Rather he openly preached against it. This infuriated them. Because of this, they stood against him “and brought him to the judgment seat.”

The meaning is to the bema seat of Gallio. They probably did this because he was new and hoped that his inexperience in this position would work on their behalf. They had surely concocted a charge against him concerning his diversion from Jewish law. Where their teaching was accepted as a legitimate expression of the Roman-approved religions, they wanted what Paul was teaching to be cut off as illegitimate.

Life application: What happened to Paul in his day is what is coming about again in our own time. The proper expression of worship concerning Jesus is derived from obedience to Scripture. However, churches around the world are actually of the attitude that those who hold to Scripture are the problem.

For example, everything homosexual and perverted is becoming the norm in major denominations. And yet, there is no provision for such things in Scripture. Despite this, these apostate bodies are actively accusing those who hold to Scripture of being the ones who are intolerant and aberrant concerning proper Christian values.

Eventually, this will become so pervasive that these greater bodies will openly come against those who faithfully adhere to the word and attempt to have them cut off from being considered Christian entities. The unholy tide is rushing in their favor, and so this is not mere speculation, but rather a logical conclusion concerning what lies ahead. Be prepared to stand on your faith from a biblical perspective. It may cost you dearly, but heck, it is well worth it in the long run.

*Heavenly Father, the time has arrived when what You have set forth in Your word concerning our conduct is no longer being tolerated. It seems inevitable that those who hold to what You expect of us will be increasingly persecuted for their faith. So, Lord, be with us and give us the strength to endure whatever comes against us. Help us in our weak state to be strong in You. Amen.*

**saying, “This *fellow* persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.” Acts 18:13**

In the previous verse, the Jews had stood against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat of Gallio. Their words are now given, “saying, ‘This *fellow* persuades men.’”

The word translated as persuades is found only here in Scripture, *anapeitho*. It gives the sense of inciting, as if Paul is forming his own insurrection by teaching something that stirs up others. That incitement is then defined by them as “to worship God.”

This is the main subject of the incitement. It is not the worship of God itself, however, that they are up in arms about. Rather, it is the manner of doctrine by which Paul taught others to worship God. To fully define his supposed inappropriate worship, they next say, “contrary to the law.”

This is not directly speaking of the Law of Moses. Rather, Gallio is a Roman proconsul. Thus, the Jews are trying to say that Paul’s doctrine is not in accord with Roman law. The worship of God through the Law of Moses was accepted as *religio licita* by Rome; it was considered acceptable under Roman Law.

The Jews, however, are saying that what Paul is teaching is not in accord with their law and therefore it is not in accord with Roman law. Hence, it must be *religio illicita*, meaning an illegitimate religious expression.

In other words, Judaism is the overall umbrella for worship by the Jews. Under that umbrella, there were many sects, such as the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, etc. However, Paul was a Christian – a Christ follower. The Jews were attempting to

disassociate this sect from the protection of the overall umbrella approved for the Jews. In doing so, the faith would be considered an unapproved form of worship by Rome, and thus “contrary to the law.”

Life application: What does it mean to be a true Jew? Paul explains it in Romans 2 –

“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. <sup>26</sup> Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? <sup>27</sup> And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, *even with your written code* and circumcision, *are* a transgressor of the law? <sup>28</sup> For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; <sup>29</sup> but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.”

-Romans 2:25-29

A true Jew is a Jew who is not merely circumcised in the flesh, but who is also circumcised in the heart, by the Spirit, through faith in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, replacement theologians take Paul’s words and say, “We are circumcised in the heart and therefore we are true Jews.” This is a fallacy known as a category mistake.

A Gentile who believes rightly in Jesus is, in fact, circumcised in the heart. But this does not make him a Jew. He remains a Gentile. Paul never speaks of Gentiles as anything but Gentiles. He refers to Jews as Jews. This goes back to Romans 2:17 where he specifically begins to address the Jews. Paul is making a theological point about what it means to be a true Jew, not what it means for a Gentile to become a Jew through faith in Jesus.

Keep the categorical boxes straight. In so doing, you will not look ridiculous when making an absurd claim that you are something you are not. If you are a Gentile, you are a Gentile. Live with it.

*Glorious God, thank You that because of faith in Jesus, each of us is precious in Your sight, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, men or women, rich or poor, or any other such earthly division. If we have called out by faith, accepting the gospel of Jesus, we are pleasing to You. What an honor and a blessing to be Your children because of that. Thank You, O God. Amen.*

**And when Paul was about to open *his* mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. Acts 18:14**

Paul has been taken before the judgment seat of Gallio and has been accused of persuading men to worship God contrary to the law. With their accusation stated, it next says, “And when Paul was about to open his mouth.”

It is a present participle, more correctly reading, “And Paul, being about to open the mouth.” The meaning is that Paul was just about to speak in defense of himself. However, without even being given the opportunity to get a word out, it next says, “Gallio said to the Jews.”

The obvious meaning is that what they have stated to him either first needs clarification, more information, that he is uninterested in what has been presented, or some other similar idea. The charge against Paul is insufficiently addressed for him to even allow Paul to speak. With that initial address complete, he next says to them, “If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews.”

There is a stress that is left out of the translation. It more rightly says, “If, indeed, it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews.” It isn’t that he doesn’t care about being thorough in his job, and it isn’t that he doesn’t care about their complaint because they are Jews. Rather, he doesn’t care about their complaint because it has nothing to do with his jurisdiction.

The word translated as “wrongdoing,” *adikéma*, is introduced here. It speaks of a matter doing evil, committing iniquity, doing wrong, etc. This wrongdoing can be a crime in a society or it can be an offense against God, such as in Revelation 18:5 where Babylon’s iniquities are remembered by God.

The second word, translated as “crimes,” is found only here in Scripture as well as in classical Greek, *rhadiourgéma*. It comes from *rhadios*, meaning easy or reckless, and *ergon*, work or a deed. Thus, it is to work recklessly. Added to it is the word wicked. Hence, it would be an action of wickedness that is recklessly worked out. One can think of thugs on the street who are skilled at doing wrong.

Gallio has noted that such things are within his purview. He then bolsters that by saying, “there would be reason why I should bear with you.” One gets the sense of Gallio being impatient with the Jews over such a petty matter, and it is probable that this was not his

first encounter with their whining. They had made themselves intolerable to him and he was fed up with it. This seems likely based on what lies ahead in the narrative.

Life application: Gallio rightly placed the matter back on the Jews where it belonged. They were bringing a matter forward that was obviously between them and Paul and had no bearing on civil matters.

In the church, such things are to be handled by the church. This is explicitly stated in Scripture. If a matter arises between believers that needs mediation, it is to be handled by a body of believers. This extends even to civil matters. Paul explains this in 1 Corinthians 6:1-7. Take time to read those verses and consider what they say.

If you are wronged by a fellow believer, Paul says that it would be better to accept the wrong or let yourself be cheated than to take such matters before unbelievers. Before doing anything rashly, consider the words of Scripture and take your actions in accord with what is recorded there.

*Lord God, give us wisdom in how we handle our interactions with other believers. May we do our very best to faithfully uphold the sanctity and sacredness of Your word at all times. May our actions not bring the name of Jesus into disrepute. Help us with this. May our actions always glorify You. Amen.*

**“But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look *to it* yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such *matters*.”** Acts 18:15

Gallio has just stated to the Jews that if the matter they had presented was something within his jurisdiction, he would put up with them. But he refused to be a judge of what they had brought forward. With that, he next says, “But if it is a question of words.”

Rather, it is singular – “But if it is a question concerning a word.” Paul preached a word concerning God. There was no reason for Gallio to get into semantics over how the Jewish faith was interpreted. He was not a religious scholar and had no care for listening to the two sides play Scripture tennis as they lobbed one verse or text across the court while the other lobbed a different one. Next, he says, “and names.”

It seems apparent that Gallio was aware of the Christian claim that Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews. If he had heard that, then he had heard counterclaims bandied about. “No! Jeremiah the prophet said...” or “But the prophet Zechariah said.” Each would claim a

name from one of the prophets claiming the Messiah would be given a particular name. Maybe some Jews, as it is to this day, heralded a famous rabbi as the Messiah.

Gallio had heard enough to be completely uninterested in such squabbles. Next, he says, “and your own law.”

The Jews had come forward saying, “This *fellow* persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.” They were attempting to disassociate what Paul taught from their religion, thus making what Paul taught illicit under Roman law. But Gallio knew better and shoved Paul’s stand right back in their faces by saying “your own law.” He has clearly noted that what Paul is preaching was an extension of Judaism. Thus, it is thus a legitimate form of worship according to Roman law. With that, he next says, “look to *it* yourselves.”

Rather, the verb is future, “you will see *to it* yourselves.” In other words, “This is not going to be addressed here. I know you will continue to bicker over this, and so you will see to it after you depart, but not now.”

He has no doubt based on his past experiences with the Jews and their whining about Jesus that he is not going to give them any foothold in his court. They will do what they are going to do, but they are not going to do it with his court’s concurrence. This will be exactly seen in just two verses. For now, he next says, “for I do not want to be a judge of such *matters*.”

The Greek is emphatic, placing the word “judge” at the beginning of the statement, “Judge I of these not intend to be.” The matter is not within the jurisdiction of his seat, even if he could wade into it to try to help resolve it. Rather, they were on their own and would have to deal with it accordingly. It is a wise move because this is how Pilate got boxed in during the trial of Jesus. Gallio completely removes himself from such a possibility.

Life application: In the church, it is as common as bristles on a brush for people to argue over the true name of Jesus. They will adamantly condemn others for saying “Jesus” and then argue whatever name they think He should be called – Yeshua, Yahshuah, Yehoshua, etc. ad nauseam, as if that is the point and purpose of their faith.

But the Lord is both the Messiah of the Jews and the Christ of the Gentiles. A person named Charlie will be called Karl by Germans, Carlos by Hispanics, Chuckles by his close friend, and Chahdee by Asians who have difficulty with the whole “r” and “l” thing. Only



a Charlie-dolt would be upset about the variety of names he is called, as long as he is called on time for dinner.

Jesus will not be unhappy with you if you use the name suited to your language. He is the One who divided the languages in the first place. Don't get caught up in the ridiculous. Rather, honor the Lord with your life and He will be pleased with that. And, by the way, the correct Hebrew name is Yeshua.

*Jesus, precious Lord Jesus, thank You for being the Savior of all mankind. May we honor You with our lives and bless You with our lips in whatever language You have given to us. Be glorified in our love and devotion to You, O exalted One! Amen.*

**And he drove them from the judgment seat.** Acts 18:16

Gallio just completed his words to the Jews about their appeal against Paul. He wants nothing to do with it. Therefore, Luke next records, "And he drove them from the judgment seat."

In this statement is a word found only here in Scripture, *apelaunó*. It is not found in the Greek Septuagint either, but it is used in the same manner as Luke uses it by the classical writers Demosthenes and Plutarch. The Pulpit Commentary says, "It implies the ignominious dismissal of the case, without its being even tried."

Although we can't know what the word fully implies, it was probably first accompanied by a curt note of dismissal –

"Now beat it or I'll have you thrown out."

That may have been followed by a warning from Gallio as well –

"And don't bring this nonsense to me again or you'll regret it."

It may have even been accompanied by a nod to the lictors, indicating that they should come forward and escort the Jews out of the tribunal.

As for the judgment seat, it is, as seen elsewhere, the word *béma*. Again, the Pulpit Commentary gives a short description, saying it "was properly the 'raised space,' or 'tribune,' on which, in the case of a consul, proconsul, or praetor, the *sella curulis* was placed on which he sat and gave judgment. It was usually a kind of apse to the basilica.

In Matthew 27:19; John 19:13, and, indeed, here and elsewhere, it seems to be used, generally, for the judgment-seat itself (see Acts 25:10).”

Life application: The case has been presented and the decision has been rendered. As has been the case, and as will be the case throughout Acts, Christianity is considered a religious expression derived from the faith of the Jews. It is not something different entirely but is so closely associated with their faith, based on the Law of Moses, that it was considered a legitimate religious expression under Roman rule.

This is important to remember. God has ensured, right in His word, that this is to be understood. It is thus a huge shame that so many within the church attempt to disassociate the church from the teachings of the Old Testament. This happens in varying degrees as well.

Some churches limit their focus solely on the New Testament. Some will take anything seemingly too Jewish in the New Testament and say it only applies to the Jews. An example of this is to say that the seven letters to the seven churches are written to end times Jews and not to the church. Their main argument is that the symbolism is all Jewish – lampstands, mentioning of synagogues, noting Balaam, etc.

The problem with such ideologies is that Jesus is Jewish. He came through the people of the Old Testament, He came under the law, and He came in fulfillment of their prophecies. Faith in Him cannot be ripped out of that context. When we see the lampstand, we see a foreshadowing of Jesus in typology.

The stories of the Old Testament, the implements of worship under the law, the sacrifices of the temple, etc., are all anticipatory of Him. To cut ourselves off from studying those things is to leave a complete void in our understanding of who He is and of what He has done.

This does not mean we are to return to the worship of the Mosaic Covenant, as others teach, but we are to know how things worked under it so that we can then understand Jesus’ fulfillment of those things. Be sound in your understanding of dispensational theology, be willing to study each of the dispensations, and while doing so, consider how each aspect of it points to the Person and work of Jesus.

The Bible, from beginning to end, is about Jesus. Cherish it and study it all the days of your life! In doing so, there is wonder and delight.

*Lord God, what a wonderful treasure Your word is. Help us to understand it more fully with each reading through it. Fill us with the knowledge of Jesus that is so richly on display in its pages. Thank You for Your precious word! Amen.*

**Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things. Acts 18:17**

Gallio just drove from his judgment seat those who made a petition against Paul. With that noted, it next says, “Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes.”

Some manuscripts do not say Greeks. Further, the verb is an aorist participle. So, it either says –

“And all the Greeks, having taken Sosthenes...”

Or,

“And all, having taken Sosthenes...”

It is not necessary to take this person as being the same Sosthenes mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:1. It is not impossible that it is so, but if it is the same person, he would have had to have converted after the events that now take place. At this time, he is noted as “the ruler of the synagogue.”

The meaning is that either the Jews turned on their own synagogue ruler, which is hard to figure out why they would do this, or that the Greeks came against him for having brought a case forward against Paul when it was obvious he had done nothing wrong. The latter seems more likely and it is from this perspective that the words will be evaluated.

Paul had been in the area for a year and a half and he would have been known as a man of integrity and uprightness. He associated with the Gentiles, did not expect them to be circumcised or converted, and proclaimed the message of salvation to all freely. On the other hand, the Jews distanced themselves from the people, expecting converts to become Jews. In seeing the Jews’ treatment of Paul, they took their ruler, “and beat him.”

The verb is imperfect. To give the sense of the action, “were beating him” or “began to beat him” would be preferable. The Greeks seized him and started pounding on him for his failed accusations against Paul. And this was done “before the judgment seat.”

Whether these Greeks were converts or not, and whether they knew Paul personally or not, it is evident that they were not fans of the Jews. Charges had been brought against Paul, the charges accused him of something that was untrue and that had nothing to do with Gallio’s jurisdiction, and the Greeks who witnessed the matter were miffed at what they had seen. But more, one gets the sense that Gallio was thoroughly fed up with them and their conduct.

The Greeks, seizing upon this, realized that nothing would be done if they beat Sosthenes up, even right in front of Gallio. This they did, but Luke next notes, “But Gallio took no notice of these things.” Again, the verb is imperfect, “And Gallio was not caring about these things.”

Although nothing is stated in the text about the reaction of the Jews to Gallio’s decision, because all people react to such things in their own way, it can be speculated that the Jews showed disdain for the ruling, even if they didn’t verbally state it. The Greeks, being fully aware of what transpired and probably seeing the negative attitude of the Jews after Gallio had decided, were moved to teach them a lesson. Gallio was indifferent to this and so Sosthenes got a pounding.

Life application: In Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 it says –

“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and *I know* the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan.” Revelation 2:9

“Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.” Revelation 3:9

The Bible says that all people are either under the dominion of the devil or they are under the rule of Christ. There are no other options. To this day, the Jews have rejected Jesus as a nation, even if there are individually believing Jews. Any synagogue that gathers in the world that is not one directed to Jesus is, by default, a synagogue of Satan. Those in attendance are no closer to God than a gathering of Hindus, Muslims, or Buddhists.

Jesus' point is that those in synagogues who have not come to Him still claim that they are the true worshippers of God. They rely on Moses, the Talmud, Jewish tradition, etc., claiming that they have the true and proper worship of the Lord. But they have rejected Jesus and so He rejects them. He told them this explicitly –

“You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it. <sup>45</sup> But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. <sup>46</sup> Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? <sup>47</sup> He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.” John 8:44-47

Sosthenes got a good whooping in this life. And unless he later came to Jesus, he will bow before those he persecuted in the next. This will be true of all who have persecuted saved believers in Christ. When you read about those martyred for their faith, or if you are persecuted for your faith, know with all surety that those wrongs will be made right. Jesus will reward those who are His faithful, and He will repay those who have persecuted His own.

*Lord God, we have a job to do while we are here. Urge us to talk to all who have not yet heard the good news of Jesus. Whether Jew or Gentile, if they have not accepted His gospel, they cannot be pleasing to You. May we be bold in telling others about what He has done and the gift of grace that is extended to all because of it. Help us to speak out while there is time. Amen.*

**So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. Acts 18:18**

The words are more closely translated as, “Now Paul, having remained many days more, having taken leave of the brothers, sailed away to Syria – and with him Priscilla and Aquila – having shaved the head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow” (CG).

In the last verse, Sosthenes had taken a pounding from the Greeks, right in front of Gallio. With that remembered, it next says, “Now Paul, having remained many days more.”

The exact timeframe is left unstated, but one can get the sense of several months at least. With the matter concerning the accusation of the Jews resolved, along with the pounding Sosthenes received, the times were again favorable for Paul to work unhindered among the Greeks. However, eventually, the time came for him to leave, go to Israel, and then finally come to the church in Syrian Antioch. That departure from Corinth is seen in the continued words, “having taken leave of the brothers.”

Paul eventually had to extend his farewells to the brethren in Corinth. It must have been a difficult thing for him to do, having been there for such a long time, but he would also be pleased that he could leave them to run things on their own. Unfortunately, the context of 1 Corinthians is an epistle being sent to a highly dysfunctional church. However, at this time and under his watchful care, he was able to leave them and journey forth. In having taken his leave of them, it next says he “sailed away to Syria.”

As noted above, this was not a straight sail to Syria, but the final leg of this particular journey. With that, it notes, “and with him Priscilla and Aquila.” Priscilla is noted first. Four times they are seen together, including this verse, Romans 16:3, 1 Corinthians 16:19, 2 Timothy 4:19. She is mentioned first three times. There is speculation as to why this is, but no definitive answer is available. Despite this curiosity, it next says, “having shaved the head in Cenchrea.”

The question that is raised among scholars is, “Who shaved his head?” The Greek is ambiguous enough to mean either Paul or Aquila. Aquila is the nearest antecedent and it would explain why he was mentioned after Priscilla. However, the context of the overall thought is focused on Paul. Because of this, the words are often taken as parenthetical. Despite this, some translations, such as the Latin Vulgate, say it is Aquila. The Syriac identifies it as Paul.

Either way, the shaving of the head was in Cenchrea. This was the port of Corinth. In other words, the shaving of the head is at the place of departure. Strong’s notes that the name Cenchrea is probably from *kegchros*, meaning millet. As for the act of shaving, it next says, “for he had a vow.”

This is surely not a Nazirite vow as found in Numbers 6, but rather something like what is mentioned by Josephus as “customary for persons in any affliction, viz. to make a vow that, for thirty days previous to that on which they intend to offer sacrifice, they will abstain from wine and will shave off their hair” (Pulpit Commentary).

What seems to be suggested is that the hair was cut as the result of having been safely delivered from the afflictions faced in Corinth. In other words, this is the fulfillment of a vow, not an act to initiate a vow. As Cenchrea was the town at the entrance to the haven belonging to Corinth, Paul (or possibly, but less likely, Aquila) was acknowledging the safe deliverance promised by the Lord. This is why “Cenchrea” and “vow” are specifically mentioned in the same thought.

Though not a Nazirite vow, the same process is seen. After the completion of the vow, the hair is cut off. If this was a Nazirite vow, the hair would have been cut off at the temple in Jerusalem and a set ritual would take place. Nothing of that is noted here or later concerning this vow. In other words, this cutting of the hair was an act of gratefulness to the Lord for something that had been vowed before, similar to what Jacob had said to the Lord in Genesis 28:20-22 –

“Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, <sup>21</sup>so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. <sup>22</sup>And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.’”

As such, this is a vow of conscience, not a matter of law. The vow was uttered, and in thankfulness for the petition having been granted, the hair is cut.

Life application: The Old Testament has places where vows are spoken of and the necessity to fulfill them. For example –

“When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. <sup>22</sup>But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. <sup>23</sup>That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth.” Deuteronomy 23:21-23

The Psalms refer to vows being fulfilled by the one who made them. A valid question is, “Are Christians allowed to make vows?” Another question is, “Are Christians required to fulfill vows?” The answer to the first is, “Yes.” A person can make a vow between himself and God, himself and a friend, etc. But it must be considered that a vow is something that binds a person to what he has promised.

Borrowing money for a loan is a type of vow. “I am promising to pay back this money.” This vow is usually put into writing as a means of holding the person responsible. As for fulfilling vows. This becomes a lengthy subject depending on the context. If a person makes a vow prior to being saved that is contrary to Christian life, he obviously cannot perform that vow. “I vow to support the edicts and commands of the gang I have joined, up to and including killing our rival gang members.”

In Christ, a new direction must take place. However, if vows are made after becoming a Christian, and remembering that the idea of a “vow” extends to all aspects of our lives, such as marriage, borrowing money, being an employee, and so on, then we need to be responsible and fulfill our obligations in the capacity that we have promised.

This is more certain because Jesus, Paul, and James each refer to a Yes being a Yes and a No being a No. Paul’s is less specific, speaking of personal words and actions, but it is a precept that was understood concerning reliability. In other words, we are to be so trustworthy as followers of Christ that when we say Yes, it is a vow in and of itself. Honesty and integrity are to be the guides of our actions before God and men.

*Lord God, may we be responsible followers of Jesus, fulfilling the words that come forth from our lips. We know that when we fail, we are forgiven, but help us to not fail in doing what we have promised. Help us in our daily walk to do so. Be glorified in our conduct, O God. Amen.*

**And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. Acts 18:19**

In the previous verse, Paul left Corinth along with Priscilla and Aquila. While in Cenchrea, he cut his hair because of a vow. Leaving Cenchrea, which is the port from which they would have sailed, it next says, “And he came to Ephesus.”

Of this journey, the Pulpit Commentary states –

“No voyage across the Aegean was more frequently made than that between Corinth and Ephesus. They were the capitals of the two flourishing and peaceful provinces of Achaia and Asia, and the two great mercantile towns on opposite sides of the sea. (Howson, vol. 1:454).”

They also note that the voyage would take from ten to fifteen days. As for Ephesus, this is the first mention of it in Scripture. Abarim says that the name is derived from the



Hittite name Apasa. That comes from *appa*, behind or after which is related to the Greek word *epi*, on or upon. They define the meaning as “Later Place,” or maybe “Place Very Much at the Back.” Their reasoning for this is that it is at the mouth of a river on the coast. Thus, it would be comparable to Land’s End or The Boondocks.

Of the city itself, Ellicott notes –

“It had been one of the early Greek colonies on the western coast of Asia Minor. It fell under the power of Alyattes, King of Lydia, and his successor, Croesus. It had from the first been celebrated for the worship of Artemis ... and her Temple, with its sacred image, and stately courts, and its hundreds of priests and priestesses of various grades, was visited by pilgrims of all nations. It was one of the cities in which East and West came into close contact with each other, and the religion of Greece assumed there a more Oriental character, and was fruitful in magic, and mysteries, and charms.”

As for the words, “And he came,” some translations say “they” instead of “he.” This would be because of the next clause, “and left them there.” As the focus is on Paul, saying “he” is probably the correct rendering. Regardless of this, after the arrival in Ephesus, one of two things occurred:

1. Paul left them at the arrival point and – as was his usual custom – he went seeking after his countrymen. If this is what the words are referring to, then the narrative continues with the next words, “but he himself entered the synagogue.”
2. The words “he left them there” are followed by a parenthetical set of verses that end in verse 21 – “And he came to Ephesus, and left them there ... And he sailed from Ephesus.”

Either way, the next thought in the narrative is his entering into the synagogue. Being an aorist participle, it properly reads, “And he himself, having entered into the synagogue.” Despite all the grief that he had repeatedly suffered from his own Jewish countrymen, one can see the desire he had to tell them of what he knew. One can almost sense the passion of the words he will later write to those in Rome –

“I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, <sup>2</sup>that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. <sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh.” Romans 9:1-3

It is because of this burning desire for them to know their Messiah that he sought them out. And so, having entered into the synagogue, it next says he “reasoned with the Jews.” The verb is not one of ongoing action, but that he went in and reasoned as in a transient act. The verses ahead will explain why he didn’t stay longer, but he at least made the effort to go in and make himself and his position known to these Jews.

Life application: If you are traveling, do you seek out a church to attend while you are in the area? Or, if your church has streaming online services, do you take advantage of attending with them even when you are traveling?

It’s hard to figure that anyone would take a vacation and say, “We are not going to church while we are on it,” but some people do this. If your priority is your vacation, your priorities are out of whack. You don’t need to go on a set day or a set time, but simply ignoring fellowshiping with others because you are vacationing speaks volumes about your priorities.

Do you eat while on vacation? If so, why? What is the purpose of eating? It is to be fed. While on vacation, go to church.

*Heavenly Father, help us to always make church attendance a priority in our lives. Even if we have other things to do, this is one thing that we can do to honor and worship You, to learn about You, and to fellowship with others. May our priorities, which reflect the state of our hearts, be set on You. Amen.*

**When they asked *him* to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, Acts 18:20**

In the previous verse, Paul entered the synagogue at Ephesus and reasoned with the Jews. He must have had an initial positive effect on them because it next says, “When they asked *him* to stay a longer time with them.”

The verb is a present participle, “And they, asking for more time to remain with them.” This is not uncommon. When Paul would go to the synagogues, they usually did not reject him outright. Rather, they would have him return on subsequent Sabbaths, or they might even study with him daily. Curiosity about the Messiah, especially if He had come, would have been a topic of delight to the ears of those in attendance.

It is usually later that the Jews would start to argue against him. This would be after they observed Paul’s desire to evangelize the Gentiles while placing no burden on them concerning circumcision, law, etc. It is at this point that their heads would steam up and

eventually their lids would blow. However, in this instance, their asking him to stay resulted in a negative response. As it next says, “he did not consent.”

The word translated as “consent” is found only here in the New Testament, *epineuó*. The word is, however, found in classical Greek medical literature. It is derived from *epi* (upon) and *neuó* (nod). Thus, it is to give assent or agree to. In this case, they got no agreeable nod to their request. The reason is coming in the next verse.

Life application: In Acts 16:6, it said, “Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.” Instead, the missionaries were called to Macedonia. Now, after so much time has lapsed, Paul has entered Asia and spoken forth his words about Jesus.

However, at this time, his words are cut short because of another pressing matter. Despite this, he will return and a great and effective ministry will arise. Eventually, a letter will be written to the church from Paul which is now known as the book of Ephesians. Also, Jesus will address this church in Revelation 2, using them as the example of the church that has left its first love. Despite this, they will have positive words spoken of them as well.

There may be times in your own life when you want to do something and you are hindered from doing it. And yet, later you get a foot in that door and are able to really start something great. Once this happens, you may look back and say, “If I had initial success in this, it would have ultimately failed because of this or that.” You couldn’t see it at that time, but later you are able to see why God’s timing was perfectly set forth for later success.

Remember this when you hit snags along the road of life. Just because you are frustrated from accomplishing something now, it doesn’t mean you have failed. It may be that the Lord is keeping you from failure. Be sure that if you are in Christ, He is looking out for your ultimate good. This is certain.

*Lord God, how amazing it is to occasionally stop and evaluate life as it has gone by and to see those times that seemed so frustrating, but now seem like propitious moments where You have guided us away from disaster. We can’t see it, but You can. Help us to be people of faith who faithfully follow Your leading through this life that we are living. May we be willing to accept that You are guiding us according to Your wisdom. Amen.*

**but took leave of them, saying, “I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.” And he sailed from Ephesus.**  
Acts 18:21

In the previous verse, Paul did not consent to staying longer in Ephesus. That thought continues now with, “but took leave of them.”

They had asked him to stay longer, demonstrating that his reasoning with them was sufficient to pique their interest and to bring them to a desire to hear more. However, his pressing business called him away.

As for the words “took leave of them,” it is the same word just used in verse 18:18 where Paul took leave of the brethren at Corinth. This time it would be less difficult as he was probably invigorated at having found an opening in Ephesus and knowing that he could come back and continue with his evangelization of those in the synagogue. Next, he explains the reason for his needed departure, “saying, ‘I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem’”

This would probably have made them more determined to believe that he was a sincere follower of the truth. Why would a charlatan be so devout in his religious duties and yet promote falsity? As for the feast, this may be the Passover. However, it could also be Pentecost. Either way, he may have intended to meet up with many others coming for that feast as well as meet with the church in Jerusalem.

If this was for Pentecost and he missed that, the next feast would not be until Tabernacles in the fall. Traveling at that time of year would be far more dangerous. Regardless of which feast, he was determined to make it, and so he was urged within himself to be in Jerusalem. Despite this, he next says, “but I will return again to you, God willing.”

This will occur as is recorded in Acts 19:1. As for the words, “God willing,” despite being an apostle, he had no true idea from day to day what the Lord planned for him. This was true in Acts 16 when he and those with him were frustrated from going into Asia. And without the vision of the man from Macedonia, he would not have known to head in that direction.

For him to speak confidently about a return to Ephesus, and then not return as indicated, would say a lot about his state before the Lord. But more, James poignantly explains the reason for Paul’s words –

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; <sup>14</sup> whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. <sup>15</sup> Instead you *ought* to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ <sup>16</sup> But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.”

-James 4:13-17

It is arrogant to claim a right to the future that one does not possess. Even if God promised Paul twenty more years of life, unless he also specifically promised him a return to Ephesus, it may be that his final twenty years would be spent ministering in Rome or Spain. Unless something is specifically revealed by the Lord, we must leave the future in His hands. With that understood, the verse ends with, “And he sailed from Ephesus.”

With these words, Paul’s second missionary trip is essentially ended. The next two verses are a part of the travels back to Antioch, but the substance of the mission trip is now behind him.

Life application: Other than the moment in which we presently exist, we have no idea what will transpire next. The ground could quake under us and the roof could then fall on us – life over. The future is known only to God, and we are to leave that unknown sea of time up to His will. In invoking His will, we can then follow the admonition of Scripture and say, “we shall live and do this or that.”

Both life and what is done with that life are up to God’s allowances. However, this is not a fatalistic approach to the future by any stretch of the imagination. Two things are occurring in James’ words –

1. If the Lord wills, we shall live (solely a decision of the Lord).
2. If the Lord wills, we shall do this or that (based on the granting of the first statement that we shall live, we will then act with the freedom to choose what we will do).

The concept of free will in man is seen throughout Scripture, and it is revealed even in our acknowledging His sovereignty over the future. The Bible does not portray the fatalistic view of Islam or various other religions. Nor does it portray the autocratic rule of God – even in salvation – which is held to by Calvinism. Instead, it reveals that God is

wholly sovereign over all things, and yet He has factored in our free will desires and actions. This is seen for example in Paul's words, such as in 1 Corinthians 4:19 –

“But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power.”

Paul freely chooses to come to those in Corinth, and yet He understood that the Lord may not will him to do so. There is a synergism that is being displayed in the life of man who works within the confines of God's overall sovereignty.

Allow God to be God and place yourself under His guiding hand in all you do. Never arrogantly boast about the future but give room for Him to be glorified as the One who controls time and all that occurs within it, even as He allows you to choose your path in the process.

*Lord God, we know that our lives are directed by Your overarching hand of providence. And yet, You allow us to act freely in what decisions we will make. When our desires and decisions align with Your overall plan for us, then we will get what we wish. When they don't, then we will be directed according to Your purposes for us. So, why should we worry? Everything will come out as it should because we are in Christ and thus Your children. Amen.*

**And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.** Acts 18:22

Luke uses participles to keep the motion rolling along. The verse more accurately reads, “And having landed at Caesarea, having gone up and having greeted the church, he went down to Antioch” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul took leave of those in Ephesus, noting that he needed to keep the coming feast in Jerusalem. He did, however, commit to returning if it was the Lord's will. With that, it now says, “And having landed at Caesarea.”

Probably to show the hurried nature of Paul's travels, Luke skips all of the interim stops that would have been made as the ship traveled the long distance from Ephesus to Caesarea. He will continue to convey almost nothing about what Paul does for what would be an extended period of time, brushing over many major events in just two verses.

Upon arriving at Caesarea, he would probably have visited friends there, maybe including Philip the Evangelist who will be introduced in Acts 21. Or it might be that he secured passage to Jerusalem and went right there. As it next says, “having gone up and having greeted the church.”

All of his time in Jerusalem is summed up in five Greek words. Even the name of the city is left out of Luke’s narrative. And yet, there would have been a considerable number of things he did, including spending a week enjoying the feast he had mentioned in the previous verse to those in the synagogue in Ephesus. Likewise, he had family in Jerusalem that he surely would have visited. Also, during that time, there surely would have been long periods of telling all that had happened in his previous years of travel. Despite that, Luke next records that after this, “he went down to Antioch.”

Some scholars believe this is the time when the events of Galatians 2:11-14 occur. As noted in the commentary on Acts 15:35, that is unlikely. Rather, Paul would have received his welcome and then he would have surely spent a great deal of time repeating all that he had been up to over the past three years, just as he would have done in Jerusalem. Despite this, these words are all that is recorded concerning the trip to the church that sent him forth with Silas some three years earlier (Acts 15:40).

Life application: The amazing brevity of Luke’s words now is instructive. God is revealing to us things that are pertinent to our spiritual lives. Despite the considerable time involved in the trip from Ephesus to Jerusalem and then on to Antioch, nothing that occurred was relevant to the redemptive narrative that is found in the pages of Scripture.

This may have been Luke’s way of expressing Paul’s desire to get back onto the mission field, but it is ultimately information that was inspired by the Holy Spirit. In just a few verses, Paul will again be in Ephesus, and the narrative of his time there will slow down to a crawl as minute details of events are brought forth by Luke.

Pay heed to these things as you read Scripture. We are being given just what God feels we need to understand the history of the church and the unfolding of His plan of the ages for His people. At this point in the narrative, God is moving away from having His attention on Israel, Jerusalem, and the Jewish people and onto the Gentile areas of the world.

The next time Paul is in Jerusalem, Luke will spend a great deal of time explaining the events that take place. And yet, those details will confirm this movement from Jew to

Gentile and from Jerusalem and Israel to the nations beyond. Contemplate such things and know that we are being given valuable insights into the very mind and heart of God.

*Heavenly Father, Your word is an incredible journey through the history of mankind as it reveals how we are being brought back to a close and intimate relationship with You once again. May we carefully and methodically consider each detail of this precious treasure all of our days. Thank You for this wonderful word! Amen.*

**After he had spent some time *there*, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. Acts 18:23**

The verse more precisely reads, “And having stayed some time, he departed, passing through successively the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples” (CG).

Paul’s journey had taken him to Caesarea, up to the church, and then down to Antioch. With that remembered, it now says, “And having stayed some time.” Without giving any further specifics, only guesswork can be made as to how long he remained in Antioch. However, if it was an extended period, Luke’s normal way of describing it would be something like “many days.” Therefore, the time spent in Antioch was probably not very long. With that, it next says that “he departed.”

This now begins Paul’s third and final missionary journey beginning as the first two from Antioch. From there, Luke immediately records that he was “passing through successively the Galatian region and Phrygia.” These were areas already visited by him as is recorded in Acts 16:6. There it said –

“Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.”

Galatia is mentioned first this time because it is the region that he would travel through first if traveling by land from Antioch. As he traveled through these areas, it says that he was “strengthening all the disciples.”

This was a necessary thing to do. The book of Galatians shows the utter dysfunction that occurred at one point after Paul had left them, falling into the trap of the Judaizers. Hence, it was right that he would stop at the churches and ensure they were being faithful to the Lord, holding fast to His grace. It is a main point of Paul’s writings and it was surely the main point of discussion at each church he visited.



At the same time, he would have instructed them concerning not falling into the trap of license. Just because the believers were not under law, they were not to take advantage of their freedom and engage in the lusts of the flesh. Because of his love for all of the churches, one can imagine Paul repeating the same admonition to each church that he will speak to those in Ephesus as recorded later in Acts concerning this matter –

“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. <sup>31</sup> Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Acts 20:29-31

Paul was adamant that works of the law were excluded before God as a means of pleasing Him. And yet, he was just as adamant that the churches were to remain pure, holy, and free from works of the flesh.

Life application: Of the contents of Paul’s travel on this journey, which will arrive at Ephesus in Acts 19:1, the Pulpit Commentary says –

“St. Paul went straight from Antioch to Galatia, passing through the Cilician Gates and by Mazaca, or Caesarea, as it was called by Tiberius Caesar, in Cappadocia, and not visiting the Churches of Lycaonia. He proceeded from Galatia through Phrygia to Ephesus. The distance from Antioch to Tarsus was one hundred and forty-one miles, from whence to Tavium in Galatia was two hundred and seventy-one miles, making the whole distance from Antioch to Tavium in Galatia four hundred and twelve miles, or about a three weeks' journey including rest on the sabbath days. From Galatia to Ephesus would be between six hundred and seven hundred miles. The entire journey would thus be considerably more than a thousand miles, a journey of forty days exclusive of all stoppages. Six months probably must have elapsed between his departure from Antioch and his arrival at Ephesus.”

Depending on how long he stayed with each church, the duration may have been even longer. It is unknown if he had a horse, if he traveled in a wagon, or if he walked. Regardless of how he went, the distance was long and would have been exhausting each day, but he pressed on because of his love for the gospel and his desire to share it with others.

How about your time with the Lord? Are you too busy to give Him time each day to be in His presence reading His word? Are you remembering Him as you take your meals,

receive the daily abundance of His open hand of grace, or interact with others? Is the beauty of a sunrise sufficient for you to thank Him for what you have beheld?

Remember the Lord in all you do. Don't pack Him away for an hour or two on Sunday morning but be with Him in your heart and soul all day every day. With every joyous moment, or in every testing or trial, allow your mind to include Him in what is happening. Live a life of faith by being faithfully aware of His presence at all times.

*Glorious God, You are with us whether we acknowledge it or not. You know every moment of our existence and it is up to us to either include You in our thoughts or exclude You from them as You see our lives unfold. Help us to remember Your presence and to live in accord with it at all times. May we be people of faith who are always faithful to You. Amen.*

**Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. Acts 18:24**

The words now form an insert into the narrative to introduce a new figure into the Bible. While Paul is going through the areas of Galatia and Phrygia, the figure is introduced so that when he meets with Paul, their two accounts will properly align. Understanding this, it now says, "Now a certain Jew named Apollos."

The name Apollos is derived from the pagan deity Apollon, meaning the sun god. It is from the same source as Apollonia which is a place in Macedonia noted in Acts 17:1. The name Apollos may be a shortened form of a longer Greek name, such as Apollonius or Apollodorus.

This person will be noted twice in Acts, six times in 1 Corinthians, and then once in Titus. Outside of these verses, nothing more is known of him. He is next noted as having been "born at Alexandria." Of this location, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown says –

*"...the celebrated city of Egypt on the southeastern shore of the Mediterranean, called after its founder, Alexander the Great. Nowhere was there such a fusion of Greek, Jewish, and Oriental peculiarities, and an intelligent Jew educated in that city could hardly fail to manifest all these elements in his mental character."*

This evaluation then explains the next words, saying he was "an eloquent man." The word in Greek is *logios*. It signifies being gifted with learning. It also speaks of one with excellent oratory skills. Vincent's Word Studies explains further –

“The word is used in Greek literature in several senses. As λόγος [logos] means either reason or speech, so this derivative may signify either one who has thought much, and has much to say, or one who can say it well. Hence it is used: 1. Of one skilled in history. Herodotus, for example, says that the Heliopolitans are the most learned in history (λογιώτατοι) of all the Egyptians. 2. Of an eloquent person. An epithet of Hermes or Mercury, as the god of speech and eloquence. 3. Of a learned person generally. ...the scripture-learning of Apollos is specified in the words mighty in the scriptures, and his superior eloquence appears to have been the reason why some of the Corinthians preferred him to Paul.”

The comment about Apollos being preferred by some in Corinth is found in Paul’s first epistle to them where the church was divided in who was the best example to follow. Because of his eloquence, it is assumed that some in the church preferred following Apollos. Not only did he possess the ability to eloquently convey his thoughts, but it also notes of him as, “*and* mighty in the Scriptures.”

Rather, the Greek contains a present participle, saying, “being mighty in the Scriptures.” In other words, he had a deep knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. Of this, Albert Barnes rightly says, “The foundation was thus laid for future usefulness in the Christian church.”

This is the purpose of introducing him at this point. When someone will soon play a prominent role in the ongoing narrative, he or she is often introduced in advance. Then, at the right time, that person is brought directly into the ongoing narrative. Suddenly introducing Apollos as Luke has done means that this will be the case with him in the verses ahead. For now, it notes of him that he “came to Ephesus.”

Earlier in the chapter, it noted that Paul indicated that he would return to Ephesus –

“When they asked *him* to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent,<sup>21</sup> but took leave of them, saying, ‘I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.’ And he sailed from Ephesus.” Acts 18:20, 21

From there, the account hurriedly rushed through Paul’s trip. At this point, he has left Antioch and is in the region of Galatia and Phrygia. At the same time, Apollos is introduced and he is at Ephesus, the place Paul committed to returning to. Without looking forward, one can be reasonably assured that these two will meet up in Ephesus. What type of meeting is unknown. Maybe they will be rivals, fighting over points of doctrine. Maybe they will become close friends as Paul and Timothy have done. But it is

reasonably assured that the two will be brought into the same account in the narrative in the not-too-distant future.

Life application: One of the biggest mistakes made by people looking for a church, or of churches in the selection of the pastors, is that they look, first and foremost, for a person who is a skilled orator. There is nothing wrong with good oratory skills. But they can also be a source of great encouragement or stirring of the soul by those who hear well-spoken sermons.

Another similar mistake occurs when people look first and foremost for a pastor who is incredibly intelligent and articulates his thoughts in a remarkably logical and methodical way. There is nothing wrong with this approach either. Some people or congregations are so well developed in their thinking that having this type of presentation really edifies them.

However, the problem with such selections is derived from the thought “first and foremost.” All of the oratory skills in the world are wholly useless to a church if they are not properly aligned with Scripture. Likewise, being extremely well versed in the Greek language or in the structure of literature means diddly if evaluations of such things are torn out of their proper context.

What should be the first and foremost consideration is, “How well does this person know, understand, and care about Scripture?” Without this considered, nothing else really matters. To be properly and excitingly orated into heresy can only lead to sadness. To be presented with meticulous analyses of Scripture that are not based on what is contextually proper will only lead to faulty conclusions and aberrant doctrine.

If a person does not know Scripture well and if his understanding of it is not orthodox, he shouldn't be given two seconds of your time. Don't look at externals! How he is dressed, what he looks like, where he went to school, what type of degree he possesses, etc., are all not to be thought of as primary considerations. Understanding of, and adherence to, sound doctrine should be looked for before anything else.

Remember this and don't get caught up in fallacious thinking. Innumerable people have been swept up into cults and aberrant sects because they failed this first and primary consideration.

*Glorious Lord God, please direct us to leaders who are mighty in Scripture and who handle it properly. We have our part in the selection of our leaders, so help us to be well-*

*versed in Your word as well. Fill us with the strong desire to be fully aware of what Your word is conveying before we select those who we will appoint over us. If they are sound in such things, only then should we consider their other qualities. Keep us on the straight path in this matter. Amen.*

**This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. Acts 18:25**

The previous verse introduced Apollos, noting that he was an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures and that he had come to Ephesus. Luke next records, “This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord.”

The verb being imperfect gives the sense of “He was being instructed.” He didn’t just get instructed at a certain point, but his instruction was ongoing in nature. He continued pursuing the knowledge of “the way of the Lord.”

These words are both technical and descriptive. The faith was called “the Way” at this time (Acts 9:2, for example). At the same time, it is technical in the sense that he understood the doctrine of the Lord. Today someone might say, the “religion” of Christ in a comparable sense. Therefore, he knew both what Jesus taught and he knew what was taught concerning the Lord. Next, it says of him, “and being fervent in spirit.”

The word translated as “fervent” is *zeó*. It is an onomatopoeia. It describes the sound of boiling water. It means to bubble over because it is hot enough to boil. Figuratively, it means showing great zeal or being keenly passionate, as if one is boiling with great interest or desire. It is found only here and in Romans 12:11.

The words “in spirit” surely refer to his spirit, not the Holy Spirit. He was zealous for his doctrine and instruction. The words “spoke” and “teach” are in the imperfect tense and should be rendered as “speaking” and “teaching.” He continuously did these things. One can imagine Apollos simply exuded with his love of telling others about the Lord and explaining the wonderful things He has done. Therefore, it next says that “he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord.”

The Greek word translated as “accurately,” *akribós*, is described by HELPS Word Studies, saying, “This root (*akrib-*) refers to gaining *exact information* with the *highest level* of accuracy (‘exactness’) and is acquired by *probing investigation* to provide a *comprehensive circumspect* (precise) view in *strict adherence* to the facts.”

What this means is that his instruction and his knowledge of the Scriptures had led him to know and understand that Jesus is, in fact, the Christ. And so, this is what he proclaimed. His deficiency in the faith that will next be described was a result of a lack of instruction on doctrinal matters, but not a lack of understanding who Christ is and what role He filled. Why is this important? Why is this being relayed to us? The answer is seen in the final words of the verse, saying, “though he knew only the baptism of John.”

The implication is that Apollos was, at this time, a saved Jew. He was a believer. Because this is so it reveals an important truth. Even though he was saved, he only knew of John’s baptism. Therefore, it is sure evidence against those heretics who say that water baptism is a necessary condition for salvation, thus adding works to the simple gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rather, water baptism is an issue of obedience and right doctrine. This is what is being conveyed, and it is fully supported by verse 27 as well as what will occur in Chapter 19. Despite being a descriptive passage, the internal clues about the faith of Apollos still help us to more accurately understand Paul’s prescriptive words in the epistles.

Life application: The simple (and only gospel) is belief in the finished work of Jesus Christ. He died for our sins. He was buried. He rose again. This was in accord with Scripture and it is what we need to know in order to be saved. If we believe that He has done these things, God will accept our faith and impute to us the righteousness of Christ.

Salvation and proper doctrine do not necessarily go hand in hand, except proper doctrine on how to be saved. But for other matters, such as the rapture or how to properly conduct oneself in life as a Christian, one must learn those things. However, they have no bearing on the matter of getting saved or remaining saved.

Water baptism is an external sign of the inward change that has taken place in us. And yet, it is a command of the Lord. As such, to not receive water baptism is disobedience to His command. Thus, to refuse to be water baptized when it is clearly known that Jesus stated to do so will result in a loss of rewards, but it will not affect one’s salvation. Get these things right, be saved through belief, and then be baptized as an open profession that you are a saved believer and follower of Jesus.

*Lord God, thank You for what You have done in the giving of Jesus. May we be obedient to the faith we profess and adhere to the word that has been given to us after we are*

*saved. Help us to pursue proper doctrine all our days. May You be glorified as we do. Amen.*

**So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. Acts 18:26**

In the previous verse, Apollos was noted as having been instructed in the way of the Lord and he taught accurately about Jesus, even if he only knew of John's baptism. Remembering that, it now says "So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue."

This provides a couple of thoughts to consider. One is that he was deemed acceptable to address the synagogue by the synagogue rulers. It implies having some formal training in the Scriptures. Also, saying "boldly" either means that his fervor for the Lord noted in the previous verse is on display or that he may have had the same type of resistance to his message that Paul had, necessitating him to speak out boldly concerning what he knew.

Because he knew about Jesus, the message of Him as the Messiah would have been the key point of his address. However, though He was accurate in what He taught, he was not fully versed in the subject matter. Hence, the words continue, saying, "When Aquila and Priscilla heard him."

The obvious meaning is that after Paul's departure, they continued to attend the synagogue. While there, Apollos came and addressed the congregants. Some texts state Priscilla's name first. If that is correct, it may imply that she was of Jewish heritage and Aquila may not have been. Rather, he may have converted after being a proselyte. Thus, in the synagogue, she would have standing because of her heritage. However, this is speculation based solely on a different rendering found in a Greek text. Concerning them, it next says that "they took him aside and explained."

This would allow them to discuss what they knew privately. There could be several reasons for this, such as not stirring up those who didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah, not wanting to embarrass Apollos while sharing their greater knowledge of Him, etc. Whatever the reason, the private setting allowed them to explain "to him the way of God more accurately."

The word translated as "accurately" is the same word used in the previous sentence. The form of the word provides a comparative sense. He taught about Jesus accurately; they taught about him "more accurately."

Aquila and Priscilla took the time to correct his deficiencies. These may have been doctrinal issues, but they were surely not salvific. If they were related to salvation, a further explanation of his conversion would be provided. It is not.

It should be noted that in verse 25, it used the word Lord. In verse 26 it uses the word God. This is a further indication that though he understood about the Lord, there were theological deficiencies in his belief. This is one of the most common situations in churches. People are converted and must go through the steps of growing in knowledge.

In the case of someone like Apollos, he was already well versed in Scripture, he knew and taught about Jesus, and yet, he needed further instruction to become a sound and proper teacher.

Life application: The words about Apollos can be considered from a modern perspective. Suppose there is someone, Ready Randy, who is raised in the church and has read the Bible all his life. He could be described in the same manner as Apollos in verses 24 and 25. He is a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He has been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he speaks with great fervor. He also teaches about Jesus accurately.

He would like to become a minister and so he talks to the pastor. The pastor says, "This is great. I would like you to go to a sound seminary. After you graduate with this particular degree, I will ordain you." Randy may say, "But I am ready now! I have been reading the Bible for years. Ask me anything."

The pastor would then let Randy know that there is a great deal more to understanding the way of the Lord than rote memory of the Bible. There are disciplines that must be drawn out of it such as original sin, the Trinity, what the doctrine of predestination means from various theological perspectives, and how to tell which of those perspectives is correct, etc.

Randy listens and agrees. He goes to seminary and discovers that he really wasn't ready at all. He had a great knowledge of the Scriptures, but he lacked an understanding of how to rightly divide and rightly apply what is recorded there. But he also learned that his foundational knowledge of the word, prior to going to seminary, allowed him to much more easily tell which doctrines were incorrect.



Because of this, he realized that in his own ministry, the single most important thing he could ever teach his congregants was for them to READ THEIR BIBLES. They may never become theologians, trained in the great doctrines of Scripture, but they will have a greater understanding of when they are being led astray from what is sound.

Ready Randy, because of his previous knowledge of Scripture, realized that he had a foot up on everyone else at the seminary who lacked this most important foundation. Many of them were led astray by professors who themselves lacked grounding in the word. Randy's advice to you today is to KNOW YOUR BIBLE above all else.

*Lord God, Your word is too precious to not study and contemplate all our lives. There is never a time that we can say, "I have read the Bible. I don't need to return to it again." Rather, the wise person will say, "I have read the Bible many times. And yet, I will continue to read it all my days. I can never exhaust the wisdom of God found in this precious word." Help us to have such an attitude. Amen.*

**And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; Acts 18:27**

The words more correctly read, "And he, resolving to pass over to Achaia, the brothers wrote the disciples, having exhorted them to welcome him, who – having arrived – helped greatly those who have believed through the grace."

In the previous verse, Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside, explaining to him the way of God more accurately. With that, and still speaking of Apollos, it next says, "And he, resolving to pass over to Achaia."

As they are currently in Ephesus, it means that he would travel, most probably by ship, to the opposite coast. As noted in Acts 18:12, Achaia essentially formed the whole of Greece with Corinth being its capital. Apollos had a desire to evangelize in Greece. Thus, it next says, "the brothers wrote the disciples."

The Greek here is translated in various ways. Notice the difference between the two –

the brothers, having encouraged *him*, wrote to the disciples to welcome him, BLB  
the brethren wrote to the disciples, having exhorted them to receive him, YLT

The flow of thought seems to make more sense when translated as “the brothers wrote the disciples.” It would mean that those in Ephesus wrote a letter to the disciples in Achaia confirming the reliability of Apollos as a follower of Christ and a teacher. With that, it next says, “having exhorted them to welcome him.”

The word *protrepó*, translated as “encouraged” is found only here in Scripture. It literally signifies turning forward for oneself. Thus, it means to encourage or exhort. In this case, rather than “having encouraged *him*,” meaning Apollos, as the BLB states, it seems likely that they are exhorting those who receive their letter to welcome Apollos.

Apollos wouldn’t need encouragement as he was the one disposed to go there. Instead, those he would encounter are the likely subject. At the time, Apollos was unknown to those in Achaia. Therefore, a letter of introduction and a note that he should be received as a faithful and knowledgeable teacher would be appropriate to help establish him among those he met with. From there, it next says, “who – having arrived – helped greatly those who have believed through the grace.”

Concerning the word “helped,” Vincent’s Word Studies says, “The radical sense of the word is to throw together: hence, to contribute; to help; to be useful to. He threw himself into the work along with them.” This is perfectly in accord with Apollos’ character as already recorded. He jumped right in and became an asset to those he fellowshiped with.

As for the final words, “the grace,” the article is rightly included in the translation. It is the particular grace that is given by God. Of this, there are varying views on what it is referring to. Vincent’s Word Studies says –

“Expositors differ as to the connection; some joining through grace with them which had believed, insisting on the Greek order of the words; and others with helped, referring to grace conferred on Apollos. I prefer the latter, principally for the reason urged by Meyer, that ‘the design of the text is to characterize Apollos and his work, and not those who believed.’”

In other words, though it is true that believers are saved through grace, Vincent’s feels that the grace referred to here is speaking of the special grace imparted to Apollos to effectively minister in the gospel. Either way, both salvation and continued life in Christ are conferred upon believers by grace.

Life application: It's good to remember that not only is salvation by grace through faith, but that our continued lives in Christ are granted by grace. And this, in more ways than one. First, any gifts we possess are given to us by God. How we use them will be the source of rewards or losses at the Bema seat. But we do not possess any gift that God did not bestow upon us.

Second, our times are determined by God. Thus, each day and everything associated with it is grace. We cannot take credit for what God has given us. How we use our time, however, will be the source of rewards or losses at the Bema seat.

If God has equipped us with a gift, and if He has granted us the time and circumstance to use that gift, we should be about using it to His glory. Let us remember this and press on in the grace that has been granted to us. Someday, we will stand before Him and must give account for what we have done with what He has bestowed upon us.

*Glorious God, thank You for having blessed us with various gifts that we can use to glorify You. Help us to be mindful of the time and circumstances in which we live so that we will use them in the most effective manner possible. May our service before You be pleasing to You. Be glorified in how we conduct our lives in Your presence. Amen.*

**for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. Acts 18:28**

In the previous verse, Apollos went off to Achaia. When he went, he was given a letter of introduction. Upon his arrival, it says he greatly helped those who had believed through the grace. At that time, it was questioned whether "the grace" applied to those who had believed or if it referred to the grace bestowed upon Apollos as a gift. What seems most likely is the latter. That appears to be bolstered by the next words, "for he vigorously refuted the Jews."

The word translated as "refuting" is found only here. It is a long compound word that signifies "to prove downright." The Jews said one thing and he said another. Also, the adverb *eutonós*, translated as "vigorously," is seen for the second and last time. It signifies well stretched, pressed to the limit, or fully extended. Thus, it gives the sense of "mightily," or "vigorously."

The subject is Apollos. The grace bestowed upon him was for oratory skills, the ability to understand Scripture, etc. He was able to make a convincing argument against the Jews because of these things. Further, the verb is imperfect, more rightly saying, "refuting the

Jews.” He didn’t have just one argument against their interpretation of things. Rather, he was overflowing with points that silenced them time and again. And more, he did this “publicly.”

It is obvious from this that he was accustomed to speaking in front of others and he was able to form arguments that were convincing not just to himself, but to those who heard. He openly challenged the Jews on a continuing basis because of this. And more, these arguments didn’t just come from his head or from hearsay evidence. Rather, he was “showing from the Scriptures.”

The source of the faith, the Hebrew Scriptures, clearly revealed that his arguments were valid and irrefutable. As they are the basis for the Jewish religion, and as he was able to draw from them his evidence, then what he said had to be taken as a valid interpretation unless demonstrated otherwise based on the context. The tenor of Luke’s words, however, is that they could not do this. Thus, Apollos was able to demonstrate, right from the Scriptures, “that Jesus is the Christ.”

There are prophecies in Scripture that when realized would point to only one possibility for fulfillment. For example, the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. He would be from the tribe of Judah. And so forth. By comparing what was prophesied and then placing Jesus side by side with those prophecies, it was absolutely assured that He is the Messiah.

And more, the things that He did validated this fact as well. He would die for sins. He would resurrect. And so forth. The Jews misunderstood the role of the Messiah and had come to faulty conclusions about who He would be and what He would do. Apollos was able to clearly refute the Jews because he grasped these things, understanding what they meant and how they pointed to what Jesus had done.

Life application: When you speak to Jews about Jesus today, it is not as easy to refute them as you might think. The reason for this is that many do not believe in the inspiration of Scripture. Most believe that the later writings of the rabbis that are compiled in the Talmud form the proper basis for their religious and cultural life.

Therefore, you will be arguing apples and oranges. Unless a Jew (or any other person) is willing to accept the authority of Scripture, there isn’t much you can do to convince them of the truth of who Jesus is. It takes a great deal of understanding Scripture and how reliable it is to be able to break through such barriers.

This is why it is so very important to know your Bible and to be able to defend what you believe. Never stop pursuing this marvelous word. It is what is needed to change hearts and minds. By knowing it, and by demonstrating how reliable it is, you can then have a positive impact on those you speak to.

*Glorious God, thank You for Your word. Give us wisdom in reading and interpreting it so that we can properly and effectively tell others about the riches contained in it. May we be responsible enough in our lives to read it daily and meditate on it constantly. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 19

**And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples Acts 19:1**

In the previous verse, which ended Chapter 18, it said that Apollos vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ. With that remembered, Chapter 19 begins with, “And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth.”

The verb is present tense. Thus, it more rightly reads, “And it happened, in Apollos’ being in Corinth.” The two accounts, though presented one after the other, are occurring at the same time. This is the second and last time that Apollos is mentioned by name in Acts.

He will be mentioned again repeatedly in 1 Corinthians, and then one more time in Titus. However, the substance of his being mentioned in Acts is really found only in Acts 18:24-28. Therefore, there is a reason that Luke has been inspired to include him. He has no direct interaction with either Peter or Paul, the two main people of focus in Acts, and yet a particular section of the book has been dedicated to events surrounding him. As for the ongoing narrative, it continues with, “that Paul, having passed through the upper regions.”

Archaic translations say “coasts” instead of “regions.” But this isn't the modern sense of coast. Instead of traveling along a seacoast, this involved inland travel along borders. From Galatia and Phrygia to Ephesus is the route. Two words are translated as the singular word “regions,” *anōterika mere*. The first word is found only here in Scripture. It signifies “upper.” The second word signifies a part, portion, or share. Thus, it is the “upper parts,” or “upper districts.”

Albert Barnes says, “These regions were called upper, because they were situated on the high table-land in the interior of Asia Minor, while Ephesus was in the low maritime regions, and called the low country.” After traveling through these upper parts, he “came to Ephesus.”

This shows the faithfulness of Paul to his words of Acts 18 –

“And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. <sup>20</sup> When they asked *him* to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, <sup>21</sup> but took leave of them, saying, ‘I must by

all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.’ And he sailed from Ephesus.” Acts 18:19-21

With Paul in Ephesus, it next says, “And finding some disciples.” Rather, the verb is an aorist participle, “And having found some disciples.” Luke is preparing the reader for the next thought to be presented.

Life application: With the short account of Apollos now complete, and with the reintroduction of Paul into the timeline, it must be asked, “What was the point of mentioning Apollos at all?” In other words, there were apostles, missionaries, and disciples all over the place at this time, spreading the word in various ways and with numerous people.

And yet, a man and the events of a short period of his time are introduced and quickly ended. With that complete, he will not be mentioned again in Luke’s narrative. This should cause us to stop and think about the “why” of what we are being told. The answer is not far off, but we can very easily miss it if we don’t intentionally ask ourselves, “Why was this included?”

As you continue to read the Bible and become more aware of such notations, take time to pause and ask yourself exactly that. This book we call the Holy Bible has been inspired by God. It is the word of God. Everything in it has been given for a purpose. So, contemplate what you have read, think about the events that occur, and consider the “why” of each thing that is included.

In this, you will be pleasing to the Lord who has put these things in it for you to consider. Think about your own situation. If you are cut off or ignored in the middle of a conversation, you will feel as if what you say is unimportant. If you speak out something and find out the person you were with wasn’t paying attention, you will be offended that they had no care about the instructions you were giving. If you write a heartfelt letter to someone and you later find out they never read it, you will wonder if you have any meaning at all to that person.

Aren’t these the same ways we treat God when we fail to heed His word, when we read it and don’t pay heed to what we have read, or when we neglect reading it altogether? As such, think of how pleased He must be when we actively participate and engage with His word! Treat your Bible time as if it is the most personal and intimate part of your life because it truly is. Just like prayer, it is a time spent with God because it is time spent hearing, heeding, and hoping in His word.

*Heavenly Father, forgive us for not making Your word a priority in our lives. We cherish each letter from a close friend or family member. We long to hear the voice of those we love, we remember the words that are spoken to us by those we care about. May we be just as attentive, even more attentive, to Your precious and lovingly transmitted word. Amen.*

**he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”**

**So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”**

Acts 19:2

The previous verse noted that Paul had arrived in Ephesus and met some disciples. That thought continues now, saying, “he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit.’” The text does not say why Paul asked this, but there is obviously something that made him suspect concerning their walk that must have precipitated the question. Further, there is no article before Holy Spirit. As Bengel notes, “the language is indefinite, to accord with the part (*pro parte*) of those who are being interrogated.”

With that understood, Paul next says what should be the case. Though this is a descriptive account, it carefully details what is normative with the words, “when you believed?” It is obvious that Paul understands that belief equates to reception. There is a one-to-one correspondence between the two. The verb is an aorist participle, “when you believed,” or more exactly, “having believed.”

This is in accord with the words of Ephesians 1:13, 14 –

“In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,<sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

It should be noted that Paul’s words of Ephesians, being a written epistle, are prescriptive. They outline what is always to be the case. Belief means sealing. It does not necessarily include what will occur in the coming verses in Acts. In other words, what occurs in these coming verses is a description of what happened at that time but it is not something that should necessarily be expected to occur. The only thing that can be expected is the sealing of the Spirit which occurs upon belief.

Expressed more fully, Paul’s words in Acts show that it is normative that the Spirit is received upon belief. That is confirmed in Ephesians. However, what occurs beyond that



cannot be taken as normative, such as speaking in tongues and prophesying. These outward demonstrations that take place are described by Luke, but they are not to be taken as normative events. If they were, then Paul's words of Ephesians would include that as well.

This is the problem with Charismatic and Pentecostal churches. They mix what is prescriptive and what is descriptive and they also take what is not normative and they assume it is normative. In this, they fail to rightly divide Scripture. This results in faulty theology. As for the account now, it continues with, "So they said to him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.'"

In these words, it appears to be saying that they didn't know of the existence of the Holy Spirit. This is not the intent of what is said. Rather, it was that they had not heard He had been given to the people of God. As Bengel says –

"...they could not have followed either Moses or John the Baptist, without hearing of the Holy Spirit Himself. [Therefore what they were ignorant of was, the effusion of the Holy Spirit peculiar to the New Testament.—V. g.]"

For example, the Holy Spirit is mentioned explicitly in Psalm 51:11, but He is inferred as far back as Genesis 1:2. He is referred to in verses such as Numbers 11:17 as well. When John the Baptist came, he spoke of the Holy Spirit in Matthew 3:11 and elsewhere. Thus, it could not be that they did not know of the existence of the Holy Spirit but of the reception of Him by believers. John 7:39 gives the sense –

"But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

The word "given" is inserted for clarity in this verse. It simply says, "the Holy Spirit was not yet." Therefore, a translation such as the ERSV gives the sense of this verse in Acts –

"Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Ghost was given."

What is being detailed here begins to explain why the account of Apollos was given just prior to this account now. If the narrative is closely analyzed and properly understood, there would not be as much poor doctrine permeating the church as there is.

Apollos "had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord" (Acts 18:25), even if he had not yet

received the baptism Jesus spoke of. These disciples have not been so instructed. Thus, the account in Acts 19 is given to reveal to us what occurred as the church began (describing events as they happened) and to form a normative or not-normative basis for future events during similar circumstances.

In this case, it is normative and expected that when a person rightly believes, he will be sealed with the Holy Spirit. It is not normative, however, that external evidences of this sealing will occur. Further, water baptism, though expected for every believer in Jesus, is not required for being sealed with the Spirit, and thus being saved. This will continue to be fleshed out as the account continues.

Life application: Look at the difference between these two translations of this verse:

He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? KJV

he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" NKJV

Just a few words can lead to a complete misunderstanding of what is being conveyed. The word "since" does not connect the two. It could be any amount of time from belief to reception. The two verbs are in the aorist tense and therefore denote instantaneous acts. Thus, the KJV is contrary to Eph 1:13, 14. The NKJV corrects this with the word "when."

The word "since" can be expressed as a preposition to denote the intervening between two events, such as, "I haven't spoken to Bob since the wedding." It can be used as a conjunction, denoting a time in the past until the time being considered, which is usually the present, such as, "Daniel has been eating durian since he got here." It can be a conjunction signifying "because," such as, "Wade is happy, since better protections have resulted in fewer accidents at his office." It can also be used as an adverb, such as, "Sergio took off for a Nephilim hunt and nobody has seen him since."

None of these accurately equate to the Greek of Acts 19:2. The verb, as noted above, is an aorist participle, most appropriately rendered "having believed." The error introduced by the Tyndale Bible of 1526 (or earlier), was carried on by the Coverdale Bible of 1535, the Bishop's Bible of 1568, and the Geneva Bible of 1587.

The KJV and many other translations took the easy path and simply passed on what earlier translations had set forth. This has surely led to many people coming to faulty

conclusions concerning the matter being presented. And, inevitably, faulty conclusions lead to faulty doctrine.

Be wise, be studious, and be willing to check things out. Don't just accept what you read, hear, or see on a TV program or YouTube video. Theology is hard work, but it will pay off in a sound walk with the Lord and in the right doctrine to guide your life.

*Heavenly Father, may we be responsible with the time You have given us, carefully searching out Your word and making sound conclusions concerning what it presents. It is of the greatest importance to a wholesome walk with You to know what is accurate and proper. Help us in this all our days. Amen.*

**And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?"**

**So they said, "Into John's baptism." Acts 19:3**

In the previous verse, Paul asked the disciples he met in Ephesus if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. Their answer was that they had not heard about whether there is a Holy Spirit. Because of this, the narrative next says, "And he said to them, 'Into what then were you baptized?'"

Paul's question is obvious. If they are disciples, then how could they not know that the Holy Spirit had been given? A lot of information is left unstated so far in this account. First, in verse 1, it said, "and finding some disciples." Paul met these people and they obviously claimed to be disciples of the Messiah. Otherwise, the content of what occurs would have no meaning.

Paul, assuming that they meant "Jesus the Messiah," but still maybe wondering if they had received a false Messiah (see 2 Corinthians 11:4), asked about their receiving the Spirit in verse 2. Again, this must be the case because they are called disciples. At this point, they said that they were unaware of this part of the equation.

1. They are disciples, implying they are followers of someone.
2. Paul asks if they received the Spirit when they believed, implying that they claimed to be disciples of the Messiah, otherwise, Paul would not have asked this.
3. They are unaware of the giving of the Spirit.
4. Therefore, Paul asks them, "Into what then were you baptized?"

This is what has taken place. The obvious and certain meaning is that being disciples involved...? Anyone...? Yes, you., in the seventh row.

Baptism.

Very good. You get an A for the semester.

Paul would not have asked this unless it was understood that being a disciple of the Messiah involved being baptized.

With that understanding, completely supported by the surrounding text, it next says, "So they said, 'Into John's baptism.'"

Their answer explains the situation. They had been baptized into John's baptism. The rite of baptism is an outward reflection of the doctrine to which one adheres to. Their doctrine looked forward to the coming Messiah and the giving of the Spirit but it did not go any further.

As John never claimed to be the Messiah, the clear inference at this point is that these people had heard that John proclaimed the Messiah was coming. They believed his words and were baptized in John's baptism. Thus, it by default made them disciples of the coming Messiah because John had died. Certainly knowing he had, they were expecting the coming of the Messiah that John proclaimed. And more, John died before the giving of the Spirit. These disciples probably traveled back home to Ephesus, never hearing about the coming of Jesus.

To understand what the faith of these disciples was based on, take time to read Luke 3:1-22. A short portion of this larger section will give an important part of that passage –

"Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ *or* not, <sup>16</sup> John answered, saying to all, 'I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.'" Luke 3:15-17

Life application: John says that the One coming after Him would baptize His believers with the Holy Spirit and fire. Special note for hyperdispensationalists: This does not mean that this is the baptism Jesus refers to in Matthew 28:19. Jesus' followers do not baptize anyone into the Holy Spirit, nor do they purify those who believe, symbolized by the fire. That is solely a work of the Lord.

In addition to proclaiming the coming Messiah, John baptized his believers. The reason for this is stated in the gospels, and it will be restated by Paul in the next verse. However, Jesus also told those who follow Him to make disciples and baptize. As noted above, the rite of baptism is an outward reflection of doctrine to which one adheres to.

This means every person who receives Jesus, believing His gospel, is to be baptized. It is a reflection of the doctrine that is adhered to when they believe – Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Paul’s question in the verse today clearly and unambiguously reveals that he expected that all disciples were to be baptized. Otherwise, the question would not have been asked.

If you have not been baptized as an outward demonstration of the inner change that has taken place in you, it is your responsibility to have this corrected. Be baptized, identifying yourself with the Lord who has already saved you because of your faith in Him.

*Glorious Lord God, Jesus did not leave us with a long laundry list of things that we should do to honor Him. But two of the things He did leave for us to accomplish are to be baptized and to regularly observe the Lord’s Supper. May we be willing to observe these ordinances to honor Him accordingly. Amen.*

**Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” Acts 19:4**

In the previous verse, Paul had asked the disciples that he had met, “Into what then were you baptized?” Their answer was that they were baptized into John’s baptism. With that, it next says, “Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance.’”

This was the point and purpose of John’s baptism. He spoke to Israel, under the law, about their state before the law. John was calling the people back to obedience to the law because the law anticipated the coming of Christ. Three times in Matthew 3:1-12 he spoke of repentance. The word repentance comes from the Greek word *metanoia*. It means “a change of mind.” One is thinking one way and he is to change his mind and think another way.

In Matthew 3, when asked who he was, John cited the prophet Isaiah. A fuller portion of what Isaiah said was –

“Comfort, yes, comfort My people!  
Says your God.  
<sup>2</sup> ‘Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her,  
That her warfare is ended,  
That her iniquity is pardoned;  
For she has received from the LORD’s hand  
Double for all her sins.’  
<sup>3</sup> The voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the LORD;  
Make straight in the desert  
A highway for our God.  
<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be exalted  
And every mountain and hill brought low;  
The crooked places shall be made straight  
And the rough places smooth;  
<sup>5</sup> The glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
And all flesh shall see *it* together;  
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.’” Isaiah 40:1-5

John claimed that he was the voice calling the people to repent, to change their minds about how they were living, and to turn to God in preparation for the coming of the Lord – the Messiah. This is not at all what Paul and the other apostles proclaimed. In Acts 2, Peter did tell the people of Israel to repent, but it wasn’t in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Rather, it was that the Messiah had come and they had crucified Him. They needed to repent of this, to change their mind about what they had done.

In the case of these disciples in Ephesus, they had been baptized into John. They had been told that the Messiah was coming and they needed to prepare themselves for that event. Paul then explains exactly what that meant with the words, “saying to the people that they should believe.”

There is no hint of repentance in the directive. The repentance John called for was directed to those of Israel under the law in anticipation of the coming Messiah. When He came, they were to believe. They would need no change of mind because their minds had been prepared for His coming. In the case of those in Acts 2, they had to change their minds because they had failed to be prepared for His coming. Now that the Messiah had come, they simply needed to believe “on Him who would come after him.”

John said He was coming. When He came, it would be evident. He would fulfill the ancient prophecies, He would be spotless before God in relation to the law, and He would fulfill the law in that capacity, etc. Their repentance, their changing of their minds, was to prepare their minds under the law to accept His fulfillment of the law. With that understood, Paul then explains who John was speaking about, saying, “that is, on Christ Jesus.”

The word Christ is Greek for the Hebrew word Messiah. Paul proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah and these disciples were to believe on Him. There is nothing affixed to that, just believe. With this verse, John the Baptist is never mentioned again in Scripture. The time of the law has given way to the time of grace. Salvation is something that is appropriated by belief in God’s provision of grace in the giving of His Son. Nothing can be added to that. The work is complete.

Life application: As noted above, the word “repent” means “to change one’s mind.” It means nothing more. The word does not mean, “turn from your sin before you can be saved.” When a person is presented with the gospel, he is told that he is a sinner – “Christ died for your sins.” If Christ died for sins, it means that there are sins in his life that Jesus needed to die for. In believing this, it is an acknowledgment by the person that he is a sinner in need of a Savior.

No list of sins is necessary to be presented to the person, identifying what it means to sin before God. The statement “Christ died for your sins” is all-encompassing. When the person believes this by faith, his sins are forgiven – all of them. Only after this occurs does a person then find out what is pleasing to God and what is displeasing to Him.

In other words, someone may be a notorious liar, a homosexual, a brawler, a thief, and a murderer. When he is given the gospel, “Do you know that you are a sinner and that Jesus died for your sins?”, the person giving the gospel may not know a single thing about that person. The person being spoken to may say, “I know I am a sinner and I know I have offended God. I am so relieved that God sent His Son to die for me. I believe!”

It is at this moment, and no other, that he is saved. He has not yet given up on any of the wicked things he has been doing. He may not even know which things he is doing are offensive to God. Only now, after his salvation, does he start to learn what he does that is in need of change. By saying, “You must give up XX, XX, and XX before you can be saved,” you have presented a false gospel of works. This person may do what he is told and he now believes he merits God’s forgiveness. This is not the gospel at all. It is an

affront to God who sent His Son to die for this person's sins. His turning from those things may not equate to belief in Jesus' work at all.

Be sure to get the gospel down properly. If you misrepresent the gospel, you are not presenting the gospel.

*O God, we just can't seem to get grace. We say we believe it, we tell people about it, and yet we then add to what Jesus has done when telling others about what they need to do in order to be pleasing to You. We remove grace from the equation and bring back deeds of self. Forgive us of this. Help us to properly present the gospel of grace. Jesus has done it all. What we need to be saved is faith in Jesus, plus nothing. Amen.*

**When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.** Acts 19:5

In the previous verse, Paul noted that John's baptism was one of repentance and that John told his audience that they should believe on Him who would come after him. With that, the account now continues with, "When they heard *this*."

Rather, being an aorist participle, it reads, "And they, having heard." They were listening to Paul, they were moved by his words, obviously believing what Paul had said, and so "they were baptized."

It is the normative action that takes place upon conversion, for both Jew and Gentile, during the church age. There is belief followed by baptism. These were followers of John who believed his words about the Messiah that was coming. Paul proclaimed the Messiah that had come, thus fulfilling John's words. And so, they were baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus."

These people had obviously not participated in the crucifixion of Christ Jesus. Therefore, they did not have to "repent" as Peter called out to Israel in Acts 2. This is purposefully left out of the account by Luke.

There are various ways of looking at what occurred here. The first is that they were literally baptized in water and then Paul laid his hands on them. Thus, it is a re-baptism of water. If so, it is the only explicit instance of it in the New Testament. No such record of the 11 apostles being baptized was given, and yet they had the Spirit.

However, it would be an argument from silence to say that this was not the normal practice for those who had once been baptized by John to be rebaptized into Jesus after



He completed His work. In fact, this account in Acts 19 suggests that this is exactly what occurred.

Another possibility is that they were baptized into the name of Jesus by their belief, not literally in water. However, as noted in a previous commentary, it is Jesus who baptizes with the Spirit, not an apostle. The order of what occurs here is baptism, then the laying on of the hands (in the next verse), at which time the Spirit is received.

Thus, this is – with all certainty – water baptism that is being referred to. This is what occurred with those in Samaria in Acts 8, even if the time between baptism and then the laying on of hands and the reception of the Spirit was greater.

Life application: As can be seen the record of what occurs in Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19 (and in other accounts) baptism is different for each. To pick one account, such as Acts 2, and claim that this is what must happen in the church today, is arbitrary and has no merit. Each account simply describes what occurred without regard to prescribing anything.

The only normative part of the process is that all who believe are saved and the customary rite that is involved after belief is baptism. There is also no instance where a person is baptized into Jesus prior to conversion. That is also not taught anywhere in the epistles. Therefore, infant baptism has no standing within biblical Christianity.

With the church fully established and the word of God complete, the proper order for what is to be done is:

1. Hear the gospel (Romans 10:17).
2. Believe the message (Romans 10:17).
3. Receive the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13, 14).
4. Be baptized as directed by Jesus (Matthew 28:19).

Not yet been baptized? You are not fulfilling your obligation to the directive of the Lord who saved you. Go get baptized.

*Lord God, how good and precious it is to our souls to be in Your presence and to share in Your goodness. For those who have believed the gospel, we are in Christ. We have gone from death to life, from futility to surety, and from hopelessness to a sure and eternal hope. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Acts 19:6**

In the previous verse, the disciples Paul was speaking to were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Despite this, and unlike Cornelius and his household, it does not say that the Spirit fell on them. Rather, something similar to what occurred in Acts 8 now takes place. They were first baptized. After this, it says, “And when Paul had laid hands on them.”

The word “when” is not in the Greek, it more rightly says, “And Paul, having laid on them the hands.” As this is not what has previously occurred with Paul’s baptisms, the Spirit seems to have impelled him to do this. Whether this is the case or not, this is the same order as the events in Acts 8 –

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. <sup>13</sup> Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

<sup>14</sup> Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, <sup>15</sup> who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>16</sup> For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” Acts 8:12-17

With that remembered, and continuing in the same order as in Acts 8, it next says, “the Holy Spirit came upon them.”

Nothing like this is recorded in Acts 16 when Lydia and her household were baptized. Likewise, nothing like this is recorded when the jailor and his household were baptized later in Acts 16. Despite this, Luke carefully records the events now, revealing a particular sequence of events that are followed by more details. As it says, “and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”

As the verbs are imperfect, it should say “they were speaking with tongues and prophesying.” This event is not unlike that which occurred in Acts 2 –

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Acts 2:4

The speaking in tongues and prophesying by these people in Ephesus would also have been as the Spirit gave them utterance. The word “tongues” signifies a known language, not gibberish. Prophesying refers to the praising of God, possibly foretelling, and also possibly forth-telling.

Some possible reasons for how things have transpired here are.

1. This was to confirm to these Jews that Jesus truly was the Messiah John prophesied of. The evidence of this was the Spirit coming upon them.
2. This was to confirm that their water baptism into Jesus was accepted.
3. As these disciples of John had not been a part of the rejection of Jesus, there was no need to repent of that as was the case with the Jews in Acts 2.
4. The laying on of hands was to confirm Paul as a true apostle to these people who were first hearing the saving message concerning Jesus.

Life application: The events taking place in Acts 19 are different than any other conversion experience found in Acts. There are good reasons for the things that have taken place as noted above. So, when you are reading the Bible, stop and make notes or lists to reasonably explain what might be taking place.

You can refer to them when evaluating other passages that are similar but which may not be identical. This will help you to more readily grasp why the differences may exist. We are being given instruction concerning what God wants us to know as we read the Bible, but it can be complicated. Making such notes is a good way of helping you to process why things are set forth.

The more time and effort you put into your reading and study of the Bible, the more grounded you will be in your relationship with the Lord who gave you this word to ponder.

*Lord God, it is so refreshing to search out Your word and to find wonderful insights into the wisdom that is presented there. May we be responsible to spend quality time in it each day, cherishing its contents and reveling in its wonders! Thank You for Your precious word. Amen.*

**Now the men were about twelve in all. Acts 19:7**

The previous verse noted what occurred after Paul baptized the disciples introduced in verse 19:1. He subsequently laid hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came upon them.

When this occurred, they were speaking in tongues and prophesying. With that remembered, Luke provides detail about them as a group, saying, “Now the men were about twelve in all.”

It is a curious verse because the word “about” leaves one to wonder. How simple it would be to just say, “there were eleven of them,” or “there were twelve of them.” However, this misses the point of what is being said. To get what is being presented, there are a few things to consider.

First, this is something Luke does elsewhere, such as –

“Now Jesus Himself began *His ministry at* about thirty years of age.” Luke 3:23

“For there were about five thousand men.

Then He said to His disciples, ‘Make them sit down in groups of fifty.’” Luke 9:14

In the first example, Luke – under inspiration of the Holy Spirit – appears to have been purposefully making a connection to Genesis 41:46 which would then tie his ministry into the typology set forth in the life of Joseph.

In the second example, one could argue that it would be much harder to be definitive about five thousand than it would be about twelve. But the point is not the number at all. Rather, it is that these are men.

In other words, the counting of numbers in this manner is focused on the men alone. Therefore, including women and children, the number would probably have been between fifteen and twenty thousand people. In this case, it can be assumed that these disciples, being fully grown people who had been to Israel and heard John and received his baptism, also included women, whether wives, sisters, daughters, mothers, etc.

The people may have gone as a group on a pilgrim feast and while in the land heard John’s words and became his disciples. This is all speculation, but the matter that there were certainly women included is valid. Therefore, the number was probably between thirty-five and fifty in total.

The “about twelve” makes complete sense when considered from this perspective. The man is the head of the household. Saying “about twelve men” would be equivalent to saying, “about twelve households.”

One can see Luke talking to Paul and asking him about the event so that he could record it in his ongoing narrative, “Well how many were there?” Paul responds, “Oh, about a dozen men.” Thus, Luke wrote down what he heard, “Now the men were about twelve in all.” These men, along with any family that held to the baptism of John, would have made a rather sizeable addition to the body of Christ in Ephesus.

Life application: Despite the brevity of the verse, there are quite a few variations in the translation. All say essentially the same thing, but some contain commas for clarity, one version makes this verse parenthetical, various translations change the order of the words, etc.

Taking the older translations and considering what they say, it is good that newer translations have rearranged the words. Versions such as the Coverdale (1535), the Bishop’s Bible (1568), the Geneva Bible (1587), and the KJV (1611) say, “And all the men were about twelve.”

Though the translation is acceptable, it leaves an unnecessary ambiguity in the predicate. Saying that “all the men were about twelve” can actually mean that their age is about twelve. With a little thought, this could have been easily corrected.

In other words, someone could say, “That is the age of the bar mitzvah! The disciples were just young men.” As crazy as that may sound, even more ludicrous ideas about Scripture are set forth on any given day. A humorous, if not incredibly sad, example of this is using Ezekiel 13:20 as rendered by the KJV to deny the doctrine of the rapture –

“Wherefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I *am* against your pillows, wherewith ye there hunt the souls to make *them* fly, and I will tear them from your arms, and will let the souls go, *even* the souls that ye hunt to make *them* fly.”

Yes, really.

If there is one thing man is inclined to do, it is to abuse Scripture to make it fit presuppositions and biases. Faulty or ambiguous translations naturally lead to this type of thing. Be sure to not jump to hasty conclusions without doing a thorough study of what is being presented. The word of God is far too precious to abuse just to supposedly prove one’s presuppositions.

*Lord God, it is so wonderful to be a part of Your church. It is a church that has had previous souls added to it for two thousand years. People who have lived in darkness*

*have been brought into Your marvelous light through the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Help us to continue to spread the word. May we be willing to share this good news with any and all who cross our paths. Amen.*

**And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. Acts 19:8**

The previous verse finished the account concerning those who had been disciples of John and who had received Christ and been baptized into Him. Now, the direction changes as Luke records, “And he went into the synagogue.”

This is referring to Paul. It was his custom to commit himself to speaking in the local synagogue if they would have him. It is also the fulfillment of the promise made in Acts 18:19-21 where he promised he would return to the synagogue and continue to reason with them –

“And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. <sup>20</sup> When they asked *him* to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent, <sup>21</sup> but took leave of them, saying, ‘I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.’ And he sailed from Ephesus.”

He has honored his commitment by now returning to them. And his offer was accepted, as it next says, “and spoke boldly for three months.”

This is a long time to debate the issues at hand, but their curiosity had been piqued in verse 18:20. On his return, he gave them a full hearing on the matter. If they were only opened on the Sabbath, three months would mean about twelve gatherings. If they were like the Bereans, meeting daily, it would be a lot more time in the word.

Either way, this means that they were at least willing to take an in-depth look into the matter at hand. His efforts were involved in, as it next says, “reasoning and persuading.”

The first word that we notice is the same one used when he was previously there in Acts 18:19, *dialegomai*. It signifies to get a conclusion across. He had a subject that he wished to discuss thoroughly. As such, he carefully went through the entire subject very thoroughly in his attempt to convey what brought him to his own understanding of the matter.

The second word is correctly translated as persuading. He was involved in the process of persuading his audience of the truths “concerning the things of the kingdom of God.”

Paul had come to understand much more fully what this term entailed. The Jews anticipated an earthly kingdom patterned after the kingship of David. Paul showed them that this view, at least in the immediate program, was faulty. Though not denying a future literal reign of Christ on earth, he carefully explains how the kingdom involves more than just that.

Writing to those of Ephesus who had accepted the message, he gives insights into this kingdom –

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

-Ephesians 2:4-7

He specifically calls this new dynamic a kingdom in Ephesians 5:5 and elsewhere in his other epistles. He further writes of the citizenship of believers. A person who is a citizen of a kingdom is a citizen under a king. It is these types of things that Paul would have carefully conveyed to those in the synagogue at Ephesus. Despite this effort on his part, it should be remembered that during all this time, Paul continued to work with his own hands, as will be seen in Acts 20:34.

Life application: Paul writes about the state of believers, demonstrating that we are subjects of the King, Jesus. He notes that we are members in His kingdom, he speaks of our citizenship in this kingdom, etc. And yet, there are those who deny that Christ is a King reigning over the Gentile-led church. In Romans 14, he writes –

“Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; <sup>17</sup> for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> For he who serves Christ in these things *is* acceptable to God and approved by men.” Romans 14:16-18

One cannot be in a kingdom unless there is a king over that kingdom. We are both members of a kingdom now and yet we await our state in the kingdom that is to come. There is nothing contradictory in this.

And yet, Paul does not deny that there will be a literal kingdom on earth as prophesied in the Old Testament. His focus is on the church and its condition, but he also speaks of Israel's national salvation in Romans 9-11. Their national salvation implies that they will then be in the position promised by the prophets. That is clearly explained by Jesus in the gospels, and it is confirmed in Revelation 20.

The word "kingdom" as noted in this verse of Acts is not a single topic, but it is a broad and all-encompassing term used to speak of the various aspect of the headship of Jesus over His people, both now and into the future – as well as over His church and over Israel the nation.

Be careful to not fall for the illogical arguments of those who deny Christ as our reigning King (such as hyperdispensationalists) or who deny Christ as the King who will reign over Israel during the millennium (such as that taught by replacement theology).

*Lord God, it is amazing to see redemptive history unfolding before our very eyes. We are citizens of a kingdom that is spiritual in nature. Someday, we will be brought into that heavenly kingdom in a new and eternal way. And yet, we see Israel regathered from among the nations and being prepared for an earthly kingdom. Someday, that will be realized and will endure for a thousand years. Our own eyes are beholding these things. How amazing it is for us to see! Amen.*

**But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. Acts 19:9**

The verbs are not well translated. It should more closely read, "And when some were hardened and disbelieving, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, having departed from them, he separated the disciples, everyday reasoning in the school of Tyrannus" (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul was noted to have spent three months reasoning and persuading those in the synagogue in Ephesus about the kingdom of God. As is usual in Acts, his efforts eventually are rejected by some or all of his audience. Such was the case in Ephesus as well. Luke next records, "And when some were hardened."

The word signifies to make hard or be stubborn. This does not mean it is a hardening initiated by God in the active sense. Rather, their predispositions about what the kingdom meant would not allow them to accept that a spiritual kingdom was currently



what was going on. They were anticipating a Messiah who would place Israel as chief among the nations and exalt them because of their heritage. This hardened state led to the next thought, “and disbelieving.”

As has happened consistently, the Jews began to oppose the teachings of Paul, rejecting the concept of a Messiah who would fulfill the law and then set aside that law for a New Covenant, even though this is exactly what their own Scriptures speak of in Jeremiah 31. Thus, their hardening led to a rejection of this teaching. They failed to obey the things laid out in their own Scriptures because of their own presuppositions and biases. That then led to their “speaking evil of the Way before the multitude.”

Rather than accept the teachings of Paul, which were clearly laid out in their own Scriptures, even if misunderstood in the past, some began to speak evil of this new Way. What follows in this verse is the standard operating procedure for most of the Jews that Paul witnesses to. When they could not refute his teachings with reason, they stirred up the masses. Because of this, Paul acted. As it next says, “having departed from them.”

There was no point in going back to the synagogue where the boisterous miscreants would simply argue and contradict him. Paul understood that a person is to state his case, defend what he believes, and then move on if the opposition was intolerant. This is exactly what he did. And when he did, “he separated the disciples.”

This would probably have included those who were mentioned in verses 19:1-7, along with any others who were convinced by his words. As these people had received the Spirit in an outward manifestation, they would have been fully convinced of the reliability of Paul’s words. Therefore, Paul separated those who believed and was “everyday reasoning in the school of Tyrannus.”

The word translated as school is found only here in Scripture, *scholé*. It is obviously etymologically connected to our modern word. It denotes a place where there is leisure or freedom from labor. Thus, by extension, it speaks of a school.

The name Tyrannus is a provincial form of the derivative of the base of *kurios*, a master or lord. Thus, it means a tyrant. However, the word would not have carried the negative sense that it now does.

Some believe that this school was a *beith ha’midrash*, or “House of the Midrash.” *Midrash* is an interpretive act, seeking the answers to religious questions (both practical and theological) by plumbing the meaning of the words of the Torah.

This would assume that Tyrannus was a Jew, but that is not stated. As both Jews and Greeks are mentioned in the next verse, it could go either way. The fact that Tyrannus is mentioned by name seems to give the sense that he was a well-known person. Luke probably specifically included the name to help confirm his words to those who were interested in checking out whether his account was accurate or not.

Life application: The church is a body of believers, not a place where those believers meet. Whoever Tyrannus was, and wherever his school was, it was an acceptable place for the believers to gather.

In our world today, we get far too caught up in the building where the fellowship meets, as if it is the central point of focus. Such is not the case. Jesus is. If a church meets in a storefront, a movie theater, a gymnasium, or on the beach, it makes no difference. As long as the Lord is being exalted, the meeting will be considered a success.

Don't get too caught up in the externals. Have a heart for the Lord and for those who gather to worship Him and hear His word taught.

*Heavenly Father, help us to have a heart for serving You above all else. May we not get caught up in flashy stuff that distracts our attention away from the word being rightly taught and of worship that is directed to You! May our hearts and minds be directed to what is right, honorable, and proper as we meet and fellowship in Your presence. Amen.*

**And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.** Acts 19:10

In the previous verse, Paul had moved from the synagogue to the school of Tyrannus. Now being established there, it next says, "And this continued for two years." Adding this to the time already spent in the synagogue, Paul worked well into his third year in Ephesus. Charles Ellicott believes that it may have been during this time that Paul also established the other churches in Asia noted in Revelation 2 & 3.

This is possible, or it could be that travelers to Ephesus heard the word there and went back to establish a church in their local area. Regardless, it should be noted that Paul continued to work with his own hands throughout the entire time (Acts 20:34). He never sponged off of those he ministered to but continued to support himself while also raising up new converts and discipling those who were converted.

It is also believed that he may have visited other established churches during this period as well, such as Corinth. In 2 Corinthians 12:14, he notes that his impending visit would be his third to them. If that is the same as the visit recorded in Acts 20:2, 3, which follows his time in Ephesus, then he may have taken a short visit during this two-year period to see them and build them up.

As for his time now being recorded in Ephesus, Luke next notes, “so that all who dwelt in Asia.” The verb is a present participle. It more rightly is rendered “all those dwelling in Asia.” The words of instruction from Paul actively went out beyond the school of Tyrannus.

As for the words themselves, they are to be taken as a form of hyperbole. It is reasonable to think that not everyone in Ephesus, much less the province of Asia, was affected by Paul’s ministry. Rather, it is a way of saying that his efforts were available to all in Asia.

Such superlative statements are found in the gospels, Acts, and the epistles. One example to demonstrate this would be –

“Now John himself was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him <sup>6</sup> and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.” Matthew 3:4-6

“And when all the people heard *Him*, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. <sup>30</sup> But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.”

-Luke 7:29, 30

Thus, the point of the superlative is to say that John’s baptism was available to all. None were turned away who desired it. Likewise, Paul’s ministry and his proclamation were, likewise, available to all.

As Ephesus was a great hub of trade and commerce, it is not surprising that the word went out to other parts of Asia, or that Paul could personally go from there on short mission trips or even send others who were trained in the word to do so.

Noting that it included all of Asia and not just Ephesus, it also lends credence to the thought that the other churches in Asia were probably established by, or at least had an

initial point that was affected by, Paul. As for what Paul proclaimed, that is explained by the words that these people “heard the word of the Lord Jesus.”

This means the doctrine concerning the Lord Jesus, but specifically the gospel. As Paul proclaimed what he had been personally instructed by the Lord (Galatians 1:12), then the word of Paul is the word of the Lord Jesus – both about and from. With that understood, Luke next notes this word went out to “both Jews and Greeks.”

Despite Paul removing himself from the synagogue, he did not remove the Jews from his evangelistic efforts. Being a tent maker, he would have remained in an area where other Jews plied their trades as well. Thus, even if not in the synagogue, his words would continue among his people as well as among the Greek population.

Life application: It is not uncommon for a pastor, preacher, or teacher to dogmatically claim that every “every” in the Bible means exactly that, or that all “all’s” in the Bible must be taken literally. This is not a responsible way to consider what is being expressed. In fact, the opposite is quite often the case.

One must be familiar with the entire context of such a claim before making it. Otherwise, a false idea will be instilled in the heads of those being instructed. Be aware of the use of such superlatives. As you read the Bible, maybe highlight them and keep them in mind. As you continue through the word, consider what you have highlighted. This will help you to properly consider the use of the words. It will also help you to expand your knowledge base in other areas.

Doing a study in one area will inevitably lead you to draw conclusions in other areas as well. Keep expanding yourself through contemplating, meditating upon, and analyzing this precious word. You will be rewarded in heart and soul as you do, and you will be pleasing to the Lord who gave the word in the first place.

*Lord God, may we carefully consider Your word, not coming to unfounded conclusions about it. Rather, help us to be responsible in how we analyze it. There is a lifetime of study ahead of us, so help us to be patient and methodical as we search out its wonders. Thank You, O God, for Your precious and sacred word. Amen.*

### **Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, Acts 19:11**

The words are rather difficult to translate literally, but a close rendering of the Greek would be, “And miracles – not matched – God was working by the hands of Paul” (CG).

The previous verse noted that Paul continued in the school of Tyrannus for two years and that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord. This included both Jews and Greeks. With that noted, it next says, “And miracles – not matched.” The word translated as “miracles” is *dunamis*. It signifies “ability to perform,” and is often translated as “mighty works,” “power,” etc. It was commonly used to describe the deeds Jesus performed, and it has also been used in Acts quite a few times.

This is the only time it is used of Paul’s abilities, and it is also the last time it is used in the book of Acts. One can see the etymological root for our modern word “dynamite” in it. The next words are rather difficult to translate as they read in the Greek, *ou tas tychousas*, or as close to literal as possible, “not the matched.”

The verb is *tugchanó*. It means “to strike (hit the mark, i.e. ‘spot on,’ ‘hit the bullseye’); to light upon, fall in line with; ‘happen to find oneself’ in the scene of life the Lord has already prepared” (HELPS Word Studies). As it is preceded by the word “not,” and being in the form of an aorist participle, saying “not matched” gives a close sense of what is being conveyed. Paul hit the mark with his miracles so precisely that they were not matched by anyone else.

The same phrase is similar to that stated in Acts 28:2, where it says, “And the natives showed us unusual kindness.” Translating the words as an adjective in this manner doesn’t convey the full sense of the words. As for the cause of the miracles, it next says, “God was working by the hands of Paul.”

In these words, Aristotle’s four causes can be expressed: The *material* cause is Paul, he is the one who makes the thing (like wood in a table) to be. The *formal* cause, the design, is the miracle as it occurs. The *efficient* cause, what brings it about, is the Lord’s presence working through Paul. And the *final* cause, the *purpose*, is that God will be glorified.

Life application: When you read in the Bible about miracles that occur, the Lord’s battles that will be waged, prophecies that are made, etc., each of these is occurring in a manner that displays how God operates within His creation. A good way to think of them is to consider them in relation to the causes expressed by Aristotle.

If you have a beautiful wood table in your house, it didn’t just wind up there by chance. There is the material cause of the table, wood. That can be further subdivided into types of wood. Other materials are also probably used, but for simplicity’s sake, wood alone is sufficient.

There is the formal cause of the table, its design. You may want a dinner table, a corner table, a nightstand, etc. Whatever the design is, that is the formal cause.

There is also the efficient cause, the carpenter (or simply carpentry). That is what makes the wood into a table, taking into consideration the design and purpose.

Lastly, there is the final cause. What is the ultimate purpose of what is being made? It may be dining. It may be for displaying an antique. It may be a butcher's table. That is what it is used for and why it was built in the first place.

In considering these things from a biblical perspective, one can see that God is the efficient cause of these things, He selects the formal and efficient causes to effect the purpose that is to come about. And His glory is the final cause of what occurs.

If you evaluate "miracles," "healings," "teachings," and so forth of people who claim they serve the Lord, you may not be able to determine the efficient cause, but you can with careful paying attention be wise enough to discern if they are meeting the proper final cause. Is God truly being glorified through what they are doing, or is their enrichment, fame, power, etc., really what is being highlighted?

Think about the ministries you follow and consider what their ultimate purpose is. God's glory. That should be it!

*Lord God, we do have needs in this world, but ultimately, what happens to us is not all that important because You have promised us something far better in the life to come. Help us to be focused on Your glory at all times. May we be willing to share with others the good news of Jesus Christ so that You will be glorified through their acceptance of Him. Amen.*

**so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. Acts 19:12**

The previous verse noted the unusual (not matched) miracles that God worked through Paul. The account of that now continues, saying, "so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought."

The word translated as handkerchief, *soudarion*, is seen for the last of four times in this verse. It is "Of Latin origin; a sudarium (sweat cloth). i.e. Towel (for wiping the

perspiration from the face, or binding the face of a corpse) -- handkerchief, napkin” (Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance).

The word translated as apron, *simikinthion*, is found only here. It is also “Of Latin origin; a semicinctum or half-girding, i.e. Narrow covering (apron) – apron” (Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance).

Both of these were probably items that Paul used while working his trade as a tentmaker. He would be working and sweating, so he would use the handkerchief. He would also be wearing the apron while doing his cutting and sewing to protect his regular garments, as is common with any such skilled laborer. These were brought “from his body.”

It is another word found only here in Scripture, *chrós*. It signifies the surface of the body, the skin. Despite this, Vincent’s Word Studies notes that in medical language it was used as a reference to the body itself. The same terminology is used even today in a negative way when one might say, “That guy is just wasted skin.” It speaks of the whole person, represented by the skin covering. These were carried from his body and were taken “to the sick.”

The reason for this is probably as simple as a token of acknowledgment. Paul is working, maybe finishing an order for a customer. Someone comes up to him and says, “We have a sick person that we would like you to come and pray over.” Paul may have then said, “Give me forty-five minutes. I am on the final stitching of this tent and the man is waiting to take it.” With that, the disciple says, “Don’t worry about it, Sir, just give me your handkerchief. I’ll take it to the person.”

Luke, being a physician, highlights such activities, knowing that they were certainly of a miraculous nature. The unusual workings here would be a sign to those in the synagogue and a means of edification for those at Tyrannus. This care for the sick would not be unlike what happened during Jesus’ ministry –

“Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, ‘Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. <sup>7</sup> Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>8</sup> For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, “Go,” and he goes; and to another, “Come,” and he comes; and to my servant, “Do this,” and he does *it*.’” Luke 7:6-8

The centurion knew that God was working through Jesus. He simply asked for a token, a word, knowing that was all that was needed. Likewise, the disciples knew that God was working through Paul as just stated in the previous verse. If this was so, then it wasn't Paul at all that accomplished the healing. He was simply the *material* cause (as described in the previous verse). As this was so, then God could work just as easily through his sweaty napkin as He could through his physical presence.

Thus, this was to demonstrate to the person that God approved of Paul's ministry and that He was working through Paul in a real way to bring glory to Himself. In Paul's case, he was proclaiming Jesus as Lord (verse 10). Therefore, God was being glorified in Christ Jesus (the *final* cause) through Paul's ministry.

This was being carried out by God (the *efficient* cause, which was the Lord's presence) through Paul's articles of trade (which were the *material* cause as being connected to Paul). With this understood, it next says, "and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them."

These actions are the *formal* cause, the design. They are the miracles that occurred. The people could see or personally experience the events taking place and know, without any doubt at all, that God had accomplished these things, that they were done through Paul, and thus Paul's ministry was validated through what occurred. Because Paul's ministry proclaimed the Lord Jesus, God was glorified in Christ by the events that took place.

Life application: Quite often, the words of 1 Peter 2:24 are used to justify healing of people today, "by whose stripes you were healed." Sometimes, the person who calls out those words will also pretend that God is working through him to bring about healing. Often, televangelists and others will send healing cloths, healing water, etc., to people, claiming that they have this same special power as seen in Acts 19.

The words of 1 Peter 2:24 are not intended to be used in this manner. The obvious question for all believers to consider is "Healed of what?" What healing is Peter referring to? Is it healing from the sniffles? Is it healing from cancer? Is it healing from any other body ailments? The answer is "No" to all of them. The whole verse says, "...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed."

Peter referred to sin and only sin. The highly inappropriate nature of claiming physical healing based on the words of either Isaiah 53:5, or 1 Peter 2:24, is obvious. Healing



from the effects of sin, such as sickness, anxiety, trouble, and death, may come about through prayer and/or right living, or it may only come about when the believer is translated to glory. But claiming physical healing of any type based on the words of Peter is not only poor doctrine, it is a false teaching which leads hopeful believers into sad paths of dejection and turmoil when they are not healed of the physical affliction they fervently desire to be healed of.

Paul was used as an instrument of healing to validate his ministry. The words of Luke have been recorded. The ministry stands validated through Scripture. There is no longer a need to validate Paul's ministry in this manner. Today, preachers and teachers are to be evaluated based on adherence to the word of God. There is no need for external validations of their ministries, and none will be provided.

Claiming healing in such ways can only lead to false expectations and weakened faith in those who are not healed. We can pray for healing and hope for it to come about, but we should never be so presumptuous as to claim it. We do not possess that authority. The word is written, and we are to live by faith in what is documented there.

The amazing part of what is conveyed to us in Scripture is that God took our pain and our suffering and placed it on His own precious Son. The healing we receive because of His cross is spiritual and it is eternal. We have new life because of the work of Jesus Christ. Praise God in the highest for what He has done for us in the giving of Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Thank You, O Lord, for the wonderful blessing of Jesus and the healing He provides. Through Him and through His suffering, we are healed of our state of corruption and death, and we now have new life through Him. How precious it is to be called a son of the Living God because of His terrible trials! May we never forget what He went through to restore us to You. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." Acts 19:13**

The NKJV is a bit off. More precisely, it reads, "And certain of the vagabonding Jews, exorcists, undertook to invoke over those having evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, 'We adjure you *by* the Jesus whom Paul proclaims'" (CG).

The previous verse noted the healings and exorcisms that occurred when Paul's handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick. Luke next records, "And certain of the vagabonding Jews."

The introductory words "And ... of (literally from)" are given to contrast what was just stated about Paul. Healings and the removal of evil spirits were brought about indirectly through him as the material cause of God's power. Now, this contrasting account is provided by Luke as an instructional tool.

In them is a new word in Scripture, *perierchomai*. It signifies "to go about" or "to make a circuit." It will be seen again in 1 Timothy 5:13 and Hebrews 11:37. As it is in the form of an aorist participle, it should be rendered "wandering," "roving," "vagabonding," "strolling," etc. In this case, rather than just wandering around their own town, it appears that they are itinerant, going from town to town in a manner not unlike gypsies. Thus, "vagabonding" seems to give a sense of their lifestyle. They are next noted as "exorcists."

It is a word found only here in Scripture, *exorkisté*s. It is one who casts out evil spirits, adjuring them by oaths and incantations. That is from *exorkizó*, an intensive form of a word meaning to adjure. That word is found only in Matthew 26:63 –

"But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, 'I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!'"

That word is then derived from *horkizó*, which also means to adjure. This word will be used as the verse continues.

These exorcists went from place to place challenging those who had evil spirits, adjuring them to depart from those who were tormented by them. With that in mind, it next says that they "undertook to invoke over those having evil spirits."

The word translated as "invoke" means "to name." For example, Simon was "named" Peter by Jesus. In this case, they took it upon themselves to invoke "the name of the Lord Jesus." What is obvious is that these were not saved believers. Luke does not term them brethren. Rather, they had heard about the healing powers of Jesus' name, and they took it as a sort of verbal talisman to ward off or cast out evil spirits.

They may have heard of Jesus having cast out demons in the past, and/or they may have derived this idea from what was recorded about Paul in the previous verses. Paul didn't

even have to go to the place of healing for it to take place. Thus, they assumed that it was simply the name of Jesus that possessed the power. Their error in thinking will reveal them as false exorcists. What they are doing is not unlike what Jesus was accused of in Matthew 12 –

“Now when the Pharisees heard *it* they said, ‘This *fellow* does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.’

<sup>25</sup> But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. <sup>26</sup> If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? <sup>27</sup> And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges. <sup>28</sup> But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.’”

-Matthew 12:24-28

The Pharisees accused Jesus of invoking Beelzebub as His authority to cast out demons. These Jews are taking Jesus’ name and are attempting to do the same – though not necessarily for the same reason – saying, “We adjure you *by* the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.”

Here, they use the word *horkizó*, noted above. They are attempting to bind the evil spirits by oath while using the name of Jesus proclaimed by Paul. Their assumption is that Paul was likewise invoking the name of Jesus in an incantation.

Life application: What these false exorcists have failed to take into consideration is that the name “Jesus,” even the “Jesus whom Paul proclaims,” is not in and of itself an instrument of power. There must be a valid connection to the Person who bears the name.

This is no different than what people do all the time in Charismatic churches. They claim the power of the name as if the name itself will then cause obedience to their demands, be they for healing, casting out demons, prosperity, wealth, etc. This makes obtaining the outcome for self the final cause of the act.

However, it has already been explained that the final cause of God’s acts is that He be glorified. Thus, there is a disconnect in the process, a fault, that cannot be overcome by using the name of Jesus in this manner.

In the case of these false exorcists, or in the case of charismatics who make their claims, the supposed *material* cause is the claimant, he is the one who attempts to make the thing (like wood in a table) to be. The *formal* cause, the design, is supposed to be the miracle as it occurs. The *efficient* cause, what brings it about, is supposedly the Lord's presence working through the claimant's use of the name of Jesus. The *final* cause, the *purpose*, is that the claimant or his addressee will be the main beneficiary.

Because the glory of God is not the final cause, the other causes cannot accomplish what is anticipated. Think of these aspects of the process as you consider these words from Deuteronomy 13 –

“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, <sup>2</sup> and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’ <sup>3</sup> you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>4</sup> You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. <sup>5</sup> But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn *you* away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.” Deuteronomy 13:1-5

Even if the Lord allowed a sign or wonder to come to pass by someone, His glory is what is anticipated as the final cause. This is not what false teachers and false prophets ultimately have in mind. If anything, other than the glory of God is the main result of the process, the process is not of God.

*Lord God, help us to properly analyze what is happening when people use Your name in the world today. It is obvious that many do so to profit from it at the expense of Your glory. May we be discerning enough to see when this is the case and turn away from such people and such false teachings. May we be instruments working to bring You honor and glory with our lives. Amen.*

**Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. Acts 19:14**

The words more precisely read, “And there were certain sons of Sceva – a Jew, a high priest – seven are doing this.”

In the previous verse, wandering Jewish exorcists were using the name of Jesus in an attempt to exorcise evil spirits. Luke now continues, saying, “And there were certain sons of Sceva.”

This Sceva (Greek: *Skeuas*) is not seen anywhere else and his name is otherwise completely unknown. Strong’s thinks it could be from a Latin name meaning “left-handed.” However, Abarim says it is derived from *skeuos* which describes any kind of portable utensil. As such, they define his name as Handy Man, Pragmatist, or maybe Sorcerer’s Apprentice. As for this Sceva, he is next identified as “a Jew, a high priest.”

This title is speculated to be one of many things. There is no definite article and so it is “a chief priest.” He could have been one of the leaders of the twenty-four courses of priests first recorded in 1 Chronicles 24, a member of the Sanhedrin, a leader of the Jews in Ephesus, or some other person of note, or claiming to be of note by using the title without any commission to do so.

Of his sons, they are next numbered as “seven.” All seven are itinerant exorcists. Probably the reason for giving the number is to show that this wasn’t just a wayward son who was out embarrassing his father. Rather, he had seven sons and all seven were doing it. Thus, it is an indication that they were brought up in this manner. The father was using his position (real or supposed) as a chief priest in this way, and they were following suit. Of these seven sons, Luke next records that they “are doing this.”

It is a present participle denoting that it was their regular and ongoing practice. This sets the stage for what is to come as the narrative continues.

Life application: Titles do not make a person. Too often, people get star-struck by titles, treating the bearer of them with unhealthy attention. Obviously, if someone has a title and that is all you know about him, it helps establish a baseline for who you are dealing with. However, as you get to know the individual, you may find out that the person you are dealing with doesn’t deserve the respect of the title he possesses.

Be ever on guard to evaluate people fairly and without bias. There are innumerable people who don’t possess any title of note in society and yet who are decent, honorable folks worthy of great respect. There are also lots of people with important titles that aren’t worthy of a greeting in the morning.

Treat people according to the person they are, apart from titles, positions, genealogies, etc. This is a good way to establish your relationships, and you will find your friends and associates will be people you can depend upon as you continue throughout life.

*Heavenly Father, help us to not show favoritism toward others, but to treat people fairly and according to who they are as people of true and honorable character. May we not get caught up in flashy titles, important positions in society, or how rich others are. Instead, help us to notice the more important aspects of life in the people we deal with. Amen.*

**And the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” Acts 19:15**

The translation could be better: “And having answered, the evil spirit said to them, ‘Jesus I know and Paul I acknowledge; and you – who are you?’”

The previous verse mentioned that there were seven sons of a high priest known as Sceva who acted as exorcists. They had decided to use the name of Jesus whom Paul proclaimed to cast out evil spirits. In doing this, a response was received from someone who truly was possessed by an evil spirit. Luke records the event, beginning with, “And having answered.”

As in the gospels at times, this evil spirit acknowledges the attempt to cast him out, demonstrating that they can think and respond independently of the person they possess. In this case, it next reads, “the evil spirit said to them.”

The evil spirit speaks through the man and for the man. It is the same as occurred with the demoniac in the Gadarenes. The plural, them, means that all seven of the sons are involved. They worked together like the false prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18. This is contrasted with the way that Luke presented the healings and exorcisms connected to Paul. He wasn’t even around. Rather, only his handkerchiefs and aprons were there to make a connection to his ministry. In his response to these seven sons of Sceva, the evil spirit said, “Jesus I know and Paul I acknowledge.”

Two different words are used, and the difference should be made in the translation to identify this. However, both words are rather close in meaning and both give the sense of knowing. Vincent’s Word Studies says –

“There is a purpose in using two different words to denote the demon's recognition of the Divine Master and of the human agent, though it is not easy to convey the difference in a translation. It is the difference between an instinctive perception or recognition of a supreme power and the more intimate knowledge of a human agent. A divine mystery would invest Jesus, which the demon would feel, though he could not penetrate it. His knowledge of a man would be greater, in his own estimation at least. The difference may be given roughly, thus: ‘Jesus I recognize, and Paul I am acquainted with.’”

Actually, it is just the opposite. The first word is *ginóskó*. HELPS Word Studies says that it signifies to know through personal experience; to experientially know. They then cite Luke 1:34 as an example, “And Mary [a virgin] said to the angel, ‘How will this be since I do not know (1097 /*ginóskō* = sexual intimacy) a man?’”

There is an absolute understanding that exists with this type of “knowing.”

On the other hand, the second word is *epistamai*. It is derived from *epi* (upon or on the basis of) and *histémi* (to set, stand, establish, etc.). It gives the sense of being acquainted with, gaining knowledge through acquaintance, carefully studying a matter, etc.

In the case of Jesus, the evil spirit had an experiential knowledge of Him. In the case of Paul, he had come to know him because Jesus was working through him. Thus, he knows Jesus in an intimate way; Paul he acknowledges only through acquaintance. On the other hand, and speaking to all seven of these sons of Sceva, he next says, “and you – who are you?”

It is a demeaning, even belittling, way of addressing them. First, the sense is, “So what if you use their names (meaning Jesus and Paul in the previous verse). What about you?” The word “you” is plural. The repetition of the address is given as emphasis. In these words, the first “you” speaks of the sons as identifiable entities. The second “you” refers to their existence. Hence, we can paraphrase it as “And you seven guys, who are you all?”

One can imagine that this was done with a hint of sarcasm in the voice as he spoke. He is aware of the names they are expressing, but he is completely unaware and uncaring about who they are as supposed exorcists. This will be communicated in more than words in the verse to come.

Life application: There is no reason to not assume, and every reason to accept, that evil spirits dwell in people today. Just looking around at the people of the world would lead

one to think that not only do demons possess people, but that they are doing so in ever greater numbers. This would be because people have opened themselves up to demonic influences through a rejection of what is morally right and good and a complete acceptance of wickedness and perversion.

Their being indwelt probably shouldn't be questioned. But what to do about it is what should be considered. Apostolic authority does not exist today. Jesus has ascended and will return at the appropriate time. He has not personally commissioned anyone since the apostle Paul. Paul even acknowledges this, saying, "Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:8). The "last of all" means that Paul was the last to see Him, and seeing Him is a requirement for being given apostolic authority.

Understanding this, and because the Bible does not provide any prescriptive guidance about how to deal with people possessed by demons, it can be known that we are not given any special authority to do what Jesus and the apostles did. And yet, we have a commission to share the gospel. Therefore, if a person is possessed by a demon, and if that person accepts the gospel, then it must be that this is the way by which God has determined that demons are to be removed from people.

The only other logical assumption would be that there is no way to drive out demons in some people. But that would be contrary to multiple verses in Scripture which indicate that God desires all to be saved. Therefore, it is our responsibility to share the gospel. It is God's responsibility to deal with the demon of someone who accepts the gospel.

Don't be duped by people who claim they have a special ability to cast out demons beyond this. They have gone beyond Scripture and are claiming an authority the Bible does not provide. Ignore such people, lest you get caught up in their ridiculous doctrines and pulled away from what is granted to us in Scripture.

*You are so great, O God. You have given us the gospel to share with the world, and it is an incredible authority we possess. We can tell others about how to be saved. In accepting this, those who respond will be freed from any evil that fills their soul. They will be sealed with Your Spirit and will have a new and heavenly hope. It is a great message that possesses power and authority to redirect lives. May we share it often! Amen.*



**Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.**

Acts 19:16

The verbs in the NKJV need a bit of a tune-up. It more closely reads, “And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, having leaped on them, and having overpowered them, prevailed against them, so that naked and wounded they fled out of that house” (CG).

In these words, we see a striking contrast to the previous verse. The words begin with, “And the man, in whom was the evil spirit.”

In the previous verse, it said, “the evil spirit said to them.” Now it says, “the man in whom was the evil spirit.” As such, it is a clear indication that the man was truly possessed. Not only did the spirit speak through him, but he also caused the man to act. That act is then described with the words, “having leaped on them, and having overpowered them.”

It should be noted that in some manuscripts, it says “both of them” instead of “them.” In other words, only two were overpowered. This seems unlikely as Luke had just clearly identified all seven sons. The only explanation for saying “both” would be that it is not referring to two sons of Sceva, but that it is referring to both classes mentioned in the previous verses, meaning the itinerant Jewish exorcists mentioned in verse 19:13 along with the seven sons of Sceva noted in verse 19:14.

Either way, at least seven and maybe more got a good pounding for their presumption. This is not at all impossible considering the state of the demoniac in the Gadarenes noted in Mark 5 –

“...no one could bind him, not even with chains, <sup>4</sup> because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. <sup>5</sup> And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.” Mark 5:3-5

The power of a person who could pull apart shackles and chains could also easily overcome a bunch of unprepared charlatans that made their money off of fooling the people with their supposed spiritual powers. After leaping on them and overpowering them, it says he “prevailed against them.”

Despite the numbers, he completely subdued them. This shows the power of a madman, whether by spirit, because of a medical condition, or by being energized through drugs. One in such a state should never be taken lightly. So violently did he tear at them and pound on them that Luke next notes, “so that naked and wounded they fled out of that house.”

The word translated as “naked” can mean either completely naked or disrobed but still wearing the undergarments. Either way, these men would have been humiliated, bruised, and bleeding as they fled from the power of this possessed man.

Life application: The truthfulness of this account is actually seen in what has not been recorded. Luke notes what happened, but if the record was written to show the supremacy of Paul’s doctrine over these false prophets, it would have included a continuation with words about Paul going to defeat the power of the evil spirit in the name of Jesus.

But this was not the intent of Luke’s writing. Rather, a brief and accurate description of what occurred was laid out detailing the power of Jesus to heal through Paul, even when Paul wasn’t physically present. On the other hand, a large number of men couldn’t subdue a single person who was possessed by an evil spirit.

As for what occurred, it should be a reminder to Christians to not get mixed up with nutty people who claim to exorcise demons and evil spirits. As they have nothing in Scripture to explain how this is to be done, there is every chance that such people will eventually face a good pounding, or worse, by taking things into their own hands.

Rather, if you suspect someone is possessed and want to help him, be ready to give him the gospel. If the person is willing to accept the good news, God will deal with him accordingly. Don’t try to be a hero when it is God who should handle the situation. Your job is to speak out the gospel. His job is to accomplish the work after that.

*Lord God, help us to be wise in how we speak to others about the saving message of Jesus. May we carefully and cautiously speak forth the words You have given us to lead others to this saving knowledge. Beyond that, You will do what is right to bring them to Yourself on that great Day when You call us home. Give us wisdom in this, O God. Amen.*

**This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Acts 19:17**

In the previous verse, the false exorcists were overpowered by the man who was possessed. They all fled out of the house naked and wounded. Because of this, it next says, “This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus.”

As usual, the word all does not necessarily mean all in the absolute sense. In this case, it means any who were willing to hear it. There are people who never get involved in spiritual things. There are people who work all day, come home and eat dinner, and then go to bed, totally uncaring about anything else outside of their small circle of life.

The general statement, Jews and Greeks, gives the sense of the totality of who heard, even if not all Jews and Greeks actually heard. The event occurred, people heard about it, and then they passed that on to others. Eventually, the story generally permeated the entire area of Ephesus. And of those who heard, it next says, “and fear fell on them all.” This is not unlike what was stated in Acts 5 at the time of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira –

“So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.”

-Acts 5:11

The people of Ephesus have come to understand one of the traits of the Lord. He is not just merciful and forgiving, but He is also holy. He and His name are to be treated as such. The false exorcists used His name as comparable to any other false god, and from it, they learned a lesson. Therefore, certainly among them as with all who heard, Luke next records, “and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.”

This is the purpose of the miracles God did through Paul and it is the purpose of God allowing the man with the evil spirit to overpower the false exorcists. It is a different thing than what occurs in Luke 9 –

Now John answered and said, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us.”

<sup>50</sup> But Jesus said to him, “Do not forbid *him*, for he who is not against us is on our side.” Luke 9:49, 50

Jesus said that if those in Israel were not against Him, they were for Him. These guys in Acts 19 were then clearly not “for” Jesus, but there is another difference as well. Jesus’ earthly ministry to Israel was complete. If these exorcists had succeeded, they could have then stood against Paul, just as Jannes and Jambres stood against Moses, thereby hardening Pharaoh's heart.

In contrast to these exocists, fear fell on all the Ephesians. In this, the name of Jesus was given its right place of honor among both Jews and Gentiles in order to meet God's purposes. If He wanted those in Ephesus hardened as Pharaoh was, then He may have allowed these men to succeed. Remember what happened in Acts 13. When Elymas the sorcerer stood against Paul, Paul spoke out against him –

“Then Saul, who also *is called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him <sup>10</sup> and said, ‘O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? <sup>11</sup> And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.’

And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. <sup>12</sup> Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” Acts 13:9-12

While in Israel during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry, it would be a completely different paradigm than what later occurred among the Gentile nations. Jesus' name was allowed to be proclaimed even by those who didn't follow Him because it still directed people to His ministry, a ministry that was eventually rejected by Israel as a nation.

On the other hand, the exaltation of Jesus' name among the Gentiles is of primary importance in it being properly conveyed from place to place. With the Bible complete, there no longer needs to be the same attention placed on this aspect of the ministry of the church. We are to proclaim Jesus, explain our faith in Him, and allow the words of Scripture to support what we believe.

Such things find their proper place when considered from the context of the times in which the events take place.

Life application: Today, it is fashionable for people to openly speak against the name of Jesus. It is also normal and acceptable for people to destroy the Bible publicly, such as tearing it apart, sinking it in wastewater, burning it, etc. Although this may be upsetting to Christians because of the value we place upon the name of Jesus and the sacredness of the word of God, it is obviously not something that God stops or interferes with.

The context of the times in which we live does not necessitate Him doing so. The word is written. It is widely available. Doctrine from it can be obtained by going to a reliable church or listening to teachings in an innumerable number of formats via TV, radio, the

internet, etc. For those who hear and reject it, they cut themselves off from the means by which God has offered salvation.

As long as we are directing people to Jesus through evangelism, and as long as the word is promoted for instruction and doctrine in the faith, we are doing our part in bringing people to Jesus. If God wanted to contend with these people, He would do so. As He doesn't, because the times do not necessitate that He does, then we need to accept that as His decision and not get all bent out of shape at the state of the world and the state of the human heart that rejects Him.

Remember the words of Gideon –

But Joash said to all who stood against him, “Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he *is* a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!”<sup>32</sup> Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, “Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar.” Judges 6:31, 32

Just as Baal (if he was a real god) was to plead against one coming against him, so the Lord (the true God) will plead against those who come against Him at the appropriate time. For now, the times dictate that free will in man allows him to do what God will judge later. Until that day, keep being a proper witness to what you believe. Expressing to others your faith and hope is what is to lead them to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

*Lord God, help us to rightly think through the times in which we live. May we be faithful servants who are willing to share our faith in You and in the word You have given to us. From there, it is up to those we speak with to decide whether they will believe or not. We don't need external confirmations of the power You possess. The change in the human heart upon accepting the gospel is a demonstration of Your power all by itself. Thank You for the hope we possess! Amen.*

**And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.** Acts 19:18

The NKJV cleared up several errors from the KJV, but it is still better translated as, “And many of those having believed, were coming, confessing and announcing their deeds.”

The previous verse noted that the matter of the man with the evil spirit overpowering the false exorcists became known to all the Jews and Greeks in Ephesus and that fear fell

on them and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Because of that, it next says, “And many of those having believed.”

The verb is a perfect participle. They had believed and that was an accomplished fact. When they believed they were saved through that belief. Their confession then is a follow-up to their belief (at which time they were saved), not a precursor to it. The ESV does a good and understandable paraphrase by saying, “many of those who were now believers.”

As can be seen, belief does not necessarily mean living rightly. Proper doctrine and properly aligned faith, leading to a proper walk before the Lord, takes time. No person is saved and is then suddenly a noted theologian. Rather salvation is a one-time and for-all-time matter, but there is much more to follow as a person learns what is right. Of these that had believed, they “were coming.”

The verb is imperfect, and it shows an ongoing procession of people coming forward. What is possibly the case is that someone was convicted of not living rightly for the Lord. In seeing what happened with the false exorcists, he realized he had been accepting falsities into his life.

In his coming forward, another came. After that, another and another came. Each realized as he saw the others coming forward that he also needed to adjust his walk to be a proper and pleasing follower of the Lord. Because of this, they were coming forward “confessing and announcing their deeds.”

Of these words, Vincent’s Word Studies says, “The two words denote the fullest and most open confession. They openly (ἐξ) [ek: from out of] confessed, and declared thoroughly (ἀνά, [ana: upwards] from top to bottom) their deeds.”

Nothing is said about where the confession was made, but it is obvious from the actions of the next verse that it was public. This then has no similarity to the closed confessionals of some churches. Forgiveness and cleansing don’t come from a priest or from works, but from Christ. From there a clear conscience won’t hide what has been forgiven. This was also the case at the time of John the Baptist’s ministry –

“Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him <sup>6</sup> and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.”

-Matthew 3:5, 6

It is also something that goes back to the time of Solomon. In the Proverbs, he wrote –

“He who covers his sins will not prosper,  
But whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy.” Proverbs 28:13

Likewise, James speaks of the power of confession –

“Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

-James 5:16

Life application: The people that came forward were saved believers. The use of the perfect participle clearly shows that at some previous point, they were saved, and that salvation adhered to them like glue. And yet, it now acknowledges that they had been caught up in wrong practices. They were convicted, and they came forward to acknowledge that. As noted, this line of thought will continue into the next verse.

So, which sins were the ones that removed their salvation from them? Obviously, we have no idea what things they had been doing wrong after being saved, and that appears to be purposeful on Luke’s part. He understood that the litany of transgressions that were confessed had not brought them to a loss of salvation because he understood that salvation is a covenant made by God in Christ and accepted by the one who believes.

Because the covenant is initiated and granted based upon faith, and that it is initiated the moment that faith exists, and because He – at that time – seals the believer with His Holy Spirit, that salvation – by default – is eternal. God, unlike us, does not violate His covenant. Pick your sin that you believe supposedly separates a saved believer from God and try shoving it into the confessions announced in this verse. Oops. Too late. The verb form noted that they were saved and continued in that salvation.

Salvation, by default, is an eternal proclamation by God. If you disagree, you are wrong.

*Lord God, thank You for saving us despite ourselves. You have entered into a covenant relationship with us through the giving of Your Son. You already know that we will fail and that if it was up to us, our salvation would be lost. But it is by grace and through faith, not by deeds we may or may not do. Thank You for our eternal salvation in Christ. Amen.*

**Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned *them* in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and *it* totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. Acts 19:19**

The verse more precisely reads, “And many of those who had practiced the meddlings, having collected the books, were burning *them* before all. And they calculated the prices of them and found them five myriads of silver” (CG).

The previous verse noted that many who had believed came and confessed by telling their deeds. Now, along with confession, personal deeds of repentance are noted by Luke, beginning with, “And many of those who had practiced the meddlings.”

The word translated as “meddlings” is a plural adjective, *periergos*. It comes from two words signifying “all around” and “work.” It is only found here and in 1 Timothy 5:13 where it is translated as “busybodies.” Of this word, HELPS Word Studies says, “properly, worked *all-around*, which describes ‘over-doing’ – i.e. spending *excessive time (effort)* where it doesn't belong (or should not happen).”

Further, it denotes types of things requiring care or skill. Thus, it was applied to the arts of “magic, jugglery, and sleight of hand” (Barnes). Today we might see it in fortune tellers, palm readers, horoscopes, feng shui, exorcists, séance folks, Tarot readers, and the like.

It is variously translated as curious arts, magic(al) arts, witchcraft, etc. The Worsley New Testament uniquely says, “inquisitive arts.” To keep it as a single adjective in the plural number, using “meddlings” gets the point across. These people had been spending time prying into matters where they did not belong. Of these people, it next says, “having collected the books.”

They each had their own books of spells and incantations by which they pursued these forbidden arts, using them to tell the future, cast spells, drive out demons, or whatever the books were purposed for. Of the word translated as “books,” Vincent’s Word Studies says –

“Containing magical formulas. Heathen writers often allude to the Ephesian letters. These were symbols, or magical sentences written on slips of parchment, and carried about as amulets. Sometimes they were engraved on seals.”



Realizing that they were meddling in areas that they should not be a part of, especially now that they had received Jesus, they collected them together and “were burning *them* before all.”

The words are in the imperfect tense, giving the graphic idea of throwing book after book on a burning pile. The idea we are to get from this verse is that they openly practiced pagan arts and so now they are openly avowing Christ and disavowing their past lives.

They made an open and public pronouncement of their commitment to Christ and their renouncement of their old way of life through this act. To most, it probably never dawned on them that what they were doing, or the books they had been keeping, were not acceptable. They had a new life and a new direction, but they had not taken the time to consider how that had replaced their old way of life. Paul’s words to the Corinthians match the new attitude of these people –

“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; <sup>15</sup> and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. <sup>18</sup> Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup> that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” 2 Corinthians 5:14-19

Of these books that were brought and burned, Luke next records, “And they calculated the prices of them.”

Here is a word found only this one time in Scripture, *sumpséphizó*. It is a compound word signifying “to count together” and thus to calculate. As the word “prices” is plural, one can see them tossing the books on the burning piles and saying, “Well, there goes \$900.00. Here goes another \$750.00.” They added up the total as they went, “and found them five myriads of silver.”

This is a literal translation, but it would signify five ten thousands and thus fifty thousand of *argurion*, or silver. It is a word used many times in the gospels, however, it is

improbable that it is a Jewish equivalent of money being referred to here. Thus, it is an unknown amount. However, if it is comparable to a drachma, it would still be a whole heap o' money. Many thousands of dollars would not be unlikely. Marvin R. Vincent (1834-1922), who authored Vincent's Word Studies, notes, "If reckoned in Jewish money, about thirty-five thousand dollars; if in Greek drachmae, as is more probable, about nine thousand three hundred dollars."

Life application: Think of what has happened in this and the previous verses and consider it in relation to the salvation of man, especially considering Paul's words of 2 Corinthians cited above. These were saved believers. They had been saved by faith in the work of Christ and had entered into the New Covenant in His blood.

The blood is a covering and a mark of propitiation for the sins they committed. And yet, they had continued an indeterminate amount of time in pursuing forbidden arts. As noted above, they could be comparable to fortune tellers, palm readers, horoscopes, feng shui, exorcists, séance folks, Tarot readers, and the like.

Did they know they were doing wrong? Apparently not. They had not yet received instruction to tell them that God does not approve of such things. In seeing the events of the Jewish exorcists, they had come to realize more fully the power of Christ, the holiness of God, and the utterly futile state of the nutty things they were involved in.

Now suppose these people had gone to a Billy Graham crusade in 1977. They heard the message, they believed it, and they were saved – having been sealed with the Holy Spirit at that time. From there, one went back to his house and started reading the Bible he bought on the way home. He quickly realized that reading the daily horoscope was bad juju and so he immediately gave that up.

The next started going to the already apostatizing Episcopal church on his island that conducted palm readings at their annual church fair. One went back to his farm that didn't even have a telephone and he had little contact with anyone outside of his little town, a town with no church at all. They all practiced divining and séances each Saturday.

Eventually, the guy at the Episcopal church went on vacation and attended a Baptist church. He realized that palm reading is not something he should be involved in. He started reading his Bible and left that crummy Episcopal church. He didn't like the new female priest anyway. In reading his Bible, he found other things the Episcopal church was doing wrong, like having a female priest to lead them.

The guy on the farm got a new truck in 1994 and it had a radio in it. While listening to Moody Radio, he found out that the things he was doing were not right. He remembered when he was saved, recommitted his life to Jesus, started reading the Bible and listening to Moody preachers each day. Further, he told every single person in his town about Jesus and became the town's pastor.

Which one of these people who continued in his inappropriate lifestyle had lost his salvation? Which one of these men had earned his salvation? The answer to both is, "None of them." Whether the change came immediately, after a year, or after 20 years – or if it never came – the matter of his salvation was one category. The matter of his doctrine and conduct was another completely separate category. Remember Paul's words "that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them."

They were under the blood of the New Covenant. It is not they that are required to perform for salvation. Rather, it was Christ who saved, and it remains Christ's obligation to bring it to its fruition. Their salvation is not in question. Instead, their life in Christ is one that must come with proper instruction and active pursuit of what God expects. Remember this lesson and know that your life in Christ began the moment you believed. That will never change. Now, it is up to you to apply yourself in the pursuit of what will be pleasing to Him.

*Lord God, may we learn to keep our categorical boxes concerning our life in You straight. You are the One who saves based on our act of faith. We are to then live out that salvation to Your glory, rejoicing in the fact that we were saved and continue to be saved by Your grace. Thank You, O God, for having saved us unto eternal life. Amen.*

**So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. Acts 19:20**

The construction of the Greek is unusual and is widely translated, but a literal translation would be, "Thus, according to might, the word of the Lord: growing and availing" (CG).

Also, depending on the Greek text, the two main thoughts are reversed –

"Thus, according to might, the word of the Lord: growing and availing."

"Thus, according to *the* might of the Lord, the word: growing and availing"

The first will be used for the evaluation.

In the previous verse, the believers who had been meddling in the world of superstition and the occult had brought their books and burned them up, despite the high value that they could have been sold for. With that, it now says, “Thus, according to might.”

The construction of the Greek almost demands that a preposition and a noun be taken together adverbially, as in “And so mightily grew.” Others use the preposition “with” and translate it as “And with might.” However, the word *kata* doesn’t mean “with.” Rather, it literally means “down from,” as if coming from a higher to a lower plane. As such, the meaning is more like “according to.” To retain the structure, it will be rendered this way, “Thus according to might.”

Therefore, it means that there is power in what is being referred to, which is “the word of the Lord.” Despite the Greek which clearly says, “Lord,” some translations like the KJV say “the word of God.” This error goes back to at least the Tyndale Bible of 1526. It was then corrected by the Coverdale Bible of 1535, but the error was reintroduced in later versions.

Hence, it is not Scripture, the word of God, but the doctrine concerning Christ, the word of the Lord, that is being referred to – His name, His deeds, etc. Further, it is according to might that it is then said to be “growing and availing.”

Again, the words are widely translated. The first, *auxanó*, is completely ignored by the KJV. It means to cause to increase, to increase, become greater, or grow. The second word is *ischuó*. It means to have strength, be strong, be in full health and vigor, and even to prevail. For this reason, many translations say, “prevailing.”

It is defined by HELPS Word Studies, noting that for the believer it “refers to the Lord strengthening them with *combative, confrontive* force to achieve all He gives faith for. That is, *facing necessary resistance* that brings what the *Lord* defines is success (*His victory...*).” As such, the word availing seems appropriate.

The might of the word of the Lord is what is useful in causing the desired outcome to occur. This is just what had been happening with the believers that had heard about the power of the Lord and dedicated themselves more fully to Him. Taking the first clause of the previous verse and connecting it to the words of this verse, the progression is more perfectly seen –

“And many of those who had practiced the meddlings, having collected the books, were burning *them* before all. ... Thus, according to might, the word of the Lord: growing and availing.”

The might, the word of the Lord, was the impetus for the growing and availing of the faith of those who heard it. It proceeded to win out over the false doctrines and names of the enchanters. The believers, in turn, acted upon their increased faith through a demonstration of the change that occurred in them.

Life application: Do you feel ineffective in your walk with the Lord? The words of this verse provide the solution. You are not going to become an effective Christian by watching TV all day. You will not become an effective Christian by listening to life application sermons that build you up for a particular aspect of your life unless they are wholly rooted in the word of God. And even then, you will need to hear and also remember a life application on every possible contingency that life throws at you to be able to apply what you were told in any given situation.

What you really need is to read the word, the Holy Bible, and to contemplate what it says. You must be aware of the power of Jesus, the Lord incarnate, as it is revealed there. From there you can understand what He means in relation to our sinful state. You can consider the covenant faithfulness of God, understanding that when you fail Him, He will never fail you. When you are faithless, He will remain faithful because He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

In other words, if you have believed the gospel, you have been saved. You are now “in Christ.” Because of this, He cannot deny the relationship that exists. You are a part of Him and He cannot deny this. Understanding such things will allow you to grow and to avail in Him because you understand the might of the word of the Lord. In summary: Read your Bible.

*Lord God, help us to devote our time wisely by spending time in Your word. Give us the strong and burning desire to know You and to be more like You from day to day. It is Your word that will instruct us in this, and so give us this wisdom and ability that we ask for. Amen.*

**When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” Acts 19:21**

The words more closely read, “And after these things were fulfilled, Paul purposed in the Spirit – having passed through Macedonia and Achaia – to go to Jerusalem, having said, ‘That after I have been there, I must also see Rome’” (CG).

The previous verse told of the word of the Lord growing mightily and prevailing. This occurred in Ephesus. Now a new direction takes place with the words, “And after these things were fulfilled.”

There was a time in Ephesus to evangelize, teach, and raise up leaders, and now that time is about to be fulfilled. Verse 19:10 said that this continued for two years. That was in addition to the three months he had spent reasoning in the synagogue. With this time in Ephesus coming to its completion, it next says, “Paul purposed in the Spirit.”

It is debated whether this should simply refer to a willful spirit in Paul or the Holy Spirit. The word is preceded by an article in the Greek text. Of this, Ellicott – who argues it should simply say “in spirit” – says, “The Greek word, however, implies a reference to something more than human volition. The spirit which formed the purpose was in communion with the Divine Spirit.”

If this is true, and it certainly is, then rendering it “in the Spirit” provides the honor of the communion to the Holy Spirit by saying “in the Spirit.” For example, Paul says elsewhere –

“And those *who are* Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.” Galatians 5:24-26

This is something he repeats in various ways elsewhere. Paul was walking in the Spirit. He was in communion with the Spirit and thus he “purposed in the Spirit” to take action. Therefore, once the gospel was firmly fixed in Ephesus, he – and the Spirit he was in communion with – couldn't sit at ease any longer. And so, it was resolved that it was time to move on. Therefore, it next says, “having passed through Macedonia and Achaia.”

Paul surely yearned to fellowship with the churches he had established. And so, it was his intention that prior to doing anything else, he would go through these areas, certainly anticipating a happy reunion with them, strengthening them, etc. In addition to this, he purposed to use this trip to gather a collection for the saints in Jerusalem. This is noted in his epistles, such as –

“But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. <sup>26</sup> For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup> It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things. <sup>28</sup> Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. <sup>29</sup> But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.” Romans 15:25-29

He also discusses this in great detail in 2 Corinthians 8. As for what he purposed in the Spirit after having passed through Macedonia and Achaia, it was “to go to Jerusalem.”

This was the purpose of the collection he was going to gather from those churches. Those who were in Jerusalem had ministered to the Gentiles in spiritual things. Paul thought it was appropriate to reward them by tending to them in material things. The entire matter concerning this offering was very sensitive. People had made promises and Paul expected them to be fulfilled.

This is especially true because the poorer churches had gone out of their way considering this offering. If the richer churches failed in their promises, it would be an embarrassment to Paul, a stain upon them, and a slap in the face of the poorer churches. Therefore, Paul carefully wrote out the necessity for everything to be handled in a proper fashion.

Once this offering was made, Paul had made plans beyond the trip to Jerusalem. Next, Luke records Paul “having said, ‘That after I have been there, I must also see Rome.’”

This is just what is recorded in the citation from Romans 15 above. He will, in fact, go to Rome. However, it will not be in the manner that he expected as indicated in those words. Of the words of this verse, the Pulpit Commentary, citing Bengel, says –

“Observe also the insatiable appetite of the apostle for spiritual conquests, and his noble contempt for idleness. He has but just won Ephesus and Asia, and already he undertakes Macedonia and Achaia. Nor does his mind stop there, but reaches on to Jerusalem, then stretches onwards to Rome, and meditates the invasion of Spain. Truly neither Alexander, nor Caesar, nor any hero of antiquity was a match for this little Benjamite (Paulus) in the magnanimity of his designs.”

Life application: There is never a time that we can say, “I have nothing else to do in my walk with the Lord.” It is true that Paul said to Timothy that he had finished his race, but the context must be considered –

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. <sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup>Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:6-8

In his words, the surrounding verses tell us that Paul’s race was ending only because of his anticipated death. In the verses following this, he continued to give instruction to Timothy which confirmed he was still active and would continue until that day had arrived.

Even if we are on our deathbed, there is no reason to keep silent about Jesus. If a doctor or nurse comes in, it is time to tell them the good news. If an unbelieving family member comes by, it is time to speak about the hope you possess. Let us continue in the good fight until we can no longer speak. Eternal destinies are being decided in those we encounter from moment to moment.

*Heavenly Father, give us the strength to speak out about Jesus until our dying breath. And more, instill in us the desire to do so. If we fail to speak, we may miss the only chance someone ever has to hear the good news about Your offer of peace and reconciliation. Yes, Lord, help us to do this until our final day arrives. Amen.*

**So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time. Acts 19:22**

The text uses participles to convey Luke’s intent: “And having sent into Macedonia two of those ministering to him, Timothy and Erastus, he held up *for* a time in Asia” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul had decided it was time to leave Ephesus and head to Jerusalem, but before going there, he wanted to pass through Macedonia and Achaia. After visiting Jerusalem, he then wanted to travel to Rome. In order to prepare for his trip to Macedonia and Achaia, Luke now records, “And having sent into Macedonia two of those ministering to him.”



This is to ensure that things were prepared for him when he would finally leave Ephesus. The matter of an offering being taken to Jerusalem was of great importance to Paul, and he wanted to ensure that nothing would cause it to fail or that the commitments that had been made would not be met. Because of this, he sent “Timothy and Erastus.”

Timothy had already gone through Macedonia as is recorded in Acts 17:14, 15. He was also recorded as being in Corinth with Paul in Acts 18:5. Therefore, he was aware of the terrain and familiar with the people. As for Erastus, it is argued whether this is the same person as noted in Romans 16:23. If so, he is noted as the treasurer of the city. Therefore, as Barnes notes, he was “a very proper person to be sent with Timothy for the purpose of making the collection for the poor at Jerusalem. Paul had wisdom enough to employ a man accustomed to monied transactions in making a collection.” Either way, he is most probably the same Erastus mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:20. As for Paul, after having sent these two ahead of him, it says, “he held up *for* a time in Asia.”

The word Luke uses, *epechó*, is seen just five times – all by Luke or Paul. It comes from *epi* (on, upon, etc.), and *echó* (have, hold, possess, etc.). Thus, it means to hold fast, hold up, give attention to, etc. For simplicity, most translations say remained, stayed, stopped, etc. In this case, the German word *anhalt* is a very good equivalent, but there is no single English word that really conveys the exact meaning.

As for Paul staying in Asia and the details about the collection, the traveling of Timothy, and so forth, this is conveyed in his first letter to the Corinthians –

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: <sup>2</sup>On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. <sup>3</sup>And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup>But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.

<sup>5</sup>Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia). <sup>6</sup>And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go. <sup>7</sup>For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits.

<sup>8</sup>But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. <sup>9</sup>For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries.

<sup>10</sup>And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also *do*. <sup>11</sup>Therefore let no one despise him. But send

him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren.

<sup>12</sup> Now concerning *our* brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time." 1 Corinthians 16:1-12

Concerning his words "and *there are* many adversaries," at least a portion of that will be clearly seen in the coming verses of Acts.

Life application: The amount of time and attention that Paul devotes to the issue of the collection for the saints is notable. Acts gives the background information, and the epistles give the instructions, admonitions, and petitions concerning it. It is evident from the detail in this matter, as well as Paul's careful attention to not being a burden on the churches by working with his own hands, that he truly wanted it to be understood how important it was to not take the matter of other people's money lightly.

As can be seen in 1 Corinthians 16:3 & 4 above, he even wanted others to be selected to handle the money. That way, he would not be accused of any wrongdoing or mishandling of the money. The reason this is important is because money is a means of expressing people's time and effort.

If a person is a blue-collar worker, his time and physical effort are represented by the money he is paid. If a person is a white-collar worker, his time and mental effort are represented by the money he makes. If a person is an inventor, the money he receives from the use of his intelligence and skills in inventing represents what he has accomplished. An actor's abilities are reflected in the money he earns for his acting. And so forth.

To mishandle other people's money is to mishandle the thing that represents a portion, even a sizable portion, of that person's life. This is why it is inappropriate for governments to fritter away what they tax from the people. It shows disrespect for those who have put in the effort to produce. Likewise, for a church or those who are responsible for the affairs of the church to have ostentatious displays of wealth demonstrates a lack of care for the time and effort of the people who give for the needs of the church.

Consider this and consider how your own church is run. Does the pastor have a fifty-million-dollar jet? That may sound laughable, but there are those that do. Be wise about where the money your church is given is spent. As noted, Paul was very cautious to do

things above board at all times and in all ways, including concerning the money that he was involved in procuring for the needs of others.

*Lord God, help each of us to be responsible with the things You have entrusted to us in this life. This includes how the money we have a part in controlling is spent. If there is a party or an individual in government that is prone to wasting the money of others, give us the wisdom to vote them out. If there is a ministry that is not proving successful, may we redirect away from it and use those resources more wisely. Help us to rightly consider such things. Amen.*

**And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way.** Acts 19:23

In the previous verse, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia while he stayed in Asia for a time. Now, it says, “And about that time there arose a great commotion.”

The NKJV makes the translation more of a paraphrase. Rather, it says, “And there came, at that time, no small disturbance.” This is referring to the time that Paul purposed to go through Macedonia and had sent the two missionaries ahead of him. At the time he was remaining in Ephesus, but certainly not long after the incident of the false exorcists being exposed, the events to be described came about.

When those exorcists were seen for what they truly were, the believers had a great turning in their hearts towards the Lord, burning their books that contained the magic, incantations, etc. That provides the backdrop for what lies ahead. As for the attitude of the believers that will bring this commotion about, Luke next says, “about the Way.”

In other words, it is their faith and what they have done to bolster it through their actions that were in accord with their lives in Christ that will bring about the commotion. Obviously, when such an event takes place, the people will be on fire for the Lord.

Not only will they remove the inappropriate things from their lives, but they will speak about what they have done to others, telling them that such things are futile and to trust in the Lord. As that word continues to spread, those who are opposed to such a change will not be pleased. Thus, the Way, meaning faith in Jesus Christ, is being set against what will next be described.

Life application: Personal experience in seeing others converted and the change in their lives will validate what is seen in the coming verses. For example, one ministry in Pakistan has frequent converts from Hinduism. Hinduism is a religion that is said to have

over three hundred million gods. These are centered on a core set of gods, but Hinduism is an impossible quagmire of man seeking to please these innumerable supposed deities.

The priests at Hindu temples don't help as they threaten the people through fear tactics, demanding money or the gods will be displeased with them. There is never a sense of security in salvation or a sense of intimacy with these gods.

However, that all changes when a person comes to Christ. This bondage is lifted, and truly unspeakable joy is realized when such a person finds out that God has reached down to them through the cross. He made the first move, and it was fully sufficient to bring about restoration and reconciliation.

Unfortunately, though, there is obvious blowback from this. The priests at the Hindu temples no longer have control over the people. They also can no longer shakedown those people for money. Because of this, there can be real trouble brought upon the new believers in Christ by the priests. They stir up the masses who are still living in bondage and fear, telling them to harm the Christian converts. As the Geneva Bible says, "Gain cloaked with a show of religion is the very cause why idolatry is strongly and stubbornly defended."

Even the local Muslims will also come against the Christians because they too despise the freedom they see in them. Rather than attacking Hindus who are polytheists, they come against Christians who are monotheists. The thinking is completely convoluted, but it demonstrates the power of the gospel to both save and condemn, depending on whether it is accepted or rejected.

Think about this as the next verses are evaluated. But also think about those within Christianity who falsely proclaim that one can lose his salvation. To them, salvation is not by grace through faith because if a person can lose his salvation, then it is a salvation of works. Why would they hold to this? It is for the same reason as the Hindu priests – control.

God did not send Jesus to provide His people with eternal insecurity. Rather, He saves once and for all time. Hold fast to your freedom in Christ and know that God has adopted you as His Son. In this, you are forever reconciled to Him.

*Heavenly Father, it is true that we can displease You through our actions after being saved, but we know that we shall never again be separated from You. You have saved us*

*despite ourselves and for that we are forever grateful. Now, Lord, direct us in Your paths according to Your word so that we will be pleasing to You in all ways. Amen.*

**For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. Acts 19:24**

The words are better rendered, “For someone named Demetrius, a silversmith making silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing to the craftsmen no little business” (CG).

The previous verse noted that no small commotion about the Way arose. That now begins to be explained with the words, “For someone named Demetrius.” The name means Belonging to Demeter. But the name Déméter is the Greek goddess of agriculture and harvest. She also presided over divine law as well as the cycle of life and death. Thus, the name can also signify Belonging to the Earth Mother.

This person is next noted as “a silversmith.” The Greek word is *argurokopos*. It literally means a silver-beater or a silver-cutter. Vincent’s Word Studies notes, “In the next verse he mentions the workmen the two words denoting, respectively, the artisans, who performed the more delicate work, and the laborers, who did the rougher work.”

He was involved in the shaping of silver for “making silver shrines of Artemis.” Many translations say Diana instead of Artemis. Diana is the Roman name for the Greek goddess Artemis, which is what the text reads. Abarim notes the obscurity of the name. It is rather uncertain what the root of it is. However, they tie it to *artames*, meaning safe and sound, as well as to *artemia*, meaning soundness or recovery. As such, they define the name as Healer or Security. Concerning this particular deity, Barnes notes –

“This was a celebrated goddess of the pagan, and one of the twelve superior deities. In the heavens she was Luna, or Meui (the moon); on earth, Diana; and in hell, Hecate. She was sometimes represented with a crescent on her head, a bow in her hand, and dressed in a hunting habit; at other times with a triple face, and with instruments of torture. She was commonly regarded as the goddess of hunting. She was also worshipped under the various names of Lucina, Proserpine, Trivia, etc. She was also represented with a great number of breasts, to denote her as being the fountain of blessings, or as distributing her benefits to each in their proper station. She was worshipped in Egypt, Athens, Cilicia, and among pagan nations generally; but the most celebrated place of her worship was Ephesus, a city especially dedicated to her.”

Concerning Demetrius' silversmith efforts, Luke next notes that his work "was bringing to the craftsmen no little business." Like any such thing, there was profit to be made from peddling this particular religious idol. Of them, the Pulpit Commentary, citing Meyer, says –

"They were silver models of the famous temple of Diana at Ephesus, and were carried as charms on journeys and placed in people's houses to ensure to them the protection of the goddess."

Life application: If you think about it, these goofy little idols are actually no different than buying rosaries and images of Mary along with the countless other idols sold to adherents of the Roman Catholic church. There are entire websites set up to sell innumerable idols to dupe adherents into believing they will somehow be closer to God.

But innumerable Christians from other denominations are caught up in various types of idolatry similar to this as well. Some have Feng Shui objects, some read the daily horoscopes, and others use the cross as a talisman rather than as an object of remembrance of what Christ did. Such idols get set up in our hearts and they only remove us from a close and personal walk with the Lord.

Let us be careful to hold to the word of God as our source of understanding the Lord, and then let us adhere to it by walking closely with the Lord, loving Him with our hearts and souls, and clinging to Him in good times and in bad. Faith in the Lord is what pleases the Lord. Anything else is just a distraction and a hindrance to a close and personal walk with Him.

*Heavenly Father, help us to remove the idols in our hearts and in our homes from our lives. May we cling to You alone as our hope, our Source of protection, and our joy. Help us to be faithful to You, just as You are always faithful to us. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Acts 19:25**

The words of this verse continue what was said in the previous verse. They read, "whom, having assembled also the workmen of such things, said, "Men, you know that from this business is our wealth" (CG).

In the previous verse, Demetrius the silversmith was introduced. He made silver shrines of Artemis which brought the craftsmen no little profit. Luke continues this narrative while speaking of Demetrius and the craftsmen, saying, “whom, having assembled.”

Without going any further, one can deduce that the issue to be discussed is money. It was said that the craftsmen received no little profit from the making of these shrines. Now they are being assembled by Demetrius. Luke next records, “also the workmen of such things.”

These would be the unskilled laborers. The Greek word used to describe them is *ergates*. As can be seen, the root of the word is *erg*, such as in our modern word ergonomics. Being masculine, plural, it signifies workmen. After having gathered all these together, he said, “Men.”

Some translations here say “Sirs” instead of “Men.” However, this is simply an address to men regardless of class or position. For example, in Acts 16:30, where the jailor said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”, the word was one of respect for one with greater authority. Demetrius is addressing a crowd of men gathered together from various classes to discuss their livelihood.

He then continues, saying, “you know that from this business.” Now, using the word *ergasia*, he includes all of them in the thought. There is a large industry being considered. Demetrius is a silversmith, but the matter extends beyond him. It would affect miners, the smelters of metal, and many other steps in the process of making these shrines. It was a fully worked-out industry. And from it he next notes “is our wealth.”

The efforts of these workers were combined into one main business which is the Greek word *euporia*, a word found only here in the New Testament. It signifies what is derived from the business, meaning their monetary wealth. Thus, it is used in the sense of riches, wealth, etc.

Life application: When you think of something you pick up at the store, there is actually an entire business that is involved in making it, even something as simple as a pencil. In fact, if you considered everything involved in the making of a pencil, you would have a list many pages long. And yet, you would probably have forgotten something.

Think of what is involved in obtaining the wood, transporting it, etc. For example, a tree needs to have a saw to cut it down. But the saw is made of metal that had to be taken

out of the ground and forged. The workmen need special clothes and personal protection for logging which must be obtained. There needs to be gas and oil for the chainsaw. Chains need to be replaced from time to time. The air filter might have been made in Wang Chung, China and the spark plug may have been made in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.

These things had to be gathered, itemized, placed in plastic bags, boxed, labeled, etc. The system that is in place to make a single pencil is so vast that it is literally beyond our ability to fully appreciate it. Each of the people involved is a part of the process. If a pastor picks up a pencil to use, that pencil represents thousands or tens of thousands – even an innumerable number – of people directly or indirectly involved in getting it into his hands.

The same is true with the paper he writes on. Etc. He could not easily compose his sermon without such a system in place. Therefore, each of those people was a part of what it takes for a sermon to be written out. God is using the mass of humanity to continue His plan of redemption, and each person should be considered as a part of the process of getting to the end of that plan.

No person should be considered too far from God's grace to be given the gospel, and there should be no Christian who feels his or her job is not worthy of the notice of the Lord's attention in the greater scheme of things. What may seem unimportant or tedious as a profession may be an intricately needed part of getting the most important sermon ever written out to the public.

We just don't know how the things we do are going to affect things elsewhere and at some point in time. So do what you do to the glory of God. He knows exactly how you fit in, and He knows your worth, even if it escapes you. Trust that He has you exactly where you should be to get us to the end of this part of the story and onto the next part of what He is doing.

*Lord God, thank You that we are included in the goodness of what Jesus has done for the people of the world. He came to redeem fallen man, and we are all a part of that state. Therefore, we must have value in this ongoing story that even we do not yet realize. The seemingly lowliest job or task may be an indispensable part of what is going on. May we do our part to Your glory because of this. Amen.*



**“Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. Acts 19:26**

The verse more correctly reads: “And you see and hear, that not only in Ephesus, but almost all Asia, this Paul – having persuaded – seduced a sizable multitude, saying that they are not gods being made by hands” (CG).

In the previous verse, Demetrius had called together the workers in the related silver trade and reminded them that they received a good income from their business. However, that was now threatened as Luke continues to relay his words, saying, “And you see and hear.”

The effects of Paul were readily apparent to Demetrius. And so, appealing to their own senses, he validates that what he is saying is obvious and true. Those in the silver trade had personally seen the scope of Paul’s ministry and they had obviously heard of it from those of other areas who had come to trade as well. That is seen in the next words, “that not only in Ephesus but almost all Asia.”

Paul was in Ephesus, but there were other churches in Asia as well. They may have been started by him or others, but if they were started by others (such as those who had been there at the first Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection), they would have been more Jewish-centered. Paul was called as the Apostle to the Gentiles. Therefore, even if he did not start some of the other churches in Asia, he still would have had an effect on their expansion into the Gentiles of the community where they were.

Therefore, this verse provides confirmation of the scope and efficacy of the work conducted by him which is recorded in verse 19:10 –

“And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”

He had such a great harvest among the Gentiles that it caused these people to feel the effects of his ministry personally and monetarily. It isn’t certain, but if the areas around the seven churches in Revelation were evangelized by Paul, along with those areas that he is definitively noted as having been at in Asia (Ephesus, Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis), almost two-thirds of Asia's coastline would have been affected by his efforts. That would certainly explain the great alarm of Demetrius. Therefore, his words continue with an emphatic note, “this Paul.”

The demonstrative pronoun calls attention to the source of their loss. One might say, “Paul is a real problem for us.” Or he might emphasize his words to get the point across, “That Paul, he is a real problem for us.” This is the sense of Demetrius’ words. He then continues to explain what the matter is saying, “having persuaded – seduced a sizeable multitude.”

The first verb means to persuade or convince. Paul was clear and precise in what he said, even to the point that people were convicted of their sins and certain that they needed what he offered in his words concerning the good news of Jesus Christ.

The second verb, *methistémi*, means to change, pervert, turn away, etc. In Colossians 1:13, it speaks of the change that takes place in us when we come to Christ. In the case of Demetrius’ thoughts about Paul, the word “seduced” probably carries the thought that was on his mind. Paul didn’t just persuade people with his rhetoric, but he seduced them away from what he believed was right, “saying that they are not gods being made by hands.”

Of these words, Bengel humorously asks, “Are they then, Demetrius?” Demetrius was so depraved in his thoughts that he believed the things he made with his own hands were actually gods. Just note the irony! If the idols he was making were really gods, then he – a man – was the creator of gods. This is the type of attitude that Paul addressed in Acts 17:29 –

“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.”

Paul also addresses the issue of such idolatry in Romans 1. From that springboard, having traded the truth of God for a lie, other sins inevitably develop. In fact, Paul’s list, which is at first based on turning away from God to idolatry, is quite extensive –

“And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; <sup>29</sup> being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, <sup>30</sup> backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; <sup>32</sup> who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that

those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.” Romans 1:28-32

But with Paul in the province of Asia, the unholy tide of idolatry was beginning to ebb. Surely at least in part because of his efforts, Ellicott notes these words –

“Pliny, in his Epistle to Trajan (Epp. x. 96), uses language, half a century later, which is hardly less strong, speaking of ‘deserted temples,’ ‘worship neglected,’ ‘hardly a single purchaser’ (rarissimus emptor) found for sacrificial victims.”

Life application: The stupidity of idolatry seems obvious to a person once he comes to know and understand the nature of the true God. And yet, idolatry is so infectious that it can continue in the lives of believers. We must always be on guard against it because anything can turn into an idol. And, depending on the church one is in, it can be reinstated in the lives of adherents almost instantaneously.

An obvious example is the Roman Catholic Church which is so filled with idols that the true God has become an ethereal secondary thought to most Catholics. This is true with other orthodox religions. It can creep into any church that is not prepared to meet the temptation head-on.

Take the time to slowly read and think about the words of Isaiah 44:9-20. Consider what is being said about idolatry and then determine to weed all such ideas out of your life. Eyes on Jesus! Let your heart, mind, and soul be filled with the knowledge of Him at all times. This is the sweet spot for your life, doctrine, and practice of faith.

*Glorious God, help us to constantly evaluate our lives, removing the idols from them as they creep up. May our hearts and affections be directed to You alone as we live our lives in Your presence. Thank You for the sure hope we possess because of Jesus. We need nothing else to connect with You. He is our All in all. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**“So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.” Acts 19:27**

In the previous verse, the efforts of Paul concerning evangelism were noted, saying that not only in Ephesus but in all of Asia he had turned many away from the notion that

gods made by hands are even gods at all. Now, Demetrius continues with the words, “So not only.”

These words cover what was just conveyed, the business of the craftsmen was in peril. As such, their livelihood would go with it. Instead of thinking about how they could change their skills in working with silver, they wanted to forge ahead with what they had been doing all along. However, he says not only “is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute.”

The word *meros*, translated as “trade,” is not the same as in verse 25. This word signifies a portion or a share. Demetrius is riling up the men because their piece of the pie was in jeopardy. Also, the word *apelegmos*, translated as “disrepute,” is seen only here in the New Testament. The meaning is that it would be exposed, refuted, or brought into contempt.

Therefore, Demetrius’ words are based on the words of the previous verse that “they are not gods which are made with hands.” Any simpleton could walk by armed with this knowledge and see that the smiths were there pounding out little idols one after another. But, despite the temple idol being on a much larger scale, the same was true concerning what the little idols were based on: the large temple idol. That is seen in his next words, “but also the temple.”

No matter how big and majestic a temple may be, no matter how much awe and wonder there may be at the intricacy of it or the splendor it contained, it was still just a temple. A temple, when rightly considered, was just a bigger version of that which is made by hands. Whether small or large, hands had fashioned it. Thus, it was – by default – constructed by human effort.

Solomon acknowledged this at the erection of the temple –

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!”

-1 Kings 8:27

Regardless of what the purpose of the temple was for, Solomon was the one to have built the temple of the Lord. Both Stephen and Paul refer to the truth Solomon spoke out as well –

“However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

<sup>49</sup> ‘Heaven *is* My throne,  
And earth *is* My footstool.

What house will you build for Me? says the LORD,  
Or what *is* the place of My rest?

<sup>50</sup> Has My hand not made all these things?’” Acts 7:48-50

“God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.” Acts 17:24

In the case of the temple at Ephesus, Demetrius says it is the temple “of the great goddess Diana.” Again, as in verse 19:24, it should read Artemis. It is the Greek name of the goddess. Scholars note that the term “the great goddess” is an epithet that has been found on many coins and medals of the city. What is important to the argument being set forth is that the worship of Artemis means the supposed existence of more than one god. This is also a concept opposed by Paul.

Therefore, if Paul’s words were believed, and he proclaimed just one God, then Artemis must be a false goddess. Demetrius’ words mean that if people logically thought through what Paul was saying, their goddess “may be despised.”

These words literally read, “to be reckoned for nothing.” If the God Paul proclaimed is the One true God, then the temple where the goddess Artemis was located was an edifice of vanity. That falls in line with Solomon’s words concerning the temple in Jerusalem. God is not limited to a single temple made by human hands.

Only the purpose of the temple in Jerusalem was what made it different. It was a place to focus attention on the God who could not be contained within it. On the other hand, the temple of Artemis was erected to contain the goddess within. When it was realized she was not a goddess, the temple would then be reckoned for nothing “and her magnificence destroyed.”

Here, a play on words is made. A harmony of wording between the “great goddess,” *megales theas*, and “magnificence,” *megaleiotētos*, is seen. In essence, Demetrius is saying that the great goddess would lose her greatness. But if she was so great, how could she lose her greatness?

As for the word translated as “destroyed,” it means to “take down,” “dethrone,” or “depose.” It is the same word used concerning Jesus being taken down from the cross four times in the gospels and Acts, such as in Luke 23:53 –

“Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb *that was* hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before.”

As for Demetrius’ words concerning Artemis, he next notes of her, “whom all Asia and the world worship.” Of this, Matthew Pool notes, “though the Romans might worship any god (of those multitudes) which they allowed, yet they might leave their estates only to a very few amongst them; but Diana of the Ephesians was one of those few.”

As this is so, the money that came to this temple would have been exceedingly great. As such, it made great profits for the artisans that worked for her name. An entire industry was in jeopardy. This is the crux of the matter at hand.

Life application: The place where the church meets often inappropriately takes the place of the purpose of the building. In other words, the difference between the temple in Jerusalem and that of Artemis was noted. One was for the central worship of God who cannot be contained within the temple. The other was for a place of worship of the false goddess that was contained within it.

When the church gathers to meet in a particular location, it is not because God is more there than anywhere else. It is because those believers are sealed with the Spirit, and they are uniting to worship the God that transcends all things. However, this notion is often lost in the minds of believers. Too much focus is on the building itself or the things contained within it. This can take our eyes from where they should be.

Let us remember that whether we meet in a little church with no frills, in an open-air forum, or in a big church with all kinds of fancy stuff, the purpose of gathering is to worship the Lord, to study His word, and to jointly praise and petition Him. The externals will all fade away, but the glory of the Lord will remain undiminished forever.

“Thus says the LORD:  
‘Heaven *is* My throne,  
And earth *is* My footstool.  
Where *is* the house that you will build Me?  
And where *is* the place of My rest?  
<sup>2</sup> For all those *things* My hand has made,

And all those *things* exist,  
Says the LORD.  
'But on this *one* will I look:  
On *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit,  
And who trembles at My word.'" Isaiah 66:1, 2

*Glorious God Almighty! How good it is to be in Your presence and to acknowledge You in spirit and in truth. May our hearts and minds be focused on Your splendor and beauty. May our hearts be directed by Your word. And may our lives be lived in a manner that will glorify You for all of our days. Amen.*

**Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"** Acts 19:28

More precisely, the words read, "And having heard, and having been filled with wrath, they cried out saying, 'Great, the Artemis of Ephesians'" (CG).

In the previous verse, Demetrius had put forth his case that the trade of the silversmiths was in danger of falling into disrepute and that the magnificence of Diana might be destroyed. With that, the reaction is swift as Luke records, "And having heard, and having been filled with wrath."

The words of Demetrius, and the thought of their money running out, were convincing enough to bring these men into a bitter rage. Luke uses the word *thumos*. It is the type of anger where one gets heated up and breathes violently.

For example, it was used in Luke 4 when those in the synagogue in Nazareth heard Jesus' words about God's compassion for the Gentiles while overlooking the plight of the Jews. The Jews were so incensed at the thought of what He said that they determined to throw Him off a nearby cliff. This is the same heated rage now being expressed by those in Ephesus. Therefore, "they cried out."

The verb is imperfect denoting continuance. As will be seen, this continued crying out will spread and eventually get the whole city in a lather. As for their words, Luke records the crowd as "saying, 'Great, the Artemis of Ephesians.'"

This may have been something called out at religious festivals each year, or it may just be a spontaneous chant that arose to meet the occasion. Either way, it is not unlike the way that people throw out chants during sports games or rallies for one cause or

another. Quite often they lack any true reason, but because they are short and catchy, they quickly become entrenched in the unthinking minds of others.

Life application: One of the common ways those with no reasonable argument will attempt to defend their viewpoint is to raise a ruckus, shouting and chanting. The liberal left has become champions of this type of activity. Without any coherent stand on an issue, such as abortion, they still gather into masses with placards and ridiculous chants that are intended to stir others up to their cause.

It worked thousands of years ago in Ephesus, and it continues to work today. This is not uncommon in areas where false religions are practiced as well. When the truth of Christianity starts to take a foothold in an area, just what is seen in Acts 19 will happen in that area.

Logical arguments and sound reasoning will not take place in such gatherings. Therefore, the best thing to do is to not engage such people. They will easily get stirred up to the point where violent reactions will take over. Turn on the news and watch any nutty leftist cause do exactly this. Such instances from the recent past are the Antifa riots, the BLM movement, and the leftist reactions to overturning of Roe vs. Wade,.

The people involved are lefties, they have no clear argument, and they are set on destruction and mayhem at the expense of what is moral, sound, and proper. This will only increase as the days unfold. Be aware of this attitude and keep yourself away from such demonstrations lest you get overwhelmed by such thugs.

*Heavenly Father, the world of man is not geared toward sound thinking and reason. And the message of the cross of Jesus Christ takes both. And so, we see enmity toward the gospel increasing everywhere. Along with faith in Christ comes moral thinking, holiness, and respect. Such things are no longer considered proper. So, Lord, give us wisdom to choose our battles and to know when to speak and when to remain silent. Amen.*

**So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions.**  
Acts 19:29

To match the Greek, these words are more closely rendered, "And the city was filled – the outpouring – and rushed single-mindedly to the theater, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, fellow-travelers of Paul" (CG).



In the previous verse, the silversmiths had gotten lathered up at the words of Demetrius and cried out, saying “Great is Diana *of* the Ephesians.” With that, people began to take notice of their excited cries and Luke next notes, “And the city was filled – the outpouring.”

It is a noun found only here in Scripture, *sugchusis*.

It comes from the verb *sugcheó*, meaning to pour out together. Figuratively, it refers to being confused or confounded. As the noun form is used, the word outpouring (an outburst of strong emotion) gives a close sense. The people heard the shouts of the silversmiths, the word was passed on from there concerning what was going on, and everyone poured out of their homes and businesses in a heat of emotion. From there, it next notes, “and rushed single-mindedly to the theater.”

Here is a word, *homothumadon*, found eleven times in the New Testament, ten of those instances are in Acts, and this is the last use in Acts. Its root words signify “same” and “passion.” Thus, it describes having the same passion or the same desire. The minds agree and thus “single-mindedly” gives the sense.

Even if they didn’t know why they were going to the theater, they were propelled by a herd mentality with one purpose. As for the theater mentioned here, it was next to the temple of Artemis and is said to have been able to hold 25,000 people according to Ellicott. Vincent’s Word Studies says it held 56,000. Apparently, it was built for gladiator combat of the day, but it was also a theater for drama and public debates. It would have been a perfect place for the gathering to meet.

Concerning the mob, in verse 32, it will note that most of the people didn’t even know why they had come together. They had simply followed the growing mob, one after another. However, of those that did know why they had come together, it next notes, “having seized Gaius and Aristarchus.”

As the crowd rushed towards the focal point of the action, those who knew that it was because of the spreading of the gospel snatched these two men by force and carried them off.

As for their names, Gaius probably comes from *gaia*, earth or land. Thus, it means Of the Land. This could be taken as “he is a man of the land” like a farmer, or it could signify “he is made from the earth” like Adam. The name Gaius was one of the most common names of the time. It is the same as the Roman Caius. Several men will be noted with

this same name in the New Testament. There could be overlap in them so that one or two are the same person, but this is not certain.

The second name, Aristarchus, comes from *ariston*, breakfast or midday meal (signifying the best meal), and *archó*, to rule. Thus, his name means Best Ruler. He will be seen again in Acts 20:4 where he is noted as being from Thessalonica. In Colossians 4:10 he is noted as Paul's fellow prisoner. He came to Christ through Paul and stayed close to him through thick and thin. He is also seen in Acts 27:2 and Philemon 1:24.

Of these men, Luke notes that both were “Macedonians.” As they are in Ephesus, they are not local to the area and had become targets of the crowd because they were also “fellow-travelers of Paul.”

This is a new noun *sunekdemos*. It comes from three words meaning “with,” “out of,” and “people,” but people of a like commonality. They are those who traveled with Paul, out of another place, and thus “fellow-travelers.”

Life application: One can see how a tumult raised by one group has grown into a general crowd that is gathered into a mob. This is as common as gravel on a driveway. Once a little ruckus gets going outside a store, people will start to gather to see what is going on. Often, without even knowing the circumstances, there will be someone to egg things on. “That guy was minding his own business and the cops started pounding on him.”

From there, the crowd starts yelling at the cops, maybe throwing stuff at them. General disarray erupts, the riot police have to be called, and people get thrown into jail. The person was a shoplifter, he turned on the cops and started pounding on them, they took action to subdue him, the crowd was in the wrong, cops were beaten, and one was killed. All because someone made up a false story.

Solomon says –

“He who passes by *and* meddles in a quarrel not his own  
*is like* one who takes a dog by the ears.” Proverbs 26:17

Grabbing a dog by the ears is not smart. They will usually attack and bite the person who does it. When you see a tussle going on outside, the best thing to do is to keep your distance and not get involved. To get more such wisdom, be sure to read the Proverbs from time to time. It is filled with good information like this. Pay attention to it and keep yourself from disaster.

*Lord God, help us to make the Bible a priority in our daily lives. It is certain that it will fill us with wisdom and also keep us from harm. Above all, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord who will save us from this world of woe, even if we get caught up in it from time to time because we failed to read Your word. In the end, we shall be secure. Amen.*

**And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him.**

Acts 19:30

The verbs in the NKJV need a tune-up – “And Paul, desiring to enter to the people, the disciples would not allow him” (CG).

In the previous verse, the city of Ephesus was seized with the rising disturbance initiated by the words of Demetrius. Eventually, they seized Gaius and Aristarchus as they rushed into the theater. With that, it next says, “And Paul, desiring to enter to the people.”

As is Luke’s custom, the use of participles brings action to the narrative, as if it is occurring in front of our eyes. Paul probably wanted to stand up and give the gospel to the entire city. It would save a lot of time to do it this way, but it would also bear the possibility of physical harm.

This wasn’t as important to him as getting the word out, so setting his own safety aside and appealing to the masses would take the pressure off Gaius and Aristarchus and place it on him. Paul had rushed into the middle of a group of excited people in the past (e.g. Acts 14:14) and he will do it again later in Acts (such as Acts 21:39).

He saw incidents such as this as opportunities to speak to more people at once about the wonderful saving message of Jesus. Regardless of bodily harm, this was his driving passion. In this case, however, “the disciples would not allow him.”

In 1 Corinthians 15:32, Paul says –

“If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage *is it* to me? If *the* dead do not rise, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!’”

The incident now being recorded might be what he was referring to. Ephesus was a large city and there were probably not a lot of wild beasts running around. Rather, he is either using the meaning figuratively to speak of wild, raging people, or he may be referring to his desire to enter the theater. Such a theater would, at times, be used for

actually fighting wild beasts. As such, he may have been saying, “I was willing to enter the theater and fight for the gospel in that setting.”

Regardless of the situation, his words in 1 Corinthians 15 are likely figurative in nature. In this case, however, the disciples were sure he would be harmed, so they restrained him. This will continue to be seen in the next verse.

Life application: Paul was restrained from entering by people that could perceive the danger of the situation. He probably didn’t care about that, but they did. As such, they kept him from what he wanted.

Despite him being an apostle and they being his disciples, they were willing to set this type of authority aside for the greater good. There may be times when a church sees a pastor being overzealous for an issue. His care may be to get the word out, but they may perceive a danger that he is unwilling to acknowledge. As such, it becomes their responsibility to take the reasonable avenue and restrain him.

Despite being the pastor for instruction and leading, he is just a guy. His ability to grasp all of what is going on around him is limited. There may be a point, therefore, that stopping him for the sake of safety may be just the thing needed at the time. Just as the pastor looks out for his flock, those of the church should look out for him.

*Lord Jesus, You have appointed leaders in Your church to guide the people in spiritual matters. But You have also placed people under their care who may have the ability to assist them in ways they cannot even imagine. So, Lord, help us to use our abilities to assist and protect those appointed over us. May Your wisdom guide us all our days. Amen.*

**Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. Acts 19:31**

To be more precise, the words read, “And also some of the Asiarchs, being his friends, having sent to him, were imploring not to venture himself into the theater” (CG).

In the previous verse, it noted that Paul wanted to go to the people in the theater but that the disciples would not allow him. That continues now, saying, “And also some of the Asiarchs.” It is a word found only here in Scripture. Vincent’s Word Studies says of them, “These were persons chosen from the province of Asia, on account of their influence and wealth, to preside at the public games and to defray their expenses.”

Charles Ellicott adds to this, saying, “The office was an annual one. They were ten in number, and the proconsul nominated one of them as president. Their duties led them now to one city, now to another, according as games or festivals were held, now at Ephesus, now at Colophon, or Smyrna. As connected both with the theatre and with the worship of Artemis, they were probably officially informed of the occasion of the tumult.”

Concerning these Asiarchs, Luke next records, “being his friends.” How he became connected to these men isn’t stated. Likewise, it is unknown if they were believers or not. Regardless, Ellicott seems to be correct when he says, “There is something significant in the fact that the Asiarchs were St. Paul’s friends. The manliness, tact, and courtesy which tempered his zeal and boldness, seem always to have gained for him the respect of men in authority: Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7), Gallio (Acts 18:14-17), Festus and Agrippa (Acts 25:9; Acts 26:28; Acts 26:32), the centurion Julius (Acts 27:3; Acts 27:43).”

Paul was obviously bold and firm in his speaking. Therefore, whether he obtained converts of others or not, the men respected him for his character. Because they are noted as his friends, Luke continues with, “having sent to him.”

Whether they were in the theater and saw the riotous nature of the crowd, or whether they were elsewhere in the city and knew of what was occurring, they sent a messenger to Paul and “were imploring not to venture himself into the theater.”

These men were aware of Paul’s character. They knew that if he went into the theater he would immediately go to where he could be heard and begin to speak up about the gospel. Having dealt with him in the past, they were certain this would be the case. They also knew that the fracas was because of him and his supposed undermining of Artemis.

All of this is either explicit or it can be deduced from the surrounding text. Knowing this, they begged him to refrain from entering, knowing that the outcome would result in certain harm to him.

Life application: As noted above, it is apparent that Paul was known to highly prominent men, not just in Asia but wherever he traveled. Even if they were not converts, he gained their respect as a person. His words and demeanor may have been totally directed to the sharing of the gospel. However, he did it in a manner that was bold and firm but not confrontational.

At times, one may come across a street preacher who yells out his message. He may stand and condemn everyone around him to hell for not accepting Jesus. These things may be true, but there is no reason for this type of conduct. To tell people that they need Jesus in order to be saved implies that they are not saved. If they are not saved, the implication is that they are already separated from God. People get this without being yelled at that they are sinners and are going to hell.

And the whole yelling thing. Yeah, right. If someone comes to your business and you start yelling at him, well, that won't go over well.

[Shouted loudly] "If you don't buy this extra insurance for your new appliance, you are an idiot!"

You will not sell many insurance policies that way. The same is true with selling hot dogs, promoting your plumbing business, etc. There is a way to convey the gospel message without yelling and/or accusation. Reading the evangelistic words of Paul in Acts will help you see how he conveyed the message. Even if his words were rejected, he was received as an honorable man.

The strong words of accusation by Paul (and by Jesus) were saved for those who claimed to be followers of the true God but who were not living according to their proclamation. For the unsaved, they were treated boldly in the message, but respectfully regardless of its acceptance or rejection. Follow this path and you will find that even if you meet with initial failure, you may later have success with those same people.

*Heavenly Father, may we be wise and discerning in how we present the gospel to others. It is the message that saves. If we don't present it with respect and care, it will not only be rejected at first, but the encounter will be remembered by those who were offended by our presentation. Our goal should be to exalt You and this saving message, not to demean and condemn those who hear our words. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Acts 19:32**

The words more precisely read, "Others, indeed therefore, another thing were crying, for the assembly was in confusion, and the majority knew not for what reason they were assembled" (CG).

In the previous verse, the Asiarchs implored Paul to not enter the theater. The reason for that is now stated, saying, “Others, indeed therefore, another thing were crying.” The meaning is as many versions paraphrase. They will say something like, “Some cried one thing and some another.” The intent is that there was utter chaos with people yelling out whatever they thought was going on. Further explaining this, Luke next says, “for the assembly was in confusion.”

The word translated as assembly is *ecclesia*. It is the same word used to describe the church. It comes from *ek* – out and *kaleo* – call. Thus, it means a “called out assembly.” In the case of this one, it was not sanctioned by leaders but by miscreants, as will be seen in a few verses.

Also, the verb is in the passive voice, “in confusion.” All of the din from the various voices calling out brought the entire gathering into confusion. It was, therefore, a dangerous situation to enter. If Paul entered and started speaking and another voice got the upper hand, Paul’s life could easily be in jeopardy.

Paul would be appealing for the gospel’s sake, Demetrius or another would bring up the matter of Artemis and Paul’s diminishing of her supposed glory, and the crowd would be easily swayed. They were in tumult “and the majority knew not for what reason they were assembled.”

As this is so, there would be heightened uncertainty and any spark could light a fire in the people’s minds. As such, and knowing this was the state of things, the Asiarchs had appealed to Paul to not get involved in the matter. The crowd was too large and too excited to take such a chance.

Life application: The images set forth in this verse are vivid and were certainly provided to Luke by firsthand witnesses. The descriptions are a perfectly apt description of a tumultuous gathering of people.

Throughout history, people flock to any large commotion simply to say they were a part of it, even if they have no idea why it was called. It is an excellent description of the term “sheeple.” Individuals are smart. But when brought into crowds, the herd mentality renders them stupid.

This is a dangerous situation to join. This is especially so when there are people that may be pushing for a religious or political upheaval. Such occurred on 6 January 2020 in Washington D.C. Government officials were embedded in the crowd to agitate it and to

set them up in a hoped-for insurrection. Thus, they could bring charges against the demonstrators and against the sitting president. Such instigators are to be found in almost every such large gathering. So be on your guard and stay away from such crowds.

*O God, give us wisdom to handle our daily affairs carefully and with reason. May we not get caught up in affairs that could bring a stain upon Your name. Instead, help us to always be wise and discerning as we live out our lives in Your presence. Amen.*

**And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people.**

Acts 19:33

In the previous verse, Luke noted the confusion of the assembly and that most of the people didn't even know why they were assembled. With that, it next says, "And they drew Alexander out of the multitude."

This is not the first time the name Alexander has been seen in Scripture, but this is the first time this particular person has been noted. According to Abarim, the name is defined saying –

"A curious consequence of the distinction between the nouns *ἀνερ* [aner] and *ἄνθρωπος* [anthropos] is that the name Alexander does not so much mean Defender of Man(kind), as it is commonly translated, but more so Defence Of The Men. In other words, this name does not so much commemorate mankind's defense against, say, forces of nature, wild animals or even the gods, but rather our boys from the evil others. The name Alexander does not speak of the betterment of mankind but rather of competition among armies or cultures or systems of governance, and the edge of advantage that the 'way of Alexander' has over the other armies and systems of governance."

Of this particular Alexander, it next notes, "the Jews putting him forward." Rather, being an aorist participle, it reads, "the Jews, having thrust him forward."

It appears that there may have been collusion between the leaders of the rabble and the Jews in attendance. They have shown up in order to act against Paul, just as the silversmiths had. These people, knowing Alexander, and having had him recommended by the Jews to speak against Paul – who was a supposed apostate from Judaism – brought him forward out of the crowd.



This Alexander then is quite likely the same guy mentioned in 2 Timothy 4 –

“Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. <sup>15</sup>You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.” 2 Timothy 4:14, 15

If it is the same person, the assumption can be made that he had a connection with Demetrius through their trade of working in metals. Therefore, if Demetrius was harmed by the loss of livelihood, Alexander may have suffered as well. Being a Jew who had not received the gospel, that would only increase his desire to see Paul harmed.

It may be that this person was on Paul’s mind when he penned his words in Romans 2, but specifically in Romans 2:22 –

“Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; <sup>18</sup>if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; <sup>19</sup>if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, <sup>20</sup>an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— <sup>21</sup>you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? <sup>22</sup>You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup>You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? <sup>24</sup>As it is written: ‘God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’” Romans 2:17-24

This is speculation, but Paul’s points about various issues stem from the things he had seen, heard, and experienced. This event in Ephesus, along with any other mistreatment by the Jews there, would have stuck in his mind as he wrote out his epistle. As for Alexander now having been thrust forward to speak, it next says, “And Alexander motioned with his hand.”

This is the common way one identifies himself as being prepared to speak. It has already been noted several times in Acts, and it will be noted again as Luke’s descriptions continue. Paul will speak before another highly agitated crowd in Acts 21 –

“After receiving the commander’s permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic...”  
-Acts 21:40

As for Alexander, it next says, “and wanted to make his defense to the people.” Rather, it says, “and wanted to make a defense to the people.” He was not defending his own actions. Instead, he was setting forth an *apologeomai*, a “compelling defense with sound logic” (HELPS Word Studies). This defense was to be in favor of Demetrius’ accusations against Paul as stated in verses 19:25-27.

Life application: The quote from Romans 2 is addressed to the Jew. Paul does this throughout Romans, using the Jew as an example to make points about the law versus grace, etc. This does not mean that the words are for the Jews and that they have no bearing on Gentiles, as if those parts can be cut out of the book when dealing with church doctrine.

As stupid as that surely sounds to you, it is not uncommon for people to have this type of theology. They pull out words, verses, and paragraphs and claim they do not apply to those in the church. Hyperdispensationalists will do this, for example, in an attempt to justify their unjustifiably poor doctrine.

What Paul writes in his epistles is doctrine for the church. His address to the Jew is a literary device to get people to think an issue through. He is not saying, “Ok, Gentiles don’t need to pay attention for a minute.” Rather, he is saying, “Brethren (Jew and Gentile), pay attention to this point in case someone comes along and brings up this issue about the Jews.”

The main point of what Paul is saying is that the law is opposed to grace. The Jews who rely on the law for their righteousness are placing their hope in the wrong place. “Therefore, O church consisting of both Jew and Gentile, put your trust in Jesus Christ and you will be deemed righteous before God.” The Jew is being used as an example in instruction.

Stay away from anyone who cannot understand basic context. Your doctrine, and thus your walk before the Lord, will be greatly harmed if your biblical analysis does not rightly consider context.

*Lord God, You have given us Your precious word to instruct and guide us. And there are many teachers of the word in the world. However, many of them haven’t taken the time to rightly understand it themselves. So, Lord, lead us away from poor teachers. As we read and learn Your word on our own, help illuminate it to us so that we will know when false teachings are presented to us. Amen.*

**But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” Acts 19:34**

The words are more closely rendered, “And having recognized that he is a Jew, there was one voice from all over about two hours, crying, ‘Great, the Artemis of Ephesians’” (CG).

Alexander was ready to speak, having motioned with his hand before the multitude. However, it now says, “And having recognized that he is a Jew.” The verb is in the present tense. Luke is writing as if it is happening right before our eyes.

Unfortunately for Demetrius and Alexander, whether they were in collusion together or not, those who recognized Alexander saw him as a Jew, they saw Paul as a Jew, and so the two were lumped together into the same basket – both as miscreants against their great goddess. As most of the crowd didn’t have any idea why they were there, this means that only some of the people were paying attention to this fact.

But to those who understood what was going on, a Jew would have been the same as any other Jew. Those that had heard Paul speak about the futility of idolatry would have remembered that and assumed Alexander held the same beliefs as Paul. Therefore, in their recognition of this fact, “there was one voice from all.”

In verse 32, those who gathered had been crying out whatever was on their minds. There was no harmony to their voices. However, they are all brought together into the singular “one voice” as the voice of those who had instigated the gathering began to prevail. Like the united chants for a particular political leader, the crowd was brought into harmony which spanned “over about two hours.”

What had started as a gathering of curiosity for most had become a united gathering in support of the original rallying cry. This would have increased the unity of those gathered immensely because they were “crying, ‘Great, the Artemis of Ephesians.’”

Being unwilling to listen to a Jew, the crisis was diverted for the Christians. Instead, a general roar of the original cries noted in verse 28 became a united rallying call to the masses. Because Ephesus was where the temple of the goddess Artemis was located, the people had become focused on it as the central purpose of their gathering.

Life application: It doesn’t take much to convince a group of people to act in a particular way. Many studies have shown that people will even do unreasonable things simply because a majority of those around them are doing them. It is the herd mindset that can

take over anyone who either wants to join in with a cause or who is unwilling to speak out about the incorrect nature of a matter.

Quite often, this occurs because people don't want to look foolish to others. This herd mindset then becomes a cult mindset. Jim Jones understood this and led an entire group of people to Guyana. They faithfully followed his leading, eventually to their own deaths. The same has repeatedly happened throughout history. Think of the cultlike thinking of those during the COVID event in 2021!

To varying degrees, this type of thing occurs in churches all the time. For example, the cult of King James Onlyism demands that only that translation be used. It claims that any other translation is of the devil. This is not an act of faithfulness to the word. If it were, the truth of the matter would be searched out. In searching, the mindset would be dismissed as ridiculous. But it is not. Fear of the leader sets in and control over the congregation is solidified.

The same occurs with other erroneous doctrines, moral perversity, etc. Anytime a leader claims something is exclusive to his teaching, it should be carefully considered. It is true that if his teaching is that Jesus is the only way to heaven, then he is teaching what is correct. However, if he teaches that Jesus is the only way to heaven and that salvation can only be realized in, for example, the Church of Christ, it is time to leave that church.

The only way to find out if such things are appropriate or not is to read and know the word. If this is not done, people are setting themselves up for disaster at the hands of others.

*Thank You, Lord God, for Your precious word. It has been given to us to keep us on the straight and narrow path, and it certainly tells us what that path is. This can be verified in Your word. Help us to get to know this wonderful treasure of safety, security, and grounded hope that You have given to us. Amen.*

**And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Zeus? Acts 19:35**

A more literal rendering, even if a bit clunky, would be, "And having calmed the crowd, the recorder says, "Men, Ephesians, why, for is there a man who knows not the Ephesian city is being temple-sweeper *of* the great Artemis and the Zeus-fallen?" (CG).

In the previous verse, the people were in an uproar for about two hours, shouting, “Great, the Artemis of Ephesians.” Now, in response to the ruckus, it next says, “And having calmed the crowd, the recorder says.”

Note the use of the present tense, “says.” Luke draws the reader directly into the events as if they are occurring right now.

With such tumult, it would take a particularly noted person to calm the people. The person now introduced is such a soul. The Greek reads *grammateus*. It is the same word translated elsewhere as scribe. This is most especially found in the synoptic gospels, but it is also seen once in John, a few times in Acts, and once in 1 Corinthians 1:20.

This person probably held a permanent office instead of the annual offices of the Asiarchs. Plus, he would be a local resident and known to the people. Hence, he would be the one with the true power. His words would have more weight than the temporary positions he served. The excitement of Demetrius is contrasted with how calm this person is. In calming the people, he says, “Men, Ephesians.”

He is appealing to their identity to make a point about what is going on. From there, he makes what he assumes is a logical appeal to their senses as Ephesians, saying, “why, for is there a man who knows not.”

It is a rhetorical question. The answer would be obvious to anyone if he just thought it through. In fact, his words demonstrate that the matter should be universally known and understood that “the Ephesian city is being temple-sweeper.”

The recorder’s use of a present participle indicates that this is the case, and it continues to be the case. Ephesus is the *neókoros*, or temple-sweeper, of Artemis. The word comes from *naos*, temple, and *koreó*, to sweep. It is found only here in the New Testament. Vincent’s Word Studies says, “This title, originally applied to the lowest menials of the temple, became a title of honor, and was eagerly appropriated by the most famous cities. Alexander says, ‘The city of Ephesus is the sacristan of the great goddess Artemis.’”

The thought is similar to the words of Psalm 84 –

“For a day in Your courts *is* better than a thousand.  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.” Psalm 84:10

To be a Levite doorkeeper may not be as important as the priestly offeror of incense or the sacrifices, but it was of greater honor than any other position in all of Israel due to the proximity to God and the personal offering connected with the service of His temple. This is how a temple-sweeper would feel in the presence “of the great Artemis and the Zeus-fallen?”

This is the last time that Artemis will be seen in Scripture. As for the words “the Zeus-fallen,” they come from a single word *diopetés*, which, in turn, is from *Dios* (Zeus) and *piptó* (to fall). It is also a word found only here in Scripture. It would have been immediately understood and accepted by those hearing his words.

The point of what he says is that there may have been a challenge to the authority of Artemis, but she would prevail because she had fallen from Zeus. What challenge could stand against her? It is a similar thought to what occurs in Judges 6 –

“And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, there was the altar of Baal, torn down; and the wooden image that *was* beside it was cut down, and the second bull was being offered on the altar *which had been* built. <sup>29</sup> So they said to one another, ‘Who has done this thing?’ And when they had inquired and asked, they said, ‘Gideon the son of Joash has done this thing.’ <sup>30</sup> Then the men of the city said to Joash, ‘Bring out your son, that he may die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal, and because he has cut down the wooden image that *was* beside it.’

<sup>31</sup> But Joash said to all who stood against him, ‘Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he *is* a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!’ <sup>32</sup> Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, ‘Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar.’” Judges 6:28-32

If Baal is god, let him prove it and stand on his own merits. And if the God Paul proclaims is God, let Him stand on His own merits. As for the words of the recorder, the temple would eventually fall into disuse. Artemis has proven to be no goddess at all. On the other hand, the name of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of the gospel continue two millennia later.

Life application: Quite often, Christians get riled up when people do various things against the faith. One “artist” took a crucifix and submerged it in urine. To antagonize Christians, some people will tear up a Bible in public. Others will burn the Bible, stamp on it, etc.

These and other things are obviously wrong in the eyes of believers, just as the crowd at Ephesus felt that an attack against their supposed goddess was wrong. But in the end, if one god is pitted against another, even if it is the true “God,” why should believers be upset? Can’t God handle and judge the actions of His creatures?

Muslims get hugely bent out of shape at supposed blasphemies against their god Allah. They even take offense at pictures being drawn of Muhammed. But can’t Allah stand on his own? When attacks come against the God of the Bible, when blasphemies are hurled out against Jesus, or when someone speaks against the Holy Spirit or the Bible, why should we get all riled up? God can and will contend for His name.

In the end, those who fail to come to Jesus will be judged and removed from God’s presence. Our job is to provide the necessary warnings and to explain the grace that is found in Jesus Christ. Don’t get in a tizzy over those who come against such things. We should be more upset at those within the church who fail to uphold the name of Jesus that they claim to bear. That is where our focus should be.

*Lord God, Your word tells us that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow. If You are God, then it shall come to pass. Our job is to get that name out so that those who are willing, will do so now. Those who are unwilling now, will do so on that great Day of judgment that lies ahead. Thank You that we have the sure and absolute guarantee that we belong to You through faith in Jesus. Hallelujah to His great name. Amen.*

**“Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. Acts 19:36**

The words are more closely translated, “Therefore, these things being undeniable, it is necessary for you to be calmed and to do nothing rash” (CG).

The recorder in Ephesus just calmed the crowd and spoke to them concerning their goddess Artemis, claiming her image had fallen down from Zeus. Having said that, he next continues, saying, “Therefore, these things being undeniable.”

He uses a word found only here in Scripture, *anantirrétos*. It consists of three parts: *a* – the negative particle, *anti* – in place of, and *rheo* – to speak of. Taken together, they signify indisputable or undeniable. Literally, “cannot be spoken against.”

The intent is that Paul had spoken against things made with hands, such as Demetrius’ images. However, the recorder stated that the image of Artemis in the temple was not

made with hands. Rather, it had fallen down from Zeus. But Demetrius' claim from verse 19:26 was against Paul's words, "they are not gods which are made with hands."

His words indicate that the crowd had been gathered and stirred up under false pretenses. This is because there was no way Paul's words could overturn what heaven itself had set up. As this was indisputable, how could such ridiculous worries even enter the minds of those in the crowd? Therefore, he next says, "it is necessary for you to be calmed and to do nothing rash."

Because they were gathered based on a false and ridiculous argument, and because ridiculous worries end in decisions that are rash, they should lighten up before something arose that they would regret. In the next verses, he will give sound advice for those who may have a grievance, but the crowd itself had no justification for their almost riotous actions.

Life application: Despite properly calming the crowd from taking unjust actions, the words of the recorder were based on a false proposition. He stated that the image of Artemis had fallen down from heaven and that this was indisputable.

If the people believed him concerning this, that is fine, but time has not borne out his words. If what he said was true, the temple and the image would still be standing to this day, but it is not. Anyone can make any claim, no matter how ridiculous. Unfortunately, the more trustworthy a person appears, the more he will be heeded, regardless of how inane his argument may be.

For example, there are scientists all over the world who are highly respected and who teach that the universe exploded itself into existence. Others teach that man evolved from goo. There is not a single shred of evidence for either of these claims, and yet they are believed by innumerable people.

Just because someone in a position of authority makes a claim, it is unwise to accept his words at face value. This applies to those in the ministry as well as the secular world. If someone makes a claim about something from the Bible, you should be well versed enough in Scripture to know whether what he says is true or not, or at least know where to go to check it out.

Don't just believe what you hear. An entire stadium of people believed the recorder's nonsensical words that an image had fallen down from heaven simply because they



were told it was true by someone in authority. Check, think, and verify. These things are important in all aspects of life.

*Lord God, the word we have been given from You is a self-validating book, filled with sufficient evidence that we can certainly trust its contents. Unfortunately, people still take what it says and manipulate it for various reasons. Help us to be diligent in reading it and being familiar enough with it to know when it is being mishandled. Help us in this, O God, so that our walk with You will be sound and proper. Amen.*

**“For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. Acts 19:37**

The words are more succinct. They literally read, “For you brought these men, neither temple-robbers nor blaspheming your goddess” (CG).

The recorder has logically defended why the crowd should calm down, stating that what he spoke was undeniable. Now, because of what he has said, he explains why they must let the people they have been rallying against be left alone, saying, “For you brought these men.”

The word translated as you is plural. He is speaking to the crowd first spurred on by Demetrius, accusing them of causing an unnecessary riot and an attack against people who have done no wrong. The people he is referring to are Gaius and Aristarchus, the Macedonians who traveled with Paul, as noted in verse 19:29. They had been seized and brought into the theater. Of them, the recorder begins with, “neither temple-robbers.”

It is a single Greek word found only here in the New Testament, *hierosulos*. It is from two words meaning “sacred” or “holy” and to rob or plunder. It is used only here in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 11:8, Paul writes a similar thought using the word “rob” with the Greek word *ekklésia*, translated as “churches.” Of this word, Ellicott says—

“The corresponding noun for ‘robbing temples,’ or ‘sacrilege,’ is found in inscriptions discovered by Mr. Wood (vi. 1, p. 14) among the ruins of the Temple, as denoting a crime to which the severest penalties were attached.”

These men had not done such a thing. But more, the recorder continues with, “nor blaspheming your goddess.” Note the use of the present tense. They had not blasphemed Artemis in the past and were not doing so now. The point of these words is that Paul and those with him could rightly say, “they are not gods which are made with

hands,” as was stated in verse 19:26. No act of blasphemy could be ascribed to such a statement.

If Paul and his disciples said, “And that includes the false goddess made by hands in the temple of Artemis,” they could be accused of blasphemy. But the recorder has said that it was indisputable that she was not made with hands but had fallen from heaven (verse 19:35). Therefore, they could not be accused of blaspheming her. If she was not made with hands, then the statement ascribed to Paul, and which was then stated by Demetrius in verse 19:26, could not apply to them concerning blasphemy against Artemis.

Finally, some texts of the clause say, “our goddess.” Others say, “your goddess.” If the latter is the true original, it could explain why the recorder was so careful to choose his words as he did. It may be that he was convinced that what Paul taught was true, even if he said it was indisputable that the image had fallen from heaven. Those words could have been purposefully chosen to exonerate these men with whom he agreed.

Life application: There is the old saying, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” This is a way of saying that when you are in another nation or among another culture, you should adapt your conduct according to the location and culture of those you are visiting. It would be arrogant to assume that you can continue to act in a manner that would be offensive to those whose land you are visiting.

For example, whether you agree or disagree with the dress codes for women in an Islamic nation, when you are in such a nation, a visiting woman should wear what is required, or she can expect to be arrested. That is not complicated. If you don’t agree with their dress codes, then you should refrain from visiting.

This concept applies to evangelism as well. There are nations that forbid evangelism of their people. Because of this, many missionaries will go to such nations under the guise of working in another job, such as an English translator. The actual reason for going is to be a missionary, but any evangelism is done quietly and usually on an individual basis. If caught, that person is usually aware that it can end in being deported, imprisoned, or worse.

If you are going to travel to another nation, it is best to be aware of what you can and cannot do. Sharing the gospel is the highest priority for a believer, but it must be accompanied with tact and diplomacy. It would be highly inappropriate to go to an Islamic nation and begin your evangelism by blaspheming their god. The same is true

with going to a Buddhist or Hindu nation. Be sure to know what is allowed and what is not allowed, and then work within that framework as closely as possible without either compromising your own faith or without getting yourself in a real pickle by those with whom you have come to reside.

*Lord God, help us to know the laws, even in our own lands, concerning how we can evangelize others. It serves no good purpose to be labeled as an outlaw when we share the gospel, if that can easily be avoided. So, Lord, give us wisdom and discernment about when to speak, how to speak, and what will be the most effective way of sharing the gospel. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. Acts 19:38**

The words read, “Therefore, if indeed Demetrius and those craftsmen with him have a matter with anyone, judicials are held, and there are proconsuls. Let them accuse one another” (CG).

The previous words of the recorder were directed to the mob that had seized Gaius and Aristarchus, having brought them to the theater. He now says, “Therefore, if indeed Demetrius.”

The recorder is in a position of authority, responsibility, and understanding concerning legal matters. He has carefully described the situation to the crowd. Having done so, he next places the responsibility for any legal issue right back where it belongs, meaning with Demetrius. It was he who began the ruckus in verse 19:25. At that time, he called together “those craftsmen with him.”

Demetrius may have initiated the matter, but he had called these others to stand with him and against Paul and his doctrine. The people now gathered had been led as blind sheep to the theater, not even knowing all the facts concerning the matter. The recorder has carefully replaced the entire situation on Demetrius and those with him, questioning if they “have a matter with anyone.”

Even more literally, it says, “have a word with anyone.” The word *logos*, or word, carries with it the idea of a cause, matter, word, speech, analogy, and more. It is a very broad word, meaning “*reasoning expressed by words*” (HELPS Word Studies). In this case, Demetrius had expressed his reasoning for exciting the other craftsmen by words.

However, that had almost turned into a riot, a matter of Roman interest and legal prosecution. These people had no valid word against Paul or the disciples with him. Therefore, the recorder is returning the issue back to those who may have a case. If so, he notes that “judicials are held.”

It is a word found only once elsewhere in Acts 17:5, *agoraios*. It signifies “pertaining to the marketplace.” In Acts 17, it was used of the wicked market-loungers who set the crowd in an uproar. In this case, it is obviously a type of court setting. As it is a plural adjective, the closest word to describe it would be “judicials.” It would be the public setting where such grievances were to be brought forward.

Once such a case was brought forward to the judicials, the recorder notes that at that place, “there are proconsuls.” Of this, Charles Ellicott notes –

“Strictly speaking, there was only one proconsul in each province, and we must therefore assume either that here also the expression is colloquial, or that the assessors (*consilarii*) of the proconsul were popularly so described, or that some peculiar combination of circumstances had led to there being two persons at this time at Ephesus clothed with proconsular authority. There are some grounds for adopting the last alternative. Junius Silanus, who was Proconsul of Asia when St. Paul arrived in Ephesus (A.D. 54), had been poisoned by Celer and Helius, the two procurators, at the instigation of Agrippina; and it seems probable that they for a time held a joint proconsular authority.”

Whatever the exact situation, it is obvious from the words of the recorder that the people knew and understood what he was saying. The matter was not in their hands, and they had no right to have it adjudicated in the manner that was currently being conducted. Therefore, it should be directed to the Roman authority that was set forth for it. With that, he concludes, saying, “Let them accuse one another.”

As in a modern court, an accusation was to be filed. From there, the matter would be handled by the court as each side presented its case or counterargument. Witnesses, if available, would be brought forward. The matter would be handled in the proper legal manner set forth by the Roman Empire.

Life application: In this verse, the clerk moved from the concrete to the abstract very smoothly, never mentioning Paul. Instead, he moved the complaint back to where it belonged, which was to Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen.

This showed everyone else that they had nothing to argue against. By using the abstract “anyone” it actually means there was nobody to charge Paul because the very person who was the supposed instigator has been shown in the previous verse to have not done anything meriting a complaint. From there, if legal action needed to be filed, it was by Demetrius.

We can learn from this type of thinking. If a complaint arises at work, in the church, in a public setting, or so forth, it is very easy for us to get caught up in the matter, not thinking it through. However, if we can remove ourselves from the rising excitement and think, “What would the authority propose concerning this?”, we may be able to quell the rash thinking before it gets out of control.

This assumes that the people are willing to listen. Such is quite often not the case. And even the legal authorities are often so corrupt that a logical presentation means little to them. However, we can at least remove ourselves from the matter and not get caught up in whatever negative arises from it.

Learn to think clearly by learning to think independently. The herd mentality will never come to satisfactory results because it is based on a lack of information and unbridled passions, and it is usually led by someone who already had failed to think through the matter clearly.

*Lord God, too often, a herd mentality exists around us, even in the church. Numbers and might do not necessarily mean that what is being considered is correct. May our thoughts and actions be properly directed to You and by Your word. In this, we will not be misdirected in how we conduct our affairs. Amen.*

**“But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. Acts 19:39**

The words read, “If, however, you seek anything beyond, it will be solved in the lawful assembly” (CG).

In the previous verse, the recorder told the crowd what was proper concerning the matter they were gathered for and excited about. He continues his words to them now, saying, “If, however, you seek anything beyond.”

The word *peran*, or beyond, signifies over, on the other side, etc. For example, it is used when saying beyond the Jordan, beyond the sea, to the other side of the sea of Galilee,

etc. In this case, the crowd has brought the matter between Demetrius and Paul forward. It was currently at a large gathering in the theater, and it needed to end there. However, he notes if there was anything beyond that point, either in time, place, or concerning the issue, “it will be solved in the lawful assembly.”

These words show that the assembly in the theater (*ecclesia* – verse 19:32) was not an authorized one. Instead, the term was used in a general sense. The clerk here notes that if there was anything that still needed to be addressed, it would have to be in an *ecclesia* that was obedient to the law. Also, the word translated as “solved” is *epiluó*. It is a verb giving the sense of unloosening. In other words, the issue at hand is like a tied knot that must be unloosened.

This is the job of the appropriate magistrates, not a crowd without authority or knowledge of the legal issues involved. The noun form of the word is found in 2 Peter 1:20, where it says, “knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation.” As for the verb used above, it is only found elsewhere in Mark 4, where it is translated as “explained” –

“And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear *it*.<sup>34</sup> But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples.” Mark 4:33, 34

Jesus “unloosened the knot” of the parables he spoke. However, the prophets of old could not form their own prophecies to unloosen the mind of God. Rather, God spoke through them as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, the matter between Demetrius and Paul, if it was not now settled by the recorder, would need to be taken before those who could properly unloosen it.

Life application: In seeing the use of the noun form of the word used here, Peter gives us insights into how prophecy is transmitted. The men of God of the past were given the words of God through a process that “unloosened” the mysteries necessary to understand what He is doing in the world concerning the redemptive narrative.

If you go on YouTube or some other internet forum and do a search for people who claim prophecy, you will find tens of thousands of people from all religions and all walks of life claiming they have had such secrets revealed to them.

Who are you going to believe? How can you determine if this one or that one is true or not? The Bible lets us know that what we have in it is sufficient for our doctrine, life, and religious practice. As this is so, the implication is that we do not need anything else revealed to us by God. It is easy to say, “That guy is a Hindu, and so his prophecies cannot be true,” but it should be just as clear to us that the people who claim to be Christians and who claim prophecy are also liars.

Their words are unnecessary for our walk with the Lord. They can only muddy the waters in which we tread. They cannot be accepted without causing some type of misdirection. Therefore, why listen to them? The plan has been set forth, it has been explained enough so that we have the broad outline we need, and it is sufficient for our time in this life. Be content with that.

*Lord God, Your word is sufficient. Help us to accept this and to not search for something extra. That has caused too much damage in the church throughout the ages. Cults have sprung up, people have been misdirected, and souls have been lost. May we hold fast to Your word alone as we live out our lives in Your presence. Amen.*

**“For we are in danger of being called in question for today’s uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering.” Acts 19:40**

The text more literally reads, “For also we are in danger of being accused of insurrection concerning today. There being no cause about which we will be able to give a reason concerning this conspiracy” (CG).

The recorder at Ephesus made his statement and then told those listening that if they had any grievance, they should take it up in a lawful assembly. That being said, it implies that the gathering was unlawfully assembled. He confirms that now, beginning with, “For also we.”

He includes himself in the matter at hand. He is an official in the city, the city has gone into an uproar, and he has entered the place where it occurred. He could, therefore, potentially be considered a part of the uproar. As such, he continues that they, including him, “are in danger.”

The authority of Rome was not to be questioned. Unlawful assemblies could be considered a lack of control. Any lack of control over the people could become a movement. Any movement could become a threat to the power of the empire.

Therefore, such things were considered intolerable. In this case, he says the result could be “*of being accused of insurrection concerning today.*”

The recorder’s words now bring in a possible ironic turn of events that could result from this mob. The word he translated as “being accused” is the same word just seen in 19:38. The entire assembly, including Demetrius and those gathered with him, are being reminded that they may end up as defendants and not plaintiffs.

If so, the results might be even worse than they could imagine. They had almost organized a lynching, but it might be they who were to be executed. Albert Barnes notes–

“Popular commotions were justly dreaded by the Roman government; and such an assembly as this, convened without any good cause, would not escape their notice. There was a Roman law which made it capital for anyone to be engaged in promoting a riot. ‘He who raises a mob, let him be punished with death.’”

Even if this didn't occur, the privileges of the city could be restricted, such as we have today with curfews and the like. The Romans did not appreciate such disobedience. The recorder was fully aware of this and next says, “There being no cause about which we will be able to give a reason.”

In other words, if the authorities heard of this gathering and came to Ephesus, there would be a hearing to determine what occurred. Even if the exact reason was discovered, which has already been described by Luke, it would not be a valid reason for the uproar. Somebody would be held accountable, and others would probably be implicated as well “concerning this conspiracy.”

In holding a hearing and finding those responsible, it is probable that charges would be made. If so, and it was quite possible under Roman law, there would be no reasonable defense. The word translated as “conspiracy” is *sustrophé* - a twisting together, hence a conspiracy. It speaks of anything rolled or twisted into a mass. In this case, a mass of people with an underlying sense of confusion, and thus a mob. The word is found only here and in Acts 23:12.

Life application: The words and actions of the recorder in this section of Acts could be compared with Gamaliel of the Sanhedrin in Acts 5. He was able to calm the crowd and use a logical defense of the situation at hand –



Gamaliel: “Men of Israel” / logical defense / conclusion – fighting against God.

Recorder: “Men of Ephesus” / logical defense / conclusion – fighting against Roman authority.

As such, there is a palpable irony between the two accounts. Gamaliel said that if the Way was of human origin, it would fade away, but if it was of God, it would endure. In this account, the recorder says that the whole world was aware of the divine source of their religion, and yet it eventually faded away.

The point of this is that in the world of faithful Christians, there are – at times – moments where it seems all is lost, and the faith is being overcome. This was the state of things several times in vast swaths of Christian-controlled areas. Wars seemed to threaten the very existence of the faith.

Likewise, in the world today, there is so much apostasy from the true faith that it seems as if those who are properly following the word of God are being pushed out by those who have completely departed from it. But this should not concern us. We have been told, in advance, that this time would come.

Eventually, the Lord will descend, and His faithful will be gathered to Him. He is not going to allow His faithful followers to be completely overwhelmed before that day comes. Until then, He expects us to hold fast to Him and His word, keep sharing the good news about what He has done, and remain encouraged even in a world filled with discouragement. Let us do so because a great Day lies ahead for those who are His faithful followers.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the sure hope we possess. Our faith is not built on fantasy but on the truth of who You are and what You have done to bring us back to Yourself. As the world devolves around us, we can remain confident and cheerful that there is an end to wickedness. A new and glorious Day lies ahead. May that Day be soon! Amen.*

**And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly. Acts 19:41**

In the previous verse, the recorder noted that the city was in danger of being called into question for their unlawful assembly. With that, the chapter ends with, “And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.”

Once again, the term *ecclesia* is used to describe this unlawful gathering. The clerk had the right to dismiss it, and he had presented a logical, orderly case to show why it must be dismissed. Anything less would certainly have led to charges now that he had made his appeal. In this case, the entire city could be put under some type of curfew or had other restrictions placed upon it, or it could have had various privileges removed from it.

To close out the commentary on this chapter for us, Charles Ellicott notes that, “An interesting inscription of the date of Trajan, from an aqueduct at Ephesus, gives nearly all the technical terms that occur in the town-clerk’s speech, and so far confirms the accuracy of St. Luke’s report: ‘This has been dedicated by the loyal and devoted Council of the Ephesians, and the people that serve the temple (Neôkoros), Peducæus Priscinus being proconsul, by the decree of Tiberius Claudius Italicus, the town-clerk of the people.’”

Life application: There is no evidence that this unnamed person was a Christian convert. However, whether by friend or by foe, the Lord is able to ensure His people and His church will continue as they should. With the church apostatizing today, we can find comfort in this fact.

Nothing is out of the providence of the Lord. To be assured that this is true, think of what Paul says to the church in this same city –

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” Ephesians 2:19-22.

The Lord is building a house, a temple, as a “dwelling place of God in the Spirit,” and He is doing it out of His redeemed. When a person wants a house built in today’s world, he will go to a builder and will tell him what he wants.

From there, the builder will go to an architect and have the designs drawn up according to the local codes. But he will also detail every item that is needed to build the house. He will note how much copper wire is needed, even the different gauges of wire for various uses. He will calculate how many bricks or cinderblocks are needed.

He will determine the thickness of the slab and how much concrete must be poured. He will know how many panes of glass are needed. If the house is in a high wind zone, the glass will have to meet certain standards. The number of tiles required for the ceiling will be noted.

In other words, every single detail of the house is planned in advance. The amount of materials is exactly known, etc. From there, the builder will go to the local market and determine how much all of that stuff will cost. He will then calculate exactly how much time it will take to do each step of the job, planning them in a set order for maximum efficiency. He will figure out the number of man-hours, the number of subcontractors and their costs, etc.

When these things are done, the plan and the costs will be laid out before the person who wants the house built. Every single detail is known.

If we can build houses with such precision that we know every detail in advance, imagine how perfectly God's temple has been planned. Here, we are dealing with sin and fallen humans to erect a house properly. God, who is perfect in all ways, and who is of infinite understanding, will have no errors or lapses in His plan.

Considering this, even external influences on the church and on the people of the church will have no negative impact on God's plan. He already knows those things. Therefore, why should you worry about today? Why should you be upset about what appears to be lacking in your life? The Lord knew and allowed those things as a part of your preparation and perfecting for the time ahead. Be content that things have been figured out according to a plan set forth by the infinite wisdom of God.

*Lord God, thank You that our lives are set in a way that will lead us to eternal glory, even when they seem – at times – to be falling apart around us. When it appears to be that way, we can confidently know that these things were allowed to mold us and perfect us in You. This is a great and wonderful encouragement to our souls. Thank You, O God. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 20

**After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to *himself*, embraced *them*, and departed to go to Macedonia.** Acts 20:1

The verbs, as translated by the NKJV, need to be tweaked: “And after the uproar ceased, Paul – having called the disciples, and having greeted – departed to go into Macedonia” (CG).

The previous verse closed out the chapter with the recorder dismissing the assembly. With that remembered, Chapter 20 begins with, “And after the uproar ceased.”

Here, the assembly is noted by Luke as a *thorubos*, or an uproar. The word gives the sense of a confused cry, a hubbub, etc. This is just as the previous chapter described things. With the calm actions of the recorder, things quieted down, the rage of the people was quelled, and Paul deemed it was the proper time to take his leave. Therefore, it next says, “Paul – having called the disciples.”

By this time, there would have been no small number of believers in Ephesus. This was seen in Chapter 19 when Demetrius said –

“Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands.” Acts 19:26

Therefore, this probably would have been the calling of a sizeable assembly. With them gathered together, Luke next says, “and having greeted.”

The word *aspazomai* is variously translated. Some say encouraged, greeted, embraced, saluted, etc. It is repeatedly used by Paul in Romans 16 as he greets individuals in the church, but the word itself signifies to enfold in the arms. Therefore, it includes some type of body motion, maybe an embrace or a waving of the arm.

Today we might shake hands or give a high five. The point is that Paul personally met with these people and did what people do when they are about to separate. From there, he “departed to go into Macedonia.”

This is in fulfillment of what he had already planned, as noted in Chapter 19 –

“When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’ <sup>22</sup> So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.”

-Acts 19:21, 22

This is where he intended to go. However, on the way there, he passed through Troas. That is seen in 2 Corinthians 2 –

“Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, <sup>13</sup> I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.”

-2 Corinthians 2:12, 13

Troas is north of Ephesus but on the general path to Macedonia when going by foot or by ship.

Life application: Though Luke doesn’t record Paul’s stop in Troas, it is of note that he continued to evangelize as he traveled. He didn’t just stop to change ships if going by sea, or pass through on a horse or donkey if traveling by land. Rather, he saw that there was an open door set before him, and he took the time to go through it, even if temporarily.

Sometimes, there is an opportunity right in front of us, but we may miss it by being so set on accomplishing whatever goal we had our minds focused on. So, as you close out each day, take time to think about what transpired and consider that maybe tomorrow you can tweak your schedule to include something that you may have overlooked in the busyness of the day that has passed.

If you think, “I really should have talked to that person about Jesus,” determine in your mind to do so on the next occasion that you meet up. If it was a one-time meeting, having lost the chance to talk to someone, determine that you will be more aware of such things in the future. This is important because such opportunities can be eternity-changing for those you meet.

*Heavenly Father, may we be attentive to the state of those we encounter. May we be willing to put aside things that are less important and speak about how our lives have been changed because of the gospel. From there, may we pass on the good news about*

*how to be saved. Without this, people's destinies will be far different. So, Lord, help us to be conscious of their plight and speak. Amen.*

**Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece Acts 20:2**

The words are more correctly rendered, "And having passed through those parts, and having exhorted them with much talk, he came to Greece" (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul departed from Ephesus, having first given his farewell to them. Luke next records, "And having passed through those parts."

The meaning is the various parts of Macedonia which would have included Thessalonica, Berea, and Philippi, along with any other area where a church was established by this time. It is possible that he wrote 2 Corinthians during this period. That is hinted at in 2 Corinthians 7 –

"For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside *were* conflicts, inside *were* fears. <sup>6</sup> Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, <sup>7</sup> and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more." 2 Corinthians 7:5-7

It is also possible that he journeyed northwest into Illyricum at this time –

"For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient— <sup>19</sup> in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ." Romans 15:18, 19

As for his time in Macedonia, Luke continues the narrative, saying, "and having exhorted them with much talk, he came to Greece."

A great amount of area, time, and events are brushed over with just a few words. The things that happened during this period are not unimportant, but they are not germane to the ongoing narrative. Therefore, the Holy Spirit did not inspire Luke to include the

details. Rather, they are quickly summed up, and the narrative continues, noting his arrival in Greece.

Here, Luke uses the term Hellas. This is the only time it is used in the New Testament, and scholars vary widely on what they believe it means – all of Greece, the area of Achaia, the area between Macedonia and Achaia, etc. Without knowing what Luke was thinking, it is hard to be dogmatic about why he chose this particular name at this time.

Life application: This verse in Acts is not unlike Acts 18:22, where Paul is recorded as having landed at Caesarea, gone up to greet the church, meaning in Jerusalem, and then proceeded down to Antioch. A lengthy journey and an extended amount of time and activity were brushed over in just a few words.

We are being kept on a precise and meticulously recorded path of the ongoing redemptive narrative as outlined in Scripture. At times, immense detail is given concerning a single event that may have spanned just a couple of hours. At others, almost no detail is provided for an excursion that could have gone on for months or more.

Therefore, it is good to stop and consider why such minute detail is given at times. The Lord is focusing attention on matters of doctrine, theology, etc., even if we don't realize it right away. So, take the time to stop and reflect on such things. Ultimately, they have great importance, or they would not have been so carefully recorded.

*Glorious God, how wonderful is Your word. It is a story of love, redemption, and blessing in Christ. Someday we will see and understand why history has unfolded as it has. For now, we have the framework set before us to know what is important to our lives in Your presence. Help us to carefully consider what is recorded in Your word. It is a marvelous treasure pointing us to You and what You have done and are doing to bring us back to You. Amen.*

**and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.** Acts 20:3

The words more accurately read, “having made three months, a plot against him having been made by the Jews, being about to sail to Syria, there arose in him a resolution to return through Macedonia.”

In the previous verse, it noted Paul's having encouraged those in Macedonia and then his traveling to Greece. Now, it says of his time in Greece, "having made three months."

During these three months, he would have gathered together the gift for the churches in Jerusalem which is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3. Probably most of the time was spent with those in the Corinthian church, as 1 Corinthians 16:6 seemed to indicate was his desire.

It is during this time that he would have written Romans. This can be deduced because he had not yet been to Rome and that he was on his way to Jerusalem to deliver the gift, as mentioned in Romans 15:25-27.

In the letter to the Romans, he greets Aquila and Priscilla, meaning they had probably left the area earlier at the same time Paul did – after the incident of the riot stirred up by Demetrius. If they had helped Paul, they would have needed to leave quickly as well.

It appears that the edict expelling the Jews from Rome had ended by this time. Additionally, it seems that Timothy and Sosipater (Sopater), who was one of the noble Bereans, were there as he wrote Romans. That is seen in Romans 16:21. These details fit with verse 20:4. The account is orderly and well documented.

With these three months complete, it next says, "a plot against him having been made by the Jews."

It is a common theme in Acts that has been seen and will be seen again. Probably the main reason for this is not simply the spreading of the news that Jesus is the Messiah, but that Jesus had fulfilled the law and it was now set aside in Him. With that accomplished, salvation was available to all, Jews and Gentiles, apart from the law.

Because of his adamant stand of salvation by grace through faith being granted to anyone who accepted the premise, he was hated even to the point of enraging those Jews who heard him. With this hatred boiling in them, they looked for opportune moments to eliminate him. Understanding this, it next says, "being about to sail to Syria."

Paul was going to leave Greece and travel by ship directly to Syria. Any stops by the ship would be for the sake of off-loading cargo and obtaining new supplies at each port as they went.



As far as the plot against him, it seems the Jews heard that he was carrying the gift to Jerusalem, or at least that he was headed there, and they wanted to either arrest him at the port or even once on the ship. Or what may be just as probable, is that they wanted to eliminate him at sea by killing him and chucking him into the water at a convenient time. Because he had heard of the plot, however, “there arose in him a resolution to return through Macedonia.”

Instead of going by ship to Syria, he took a much more roundabout way of getting home by heading up through Macedonia once again – either by land or maybe sailing up the coast on another vessel, something the Jews would not have expected. Despite this delay, those in Macedonia were then favored by another visit from their beloved apostle.

Life application: Things haven't changed that much, even after two thousand years. There are still Jews much like Paul (Saul) in Israel who literally hate the Messianic believers in Israel. They despise the thought of the gospel that robs them of their elite status as Jews, superior to all others.

Despite not upholding the law themselves, they see the law and their culture as being the epitome of God's favor. Along with this are those heretical Christians who proclaim law observance, clinging to their own deeds as acceptable before God. They refuse to come to Christ through faith alone, and they bitterly oppose any who dare to challenge their unscriptural doctrine.

This is a real problem in the world, and it can only lead to being separated eternally from God. Those who think they are the ones to receive His favor, most especially because of their relationship with the Law of Moses, are those who will never satisfy Him through their attempts. But self gets in the way and the wall is built, one brick of work at a time, forever separating themselves from the righteousness of God in Christ.

Be sure to hold fast to God's grace. Remove yourself from the equation. Have faith in the merits of Christ alone and you will be accepted by God. Jesus! It is all about Jesus!

*Glorious Lord God, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord who alone can reconcile us to You. We gladly receive the grace offered through His cross. Yes, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.**  
Acts 20:4

The verse more exactly reads: “And there accompanied him as far as Asia Sopater, a Berean; and Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius a Derbite and Timothy; and Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus” (CG).

In the previous verse, a plot against Paul by the Jews caused him to cancel his sailing trip to Syria. Instead, he returned through Macedonia. Along with Paul, seven other people are mentioned as going to Asia with him.

These would have been the people selected to go with him to Jerusalem to present the gift to the church. They would then have all been in Corinth with him, intending to travel by ship when he went. Instead, they have all taken the longer trip with him. The naming of these individuals begins with, “And there accompanied him as far as Asia Sopater, a Berean.”

Rather than “of Berea,” as some translations state, the designation is an adjective, “a Berean.” Some think that Sopater is the same as Sosipater, who is mentioned along with Timothy and others in Romans 16:21. The name occurs on an arch in the area of Thessalonica. If he is the same person, he may have been one of the politarchs of Thessalonica. He is identified here, however, as a Berean. Next, it says, “and Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus.”

Aristarchus worked with Paul at Ephesus and had been in the riot there (Acts 19:29). Secundus isn't mentioned elsewhere, but if his name is aligned with Tertius of Romans 16:22 and Quartus in Romans 16:23, then he may have been their brother. Secundus means Second, Tertius means Third, and Quartus means Fourth.

They may have been either the sons of one man who chose to name his sons this way, or they could have been born slaves and named according to their birth in that way. The only name missing is Primus, which would be the First, and it was not an unknown name at the time. The verse continues with, “and Gaius a Derbite and Timothy.”

Gaius may be the same Gaius in Acts 19:29 (but there he is referred to as a traveling partner from Macedonia) and 1 Corinthians 1:14. The term used to describe him is also an adjective, not a noun. Hence, he is a Derbite. Timothy is Paul's faithful friend and

companion first mentioned in Acts 16:1 and who is mentioned many times in Acts and Paul's epistles. The verse ends with, "and Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus."

Tychicus means Fortunate or Fortuitous. It is the Greek equivalent of Felix. It was a common name of the time. He is mentioned five times in the New Testament – Here in Acts, Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:7, 2 Timothy 4:12, and Titus 3:12. He is well spoken of.

Trophimus comes from *trophé*, meaning food or nourishment. Thus, according to Strong's, the name means something like Nutritive. However, others think it signifies something like Nursling or Foster Child. He is found again in Acts 21 and then in 2 Timothy 4:20 in a classic verse concerning health in relation to New Testament teachings on the misused doctrine of faith healing. That there were seven with Paul may be a subtle connection to the seven deacons found in Acts 6.

Life application: As noted, Trophimus is mentioned later in 2 Timothy 4:20. There, it says—

"Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick."

Paul was an apostle who had been granted special powers. At times, his influence alone was able to heal without him even being present. Each time that he was able to heal, it was for a set purpose. At other times, he was unable to heal. Such instances are recorded for us to understand, in advance, that the claims of "faith healers" are false.

There is no such things as faith healers in Scripture, and there is no guidance for its practice. Rather, the Bible asks us to pray for the healing of others and to allow God to respond according to His wisdom. Hence, we can say that faith healing is possible, but faith healers are false. Such people who make claims like this should not be listened to. Rather, read the Bible, and accept that people get sick, and some will die.

We are to accept God's providential care for us, praying for His hand of healing or for His hand of comfort in our afflictions or loss. In all things, let us not lose heart but be people of faith as we continue on life's path.

*Heavenly Father, we know that You can and will heal if it is according to Your will. You can do all things, but sometimes it is not in Your plan to do so. Help us to remain faithful when times of trial and testing come about. May we understand that Your plan is far*

*greater than our temporary health or happiness. We bow to You and will follow, even through the valleys that may test us. Amen.*

**These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas.** Acts 20:5

The verse more correctly reads: “And these, having gone ahead, waited for us in Troas” (CG).

The previous verse listed seven men who had accompanied Paul on the journey. Of them, it next says, “And these, having gone ahead, waited for us in Troas.”

At first, one might think that it is referring to all seven. However, the Greek may indicate that it was only Tychicus and Trophimus that went on ahead. This is not unlikely because they were from that area, and therefore they may have been the only two to head that way. If so, then the other five went with Paul.

The word “us” indicates that Luke has now joined them in Philippi. The last we/us section was also in Philippi. That was in Acts 16. Therefore, it appears that Luke stayed there during all this time. Possibly he pastored a church or did medical work there. Only speculation is possible, but his connection to Philippi seems assured.

There are two good reasons for the arrangement of this verse. First, Paul could then observe the Passover at Philippi as the next verse will show. Therefore, it is certain that this time of year was already becoming a celebration of the cross and the resurrection, as Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 5:7, 8 and 1 Corinthians 15:20. Also, second, it would allow for all the believers at Troas to come together to meet with Paul upon his arrival.

Life application: It is common among various heretical Christian sects to claim that believers must adhere to the Law of Moses in part or in whole. For some, celebrating the Leviticus 23 Feasts of the Lord is mandatory. And yet, Paul dispels that notion in Colossians 2 –

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,<sup>17</sup> which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” Colossians 2:16, 17

The “sabbaths” are the weekly Sabbath observances noted in Leviticus 23:1, along with special Sabbaths specifically noted in the Law. The “festival” refers to the individual annual feasts of Leviticus 23. These only anticipated the coming of Jesus. They are

fulfilled in Him, and it is pointless to observe them now, except in the sense of remembrance of what He has done.

To reinsert law observance is to diminish or ignore the purpose of the coming of Jesus. It is, in essence, another path of working one's way to heaven. That is an infinite climb that no man can make. Set aside such things. Look to the cross and consider the words, "It is finished." That is where our faith should rest.

*Glorious God, thank You for all You have done for us. May Your glorious name ever be praised as we look to the cross of Jesus and find our hope, our assurance, our peace, and our rest. May we never diminish the glory of what He has done by trying to earn what is offered by grace. All hail the name of Jesus, who alone has secured our path back to You. Amen.*

**But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days. Acts 20:6**

In the previous verses, it noted that some of those traveling with Paul went ahead of him to Troas. However, Luke accompanied Paul by ship. That can be discerned from the next words, "But we."

Luke includes himself in the narrative. He and Paul "sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread."

The word "Bread" should be italicized. The Greek simply gives the adjective *azumos*, not leavened. The timing shows that the span spent in Corinth was the winter months. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is in the spring. Having left that area and going through the area of Macedonia, they met up with Luke in Philippi. With Unleavened Bread complete, Luke obviously decided to join him on his trip and sailed with him. From there, it says, "and in five days joined them at Troas."

The Greek reads "until five days." It is a way of indicating the duration of the voyage between Philippi and Troas. In Acts 16, the same trip appears to have taken only three days. The reason for the longer trip could be either because there was a contrary wind as they traveled eastward, or it could be that they made a few more stops to offload and onload cargo.

Either way, Luke's providing the specific timeframes shows his meticulous nature. He carefully records such things, providing details often not found in other narratives that

he later compiled. Once having reached Troas, Luke next says, “where we stayed seven days.”

Although it is impossible to know for certain, it is generally accepted (and likely) that they stayed a full week to ensure they could participate in one week of fellowship together. This will be seen in the coming verse.

Life application: It is known from this verse that Paul observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Based on this, Judaizers are adamant that we too must observe the Feasts of the Lord. This is obviously wrong for several reasons.

First, Paul was a Jew. Gentiles are not Jews. Gentiles were never given the law, and Christ fulfilled the law, setting it aside through His work. As this is so, it makes as much sense as making a tennis puck to observe something never mandated and which is now obsolete.

Even Paul did not feel compelled to do such things any longer. He clearly indicates that we (including himself) are not under law but under grace. That is found in Romans 6:14, 15 –

“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.<sup>15</sup> What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!”

Second, Paul clearly dismisses such observances in Colossians 2:16, 17 –

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,<sup>17</sup> which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”

Dietary laws, Sabbaths, and feast observances simply anticipated Christ. They have no substance but are mere shadows that anticipated Him.

Third, Paul explicitly explains what we are to do at Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 –

“Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup>Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for

us. <sup>8</sup>Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.”

The words “let us keep the feast,” meaning the feast that Paul just got done observing, do not mean “observe as Israel observed.” Rather, he explains that the physical rites observed by Israel anticipated spiritual truths. He does this with the words, “not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.”

This is exactly what he meant in Colossians 2. The physical rites of Israel were mere shadows that pointed to spiritual truths. Keeping the feast for a week each year is replaced with living in sincerity and truth throughout the year. The feasts only anticipated our lives in Christ.

If this is so, then why did Paul observe the feast? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 9–

“For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; <sup>20</sup>and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law; <sup>21</sup>to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; <sup>22</sup>to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. <sup>23</sup>Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with *you*.”

-1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Paul’s actions were to bring people to Christ. If that meant observing a now obsolete fest, he was up to it. If it means having a super yummy pulled-pork sandwich at Demetrio’s Diner, he was up to it. Paul’s only goal was to have people come to Christ.

Don’t allow uneducated, legalistic people to ruin your walk with Christ through such silly notions as “It is pleasing to God to observe these points of the law.” If you must observe any point of the law, you must observe the entire law – perfectly. Choosing the law over the grace of Christ is a self-condemning act. You do not have the right to pick and choose which laws you will observe and which you will not. You have placed the entire burden of the law on your shoulders. Good luck with that.

*Lord God Almighty, thank You for the grace which is found in Jesus Christ our Lord. Help us to never fall back on our own supposed deeds of personal righteousness, assuming*

*that they can make us right before You. Instead, may we hold fast to what Jesus has done and live our lives from that perspective. Thank You for the freedom we have because of Your grace lavished upon us. Amen.*

**Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. Acts 20:7**

In the previous verse, it noted that Paul and Luke (indicated by the word “we”) joined the others at Troas, where they then stayed seven days. With that noted, Luke continues, saying, “Now on the first *day* of the week.”

The Greek reads, “In now the one *of* the sabbaths.” The cardinal numeral here is used for the ordinal. The word “sabbaths” is plural. This plural is used for the singular in imitation of the Hebrew form. The noun, sabbaths, is used after numerals in the signification of a week. In other words, the Sabbath is the last day of the week. The next day begins a new week which is day one of the week. Thus, the day is Sunday, even if it started on Saturday night.

This verse, along with 1 Corinthians 16:2, shows with certainty that the Lord's Day (Sunday) was already being observed at this early time in church history –

“On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.”

Of this day, Luke next records, “when the disciples came together to break bread.” The words are more precisely translated, “the disciples having been gathered together to break bread.” Like in Corinth, the people have gathered as an assembly. In Troas, this included 1) being on the first day, just as in Corinth, 2) gathering together, 3) breaking bread after that (see verse 11), 4) a sermon, and 5) long hours of contemplating God’s word.

This may have been Saturday night, which is the beginning of the first day of the week when reckoning by Jewish days. The breaking of bread is in accord with Paul’s words of 1 Corinthians 11. It is the observance of the Lord’s Supper. This would have been done along with a greater meal, an Agape or love feast, which is a regular meal along with fellowship. Next, Luke records, “Paul, ready to depart the next day.”



If this is Saturday night, meaning the beginning of the first day of the week, then Paul would depart on a Sunday. If this gathering began during the day on Sunday, then Paul would depart on a Monday. The reason for the confusion rests in the fact that the Jewish days begin in the evening at sundown. Thus, without knowing what time they gathered, it is unwise to be dogmatic.

At this meeting, Paul “spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.” The word translated as “spoke” is *dialegomai*. HELPS Word Studies says it signifies “through, from one side across to the other,” It contains the idea of “exercising ‘dialectical reasoning.’” Further, it notes, “This is the process of giving and receiving information with someone to reach deeper understanding – a ‘going back-and-forth’ of thoughts and ideas so people can better know the Lord (His word, will).” One can see that this is where our word “dialogue” comes from.

In other words, people were asking questions, and Paul was answering them. At times, Paul may have pulled out his parchments, referring to them to find the answer to a particular question.

The word translated as “continued” is found only here in Scripture, *parateinó*. It means to prolong. Paul obviously had a lot to say, and the people would then continue to question him as well. As a historical note, the Pulpit Commentary says –

“Justin Martyr, in his second Apology to Antoninus Plus (or Marcus Aurelius), of the Church assemblies in his day, not a hundred years after this time, is in exact agreement with it: - ‘On the day which is called Sunday, all (Christians) who dwell either in town or country come together to one place. The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read for a certain time, and then the president of the meeting, when the reader has stopped, makes a discourse, in which he instructs and exhorts the people to the imitation of the good deeds of which they have just heard. We then all rise up together, and address prayers (to God); and, when our prayers are ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president, to the best of his ability, offers up both prayers and thanksgivings, and the people assent, saying “Amen.” And then the distribution of the bread and wine, over which the thanksgivings have been offered, is made to all present, and all partake of it.’ He adds that the elements are carried to the absent by the deacons, and that collections are made for poor widows, and orphans, and sick, and prisoners.”

Life application: Regardless of whether these believers gathered on Saturday night after the Sabbath or at some point during the day on Sunday, the church was gathered on

Sunday. The reason that the Sabbath is mentioned at all by Luke, as a means of counting the days, would be because Paul would have observed the Sabbath in order to not be an offense to Jews (1 Corinthians 9:20).

Luke, knowing this, is explaining things from the perspective of Paul's conduct. However, Paul's instruction to the church, not his personal habits, is what direct doctrine. Just because Paul may or may not have observed a Sabbath, that has no bearing on what he taught. Also, the words that he was set to travel the next day show that there were no restrictions concerning Sabbath observance transferred to the new day of worship, meaning Sunday.

Those who impose Sabbath standards for Saturday worship, or who move those Sabbath standards to Sundays, are not working in accord with our freedom in Christ, which Paul writes about in Romans 14:5, Galatians 4:10, or Colossians 2:16. The Sabbath belonged to the Jewish people alone. It was never transferred to the church, even if Jews in the church continue to conduct their weeks in accord with the Jewish weekly calendar.

Those who have come to Christ have entered the rest that the Sabbath only anticipated (Hebrews 4:3). Exercise your freedom in Christ and do not be led down a path of false piety, nor to the observance of things that were mere shadows of the substance that has come in Jesus.

*Heavenly Father, we are grateful to you for the full, finished, final, and forever work of Jesus Christ. Now, and in Him, we have the freedom to worship You in spirit and in truth. May we hold fast to Him and cling to You through His completion of all things necessary to restore us to Your presence. Thank You, O God, for Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

**There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together.**

Acts 20:8

In the previous verse, it noted that the church in Troas had come together to break bread and that Paul, being ready to depart the next day, continued his message until midnight. With that remembered, it now says, "There were many lamps in the upper room."

At first, it seems like something entirely superfluous to say. However, there are probably several reasons for Luke's inclusion of these words. The first was probably unintentional by him, but it shows the minuteness of the details.

The room was well lit, maybe more than usual, to mark the joyous nature of the first day of the week. It would show that the Christians met not in secrecy but in open fellowship.

Also, it would dispel the lie against the early church that Christians would turn out all the lights and proceed to commit all kinds of abominable acts. Also, the mentioning of it would explain what occurs in the coming verses.

As for noting that it is in the upper room, Charles Ellicott says –

“...the upper storey is often chosen for social or devotional purposes, partly as more removed from the noise of the street, partly as giving access to the roof of the house. Such a room in a good sized house might well hold two or three hundred people.”

It is in this large upper room “where they were gathered together.” In these words, some manuscripts say, “where we were gathered.” That would then be inclusive of Luke. Saying “we” would bolster the point about Luke’s careful attention to the details from a personal perspective, but even if the original is “they,” the note of many lamps would still probably have been told to Luke – even if he was not physically present – in order to explain what occurs in the ongoing narrative.

Life application: As has been explained previously in Acts, small differences in source Texts do not mean we do not have a sure word, as some claim. The argument in such a case would be that God failed to preserve His word. This is incorrect.

The original is contained in the manuscripts, even if scribes have made mistakes in various parts of it during the copying process. If there are 100 texts that say “how” and one that says “who,” and if the context demands “how,” then it is rather obvious the scribe had a moment of dyslexia, or he transposed the two letters by accident.

If a word is missing from a text and yet it is found in 72 others, it is likely the copyist missed the word without realizing it. Etc.

The original, however, remains within the enormous number of texts, lectionaries, and other ancient witnesses. But it must be searched out. There is nothing wrong with such a process. Rather, it confirms that God has given us His word, but He has allowed fallen, fallible man to transmit it throughout the ages, occasionally adding in an error that must then be weeded out by others.

Don't ever feel we are lacking a sure word. The contents of Scripture contain the word of God because they are the word of God. Our errors in transmitting it do not change that.

*Lord God, we know that Your word is sure because it tells us exactly what we need to know concerning our state before You, what You have done to correct it, and how we can then appropriate what You have done. No other religion comes even close to this. Rather, the message of Jesus is the resolution to man's problem. Thank You for having sent Jesus to bring us back to Yourself. Amen.*

**And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.** Acts 20:9

The translation is more precisely rendered, "And a certain youth named Eutychus, sitting upon the window, deep sleep overpowering *him* – Paul discoursing on more – having been overpowered from the sleep, fell from the third story down, and was taken up dead" (CG).

The previous verse curiously noted that there were many lamps in the upper room where the church was gathered. One main reason for including that observation is now seen. Luke's use of participles gives action to the events as they occur. His words begin with, "And a certain youth."

The word "youth" signifies a young man, but it can extend to someone even forty years of age. He is a man in the prime of life. Luke next says, "named Eutychus." The name comes from *eu*, well or good, and *tuché*, fortune or fate. Hence, his name means Well Fated. This Eutychus is "sitting upon the window."

Luke uses a present participle. He is sitting there during the gathering. Vincent's Word Studies says, "The windows of an Eastern house are closed with lattice-work, and usually reach down to the floor, resembling a door rather than a window. They open, for the most part, to the court, and not to the street, and are usually kept open on account of the heat."

It is in this location that he is sitting "upon" the window, meaning directly upon the frame. But more, the use of the article before "window" implies it is the one (or main) window to the entire room. Certainly because of this, as will be explained, there was "deep sleep overpowering *him*."

The word translated as overpowering, *katapheró*, is also a present participle. It is used for the first of four times, all in Acts. It signifies to bear down, overpower, oppress, etc. Its second use will be in this verse as well. Being another present participle, Luke is drawing the reader into the narrative with one quick thought after another. Eutychus is sitting upon the window, and he is being overpowered by sleep.

With that, Luke provides the next words in another present participle to provide a reason for why he was being overpowered, saying, “Paul discoursing on more.”

The night is wearing on, Eutychus is sitting upon the window, there are many lamps in the room, all of which are burning, and Paul is talking on and on. Being in the window, he was in the spot where all of the heat and smoke of the “many lamps” would exhaust from the room. Breathing this in would make anyone sleepy, no matter how exciting the words of Paul. Thus, Luke switches to an aorist participle, saying, “having been overpowered from the sleep.”

It is the second use of *katapheró*. Eutychus was being overpowered, and then he is overpowered. He could not bear up with the long hours sitting directly in the spot where all of the lamp fumes, heat mixed with smoke, were exiting. And so, he “fell from the third story down.”

This is the only use of the word *tristegon*, or third story, in the Bible. It means that Eutychus probably fell somewhere about 18-25 feet, maybe a bit more if the window was elevated. Being asleep when he fell, he would have been unable to keep himself from damage. Rather, he would have plunked down in whatever form his body slumped over in. Therefore, Luke next notes, “and was taken up dead.”

Luke, being a competent physician, notes with all certainty that Eutychus had expired from the fall. Goodbye, Eutychus.

Life application: When something unusual is stated in Scripture, such as noting “many lamps” in the previous verse, there will be a reason for it. The reason may escape us. But in thinking through the times, situations, and circumstances of the event being described, we can usually come to a conclusion concerning the reason.

Further, there are two thousand years’ worth of commentary available to us. A simple search on the internet will bring up many of them. Be careful with such things because, quite often, the most sensational comments are the ones that are more commonly read.

Because of this, they will come up first on internet searches. So be sure to read several commentaries. The initial one may be sensational, but it also may be wrong.

Take the time and effort necessary to find out the reason for things that you find curious. Quite often, you will discover that real human events are connected to real human circumstances. From there, and built upon that foundation, the miraculous will then come forth, such as what will next be stated by Luke in the ongoing narrative.

*Heavenly Father, it is a treasure to search out Your word and to find out why things are stated there. The cultures described are different and the circumstances vary, but the human element remains the same. We can identify with what happened thousands of years ago because we are humans that You have created to know You and Your intents for us personally. Thank You for this precious word. Amen.*

**But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing *him* said, “Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him.”** Acts 20:10

The words more exactly read, “And Paul, having descended, fell upon him and having embraced, said, ‘Be not agitated, for his life is in him’” (CG).

In the previous verse, Eutychus was overcome by sleep and fell out of the third-story window. He was taken up dead. However, it now says, “And Paul, having descended, fell upon him.”

It is certain that the people in the room that saw him fall shouted out and rushed down the stairs. These stairs are generally a staircase on the outside of the house. One after another, the people would have rushed down in a state of anxiety. As the line allowed, Paul would have joined in the descent.

At such a time, most people would be standing there looking at the corpse. Those who knew him well would begin to start moaning and wailing. The women would be crying. Paul, obviously feeling the power of the Spirit, fell upon Eutychus. Luke next notes, “and having embraced.”

There are similar accounts in 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 4. The prophets Elijah and Elisha both raised dead young men after physically joining to them. In Paul’s embracing of Eutychus, it next says that Paul stated, “Be not agitated, for his life is in him.”

The word translated as “agitated,” *thorubeo*, is used for the fifth and last time in the New Testament. It signifies to make an ado, disturb, agitate, etc. The idea here is certainly the tumult of sadness over death. The cries would increase, and some would shriek or cry out, “O God!” Paul’s words are given to silence this and to give them the comfort of knowing that all was ok. Welcome back, Eutychus.

“LIFE” application: The word “life” in this verse is from the Greek word *psuché*. This is the soul. There are three words in Greek that are used to describe the state of what is going on within a person.

The first, *psuché*, is the soul. It is that which exists from conception, and which is tied to the body. However, even if the body dies, the soul continues, albeit in an unnatural state.

The next is *pneuma* – wind, breath, or spirit. The Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit and the spirit of man. This is the rational soul or the mental disposition.

The third is the *zóé*, or life. This speaks of the vitality of the being, even plant life.

These three words correspond exactly to the Hebrew words *nephesh*, *ruakh*, and *khai*.

In the case of Paul’s words, he literally says, “his soul is in him.” As the soul is the part that actually doesn’t die, saying “life” explains the matter clearly to us. His soul returned to his dead body. To understand this, Paul says this in 2 Corinthians –

“For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup> For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, <sup>3</sup> if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup> Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

Paul, speaking of our physical bodies, here called “our earthly house,” notes that if a person is separated from this earthly body (it is destroyed), he is unclothed and naked. This was the state of Eutychus. His body was broken from the fall and his soul (*psuché*) had departed.

This is an unnatural state. The soul of man continues to exist, but the *zôé*, or vitality of the body, has ended. This is what happened to Eutychus. In the ending of his physical body's *zôé*, the vehicle by which his soul went about could no longer sustain it. Therefore, his soul departed from the physical body. Unless the rapture happens first, this will happen to each of us. However, God has promised us, by giving His Spirit (His *Pneuma*) as a guarantee, that this will be corrected.

One can see that the *Pneuma* of God is connected not to the corruptible body but to the soul. We have been given a guarantee that our soul will be "further clothed." The meaning is that we shall be given an eternal and incorruptible body. It is hard to figure out how people fail to understand what is being said here, but it is as common as pages in a book.

Our soul has been reconnected to God through an act of grace. At that moment, we are given His Spirit as a guarantee of our future redemption. The physical body no longer has any bearing on our eternal state. As it is in our physical bodies that we sin, and as we are no longer being imputed sin, then we are no longer under any sentence of condemnation. We have gone from death to life. It is an eternal decree of God. Salvation is, by default, something that is eternal.

*Glorious God, thank You for having saved us by Your grace in Christ. But more, thank You that this is an eternal decree. We have been brought into the New Covenant. Even if we fail You, You will never fail us. And You have proved this by giving us Your Spirit. Thank You for the sure hope of eternal salvation. Yes, thank You, O God. Amen.*

**Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed.** Acts 20:11

Luke uses a string of singular participles to connect the thoughts together – "And having gone up, and having broken bread, and having tasted, also at length having talked – until daylight – so he departed" (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul had gone down and embraced the dead Eutychus and then acknowledged that his life was in him. Now, with that behind them, it next says, "And having gone up."

As noted, the verbs are singular. Everything focuses on the actions of Paul. Eutychus was restored to life. With that out of the way, Paul returned to the upper room. Immediately, Luke next notes, "and having broken bread."



Some manuscripts include an article – “and having broken the bread.” It is probable that this is referring to the Lord’s Supper, or it could be the Agape feast that accompanied it. The idea of “breaking” bread is that of a single loaf (or loaves if a lot of people are present) which is passed around as pieces are broken off for each. With that stated, Luke next says, “and having tasted.”

Not only did Paul break off the bread for others, but he also had a taste of it himself. The word *geuomai* signifies to taste. It is the experiential part of eating or some other event. Jesus said in Matthew 16 –

“Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” Matthew 16:28

Likewise, it says this in 2 Peter –

“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, <sup>2</sup>as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, <sup>3</sup>if indeed you have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious.” 2 Peter 2:1-3

Such examples show that Luke is focusing on the experience rather than the idea of filling one’s stomach. The probable reason for these words is because of what Paul would have said in the rite of the Lord’s Supper –

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; <sup>24</sup>and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ <sup>25</sup>In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.’

<sup>26</sup>For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

In other words, Eutychus had just tasted death, but because of Christ Jesus’ death, the restoration of his life was made possible. Therefore, the taking of the Lord’s supper would have taken on a much more poignant taste during this meal. They were proclaiming His “death until He comes.” Luke is quickly connecting the thoughts together to show an unbroken succession of events, all bearing on what just occurred. Now, he continues with, “also at length having talked – until daylight.”

The word for “talked” is not the same as verse 9 (“discoursing”). Instead, it indicates a conversation. This verse shows the man Paul as one who devoted every moment of his time to the people he was with, right up until the moment he had to depart. He was a tireless, selfless individual concerning the gospel and the fellowship. With the coming of daylight, it was necessary for him to go his way, and “so he departed.”

Verse 20:13 will show that Paul departed on foot to Assos. Meanwhile, the others would sail there and meet up with him. The reason for this goes unstated, but after an entire night, without any sleep to sustain him, he left Troas and began walking to Assos, a distance of about 21 miles as the crow flies. Taking the Roman road was a distance of about 31 miles. Thus, he would have taken at least two days to make the trip.

Life application: Luke has tied the bringing back to life of Eutychus in with the subsequent breaking of bread. It is his way of connecting the life found in Christ Jesus to that of the life in His people. In this case, it was to teach us that even death cannot hold a believer in Christ.

But more, it is to show a transition of the gospel from going to the Jews to it going to the Gentiles. In Acts 9, Peter was used to bring Tabitha (Dorcas) to life. Paul has now done the same for Eutychus. The various events, signs, and miracles accomplished by Peter for the Jews are also occurring through Paul for the Gentiles.

For both, we now have the written word that verifies these things took place. This is to assure us that the life that is found in Jesus is still available to us now. We may not have a miracle of the restoration of life after a calamity, but we can have the absolute assurance that we will be raised at the coming of the Lord, just as the Bible describes in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4.

Let us hold fast to this truth as we experience our own times of loss. We are asked to trust the Lord and have faith that what His word presents is true and reliable.

*Lord God, because of the death of Jesus, we can now have eternal life in Jesus. For those who have believed the gospel, it belongs to us by guarantee. Even if our mortal bodies die, we know that we shall rise again. The promise is sure, the matter is settled, and we SHALL RISE AGAIN! Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.*

**And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted.**

Acts 20:12

Rather, the words read, “And they brought the boy, living, and were comforted not a little” (CG).

In the previous verse, Luke detailed the actions of Paul after having restored Eutychus to life. This was to make a connection between his death and the death of the Lord as remembered in the Lord’s Supper. Through the Lord’s death, restoration of life is available. The words now are certainly inserted into the chronology of those events, probably at the same time as when Paul again went up to the third floor. Luke records, “And they brought the boy, living.”

Most translations use an adjective, alive. But the word is a present participle, thus highlighting the astonishing nature of what occurred. They brought him living. As for Eutychus, the word now used to describe him is *pais*. It signifies a child under training. Thus, he would have been a younger boy. He had his whole life ahead of him and yet he died during a church gathering.

It explains the use in verse 20:10 of the word *thorubeo*, being greatly disturbed or panicked. The people would have been horrified at the loss of such a young person. But because of the power of God present through the apostle, he was restored to life.

As for the word translated as “brought,” it generally indicates being led. Thus, he wasn't carried. Rather, he came in on his own power, fully healed and showing no worse for the wear. Because of that, it next says, “and were comforted not a little.”

This certainly would have gone beyond the comfort of not having to bury a young man, but the comfort of the assurance of life that is found in Jesus.

Life application: These people were given sight into the power of the Lord. We could say, “How blessed they were to have seen these things and to have personally experienced the ability of Jesus to restore that young man to life!” It would certainly have bolstered their faith in an amazing way.

However, Jesus says this –

“Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed.’” John 20:29

The people at Troas were given a blessing through the restoration of Eutychus to life. We are, however, given that exact same blessing if we believe the words of the Bible.

We no longer need to have sight. The events recorded in Scripture confirm the power of the Lord to restore life. We can now have faith because of what is recorded there.

And more, we have the exact same blessing awaiting us that Eutychus received and that those with him beheld –

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup>Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

-1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

The same word translated as “comfort” in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 is the word that is used of the state of those in Troas in Acts 20:12. Because we have the words of Scripture complete, we can be “comforted not a little” as we experience the loss of those around us and as we face our own mortality. The power of God in Christ Jesus is available to all who will simply believe. Death itself has no power over us as we await the coming fulfillment of the promises of God!

*Glorious Lord God, we have comfort in our faith because it is grounded on the truth of what You have done in and through Jesus Christ our Lord. What more do we need to be assured and reassured of eternal life through Him? It is sufficient to carry us through this woeful life as we await the glorious life ahead. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board; for so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot. Acts 20:13**

The words of the NKJV need help, “And we, having gone ahead to the ship, sailed to Assos, thence readying to take up Paul. For so he had arranged, readying himself to hike” (CG).

In the last verse, Eutychus was taken home alive, and the people were greatly comforted. With that noted, the journey for the missionaries from Troas was set to commence. Therefore, Luke next says, “And we.”

The “we” verses continue, showing that Luke is with the missionaries at this time. Everything recorded here would be from his first-person perspective. Understanding this, he next notes, “having gone ahead to the ship, sailed to Assos.”

The missionaries, inclusive of Luke, are departing by ship. The first leg of the journey is from Troas to Assos. Assos is about 20 miles south of Troas, but for those who sailed, it was about twice as far as they had to go around a cape. Of this location, Albert Barnes notes –

“There were several cities of this name. One was in Lycia; one in the territory of Eolis; one in Mysia; one in Lydia; and another in Epirus. The latter is the one intended here. It was between Troas and Mitylene. The distance to it from Troas by land was about 20 miles, while the voyage round Cape Lectoure was nearly twice as far, and accordingly Paul chose to go to it on foot.”

Assos is only found here and in the next verse in the New Testament. The meaning is uncertain, but Abarim says the following –

“The name Assos may derive from a rarely used adverb *ασσον* (*asson*) and revel in the fact that it's **Closer** than some other place. Or it relates to the name of the local son and international hero king Assaracus, **Number One** and the patriarch of all things Rome.

“Even in 1000 BC, when there was no Rome yet, the preference would probably have inclined toward Assaracus. Assos means **Number One**.”

Of this trip to Assos, Luke next records that they left by ship. Once they had arrived, the plan was “thence readying to take up Paul.”

Luke notes that while he and those with him would sail, they would be ready at their arrival point to take up Paul at that location. The meaning is obvious. Paul would travel another way to Assos. That is then explained by the next words, saying, “For so he had arranged, readying himself to hike.”

Rather than sail, Paul desired to go by land. Luke uses a word found only here in Scripture, *πεζουό*. It is ultimately derived from *pous*, meaning “foot.” Being a single verb in the present tense, the word “hike” suffices. A hike is something conducted on foot and is a little less arduous sounding than “trek” or “trudge,” and a little more determined than “amble” or “saunter.”

Paul hiked to Assos. Quite a few reasons have been speculated as to why he did this. Some think he didn't want to sail unless it was necessary. Others think that maybe he wanted to pray or contemplate life. Still, others suggest that he might have wanted to visit friends on the way. And yet, others think it might have been for health reasons. Maybe he wanted to race and see who would arrive at Troas first – the old competitive spirit and all. Only speculation can be made because Luke provides no further explanation.

Life application: The traveling noted by Luke as they sailed and Paul, as he walked, can be followed on google maps exactly. You can zoom in on even the minutest details, following along the ancient ports and paths that have been updated for modern shipping and automobiles. What is wonderful about doing this is that you can find assurance that what you are reading is reliable.

Luke didn't just write a novel about the adventures of fictional characters. Instead, he has documented the exact movements of real people that really set out on these missionary journeys. If the locations, directions, time of travel, etc., are all reliable, why would anyone assume that the other details, such as the restoration of life to Eutychus are any less reliable?

It would make no sense to document the minutest details of one aspect of the narrative and then make up a bunch of fairy tales about the other parts. Rather, we have a sure and sound word that is backed up by facts and eyewitness accounts. Let us not doubt the accuracy of what we read. Instead, let us be firm and confident in what is recorded. This is the word of God, and it is reliable.

*Lord God, thank You that Your word is so reliable and verifiable. Because of this, we can know that when things are recorded that are difficult to grasp because of their miraculous nature, we can still have faith that they are true. Because of this, we can also know that what is detailed for the times ahead is also true. We have a sure and grounded hope because of this precious word! Amen.*

**And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene.** Acts 20:14

The Greek reads, "And when he met with us at Assos, having taken him up, we came to Mitylene" (CG).

In the previous verse, the missionaries were set to sail for Assos while Paul took the journey on foot. Now, Luke's words continue with, "And when he met with us at Assos."

Without any comment as to why the two parties traveled separately and without any details of their meeting up, other than that they met, it is apparent that it occurred as planned. It isn't even sure which arrived first. The words simply indicate that they came together. With that, Luke next records, "having taken him up, we came to Mitylene."

Paul got on board, and they departed. Their first stop is noted as Mitylene. This was, and still is, the capital of the island known as Lesbos. It is about 30 miles south of Assos and just off the west coast of Anatolia. The island is one of the largest in the Aegean Sea and is the seventh largest in the Mediterranean. Its total circumference is about 168 miles. As for the name of the location, Abarim says –

"The name Mitylene comes from the adjective μιτυλος (*mitulos*), which in turn is related to the familiar Latin word *mutilus*, from which comes our English verb 'to mutilate.' How and from what the Greek language derived our word μιτυλος (*mitulos*) isn't clear but from its sparse usages it appears that it was solely used in the meaning of hornless."

This location, Hornless, is noted only this one time in the Bible.

Life application: Paul spent the entire last night at Troas talking to the disciples there. He then got up and walked the distance from Troas to Assos. As those on the ship met him there, it is apparent he didn't sleep the entire time it took to meet up with them. It makes guessing why he determined to walk all the more curious.

It is, however, good to stop and consider such things because we can then evaluate our own paths that we decide to take. Paul may or may not have walked that particular area before, but he knew that Mitylene awaited him. It is good to set out on a new path at times, but there has to be a reason for doing so. There also needs to be a goal at the end that is expected. If not, you will be ambling blindly.

This doesn't mean we control our steps at all. We may not make it till tomorrow morning. But if we do, we should at least have a plan for when we get there. In the meantime, we should include the Lord in the process. The words of James instruct us on this –

"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; <sup>14</sup> whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. <sup>15</sup> Instead you *ought* to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'" James 4:13-15

*Heavenly Father, direct our steps according to Your wisdom. We do have to plan them, but our plans are still at Your allowance. So, Lord, may the two be harmoniously put together through Your guiding hand. We look to You for each breath, so if it is Your will, may our plans be in accord with what You would have us do. Amen.*

**We sailed from there, and the next *day* came opposite Chios. The following *day* we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogyllium. The next *day* we came to Miletus.**

Acts 20:15

The words are difficult to directly translate, but they can be more closely rendered as, “And thence having sailed the following *day*, we arrived opposite Chios. And the other *day*, we cast-aside at Samos, and having remained in Trogyllium, the adjoining *day* we came to Miletus” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul was taken aboard. They then sailed to Mitylene. Now, the voyage continues, saying, “And thence having sailed the following *day*.” Here and in the final clause, Luke will use present participles to describe the passing of time. This time, it is from the verb *epiousa*, or next. Being a present participle, “following” gives the needed sense. From one day leading to the next, they have gone from Mitylene where Luke next says, “we arrived opposite Chios.”

Chios is about halfway between Lesbos and Samos. It is an island about five miles off the coast. They would have sailed through this narrow straight but stopped on the eastern side for the night, opposite Chios on the mainland.

The name Chios is found only here. Its meaning is uncertain. Also, the word *antikrus*, or opposite, is also found only here. It means opposite, over against, or off when used in a nautical sense. Luke next says, “And the other day, we cast-aside at Samos.”

Using a different word, *heteros*, or “other,” Luke describes the next day’s travel where they neared Samos. This is an island south and east of Chios, also mentioned only this one time. Abarim says that most commentators state that the name means “high place” because it has Greece’s fifth highest place, being 1434 meters high.

The word translated as “cast-aside” is *paraballó*. It is also a unique word found only this once. It is directly translated as “cast aside.” In other words, they neared there, merely bringing the ship alongside the island. From there, they crossed over to Trogyllium. As it says, “and having remained in Trogyllium.”



This clause is not found in some manuscripts, rather simply noting the journey going from Samos to Miletus. However, it is likely Trogyllium was included in Luke's original words. Trogyllium is "the rocky extremity of the ridge of Mycale, on the Ionian coast, between which and the southern extremity of Samos the channel is barely a mile wide" (Speaker's Commentary).

Of the name Trogyllium, Abarim says, "To an average Greek speaker, the name Trogyllium probably sounded like Place For Things To Nibble On or The Hole That Gobbles Up." Of this location, Hastings Dictionary of the New Testament says –

"Trogyllium was a promontory formed by the western termination of Mt. Mycale, on the coast of Asia Minor, about equidistant from Ephesus and Miletus. It runs out into the sea just opposite the island of Samos, from which it is separated by a channel less than a mile wide (Strabo, XIV. i. 12, 13). Its present name is Santa Maria."

Concerning which manuscript is right, Hastings continues, saying –

"This in itself is likely to have happened. ... The reason for their omission may have been either the mistaken idea in the mind of the copyists that the text located Trogyllium in Samos, or the difficulty of imagining two night-stoppages, one in the harbour of Samos and another at Trogyllium, which is only 4 or 5 miles from Samos. But a night spent at Samos is quite imaginary, for the nautical term *παρεβάλομεν* [*parebalomen*] does not mean 'arrived at' (Authorized Version) or 'touched at' (Revised Version). All that it implies is a crossing from one point to another; and, while Samos was merely sighted and passed, Trogyllium was the resting-place. An anchorage just to the east of the extreme point of Trogyllium now bears the name of 'St. Paul's Port.'"

With this understood, Luke finishes the verse with, "the adjoining *day* we came to Miletus." Luke again uses a present participle, coming from the verb *echó*, to describe the day. It means to have, hold, or possess. In this case, "adjoining" gets the point across. The days adjoin. Thus, they hold together.

Miletus is further south and east of Trogyllium. It is on a large promontory in modern Turkey. The area they landed at is now called Gundogan. The name Miletus is from an uncertain origin. Thus, it is not known what it means.

Life application: As has been seen, Luke has used a variety of terms in this one verse to describe the travels. It is inexcusable to not at least attempt to translate them in a variety of ways so that the reader can get the flavor of what is being said. However, the

Pulpit commentary says the following concerning the King James Version's failure in this regard –

“The A.V., [meaning the King James Version] which often gives a varied English for the same Greek, has here for varying Greek given the same English [next] three times over.”

If translators are not going to at least attempt to rightly translate a verse, they shouldn't be translating. The word is so rich and varied, and yet so much is lost when the necessary time and effort is not put into giving the flavor of what is being conveyed.

For this reason, be sure not to get captivated by a single translation. Refer to several or many. Also, be sure to read commentaries on the things that pique your interest. You will get out of your studies what you put into them.

*Thank You, O God, for the wonderful detail and delight that is found in Your precious word. May we be careful to attend to it daily, reading it, studying it, and cherishing its contents. In doing so, we will be blessed in so many ways. Yes, Lord, thank You for this marvelous word! Amen.*

**For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.**

Acts 20:16

In the last verse, the missionaries had left Mitylene and had wound their way as far as Miletus. Now, and from Miletus, Luke next records, “For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus.”

It is a pluperfect verb. He had decided before getting on the ship that they would not stop there, and upon having arrived further along the journey in Miletus, the matter was resolved. If he had stopped at Ephesus, it would inevitably have meant spending time there that he did not want to lose. Also, The KJV says “sail by” Ephesus. This is ambiguous. It could mean “sail to along the way” or “sail past.” The intent is the latter, as indicated by the Greek word *parapleó*. It is found only here in the New Testament. It signifies sailing near or past but without stopping. This was “so that he would not have to spend time in Asia.”

Both Miletus and Ephesus are in the region of Asia. But Miletus was a short distance past Ephesus on the way to Jerusalem. Not stopping in Ephesus via ship would avoid getting

bogged down in a long visit, but it would still allow them to meet with members of the church. Verse 17 will further explain this.

For now, Luke explains the matter using the word *chronotribeó*, translated as “spend time.” It is also only found here in the New Testament. It comes from two words: *chronos*, time, and *tribos*, a worn path, a road, or a highway. It indicates to delay or waste time.

If he had stopped at Ephesus, he would certainly have gotten caught in a significant delay which he did not want. Instead, Luke next says, “for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.” Paul had his sights set on this and did not want to be deterred from it. Jerusalem is where the church began. Pentecost was both the timeframe when the law was received at Sinai, and it was also when the church began with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon believers.

He had left Philippi at Passover, and this only gave him 50 days to travel the entire distance. He probably wanted to be in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast with the brethren there as a memorial. It was also because it was a good time to pass on the gift from the churches to them. Along with that, it was a good time to meet family and old friends who would be in town. Likewise, it would be a good time to evangelize many who had come for the feast and who were curious about The Way.

Life application: In Galatians 4:9-11, Paul writes –

“But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? <sup>10</sup>You observe days and months and seasons and years. <sup>11</sup>I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.”

Also, in Colossians 2:16, 17 he writes –

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, <sup>17</sup>which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”

In both, he is alluding, among other things, to the Feasts of the Lord recorded in Leviticus 23, of which Pentecost (Shavuoth/Weeks) was such a feast. Paul calls that bondage. He also says these things were mere shadows of the reality found in Christ. He says these things because they are a part of the Law of Moses which anticipated the

work of Jesus and which were fulfilled by Him. Further, being Gentiles, the Galatians and Colossians had never been obligated to the law. The law was given to Israel alone.

Likewise, Paul had entered the New Covenant and was no longer bound by the Old. However, being a Jew, it was still a part of his culture. It was a time when the multitudes would gather and celebrate. There is no contradiction in Paul's words and his actions. His intent to be in Jerusalem was not because the Law of Moses demanded it. It was because it was an opportune time for him to carry out many affairs.

Quite often, Hebrew Roots adherents and others will try to influence your thinking by noting that Paul was an observant Jew in all ways, including the Feasts of the Lord, the Sabbath, dietary restrictions, and so on. From that springboard, they will then attempt to impose on you the exact same bondage. Don't be led astray by this false teaching.

The Law of Moses, of which the Gentiles were never under, was fulfilled and set aside in Christ. You never were under it, and you remain free from it, completely and entirely. Live out your life in Christ, understanding the grace that has been bestowed upon you. Don't set that grace aside for the sake of false humility. The cross is sufficient to restore you to God. Don't mar the grace of the cross.

*Glorious Lord God, thank You for the freedom we possess in Christ. You sent Jesus to accomplish all things, and He did. What can we add to that? Rather, help us to live our lives in gratitude for what You have accomplished in Him. Be glorified as we praise You, O God, for the giving of Your Son to bring us back to You! Amen.*

**From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. Acts 20:17**

The verse should read, "And from Miletus, having sent to Ephesus, he called for the elders of the church" (CG).

The previous verse noted that Paul was in a rush to get to Jerusalem by the Day of Pentecost. Because of this, he decided to sail past Ephesus. Instead, they stopped at Miletus, a port a short distance beyond Ephesus. With their arrival, Luke next notes, "And from Miletus, having sent to Ephesus."

The distance to Ephesus is estimated to be about thirty to forty miles from Miletus. It would take some time to travel that far and then an equal amount of time for the messenger to return with those of the church. It would be a 10-to-15-hour journey for a

healthy person to walk that far at a normal pace. With donkeys, it would be a bit faster. With horses, it could be done even more quickly.

No matter what, there would be at least a day of travel, spending the night, and then another day of travel back to Miletus. In a best-case scenario, they would not continue their travels until at least the third day after arriving.

It would seem that after such a long journey, waiting for these people would be contrary to his plans to reach Jerusalem quickly. From this, it is obvious that he knew he would get bogged down in a personal visit to Ephesus. Many days of fellowshiping would be the minimum. Therefore, he reasoned that the time waiting for the church to come to him would still be less than that. This then is actually the more expedient way of handling the situation. Therefore, “he called for the elders of the church.”

In this verse, the elders who are summoned are designated by the Greek word *presbuteros*, an elder. However, in Acts 20:28, the word used to describe these same men will be *episkopos*, overseers. Because of this, it is obvious that the titles were synonymous. Their state was that of being elders, while their duties were that of overseeing the church.

Life application: Thinking about what is recorded here, it is rather amazing to consider. Paul bypassed Ephesus, a good distance away, and then sent for the elders. It isn't known if there were one or more churches in Ephesus. But even if there was only one, these men would have been called to drop everything they were doing and travel the long distance to Miletus on a moment's notice.

Think of where you live and consider a location thirty miles away. Now imagine if someone came to you and said, “We need to leave right away and start walking to that place. Johnny Come Lately wants to see you and the other seven leaders of the church.”

This means a day of walking, a meeting, and then another day of walking back home. When looked at from this perspective, one can see how carefully Paul must have balanced things out concerning stopping at Ephesus or not. And more, consider the state of these men who were willing to drop everything and head to Miletus to see him.

Now, think about your own associations. Who would you be willing to do this for? Are the needs or desires of someone that important to you? Imagine if there is a natural disaster, maybe a hurricane, that has caused damage to a friend. Would you drop everything and say, “I'm going to help with this.” Let us be grateful to the Laborious

Lee's and Magnificent Mike's who would do such a thing. Let us also consider if we too would be willing to do such in the time of other's needs.

When the need arises, think about how you can meet it. In the case of Paul and the elders at Ephesus, the need arose, and it will be met in the verses ahead.

*Lord God, help us to be attentive to the needs of others as they arise. May we be willing to extend our hand, if possible, to attend to the call or need of others. Thank You for those who willingly put forth of themselves in such moments. And above all, thank You for Jesus, who came to meet our greatest need, even while we were still sinners. Amen.*

**And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, Acts 20:18**

The words need to be more precisely aligned with the Greek, “And when they came to him, he said to them, ‘You know from the first day in which I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time’” (CG).

Paul had just sent an emissary from Miletus to Ephesus to gather the elders of the church at Miletus. Now, with their coming, Luke records, “And when they came to him.” As noted, this would have been at least a day later, maybe even two. The men would have had to have walked or rode about thirty miles to Ephesus, gathered the elders, and then made the return trip. Despite the distance, the men came. With that having transpired, “he said to them, ‘You know.’”

The word “you” is in the emphatic position. To highlight this, the YLT says, “Ye – ye know.” Paul is declaring in their presence, and with their knowledge to support his words, the truth of what he will say. Next, he says, “from the first day.”

These words speak of a period of three full years, as will be noted in Acts 20:31. There was sufficient time to come to know Paul and to evaluate his conduct and his character. Therefore, they will know that what he has called them for is based on that knowledge. His words will need to be considered and accepted because of this. He next says, “in which I set foot in Asia.”

The word translated as “set foot” is *epibaino*. It is used just six times in the New Testament. It means to set foot on, mount, or board (as if boarding a boat). It is derived from *epi* (on, upon, etc.) and *basis* (a step). Paul notes that, from the first step of his foot among them, what he will convey was the case. As they are the witnesses to the

matter, it must be a true proclamation concerning it, which is, “how I was with you the whole time.”

The words are singular, “the whole time.” There was no lapse in how Paul conducted himself from beginning to end. Concerning such steadfast conduct, the Geneva Bible says, “A graphic image of a true pastor.”

Life application: Out of all of the speeches made in Acts, this one stands out as certainly being one where Luke was present. The style of his words shows the first-hand knowledge of what was said. Also, it closely mirrors Paul’s words in his epistles.

Everything about it shows evidence of a faithful recording of what Paul actually said rather than a second-hand account. The other speeches are true representations of what was said, but this one indicates the careful detailing of the deep emotion and heartfelt love that Paul and the elders shared.

As they are analyzed, remember this and think of your own times when you were closely bonded with others in the fellowship of Christ. And this doesn’t have to just mean in one another’s presence. In our modern world, communication and fellowship can take place over vast distances. And so, think about what Paul emphasizes to these men.

Consider his words and develop the same passion as he had for what he will convey. Spoiler alert: Paul will implore these men to hold fast to what is good and sound, and to guard against those who would come in and pervert the church. He knows these will be his last words to them, and so he begs them to remain sound in their lives, conduct, and doctrine before the Lord.

*Glorious God, may we consider our walk before You, hold fast to what is good, and emphasize to others the importance of holding fast to what You have set before us in Scripture. Help us to rightly divide it, to faithfully live by it, and to be willing to instruct others in it. To Your glory and for the edification of others, we pray. Amen.*

**“serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; Acts 20:19**

Although a bit clunky, the words more correctly say, “serving the Lord with all mind-abasement, with many tears and trials occasioned me by the ambushes of the Jews” (CG).

The words continue the thought of the previous verse. Taken together, they would say, “And when they came to him, he said to them, ‘You know from the first day in which I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all mind-abasement, with many tears and trials occasioned me by the ambushes of the Jews.’”

With that noted, the words of this verse begin with, “serving the Lord with all mind-abasement.” It is a single noun first found here, *tapeinophrosune*. It is derived from *tapeinos* (humble, lowly, etc.), and *phrén* (mind, intellect, etc.). And so, as a single noun, “mind-abasement” exactly translates it. It will be used by Paul five times and by Peter twice. Paul continues by saying, “with many tears and trials.”

Some manuscripts omit the word “many,” but it is likely original. Paul’s use of the word would fit perfectly with the events of his time in Ephesus. He labored vigorously, cared deeply, and faced trials repeatedly. And these were “occasioned me by the ambushes of the Jews.”

The word translated as “occasioned” means to come together or come to pass. These things befell Paul personally and they were instigated by the Jews. As for the word translated as “ambushes,” it is a plural noun signifying a plot, but it also carries the sense of the plot being put into action. Some translations say, “plots.” This gets half of the idea. Others say, “lying in wait,” but that is a paraphrase that is singular in nature. A single word that carries the whole intent would be the plural “ambushes.” In this, there are the plots which are combined with the actions of carrying them out.

Life application: Paul’s words are not boasting through self-piety. The things he said are simply the manner in which he conducted himself. This is perfectly evident from the fact that he is saying them to the very people who saw how he conducted himself. He is laying out the foundation for his words of admonishment, and it is appropriate that he sets this groundwork down in the exact manner in which he conducted himself.

This is a good lesson for each of us. If we act in a pious manner to ingratiate ourselves to others, that is not an acceptable way to conduct our affairs. However, if we live in an attitude of self-abasement as our regular conduct, it is an acceptable and noteworthy choice. Paul says as much to us in his epistles, such as –

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” Romans 12:3



*“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”* Philippians 2:3, 4

This was Paul’s attitude and conduct, and it should be ours as well. In this, we will be living properly before the Lord.

*Heavenly Father, help us to consider others before ourselves, deeming them as valuable people in Your eyes. Jesus came to save others, even while the world was sold to sin. We were once in that state, and they still are. The only difference between the two is Jesus. How can we look down upon others when – without Him – we would still be just as they are? Help us to have this mind. Help us to care about their state and to pity where they are. Soften our hearts to their plight, O God. Amen.*

**“how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, Acts 20:20**

The words are more closely stated, “how I withheld nothing of things that are profitable, not to declare to you and to teach you *in public and among houses*” (CG).

The words continue from the previous verse, “And when they came to him, he said to them, ‘You know from the first day in which I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, how I withheld nothing of things that are profitable, not to declare to you and to teach you in public and among houses.’”

With that context, we see that Paul’s words could not be made unless they were true. He is speaking to the people among whom the claims he is making pertain. Therefore, what he says must be the way things were. He is merely reminding them so that he can then encourage them based on what he says. And so, he continues by saying, “how I withheld nothing of things that are profitable.”

Hindsight is 20/20, but that is not what Paul speaks of here. Now, he says that he “withheld nothing.” We now welcome a new verb to Scripture, *hupostelló*. It will be seen just four times. According to Vincent’s Word Studies, “A picturesque word. Originally, to draw in or contract. Used of furling sails, and of closing the fingers; of drawing back for shelter; of keeping back one’s real thoughts; by physicians, of withholding food from patients.”

Ellicott thinks he used it specifically as a sailing metaphor where he “seems to say of himself, had used no such reticence or reserve, but had gone on his course, as it were, before the wind, with all his canvas spread.” This very well could be because he uses sea-related metaphors elsewhere, including Ephesians 4:14, 1 Timothy 1:19 and 1 Timothy 6:9.

No matter what his intent for using this word, it is clear that he was unafraid to teach them every doctrine and every counsel in accordance with the truth, regardless of whether they might find it offensive or unpalatable. Everything that was profitable was openly and fully shared with his disciples. From there, he turns to a negative clause to reiterate the point he has just made.

He said, “how I withheld nothing,” and now he says, “not to declare to you and to teach you.” The meaning is that instead of not declaring and not teaching, he did exactly the opposite by declaring and teaching. He did so without reservation and in a manner that was open to any and all. As he next says, “*in public.*”

Here is a word used for the last of four times, *démosios*. It is an adjective translated by most as publicly. But that is an adverb. Therefore, to retain the flavor of the original, “*in public*” more reasonably matches the intent. The word is derived from *demos*, a noun signifying “the people.” One can see the etymological root of the modern word democracy. As for the word *démosios*, you can wave it goodbye as it departs.

As for Paul, he was willing to speak about Jesus, the faith, holiness, righteousness, keeping from uncleanness, etc., all in the open and without shame or peevishness. He was bold and confident that his words were fully in line with the faith he professed. But, added to that, he next says, “and among houses.”

This would have been his talks and instruction in private settings. But don’t some people speak one way in public and another in private? Paul refused such a tactic. He spoke in the same manner when in a public forum and when in private. His words were not two-faced but always in accord with what the Lord had set before him from the start.

Life application: How nice it is when preachers continue to follow this same pattern today while we live in the face of ever-increasing wickedness. Who will be willing to unfurl the sails of proper doctrine and let the winds carry the whole counsel of God to every shore, despite the dangers? Who will teach publicly the doctrines that are found offensive to today's sensitive and dull ears?

Jesus spoke in this manner, setting an example for us two thousand years ago. Paul was a man who did likewise, and many have since followed suit. We know that the Lord is pleased with any and all who are willing to take such a stand. As it says in Matthew 10:27 –

“Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.”

In Genesis 31:39, Jacob told Laban that he bore the cost of any lost sheep himself rather than having it charged to his master. Considering the value that Jesus places on the souls of men, as noted, for example, in Matthew 16:26, Paul felt the cost of losing any for his Master. He was willing to expend himself to ensure those who heard and accepted the word would be kept safe from the ravages of the world around him.

And more, he did all he could to glorify God through evangelism and teaching. In verse 27 of this chapter, he will say that he did not shun to declare to his hearers the whole counsel of God. Let us be willing to hold fast to this word and to never waffle on what it proclaims, and to declare it in its fullness. This life is temporary. We might as well please God now with our conduct because eternity is a long time to regret not having done so.

*Glorious Lord God, You have given us instruction through Your word, and You have provided examples of how we are to share that through the actions of the apostles. May we be willing to expend ourselves in the furtherance of the gospel and in the necessity of living in accord with the word that You have blessed us with. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**“testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 20:21**

In the previous verse, Paul continued his words to the elders of Ephesus concerning his teaching and how he withheld nothing from those he spoke to, both in public and in private settings. Now, that continues further, saying, “testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks.”

The word translated as “testifying,” *diamarturomai*, means more than that. It signifies “fully testifying.” The prefix *dia* gives the sense of “through.” Thus, it is thoroughly testifying. Paul spoke out his witness in a full and complete manner, and he did so to all people, without distinction, meaning to both the Jews and the Gentiles.

His words are intended to mean all people of the earth, of whom the Greeks represent the whole. In both categories, he next notes the need for “repentance toward God.” This is the only time that Paul will tie in repentance in quite this manner, although it is similar to what he says in 2 Corinthians 7:10 –

“For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”

The meaning of the word must first be explained. It means “change of mind” and nothing more. Paul says that we must have a change of mind toward God. This does not, in any way, mean what people think it means today, as in, “You must repent, or turn from, your sins.” That is not what the word means.

Paul’s words now refer to an evangelical type of repentance, not a legal form. One cannot at first legally repent of what they do not understand. We cannot repent of a law or custom which we have violated until we know what that law or custom is.

Therefore, we cannot say that Paul is speaking of the standards of the law. Rather, it is speaking of who God is, what our relationship to Him is, and who Jesus is in relation to us in that context. From there, we are to repent (change our mind about who He is) and turn toward Him in faith.

His words have nothing to do with the issue of sin, except that we recognize that we are sinners before God, without dealing with any specific sin that must be first ended before we can be saved. If we tie works into the process of this verse, then we are putting the horse before the cart.

If a Buddhist is to be saved, he must repent of what he thinks about God, turn from that incorrect thinking, and put his faith in the true God through Jesus. The same is true with a Muslim or an atheist. The mind must be changed about what “god” is being pursued and then combine that with turning to the true “God.”

Only after we are saved can we then learn the laws, grow in conformity to what is expected, and be obedient to the Lordship of Christ, not before. This may sound obvious, but it is one of the chief points of incorrect doctrine among almost all legalistic churches. They tie legal repentance, rather than evangelical repentance, in with this verse.

Paul next continues with, “and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” This explains the first part of the equation more fully. God is God. There is one God. However, there must be a means by which He is approached. It is not through Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, or any other expression than through His Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Note how Paul opened his words of this thought with “testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks.” This means, without any ambiguity at all, that Jews must come through Jesus as well. Judaism, as it is defined today, is not an acceptable approach to God. The Messiah has come. Any Jew who has not come to God through Him is in the exact same position as a Muslim, Buddhist, atheist, etc.

Remember: Repent means “change of mind.” Repentance toward God means “change your mind about God.” Repentance at this point (meaning in order to be saved) does not mean “stop all your sinning.” It means to acknowledge you are a sinner and that as you learn what things displease God, you will then turn from those things. Finally, no person can be saved, Jew or Gentile, unless he turns to God (repents of his incorrect notion about God) by coming to Him through Jesus Christ.

Life application: Dual Covenantalism is a doctrine that says Jews can be saved by adherence to the Law of Moses. John Hagee teaches this. It is the official stand of the Roman Catholic Church and others. And it is a heresy. This is a great lie from Satan, and those who teach it are condemning unsaved Jews to eternal separation from God because of such teaching. They will be held to account.

Do not waffle in your convictions about Jesus Christ. Be firm and ready to defend what you believe by properly presenting it to those you talk to. Jesus Christ is the Incarnate Word. He is God who came to dwell among His people. He fulfilled the law, He died in fulfillment of it, and by faith in His death, burial, and resurrection, people will be saved. There is no other path to God available to man.

Get the word out! God has done it! Jesus has prevailed, and salvation is a gift of God’s grace to any who will simply believe.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the sure hope we possess. Through Jesus Christ, You have accomplished all things necessary to reconcile us to Yourself. We acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that through Him we are restored to You. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.*

**“And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, Acts 20:22**

The words bear more of an emphasis than the NKJV provides – “And now, behold, I – bound in the spirit – go to Jerusalem, not knowing what will befall me in it” (CG).

The previous verse includes Paul’s words concerning “repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now, he speaks of what lies ahead for him, saying, “And now, behold, I – bound in the spirit.”

These words are curious when taken in connection with the words of Agabus in verse 21:11. Paul says he is “bound” in the spirit. The word is *deo* and is used often concerning binding someone up, such as binding the strong man in Mark 3 or the demoniac in Mark 5. When a donkey is bound to a post, this word would be used. If one is bound in prison, this word is used.

Paul feels “bound in the spirit,” not knowing what he will next speak of. Scholars vary on whether they believe he is referring to the Holy Spirit or simply being constrained in his own spirit. Based on what Agabus says, it is most likely his own spirit, not the Holy Spirit. This will be seen as the verse continues.

Paul next says that he will “go to Jerusalem” in this state of being bound in the spirit. This is the path set before him and his traveling companions. He is so determined to get there that he has called these elders of Ephesus to come a considerable distance for this short meeting. Despite this determined trek to Jerusalem, he next says, “not knowing what will befall me in it.”

These words tell us that Paul is most likely referring to his own spirit. This is because the Holy Spirit does know, and it will be altered more fully to Paul at the meeting with Agabus. This seems more likely because it appears that Paul is drawing a contrast between his own desires and efforts and what he says in the next verse concerning what the Holy Spirit is revealing to him –

Paul is bound in his spirit to accomplish his mission.  
The Holy Spirit testifies that chains and tribulations await.

For whatever reason, the Holy Spirit did not reveal everything to him directly, but rather, He will do it more fully through Agabus. It is a remarkable testimony concerning the reliability of the Book of Acts as a true account.

Life application: It is important to not mix our desires with claims of divine leading. And yet, it is as common as signs on a highway for people to do it. “I think the Lord is leading me to marry this woman.” What if someone else says the same thing? God is not in the business of causing contradictory desires in people. “I think the Lord is leading me to open this business.” What if the business fails the first year it is opened? Did the Lord lead this person to bankruptcy?

“I think the Lord is leading me to stop paying on my house and to move to Franklin, Tennessee.” The Lord tells us to pay our debts. People may do these things because they are bound in their spirits to take certain actions. And yet, they claim that it is God, the Lord, or the Holy Spirit who is directing them.

We should be careful to not make such claims. Later, when it is discovered that the thing doesn’t come about, or it turns out in a negative way, we will either have to admit we were wrong or implicitly pass the blame onto God for what happened. Rather, let us state our desires as such, pray about what we intend to do, and then acknowledge, “If it is the Lord’s will.” If what we desire doesn’t come about, or if it proves to have been the wrong decision, we will find that out in due time.

*Lord God, help us to carefully consider our words and to never make claims concerning Your presence in our lives that are not in line with reality. Instead, we can acknowledge Your presence and ask for Your guidance but not bind our words so that what later transpires could possibly tarnish what we have stated about You. Help us in this, O Lord. Amen.*

**“except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. Acts 20:23**

Paul just noted that he did not know what would happen to him in Jerusalem, but he was going there bound in the spirit. Now, he continues that thought, saying, “except that the Holy Spirit testifies.”

The same verb, *diamarturomai*, translated as “testifying” in verse 20:21 is used again here. It signifies “fully testifying.” The prefix *dia* gives the sense of “through.” Thus, it is thoroughly testifying.

Paul was bound in his spirit, determined that he was to go to Jerusalem, and yet in this state of personal conviction, he also knew that the Holy Spirit was giving him advanced

notice of what lay ahead. And more, it wasn't just an inkling that rushed upon him for a moment, rather, the Spirit had testified to him "in every city."

With each stop he made, he could feel the presence of the Spirit. But more, he could sense what the Spirit was conveying to him. That is then noted in the rest of the words of this verse, "saying that chains and tribulations await me."

These words refer to the limited portion of what lay ahead that Paul was made aware of. However, this doesn't mean that it was directly from the Spirit to him. Rather, it could be just like the meeting with Agabus. People were selected to progressively reveal to Paul what would happen.

Or it could be that because of the persecution he had faced in each and every city he had been to during his ministry, he could expect that in Jerusalem it would be even greater. Everywhere he had gone, the Jews had hounded him. They pursued him relentlessly with each step and attempted to refute him each time he opened his mouth.

Jerusalem was the hub of Jewish life. Therefore, if this spirit of enmity existed in the isolated areas where the Jews were, it could only be magnified in Jerusalem. Paul, being indwelt with the Holy Spirit, could readily discern this. Paul's use of the term "every city" seems to imply that this might be the case.

People like Agabus were warning him externally. The Jews were hounding him personally. And so, rather than the Holy Spirit revealing it to him directly, he was being given Spirit-led warnings about what lay ahead.

Vincent's Word Studies agrees by saying, "The compound verb signifies full, clear testimony. Not by internal intimations of the Spirit, but by prophetic declarations 'in every city.'" It is for this reason, and despite what he knows, that he was bound in his spirit. He felt compelled to press on, and yet he perceived in his spiritual self what his physical self would soon endure.

Life application: In this life, we constantly have to make choices about what we will do. Some of them are minor and don't need a lot of consideration, such as, "Will I leave the house at 8:05 or 8:10?" It really isn't that big of a deal. At least, not in most circumstances.



And yet, we may leave the house at 8:10 and find out that exactly where we would have been at 8:05, we would have been caught in an exploding gas main that killed 273 people. It occurred on the subway we would have been on. The same could be true about the 8:10 train instead of the 8:05 train. And yet, if we are going to keep our job, we must act and get on the subway.

If we want our decisions to be the right ones, we should commit our day to the Lord in advance through prayer. "Lord, lead my steps according to Your wisdom. I don't know what lies ahead, but You do. Help me to make each decision accordingly." In this, we have entrusted our time and circumstances to His capable hands. Whether disaster or a humdrum ride to work awaits, we will know that we have at least committed ourselves to His guiding hand.

If this is true with the little things we do, how much more the larger decisions that will not only affect us but many others in their lives as well. Paul understood this. Think of the impact he has had, not only on the elders of Ephesus as they met together in Miletus, but two thousand years of people whose lives have been affected by what he experienced.

We cannot know the extent of the impact of our life beyond ourselves. So, commit your days to the Lord and His guiding hand.

*Glorious God Almighty, today is a new day. We don't know what lies ahead, but You do. You know every possible outcome of every step we will take and each decision we will make. So, Lord, we ask that You direct us according to Your wisdom. Point our feet so that they will bring about the greatest outcome for Your glory. May our days be filled with You through delight or disaster. Yes, Lord, direct us for a greater purpose. Amen.*

**"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20:24**

In the previous verse, Paul noted that the Holy Spirit was fully testifying in every city that chains and tribulations awaited him. Now, he continues that thought, saying, "But none of these things move me."

The words are more closely translated as, "But the word of none do I make mine own" (SLT). Of all of the things that were testified of what lay ahead, he simply disregarded the

warnings. He did not hold them to account or consider applying them to himself as if they should deter him. And more, he next says, “or do I count my life dear to myself.”

Again, the SLT more closely says, “neither have I my soul highly prized to myself.” Paul couldn’t care about himself in relation to the work he was doing. He was entirely unconcerned with the many prophecies that warned him about what lay ahead. In fact, it may be that these arose in order to help him mentally prepare for the very challenges he faced.

By being progressively told what was coming, he could harden his heart to the consequences. It is a similar and yet contrasting process to that which Pharaoh faced before the Exodus. Pharaoh hardened against the will of God, but Paul hardened toward the will of God. This was so much the case that he had given up counting the dearness of his own life.

Where Pharaoh looked to increase his earthly wealth and standing by keeping the Hebrew people, Paul looked to increase his heavenly rewards at the expense of this earthly life by freeing people through the gospel. Despite any earthly afflictions that would normally bring pain and sorrow, he instead says, “so that I may finish my race with joy.”

The tribulations that would arise, despite being physically and mentally challenging, would be a source of joy at the end, knowing that he had suffered them for the sake of Jesus and in receiving a favorable word from Him. He was on a race, his eyes were on Jesus, and his desire was the accomplishment of his ministry. As he next says, “and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus.”

He inextricably links his race, meaning his conduct in life as he raced towards his goal, with the ministry Jesus had bestowed upon him. He didn’t consider his life one thing and the ministry as another. Rather, they merged into a single unit where Paul fully identified with the ministry, and the ministry reflected Paul the man.

Therefore, if Paul was to suffer for his work, it meant that his work was designed for him to suffer. And his work, that which was endowed upon him by the Lord Jesus, was “to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

Again, for the third time in this chapter, the same verb, *diamarturomai*, translated as “testifying” or “testifies” in verses 20:21 and 20:23, is used again here. It signifies “fully testifying.” The prefix *dia* gives the sense of “through.” Thus, it is thoroughly testifying –

- Paul was fully testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The Holy Spirit fully testified that in every city that chains and tribulations awaited Paul.
- And yet, Paul’s determined mission was to fully testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

This was what was set before him. If the Holy Spirit testified to chains and tribulations, then the Holy Spirit was preparing him for, not deterring him from, what lay ahead. He knew this and so he was bound in his own spirit to go to Jerusalem, fully set for what was to come.

Life application: The terminology of being in a race was a favorite of Paul’s, having used it several times in his epistles. It is found in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Philippians 3:14, and 2 Timothy 4:7. Further, it is also found in Hebrews 12:1, an epistle that is unsigned and yet which bears innumerable marks of Pauline authorship. There, it says –

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1, 2

Those words were based on the contents of Hebrews 11, the great Hall of Fame of Faith. The trials and tribulations of the past saints were endured because they had a better hope than this temporary, fallen world. Paul had this same hope and united his life in Christ with the fact that tribulations would be a part of it.

The author of Hebrews then builds on that, asking his readers to “lay aside every weight.” Whatever may be considered a limiting factor in reaching the prize should be laid aside. That includes any possibility of loss, trouble, trial, or even death. There is a course marked out before us that leads directly to Jesus. Let us be of the mind that nothing in our lives will hold us back, slow us down, or hinder our progress towards that goal.

No matter what path we choose, we will reach the prize. That is guaranteed because of God’s covenant faithfulness. But how we get there and the rewards we receive for it are

up to us. This is why the author of Hebrews so carefully detailed his words of Hebrews 11 and then so clearly admonishes his reader at the beginning of Hebrews 12.

Live your life in a manner that will bring you the highest joy in the next. Eyes on Jesus!

*Lord God, our lives are like a race being run toward the greatest prize of all. Jesus is at the finish line, and His words to us about the conduct of our lives will be waiting there. Help us to remember this all our days. May we count this life as nothing in comparison to the glory that lies ahead. And so, may we conduct them accordingly now. Amen.*

**“And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Acts 20:25**

The word should be more precisely translated, “And now, behold, I have known that no more you will see my face – you all – among whom I passed through proclaiming the kingdom of God” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul noted that he was doing his utmost to finish the race set before him. Therefore, he was unmoved by the thought of chains and tribulations. With that remembered, he next says, “And now, behold, I have known that no more you will see my face.”

The words “have known” are in the perfect tense. He came to realize this at some point in the past, and the feeling remained true at this point. Paul felt his work was done in this area. This is seen in Romans 15:23, 24 –

“But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you, <sup>24</sup> whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your *company* for a while.”

Despite this, his words also seem to indicate a feeling that he would never be able to come to them again, maybe because of the prophecies mentioned in verse 20:23. The Lord used him in the area before allowing the trials that he was destined for.

However, he didn't know God's plans, and if the accepted dating of the pastoral epistles is correct, he did go to Asia again. This is noted in 2 Timothy 1:15 and 2 Timothy 4:13 & 20. This probably included time in Ephesus as well, but that is not positive.

That reference is seen in 1 Timothy 1:3, where he told Timothy to remain in Ephesus while he went into Macedonia. The meaning seems to be that he was in Ephesus and had Timothy stay behind when he left.

Further, he doesn't say that he won't see them but that they won't see him. This may be alluded to in 2 Timothy 1:15 –

“This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.”

Therefore, Paul and Timothy may have gone to Ephesus and the people refused to greet Paul, so Paul said, “Ok, I’m out of here. See what you can do.”

And more, it could be that those he knew in the church had died or dispersed by the time of his return. Therefore, his next words cannot be considered a false prophecy when he says, “you all – among whom I passed through proclaiming the kingdom of God.”

Paul is speaking to a certain group of people, and we have no idea if he actually met up with this group again or not. Something similar may have happened in Ephesus as happened to a church John wrote to in his 3<sup>rd</sup> epistle –

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. <sup>10</sup>Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting *them* out of the church.” 3 John 1:9, 10

There may have been such drastic changes in the church structure that the people Paul is now speaking to may have been put out, or they may have allied with the doctrine of someone like Diotrephes. Despite the difficulty that is present on a cursory reading of his words, there is no reason to question the reliability of the Bible from this verse.

Life application: It is important to remember that not every statement recorded in the Bible is true, but that everything the Bible records is the truth concerning what occurred. In other words, there are people who lie in Scripture, such as Rahab when she lied to the king's men who came looking for the spies. That is recorded in the Bible, but it is not true what she said. However, what the Bible records is the truth of what occurred.

Paul really spoke to these men in Miletus. However, what he said may or may not have come about. This does not call into question the integrity of the Bible at all. He is not necessarily prophesying. The only claim made concerning the Holy Spirit's testifying is that chains and tribulations awaited him. That happened. The rest is Paul's passionate words about what he feels will transpire. And, as noted above, what he says here may actually have occurred. There is enough in Scripture to at least hint that it is so.

Therefore, if someone comes challenging your faith in the reliability of the word of God over a verse like this, don't despair. The Bible fully confirms what it says, and what it proclaims is accurate and reliable. Have faith in that. We have a sure word.

*Lord God, help us in our times of doubt and weakness. Provide us with the assurances we need concerning Your word and how it affects our lives. We come to You in faith, so be with us and direct us all of our days. Amen.*

**“Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*.”**

Acts 20:26

Paul had just noted that he knew that those he was talking to would see his face no more. Now, and because of this, he next says, “Therefore.”

He is basing his words on what he will say next. It is a way of calling attention to the main point: this, this, therefore, this. With that stated to alert them to the importance of his coming words, he next adds in a note of solemn assurance, saying, “I testify to you this day.”

In other words, “What I am about to say is the truth. It is fully supportable by what I have already laid out before you. So, please take my words to heart.” With that in mind, he next says, “that I *am* innocent of the blood of all *men*.”

The Greek word *katharos*, or pure, is used. Paul is saying that he remains undefiled before God concerning the blood of those he encountered. However, this is not speaking of literal blood. Rather, the blood is the life of a man. For example, when it says that Jesus shed His blood, it means that He died. Understanding this terminology, Paul's words form an expression similar in thought to what he said in Acts 18 –

“When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus is the Christ*.<sup>6</sup> But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and said to them, ‘Your

blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’” Acts 18:5, 6

Paul had shared the message of God in Christ. He had explained to the Jews that this is God’s means of salvation, and they had rejected it. He was not guilty of withholding the message, and therefore, he was pure from the defilement of their blood. This is an expression that goes back to the book of Ezekiel –

Now it came to pass at the end of seven days that the word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>17</sup> “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: <sup>18</sup> When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. <sup>19</sup> Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.

<sup>20</sup> Again, when a righteous *man* turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. <sup>21</sup> Nevertheless if you warn the righteous *man* that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul.” Ezekiel 3:16-21

Ezekiel was to warn the people about their spiritual state. If they failed to turn from the words of the Lord through Ezekiel, their blood would be on their own heads. However, if Ezekiel failed to warn the people as the Lord required, the blame for their condition would be laid upon Ezekiel. Paul was using this example before those of Ephesus to let them know he had faithfully discharged his duties in regard to the spiritual condition of those he encountered.

Again, this is also not unlike what Samuel said to the people of Israel. He set before them a challenge to accuse him of wrongdoing. In doing this, he was demonstrating that no person had a valid case against him later, blaming him for what would come about when a king was appointed over the people –

“Now Samuel said to all Israel: ‘Indeed I have heeded your voice in all that you said to me, and have made a king over you. <sup>2</sup> And now here is the king, walking

before you; and I am old and grayheaded, and look, my sons *are* with you. I have walked before you from my childhood to this day. <sup>3</sup> Here I am. Witness against me before the LORD and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received *any* bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore *it* to you.” 1 Samuel 12:1-3

Again, understanding that this is not referring to literal blood, Paul’s conduct in Acts 7 has nothing to do with what is stated here. He was present at the death of Stephen. But Stephen was a saved believer in Christ. Therefore, the death of Stephen cannot be equated to what Paul is now speaking about.

Albert Barnes adds a note of eloquence to this verse: “...Greek: I call you to witness. If any of you are lost; if you prove unfaithful to God, I appeal to yourselves that the fault is not mine. It is well when a minister can make this appeal, and call his hearers to bear testimony to his own faithfulness. Ministers who preach the gospel with fidelity may thus appeal to their hearers; and in the day of judgment may call on themselves to witness that the fault of the ruin of the soul is not to be charged to them.”

The sentiment of this verse is seen in James 3:1 and in Hebrews 13:17. Take time to look up those verses and think about what is said there.

Life application: It is a very common thing to hear people today claim they are “watchmen” or “watchmen on the wall,” as if they have a special commission from the Lord or that they have personally taken on a burden that others don’t carry. Inevitably, they equate their words to being specialists in Bible prophecy and that they are watching as prophetic events unfold, carefully monitoring the world so they can alert God’s people to be aware of what is happening or soon to happen.

This is nonsense. There is no office of prophetic watchman detailed in Scripture. The idea of the watchman, as clearly indicated in Ezekiel, was that Ezekiel was designated to warn the people about their spiritual conduct before God. Paul, using this same type of argument but avoiding the “watchmen” terminology, notes that he had carefully told all he encountered about the way to be saved, meaning through Jesus Christ.

People who claim to be watchmen today need to drop the fancy titles and get about the business of sharing the gospel, warning those they encounter that they cannot be reconciled to God without Jesus. This would at least be in line with what the title “watchman” terminology in Ezekiel was given for. But, again, there is no need for the



title. It is not something assigned to a class of people in the New Testament. Therefore, it is a title without merit in the church today.

*Lord God, may we not get caught up in things that do not edify, and may we stay away from the sensational in our walk with You. Rather, may we quietly, obediently, and effectively share the gospel with others so that their eyes will be opened, and their hearts will be receptive to the words of life and restoration that You have given to us. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**“For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Acts 20:27**

Paul just said that he was innocent of the blood of all. He now explains exactly what that means, beginning with, “For I have not shunned.”

It is the same word just introduced in verse 20:20, *hupostelló*. It signifies to withhold, draw back, keep back, etc. There, he said that he “kept back nothing that was helpful.” To get a fuller flavor of its meaning, the word is also found in Galatians 2:12 when speaking of Peter withdrawing from the Gentiles because he feared those who were of the circumcision. It is used again in Hebrews 10:38 along with the noun form in Hebrews 10:39 –

“For yet a little while,  
And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

<sup>38</sup> Now the just shall live by faith;

But if *anyone* draws back,  
My soul has no pleasure in him.

<sup>39</sup> But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.” Hebrews 10:38, 39

Paul continues the thought, saying, “to declare to you.” HELPS Word Studies says the word signifies “*to tell all the way up*, i.e. clearly – declaring a thought (communication) that shows it has cleared (gone through) *its necessary stages*.” Paul is therefore saying that he has not withheld anything but instead fully expressed everything included in “the whole counsel of God.”

The whole counsel of God specifically meant Scripture for Paul, but it also included his revelation of Jesus. For example, in Ephesians 3, Paul says –

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— <sup>2</sup> if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, <sup>4</sup> by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), <sup>5</sup> which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: <sup>6</sup> that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, <sup>7</sup> of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.” Ephesians 3:1-7

Such insights and revelations are a part of the whole counsel of God that had been revealed to Paul. He had held nothing back and had given every detail necessary for those who heard to both be saved and to walk properly in Christ.

Life application: Consider Paul’s words carefully. The words of Paul and the other apostles are now a part of “the whole counsel of God.” These men were commissioned to express what they knew about Jesus Christ. Their writings are now complete and sealed.

We are to not abuse them, misuse them, add to them, or subtract from them. In 2 Timothy 3, it says –

“All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16, 17

As these things are true, we can know – without any doubt or ambiguity – that any supposed revelation beyond Scripture is false. For example, Paul has said that he has withheld nothing. He revealed to us the doctrine of the rapture. He has given the sequence of events exactly as they will occur. However, he has not given us any word that will allow us to know when the rapture will occur.

Therefore, any rapture prediction or prophecy is false. We don’t need to guess if this is true. We are to take it as an axiom. Think about what Paul has said and be sure to consider claims made by people in light of his words. In the end, the whole counsel of God is about Jesus Christ. From beginning to end, it is all about Him. And it is sufficient.

*Lord God, thank You for this precious word that tells us just what we need to know. We don't need to worry that maybe there are details that were mistakenly left out. Nor should we think there is anything unnecessary or superfluous recorded there. Rather, it is a sure and pure word we have received. Thank You that we can have this confidence. Amen.*

**“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. Acts 20:28**

In the previous verse, Paul noted that he had not shunned to declare to them the whole counsel of God. Now, and using that as an example for them to follow, he says, “Therefore take heed to yourselves.”

Paul is speaking to those in charge and reminding them that they first need to oversee themselves or everything which follows will be wrong. As the Pulpit Commentary says –

“He that is careless about his own salvation will never be careful about the souls of others.”

The Pulpit Commentary is correct, if it is referring to one's state in salvation, not in the state of salvation itself. In other words, if a person is saved, the state of his salvation is no longer in question, but his condition as a saved believer can and does change. Paul's words are that these already saved believers must take heed concerning their actions as believers. 1 Timothy 4:16 is a great comparable verse to consider –

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”

At first, the words of 1 Timothy 4:16 appear to be pointing to works-based salvation, but that is not the case. In teaching right doctrine, those who are taught will be saved (if they choose to accept God's gracious offer in Christ). In caring for the salvation of others, a minister is demonstrating that he cares for his own salvation. It is the gospel that brings salvation to men. As for the verse in Acts, Paul continues with, “and to all the flock.”

Drawing on the symbolism found throughout Scripture, the shepherd tends to his flock. The word translated as “flock” is the neuter noun *poimnion*. It is a flock of herding animals, especially sheep. In emulation of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, Paul asks them to

continue in this same care for those entrusted to them. This endowment is, according to his words, “among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.”

The Holy Spirit is the One who consecrated these men to be overseers of their flock in Ephesus. The idea here is first a desire to serve in this capacity and then with the approval of those who would be shepherded by them. As those in the church are believers sealed with the Holy Spirit, then these men have, by implication, been made overseers by the Holy Spirit.

As for the term “overseers,” Paul now uses this term - *episkopos*. It is derived from *epi*, upon, and *skopos*, a watcher, or a mark on which to fix the eye as if using a scope. Hence, it is an overseer. He is one who views intently. It is to be remembered that in verse 20:17, the term *presbuteros*, or elder, was used. Thus, the words are being used synonymously for the individual, even if the substance of the word is different. They are elders, and their job is to oversee.

This word, *episkopos*, is used five times, four by Paul and once by Peter in 1 Peter 2:25 when speaking of Jesus. Hence, the church overseer is to be like the ultimate Overseer, Jesus. He carefully watches over the souls of His people, as noted in 1 Peter, and these men are to do likewise and “shepherd the church of God.”

Here, Paul uses the verb form of the word translated as “flock” that he just used, *poimainó*. It signifies caring for the flock, inclusive of feeding them, protecting them, directing them, etc. The KJV says, “feed.” That is only a part of what a shepherd does, and thus it is an inadequate translation.

As for the words “the church of God,” although seemingly straightforward, this is one of the most debated verses in the New Testament. Along with 1 Timothy 3:16 and 1 John 5:7, this verse has several marked textual variations. One is the “church of the Lord,” and one is the “church of the Lord and God.”

Paul uses the term “church of God” around ten times (with variations on that theme making even more), but never “church of the Lord.” However, that doesn't mean it wasn't his intent here. The difference is important, particularly because of the next words he will say.

As for the church itself, it is a called-out assembly of believers. It is at the direction of those who lead it, just as Israel was at the direction of the king appointed over them. When the king strayed, the people inevitably did so as well. Likewise, when an

unsuitable leader is found within the church, those he leads will likewise go astray. But this should never be the case because, as Paul next says of Jesus in relation to the church, “which He purchased with His own blood.”

The word “purchased” signifies to fully acquire. The payment for the souls of those in the church was complete when Christ shed His blood. Concerning the words “His own blood,” they are in the emphatic position, literally “which He purchased through the blood the own.” The meaning of the word “blood” is “death.” The life is in the blood.

It isn't as if Jesus could have drawn out a pint of His blood and said, “Here, use this to buy the church,” as implied in the words “with” or “which.” Rather, when the blood is shed, death is the result. The payment for the souls of God's people is the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. It is through His death that man has life. Paul's words are carefully selected and spoken out to these men as a point of theology.

These words are why the textual variations are so contested. If “God” is intended, then it is absolute evidence of the deity of Christ. If God in Christ has His own blood, then it must be Jesus who is being referred to.

If this is the correct rendering, it brings in a point of theology concerning the deity of Christ. He is the God/Man. He can be referred to as God even though it is His humanity, not His deity, that possessed the blood. God cannot die, He does not possess blood, etc. To say He does is to introduce heresy into the nature of God. Jesus Christ is God united with humanity. For example, God did not die on the cross, Jesus' humanity died on the cross.

Either way, those who wish to intentionally diminish the deity of Christ would naturally prefer “Lord” and vice versa with those who desire to prove His deity. However, Christ's deity is so obvious from other portions of Scripture that only a person who intentionally denies the premise could miss it anyway.

Life application: In the words of this verse, Paul notes that these elders are to lead the flock “among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” As noted, this was – and continues to be – based on a selection and appointment process. The pastoral epistles give the necessary qualifications for such leaders. Therefore, the idea of the Holy Spirit making people overseers is inclusive of what is recorded there.

As such, if a person does not meet those minimum qualifications, the Holy Spirit does not at all make that person an overseer. The church departed from the word which is given by the Holy Spirit, and it failed to uphold its sacred duty.

The obvious point of this is that a church that failed to do as instructed is not an acceptable body of believers. This does not mean that those in the church are not saved. They may or may not be, but they have placed themselves in a state of apostasy because of their selection and appointment.

Just as the nation of Israel devolved into inappropriate conduct during the rule of a bad king, any particular church body that deviates from Scripture will devolve as well. This is the inevitable path for such things. If you are in a church that has appointed leaders whose qualifications are not in accord with the pastoral epistles, you should work to get that corrected or leave that church. Otherwise, your own walk will suffer.

*O God, You have given us Your word to lead us and direct us. Within that word are directions for men to be selected and designated as leaders within our local church. Help us to use wisdom in selecting men who meet the qualifications laid out by You. We wish to remain a body that is living in accord with Your will. So, help us to act accordingly in our leadership choices. Amen.*

**“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Acts 20:29**

Paul had just admonished the elders of Ephesus to take heed to themselves and to the flock. He stated that they were overseers of the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. Now, he explains why he so admonished them, saying, “For I know this.”

The Greek is in the perfect tense. The literal meaning of what he says is, “For I have seen,” but in the sense of his sight becoming knowledge. It is seeing in a metaphorical sense. We continue to use the same type of wording today when we say, “I see just what you mean.” We don’t physically see it, but our minds can see just as clearly as if our eyes had actually seen. Paul is fully convinced of what he is about to say, which begins with, “that after my departure.”

As he is on his way to Jerusalem and only meeting these men for a short time now, it means that this could happen at any moment. They, therefore, must pay careful heed to his words because he has already known what would happen. It is not an “if” but a “when.” Of what he warns about, it is that “savage wolves will come in among you.”

These words, along with what is coming in the next verse, comprise one of the saddest sets of prophetic verses in the New Testament. Paul, knowing the wickedness of the human heart, as well as the cunningness of the devil, was aware of what would happen to the churches.

His words will be confirmed as true within just a few short years when Jesus speaks to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2:1. Paul indicates that, with his departure, there will be the immediate temptation for false teachers to step in and take his place. He describes them as *lukoi bareis*, or burdensome wolves.

The word *lukos* is where lycan, or werewolf, comes from. It is derived from *leukos*, or white. That reflects the whitish hair of the wolf. The word *barus* signifies weighty or oppressive. Jesus uses it when referring to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:4, saying, “For they bind heavy [*barus*] burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men’s shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.”

These people would be heavy, oppressive wolves, savages “not sparing the flock.” They would be ravenous against the flocks and are thus set in contrast to the shepherds of the previous verse. The elders Paul is speaking to would have to be on a constant guard because those coming would certainly come in with subtlety and cunning, creeping around looking for a chance to assume leadership and then start to throw in their own perverse ideas and doctrines.

Life application: It would be unheard of for a church to open its doors and say, “We are proclaiming a false Jesus! Come in and join our damning doctrines. We have a sure path to hell.” Rather, churches begin with the intent of teaching the path to salvation, even if their doctrine is incorrect to begin with. Their intent is to do as they believe is proper.

For those churches with incorrect ideas and doctrine, they will face the Lord for judgment just as would any incorrect religion. However, there are churches that start out properly. They hold to what is right and in line with the word of God. However, it is not uncommon for such churches to quickly begin to divert after the retirement or death of a sound pastor.

It may be a matter of expediency, such as, “We really need a pastor, and although this guy isn’t the best, he will do until we find someone better.” In such a case, the chances are, the new pastor will come in and never leave. The congregation will get used to him and accept his watered-down teachings because it is the easiest path.

It may be a matter of someone being in the church who has always wanted to run things. And so, he secretly waits, agreeing with everything the pastor says. When the pastor retires or dies, he seems to be the right person to take over. However, he actually disagreed with the pastor on many points of doctrine, and he slowly begins to introduce them to the ears of the church. The wise leave. However, some stay, sure they made the right choice. Eventually, they are lulled into a state of total apostasy by this cunning wolf.

There are countless permutations of this to consider. The main thing is that the guard of the church was let down. It failed to adhere to the sound principles laid out in Scripture, and the congregation eventually accepts doctrines that are completely at odds with what is taught in the word of God. It is as common as nails in the frame of a house for this to happen.

Churches must be fixed and firm on proper doctrine. Without that, they will eventually be led astray, just as Paul noted to the elders of Ephesus.

*O God, things that should never come about in a church arise. Quite often, it is simply because we are in a rush to have things continue without interruption or difficulty. But it often happens because people simply do not know the word well enough to know when they are being duped. Help us to overcome our desire for expediency at the expense of soundness. Help us to learn and adhere to Your precious and sacred word. Keep us on the proper path as we live out our days in Your presence. Amen.*

**“Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Acts 20:30**

Paul just noted to the elders at Ephesus who are gathered with him in Miletus that after his departure savage wolves will come in among them, and they will not spare the flock. With that, he continues, saying, “Also from among yourselves.”

As a point concerning how the church is structured, Paul’s words show the ingenious nature of the New Testament church. There is no individual “church,” such as the Roman Catholics claim. Rather, there are believers who unite together who are the church.

Therefore, if a church departs from the faith, another can spring up that can go back to the foundation and hold fast to the integrity of Scripture. This is why instead of there being one letter to the churches in Revelation 2 & 3 there are 7.



Any church that claims to be the “true” church, which is as common as peanuts in peanut butter, is already either departing from or has departed from the model. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd. There are overseers below Him who are expected to be faithful to the word He has given and to the flock entrusted to them.

However, as Paul notes, not only would wolves come from without, but even from among the ranks of a faithful church. Again, the words “from among yourselves” reveal this. Paul was standing there telling the church leaders this will be the case because he knew the inclinations of the human heart. There is the desire to control others always brewing within it. And so, he says, “men will rise up.”

Right out of a perfectly functioning flock, there are people who will sow discord. They will try to usurp authority, and they will try to remove surety of salvation from the hearts and minds of those they sit with each week. In doing so, they will then introduce various aberrant ideas about what God is like, what He expects of His people, and how He can be appeased.

Grace is not a consideration in their theology because grace removes all hope of their power and influence being wielded over others. Think of the Roman Catholic Church! They have innumerable doctrines that divert eyes and hearts away from Jesus, the very pinnacle of God’s grace to the people of the world.

Why do they do this? It is because, in so doing, they become the arbiters of what is and is not acceptable. If they are, the people are in bondage to them and will do anything in their means to secure salvation through them. It is a trap that innumerable souls are stuck in.

Grace cannot be earned. But expecting allegiance and money to be given to a church means that those individuals in the congregation are attempting to earn favor. Such evil overseers know this, and they have profited for millennia because of it.

And yet, Paul stood there with these men from Ephesus and warned them of exactly what is happening in churches all over the world to this day. And the way that it comes about is by such men rising up and “speaking perverse things.”

The word translated as perverse is *diastrephó*. It signifies through (*dia*) and to convert or change (*strephó*). The word then means distorting, perverting, and making something different or even the opposite of what it was.

These people will give perverse ideas about the nature of God. They will twist Scripture away from grace to works. They will deny the fully sufficient work of Christ. They will claim that grace means license, such as “I have been given grace, and so I can do whatever I want.” On and on, the things they come up with are perverse and corrupt. And the reason is for self-gain. As Paul says, they do it “to draw away the disciples after themselves.”

This is the crux of the matter. They will be able to wield power over those they control. They will have fame, ease, sexual gratification, or whatever other perverted thing that motivates them. And this is not limited to local churches. By establishing denominations, the level of power only increases, just as in government entities. Those at the top wield unbiblical authority over those they have never even met.

In and of itself, there is nothing wrong with denominations, but they eventually become self-feeding bodies that do not have the interests of the local churches in mind. It is an inevitable outcome of such structures.

Life application: How sad it is to look at once faithful churches and denominations where Paul’s words have been proven true. But the Bible warned of it. Therefore, the blame rests upon those who are unwilling to take to heart the words of Scripture and carefully follow what is provided there.

Is it possible that Hymenaeus and Philetus noted in 2 Timothy 2:17 were standing there with Paul as he spoke? Were they back in Ephesus waiting till he left for good so that they could work their evil?

Heretics promote self and they divide in order to conquer. John Lange notes exactly this when he says, “The note of heresy was that it was essentially self-asserting and schismatical.”

It is not only good, but proper to teach sound doctrine. If a church divides over such a thing, so be it. But it is not good when someone divides to promote self in the process. Watch out for such people and be on guard against those who would attempt to mar grace.

*Lord God, our hearts are wicked, and our thoughts are corrupt. This is the natural state of humanity. Please help us to grow in the knowledge of Your word so that we can change this and become people with pure hearts and intentions. May we learn to place others ahead of ourselves and acknowledge our faults and failures as a part of who we*

*are. You alone are to be exalted for the grace You have given us in the giving of Your Son. Amen.*

**“Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. Acts 20:31**

A little more literally, the words read, “Therefore, be awake, remembering that three years – night and day – I ceased not with tears, admonishing each one” (CG).

Paul warned the elders standing before him about savage wolves coming in among them, not sparing the flock. He also warned them that even among them men would rise up, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves. Based on this, he next says, “Therefore, be awake.”

It is a single word in the Greek, *grégoreó*. It is used in the synoptic gospels where Jesus admonished the disciples to stay alert. It literally means to stay awake, but it figuratively means to be alert or to watch. It is usually translated in the figurative sense: watch. With that, he next says, “remembering that three years – night and day – I ceased not with tears.”

The words “three years” come from the Greek noun *trietia*. It is a term only used here in the New Testament. It comes from *treis* (three) and *etos* (year). There is no suitable single word in English to translate it.

Paul’s use of the words “with tears” shows his immense passion for the Person of Christ, the truth of the gospel, and his love for the converts he disciplined. He knew what would come about after he was gone, and he constantly warned what was coming, even to the point of tears. They were to constantly watch and be continuously remembering his admonitions. Further, the term “night and day” means that it was something that he never stopped telling them.

It cannot go unstated that Paul could not have said these words unless they were true. The people he is talking to are the same people that he had given the admonitions to in the past. He was literally brought to tears over the thought of his precious churches falling away from sound doctrine. Therefore, he was “admonishing each one.”

Those in Ephesus could not say they weren’t fully warned of what was coming. They had been implored to hold fast to the truth, watching out for those who would do their best to misdirect them.

Life application: Jesus' words to those in Ephesus in Revelation 2 show that they had paid heed to Paul's warnings to some extent, but in so doing, they had actually lost their first love. Unfortunately, the importance of doctrine had become elevated to such a degree that Jesus had become a side issue in many ways. Doctrine is important, but only if it continuously points us to the reason for the doctrine, Jesus.

Jesus warned the disciples to watch on several occasions. Paul continued with this admonition to the churches he planted. Without watching, we are also going to fall. This is the case without any doubt.

No church is immune from temptation, division, or apostasy. Eventually, it seems that most churches will follow this path. If you have a pastor who constantly tells you to read your Bible, do you pay heed? If your pastor tells you to pay heed to your doctrine, do you listen and stay focused on what is right?

These are right and proper to do, but while reading your Bible, don't let it take the place of your love for the Lord. And while pursuing right doctrine, don't let that head knowledge replace total love and devotion for Jesus. These things should complement each other so that we come to love Jesus more and more as the days go by.

*Heavenly Father, learning doctrine can bring us a lot of joy as we grow in our knowledge of what is right and wrong concerning who You are and what it means to follow You. It is also great to debate doctrine with others to hone our own thoughts about these things. But, Lord God, may our doctrine be sound because of our love for You. May it never replace You in our hearts and minds. Amen.*

**“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.**

Acts 20:32

A few small adjustments will bring the words closer to the Greek text, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God and the word of His grace, being able to build and to give the inheritance among all those having been sanctified” (CG).

Paul just reminded the elders of Ephesus that he did not cease to constantly warn everyone for three years, even with tears. Now, to bolster them in how to stay on the right path, he begins his next words with, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God.”

Paul, calling these men “brethren” for emphasis and a sense of true fraternity, begins his summary thoughts to their ears. He has spoken frankly about the hazards that lay ahead of them in hopes that they would pay heed. He does this by commending them to God. It is something he says about himself in his second letter to Timothy –

“For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.” 2 Timothy 1:12

As for these men of Ephesus, Paul would no longer be their instructor or counselor in the things of God and so they would have to rely on the same Source he relied on continuously, meaning God. And further, he continues by saying, “and the word of His grace.”

It is doubtful that he is thinking of Christ in the way John later writes, meaning the Word of God. Rather, he is rather speaking in the sense of what James 1 says, where James repeatedly brings up the word, meaning Scripture –

“Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

<sup>19</sup>So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; <sup>20</sup>for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

<sup>21</sup>Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

<sup>22</sup>But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. <sup>23</sup>For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup>for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. <sup>25</sup>But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”

James is essentially committing his reader to the word of God’s grace. Likewise, this is what Paul is telling the elders of Ephesus, imploring them to cling to the word. It is the word that, according to Hebrews 4:12, is “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

This word was, at this time, limited to the Old Testament and any verbal or written communications that existed concerning the Lord as the fulfillment of them. Together, they were sufficient to meet the specifics of the second half of Paul's words in this verse which begin with, "being able to build and to give the inheritance."

The idea of building is used by Paul several times, mostly in his first letter to the Corinthians. The word "edify" carries the same connotation and once meant exactly that: to build. Of this word, Albert Barnes says –

"The word used here is properly applied to a house which is raised and completed by slow degrees, and by toil. It here means to establish, make firm, or permanent, and hence, to instruct, to establish in doctrine and in hope. The idea is, that the Word of God was able to confirm and establish them, amidst the dangers to which they would be exposed."

This process of building is specifically said by Paul to be for the inheritance. That is another thought carefully described by Paul in his epistles, especially his letter to the Ephesians, the very group who is represented before him now. He refers to the "guarantee of our inheritance" in Ephesians 1:14, the "riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" in Ephesians 1:18, and the "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" in Ephesians 5:5.

Understanding this, Paul's words finish with this thought concerning the inheritance. It is "among all those having been sanctified." The verb is a participle in the perfect tense. Through faith in Christ Jesus, the sanctification of the believer is immediate, and it is complete.

This doesn't mean that the believer is now perfected. Rather, it means that in God's view, what Christ did to sanctify us is complete and perfect. Nothing is lacking. Jesus' perfect life and atoning death have allowed us to be fully consecrated to God, once and for all time. Nothing further needs to be accomplished for us to be allowed into the presence of the infinitely holy and pure Creator.

Sanctification is also implied in his words, but not the ongoing sanctification of our Christian walk. Rather, he is speaking of the position we are in because of the work of Christ - sanctified by Him as holy and acceptable to God.

Life application: Paul's words to those of Ephesus are a descriptive account of what he conveyed to them. However, what he said is to be taken as a truthful and accurate state

of how things are. It is as if his words are an epistle spoken forth to them. When he commits them to God and the word of His grace, he intends for them to trust God wholeheartedly and not waffle in their convictions concerning their state before Him.

It means that the word of God is sufficient for believers to trust in regard to their walk before God. It is where our knowledge of Him and what He has done for humanity is recorded. There is nothing lacking for those who are considering a relationship with Him, and like those already counted as believers, their hope will not be futile. Rather, they will also be sanctified and set for eternal glory by trusting in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How sad it is that people fail to accept that God's provided sanctification is complete and now belongs to them forever! There is no hint in Scripture of the false doctrine of "loss of salvation." What God has done in Christ is fully sufficient to sanctify His people once and for all time.

We are to accept this and hold fast to it. Otherwise, we will be like so many whose hope is marred by their personal failures, as if their failings can somehow override the full, final, finished, and forever work of God in Christ. Don't be like that. Instead, be confident that His grace is sufficient to cover all our sins and failings.

*Heavenly Father, Your word says that the work of Jesus Christ is sufficient to carry us through this life and into Your presence. We will fail You, but in Christ, we will never be separated from You again. We accept this and give our eternal thanks to You. Hallelujah to Jesus Christ, who has made this possible! Amen.*

**"I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Acts 20:33**

The order of the words is reversed in the translation – "Silver or gold or clothing of none I coveted" (CG).

Paul just commended those with him to God and the word of His grace. He also spoke of the inheritance among those who have been sanctified. The words he now will speak seem somewhat disconnected from that, but they are not. Rather, he is going to use his state among them to confirm the truth that what he just said is living in him. Rather than focusing on the things of this world, he was doing exactly what he just commended to them. Taken together, this can be seen –

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God and the word of His grace, being able to build and to give the inheritance among all those having been sanctified. Silver or gold or clothing of none I coveted.”

He will continue this thought in the verses to come. But the point is that it would be outrageous to commend someone to God and the word of His grace if he wasn't living in exactly that manner. Understanding this, the verse itself appeals to three particular items, “Silver or gold or clothing.”

Smith's translation seems right by placing a comma after gold – “Silver or gold, or clothing.” In other words, Paul begins with the metals that are commonly used for wealth accumulation, starting with the lesser and going to the more desired. He then mentions one of the highly desired commodities that can be bought with silver or gold. Thus, the idea would be, “Silver or gold, or even clothing.” As such, clothing reflects the wealth status of a person.

The words demonstrate the cultural value of garments at that time, something that has not changed in the past two millennia. The outward adornment of clothing is still something that reflects the status and wealth of a person. Of these things, Paul next says, “of none I coveted.”

He was unconcerned with getting rich, nor did he envy those who were rich. His focus was on God and the word of His grace. Those things, and not silver or gold or even clothing, were able “to build and to give the inheritance.”

Therefore, his words of the previous verse are being validated by his own personal conduct before them. The same general intent of Paul's words is reflected later in his first letter to Timothy –

“Now godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out. <sup>8</sup> And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. <sup>9</sup> But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of* evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” 1 Timothy 6:6-10

Life application: Although the reason for Samuel's words is a bit different, his words to Israel in 1 Samuel are similar to those of Paul in Acts –



“Now Samuel said to all Israel: ‘Indeed I have heeded your voice in all that you said to me, and have made a king over you. <sup>2</sup>And now here is the king, walking before you; and I am old and grayheaded, and look, my sons *are* with you. I have walked before you from my childhood to this day. <sup>3</sup>Here I am. Witness against me before the LORD and before His anointed: Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken, or whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed, or from whose hand have I received *any* bribe with which to blind my eyes? I will restore *it* to you.’” 1 Samuel 12:1-3

Samuel was confirming his integrity before Israel to demonstrate that it was not his actions that led to the people’s call for a king. Rather, the Lord had supplied them with a faithful judge, but the people wanted a king to rule them instead of the Lord. In Paul’s case, he is commending the people to live a God-focused life, trusting in His word rather than looking for security or status in earthly things.

Both Samuel and Paul were using their lives as examples of how people should conduct themselves and in whom they should place their trust. And their words were not just, “Do as I say but not as I do.” Rather, they were, “Trust in God as you see I have been doing.” This is what we should look for in our leaders, both political and spiritual.

Don’t get caught up in fancy people who merely impress with externals. Rather focus on what the true intent of those you encounter is. When those you surround yourself with are honest, sincere people, you will find yourself blessed for it.

*Heavenly Father, it is very easy for us to get distracted by the things of this world. We are earthly beings that have needs and desires that must be met. But help us to, first and foremost, keep our eyes and hearts focused on You. In this, we will then be able to rightly fulfill our needs and desires. May our lives always be committed to You. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**“Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. Acts 20:34**

The words are out of their original order and should read, “And you yourselves know that to my needs, and to those being with me, these hands ministered” (CG).

Paul just noted that he had coveted no one’s silver, gold, or apparel. He now goes further, beginning with, “And you yourselves know that to my needs.”

He is stating, right in front of those that he lived and served with, that his own needs were met in a particular way that will be noted in a minute. In starting with a statement about his own needs, he is ensuring that what will follow in his statement did not interfere with his needs, nor were his needs met in some other way than how he will indicate. Next, he says, “and to those being with me.”

Paul uses a present participle to indicate the ongoing nature of what he is referring to. Thus, it would be inclusive of even the present time while speaking to these men. He is, in fact, doing for them what he will next state, even at the present time. It is these words concerning the needs of those with him that explain why he started with his own needs. Both to his needs and to those who were there with him, he says, “these hands ministered.”

It could have been that Paul came to Ephesus and ministered to others but let others tend to his needs. This is how most churches are set up today. The pastor does his thing while the church tends to the pastor. Paul excluded himself from such a notion, noting first and foremost that he had tended to his own needs, but he had not done so at the expense of others.

Anytime that someone was in need, as evidenced by the present tense, he was there ministering to that person. If his words weren't true, Paul could neither have said it to the Ephesians nor could Luke have recorded it for them to read. It would have been shown false as soon as it was published.

And the fact that Paul was counseling them and encouraging them at this time meant that he was still ministering to them. He could have just sent a letter from Jerusalem, but he purposely stopped at Miletus to minister one last time to his beloved disciples.

Life application: Paul's words concerning his work show the truth of his faith in the gospel he preached. Nobody in their right mind would conduct themselves in this way unless he was convinced that the message he was relaying was the truth.

Instead, he would have accepted the gold, silver, and clothes offered to him and lived like Creflo Dollar. For a succinct statement of one's labors, the words of Paul show special devotion to the work set before him. This is not unlike Jacob –

“Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban, and Jacob answered and said to Laban: ‘What *is* my trespass? What *is* my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me?’<sup>37</sup> Although you have searched all my things, what part of your household

things have you found? Set *it* here before my brethren and your brethren, that they may judge between us both! <sup>38</sup>These twenty years I *have been* with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. <sup>39</sup>That which was torn *by beasts* I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, *whether* stolen by day or stolen by night. <sup>40</sup>*There* I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. <sup>41</sup>Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. <sup>42</sup>Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked *you* last night.” Genesis 31:36-42

Jacob served for his wives and his flocks. Paul served for the bride of Christ and the flock of His church. Both of them did so tirelessly. Labor, when rightly placed in the hours of one’s life, is a blessing. Solomon reflected on that and wrote these words to consider –

“What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? <sup>10</sup>I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. <sup>11</sup>He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. <sup>12</sup>I know that nothing *is* better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, <sup>13</sup>and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it *is* the gift of God.” Ecclesiastes 3:9-13

Be sure to conduct your labors honorably and with a sense of enjoyment. They take up the majority of the time of your existence, so find satisfaction in them because they are the gift of God to you.

*Lord God, we all have chores and responsibilities. Help us to do them to Your glory. May our attitudes toward our work and those we work for be positive and pleasing in Your sight. Thank You for the labor of our hands, O God. Amen.*

**“I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”** Acts 20:35

Paul just noted that his hands had provided for his necessities as well as for those with him. He now explains why he has done this, saying, “I have shown you in every way.”

The verb Paul uses is seen for the last of six times, *hupodeiknumi*. It signifies showing by tracing out, or by example. Luke, citing Jesus, uses it in Luke 6:47 –

“Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: <sup>48</sup> He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. <sup>49</sup> But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great.” Luke 6:47-49

Jesus made the statement and then followed up with an example of what He meant. This is the sense of Paul’s words. He demonstrated by the example of his own actions, having endeavored by his conduct – and not only his spoken or written words – to set forth an example for others. With that, he continues, saying, “by laboring like this, that you must support the weak.”

Rather than an adjective, weak, he uses a present participle, “support those being weak [or ailing].” The word signifies diseased, sick, impotent, etc. Paul also uses both its adjective and verb form in the sense of moral weakness as well –

“However, *there is* not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat *it* as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak [adj.], is defiled. <sup>8</sup> But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. <sup>9</sup> But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak [adj.]. <sup>10</sup> For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak [adj.] be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? <sup>11</sup> And because of your knowledge shall the weak [vb.] brother perish, for whom Christ died? <sup>12</sup> But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak [vb.] conscience, you sin against Christ. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.” 1 Corinthians 8:7-13

Those Paul refers to are ailing in their consciences. This is ultimately derived from a lack of knowledge, but it is the state of weakness that is being focused on. Therefore, like one who is physically weak, a person who is struggling with his conscience is to be assisted.

The cause of the weakness, how to cure it, is up to the one who is weak to seek a cure. A person with the flu should go to the doctor and then get rest. A person with poor doctrine should get to Bible class and then apply it to his walk.

Again, as stated before, Paul has endeavored by his conduct, and not only his spoken or written words, to set forth an example for others. The purpose of his actions was for the support of the weak, meaning those who were incapable of taking care of themselves – most especially through bodily infirmity, which is how the word is generally used. Next, Paul introduces the basis for such conduct, beginning with, “And remember the words of the Lord Jesus.”

He will cite the words of the Lord to justify both his conduct and how his example should then be followed by those who have seen him. Jesus made a statement that was obviously well-known, maybe having been occasionally repeated by Paul. This can be inferred because he is asking these men to recall them now. Thus, Paul continues, “that He said.”

Rather, the words are emphatic, “that He Himself said.” Paul is directly attributing the thought he will speak to the Lord Jesus, which is, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

The thought forms the only recorded saying of the Lord of this kind. Other words attributed to the Lord are those he quoted or that were repeated, but these words are not recorded elsewhere. Thus, they are known as an *agraphon* (not written). It refers to a saying attributed to Jesus, but which is not recorded in the gospels.

There is a blessing in giving that cannot be experienced or attained otherwise. Jesus set the example for us to consider. He possessed all things and yet He took on human flesh and dwelt among us. He gave of Himself to those who were ailing, both physically and spiritually. He did this, even to the point of death, so that our healing could be permanent before God. Paul cites the words of the Lord because they carry the substance of what Christ did for him and indeed for all.

Life application: The words of this verse cannot be used to justify wealth redistribution to those who sit around on their otherwise fully capable hands. They are not even implied in what is said. The ailing refers to those who are incapable of tending to their own needs at a particular time.

If one is lying in bed with a fever, he needs to be tended to until he is better. When one has a weak conscience, he needs to be accommodated until his conscience is firmed up. However, when the fever is gone, it is time to get out of bed and get back into the game. When one has been shown what is proper concerning sound doctrine, it is time he applies it to his life, no longer burdening those who have instructed him.

This can be applied to salvation as well. Jesus came to heal the ailing. He accomplished His work, and that healing is available. Now, we are expected to accept His cure and be healed. For those who are simply slackers, Paul's words of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 apply –

“For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.”

It is inexcusable to pander to those who are unwilling to apply proper doctrine to their lives. It is also inexcusable to fund those who are unwilling to get up and work with the abilities granted to them by God.

For those who refuse to come to Jesus, for those who fail to progress in their walk, or for those who refuse to feed themselves, Paul continues his thoughts to those in Thessalonica. They are words being spoken to believers about their walk, but they are words that carry the same truth in any such situation –

“And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. <sup>15</sup> Yet do not count *him* as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.” 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15

Pandering to those who are able solves nothing. It merely enables them to continue in their unhealthy state. Refuse this attitude to shame them. This is not a cold and uncaring approach. Rather, it is exactly the opposite. Harm to people's basic humanness is the inevitable result of such indulging.

*Lord God, help us to be helpers! May we be willing to assist those who are unable to tend to themselves. But give us discernment to know when we are merely accommodating others who do not need such attention. Give us wisdom in this so that we will properly handle our relationships with those truly in need. Amen.*

**And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.**

Acts 20:36

The words are more literally rendered, “And having said these things, having bowed his knees, he prayed with them all” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul reminded those with him as to why he worked providing for himself and others, quoting the Lord about it being more blessed to give than receive. With that, his words of encouragement and admonishment are done. Therefore, it next says, “And having said these things.”

It is Luke’s way of noting that the words of Paul are complete and that a new action or direction is forthcoming. For Paul, the next logical thing to do is to commit those he loved to the Lord. And so, it next says, “having bowed his knees.”

A bowed or even prostrate position indicates humility, be it before God or man. Once bowed, and it is assumed that the others bowed with him, it next says, “he prayed with them all.” The words of the prayer are left out of the narrative. They were spoken for the moment, were private, and were obviously not intended as a prayer to be used repetitively in the future.

Paul felt it was right to close in prayer. Likewise, when our heart is full, we should simply let our prayers come out in a manner appropriate to the situation.

Life application: Prayer is mentioned throughout the Bible. There are many types of prayer as well, such as supplication, praise, petition, vindication, triumph, imprecation, etc. Each has its own place. One of the things about prayer is that there is no set manner in which it is to be accomplished, but they are to be made.

It is not uncommon for people to pray for extended periods of time and to begin to question whether their prayers are even heard. Someone may say, “I prayed for my neighbor’s cancer for three years, and he died anyway. What is the point if the prayer isn’t heard.”

If the person who is praying is a believer, the prayers are heard. Jesus is our Mediator to bring them before God. It is God’s right to respond according to His wisdom. If He answered every prayer brought before Him in the way we wanted, there would be chaos. We are to have faith that God has received our prayers and that He will bring about the best end for all things presented before him.

Paul says to pray without ceasing. Lift up your burdens, joys, cares, etc., to the throne of God. Have faith that He is working according to a plan we cannot even imagine, and it will come to the best end for His people. Pray!

*Heavenly Father, we know that because of Jesus, we have a right to come before You in prayer, boldly asking for those things that are upon our hearts. But we also know that what we want may not be the best avenue or result in the best outcome. So, Lord God, we commit our prayers to You and thank You that You are handling each with a wisdom that we cannot even comprehend. How great You are, O God. Amen.*

**Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, Acts 20:37**

The words are more literally rendered, "And there was much weeping of all, and having fallen upon the neck of Paul, they were kissing him" (CG).

Paul had just knelt and prayed with those he was with. Now, as their time together is quickly coming to a close, it says, "And there was much weeping of all."

The true depth of their friendship is readily apparent from the words. Rather than a humorous salutation and hearty laughter, they were emotionally distraught at the coming separation. This mourning next brought them to physical embracing, as it says, "and having fallen upon the neck of Paul."

Instead of happy, non-serious noogies, they embraced Paul as if they didn't want him to leave, holding onto his neck. And more, "they were kissing him."

The Greek word is a compound verb *kataphileo*. It thus made a grandiose salutation, reflecting great sorrow. Helps word study defines the verb as to "kiss passionately and fervently." This was the moment that would separate them and they wanted the affection they bore for him to be remembered forever. The same verb is used in Luke 7 when the sinful woman went to Jesus and repeatedly kissed His feet and washed them with her tears.

Life application: It is still quite common for people to attempt to stoically face emotional situations. This is not the usual way things occurred in Scripture. Time and again, people are presented as conveying great levels of emotion.

Although false, ostentatious displays of emotion are a bit nauseating to deal with, there is nothing wrong with people openly showing the feelings they possess. It is a good



release for the things that are often bottled up within us. Above all, God is the One who created us, so if you need to let out your emotions, He will understand. If they are positive emotions of joy, love, and awe, He will certainly appreciate them as well.

*Lord God, You are worthy of all of our joy, praise, love, and devotion. Today, we praise You for who You are and for the magnificence of Your splendid glory. Dwell in our praises, O God. Amen.*

**sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship. Acts 20:38**

The translation needs several tweaks to align with the Greek, “agonizing especially over the word that he had spoken, that they are about to see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul knelt and prayed, all of those with him wept freely, and they fell on his neck and kissed him. With that, it now continues with the word “agonizing.”

Most translations simply say, “sorrowing.” However, there are other words that can be translated as merely being sorrowful. This one, *odunaó*, goes beyond that. It is used here for the last of four times. It signifies torment, acute pain, etc. This can be either physical or mental. HELPS Word Studies says it “literally means ‘go down’ (as the sun in a sunset) and refers to *consuming* sorrow.” They were agonizing of the moment, “especially over the word that he had spoken.”

Here, the NKJV follows the KJV and incorrectly says, “over the words which he spoke.” Rather, the noun is singular, and the verb is pluperfect. Paul has been speaking words. One particular thing he said is what they are truly agonizing over, and it was a word he had spoken back in verse 25, which is “that they are about to see his face no more.”

They were sure they were in the final moments of their earthly time together with the man who had brought to them the heavenly promise of life in Christ. The weight of the parting was so heavy upon them that they agonized over what it meant. He had always made himself available to them. If they had a question, he was there (or returning there sometime) to answer.

They could tap his mind, they could share in his presence, and they could rejoice with him in the Lord Jesus. This was about to end, and their pain was being magnified with each moment that passed. Therefore, instead of turning and parting from their meeting

location, they held on to a few more moments with him. As it says, “And they accompanied him to the ship.”

They would see him off rather than him seeing them off. Their journey back to Ephesus could wait a few more moments because they were the last moments they would ever share together. Of this account, the Pulpit Commentary says –

“It is impossible to part with this most touching narrative, of such exquisite simplicity and beauty, without a parting word of admiration and thankfulness to God for having preserved to his Church this record of apostolic wisdom and faithfulness on the one hand, and of loving devotion of the clergy to their great chief on the other. As long as the stones of the Church are bound together by such strong mortar, it can defy the attacks of its enemies from without.”

Life application: If you knew this was the last moment you would share with someone you love, would you take an extra moment to hug, say words of care, letting him or her know how you feel about their presence? The fact is that you never truly know when it will be the last time you will see that person.

Therefore, it is right to consider each person you care about and be tender and gentle to them at all times. Life is short, and each person we meet will perish in time. Or we may be the one who goes first. Hold fast to this thought and let it guide your steps, knowing that the time of departure is at hand.

And how much more should we consider this with those who have not called on Jesus. Be sure to tell them about the hope you possess and pray for them as well. It’s important. Eternity is forever, but this life is a passing vapor.

*O God, give us wisdom to live our days rightly, redeeming the time and understanding the brevity of our walk before You. Help us to consider this and to conduct our affairs properly before You all our days. May our end not be one of regret, but of satisfied happiness that we have lived our lives well before You. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 21

**Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following *day* to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.** Acts 21:1

The words of the NKJV do not logically follow the Greek. It more closely reads, “And it was, at our sailing, having drawn away from them, having run a straight course from them, we came to Cos, and next to Rhodes. From there to Patara” (CG).

In the previous verse, the emotions of those gathered with Paul were described, and then they conducted him to the ship. With that remembered, Chapter 21 begins with, “And it was, at our sailing.”

The word for their setting sail has already been seen in Acts, but as a reminder, it conveys the idea of going up. In essence, the idea is to go up to the sea from the land. On the other hand, the idea of coming to land after a voyage is to go down to the land from the sea. With their departure upon the sea, Luke next records what that departure was like, saying, “having drawn away from them.”

The verb is *apospaó*. It signifies “away from” and “to draw” as in the drawing of a sword. The sense is that it was as if they were pulled away from those on the shore who were, in essence, still clinging to them. The emotion of the moment is reflected in the choice of words used by Luke. Once they were so drawn away, Luke describes the next three stages of the journey, beginning with, “having run a straight course from them, we came to Cos.”

This is the only time that Cos is mentioned in Scripture. Abarim notes, “It's unclear where the name Cos originally came from, or even in which language it was conceived. But mythology held that it meant Number or Ratio.” Whatever its meaning, it was a straight run from Miletus to Cos. Luke then says, “and next to Rhodes.”

The name is also found only here in Scripture. It is from the same root as Rhodé, the maidservant noted in Acts 12:13. Thus, the name Rhodes probably means something like Place of the Rose. Finally, Luke records, “From there to Patara.”

Patara is also seen only here in the Bible. It was a town on the coast of the Roman province of Lycia. Abarim says, “The Greek name Patara is a transliteration of the original Lycian name Pttara, which in turn derives from the name of a mountain, namely

Mount Patar, which is mentioned in the Hittite Yalburt Inscription, and which [in] turn appears to have been named after the Lycian word for basket, again *patar* (*Lycia - Crossroads of Hittite and Greek Traditions?* — Annick Payne).” Hence, they define the name as Basket(s).

Luke’s noting of the ship’s stops informs us that this was the common way of traveling. Ships would go from place to place with their commodities. Travelers would have taken advantage of it, just as Paul and those with him did. For the merchants, goods would have been loaded and unloaded, and possibly even postage might have been conveyed for a fee. Any travelers would also add to their profits.

Ellicott describes the three locations –

“Coos was famous both for its wines and its silk fabrics, of fine and almost transparent tissue; that Rhodes, then famous for its Colossus, was one of the largest and most flourishing islands of the Archipelago, and is memorable for us in later history as connected with the history of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John; that Patara was a harbour on the coast of Lycia. For this harbour the ship in which the travellers had left Troas and Miletus was bound, and they had therefore to look out for another. Happily there was no long delay, and they embarked at once on a merchant-ship bound for Phœnicia.”

Life application: Luke is quite meticulous in his record of the events as they occurred. The particular note of them being drawn away from Miletus shows the difficulty of the departure, but the quick and direct notes about the next three stops relieve that tension as the team gets drawn toward their next goal, which is to be in Jerusalem.

We can look at these events as we look at our own lives. We have connections here that cause us to want to hold on to them. We have family, friends, tasks that we enjoy, and so forth. However, as believers, we also have a heavenly home that is awaiting us.

For the normal course of life, we need to be drawn away from the earthly things and toward the promise of the New Jerusalem. In order for that to happen, God has set our lives to occur in a certain way. As we get older, we are drawn away from certain aspects of life. For example, our bodies no longer allow us to do certain things.

We also experience loss in various ways, drawing us away from other aspects of our lives. For example, we will lose our favorite pets, cherished things in various ways, and even those we love as time goes by.

These things are common to all people. The wise will understand that we must leave this world behind and set a straight course for our heavenly home. Of course, there is a time when this cycle will end, and the rapture will occur. But until that day, we should take our lives and the things that happen here in the context of a greater hope that lies ahead.

Let us not become overly distraught at the changes that occur. Instead, we can cherish the memories while still focusing on the glory that God has promised us in our future, eternal home. We are being drawn away from here to there. It is normal, and we should realize this as we continue along life's often difficult path.

*Glorious Lord God, thank You that a better and permanent home awaits us where we will no longer experience the trials and troubles that we currently face. Slowly, but surely, we are being drawn toward that glorious place. Help us to understand this process from Your perspective and to not fret over the changes we must face in this fallen and woeful world. Amen.*

**And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.** Acts 21:2

To properly get the sense of the verbs, the verse should read, "And having found a ship passing over into Phoenicia, having boarded, we set sail" (CG).

In the previous verse, the missionaries departed from Miletus, ran a straight course to Cos, then to Rhodes, and then to Patara. With those stops complete, it next says, "And having found a ship passing over into Phoenicia."

The need for a change of ship could be for several reasons. It may be that the one they had been on stopped at Patara for an extended stay. It also may have turned back, having reached the final leg of the journey it had planned. Or, it may have been a coasting vessel that would continue to skip along from port to port.

If so, by finding a new ship that would sail all the way to Phoenicia, the voyage would be cut shorter by quite a few days. It would sail across the open sea and directly to Tyre. Looking at a map, one can see that quite a bit of land is passed when taking this more direct vessel than a harbor hopper. Once they found a suitable ship, it next says, "having boarded, we set sail."

The description of the sailing course will be described in the coming verse.

Life application: The choice of these missionaries to take the more direct route was because of Paul's desire to be in Jerusalem by a set date. Taking this ship, rather than a harbor hopper, makes much more sense. Like their choice, in our lives, there is nothing wrong with setting goals and striving to attain them. In fact, living by the seat of one's pants can often be a hindrance to achieving anything of real substance.

To meet a set goal, there normally needs to be specific planning of the target and the successive steps necessary to get there. The more detail in the steps, the less room for error there will be. However, one can plan something to the point where nothing ever gets done. That can be as much of a problem as having no plan at all.

The key to such things is balance. What is of the highest importance, and what can be left out of the details? From there, and with a plan set forth, all things should be accompanied by prayer. To set forth on a journey without prayer is arrogant. It lacks the notion that God is the ultimate Director of our lives.

We can make plans, but those plans can be easily frustrated by a simple slip on the first step of the journey. A slip, a fall, a chipped tooth and a broken leg, and all of the plans in the world will need to be tossed out the window. Proverbs says –

“Commit your way to the LORD,  
Trust also in Him,  
And He shall bring *it* to pass.  
<sup>6</sup>He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light,  
And your justice as the noonday.” Proverbs 37:5, 6

The obvious unstated words of the proverb are that the Lord will bring your plan to pass according to His wisdom, not necessarily your desired intent. But it will be what the Lord has ordained for you. This is also the intent of James' words –

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; <sup>14</sup>whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. <sup>15</sup>Instead you *ought* to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ <sup>16</sup>But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.” James 4:13-16

Include the Lord in your plans. In so doing, you will do well.

*Lord God, guide our steps at all times. We have plans and desires, but there is a greater plan that is being worked out in the world. You already know what will transpire. So may our lives be lived in accord with Your greater plan, even as we live out our lesser plans. May we not forget to include You in every step of this trek we are on. Amen.*

**When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. Acts 21:3**

The Greek reads, “And having sighted Cyprus, and having disregarded it on the left, we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre. For there the ship was to be unloading the cargo” (CG).

The previous verse noted that the missionaries found a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, so they boarded it. That continues with, “And having sighted Cyprus.”

Luke, proving himself to be a marvelous chronicler, uses a technical term, *anaphainó*, to describe the sighting of Cyprus. This is a nautical term that means to appear, or literally “to bring to light.” The only other time the word is used is in Luke 19:11 in relation to the appearing of the kingdom of God.

With the island having been sighted, the sailors would then be able to fix their minds more perfectly on the route they were taking. Because of the limited technology of the time, navigation in those days was much more of a feel and less precise than it is today. Having sighted the island, it next says, “and having disregarded it on the left.”

The word is *kataleipó*. It means to leave, desert, abandon, etc. As the ship was bound for Phoenicia, a stop at Cyprus was not part of the plans. Therefore, they disregarded it as they passed it to their left. This means that they were in the open ocean rather than the channel that runs between Cyprus and the mainland.

As Paul passed, he probably reflected on the many people and events that he had come to know when he was there. He traveled there with Barnabas, met with Sergius Paulus, and was empowered to blind Elymas, the sorcerer, while there (see Acts 13). As his name Paul (Greek Paulus) was probably taken after having met with and converted Sergius Paulus to Christ, passing Cyprus may have opened a flood of other memories of his travels since then. After having passed by Cyprus, Luke next records, “we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre.”

It is reckoned that the journey, if having fair winds, would have taken about 48 hours from the departure from Patara. Tyre was an important trading city, having two harbors. The Pulpit Commentary notes that the harbors, one north and one south of the causeway, connected the island with the mainland. Luke next notes, “For there the ship was to be unloading the cargo.”

The word translated as “unloading” is found only here in Scripture, *apophortizomai*. It comes from *apo* (away) and *phortizó* (to load). Thus, it is the opposite of loading. They are taking away what they have brought and would then load up with other cargo for the next part of their travels. As will be seen, the ship will remain in port for about a week.

Life application: The KJV, following the Geneva Bible, says they “discovered Cyprus.” The word no longer carries the same sense it once did. Someone picking up such an archaic version might think these hearty missionaries were the first to know of the existence of the island. This is another good reason to read multiple translations. Words come into use and fall out of use quickly.

Translations that are more than one hundred or even fifty years old may have words that are no longer used, or the meaning may have changed so drastically that it is hard to know exactly what is being conveyed. Thus, a false sense of doctrine may arise.

Going back to the time of the KJV (1611) or the Geneva Bible (1587), the reader will have almost no idea what is being conveyed in many passages. For example, the Geneva rendering of this verse says –

“And whe we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, & sailed toward Syria, and arriued at Tyrus: for there the ship vnloaded ye burden.”

The versions of the KJV that are used today are not close to the original 1611 version, but even they are often difficult to read. For example, the KJV revisions include the following years for the Cambridge edition: 1629, 1638, 1760, 1873, and 1900. The Oxford Edition is from 1769. Therefore, the most recent Oxford KJV is almost 250 years old. The most recent Cambridge edition is over 120 years old. A lot of change has come into the language since then.

Don't be afraid to check out new versions, but when you do, be sure to read the preface and find out why they have made translational choices, what the intent of their



translation is, and – if possible – check out the person or body that made the translation. There may be a doctrinal bias that you want to avoid with some translations.

*Lord God, give us wisdom in searching out Your word. Help us to find translations that are faithful to the original and that are not following some perverse agenda that is intended to draw us away from the grace You have revealed in the giving of Your Son. Thank You for Jesus Christ and the grace found in Him! Amen.*

**And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. Acts 21:4**

The verse more closely reads, “And having found the disciples, we continued there seven days: who were saying to Paul, through the Spirit, not to go up to Jerusalem” (CG).

Paul and his fellow missionaries just arrived at Tyre where the ship’s cargo was to be unloaded. Next, it says, “And having found the disciples.”

This is a word peculiar to Luke - *aneuriskó*. It implies that a search was made, and then the disciples were found. The only other time it is used is in Luke 2:16, at the birth of the Lord when the shepherds came looking for Him.

Having to look for the disciples reveals a couple of things. First, there were probably only a few of them. Secondly, they were probably not Jews, or they were Jews who no longer attended the synagogue. Instead, they met privately. Otherwise, Luke would have given those details, as is often the case in Acts. With that considered, it next says, “we continued there seven days.”

As the narrative continues, it will note that they will board the ship. This certainly means the same ship that they had just arrived on. Otherwise, Luke would probably have said so. They had a full week in Tyre while the boat was being unloaded, and new supplies were being loaded. During this week, they would be to attend at least one meeting on the Lord’s Day.

During this week, Luke records of these disciples, “who were saying to Paul, through the Spirit.”

As for this advice, more might be inferred here than is necessary. The Holy Spirit is certainly who is being referred to. The word “who” is plural, but “Spirit” is singular.

Hence, it is not their individual spirits. These disciples kept saying (the verb is imperfect) the same thing to him which was “not to go up to Jerusalem.”

Rather than a command not to go, it is reasonable to assume that they simply received a confirmation that Paul would face troubles. This is what will be seen coming up in verse 11. In verse 12, those who hear what is prophesied will plead with him not to go. The same thing is happening here.

These disciples at Tyre are adding in their own warnings to not go to Jerusalem. It is not likely that the Spirit directly warned Paul to not go and he then simply ignored the Spirit. This has already been confirmed to him in the previous chapter –

“And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. <sup>24</sup> But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:22-24

Life application: Regardless of how the words of this verse are interpreted, one thing that is on prominent display is the doctrine of free will. The Spirit does not override the will of man in the sense that there is no desire or will to resist, even if He strongly compels the person at times.

There is a point that an individual will simply give up and do what he should have done all along. However, the fact that he did not do (or desire to do) what he should have from the beginning demonstrates that he has free will. This is seen, for example, in the prophet Jeremiah –

“Then I said, ‘I will not make mention of Him,  
Nor speak anymore in His name.’  
But *His word* was in my heart like a burning fire  
Shut up in my bones;  
I was weary of holding *it* back,  
And I could not.” Jeremiah 20:9

In his state of being compelled, Jeremiah could have jumped off a cliff and ended it all. Instead, he yielded to the will of the Lord, even if his own will wanted to rebel. The point of this is that we can either yield to the Spirit of the Lord or not. As the Bible is given

under inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:21; etc.), it is incumbent on us to yield to the will of the Spirit by being obedient to the word He has given.

If we fail to do so, we are the ones who will suffer. God has spoken out His word. Those who have received Jesus are God's people. Is the Spirit overriding our will as we stand in disobedience to His word? Your answer may depend on how you perceive what is happening in your life as God chastises you, but the answer is "No."

Your free will means that the troubles that arise from disobeying His word are the result of your choices. Until this is understood, your walk before the Lord will not be sound. Learn the word, meditate upon what it says, and then apply to your life what you know you should do. In this, you will be pleasing to God. Don't fight the Spirit by rebelling against the word of God.

*Lord God Almighty, Your word is given to instruct us. Help us to understand this and to not rebel against what You have set forth in its precious pages. May we be willing to submit our wills to Your direction. In this, our walk will surely be pleasing to You. May it be so, to Your glory. Amen.*

**When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. Acts 21:5**

The verbs of the verse are far different than those of the NKJV – "And when it was that we completed the days, having set out, we were going; they, accompanying us – with wives and children – as far as outside the city. And, having bowed the knees upon the shore, having prayed" (CG).

The previous verse noted the disciples repeatedly warning Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. Despite that, his eyes were fixed and set for the journey. Therefore, Luke next records, "And when it was that we completed the days."

Luke uses a word that is only found elsewhere in 2 Timothy 3:17 - *exartizó*. It means completely furnished or equipped. It is used to indicate the ending of the days of their stay. This would be the seven days noted in the previous verse. With the span of their stay now complete, and certainly because the ship they had booked passage on was now loaded and set to sail, it continues, saying, "having set out, we were going."

The verb is imperfect. They started out, and they continued going, the destination of which will be noted at the end of the sentence. But the imperfect verb gives the sense of time and motion being stretched out. That then transfers to the emotions of the people who are faced with being parted when the going finally ends. From there, Luke explains the reason for this, saying, “they, accompanying us.”

It is the disciples mentioned in the previous verse. Luke’s masterful way of describing the situation through the use of participles and various tenses brings us into the narrative with him. The disciples didn’t just say goodbye at the house, give them a hug, and wave as the missionaries left. Rather, they were there with them, accompanying them with each step. Luke is reminding the reader of the words just stated in the previous verse, “They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.”

They knew trouble lay ahead, and they wanted to share as much time as they could with him before he was gone, maybe forever. And more, as a touching note of how they esteemed him, it next says, “with wives and children.”

Along with the disciples came their entire families, even children, who are mentioned for the first time in the Christian church context. One can almost hear the conversation before they left. “This is a great man, willing to give everything for the cause of the Lord. Tomorrow, we will join him to the harbor and see him off.” And so, they accompanied them “as far as outside the city.”

It is probable that things were set up much like they are today. When one is getting on board a ship or an airplane, those with him can only go so far before there are customs agents, ticketing agents, etc. Whatever was set up for such travel, this would be the point where those with Paul and his team would have to stop and say their final words. Further, as is to be expected from such devoted people, it next says, “And, having bowed the knees upon the shore, having prayed.”

It would have been a beautiful sight to see. The missionaries, the disciples, and the accompanying wives and children all kneeling. Those who saw them probably took a moment to consider what they were seeing. If there were smartphones available at the time, everyone in sight would have them out to record what they were seeing.

In their kneeling, they lifted up their prayers to the Lord and readied themselves for the final parting. The plural pronouns used here appear to indicate that prayers were offered by a number of people, not just Paul. It is a very touching scene to contemplate.

The ending of the verse seems incomplete because it finishes with an aorist participle. However, the next verse will continue with another verb. This will resolve the tension now being seen.

Life application: There are obviously times when it is not possible to make a wedding, a funeral, or a parting of company at the port of call. But when time permits, it is a good thing to participate in such things with those you know. If someone is in the hospital, make time to go visit. If you are not in the same town, order some flowers for the person. If someone has bought a new house, take them a “welcome to your new home” gift.

Such small things will go a long way with the people who are on the receiving end. So do your best to reach out and join with those you are close to. It shows an extra level of attention that is often lacking in our rushed, cold, and uncaring world today. These accounts in Scripture reveal to us a slower, more methodical approach to friendship that is comforting to the soul and worthy of emulation.

*Glorious Heavenly Father, You have created us as social beings. We have needs and desires, as do those around us. Help us to be attentive to those who need a caring bit of hospitality. May we be willing to rejoice with those who are rejoicing, mourn with those who are mourning, and carry the burden of those whose loads are heavy. Help us to have these things in our minds as we interact with others. Amen.*

**When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.** Acts 21:6

The words more closely read: “And having embraced one another, we went up into the ship, and they returned to their own” (CG).

In the previous verse, the disciples and their families accompanied the missionaries till they were outside the city. There, they bowed their knees to pray on the shore. With that complete, it next says, “And having embraced one another.”

It is the same word used elsewhere at times like this, such as in Acts 20:1, *aspazomai*. It is variously translated. Some say encouraged, greeted, embraced, saluted, etc. It is repeatedly used by Paul in Romans 16 as he greets individuals in the church, but the word itself signifies to enfold in the arms.

Therefore, it includes some type of body motion, maybe an embrace or a waving of the arm. In this case, it was most probably a close embrace. The tenderness of having accompanied these men to the ship demonstrates the closeness of the relationship, even as if they were family. Next, it says, “we went up into the ship.”

The word *anabainó* means to ascend or go up. This is just what one does when he gets on a ship, ascending a plank or set of stairs to get to the deck. As for the ship itself, there is an article in front of the word, and so it is likely, but not certain, that this was the same ship that they had arrived on. It had been unloaded and then reloaded during their stay. As no new ship is mentioned, and as Luke is the great detailer of such things, this is most probable. With that considered, the verse ends with words about the disciples and their families, saying, “and they returned to their own.”

The most probable meaning is “their own homes,” but Luke leaves that unstated, simply giving the word that signifies possession, such as a family, home, property, etc.

Life application: These people truly cared about the missionaries that had come to them. The fact that not only they but their entire families joined them to the shore shows this. Someday, we will be brought to the Lord at the rapture. But we aren’t going to just be brought directly to the bema seat where Christ will be sitting, there to receive our judgment.

Rather, the word tells us that the Lord will meet us in the air, having descended from heaven. Imagine the significance of that! Even before we are brought to the Bema Seat of Christ for our judgment, we will be met by Him. Let us endeavor to act in a similar manner toward those we are set to meet. If we can receive them at a restaurant upon their arrival in town or wait outside for them to then bring them into our dwellings, it shows an extra level of attention.

God determined before He created anything that He would come to us rather than us coming to Him. He sent Jesus to this fallen world to redeem us. He will again send Jesus to meet us on our return to glory. And He will come again to Israel as detailed in Revelation 19. Our God meets us where we are. Let us consider this and do likewise to those we interact with as well.

*Lord God, how good You are to look upon us with favor. You have given us a way to be restored to You through the coming of Jesus Christ. Help us to also step out and tell others about this wonderful blessing. May we never withhold the good news of Jesus when it is in our power to share it. Help us to be faithful in this, O God. Amen.*

**And when we had finished *our* voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day.** Acts 21:7

The words are better rendered, “And we, having completed the voyage from Tyre, came to Ptolemais and, having greeted the brethren, stayed one day with them” (CG).

The previous verse indicated that the missionaries had boarded the ship to depart from Tyre. Now, it says, “And we, having completed the voyage from Tyre.”

Another word found only here in the New Testament is seen here, *dianuó*. It means to finish. Luke seems to enjoy finding new words to improve the reading skills of his audience. This word is from *dia*, through, and *anuo*, to effect. It is a word found commonly in classical Greek to indicate finishing a voyage, completing a journey, or coming to the end of a race. Here, the trip from Tyre is complete as the men “came to Ptolemais.”

In modern Israel, Ptolemais is known as Akko. It first appeared in Judges 1:31 during the time of the Canaanite rule. At that time, the name was Akko. It was a part of Asher’s land grant, but they failed to conquer it. Later it was conquered and rebuilt, being named after Ptolemy Soter who was the king of Egypt. It was he who rebuilt the city. Abarim says that to a Greek speaker, the name Ptolemais would be understood as Bellicose or Warlike.

Since Israel has retaken control of the area in modern times, the original name of Akko has been revived. In Scripture, there is no record of who evangelized this area, but it could have been by Philip the Evangelist. Or these believers could have been some of those who were scattered after Stephen's martyrdom (see Acts 11:19). What is certain is that there were believers in the area. That is seen in the next words, “and, having embraced the brethren, stayed one day with them.”

It is the same word just used in the previous verse, *aspazomai*. It means to greet, salute, embrace, etc. The idea is that of enfolding in the arms. Being fellow believers, it is probable they met and gave hearty hugs and fraternal kisses. Then, after staying for just one day, they traveled from this point by land. That will be seen in the next verse.

Life application: Having arrived at Ptolemais, it is evident that the first thing these men did was to seek out the believers in the town. Although in Western culture, not everyone is disposed to bringing a bunch of people into their homes that they may not

know very well, or for people who are traveling to impose upon those they meet up with, it is right that these men sought out the believers in the area.

Those of the faith would not have been great in number. Israel had obviously rejected Jesus, and they were on their way to rejecting anyone who had called on Jesus as Messiah. Therefore, meeting up with other believers would be something that bolstered their faith and encouraged them.

If you are going to a place that has become less friendly to Christians, it would be good for you to seek out those faithful Christians who remain and give them a time of encouragement. Just meeting up with other believers is a point of letting them know they are cared about and thought of. A little effort will, therefore, go a long way in their hearts and minds.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the fellowship we can experience with others, simply because they have called on Jesus and now share in the same faith that we possess. Help us to encourage those of the faith to stand strong and be uplifted in Your goodness because of what Jesus has accomplished for us. Such reminders are never without a positive benefit in the lives of others. Amen.*

**On the next *day* we who were Paul’s companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was *one* of the seven, and stayed with him.** Acts 21:8

The Greek reads, “And on the morrow, they about Paul having gone out, came to Caesarea. And having entered into the house of Philip, the evangelist – being of the seven – remained with him” (CG).

In the previous verse, the missionaries had completed their voyage from Tyre to Ptolemais. Having arrived there, they greeted the brethren and stayed one day with them. Next, it now says, “And on the morrow.”

It is the completion of the one day spent with the brethren in Ptolemais. At this point, various manuscripts read differently in the next words. In some, it says, “they about Paul,” meaning those who accompanied him on the journey. In other manuscripts, those words are not included.

If the words belong in the text, it is telling us that not everyone who is mentioned in the previous verse would continue the travel. Maybe some who had accompanied him to



Ptolemais were staying there, or it may simply indicate that those they visited in Ptolemais would not be accompanying the team when they departed. Regardless, now that the missionaries were heading to Caesarea, those who were his companions on the journey continued the travel toward Jerusalem. That is seen in the words, “they about Paul having gone out, came to Caesarea.”

This is now Paul’s third recorded visit to Caesarea. His other visits were in Acts 9:30 and Acts 18:22. Once they arrived in Caesarea, it next says, “And having entered into the house of Philip, the evangelist.”

It is the first of three times the term “evangelist” is seen in the Bible. The other two times are in Ephesians 4:11 and in 2 Timothy 4:5. It indicates one who shares the good news, meaning the gospel. More specifically, however, it is the person’s vocation. This then would include preaching the entire message about salvation in Christ. In Ephesians 4, it says this, demonstrating that evangelists are an integral part of what God has ordained in order to meet the goals of the church –

“And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; <sup>14</sup> that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, <sup>15</sup> but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head— Christ— <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

-Ephesians 4:11-16

Of Philip, it says, “being of the seven.” This is referring to the seven chosen deacons of Acts 6. After being a deacon, he was part of the dispersion after the death of Steven in Acts 8:5, having gone to Samaria to preach the gospel there. Later in Acts 8, he was the one told by the angel of the Lord to preach to the Ethiopian eunuch. After that, Acts 8 finished with these words –

“But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.” Acts 8:40

As for their arrival at the house of Philip, it next says that they “remained with him.” The duration of the stay is not stated, but they will eventually leave the area in verse 21:15.

Life application: It is the duty of every Christian to share the gospel. However, only some make it their full-time vocation. It is a calling of the Lord, and when He calls, He will supply what is needed for the person to accomplish his mission. This was true of Philip. It should be noted, though, that Paul was present at the time of Stephen's death, condoning his execution.

The meeting here between Paul and Philip shows that truly all things are new in Christ. Philip fully received Paul as an apostle. His work as an evangelist would not make any sense if he preached forgiveness and salvation through Christ, but he then failed to forgive Paul himself. There is new life in Christ.

Even if you are not an evangelist, if you are a believer in Christ, it is your ever-present duty to tell others about your faith in Him. If not you, then who?

*Glorious God, help us to forgive what should be forgiven. Help us to speak what should be spoken. Certainly, this means that we should never withhold the news about the love You have displayed in the giving of Your Son for our sins. Help us to be bold and to speak. May it be so to Your glory. Amen.*

**Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.** Acts 21:9

The Greek reads, “And to him were four daughters, virgins, prophesying” (CG).

In the previous verse, it noted that Paul and his companions departed and came to Caesarea. There, they entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven. Now, that continues, saying, “And to him were four daughters.”

The verb is imperfect, signifying that it was ongoing and indeterminate in duration. It cannot be implied that this was their permanent state. As for Philip, he was an evangelist. He held the duty of “preaching the *full message of Christ's salvation*” (HELPS Word Studies). Having four daughters meant he had a wife.

Therefore, this is contrary to the false doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church that those who are in such a position were to remain celibate. This is obvious from Paul's pastoral epistles, but it is a valid point of doctrine that is substantiated here and elsewhere. Of his daughters, it next says that they were “virgins.”

Luke takes care to mention this. Therefore, it has a bearing on their state. Otherwise, it would be a pointless addition to the context of his note. Being virgins, they were still living in his house, awaiting the time when they would be married. If they never married, they would remain in his house. The matter would have been decided as families determined such things at the time and within the culture. Finally, Luke notes that they were “prophesying.”

This is not unique in Scripture. It is something that several women of the Old Testament did. Deborah, the Judge of Israel, was a prophetess. A married woman named Huldah, the wife of the keeper of the wardrobe, was noted as a prophetess in 2 Kings 22:14. These and others were noted as having this ability.

It is, however, noted in 1 Corinthians 14 that women (or wives, the word can mean either) are to remain silent in the churches. It may be that being noted as virgins provides an exception to the prohibition of 1 Corinthians. But their prophesying cannot extend to teaching or having authority over men. That is explicitly forbidden in 1 Timothy 2:11, 12.

Further, Paul’s words concerning the selection of elders and deacons in the pastoral epistles are directed to males only. There is no provision in Scripture to allow for the ordination of women. Thus, Luke’s words here must bear these limitations. These women prophesied. Nothing more can be gleaned from the narrative.

The coming verses will mention another man who will prophesy over Paul. What he says is very clearly recorded by Luke. Such is not the case with these four daughters of Philip. Therefore, their ability to prophesy obviously did not include the matter that would be brought forth by him.

What is possible is that Luke’s note concerning these women is a generous acknowledgment of their ability to pass on what has already been received by Philip. This would be similar to the first noted woman to prophesy in Scripture, Miriam, the sister of Moses. In Exodus 15, it says –

“Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. <sup>21</sup> And Miriam answered them:  
‘Sing to the LORD,  
For He has triumphed gloriously!

The horse and its rider  
He has thrown into the sea!” Exodus 15:20-21

Miriam’s prophesying was not her own words but those already given by Moses –

“Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying:

‘I will sing to the LORD,  
For He has triumphed gloriously!  
The horse and its rider  
He has thrown into the sea!” Exodus 15:1

In the case of these four daughters, it is best to take the most conservative view of their words, keeping them also completely in line with what is elsewhere stated as doctrine for the church.

Life application: Q: Is this verse prescriptive or descriptive? It is a descriptive verse that sets no doctrine forth for the conduct of the church.

These words, along with scattered other verses in the Bible, are incorrectly used at times to justify women preachers and “prophetesses.” In doing this, one must completely disregard the prescriptive and authoritative writings of Paul. Further, context is necessary to understand what is going on. Outside of this descriptive verse, there is no additional context to justify women instructors or preachers with authority over men in a New Testament context. Rather, exactly the opposite is the case.

If one is to logically claim that the words of this verse mean that women today also are entitled to prophecy as these girls did, then the entire description of them must be considered applicable. Luke was careful to note that they were the daughters of an evangelist. Therefore, only the daughters of an evangelist would meet the requirements.

Next, he takes special care to note that they were *parthenoi*, virgins. Therefore, that must be applied as a required standard. As such, it would mean that this ability only applies to virgins. As they were not married, they also wielded no authority over a man. Should they marry, they would then fall under the authority of their husbands. Luke is being careful to show that their role in no way contradicted what Paul was already teaching concerning women.

These daughters prophesied because they were, at least for a season, set apart as virgins to prophesy. This was probably to other women while Philip was conducting evangelism. There is no need to go beyond what is written here and assume that they held any other duties than those intended for women by women. Their status as virgins is what sets them apart as acceptable for ministry. Should their status change, it would mean a change in their life roles.

Finally, as no other gifts are listed, the most one could claim is that the gift of prophesying alone could be appropriated by virgin daughters of evangelists. This is not a verse that allows for women to prophesy in a congregation. It is not a verse that allows for teaching or having authority over men in a congregation. It is also not a verse that would allow for the ordination of women. None of these things can be deduced or appropriated by women from the words of this verse.

*Lord God, help us to stay in the proper lanes as we travel on life's highway. May we be careful never to take single verses out of their intended context in an attempt to justify what Your word elsewhere forbids. May we be obedient to the overall standards that prescribe our conduct as clearly revealed in Your precious and sacred word. Amen.*

**And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Acts 21:10**

The Greek reads, "And remaining many days, a certain prophet came down from Judea, by name Agabus" (CG).

The last verse was a short note about Philip's four daughters who prophesied. Luke next says, "And remaining many days."

The adjective which is used here is given in the comparative degree. Therefore, Ellicott believes that this means that they stayed longer than originally intended. But because there was still time available, either because of quicker travel on the voyage to Israel than expected, or because they cut another stop short, they stayed on for a while.

The only time limitation that is known to be weighing on them is what it said in Acts 20:16 –

"For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost."

Therefore, even if they stayed with Philip longer than intended, as long as they had time to spare before the short trip to Jerusalem, it was of no great matter. It is during these “many days” that “a certain prophet came down from Judea, by name Agabus.”

This Agabus is probably the same prophet who was first seen in Acts 11. At that time, it was said that he had come down from Jerusalem to Antioch. Now, it says that he has come down from Judea. Thus, it is highly probable that this is the same prophet again being drawn into the narrative.

Life application: We should be prepared to expect the unexpected. We don’t know what the future holds, and our plans are just that, plans. They may or may not come to pass. If you are in the Lord and living in accord with His word, then wherever you are – regardless of whether your plans are coming about – the Lord has you exactly where He needs you to be.

It may not be comfortable for you, or the changes that come up may be surprisingly nice. But it is where you are, so make the best of it. Throughout the book of Acts, people make plans, and they don’t always come out as originally intended, but time has gone on, and the lives of these people came out in the way God knew they would.

If you can have this attitude when plans get changed or frustrated, you will be much better off in your own mind. Don’t become discouraged but look for opportunities that may have been placed in your path. You are the Lord’s, so have the proper attitude about the situation you are in. He has you there for a purpose.

*Lord God, help us to be content in the situations we find ourselves. We make plans, but ultimately it is Your will that we need to be obedient to. If we are living in accord with Your word, then we are in Your will. May we find peace, joy, and contentment in that. Amen.*

**When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.’” Acts 21:11**

The words are more closely rendered, “And having come to us, and having taken up the belt of Paul, having bound his hands and feet, he said, ‘Thus says, the Holy Spirit, “The man whose is this belt, thus will bind in Jerusalem the Jews, and will deliver into *the* hands of Gentiles.’””

The previous verse told of the coming down of Agabus from Judea to the missionaries staying in Caesarea. In his coming, it next says, “And having come to us, and having taken up the belt of Paul.”

There is no indication of how long he was there before this occurred, but Luke, using participles to show action, writes his words to make it seem as if it is the first thing that happens. Agabus was just called a “certain prophet.” So, one gets the sense of this prophet arriving at Caesarea, walking up to Paul, and then lifting Paul’s belt off of him.

The belt noted here is *zóné*. It indicates a girdle, belt, or waistband. This is not a belt to hold up the pants as we use today. Rather, it would be worn on the outside of the loose-fitting garments worn by men. They would pull it tight to remove the slack from the garment. Thus, to lift it off of Paul would be a simple process.

At times, such a belt would be hollow and used as a money belt. This is why some versions will say “girdle.” Of this belt that was just taken up by Agabus, it next says, “having bound his hands and feet.”

It is generally believed that Agabus tied his own hands and feet, not Paul’s, but some scholars think maybe it was Paul. Different manuscripts use a reflexive pronoun that would definitely indicate it was Agabus tying himself up rather than Paul. Also, the words vary in order saying either “hands and feet” or “feet and hands.”

It would be hard to tie up one’s feet if the hands were already bound. Therefore, the action may be tying up Paul, or it may be Agabus tying himself up. Either way, it is a symbolic gesture not unlike many other examples found in the Old Testament and which are worthy to be considered, such as –

“In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it, <sup>2</sup> at the same time the LORD spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, ‘Go, and remove the sackcloth from your body, and take your sandals off your feet.’ And he did so, walking naked and barefoot.”  
-Isaiah 20:1, 2

With that action directed, the Lord then explains the command –

“Then the LORD said, ‘Just as My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years *for* a sign and a wonder against Egypt and Ethiopia, <sup>4</sup> so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as prisoners and the Ethiopians as captives,

young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. <sup>5</sup> Then they shall be afraid and ashamed of Ethiopia their expectation and Egypt their glory. <sup>6</sup> And the inhabitant of this territory will say in that day, “Surely such *is* our expectation, wherever we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria; and how shall we escape?””” Isaiah 20:3-6

As for the action taken by Agabus, he then proclaims, “Thus says, the Holy Spirit, ‘The man whose is this belt, thus will bind in Jerusalem the Jews.’”

Just as Isaiah was used as a warning and an object lesson for Israel, Agabus’ action is also an object lesson to warn Paul. The Lord, through Agabus, has given an advanced sign to Paul and those with him that what will occur has been ordained by Him and that it is the way that things were supposed to be.

Israel at Isaiah’s time could not say that what occurred to them was not the will of the Lord. Likewise, those who saw Paul being bound could not say that this was out of the will of the Lord or something that they should act against. It was a part of a greater plan, already known and authorized by God. From there, it next says that the Jews “will deliver into *the* hands of Gentiles.”

A greater plan was going to be worked out which included Paul being handed over to the Gentiles. Therefore, the people who saw these things come about should not interfere with the events, nor should they think that Paul was out of favor with the Lord. The events to take place were meant to be, and those who would interact with Paul should do so with this in mind.

Life application: As reading the Bible is an important part of the things we do each day, take a few more minutes and read one or more of the following object lessons that are found in the Old Testament: 1 Kings 22:10-12; Jeremiah 13:1-11; Jeremiah 27:2-11; Ezekiel 4:1-13; Ezekiel 5:1-10; Ezekiel 12:1-14; Ezekiel 24:15-24.

There are other such object lessons to be found. The book of Hosea is built around such an idea, where the prophet is asked to marry an unfaithful woman. Throughout the book, the interactions of the prophet with her, as directed by the Lord, mirror the interactions of the Lord and Israel.

Consider the things you are reading in Scripture and why the Lord places such things there. In the end, we can more fully understand the mind and intent of the Lord, His faithfulness even in our unfaithfulness, etc. The Bible tells us that God has everything



under control and that we should trust that His plan is being worked out in a way that will bring His people to a very happy end, even if the road we are currently on may be a bit rocky.

*Lord God, thank You for Your tender care of us. We can know from Your word that You have a plan that is already set and that will lead us back to Yourself. Help us to faithfully endure in this life and to walk in a manner that is pleasing to You, knowing that our actions reflect our trust in You as we continue our trek to our heavenly home. Amen.*

**Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Acts 21:12**

A literal rendering would be, “And when we heard these things, implored him – both we and the residents – not to go up to Jerusalem” (CG).

In the previous verse, the prophet Agabus tied himself (or Paul) up by his hands and feet and prophesied that the same would happen to Paul in Jerusalem, noting that he would be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. Now, Luke records, “And when we heard these things.”

The reaction is immediate, and Luke includes himself in the words of the verse with the use of “we.” He and all those with him “implored him.” The word is variously translated, having several different meanings, depending on the context. In this verse, translations still vary widely: beg, intreat, entreat, beseech, urge, plead, etc.

In this case, it was certainly a mixture of begging and admonishing. Thus, he was implored. Further, the word is imperfect, indicating that they continued to implore him. But the words were not just from his companions alone. Rather, it next says, “both we and the residents.”

Here, another word unique to the New Testament is seen – *entopios*. It is an adjective derived from *en* (in) and *topos* (region). Hence, a single English comparable word would be “residents.” Luke was a master of using interesting words to make simple points. Those who were residing there and heard, along with the missionaries who were going to Jerusalem with Paul, implored him “not to go up to Jerusalem.”

Luke and the others who accompanied Paul were fully capable of taking the gift themselves, and there was no need for Paul to go and thus endanger himself. Therefore,

they continued to implore him not to go with them on this final portion of the long voyage they had been on.

Life application: One of the things that makes a sermon, narrative, or story interesting is a wide range of words. Why use one adjective when two or even three will do? If you want to excite the minds of others, it is important not to repeat the same words in sentences if at all possible. In this, you will keep the minds of your readers active as they listen.

Having said that, it is important for translations of Scripture to convey the meaning of the words as originally presented. There are various ways of doing this. The first and most obvious is a literal translation. The word noted above is a single plural adjective preceded by a plural article indicating “those residents.” That is the most literal way to translate it.

However, it is not the only way to do so. Saying “the residents” means the same thing because the plural marker in English sufficiently carries the meaning. It also sounds smoother to the ear than “those residents” when taken in the context of the rest of the sentence. The words can also be translated in an equivalent paraphrase: those of that place, they of that place, the locals, the people there, etc.

A literal translation will often get clunky or cumbersome to the mind of the hearer. Thus, the equivalent rendering may be preferred. Don’t get too negatively excited over varying translations. Instead, look at them as opportunities to understand more fully what is being conveyed while also learning to expand your own lexicon and ability to form interesting sentence structures.

This appears to be Luke’s goal as he continuously introduces nifty new words to Scripture. Remember that in order to fully understand the meaning of his words, it is often necessary to refer to a concordance, lexicon, or formal word study. As this is so, then it may be that you had to read an entire paragraph, or more, just to get what is being said. Therefore, a single translation will never fully express what the intent of the entire original text is saying.

Study! Enjoy! And then turn around and express. Use your words in a way that will bless and benefit others without overwhelming them. Be one that will excite the minds of those around you. The Bible has shown, right in the diverse and unique words that it uses, that this is a commendable thing to do.

*Lord God, You have given us a precious word meant to excite our minds and fill our thoughts with delight and wonder. Thank You for this precious gift. May we be willing to study it deeply all the days of our lives and then use our words in a manner that will also bless and excite others. Praise to You, O God, for the gift of Your precious word. Amen.*

**Then Paul answered, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” Acts 21:13**

To match the Greek, the words read, “Then answered Paul, ‘What do you, weeping and pulverizing my heart? For I hold readily not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus’” (CG).

The previous verse told of those around Paul begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. With that stated, it next says, “Then answered Paul, ‘What do you?’”

The word means to do or to make. In essence, their words produce an action, making something happen. Today, we would say, “What are you doing to me?” Paul then explains what it is they were doing, saying, “weeping and pulverizing my heart.”

The first action is that of those with Paul, weeping. The response to their weeping is then Paul’s action. They were pulverizing his heart. Here, Luke introduces another word only seen once in the New Testament, *sunthruptó*. Strong’s defines it as break in pieces, crush, or thoroughly weaken. It is derived from two words signifying “with” and “to crumble.” Thus, one can think of someone grabbing Paul’s heart and crushing it so that it crumbles. Hence, pulverize gives a good sense of what he means.

His words indicate that their weeping was only making matters worse because, as he next says, “For I hold readily.” It is an adverb. Thus, the word readily appropriately gives the sense of what is being conveyed. He was set and would not be dissuaded from his mission, and he was readily set to continue on it, even if the extreme occurred. He conveys this first in relation to the prophecy, saying, “not only to be bound.”

This is what Agabus had prophesied. It included being handed over to the Gentiles. If such happened, who knows what might then occur? Paul, evaluating the matter and considering the greatest potential threat continues with, “but also to die at Jerusalem.”

Being bound meant to be considered a lawbreaker. In such a state, various judgments could be rendered, up to and including execution. This meant little to Paul if he had

successfully done what he was called to do. And, of course, his calling was by the Lord. If the Lord determined that was the path for him to go, then he would take it “for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

It was Jesus who had called him. It was Jesus who had saved him and given him his commission. It was the Lord who had fashioned him and who would someday transform Paul’s lowly body to be like His. So why should death be any concern at all? He was fully accepting of whatever was to come because he belonged to the Lord Jesus. The victory was already won, and the path to eternal life was secured for him.

Life application: The words in this verse are emphatic. Paul essentially says, “You are breaking *my* heart.” “*I, for my part, am ready . . .*” His intent wasn’t merely a stoic resolve. Rather, his heart was truly broken by their sadness, but he didn't want his determination to be weakened because of it. Instead of worrying about what might happen, he had his eyes fixed on Jesus and his heart set on glorifying the Lord with his life. He was, as it were, an example of the words penned by Solomon -

“For love *is as* strong as death.” Song of Solomon 8:6

In the seven letters to the seven churches, Jesus said to the church at Ephesus, “...you have left your first love.” Paul was a man of doctrine. He never waffled on it, and he directly spoke against what was incorrect, even when it meant openly confronting another apostle. His inspired words are what set doctrine for the church age, and he would readily stand against anyone who incorrectly taught them or misapplied them in his walk.

Despite this, Paul remembered his first love before all other things. He fixed his eyes on Jesus in everything he did, including arguing sound doctrine, for the sake of that love he felt. Sound doctrine is important, but other than accepting the simple gospel as it is properly understood, doctrine is not what saves a person. Instead, it is what allows a person to mature. In maturing, the love one has for Christ should only deepen.

If, however, the doctrine becomes the most important point to a person, his love will grow cold. Be sure to include Jesus in every step you take towards full Christian maturity. Without it, you will never attain what you are attempting to reach. Keep the love of Jesus as the paramount point of what you do, and you will do well.

*Lord Jesus, may we never turn our eyes from You in our attempt to become doctrinally sound believers. We can dot every i and cross every t, but without having our hearts*

*directed toward You, our walk will be dark and cold. Help us to remember this most important point. We love You, our God and our Lord. Amen.*

**So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, “The will of the Lord be done.”** Acts 21:14

The Greek literally reads, “And he not being persuaded, we quieted, having said, ‘The will of the Lord be done’” (CG).

Paul just protested to those who desired him to not go up to Jerusalem. In his words, he said that he was ready not only to be bound but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. With that stated, it next says, “And he not being persuaded, we quieted.”

There was obviously no point in continuing. His statement meant he was fixed and firm in his decision to go as intended. Therefore, they resignedly ceased, “having said, ‘The will of the Lord be done.’”

As Paul invoked the name of the Lord in the preceding verse, they gave in and, in turn, invoked the will of the Lord.

Life application: There is a time when words are to cease, and attempts to change what shouldn't be changed should be ended. Jesus understood this, made a simple petition, and then resigned Himself to the will of His Father –

“Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. <sup>40</sup> When He came to the place, He said to them, ‘Pray that you may not enter into temptation.’

<sup>41</sup> And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup> saying, ‘Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.’” Luke 22:39-42

For us, although we cannot know what the future holds, we can clue in and realize that fighting against what should occur is a futile thing to do. Paul was determined to complete his mission, he was aware of what was coming, but he knew that it was the right thing to do.

There are times where we may be challenged to act in a way that compromises our faith. That may include certain imprisonment or even death. But if we truly believe that Jesus has us firmly in His hands, then such an outcome is temporary. We will be

rewarded for our faith. Therefore, let us choose the right path, even if things look bleak in the short term.

*Lord God, our faith can be weakened when facing difficult prospects that may lie ahead of us. In such times, give us strengthening for the trials. Help us when we willingly choose to be obedient to Your word and Your will. Yes, be with us, O God, that we may be faithful to the calling You have called us to. Amen.*

### **And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem. Acts 21:15**

The Greek reads, “And after those days, having packed up, we were ascending to Jerusalem” (CG).

In the previous verse, those with Paul gave up trying to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem. Therefore, it next says, “And after those days.”

The amount of time they remained in Caesarea is unknown, but it was spent at the house of Philip the Evangelist. Due to the proximity to Jerusalem, they could have stayed right up until the time just before the Feast of Pentecost. Once the feast was close enough for them to begin the short trek, it next says, “having packed up.”

This is another word found only here in Scripture, *aposkeuazó*. It comes from two words, meaning away and vessel. Hence, packed up gives a good sense of what they did. From there, and with their things readied, it next says, “we were ascending to Jerusalem.”

The verb is imperfect, giving the sense of motion. As they are heading to Jerusalem, it says “up.” A trip from any location or direction, regardless of height or the importance of the location, is always said to go up to Jerusalem. This signifies that it is the location of pinnacle importance from a biblical perspective.

Life application: For such a short verse, translations vary quite a bit. A few of them, with a short analysis of each, are provided –

“After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem.” (NIV) The words are incomplete because of the missing content concerning packing up.

“And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.” (KJV) The words are archaic and without any modern sense. Also, the verbs do not match the intent of the original.

“A few days afterwards we loaded our baggage-cattle and continued our journey to Jerusalem.” (Weymouth) It is overly wordy, adding in stuff that is not reflected in the original.

“And after these days, having got our effects ready, we went up to Jerusalem.” (Darby) It is a good job, but still a tad wordier than the original. Also, the words “went up” can be taken as an accomplished task or as ongoing. Therefore, to reflect the imperfect, that needs tweaking.

“And after those days, having packed up, we were ascending to Jerusalem.” (CG) This is a super-duper translation. It reflects the original without getting overly wordy.

Take time to read various translations, think about why certain words were chosen, and how the variations may actually help you to get a fuller understanding of what is being said. Sometimes, two different words may have a similar meaning, but you might be unsure of what one of them means within the context of the verse. But in reading the next translation, you can then say, “I see what they were saying in the first.”

The more you check, compare, and study, the more likely you are to not make an error in thinking concerning one particular translation that may be incorrect, outdated, or ambiguous in meaning. Note that the KJV reflects all three of these inadequacies. It is incorrect in the tense of the first verb, outdated in the content, and ambiguous in the final verb. And this is a short, doctrinally unimportant verse!

*Heavenly Father, may we be well studied in Your word. In some cases, people may have just one translation. At least they have that. In some cases, there may be several. That will help them to compare and consider. In some cases, there may be the original language and fifty translations. How blessed are such people! In whatever we possess, may we be careful to consider Your word as a gift from You and treat it accordingly. Amen.*

**Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge.** Acts 21:16

A more literal rendering would be, “And also the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing – with whom we would lodge – Mnason, a certain Cypriot, an original disciple” (CG).

The previous verse noted that the missionaries completed their time in Caesarea and packed up, beginning their ascent to Jerusalem. Now, that continues with the words, “And also the disciples from Caesarea went with us.”

Most translations add in the word “some” or say something like, “of the disciples,” implying that not all of the disciples went. This is probably the case, but such an insertion should be italicized or set in brackets if it is included. Of these disciples that joined in the trek up to Jerusalem, it next says, “bringing – with whom we would lodge – Mnason.”

This person is noted by name only here in Scripture. Most studies and commentaries note that the name is of uncertain origin. However, undeterred as usual, Abarim suggests it is derived from the Greek word *mnaomai*, meaning to remember. Thus, they define the name as Remembering. They also add in the following thoughts concerning the name –

“The phrase ‘Mnason of Cyprus’ means the Cypriot Tradition and may very well have been the code name for a kindred movement that too sought to topple Roman tyranny by means of theology and philosophy (instead of an armed revolt).

“Remember that Paul's good friend Barnabas was from Cyprus (Acts 4:36), and although the two individuals parted ways due to a disagreement (Acts 15:39), the two movements may still have remained kindly inclined to one another.”

Their words are wholly speculation, and it could also be that Mnason was one who was careful to memorize Scripture as a means of protecting its passing from one generation to the next. This, or some other such thought, could be behind the name.

Saying that they would lodge with him could have one of two meanings. Either they would stay with him in a home on the way to Jerusalem, which was a two-day journey, or they would lodge with him in Jerusalem. The latter seems more likely. Of him, it next says he was “a certain Cypriot.”

As Abarim noted, this is where Barnabas was from. Nothing is said of how the men met up with Mnason, but it is possible that he was one of the people referred to in Acts 11 –

“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. <sup>20</sup> But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who,



when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup> And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” Acts 11:19-21.

If so, it might explain why he had a place to lodge in Jerusalem, but he also dwelt in Caesarea. One more thing is said of him which would support that possibility. Luke next says that he was “an original disciple.”

The word is *archaios*. It signifies original, primitive, ancient, etc. Some translations say “old,” but that is ambiguous. Does that mean “old as in age” or “of olden times?” In this case, Luke is noting that he was a disciple from the very founding of the church. He may have even been with Jesus in His ministry.

The special noting of him by Luke may also mean that he was one of those mentioned in Luke 1 –

“Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us.” Luke 1:1, 2

In other words, Luke may have obtained some of his eyewitness accounts from this man who had seen the works of the Lord. If he was a man of remembering, his eyewitness testimony would be even more reliable than others as he took care to minutely detail in his mind events that he had participated in or personally seen.

Two short commentaries concerning the words of this verse are –

“It lies on the surface of the narrative that Mnason had a house at Jerusalem in which he could receive St. Paul and his companions. The arrangement seems to have been made as the best course that could be taken to minimise the inevitable danger to which the Apostle was exposing himself. In that house at least he might be sure of personal safety, and the men from Cæsarea would form a kind of escort as he went to and fro in the city.” Charles Ellicott

“This would imply that Mnason was at Caesarea, and accompanied Paul and his companions to Jerusalem. It seems better to suppose that the disciples accompanied the apostle in order to introduce him to Mnason, whom they knew. Render, conducting us to Mnason, with whom we should lodge.” Vincent's Word Studies

In other words, Vincent's thinks that rather than Mnason having been with them in Caesarea and who then accompanied the missionaries to Jerusalem, the disciples went along with the missionaries, and they introduced the missionaries to Mnason when they arrived in Jerusalem. This is how some translations state it, such as –

*“Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to stay.” NASB*

Either way, the men were to lodge with this original disciple upon their arrival in Jerusalem.

Life application: Acts 21:16 is the official ending of the third missionary journey. It is an adventure that has been filled with amazing details of real events that took place during the early days of the church. It is good to remember that the record of Acts is a descriptive account of what occurred. There is nothing to prescribe anything for our daily lives.

However, in Acts, there are things that are normative and can be taken as universally applied truths because of this. For example, it is noted, time and again, that when someone received Jesus, he was immediately baptized. This forms a normative idea of what is expected of all believers. This fully supports the notion that Jesus' words in Matthew 28 concerning baptizing disciples apply to all believers throughout the church age.

It makes no sense to say that believers in the church are disciples – something to be taken as an axiom – and yet they do not need to be baptized. This is the claim of various sects, but it is then something in defiance of the Lord's words concerning baptizing disciples.

Be sure to take Acts as it is intended. It is a descriptive account of what occurred, but there are hints of what is normative for all believers found within it. Carefully consider what is being conveyed, and be sure to follow what should be followed, especially if it is supported by a command from the Lord Jesus. We all have to stand before Him someday. Let our meeting be one of rewards and not of loss.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the early apostles and disciples who were willing to travel far, work long and tedious hours, and expend themselves for the sake of the church. May we be like them and continue on that noble tradition of giving our all for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. Acts 21:17**

In the previous verse, it referred to the journey to Jerusalem and that Mnason of Cyprus, who was an early disciple, went also. The missionaries were to lodge with him upon arrival there. Now, Luke continues the narrative, saying, “And when we had come to Jerusalem.”

Paul left Antioch and traveled by land, eventually coming to Ephesus. He was in Ephesus for about three years (Acts 20:30). He had extensive other travels during this journey as well, including Macedonia, Greece, and elsewhere. This means that his journey probably lasted 4 or 5 years. It is thought that this journey lasted from approximately 53-58AD.

Now, along with Luke and others, they have arrived at Jerusalem to complete the mission of bringing a gift from the Gentile churches to the Jewish believers. Next, the narrative says, “the brethren received us gladly.”

Paul and his associates had come with the express intent of bringing this gift with them for the saints in Jerusalem. This alone would have been a great reason for the glad reception, but there is also the fraternal greeting among brothers, meeting new friends, and of reengaging those who had not seen one another for a rather long time.

The verb, being imperfect, tells us that believers in Jerusalem kept coming as they learned about the arrival of these men. As they arrived, the gladness and favorable reception continued.

Life application: When we read the account of Paul’s missionary journeys, the turn of a page may encompass a period of years. Therefore, what we read comprises a large portion of the life of Paul and those with him.

Despite often being hurried out of one place or another because of the enmity of the Jews, there really wasn’t anything hurried about Paul’s approach to dealing with those he encountered. He took the time to get to know people, interact with them, instruct them, and build up bonds that would remain for a lifetime.

In our world today, things are truly conducted at warp speed in comparison to how things were, even until the very recent past. Information flies before our eyes, friendships are often based on a tally displayed on a social media page, and there is very little true and heartfelt interaction with others.

And more, we tend to put everything else in our lives on hyperdrive as well. We may learn a point of doctrine, accept it, and run with it without ever taking the care that is necessary to determine if what we were told is correct or not.

Let us slow down, take time and care to learn what is presented in Scripture, and be willing to do the hard work to confirm that what we have learned is correct or not. In the process, let us not neglect the special fellowship that can arise from interacting with others as we grow in Christ.

There is no need to rush because we have eternity to continue from this starting point. Again, let us slow down and make the walk of our lives one that is not overly jammed with things that are not profitable, to the glory of God, who placed us here to search Him out all our days.

*Precious Lord God, thank You for providing us with the wisdom found in Your word. There is instruction to be found for every aspect of our walk before You. May we slowly, carefully, and prayerfully pursue You through this precious word all our days. Amen.*

**On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.**

Acts 21:18

In the previous verse, it noted that the missionaries had arrived in Jerusalem and that the brethren received them gladly. Now, the narrative continues, saying, “On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James.”

This is now very close to Pentecost, which was Paul's intent from Acts 20:16. Jerusalem would be filled with many pilgrims, and it would be a great time to remember the establishment of the church and the giving of the Spirit. It was at this memorable time that they had arrived and were now meeting with James.

The highlighting of James (certainly James the Less, the brother of the Lord) gives sure proof of his office as the leader of the church and the true Bishop, or Overseer, of Jerusalem. This was seen in Acts 15, and nothing has changed in all the years since the gathering of that council. Along with him, it next says, “and all the elders were present.”

As the verb is imperfect, it means that they were arriving, not that they were sitting there in chairs like a Sanhedrin or governing council. Paul and the missionaries arrived for a gathering while the elders of the church in Jerusalem were also gathering.

This gathering, and the words conveyed during it, show that Paul and his apostolic ministry to the Gentiles were fully accepted by those in Jerusalem. There will be some points of life for Jews at that time that need to be worked through while this meeting is conducted.

The reason for what is conveyed will be explained as the narrative continues, but it is to be remembered that these men lived during the time while the temple was standing, and the temple's rites were centered on the Law of Moses. Understanding this will help explain what will be discussed by these men.

Life application: To this day, the ridiculous claim that Peter was the first Pope is a central point of Roman Catholic teaching. Claiming Peter was the first pope is completely unsubstantiated by any portion of the book of Acts. It also cannot be justified by the gospels or the epistles without a complete twisting of what is said.

This is important because it is one of the ways that the RCC claims it is the true and only valid church. They claim an unbroken succession back to Peter, making them stand out as bearing the authority of Peter's supposed seat as pope. It is rubbish, and such things are thoroughly opposed to what Scripture proclaims.

Despite many claims of this sort, there is no true "church," such as the Roman Catholics. Nor is there a set line of those who held to the "true faith" during the years of the church while all others had apostatized, as the Jehovah's Witnesses and certain Baptists claim.

The Scriptures have always been present and available for some in the church. It is from this precious word that proper doctrine and understanding of church matters are found. And just because a church has a copy of Scripture, it does not mean it is faithfully following it. That is the case in the vast majority of churches in the world today.

Having said that, being a Bible-believing Christian is not a requirement for being a saved believer. It is not something that determines whether a person will be taken at the rapture or not. Faith in the simple gospel alone is what marks a person as a believer. When a person believes, he is sealed with the Holy Spirit.

A person who has been saved may never have read the Bible or even known it exists. Therefore, it cannot be a requirement of the faith to be a Bible believer. Further, every person ever saved is on a different level of maturity in Christ. If acceptance of and

adherence to Scripture were a requirement for salvation, there would be very few, if any, ever saved.

Keep the theological boxes straight. It is acceptance of the gospel that saves. Development in doctrine and maturity in Christ will come with learning and applying the word of God to one's life after being saved. Think from a biblical context, and you will cut out a lot of the fat of poor theology found in various teachings.

*Lord God, thank You for the simplicity of salvation. Jesus Christ has done the work. He died for our sins, He was buried, and He rose again. In our believing this, we are saved. You have made it simple because we are dull. Help us to remember and share this simple gospel of hope. Thank You, O God, for the surety of eternal life because of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.*

**When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. Acts 21:19**

More precisely, the Greek reads, "And having greeted them, he recounted one by each thing that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry" (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul went with the other missionaries to see James and the other elders in Jerusalem. Now, Luke continues, saying, "And having greeted them."

It is the same word used in Acts 21:6 and 21:7, *aspazomai*. It means to greet, salute, embrace, etc. The idea is that of enfolding in the arms. Being fellow believers, it is probable they met and gave hearty hugs and fraternal kisses. After this greeting, "he recounted one by each thing."

To recount means to fully explain. Paul mentally calls forth the wonderful things that were accomplished over the past years, and then he repeats those things in detail to his audience.

This report would have included everything since his last visit which was in Acts 18:22. This would have been a long and detailed report, filled with the marvels of what had occurred throughout the various regions he had visited. These things are further described, saying, "that God had done among the Gentiles."

The things Paul did are specifically credited to the hand of God. Paul and those with him were as emissaries going forth on behalf of God. As Paul was the active agent of what

God was doing, the mentioning of what was done among the Gentiles reflects his own words of Galatians 2:8-10 –

“...(for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), <sup>9</sup> and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup> *They desired* only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.”

Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles, and it is his words that set church doctrine in this context, meaning during the Gentile-led church age. Understanding this, Luke specifically says this with the words “through his ministry.”

God is doing the work among the Gentiles, but it is through Paul that this is being accomplished. There is a syncretism implied here that carries through to the doctrine of election. God uses man to carry His message forward to others. He initiates, He enables, He directs, etc. However, it is still done through man. In this case, it is through Paul and his ministry.

God is pleased to allow Paul to be recognized for his efforts which have been accomplished through him. Further, this verse is a sharp rebuke to Judaizers who have attempted to limit him in his ministry and shrivel the church into a Jewish-only sect.

God has different plans, and He used the apostle to the Gentiles to bring it about. No glory is robbed from God in the way Luke has structured his words. Rather, God is further glorified because it was He who selected Paul, and it was He who worked through Paul, to effect what had (and continues to) come about. As the Geneva Bible says, “God is to be praised, who is the author of all good sayings and deeds.”

Life application: A couple points of extremely important doctrine are focused on in the words of this verse. One of them is that of free will. Paul was fully capable and permitted to simply walk away from his ministry. But he knew that he was the one carrying the message to the Gentile for them to hear and respond to.

In other words, the doctrine of free will extends not only to Paul, who was already a believer in Christ, but to those Gentiles he would speak to. If Paul had not conveyed the message to them, they would not have heard. If they didn't hear, they could not respond. If they did not respond, they would not be saved.

Thus, the Calvinistic idea of God electing people apart from their free will is shown to be false. One must hear the word of God. After hearing, one either has faith and believes or dismisses what he heard and doesn't believe.

Another doctrine that is seen is that what Paul says is that which applies to the Gentiles who hear it. Paul is dismissed in varying degrees by the Judaizers of the world, be it through Sabbath day observance, not eating various foods, etc. Deferring to the Law of Moses for one's standing before God is totally excluded from Paul's teachings, and thus for the whole of the Gentile-led church age.

Thus, for two thousand years, the church has been a Gentile-led display of God's redemptive plans. This is so plainly evident that it is amazing how much of the church seems to miss this fact.

*Lord God, help us to keep what is being relayed to us in Scripture in its proper context. May we readily accept and not tarnish our calling, meaning Your grace that is seen in the giving of Jesus for our sins. Help us never to attempt to earn what we have been freely given. May we not disgrace the significance of His cross in this way. Amen.*

**And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; Acts 21:20**

More precisely, the Greek reads, "And they, having heard, were glorifying the Lord. And they said, 'You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are having believed. And all are zealots for the law'" (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul told James and the elders in Jerusalem all that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. Now, in response to that, it says, "And they, having heard, were glorifying the Lord."

Depending on the source manuscript, this will either say "Lord" or "God." Verse 19 says "God," but that doesn't necessarily mean that it carries through to this verse. Either way, it doesn't substantially change the intent. The Lord Jesus is the God/Man.

As for Paul's work among the Gentiles, it was to these leaders a source of great praise and of glorifying the Lord. There is nothing in what is said here to somehow suppose that they felt jealousy or feelings of ill will towards Paul. Instead, they rejoiced in his apostleship and the fruit that it bore.



That is important because the rest of the verse and several verses to come are misused by Judaizers to indicate that Paul's ministry was not working in accord with their own twisted view of the grace of God in Christ. Understanding this, Luke next records, "And they said, 'You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are having believed.'"

Using the word "brother" indicates that they felt he was certainly in right standing among them and that they had friendly feelings towards him. That is a key point to consider in relation to the coming words.

They knew the details of Paul's ministry. They knew and acknowledged that he taught that the Gentiles did not need to observe the Law of Moses. They knew that Peter had associated with the Gentiles and had been rebuked by Paul for his actions, as recorded in Galatians 2, etc.

However, they also knew that the temple was still standing, that the Law was still being observed by Israel, and that if they did not observe the law, it would only further complicate their lives and evangelism of the Jews. Thus, they remained obedient to the law for both cultural and practical reasons.

As for the word myriads, it indicates a large but indeterminate number, quite often in the tens of thousands. Some translations will say "thousands" instead of myriads in order to convey the sense to an English audience, but "myriads" or "tens of thousands" would be more appropriate.

This large, indeterminate number shows how the smallest of mustard seeds had truly grown into a great tree before Israel was eventually brought into judgment for rejecting Christ as a nation.

It is probably only about 25 or 30 years after the cross at this point. Further, adding in the Gentiles would bring the universal church up to a rather large number. Of these believing Jews, it next says, "And all are zealots for the law."

It is James who is probably speaking. The word he uses is a noun, not an adjective. Thus, they are zealots. Thayer's Lexicon says it signifies "a person with *zealous* enthusiasm who (literally) '*boils over* with passion.'" It says this because the word is derived from *zeó*, to boil or be hot. Thus, it figuratively refers to one who is passionate or fervent about a matter.

Those of Israel who had believed in Jesus during this period continued to be faithful observers of the law. The Gentiles were not of Israel, they were not in Israel, and they had never observed a single rite of the law. Instead, they came directly to Christ who is the fulfillment of the law.

As for the Jewish believers, their ability to observe the law would be ended with the temple's destruction in AD70. It would be the final termination of the Law of Moses. From that point on, any observance of the law would be pointless.

Observing or not observing the law after coming to Christ did not affect their standing before the Lord. With the temple gone, they would be able to rely solely, and more properly, on the grace of God in Christ as is intended for all believers.

Life application: Just because these believers of Israel continued to be zealous for the law after coming to Christ, it doesn't mean that their actions gave them any greater standing before the Lord.

This must be true, because without the temple after AD70, they remained saved. Not observing the rites of the law did not change their position in Christ at all. The time between the ascension of Christ and the destruction of the temple was a time of grace for Israel to turn to Jesus.

When that time ended, just as prophesied by Jesus in Luke 11:31, 32, the nation's time was up, and the temple was destroyed. The focus of God's attention turned solely to the Gentile-led church age, and that has continued to this day.

At the rapture, the focus will return to Israel. Until then, the Law of Moses cannot be observed, nor is it right for those in the church to attempt to do so, in part or in whole. We are to trust exclusively in the merits of Jesus Christ for our salvation and continued salvation. Don't mar grace, but trust in Christ!

*Lord God, thank You for the guarantee of eternal salvation that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**“but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children nor to walk according to the customs. Acts 21:21**

The words are more literally rendered, “And they have been taught about you that you teach apostasy from Moses – all those Jews among the Gentiles – telling them not to circumcise the children nor walk in the customs” (CG).

In the previous verse, a problem with Paul’s ministry, as perceived by some in Israel, had arisen. It said in those words, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are having believed. And all are zealots for the law.”

With the temple still standing, and with the leadership of Israel having rejected Jesus, the people were required to observe the Law of Moses. To teach otherwise was justification for being stoned to death. Now, to continue the thought, it says, “And they have been taught about you.”

The word translated as “taught” is *katécheó*. It signifies to be instructed orally. It is where we get our modern word catechism. Some, quite likely the Judaizers mentioned in Galatians, had been spreading falsities about Paul. Their words, as he was being told, were “that you teach apostasy from Moses.”

This was a way of imputing true wrongdoing, even evil, to Paul. It was a criminal charge against him, indicating that he was an apostate Jew. Their words were either an intentional lie, or what they were saying was a misunderstanding of Paul's instructions to the Gentiles.

He taught that there was now no distinction between Jew and Gentile. He also explicitly taught them that they were not bound to the Law of Moses. This is found time and again in his epistles, but it was fully supported by the decision rendered at the Jerusalem council as recorded in Acts 15.

Also, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul rebuked Peter for his hypocrisy in this matter –

“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; <sup>12</sup> for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. <sup>13</sup> And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.”

-Galatians 2:11-13

Paul’s words to and about Peter continue to tell the truth of the gospel. However, Paul had not violated the command of the Jerusalem council. He had not told Jews not to

observe the customs or the law. He states this explicitly in 1 Corinthians 9 while, at the same time, explaining what that meant –

“For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; <sup>20</sup> and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law; <sup>21</sup> to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; <sup>22</sup> to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. <sup>23</sup> Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with *you*.”

-1 Corinthians 9:19-23

However, he was being charged with teaching apostasy from Moses to “all those Jews among the Gentiles.”

He had not done that. The decision of the council had been rendered, the temple was still standing, and to do so would have been contrary to what was expected of Jews at this time. Eventually, the Gentile church would gain complete ascendancy. With their rejection of Jesus, the nation of Israel would have its temple destroyed, they would be exiled, and they would remain in this state of punishment for the time set by God.

This was known to God. But until that occurred, there was still friction and tension between what was expected of Jews and Gentiles. Teaching Jews that they no longer needed to observe the law would only make things worse. Such a teaching, as some were claiming about Paul, was “telling them not to circumcise the children nor walk in the customs.”

Circumcision was first mandated to Abraham and his household. It was later made a point of law by Moses. In Galatians, Paul clearly taught that circumcision was not a part of salvation in Christ. The customs mentioned here refer to everything Israel was bound to, both by law and by the decisions rendered by the leaders of the people. Jesus taught the latter was true in Matthew –

“Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying: ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. <sup>3</sup> Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.’” Matthew 23:1-3

These words were spoken by Jesus to Israel. None of what He said was imposed upon the Gentiles. Paul, though the apostle to the Gentiles, did speak to Jews about the Messiah. In order to accommodate them, he even had Timothy, whose mother was Jewish, circumcised (Acts 16:3). However, he did not have Titus, who was a Gentile, circumcised (Galatians 2:3). He was careful to follow the decision rendered at the Jerusalem council.

Paul did not forbid observance of the law of Moses for Jews to remain within the boundaries of the religious authorities and as a cultural accommodation. However, salvation, even to the Jews, was by grace.

Life application: Other than aberrant cults, few in the church would argue that Jews today are in any way obligated to the Law of Moses. A simple read through the book of Hebrews shows with all clarity that the author (who was probably Paul) states that the law is done and over. This is explicitly stated in Hebrews 7:18, 8:19, and 10:9. It is implied in numerous ways as well.

Despite that, it needs to be remembered that at the time recorded in Acts, the temple still stood and the Jews who had not received the Lord were in control. As noted above, they would find any Jew not adhering to Moses as an offender of the law and subject to punishment and even death.

The law will again be brought into the lives of the nation of Israel in the end times. The final week of Daniel 9:24-27 (a period of seven years) is granted to them to lead them to the Messiah that they failed to recognize on His first advent.

Despite this allowance, having a rebuilt temple with all of the rites and rituals being conducted by them does not mean that they will be right with God. Until they call on Jesus, they are not His people (Romans 9:26). Only when they, as a nation, receive Jesus as the fulfillment and end of the law will they again be in a right standing with God. At that time, they will again be His people.

It is an important point of theology. Today, Christians are actively supporting the rebuilding of the temple and anticipating the restoration of the temple rituals. Instead of rejoicing over this, we should mourn that they have not, instead, taken the direct course to Jesus. Because of their rejection of Jesus, two-thirds of the nation will perish (Zechariah 13:8). Be willing to evangelize the Jews you know now. Like all people, without Jesus, there is no hope for them.

*Glorious God, may we accurately and faithfully teach the truth about who Jesus is and what the gospel tells us. It is not by our works that we will be right with You. Rather, it is about what Jesus has done. Help us to think this through and be willing to share this simple, direct, and beautiful offer of restoration through the all-sufficient work of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**“What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. Acts 21:22**

The words of this verse are significantly different based on the source text used –

LSV: ...what then is it? Certainly the multitude must come together, for they will hear that you have come.

LET: What is it then? Certainly they will hear that you have come.

In the previous verse, James and the elders noted that the multitude of believing Jews had heard that Paul was teaching apostasy from Moses and the customs of the people. Now, their words continue, beginning with, “What then?”

These words are given as an introduction concerning what is sure to occur and what should be done about it. Today, we might say, “Whadaya think? It is sure to be, and so what to do about it...” These leaders of the church are preparing, in advance, to avoid any problems that may arise from the rumors that had been spread about Paul and his teachings. With that, they next say, “The assembly must certainly meet.”

The word “assembly” is better rendered “multitude.” There would be a large gathering of people simply because Paul was such a hot topic. He would have the nonbelieving Jews attacking him because of his faith in Jesus. He would have the Judaizers attacking him because he taught the Gentiles that they were not obligated to Moses. And more, He taught all that Jesus was the fulfillment of the law.

Therefore, even if he never told a Jew to not observe Moses and the customs, the inevitable truth was that they were freed from such bondage. What they were doing by continuing to observe the law was as pointless as remaining in prison after one’s sentence was complete. His letters to the Gentiles could very easily be twisted to fit any situation they wanted to stir up. And this is exactly what Peter warned about –

“Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; <sup>15</sup> and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, <sup>16</sup> as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures.” 2 Peter 3:14-16

Any law-observing Jew, whether believer or unbeliever, could read his words, twist them, and use them against him, charging him with apostasy. Because he is now in Jerusalem, there would be little doubt that an angry crowd would be just around the corner. This is exactly what is implied in the next words, which say, “for they will hear that you have come.”

It was inevitable that the word would get out. It was the time of the feast. The people who had argued against Paul in Acts 15:1 & 2 would be there. His old associates from the Pharisees before his conversion would be there, etc. It wasn't a question whether it would become known or not. Rather, it was a matter of just how soon until it took place. With a list of enemies a mile long and growing by the day, it would be easy to stir up the multitudes against him.

Life application: Peter's words about Paul still resound today. There are those that take the words of this chapter and other parts of Acts and adamantly state that Paul always observed the Law of Moses. They then essentially say, “Because Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and because he faithfully observed the law, it then logically follows that his adherents must also follow the Law of Moses.”

Rather, Paul explicitly denies this time and again in his writings. But to the unlearned, fear tactics are used to lead them away from the truth and directly into the very bondage that Christ Jesus came to free people from. Take time to read Colossians 2:11-23 today.

When he writes about “the handwriting of the requirements” in verse 14, he is writing about the Law of Moses. When he writes about food, drink, festivals, new moons, and sabbaths, he is writing about various things required under the law and within the customs of Israel.

Christ has freed us from these things. Don't let anyone steal the prize from you. Jesus offers grace. If you choose law, you reject Jesus. Hold fast to the grace of God which is found in the completed work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Lord God, we are all susceptible to being led astray by those who desire control over us. Please guide us in understanding Your word so that we will be able to spot when such people come against us. May we be clear in our thinking so that we are faithful in our lives and sound in our doctrine. Yes, Lord God, lead us for Your name's sake. Amen.*

**“Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Acts 21:23**

The words more literally say, “This, therefore, do what we say to you: With us are four men having a vow on themselves” (CG).

In the previous verse, it was noted by the church leaders to Paul that those in Jerusalem would meet, and it would be made known that he had come to Jerusalem for the feast. They continue by saying, “This, therefore, do what we say to you.”

James and the other elders have a plan that will hopefully convince the people of Paul's still holding to the law and the customs of the people. Their recommendation is just that. They are not commanding Paul to do what they suggest but have devised a path that will make it open and public that he has remained faithful to the precepts of the people. That plan begins to be explained with the words, “With us are four men having a vow on themselves.”

Israel was given laws concerning vows within the Law of Moses. One of them was a Nazirite vow, carefully recorded in Numbers 6. Other vows and their binding nature upon the individual are recorded in Numbers 30. It is generally accepted that the vow now mentioned in Acts is dealing with the Nazirite vow.

Charles Ellicott, noting an ancient source, says that James himself lived his life under a Nazirite vow. The contents of the history say that “No razor came upon his head, and he drank neither wine nor strong drink.” Along with him, these four others had taken such a vow which was now expiring. They were apparently converted Jews that James was associated with.

These vows were of whatever duration the person decided. It could be for a month, a year, five years, etc. When the vow expired, they were to follow a very precise ritual explained in Numbers 6. Certain offerings were made at that time, and others could



identify themselves with the vow and its fulfillment by helping to pay the expenses associated with the offerings. Those offerings, as detailed in Numbers, were as follows –

“Now this *is* the law of the Nazirite: When the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall be brought to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. <sup>14</sup> And he shall present his offering to the LORD: one male lamb in its first year without blemish as a burnt offering, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish as a sin offering, one ram without blemish as a peace offering, <sup>15</sup> a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and their grain offering with their drink offerings.” Numbers 6:13-15

Life application: Unlike the Old Testament, there are no particular vows detailed in the New Testament. However, the books of Psalms and Ecclesiastes are books of wisdom. These carry truths that extend to any given situation, whether during the time of the law or at any other time. They speak of man’s obligations before the Lord in a general way. In these books, the following words of wisdom are provided –

“Make vows to the LORD your God, and pay *them*;  
Let all who are around Him bring presents to Him who ought to be feared.”

-Psalm 76:11

The psalm is not saying that we must make vows. The point is that when vows are made, they are to be paid. This is a simple truth that exists at any given time. If a man says to the Lord, “I vow to give this thing to the church I attend,” it would be inappropriate for him to later renege on that vow. Nobody made him make the vow. He was under no obligation to make it. In vowing and then not following through, he has essentially lied to the Lord. Solomon continues with this line of thought, saying –

“When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it;  
For *He has* no pleasure in fools.  
Pay what you have vowed—

<sup>5</sup> Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.” Ecclesiastes 4:4, 5

The Lord expects us to be people of integrity. If we are to keep our promises to those we interact with, how much more should we be willing to keep the vows we make to God? If there is a chance that we will not be able to fulfill that vow, it is better to not make the vow at all.

Having said that, if you made a vow before becoming a Christian, and it was a vow contrary to the faith or to your life in Christ, why would you feel obligated to keep it? Christ is the one who paid all of your debts before coming to Him, that would include any such vow contradictory to your new faith. Use reason in such matters. Just be sure that any vow you make to God as a Christian, you do your utmost to fulfill it accordingly.

*O God, give us wisdom to conduct our lives properly before You. May we honor the commitments we make with others and with You. Help us to not speak rashly and later regret it. Instead, may we carefully consider the words that come out of our mouths. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave *their* heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but *that* you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law. Acts 21:24**

A more literal rendering of the Greek is, “Having taken these, be purified with them and spend upon them so that they will shave the head. And all will know that which they have been informed about you is nothing, but you yourself walk also, keeping the law” (CG).

Paul was just told about four men who had taken a vow. Now, to help Paul’s image before the people, ensuring that they could not make unfounded claims against him, it next says, “Having taken these.”

It is referring to the four men just mentioned. Their way of helping Paul is to include others who were not in question concerning their keeping of the law. Paul was to take them and “be purified with them.”

In being purified with those who were being purified after a vow, it was as if Paul had included himself in the vow vicariously. There is nothing in the law that specifically allowed this, but there was nothing to preclude it as well.

By including himself in the vow, it would increase the number (and thus the cost) of the sacrificial offerings required. The priests would certainly have no problem with this. More than just being purified and identifying himself with these men, the words of James continue, saying, “and spend upon them so that they will shave the head.”

This is just what the law required. First, the offerings were made, and then the head was shaved –

“Then the priest shall bring *them* before the LORD and offer his sin offering and his burnt offering; <sup>17</sup> and he shall offer the ram as a sacrifice of a peace offering to the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread; the priest shall also offer its grain offering and its drink offering. <sup>18</sup> Then the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put *it* on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering.” Numbers 6:16-18

James has suggested this for obvious reasons. If Paul were to join in the purification and also pay the expenses of the others, then it would be apparent that the charges against him were false and that he was, in fact, a law-abiding Jew.

It would be impossible to claim otherwise because he is accomplishing these things prior to any public accusations. The four men and the accompanying priest would be open witnesses to the fact. As this is so, James states it, saying, “And all will know that which they have been informed about you is nothing.”

This was not a minor point of the law that people might do out of cultural identification. Nor was it something so obviously required that even a non-observant Jew would still be sure to follow, such as not eating pork or keeping the Sabbath.

Rather, the Nazirite vow was a voluntary imposition upon oneself. It would be unthinkable that someone would lay this burden upon himself unless he truly respected the law and saw the benefit in assuming this burden. Therefore, James continues, “but you yourself walk also, keeping the law.”

The idea of walking is the conduct of one’s life. For example, one can walk contrary to the law, or one can walk in accord with the law. Therefore, to participate in the vows and sacrifices of these men was a way of ensuring people knew Paul was walking in step with Moses.

Of this verse, James Kypke (quoted by Meyer) says, “It was a received thing among the Jews, and was reckoned an act of eminent piety, for a rich man to undertake to bear, on behalf of poor Nazarites, the expense of those sacrifices which they had to offer when they shaved their heads at the expiration of their vow.”

Further, Vincent's Word Studies says, "'For a week, then, St. Paul, if he accepted the advice of James and the presbyters, would have to live with four paupers in the chamber of the temple which was set apart for this purpose; and then to pay for sixteen sacrificial animals and the accompanying meat-offerings' (Farrar, 'Life and Work of Paul'). He must also stand among the Nazarites during the offering of the sacrifices, and look on while their heads were shaved, and while they took their hair to burn it under the caldron of the peace-offerings, 'and while the priest took four sodden shoulders of rams, and four unleavened cakes out of the four baskets, and four unleavened wafers anointed with oils and put them on the hands of the Nazarites, and waved them for a wave-offering before the Lord'" (Farrar).

Life application: Walking, as noted above, indicates the way and manner of one's life. If you believe you must walk according to Moses in order to be pleasing to God, then you are walking contrary to the gospel of Jesus, which says that Christ died for your sins.

Sin is imputed through infractions of the law. Christ never sinned under the law. Further, He gave His life up as the Substitute for our sins. To attempt to merit God's favor by law observance means you are attempting to do so apart from Christ's already accomplished work. As such, you have set yourself against Christ as if you are racing. Be advised that Christ has already won this race. Your attempts at meriting righteousness apart from Him means that you will be disqualified.

Rather, learn what it means to walk in Christ. From the book of Ephesians, Paul gives numerous thoughts on how we are to walk properly –

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, <sup>2</sup> with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:1-3

"This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as [f]the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind." Ephesians 4:17

"Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." Ephesians 5:1, 2

“For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), <sup>10</sup> finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.” Ephesians 5:8-10

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, <sup>16</sup> redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” Ephesians 5:15, 16

These and many other charges are provided by Paul in his epistles. Never does he instruct his reader to be a law observer. Instead of self, walk in Christ and honor Him because of what He has done.

*Lord God, may our walk in this life be pleasing to You by following in the footsteps of Jesus, who has accomplished all things necessary to reconcile us to You. Our walk is one of thankfulness and holiness in Christ. May we walk faithfully all our days, honoring Jesus and glorifying You through Him. Amen.*

**“But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written *and* decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.”** Acts 21:25

Paul was just told that he should consider going with four men who were completing their vows and to participate in their purification rites according to the law, also paying their expenses. That was intended to show all who saw that the things they heard about him were untrue and that he also walked in an orderly manner and kept the law.

With that remembered, James once again upholds the edict of the Jerusalem council. By doing so, he is determined that the Gentiles are to be considered acceptable to the Jews in the church regardless of their nature. Therefore, he begins with, “But concerning the Gentiles who believe.”

James has set a line between the Jews and Gentiles. The Jews are doing their thing, but what they were doing was not to be imposed on the Gentiles. The thing the Jews were doing is what he just said, they “kept the law.” On the other hand, he says, “we have written *and* decided.”

This refers to the formal edict published by the Jerusalem Council based upon the judgment rendered there. That explicitly said “that they should observe no such thing, except...”

In other words, they were not bound to any restriction, law, precept, custom, or tradition of the Jewish nation, nor to the Law of Moses. They were given complete freedom to live out their lives in the manner of their culture, laws, customs, traditions, diets, holidays, etc. All of this was to be without any question of impropriety in the minds of the Jewish believers.

However, the word “except” is given to introduce four points agreed on by the council that the Gentiles should avoid. And even those four things were not given as laws, but as hoped-for recommendations as evidenced by the words of their letter which said, “If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well” (Acts 15:29).

James next repeats the four recommended prohibitions, beginning with “that they should keep themselves from *things* offered to idols.” The word “should” is not in the original, even if it is implied. It more literally says, “to watch themselves from that sacrificed to idols” (SLT).

In Acts 15, it was clear that this doesn’t merely mean practicing idolatry, but abstaining from anything that is connected to the service of idols, such as partaking in sacrifices and offerings, etc. James does not go into the depth of the Law of Moses concerning this. Rather, it is a general statement set forth as a guideline for right living among believers. His words distance the decision of the council from the weight of the law in his words.

He next says, “from blood.” The words form a general statement concerning a matter that is carefully detailed in the law. It is stated many times and in exacting ways concerning what was to be done with the blood. James’ decision completely separates the matter from the Law of Moses. But its main intent was surely to have the people consider why they were drinking blood in the first place. Several reasons were surely behind the decision.

One is that drinking blood was, and even today in some cultures is, intended to assimilate the power of the one whose blood was being drunk into the person drinking. Another reason is related to idolatry, where the blood of an animal that was sacrificed was consumed by the offeror as a way of fellowship with their god or gods.

Also, the shedding of blood has almost universally been considered a means of atoning for sin. This is seen in cultures around the world. But Christ’s blood is the only effectual sacrifice for the atonement of sin. This then is an object lesson concerning the nature of Christ’s sacrifice as much as anything else.

James next says, “from things strangled.” The Greek simply reads “and strangled.” The Greek word is *pniktos*, and this is its last use in Scripture. It signifies something killed without letting the blood out. Vincent’s Word Studies extends the thought to animals killed in snares. This is an inference, but it is probably the case.

The laws within the Law of Moses are detailed and explicit on how to treat the blood of animals sacrificed or simply slaughtered for meat. James, once again, gives a general statement concerning the matter, completely distancing the decision from the Law of Moses. With that, he finishes the thought with, “and from sexual immorality.”

The word in Greek is *porneia*. It signifies “*selling off* (surrendering) of sexual purity, *promiscuity* of any (every) type” (HELPS Word Studies). Quite often, it is associated with idolatry. James gives this general word, never mentioning the very strict laws associated with such things as set forth in the law of Moses. As such, it was another clear indication that the Law of Moses had no bearing on the decision.

In Acts 15, James said, “to abstain from things polluted by idols, *from* sexual immorality, *from* things strangled, and *from* blood.”

In Acts 21, he says, “except that they should keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.”

His words, though being in a different order, are essentially the same. These were the only restrictions placed upon the Gentiles, and they are clearly only recommended prohibitions.

Life application: The words of James, repeated from Acts 15, are not words of law. If they were, then the Gentiles would be under their own set law, and grace would be excluded. But Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, has clearly indicated this is not the case in his epistles. These are recommendations given for a set purpose, which is to not cause conflict between the Jews that believe and the believing Gentiles they would encounter.

The Jews eventually stopped observing the Law of Moses as well, it being impossible to observe without a standing temple. Even if believing Jews continue to observe various aspects of the law as cultural customs, they are not under the Law of Moses any longer. That is made explicit in the book of Hebrews.

It was during the time that the temple was standing, a time when observing the law was culturally mandatory, that believing Jews continued to observe Moses. Paul includes himself when he confirms this in Romans –

“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. <sup>15</sup>What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!” Romans 6:14, 15

The law is not grace. But believers are under grace, not law. Therefore, even if Paul observed Moses for set purposes that have been seen in Acts and in his epistles, he also did not observe Moses for set purposes as well. He did these things to win people to Christ. Do not let anyone steal you from the proper path. Your salvation is not dependent on what you do or do not do. It is dependent on your faith in what Christ has done, nothing else.

*Glorious Lord God, today we rejoice in You and in Your goodness toward us through the giving of Your Son for our sins. He has freed us from the bonds of the law and set us on a path of grace. May we be all the more willing to please You in our walk of faith and holiness because of this wonderful blessing that rests upon us! Amen.*

**Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them. Acts 21:26**

The Greek is more literally translated as, “Then Paul, having taken the men on the following day – having been purified with them – entered into the temple, declaring the fulfillment of the days of the purification, until which was offered the offering for each one of them” (CG).

In the previous verse, James repeated the requirements expected of Gentiles concerning their walk before the Lord. Now, in contrast to that, the hoped-for completion of the rites of the Nazirite previously discussed for the four men who had taken such a vow is noted. Paul included himself in these rites, thus identifying with them. That is noted, beginning with, “Then Paul, having taken the men on the following day.”

The word “them” is referring to the four men described by James in verse 23. Paul took the advice of James and the other elders and took these men on the very next day, “having been purified with them.”



Fully complying with James' advice, he took the men and went through the mandatory rites of purification with them. This was in accordance with the law, and the period would be seven days. When those days were met, an offering was to be made for each individual. That is stated in the next words, saying he "entered into the temple, declaring the fulfillment of the days of the purification."

Of this, Charles Ellicott says, "The process lasted, as the next verse shows, for seven days, which were probably reckoned from the completion of the thirty days, or other term, of the vow itself. St. Paul, having made himself the representative of the Nazarite company, had to give, in their name, the formal notice to the priests, who were to be ready for the sacrifices when the seven days had expired. Seven days was, it will be noted, the ordinary period for the more solemn purifications (Exodus 29:37; Leviticus 12:2; Leviticus 13:6; Numbers 12:14; Numbers 19:14, et al.)."

Ellicott may be correct. There is nothing in the rites of the Nazirite to specify a seven-day period being required. However, if Paul was to be the representative for these men, a seven-day period might have been expected for purification purposes. No matter what, this was obviously a custom expected by the priests. Therefore, it next says, "until which was offered the offering for each one of them."

The words "until which" could have various meanings. The Pulpit commentary says –

"Meyer makes 'until' depend upon 'the fulfillment of the days,' so as to define that fulfillment as not taking place till the offering was offered. Wieseler makes 'until' depend upon 'he entered into the temple,' with the idea supplied, 'and remained there,' or 'came there daily;' supposing that it was the custom for Nazarites to finish up their time of separation by passing the last seven days, or at least being present daily, in 'the court of the women, where was the apartment appropriated to the Nazarites.'"

What seems logical based on the previous words, "having taken the men on the following day," is that the rest of the days are future, not past. If it was past, it seems likely that Luke's words would have been more precise concerning those seven days. Therefore, in these words, it is probably that Paul is declaring that the rites of purification had been administered, he was representing the four men, and after the necessary interval, he would make the offering for them.

Life application: The book of Hebrews says –

“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. <sup>2</sup> For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. <sup>3</sup> But in those *sacrifices there is* a reminder of sins every year. <sup>4</sup> For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.” Hebrews 10:1-4

The point of those words is that the rites and rituals of the temple were only outward, fleshly ordinances, a term used in Hebrews 9:10. They actually didn't cleanse anything but were external rites that could never change the true nature of a person, making him permanently acceptable to God.

However, Christ, because of His complete cleansing of those who come to Him, makes us wholly and eternally acceptable to God. This is reflected in the words –

*“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,’ <sup>17</sup> then He adds, ‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.’ <sup>18</sup> Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.”*

-Hebrews 10:16-18

In saying, “*there is* no longer an offering for sin,” it means that Christ's work is a one-time and for all-time cleansing. No other offering for sin is acceptable, nor is it needed. As this is so, then why would anyone want to go back to the external, temporary, and futile rites and rituals of the Mosaic Covenant?

Jesus Christ purifies those who come to Him once and forever! Rejoice in that and be confident in your salvation and eternal cleansing. Take time today to read Hebrews 10:1-25. Think about what is being said there. Hold fast to faith in Christ as your hope. It is the sweet spot in what God offers to the people of the world.

*Heavenly Father, it is beyond imagination to think about what You have done through the giving of Jesus. You have brought us back to Yourself, completely and perfectly, through His sacrificial offering. We rejoice in You and thank You. Praises be to You forever and ever! Amen.*

**Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, Acts 21:27**

The previous verse saw Paul being purified according to the temple rites and announcing the expiration of the days of purification. Continuing the narrative, it next says, “Now when the seven days were almost ended.”

This makes it certain that the seven-day duration of the previous verse began with Paul’s purification and that the offering would be made at the end of that period. From verse 24:11, in relation to the timeline of events, it appears that the details of this occurred about the fifth day. There, it says, “because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship.” It is right about this time, as these seven days were almost complete, that it then notes, “the Jews from Asia.”

At that time, Jews from Asia, meaning Jews who had been in the same locations that Paul had evangelized – and who had probably stirred things up against him previously – saw him in the temple. As it is the time of a pilgrim feast, it was a time when many Jews came to Jerusalem to meet old friends, share in cultural fellowship, and – above all – worship the Lord as instructed in the law. Of these Asian Jews in relation to Paul, it next says, “seeing him in the temple.”

Paul was still in the time of purification. Therefore, it was natural that he would be in the temple. It is because of this, and their unwillingness to determine the facts, that they will accost him. It is ironic that the very place where he was under rites of purification was to be the place which they accused him of defiling.

Instead of perceiving the truth of the matter, they simply relied on their memories of his past actions in Asia and began the attack. As it next says, they “stirred up the whole crowd.”

The verb indicates pouring things together so that they are mixed. Hence, they were confusing the situation in the minds of the people. It is a term found among medical writings of the time and which Luke would have probably used often in his own work. One can think of a doctor pouring various liquids together to form a particular medicine.

As the verb is imperfect, it means that they began to stir up the crowd, and they continued to stir it up, getting the multitudes into a mass hysteria over Paul. Because of

the crowd and the confusion that was brought upon them, it next says the crowd “laid hands on him.”

The meaning is that they were ready to commit physical harm against him at any moment. Once again, Paul has found himself in a dangerous situation from the agitations of his own people. It was, as he says in 2 Corinthians 11:26, “*in perils of my own countrymen.*” The message of the gospel was rejected by the nation. But hatred for that message came into its strongest focus because it is a message available to the Gentiles.

The idea of Jesus’ incarnation and sacrificial death for the sins of Israel could only mean that Israel was a nation of sinners. But more, it meant that the Law of Moses was incapable of correcting this situation. This notion was unconscionable to them. But more, that the same sacrifice of Jesus extended to Gentiles, who were not even a part of what God had been doing (or so they thought), was inexcusable to them. Paul was the herald of this message, and they wanted him eradicated because of it.

Life application: At the outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Gaza in October 2023, a Jewish “rabbi,” Chaim Richman, was being interviewed and said to the interviewer, “You guys are worshiping one Jew, that’s a mistake. You should be worshiping every single one of us because we all die for your sins every single day. And that’s exactly what’s going on here. We’re all God’s firstborn and we’re dying for your sins right now.”

This is the attitude of the Jewish people that attacked Paul, and it has permeated their society to this day. They cannot accept that it is they who need forgiveness of sin, not only individually but as a nation.

Until one comes to Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, there is a mental disconnect between one’s state as a sinner and the infinite holiness of God. This is why people grade themselves on a bell curve when asked why they should be allowed to go to heaven. A common answer is, “Well, I’m not as bad as...” or “Well, I’m a good guy.”

Such evaluations make oneself the acceptable standard of goodness, a standard that sets the bar for God’s decision. This is what Chaim Richman has done in relation to Israel. He has openly avowed that Israel is the standard of God’s holiness, that they alone have met it, and they are, therefore, to be worshiped as a people. All others are to be subject to them, not because of who God is in relation to them, but who they are in relation to God.

Rather, there can be only one standard of holiness: God alone. The incarnation of Jesus Christ means that Jesus is God come in human form. He, therefore, is the standard – the bar – by which all men will be judged. One will stand in relation to Him and be condemned or saved, and the only way to be saved is by faith that He is the offering for the sin of man.

This is the message of the Bible. We must come to God through Jesus, and when we do so, God's infinite perfection – His righteousness, holiness, etc. – is imputed to us. Without this, we are condemned already. Let us hail God, who has brought us back to Himself through Jesus!

*Glorious God Almighty! Praises to You forever and ever because of what You have done. You are worthy of all our honor and praise simply because You are our Creator. How much more should we glorify You because You are our Redeemer! Thank You for Jesus Christ, who has made this possible. Praises to You, O God. Amen.*

**crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” Acts 21:28**

A more literal rendering would be, “crying out, ‘Men, Israelites, help!’ This is the man, teaching all everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place. And also, Greeks he brought into the temple and defiled this holy place” (CG).

In the last verse, Jews from Asia, seeing Paul in the temple, stirred up the crowds and laid hands on him. With that, they were also “crying out, ‘Men, Israelites, help!’”

Their goal was to solidify their position by appealing to the crowd as fellow Israelites. The implication is that even if Paul were a Jew, he didn't measure up as a citizen of the nation. This is because of their coming words. He was, to them, essentially, a traitor. They were Israel, but this person was a friend of Gentiles. That is seen in their next words, “This is the man, teaching all everywhere against the people.”

The words “This is the man” imply that they had already informed people about him and maybe even warned them to keep an eye out for him if he came. They had failed to quiet him in their own land, and now they thought to do so while on pilgrimage in Jerusalem, where the crowds would be easier to manipulate from a sense of national and religious pride.

And this is exactly how they have come against him, making accusations that he was both unpatriotic and apostate. But more, they next appeal to the main source of their national identity, saying, “and the law.”

They were all of Israel, but it was the law that set them apart as the people of the Lord. Moses was their great lawgiver, and their national leadership was based upon that, as is testified to in both testaments of Scripture. For example, Jesus said –

“Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying: ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. <sup>3</sup> Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.’” Matthew 23:1-3

Because of Moses, the people were under those who administered the Law of Moses. This was understood just as the US Constitution is what guides and governs the law of the United States. The law was the basis for Israel’s religious, political, and cultural life. Along with their words concerning the law, they next bring in the edifice that is intimately tied to the religious administration of that law, saying, “and this place.”

It is referring to the temple itself. They accused him, incorrectly, of having defiled the temple. The word for “defiled” is *koinoó*. It literally means “to make common.” As the temple was considered holy, they claim his actions had defiled it by making it common. In such an instance, there would be a need to ritually cleanse the temple.

They were acting as if Paul were a contaminant that needed to be eradicated so that he would not affect the people, violate the law, or cause defilement to the temple. But more, they continue with untrue words, saying, “And also, Greeks he brought into the temple and defiled this holy place.”

The meaning of this will be explained in the coming verse. For now, Vincent's Word Studies provides the following on this –

“The Jews evidently meant to create the impression that Paul had introduced Gentiles into the inner court, which was restricted to the Jews. The temple proper was on the highest of a series of terraces which rose from the outer court, or Court of the Gentiles. In this outer court any stranger might worship. Between this and the terraces was a balustrade of stone, with columns at intervals, on which Greek and Latin inscriptions warned all Gentiles against advancing farther on pain of death. Beyond this balustrade rose a flight of fourteen steps to the first platform, on which was the Court of the

Women, surrounded by a wall. In this court were the treasury, and various chambers, in one of which the Nazarites performed their vows. It was here that the Asiatic Jews discovered Paul.”

Life application: It must be remembered that the reason these people were riled up against Paul was ultimately because of one word: Gentile. There were innumerable Jews who didn't adhere to Moses, they practiced sorcery, lied, cheated, made idols, etc., thus failing to adhere to the Law of Moses. These are seen in both testaments of Scripture.

Of such infractions, there was normally little or no response to their conduct. But once Paul, commissioned by Jesus as an apostle to the Gentiles, came on the scene, things never went well for him. And the One he proclaimed became completely disdained in their eyes. How could Jesus be the Messiah when He accepted Gentiles?

But this is exactly what Isaiah proclaimed –

“Indeed He says,  
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,  
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,  
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’” Isaiah 49:6

To this day in Israel, Jews can become Muslims, Buddhists, or pretty much any other religion they choose. They can even be atheists. And yet, they are accepted as Jews. But when a Jew converts and accepts Jesus as his Messiah, he is ostracized by much of the society.

Take time today to pray for those Jews who are willing to openly proclaim the Name above all names, Jesus. And pray that their testimony to their own people will be effective in changing hearts and minds. Israel needs Jesus. Until they call out to Him, bad times will continue to plague them.

*Heavenly Father, there is a great deal of animus and even hatred towards You among the people of Israel. This is multiplied when the name Jesus is proclaimed. Help us to be willing to witness to this stubborn and rebellious group so that hearts and minds will be softened and converted. May it be so to Your glory. Amen.*

**(For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) Acts 21:29**

In the previous verse, the Jews from Asia had leveled various charges against Paul. The last of those charges was, in their words, that “he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” As a note of explanation from Luke, the next words are provided, saying, “For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city.”

This would be the same Trophimus noted in Acts 20:4 and who will be referred to in 2 Timothy 4:20. Though he has not been mentioned since Acts 20:4, he had been a member of the missionary party continuously referred to since then. He and any other Gentiles, including Luke, had clearly been welcomed into the houses of the Jews mentioned in Acts 21:4, 21:7, and 21:8.

Because of his many interactions with Paul and the others, Trophimus would have been at least visually known to these Asian Jews, being from Ephesus himself. Having seen him together with Paul, they assumed that he was Paul’s sidekick, to be taken everywhere he went, including the temple. That is seen in the words, “whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.”

This seems to confirm the idea mentioned in verse 28 concerning them already having been speaking against Paul to others in the city. They knew he was there, and they were determined to get him in one way or another. They were using the presence of Trophimus as a pretext to bring charges against Paul.

It never says they saw him bring Trophimus into the temple, only that they supposed he brought him into it. To make such a serious charge against him without actual proof meant that they did not care about the truth at all.

Life application: Israel was set apart as the people of the Lord. They were to refrain from becoming defiled and thus bringing defilement into the Lord’s presence, among whom they dwelt. However, throughout the Old Testament, they are continuously noted as defiling themselves.

The only thing that actually deemed them as holy was the Lord Himself. In Isaiah 65, speaking first of the Gentiles who sought the Lord, and who are then contrasted to the people of Israel, Isaiah calls out the word of the Lord –



“I was sought by *those who did not ask for Me*;  
I was found by *those who did not seek Me*.  
I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’  
To a nation *that* was not called by My name.  
<sup>2</sup>I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people,  
Who walk in a way *that is* not good,  
According to their own thoughts;  
<sup>3</sup>A people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face;  
Who sacrifice in gardens,  
And burn incense on altars of brick;  
<sup>4</sup>Who sit among the graves,  
And spend the night in the tombs;  
Who eat swine’s flesh,  
And the broth of abominable things is *in* their vessels;  
<sup>5</sup>Who say, ‘Keep to yourself,  
Do not come near me,  
For I am holier than you!’  
These *are* smoke in My nostrils,  
A fire that burns all the day.” Isaiah 65:1-5

Paul cites a portion of these words of in Romans 10, contrasting the Gentiles who had received Christ to the people of Israel who had rejected Him –

“But Isaiah is very bold and says:  
‘I was found by those who did not seek Me;  
I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.’  
<sup>21</sup> But to Israel he says:  
‘All day long I have stretched out My hands  
To a disobedient and contrary people.’” Romans 10:20, 21

Israel, not believing Gentiles, stands as defiled before the Lord. Why? The reason is that none of us are holy except because of the Lord who purifies us. Israel’s holiness was positional, not actual. They, however, did not live out their positional state by backing it up with holy actions. When Christ came, He offered holiness to those who would, by faith, trust in Him.

Israel as a nation failed to do this. On the other hand, the Gentiles readily accepted the message, they were granted God’s righteousness, and they are deemed holy and set apart to Him. This continues to this day. Those, whether Jews or Gentiles, who come to

God through Jesus are reckoned as holy. Israel, as a nation, remains in a state of defilement. Be sure to grasp this. Until they, as a nation, call out to Jesus, they remain – as Paul says in Romans 9:26 – not His people.

Israel is God’s people in the sense that there is a future for them under the Messiah. But they are not at this time His people as regards being set apart as holy. It is Jesus who makes the distinction. No Jew who has rejected Jesus is saved, nor is he holy. This is important to remember so that we do not fall into error concerning the state of Israel at this time.

*Lord God, help us to clearly understand what You are doing in the stream of redemptive history at this time. You are calling forth a people unto Yourself out of all nations of the earth through simple faith in Your offering of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel and the Christ of the nations. May we proclaim this message loudly and clearly so that none are deceived about their relationship with You. All people need Jesus. Help us to get this word out! Amen.*

**And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. Acts 21:30**

More literally, the verse reads, “And the whole city was moved. And there was a rallying of the people. And, having seized Paul, they dragged him outside the temple, and immediately the doors were shut” (CG).

In the previous verse, it mentioned that the people erroneously believed Trophimus the Ephesian was brought into the temple by Paul. Because of this, it next says, “And the whole city was moved.”

When the accusatory words of these Jews, as stated in verse 28, were heard, it would have been greeted with the same horror as the defilement of any closely held religious or national icon among any given people. The entire city would have gone into an uproar, just as it did when accusations were leveled against Paul while in Ephesus at the Temple of Artemis.

One can see the entire throng beginning to move in unison as if rushing at a rock concert or political gathering, hurrying to participate in the surrounding events. This then led naturally to the next event, where Luke records, “And there was a rallying of the people.”

Here is a word found only here in Scripture, *sundromé*. It is a noun signifying “a rushing together,” or literally “a concourse.” Saying “a rallying” gets the intent across because the accompanying words indicate that it was a riotous rallying.

As the crowd was moved, it was impelled toward the source of the events. All rallied to where the finger of the accusing Jews was pointed, meaning Paul. He is the focus of the rallying that has occurred. The violent actions of that are seen as the words continue, saying, “And, having seized Paul, they dragged him outside the temple.”

With a bloodthirsty lust, they grabbed Paul and dragged him out of the temple, supposing it was his actions that had brought defilement to their holy site. It is obvious that they intended to kill him. However, they didn't want to do so in the temple and further defile it with his blood.

Instead, they would do it outside. Further, to make sure that there could not be any further defilement, it next says, “and immediately the doors were shut.”

This would have been a hurried act by the priests to keep anyone else from coming in. These doors would have been the gates between the holy place and the Court of the Gentiles. Access to the temple was thus cut off from any but the priests. But no matter what would happen to Paul, because of the actions of the riotous mob, the good news of Revelation 21 would await him if this moment were to be his last –

“But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup> The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light. <sup>24</sup> And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. <sup>25</sup> Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). <sup>26</sup> And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. <sup>27</sup> But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”

-Revelation 21:22-27

Life application: In the world today, there are innumerable edifices that claim to be the focus of religious life for adherents of whatever religion is espoused. Judaism has synagogues, Islam has mosques, and Hinduism has temples. The Roman Catholic Church has churches spread out around the world, but the main focus of their religious life is found at the Vatican. Someday, Israel will again have a temple that will be considered the ultimate symbol of their faith.

These are locations where people meet and attend to their religious affairs. But despite being physical locations, this is shadow over substance. The true substance of rightly directed worship of God is not found in a building but in a Person. As Revelation 21:22 says, “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”

Jesus implied this in His words to the woman at the well in John 4 –

“Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. <sup>24</sup> God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:21-24

True and proper worship of God can occur anywhere and at any time. It is found in honoring God through the provision He has given to allow us to once again fellowship with Him, meaning the Person of Jesus Christ. Only Jesus can atone for our sin, which separates us from God.

In this act of atonement, our prayers can be heard, our praises can be accepted, and our fellowship is restored. Don’t worry about a building or a location when you need to pour your heart out to God. Instead, cry out to Him through Jesus. In this, your words will be heard.

*Lord God Almighty, how thankful we are for Jesus, who has made our calls to You possible. When we cry in anguish through Him, You will receive them and send comfort. When our hearts are overfilled with joy, and we extol You through Him, You will hear and be pleased. And when we have a need, You will attend to it according to Your wisdom because of Jesus. Yes, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Acts 21:31**

In the previous verse, the city was disturbed, and the people ran together, seizing Paul, and dragging him out of the temple. With that, it next says, “Now as they were seeking to kill him.”

As is typical with crowds that have been stirred up, people will often act in a manner that they would not act in when alone. In this case, they have been riled up to the point that they are ready to kill Paul.

As will be seen, though, once Paul has a chance to defend himself, they will quiet down and listen to him. This means that at this time they actually have no idea why they are doing what they are doing. They are bent on killing him based on whatever rumor met their ears, whether true or not. While this was going on, “news came to the commander of the garrison.”

The word translated as garrison is better translated as a cohort or band. A garrison is the place where men are gathered. This man’s position refers to the gathering of the men rather than the place of their gathering. He is the commander of a unit of men stationed in Jerusalem.

The Greek designation of the commander is a *chiliarch*, meaning the captain of one thousand men. Such a cohort is one-sixth of a legion, which equates to six thousand men. This cohort was stationed in the castle Antonia which was on the north side of the temple. It is referred to in Matthew 27:65, 66; John 18:12; and Acts 5:26.

As for the word translated as news, it is the Greek word *phasis*. It is found only here in the New Testament. It speaks of the disclosure of a secret crime. In other words, an unlawful act was occurring because the Jews had no right to put anyone to death, especially in a mob scene.

However, by beating him to death in a mob, they could avoid having accusations against any individual for murder. It was a planned way of executing him that would leave a body but no available suspects. However, during the time of a feast, the Romans would be on a higher state of alert because of the multitudes of people flocking to Jerusalem.

As for the news he received, it was “that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.” Chaos had broken out because of the situation. In such a case, it could only get worse without immediate crowd control. Otherwise, people would be hurt, factions within the crowd would arise, and more chaos and destruction would occur. This is the exact reason why so many men were stationed in Jerusalem.

The city was a hotbed of activity. The religious, cultural, and political views of the Jews were set against any authority being established over them. Unless very strict controls were placed over the people, especially during the annual pilgrim feasts, things could

get out of hand quickly. From there, a general uprising could easily spread throughout the land.

Life application: The best thing to do when in a crowded situation is to mind your own business. If people start getting out of hand, finding a quick avenue of escape is then the preferred option. Once the camera comes out and people start recording, it means things are getting out of hand. Instead of watching, which can be done on the evening news or YouTube later, ducking out and getting away from the mob is prudent.

This is even more important today, where governments are actively looking for reasons to arrest people of conservative, Christian values. There is a “guilt by association” attitude for anyone who is in such an area, even if they are just watching. This is perfectly evident when murderous thugs on the left are actually apprehended for severe crimes but are then released without charges within a few hours.

The world is devolving into wickedness, and it is the wicked who will be given the free pass when such times arise. Be on your guard and get away from crowds that are getting agitated. That is your best option in today’s world.

*Lord God, give us wisdom and discernment in how to conduct our affairs when we are gathered in large settings. Help us to pay attention to what is going on around us and to be ready to act quickly if things get out of control. Above all, Lord, keep us from getting ourselves into situations where we might bring reproach on the name of Jesus. May it be so, O Lord. Amen.*

**He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Acts 21:32**

The words are more literally rendered, “Who, immediately, having taken soldiers and centurions, ran down upon them. And having seen the commander and the soldiers, stopped beating Paul” (CG).

In the previous verse, it noted the commander of the cohort heard that all of Jerusalem was in an uproar. Now, referring to this commander, it says, “Who, immediately.”

This man was responsible for keeping peace and security within his area of jurisdiction. If he failed to act with absolute alacrity, things could get out of hand within moments. If it did, there would be investigations and a possibility of him being relieved of his rank

and/or position. Therefore, without delay, he arose from whatever he was doing, “having taken soldiers and centurions.”

Without even bothering to go see what was occurring, the first thing he did was to instinctively get a number of men assigned under him. By the time he had gone to see the disturbance and then returned, it might be too late. Therefore, he grabbed an overwhelming force and headed out.

Centurions were leaders over one hundred men. Therefore, this gives the sense that many soldiers were immediately dispatched. If there was more than one centurion, as the plural implies, then there were at least two hundred soldiers, maybe more.

They were prepared for whatever could happen by bringing a large show of force. And it worked. It next says they “ran down upon them.”

The sense is lost with the NKJV, which says, “ran down to them.” First, Luke uses a word found only here, *katatrechó*. The word gives the sense of running down from a higher point to a lower point. As they were in the tower, they descended.

Second, the word *epi*, or upon, is used. It was as if the soldiers were poured from on high, descending upon the masses below, flooding them. With that, Luke next says, “And having seen the commander and the soldiers.”

Those who were the perpetrators of the confrontation realized that they were being flooded with soldiers who were well-ranked and set for battle. There was obviously only one thing they could do at this point. And so, they “stopped beating Paul.”

As soon as the folks pounding on Paul saw the overwhelming flood of soldiers descending upon them, they restrained their fists lest they be taken in for rioting and assault. Of this, Matthew Poole marvelously notes, “The fear of man caused them to forbear what the fear of God could not.”

With that, the commander would have to evaluate the situation and take the path that would lead the most quickly to restoration of peace.

Life application: It has previously been argued during this Acts commentary that checking a variety of translations is profitable for finding out the true sense of what is being conveyed. In this verse, and speaking of the commander, it says, “Who, immediately, having taken soldiers and centurions.”

Here, the word *exautés* is used. It is derived from *ek*, from or out of, and *autos*, a word used for a third-person pronoun such as he, she, it, etc. In the case of *exautés*, the explanation of the second word is given by James Strong, saying it is “the genitive case singular feminine of *autos* (*hora* being understood).” The word *hora* that Strong’s says is implied means a time period, such as an hour.

Why does this matter? It is because Smith’s Literal Translation uniquely says, “Who having taken out of it the soldiers and centurions.” In other words, instead of “immediately,” he says, “out of it.” The obvious question is, “Out of what?” The answer is determined from the previous verse, “Out of the cohort.”

Why would Smith’s translation say this? It is because the word translated as cohort is genitive, feminine, singular. This is exactly what the form of *autos* is in the word *exautés*. Hence, Smith’s determined that Luke’s reference is to the cohort and not to the amount of time in which the commander acted. Considering this, look at the two translations again –

“Who, immediately, having taken soldiers and centurions.” CG

“Who having taken out of it [the cohort] the soldiers and centurions.” SLT

Which is correct? They are both possible, and just because Smith’s is unique among translations, it does not mean he is wrong. As for the word *exautés*, it is used five other times in the New Testament. Each time it is used, it implies time. As such, the conservative view would be this is referring to time as well.

Hence, the CG translation followed this translation for consistency. However, this does not mean that this is what was on Luke’s mind. It would have been foolish for the commander to do anything but act with promptness. But there have been many fools in the world. Maybe he was just scared to go alone and called men out of the cohort.

As you can see, there is a chance that the translation may be one thing or another. Translating this verse one way or another will make absolutely no change in theology. But it demonstrates to us that we should not be so bullheaded as to demand that the Bible we are using is correct and all others are to be tossed in the fire. Rather, let us consider this wonderfully precious word, giving it our attention and careful consideration all our days.

*O God, You who have given us Your word, help us to be careful and meticulous in how we consider what You have given to us in the pages of Scripture. May we be studious*



*and lovingly consider each word that comes forth to us as we read. What a precious and beautiful gift of love this word is! Thank You for Your superior word. Amen.*

**Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. Acts 21:33**

More precisely, the Greek reads, “Then, having drawn near, the commander seized him and commanded to be bound with two chains, and inquired who he might be and what he had done” (CG).

In the previous verse, the commander took soldiers and centurions and ran down to the unruly mob beating Paul. When they saw these Romans coming, the mob stopped beating him. Now, the action continues, saying, “Then, having drawn near.”

With the power and authority of Rome, they came through the unruly mob and approached Paul. Once there, it says, “the commander seized him.”

It is a bold move showing the caliber of the man. This chiliarch, taking full command of the situation, simply came forward and personally seized Paul from their grasp. Being the commander of a thousand men, he could have delegated this to anyone below him. But one can see the air of authority in him through this action. He personally seized him “and commanded to be bound with two chains.”

These words are the fulfillment of the prophecy by Agabus in Acts 21:11 –

“When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.’””

As he prophesied, so it came to pass. However, the Jews only passively bound him through their actions. The Romans formally bound him. The two chains, if to be taken literally from the words of Agabus, were placed with one chain on his hands and the other on his feet.

Luke’s specificity in these details concerning “two chains” is probably to indicate this. Being bound in this way would imply that they thought he was a hardened criminal, and this appears to be the sense as indicated in the coming words of verse 38. For now, it next says, “and inquired who he might be and what he had done.”

It is an obvious thing to do, even if the responses he received may not be the truth of the matter, the commander had to begin somewhere. As will be seen, the confusion of the situation will not be determined until later.'

Life application: The boldness of the commander walking into the midst of the fray and seizing Paul reveals a person confident in his position and authority. One can even imagine the Jews around Paul dividing and stepping back as he approached. He is the one who wielded the power, and he was unconcerned about what anyone around him may do.

This is a confident act, but it could have ended badly for him. One in the crowd, or even Paul himself, may have had a knife and struck out at him. But he was confident enough that such an occurrence was unlikely. This man was not a believer in Christ, and yet he didn't fear the situation around him. He was a man with hope only in this life, but he was confident in his actions.

Unlike him, we have a hope that goes beyond this earthly life. Despite this, how willing are we to simply step forward and act? People are going to be separated from God for all eternity, and yet we act peevishly in our sharing of the gospel. We worry we might offend. We worry that we will look silly. We fret over not being able to properly convey what needs to be said.

One thing is for sure, if we don't try, we won't convey anything at all. Let us be bold and confident that our words and actions can have an effect on those we meet. Go forward and speak! People need Jesus. Let us be bold in our desire to share the wonderful message of Jesus Christ.

*Heavenly Father, be with us and direct us according to Your wisdom. Help us as we go out into the world each day and boldly find others that we can talk to about what You have done through the giving of Your Son for us. May we not fail to speak! Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another.**

**So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. Acts 21:34**

In the previous verse, the commander came forward and seized Paul, asking what he had done. With that, it now says, "And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another."

Notice the similarity to what occurred in Ephesus –

“Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together.”

-Acts 19:32

The same disarray that was found among Gentiles was to be found among Jews as well. There was a disturbance, and few of the people knew why they were there. They simply were there to join in the melee and participate in a big event.

And more, those who did know were probably on the outskirts of the fray, egging on the useful idiots who really had no idea why they were there at all. This type of thing continues to this day. People in a mob are easily stirred into a frenzy. And more, they are easily swayed by a quietly spoken suggestion in the ear of one who is antsy to take out his life’s frustrations in such a setting.

The word translated as “cried” is used only by Luke in the New Testament. He uses it at the crucifixion in Luke 23:21 and three times in Acts. It is derived from two words signifying “upon” and “to give forth a sound.” Thayer’s Greek Lexicon notes that it signifies to call out, followed by direct discourse.

One can see the people hollering something out, looking for attention. That is then followed up with words that the speaker hopes will have an effect on the commander. But with probably dozens of people yelling at the same time, it would make determining the matter impossible. Because of this, Luke next records, “So when he could not ascertain the truth.”

If there were calls from various factions, all trying to defend their actions and to place the blame on Paul – but without actually knowing what he had done – the facts would be nearly impossible to determine. Because of this and “because of the tumult,” the commander would get nowhere. The obvious best course of action would be to get the truth of what occurred from the person who was being pummeled.

This could be obtained in various ways, but it was certain that Rome would ultimately get its answers. Therefore, “he commanded him to be taken into the barracks.”

Thayer’s Greek Lexicon notes that the word translated as barracks is actually one that signifies interpolation or insertion, such as “into a discourse of matters foreign to the subject in hand.”

In other words, the area is Jerusalem, a Jewish city in the land of Israel, and yet, there are foreign barracks tossed into the mix. This doesn't match the Jewishness of the general layout of the city. One can think of a US Air Base located in the greater Tokyo area. It is something foreign to the Japanese and city-like nature of the surroundings. Of this word, Vincent's Word Studies provides necessary detail –

“The main tower had a smaller tower at each corner, the one at the southeastern corner being the largest and overlooking the temple. In this tower were the quarters of the soldiers. The word is derived from the verb παρεμβάλλω [paremballo], to put in beside, used in military language of distributing auxiliaries among regular troops and, generally, of drawing up in battle-order. Hence the noun means, a body drawn up in battle-array, and passes thence into the meaning of an encampment, soldiers' quarters, barracks. In Hebrews 11:34, it occurs in the earlier sense of an army; and in Hebrews 13:11, Hebrews 13:13; Revelation 20:9, in the sense of an encampment. In grammatical phraseology it signifies a parenthesis, according to its original sense of insertion or interpolation.”

Life application: What happens in this account is no different than riots all around the world on any given day. People show up at events and quickly become followers of whoever seems to be in the know. They act out, trying to be a part of something big going on around them, maybe to gain status or notoriety from their conduct.

Unfortunately, that is not what will normally occur. Instead, the evil machinations of those who start the ruckus are usually obscured enough to keep them out of the picture while still controlling the events.

Today, with surveillance cameras everywhere, such cunning people can be identified. For example, during riots in Washington DC, a city with cameras everywhere, a review of the recordings will reveal people actually giving orders to others to act. At the same time, they remain out of the main focus of the rioting. Their care is not for immediate attention, but to have their greater purposes brought about.

When those who are directed to act are arrested or shot, it means nothing to those who instigated the matter. The damage is done, and the cause has been brought forth, permanently changing the course and structure of the society.

For this reason, it is important to not be caught in the middle of religious, cultural, or political gatherings without being fully aware of one's surroundings. Real harm is intended for people who start out with good intentions but who get caught up in events

beyond themselves. Evil agendas are well planned, carefully monitored, and will rarely reveal themselves, except in how they ultimately gain control from such situations.

*Lord God, we have lives to live, and we enjoy participating in the things that occur around us, joining in societal events. But we ask You to help us always to be cautious and circumspect in how we enter into gatherings, knowing that as Christians we can easily be targeted simply because we love Jesus. Help us to bring glory to You and to not be caught up in things that could diminish His great name in others' eyes. Amen.*

**When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob.** Acts 21:35

A literal rendering would be, “And when he came upon the stairs, it happened he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd” (CG).

In the previous verse, it noted that the commander of the soldiers couldn't determine what Paul had done, if anything, because of the yelling of the crowd. Therefore, he commanded that Paul be taken into the barracks where things could be sorted out. Now, the action continues, saying, “And when he came upon the stairs.”

This takes the reader back to verse 32. The Roman soldiers were said to have run down to the tumult, indicating from a higher area. Now, Paul was being conducted back to that place. As they arrived at the stairs to ascend to the barracks, it next says, “it happened he was carried by the soldiers.”

It doesn't yet say why this is the case. There would only be one of two reasonable explanations for it. The first would be that Paul was purposefully hindering their ascent, refusing to comply with being taken voluntarily. The second would be because of external pressures bearing down on them. The latter is the case. As it says, “because of the violence of the crowd.”

Luke's description takes us mentally right into the account. The soldiers literally picked him up by his legs and started carrying him up the stairs because the people were pressed in against them.

The more they were pressed, the more the crowd would reach in, trying to get Paul. With the soldiers busy caring for him, they were unable to fend off the people. Luke uses a word to indicate suddenness, *sumbainó* – literally, “it happened.”

According to Vincent's Word Studies, "The verb means, literally, to come together; hence, of a coincidence of events. It is designedly introduced here to express more vividly the fact of the peculiar emergency and the peril of Paul's situation."

What this means is that while they were on the flat portion of the temple mount, the guards could easily encircle Paul and have their hands ready at their weapons. However, as they arrived at the ascent, the cohort was unable to fully protect him and the raving crowds pressed in, taking advantage of the confined situation to tear at him.

Life application: Like so many things that occur in life, there are times that our guard is let down. For the Romans surrounding Paul, it was an unavoidable event that they could not fully encircle him due to the layout of the surroundings. At times, we may be exhausted, not paying attention, distracted, etc.

At such times, we may let our guard down unintentionally. It is at such times that others may take advantage of the situation and try to trip us up. Likewise, the devil wants nothing more than to have the people of the Lord ineffective in their lives. When we are busily engaged in matters of life, he will come to rob and steal our testimony.

Therefore, even when we are off guard, we need to be on guard. In other words, the old adage, "When you least expect it, expect it," applies to believers. We need to always have a subroutine running in the back of our minds to be cautious, wise, and discerning about the world around us.

To hone such skills means to purposefully think about one's surroundings at all times, until it becomes second nature. A bodyguard is taught to be alert at all times. He scans close by and off into the distance. His job is to protect. Ours is too. But our protection is to be directed to our maintaining a good testimony, no matter what challenges we face. Let us endeavor to do so, considering that we represent the Lord at all times.

*Glorious Lord God, You have given us salvation and a new direction in life. Please be with us and help us to always reflect a proper attitude that is honoring You. May our guard be up, and may our lives be alert and ready at all times to stop the attacks that suddenly arise against us. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!"**

Acts 21:36

In the previous verse, the violence of the mob necessitated that Paul be carried by the Roman cohort that had arrested him. To explain the matter further, Luke next says, “For the multitude of the people followed after.”

The angry mob, as so often happens, was unwilling to allow the soldiers to do their duties unhindered. Once Paul was arrested, one would think the people would be satisfied and leave him to the Romans to be dealt with. However, they were so worked up that they were determined to follow, attempting to get their hands on him. As they went, they were “crying out, ‘Away with him!’”

The word translated as “away” is *airo*. It means to lift up, take off, or remove. Our modern word *aero*, such as in an aerodrome, finds its root here. It is the same word, in the same angry voice, that was used in Luke 23:18 and John 19:15. For example, it says in Luke 23:18 –

“And they all cried out at once, saying, ‘Away with this *Man*, and release to us Barabbas.’”

The same word will be used in Acts 22:22, where its full intent and sense will be clearly given –

“And they listened to him until this word, and *then* they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a *fellow* from the earth, for he is not fit to live!’”

The intent for Jesus as He stood before Israel at Passover, and for Paul now in Acts, is that these crowds wanted them killed.

Life application: The same sentiment has been brought against faithful believers innumerable times over the past two thousand years. Today, it is a common event to see people demanding that Christians be executed for supposed crimes against Islam. Even when the person has done nothing wrong, false charges of blasphemy are conjured up by the rabid accusers.

This is becoming much more common in the West as well. Marxist groups are becoming more and more unfriendly to Christianity. Churches are targeted, politicians on the left cry out untrue accusations, and schools are filled with people who literally hate the idea of Christianity being proclaimed.

These things will never get better. The world is on a course against God, and it is the Bible that properly reveals who He is and how He has displayed Himself in human history. Because of this, the nations hate Israel as well. It isn't that Israel is right with God, but that God has covenanted with them as a nation. If Israel could be destroyed, then it would prove that the Bible was not truly the word of God.

It is understood from the Bible that Israel will not be right with God until they come to Jesus. Therefore, even Jews hate the complete message of Scripture as revealed in the New Testament. It is why so many Jewish people actively work against Christianity.

Any attack against you simply because you are a faithful Christian, or against your faith because it is biblically based, is an attack against the God who has saved you and who has revealed Himself in Scripture as having done so. Expect this, and do not be surprised as these things occur.

*Lord God Almighty, we know that it is in Your power to simply eradicate all the evil in the world today. We also know that You have not done so yet because You have a plan that is greater than our short existence. So, Lord, help us to be patient in our waiting upon You. Should trials come, give us the strength and wisdom to handle them appropriately. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I speak to you?" He replied, "Can you speak Greek?" Acts 21:37**

The NKJV is more of a paraphrase. Although clunky, the Greek reads, "And being about to be brought into the barracks, Paul says to the commander, 'If lawful to me to say something to you?' And he said, 'Do you know Greek?'"

In the previous verses, Paul was picked up by the Romans and started to be carried up the stairs while the crowd hemmed him in shouting, "Away with him." Now, that continues with, "And being about to be brought into the barracks."

This is still on the stairs, as will be seen in verse 40. He is probably at a much more elevated point by now and thus safely out of the grasp of the people. And yet, he was still not confined indoors.

Therefore, this was the most opportune time to speak to the crowd. As such, it next reads, "Paul says to the commander, 'If lawful to me to say something to you?'"



If you think about it, the question is a bit ironic. “Can I ask you something?” “I think you just did!” Despite this, Paul’s question is the first time there has been any communication between the two. The commander never bothered to ask Paul what was going on. It shows the abrupt and rigorous military nature of how the Romans dealt with such things. As for the response to the question, we next read, “And he said, ‘Do you know Greek?’”

The irony continues. If Paul spoke in Greek under such dire circumstances, it meant that this was his normal language. By speaking in Greek, the commander’s question makes their exchange almost comedic.

The substance of what has happened in these words is that Paul’s question was to ask for permission to formally address the commander. Despite the irony, it was right of him to ask if he could do so. The commander's response was simply a surprised rhetorical question because he expected Paul to only speak Aramaic, or maybe Hebrew at best. Only more learned people or a Hellenistic Jew would immediately break out in fluent Greek. A commoner would go to his default language to speak.

With these questions now asked, Paul will have an opportunity to explain his situation and ask for freedom to address his accusers. These things will be seen in the next few verses.

Life application: In 1 Corinthians 14:18, Paul says, “I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all.” The meaning of these words is not that Paul was constantly flooded with supernatural gifts of speaking in many tongues. Rather, it meant that he was able to speak in numerous languages.

He certainly knew and spoke Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew. He would have spoken the dialect of his native home of Tarsus, it probably being its own unique tongue. Being a Roman citizen, it is likely he spoke Latin. In his travels, he would have certainly picked up numerous other variations of the languages he already knew.

Paul was grateful for this because it allowed him to communicate the gospel effectively to others in their native tongues. He knew that it was pointless to speak in other languages when nobody in the room could do so. Understanding this, the words concerning tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 make sense. He is not referring to unknown languages at all. The word translated as tongues simply means a known language or a nation distinguished by its speech.

The unfortunate continued rendering of the word as “tongues” in modern Bibles leaves the reader thinking there is more to what is being conveyed than there actually is. Don’t get duped into the nutty teachings of denominations that say you have to “speak in tongues” in order to prove you are Spirit-filled. If you can speak a language, you are speaking in a tongue. If you only know one language, that is fine. If you have accepted the gospel, you are a Spirit-sealed believer. Deal done.

*Heavenly Father, the most sensational message of all is that Jesus came to take away our sin through His perfect life, followed by His death upon the cross to atone for our wrongdoing. By faith in that, we are saved. We don’t need to add anything to that to prove our salvation. Thank You for the eternal security we possess because of what Jesus has done. Thank You for the simplicity of salvation, O God. Amen.*

**“Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?” Acts 21:38**

A more literal rendering would be, “Are you not, then, the Egyptian who before these days having upheaved and having led out into the wilderness the four thousand men, the Sicarii?” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul was about to be taken into the barracks by the Roman soldiers. At this time, he asked the commander for permission to speak. In response, the commander asked if Paul spoke Greek. It can be inferred that Paul either nodded or verbally responded affirmatively. With that, the confusion of the commander arose, asking, “Are you not, then, the Egyptian.”

The conjunction, translated as “then,” reflects an inference on the part of the commander. He must have heard one of the people in the crowd (see verse 21:34) and deduced that what he had heard must be the truth of the matter.

In other words, the claim was so outlandish that he assumed it must be true. “Hey, get him. He’s the Egyptian that you’ve been looking for!” Luke will continue describing this Egyptian in his coming words.

Some scholars, however, look at his words as confirming a suspicion that he had. They say that the commander means, “You art not, then, that Egyptian?” The claim is that because he spoke in Greek, the assumption that he was the Egyptian was wrong.

Two things would argue against this. The first is that he had to defend Paul, not fight against him. Secondly, Greek was well-known in Egypt at the time. The weight of the evidence is that he is now making the assumption that this is the Egyptian, and for some reason, he has fallen into disfavor with the Jews.

Thus, the probable explanation for the words is that someone shouted out this lie, and the commander accepted it in his mind. Luke explains who that Egyptian was, saying, “who before these days having upheaved and having led out into the wilderness the four thousand men.”

There was a rebellion of some sort that took place. The commander was fully aware of it and was probably even told that his unit should be on the lookout for them. The word translated as “upheaved” has only been previously seen in Acts 17:6. It signifies to turn upside down, upset, unsettle, etc.

HELPS Word Studies says, “properly, turn something over (up to down), i.e., to *upset* (*up-set*), raising *one* part up *at the expense of another* which results in dislocation (confusion).” Thus, using “upheaved” sufficiently translated the idea. As for this crowd of four thousand, the commander next identifies them as “the Sicarii.”

It is a word found only here in Scripture, *sikarios*. Thayer’s explains the word, saying, “an assassin, i. e. one who carries a dagger or short sword (Latinsica (cf. Josephus, as below)) under his clothing, that he may kill secretly and treacherously anyone he wishes to (a cut-throat).” It specifically defines a Jewish fanatical group outlawed by the Roman authorities.

Concerning such a band of men, Cambridge notes –

“Josephus (Ant. xx. 8. 6; Bell. J. ii. 13. 5) tells how he was one of many impostors of the time, and when Felix was governor came to Jerusalem, gave himself out as a prophet, gathered the people to the Mount of Olives in number about 30,000, telling them that at his word the walls of Jerusalem would fall down, and they could then march into the city. Felix with the Roman soldiers went out against him. The impostor and a part of his adherents fled, but a very large number were killed and others taken prisoners. The narrative of Josephus does not accord with the account of St Luke, but if the former be correct, we may well suppose that the numbers and the occasion spoken of by the chief captain relate to an event anterior to that great gathering on the Mount of Olives. The fame of the impostor may have grown; indeed, must have done so before he could collect the number of adherents of which Josephus speaks.”

Life application: The account between the Roman commander and Paul shows us the extreme nature of hatred the Jewish people had developed toward Paul and his doctrine. Paul was a respectable Jew, a Pharisee. He was well-educated and well-known during his day.

When he came to faith in Jesus, he began to share the message of salvation to the Gentiles. Because of this, he became hated. The Jews thought that salvation and exaltation in the eyes of the Lord belonged exclusively to them. They were incensed that he would speak to Gentiles about such matters.

And yet, an Egyptian thug was given the lead over four thousand Jews and would have been almost a folk hero among the people in his resistance to Roman authority. If the account of Josephus is correct, even more sided with him eventually.

To these Jews, it was okay to follow a murderous Egyptian if it meant casting off Roman oppression, but it was not okay to follow a Savior who told the Gentiles that they could cast off the bondage of sin and death through faith in Him. To this very day, such an idea of Gentile salvation without conversion to Judaism is repugnant.

Paul's words in the epistles are words of the Lord. They tell of freedom in Christ, but there are many who want to bring people back into bondage. Be careful to avoid anyone, Jew or Gentile, who preaches a message of works, especially works of the law, to somehow merit God's favor. Christ has done it all. Trust in Christ alone for your salvation.

*How we praise You, Lord God Almighty! Thank You for the freedom we possess from the bondage that once held us. Addictions are gone, legalism is removed, and purity of worship in spirit and in truth is realized when we come to Jesus, accepting the good news of His completed work. Yes, Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**But Paul said, "I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people." Acts 21:39**

More precisely, the verse reads, "And Paul said, indeed, I am a man, a Jew of Tarsus of Cilicia – not an insignificant city. And I beg you, allow me to speak to the people" (CG).

In the previous verse, the Roman commander had asked Paul if he wasn't the Egyptian who had stirred up a rebellion among the people and who led four thousand Sicarii into

the wilderness. In response to that, it next says, “And Paul said, indeed, I am a man, a Jew.”

Where the man just referred to was clearly an Egyptian who led Jews, Paul is a Jew who was being persecuted by Jews. He is contrasting himself to the Egyptian. The intent is surely to reveal to the commander that there was more hanky-panky going on than first met the eye. With that, he continues identifying himself, saying, “of Tarsus of Cilicia.”

This is the second and last time that Tarsus is identified this way. The first was in Acts 9:11. Being from Tarsus meant that he was a part of the dispersion. Thus, he would be familiar with the way Gentiles lived. He would also more than likely speak several languages and dialects (see 1 Corinthians 14:18), including the Greek he is now conversing in.

The particular spelling of the name in Greek is Tarseus. It is also called Tarsus in Acts 9:30, 11:25, and 22:3. James Strong speculates that the name comes from *tarsos*, meaning a flat basket. If so, it may reflect the layout of the city. It is one of the longest continually inhabited cities in the world.

Paul came from the opposite direction of Egypt, and he claimed to be a citizen from Tarsus. If he was found lying, it would only make it worse on him. Hence, there was every reason to believe him. Paul next notes that Tarsus is “not an insignificant city.”

The Greek word used to describe it is *asémos*. It means “undistinguished.” Vincent’s Word Studies says –

“...without a mark or token (σῆμα [*sema*]). Hence used of uncoined gold or silver: of oracles which give no intelligible response: of inarticulate voices: of disease without distinctive symptoms. Generally, as here, undistinguished, mean. There is a conscious feeling of patriotism in Paul's expression.”

Ellicott further notes, “In addition to all its fame for culture, the town of Tarsus bore on its coins the word METROPOLIS-AUTONOMOS (Independent).”

Having confirmed his identity, thus demonstrating that he was not a rabble-rouser, he then makes a formal request to speak to the people, saying, “And I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.”

It is a formal request to the man who could allow it to be realized. His boldness in asking demonstrates that he was hoping it would make a difference in the outcome of the situation. Being a Jew and also not an instigator, then he must want to make a defense against their treatment of him.

Life application: As Paul does elsewhere, he appeals to his cultural and national identity. He was willing to work within the framework of the society in which he lived, using his particular identity for the benefit of himself and the ministry.

This is completely the opposite of how many cults and sects treat the national identity they possess. They shun participating in various aspects of society that affect them while actively participating in others. They claim they are not of this world, completely abusing the intent of Jesus' words, in order to not participate. At the same time, they have driver's licenses, registered marriages, and (you betcha they do) pay taxes, claiming it is right and responsible to do so.

And yet, they refuse to vote, engage in politics, participate in other cultural events, etc. It is a failed "pick and choose" type of lifestyle that harms the very goals they set forth for themselves in the country in which they live. This is completely the opposite of the biblical model found in both testaments of Scripture.

Don't hesitate to participate. Your failure to do so may result in the loss of rights you possess or in harm to others (such as the Jews during Nazi Germany). You have a voice as a citizen of your nation. Use it.

*Lord God, we are citizens of heaven because of Jesus, but we are also living out earthly lives in the lands which You have ordained for us. May we be responsible citizens of both as we await our departure from here and the trip to our final, heavenly, home with You. Help us in this. Amen.*

**So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to *them* in the Hebrew language, saying, Acts 21:40**

The Greek reads – "And he, having permitted; Paul, having stood on the stairs, shook with the hand to the people. And great silence having come to be, he spoke in the Hebrew dialect, saying," (CG).

Paul had just spoken to the commander, requesting permission to speak to the people. With that, it next says, “And he, having permitted.”

The commander was probably curious as to what would come about, and so he allowed this unusual request. Paul was safely out of the grasp of the people, the soldiers were obviously in control of the stairways, and the people would be no threat at this point.

Thus, allowing this could possibly control the crowd more. If they remained riled up, nothing would be lost. Therefore, permission was granted, and “Paul, having stood on the stairs, shook with the hand to the people.”

With permission comes action. Paul, being on the stairs, would have been above everyone in the crowd. The perfect participle indicates that Paul first stood, certainly facing the crowd. This alone would have brought the crowd’s attention more firmly on him. With that, he then motioned with his hand.

The word *kataseiό* was also used in Acts 12:17, 13:16, and 19:33. It gives the sense of waving downward with the hand. It is probably the same type of motion we make even today. When someone is being noisy, and another person is trying to sleep, we may make the shhhhh sound while motioning downward.

By making this common hand motion towards the people, the crowd would have suddenly become interested in hearing him. With that, it then says, “And great silence having come to be.”

Anyone who could get a Roman commander to stop in the middle of an arrest and allow the supposed offender to speak would certainly have something to say. The mental picture is worth ten thousand words.

He would have been in chains that clanged as he moved. He would have been surrounded by a large number of soldiers bearing swords and shields and fully dressed for battle. He would have been in a traditional Hebrew garment and without any great flash. And yet he is allowed to speak! Who wouldn’t stop and grow silent? The marvel of the moment would have been an attention-arresting sight. With that, it next says that “he spoke in the Hebrew dialect, saying.”

With the coming of the silence came forth speech in their own language. Some translations say “Hebrew,” others “Aramaic.” The lingua franca was Aramaic, and this is what he would have spoken to them in.

In other words, the Hebrew language used in Scripture would be taught in synagogues, but the language of the Jews had evolved beyond that in the common speech of the people. This is the same idea as understanding ancient English and reading from it out of the Geneva Bible, while normally speaking in the common English of the United States today.

Hints of this Aramaic tongue are found in the gospels, clearly indicating that the original Hebrew was no longer the common tongue of the people. As for what he is about to speak to the crowd, curiously, the chapter ends in the middle of a sentence.

Some use a colon, some a semi-colon, and some a comma. However, it is punctuated, it is one of the convincing proofs of divine attention to the chapter and verse divisions of Scripture. A new chapter will commence in the middle of a thought.

Life application: People often get bent out of shape when they are told Paul spoke in Aramaic to the people. It is as if a sacredness has been removed from their thinking, and they immediately go on the defense, insisting that the people spoke Hebrew.

Call it what you will. What was spoken at the time of Jesus was not the language used in the Old Testament Scriptures. Today, the people in Israel speak Hebrew, but it is also not the same as in the Scriptures. Just as we find it very difficult to read the English of John Wycliffe, so it is with ancient and modern Hebrew.

The language of Israel at the time of Jesus and the apostles was so infused with Aramaic that calling it Aramaic is probably a better description of the dialect that would have been commonly spoken. The important issue isn't the exact dialect that was spoken but that what Paul spoke to them was what they also understood.

He was fully capable of speaking in their local dialect. This is the same as what it says in 2 Chronicles –

“Then they called out with a loud voice in Hebrew to the people of Jerusalem who *were* on the wall, to frighten them and trouble them, that they might take the city. <sup>19</sup> And they spoke against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth—the work of men’s hands.” 2 Chronicles 32:18, 19

Here, it does not say “Hebrew.” Rather, it says Yehudith, or “Judean.” The language of the Jews had evolved into its own particular dialect. That dialect was known by some of the attacking army, and it was spoken clearly and openly to the people.



The study of languages in the Bible and during biblical times is an exciting adventure. But remember, no matter what language you speak, the Lord understands, reading your heart and knowing what is on your mind. Be blessed in this thought. The intimacy that you share with the Creator because of Jesus is closer than any variations that our languages develop over the millennia.

*Lord God, no matter what language we speak, You are intimately familiar with our thoughts as we open our hearts to You. You gave us languages and they have evolved throughout the world. And yet, people from every tongue will sing their praises to You. How great it is to share intimacy with You through Jesus, regardless of which language we speak! Amen.*

## CHAPTER 22

**“Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.”** Acts 22:1

The Greek reads – “Men, brothers and fathers, hear now my defense to you” (CG).

In the previous verse, which ended Chapter 21, Paul had been given permission to speak to the mob. Therefore, he motioned with his hand and began speaking to them in their own dialect. His recorded words begin with, “Men, brothers and fathers.”

He begins his discourse with the same words as Stephen in Acts 7:2. *Andres, adelphoi kai pateres* – “Men, brothers and fathers.” It seems like a triple address, but it is intended as simply “Brothers and fathers.” Calling out “men” first is a way of acknowledging the whole, which is then subdivided into a respectful note to the elders and a brotherly note to the others.

It also may have been a standard formula when addressing an assembly that included the leaders of Israel, such as scribes and elders. Either way, he next says, “hear now my defense to you.”

The word translated as “defense” is the Greek word *apologia*. It is the same word used in 1 Peter 3:15 when speaking of making a logical defense concerning the faith that we possess. It signifies a reasoned argument put forth in a verbal defense of oneself, one’s beliefs, etc. It was a term used when making a legal defense in ancient courts.

Life application: Paul will set forth to his countrymen a defense of himself and the reason for his faith. He will explain how he came to the position he held. He will acknowledge those who were familiar with his life before coming to Christ, his faithfulness to the customs and cultures of his people, and so forth.

We should all likewise be prepared to explain our faith as well. In our explanation, we should be ready to tell what brought us to Christ, how it is logical and reasonable that we hold to our views, the changes that have come to our lives because of our conversion, etc.

Think about your conversion and consider how you can use it to tell others about your hope. Also, take time to continue to solidify why you believe the Christian faith is reasonable and worthy of consideration for those you talk to.

*Heavenly Father, Your word is what reveals Jesus to us. The message is sound and reasonable, and it is a message of love for the people of the world. Help us to properly convey this precious message to all we know and to all we encounter. May we be bold in our proclamation that Jesus is the hope for mankind. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent.**

**Then he said:** Acts 22:2

In the previous verse, Paul noted his desire to present his defense before the people. With that, it now continues, saying, “And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language.”

As noted in the commentary on Acts 21:40, the meaning of the word translated as “Hebrew” would be the Aramaic variant of the inhabitants at this time. It would probably have had a mixture of both Hebrew and Aramaic mingled together, drawing on one language or another for emphasis.

Until he started speaking in this particular dialect, the people who were in the mob probably didn’t know who Paul was or what he had done wrong. They simply heard someone say something, and they jumped into the fray, accepting what they heard. The impression of many would be that he spoke one of the languages of the dispersion and was simply a miscreant who had come to the festival and defiled the temple.

However, he is now speaking to them in their own dialect. The sudden understanding that he was one of them caused them to quiet down. As it says, “they kept all the more silent.” They were already somewhat calmed down by his having been taken by the Romans.

There were probably minor cheers or cries for justice, but these would be intermittent by this point. But seeing him turn, wave his hand, and then start speaking in their tongue would have shut up the most boisterous of them.

As he was out of their hands, and because there was no reason to continue to strive against him without ending up in chains, or worse, the natural thing to do now would be to simply quiet down and listen to what he had to say. With that, the verse ends with, “Then he said.” The verse leaves us on a cliffhanger. Exciting words surely lie ahead.

Life application: To get a sense of what the language of Judea may have been like at the time, we can think of how any language is used today. If you ever go to the Philippines, you will hear people talking in their own language. And then, right out of the blue, they will throw in a few words or even a full sentence of English.

In America, we will do the same but usually in a more limited way. Someone may say, "I went to the store today, and the shelves were practically empty. That was no bueno." Adding in the Spanish is simply for effect.

After the return of the people from Babylon, the Aramaic script had taken over as the written aleph-beth. The returnees would have spoken Aramaic for the most part. Over the years, the Greeks came in, and everything Greek became a fashion to many. Therefore, much of their influence was incorporated into the culture. By the time of Jesus' coming, the original Hebrew was reserved for reading in the synagogues, but it was not a language that people would have readily spoken.

Everything about languages is in a state of flux. Very few languages remain untainted for very long. As languages evolve, it is important that translations are updated to reflect these changes in order to be relevant to the minds of the readers.

Do you know what the word sith means? Hint: it has nothing to do with Star Wars. How about ensample, besom, blains, or bolled? These are just a few of the hundreds of words that have not existed in the English language for eons, but which are used in the KJV.

As for the word sith, it is an archaic way of saying since. But even at the time of the writing of the KJV, it was an obscure word, uncommon but to a very small section of the UK.

The meaning of so much of the KJV is completely unknown to the modern mind. Why should you need to have a dictionary or use an internet search to translate the Bible just so you can understand it? That is as nutty as a banana split. Read the Bible in the morning, during the day, and at night. Read various versions of the Bible. Listen to audio Bibles.

Fill your mind with the word of God. Let it become a passion for you. It is a love letter from the Lord. Refer to it for encouragement, understanding, joy, peace, contentment, and so much more. **READ THE BIBLE!**

*Lord God, thank You for the precious word that You have given us. It is a delight to our minds and a light to our path as we proceed through life. May we fill our minds with it and be encouraged by it. Yes, thank You for the Bible! Amen.*

**“I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. Acts 22:3**

More precisely, the Greek reads, “I am indeed a man, a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia and brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the scrupulousness of the patriarchal law; being a zealot for God, as all you are this day” (CG).

In the previous verse, Luke prepared us for Paul’s words of defense before the people of Israel. He now begins those words, saying, “I am indeed a man, a Jew.”

These words of Paul, spoken in his defense, will answer everything that he was accused of in Acts 21:28. He begins with the fact that he is a man, a Jew. Thus, he has identified himself as one who was legally allowed to be in the temple area, and specifically the area of the temple in which he was accosted. There is the Court of the Gentiles, the Court of the Women, and then it proceeded to where only men could go. From there, he next says, “born in Tarsus of Cilicia.”

Mentioning that he was born in Tarsus might seem unnecessary, but he is speaking to them in their language. Unlike many of those who came and didn't speak the local dialect (as is seen in Acts 2), Paul did. Secondly, noting his place of birth sets the stage for his next words, “and brought up in this city.”

He was brought up in Jerusalem. He was fully aware of the culture and customs of the city. He would have frequently been to the temple, interacted with the people, and was fully aware of what was allowed and what was not.

This is important because it was in Acts 21:29 where it was supposed that he had brought Trophimus the Ephesian into the city. Anyone raised in Jerusalem would know that this was not acceptable. He then notes that his rearing was “at the feet of Gamaliel.”

This showed that not only was he a Jew, but that even from a very young age, he was brought up to live as an observant Jew in the home country and even in the home

capital where Gamaliel instructed. And more, being brought up under him – one of the greatest teachers in their history – meant that Paul probably came there at 12 after becoming a “Son of the Covenant.” To be brought up “at the feet” of a rabbi as was the custom of observant families.

Sitting at the feet of a rabbi has a literal meaning. The rabbis sat in a highchair, and their students sat on the ground at their feet. In this honorable study, he next says he was “instructed according to the scrupulousness of the patriarchal law.”

The word translated as scrupulousness is found only here in Scripture, *akribeia*. It is a noun that gives the sense of exactly adhering to something. There is precise attention and focus.

In other words, he perfectly attended to the law which had been passed down from the fathers, even since it was received by Moses at Sinai. The adjective form of the word is used again in Acts 26:5.

As for the word translated as patriarchal, it is an adjective meaning hereditary, but in the masculine sense. It is that which is received from one’s fathers. Some translations say, “of our fathers,” “father’s law,” “ancestral law,” “patristic law,” etc. However, for an exact match, the word “patriarchal” gives the best sense. He next says, “being a zealot for God, as all you are this day.”

As he continues, he indicates that this strict upbringing made him just as zealous towards God as they were. It is a subtle compliment to them that they at least thought they were acting on behalf of God’s honor through their actions.

As he says this in the present tense, translating it as “was” as in the KJV and NKJV is a poor rendering. It makes it sound like his zealousness was in the past and not necessarily continuing at this time. Paul’s use of the present tense indicates that he is just as zealous to what God had presented now as he was in the past.

How could he say this if he was associating with Gentiles? It is because Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law of Moses. In following Jesus, Paul was actually more observant to Moses than any Jew who thought he was pleasing to God by observing the law without Jesus.

Life application: One cannot say he is a follower of Moses while rejecting Jesus. It is impossible because Moses wrote about Jesus (John 5:46). One who accepts the words of Moses will be willing to come to Jesus (John 5:40).

Moses wrote of the Prophet to come. Jesus is that Prophet. This Prophet would be like Moses. As Moses introduced the covenant at Sinai, Jesus would introduce the New Covenant in Jerusalem. This New Covenant was prophesied during the time of Moses (Jeremiah 31). Therefore, Moses (meaning the Law of Moses) anticipated the end of the law and the introduction of something new.

If one fails to come to Jesus through His New Covenant, he has failed to be obedient to Moses, and his condemnation remains. Only in coming to Christ can one truly be observant of the Law of Moses.

Paul does not say to the people that they are being obedient to the law. Rather, he says that they are zealous toward God. One can be zealous toward God in Islam. It does not mean that he is right with God. One can be zealous toward God in Judaism and not be right with Him. Paul did not mislead the people, and his words will continue to lead them to the truth of who Jesus is.

It will then be their choice to either receive or reject his words. The same is true with each of us today. Choose wisely. Choose Jesus.

*Lord God, we thank You for Jesus who has come, fulfilled the Law of Moses, and who has set it aside so that we can worship You in spirit and in truth. Without Him, we are all goners. But in Christ, we are brought near to You for all eternity. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.*

**“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, Acts 22:4**

The words are more literally rendered, “Who persecuted this Way until death, binding and betraying to prisons both men and women” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul refuted the accusations levied against him to the crowd standing before him, noting that he was zealous toward God as all of them were. Continuing now, he says, “Who persecuted this Way.”

Instead of saying, “I persecuted,” he uses a relative pronoun, referring to his past self in a way that highlights his particular role. In essence, “I am Paul, he who did these things.” Adding in the words “this Way” is a way of revealing that the man standing before them was the same man. It was a part of who he was at the time. He was an enemy of the Way.”

The term Way is the early Christian formula that harkens back to the words of Jesus –

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” John 14:6

By this time, it was an understood term used by believers that others also seemed to be aware of. And more, it could have been a term of derision used by non-believers. Like messianic believers today, they may have been accepted in society but considered on its fringe. This is true of any strange sect.

No matter what, the use of the words “this Way” identifies something that the people were aware of. As for his connection to persecuting the Way in his previous life, it was “until death.”

The word translated as “until” is *achri*. It doesn't necessarily mean that he participated in their deaths but that his actions brought the people to this point. Acts 26 gives more detail on this –

“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. <sup>10</sup>This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*. <sup>11</sup>And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities.” Acts 26:9-11

Of this treatment, Paul openly acknowledges his previous conduct, saying, “binding and betraying to prisons.”

This was something already acknowledged in Acts 9, where Paul actively went out searching for those he wanted to be brought before the rulers for trial –

“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked letters from him to the synagogues of



Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” Acts 9:1, 2

He was given full authority to not only seize the people but to bind them and bring them in. But his words go further by using the word *paradidómi*, translated as “betraying.” It signifies close, personal involvement. Translating it as betray instead of deliver is because these were fellow countrymen. There had to be a sense of purposeful betrayal, whether right or wrong. Jesus uses the word often. In Matthew 26:46, He says of Judas—

“Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.”

As for the word “prisons,” it is in the plural, even though not all translations rightly reflect this. It is a note to the people that he didn't just have them arrested around his area but that he actively went out looking for people to be imprisoned. This included “both men and women.”

The man of the house was considered the responsible party for the conduct of the house. However, Paul held women personally accountable for their conduct and arrested them along with the men. He was passionate that anyone associated with the Way was to be rounded up, bound, and taken to prison. He felt there was no room for any such person within the Jewish society.

Life application: Acts 9, where Paul was converted, was a long time ago in the ongoing narrative. It had been many years, and Paul had never lost his zeal to speak out concerning the calling to which he had been called.

It is something that we should reflect on. It is not possible to retain the same level of emotion as we felt when we first came to love someone. But that doesn't mean we cannot have the same level of commitment to them. Our love evolves and develops in new directions as we learn, grow, and interact. But our commitment can and should remain the same or even stronger.

There should never be a time that one is less committed to his marriage, being a parent, being a follower of Jesus, etc. And yet, though we may stay committed in some of these aspects, we may not be so devoted in others. Let us take time to evaluate how truly committed we are to those things we have a responsibility for.

Are we just as committed to our job as the day we started? Are we as committed to reading the Bible as we used to be? What about church attendance? Have we let that wane? Search out your priorities and refocus if need be.

You may have come to dislike your job, but you should be just as committed to it today as you were when things were going smoothly. Your pay reflects a standard that you should be upholding. Consider and redirect! Be that committed soul that you should be in those areas of life that are a part of who you are.

*Heavenly Father, we may have let parts of our lives slacken in commitment. In doing this, it is ultimately a reflection on You because we are called by Your name because we are in Christ. Help us to consider this and to redirect ourselves to be fully committed to those things we are a part of in life. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished. Acts 22:5**

A more literal rendering would be, “as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the elderhood. From whom also having received letters to the brothers, I went to Damascus even to bring those there being bound to Jerusalem so that they might be punished” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul noted that he persecuted the Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. He continues that thought now, saying, “as also the high priest bears me witness.”

Scholars enjoy arguing over which high priest is being referred to. Some are adamant that he's speaking of the high priest at the time of his conversion. Others say that he is speaking of the high priest at the time he is speaking.

It could be either, but that is not what is important. Having grown up around these people, they would understand his actions and the authority of the position. Such argumentation distracts from the main point, which is the authority of the office. Along with the high priest, he next says, “and all the elderhood.”

His statement that the high priest, as well as all of the council of elders, knew of his actions could so easily be refuted that it had to be true. Some of them may have been standing there at that moment.

As for the term “elderhood,” it is found only in Luke 22:66, here, and 1 Timothy 4:14. In 1 Timothy 4, Paul uses it concerning the elders of the church. It is a noun indicating an elderhood or presbytery. Of these offices in the leadership of Israel, he next says, “From whom also having received letters to the brothers, I went to Damascus.”

From the body of the high priest and the elders, among whom some were still living at the present time, he received his permission to conduct his persecution of the Christians even as far as Damascus.

In his words about the Jews there, he calls them “brothers.” It is an emphatic way of saying that, even now, he identified himself with the Jewish people as brothers. Implied in this is that the faith he pursued in no way removed him from his status as a Jew.

What he did was with the authority and sanction of Israel’s leaders, and it was in accord with the principles of his Jewish brethren where he traveled. This was specifically, “even to bring those there being bound to Jerusalem.”

One can see that Paul was operating under a greater plan of ending the Way. Those in other locations who believed were bound. Paul went to retrieve them and bring them to the seat of power and authority in Jerusalem “so that they might be punished.”

The word he uses, *timóreó*, is found only here and in a verse where he again discusses this persecution against the saints, Acts 26:11. Its literal meaning is to assign due retribution. Paul was avenging himself upon the church, and he was working for the elders who would also avenge themselves on it. They believed that the church was committing offenses against their way of life. Thus, suitable atonement through their punishment was necessary.

Life application: Paul never stopped being a Jew when he came to faith in Jesus. However, this does not mean that he had to adhere to everything that he once adhered to. That thinking will be proven completely false in the verses ahead.

Rather than losing his cultural and national identity, he solidified it. As many messianic believers state today, they are now “completed Jews.” They have developed beyond the Law of Moses, having come to the One whom Moses spoke of.

The Law of Moses does not define who the Jewish people are. Their relationship with the Lord, in the context that applies at a given time within His redemptive plans, is what

defines them as a people. As the law was fulfilled by Christ, it is by faith in Him alone that defines them as His people. This is explicitly stated in Romans 9-11.

Without national salvation through Messiah, Israel is not in a right standing with the Lord. Pray that they will seek Him out while He may be found. The end times are coming upon the world, and Israel will be here, enduring through that terrible trial because of their rejection of Christ.

The good news, however, is that they shall survive as a people and enter into the millennium with Christ as their Head. God is ever faithful to His faithless people.

*Lord God may Your guiding hand be upon Israel during their time of trial and trouble in the years ahead. Open hearts and minds to the truth of who Jesus is before that day comes. And, Lord, we long for the day when You will be glorified through them when they, as Your people once again, hail the exalted name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**“Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me.” Acts 22:6**

A more literal translation would be, “And it was to me, traveling and approaching Damascus about midday, suddenly from heaven considerable light gleamed around me” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul told the gathered crowd that he had received letters allowing him to bring in chains to Jerusalem those who followed the Way in Damascus. He continues now, saying, “And it was to me, traveling and approaching Damascus.

Paul notes a few things here that are of interest. The first is that what occurred was as he was approaching Damascus. This means that it occurred outside of the land of Israel. It is not to simply be dismissed because of this though, as some Jewish commentaries attempt to do about such events.

Daniel and Ezekiel had their visions outside of the land. Moses received the law outside of the land. Elijah was taken out of the land when he spoke to the Lord. Etc. Paul is stating this as a fact, and the people were to receive it as such.

Secondly, he next says it was about midday. This was omitted from the account in chapter 9. Paul is giving a first-hand account of the matter. Stating that it was around

the middle of the day is then telling the crowd that what occurred was more intense and brighter than even the sun in its fullest moment.

The glory which he beheld eclipsed the splendor of the sun. This is similar to how Jesus is described in Revelation 1:16 –

“He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.”

As for the word translated as midday, this is the second and last time it is seen in Scripture. The word is *mesémbria*. It is a compound word coming from *mesos*, meaning “middle,” and *hémera*, meaning “day.” Hence, it means “midday.” Of the manifestation, he next says it occurred “suddenly from heaven.”

This was not something that could be attributed to man, such as someone in the distance carrying a mirror that reflected the light. Rather, the direction is from above. It wasn't there, and then it was suddenly there. Continuing, Paul says, “considerable light gleamed around me.”

The word *periastrapto* is also used for the second and last time. It comes from *peri*, around, and *astraptó*, to flash forth. The word *astraptó* was used in Luke 24:4 to describe the dazzling garments worn by the two men at Jesus' tomb. This was more than a temporary flash. Rather, there was a gleaming radiance from heaven that suddenly enveloped Paul.

Life application: Paul was chosen as an apostle and designated to go forth to the Gentiles. He was a hard case in his fight against Christianity, and it took a hard lesson for him to understand just who he was persecuting.

The same is true with many of the people of the world today. But it should not be expected that the Lord is going to suddenly reveal Himself to them. Nor is it wise to listen to people who claim this is how they met the Lord. We now meet the Lord through His completed word.

This is stated explicitly in Scripture. Instead of wasting your time reading books about heavenly visitations and watching videos about people claiming they have seen the Lord, it would be prudent to spend your time reading the Bible and sharing the gospel.

It is incumbent on us to tell the world about Jesus. He is not going to go around His word, popping into people's heads or offices, to make converts. He has entrusted that sacred duty to the people of His church.

*Lord God, what a treasure and a gift Your word is. May we be wise in pursuing it and diligent in sharing it. People need this word to know who Jesus is and what He has done. They need it to understand the gospel. Help us to learn the word and then share it with others. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ Acts 22:7**

In the last verse, Paul was approaching Damascus when a gleaming light shone around him. Next, it says, “And I fell to the ground.”

The light overwhelmed him, as happens at other points in Scripture where someone encounters the glory of God. Regardless of how He reveals Himself, it is a natural reaction to beholding His glory. An example of this is found in Peter's encounter with Jesus –

“But Simon answered and said to Him, ‘Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.’<sup>6</sup> And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking.<sup>7</sup> So they signaled to *their* partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.<sup>8</sup> When Simon Peter saw *it*, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!’” Luke 5:5-8

This doesn't mean that Peter recognized Jesus as God, but he did recognize the miracle as having come from God. Thus, Peter understood that Jesus had been a divinely appointed Messenger of the Lord. The miracle leveled him because he discerned his utterly contemptible nature before such greatness.

Paul is now overwhelmed in a different but comparable way. The glory of the risen Lord was too much for him to bear, and the event, likewise, leveled him. With that having occurred, it next says, “and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul.’”

The Greek Saoul – Saoul is transliterated from the Hebrew name Shaul, or Saul, meaning Asked For. Further, the call is personal, having been repeated twice as so often occurs in

Scripture. It is a way of bearing verbal emphasis. Further, it is generally used in a way that demonstrates intimate familiarity. For example –

“So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. <sup>2</sup> Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, ‘Jacob, Jacob!’

And he said, “Here I am.”

<sup>3</sup> So He said, ‘I *am* God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. <sup>4</sup> I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up *again*; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes.’”

-Genesis 46:1-4

The Lord was emphatically calling Jacob, intimately identifying with him, and demonstrating that He knew what would come to pass. In this, He was reassuring Jacob concerning the future, the events of which were completely within the control of His capable hands.

As for the encounter between Jesus and Saul, the words continue, saying, “why are you persecuting Me?”

The accusation is personal as well – “Why are you persecuting ME?” An attack against believers is an attack against Christ Himself. If the church is “in Christ,” then it is “in” Christ! Of interest is that the noun “voice” is in a different case than in verse 9.

The same is true with Acts 9:4 and Acts 9:7. The reason is certainly to show that the others heard a sound, but it was not speech to them. The Lord was only speaking to Paul.

Life application: In Isaiah 66, it says –

“Thus says the LORD:

‘Heaven *is* My throne,

And earth *is* My footstool.

Where *is* the house that you will build Me?

And where *is* the place of My rest?

<sup>2</sup> For all those *things* My hand has made,

And all those *things* exist,’

Says the LORD.

‘But on this *one* will I look:

On *him who is poor and of a contrite spirit,*  
And who trembles at My word.’” Isaiah 66:1, 2

The word of God, meaning the Holy Bible, reveals who God is. It speaks forth His intentions for the people of the world. God says that He looks favorably upon the one who trembles at this word. Does this reflect your state before God?

It is certain that you cannot tremble at a word you don't read. Nor can you tremble at a word that you read in which you are looking for personal earthly gain. But this is how much of the church treats the word because this is what they have been taught about the word.

You might be looking to get rich, and so you look to the Bible as a talisman to make that happen. There is no trembling and reverent fear in this. There is only the expectation that the Great ATM in the sky will be paying out in the days ahead.

The word of God is supposed to appeal to our souls, convict us of our sins, reveal to us His greatness, demonstrate our need for His mercy and grace, etc. These things are what we should find when we open the word and look into it. Let us consider this as we reflect upon this sacred and precious word.

*Glorious Lord God, we stand in awe of Your splendor and majesty. We thank You for the grace and kindness You have shown to us, even in our fallen state. And we thank You that, because of Jesus, we are now reconciled to You for all eternity. Be glorified in our praises to You, O God. Amen.*

**So I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ Acts 22:8**

Rather, the Greek reads, “And I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting’” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul had fallen to the ground and heard a voice asking, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” It next says, “And I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’”

Paul's questioning of who the Presence is shows that even though he had all of the training of a master, he still didn't know who the Lord truly was. It is reminiscent of the story of Samuel in 1 Samuel 3 –



“And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, ‘Here I am, for you did call me.’

Then Eli perceived that the LORD had called the boy. <sup>9</sup>Therefore Eli said to Samuel, ‘Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, “Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.”’ So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

<sup>10</sup> Now the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And Samuel answered, ‘Speak, for Your servant hears.’” 1 Samuel 3:8-10

Paul knew that this was a divine messenger, but he could not have imagined that Jesus was that divine messenger. His worldview and presuppositions about the law, the Messiah, etc., would not allow him to believe that his actions could possibly be responsible for the persecution of God’s appointed Messiah. However, that was about to change with the next words, “And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene.’”

The word Nazarene was not used by Luke in Chapter 9. However, Paul here indicates that this is the full title that was spoken to him. Luke’s words in Chapter 9 were focused more on the persecution and Paul’s stubborn inability to perceive the truth, instead recklessly pursuing a false direction –

“And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’

Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It *is* hard for you to kick against the goads.’”

Here, Paul first identifies the Source of the words from heaven because of the audience he is addressing. He carefully calls Jesus the Nazarene to ensure that the proper Jesus (Hebrew: Yeshua) was being identified for their understanding.

The name was not uncommon in Israel at the time. Identifying him this way would carefully elicit memories of the Man who had come and done so many miracles among the people, who had been crucified, and whose followers avowed that He had risen. Paul poignantly identifies himself with this same Jesus. With that, he completes Jesus’ words to him, saying, “whom you are persecuting.”

Paul doesn’t leave out the fact that he had been persecuting Jesus, but the proper Jesus had to first be identified. Matthew Poole describes the term Nazarene used here, saying “...that contemned (though not contemptible) name is owned by Christ from heaven, that they might not be ashamed when they were reproached by it on earth.”

Life application: The name Jesus is the name at which every person shall someday bow. All of humanity, from Adam until the last person born, will acknowledge Him –

“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”  
Philippians 2:9-11

Isaiah, however, ascribes this honor to the Lord (Yehovah) –

“Look to Me, and be saved,  
All you ends of the earth!  
For I *am* God, and *there is* no other.  
<sup>23</sup> I have sworn by Myself;  
The word has gone out of My mouth *in* righteousness,  
And shall not return,  
That to Me every knee shall bow,  
Every tongue shall take an oath.” Isaiah 45:22, 23

Paul directly cites Isaiah and applies what the Lord said through him to Jesus. Either Paul was a heretic and a blasphemer, or he is rightly claiming that Jesus is the Lord incarnate. The truth of Jesus’ deity cannot be missed if one truly searches it out. However, presuppositions and biases stand in the way. Paul was given a special grace by encountering the Lord personally.

We are likewise offered the grace of meeting Jesus personally through the now-completed pages of Scripture. Let us be wise and attend carefully to what we read. The choice is ours, just as it was for Paul. As Paul would, later on, declare to Agrippa –

“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, <sup>20</sup> but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.” Acts 26:19, 20

Paul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. We are not to be disobedient to the testimony now set forth in the pages of the Bible. Believe and be saved, and then share this message with those you encounter, to the glory of God who saved you.

*Lord God Almighty, thank You for the word that You have given us. It is the place where we can encounter You and find the truth of who You are. May we not be slack about our pursuit of You. Rather, fill us with the burning desire to know You more and more each day. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. Acts 22:9**

The Greek more literally reads, “And those being with me indeed saw the light and were terrified but did not comprehend the voice of Him speaking to me” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul told the crowd that he asked who was speaking to him on the road to Damascus. Paul then noted that the voice stated He was Jesus of Nazareth, whom he was persecuting. Paul now adds more detail about the encounter, saying, “And those being with me indeed saw the light.”

This is an important addition. First, it could be verified if it was true or not. Second, if only Paul saw the light, it could be claimed that he had a stroke, suffered a mental breakdown, got donked on the head by a falling rock, or some other event. However, if all of those with him saw the light, it could not be denied that the event occurred. Understanding this, Paul next says, “and were terrified.”

These words are not found in some manuscripts, but they are likely original. It is a natural and obvious reaction to such an encounter, and the words fit with the general tenor of the account. Terror would have gripped anyone who was in such a situation. Such a radiant light in the middle of the day would be inexplicable. But more, Paul continues with, “but did not comprehend the voice of Him speaking to me.”

In many translations, there is a seeming contradiction from chapter 9. In Chapter 9, it said, “And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.” As in the NKJV, translations will say “hear.” It is not incorrect, but it leads to a seeming contradiction. The men heard a voice, but they did not understand it. The same word carries both connotations.

We might say, “You aren’t hearing me” to someone who hears but does not pay heed. We may knock on someone’s head and say, “Helloooo, did you hear me?” when it is perfectly well-known that he did. However, he may not have grasped what was said, or he may have completely ignored it.

This would have added to their terror. Seeing a gleaming light and hearing a voice but not understanding it would be something truly terrifying to those who experienced the encounter.

As for the word “hear,” that carries a dual meaning, one example is found in Mark 4:33–

“And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear *it*.”

It is clear that the word “hear” means to assimilate into the mind, not simply to audibly hear a sound. 1 Corinthians 14:2 also provides clarity –

“For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.”

The same word, here translated as “understands,” clarifies the dual nature of the word.

Life application: It is the constant aim of some people to tear apart the word of God in order to deny that it is what it claims to be. Supposed contradictions are highlighted on innumerable websites, attempting to deceive people and rob them of faith. Such claims, incredibly, will even come from the pulpit or lectern in churches or seminaries.

However, with a bit of study, such supposed contradictions are cleared up. Don’t be hasty to believe everything you read or hear. Instead, check out such claims. In the end, you may find that what you heard was inaccurate. If you care about your analysis of Scripture, it can be even more embarrassing to have repeated what was said, to only later find out you were wrong.

Check things out, don’t be quick to repeat without verification, and be ready to defend the word as you find out how truly reliable it is.

Thank You, O God, for the precious word You have given us. It is a wonder to our understanding, a delight to our minds, and a joy to our hearts to read and know it more each day. We thank You for how You have displayed Your heart to us in it. Thank You! Amen.

**“So I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.’” Acts 22:10**

The words are more appropriately translated as, “And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord.’ And the Lord said unto me, ‘Having arisen, go to Damascus, and there it will be told you all things that have been appointed you to do’” (CG).

Previously, Paul noted that those who were with him were afraid, having seen the light, but they did not understand the voice speaking to him. With that, he continues, saying, “And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord.’”

Paul continues saying “Lord” as he did in verse 8. This, however, is the first time that he has done so with the understanding that Jesus is the Lord. There he was, on the ground speaking to the Lord of creation and the Messiah of Israel, acknowledging submission to Him when the very purpose of him going to Damascus was to snuff out any remnant of His name.

There must have been a great sense of terror in his heart as he considered the dreadful awe of the situation in which he found himself. But instead of words of condemnation, the words continue, saying, “And the Lord said unto me, ‘Having arisen, go to Damascus.’”

There is a slight variation in Paul’s words here from Chapter 9. There it said, “Arise and go into the city...” Here, it says, “Having arisen, go to Damascus.” Paul is speaking to the people in Jerusalem, and so this is an obvious amendment for them to hear and understand.

Paul was already headed to Damascus, but now his purpose for going would be diametrically opposed to what it had been only moments before. Instead of giving orders and arresting faithful believers, he would receive words concerning his new direction in life, as recorded in the continued words, “and there it will be told you all things that have been appointed you to do.”

In Chapter 9, it said, “...and you will be told what you must do.” Here, that is amended to show his appointment by the Lord as a son of Israel and one given a commission for spreading the word of the Lord. The changes are logical and appropriate. Of these words, Bengel says –

“The Divine appointment is the sphere of the godly: whatever they do is a realisation (repræsentatio, a vivid exhibition or ready performance) of that appointment.”

Life application: At this point in the narrative, Paul’s mind must have gone from vehement rage to utter astonishment to absolute horror and then to complete confusion – all within a few moments of discourse by the Lord.

The process of his conversion from persecuting Jesus to acknowledging Him as Lord was as sudden as the flash of lightning. There was no questioning if the Lord could clarify a few things, there was no asking for a sign to confirm who He was, and so forth. He heard, and he acknowledged.

How good it would be if we would do this as well. Obviously, we must ensure that what we have read or heard is properly understood. Unlike Paul, who didn’t need such clarification, we might. Varying views on Scripture necessitate logically thinking through which view is correct.

Is the view of N.T. Wright correct where he views Jesus and the Gentile-led church as being the true Israel? If so, then there will be no national salvation for Israel and the people who have been brought back to the land of Israel have no future hope or purpose in God’s redemptive plans.

If he is wrong, then there is a future for Israel and, even if not supporting the worldview of Israel at this time, it is incumbent on faithful believers to pray for and stand with Israel in anticipation of the coming fulfillment of the Lord’s promises to them.

Once that matter is settled in our theology, the latter being the correct view as argued by the author of this commentary, then we should accept God’s will, stop bucking against what He is doing in regard to Israel, and continue to pray for Israel in anticipation of the Lord’s returning to them.

We are under no obligation to place ourselves in a subservient position to the overall views of the Jewish society, but we are obligated by Scripture to anticipate and pray for God’s will to be fulfilled according to how His word is laid out and properly interpreted.

In all such matters of theology, let us not kick against what God has ordained. Instead, let us look to the higher purposes of God and allow our hopes for the future to be realized in our attitudes in the present.

*Gracious and almighty God, we come before You, knowing that You are the One who keeps His covenant, even when we fail to do so. Unlike man, who is willing to toss away the promises set forth by You, Your word stands, confirming what You have spoken as a promise to the people You have covenanted with. Help us in our weakness, clarify our confusion, and redirect our hearts and minds to be in accord with Your intentions for all humanity. Amen.*

**“And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus. Acts 22:11**

Paul was just instructed by the Lord to arise and go into Damascus where he would be told all the things appointed for him to do. Continuing the narrative, he next says, “And since I could not see for the glory of that light.”

This verse explains the blindness of chapter 9. The reason for his blindness might be inferred from the words there, but it was not stated. Now, the reason is explicitly given. The glory of the light was so intense upon his eyes that he could no longer see.

It is an argument for the authenticity of the account because Paul personally explains what happened and also added a note to the people that what he beheld was exceedingly glorious. It is a reminder to them of the glory of the Lord that Moses beheld. It was because of this glory that he veiled his face –

“Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony *were* in Moses’ hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him. <sup>30</sup> So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. <sup>31</sup> Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him; and Moses talked with them. <sup>32</sup> Afterward all the children of Israel came near, and he gave them as commandments all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. <sup>33</sup> And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. <sup>34</sup> But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take the veil off until he came out; and he would come out and speak to the children of Israel whatever he had been commanded. <sup>35</sup> And whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him.”

Paul will later explain the theological importance of what happened to Moses –

“Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech— <sup>13</sup> unlike Moses, *who* put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ. <sup>15</sup> But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. <sup>16</sup> Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty. <sup>18</sup> But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 3:12-18

Paul was so steeped in reveling in his own efforts through law observance that when he encountered the glory of the Lord, he was literally blinded by the goodness that he saw. The grace of God in Jesus Christ simply overwhelmed him.

Of all people, Paul understood the theological implications of the dulling of spiritual senses because of the law. Eyes are blinded, ears are covered over, and hearts are made dull. These types of manifestations of the effects of the law are seen in Scripture, and they are seen in the lives and conduct of people throughout the world today.

With these things understood, Paul continues with, “being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.”

Rather, both verbs are present participles – “being led by the hand” and “being with me.” Paul is conveying the events in a lively manner for the crowd gathered before him. As for the word translated as “being led by the hand,” this is the second and last use of *cheiragógeó* in the Bible. Its other use was in Acts 9:8.

Also, the word translated as “being with me,” *suneimi*, is found only here and in Luke 9:18. Luke masterfully uses the Greek language to convey what Paul would have said to the audience in their native dialect.

Life application: Referring to the idea of senses being dulled, at the time of Isaiah’s commissioning by the Lord, he was told –

“And He said, ‘Go, and tell this people:  
“Keep on hearing, but do not understand;  
Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.”’  
<sup>10</sup> ‘Make the heart of this people dull,



And their ears heavy,  
And shut their eyes;  
Lest they see with their eyes,  
And hear with their ears,  
And understand with their heart,  
And return and be healed.” Isaiah 6:9, 10

Jesus used those words to explain why He spoke as He did to the people –

“Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. <sup>14</sup> And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,

And seeing you will see and not perceive;

<sup>15</sup> For the hearts of this people have grown dull.

*Their* ears are hard of hearing,

And their eyes they have closed,

Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears,

Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn,

So that I should heal them.” Matthew 13:13-15

The people lived under the law. They thought it was what made them holy and distinct above all else, and they conducted their lives as such. It is true that the law was given to distinguish them from all other people, but the law reflects the Lord’s will for them. Thus, it is ultimately the Lord who sets Israel apart.

Their history had shown them that the law could not save them. They should have been jubilant at the coming of the perfect Savior who would remove this burden from upon them. But they could not see the truth of who He is.

As noted, this continues throughout the world today, and it does so in some very surprising places. Not only is Israel still affected by this, but supposed churches also are. They have returned to the law, given up on the grace of God in Christ, and they have their senses dulled because of this.

Grace! The Bible is trying to tell us (if we will only pay heed!) that the ultimate glory that we can behold is the grace of God. It is the greatness of the glory of God found in Jesus Christ that reveals this to us. Do not mar grace. Rather, embrace it. Rejoice in it. And

thank God for it all the days of your life. You don't need more law. Rather, you need grace. Cling to what God has done. It is all about Jesus.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for Your glory revealed. Thank You for the grace that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**“Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there*, Acts 22:12**

The words are more exactly translated, “And a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, being testified to by all the Jews dwelling *there*” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul noted to the crowd that he could not see because of the light, and so he was led by the hand to Damascus. Continuing now, it says, “And a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law.”

Only the term “disciple” was used of Ananias in Chapter 9. Now, for the sake of this Jewish audience and to show that the man would have been acceptable in their eyes, Paul calls him a devout man according to the law.

This is the fourth and last time that the word *eulabés* is found in Scripture. It is found only in Luke's writings. Once in his gospel (Luke 2:25) and three times in Acts. It is a compound word that literally means “‘taking hold of what is good.’ It focuses on the outward response someone gives to what they feel is truly worthwhile (worthy of respect)” (HELPS Word Studies). At times, translators say, “God-fearing” which is more of a paraphrase, but it implies that a godly fear is instilled in the person. With that, Paul next says, “being testified to by all the Jews dwelling *there*.”

This would be easily verifiable, and it shows that Ananias was obedient in his actions as a faithful Jew. The resentment of followers of The Way was obviously not as pronounced elsewhere as it was in Jerusalem.

And even at this time, it was perceived by most that followers of The way were considered obedient Jews. This is an obvious truth from the fact that James and the other apostles moved freely about. Gloag says that this “affirms that he was not introduced to Christianity by an opponent of Judaism, but by a strict Jew” (Paton James Gloag).

Paul's argument before the people is a petition for reason concerning faith in Jesus that does not contradict their faith. However, as the author of Hebrews (probably Paul) notes –

“In that He says, ‘A new *covenant*,’ He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.” Hebrews 8:13

It was understood that law observance would eventually be ended. Thus, there is nothing deceitful by Paul in living as a Jew among Jews, as a Gentile among Gentiles, and promoting law observance among the Jews during the time that the temple was still standing.

As for the ending of the law, Hebrews notes that it will come at some future point. According to Daniel 9:27, Scripture reveals that point will be after the seven years of tribulation, whenever that occurs. Since the destruction of the temple, believing Jews and Gentiles are not bound to law observance, nor could they be. Without a temple, it would be impossible.

At the rapture, all believers will be taken to glory. After that, a temple will be rebuilt, and temple rites and law observance will return to Israel temporarily to consummate the times set forth by the Lord in Daniel 9.

Life application: The words of Hebrews 8:13 are written to the Hebrew people. They do not apply to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were never under law observance. As the New Covenant supplants the Old, it is insane theology to teach that a Gentile must observe the law, in part or in whole. This is why Paul is so adamant about this issue in Galatians.

To go to the Law of Moses, after coming to Christ, means that Christ's finished work has been rejected. Is this where you really want to stand? Is your hope in your own meriting of God's favor. If so, you will be sorely disappointed.

Be sure to trust in Christ, rest in Christ, and find your eternal security in the grace of God that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Lord God Almighty, how can we be pleasing to You? Your word tells us. We are pleasing to You through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Help us to never attempt to merit Your favor through observance of the law that He came to fulfill. How good it is to simply rest in His finished work. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Hallelujah and amen.*

**“came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him. Acts 22:13**

The Greek reads, “Having come to me and having stood, said, ‘Saul, brother, look up.’ And I, the same hour, looked up to him” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul told the crowd about Ananias, a devout man according to the law and who had a good testimony with the Jews. Of him, it now says, “Having come to me and having stood, said.”

Luke’s use of participles makes each step carefully anticipate the next. In Acts 9, Ananias was told by the Lord to go to Paul and put his hand on him in order to restore his sight. Paul skips this information and simply notes that an observant Jew was the one taking the action. This would have had a more profound effect on the crowd.

They were gathered outside the temple, accusing Paul of being a violator of the law. And yet, everything he is presenting to them concerned adherence to the law by those he was associated with. As the temple was still standing, it would be an affront to the sensibilities of the Jews to do otherwise when among them.

As for Ananias, once he had come to Paul, he then spoke, “Saul, brother, look up.” The word is *anablepó*. It literally means “look up.” However, it is also used to indicate the recovery of sight, such as in Matthew 11 –

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> *The* blind see [*anablepó*: look up] and *the* lame walk; *the* lepers are cleansed and *the* deaf hear; *the* dead are raised up and *the* poor have the gospel preached to them. <sup>6</sup> And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.’”

-Matthew 11:5, 6

Therefore, many translations simply say, “receive you sight.” With that stated, Paul next says, “And I, the same hour, looked up to him.”

He uses the same word, *anablepó*, that was just used. Paul received his sight right then. The word was spoken, and the sight was immediately restored. Thus, it was certainly a miracle. Further, it was performed by a Jew in good standing and it was performed on Paul.

This would have had a pronounced effect on them. This would not only validate that Ananias was capable of such things, but that it was the Lord Jesus who was ultimately behind the act. This is because he had already noted in verse 10 that it was Jesus who directed the events.

And more, this power of the Lord through Ananias was in approval of Paul's coming ministry. Paul's words thus far would have had a weighty effect on those listening.

Life application: By following the progression of thought one step at a time, it is evident that Paul's ministry was a particular one that was directed and commissioned by the Lord. He was not a rogue Jew who was out of control among his people and among the Gentiles.

Rather, he was called by the Lord, healed by the power of the Lord, commissioned as an apostle by the Lord, and then sent forth to his ministry by the Lord. As he was not one of the twelve apostles sent forth to the house of Israel, it means that his ministry served an entirely different purpose.

There is overlap in what the apostles taught, but the focus of Paul's ministry was different than that of the others. This clearly indicates that the Gentile-led church, though being brought into the commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:12), is not a replacement of Israel. Nor is it the fulfillment of the promises to Israel.

These things have to be carefully considered. Otherwise, there will be a defect in one's understanding of proper doctrine, sound eschatology, etc. Keep the boxes straight, and the Bible will be rightly divided regarding sound dispensational theology.

*Lord God, give us wisdom and discernment in how to interpret Your word properly. It is a big book, filled with many difficulties. And so, be with us as we actively engage in it through reading and study. May our doctrine be sound as we go forth telling others about the great plan You have set forth for the people of the world in this wonderful word. Amen.*

**"Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. Acts 22:14**

The Greek reads, "And he said, 'The God of our fathers has before-handed you to know His will, and to see the Just, and to hear the voice from His mouth.'" (CG).

Paul's sight was just restored at the word of the Lord through Ananias. Now, Ananias will speak again in order to explain to Paul his commission. That begins with a statement concerning his calling. This is detailed to the crowd, beginning with, "And he said."

He is referring to Ananias. Paul makes note of the divine appointment given through this Jew who was in good standing in regard to the law. The exact words of Ananias begin with "The God of our fathers."

The meaning of "The God of our fathers" is obvious. He is Yehovah, the one true God. Paul has been selected to know His will. Understanding that in verse 3, he said, "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today," this statement by Ananias is all the more astonishing.

How could someone, brought up in the strictness of "our father's law," not "know His will?" Wasn't it written down for all to know? How much more this man! And yet, he obviously was completely clueless as to what the will of God was.

This is an obvious conclusion because of his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, his blindness, and now his forthcoming instruction. As for this will, Ananias is next noted to have said that their God "has before-handed you."

The word is *procheirizó*. It was first used in Acts 3:20 and it will be seen one more time in Acts 26:16. It comes from *pro*, before, and *cheir*, hand. Thus, it is literally before-handed, meaning divinely handpicked in advance. The Pulpit Commentary notes, "In classical Greek it means mostly 'to get anything ready beforehand.'" The words bring to mind the calling of Jeremiah –

"Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying:  
5 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;  
Before you were born I sanctified you;  
I ordained you a prophet to the nations.'" Jeremiah 1:4, 5

What was said to Jeremiah is summed up in this word, translated as before-handed. Paul's calling was "to know His will." Paul's preselection was to know the will of the Lord. Again, it obviously meant that he did not know this will. Therefore, his persecution of believers was not in accord with the will of the Lord. Ananias was sent first to begin to set this straight.

Eventually, Paul would personally receive revelation from the Lord (Galatians 1:2), but this was a necessary first step in preparing him for that. This explains why Paul quite often opened his letters stating that he was an apostle according to the will of God. He does this in 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; and Colossians 1:1. Ephesians 1:1-11 actually gives an entire commentary on this. Next, Ananias says, “and to see the Just.”

This term, “the Just,” comes from an adjective, *dikaios*. It means correct, righteous, innocent, etc. Being prefixed by an article, and without any other words to further qualify it, the meaning is a single individual who embodies what the adjective signifies. It is a term that any Jew would have understood as referring to the Messiah. Many Old Testament passages would have immediately flooded their minds, such as Psalm 2, Isaiah 11:1-5, Isaiah 53:11, etc.

The words of Ananias continue, saying, “and to hear the voice from His mouth.” It is a phrase that carries great weight. To hear the voice from His mouth meant that Paul was being granted a prophetic office.

If his words to the crowd were true, and they could be verified by Ananias if he was still alive, Paul was being given a commission that raised him to the level of any true prophet of Israel. His words would carry the same weight and effect as those of their own Scriptures.

Paul was not being called to do another thing than the other selected apostles, but to carry the same word of the Lord to another group of people, making understandable to them what God was doing in and through Israel. That will be seen in the next verses.

Life application: There is one prophetic plan that is being worked out in redemptive history. It is being developed in various steps. The Mosaic Covenant was one step. That was replaced by the New Covenant. Gentile inclusion in the New Covenant was to be a part of that plan, not something separate from it.

Israel’s rejection of Jesus was known by God before it happened. During their time of rejection, God has been working out His New Covenant through a Gentile-led church, but it is still the same covenant that will be continued through the Jews at a future point. This is completely certain because Paul, writing to the Gentiles, appeals to the New Covenant in 1 Corinthians 11 –

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; <sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ <sup>25</sup> In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.’” 1 Corinthians 11:23-25

Watch out for heretical doctrines that attempt to separate what God is doing for the Jews and for the Gentiles. There is one New Covenant. The nation of Israel has temporarily rejected the offer. But because of His faithfulness to His covenant promises, they too will be brought into the New Covenant someday.

In the meantime, any Jew or Gentile can come into the New Covenant in exactly the same way. That Israel, the nation, will be given this opportunity again is explicitly stated in Hebrews 9:15 –

“And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

Hold fast to what is sound and proper. The New Covenant is one thing. It was given to the House of Israel and the House of Judah, as noted in Jeremiah 31:31 and Hebrews 8:8. They will be brought into it in due time. Until then, the one and only gospel is currently going forth to any individual who will receive it.

*O God, Your faithfulness is everlasting. What concern should we have that You would ever not fulfill every word You have spoken forth? Rather, we can read Your word and know, with absolute surety, that You will perform as You have spoken. Praises be to You, our great and faithful Lord! Amen.*

**“For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. Acts 22:15**

Paul was just told by Ananias that the God of their fathers had chosen him to know His will and to personally see and hear the Just, meaning Jesus. With that, he next says, “For you will be His witness.”

At this point, Paul leaves off the words of Acts 9:15. Those words would have been completely abhorrent to them –



“But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.’”

The part about “the children of Israel” would have been no problem, but mentioning the Gentiles would have put them into attack mode, as will soon be seen. Rather than that, he tells the crowd that he was selected to be the Lord’s witness.

The other apostles were told they would be His witnesses as well –

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

As for what Paul is expected to witness, it is to be directed “to all men.” This would include the “Gentiles, kings, and children of Israel” of Acts 9:15. Any and all whom he encountered would be those he was to tell the good news about. This would have been much easier for him than the other apostles.

He was raised in a Gentile land; he was a Roman citizen, making his testimony more likely to be received by many; he was comfortable around highly placed leaders; he spoke many languages, allowing him to travel more easily throughout the empire, etc. What the other apostles would struggle at, he would be able to effortlessly accomplish, speaking to any and all. With that noted, Ananias continues with, “of what you have seen and heard.”

These things are not merely referring to the encounter he is now describing. Instead, it will encompass the personal revelations that he will receive directly from the Lord, his encounters with others, as he travels, and so forth.

Of his personal revelations, he mentions these in several passages, such as 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, Galatians 1:11-17, Ephesians 3:1-7, etc.

Life application: Paul was deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures. He didn’t need to be trained in what was contained there, something that takes much of one’s life to even begin to grasp. The other apostles did not have this wealth of knowledge.

Where they could easily tie Jesus in with the more common parts of Scripture, Paul could give the theology behind why it was so. This was especially necessary because he

would be dealing largely with Gentiles. Because of this, a deeper theology would be needed to overcome barriers that naturally existed.

Today, Christian theology is highly refined because of the words of Paul. But it was not this way at the time of the early church. Paul's evangelism made this possible, and his writings continued to do so during his life. And because they were maintained by those who received them, they continue to provide clarity even today.

Unfortunately, people spend more time reading about the Bible than reading it. This is unfortunate because it does not provide a sufficient grounding to know if what is presented aligns with Scripture or not. Above all, we must put reading and studying of the word, directly from the word, as the most important part of our day each day.

On the day this commentary was typed, a note came from someone who attends the Superior Word Church with the following comments –

“I sit on my couch today ... and I just read Galatians. ... Today the scriptures have come alive in me like never before. ... I understand belief, faith and grace like never before and ... I wanted to share it because I truly feel free today in my spirit and I understand why Christ had to come to die. I before always had the head knowledge but now I have it written on my heart. I just wanted to share my testimony with you. ... Your constant encouragement to read the scriptures have [made them] come alive in my heart today.”

This person, whether attending online or in the building, has heard many sermons, but through direct study of the word, the book of Galatians made a particular impact that could not have come otherwise.

Each day, be sure to pick up and read the Bible, the source of our knowledge of God in Christ. You will be blessed as you do.

*Lord God, Your word truly is a lamp for our feet and a light to our path! Thank You for Your precious and glorious word. Amen.*

**“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Acts 22:16**

The Greek reads, “And now, why delay? Having arisen, be baptized and wash away your sins, having called on the name of the Lord” (CG).

In the previous verse, Ananias said to Paul, “For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.” Now, with his calling set forth, Ananias continues with, “And now, why delay?”

There is a sense of urgency in his words, as if the clock of people’s lives is winding down. Paul has a charge to carry forth the word of the Lord, and without that message, people will die apart from Jesus. He needs to begin his ministry immediately. But before he does, Ananias next says, “Having arisen, be baptized.”

Baptism is the normative thing seen after any conversion. It is based on the word of the Lord to those who were with Jesus at the beginning –

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age. Amen.” Matthew 28:19-20

However, unlike the instructions given to many who heard the word, received the Spirit, and were then baptized (for example, Acts 10:46-48), Ananias continues, saying, “and wash away your sins.”

Baptism for repentance is what John the Baptist told Israel to do and which all of Israel would have been aware of. However, in Luke 7 it says –

“And when all the people heard *Him*, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. <sup>30</sup> But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.” Luke 7:29, 30

Paul was in this group. The people of Israel were then admonished to be baptized into Jesus in Acts 2. There is no record of the other apostles having been baptized. However, Paul was told to be baptized “and wash away your sins.” In Acts 2, Peter instructed the people, saying –

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” Acts 2:38, 39

This implies that their sin (as with Paul) was not connected with the law, which could have been forgiven on the Day of Atonement. Instead, they were connected with “the Just” mentioned in verse 14, meaning the Messiah. Paul, like Israel, had rejected the Messiah. Israel had to repent (change their minds) concerning this. Their minds needed to be converted from rejection to acceptance.

At this point, however, Paul does not need to repent. He has already changed his mind about who Jesus is. And yet, he was still told to be baptized to wash away his sins. Those in Acts 10 did not need to do this. They were baptized as an outward demonstration of the faith they possessed, and which had saved them. In both instances, baptism is required, but the underlying reason is different.

As for the word translated as “wash away,” it is *apolouó*. It is a compound word, coming from words meaning “away” and “wash.” It is only used here and in 1 Corinthians 6:11. However, the verb *louo* is used in an important passage during Jesus’ ministry, John 13:10. In that verse, a picture of both justification and sanctification are given by using two different words for “wash,” *louo* and *nipto*. Paul needs to be “washed,” meaning sanctification and justification, in order to be cleansed from his sins.

Those in Acts 10 received this immediately. Paul, having previously rejected Jesus, needed to go through the process of baptism for this purpose, just as those in Acts 2 did. In his baptism, he was to enter into a new life in Messiah while “having called on the name of the Lord.”

The Greek word translated as “Lord” is used, *kurios*. Some manuscripts simply say, calling on His name. Either way, it is implying that the Just is the Lord because only God can forgive sins. Once again, the text clearly indicates that Jesus the Man is the embodiment of Yehovah of the Old Testament. Thus, He is the God/Man.

As for the giving of the Spirit to Paul, nothing is said of when he received it. However, it can be inferred that the Spirit only came upon him after the act of Baptism. Notice the necessary conditions for those Jews who had first rejected Jesus –

#### For Israel on Pentecost:

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” Acts 2:38, 39

For Paul as noted in Acts 9:

“And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’<sup>18</sup> Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.” Acts 9:17, 18

For Paul while speaking to Israel in Acts 22:

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Acts 22:16

Without telling us when Paul received the Spirit, it can be inferred that it occurred only after he was baptized. The sin of rejection by these early Jews was to be overcome through water baptism. The reason for this is because it is a sign to national Israel of their need to be identified with the Messiah in order to be saved as a nation. That is actually prefigured in typology in Joshua 3 and 4. Take time to watch the Superior Word sermons on those chapters to more fully understand this.

Life application: Today, a person who accepts Jesus is saved by faith and he is immediately sealed with the Spirit. At that moment, he is sanctified and justified before the Lord. Water baptism follows this as an outward sign of the inner change that has taken place.

It is a command of the Lord that baptism takes place, just as taking the Lord’s Supper is a command. Such rites are obviously important to the Lord and He expects us to follow through with them. Salvation is not tied up in either, but it is sure that rewards are. Be sure to receive baptism if you have never done so, and then be sure to take the Lord’s Supper when you meet.

Also, take time to read the Bible each day. Consider it in its intended context and think about why things occur as they do in Scripture. There is always a logical reason for why things are detailed as they are. So, contemplate the word as you go about your day.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for salvation by grace through faith. Thank You that, when we believe, we are saved and sealed for the day of redemption. We no longer have to fear death or condemnation. Rather, we can look to the future with hope and joy because of the work of Jesus our Lord! Thank You for Jesus. Amen.*

**“Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance Acts 22:17**

The Greek is more literally translated, “And it happened to me, having returned to Jerusalem and my praying in the temple, I came into a trance” (CG).

Paul had just been instructed by Ananias to arise, be baptized, and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord. That was while he was in Damascus. Next, he tells the crowd, “And it happened to me, having returned to Jerusalem.”

His words now occurred upon his return, which is recorded in these few verses of Acts 9—

“And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and brought *him* to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. <sup>29</sup> And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. <sup>30</sup> When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.” Acts 9:26-30

Though these words in Acts 9 are recorded directly after his departure from Damascus, as if he immediately traveled there, it is probable that he first went to Arabia, returned to Damascus, and then went to Jerusalem —

“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called *me* through His grace, <sup>16</sup> to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

<sup>18</sup> Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.” Galatians 1:15-18

It is then during this fifteen-day stay in Jerusalem that his next words probably took place. He says, “and my praying in the temple, I came into a trance.”

The fact that he went to the temple to pray forms a part of his defense against being a blasphemer. His words to them indicate that he has remained an observant Jew all along.

Versions such as the KJV and NKJV don't give the correct sense here. Instead of "he was in a trance," it says he "came" or "fell" into a trance. Like both Cornelius and Peter in Acts 10, the state came about during a time of prayer.

Life application: By the time of these events, Paul had personally received revelation from the Lord in Arabia. He had believed in the Lord for a full three years. And yet, he took time to pray while in the temple.

In other words, his attitude was not, "I personally know the Lord and don't need to pray anymore." Rather, prayer was a part of his continued life in Christ. In his epistles, he holds prayer as a key and integral part of his walk with the Lord.

If this is so with someone who was personally called by the Lord and who had then personally received revelation from the Lord, it shows the high value of prayer. It should be something we likewise place a high value on. Let us remember this and take time to stop and pray. Moving mountains in one's life begins while stationary on one's knees.

*Lord God, help us to remember to connect with You as we conduct our affairs each day. May prayer be considered an important part of our walk as we draw near to You with our souls open before You. Help us to solidify this as a priority in our lives. Amen.*

**"and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.' Acts 22:18**

A literal rendering would be, "and saw Him saying to me, 'Hasten, and in speed depart from Jerusalem: because they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.'"

Paul just noted that after his conversion, when he had returned to Jerusalem, he was praying in the temple and a trance came upon him. That continues now, saying, "and saw Him saying to me."

Without going any further, who "Him" is can be discerned by referring to the nearest antecedent. In verse 16, it said, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Thus, Paul is referring to the Lord. He is continuing his

thoughts about his relationship with the Lord as His chosen instrument. Next, he details what the Lord said with the words, “Hasten, and in speed depart from Jerusalem.”

At various times in Scripture, the Lord either directly or indirectly tells people to move from one place to another. For example, after serving Laban for many years, the Lord directed the steps of Jacob –

“Then the Lord said to Jacob, ‘Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you.’” Genesis 31:3

The Lord also directed the steps of His prophets from time to time, and that continued with His apostles during the establishment of the church –

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’<sup>3</sup> Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.” Acts 13:2, 3

In this case, it is early in Paul’s ministry, he has been selected as the apostle who would most thoroughly explain salvation by grace through faith apart from deeds of the law, and he was in the location from which the law issued forth. His message would not be well received at this time by any Jew, but especially not in Jerusalem. Hence, the Lord continues, saying, “because they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.”

Paul was direct in his approach, he did not hold back what he had learned, and he meticulously detailed what it meant to enter into the New Covenant by faith in Christ. This is clearly laid out in Romans where he, time and again, addresses matters directed at particular categories of people.

When addressing an issue concerning Jews, he explicitly uses them as his example, such as, “Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God...” (Romans 2:17). From there, Paul explains the problems with resting on the law as one’s boast. This type of abrupt and direct discourse concerning Jesus and the effects of His work would not be well-received by the Jews. Indeed, two thousand years later, it still is not.

As for Paul’s words in this verse, the account in Acts 9 doesn’t mention any of this. However, it does mention his disputing with the Hellenists. It may be that at this time, the warning in the trance came. He may have thought to stay and debate with these



people, hoping to convert them, but if he had, they would have sought to kill him. Instead, and because of the vision, he took the direction to depart as he was instructed.

Life application: When speaking to others about spiritual matters, a lot of enmity can arise. People are often sensitive about even discussing matters of salvation, condemnation, etc. Therefore, tact in one's approach is necessary.

And yet, being tactful should not include waffling on proper doctrine. For example, the Bible teaches that all people are born in sin and are at enmity with God. This is something that we cannot avoid sharing when asked. However, how we present this truth can make a great difference in the anticipated response.

If a person stands on a street corner and yells at everyone who passes him, "You are a sinner. You are going to hell!" He probably won't make any converts. Someone might give him a good pounding, though.

On the other hand, if the same person quietly approaches someone and says, "May I share the good news of what Jesus did with you?" He might get a favorable response. From there, he might say, "Because of the sin in our lives, God cannot accept us, but He loves us enough to have sent Jesus to restore us to Himself."

Such an approach conveys the same truth as the first approach, but it does it in a spirit of caring, not high-handed superiority. Paul's approach was always direct but not necessarily confrontational. However, when dealing with matters of the law, even something nonconfrontational can still be very upsetting to those whose boast is in the law.

Therefore, he had been directed by the Lord to depart from Jerusalem. His message needed ears that would be receptive to it at the right time. That time is yet ahead for this troubled city, but it will come someday. Until then, Jerusalem continues as a city without a proper relationship with the Lord. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem by praying for its collective heart to be turned to Jesus.

*Glorious Lord God, today we lift up Your wayward nation, the people of Israel. We also pray for Your holy city, Jerusalem. There is not yet peace in the people's hearts, nor is there peace in the city. But we pray for hearts to be changed before the days of tribulation come upon them. May the word about Jesus continue to expand and convert hearts and minds before that time comes. Amen.*

**“So I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. Acts 22:19**

The verbs are all present participles – “And I said, ‘Lord they know that I was imprisoning and scourging in those synagogues those believing on You’” (CG).

In the previous verse, the Lord instructed Paul to get out of Jerusalem because those in the city would not receive his testimony. Of course, like Ananias in Acts 9, Paul’s human nature decided to argue against the Lord’s word instead of simply complying with it. Therefore, he tells the crowd before him, “And I said, ‘Lord they know.’”

Despite the divine warning, Paul felt compelled to defend his presence in Jerusalem, as if his words would sway the Lord to change His mind or something. And so, he continues, saying, “that I was imprisoning and scourging in those synagogues.”

The word translated as imprisoning is found only here in Scripture, *phulakizó*. It is derived from *phulax*, a guard, or a sentinel. Thus, it signifies the act of incarcerating. The word translated as scourging means to flay. By implication, then, it means to scourge, which can flay the skin. However, it can also mean to simply thrash or beat another person. In this case, he continues speaking to the Lord saying, “those believing on You.”

Paul was a persecutor of the very faith he was now being persecuted over. He had converted, but his change would not positively affect those he later encountered in Jerusalem. He was given authority to do these things, the people of Jerusalem knew this, and yet Jesus knew that his conversion would be upsetting to them. None of this was unknown to the Lord, and Paul’s appeal would not change the matter.

Life application: Despite the divine warning, Paul felt compelled to defend his presence in Jerusalem to the Lord. Sharing that now with the crowd who was accusing him actually serves a two-fold purpose in the ears of his hearers.

First, he had been opposed to the faith that he now professed. Thus, they would know that his actions were sincere for the tenets of being an observant Jew, but that he realized that these tenets did not extend to persecuting Christ’s followers. Instead, those actions were opposed to the true faith of an observant Jew.

Secondly, it showed the audience that it was they, not him, who stood opposed to what was correct and proper. Though he had imprisoned and beaten those followers of Jesus

in defiant opposition to Him, his zeal was misdirected. Thus, their zeal at his arrest is similarly misdirected.

Therefore, Paul could use his own failing (meaning arguing against the Lord's word) to reinforce his present position before the people. However, this doesn't change the fact that he originally argued instead of simply obeying. As noted, this is what Ananias did in Acts 9. It is also what Moses did in Exodus 4 and Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1.

Despite this obviously being a human trait that is hard to overcome, as evinced by these and other examples in Scripture, we can learn from them. The word of the Lord is now complete. It is written, and it is authoritative. And yet, people who have believed on the Lord and been saved will still argue against the word of the Lord.

We rebelliously buck against the instructions laid out there, acting as if we know better than He does. Until we are willing to accept His word as written and in proper context, we are no different than those who stood right in front of the Lord and argued why He must be wrong.

Let us not rebel against His word. Instead, we should be willing to comply with its directives. The Lord is infinitely more intelligent than we are. When He directs, it is for a good purpose. Therefore, let us obediently submit to His will.

*Heavenly Father, forgive us for those times when we question Your word, either openly or through our general conduct as we walk before You. Give us knowledge to understand the things that are often difficult to grasp and the wisdom to apply that knowledge to our lives. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.”**

Acts 22:20

Paul has been defending his conversion and adherence to the Way based on his life prior to his conversion. He continues that thought now, saying, “And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed.”

Paul uses the word *martus* to describe Stephen. Some translations say “martyr,” while others “witness.” Either is correct, depending on the context. It is generally believed that the use of “martyr” came later. Therefore, “witness” is probably a better rendering for this account.

Also, as he is speaking to a congregation about the events that occurred and of which they would have been familiar, the idea of Stephen having been a witness seems more appropriate. However, by the time Revelation was written, “martyr” was probably more in use and is probably a correct translation for Revelation 2:13, although even there, “witness” is possible. Of Paul’s conduct at the time of Stephen, he next says, “I also was standing by consenting to his death.”

Paul ensures that the account of Stephen is conveyed to them with exacting detail in order to show them the extent of his zeal before his conversion. He was willing to consent to the murderous act of a person because of his belief that it was the right thing to do. He was part of a crowd, not unlike those now standing before him, looking for the blood of the accused.

Paul’s words are an attempt to show them that just what they were engaged in is what he previously engaged in and for essentially the same reasons. Therefore, there must have been a change in him that converted him to the stand he now took. As for his actions at Stephen’s death, he next says, “and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.”

These were the outer garments of the people who stoned him. Today, we might take off our jackets if we are going to engage in an activity that needs labor or precision of movement. This is true with the outer garments of the Jews. They were flowing and cumbersome for such activities.

Therefore, the people would have removed them and placed them near someone trustworthy to watch them. The meaning is that even if Paul did not pick up stones and cast them at Stephen, he was complicit in Stephen’s death through his actions, approving of what was occurring and giving the death a better opportunity to come about.

Life application: Paul was a part of the execution of Stephen, even if he never cast a stone. There are ways that groups of people can execute someone where no one person is directly responsible for the person’s death.

For example, if a hundred people lined up and each punched someone, none of them might land a death blow, but the person would die from the many blows he received. The same is true with death by a thousand cuts. One little cut on the skin may not kill someone, but when a person is cut many times, he will not survive.

Such actions reveal to us that we may know something is wrong, but we will take various legal or quasi-legal avenues to make it happen, thus trying to find a way of exonerating our consciences from the guilt of what we are doing. This may occur in divorce situations, business dealings, and so forth.

These types of things show us that there is a problem in man that already exists. It is the infection of sin. It is in our lives, and it permeates ourselves and our societies. We all bear guilt for many things that occur. An example of this is found in the law –

“So you shall not pollute the land where you *are*; for blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it.” Numbers 35:33

This is a statement that is found in the law, but it follows from a general principle about the nature of God. That can be deduced from other verses that speak of such things in relation to the inhabitants of the land prior to Israel’s entry.

As this is so, we collectively bear guilt when we allow murderers to walk free. Abortion is something that cannot be excused, and yet we pass laws allowing it to happen, as if a human law can override a God-centered principle. When we vote for those who will pass such laws, we bear direct responsibility for such deaths.

The only way to be free of such sin debt is to come to Jesus and be cleansed. Only through the atonement of His precious shed blood can we ever find restoration with God because of the sin debt that we bear. And when that restoration is made, it is an eternal restoration. Therefore, let us not disgrace what God in Christ has done for us by continuing in sin.

Rather, let us be grateful for His gracious atonement and live for Him according to holiness. May we have this attitude, to the glory of God who saved us.

*We praise You for Your goodness to us Lord God Almighty! Thank You for the forgiveness we have been granted because of the work of Jesus. May we live out our lives in gratitude and holiness all our days. Praises to You for JESUS! Amen.*

**“Then He said to me, ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.’”**  
Acts 22:21

Paul just tried to defend why he was no longer a threat to the people, even after Jesus had told earlier him he should quickly leave Jerusalem on the first visit after his conversion. However, Jesus had already spoken, knowing what was best. Therefore, without allowing any further appeal, it next says, “Then He said to me, ‘Depart.’”

After Jesus’ first instruction to depart and Paul’s rebuttal concerning his certainty that the Jews would understand his conversion and surely convert as well, Jesus again instructs him to depart. What is implied in this is that Jesus knew that the Jews would continue to reject His Lordship.

The offer of salvation had been made, and those who were to accept it had done so. However, the leaders of the nation, thus representing the entire nation, had rejected their Messiah. Paul’s words would fall on deaf ears. But more, Jesus doesn’t just tell him to depart, but He specifically says, “for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.”

Jesus’ words directly imply that Paul’s being sent to the Gentiles was for the purpose of telling of his conversion, of the offer of salvation that extends to them, and that they would accept it.

There can be no doubt this is what is implied in His words based on the reaction that is forthcoming from the crowd. It must be remembered that the word “Gentiles” included the Romans who ruled over them and who stood between them and Paul at that very moment.

Israel was anticipating a Messiah who would break off their yoke and set them at the head of the nations. One of many prominent sets of verses that promise this is from Isaiah 2 –

“The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> Now it shall come to pass in the latter days

*That* the mountain of the LORD’s house

Shall be established on the top of the mountains,

And shall be exalted above the hills;

And all nations shall flow to it.

<sup>3</sup> Many people shall come and say,

‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

To the house of the God of Jacob;

He will teach us His ways,

And we shall walk in His paths.’

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,  
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” Isaiah 2:1-3

These words are repeated, almost exactly, in Micah 4. They, along with many other assurances, prophesy about a time when Israel would be under her own control while also being the main point of focus throughout the world.

For Jesus to instruct Paul to depart to the Gentiles did not fit in with that idea at all. With Rome having authority over Israel, Paul was saying that he was directed to evangelize the very people who had the yoke upon the necks of the Jews. They could not accept such a Messiah who would allow this at their expense.

Life application: The problem with Israel lay in a misunderstanding of their position before the Lord. That same problem continues to this day. Everything about Israel’s calling, even before the calling was made, was of grace.

Noah found grace and was saved through the waters. Abraham was selected by grace. Isaac was chosen apart from any merit. Jacob was known to be the one God favored before the children were born. Israel was given grace in the sending of Moses.

The covenant between the Lord and Israel came about because of the gracious promises made to the patriarchs. The continuation of the covenant, even after Israel’s breaking it repeatedly, was based on the grace of God. Every step of the way, God demonstrated grace in the establishment, calling, and preservation of Israel.

Today, Israel has been called back from among the nations as prophesied by the Lord. Thus, this restoration is an act of grace. And yet, Israel has consistently looked at their calling as one of personal merit – “We deserve this because we are Israel.” If Israel truthfully looked at their history, they would realize what every sinner who comes to Christ realizes – “All we deserve is condemnation, and yet God has given us grace.”

Until they come to this realization and accept Jesus, thus entering into the New Covenant, their days will be marred with unhappiness. In our relationship with God, personal merit is excluded. Let us consider this and be grateful to Him for His unlimited grace in saving even us.

*Lord God, thank You for the grace of God that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And they listened to him until this word, and *then* they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a *fellow* from the earth, for he is not fit to live!” Acts 22:22**

In the previous verse, Jesus told Paul he was to depart because he was being sent far from Jerusalem to the Gentiles. Now, that continues with, “And they listened to him until this word.” The reference is to the word “Gentiles.”

One word. Just one word is all that it took to remove any further chance of reasoned dialogue. That same thought permeates the theological and cultural minds of Jews to this day. Gentiles, though being the people among whom they dwell, are not considered on the same spiritual or cultural level as they are.

To think that one of their own would be willing to minister to them about the “supposed” Messiah was worse than a slap in the face. Everything Paul had said implied that he was a spokesperson for this Messiah and that the message he proclaimed was in line with this Messiah’s intents and purposes. Therefore, Paul’s Messiah could not be their Messiah. Therefore, it next says, “and *then* they raised their voices.”

One can see the crowd suddenly roaring as one. Those who had sat down to listen while he spoke would have raised to their feet with their fists held high. Teeth would have gnashed, and faces would have fumed with fury. They collectively shouted out “and said, ‘Away with such a *fellow* from the earth, for he is not fit to live!’”

The Messiah Paul proclaimed was, to them, a total failure. How could He favor the Gentiles when He hadn't even broken off their bonds? The people of Israel were looking for an earthly ruler, never considering that the bonds they were in were spiritual ones. They were slaves to sin, and the law kept them in that bondage.

Only in the Messiah that Paul proclaimed could such bonds be removed, but they couldn’t see this. They stumbled over the stumbling block, and in the process, they killed the messengers of the truth. They now intended to kill this one as well.

In proclaiming that the messianic message was intended for all people, Paul had raised Gentiles to their level. At the same time, he had lowered them from their supposed exalted and chosen status. However, this attitude was from a selective reading of their own Scriptures that proclaim salvation to the nations and restoration of life to the Gentiles as well as Israel.



Having missed this obvious precept, they found him wholly unfit to live and called for him to be removed from the earth.

Life application: When we are taught something by someone we trust, such as our preacher, we will generally accept his words as correct. After all, he is the specialist in matters of faith. Dad might be a dentist, and the preacher may go to him to have his teeth repaired, but Dad goes to the preacher to be taught the word.

As we grow up, having believed a particular doctrine, we will tend to mentally dismiss anything that contradicts what we now believe is true. This is known as cognitive dissonance. It is a state where we have inconsistent thoughts, attitudes, or beliefs that are related to particular matters or concepts.

For example, if we are taught that there is no such thing as a rapture of the church, we will tend to ignore any teaching that supports that doctrine, even if there is a preponderance of evidence that supports it. Even irrefutable arguments will be dismissed.

This is why it is so difficult for people to leave cults. What has been trained into them is extremely difficult to overcome. Therefore, it is so very important to read and know the Bible and ask God to correct anything in your doctrine that is wrong. But you must be willing to go where He leads directly from His word.

Removal of bad doctrine is difficult, but it is not impossible. As Paul says, “Test all things; hold fast what is good” 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

*Lord God Almighty, we are prone to take wrong turns in life, thinking we are on the right path. Help us to keep our feet on sound doctrine and proper biblical interpretation. Clean out those doctrines that are faulty and fill us with right and proper thinking concerning this precious and sacred word that You have given us. Amen.*

**Then, as they cried out and tore off *their* clothes and threw dust into the air,**  
Acts 22:23

The tense of the verbs is all wrong in the NKJV. The Greek uses present participles, saying – “And they – howling and hurling their garments and casting dust into the air” (CG).

In the previous verse, the crowd before Paul shouted out for him to be removed from the earth, not being fit to live. With that, it next says, “And they – howling.”

It is a word that signifies clamor. It is properly identified with the loud bay or croaking of animals. Thus, it can signify shouting, shrieking, etc. Plato used it when describing the howling of dogs. These people, who were supposedly the holy nation of the law, had assumed the aspect of unclean canine, yelping as if a pack of rabid Dobermans. Next, it says, “and hurling their garments.”

It is a word found only here in Scripture, *rhipteó*. It signifies to cast or hurl. In this case, one can see them like a bunch of angry school children ready to fight. They pull their outer garments off and toss them in the air or to the ground, away from their bodies, thus freeing themselves for a rumble. It then adds, “and casting dust into the air.”

It is a metaphor for their conduct about Paul. He is a man of the dust, and they are recommending he be returned to dust. It is a sign of great distress and, at times, mourning. The scene may seem almost comical to us, but what is written here is the customary way of showing both anger and a sense of anguish over what they perceive as blasphemy.

Even today, we can see this type of Middle Eastern rage on TV as people show their offense or revulsion in similar displays. Both acts also have to be considered in light of Paul’s detention by the Romans.

The Jews knew that they couldn’t stone Paul while he was in Roman custody. But showing him that this is what they would do if he wasn't protected by them, they 1) cast off their clothing, a sign that they were readying to stone him; 2) they threw dust into the air, a sign that if he wasn’t surrounded by Romans, it would be rocks instead of dust.

Both actions are signs that they would gladly fulfill their words of removing him from the earth.

Life application: There is a lot of rage in the world against the gospel. That is becoming more pervasive as time goes by. Nations that were once heralds of the gospel now send government agents to spy on people who simply want to worship Jesus as their forefathers had done.

This attitude results from an internal hatred stemming from their own deviant morals. Christians hold that their ultimate moral standard is based on what God expects of

them, not what the government dictates. Thus, it is ultimately an attack against the God who gave man the moral guidelines in the first place.

These people claim they don't believe in God, and yet they have a vehement hatred for the God they claim doesn't exist. Their thinking is irrational and violent, just as the Jews in Paul's time were. They hated that the God Paul proclaimed had a moral base inclusive of Gentile salvation. Thus, they hate His Messiah, who came to represent God.

From there, they hate any messenger of this Messiah. But Jesus stated this would be so—

“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup> that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” John 5:22, 23

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

-John 15:18, 19

This attitude continues today toward those who hold to the words of Scripture. The world hates the message of Jesus because it proclaims a standard of morality that the world does not accept. Scripture also holds a standard of acceptance that most people groups do not want to accept. All people are on the same level of acceptance in Christ, regardless of culture, genealogy, etc. This is highly unpalatable to many.

Hold fast to the word despite this. God is calling out a group of people from this world who will worship Him in spirit and in truth for all eternity. What happens now is a temporary blip on the way to glory.

*Lord God, thank You for allowing us to come to You just as we are. The color of our skin, the family line we descend from, the cultural background we possess, and other such distinctions are set aside in Christ. We are accepted by faith in Him. How freeing that is! Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him. Acts 22:24**

The Greek reads, “The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, having directed him examining *by* scourges so that he might know for what reason they cried out thus against him” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul’s words had caused the crowd to go into an uproar, casting off their clothes and throwing dust up into the air. With that, Paul’s words were forcibly finished, and, as it next says, “The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks.”

No further purpose could be served by allowing Paul to attempt speaking to the crowd again. As Paul spoke in the local dialect to the people, the commander probably would not have known the substance of what he had said. He might have known a little of the language, but he obviously didn’t understand the entire discourse. And so, he gave order to his men to bring him into the barracks, “having directed him examining *by* scourges.”

This implies that this was the standard way of eliciting information from someone. Were it not, the account would have gone through stages of interrogation leading up to torture. As for the word translated as examining, *anetazó*, it is used only twice in the Bible, first here and then again in verse 29.

It signifies thorough examining, as if a person were on trial, such as a witness. Strong’s notes that this was frequently accomplished through the aid of torture. Such is the case now with Paul. The word is not found anywhere in classical Greek, but it is used once in the apocryphal book of Susanna.

As nothing is noted concerning interrogation leading up to torture, it shows that the Romans wasted no time in getting to the point. Hence, it next says, “so that he might know for what reason they cried out thus against him.”

It would be well known that this type of punishment was how the Romans operated. Therefore, it would be a way of keeping the peace through threats. Paul was to be subjected to a brutal interrogation that would leave him in agonizing pain and with permanent scars to remind him of the ordeal.

Life application: Ecclesiastes 8:11 says, “Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” We can philosophize all day long about whether the judgment to beat Paul, in order to elicit information from him was wrong or not. But it is certain that it was an effective deterrent within the Roman society.

When people saw the consequences of being a miscreant, it would keep them in check concerning their own conduct. Today, it is exactly the opposite. Those who do right are punished as offenders of the law. Those who break the law are not required to post bail, given light or no sentences, and are pandered to by the news media, portraying them as victims.

Because of this, society in many large cities has devolved into abject fear among the general populace. They know that if they defend themselves and their property from evildoers, they will be charged. Police are likewise hand-tied. If they capture a thug who should otherwise be removed from society and something happens to him, even accidentally, the arresting officer can be charged and spend many years in prison.

This has led to a total breakdown in society. Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and even Job provide wisdom concerning these things. This wisdom has been rejected by left-leaning politicians, media, judges, and academia. Thus, societal harm, possibly permanent, has arisen.

A society cannot function like this. A rejection of the biblical standard of morality, by a nation that was established on the biblical model, can only result in its own implosion. Be sure to vote when the time arises. The only thing that will stem this unholy tide is to vote against these ungodly lefties.

*Heavenly Father, nations that previously honored You, Your word, and the moral principles set forth by You are quickly turning away to ideas that can only result in societal degradation and ever-increasing moral turpitude. Give us wisdom and the ability to stand against these things. It is our desire that our societies be honoring of You. Help us to restore godly values in the nations we live in. Amen.*

**And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?” Acts 22:25**

Paul has been taken into the barracks where the commander ordered that he be examined under scourging. Now, that continues with, “And as they bound him with thongs.”

Luke uses another word unique in Scripture, *proteínó*, translated by the NKJV as “bound.” It signifies “to stretch forward.” There is a debate about the correct way to translate these words. It could either say, “As they stretched him out to thong him...” or “And as they stretched him forward with thongs.”

In other words, are the thongs used to tie him in preparation for being beaten, or is he being tied up in order for the thongs, on which are the scourges, to be used on him? Vincent's Word Studies argues that it would be superfluous to say, "bound him" and then add in "with thongs." But Luke is normally very precise in his use of words. What others may find superfluous, he will find as an exacting and necessary detail.

On the other hand, Ellicott notes that "The Greek word for 'thong' is always used in the New Testament in connection with the idea of tying." A good question to ask is, "Does it make any difference in the end?" For precision, yes. However, in the overall picture, the result will be the same. Paul is facing a good beating with scourges. Therefore, "Paul said to the centurion who stood by."

The commander gave the order. A centurion is ensuring the order is complied with and will probably be the one to administer the scourging. Lower-ranking soldiers are the ones tying Paul up. Paul addresses the one in greatest authority in the room at the current time, asking, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?"

His question would have an immediate effect on the centurion. If this person were a Roman citizen, those in the barracks would already be guilty of a crime for violating Paul's rights by not giving him a trial first. Further, even if guilty, this type of punishment could not be given to a citizen.

To continue would make him even more guilty and possibly liable to the same punishment he was about to administer. If Paul were not a Roman, he would be a lunatic. To claim citizenship in this way would be punishable, probably by death. His claim alone would be enough to make the centurion stop and investigate what he was about to do.

Cicero says, "It is a heinous sin to bind a Roman citizen, it is wickedness to beat him, it is next to parricide to kill him, and what shall I say to crucify him?" Another ancient witness says, "According to the Valerian law, it was not lawful for magistrates to condemn a Roman without hearing the cause, and pleading in it; and such condemned persons might appeal to the populace" Pompon. Laetus de Legibus, p. 157.

Life application: If we think about the situation being described, Paul possessed certain rights that kept him from being bound, scourged, or executed without the strictest of investigations and proper judicial processes. Jesus was born in the same general generation, but He did not possess these rights.

Although we can dismiss that idea without much thought, we can also contemplate the enormity of it and stand in awe of what it means. God could have sent His Messiah into the world as the son of a Roman citizen. If this were to have been the case, the result would have been completely different.

But He preordained every aspect of the birth of Christ to meet His purposes. Hebrews 10 says –

“Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:  
‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,  
But a body You have prepared for Me.  
<sup>6</sup>In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin  
You had no pleasure.  
<sup>7</sup>Then I said, “Behold, I have come—  
In the volume of the book it is written of Me—  
To do Your will, O God.”” Hebrews 10:5-7

God’s preparation of a body for Jesus includes every ancestor who came into His genealogy, purposefully selecting the line to ensure each prophecy about Him would come to pass. It included the timing of His birth, its location, the rights or lack of rights He would possess, etc.

Everything was meticulously ordained by God for the purpose of redeeming man. Those who dismiss the life of Christ do so without thinking through the incredible nature of what transpired, and thus the immense love God must have for the objects of His affections, meaning those whom He will save through the giving of Jesus.

Let us never minimize the magnitude of the marvel that is displayed in the coming of our Lord. God’s affections are on redeeming the people of the world. May we consider this and be willing to speak out the good news to those who so desperately need to hear it.

*Lord God, how can it be that You would look upon us and see anything of value? We have all sinned and gone astray in our hearts, minds, and actions. And yet, You have graciously accepted us and forgiven us because of faith in what was done in the giving of Christ Jesus our Lord. We shall praise you forever and ever because of the glory of our Lord. Hallelujah and amen.*

**When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the commander, saying, “Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.”** Acts 22:26

A literal translation would be, “And the centurion, having heard, having gone to the commander reported, saying, ‘See what you are about to do! For this man is Roman’ (CG).

As the Romans were binding Paul, intending to scourge him, he asked, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?” An immediate response follows. Luke next records, “And the centurion, having heard, having gone to the commander.”

As soon as Paul uttered his words, the centurion realized there could be trouble. Any further action by him concerning Paul without direct approval of the commander could mean any level of punishment. Therefore, he “reported, saying, ‘See what you are about to do!’”

Some manuscripts place this as a question, saying, “What are you about to do?” Others make it a proclamation, “See what you are about to do...” The change doesn’t substantially alter the intent. The centurion is simply protecting himself and the commander from real trouble. If the commander presses the punishment on Paul, and Paul’s words are true, it could permanently change the course of their lives. The centurion’s next words explain why, “For this man is Roman.”

Paul was a citizen of Rome. What they were about to do was illegal and a punishable offense. Further action against Paul had to be stopped, and at this point, trouble may already be brewing. Paul’s personal attitude towards them could still result in real problems ahead.

Life application: Citizenship in a country carries certain rights and responsibilities. However, in many countries today, the leaders are purposefully following an agenda where those who are illegal in a country are treated better than those who are citizens.

Those who productively work are having the effort of their labors stolen from them and handed over to those who have no right to them. When a citizen is raped or killed by an illegal alien, the government – from the local level even to the federal level – will shield the illegal from punishment and deportation. Why do you think this is occurring?



There is a globalist agenda that is attempting to bring the world under a single authority, removing national barriers, rights, and laws. In order to do this, destroying the foundational underpinnings of societies is required. The only time those following this communist agenda have a change of heart is when their agenda personally backfires on them.

These things are, however, inevitable. The Bible's prophecies about the future are being realized with each wicked step of these insufferable people. Don't be surprised as you continue to see those in authority despise the nations they are charged to run and the people they are sworn to protect. Realize that the times are drawing near for God's judgment on a global scale.

This also means that the time for Jesus to come for His people is also drawing near. Be ready! Tell people about God's goodness in Christ now. The time for our departure is coming quickly.

*Heavenly Father, help us to be prompt in speaking to others about their need for Jesus. May we not hold back in explaining the good news. Rather, may we be about fulfilling our call to evangelize, sharing the wonderful news that Jesus has prevailed over death, and He promises us eternal life in a world without wickedness. Instill this desire in us, O God. Amen.*

**Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?"**

**He said, "Yes." Acts 22:27**

A literal translation is, "And the commander, having come near, said to him, 'Tell me, are you Roman?' And he said, 'Yes.'"

The centurion had just gone to the commander and informed him of Paul's claim of being Roman. Having heard this, Luke next records, "And the commander, having come near, said to him, 'Tell me, are you Roman?'"

The commander seems truly shocked by the claim, as seen in his words. The "you" in the question is emphatic. In essence, "You? Roman?" By this time, the commander is certainly scared, probably in disbelief, and surely baffled. The coming response would make his heart drop, "And he said, 'Yes.'"

The commander never thought to ask, and now he was in a very difficult position before the law. If Paul were to press the matter, he might find himself reduced in rank, sent to

an even worse outpost, or even imprisoned for having failed in properly discharging his duties in this regard.

As for Paul's response, it is unimaginable that he would lie about such a thing. As Ellicott notes, "The combination of so many more or less discordant elements was so exceptional as to be almost incredible."

Paul's answer is either horrifyingly true or it is the answer of a fool with a death wish. Attempting to claim such a position to which he had no right would be the claim of a madman. Therefore, the commander must assume it to be true.

Life application: Paul directly appealed to his citizenship as a right that he possessed and which he was exercising that right to. This sentiment is found throughout Scripture, and the reason it is so is because God has set the nations before Him. By dividing the peoples by individual languages, He directed that they would unite in a manner that would result in the establishment of individual nations.

Within those nations, those who are citizens are given the right to whatever benefits are to be derived from such citizenship. How tragic it is that Christians in today's world have failed to rightly understand this, and they have ceded their rights by not voting according to biblical principles.

For each Christian who neglects to vote, there is another non-Christian with whatever perverse agenda he is supporting. The vote of the Christian is lost. Along with that, his own rights are slowly stripped away from him. This is all because of a failure to responsibly act in the nation where God has placed him.

When people such as this are rounded up for extermination, they will only be able to blame themselves. If you are a citizen of a nation with a right such as voting, use your right to the glory of God. In such instances, failing to be responsible because of supposed piety will only lead to future tragedy.

*Lord God, may we be aware of our position within the societies You have placed us. When we have a right that allows for our active participation, may we be wise and responsible to act for the betterment of the nation in which we live. In failing to act, we are only bringing disaster upon ourselves. Thank You for the rights we possess in the land in which we live. May we use them to Your glory. Amen.*

**The commander answered, “With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.”  
And Paul said, “But I was born *a citizen.*” Acts 22:28**

While preparing to have Paul scourged, the centurion was alerted to the fact that Paul was Roman. Hearing this, the centurion told his commander. From there, the commander went to Paul and asked if he was Roman. Paul responded affirmatively. Now, it says, “The commander answered, ‘With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.’”

The words bear emphasis – “I, great sum, this citizenship bought.” The commander’s response shows without any doubt that citizenship could be purchased and that he had done so at great expense, something he was quite proud of. Some believe that such a purchase was made through bribery of corrupt officials. Vincent's Word Studies says –

“The purchase of Roman citizenship was an investment. Under the first Roman emperors it was obtained only at large cost and with great difficulty; later, it was sold for a trifle.”

If that doesn't sound like the US today! It used to be an honor to earn citizenship. Now, it means nothing. It is handed out to those who don’t deserve it, and it is denied to those who have demonstrated the wits, intelligence, and business acumen to merit it in the way the law clearly states.

The word translated as sum is *kephalaion*. It is used only twice in the New Testament, here and in Hebrews 8:1, where it is translated as “the main point.” It comes from *kephale*, meaning the head, a cornerstone, or even the primary head of something, like a ruler.

Also, the word translated as citizenship is *politeia*. It indicates “citizenship; concretely, a community -- commonwealth, freedom” (Strong’s). Its only other use is in Ephesians 2:12 speaking of the commonwealth of Israel –

“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— <sup>12</sup>that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth [*politeia*] of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

-Ephesians 2:11-13

Now, and understanding the commander's words, it next says, "And Paul said, 'But I was born *a citizen.*'" Again, the Greek is more emphatic. It reads, "I, and even, was born." This means that he was born into a family who were already citizens. Many theories have arisen as to how he obtained it, but Ellicott may be correct –

"Many of the Jews who were taken to Rome by Pompeius as slaves first obtained their freedom and became libertini, and afterwards were admitted on the register as citizens. The mention of kinsmen or friends at Rome (Romans 16:7; Romans 16:11), makes it probable, as has been said, that the Apostle's father may have been among them."

Life application: Think about what this conversation means in relation to the world today. Something that was once highly cherished, even precious and/or life-saving, eventually meant nothing at all. The leaders of the great and vast Roman empire squandered what had been built. The mid-level officials had become corrupt and uncaring about safeguarding what had been entrusted to them.

Eventually, Roman citizenship had no value at all. Today, the exact same attitude is on display in most of the great and powerful governments of the world. Obtaining US citizenship, for example, is a laughable process that is so misused by government employees that, for a quick bribe when no one is looking, even pedophiles can easily obtain it.

The only citizenship that truly matters in this world is the one that will never be diminished in how it is obtained –

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, <sup>22</sup> in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." Ephesians 2:19-22

There is only one way heavenly citizenship is realized, and it is through faith in what God has done in and through the giving of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. While the rest of the world is hurriedly seeking things that have no lasting value, Jesus Christ's offer stands as an eternal hope for those who come to Him.

This offer comes at the highest price of all, and yet, that price has been paid already through Jesus' cross. All that is needed to appropriate it is to believe to the saving of the soul.

*Lord God, how thankful we are that there is a hope beyond this fallen world. We strive for things that have no value and things that can be taken away or lost in a moment. But what You offer is eternal citizenship in a heavenly kingdom. May we be willing to share this good news with those who so desperately need it. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. Acts 22:29**

The words are more literally rendered, "Immediately, therefore, those being about to examine him departed from him. And also, the commander was afraid, having ascertained that he is a Roman, and because he had bound him" (CG).

Paul just confirmed to the commander that he was born a citizen. With that, it next says, "Immediately, therefore, those being about to examine him departed from him."

Oopsie. As soon as the words left Paul's lips, they stepped back from his "examination." The word here is used in a euphemistic sense for scourging him. They would have done so until he spoke whatever they wanted to hear. Hence, it was an examination.

This is the second and last use of the word *anetazó* in Scripture. The first was in verse 22:24. As noted then, it signifies thorough examining, as if a person were on trial, such as a witness. In Paul's case, the examining was to be done in conjunction with torture. There is a point where even the hardest of men will yield under such inquisition, although that point may lead to death.

As for Paul, any thought of the examination continuing was ended. One might ask why he didn't object to the punishment he and Silas received in Acts 16, but he objected now in Jerusalem. The reason is that their beating in Acts 16 was with rods. Though painful, it would not be life-threatening. This treatment in Jerusalem would have resulted in a great loss of blood and an extended period of convalescence, or possibly death.

Therefore, and knowing that he could use this to his advantage, he appealed to his citizenship. Understanding this, it next says, "And also, the commander was afraid."

The word afraid could be an understatement, depending on those appointed over him. He had almost degraded a fellow citizen in one of the most humiliating and painful examinations that could be imagined. Having even prepared Paul for this, by stretching him out and readying the scourges, was intolerable treatment. He knew this, “having ascertained that he is a Roman, and because he had bound him.”

One thing is certain, it would not be wrong to bind him in chains. This is known because Paul will be in chains later, even though a Roman. Therefore, the illegal binding is having strapped him into a position where he could be tortured and then binding him there with leather straps.

Life application: Imagine yourself in a crowd, and the authorities were about to execute a baby in front of her mother. Because of your position within society, you have the ability to appeal on behalf of the child, thus saving its life. Would you remain silent, or would you speak up for the child?

Any person with even a modicum of God-centered morals would immediately speak out. To not do so would mean you were actively complicit in the murder of the child. In Proverbs 3:27, it says –

“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,  
When it is in the power of your hand to do so.”

This sentiment is not unique in Scripture. Rather, we are to speak up and speak out about such matters. So why should you think your vote is any different? You are a citizen of a nation. If your nation allows you to vote and you withhold your vote, knowing that an ungodly person may prevail in the election, you are working against what is good.

Likewise, if you vote for a person who supports abortion, you are actively working against God’s intent for human life. In the US, for example, abortion on demand is the platform of the democrat party. If a Christian votes for a democrat, he is – by default – supporting the murder of the unborn.

Do you not fear God? There is a judgment coming, even for believers. We cannot be held guiltless when we work against the moral principles God has laid out in Scripture. Be wise and be discerning. Use your citizenship through the power of the vote to glorify God.

*Lord God, please give us wise and discerning hearts concerning matters of morality as outlined in Your word. May we apply our lives and our decisions in such matters to uphold what is right and good, and to stem the tide of wickedness that will arise if we fail to act. Yes, Lord, give us wisdom in this way. Amen.*

**The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from *his* bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them. Acts 22:30**

A literal translation would be, “And the next day, desiring to know for certain why he is accused by the Jews, he loosed him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to assemble. And having brought down Paul, set him among them” (CG).

In the previous verse, the Roman soldiers withdrew from their plans to scourge Paul. Now, the words continue with, “And the next day.”

Without any delay, and certainly because Paul was a Roman, the commander acted. He surely didn’t want to keep Paul incarcerated if he had done nothing wrong. Continuing, it says he was “desiring to know for certain why he is accused by the Jews.”

This refers back to Acts 21:34, which occurred on the previous day –

“And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another.  
So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks.”

We need to carefully consider what is happening. If Paul was a Roman, then the commander would certainly have talked to him about what happened and asked about the situation. No charges had been filed against Paul that we are aware of. He was in the midst of a ruckus and was carried out of it. At this point, the commander just wants to know for certain why he was accused.

As he had not been able to satisfactorily determine what the Jews were in a tizzy about, and because he could not “examine” Paul through torture, he needed to set the record straight before he could take any further action. Therefore, “he loosed him.”

The word is *luó*. It means to loosen. Thus, he may have been bound, or he simply may have been in a cell from which he was released. Either way, once he was loosed, the commander “commanded the chief priests and all the council to assemble.”

A general meeting of the leadership was called. This probably would never have been needed if Paul was not a Roman. Instead, the scourging would have revealed what they needed to know. However, that could not take place, and so this meeting was necessary. There is still the consideration that if Paul was telling the truth in whatever they had discussed, he would still be open to attack and harm. Therefore, the verse and the chapter end with, “And having brought down Paul, set him among them.”

In order to both protect Paul and also to get the leaders to tell their side of the story, he had Paul escorted to them for all to openly work through the matter. The commander had made a giant mistake in his handling of Paul the previous day. He would not allow such an error to take place again. Therefore, Paul was to be carefully escorted and protected during the entire process.

Life application: The account of the Roman commander shows that cutting corners is not the best way to go about things. He was given the responsibility of maintaining the peace, but he was also given the responsibility of protecting the citizens of Rome from those among whom they dwelt.

It may have been unexpected to find a Jewish man in the middle of a ruckus to be a Roman citizen, but it was something he should have checked anyway. This is especially so because putting anyone through a scourging would be a serious matter. But to put a Roman citizen through that ordeal would be a life-changing ordeal for both of them.

He didn't stop to check. Now he must make an extra effort to determine what he might have found out the day before without the additional grief. We can learn from this. When we have a matter that is set before us, the least we can do is think through what the outcome of being hasty may be. Small things can turn into big problems if we don't consider how our decisions may adversely affect the result we are trying to obtain.

Go slow, think through your actions, and then act in a wise and prudent manner in the matters you are involved in. Be sure this is especially so when others may be negatively affected by what you do. Stop and pray about matters as well. James tells us that if we lack wisdom, we should ask of God, “who gives to all liberally and without reproach” (James 1:5).

*Glorious Lord God, may the decisions we make and the actions we take be carefully considered before we act. Give us wisdom to not cause harm to others as we go through life. May we carefully think through the steps we take so that harmony will reign, and You will be glorified through the wise conduct of Your people. Amen.*



## CHAPTER 23

**Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, “Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” Acts 23:1**

The Greek is more literally translated, “And Paul, having looked fixedly at the council, said, ‘Men, brothers, I – in all good conscience – have citizenized to God until this day.’”

In the previous verse, Paul was brought by the Roman commander and set before the council. With him there, Chapter 23 begins with, “And Paul, having looked fixedly.”

Paul’s fixed look implies a staring gaze. HELPS Word Studies says it signifies “to fix one’s eyes on some object continually and intensely – ‘to look straight at, to stare at, to keep one’s eyes fixed on.’” It was used in Luke 4:20, Acts 6:15, and Acts 7:55, among other times. If his eyesight was bad, as speculated, it would be all the more relevant to show that he diligently was attempting to meet the eyes of his accusers. Therefore, he having looked fixedly “at the council, said, ‘Men, brothers.’”

In his address, he greets them as equals, “men, brothers.” This would have been the first time in a quarter of a century that he stood in this place, sometime around the stoning of Stephen. There, after all these years, he begins his defense with the words, “I – in all good conscience.”

Here, a new word is introduced into Scripture, *suneidésis*. It signifies “joint-knowing.” It thus signifies “*conscience* which joins moral and spiritual consciousness as part of being created in the divine image. Accordingly, *all* people have this God-given capacity to know right from wrong because each is a *free moral agent*” (HELPS Word Studies).

Paul is summing up all of his time during those intervening years and his ministry to the Gentiles, whom they so despised, as right and appropriate. He asserts that his moral conduct in this regard was above reproach and that it would have been approved of by the higher moral power before whom he conducted his affairs. That is next expressly stated in the words “have citizenized to God until this day.”

Another new word is brought into Scripture here and is defined by a new Greek word now gifted to the English language, *politeuomai*. It means to behave or live as a citizen, coming from *polités*, a citizen. Thus, it means to citizen oneself. As it is a perfect participle, “have citizenized” fits the meaning exactly. The word is found only elsewhere in Scripture in Philippians 1:27 –

“Only let your conduct [lit: citizenizing (another new Charlie word)] be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”

This word is an idiom of the times to mean that he had lived properly, and his conscience was clean, even before God. This would have riled up those before him to no end, having been aware of his efforts among the Gentiles and of his walk with the Messiah they had rejected.

For some other times Paul speaks of conscience, see 2 Timothy 1:3; 1 Timothy 1:5; Romans 2:15, 13:5; 1 Corinthians 4:4, 10:25; and Acts 24:16.

Life application: As noted in previous commentaries, Paul never denied his citizenship either before God, or as a citizen of the empire (Rome) or country (Israel) to which he belonged. He used each according to the rights and benefits conferred upon him because of that citizenship.

And more, he claimed his rights to a heavenly citizenship as is indicated elsewhere in the New Testament. Of this status within a society, Wikipedia defines the word *politeia*. It is a help in understanding one’s rights within a particular society –

According to Liddell and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* a meaning of *politeia* is ‘the conditions and rights of the citizen, or citizenship’, analogous to the Latin *civitas*.

*Politeia*, in Greek means the community of citizens in a city / state. ...

*Politeia* is derived from both the root word *polis* meaning ‘city’ or ‘state’, and from the verb *politeuomai* that means ‘I am living as an active citizen of the *polis*.’

People living in a Greek city/state were not necessarily citizens. A person that was ostracized from the active matrix of the city was an example of such. Another example was people who lived in the city but were not active citizens who had a say in the political processes of the community. Women, slaves and others who Greek men deemed unworthy were not in the active matrix of the political formations of that city state, making them not-citizens, so not part of *politeia*.

In countries of the world today, many illegal aliens are brought in. And yet, they do not possess the rights of the nation in which they live. In the visible church, there are

unbelievers. They are in the church, but they are not of the church. Thus, they have no right to the citizenship of the church.

Paul held the rights of a Roman, a man of Israel, and a member of the church. He thus possessed the rights of the heavenly citizenship found in Christ. The Jews who had rejected Jesus do not possess those rights. This continues to this day.

This is an important point. Dual Covenantalism claims that Jews are saved by adherence to the law. This would be like saying that the illegals, or even legal immigrants still on visas or Green Cards, in the US have rights to citizenship because they work in jobs earning money.

Anyone with a modicum of sense can tell that such a notion is false. Only a person who is made a citizen can have the rights of a citizen. This is the false dichotomy set forth by people like John Hagee, who teach Dual Covenantalism. They claim rights for others that do not exist. The only way to possess the heavenly rights of citizenship of the New Covenant is to enter into the New Covenant through faith in the completed work of Jesus Christ.

But this also again shows the sad state of those Christians who do not participate in the political decisions of the nations in which they live. They fail to understand that God has placed them in those nations to be active members of them.

Understanding the nature of the Hebrew or Greek writings, from the perspective of the people who lived during those times, helps shed light on what we are being told in Scripture. Be sure to pay heed. Be sure to participate in each body of which you are a citizen. And be sure to never acknowledge others' rights to citizenship that they do not possess, lest you lead them to a false sense of security that they should not enjoy.

*Lord God Almighty, may we diligently study Your word and show ourselves approved before You by adhering to the precepts You have laid out for us there. May we carefully consider our state before You and never waffle in conducting our lives accordingly. We have been granted heavenly citizenship because of Jesus. Help us to live in accord with that truth. Amen.*

**And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. Acts 23:2**

Chapter 23 began with Paul telling the council that he had citizenized in all good conscience before God, even until that day. With that, a violent reaction occurs. What Luke records begins with, “And the high priest Ananias.”

This Ananias would have been the son of Nebedæus. He had been suspended from his office during the reign of Emperor Claudius for an offense. At that time, he was sent to Rome (Josephus Ant. xx. 6, 2).

The Pulpit Commentary says, “He was a violent, haughty, gluttonous, and rapacious man, and yet looked up to by the Jews.”

Vincent’s Word Studies says, “He is described as a revengeful and rapacious tyrant. We are told that he reduced the inferior priests almost to starvation by defrauding them of their tithes, and sent his creatures to the threshing-floors with bludgeons to seize the tithes by force.”

This repugnant man then “commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.”

The words more exactly read, “to strike his mouth.” It is referring to Paul’s mouth. He was brought before the council to state his case. With his opening words, this violent reaction from the vile high priest of Israel was to strike the place from which his words uttered.

The conduct of the high priest bears out that he was at least a law-breaker and a violent man. Paul had done nothing wrong, and he had not been convicted of any wrongdoing. And yet, he was punished in violation of the law. There was first to be a conviction before any punishment could be meted out.

Life application: In once Christ-honoring countries of the world, the radical and violent left, just like Ananias, has taken over to the point that laws are flippantly disobeyed. Those who commit horrendous crimes are given little or no sentences at all, and those who defend themselves and their families are counted as criminals.

Violence in the left-leaning cities is completely out of control, the citizens live in fear, and God is mocked at every meeting of the city councils. Nations are becoming ripe for judgment because of these ungodly people. And what is worse is that they are only getting worse with each passing day. They have lost any sense of moral reason and have become like those described by Jude –

“But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves.” Jude 1:10

Various translations say, “unreasoning animals,” “irrational animals,” “unthinking animals,” “wild animals,” “creatures without reason,” etc. The point is that they have devolved in their thinking to the point where they no longer carry any sense of human cognition, morality, care for others, etc.

And more, these people have moved into the pulpit and the classroom. They are rearing a generation of people just like them, spiritually dead and morally without care or cognition. This cannot end well.

It is incumbent on all to do their utmost to stand against this unholy tide of violence and perversion, even if it means being ostracized or labeled in a manner that is untrue concerning the faith they possess. We cannot remain silent about our convictions or in our votes without being guilty of allowing these things to devolve further.

*O God, help us to be strong in our resolve as we stand against the moral perverseness of those who have taken over much of our societies in the world today. If we must pay a cost for our speech, may it be to Your honor and glory that we do so. Help us to be fixed and firm in our doctrine, standing on Your word as we conduct our lives before You. Amen.*

**Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?”**  
Acts 23:3

The Greek more literally reads, “Then Paul said to him, ‘God is set to strike you, you plastered wall. And you, you sit judging me according to the law, and law-transgressing command me to be struck?’” (CG).

In the previous verse, the high priest Ananias commanded that Paul be struck on the mouth. Now, in response to that, it says, “Then Paul said to him, ‘God sets to strike you.’”

The verb *melló* gives the sense of “about to happen.” It is variously translated, but it carries with it the idea of expectation. Being in the present tense, and as a single word to define it, “sets” get the idea across. With that, Paul next says, “you plastered wall.”

This is the second and last use of the word *koniaó* in Scripture. It is derived from *konia*, dust. Its only other use is found in Matthew 23:27 –

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men’s* bones and all uncleanness.”

The word, though coming from dust, also signifies lime used to plaster something over. Paul uses this expression to describe this terrible person. It was either an idiom of the time which was used by Jesus, or it was something that Jesus coined and became known among the disciples.

If coined by Jesus, it was now idiomatically used by them. In essence, it means a hypocrite or having a hypocritical attitude. The reason for this is seen in Paul’s continued words, “And you, you sit judging me according to the law, and law-transgressing command me to be struck?”

Paul cites the intent of the law in his defense, though not a particular passage. In what he says is a word found only this one time in Scripture, *paranomeó*. It is a single noun derived from *para*, by or alongside, and *nomos*, law.

In the sense used by Paul, it means law-transgressing. This is justification for using the idiomatic expression. The high priest was giving a law in violation of the law. His actions were hypocritical. It was as if he was a dirty wall that was simply plastered over to hide the defilement below.

In John 7, in his words to the Pharisees, Nicodemus said, “Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?” (John 7:51). This was understood and taken as an axiom within Israel. Before a judgment for guilt and/or punishment was rendered, there had to be a trial to determine the facts. Paul was denied this and given a punishment before he had even spoken in his defense.

As for Paul’s words to Ananias, although extra-biblical, Josephus says that he was eventually killed by the Sicarii. (Flavius Josephus, Wars ii 17 2-9).

Life application: Our world today is becoming more and more corrupt. Unlawful renderings of judgment permeate the nations of the world. Set laws are flagrantly ignored, and those in positions of legal authority demonstrate overt biases against

particular ideologies. And yet, they refuse to recuse themselves. Instead, they convict the innocent and acquit the guilty.

This type of corruption will only increase as the world continues to devolve into anarchy and chaos. As this occurs, decent people are harmed, Christian rights are removed, and unrighteousness will eventually permeate the world.

It is frustrating and even maddening to behold, but it is not the end of the story. Just as Paul said to Ananias, we can rightfully assert that God will strike them as well. Their teeny little victories will not be remembered when they are brought to an end. Someday, they will be raised before God at the Great White Throne. There, they will be judged and condemned. Their destiny is the Lake of Fire.

We shouldn't rejoice that they will be condemned, but we should be comforted that their actions will be judged and the people of God will be vindicated. From that point on, righteousness will rule for God's people for all eternity. Don't look at what is happening now as a failure of God. He is allowing what shouldn't be saved to destroy itself. What is of value will be purified and will then go forth in perfect goodness forever and ever.

*Thank You, O God, for the precious hope we possess. This fallen world is perishing and will pass away. But those who have called on Jesus shall be raised to live in a state of perfection and glory forever and ever. May that wondrous day be soon, O God. Amen.*

**And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" Acts 23:4**

In the previous verse, Paul rebuked the person who ordered him to be struck, saying that God would strike him for his hypocrisy. Now, it says, "And those who stood by said, 'Do you revile God's high priest?'"

In the response, the word "God" is in the emphatic position. According to their words, the high priest was the one who sat as God's representative to the people. There are two views on this statement. Either he was actually ordained as the high priest and was qualified to act in that capacity, or he was an illegitimate high priest who didn't possess the ordination necessary to execute the duties of this job.

If he was legitimate, the Law of Moses indicated that he was, in fact, the one to mediate between God and the people. He was due honor and respect because of the position he held. If he was illegitimate, then he was not worthy of the title or respect of the job.

However, Paul could still be punished for not giving it simply because of the power held by those who supported the high priest.

As for Paul's response to this charge, it can also be taken then in more than one way, as will be seen.

Life application: In the 2020 elections, an incredible amount of fraud took place. To this day, a sizeable portion of the electorate feels the election was stolen away from President Donald Trump.

The power of the progressive left has tentacles that extend to every corner of society, deviously and cunningly doing things that are outright illegal. However, they also possess the power to allow themselves to get away with almost anything, no matter how egregious the violation of law.

At the same time, people who have committed no crime at all have been paraded before the public and charged with serious offenses, such as insurrection. They have been incarcerated, and their lives have been ruined. Joe Biden has committed great crimes against the nation and against its people. And yet, after three years in office, nothing continues to be done about these things.

This is a fallen world, and such things are to be expected. Christians must use wisdom in how they approach such matters. While being responsible for upholding the laws of the nation, they should also work within the framework of those laws to root out wickedness and stand against evil. Pray for wisdom in how to conduct your affairs in times such as this.

But also know that the wicked shall have their end. A day lies ahead for the redeemed of the Lord where righteousness will rule forever and ever. God will remove all that is unclean and defiled, and life without the wicked will be our eternal state. Thank God for Jesus, who makes these things possible.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for Your wondrous plan of redemption. You have brought a people out of this fallen, sin-stained world and back to Yourself. We praise You for what You have done. Be glorified forever and ever, O God! Amen.*

**Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" Acts 23:5**



In the previous verse, those in the council questioned Paul's words to the high priest, saying, "Do you revile God's high priest?" In response, it next notes, "Then Paul said, 'I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest.'"

Rather, Luke records it exactly as Paul would speak, first using a pluperfect verb and then a present tense verb, "I had not known that he is the high priest." He is indicating that at the time he said his words, he was unaware of the fact that he was addressing the high priest. However, he now sees, based on their response, that he is the high priest.

There are various ways that his words might be taken. They may have been a note of sarcasm, stressing his words as if he was fraudulently appointed as high priest. Or it could be that he didn't know who had made the statement as his attention was elsewhere. It could also be that he couldn't identify who it was that had spoken because of bad eyesight.

No matter which is correct, he immediately pulls back from his impulsive response and cites the law which had been ignored by them, saying, "for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

His words provide the substance of a portion of Exodus 22:28 –

"You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people."

If the high priest was legitimate, calling him a plastered wall might be taken as a curse. If so, they could have legitimate charges brought against him. By his response, this was no longer the case. Also, in citing the law that they ignored, Paul has gained the upper hand in the matter, regardless of how the situation turns out. He will have shown that he is aware of the law and is able to properly apply its precepts when situations arise that require him to do so.

The high priest, on the other hand, either didn't know the law or he flippantly disregarded it. Either way, it demonstrated his unworthiness to be in the position he filled.

Life application: When reading words, there are times when it is hard to know what a person is saying. By placing the stress on one word or another within a sentence, we can come to a completely different conclusion about what is being said.

Quite often, this will not be the case in the original language. Therefore, precision of translation is necessary. However, this is often lacking. Hence, reading multiple translations may provide clarity for the reader. However, there are times when vagueness or ambiguity may lie in the original. Thus, the words must be taken in the greater context of what is being said.

Therefore, knowing the Bible through constant reading is necessary to know where there is an error in thinking about how a set of words should be translated. Be sure to keep reading the word, keep referring to other translations before coming to unfounded conclusions, and also check with commentaries when you are still not sure.

However, it is still common for those fully trained in the original languages to come to completely opposite conclusions about what is being said. Therefore, it again may be up to you to know what they have missed by knowing the rest of the word. Be sure to read the word, pray for the Lord to be with you in your study, and don't be quick to come to conclusions or accept the conclusions of others.

*What a large and complicated word You have given us, O God. It is filled with things that are often quite complicated or hard to understand. And yet, it is a word that gives a simple overall message of love, reconciliation, and our need for Your grace. Help us to have the basics down properly. From there, we can pursue the rest of the word in its proper light. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!"**  
Acts 23:6

Paul just proclaimed that he was unaware that the one who ordered him to be struck was the high priest. Now, before anyone else could chime in, he continued his words. Luke notes, "But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees."

We are not told how Paul perceived some to be Sadducees and some Pharisees. It is possible that they maintained certain seats Just as Congress does for those on the right and those in the wrong. It could be that they wore garbs that identified them. He also may have recognized some of them, even after these many long years.

What may be more probable, based on what had just occurred, is that the attack by the High Priest prompted the Pharisees to react negatively towards him in their words or demeanor: “Is this how Sadducees act in the Sanhedrin?” Whatever brought the fact to his attention, he was ready to act quickly in order to take advantage of the situation. Perceiving this division as he did, “he cried out in the council.”

Paul was not the timid sort. He obviously had a quick temper. Jesus was also not timid, but His time before the rulers was markedly different. Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would stand before His accusers and not open His mouth. That is confirmed in the gospels –

“Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked Him, saying, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’  
Jesus said to him, ‘*It is as you say.*’<sup>12</sup> And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing.  
<sup>13</sup> Then Pilate said to Him, ‘Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?’<sup>14</sup> But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.” Matthew 27:11-14

Other than responding to direct questions, Jesus remained silent. Paul, however, openly spoke out at his trial. His words to them are next recorded by Luke, saying, “Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee.”

His declaration is given with express intent and purpose. He first cordially addressed all. This would help him gain the upper hand through his gracious address. Those disposed to his coming words will feel the fraternal bond more closely.

He then carefully noted his position within the society. Not only was he a Pharisee, but the tradition in his family preceded him. This was intended to bind him directly to one party while separating him theologically from the other. This was the Roman tactic known as *divide et impera*, divide and rule.

The words “son of a Pharisee” can have one of a few meanings. It could mean that his father was literally a Pharisee, or it could mean that he was a student of the Pharisees, just as a “son of the prophets” indicates one who was in the school of the prophets. It would then indicate an adherence to the tenets and traditions of the body.

The latter seems likely, as any Pharisee standing there could make the latter claim. However, it is still possible that he was claiming that his present doctrine matched that

of the Pharisees, even if he had diverted from a future messianic hope to a hope that was fully realized in the coming of Christ Jesus. That is something that would sync with his next words, “concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead.”

In order to fully identify with the Pharisees, he openly avowed one of the tenets to which they ascribed but which the Sadducees denied, meaning this hope and resurrection of the dead. The fact is that most or all of the Pharisees probably didn't have a full understanding at this point of what he was being questioned about.

He was accused of certain things while in the temple. He was then arrested by the Romans. When the commander of the Roman contingent couldn't fully determine how to handle Paul's situation, he was brought before the council. Paul, without fabricating a thing, says that he was standing there before the council because of this hope.

This is a true statement because it was the sole purpose of his apostolic ministry. Jesus had become the reason for everything he did. Therefore, regardless of the surface reason why he was arrested, it ultimately came back to the thought in these words. It was for this that he proclaimed, “I am being judged.”

In proclaiming his hope and the resurrection of the dead, he would completely divide the assembly down party lines. At this, no other tenet would matter to the Pharisees. At the same time, it would be objectionable to the Sadducees who stood against any such notion.

As for Paul's status before them, it is debated whether his words were actually correct in the fullest sense. Was he really a Pharisee at this point? The answer is that he was no less a product of his training than a graduate of a university.

A person with a degree from Yale is an alum of Yale, regardless of whether he continued to accept the tenets of his training or not. Paul cannot be said to have lied or even stretched the truth in his claim, at least from the perspective of the tenet concerning the resurrection. His masterful proclamation here can be tied back to Jesus' words in Mark 13:9-11 –

“But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. <sup>10</sup> And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. <sup>11</sup> But when they arrest *you* and deliver you up, do not worry

beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.”

Life application: Paul was in a bit of a pickle until he avowed his faith in the hope and resurrection of the dead. In this, he made a clear delineation between what he believed and what he rejected. If you are willing to speak about your faith, you must be prepared to do the same.

Jehovah’s Witnesses do not believe Jesus is God. Do you? If you do, you need to be willing to state this, correcting their deceit. In his second epistle, John writes –

“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. <sup>10</sup> If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; <sup>11</sup> for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.”

-2 John 1:9-11

We are not to greet such people or welcome them because when we do, we implicitly condone their evil deeds. However, this does not mean we cannot stand in the same doorway and speak against their false doctrine.

There are churches that do not support the modern nation of Israel. In fact, they openly speak against it. What is your stand on this issue? One thing is for sure: if you openly express what you believe, either way, you will be initiating a divide.

Some will claim, “We shouldn’t talk about such matters. Rather, we should focus on love.” That is simply an attempt to make the issue, which actually exists, and which is theologically important, go away. Theology, by its very nature, is divisive. There is a right way and a wrong way in all major biblical themes.

Decide now what points of doctrine you will stand on and whether you are willing to debate them or not. That way, you will be prepared to either pass on the issue or defend it.

One more point to consider is the timing of such a debate. If you are evangelizing someone who knows nothing about the Bible, it would be important to defend the deity of Christ right then and there. And yet, it would not be profitable to get into the details of why you support Israel or not unless that was the reason you got into the conversation in the first place. The first issue is of paramount importance in gospel-

related discussion. The second is not. Learn to use tact and prudence, remembering the forum in which you are currently speaking.

*Lord God, give us wisdom in our discussions about our theology and particular points of doctrine that we ascribe to. May we speak when it is necessary and refrain from speaking when it is not. Our goal should be to be helpful and productive in whatever situation we find ourselves in. So, Lord, help us in this. Amen.*

**And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.** Acts 23:7

In the previous verse, Paul, standing before the council, had called out in the assembly that he stood before them because of “the hope and resurrection of the dead.” With that remembered, it next says, “And when he had said this, a dissension arose.”

His words had the exact effect he intended. The council had the hope that he would be quickly voted as an offender of the law and punished according to the law. Before such a decision was rendered, the congregation instead had divided right down the middle of the two parties. As Luke said, the dissension was “between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.”

Rather, the Greek literally reads, “and there was a dissension, the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” Therefore, rather than “between,” it should say, “and there was a division of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” In other words, there was always a theological disagreement between the two. However, this separated their ability to sit and reason together any longer.

One can see the same effect today in various situations. For example, if there is a gathering of Christian leaders to discuss the state of the nation of Israel, there will be obvious disagreements during the discussion. However, as long as the main subject, that of the state of the nation of Israel is addressed, things will normally go well.

However, if an instigator wants to start a division, he might inject something – such as the doctrine of the rapture – into his discussion. By doing this, he will uncover an underlying disagreement that will divert the attention away from the original topic. As it was not the main point being addressed, people will passionately divide into factions. With that, the dam will break loose, and a complete lack of control over the gathering is bound to ensue.

This is just what Paul did, knowing what the outcome of such a proclamation as his would bring about. And just as he had hoped, Luke records, “and the assembly was divided.”

The word translated as divided comes from the Greek *schizo*. It is where our modern word schism is derived. The rending of the veil in the temple at Jesus’ death uses this same word. In this case, it signifies that a complete division of thought on the subject was the result.

Life application: The example of introducing the rapture into a discussion about the state of the nation of Israel is bound to cause trouble because the two issues are actually interconnected. If someone thinks Israel has been replaced by the church, then he will normally dismiss the doctrine of the rapture.

In Paul’s case, he was originally accused of violating the Law of Moses. However, if his hope is in the risen Messiah, Jesus, then that means the words of Jeremiah 31:31 have been fulfilled in Jesus’ work. As such, the Law of Moses – which is a part of the Mosaic Covenant – has been superseded by the introduction of the New Covenant.

Therefore, Paul could not be a violator of the law. He had moved from Moses to Jesus. The council could still charge him and have him punished, but it would be based on a faulty rendering of their own law, which foresaw and planned its own obsolescence.

Even if the Pharisees disagreed with him over this, their own doctrine was still sided with Paul’s overall worldview. If one wants to get to the heart of a matter in such a forum, by knowing the underlying reason for holding onto the various views being discussed, that knowledge can be used to one’s advantage.

On the other hand, if one wants to avoid getting trapped in someone else’s machinations in such a situation, it can be done by quickly noticing the ploy and stating something like, “You may have a point on that issue, but this is not the time or place for it to be addressed. It is a red herring. We need to get back to the main issue of discussion.”

If you are on social media, this type of diversionary ploy is brought in with almost every topic that is introduced as a main matter of discussion. Within a very short time, matters completely irrelevant to the original topic will be introduced, cyber punches will fly, and friendships can quickly be destroyed.

Pay attention to such things, and you can easily weed out miscreants who love to stir the pot by watching how they sneakily enter into any given discussion.

*O God, we often fail to think logically about matters we are involved in. People may want to divide others for their own perverse purposes and so they introduce a fallacious argument, hoping it will take root and cause a schism. Help us to identify such things and work to quash their intentions before they become established. Yes, Lord God, give us wisdom in such things. Amen.*

**For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.** Acts 23:8

Luke just noted that a dissension had arisen between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Now, as an explanatory thought concerning why, he records, “For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection.”

Although it has been said in a jillion sermons over the years, this commentary would be remiss if it didn’t include the words, “This is why they are sad, you see.” Like evolutionists today, the Sadducees believed that this life was all one got, and thus, they were to personally make the best of it.

The difference between Sadducees and evolutionists would be that the Sadducees believed that there is a God, and He rewards men in this life for right conduct. Thus, it would have been a religious expression filled with self-righteousness and works of the law to justify oneself before God. Along with this failed view, Luke continues describing their theology, saying, “and no angel or spirit.”

The doctrine of the Sadducees is hard to reconcile with the writings of Moses. As the rest of the Old Testament is an extension of the dispensation of the law, their doctrine is simply irreconcilable with what God had been doing in the stream of time concerning Israel’s history. It is generally believed that they believed, as described by Charles Ellicott –

“For them the ‘angels’ of the Pentateuch were not distinct beings, but evanescent manifestations of the divine glory.”

In other words, when an angel is referred to in the books of Moses, it was to the Sadducees actually God manifesting Himself in a supernatural way to those He encountered. It is true that, at times, this is the case. The angel of the Lord appeared in



human form to Abraham in Genesis 18, for example. However, this doesn't explain the two who came with the Lord.

Their explanation of such things was certainly out of line with a right reading of the words of Moses and later biblical writers. To complete the explanation of why the dissension arose, Luke next says, "but the Pharisees confess both."

As for the word 'both,' it shows that the Sadducees are denying two things: 1) the resurrection and 2) any non-corporeal being. Hence, this stand lumps in angels, spirits of dead men, etc. It also, by default, means that they would not be able to accept God as Spirit. Their entire theology was twisted, just as Jesus demonstrated in Matthew 22:23-33.

Because of this, there was a great divide between these two camps. Both would have been extremely passionate about their view, and it is surprising they could even stand to be in the same room with one another at times. Such was the case now. Paul had effectively separated the two through his masterful use of understanding the layout of things and then taking advantage of the situation at hand.

Life application: As noted above, the doctrine of the Sadducees is hard to reconcile with the writings of Moses or of any of the rest of the Old Testament. It took a great deal of presuppositional bias and cognitive dissonance to come to such views and then stand by them.

However, the doctrines of the Catholic Church, the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and many other sects and cults are just as convoluted today. It shouldn't be surprising that there are those who claimed to follow Moses and yet denied or allegorized his words.

In saying that this is the only life, they would then have a special type of control over those whom they taught: "If you want God to bless you and make you rich and comfortable, you will do what we say."

When the Roman Catholic Church teaches works, they have far greater control over man than when grace is proclaimed. Understanding grace means understanding that Christ has done all the work necessary to be saved and to keep being saved forever. This obviously leads to the understanding that wielding monetary control over people is wrong, as is having control over their afterlife.

An acceptance of, and then gratefulness for, God's grace should alone direct where one gives. And a confident anticipation of glory because of faith in Christ should alone direct the steps of those who have been bestowed that grace through Him.

The doctrine of the Sadducees was one of bondage and denial, just as all heretical doctrines are. They are manipulative. They are set up to serve those who are in positions of power within the particular expression.

*Lord God, please keep us from the twisting and manipulative minds of those who would lead us away from grace and toward bondage and self-righteousness. With grace, there can be no bondage because it is bestowed freely and without conditions. Simple faith alone results in the eternal blessings promised in Your word. Thank You, O God, for Your word and for Jesus who is revealed in it. Amen.*

**Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." Acts 23:9**

The Greek more precisely reads, "And there was a great clamor. And having arisen, some of the scribes of the part of the Pharisees were contending, saying, 'We find nothing evil in this man. And if a spirit spoke to him, or an angel, let us not fight against God'" (CG).

Luke had previously included an explanatory sentence to detail why the reaction in this verse now came about, "For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both." Because of this division of thought between the sects, it now says, "And there was a great clamor."

The loud outcry mentioned here was probably a lot of "harumphs" from one side and "here here's" from the other. The word is *kraugé*. It is used, for example, to describe the loud cry in Matthew 25:6 and the crying noted in Revelation 21:4.

It indicates loud crying done with great emotion. Each side defended what they believed was possible based on Paul's words. As it was a cry among many, the word "clamor" is well-suited to the intent. Next, it says, "And having arisen, some of the scribes of the part of the Pharisees were contending."

The scribes are the learned men, whether from the Pharisees or the Sadducees. They were not an independent group but were simply those who were well educated and

performed a scribal role. Being educated, they would be more disposed to protesting over the din of others and getting them to quiet down while they made their case.

In this situation, they probably sided with Paul more on a theological basis than on whether they agreed with him personally. In this case, they were saying, “We find nothing evil in this man.”

He had said nothing that was impossible from their worldview, and so, they defended his right to present his case based on that. Their protesting then shows they had a greater disdain for the opposing party than they did towards Paul’s misdirected (as they perceived) faith in Christ. Therefore, as a jab in the eyes of the Sadducees, they next called out, “And if a spirit spoke to him, or an angel, let us not fight against God.”

It should be noted that the final words of this verse, “let us not fight against God,” are disputed as to whether they are original or not. Many scholars see them as an insert to match what was said by Gamaliel in Acts 5:39. For this reason, they are not included in many translations.

Despite this, Paul’s diversion was successful. Their words, “And if a spirit spoke to him, or an angel,” are likely referring to Paul’s claim in Acts 22:17-21, of which they would be aware by now.

Unless they accepted that Paul’s vision was real and from a divine source, the words “let us not fight against God” seem to be out of place. Demons can speak as well as the Lord. And so, for them to include God in the statement would imply that they accepted his words, including being sent off to the Gentiles. This seems less likely, and the words may have been inserted at a later time by someone attempting to give additional credence to Paul’s case.

Life application: The old saying, “The enemy of my enemy is my friend,” seems to apply to this verse. The Pharisees stood against Jesus, and they continued to stand against those who followed Him. However, the theology behind the Sadducees’ theological position was so aberrant to them that they were willing to use Paul as an ally to poke at what they perceived as a completely misguided approach to Scripture.

This is not uncommon in Christian circles. There may be two completely divergent approaches to a particular concept, and yet adherents to one or the other may join together to defend a third, unrelated issue.

For example, Dispensationalists and Calvinists may be at odds over the state of Israel, but they may be united in their dismissal of evolution. Therefore, they may put aside their unhappiness concerning the former issue and unite in a letter to a Christian college that has recently hired an evolutionist professor.

Some things are worth setting aside differences over in order to secure an intended goal in another area. Looking for common ground in this manner is not caving to one side or another. And yet, protestations by others may rise to a crescendo, calling out charges of apostasy or compromise – “I didn’t get a harumph out of that guy!” This is inevitable. Some people feel so passionately about a particular issue that it will cloud their thinking in other areas.

Be on the lookout for such things and be ready to defend why you take particular actions. If feelings are hurt, or charges of apostasy are thrown at you, for standing up for the truth, so be it. You can’t please everybody, and some seed pickers will never be pleased with anything. Ignore them, and you will do well.

*Heavenly Father, may we be willing to stand up and speak out when it is right to do so. Help us not to be timid or pusillanimous in our approach to sound doctrine and right conduct before You. Strengthen us in our resolve to stand for what is right. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring *him* into the barracks. Acts 23:10**

The Greek more literally reads, “And great dissension arising, the commander, having feared lest Paul should be torn apart by them, commanded the detachment – having descended – to seize him from among them and bring into the barracks” (CG).

In the previous verse, the scribes of the Pharisees protested Paul’s treatment, defending the fact that he could have been spoken to by a spirit or an angel. This upset the apple cart, and things immediately devolved, as seen in the next words, “And great dissension arising.”

It is the same word just used in verse 7 that indicated a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees. Now, the entire council is in an uproar. This was so much the case that “the commander, having feared lest Paul should be torn apart by them.”

Here is the second and last use of the word *diaspaó* in Scripture. It was only seen elsewhere in Mark 5:4, where it noted that the demon-possessed man tore apart the chains that bound him. This is now what the commander feared would happen to Paul.

This argument between the two parties grew to such a state that each side was probably grabbing onto Paul and pulling him in either direction – one to rescue him and one to pummel him. In the tugging, he could actually be ripped apart. But, being a Roman citizen, the commander was responsible for him. Therefore, he “commanded the detachment – having descended – to seize him from among them and bring into the barracks.”

The soldiers would be necessary by this time because of the violence of those who meant Paul harm. This included the high priest himself, and it shows the level of depravity that they had fallen to, despite being the supposed representatives of the Lord on earth.

In securing Paul and taking him to the barracks, it could be that Paul had been in and out of the very same room that had been used for Jesus on the night before His cross. In contrast to the sufferings He faced, Paul would be kept safe in that same location.

Life application: The conduct of the council seems entirely out of place, and it is. However, it is not uncommon. Innumerable fights have broken out in parliaments, congresses, and other bodies that rule the people. Many of them are recorded and can be seen on YouTube.

It is not unlikely that if you pick a country at random and do a search for a fight in that country’s government, you will find a video of a fight breaking out. An arbitrary search immediately brought up a lively brawl in Kosovo’s cabinet, including men and women, older and younger, etc. Following that came a long list of similar videos. The Indian parliament went full throttle, into chaos throwing microphones and lamps; the Taiwanese were throwing chairs; and there was a lot of slapping and punching in the Jordanian parliament.

Anytime you deal with religion or politics, tempers are bound to get out of control. In the council where Paul stood, it was a mixture of both. Thus, it was an explosive environment that Paul was able to successfully divide, taking the focus off of him and demonstrating the hypocrisy of those who stood over him with their accusations.

If you attend any large gathering to defend your rights as a Christian, such as a state or local meeting, you should be prepared to have accusations fly, angry people demanding your silence, and possibly fighting to break out. In the place where civility is most expected, it often is not. Thus, it is a clear indication that things will only continue to devolve in the world around us.

The message of Christ is the only true hope and saving message in the world. And yet, it is becoming less and less tolerated because it deals with the underlying problem in man: sin. Because it does, in highlighting this defect, people will continue to strengthen their enmity toward the message it proclaims. Be aware of this as you head out and speak about the goodness of God in Christ. Many will find it offensive.

*Glorious Lord God, we were all at enmity with You at some point. But because of Jesus, we were reconciled to You. Help us to be willing to share this message, even if it brings about trouble in our lives. Without addressing the problem of sin, all people remain Your enemies. Give us the ability to explain this and to effectively speak about the goodness of what You have done in sending Jesus to fix the problem. Amen.*

**But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”**  
Acts 23:11

More literally, it reads, “And the following night, the Lord, having stood by him, said, ‘Fortify! For as you fully testified about Me at Jerusalem, so you must also testify at Rome’” (CG).

Paul was removed forcibly by the Roman guards from the out-of-control crowd in the council he stood before. Luke now continues the narrative, saying, “And the following night.”

This probably means that same night. If Luke is using the Jewish way of reckoning time, the following day begins at sundown. Thus, this would be the evening of the same day, but the start of the new day. From there, it says, “the Lord, having stood by him, said, ‘Fortify!’”

This is the seventh and last time that the word *tharseó* is seen in Scripture. It means to take heart, be of good courage, etc. HELPS Word Studies notes that its root signifies “emboldened from within.” As such, and to use a single verb that catches the meaning,

fortify gets the point across. The Lord is telling Paul to strengthen himself from within to prepare himself for what was ahead.

If Paul is in the same chambers as that which the Lord had been in, then this is a return visit for Jesus. It is an amazing thought to consider. How much more in the content of the two stays! Christ was harassed and brutalized in the same place where He now stands and gives Paul words of comfort and even renewed vigor. His words to Paul now are reflective of His words to the other apostles in Matthew 14:27, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

As for His word to Paul to "Fortify!" That is then explained with the next words, "For as you fully testified about Me at Jerusalem, so you must also testify at Rome."

Paul had already told those in Rome of his desire to travel there (Romans 1:13; Romans 15:23). Now, he is given the assurance that this will come about exactly as he had hoped. Further, this conversation surely lets him know that his service has been acceptable. Were it not so, then he would not be tasked with further work. The Lord's presence, His words, and His approval of Paul surely worked like an elixir in him.

Life application: The last time the Lord appeared to Paul was in Acts 18:9, where He said, "Do not be afraid." Paul was probably less afraid at this time and yet more weary and downtrodden. Hence, the word "Fortify!" is appropriate to the mood in which he found himself.

The Lord never fails to meet us in exactly the condition we are in and the circumstances we are facing, and then give us exactly the comfort we need at the moment. This doesn't mean He is going to physically appear before us. But we still have Him with us through His word. When we are in some sort of difficulty, trial, pickle, conundrum, etc., we can find comfort, strength, emboldening, and so forth right in the word He has given us.

If you are a faithful reader of the word, how many times has this been the case in your own life? The Lord's words to Paul were just what was needed. The word of the Lord is just what is needed for us at just the right time, every time. Keep in the word. It will carry you through the many trials, troubles, and tribulations that you are facing or will face as you continue on life's path. Don't neglect this comforting and necessary resource that God has lovingly set before you.

*Heavenly Father, Your word is a gloriously wonderful light for our times of darkness. It is a calming hand in our times of distress. It is a soothing balm in our times of tribulation. Give us the wisdom, as Your people, to read it and carefully consider it all the days of our lives. Thank You, O God, for Your precious word. Amen.*

**And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.**

Acts 23:12

The Greek more literally reads, “And day having come, certain of the Jews having made a conspiracy, anathematized themselves, saying neither to eat nor to drink until they might kill Paul” (CG).

Paul was just told by Jesus that as he had testified for Him at Jerusalem, so he must also do so in Rome. With that note of assurance, a plot is next revealed in an attempt to stop this, saying, “And day having come.”

This is the same day that started at evening following his standing before the council. The thought here is probably that those involved in the plot twisted and turned in anger all night long, stewing over Paul and his proclamations concerning Jesus. Eventually, their thoughts welled up into murderous desires. Therefore, “certain of the Jews having made a conspiracy.”

One can see them coming together and saying, “That Paul is a real problem. He needs to be dealt with.” They went to bed angry, and by morning, their thoughts had turned into a conspiracy to deal with their enemy.

These Jews may be zealots. They are noted in the Apocrypha and in the writings of Josephus as following this course of action at several points in Jewish history. They honestly believed what they were doing was for the honor of the name of God, and they felt that they were rightly serving Him at such times. Therefore, they planned, and then they intended to execute the plan. In order to do so, they “anathematized themselves.”

This Greek phrase corresponds to the Hebrew idea of *kherem*, where a person, thing, or even an entire city, was devoted to God. The destruction of Jericho was such an instance. Likewise, the account in 1 Samuel 15:1-9 met this standard.



It is seen at other times in the Old Testament. Likewise, Paul uses the term “anathema” to describe what should occur towards those who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ in 1 Corinthians 16:22. And in Galatians 1:8, 9, using this idea of anathema, he says –

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup>As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”

The same word used to describe this oath is used in Mark 14:71, where Peter called down curses on himself. This is a solemn obligation that these Jews have placed upon themselves. To show the binding nature of this, it next says, “saying neither to eat nor to drink until they might kill Paul.”

It seems like these men would have perished from their oath because it would be unsuccessful. However, Lightfoot shares this from the Talmud, “He that hath made a vow not to eat anything, woe to him if he eat, and woe to him if he do not eat. If he eat he sinneth against his vow; if he do not eat he sinneth against his life. What must such a man do in this case? Let him go to the wise men, and they will loose his vow.”

This type of shenanigans in their theology is not uncommon. However, the Bible expects that if a person made a vow, he was to keep it at all costs. As Solomon says –

“When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it;  
For *He has* no pleasure in fools.  
Pay what you have vowed—

<sup>5</sup> Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.” Ecclesiastes 5:4, 5

Life application: When a vow is made to God, it is expected that it will be paid. Obviously, if one is saved and in Christ, he will not lose his salvation if he fails to fulfill a vow he has made. However, the wisdom of simply not vowing is obvious.

There are times when a vow cannot be fulfilled. If it was spoken, how foolish the person will look when he cannot fulfill what he has promised to God? We are expected to be people of integrity. Again and again, believers are told that they are to perform what they speak and that one’s Yes is to be Yes. How much more should we be honoring a vow we utter to the Lord?

For best happiness, refrain from making vows. Simply fulfill the words that you speak and be people who can be trusted. This is the wise course to take.

*We praise You, Lord God, because we know that You are ever-faithful to Your word. What You have said, and what is recorded for us to read in Your word, will come about. We know with all certainty that You will never fail to perform. Help us to emulate You and to be people of integrity towards the things we say. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. Acts 23:13**

The Greek more literally reads, “And they were more than forty having made this joint oath” (CG).

The previous verse noted the Jews who had banded together under an oath, saying they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Next, Luke records, “And they were more than forty having made this joint oath.”

It seems like overkill, but there are a couple of reasons why it is not at all unreasonable. First, anytime people gather to do evil (or supposed good, but with harmful intentions), others will naturally want to join in. In this case, they were doing evil by desiring to commit murder, but they were doing it to supposedly be pleasing to their God.

As such, people will want to participate simply because of wanting to be part of the heroic movement that is taking place. Also, because the plotters would have to contend with the Romans, they could plot better plot diversions or surprise attacks. With forty men banded together in such a vow, they felt that they had an excellent chance of prevailing, especially in the surprise manner that they would certainly conduct the task.

The word translated as “joint oath,” *sunómosia*, is found only here in the New Testament. It comes from two words signifying “together” and “swear.” Thus, it means “a swearing together,” and thus, a joint oath. They had mutually vowed to participate and to see the matter through.

Life application: In the Proverbs, it says,

“My son, if sinners entice you,  
Do not consent.

<sup>11</sup> If they say, ‘Come with us,  
Let us lie in wait to shed blood;

Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause;  
<sup>12</sup> Let us swallow them alive like Sheol,  
And whole, like those who go down to the Pit;  
<sup>13</sup> We shall find all *kinds* of precious possessions,  
We shall fill our houses with spoil;  
<sup>14</sup> Cast in your lot among us,  
Let us all have one purse'—  
<sup>15</sup> My son, do not walk in the way with them,  
Keep your foot from their path;  
<sup>16</sup> For their feet run to evil,  
And they make haste to shed blood.  
<sup>17</sup> Surely, in vain the net is spread  
In the sight of any bird;  
<sup>18</sup> But they lie in wait for their *own* blood,  
They lurk secretly for their *own* lives.  
<sup>19</sup> So *are* the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain;  
It takes away the life of its owners.” Proverbs 1:10-19

When there are people who want to do evil, depending on who it is, getting others to join them is often a hard to refuse enticement. If they are notable in school, others may want to be esteemed in their eyes. If they have influence in some other type of setting, it may be hard to say “No” to their advances.

But the wise person will refuse to participate. Solomon’s words have been borne out innumerable times in history. What seems enticing or too good to pass up can often lead to a death sentence. Be wise and discerning, and hold fast to what is good, right, sound, and godly. The momentary temptations that you stand against will most probably save you from a lifetime of grief.

*Lord God, give us wisdom to know what is good and right. And then give us the fortitude to stand up against the temptations that arise, asking us to do what is wrong. May we hold fast to what would be honoring in Your eyes at all times. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, “We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. Acts 23:14**

A literal translation is, “Who, having come to the chief priests and the elders said, ‘Anathema, anathematized ourselves – tasting nothing until that we should kill Paul’” (CG).

In the previous verse, it was noted that forty men had come together against Paul. Of them, it next says, “Who, having come to the chief priests and the elders.” They had made a joint oath to kill Paul. This is often translated as a conspiracy. Now, they will present their intentions to the chief priests and elders. As such, and even if they have not joined in the oath, these rulers are now a part of this conspiracy.

It was said in their midst quite some time earlier, “And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; <sup>39</sup> but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God” (Acts 5:38, 39). This was repeated in part in Acts 23:9.

As this movement has taken root, it means that the elders and priests are clearly pitting themselves against God if they agree to what is next said by the forty men, “Anathema, anathematized ourselves.”

The way the Greek is structured in these words follows the pattern of a Hebrew idiom where a verb is repeated while being restructured for emphasis. This intensifies the words being spoken. The word “great” stated in the NKJV may help convey this idea for our English understanding, but it is not a part of the Greek. The idiom itself is sufficient to understand the intensive nature of the statement.

They have irretrievably bound themselves to a particular matter until it is seen through. With that, they next explain what it is they have committed to, saying, “tasting nothing until that we should kill Paul.”

These men know that the faction of the Sadducees would be more than happy to hear this news. The brutality of the high priest, who was a Sadducee, was known, and he would be most displeased with how the events of the inspection of Paul came out. Knowing this, they will use his authority as a pretext to be rid of Paul.

In their oath, and in the fact that they are repeating its substance to the chief priests and elders, there is conveyed a sense of urgency. They would quickly lose their strength and their stamina if their request was not expedited. They are trusting that what they recommend will be approved and acted upon speedily. What is occurring also matches the words of Jonathan in 1 Samuel 14 –

“Then one of the people said, ‘Your father strictly charged [literally: swearing, has sworn] the people with an oath, saying, ‘Cursed *is* the man who eats food this day.’ And the people were faint.

<sup>29</sup> But Jonathan said, ‘My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. <sup>30</sup> How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?’” 1 Samuel 14:28-30

Life application: If you are plotting to do wickedness and you go to someone in a higher position of authority to get approval for what you are doing, it does not exonerate you from your actions.

For example, if you are planning on murdering your child through abortion, you might go through the court system and get them to declare abortion legal in the land. Should that be approved, it does not mean that you are now absolved from the guilt of murder when you have your child killed.

This goes along with things like voting as well. If you vote for someone who will work to make abortion legal, you are participating in the resulting laws being passed. We all need to understand that just because something is legal, it does not mean it is morally right in God’s eyes. The only way to be freed from the sin debt you bear is to come to Jesus and be cleansed. From there, live rightly and in accord with Scripture. This is what God would have you do.

*Lord God Almighty, we are prone to make all kinds of mistakes in life. We may try to hide some of them by claiming what we are doing is legal. But if it is contrary to Your will, we are guilty of our actions, nonetheless. Help us to consider this and to do what is right and good in Your eyes at all times. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near.” Acts 23:15**

In the last verse, the men who were plotting to kill Paul placed themselves under an oath and informed the chief priests and elders of their intentions. With that remembered, it next says, “Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow.”

Some manuscripts leave off the word “tomorrow,” but it is probably correctly placed here. There is a definite sense of urgency concerning the vow. It is, therefore, unlikely that they would simply leave the timing open to the convenience of whenever a general meeting was held. Instead, it would need to be expedited.

The band of men had laid out the plans and made the agreement. And so, they would be conveying their intentions, including the particulars, at this time. Next, they explain why they wanted this request to be made, saying, “as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him.”

This squarely places these leaders in the crosshairs as far as guilt before both Rome and God is concerned. They now know of the ongoing plan and are being directly asked to participate in it. This call for Paul, however, is a pretext for something else. As it next says, “but we are ready to kill him before he comes near.”

Charles Ellicott notes three reasons for this action being necessary –

“...either (1) because the Sanhedrin had lost, under Roman rule, its power to inflict capital punishment; or (2) because, even if they possessed that power, the chiliarch was not likely to allow its exercise in the case of a Roman citizen; or (3) because the experience of the previous day had shown that the violent party were not likely to obtain a majority in the Council.”

No matter what, the plan is certainly plausible because nothing had been decided in the previous interrogation, and so another one would be both expected and appropriate. The words “kill him before he comes near” are intended to keep the council’s hands free from accusation by the Roman masters. However, there could always be a weak link in this chain that would identify them as a part of the growing conspiracy.

Life application: When those in power want to retain their power, it will often result in harming others. Imagine a party having lost an election and seeing their goals being swept away by a well-respected and honest leader. The only way for them to regain power is to rely on deceit, theft of the popular vote, and using those aligned with them who are still in jobs within the government.

From there, and once the election is stolen, those who were aligned with the now-ousted leader are pursued with reckless abandon by the new government. False charges are made up, sham councils are organized that have highly edited videos to manipulate the truth and malign anyone who disagrees with them.

Lives are ruined, trust in the government is lost, and fear of speaking out becomes the standard for most. Those who are willing to speak out risk their very lives to uphold what is right. Does this sound impossible to you? Then maybe you need to reevaluate what has been going on in the world around you.

You must decide whether you will speak out against what is wrong, or if you will safely and quietly remain in the background, not wanting to upset the applecart. Such decisions must be made by each person in such a nation. Where will you stand when you find yourself in a position like this?

*O God, help us to be willing to work against the evil that surrounds us in the world. May we be bold enough to call out wrongdoing, identifying it for what it is. Someone must do so, or the wicked will certainly prevail. Give us the fortitude we need to do what is right. Yes, be with us, O God. Amen.*

**So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. Acts 23:16**

The Greek more literally reads, "And the son of Paul's sister, having heard of the ambush, having come and having entered into the barracks, reported to Paul" (CG).

The previous verse gave the details of the plot that had been schemed against Paul. Now, Luke continues to record what transpired after that, beginning with, "And the son of Paul's sister."

The sister and nephew of Paul are the only named relatives in the book and possibly in the Bible. Romans 16:7 & 11 mention Paul's kinsmen, but this could refer to kinsmen of the flesh, meaning Jews. That cannot be discerned decidedly in one way or another. However, these two can. Of this nephew, it says, "having heard of the ambush."

Luke leaves off any details of how he could have heard about this. He simply states it as a fact that he heard. The next words show that despite, or maybe because of, Paul's faith in Jesus, they were still close as a family. The record says, "having come and having entered into the barracks, reported to Paul."

When he heard of the plot, it was something he felt needed to be reported immediately. This sister may not have lived in Jerusalem or Paul may have stayed with her rather than Mnason (Acts 21:16). If she lived back in Paul's hometown, then this young man may have been sent to Jerusalem as a student of the rabbis just as Paul was.

If so, and it is all speculation, then he may have heard of the plot via the people he was studying with because these would be the circles where talk of this would occur. This is especially so when 40 people had come under the same vow and whose vow was known to the rulers. Such a matter could not be kept quiet within the rabbinic circles of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Another possibility is that the nephew was in town for the feast along with all the other Jews, but this would not explain how he came to know of the plot. It is unlikely that it was common knowledge in Jerusalem.

Noting that he entered into the barracks tells us that Paul was given liberties while he was detained. More than this, his detainment at this point would be not so much for the good of the public but for his own good. He had not been charged with any crime. Therefore, being allowed visitors would be acceptable.

Life application: As noted above, Paul's close kin were allied with him despite (or maybe because of) his faith. If they were not believers, they were willing to help him despite this. If they were, they would be even more willing to help him.

The record does not say either way, and thus it is purposeful. There are cults that ask their followers to not associate with people outside of their circles, including family members. This is wholly unscriptural, and it is a good indication that you should not give them an ear, even for a moment. Get away from such control freaks before you get sucked into their aberrant teachings.

Paul's words are clear –

“But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.

<sup>12</sup> For what *have I to do* with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? <sup>13</sup> But those who are outside God judges.

Therefore ‘put away from yourselves the evil person.’” 1 Corinthians 5:11-13

It is not those outside of the faith that we need to keep away from. Rather, it is miscreants who call themselves believers that are to be avoided. And avoid them like the plague. They can only damage your walk with the Lord and bring you into whatever bondage they are held by.



*Lord God Almighty, give us wisdom when dealing with others. So many people have perverse hidden agendas that will only draw our eyes away from You. And yet, they can be very cunning and convincing in how they present their messages. Help us to not get duped by such people. May our allegiance be directly to You through Jesus! Amen.*

**Then Paul called one of the centurions to *him* and said, “Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him.” Acts 23:17**

The words more literally read, “And Paul, having called one of the centurions, said, ‘Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him.’”

In the previous verse, it noted that Paul’s nephew heard of the planned ambush, and so he went to the barracks and told Paul. With that remembered, it next says, “And Paul, having called one of the centurions.”

The centurion was probably the head man on duty at the time. The centurion would then have reported to the commander (*chiliarchos*, thus a chiliarch,) who would have been over ten centurions and in charge of the entire force at the fort. Having called the centurion, Paul then said, “Take this young man to the commander.”

The word translated as “young man” doesn’t tell us much concerning his age, but what will happen later will show that he is probably a very young person. The word in Greek simply means a youth or a young man. At times, it is even used for a man of forty years of age. Having said that, Paul continues, saying, “for he has something to report to him.”

Because of his status as a Roman citizen by birth, the request would not be out of line. The centurion certainly would not want to impede the matter, especially after what previously happened when Paul was illegally bound. Further, the petition for the commander to hear the matter meant that it was above his own pay grade to properly handle.

It should be noted that Paul has already been promised by the Lord that he would be safeguarded and that he would see Rome, but this doesn’t exclude him from acting in order to make that happen. There is nothing contradictory in the two concepts. Rather his efforts will complement the promise already made.

Life application: Quite often, people expect their lives to be without troubles simply because they have accepted Jesus. It is as if the purpose of their faith is for them to be

served by God. When something difficult, taxing, or even terrible happens, the first question off of their lips is, “Why is God doing this to me?”

For example, the person has a car, needing it to get to work each day. If the car breaks down, the “Why is God...?” question pops out. Is it God’s responsibility to ensure the car runs forever? Should we expect Him to spend His time changing the oil, greasing the joints, and keeping it filled with gas? If not, then at what point does His responsibility start?

The same person, on the same day, has the home air conditioner fail. Again, the almost accusing question pops forth, “Why is He treating me this way?” How many times was the a/c turned on and a “Thank You for this wonderful a/c!” uttered? If not, then it demonstrates that it was something under that person’s control.

Cars break down, air conditioners fail, and bills must be paid. We cannot expect God to live our lives for us. Rather, we should take the actions necessary to have our lives operate properly. And even if we are responsible for hot water heaters, isn’t it right from time to time to thank the Lord for the hot water we have? Many people in the world have never taken a hot shower.

We should be grateful for every blessing we possess, and yet, we should be responsible enough to care for those things that are under our control without blaming God or questioning His goodness when things stop working as they should.

The more we have this perspective, the less we will be frustrated by the world which casts out frustration at every rising of the sun. Be grateful! Be filled with thanks! And be content, even in times of trouble! Live a life that is tuned into the goodness of God, even as you walk through the troubled valleys of life.

*Lord God, how thankful we are for every good and kind blessing of this life. Ultimately, all good things come down from Your open hand of grace. Help us to be appreciative of what we have, responsible for caring for those things, and accepting of the times when they fail or are taken away from us. Above all, thank You, O God, for the giving of Jesus Christ our Lord. Hallelujah and amen.*

**So he took him and brought *him* to the commander and said, “Paul the prisoner called me to *him* and asked *me* to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you.” Acts 23:18**

A literal translation would be, “He, therefore, indeed, having taken him, brought to the commander. And says, ‘The prisoner Paul, having summoned me, asked to lead this young man to you, having something to say to you’” (CG).

Paul had just asked one of the centurions to take his nephew to the commander to relay some important information. Next, Luke says, “He, therefore, indeed, having taken him, brought to the commander.”

There is a note of military obedience here. There was no questioning of Paul by the centurion, just the obedience of such a life under authority. This may be mingled with respect for Paul because he didn’t say, “I’ll let the commander know and will be right back.”

In other words, he may have trusted Paul’s interactions with the commander and the other centurions enough to comply without first receiving verification that Paul’s request was acceptable. Rather, it was understood to be so. And so, he conducts the boy to the commander and advises him of the situation. Luke uses a present tense verb to convey the beginning of the exchange, saying, “And says, ‘The prisoner Paul, having summoned me.’”

Luke brings his audience directly into the narrative with the present tense “says.” It is as if we are watching the event as it unfolds. Also, rather than “called,” the word signifies to call near. Thus, “summoned” conveys the sense. It wasn’t something Paul shouted out from a distance. Rather, it is something that he wanted to keep closely guarded.

The sense may be that Paul was afraid that some of the guards might secretly be on the payroll of the Jewish officials. This would be less likely with a centurion. Also, Paul is called “the prisoner Paul.” It is a name which he will afterward call himself in both Ephesians 3:1 and Philemon 1:1. He will also allude to his status as a prisoner several times elsewhere. The walls of prison became a common sight in his life as an apostle. Vincent's Word Studies explains Roman imprisonment –

“The prisoner (ὁ δέσμιος) From δέω, to bind. Paul, as a Roman citizen, was held in custodia militaris, ‘military custody.’ Three kinds of custody were recognized by the Roman law: 1. Custodia publica (public custody); confinement in the public jail. This was the worst kind, the common jails being wretched dungeons. Such was the confinement of Paul and Silas at Philippi. 2. Custodia libera (free custody), confined to men of high rank. The accused was committed to the charge of a magistrate or senator, who became responsible for his appearance on the day of trial. 3. Custodia militaris (military

custody). The accused was placed in charge of a soldier, who was responsible with his life for the prisoner's safe-keeping, and whose left hand was secured by a chain to the prisoner's right. The prisoner was usually kept in the barracks, but was sometimes allowed to reside in a private house under charge of his guard."

As Paul was guarded in prison, and for whatever reason, he specifically summoned the centurion to personally convey his request to the commander. With that noted, Paul's request is repeated by the centurion, saying that Paul "asked to lead this young man to you, having something to say to you."

The matter was important enough for the young man to be taken to the commander personally, not to be transmitted indirectly.

Life application: In both testaments of Scripture, the necessity to not share things that are private is highlighted. For example, in Proverbs 16:28, it says –

"A perverse man sows strife,  
And a whisperer separates the best of friends."

Paul was careful to keep his nephew's information carefully guarded. If a whisperer can ruin friendships, how much more can he do in a place where there may be spies? The best thing to do is to keep private matters private. No matter how much someone seems trustworthy, the temptation to further pass on personal information or secrets is great.

Eventually, there will be a breakdown in the chain of people sharing with "just one person" who shouldn't be trusted with even the day's headline news. To avoid many troubles and grief, remember that if you are told something in private, it should not be repeated to anyone without permission to do so.

*Heavenly Father, help us to be trustworthy in our speech and conduct before You. Help us not to be tempted to disclose private matters, even if it seems like it is safe to do so. Rather, let us share those things that need to be shared openly, such as the gospel. Yes, Lord, give us wisdom to keep private things private and to call out the Good News at all times. Amen.*

**Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside, and asked privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" Acts 23:19**

A literal translation is, “And the commander, having taken his hand, and having withdrawn in private, inquired, ‘What is it that you have to tell me?’”

In the previous verse, the centurion had taken Paul’s nephew to the commander so that he could convey a message to him. Next, it says, “And the commander, having taken his hand.”

These words certainly imply that Paul’s nephew was very young. It can almost be felt in the words that he feared even being in the presence of the military, and so to calm him and assure him that all was well, the commander literally took him by the hand. The gesture would not go beyond a child in his early teens. Understanding this, it next says, “and having withdrawn in private.”

This tells us that the commander was wary of anyone, even his own men. If they were spendthrifts, as soldiers often are, they would be hard up for money. Someone in authority among the Jews could take advantage of this and bribe them for information.

If the matter was important enough for Paul to send the boy to him directly, it meant that it was something that could affect his life. Attempts to kill him had already taken place on several occasions. To succeed in an assignation while Paul was in Roman custody would be a giant success for their cause. Therefore, the commander took him aside and “inquired, ‘What is it that you have to tell me?’”

It appears that the commander was favorable toward receiving the message before it was even spoken. In other words, he had seen what transpired between Paul and his accusers. He also knew that Paul was a citizen who had almost been beaten illegally by his own men.

In reassuring the boy, he does everything possible to guarantee that whatever was important enough to be brought to his personal attention by Paul was important enough to be done with tenderness and in a private setting. The commander had made a grievous mistake in having Paul bound and prepared for scourging. He did not want any such thing that could bring personal harm to Paul to happen again.

Life application: The words of this verse appear to reveal that Luke personally interviewed the commander. He could not otherwise know such minute detail, such as his taking the boy by his hand, unless he either witnessed it or was told it from the commander, one of the centurions, or Paul or his nephew. But what was said in private would only have been known by the commander or the nephew.

Think about such things as you read Acts. It is a carefully detailed record of things that actually transpired. It was then judiciously checked out by Luke, ensuring that we have the most accurate details possible. This is just what Luke claims at the beginning of his gospel account –

“Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, <sup>3</sup> it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.” Luke 1:1-4

As many details that we may have expected to be included are left out, and as many seemingly insignificant details are included, we can be assured that the Spirit was directing Luke each step of the way to come to an account that is exactly what God intended for us to receive.

Therefore, be assured that the word we are reading is truly the word of God. It is there for us to know and defend the faith we profess. Use it as such, to the glory of God.

*Lord God, may we be aware of the contents of Your precious word and then be willing to defend our faith before others, using this word as the source of our understanding of what You have done, are doing, and will continue to do for the redemption of man. Thank You, O God, for this precious word. Amen.*

**And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. Acts 23:20**

A literal translation is, “And he said, ‘That the Jews agreed to ask you that to-morrow you might bring down Paul to the council, as intending to more precisely inquire something about him’” (CG).

In the previous verse, the commander had taken Paul’s nephew by the hand and went aside with him to privately ask about why he had come. Now, the narrative continues with, “And he said, ‘That the Jews agreed to ask you.’”

The term “the Jews” is certainly speaking of the body of religious leaders within the nation, this would be specifically inclusive of the Sanhedrin. It is a term used of them

several other times in the New Testament, especially in John. They are the leaders of the people. Therefore, they are called “the Jews” to represent the collective whole.

Saying they agreed to ask indicates that they are in full agreement with the plot against Paul. This would obviously be in violation of Roman law, but it would also be a violation of their own requirement to serve Rome. That is not contradictory at all. Jesus told them this when He was among them –

“And He said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’” Matthew 22:21

But this wasn’t just something Jesus pulled out of the wind. At the time of the Babylonian exile, the Lord told them this through Jeremiah –

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup> ‘Build houses and dwell *in them*; plant gardens and eat their fruit. <sup>6</sup> Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. <sup>7</sup> And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.’” Jeremiah 29:4-7

Israel served other nations because they failed to serve the Lord. This could be no less true under Rome than it was under Babylon. The guilt of “the Jews” was a guilt that transferred to the entire nation because they represented the nation. For now, the words of Paul’s nephew continue with, “that to-morrow you might bring down Paul to the council, as intending to more precisely inquire something about him.”

The term “the Jews” is further explained by the words “the council.” As leaders in the council, they are the leaders of the people. It is this council who is using the pretext that they have more to ask of Paul in order to have him killed on the way there.

Life application: Today, Israel is a nation under its own authority. This is the first time that this has been the case for thousands of years. This is not by random chance but by the providential hand of the Lord. The agreement they made at Sinai is still binding upon them. They will either serve the Lord, or they will receive the punishments of the law that they agreed to.

In serving the Lord properly, they must come to Christ Jesus. This is because law and the prophets testify to the coming of their Messiah, Jesus. It is their rejection of Him that brought them the catastrophes they have suffered. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law. Thus, He is the One who has brought it to its end.

The point of Jesus' coming was to bring restoration and life to Israel that the law could never bring. Israel has a choice to make in order to receive life. However, the New Covenant was not limited to Israel. Gentiles, who were never under the law, are graciously grafted into it as well.

And so, why would anyone want to place the yoke of the law upon himself? Apart from Jesus, the law can only bring condemnation. Please remember this. Don't fall into the trap of law observance. Instead, trust in the goodness of God through the giving of His Son to remove condemnation from all men. Come to the grace of God in Christ and be saved!

*Lord God, may we be wise and discerning in our understanding of Your word. Keep us from those who would impose false teachings upon us and bring us under the bondage of the law. Instead, may we rest confidently in the work of Jesus, knowing He has done all things to secure our salvation and restore us to You. Amen.*

**“But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you.” Acts 23:21**

More literally, the Greek reads, “Therefore, you should not be persuaded by them. For more than forty men of them are lurking, who anathematized themselves, neither to eat nor to drink until that they have killed him. And now, they are ready, awaiting the promise from you” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul's nephew told the Roman commander that the Jews agreed to ask him to bring Paul down to the council on the following day. His words now continue, beginning with, “Therefore, you should not be persuaded by them.”

Without having yet said it, the meaning is clear. Something is amiss that sets the council against Paul. He has heard of it and has come into the Roman barracks to reveal it to the commander. His words continue with the actual details of the preplanned plot, saying, “For more than forty men of them are lurking.”



The word is *enedreuó*. This is its second and final use in Scripture. The first was seen in Luke 11–

“And as He said these things to them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail *Him* vehemently, and to cross-examine Him about many things, <sup>54</sup> lying in wait [*enedreuó*] for Him, and seeking to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him.” Luke 11:53, 54

It is derived from *enedra*, an ambush, plot, treachery, etc. Thus, it signifies to lurk. Figuratively, then, it means to plot Paul’s assassination. Of these lurking men, Paul’s nephew continues to describe them, saying, “who anathematized themselves.”

It is the same word the men used in Acts 23:14 when speaking to the chief priests and elders, “Anathema, anathematized ourselves – tasting nothing until that we should kill Paul” (CG).

They had irretrievably bound themselves to the killing of Paul until the matter was seen through. They were firm and fixed in their determination to “neither to eat nor to drink until that they have killed him.” This is, again, the same thought expressed in Acts 23:14 where it said that they would taste nothing until they had completed their task.

The words show the reliability of Luke’s account. In verse 14, the overall word *geuomai*, or taste, was used. That is now explained by Paul’s nephew as either eating or drinking. Nothing was to pass their lips until the matter was completed. With that stated, he next tells the commander, “And now, they are ready, awaiting the promise from you.”

Once the request by the Jews is approved by the commander, the plot will be put into action. In the case of this event, the charcoal is in the pit, the lighter fluid is absorbed into the coals, and the match has been lit. The only thing to start the fire is for the commander to approve the request.

If he takes the boy’s recommendation and is not persuaded by them, the events will take a different turn. This is what the boy was sent to convince him of.

Life application: The use of the words “eat nor drink” instead of “taste” provides a nice touch as to the authenticity of the narrative. Unfortunately, many versions translate the word that should be rendered as “taste” in verse 14 as “eat.” In this, the true sense of the words is lost.

The words used in Scripture are purposeful and carefully selected by God to reveal the unfolding of a process that we can learn from. When those words are mistranslated, we will get a faulty sense of what is being conveyed. Unfortunately, pretty much every translation will have such errors because they were translated by men.

Men get distracted, they get tired, they get mentally overloaded, etc. Such things are inevitable. Therefore, it is profitable to read more than one translation if you want to get a fuller and probably more suitable sense of what is being conveyed. The next time you go through the Bible, maybe consider a parallel Bible. You can get them with two, three, or even four translations on a single page. It is a great way to compare what is translated and then to consider why there are differences.

Above all, keep reading the word! It is a treasure of delight as it details the unfolding of God's wonderful plan of redemption for the people of the world.

*Lord God, how thankful we are that there is a written record of what You are doing in the history of redemption. We don't need to trust anyone who makes a claim about Your intentions if what they say doesn't align with Your word. How grateful we are that we have the anchor to keep us from being tossed about on the seas of theological confusion. Thank You, O God, for Your precious and superior word. Amen.*

**So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded *him*, "Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me." Acts 23:22**

More literally, the Greek reads, "Therefore, indeed, the commander excused the young man, having instructed, 'Tell no one that you reported these to me'" (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul's nephew completed his explanation to the commander concerning the plot against Paul. With that, it now says, "Therefore, indeed, the commander excused the young man."

The word *apoluó* is used. Translations vary – let go, dismissed, discharged, sent away, etc. It signifies to release or let go. Sometimes it even speaks of sending away a wife, meaning "divorce." In this case, the boy was under no obligation to stay, so saying discharged or dismissed seems too restrictive, as if the boy was under some type of compulsion. For a single word to get the point across, "excused" fits.

Paul's nephew completed his words, the commander had all the information he needed, and so he excused the young man, "having instructed, 'Tell no one that you reported these to me.'"

In telling the boy not to say anything further, he is ensuring that no change in the original plans will be made. If the council learned that the commander knew of the plot, the Jews would simply amend what they intended and get Paul another way.

Instead, they will be unaware of the coming events until after the commander's new plans have transpired. His concern is far greater for the security of a citizen of Rome than it is for taking Paul to another trial when there were no formal charges made against him.

It is interesting that this event will completely smooth over any hint of his own wrongdoing when he had Paul bound in order to flog him. The coming events will make it possible for him to look like a great commander to his superiors, one who is concerned about the citizens, and it will allow for what did happen to be brushed under the table.

All in all, it is a sweet deal for this person who held such a prominent place in this particular passage of Scripture.

Life application: Sometimes, we can wear ourselves out by attending to every matter that comes across our desks as soon as it occurs. At times, if there is nothing lost in putting a matter on hold, just setting it aside for a day or two will resolve things. Quite often, what seemed like a matter needing careful attention is overcome by other events.

And more, by jumping directly into an attempted resolution, one might not only waste time, but he may make things more complicated or more stressful for others. Patience and discernment are often the key to knowing the right time to act.

If you are the impulsive sort, take it to the Lord. Ask Him for His wisdom in how He would handle the events that are unfolding. Live in tune with Him and seek Him through His word. In the end, commit your ways to Him, and He will direct your steps.

*Lord God, please give us wise and discerning hearts concerning matters that arise in our lives that may seem complicated or difficult to engage. By relying on Your wisdom, we*

*will more rightly be able to discern when to act, how to respond, and what the outcome of our actions may be. Guide us in these things, O God. Amen.*

**And he called for two centurions, saying, “Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; Acts 23:23**

A literal translation would be, “And having called a certain two of the centurions, he said, ‘Prepare two hundred soldiers that they might go unto Caesarea, and seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen; from *the* third hour of the night’” (CG).

The commander, having received word about the plot against Paul, just dismissed Paul’s nephew. Now, it says, “And having called a certain two of the centurions.”

Luke notes that the commander called “a certain” two of the centurions. Although this could simply be two on duty at the time, the wording seems purposeful. The commander is calling forth two trusted centurions that he knows he can rely on. These certain two are called to make the preparations.

With these two noted, he then said to them, “Prepare two hundred soldiers.” This would seem in line with their title, “centurion.” They are designated over a hundred men each. Therefore, calling two hundred men would be expected. This was so “that they might go unto Caesarea.”

They were to prepare for a lengthy march. The distance from Jerusalem to Caesarea on the modern highway is about 75 miles. So, this is at least a two-day march. Along with these men, the commander next says, “and seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen.”

Within a short time, they would have gathered a contingent of almost five hundred soldiers just to safely conduct Paul out of the city and to the city of Caesarea. It will be seen that the soldiers will accompany Paul as far as Antipatris (as will be noted in verse 32) and then return to the city. From there, only the horsemen would be needed to conduct him the rest of the way. The commander then notes that this contingent was to be needed “from *the* third hour of the night.”

What the third hour of the night means depends on what clock Luke is using for the account. If he was using Jewish reckoning, it would be around 9 to 10 pm. Either way,

without anyone knowing of the plan, they would be safely out of the city before daybreak, and the plotting of the Jews would be a complete failure.

Of interest is the word translated as “spearmen,” *dexiolabos*. It is a word found only here in Scripture. It literally means “right-hand grabbers,” coming from *dexios* (the right hand, or on the right side) and *lambanó* (to take hold of). Not only is it not found anywhere else in the Bible, but it is not seen anywhere in classical Greek. The next time it will be seen will be in the 7th century.

Vincent’s Word Studies says, “The exact meaning is uncertain. Some explain it as those who take the right side of the prisoners whom they have in charge; others, those who grasp (their weapon) with the right hand; others, again, those who hold (a second horse) by the right hand. They are here distinguished from the heavy-armed legionaries and the cavalry. They were probably light-armed troops, javelin-throwers or slingers.”

Life application: The Lord obviously knew that almost five hundred men would be used to conduct Paul as he was taken to Caesarea. In Acts 8, Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, and then it says –

“Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. <sup>40</sup>But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.” Acts 8: 39, 40

The word used to describe Philip’s removal from the eunuch is *harpazó*, to seize or snatch by force. We are left with the sense that Philip was there, and then he was gone. From there, he was “found” at Azotus. The wording is telling us that something unique took place, and Philip was there, and then he wasn’t.

Why didn’t the Lord just do this with Paul instead of having almost five hundred men’s lives upheaved for an emergency trip to Caesarea? It’s the same place Philip was eventually led to. We can speculate all day long about the workings of God, but when something unusual happens in Scripture, we should take it as a reliable account of what occurred and not try to diminish what we are being told.

At the same time, we should not rely on sensationalism to spiff up the narrative either. There is a sense of great importance assigned to Paul because his message was one of the greatest importance. This is seen with all clarity in Acts 23:11, where the Lord stood

by him to encourage him with the words “as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”

The same is no less true today. If you are sharing the gospel, the Lord will be with you through the process. As long as you are needed to fulfill that purpose, He will see you through whatever trial is happening. At some point, your time will be over. These things are determined by God. Therefore, don't be frustrated at the Lord over seemingly negative things that transpire.

If your church has a missionary who was killed while in the field, if your pastor gets cancer and dies, if your church is destroyed in a flood or a fire, the Lord knew these things. Look for His hand in what occurs and be willing to acknowledge that what He has decided is what is right. In the end, the words, “The Lord's will be done,” are always true.

Whether you are taken in the rapture or die in your bed, the Lord is with you. Be of good cheer. If you are in Christ, the Lord is certainly with you.

*Glorious Lord God, may we hold fast to the truth that You are with us and are aware of everything that transpires around us. Give us the wisdom to conduct our lives with this knowledge and display an attitude to those around us that we accept it is so. Help us to always be people of faith who live out our lives faithfully. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring *him* safely to Felix the governor.”**

Acts 23:24

A more literal translation would be, “And provide beasts, that, having set Paul upon, they might bring safely unto Felix the governor” (CG).

In the previous verse, the commander directed that soldiers, horsemen, and spearmen be readied to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night. Now, his words continue, saying, “And provide beasts.”

The word *kténos* is used. It simply means a beast, as in a beast of burden. It could be a horse, a donkey, or a camel. Being with the Romans, it was probably either a horse or a donkey. Paul would not have to walk the long trek to Caesarea because it next says, “that, having set Paul upon, they might bring safely unto Felix the governor.”

Being on an animal and surrounded by almost five hundred soldiers, there would be very little chance any harm would come to him. Once safely out of the local area, many of the soldiers would return to Jerusalem, but those continuing on would guarantee his safe passage and delivery to Felix. As for this governor named Felix, a short description from Adam Clarke will suffice –

“This Felix was a freed man of the Emperor Claudius, and brother of Pallas, chief favourite of the emperor. Tacitus calls him Antonius Felix; and gives us to understand that he governed with all the authority of a king, and the baseness and insolence of a quondam slave. ... He had, according to Suetonius, in his life of Claudius, chap. 28, three queens to his wives; that is, he was married thrice, and each time to the daughter or niece of a king. Drusilla, the sister of Agrippa, was his wife at this time; see Acts 24:24. He was an unrighteous governor; a base, mercenary, and bad man: see Acts 24:2.”

Life application: Imagine how safe Paul was as he was carried out of Jerusalem on his way to Caesarea. It is certain that no harm would come to him. And more, he had the assurance of the Lord Himself that he would be taken to Rome to testify concerning the risen Christ.

With such security, and with such a guarantee from the mouth of the Lord, he would have had no concerns at all as he traveled along the road out of Jerusalem. We all have trials and troubles in this life, some of them are greater than we might be able to bear at the moment. And some of them will lead to our death or the death of those we love.

But this is not the end of the story for those who know Jesus. We may have uncertainty about the immediate prospects in our lives but let us be as certain as Paul was that we will make it to our final destination. The Lord has spoken, and the promise is sure –

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. <sup>2</sup>In My Father’s house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. <sup>4</sup>And where I go you know, and the way you know.’

<sup>5</sup>Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?’

<sup>6</sup>Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” John 14:1-6

This is a promise from Jesus Christ, the risen Lord and the eternal God. Yes, trials and troubles are the hallmark of our walk in this fallen world, but safe passage to the New Jerusalem is guaranteed. Even if the ride getting there is a bit bumpy, we shall arrive safely and be granted an eternal inheritance that will outshine any temporary darkness and difficulty we now face. Be confident in this.

*O God, we are grateful to You for the assurance we possess because of the wonderful and exalted work of Jesus Christ our Lord. Though our trials are many and this earthly life is often difficult, we are confident that what has been promised shall be delivered. Thank You, O God, for this wonderful surety we can hold onto. Amen.*

**He wrote a letter in the following manner:** Acts 23:25

A literal translation says, “Having written a letter, having this form:” (CG).

In the last verse, the commander ordered that beasts were to be provided to set Paul on in order to safely conduct him to Felix the governor. Now, it says, “Having written a letter, having this form:”

It seems like a curious few words to make into a single verse, but it is not without importance. First, Luke uses the word *tupos* which indicates a representation of something else. In other words, this letter is in the same form as the original, but it was not an exact copy.

*Tupos* is “originally: the mark of a blow, then a stamp struck by a die, (a) a figure; a copy, image, (b) a pattern, model, (c) a type, prefiguring something or somebody” (Strong’s).

Hebrews 8:5 and 1 Peter 5:3 show good uses of this word for us to understand –

“For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; <sup>5</sup> who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘See *that* you make all things according to the pattern [*tupos*] shown you on the mountain.’” Hebrews 8:4, 5

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples [*tupos*] to the flock; <sup>4</sup> and



when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” 1 Peter 5:2-4

As for the letter Luke now refers to, both the author of the letter and its recipient were Roman citizens. Because of this, the letter was probably written not in Greek, but in Latin. Therefore, the letter, as explained by Luke, would be a translation of what was said, not a direct copy of it. Hence, it is a type or form of the original.

Life application: The Bible was written in several different languages. There is only one way to exactly convey the original language, which is to read and understand it in that language. But that would mean everyone would need to be proficient in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, something totally unnecessary.

Rather, through competent translation, the sense of the original is sufficiently conveyed. However, there are various ways of translating so that the original makes sense in a particular manner. If there are alliterations in the original language, they are there to excite the mind in a particular way.

However, a literal translation may not produce an alliteration. So, should it be more freely translated and include an alliteration to match, or should it be a literal translation that has no alliteration? Actually, either is sufficient as long as the original meaning is still understood. As some translations will follow one method and others will follow another, it is good to read many different translations and styles of translations.

In this, you can get a fuller appreciation of the content that was originally presented when it was first written. Never stop reading the word, and don't get bogged down and captivated by a single translation. You will miss out on so very much if you do!

*Glorious God, we are grateful to You for the wonderful word You have given to us. Thank You for the competent translators and expositors who convey to us what the original writings mean in our own languages. Your word is a treasure and exploring it is a joy. Please provide a special blessing today upon those who so faithfully and tenderly convey Your word to us. Amen.*

**Claudius Lysias,**  
**To the most excellent governor Felix:**  
**Greetings.**  
Acts 23:26

The narrative previously noted that the commander wrote a letter to Felix, the governor. The introductory salutation of that letter now begins, saying, “Claudius Lysias.”

By giving his name here, we finally learn the commander’s identity. Until this point, he has been referred to many times as the *chiliarchos*, a commander over a thousand men, and simply translated as “the commander” in these commentaries.

His first name, Claudius, is Roman. It was probably a name he assumed from Emperor Claudius, maybe when he received his citizenship. The second name appears to be Greek and was probably his name before becoming a citizen. Thus, he was probably originally a Greek or from the various Greek speaking peoples within the empire. He next writes, “To the most excellent governor Felix.”

The title “most excellent,” *kratistos*, is the same title that Luke gave to Theophilus at the beginning of the book of Luke. It will be used two more times, both in Acts and both spoken during formal discourse with the appointed governor. The word is an adjective coming from *kratos*, a word signifying might, strength, dominion, power, etc. Thus, it literally means “strongest.”

As for the word translated as governor, it is *hégemón*. It is the source of our word hegemony. In classical Greek, it is used to refer to various leadership positions. The verse ends with “Greetings.”

The word used, *chairó*, is the same as was used in Acts 15:23 and in James 1:1 in the introduction of those letters. This letter may have been sent unsealed. Thus, it might have been read by Paul. It may have even been that he read it as the commander wrote it out. Or it may be that Paul or Luke was provided a copy of it in Caesarea. Thus, the substance of the letter has been recorded in Scripture.

Life application: This is a very short and simple verse, and yet it has details that give us a fuller understanding of how things were at the time of the apostles. Knowing the meaning of the words used can help us to piece together how people interacted, what words were commonly used in various settings (such as the introductory greeting to letters), what type of lines of authority existed, and so forth.

When you come to short, seemingly insignificant verses like this, don’t just quickly brush past it. Instead, take time to consider how such interactions are similar or different to how our modern world is structured. Quite often, we can see that things were not all that different in the past.

Though time is marching on, the human race remains in pretty much the same state that it has always been in. Until the return of Jesus, it will be so. Societies will evolve and devolve in a manner not unlike those recorded in the Bible. The main thing that directs them is their relation to laws intended to govern the sinful traits of man.

When societies punish wrongdoing in a just and fair manner, they will tend to prosper. When they treat their citizens in a respectful way, there will be harmony. Etc. However, when society moves away from such things, chaos begins to enter, and societal breakdown occurs. These things can be seen in Scripture, in the writings of societies, and in the way societies are moving before our eyes.

When Jesus comes for His people, a new order of things will come about. Someday, a perfect government without any sin will be realized. It will have perfect harmony, and there will be eternal communion and fellowship with our Creator. This is what God has done for us. It is now offered to us through the giving of Jesus. Hallelujah!

*Thank You, O God, for the precious hope we possess. Someday, we will no longer have to deal with our fallen nature. We will be granted a new direction and an eternal state of joy and fellowship in Your presence. How we long for that day. We possess this hope and are highly anticipating its coming about. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. Acts 23:27**

The words are filled with participles, excitedly filling the statement with action. It more literally reads, “This man, having been seized by the Jews, and being about to be killed by them, having come with the detachment, I rescued him, having learned that he is Roman” (CG).

In the previous verse, Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander, opened his letter to Felix the governor. He now enters into the main details of the reason for that letter, beginning with, “This man.”

In the Greek, Paul is identified as *ton andra touton*, “the man, this.” Bengel sees this as a way of granting a title of honor. It is again used as the letter closes out in verse 30. The reason for this particular expression is explained by the end of the verse when he is identified further as being Roman. Of him, the letter continues, “having been seized by the Jews.”

It was the Jews who seized Paul and started hurling accusations at him. They got into such a lather that he was “about to be killed by them.” The situation practically turned into a riot as the temple doors were shut.

Once it was seen that they were about to kill Paul, the Roman garrison was notified, and the soldiers acted, “having come with the detachment.” Were they not to have come immediately, Paul surely would not have survived. However, the commander briefly states, “I rescued him.”

Of this word, while citing Bengel, Vincent’s Word Studies says –

“Bengel says, ‘a lie.’ Lysias wishes to make the impression that Paul’s citizenship was the cause of his rescuing him; whereas he did not know of this until afterward. He says nothing about the proposed scourging.”

That untruth is seen in the final words of the verse, “having learned that he is Roman.”

It is not a noun, “a Roman.” Rather, it is an adjective, “Roman.” He is highlighting the honor of the state of citizenship and how he carefully defended that aspect of the culture, regardless of any other traits. It would be like saying, “I was willing to defend the citizenship itself, whether he was my best friend or a personal enemy.”

Although this isn’t at all what happened with respect to Paul’s Roman citizenship, it is intended to show the commander’s passion for protecting Romans and to preempt any negative comments by Paul concerning his treatment. In essence, he has completely buried his illegal actions towards Paul and is hoping that his wording in this letter will keep them forever buried. Unfortunately, he didn’t know that Luke was such a minute chronicler of the events of life.

Life application: Claudius Lysias has presented his actions in the most favorable light, even if they were not completely true. This will continue to be seen in his brief letter. His words are recorded and placed in Scripture for every person who has ever read the Bible to see.

How would we act if we knew that every word we spoke and deed we did were being recorded for others to see? Would we say things a little bit differently? Would we refrain from doing certain things and be sure to do other things that we would otherwise leave undone?

If we really believe that God is the judge of all men and is omniscient, then our words and deeds are, in fact, being recorded. If we can capture millions of live stream cameras 24 hours a day and keep those recordings in storage for future playback, how much more can we know that God is able to replay every moment of our existence before us!

This thought should not scare us, but it should alert us to the fact that God is there and everything we think, say, and do is known to Him. From that knowledge, we should endeavor to live our lives appropriately before Him. Everything we do will be brought to light when we stand before Him –

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup> each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. <sup>14</sup> If anyone’s work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” 1 Corinthians 3:11-15

“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. <sup>11</sup> Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.”

-2 Corinthians 5:9-11

We believed the gospel. The same God, who we believe read our hearts at that time, is the God who is now monitoring our lives in Christ for eternal rewards. Let our hearts be faithful, and may our actions be in accord with His will, as is set forth for us in Scripture. On the day when we are presented before the Judge, may rewards abound because of it.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for having heard us on the day we believed the gospel. At that time, You sealed us with Your Spirit and granted us eternal life. Help us to remember that You are still listening and hearing. May our lives now be filled with the same faith that we professed on that day. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. Acts 23:28**

The words more literally say, “And desiring to know the charge through which they accused him, I brought him down to their council” (CG).

In the previous verse, the commander referred to his actions in rescuing Paul, noting that he rescued him, having learned he was a Roman. In his words, he certainly fudged the truth, hiding his inappropriate actions, and changing the facts to highlight his alertness in defense of a fellow Roman. He continues this approach now, saying, “And desiring to know the charge through which they accused him.”

Again, the commander will completely omit his first choice of determining the accusations against Paul, which was to tie him up and torture him into a confession. Being such a minor detail, he must have felt sure that no governor could possibly want to know about it 😊.

However, the governor would surely want to know about his adeptness at getting to the heart of what was going on. Therefore, he next says, “I brought him down to their council.”

The commander’s letter shows a decisive person who takes the necessary action to get to the bottom of a matter with alacrity and alertness, even if that wasn’t exactly how things transpired. What appears to be the case is that he is looking for a year-end bonus or maybe a promotion for his attentiveness and military competence.

Life application: Doing what is right and telling the truth concerning a situation is always the best option, even if it may temporarily stain one’s image in the eyes of another. People will generally remember that a person was willing to admit his faults and acknowledge his shortcomings.

It’s hard to do, but it also frees up the mind from the lurking possibility that the actual circumstances of what occurred may someday be discovered. But even if they aren’t, and the event is completely forgotten, getting away with an untruth may sear the conscience to tell more lies. This is not a good way to conduct one’s life.

In the end, it is best to speak truthfully and be open and honest in one’s life. Above all, the Lord is aware of such things and so we should strive to live honorably and properly in His presence at all times.

*Lord God, it can be difficult to face our own shortcomings. It can be more difficult to admit them to others. But it is right that we should be open and honest in our dealings with those around us. Help us to consider this and honor You through our words, deeds, and interactions with others. Amen.*

**I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. Acts 23:29**

The tense of the verbs needs tweaking. The Greek reads, “Whom I found being accused about questions of their law and having no accusation worthy of death or chains” (CG).

The commander’s letter to Felix, the governor, about Paul continues, saying, “Whom I found being accused about questions of their law.”

The words, “questions of their law,” mean that there was nothing involved that Rome would care about. Instead, it was a matter of the interpretation of Jewish law and not something that was defined by the courts of Rome.

The Jewish people had been given authority to worship their God as they chose. Any internal strife concerning rites, interpretations, authorized teachers, etc. in relation to the law was left solely up to those in charge of such religious matters to decide. Because of this, the commander was certain that they were of no concern to Rome. They are what was detailed earlier in this chapter where it said –

“But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, ‘Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!’<sup>7</sup> And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup> For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. <sup>9</sup> Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees’ party arose and protested, saying, ‘We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.’” Acts 23:6-9

As this was a matter not within the jurisdiction of Roman decision, the commander concluded that Paul was “having no accusation worthy of death or chains.”

None of the things he heard were sufficient to bind him, imprison him, or have him executed. And yet, ironically, the things that they discussed are the most important issues that will ever affect the people of the world.

Because of the Roman system that was in place at the time, the worldly matters seemed to overshadow the more important spiritual ones, at least in order for Paul to be able to continue his ministry. Here and in all other cases in Acts, no magistrate found any wrongdoing in Paul.

Life application: The same situation exists today that existed at the time of Paul's life under Roman rule. There are those who share the gospel in order to free people from the bonds of sin and the power of the devil. They do this within nations that supposedly have the right to rule over such matters or who are indifferent to such things.

And yet, the problem of sin infects every single person on the earth. At the time of the writing of this commentary, there is a major corruption scandal concerning fundraising in Japan. In Germany, there is a corruption scandal concerning gas supplies from Qatar. In the United States, the person in the White House is being investigated for corruption that literally permeates his political life and his family.

The same type of sinful behavior is found in one nation after another and in religious institutions around the world, including Christian churches and especially the Vatican, from the pope down to all levels. Some of these entities proclaim that they have authority over what believing Christians can say or how they can say it.

This, then, supposedly puts them over God who has given His word and has then instructed believers to share it and teach it. Imagine that! God has allowed humanity to run its own affairs, even if what they decide is set in contrast to His word. This includes churches that are supposed to rightly teach it.

And yet, people call God an ogre for telling them that the problem rests within their hearts and that He has done everything necessary to fix it and bring restoration between them and Him. No wonder the world is devolving into total chaos.

When the people turn from Him and how He has revealed Himself, it means that only sin is left to rule in their lives. Even the very best governments will fail unless the truth of God in Christ is accepted and allowed to flourish within the society.



*What a mess the world is in, Lord God. Nations have cast off any sense of Christian morality, and we have turned away from the magnificent message of the gospel. Even churches and denominations are following the path of perversion, accepting profane doctrines to be taught as acceptable. Lord, we know that the coming of Jesus for His people is getting closer each day as we see these things unfold. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.*

**And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell. Acts 23:30**

The Greek, though a bit clunky, more literally reads, “And, having been revealed to me a plot, about to be by the Jews, against the man, I sent immediately unto you, having also instructed the accusers to say these against him before you. Be strong” (CG).

In his letter to Felix, the commander just noted that he found that there was nothing charged against Paul deserving of death or chains. Because of this, he next writes, “And, having been revealed to me a plot, about to be by the Jews, against the man.”

The commander, Claudius Lysias, appears to be the epitome of rational thinking. He perceived trouble at the beginning and saved Paul. As the trouble hadn’t ceased, he again saves him by directing the things he now is writing to Felix.

This second half of the account is at least truthful. It also sets Paul as an honorable person being troubled by the seditious Jews who would even dare to harm a Roman citizen and thus make an implicit attack on the government. Thus, as a Roman military officer, he places the Roman priorities above any favor he had curried with the Jews since being assigned in Jerusalem.

This is certainly the intent of his words. He is looking for Felix’s favor by showing his allegiance to Rome above all else. As Paul is also Roman, and to demonstrate his care for his fellow citizens, he next writes, “I sent immediately unto you.”

Paul will be safely conducted with a large force of soldiers. Even after getting safely out of the local area, a sizeable portion of them will continue the trek to Caesarea. When Paul arrives safely, this show of force would be considered a notable aspect of the commander’s care for his charge. Along with that, he tells Felix, “having also instructed the accusers to say these against him before you.”

It is apparent that, by his letter, he wants Paul looked at in a favorable light so that Paul's original mistreatment will never come to light. The note of him commanding the accusers to state the charges before Felix probably means that he composed two letters at the same time. The first was this letter to Felix, and the second would have been dispatched to the Jewish council once Paul was safely out of the area.

Thus, this letter explains why Paul was sent to Caesarea and why his journey included such a large contingent of soldiers. With that, he closes out the letter with a word not found in all manuscripts, saying, "Be strong."

In many manuscripts, it is the second and last use of the word *rhónnumi*. It was first used to close out the letter from the council in Jerusalem to the Gentile church in Acts 15:29. It is a verb that literally signifies to strengthen or be strong. Being a perfect imperative, it literally gives the sense of "you have been strengthened and so remain strengthened."

Life application: There is no note of the commander having ever come to Christ. Therefore, it is likely that if he did, it would have been after Paul's time with him. During his time interacting with Paul, he placed his highest priority on discharging his duties as a Roman officer.

He was careful to ensure that his account would make him appear favorable in the eyes of those above him, hoping they would notice his deeds and look favorably upon him. For those in Christ, our highest priority should be doing those things that exalt the Lord above all else.

However, in doing this, we will actually be doing our very best to perform our duties in all other areas to the very best of our abilities. This is because in wanting to honor the Lord, we will conduct all other aspects of our lives in the most noble way possible. Only when there is a conflict between our allegiance to the Lord and conducting our duties should this not be the case.

Today, we may be asked to compromise our faith to meet a liberal, woke agenda. We should never cave to this sort of perversion. Instead, we should use our rights as Christians to work against such things. We should even do it to the full extent of our ability. This will be what is most honoring to the name of the Lord. In all things, let us consider the Lord being glorified through our actions as our highest priority.

*O God, we may have challenges set before us that ask us to compromise our position as Christians. Help us never to cave to such things. Rather, give us wisdom and strength to stand against anything that may hinder our relationship with You. In the end, we must give an account for our actions when we come before You. May what we do be right and pleasing so that we are prepared to do so. Amen.*

**Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought *him* by night to Antipatris. Acts 23:31**

A more literal rendering is, “Then, indeed, the soldiers according to that having been appointed them, having taken up Paul, brought through night to Antipatris” (CG).

With the letter from the commander fully detailed by Luke, it next says, “Then, indeed, the soldiers according to that having been appointed them.”

The plan was previously detailed. When the commander completed his letter, the soldiers were assembled according to their previously arranged assignment, and Paul was brought out of the barracks to where the soldiers awaited him. At that point, it next says, “having taken up Paul.”

In verse 24, the centurions were instructed to provide mounts to set Paul on. This is what is now taking place. He is taken up onto his mount for the journey and “brought through night to Antipatris.”

Antipatris was previously called Cafar-Saba. It is mentioned by Flavius Josephus in his writings. Herod the Great had its name changed to Antipatris to honor his father Antipater. It is about thirty-five miles north and west of Jerusalem and still another twenty-six miles south and east of Caesarea.

Today it is known as Kefr-Saba, having reverted back to its original name. The majority of the trip from Jerusalem would be somewhat downhill from the hill country of Ephraim and into the plain of Sharon.

If they went all night, which seems likely, they could have reached this by 6 or 7 the next morning. The rest of the trip would take about six hours until they reached Caesarea. If they stopped for an extended break, they could have been there by sometime in the afternoon.

Life application: The Bible isn't just a book that tells of arbitrary events that may or may not be true. It details events that can be verified, including locations, names of those locations, structures that existed in those locations, events that are recorded to have happened in those same locations (like certain details of battles where evidence is readily available), and so forth.

There is no reason to assume that the events of a battle that are recorded in the Bible are true but that the details of the lives of those people – as recorded at the time of those battles – are merely myths. Rather, when it says that a city is besieged by the Assyrians, something that can be verified as true, and that the king said and did certain things at that time, we should assume that those things are also true.

This is true with events like Paul's situation that is now being detailed in Acts. If Luke correctly recorded all of the verifiable information, like names of cities, names of certain officials, distances between locations, etc., then what he says about Paul's personal matters would have been equally well-researched.

Have confidence that what you are reading is accurate and reliable. This is especially so because it is recorded in God's word. Why would God allow something false or misleading to be included there? He wouldn't! Trust the word because God is trustworthy.

*Heavenly Father, may we be confident in Your word, knowing that it has been checked, rechecked, and then checked again throughout the time since it was received. Even today, new evidence of its reliability is being discovered. Thank You for the surety we can possess concerning Your word. And, thus, thank You for the surety we can possess concerning what it says about Jesus! Hallelujah for the story of the coming of our Lord. Amen.*

**The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks.**  
Acts 23:32

More literally, the words read, "And the morrow, having allowed the horsemen to go with him, they returned to the barracks" (CG).

In the previous verse, the detachment of soldiers took Paul out of Jerusalem to Antipatris. Now, the narrative continues, saying, "And the morrow."

Scholars debate whether this means it is the next day from Jerusalem or from Antipatris. Being a forced march, it is most probably from Jerusalem. Thus, the entire trip was done in a single day. Further, Cambridge notes that “The original has a conjunction which the Rev. Ver. represents by ‘But.’ These men would return to Jerusalem again on the day of the intended plot.”

Because of the use of the conjunction, which can be translated as and, but, now, etc., it is more probable that this is referring to the next day from Jerusalem. Further, some translations add in the word “on” before “morrow” or “next day.” That will also cause confusion. It is most likely the first day after leaving Jerusalem that it next says, “having allowed the horsemen to go with him, they returned to the barracks.”

The four hundred soldiers and spearmen went directly back to Jerusalem. Thus, they would be in Jerusalem when the original plot against Paul was supposed to occur. These soldiers would have had a very long time without sleep before all went back to normal. The seventy horsemen would be more than sufficient to conduct Paul the rest of the way swiftly and safely.

This account shows us the immense size of the force that must have been kept in Jerusalem. If almost 500 were dispatched for this one incident, there were many more who remained to keep the peace and to perform the normal functions Rome required.

Life application: For such a short and simple verse, one would think the translators would be willing to carefully look at the Greek, notice there was an opening conjunction, and say, “This is a necessary part of God’s word,” and include it in the translation.

But translations as far back as Tyndale (1526), the Bishop’s Bible (1568), and the King James (1611) arbitrarily omit it. By doing so, an ambiguity in the wording arises, and debates arise concerning which day Paul was escorted. It’s not an issue that someone should lose sleep over, but because of the poor translation, varying thoughts are unnecessarily bandied about concerning what is being said.

So why would this conjunction have been left off? It may have been to make the verse flow better in English. Reading a literal translation can be awkward because the words fit together in a clunky fashion. But this is not an excuse to arbitrarily skip necessary words.

When you come to a conflict in translations, before deciding on a final analysis that may be wrong because of one translation or another, try checking the original manuscript.

Carefully consider what is being conveyed. Unlike Acts 23:32, faulty translations of some verses can lead to very poor theological positions being held. Study! Stand approved in what you accept.

*Glorious Lord God, the more we study Your word, the more delightful it is to our minds. It is like a well of deep waters that are sweet and refreshing. Help us to read it, cherish it, and carefully study its contents all the days of our lives. To Your glory! Amen.*

**When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. Acts 23:33**

More literally, the words read, “Who, having entered into Caesarea, and having delivered the letter to the governor, also presented Paul to him” (CG).

In the previous verse, it noted that the soldiers returned to Jerusalem, but the horsemen stayed with Paul in order to conduct him the rest of the way to Caesarea. Now, referring to these horsemen, it says, “Who, having entered into Caesarea.”

It would have been an impressive sight for the people of the city to see seventy horsemen arrayed in Roman colors marching a single man into the city, carefully guarding him as they went. Like the procession of a presidential limousine today, the people would have stopped to gawk. Upon arriving at their destination, it next says, “and having delivered the letter to the governor.”

Interestingly, Paul’s name is mentioned a total of sixteen times in this chapter, but in the letter from Claudius Lysias, it is never declared. As such, it was up to the testimony of those who conducted him to say, “This is the man.” Therefore, it next says that they “also presented Paul to him.”

As there was a whole contingent of horsemen, they could testify that the right man had been safely delivered into the care of the authorities.

Life application: The word is a wonderful gift to us from the mind of God. As you read it, be sure to think about why things are included in it. Stopping to do short word studies, counting the number of times things are mentioned, or doing short topical studies will open up new avenues of thought that may never have been contemplated before.

Also, let your mind wander into what things might have been like. Considering such things as the majestic, stately, or terrifying march of horses into a city, a battle, or across

a desert area will make the word come alive in your mind. Let the word come alive to you in wonderful ways.

Your time in the word will only be as interesting as you make it. So be sure to make it interesting!

*Lord God, thank You for Your wonderful word. And, above all, thank You for Jesus, who is revealed to us in this precious word! Amen.*

**And when the governor had read *it*, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that *he was from Cilicia*, Acts 23:34**

In the Greek, the words are full of participles, and the sentence remains incomplete until the next verse. More literally, it reads, “And the governor having read, and having asked from what province he is, and having learned that from Cilicia” (CG).

The previous verse told of the arrival of the Roman horsemen in Caesarea, where they delivered the letter to the governor and presented Paul to him. That next continues with, “And the governor having read.”

One can imagine the situation. The soldiers, along with Paul, were conducted into the main area where the governor sat. The letter bearer would have come forward, probably not saying a word but simply presenting the letter. Then, he would have stood at attention while the letter was read. Once the governor read it, it next says, “and having asked from what province he is.”

Luke begins the clause with an aorist participle and then uses a present tense verb, thus bringing the reader right into the proceedings – “What is his status?”

The question as to where Paul was from would have been the normal way of validating jurisdiction and being able to ascertain more information about the person at hand. This is the same thing that occurs in Luke 23:6. In the US, it is common for a similar question to be asked, such as, “What state are you from?”

We are not told who gave the response. It only says, “and having learned that from Cilicia.” There are a couple of possibilities concerning his question. Cambridge says –

“Cilicia had been at one time, and perhaps still was, attached to the province of Syria. It was so in the time of Quirinus. This will explain why at once Felix without question decided that, at the proper time, he would hear the cause.”

If Cilicia was not attached to Syria, then a formal note would probably have been sent out for either permission to try the case or to determine what they wanted to do with the matter. On the other hand, Vincent's Word Studies says that, rather than asking what province Paul was from, Felix's words *ek poias eparchias* signify “from what kind of a province?”

In other words, Vincent's Word Studies is stating that, in this situation, the word *poios* is intended to mean “of what sort,” not merely “which.” As such, he is trying to determine if the province is senatorial or imperial. Cilicia was an imperial province.

Life application: The question concerning Paul's province may seem irrelevant to us until we consider that the same type of question is asked of accused criminals thousands of times a day. What was the crime? Where was it perpetrated? What is the citizenship of the person who committed it? What is the legal status of the person who committed it?

All of these things must be determined before someone can be properly processed and tried. If a person is from Japan, something is learned about him. If he is in the US on a student visa, something more is now known. If he came here illegally, on a green card, or with diplomatic privileges, it makes a difference in whether he can even be charged at all.

Luke is carefully recording what happened so that the status of Paul in the coming verses will be more properly understood. Seemingly unimportant details may be extremely important if someone wants to question the Bible's authenticity. A person who is well-informed about how legal matters were conducted in the Roman empire at Paul's time may say, “This isn't at all how things worked. The Bible is wrong.”

But with Luke carefully presenting what occurred, such arguments can be laid to rest. Therefore, should you come across such accusations, be sure to not just accept them at face value. Rather, because commentaries have been faithfully composed covering every verse in Scripture, there is a good chance that you will find one that covers exactly what you are looking for.

So carefully has the Bible been studied that even the nuances of single words – their tense, gender, etc. – are carefully considered and commented on. Be sure that this word



has been meticulously looked over and challenged. And yet, the brightest minds in history have concluded that this is, in fact, the sure word of God.

*Heavenly Father, Your word is a gloriously constructed marvel of wisdom. It is presented to the world as a testament that You are truly working within the stream of time and human existence to reconcile man back to Yourself. Thank You for the elaborate and intricate detail of Your wonderful, superior word. Amen.*

**he said, “I will hear you when your accusers also have come.” And he commanded him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium. Acts 23:35**

The Greek more literally reads, “I will thoroughly hear you, he said, when your accusers also may have arrived,’ having commanded him to be guarded in the Praetorium of Herod” (CG).

The previous verse flows into this one, having ended with the words, “and having learned that from Cilicia.” That thought now continues with, “I will thoroughly hear you.”

Whatever the correct interpretation of Paul’s standing was concerning his being from Cilicia, as discussed in the previous verse, it was sufficient for Felix to accept responsibility for the investigation.

Apparently, there would be no conflict in his doing so. The word translated as “I will thoroughly hear you” is *diakouó*. It comes from *dia*, “through,” and *akouo*, “a hearing.” This is its only use in the Bible. It is obvious when connecting the two words that a “thorough hearing” in a judicial sense is what is intended.

The questions from Felix thus far were only preparatory, and Paul would be given an entire and thorough chance to speak when those who accused him might come before Felix. That is seen in what Luke next records, “he said, ‘when your accusers also may have arrived.’”

Felix continues his thoughts using an aorist subjunctive verb. In other words, “when this, then this.” The anticipated trial is wholly dependent on the coming of his accusers. If none come, then there will be no trial. Every protection for Paul’s status as a Roman citizen is being afforded to him. Therefore, it next says, “having commanded him to be guarded in the Praetorium of Herod.”

Herod's Praetorium was built by Herod the Great. A great deal of this building is still standing today. The praetorium itself was a judgment hall. Paul was to be kept in that area, but in this case the word translated as "guarded" apparently does not imply being held as a prisoner.

He would have been granted the respect of his citizenship while he awaited the trial to come. Thus, the act of guarding was less for the sake of keeping him bound as a prisoner than it was to keep him safe and secure as a citizen.

Life application: It has become evident in the UK and the US that being a citizen does not carry the same protections that it once did. Being a Christian who accepts the Bible as authoritative places a person at odds with the ruling authorities who reject the notion of the God who judges in righteousness.

Therefore, arresting citizens and holding them without due process under trumped up charges is becoming more common. The legal system does fight back against this, but all it will take is minor tweaks in the structure of these governments for even that to change.

From here on out, Christians must be willing to accept the fact that the faith they possess will be challenged by wholly corrupted leaders who are willing to test the true metal of those who profess their faith. Many will yield and deny what they have claimed all along. Others will be willing to hold fast to Jesus with all their hearts and souls.

The difference will be found in how they have been instructed on the salvation they have received and what that means for their future in Christ's presence. Those who hold the absolute assurance that their faith is grounded on reality will be much more likely to put their lives aside now for the greater and eternal glory that lies ahead.

Be ready! The time may not be far off. When it comes, decisions will have to be made. Where do you intend to stand should the Lord tarry in His coming?

*We praise You, Lord God! Nothing in this life compares to what You have promised Your people in the life to come, which is true life in Christ. In that day, give us the strength and fortitude to stand on the truth of Your word, never compromising with those who hate You and the doctrines You have conveyed to us in Your word. Yes, Lord, be with us. And we know You will be. Hallelujah and amen.*

## CHAPTER 24

**Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator *named* Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul. Acts 24:1**

Chapter 24 enters into the hearing that Felix promised Paul in the preceding verse. The words begin with, “Now after five days.”

This five-day period is probably from the time of Paul’s departure from Jerusalem. At that same time, the council would have been informed, and they would have begun preparations for a case against him.

This is the likely scenario because it was twelve days since Paul's arrival in Jerusalem, as will be seen in verse 24:11. Therefore, the timeline is better reckoned from the departure from Jerusalem and not from the last events of Chapter 23.

Regardless of this, the five-day period sees the coming of a delegation to testify against Paul. Of them, Luke records that “Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator *named* Tertullus.”

As always, when a trip is made from Jerusalem, the term “came down” or “descended” is used. Because the Lord’s temple is in Jerusalem, it is considered as the highest place on earth from a legal and royal perspective. He being the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Likewise, when going to Jerusalem from anywhere else, it is an ascent regardless of direction or elevation. The word used to describe Tertullus is *rhétór*. This is its only use in Scripture. It signifies an orator, public speaker, or an advocate. Today, we use the words rhetoric, rhetorically, etc. These are etymologically derived from this ancient Greek word.

As for Tertullus, he would have the eloquence of a toastmaster. Ellicott describes the *rhétór* –

“Men of this class were to be found in most of the provincial towns of the Roman empire, ready to hold a brief for plaintiff or defendant, and bringing to bear the power of their glib eloquence, as well as their knowledge of Roman laws, on the mind of the judge.”

Of this delegation that has arrived, it next says, “These gave evidence to the governor against Paul.”

The word translated as “gave evidence” is *emphanizó*. It signifies to appear, declare, make visible, etc. In this case, it is being used in a technical sense. In essence, it is a formal indictment being made against Paul. One might more accurately say that they litigated against Paul. They are set to disclose the charges against him that have been decided upon.

Of this verse, the Geneva Bible comments, “Hypocrites, when they can not do what they want to do by force and deceit, at length they go about to accomplish it by a show of law.”

Life application: Think of what has happened to Paul. These miscreants had initiated a sort of coup against him in the temple, stirring up the masses against him and stealing away his rights in the process. The only thing that saved him from disaster was that he was found to be Roman by the barracks commander.

From there, they plotted against him to kill him. That plot was discovered, and Paul was safely conducted out of Jerusalem. Now, because they have been ineffective in laying hands on him any other way, they are set to bring false charges against him to keep him from spreading his message of freedom in Christ any further.

The parallel between what has happened thus far and what has happened to President Donald Trump is quite similar. There are certain ways that people will react when they cannot get their way. They will follow the same patterns again and again in history to meet whatever the present circumstances are that they find displeasing.

But this isn't just with leaders. Eventually, the persecution continues even to those who are inspired by the leader. In the case of Paul, it started with Jesus. It continued to His apostles. From there, it continued to the people who accepted the apostles' message. Paul was supernaturally pulled from that by a personal appearance of Jesus. But then the persecution against him began.

In our world today, the communists on the left have fought against conservative ideology. They have then targeted the leader of the conservative movement that was most likely to harm their globalist agenda. With that goal seemingly realized, they began targeting his supporters.

Only with a massive amount of public support has this wave of communism been fought against. Will it be turned around? Only time will tell. If not, the political persecution will very quickly become a persecution of the religious lives of the people they are targeting. This is because faith in God is diametrically opposed to communist ideology. It must be terminated for the communists to prevail.

Be ready to stand on your priorities, whatever they are. If they include Jesus, be ready to face what so many have faced before you. Faith in Christ will eventually be something considered intolerable and worthy of death. Even now, that is on the minds of these miscreants.

*Lord God, we know that the end times will be difficult for those who hold fast to faith in You. We don't know the timing of the rapture, and so we don't know at what point we may have to face persecution because of what we believe. Should it come to pass, may we be faithful to stand and proclaim the Name of Jesus as our ultimate hope and passion. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: "Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, Acts 24:2**

A literal translation is, "And he, having been called, Tertullus began accusing, saying, 'Great peace we are attaining through you. And reformations are being done to this nation through your foresight'" (CG).

The previous verse opened the chapter noting that Ananias, the high priest, came down to Caesarea with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus to give evidence to the governor against Paul. It now says, "And he, having been called, Tertullus began accusing."

Tertullus, the orator, will speak on behalf of the entire delegation. This is what is customary in such proceedings. Anything else would naturally lead to a chaotic session where everyone was interjecting. Therefore, Tertullus alone began the discourse, "saying, 'Great peace we are attaining through you.'"

Verses 2-4 are given as an introduction to the charges as a way of gaining favor with Felix. This is in hopes of winning him to their side before the actual charges are even given.

Scholars agree that the things Tertullus focuses on are pretty much the only things worth focusing on. Other than this, there was truly nothing to compliment about the governor. His first item of presentation is that of the people having obtained great peace.

This is obviously not the type of peace that the Jews would have asked for. It was a forced peace through the strength of the Roman Empire. However, it would have been a true statement, nonetheless. The Jews were subjugated to Roman authority, and the Pax Romana was forced upon them, as it was throughout the empire. Next, Tertullus notes, “And reformations are being done to this nation.”

Here is found a new word in Scripture, translated as “reformations,” *diorthosis*. It is found only here and in Hebrews 9:10. It comes from *dia* and *orthos* (through and upright). Some translations say, “worthy deeds,” “excellent measures,” or something similar. It is a noun signifying improvements, reformations, etc. Being plural, “reformations” provides the proper sense.

Next, Tertullus says to the governor that these were done “through your foresight.” It is another new word in Scripture, *pronoia*. It is a noun derived from the verb *pronoieó*, to foresee. The word is described by Ellicott –

“The Greek word had at this time, like the English, a somewhat higher sense than ‘prudence’ or ‘forethought.’ Men spoke then, as now, of the ‘providence’ of God, and the tendency to clothe the emperors with quasi-divine attributes led to the appearance of this word—‘the providence of Cæsar’—on their coins and on medals struck in their honour. Tertullus, after his manner, goes one step further, and extends the term to the procurator of Judæa.”

The Geneva Bible notes that “Felix ruled that province with great cruelty and covetousness, and yet Josephus records that he did many worthy things, such as taking Eleazar the captain of certain cutthroats, and put that deceiving wretch the Egyptian to flight, who caused great troubles in Judea.”

In other words, Tertullus is using carefully selected words to butter up the governor in hopes of obtaining a favorable verdict for his side. Through his efforts, there was at least peace, which led to prosperity, even if it was under the oppressive hand of Roman rule.

Life application: So far, everything Tertullus said has been irrelevant to the case against Paul. His approach, then, is already one that demonstrates their main argument will lack substance, at least from the perspective of Roman authority.

This type of presentation is not at all uncommon, and it should be watched for in any forum. People who come in and begin with comments irrelevant to the main subject of attention are often doing so to distract the mind from that main subject. Perceiving this type of approach, and mentally standing against it until the main arguments are presented, will keep you in a stronger position to cut out the superfluous fat in order to challenge whatever main point is then introduced.

Be aware of such things. They may seem innocuous, but they usually come when a logical argument is lacking, or someone who is involved in what is being said is a target for misdirection and deception.

*Lord God Almighty, when we are presented with challenges to Your word, or to who You are as the Creator and Sovereign over our lives, help us to identify fallacious thinking or invalid points of argumentation and to focus on the main substance of what is being addressed. Sometimes, it is hard to see where people are going until it is too late. So, help us to have wisdom as we defend our faith in You. Amen.*

**“we accept *it* always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.**

Acts 24:3

The Greek more literally reads, “Both entirely and everywhere we welcome, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness” (CG).

In the previous verse, Tertullus began his accusation against Paul. It was a butter-up job to hide the fact that they really have no case against him in any matter that Rome would be interested in. The spreading of the butter now continues with “Both entirely and everywhere.”

He uses a word found only here in Scripture, *panté*. Some translations say “always.” However, it is generally accepted that it doesn't mean “always” as in time, but rather “all ways” as in scope. Therefore, the single word “entirely” is more definitive.

As such, the “entirely and everywhere” of this verse are tied to the “great peace” and the “reformations” of the previous verse. Understanding that, the words of Tertullus continue with “we welcome.”

Considering that the Jews' hatred of the Roman rule over them permeated the entire society, the words must have been a bitter pill to even utter. For Felix, it was probably a point of great happiness to see the leaders of Israel, along with their authorized representative, groveling before him with such platitudes. Next, Tertullus says, "most excellent Felix."

The word translated as "most excellent" is the same as that found in Acts 23:26 in the introduction of the letter from Claudius Lysias to Felix. It will be used one more time in Acts when spoken during formal discourse with the appointed governor. It is an adjective coming from *kratos*, a word signifying might, strength, dominion, power, etc. Thus, it literally means "strongest." With that stated, Tertullus ends this introduction, saying, "with all thankfulness."

A satire could not put forth words more painfully expressed. Of them, John Gill says, "this was all a farce, mere artifice, and wretched flattery." Tertullus and the entire body of elders who were there before Felix were probably clenching their teeth in disgust, while Felix was probably smiling and on the verge of bursting out in condescending laughter.

Life application: In reading and considering the words of Tertullus, and while thinking about the unnecessary kowtowing that he did before the Roman authorities, you can then consider your own choice of words should such a circumstance ever arise in your life.

The words of Solomon, when speaking of our own choice of words before God, give direction that is suitable to any such circumstance –

"Do not be rash with your mouth,  
And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.  
For God *is* in heaven, and you on earth;  
Therefore let your words be few.  
<sup>3</sup>For a dream comes through much activity,  
And a fool's voice *is known* by *his* many words." Ecclesiastes 5:2, 3

The only things Tertullus has accomplished with his opening statement are to waste time and look foolish. He has brought embarrassment to himself. What is more, it is recorded for all to see and learn from. When addressing others in such a forum, keep your words to the minimum and be open and direct about the matter at hand. In this, your wisdom will be seen and appreciated by the wise.



*Lord God Almighty, help us to not be babblers or smooth talkers. May our words be precise and effective, especially when dealing with others. May our conversations about You, such as when we share the good news, be carefully constructed to convey the proper meaning intended by You for the conversion of the soul. Help us in such things, O God. Amen.*

**Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us. Acts 24:4**

The words more literally read, “And so not upon you further I should hinder, I implore you to hear us briefly, in your indulgence” (CG).

In the previous verse, the orator Tertullus completed his opening platitudes to Felix. He now transitions towards the main argument against Paul. His words are suited to an orator, some being rare or uncommon. He begins with, “And so not upon you further I should hinder.”

The words imply that he could go on and on about Felix, and how great he is. However, he doesn't want to be a continued hindrance to his obviously busy schedule as governor. As Felix was such a busy and important man, Tertullus didn't want his continued accolades to keep him from his job of governing.

His statement introduces a new word to Scripture, *egkoptó*. It is a verb signifying to hinder or interrupt. As the mood of the verb is subjunctive, it gives the sense of “should hinder.” With that said, he continues with, “I implore you to hear us briefly.”

This is the second and last use of *suntomós* in the New Testament. It is an adverb giving the sense of cutting something short through conciseness or promptness. However, the first use of the word (Mark 16:20) is only found in some manuscripts.

In this case, Tertullus intensifies the previous clause – “So I don't hinder you, please hear us briefly.” He then further intensifies the thought by finishing with, “in your indulgence.”

Again, another new word is introduced, *epieikeia*. It is an intensification of what is fair or equitable. Thus, it is a petition for going beyond what would be expected. It is defined by HELPS Word Studies as “(‘true equity’) is a ‘sweet reasonableness’ that knows when to ‘relax the strict legal requirements concerning others . . . to carry out the real spirit of the law.’”

In essence, the sense of Tertullus' words is, "O great governor, we know how precious your time is, so we are cutting short our praises, we are asking just a short petition of our grievances, and we know that even in that – which is our rightful due – we must petition for your indulgence in the matter."

Tertullus is really slathering on the butter in his words to the governor. His obvious talent as an orator is evident in the choice of words he uses.

Life application: The sweet-tongued words of Tertullus have taken up three verses. It may be that Felix accepted them as deserving of his supposedly great position, or it may be that Felix was chuckling inside at the verbal groveling he was hearing.

Either way, the words are unnecessarily verbose and are of no real value in the case to be presented against Paul. This is often the situation with people who have an invalid or weak argument concerning their stand on a position concerning some particular matter.

Be attentive to how things are presented, and you can often get a feeling for the soundness of an argument even before you have gotten to the substance of what is being said. If someone uses technical or complicated words, it is often intended to make him appear smarter on a given subject than others.

If a person states his qualifications, it is often an attempt to promote himself, even if his argument is weak. By saying, "As a doctor of theology, my position on this matter is...", the person is trying to get the upper hand even before presenting his position.

These types of approaches are known as fallacies. Anything that obscures an argument diminishes another's view even before it is heard, sideswipes the main argument, thus attempting to produce a fallacy. From time to time, read up on the various fallacies that exist. This will help keep your mind attuned to illogical or underhanded presentations that arise in general discourse.

*Lord God, Your word says that You desire truth in the inward parts of man. Help us to be truthful inwardly so that what we say outwardly will be a true reflection of who we are and what we believe. Keep us from silly arguments and presentations that do not convey the truth. May our inner convictions be revealed in honesty and faithfulness. Amen.*

**"For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. Acts 24:5**

The words are more literally rendered, “For we have found this man a plague and stirring insurrection *in* all the Jews throughout the habitation, and the leader of the Nazarenes sect” (CG).

Tertullus just gave a statement in preparation for introducing the supposed charges they would make against Paul. He now begins to list them, beginning with, “For we have found this man a plague.”

After his words of flattery toward Felix, Tertullus immediately goes into a verbal assault on Paul, beginning with the word *loimos*, a plague or pestilence. It is only used one other time, in Luke 21:11, where Jesus describes the plagues coming in the end times.

The KJV translates this as “a pestilent fellow,” but that hardly fits the intent. Rather than being an adjective, it is a noun. Paul is not plagued but rather is a plague. Next, Tertullus says “and stirring insurrection *in* all the Jews.”

The verb is in the present tense, giving the sense that not only did Paul stir up insurrection but that he continues to do so and would continue to do so if he is released. However, Tertullus notes that this behavior was among the Jews. The insurrection itself could be among the Jews against the Romans or an internal struggle. Without further explanation, it would leave the charge vague at best. Despite this, he next notes that it is “throughout the habitation.”

The word is *oikoumené*. It is a noun signifying the land that is inhabited, but it specifically refers to the Roman world. As Strong’s notes, “for all outside it was regarded as no account.” Thus, Paul was stirring up the Jews within the Roman empire, but not necessarily against it.

The point is, however, that Paul has caused trouble beyond the boundaries of Felix's authority, and now he is here and within the grasp of the governor. It is a way of enticing Felix to be the champion of all of the poor Jews who have been plagued by this man throughout the empire and which no other ruler was able to secure. He makes Paul out to be a prize that others could not attain.

Understanding that, he next says, “and the leader of the Nazarenes sect.” The Greek word translated as “ringleader” is *prótostatés*. It is found only here in Scripture. It means “one who stands first on the right of a line” (hence, a file leader), and so he is being called the leader or head of the sect.

Interestingly, the term Nazarene is only used thirteen times in the New Testament, and all of them are used to describe Jesus except this one. The title has been transferred from the Master to those who follow Him, and Paul is being called the head of them all.

In the words of Tertullus, he has taken the very things which Felix was noted for suppressing and he has attributed them directly to Paul. It is with certainty that Paul didn't look like any such person, but the words of accusation by Tertullus are as if he were in the act of such a crime at that very moment.

Life application: Because Tertullus has only identified Paul as a miscreant among the Jews, unless he further defines it as Jews being stirred to rebellion against Rome, his words will be pointless. As has been seen elsewhere in Acts, the issue of whether Christianity is acceptable under Judaism is a main point of consideration being addressed in the book.

That was a matter for Jews to determine and handle. Only if the matter brought some type of harm to the Roman Empire or its citizens would it be worth the pursuit of a magistrate. Consider this as you read through Acts. Christianity is either an authorized extension of the faith recorded in the Bible that came through Israel or it is not.

If it is, then it tells us that God is working through Christianity as redemptive history unfolds. It also means that whatever Judaism teaches today falls short of what the law and prophets proclaimed.

Christianity is based on the work of Jesus, the Christ. If God has purposed that to be His revelation of Himself to the world, and if the Jews have rejected that, then there cannot be salvation within the Jewish nation at this time. Only individual Jews who come to Christ will be saved. This is a key point of theology that must be considered.

Until Israel, as a nation, receives Jesus, He will not return to them and dwell among them as foretold in the law and prophets. Be careful to not get swayed by law observers and Judaizers. This is a key and central point of doctrine that is clearly and unambiguously expressed in Scripture.

*Heavenly Father, may we be sound in our thinking concerning where we will place our trust. Only Jesus and His fulfillment of the law can bring us back to You. May we never presume to hold to false teachings of those who would creep in an attempt to pull us away from Your grace, as expressed through the giving of Your Son for our sins. Amen.*

**“He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. Acts 24:6**

In the previous verse, Tertullus began to list the accusations against Paul, saying he was a plague, a creator of dissension among the Jews throughout the empire, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He continues now, saying, “He even tried to profane the temple.”

This accusation is modified from that of Acts 21:28, where he was actually accused of defiling the temple by bringing uncircumcised Greeks into it. Tertullus leaves this out because Felix himself would have been uncircumcised, and this would then have become a possible point of stumbling in his case if, by offending Felix, he would lose his favor. Continuing, he says, “and we seized him.”

He is speaking on behalf of his clients who represented the Jews as their leaders (we). However, he is not telling the whole story. Paul was seized, but it was in a violent way, not in an orderly fashion. Rather, the account said –

“And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. <sup>31</sup> Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.” Acts 21:30, 31

Despite not giving the full and accurate details, Tertullus simply moves on, saying, “and wanted to judge him according to our law.”

This is only true as they intended to kill him. Though their law may have allowed this, Roman law didn't. Therefore, he glosses over the situation and the conduct of the unruly mob in order to make it look like they had been wronged by not being allowed time for a trial to be held.

As for the word translated as “profane” in this verse, *bebéloó*, it is an interesting word. It comes from another word, *bélos*, meaning a step or a threshold. The idea is that Paul is accused of stepping beyond the bounds of that which was proper, as in overstepping the threshold of the sacred place.

Life application: There are people in the world who teach that Paul was actually a heretic, and that the Bible argues against his doctrine. They supposedly use Scripture to come to this conclusion. However, in order to teach this heretical doctrine, 2 Peter is

dismissed as a false epistle. They must do this because Peter clearly teaches that Paul's writings are inspired (2 Peter 3:15).

In order to make this claim, it is stated that the epistle was never considered canon and was falsely introduced later. There is nothing to actually substantiate this. Determining its canonicity came about in the same manner as the other books of the New Testament.

To hold to this doctrine, one must not consider the epistles of Paul as inspired. Further, the book of Acts is not to be held to as inspired. Rather, it is subjectively torn apart, and those who hold this view choose which parts are valid and which are not.

Why would anyone hold such an incredibly stupid view of Scripture? The reason is that Paul teaches grace apart from any works of the law. He teaches that the law is fulfilled and obsolete. These Judaizers cannot let go of their own personal importance before God. And so, they diminish grace and boast in their own supposed holiness.

They set themselves as the standard of God's acceptance of humanity, and they determine what part of God's word is acceptable or not. In other words, they hold to themselves as being the gods of acceptability.

But this is what the Bible presents of people from the very beginning of time. Adam wanted to be like God. Ever since then, man has chosen to determine what is right and good, as if he is the standard to which God must acquiesce. Unless we are willing to admit that we are fallen, cannot save ourselves, and that we are wholly at the mercy of an offended God, we will never see the need for a Savior who has done all the work necessary to reconcile us to God.

Be aware of the innumerable false teachings that exist in the world. Any teaching that says we must "do" in order to be saved – or to keep being saved – is to be rejected. Christ has done it! What we need to do is to believe, accepting by faith that He has done it. Thank God for Jesus Christ our Lord who has prevailed for His people!

*Lord God Almighty, today we come before You to praise You. All glory, majesty, and honor belong to You alone. We receive Your offering of Jesus by faith, and we praise You, now and forever, for what You have done. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**“But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took *him* out of our hands, Acts 24:7**

A better rendering of the Greek is, “And Lysias, the commander, having come with great force, led away out of our hands” (CG).

It should be noted that some manuscripts do not include the second half of the previous verse, this verse, or the first clause of verse 8. Thus, depending on the Bible you use, you may not have those things included or they may only be footnoted.

In the previous verse, Tertullus told Felix that Paul tried to profane the temple. Therefore, he was seized, and they tried to judge him according to Jewish law. That now continues with, “And Lysias, the commander.”

Interjecting the name of Lysias is an attempt to say, “If this person didn’t interfere, this matter would have been settled already. Paul would have been judged according to our law, and there would have been no reason to bother you here today.” With that understood, Tertullus continues, saying, “having come with great force, led away out of our hands.”

His words completely overlook the riot of the people and the quick actions of the Romans, which saved the life of Paul, a Roman citizen. In essence, there is an attempt to throw a disparaging light on Claudius Lysias, as if he had meddled in a matter that belonged to the Jews alone.

Tertullus is presenting the Jews as the unfortunate losers. He is further implying that if things had gone differently and they had just been allowed to handle things, they would have spared Felix all of this trouble by taking care of the matter themselves.

Life application: The common adage “hindsight is 20/20” means that if the information that is now known was available before, the errors of the past would not have been made. It is comparing 20/20 vision to clarity concerning a matter.

Tertullus is using this idea against Lysias’ actions. In essence, he is saying, “If Lysias had only known the whole situation, things would have come out just fine.” Sometimes, this type of thinking is true, but in the case of the Jews, this is completely false.

Felix can only go by what he is told. The flattery of Tertullus should give him a hint that what he is being told is a pile of lies. This is all the more certain because Lysias sent Paul

to Caesarea based on the discovery of a plot to kill Paul that arose sometime after the events they are now referring to in the hearing.

It is often necessary not to rush to a judgment on a matter until it is carefully thought through and all options are weighed. Felix's main responsibility was to maintain order in his jurisdiction, but another prime responsibility was ensuring the safety and protection of Roman citizens.

Paul used his citizenship to benefit himself. As such, he is using his citizenship to further his goal of spreading the gospel. Don't hesitate to use whatever means are available to you to secure your safety and advancement within your society. This includes appealing to your citizenship, including your right to vote.

If you refrain from using those things that are available to you, you will ultimately be hindering your ability to share the gospel. If the opposing political party takes away your rights because you failed to vote, you will have harmed not only yourself but those who will never benefit from hearing the good news in a free and open society.

Little choices can have big consequences. So do what is right and participate in your society.

*Lord God, help us to think clearly about our responsibilities. May we be willing to do the right thing in all situations. And to do the right thing, we need to consider not just the immediate effects but also the long-term effects of our actions or inactions. Give us wisdom in this, O God. Amen.*

**“commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him.” Acts 24:8**

A literal translation, even if a bit clunky, is, “having commanded his accusers to come to you, from whom you will be able, having examined, to know yourself concerning all these things which we accuse him” (CG).

In the previous verse, it said, “And Lysias, the commander, having come with great force, led away out of our hands.” That now continues with the words “having commanded his accusers to come to you.”

This was seen in a portion of Claudius Lysias' letter to Felix, as recorded in the previous chapter –



“And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him.” Acts 23:20

Not only did the commander send Paul safely to Caesarea, but he told the leaders of Israel that if they wanted a meeting with Paul in attendance, they would have to do so in the presence of the Roman governor. In fact, they were not given the choice. Instead, he commanded that they should appear before Felix. From there, Tertullus next says, “from whom you will be able.”

A relative pronoun is used, “whom.” Some translations, like the NKJV, say “him.” To our ears, using “whom” it sounds like Tertullus is asking for the accusers to be allowed to be examined. However, the pronoun is singular. And so, it is most probably speaking of Paul. But it also could be speaking of the Roman commander.

If so, and because he is not there, it may be that Tertullus is hoping that Felix would take this statement at face value and say, “No, there is no need to call him over this.” Either way, Tertullus continues, saying, “having examined, to know yourself concerning all these things which we accuse him.”

Either way, it is unlikely that either the Roman commander or Paul would agree that the things Paul had been accused of were true. The Roman commander would have insufficient evidence to substantiate the charges, and he would disagree with portions of the claims made. If he is referring to Paul, his words in the coming verses will completely refute the charges against him.

Life application: In this verse, Tertullus does what people continue to do today. He brazenly sets up a false narrative and then claims that when those who are interviewed are brought forward, they will agree with his position. We might call this the Shifty Schiff approach.

By boldly and brazenly lying, such people are openly mocking the integrity of the accused so that when they speak, they appear to be liars. It is a position that people will take when their side of an issue or argument has no substantiation at all.

This is a fallacy known as Poisoning the Well. The first person to speak will do so in an attempt to undermine the integrity of the next speaker, impugning his character in one way or another. They may imply he is manipulative, a liar, and that his words will be highly persuasive and thus must not be trusted, and so forth.

Even if the water in the well was perfectly good and drinkable to begin with, by poisoning the well, it is no longer to be trusted as safe. This tactic has been constantly used throughout the ages as a means of destroying someone of integrity before he even gets a chance to begin his presentation. It is highly effective because most people trust those they align with, even if their words are completely false.

Be aware of this fallacy, especially around voting season. You will see it constantly employed by those whose political position is one that has nothing of value to present to the people. It is also seen among Christian leaders and speakers at times. Be aware of this and call it out as soon as you identify it.

*Lord God, help us to consider arguments – clearly and responsibly – that we see arise between people. May we not be sidetracked by fallacious thinking but instead consider what is said based on its adherence to the truth. It is a world full of confusion, but with Your wisdom to guide us, we will not be led astray by those who speak falsity and introduce error into their words. Yes, Lord God, help us in this. Amen.*

**And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.** Acts 24:9

The previous verse completed Tertullus' words to Felix. With that, it next says, "And the Jews also assented."

They agreed either collectively or individually, but they stood behind the substance of his words, affirming that Paul was a plague that needed to be eradicated. One can see them seated behind Tertullus nodding in agreement and maybe vocally assenting to the presentation. It is likely that they were all in agreement before they even arrived and were thus satisfied with Tertullus' presentation. As such, they were "maintaining that these things were so."

A new word is introduced: *phaskó*. It will only be seen again in Acts 25:19 and Romans 1:22. It is a prolongation of a more common word that signifies to say. Thus, it means to affirm, allege, profess, or something similar. Its use in Romans gives a sense of one of its intended meanings –

"Professing to be wise, they became fools." Romans 1:22

One can see scientists haughtily proclaiming that the universe exploded itself into existence, with man arising over billions of years out of goo and thus proclaiming, "We

don't need God. We are free from His rule over us! Look at how wise we are!" God says they are fools.

These Jews had come together, affirming that Paul was guilty and needed to be punished for his transgressions.

Life application: The Bible makes many proclamations about how the world was created by God, is governed by His power and sustaining hand, is guilty before Him for failing to acknowledge Him, and so forth.

Either what it says is reliable and true, or it is not. If the first chapters of Genesis are not literal history, then the rest of the Bible is suspect as well. Jesus cites those chapters and proclaims they are literally true, acknowledging that the events really happened.

We cannot allegorize the creation account without falling into great error. If we are saved, we will not lose our salvation. But if we fail to accept God at His word, we will be judged for our lack of faith in regard to what He has proclaimed.

There are abundant videos and teachings available that give reasonable explanations that fully support the Genesis creation account. If you are unsure if the word is reliable in these chapters, test them by watching or reading what is out there. In the end, the Lord asks you to use reasoned faith in your relationship with Him. You cannot do this without checking things out.

Be wise and discerning. What can you skip in your normal routine that will allow you sufficient time to investigate such things?

*Lord God, Your word is written, and it makes certain proclamations about who You are and what You have done. Help us to be willing to research and investigate these things and come to reasonable conclusions about the claims that are made there. May our faith be grounded in reality as we seek the mysteries of the world around us. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: "Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, Acts 24:10**

A literal translation would be, “And Paul answered, the governor having beckoned him to speak, ‘Knowing from many years, you, being judge to this nation, cheerfully these concerning myself I make a defense’” (CG).

Tertullus presented the charges against Paul, and the Jews assented to what Tertullus said, maintaining that his words were true. With that complete, it next says, “And Paul answered, the governor having beckoned him to speak.”

There is a sense of order and decorum. The plaintiff was allowed to speak in an uninterrupted fashion. Upon completion, the governor acknowledged Paul’s right to defend himself, and so he nodded or made a sign of some sort that indicated Paul could begin his defense. Paul then answered, beginning with, “Knowing from many years.”

He avoids the unnecessary words of flattery used by his opponent. He also defends himself without using a lawyer. Instead, he appeals directly to the justice of his case, stating that he knew it would be upheld because of Felix’s lengthy service.

The “many years” that he refers to is actually six or seven at this point. However, it is noted by Tacitus that Felix had already been a joint procurator with his predecessor Cumanus. Also, scholars note that many in his position were recalled after a much shorter period, and so from that perspective, “many years” is a good description.

He would be well educated in how to conduct such affairs and also well-versed in the Jewish rites, customs, and laws. Understanding this, Paul’s words continue, saying, “you, being judge to this nation.”

Again, there is nothing superfluous or unnecessary stated. Paul simply acknowledges that the governor had a right to judge the matter set before him. It is an implicit acceptance of the position and, thus, the judgment that will be rendered. Also, knowing that he is now under Roman jurisdiction, he will get a trial that fairly acknowledges his state as a Roman. Therefore, he continues with, “cheerfully these concerning myself I make a defense.”

The word Paul uses, translated as answer, is *apologeomai*. It is a word that is related to the “apology” or defense one would make for the Christian faith. In this case, it is a rightful defense against charges brought against him.

In all, the words Paul uses show a person who is bold in his words because of his belief in his personal innocence concerning wrongdoing. There is nothing smug, flattering, or

superfluous in his opening statement. And more, he has the fact that a plot to kill him was initiated by the leaders of Israel to bolster his defense.

Whether those leaders knew that their plot was discovered or not, the governor did. It is a stain on their actions, and it weakens any charges brought against Paul, making them suspect and biased.

Life application: It can be difficult at times to restrain oneself from blurting out a defense against false charges. This is true regardless of the size of the offense that is being accused. Little things can be just as annoying to listen to as big ones. However, it is best to allow people to speak in an uninterrupted manner.

To see this type of thing in action, watch reporters who are designated to conduct interviews or debates for political positions, like those running for Congress or even the presidency. It is not uncommon for a question to be asked by the reporter, and then a lucid, rational, and well-thought-out answer is given. Because the response does not fit with the reporter's worldview, he or she immediately begins to interrupt the candidate.

This is unprofessional and it demonstrates a weakness in any supposed impartiality of the reporter. And yes, it is as common for those on the left to do this as it is for dogs to pant. Don't be like a panting dog in your own time of defense. And don't be like one if you are asked to impartially judge or oversee a matter such as an interview or debate. Let your words be few, directed, and spoken at the proper time without interrupting others in the process.

*Glorious Lord God, may we be careful to speak clearly and thoughtfully when there are words that may affect our standing in the eyes of others or even our freedom in society. Help us know what to say at such a time, give us grace and patience in our responses, and may we honor You in our lives. Amen.*

**“because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. Acts 24:11**

More literally, the verse reads, “You, being able to know that there are not to me more than twelve days from which I went up to worship in Jerusalem” (CG).

Paul had just presented his opening words of defense, beginning with an acknowledgment that Felix was the duly appointed judge for the matter. With that, he next says, “You, being able to know.”

The meaning is that Felix has the means at his disposal (the verb is a present participle) to readily ascertain if what Paul says is true or not. Each thing he will say can be searched out and verified. Therefore, it would be the mark of a truly corrupt person to attempt to make a claim that was untrue. Understanding that, he says, "that there are not to me more than twelve days."

It is a specific amount of time that is so short and precise that retracing the steps would take almost no effort at all. Considering that several of those days were spent under Roman guard, the events preceding that are condensed even more.

As the time frame can easily be corroborated, Paul's words bear the mark of either total honesty or a loony desire to be incarcerated. To assist in the verification of his claims, he specifically notes that those twelve days were "from which I went up to worship in Jerusalem."

What he says here and in the coming verses are given to challenge the three charges made against him by Tertullus, which are sedition, heresy, and profaning the temple.

Concerning sedition, he implies that it would be impossible to form a party and act in a seditious manner because it was just twelve days earlier that he arrived in Jerusalem. Five of those days were in Caesarea, two were on the journey, and the rest were in Jerusalem, where he went to worship and was subsequently incarcerated. If he were there to worship, he could then not be a heretic. He was obviously following the customs of Jews who came for exactly this purpose.

The Pulpit Commentary divides the 12 days in this manner -

- (1) arrival at Jerusalem (Acts 21:15);
- (2) Visit to James and the elders (Acts 21:18);
- (3) first day of purification (Acts 21:26);
- (4) second day of purification;
- (5) the third day;
- (6) the fourth day;
- (7) the fifth day, when the tumult took place (Acts 21:27);
- (8) Paul brought before the Sanhedrim;
- (9) the conspiracy of the forty Jews, Paul leaves Jerusalem for Caesarea - the first of the five days mentioned in Acts 24:1;
- (10) arrival of St. Paul" next day" at Caesarea, and lodged in the pretorium - second of the five days (Acts 23:32, 35);

(11) Paul in Herod's judgment hall - third of the five days;  
(12) ditto - fourth of the five days;  
(13) the current day, being also the fifth day of those mentioned in Acts 24:1. The mention of the brief time of twelve days shows the narrow limits of time within which the crime must have been committed, while the adroit mention of the purpose of his visit, to worship, would show how unlikely it was that he should have gone with any evil intent.

All of these could be supported by eyewitnesses if necessary.

Life application: Paul's words directly challenge the accusation against him. He doesn't waste a lot of time with superfluities, and he refrains from any verbal attacks on those accusing him. He is calm, cool, and collected in his address.

And more, he understands the process of what is going on around him. It is important to remember that if you don't have the same demeanor, or if you are unaware of how to properly navigate such things, it is a good idea to have someone skilled in what you are involved in to assist you. If it is a legal matter, a lawyer is a good idea. If it is a financial problem, a certified accountant can help, and so forth.

The world is there trying to trip you up. Being ready to defend yourself with the right people around you. This is always a good idea.

*O God, the world in which we live can be a complicated place. Governments exist that often heap burdens upon their people that require a lot of attention, without which all kinds of trouble can result. Help us to be wise in our actions and interactions regarding such things. May we live rightly and peaceably in our societies, honoring You with the lives we lead. Amen.*

**“And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. Acts 24:12**

A more literal translation is, “And neither found me disputing with anyone in the temple, or making a crowd revolt, nor in the synagogues or in the city” (CG).

Paul, in giving his defense to Felix, just noted that he just told him that it was only twelve days since he went up to Jerusalem to worship. He continues now, saying, “And neither found me disputing with anyone in the temple, or making a crowd revolt.”

These words introduce another new word to Scripture: *episustasis*. It signifies a conspiracy, concourse, tumult, etc. It is found only here and in 2 Corinthians 11:28, where Paul says, “I face daily the pressure (*episustasis*) of my concern for all the churches” (MSB).

What he says completely contradicts the words of Tertullus. Either one is true, and the other is lying, or both have fabricated a portion of his words, but both cannot be true. He never disputed with anyone in the temple, and there will be no proof of him making a revolt because such an event never took place.

The only ruckus that arose was because of accusations leveled against him, not because of his agitating anyone. This was carefully detailed by Luke in Chapter 21 –

“Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, <sup>28</sup> crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.’ <sup>29</sup> (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

<sup>30</sup> And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.”

-Acts 21:27-30

His words to Felix mean that he never got into either a civil or a religious dispute, contradicting Tertullus’ accusations. Further, he claims that he incited no one, and he adds in an all-inclusive “nor in the synagogues or in the city.”

This could be easily substantiated by those Paul stayed with, if necessary. Unless the Jews were ready to present false witnesses, the matter would have to be decided based on who Felix believed was telling the truth. At this time, and based on Paul’s rebuttal, the Jews had neither a civil nor a religious claim against him that would stand up to eyewitness testimony.

Life application: The world is not normally a fair place. In many places, that is becoming more so as each day goes by. The corruption of the human heart is steadily taking over humanity, just as it did in the days of Noah. Soon enough, there will be no remedy, and God will remove His restraining power.



Sometime after that, the antichrist will come upon the scene, and the world will devolve into utter chaos and turmoil. But, as just noted, the world is on a path to that time now. If you are expecting to be protected from the power of wicked people, that may not be the case. Therefore, it is best to live your life quietly and not cause any trouble.

And yet, we are obligated to be bearers of the truth of God in Christ. Therefore, if you are faithful to this calling, you may be in the same position Paul found himself in. Be ready to stand on the truth as revealed in the word.

Paul and the other apostles, and so many since their time, have chosen that right path, even to the point of death. But a crown awaits them as it will you. So don't fear what man can do to you. A better Day is ahead. The promises are sure, and the One who has given them is reliable. In this, you can safely trust.

*O God, the world in which we live is quickly turning away from any semblance of right morality and holy living. Christians will inevitably be marked out as miscreants because of their refusal to support the depravity and wickedness that will be openly condoned. Until You call us home, give us the fortitude and courage to continue to proclaim Your truth. Amen.*

**“Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me. Acts 24:13**

Paul just said to Felix that he was neither found in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting a crowd. He then added that this was true in the synagogues and in the city as well. He now adds in an almost challenging note to his accusers, saying, “Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.”

His words here, especially the word for “prove,” are actually a calling and a challenge to his accusers to come forward with evidence. He is the plaintiff and, therefore, they are under the burden of the law to stand behind the charges they have made.

The word he uses, *paristémi*, means to place beside or to stand beside. In other words, those who have made the accusations should now be ready (standing near) to present their proof. As there is none, the charges against Paul cannot stand.

Life application: As discussed in the previous verse, the world is getting more wicked and depraved daily. This, unfortunately, includes accusations being made against people that are wholly untrue. A lack of evidence or manipulated evidence, even when found out to be such, no longer matters.

In fact, evidence that exonerates people who have been charged is often completely ignored. Police have been arrested for simply doing their jobs. When evidence proves their innocence, it is ignored when what they were charged with carries political value.

Peaceful protestors are being arrested, and bogus charges are leveled against them when they are of a particular political party. This has gone even to the level of bringing innumerable charges against former leaders, not only in the US but in other countries as well. Anyone who bucks the globalist agenda is being targeted openly and flagrantly.

Conservative journalists are harassed and sued to silence them. These things will continue to get worse. Be wise and discerning as you go out into the world. Your stand as a Christian will be one that brings you under the watchful eye of the government. In China, this is now ubiquitous. Other countries of the world are quickly following that same path.

*Wonderful Lord God, we are grateful to You for the honor of carrying the name of Jesus our Lord. Help us to be faithful to exalt Him, no matter what challenge is brought against us. The world is temporary, but what You have promised is eternal. May we be prepared to face the eternal, having never denied the Name that we now bear. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. Acts 24:14**

The words are more literally rendered, “And I confess this to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I serve the father’s God, believing all throughout the Law and that has been written in the Prophets” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul noted that those who stood against him could not prove the things of which they now accused him. As a concession to his position in relation to them, he next says, “And I confess this to you.”

The reason he is doing this is to show the true reason why they have brought charges against him. They have a personal beef against him that has brought about their false charges. Without directly saying it, he is calling into question their integrity and honesty before Felix. With that, he next says, “that according to the Way which they call a sect.”

The word translated as “sect” is the same as was used in 24:5: *haireisis*. It is etymologically connected to the word heresy that we use today. Therefore, some versions incorrectly translate it as “sect” in verse 5 and then “heresy” here. However, this makes no sense.

Paul explains that what they call a “sect” is what he calls the Way. They should both be translated as sect because the word specifically means “a strong, distinctive opinion” (HELPS Word Studies). To say verse 5 should be “sect” and verse 14 should be “heresy” causes a logical contradiction in thought because Paul now says, “they call.”

If they called it something in verse 5, then all he is doing is repeating what they called it, not stating something new. The word “is used in the NT of individual ‘parties (sects)’ that operated within Judaism. The term stresses the personal aspect of choice – and hence how being a Sadducee (Ac 5:17) was sharply distinguished from being a Pharisee (Ac 15:5; 26:5)” (HELPS Word Studies).

It is this “sect” that he now calls “the Way.” In doing so, he elevates it in a manner of protest against any degradation of the term to something less disrespectful. Instead, the term has been brought to a level of distinction and honor. Understanding this, Paul next says, “so I serve the father’s God.”

The word translated as serve, *latreuó*, is not the same as in verse 11, *proskuneó*. Here, unlike the NKJV, it is better translated as serve. Worship is encompassed in this word, but it also carries a further signification than merely worship. It is derived from the word *latris*, which means a hired servant.

The fact that he was in the temple, serving the God of his fathers, was sufficient proof to show that he was not engaged in heresy, which is the second charge made against him. With that understood, Paul next says, “believing all throughout the Law and that has been written in the Prophets.”

The words are a direct denial of him being the leader of an aberrant sect. By stating that he believed all things in the Law and the Prophets, it is a way of acknowledging that he was no different than any Pharisee.

What is being argued then is a matter of interpretation of the Law and Prophets, not whether they were authoritative or not. He affirms that they are, in fact, authoritative. The question is whether Christ is the fulfillment of them.

As this is so, then Felix would have no ability to even handle this charge, being unschooled in what the Law and Prophets claimed. This would be no different than asking a secular judge to determine whether replacement theology or dispensationalism is correct. Both claim that the Bible is the inspired word of God. How that word is to be properly interpreted is the matter. Having said that, dispensationalism is correct 😊.

Life application: If you want to know if the church has replaced Israel, you need to read your Bible. If you want to know if dispensationalism is correct, you need to read your Bible. If you want to know if God approves of abortion or if divorce is acceptable to Him, the way you will find out is by reading your Bible.

Just because a pastor, preacher, or priest says something is correct, it does not mean it is so. One must go to the source of a matter to find out whether what is said is true or not. It doesn't matter what the issue is. If someone says that drinking water in Guatemala is safe, until you check it out, you will never know if that is true.

And you can check it out in various ways. You can follow the scientific method and have the water tested. You can test it observationally by going to Guatemala with a friend and having him drink it while you watch. Or you can test it experientially by going there and drinking it yourself.

The scientific method is only as good as the process and materials that are used. What is more, some people may be affected differently than others. The people of Guatemala drink their water all day long and suffer no ill consequences.

Having a friend test it may not work either. Depending on his stomach and other variables, it may not affect him at all. However, if you check out the water for yourself, you will certainly find out whether you should have done so or not. Montezuma's revenge probably awaits 😊.

The point is that until you personally check things out, you can never know if what you believe to be true is actually true or not. The Bible will not cause you harm, but it will certainly keep you from it. Therefore, even if you have a pastor you trust to be honest, he may not be well-versed in the Bible. Are you willing to receive incorrect instruction on a matter that could affect your standing when you appear before the Lord?

Rather, read and know your Bible! This is the defense against potential problems that will be far worse than a case of Montezuma's revenge.

*Thank You, O God, for the precious contents You have carefully laid out in Your word. We can know what You expect of us, and we can know what doctrines are sound and which are incorrect. May we be responsible concerning our interactions with You by knowing what You expect of us. Thank You that the word makes this possible. Amen.*

**“I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust. Acts 24:15**

A more literal rendering would be, “Having a hope toward God which they themselves also embrace: a resurrection of dead shall be, both just and unjust” (CG).

Paul, speaking to Felix, had noted in the previous verse that he worships the God of the fathers, believing all things written in the Law and the Prophets. Now, in order to explain that further, he says, “Having a hope toward God.”

This confirms his stand on the authority of Scripture. The belief was that their Scriptures were from God through His chosen prophets and holy men. As this is so, then what the Scriptures said, when believed, demonstrated a hope toward God concerning what Scripture proclaims.

The connection is that if the God of Scripture is who Paul serves, then his hope must be in that God. This hope is the same one that his accusers accepted in part or in whole. Other than the Sadducees, this hope was one “which they themselves also embrace.”

The word here rendered as embrace is *prosdechomai*. It is translated by some as allow or await. It can also have the meaning of looking for. Thus, it is a hope that is anticipated, even eagerly. Thus, because this is a future hope that is eagerly anticipated, the word embrace suits the meaning well. And what is being embraced is the thought that “a resurrection of dead shall be.”

The word translated as “dead” is not in all manuscripts. In those manuscripts where it is used, there is no article before dead. Because of this, the words seem vague, but Paul is making a distinction between physically dead and living people. Not all dead are, however, dead in the spiritual sense of the word.

This is probably why Paul states the word without the article. The resurrection is a hope that permeates Scripture. From the implicit words of Eve when she named Cain, to the hopes of Job, and to the explicit promises to Isaiah and Daniel of the Old Testament (e.g. Job 19:23-27, Isaiah 26:19, Daniel 12:2).

It is also something that was known to the common people of Israel at that time (John 11:24). However, Felix may or may not have been aware of this. Therefore, Paul gives him an explanation of what his faith consists of. Comprised within that faith is not just that the just shall be raised. Instead, he next says, “both just and unjust.”

This is an all-encompassing explanation of a resurrection of physically dead people. No article was necessary because the words are qualified now by “just and unjust.” This thought from Paul must be taken as a point of evangelism for Felix and a continued defense for himself.

If he were to believe in such a resurrection and there was a distinction between the just and the unjust, then it implies that he must surely be living according to the law that told of the coming resurrection. Only a fool who believed in such a resurrection would willfully be disobedient to the God who promised a different end based on one’s standing before Him.

Life application: The physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is a central point of theology found in Scripture. His physical body died. It went into the grave. And that same body rose to life again.

This was not a rapture (an exchange of one state for another), a spiritual resurrection, or any other such event. It was also not simply a reward for right living. Instead, it was a necessary outcome for having lived in sinless perfection. Man dies because of sin. He is condemned the moment he comes into existence (see Psalm 51:5 and John 3:18) because he inherits Adam’s sin (Romans 5:12).

The Lord God united with human flesh in the womb of Mary. This is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Because He did not have a human father to transmit sin to Him, He was conceived in sinless perfection. He was born in that state, and He never sinned in that state. In His death, He could then atone for the sins of the people of the world. The physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is the proof of this.

To deny the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus is to deny what God in Christ has done. As this is a part of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4), no person who denies the resurrection of Jesus Christ can be saved. It is that simple, and it is that profound. Be sure to tell those who believe someone can be saved in any other way that they are espousing heresy. There is one path to restoration with God and one alone.

To God be the glory for what He has done in and through Christ Jesus!

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the sinless perfection of Christ Jesus our Lord. All glory and honor belong to You for what You have done. May we boldly proclaim the truth that He alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Only through Jesus can man be restored to You. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**“This *being* so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. Acts 24:16**

More precisely, the text reads, “And in this, I train myself to have an inoffensive conscience toward God and men through all” (CG).

In the last verse, Paul noted his hope in God, affirming his belief in a resurrection of dead, both just and unjust. Because of this, he next says, “And in this, I train myself.”

Here, he uses a word found only this one time in Scripture: *askeó*. It is a verb signifying to train, practice, or exercise. Despite it being found only here in the New Testament, it was a common medical term of the time. It is another indication of Luke’s authorship. It gives the idea of working raw material to form something. A kindred adjective to this is where our word ascetic comes from. Next, Paul says, “to have an inoffensive conscience.”

The word translated as “inoffensive,” *aproskopos*, is new. It will be used only three times in Scripture. Here, it is used in a passive sense. This is the same as in Philippians 1:10. However, in 1 Corinthians 10:32, it is used in the active sense. In essence, he attempted to always be blameless in his conduct, looking forward to the hope found in the promises of God.

Because of his hope in God, and because of his firm belief that there would be a resurrection, he endeavored to keep his conscience clear, knowing that a judgment lay ahead for all men. This sentiment, now being expressed by Paul to Felix, is more fully explained in 2 Corinthians 5 –

“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. <sup>11</sup> Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.”

-2 Corinthians 5:9-11

With that stated, Paul completes this verse, saying, “toward God and men through all.” Paul’s conduct was not just directed toward God. Rather, he conducted his affairs in this way towards his fellow man.

It is true that before his conversion, he likewise lived in this manner, but it was misdirected. He thought he was doing a service to God by destroying Christians. Further, if his actions were correct, they would have been a service to his fellow man by removing the heretics of the world. However, he found that attitude to be faulty when he met Christ.

Therefore, there is a disconnect between his actions and those of his accusers. They did not accept the work of Christ Jesus. They, therefore, remained at enmity to the goals and purposes of God as revealed in Jesus’ life and work.

Life application: Later in 2 Corinthians 5, Paul says –

“Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. <sup>18</sup> Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup> that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

As this is the state that we are now in because of faith in Christ, we should do our very best to live in accord with it. It is contrary to a holy life in Christ to continue to conduct ourselves in a manner that is at odds with this new life.

This doesn’t mean we cannot associate with those of the world. Paul makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 5. However, when we are engaging the world, it should be in a manner that sets us as examples of a right and proper walk in Christ. If it is our job to share the message of reconciliation, and we are acting as if we were never reconciled, then where is there to go for those we are sharing such a message with?

Think on this and be willing to share the truth that God is holding all people to account for their lives either apart from Christ or our lives in Christ.

*Lord God, we have been redeemed through the precious blood of Christ. May we remind ourselves of this and live in a manner that is holy and acceptable to You. May our*



*conduct be appropriate to lead others to understand their need to act likewise. Yes, Lord, may our lives and actions be pleasing to You and glorifying of You. Amen.*

**“Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, Acts 24:17**

More literally, the Greek reads, “And through many years, I arrived to bring alms to my nation, and offerings” (CG).

Paul just said to Felix that he always strove to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. In support of both of those thoughts, he next says, “And through many years.”

Rather than saying, “And after many years,” he uses the word “through.” Paul expresses his thoughts as if he is on a journey through time, much of it being separated from Jerusalem and the religious life and offerings that are continuously conducted there.

As for the duration away, it had only been about four or five years at this time. His last visit was in Acts 18:22. His use of many is to be taken in light of the “many years” of verse 10. If he was asked what “many years” was, he could say “four,” and it would then be a note of approval towards the comment he made about Felix’s service. In other words, it would be a way of acknowledging Felix’s service as lengthy and thus well received by his superiors.

Now, to fill those years apart from Israel, he says, “I arrived to bring alms to my nation.” His note concerning the “alms” is otherwise not mentioned in Acts, and yet it appears prominently in his epistles, such as Romans 15:25, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, and 2 Corinthians 8:1-4. Along with the alms, he adds “and offerings.”

The “offerings” (or sacrifices) were those prescribed by the law when one would come for a feast day celebration and those associated with vows as well. As can be seen, he says the alms are for the nation, but the offerings being set apart in the sentence were for his personal relationship with the Lord. Also, as noted in the NKJV translation, they and other translations lump these together as “alms and offerings to my nation.” However, this is not the intent of Paul’s words.

As for the word “nation,” he uses the term *ethnos*. It most properly indicates “people joined by practicing similar customs or common culture” (HELPS Word Studies). He uses this word rather than identifying them with a more commonly used word for “people.”

It is a hint of courtesy towards Felix by avoiding a term that could be interpreted as a note of superiority over the Gentiles.

Life application: Paul carefully divided his words, as noted above, to indicate two separate acts that have a different purpose. His alms were something he was doing for his nation and people. The offerings were those things that were intended to keep him on a personally sound footing within the religious sphere of life that connected him to the Lord.

Obviously, being in Christ meant that he had immediate access to God through Jesus the Mediator. But for the sake of propriety, he continued conducting his religious life while in the land of Israel as an observant Jew. There is no contradiction here. Today, there are messianic Jews in Israel who observe the Sabbath even though Christ Jesus is their true rest (Hebrews 4:3).

It is culturally appropriate that they conduct themselves in a manner that keeps them in the favor of their nation while also understanding that they are free from all such observances because of Christ. This is not a hypocritical approach to worshipping God. Rather, it is a respectful way of doing so.

If a Pentecostal were to attend a Presbyterian church, it would be wholly inappropriate for him to get up and start yelling in the false gibberish that he yells out when in his own church. If that is how Pentecostals want to conduct their relationship with the Lord, they need to do it in their own church.

Be sure to use tact when you attend services with other Christians or when you are visiting other countries. See what they do first and then conduct yourself accordingly. This is right and proper. We, as Christians, worship in spirit and in truth in our hearts and minds. What we do externally should be courteous and with proper decorum in the particular setting we find ourselves.

*O God, there are innumerable ways to worship You while still staying within the boundaries of our faith in Christ. Some like organ music, while some like a band. Some worship on the beach, while others do so in ancient buildings. Wherever we are, may our conduct be appropriate to the setting in which we find ourselves. May our worship be to Your glory and for the mutual benefit of those around us. Amen.*

**“in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. Acts 24:18**

The verse is incomplete without the next verse. For now, a more literal rendering is, “In which they found me purified in the temple, not with a crowd, nor with a tumult. And who, Jews from Asia...” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul noted that after many years away, he came to bring alms to his nation, and offerings. Now, he says, “In which they found me purified in the temple.” This is a key point concerning his right to be in the temple area that stems from Chapter 21. Upon his arrival, he was exhorted by the elders of the church to pay the expenses of those who had taken a vow. In compliance with that, and going further by joining them in purification, it said –

“Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.” Acts 21:26

This was something that could easily be validated and which proved he had the right to be in the temple area, and he was obviously there for proper religious purposes. He continues further, saying, “not with a crowd, nor with a tumult.”

It would be improbable that a person who was bringing alms and making sacrifices after an extended absence would suddenly decide to start a tumult. As his words could be proven on those points, his innocence in the matter logically follows.

As for the introductory words to the verse, “in which,” they mean that he was actually in the process of performing his sacrifices. At the very time he was conducting his religious affairs in a purified state, he was interrupted. To support that, he then begins his next thought. His words will continue into the next verse. For now, he begins with, “And who, Jews from Asia...”

These are those mentioned in Chapter 21 –

“Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, <sup>28</sup> crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.’ <sup>29</sup> (For they had previously

seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)”

It is these Asian Jews who certainly saw him among the Gentiles in the past and who had hounded him all along. When they saw him in Jerusalem, they realized it was a perfect opportunity to cause him grief.

Life application: When people are ideologically at odds with others, it is hard to come to a reconciliation over those differences. It is human nature to not “live and let live.” Muslims, particularly because of the words of the Koran, feel it is a sacred obligation to kill or enslave unbelievers. Those who hold to this are not the extremists but rather the fundamentalists.

They hold their writings as sacred and feel it is their duty to act in this way. Likewise, the Jews, depending on how they interpret Scripture and their later writings, feel that they are God’s chosen people – above and apart from all others. When Paul went among the Gentiles and communed with them, it was taken as a great and blasphemous thing.

His actions were seen as defiling and worthy of death. This is not so much because he associated with Gentiles, something all of the diaspora Jews did to some extent. Rather, it was because he taught that Jesus was the Messiah and that His message accepted Gentiles on an equal footing with Jews. To them, this was intolerable. This totally nullified the “above and apart from all others” attitude that still permeates Jewish society today.

Christians are not expected to have such an idea about themselves. Rather, we are to acknowledge that we are sinners in need of a Messiah who alone can save us. But this is a problem that the world doesn’t understand. Instead, they look at the result, not the process.

In other words, true Christians believe that Jesus is the only way to be saved. This is because Jesus said it, and it is also logically true. As such, the meaning is that only true Christians are saved. This is the result of faith in Christ. It is what the world sees, and they perceive this as a point of arrogance – “How dare you say I am not saved!”

The process, however, is that we first acknowledged that we were sinners and that we understood Jesus could save us. This excludes all arrogance. Rather, it is a point of extreme humility to stand before the Creator and say, “I leave myself totally at your mercy. Without you, I am lost. I trust in Your grace alone to save me.”

If the world more fully understood this, it may relieve the tension to some extent. However, much of the world refuses to simply acknowledge that they are sinners. If they are, they have a need for a Savior. But this would then require them to have the same humility saved believers once demonstrated. As such, this is still a great cause for a feeling of contempt towards Christians.

In understanding this, we can then understand why Christianity is so quickly becoming abhorrent to the people of the world. With each new “freedom” that governments proclaim, there is a new wall put up. If people are free to be homosexuals, then they cannot be “sinners” for their conduct. If people are free to murder their unborn, then they cannot be “sinners” for aborting babies.

As wickedness increases, a hatred of what you stand for will logically increase. Be ready to focus on the process (by grace through faith) of your salvation when talking to others. Some of them may get it. But to focus on the result, I am saved, and you are not, is a point of theology, though true, that we now find is almost completely impossible to state without being hated all the more. Until people see their sin as something God cannot accept, they will never believe that they are in need of a Savior.

*Heavenly Father, we, as believers, came to You with empty hands, realizing our fallen state before You. We believe that because of the cross of Jesus Christ, we are saved. Help us to properly and faithfully communicate this truth to the world around us. May we not waffle in our proclamation that it is sin that separates us from You. We are saved because we were first sinners who needed to be saved. Thank You, O God, for Your saving grace that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**“They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me.**  
Acts 24:19

This verse completes the previous verse. A more literal rendering is, “...who ought to appear before you and accuse if they may have anything against me” (CG).

The previous verse reads, “In which they found me purified in the temple, not with a crowd, nor with a tumult. And who, Jews from Asia...” (CG). That now continues with, “who ought to appear before you and accuse.”

Paul’s words cut to the heart of the matter. The very people who could testify to the situation had not come to do so. It is a hint that either they would have to perjure themselves or that they would have to admit that he had done nothing wrong.

However, if the excuse was made that these witnesses had gone back home after the feast, it would still show that there were none to accuse him. As such, any charges against him would have to be dropped for lack of evidence.

As for any others who would testify, it would be hearsay, not firsthand witness. The logical end of his words is that the charges were unsound and should be dismissed. He finishes the thought with, “if they may have anything against me.”

The obvious meaning is that there were no valid accusations, and thus, the charges were invalid. This was a religious matter that had nothing to do with Rome. And more, it was Paul who was wronged simply because of his interpretation of the law and the prophets.

Life application: Paul was an apostle. As such, the words of Jesus found in Matthew 10 certainly apply to him –

“But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; <sup>20</sup> for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”

-Matthew 10:19, 20

Although persecution is not uncommon in the church today, those words were not spoken to us as a general rule we can apply to ourselves. They were spoken by Jesus to His apostles. Evidence that the Lord was with Paul in the same manner is found throughout Acts, where the Lord appears to him and tells him that He is with him.

As this is so, and as those words of Matthew 10 do not apply to us today, it is the best policy not to speak out of turn. If we have a legal matter, it is a sound strategy for us to hire a lawyer. The Lord wanted Paul’s ministry to continue because it was a part of the unfolding actions that would lead to the compilation of His completed word.

We now have that completed word and should not expect the Lord to appear to us and tell us what to do. Nor should we expect visions, dreams, or revelations of things that are not recorded in the word.

Having said that, we will get out of the word just what we put into it. The more we read it, the more clarity we will be able to obtain about the mysteries God has tucked away in it. New insights, types, and pictures are found every day by people who study and evaluate the word.

It is truly an inexhaustible word, so filled with wisdom that we will be searching it out and finding new insights until the day the Lord takes us home. So be sure to get into the word and read it daily. You will be blessed as you do.

*Lord God Almighty, how wonderful it is to read Your word, come to something we don't understand, and then take the time to read commentaries or try to work through it until we find a resolution to our questions. It is a delight because we are filling our minds with what You have given us to guide us all our days. Thank You for this wonderful treasure, Your superior word! Amen.*

**“Or else let those who are *here* themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, Acts 24:20**

A more literal rendering is, “Or let these themselves say if they found any unrighteousness, having stood me before the Sanhedrin” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul noted that the people who purportedly had testimony against him should have been brought forth if they really had evidence worth listening to. As a final challenge to his accusers, he now introduces the words of this and the next verse, beginning with, “Or let these themselves say if they found any unrighteousness.”

As none of the Jews from Asia who supposedly had testimony against Paul had come to testify, he appealed to those who were present to testify against him. It is almost a mocking challenge because they had brought Tertullus to speak for them. Paul knew that they didn't know Roman law. He also knew that they had absolutely no evidence against him.

Therefore, if they opened their mouths, they would either have to tell the truth, thus exonerating him, or they would have to perjure themselves, something he knew they would not be able to do effectively. As such, they would not do it at all. With that stated, his challenging words continue with, “having stood me before the Sanhedrin.”

They had been at the Sanhedrin where Paul had been presented. This is found in Acts 22:30-23:10. The thing is that the garrison commander and various Roman guards were there, too. Therefore, they could testify to Paul's truthfulness and against any lies spoken of him during that time at the Sanhedrin.

While there, they had heard Paul's testimony and should be able to competently bear witness to his conduct at that time, whether proper or improper. Thus, his words are a direct challenge to either speak up or give up on the case against him.

It should be noted that until this verse, Paul hasn't spoken at all about Jesus being the Messiah or about His resurrection. It has been a defense formed entirely around the facts of the case in regard to what he has been accused of.

Life application: Paul has masterfully kept his religious beliefs out of the trial until this point, knowing that what he said in that regard would be a distraction from the main point of the trial itself, which was that he stood before a civil court, not a religious one.

Having said that, in the next verse, he will finally bring in religious matters. The reason why he will do this is because his words of defense have come to their end with nothing of a civil matter having been done wrong. Therefore, by bringing in the religious words, it will be evident that it is that, and not an infraction against Rome, that lies at the heart of the enmity directed at him.

As this is so, it will mean that Rome has no jurisdiction over that issue, and all charges should be dropped. However, Jesus has already told him that Paul must witness for Him in Rome (Acts 23:11). Therefore, the coming events will continue to unfold with that statement being fulfilled.

In other words, God's plans will come to pass. This is true not just in Paul's life but also in all of ours. We have our part to do in living out our lives, but God's overall plan is the priority. Therefore, when all is said and done, we must acknowledge and accept that what transpires is what is in accord with His will.

Having this attitude, we can be freed from frustrations that would otherwise consume our thoughts. The words "His will be done" are true and comforting. Speak them often.

*Lord God, may Your will be the highest joy in our lives. As time passes and our lives unfold before You, may we understand that nothing happens apart from Your knowledge. Things will meet up with Your final plan for us, so help us to be content with that and glorify You at all times. We truly believe that You have the best in store for us. Thank You for this assurance. Amen.*



**“unless *it is* for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, ‘Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.’”**

Acts 24:21

The Greek more literally says, “...or concerning this one voice which I cried out, having stood among them, ‘Concerning resurrection of dead I *am* judged this day by you” (CG).

Paul has refuted the charges against him, clearly indicating that they were without basis and should be dropped. This is especially so from a legal standpoint within the Roman Empire’s area of authority.

However, Paul now adds a statement to demonstrate that what has been brought against him by the Jews concerned questions of their own religious and cultural law, having nothing to do with something the Romans would get involved in. This is because Rome had allowed the Jews to conduct and judge their own religious affairs. Understanding this, he says, “...or concerning this one voice which I cried out.”

Paul used his own voice within the Sanhedrin to elicit a response from those appointed to judge him. In this, he openly admits that he may have said something to rile up the Jews in authority.

Felix was probably all ears at this point, waiting to determine if it was something he could finally use to put together a bigger picture of what had them in such a lather. To this point, nothing of a legal standing had been brought forth for him to judge. With that, Paul next says, “having stood among them.”

This matter was, as he said in the previous verse, “while I stood before the council.” Paul completely ignores anything that occurred at the temple because he has already addressed that matter sufficiently. Instead, what has the Jewish leadership in such a tizzy is a statement about their own interpretation of the law.

This is what stirred up the Sanhedrin in Acts 23:6. It is the only thing that he could be accused of that caused any tumult, and yet it has nothing to do with the charges against him, nor is it anything that was punishable under Roman law. That is perfectly evident from what he had called out, which is, “Concerning resurrection of dead I *am* judged this day by you.’”

Note that there is no article before “resurrection” or “dead.” It is a general thought that Paul is expressing. In other words, “Can that which is dead be returned to life?”

Further, his words are not given as if there was anything wrong with his opinion about the resurrection. Instead, may be a sort of sarcastic irony directed towards his accusers, knowing that they would not want to argue over the matter again, especially right there in front of Felix.

The really humiliating part of what Paul has said is that the commander, Claudius Lysias, was personally there to witness that this is what occurred. He and any soldiers who conducted Paul to the Sanhedrin could be brought before the commander in just a couple of days to testify to this. As such, Paul would be a complete fool to make it up.

From a legal standpoint, Paul's case is all but over. Anything that happens beyond this point will simply be to validate that what he has just said is true. If it is, that should settle things.

Life application: It is good to remember that Paul was able to manipulate the Sanhedrin's direction by calling out something that would divide them. He knew this. They took the bait and brought embarrassment upon themselves by failing to stick to their jobs in judging without bias.

Remember that when you are in a debate with someone, be it in court, at college, on social media, or elsewhere it is good to stick to the main subject. As soon as someone introduces a red herring, call him or her out on it, and let them know that is not what is being discussed. If they don't listen, simply cut them off. They are there to divide and conquer, not to engage in a reasonable debate about the main subject.

Be on the lookout for such things. The smallest diversion can take the debate in a completely different direction than it was originally intended. And because the diversion was initiated by a red herring, that direction is probably already one that the other person can box you in and defeat you over. It's what Paul did for a positive reason, but it is also what others will do for their own inappropriate purposes.

*Lord God, give us wisdom in this life to not get distracted by silly or fallacious arguments. May our words be well thought out and proper to the situations we find ourselves in. Be with us when we speak out for the truth of the gospel so that those who hear will be convicted and convinced that it is the right answer for the dilemma they are in. Amen.*

**But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of *the Way*, he adjourned the proceedings and said, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case.” Acts 24:22**

Even if a bit unwieldy, a literal translation is “And having heard these, Felix deferred them, having known distinctly these about the Way, having said, ‘When Lysias the commander might descend, I will examine these as to you’” (CG).

Paul just made his final words of defense to Felix with a possibly sarcastic note that it was concerning his belief in the resurrection of the dead for which he was being judged. With that concluded, it next says, “And having heard these.”

It is referring to the entire discourse that has occurred before him, both that of Tertullus and then Paul’s rebuttal. Once he had heard both sides, it next says, “Felix deferred them.”

Here is a word found only this once in Scripture, *anaballó*. It literally means “up-cast.” As if something is being tossed upward. However, translated into English, it means to put off or defer. It seems to be similar to our “he punted.” Rather than deciding at the time, there would be a delay for a particular reason.

It was clear that the two presentations were at odds with one another. In order to establish if what Paul said was true, Felix would need the eyewitness, Lysias, to verify the events Paul said took place. If they matched what Paul had said, Felix would no longer need to accept the words of the Jews concerning what may have taken place prior to the arrival of the Roman soldiers during the ruckus at the temple.

This is particularly so because it next says, “having known distinctly these about the Way.” Albert Barnes notes that the Greek in this verse is rather obscure, and scholars are divided over what the true intent is. What it seems to imply is that Felix had knowledge of “the Way,” meaning Christianity, which was greater than the accusers did. Because of this, he adjourned the trial.

There are several possible ways he could have come to know about Christianity. He may have simply heard about it as a part of the general religion of the Jews. In essence, “There is a group of Jews who believe their Messiah has risen from the dead.” From that, he could have decided to learn more.

It could also be that the church which Philip established in Caesarea may have had a large enough influence there, even extending to Romans. Cornelius was in Caesarea at his conversion and may have been an example to others.

Further, Felix's wife, Drusilla, may have also added to his knowledge. One way or another, he was sufficiently versed in Christianity that he knew that the charges against Paul were not reliable.

The “sect of the Nazarenes,” as Tertullus called it in a somewhat negative manner, was not so esteemed by Felix. Because of this, he would instead focus on Lysias's testimony. If he had nothing to add to a charge against Paul, it is certain that Felix would let him go because there was nothing of substance offered by the Jews at this trial. Therefore, “having said, ‘When Lysias the commander might descend, I will examine these as to you.’”

It would be up to a visit from Lysias, who had been with Paul both at the temple and then in the Sanhedrin, to set the matter straight. As Paul was Roman, and because this is a court specifically set to judge Roman matters, the decision would not go further than that.

Life application: The previous verse spoke of “resurrection of dead.” As noted, that was a general statement. Can that which is dead be brought back to life? Paul had noted to Felix that he called out this idea while in the Sanhedrin.

Around the world, there are people who claim they can raise dead people. Shamans, mystics, etc., call out incantations and use potions and spells. Some apparently only raise the dead as zombies. Some claim they can raise them to fully restored life.

Modern technology has led people to look for restored life in the future by freezing sick people now. This is in hopes of the discovery of cures that will then be applied to those who will be thawed out for that purpose.

Solomon noted that God has put eternity in man’s heart. There is a longing to live forever that is instilled in us. Only when we become mentally defective does that change. But for the normal person, continued life is the hope.

Where is your hope of eternal life going to be directed? The most reliable witness in all of the world is that of the Bible. It testifies to why man dies. It also testifies to what God

has done to correct that defective state. He Himself has accomplished all that is necessary for man to live forever in a fully restored relationship with Him.

This came about through the giving of His Son, Jesus. To prove that this is so, Jesus resurrected. Have faith in this. It is the full, final, and forever cure for humanity. You don't need to be frozen in hopes of someday being fixed in a body that will still be susceptible to death. Rather, God promises a new life and a new reality for those who come to Him through Jesus. Believe, to the saving of your soul!

*Glorious Heavenly Father, Your word testifies to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. May we have faith that it is so. Help us to consider what You have done and to accept that it is not only possible but that it is reality. Strengthen us in our faith and help us in our walk all the days of our lives. We wait with longing for the day that You come for us. May that day be soon! Amen.*

**So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let *him* have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him. Acts 24:23**

In the previous verse, Felix told Paul that when Lysias, the commander, came down, he would decide the case against him. With that complete, it now says, "So he commanded the centurion."

The centurion mentioned here was probably the one in charge of all of the prisoners who were at the location. It would be he whom Felix would deal with. This centurion would then have guards under him that he would direct concerning individual prisoners. To this particular centurion, the direction was "to keep Paul and to let *him* have liberty."

The word translated as "liberty" is new to Scripture, *anesis*. It is a noun derived from the verb *aniémi*, to let loose or slacken. For example, that verb was used previously in Acts –

"But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup>Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed [*aniémi*]." Acts 16:25, 26

Thus, Paul is being given an easing or loosing of the normal confinement of prisoners. But more, Felix goes further "and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him."

The order for Paul to have a relaxation of the prison rules included that he should be allowed to have visitors and be provided for by them as well. This might mean better food could be brought to him or whatever else his visitors thought would help his time go by more enjoyably.

This time in prison may very well have been used by Luke to obtain information for either his gospel, or the book of Acts (as a legal defense for Paul), or maybe both.

Paul's time in prison in Caesarea would not be overly difficult as far as Felix is concerned. As the Geneva Bible says, "God is a most faithful keeper of his servants, and the power of the truth is wonderful, even amongst men who are otherwise profane."

That was true of Joseph while he was in prison. Likewise, Paul will now enjoy freedoms during his incarceration that will allow him to contemplate the goodness of God even during a difficult situation. It is more than probable that he was allowed to keep his parchments in order to study the word. If so, he would constantly be making connections from the Old Testament concerning the marvelous work of God in Christ.

Life application: Tough times are sure to come upon each of us. Some may be arrested for their witness to Christ. Some may lose their jobs in a time of financial distress. Some may be hurt or get a sickness that causes them to be incapacitated, paralyzed, bedridden, etc.

We don't normally think about such things until they come upon us. However, what would you do if one of these came upon you? How would you respond to it? It is likely that Paul used his time in prison in prayer and in a study of the Scriptures. He certainly told those around him about the freedom found in Christ, even while they were bound in prison.

It is good and right for us to remain productive even while in troubling circumstances. Let us not lose or slacken our devotion to the Lord at such times. Rather, let us continue to be proper examples of the patience of Christ, even through them. This is a demonstration of faith, and nothing done in faith will lack its reward when we stand before the Lord.

*Lord God, may we be willing to hold fast to You even in the most trying of times. Help us to have this attitude now in preparation for anything that may come against us in the days ahead. Help us to remain faithful vessels filled with Your Spirit so that those around us will see that our faith is worth emulating. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Acts 24:24**

In the previous verse, it was commanded that Paul be given certain liberties while he was incarcerated in Caesarea. Now, the narrative continues, saying, “And after some days.”

This period was probably not very long. If the days were delayed to any extent at all, Luke most likely would have noted this. Regardless of the timeframe, however, it says, “when Felix came with his wife Drusilla.”

Drusilla was the third daughter of Herod Agrippa I and the sister of Agrippa II. Agrippa I was the king who spoke before the people of Tyre and Sidon in Acts 12, and who, failing to give glory to God, was struck by Him and was eaten by worms. Agrippa II is the king whom Paul will speak before in Acts 26.

This royal family was aware of the Christian movement, as Acts particularly describes. Of Drusilla, it next says, “who was Jewish.”

This is a point Luke felt was necessary to include to remind the reader of the status of those Paul spoke to. It could be deduced from a careful study of Acts that she was Jewish, but Luke especially notes it anyway.

As for her situation, at one time, she was engaged to be married to Antiochus Epiphanes, first son of King Antiochus IV of Commagene, but because he wouldn't get circumcised, she was married to Azizus, king of Emesa. This is recorded in Josephus Ant. xx. 7. 1.

After this, and with the supposed help of a sorcerer named Simon, she was estranged from him and eventually was married to Felix. It is not certain if this was the same as the person mentioned in Acts 8. Barnes says the following concerning this –

“Felix was governor of Judea, he saw Drusilla and fell in love with her, and sent to her Simon, one of his friends, a Jew, by birth a Cyprian, who pretended to be a magician, to [endeavor] to persuade her to forsake her husband and to marry Felix. Accordingly, in order to avoid the envy of her sister Bernice, who treated her ill on account of her beauty, ‘she was prevailed on,’ says Josephus, ‘to transgress the laws of her forefathers, and to marry Felix’ (Josephus, Antiq., book 20, chapter 7, sections 1 and 2).”

Her recorded life, including her marriage to a Gentile, indicated that she wasn't a strict adherent to Jewish ways. As for Felix's return with Drusilla, Luke next records that "he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ."

The news about how the Jews opposed Paul's teaching may have made both her and Felix eager to hear what he had to say concerning the message of Jesus. Luke specifically focuses on the fact that Paul's message was centered on "the faith."

Life application: Felix was a Gentile, and Drusilla was a Jewess who was not obedient to the law. Both of them stood outside of the acceptable parameters of the Law of Moses. And yet, they were willing to hear about Paul's doctrine concerning faith in Christ.

Even though Felix was a Gentile, he would have had a good understanding of what Judaism taught. As such, it was probably surprising to both he and his wife that Paul spoke of faith rather than works.

In the coming verses, Paul will explain what the faith in Christ should entail, but the things he mentions are points of doctrine that come after salvation. Salvation is not contingent on those things, nor is continued salvation contingent on those things.

The saving message of Jesus is one of faith in what He has done. Personal merit is entirely excluded. Be sure that when you present the gospel to others, that this is clearly understood. If people are told they must merit salvation through works, you are not presenting the true gospel.

Jesus! He has done it all. We need to believe this by faith. Upon belief, we are saved. After belief, we should endeavor to live in a holy and upright manner because of the salvation God bestowed upon us by His grace.

*Lord God Almighty, what could we place before You and say, "See, this is why You should save me?" We are stained with sin and incapable of doing anything that could remove that. But You, O God, have made it possible through the giving of Jesus. We can now boldly proclaim, "See, this is what God has done to save us all!" Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." Acts 24:25**



A more literal translation is, “And he, reasoning concerning righteousness and continence and the judgment coming to be, Felix, having become frightened, answered, ‘For now, be going, and having found time, I will call you’” (CG).

In the previous verse, it noted that Felix came to Paul with Drusilla, his wife. He heard Paul concerning the faith in Christ. From there, Luke now records, “And he.”

It is referring to Paul. While Felix and Drusilla were listening, Paul spoke, “reasoning concerning righteousness.”

The word is *dikaiosuné*. It speaks of “righteousness” or “justice” that is deemed right by the Lord. It isn’t so much in reference to the character of God as it is to what is expected of us in our relations with both God and man. Thus, it is the proper conduct of our lives.

In the next verse, it will be seen that Felix is susceptible to taking bribes, and so this was a good point for Paul to have started with. Next, it notes “continence.”

It is a new word in Scripture, *egkrateia*. It refers to a person’s ability to practice moderation or restraint concerning life’s temptations. Strong’s says it is “the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites.” Thus, continence is a good word. The thought is also well expressed by the words self-control. Paul then continues with “the judgment coming to be.”

It is an obvious thought concerning what a person can expect if there really is a God. Tucked inside of man is a sense of responsibility to his Creator. Further, the knowledge that God exists is revealed in the creation itself. Paul addresses these things in Romans 1.

However, man can sear his conscience to the point that this thought is almost completely erased from his mind. Therefore, it is something that Paul spoke about because whether one accepts the gospel or not, judgment lies ahead. The difference is how one will stand before God on that day.

In the case of Paul’s words, he certainly presented the gospel in the sense that we are fallen, and that leads to our failings, all of which will be dealt with in either our judgment for condemnation or in our salvation through Christ’s judgment on our behalf.

What is amazing about Paul’s words is that he is standing before the one who has the power to release him or convict him. Despite that, instead of tickling his ears, he talks about issues that would make both the humble and the hardened squiggle in their seats.

Rather than pursuing a soft message, he chose the topic that bore especially on Felix's character. And rightfully so, because Tacitus's writings about him say that he "exercised the authority of a king with the spirit of a slave." Because of Paul's words, Luke next records, "Felix, having become frightened."

The presentation had its intended effect. The word used has a strong sense. "Terrified" might be a better description of his state. Fear can lead to changing one's mind if the heart is tender, or it can lead to looking for a means of escape from that which terrifies. Unfortunately, Felix chose the latter. Luke continues that he "answered, 'For now, be going, and having found time, I will call you.'"

Felix has put off what he should have acted on. When a person is faced with such a decision, delaying a response will generally lead to the hardening of the heart.

Life application: Sharing the gospel is something we should do. When we do, it is good to give a summary thought concerning what we have said. In 2 Corinthians 6, Paul writes—

"We then, *as workers together with Him* also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup> For He says:  
'In an acceptable time I have heard you,  
And in the day of salvation I have helped you.'  
Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation."

-2 Corinthians 6:1, 2

This is a good verse to use to bring what you have said home. A delayed decision for Christ may turn into a decision never being made. In quoting Paul, adding an understandable life application of the thought is helpful –

"Do you know that on September 11, 2001, several thousand people went into the World Trade Center, pressed the elevator button, and went up to whatever floor they were set to go to? Not one of those people thought, 'This is the last time I will ever get on an elevator. I will be jumping out of a window at the top of this building in a few minutes.' This is what life is like. We are one moment away from our demise at any moment. Without Jesus, we will have to face God alone. Today can be the day that changes for you. Call on Jesus and be saved while you have the opportunity."

Be sure to speak of the judgment coming to be and how that can be one of salvation, not condemnation. Be sure to tell them that it can be so if they just believe in Jesus.

*Lord God Almighty, may we be responsible with the time You have given us. Give us a heart to talk to others about Jesus, declaring their need to accept what He has done, believing the gospel of our salvation. And may we remember to remind them that today is the day! We may not have tomorrow. Amen.*

**Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him. Acts 24:26**

The words more literally read, “And simultaneously, also hoping that money shall be given him by Paul that he might release him. And, therefore, summoning often, he talked with him” (CG).

In the previous verse, Felix sent Paul away, telling him he would call him at a convenient time. Rather than wanting to hear about the gospel, however, he had another reason for the delay, as Luke next records, “And simultaneously, also hoping that money shall be given him by Paul.”

As in government positions throughout history, getting bribes is something that the greedy and dishonest will naturally take advantage of. In this case, it may be that Felix latched on to Paul's words of verse 24:17 and figured that he either had money or had friends who would take care of him if he were in need. There, it said, “Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation.”

If Paul was carrying alms, it had to have come from somewhere. The source was less important to him than getting what Paul may have had access to. In exchange for a bribe, Luke says it was “that he might release him.”

Paul had clearly established his innocence, and there was no evidence of any wrongdoing in him that could be proven, and yet out of a sense of personal gain alone, Felix kept him in prison and waited to see if he could profit off it in order for Paul to be freed. And more, he assumed that the longer Paul was in prison, the more willing he would be to make a deal. Thus, Luke records, “And, therefore, summoning often, he talked with him.”

These words fail to mention any further fear on the part of Felix. Instead, he seems to have simply hardened his heart against the word. Such may not be the case, but it seems likely that if there were any hint of a conversion in him, Luke would have mentioned it.

This back and forth between the two went on for a full two years. It seems that he hoped to simply wear out Paul's patience until he caved in and paid a bribe.

Life application: It appears that Paul was in no hurry to leave the prison. He was allowed to live there in a semi-free state. People could come to him and help him out, and – probably above all – he could study the parchments he possessed. His time in prison was probably one of great learning.

Today, we find ourselves always wanting to do more, go to more places, have adventures, and so forth. And yet, there are people who live on little islands or in country towns that have never traveled more than a mile or two away from home in their entire lives.

What is it that we find so important about doing, doing, doing? If we are truly happy people, we should be able to find contentment right at home. People find it necessary to miss church to attend sports. People skip work to go on a quick excursion to the beach.

Such things are obviously fun to do, but where are our priorities? Let us remember to cling to what is important first and foremost. If time permits, we can find other things to do, but we should never skip our time in the word or our time in fellowship with other believers if it is at all possible.

*Lord God, help us to be content with simpler lives that focus on You more and the things of this world less. In the end, we won't say, "I wish I had earned more money" when we are facing our final moments. How much more then will we regret the misuse of our time when we stand before You? Help us to wisely consider such things. Amen.*

**But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.** Acts 24:27

The words more literally read, "And after two years having been fulfilled, Felix received a successor, Porcius Festus. 'And intending to lay the Jews' a favor, Felix left Paul bound'" (CG).

In the previous verse, it noted that Felix was hoping for money from Paul. Therefore, he called for him often and conversed with him. Now, the last verse of the chapter says, "And after two years having been fulfilled, Felix received a successor."

In this clause is a word found only here in Scripture, *diadochos*. Successor is an exact translation. Felix's time as governor had finally come to an end without any change in Paul's status. It has been said that this succession was caused by the complaints of the Jews against Felix.

Their constant moaning finally led Nero to recall him. However, and maybe to keep from further complaints being filed against him, he granted them the favor of leaving Paul in prison. The justification for this was then a greedy hope of self-preservation.

Because of this, it appears that Paul's frequent conversations fell on deaf ears if they were in relation to the gospel. No other conversations changed Felix's attitude concerning Paul's imprisonment. Instead, Felix departed Caesarea having abandoned Paul to the fate of the next governor, "Porcius Festus."

It is known that Festus came to the province in AD60. He ended up dying in his second year in office. During the two years that Paul was in prison up to this point, it has been conjectured by some that he wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews.

It is also conjectured by some that Luke used this time to do his research for the gospel and for the book of Acts, compiling them and using Paul for necessary reference. As for the verse and the chapter, it ends with the words, "And intending to lay the Jews' a favor, Felix left Paul bound."

In this sentence is a new word, *katatithémi*. It signifies to lay or deposit a favor, probably with the view of receiving one in return. It will only be seen again in Acts 25:9. Both uses are tied to the sitting governor's relationship with the Jews.

Paul came to Caesarea as a prisoner, having been falsely charged by his Jewish brethren. His time in prison outlasted the final years of the governor, and his state was left unchanged as a new governor was brought in to oversee the matter that should have been handled after the short trial two years earlier.

Closing out the chapter, the Pulpit Commentary says -

"The scene in this chapter is a very striking one, depicted with admirable simplicity and force. The bloated slave sitting on the seat of judgment and power, representing all the worst vices of Roman degeneracy. The beads of the sinking Jewish commonwealth, blinded by bigotry and nearly mad with hatred, forgetting for the moment their abhorrence of their Roman masters, in their yet deeper detestation of the Apostle Paul.

The hired advocate with his fulsome flattery, his rounded periods, and his false charges. And then the great apostle, the noble confessor, the finished Christian gentleman, the pure-minded, upright, and fearless man, pleading his own cause with consummate force and dignity, and overawing his heathen judge by the majesty of his character. It is a graphic description of this very noble scene.”

Life application: The conjecture about Paul’s writing the Epistle to the Hebrews at this time is interesting. Although the letter is unsigned, it certainly bears all the hallmarks of having been written by Paul.

Internal clues in the letter tell us that the temple was still standing at the time of it having been composed. Paul would have had time to consider the many facets of why he held to his position concerning the law, the temple, and the sacrificial rites associated with them. As such, it was the most opportune time to write such a letter.

Further, it would mean that the letter was penned to his beloved brethren in the land of Israel, a nice touch. Being a Pharisee, he had the knowledge of the matters contained within the epistle to piece together the words to make the very complicated issues penned in it understandable.

Paul didn’t just whittle away his time in prison playing solitaire. If he penned Hebrews there, it would add another level of industry to his time in confinement. This can then inspire us to take advantage of such times in our lives as well.

Just because we are in difficult or trying circumstances, we shouldn’t let them take away our joy and productivity in the Lord. Look at David and what he did! Note the introductory words to the 57<sup>th</sup> Psalm: “To the Chief Musician. Set to “Do Not Destroy.” A Michtam of David when he fled from Saul into the cave.” And again, the introduction to the 142<sup>nd</sup> Psalm says, “A Contemplation of David. A Prayer when he was in the cave.”

David was hemmed in by his enemies, and yet he took time to pen his devoted words to the Lord. How many of us would get stuck in a car in a snowstorm and stop to write a song to the Lord? And once again, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Psalm opens with, “A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom, his son.”

Who would be on the move on a battlefield and stop to write a psalm to God? David did. Remember the Lord at the bleak times in your life. God may just use you to do great things because you did.

*Lord God, may we be productive for You in our lives, even when things seem tough or troubling. It is at such times that we may have the greatest inspiration of all to glorify You. Remind us that You are there, and may we have the wisdom to acknowledge it. This life is fleeting. What we do with it now is important for ourselves and maybe for others as well. So, help us in this, O God. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 25

**Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Acts 25:1**

The verse more rightly reads, “Festus, therefore, having arrived in the province, after three days, he ascended to Jerusalem from Caesarea” (CG).

Chapter 24 ended with a note that Felix was replaced with Festus Porcius and that Paul remained in prison, even after two full years under Felix. With the arrival of Festus as the new governor, it next says, “Festus, therefore, having arrived in the province.”

He has assumed the position as governor. It is expected that he would be in the province from which he would govern for a few days. He would meet those who were assigned under him, get his house and effects in order, etc. However, after a short time, he wisely did what a responsible governor would do. Therefore, it next says, “after three days, he ascended to Jerusalem from Caesarea.”

Only a short time after his arrival, Festus “ascended” to Jerusalem. Though Caesarea was where he ruled from, Jerusalem is highlighted. It is an ascent to Jerusalem from Caesarea. However, despite all manuscripts reading this way, many translations change the wording and say , “from Caesarea to Jerusalem.”

It is unfortunate because it takes the emphasis off of what is being conveyed. This trip was not an unimportant thing to do. It was the complaints of the Jews there that got Felix removed, and Festus needed to show that they were important to him as a leader.

It may even be that a note was waiting for him upon his arrival in Caesarea that they wanted to meet with him. Paul would have continued to be on their minds, and with a change in leadership, there would then have been a chance to have Paul released to them or at least brought to them. If so, they could have him cut down on the trip to Jerusalem, exactly as they had planned two years earlier. This is just what verse 3 will indicate.

Life application: As you read the Bible, think about why things are worded the way they are. That is, if the translation is a competent one and if it is properly structured in its presentation. In the case of this verse, you would not notice the change unless you read other translations and compared them.



Having a parallel Bible with three or even four translations in it is a good way to compare things. Once you see a striking difference in a translation, you can then research further as to why they are different. Then, making your own margin note will remind you the next time through which translation is correct and why.

Study! Then think on what you have studied! Why are things written as they are? The more you think about what you are reading, the more your mind will understand things concerning this precious word that God has given to us. Enjoy your time in Scripture. You will get out of it just what you put into it. So read! Study! And enjoy!

*Heavenly Father, how grateful we are that You have expressed Your thoughts to us in a word that is understandable and directed to who we are as Your creatures. It demonstrates what a great and loving God You are. Thank You for Your precious word. And thank You for Jesus who is revealed in it. Yes, thank You, O God. Amen.*

**Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, Acts 25:2**

Chapter 25 began with Festus coming to the province and then ascending to Jerusalem after three days. Now, while in Jerusalem, it says, “Then the high priest.”

Some manuscripts have the plural “priests,” while others have the singular “priest.” Either is possible because any previous high priest would still bear the title of high priest. By this time, the high priest was a person named Ismael, the son of Fabi (Josephus, *Antiq.*, book 20, chapter 8, section 8). Along with him, it next notes, “and the chief men of the Jews.”

The word is *prótos*. It signifies the foremost, principle, etc. Further, it is this in time, place, order, or importance. In this case, it is referring to people. Being plural, it thus speaks of the principal men of the city. Of this gathered group, Luke next notes that they “informed him against Paul.”

After two full years of time, they were still stewing over Paul. They simply couldn’t move on from his words. Unlike the other apostles who apparently lived and moved freely among the people, Paul actively went forth to the Gentiles, evangelizing them and telling them that there were no cultural distinctions in Christ.

In other words, Paul clearly and unambiguously reveals in his words that Gentiles are just as favored by God as Jews. There is no distinction, even if there are differences (e.g., Jew/Gentile, Russian/Japanese, Black/Caucasian, etc.).

Yes, there are differences in all people and in all people groups, but there is no distinction in Christ. The Jews could not accept this. Therefore, they sat in Jerusalem stewing like meat in a pot, angrily awaiting the day that they could be rid of such a heretic. Therefore, when Festus showed up, they plotted in their minds, “and they petitioned him.”

The word translated as “petitioned” is in the imperfect tense, and so it indicates that they not only petitioned him but continued to petition him. The entire time he was there, they kept bringing the issue of Paul up to them. It shows that they were truly possessed by the situation and simply couldn’t let it go.

One can imagine them going to bed each night, lying on their beds, and tossing and turning at the nerve of this man who said they were just like the Gentiles. But this is how it is in Christ. Thus, they rejected not only Paul’s message but also the One Paul proclaimed.

Life application: To this day, there is an almost idolatrous reverence by some in the church regarding Jewish teachers. They are fawned over, regardless of what they teach or preach. Many of these teachers reinsert law observance, such as telling their followers not to eat pork, to observe the Sabbath, and so forth.

And yet, because these people are Jewish, they are held in special esteem. This is a bad approach to one’s theology. It doesn’t matter if someone has a doctorate, if he speaks fluent Hebrew or Greek, or if he has expensive, flashy clothes. The only thing that should matter to people in the church is adherence to, and right application of, God’s word.

Anything less should not be tolerated. Be careful to not get caught up in fallacious thinking. Evaluate leaders based on the word. In doing this, you will avoid many pitfalls and many false teachers who are out there, trying to steal you away from a right relationship with Jesus.

*Lord God Almighty, help us to be sound in our thoughts about those who minister to us. May our hearts be directed to You. If anyone proclaims law observance instead of Your grace, help us to identify this error and get away from it. You alone have done all that is*

*needed to restore us in the giving of Jesus. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem—while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him. Acts 25:3**

The Greek more rightly reads, “Asking a favor against him, that he might summon him to Jerusalem, making an ambush to kill him along the way” (CG).

The previous *verse* told of the charges the chief priest and leaders made against Paul. Based on those, it now says, “Asking a favor against him.”

When Felix was noted as being replaced, the narrative said he left Paul in prison as a favor to the Jews. Now, with a new governor to replace Felix, they are asking for advanced favor from the inexperienced Festus against Paul as well. The fact that they had previously planned to kill him was certainly erased from the memory of those serving under Felix after two years. And so, a plan is now made by the Jews under the government of Festus. It was so “that he might summon him to Jerusalem.”

Paul was incarcerated in Caesarea. How inconvenient it would be for all of the leadership to be gathered in Caesarea when just one man could be brought to Jerusalem! It made all the sense in the world to not inconvenience Festus with such a trivial matter there in Caesarea. One can almost hear their cunning words. But all the while, they were planning on “making an ambush to kill him along the way.”

Instead of a giant contingent of soldiers, spearmen, and cavalry, Paul would probably be conducted by a few soldiers. The contingent would be easy prey. In no time, the Jews could be done with Paul once and for good!

Everything about the account shows that the memory of Paul was as fresh as it could be on the minds of the Jews. The failure of the past was to them a stinging rebuke concerning their supposed duties to God.

Until they made things right, they would feel they remained out of His favor over the matter. It is ironic that the opposite is true. They had left the favor of the Lord when they rejected Christ. It was Paul who could lead them back to the truth of their actions and into a right relationship with Him once again. But they were blinded to this truth and were, once again, plotting to do away with their loathed foe.

Life application: There are times that we become so passionate about a matter that it will blind us to any possibility of seeing other possible options concerning what we perceive as the truth. This is how Paul was before the Lord personally called him as an apostle.

Now, the people he was once aligned with had become his sworn enemies. People who are trained, for example, in the doctrine of the Jehovah's Witnesses are told that they possess the truth and everyone else is a heretic. They cannot see beyond their own state, and they are normally completely unwilling to hear any other option.

This is true with most of us in one way or another. It is a state known as cognitive dissonance. We shut out anything that interferes with our presuppositions, and we then refuse to believe things that may be evident on the surface.

We should be willing to test and verify everything, even if it goes against our presuppositions. The Jews who wanted Paul dead presupposed that Jesus was a heretic, and they were unwilling to even entertain the thought that Paul could be right about Him. What is it that we think we are so sure about that we are unwilling to see other options?

Let us honestly evaluate what we believe and let us be willing to check and verify it by setting aside any false presuppositions. It is a healthy way to approach all matters because we may be completely blinded to a matter that we are promoting without the right knowledge to even speak on it, much less claim that it is the absolute truth.

*Lord God, may we be willing to challenge everything we believe and teach to others, honestly opening our eyes and checking if we could be wrong. If we are, and if we don't do this, we will be instructing others in that which is false. May we not be such people. Instead, help us to think clearly and rightly about all things that we in turn teach. Amen.*

**But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going *there* shortly.** Acts 25:4

A more literal rendering would be, "Therefore, indeed, Festus answered, Paul is kept in Caesarea, and he himself is about in quickness to go out" (CG).

In the previous verse, the leaders' plot to have Paul ambushed on a journey to Jerusalem was noted by Luke. This was based upon their asking Festus to have him brought up to Jerusalem. However, Luke next records, "Therefore, indeed, Festus answered."

The final decision on such a matter was up to the Roman authority. As Festus was the new governor at Caesarea, what he decided would settle the matter. At this time, rather than accommodate the Jews, it says, “Paul is kept in Caesarea, and he himself is about in quickness to go out.”

The intent of Festus is debated. Luke uses a present tense verb, “is kept.” Some, such as the NKJV, interpret this in the sense that Paul “should be kept at Caesarea” because he was a Roman. It was a matter which Rome had to judge, and, therefore, Caesarea was the place where Paul belonged.

Others interpret this as simply being a matter of fact, thus, “Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon” (NIV). In this, it is believed that it was just more expedient for them to come to Caesarea and have them attend a trial there.

It seems unlikely that Felix would have ignored informing Festus about Paul’s situation and the attempt to kill him. Thus, the first option may be correct. This also seems more likely because the Jews have asked the favor of having him brought to Jerusalem.

Further, as Festus was in Jerusalem, it would have been rather irresponsible of him to not have talked to those in the Roman garrison. During their talk, the subject of Paul’s imprisonment would have been a matter of importance. Therefore, it seems that, at least for the time being, he was aware of possible trickery on their part. Verse 9 may dispute this, though, as Festus is said to want to do the Jews a favor.

Another option is that Festus, being the new governor, simply wanted to establish the precedent that he was in charge, and by not caving to the demands of the Jews at such an early date, he was demonstrating this authority. Therefore, he would only yield to their requests when it suited his purposes.

Life application: As noted above, the verb used by Luke is present tense, “is kept.” Despite this, there are variations in translation: is being held, was at, was being kept, should be kept, to be kept, is to be kept, etc.

Such changes, though possibly correct, do not accurately identify what the Greek actually says. The job of translators is to translate. Unless the preface to a Bible notes that they take liberties with their translations, identifying what type of liberties they take, it is not really appropriate to insert guesses, biases, presuppositions, and so forth.

These things will often not make a great deal of difference, but at times, a pastor or preacher will argue over a single word – from the version he is using – to establish a doctrine, only for it to be incorrectly translated in the first place.

Therefore, as a student of the Bible, the more time you spend checking things out, the better off you will be in what you believe. Be prepared to defend what Scripture says, but if you are going to do so, it is best for you to be properly prepared.

Today, with internet access available wherever you go, you can easily check what the preacher or teacher is saying right while you are listening to him. We live in a time of great blessing concerning the ability to access information. Let us not ignore it!

*Lord God, how blessed we are. We can carry a little device with us that has more information available on it than entire libraries. We no longer need shelves full of books to access important information about Your word. Help us to wisely use the technology You have favored us with at this time in history. May we be responsible with what we have available! Amen.*

**“Therefore,” he said, “let those who have authority among you go down with me and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him.” Acts 25:5**

A literal translation would be, “‘Therefore, those able among you,’ he says, ‘having descended together, if anything is wrong in the man, accuse him’” (CG).

The previous verse revealed Festus telling the Jews that Paul was kept in Caesarea and that he was going there soon. Because of this, his continued words begin with, “‘Therefore, those able among you.’”

Depending on the translation, various versions say something like “those who are able,” while others essentially say, “those who have authority.” The Greek could mean either. In one case, it would be considered “someone who could personally come and testify against Paul” like Tertullus. In the other, it would be a leader who could speak for the charges against him.

Whichever is the intent, the outcome will be the same. Charges will be made concerning Paul in Caesarea during a trial. From there, a judgment from Festus can be expected. Next, “he says, ‘having descended together.’”

Just as a journey to Jerusalem is an ascent, so a journey from it is a descent. In his statement, a word not found elsewhere in Scripture is seen: *sugkatabainó*. It is derived from a word meaning “with” and another meaning “to descend.” Thus, it signifies “to descend together.” Finally, to finish the sentence, he says, “if anything is wrong in the man, accuse him.”

Once the descent to Caesarea is made, charges can be laid before Festus for consideration. It would be determined if there was any fault in him. The matter that should have been settled two years earlier when Felix was governor must once again be considered. This time, it will be before Festus.

Life application: In Psalm 122, it says –

“Jerusalem is built  
As a city that is compact together,  
<sup>4</sup>Where the tribes go up,  
The tribes of the LORD,  
To the Testimony of Israel,  
To give thanks to the name of the LORD.” Psalm 122:3, 4

The tribes of Israel ascended to the place where the Lord dwelt among them. For the believer in Jesus Christ, something new has taken place –

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup>and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:4-6

In Christ, we are, even now, positionally seated in the heavenly realms. The reason this is so is because we are, in fact, in Christ. As Christ is in heaven right now, and because we are in Him, in God’s view, we are there too. Therefore, Hebrews 4 says –

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup>Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrews 4:14-16

Though this is written specifically to the Hebrews, it is a truth that applies to all believers. We do not need to first ascend to meet with God. Rather, we simply need to enter His presence, coming through Jesus as our Mediator to make our petitions and praises.

As Jesus said –

“God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

-John 4:24

We don't need to physically be anywhere particular to worship God. We just need to be in Christ. If we are, then we have access to God. Let us not get so caught up in rites and rituals that we forget this truth. The church is not a place. It is the people of God in Christ Jesus. Live out your life in this understanding. There is no lack of access to God when you access Him through the Lord Jesus.

*Glorious Lord God, all praises, honor, and glory to You for what You have done in and through Christ Jesus our Lord. We come boldly before You today in His name, praising You for who You are. You are the God who has received us because of Your own goodness toward us. How can we withhold our thanks and praise? We shall not! Yes! All thanks and praises to You, O God. Amen.*

**And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought.** Acts 25:6

A literal translation would be, “And having stayed with them more than ten days, having gone down to Caesarea, the next day, having sat upon the bema, he commanded Paul to be brought” (CG).

In the previous verse, Festus had told the leaders of Israel to come down to Caesarea with him and to accuse Paul there instead of him being brought up to Jerusalem. Next, it says, “And having stayed with them more than ten days.”

Depending on what Greek text is used, there may be a difference in translation. Some variations are: “more than ten days,” “no more than ten days,” “eight or ten days,” or “not more than eight or ten days.”



Why the texts read differently isn't known, but it could be that "no more than eight or ten days" is an idiom for a short amount of time. From that, different scribes wrote it as they felt was intended. This is speculation, but for whatever reason, different texts do read a bit differently. Regardless of the actual time, it next says, "having gone down to Caesarea."

During his short trip to Jerusalem, he probably would have been quite busy, possibly visiting all of the main soldier areas, the houses of the dignitaries, and the like, just like any such governor's visit today.

From Jerusalem, he then returned to the governor's station in Caesarea. And, notably, there was no delay in his commitment to bring the matter forward for the Jews to make their accusation. Therefore, "the next day, having sat upon the bema, he commanded Paul to be brought."

The *béma*, or judgment seat, was normally an elevated place ascended by steps, somewhat like a throne. A literal explanation is "tribunal chair." It is derived from the same root as the *word* basis, a step. Thus, it is a foot-breath. By implication, then, it is a rostrum.

Life application: In Romans 14:10, Paul says that we will all stand before the *béma* of God. In 2 Corinthians 5:10, he says that we must all appear before the *béma* of Christ. These are one and the same judgment, Christ Jesus being God.

This judgment will be for rewards and loss based on our lives in Christ. The judgment for salvation or condemnation for believers was determined at the cross of Calvary. By faith in what Christ did there, we are saved. We have moved from death to life and from condemnation to salvation.

The doctrine that says one can lose his salvation is actually heretical because it means that our salvation after coming to Christ is up to us. Were this so, it means that His salvation was not fully effectual for the purpose it was intended. Further, it means that our salvation was not of grace at all but of works.

If so, at any point after being saved, that salvation can be removed because of our actions, it means that we are responsible for our salvation. But salvation is a gift, and it is of grace. Be sure to not let people trouble you with their incorrect ideas about salvation.

Having said that, what we do with our salvation is up to us. How will we be judged by Christ at the *béma* we must appear before? What we do today has consequences. Therefore, let us consider what we do and act in accord with the salvation we have been granted. May the Lord smile upon our lives and actions that we live now!

*Glorious Lord God, thank You for the salvation You have granted to us through the shed blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. May we be faithful to live out our salvation in a manner that is pleasing to You. Help us in our weaknesses, O God. Amen.*

**When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, Acts 25:7**

In the previous verse, Festus had returned to Caesarea and sat on the judgment seat the next day, commanding Paul to be brought forward. With that remembered, it next says, “When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about.”

Saying that they “stood about” seems to imply that there were quite a few who came down. It was a grand show that they put on for Festus. This was certainly intended to make it appear that all of the Jewish leadership was in complete agreement concerning the need to have Paul judged and removed from society. Therefore, it next says that they “laid many serious complaints against Paul.”

These allegations would have been the same as before and which Paul will refute, such as him being a defiler of their religion, which was the sanctioned religion of the province. They would accuse him of being a defiler of the temple, which Rome had sanctioned as an acceptable edifice for worship by the Jews.

They would also certainly accuse him of being one who disturbed the peace. As such, he was supposedly a threat not only to Jewish society but Roman rule as well. Further, they would certainly note him as one who would question the rule of Caesar because he claimed there was another king.

These, and any other such accusations, would be proclaimed against him, things “which they could not prove.” They could not prove them in the past, and they were not able to prove them at this time either.

Life application: The reason they could not prove the charges against Paul is because what they charged him with was not true. If he was tried in Jerusalem, this would not have mattered. They would have unjustly found him guilty and dealt with him

accordingly. However, at the Roman judgment seat, reliable evidence of guilt would be needed.

Assuming that you were to be given a fair trial today concerning a matter, would you be found innocent or guilty? Paul had done nothing wrong because he lived his life in a manner that was in accord with the laws of the land.

This is what is expected of Christians. If we do wrong, we can expect to be judged according to our wrongdoing. If we act responsibly and in accord with the laws of the land, as long as a trial is fair and impartial, we can expect to be judged accordingly and be exonerated.

Obviously, not every trial is fair. In fact, fair trials are becoming less and less likely in the world because of biases, political agendas, a perception that Christians are somehow wrongdoers, etc. At such times, there is not much that can be done about it. However, for normal conduct in life, we should be obedient to the rules and laws that govern the society in which we live.

*Lord God, regardless of what comes about in our lives, as long as we are living for You in a manner that is in accord with Your word, we can expect You to judge our lives accordingly. In this life, that may not be the case, but what happens now is just a temporary blip on the way to eternal glory. So, Lord, help us to live lives that honor You now. Amen.*

**while he answered for himself, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.” Acts 25:8**

More literally, it says, “He, making defense, ‘Neither toward the law of the Jews, nor toward the temple, nor toward Caesar, have I sinned anything’” (CG).

The previous verse noted that when the Jews had come down from Jerusalem, they stood about and made many serious complaints against Paul. In response, it now says, “He, making defense.”

Paul states his defense very precisely and without any ruffles or flourishes. If he said more, Luke did not record it. That, however, is unlikely. Luke’s record is usually very precise, and such is probably the case here. Paul simply states his side as a fact. There would be no need to expand his words because the burden of proof rests with his

accusers. Therefore, his words say, “Neither toward the law of the Jews, nor toward the temple, nor toward Caesar, have I sinned anything.”

Paul specifically makes his defense against the three main charges, any of which could cause him to be punished. He had not violated the law, desecrated the temple, or offended Caesar. In the words, “not...have I sinned anything,” the English seems clunky, and it is usually paraphrased to get the sense across. However, it would have been a perfectly clear and understandable statement to Festus.

The word he uses is *hamartanó*. It can refer to an offense against man or God, including sin. It most especially means “to miss the mark.” Paul had stayed on course and not strayed from soundness in any of these areas. He had not offended in any manner that could be considered a violation worthy of trial.

He may have offended the Jews by going to the Gentiles to proclaim the saving message of Jesus, but that would only be something that offended them emotionally. It was not something that could be avoided in normal human interaction. They would have to get over it apart from legal charges.

Life application: In today’s world, there is an attempt to regulate personal offense, as if nobody should be allowed to harm the emotional state of others on even a basic level. The problem with this is that by passing such ridiculous laws, those who are targeted by them are emotionally offended.

It is not possible to avoid offending others because every person experiences life differently. Some enjoy one thing, others another. People can get upset by simply hearing that another doesn’t like to do what someone might find completely enjoyable—

- “I just love going to the beach. It is my place of refuge and relaxation.”
- “Oh my, I can’t stand the beach! The sand gets everywhere, kids running around are so annoying, and the water is so salty... I just hate the place.”
- \*And the first person is suddenly offended, going home to cry.

Despite this, people in power want to somehow legislate control over emotional distress. This approach caters to the weakest as if they have an absolute right to never be offended. It is an impossible avenue to follow, and it will only continue to degrade society as the end times approach. Be sure when you vote to not cast a vote for anyone who promises to eliminate such ridiculous things. This is not the purpose of the government.

The Bible does not focus on such petty issues. Rather, it focuses on offenses that are truly harmful to others. As for the emotional state of others, like the Jews in Paul's time, they must simply grow up and get over their emotional insecurities.

*Lord God, help us to be respectful and responsible in our interactions with others. At the same time, help us to understand the fallen nature of the world in which we exist. May we be sound in our thinking about what it means to accept personal responsibility for things that may offend us, but which are not truly offensive. Help us to understand our own limitations and not attempt to impose ourselves unnecessarily on others. Amen.*

**But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?"**

Acts 25:9

The Greek more literally reads, "And Festus, intending to lay the Jews a favor, answering Paul, said, 'Are you willing, having gone up to Jerusalem, to be judged there concerning these before me?'" (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul gave his short defense concerning the charges against him. Now, with that complete, it says, "And Festus, wishing to lay the Jews a favor."

In this clause is the second and last use of the word *katatithémi*. It signifies to lay or deposit a favor, probably with the view of receiving one in return. It was first seen in Acts 24:27. Both uses are tied into the sitting governor's relationship with the Jews.

Festus was probably asked, in advance, that after the initial presentation of the charges, the matter could be brought to Jerusalem for evaluation there. Because it involved non-Roman religious matters, such a request would seem innocuous but satisfactory. Otherwise, he would certainly have just rendered his judgment and been done with the matter.

But he was an appointed diplomat and wanted to tactfully handle matters between himself and those he would have to deal with. Therefore, he "answering Paul, said, 'Are you willing, having gone up to Jerusalem, to be judged there concerning these before me?'"

What seems apparent is that Festus found nothing wrong in Paul from the standpoint of his Roman jurisdiction. However, being the new governor, such a request would help maintain a friendly relationship with those now under him.

As such, and in order to obtain that standing, he asked Paul if he was willing to be judged, with him in attendance for his protection as a Roman citizen, by the religious court of the Jews. For him, it was a win-win move. If Paul declined, Festus would still be shown to have tried for the sake of the Jews. If accepted, then Festus would have allowed what was unnecessary from his seat of judgment but favorable in the eyes of the leaders of his subjects.

Life application: Politicians are generally people who are looking out for themselves. They desire power, recognition, and the ability to enrich themselves. The larger a city becomes, the more power and ability to influence others at higher levels they wield. For example, the mayor of Chicago will have more power and political influence than the mayor of a city of twelve hundred people.

As cities increase in size, the electorate generally tends to become more liberal. This means the people are less godly, more inwardly focused, and their attitudes about political issues increasingly do not align with Christian values.

For this reason, biblical Christianity becomes less and less acceptable to those in power. They do not want to be reminded of their sinful ways. Instead, they replace God with corruption and wickedness. However, these local leaders will have more sway with the next level of authority, such as the governor. Therefore, his policies will naturally align with those who can keep him in power.

From there, the governors have sway with the federal authorities and the corruption continues to expand. The ones to suffer the consequences of this are those whose ideas and goals do not match those of the people in power. Eventually, true Christians begin to be considered the enemy within. One can see this in almost any country on earth where there is a sizeable Christian population.

Their calls for holiness and right living stand at odds with the extreme levels of corruption and perversion that continue to be brought forth. Soon, there is a dividing wall between the two. Thus, the two ideologies are completely at odds. Those with the power will eventually act to remove this supposed infection from their site.

It is a pattern that has repeatedly occurred in the nations of the world, and it is one that is coming to a head throughout the world today. Christians must be willing to stand on their values and speak out, even if it means trouble lies ahead. Paul did this, and many faithful throughout the ages have done so as well.

Evaluate yourself. Strengthen yourself. Be ready to stand up for what is right, even if it will cost you greatly. The Lord will return a great blessing upon you when you stand before Him.

*Wonderful Lord God, Your way is right and just and holy. Help us to stand up for it in this world of ever-increasing wickedness. May our lives and actions be found pleasing in Your sight as we face perversion and corruption head-on. Strengthen us for this battle, O God. Amen.*

**So Paul said, “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. Acts 25:10**

The words are more literally rendered, “And Paul said, ‘I am, having stood upon the bema of Caesar, where I should be judged. I harmed Jews nothing, as you also know very well’ (CG).

In the previous verse, Festus asked Paul if he was willing to go up to Jerusalem to be tried. In response, Paul speaks firmly and directly: “And Paul said, ‘I am, having stood upon the bema of Caesar.’”

The verb is a perfect participle, active. In essence, “I have stood and continue to stand upon the bema of Caesar.” As such, it is not surprising that Paul declined the invitation to be tried in Jerusalem. He had nothing to gain, and it was evident that neither Rome nor Jerusalem had any basis for a conviction against him.

Therefore, it was to this that he made his appeal. He was brought to a Roman setting for alleged crimes against Rome. The religious crimes of which he was charged went unproven, and so to send him back to Jerusalem would be a mockery of his time spent under Roman imprisonment. Because of where he was brought and where he continued to stand, he next notes it is “where I should be judged.”

Barnes paraphrases Paul’s thoughts by saying, “I am a Roman citizen. I have a right to justice. I am under no obligation to put myself again in the hands of the Jews. I have a right to a fair and impartial trial; and I claim the protection and privileges which all Roman citizens have before their tribunals - the right of a fair and just trial.”

This, then, is almost a rebuke to Festus for leaving the justice of Rome and a Roman citizen in the hands of those who had failed to make a case against him, despite many weighty accusations which were obviously false. Regardless of Festus being in

attendance in Jerusalem or not, the trial would be a travesty. With that understood, and to make the point perfectly clear, he next says, “I harmed Jews nothing, as you also know very well.”

Although the tone of his voice is lacking, we can guess that the words were courteously stated while still being cutting in their meaning. The “you also” indicates quite clearly that Paul feels Festus has overlooked his rights as a Roman to accommodate those he will have to face during his tenure as governor. The stand is inappropriate, and Paul reminds him of this.

Paul also uses a word, *kallion*, found only here in Scripture. It means “very well.” Paul not only says “you also,” but he adds in this direct and bold statement that what Festus was presented, he was completely aware of it, despite not acting on what he knew.

Life application: When Jesus was tried, John records a part of His time before the leaders of Israel –

“The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.

<sup>20</sup> Jesus answered him, ‘I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. <sup>21</sup> Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.’

<sup>22</sup> And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, ‘Do You answer the high priest like that?’

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?’” John 18:19-23

Jesus’ words were truthful and were stated in a way that told the high priest that what He had previously spoken could be verified by others. If this made the high priest look biased in his judgment and incomplete in his actions that led to Jesus’ arrest, that was his problem. Jesus said nothing evil or malicious.

This is something we must consider in our own speaking with others. People may not like how we respond to them, but as long as our words are truthful, any offense taken by those who hear us is their problem. Jesus and Paul were brought forth for trial. In Jesus’ case, it was to bring false charges against him to eliminate him.



In a similar manner, the Jews falsely accused Paul. The previous trial had demonstrated that. However, Festus' actions only exacerbated the problem by not acknowledging Paul's innocence and immediately calling forth a not-guilty verdict.

Therefore, they both stated what was true concerning the trials in which they stood. Should you find yourself accused of wrongdoing, if you are innocent, be sure to speak out firmly about what the situation is. If the law is on your side and the judge is fair, you will suffer no harm from your words. However, if the trial is unfair, it will not make any difference from the start.

Either way, saying what is true and standing upon the truth is always the best option in such matters.

*O God, it seems more likely each day that those who are willing to boldly proclaim the truth concerning Jesus will face increased persecution. The world has quickly taken a stand against the message of sin, our need for redemption, and that it is only found in Jesus. Instead, people want to work out wickedness without being bothered by the thought of facing judgment for their actions. Therefore, they increasingly want to do away with the messengers who proclaim this. And so, O God, give us boldness to stand firm on this truth no matter what the consequences. Amen.*

**“For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.” Acts 25:11**

Paul just corrected Festus's request by noting that he stood before Caesar's judgment, where his judgment should take place. He also noted that he had done no wrong to the Jews. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for him to be sent to a judgment by the Jews. Continuing his words, he next says, “For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death.”

Better translated, he ties the two thoughts together, “For, indeed, if I am an offender and have committed anything deserving of death.” It may be that he was an offender. That was the point of a trial. But the trial for such a thing did not belong to the Jews whom he had not wronged. Instead, Paul understood that if he had done something wrong within the confines of Roman law, that he would be judged and punished according to that law. If found an offender, he says, “I do not object to dying.”

A citizen of Rome bore the responsibility of being Roman. They were to live according to the laws of Rome and uphold the principles, values, laws, and statutes of Roman society. Those who offended were to be charged and punished in the manner set forth by the laws of Rome. That included the death penalty. He would comply with the law, even if found guilty of a capital crime. However, he next says, “but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me.”

Paul’s words are more succinct, “if, however, there be none of which these accuse me.” The charges were made by the Jews. He has demonstrated that their case has no merit because he did nothing that violated Roman law. But even if he did, they had no authority over such things.

He was in the court of Rome. Therefore, it was completely unnecessary and unlawful to send him outside of that court for a trial. Thus, asking him to go to Jerusalem was a pointless venture. Therefore, he notes, “no one can deliver me to them.”

The meaning of this is “no one can legally deliver me to them.” Festus could have done so, but it would have been a violation of Paul’s rights. If discovered, Festus would have to face the consequences of such a bold violation of Roman law. It is something he would not even consider.

With this stated, Paul could have stopped and waited for a response from Festus, which certainly would have been after a consultation with his lawyer, a note of feigned apology to Paul’s accusers, and then a “You are free to go” to Paul.

However, Paul still had the words of Jesus from Acts 23:11 in his ears, and he probably felt sure that by his next words, they would come to pass. And so, without waiting for Festus to give his response, he used his rights as a Roman citizen and said, “I appeal to Caesar.”

This appeal, stated before the court with any witnesses in attendance, could not be denied. Making this appeal meant that Jesus’ words would now come to pass. Paul would be sent to Rome.

As a side note, this verse is one the Bible’s surest proofs that the death penalty of the Old Testament was never set aside in the New. Paul, the apostle of our church-age doctrine, acknowledges that Rome had a right to execute people and that there was nothing contrary to Christian ethics that he could or would appeal to. If there were, it

would be in one of his epistles. It is not. Paul takes it as the norm that the death penalty was acceptable and expected for crimes as determined by the government.

Life application: It is always good to either know the law or have someone who knows the law represent you concerning legal matters. The way the laws of most nations are structured, one must tread carefully in such things.

Even when someone has not committed an infraction and also has proper representation, those who sit in judgment are often completely flawed in their thinking. Judges are elected or appointed by politicians. Therefore, there is usually already a bias involved in how they will judge.

Because politics is involved, some of the least astute people are appointed, all the way up to the highest courts in the land. In the United States, a recent appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court could not provide a definition for what a woman is. This demonstrates either an amazingly flawed social and political bias or a level of mental retardation never before seen in this court. And yet, because of her gender, race, and political persuasion, she was appointed to this highest court in the land.

In other words, just because you have done nothing wrong, it does not mean that you will not be found guilty of a crime you did not commit. In such an instance, you may then appeal your sentence to a higher court. If they carry the same bias as the lower court, which is commonly the case, you may then appeal to the highest court in the land.

As long as there are a sufficient number of truly impartial judges, you may have a chance of being exonerated. If not, and it is becoming more likely by the day, you may find yourself punished. As Christians are the most recent societal punching bags to be targeted, this can be expected more and more as the future unfolds. Be prepared for such a time.

*Lord God, we long for the day You come for Your people. It is an unfair world, and the wickedness in it is increasing daily. We know You will judge all wrongdoing, but until that day, be with Your people as we face the onslaught of increasingly hostile governments against those who hold fast to Your word. Amen.*

**“Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, ‘You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!’” Acts 25:12**

In the previous verse, Paul had appealed to Caesar as was his right as a Roman citizen. With that, it next says, “Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, ‘You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!’”

Festus had a body of legal counselors, just as anyone in such a position today would have. It would be unwise to render any decision without going through them because they were schooled in the law.

To bypass them in a legal matter would show incompetence, especially if the ruling turned out badly later. After the legal counsel explained the law, Festus then rendered his decision to Paul – to Rome, he would go, and to Caesar, he would be brought.

Some translations state his words as an acknowledgment, “You have appealed.” Others, as a sarcastic question, translate it as, “Have you appealed?” The first is probably correct because the words are said after the consultation with his council, not before.

If he were being a wise guy, he would have first asked it sarcastically and then conferred with his council. But without having been in the room, it is impossible to say for sure. Either way, Festus would have probably been more than happy to have this out of his hands. The Jews could not say that they had a new governor who wasn't willing to hear them, and Paul couldn't make a complaint as a citizen of Rome about Festus's faulty care for his rights.

Life application: In the book of Proverbs, it says –

“Where *there is* no counsel, the people fall;  
But in the multitude of counselors *there is* safety.” Proverbs 11:14

It is unwise to make decisions without being properly informed on a matter. This is why there are lawyers and legal advice. It doesn't matter if it is an issue concerning estates, being in an accident, or being charged with a crime, there are lawyers to meet these and many other needs.

But there is also counsel for the more weighty and important matters of life as well, meaning the matters concerning one's relationship with his Creator. In Proverbs, and while speaking of attaining wisdom, it says this about that –

“A wise *man* will hear and increase learning,  
And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel.” Proverbs 1:5

Overall, the Bible is a book of wisdom. It is also a book that contains books of wisdom within it, such as Proverbs. Taking time to read the Bible, think about what it says, and even going into deeper personal studies demonstrates wisdom.

Along with that, attending studies with someone who is properly trained in theology and sound biblical hermeneutics is important as well. Today, one doesn't even need to drive across town to do so. You can watch a study a day on YouTube. You can listen to a podcast while jogging. You can have a study going while driving to work. Such avenues of learning demonstrate that you are being wise with your time.

To not seek out your Creator and to not try to have a proper relationship with God is unwise. Don't be unwise. For best happy in the afterlife, read and study your Bible!

*Lord God, forgive us for those times where we get distracted in life and misdirected from what is important. Help us now and always to be responsible with our time and to carefully pursue a sound relationship with You. Thank You for Your precious word. With it, we can seek its truths in order to gain a heart of wisdom. Amen.*

**And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus.**

Acts 25:13

A more literal rendering is, "And some days having passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice came down to Caesarea, having saluted Festus" (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul was told that because he had appealed to Caesar, to Caesar he would go. Now, the narrative continues with, "And some days having passed."

While Paul was awaiting his transfer to Rome, an indeterminate amount of time elapsed. However, during that time, the narrative introduces two people, "Agrippa the king and Bernice."

Lengthy commentaries on these two abound if you want to learn more about them. In short, however, Agrippa is Herod Agrippa, the son of Herod Agrippa I. He was a brother of Drusilla, the wife of Felix, seen in Acts 24:24. The Pulpit Commentary lists some of the facts about him and Bernice –

"He was only seventeen at his father's death, and so not considered by Claudius a safe person to entrust his father's large dominions to. But he gave him Chalets, and afterwards, in exchange for it, other dominions. ... He was the last of the Herods, and

reigned above fifty years. Bernice was his sister, but was thought to be living in an incestuous intercourse with him. She had been the wife of her uncle Herod, Prince of Chalets; and on his death lived with her brother. She then for a while became the wife of Polemo, King of Cicilia, but soon returned to Herod Agrippa. She afterwards became the mistress of Vespasian and of Titus in succession (Alford).”

Of these two, it says they “came down to Caesarea, having saluted Festus.” This would be a formal introduction to the new procurator. If they were already acquainted, it would be a congratulatory visit to his appointment. Either way, they have come to acknowledge his being placed in his role as the new governor.

Life application: One can see the same formalities today when dignitaries come to the office or residence of a newly appointed or elected official. Luke carefully records these events, describing what occurred when it is relevant to the ongoing narrative.

The visit of these two, and their interactions with Paul, will be carefully noted and detailed. The Lord is setting out His word so that we can see how the message of the gospel went forth and what were some of the workings that made it possible.

As you read the Bible, think about what is presented and why. We are being given insights into how the transfer from the Jewish-led to Gentile-led church took place, why it was so effective, and what will occur, even into the future as the words of Paul’s epistles are fulfilled.

Look at the minute details and also look at the wider picture. A beautiful panorama of history is taking place before our eyes as we read and contemplate this precious word.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for Your word, which includes us in the process of what occurred in the past so that we can know how we got to where we are now as Christianity spread in Israel and then beyond, even to the furthest extents of the world. We can see Your guiding hand in all of it. Hallelujah! We are seeing Your word fulfilled, even before our eyes. Amen.*

**When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king, saying: “There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix, Acts 25:14**

In the previous verse, it noted that Agrippa, the king, and Bernice came down to Caesarea to greet Festus. That continues now with, “When they had been there many days.”

The term “many days” is a comparative term. The Pulpit Commentary says, “The number indicated by the comparative degree, πλείων, depends upon what it is compared with. Here, it means more days than was necessary for fulfilling the purpose of their visit, which was to salute Festus.”

It may be that they were enjoying the time by the ocean, had found things that interested them, or they may have been avoiding going back to their regular lives for some reason. Luke doesn’t explain why they continued, nor does he tell what the number of days was. However, with any office dealings and other formalities complete, it was an opportune time to then enter into his talk about Paul. Therefore, it next says, “Festus laid Paul’s case before the king.”

Festus probably thought that Agrippa, being a Jew, would be interested in the case. Further, he might have thought the king may be able to shed some light on Paul’s belief and what course of action should be taken with him.

The words “laid” and “before” are separated by the NKJV, but in the Greek, it is a single word, *anatithémi*. That comes from *ana* and *tithémi* – “to set before.” It is used only one other time, in Galatians 2:2, where Paul said he “communicated to [*anatithémi*: literally “set before”] the apostles the gospel which he preached among the Gentiles. Of Festus’s words, he was “saying: ‘There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix.’”

Festus is careful to note this fact. He had assumed charge of Paul from another, and he desired to ensure that the case was handled properly and in an expeditious manner.

Life application: Paul had a particular calling concerning the gospel. He faithfully carried out his duties before the Lord. Eventually, he went to those in Jerusalem and laid before the leaders what he communicated to the Gentiles. They accepted his presentation of the execution of his duties.

One of the main points of Paul’s apostleship was that the law of Moses was fulfilled in the coming of Christ. A New Covenant was introduced, which superseded the Old, rendering the Old obsolete. This message went forth to the Gentiles who were never under the law. In accepting the good news of Jesus, they were sealed with the Spirit and saved.

Judaizers, however, came in and tried to infect the believers by insisting that the Gentiles had to adhere to the Law of Moses to be saved. This is not what Paul laid before those in

Jerusalem, and it is not what Jesus had instructed Paul to communicate. Rather, we are saved by grace through faith. Law observance has no part in the equation.

And yet, to this day, the same wicked spirit of the Judaizers continues in the world. Do not budge on grace. Do not mar grace. And do not diminish the glory of the cross of Christ by trying to earn what is provided freely by God through the giving of His Son.

Trust that Jesus has paid the debt and that nothing more is needed. This is what gives God the greatest glory. Our pitiful attempts to merit His favor apart from the cross are like a slap in His face. Yield to the notion that Jesus is fully sufficient to save you and keep saving you. All glory to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

*Yes Lord God! We give You glory and honor and praise for what You have done for us. We receive the completed work of Jesus, accepting by faith that what He has done is fully sufficient to save us and to keep us saved forever. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**“about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him. Acts 25:15**

In the previous verse, Festus laid Paul’s case before Agrippa the king, noting that Paul had been left by Felix. He continues the thought now, saying, “about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me.”

The words of the verse are rather clear. The entire body of the leaders of the Jews, both chief priests and elders, had a united voice against Paul. Even if they couldn’t agree on sound theology, such as their arguments concerning the resurrection of the dead, they could all agree that Paul was an enemy of their way of life. He was telling the Gentiles that they were on the same level with God as the Jews if they were in Christ.

Further, anyone not in Christ stood condemned before God. To them, this was intolerable, and it was worthy of being excommunicated from the temple and the nation. And more, in their eyes, it was worthy of death. Therefore, Festus next says, “when I was in Jerusalem.”

As Festus had just become governor, and as he had made one trip to Jerusalem, what was presented to him must have been of the highest importance to the Jews. It wasn’t like the topic was something that could wait until they had established a good working relationship.



Rather, right from the moment of his being introduced to them, they brought the issue of Paul up as an absolutely important diplomatic matter. And the issue was that they were “asking for a judgment against him.”

The Greek word is *dike*. It speaks of a judicial hearing, an execution of a sentence, punishment, justice, etc. It is only found elsewhere in Acts 28:4, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, and Jude 1:7. Some older texts actually have a stronger word in the Greek, *katadikazo*, a word implying “condemnation.”

Either way, the Jews were intent on getting their hands on Paul, and they did this through the pretext of a trial leading to judgment. However, their true intentions were to have him killed during the passage to or from Jerusalem.

Life application: The Jews wanted Paul dead. Extrabiblical writings reveal that Paul and most of the apostles were eventually martyred for their faith. The fact is, however, that we are all going to die. And that could happen at any moment.

We have no control over stopping that aspect of our existence. However, we can control what we do while we are alive. Each of us must work out our own salvation. This doesn't mean working out getting saved or remaining saved. Rather, it means working out what we will do with the salvation we received based on faith in Jesus.

The older one gets, the more he realizes how short this life really is. A young person will look at old people and think, “Wow, they are really old.” An old person will look at a young person and think, “It was only moments ago when I was like that.” Because of this, we should consider our days and be willing to use them wisely, to the glory of God.

This is especially so because of what was already noted. We have no idea when our day of death will come. Therefore, let us be about the business of the Lord while we can. It should not be our attitude to say, “I will start living for the Lord tomorrow!” Rather, we should say, “I will live for the Lord today!”

Demonstrate the wisdom that the Bible proclaims and live out your days, starting right now, for the sake of the Lord. Each moment is a new moment to dedicate to Him. May it be so in our lives!

*Lord God Almighty, help us to be wise and discerning about the lives we lead. May we forget what is past, put what we cannot change behind us, and go forward with a new*

*and right attitude from moment to moment, honoring You and bringing glory to You all our days. Amen.*

**“To them I answered, ‘It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.’ Acts 25:16**

Although a tad clunky, a more literal rendering is, “To whom I answered, ‘That it is not Romans’ custom to grant any man to destruction before that the accused may have the accusers to face, and he may receive place of defense concerning the accusation’” (CG).

In the previous verses, Festus explained Paul’s position to king Agrippa and noted that the Jews were asking for a judgment against him. With that, it next says, “To whom I answered.”

It is Festus’s answer to the Jews that he is now explaining to Agrippa. His words to them were, “That it is not Romans’ custom to grant any man to destruction.”

The words “to destruction” are not found in some manuscripts. Despite this, the Jews had asked for a trial and a sentence based on their charges. If granted, it would have led to that being the sentence. However, Roman custom did not simply allow its citizens to be handed over willy-nilly, especially “before that the accused may have the accusers to face.”

Paul had already been tried before Felix, but no sentence was given. Instead, he punted and had Paul remain incarcerated under his authority until his departure. The Jews now wanted Paul charged based on their same accusations as if the charges were valid against him.

Instead, Festus noted to them that there would need to be a trial where his accusers came and presented to his face what their claim against Paul was, “and he may receive place of defense concerning the accusation.”

Once their charges had been presented to his face, Paul could then respond to each charge individually or collectively. Either way, he was allowed under Roman law to have a trial that any citizen of Rome was allowed to have.

In his words, Festus clearly noted to the king the obligation of his office, demonstrating that he was bound to Roman law and that his judgment was not because of any bias

against the Jews. If Agrippa were inclined to the ruling decision of the leaders of Israel, it could cause tension between the two unless he understood that Festus's hands were bound under the fair principles of Roman justice.

It seems that this comment is less one of arrogance or Roman superiority than one of attempting to show harmony between his office and his rulings over the Jewish people under his jurisdiction.

It is of note that the same verb translated as "to grant" was used by Paul in verse 25:11, which was *after* the meeting with the leaders of Israel and Paul in Caesarea. Festus uses the same term now as if it were his idea all along to be Paul's defender as a citizen of Rome. He uses the word as if it were spoken to the Jews *before* the meeting!

Paul's words were convincing enough, and his appeal to Caesar was valid enough, to justify where he was. The advice of Festus's council supported Paul's words, and so he, in turn, now uses them before Agrippa. Paul has proven his verbal and analytical prowess concerning the matter.

Life application: The Greek word, noted above as "to grant," means "to show favor." In other words, it is more than simply delivering Paul to the Jews. Rather, it is doing so as a grant. In the case of the law, Festus couldn't just grant a favor without a legal reason behind his actions.

This is how it should be anywhere. Laws are put in place to keep the playing field level. Each person who is authorized to have those laws apply to him has a right to appeal to that law. Unfortunately, many people don't know what the law states in a particular matter and their rights are trampled.

This happens with unjust prosecutors and judges all the time. They grant things that they should not grant. They also withhold charges against people they are aligned with. This is the fallen world in which we live. The safest course of action against this is to have proper legal representation, but that is not always a guarantee.

Having said that, when we stand before Jesus, our judgment will be absolutely fair in all ways. There will be no underhanded dealings, and there will be no favoritism. Everything will be perfectly just. Knowing this, let us live for the Lord in a manner that will always be honoring Him and demonstrating faith through the things we do. In this, our judgment will be a positive one.

*Lord God, we know that when we stand before You for judgment, things will be handled fairly and in a just manner. Thank You that we will be treated with the favor of Jesus because we are now in Christ. The punishment for our failures came at the cross. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord and for what He has done for us. Amen.*

**“Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in. Acts 25:17**

The Greek more literally says, “Therefore, they, having come together, having made no delay, the next, having sat on the bema, I commanded the man to be brought” (CG).

Festus had just told Agrippa that it was not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused could meet his accusers face to face so that he could answer for the charges against him. Having said that, he next says, “Therefore, they, having come together.”

That was seen in verses 25:5, 6 –

“Therefore, he said, ‘let those who have authority among you go down with *me* and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him.’

<sup>6</sup>And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea.”

From there, Festus next says to Agrippa, “having made no delay, the next, having sat on the bema, I commanded the man to be brought.” These words are exactly as recorded in the continuation of verse 25:6 –

“And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought.”

As can be seen, the words are exactly in accordance with what was recorded by Luke. The only thing not stated, and which would have been an obvious part of his formalities while in Jerusalem, is that he had spent ten days with the Jews.

Thus, immediately after his time in Jerusalem, the trial with the leaders and Paul came about. He cannot be said to have been negligent in this matter as it was, truly, the next day after his state visit. It demonstrated then, and it is showing to Agrippa now, that he intended to be a governor who was willing to listen to the complaints of the leaders of the people under him.

At the same time, it demonstrated that he was concerned about placing the rights of Roman citizens in a very high priority. The Jewish king, therefore, would understand that the priorities of Festus were exactly what they should be as a governor of Rome who was placed over a district of the empire.

Life application: After WWII, MacArthur was placed in a leadership position over the nation of Japan. His time there lasted from 1945 to 1952. His word was considered as the absolute authority concerning what would take place.

At the same time, he demonstrated concern for both the Japanese and for the forces assigned under his command. It was a balancing act that proved highly successful. The nation of Japan was brought out of its former state and into a thriving modern society.

However, this time of ruling will be outshined by that of the coming millennial reign of Christ. Hints of that time are found throughout the Old Testament prophets, and they clearly indicate that this rule will go forth from Jerusalem in the land of Israel with the people of Israel as chief among the nations. For example –

“The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> Now it shall come to pass in the latter days

*That* the mountain of the LORD’s house

Shall be established on the top of the mountains,

And shall be exalted above the hills;

And all nations shall flow to it.

<sup>3</sup> Many people shall come and say,

‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

To the house of the God of Jacob;

He will teach us His ways,

And we shall walk in His paths.’

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,

And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup> He shall judge between the nations,

And rebuke many people;

They shall beat their swords into plowshares,

And their spears into pruning hooks;

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,

Neither shall they learn war anymore.” Isaiah 2:1-4

This sentiment is repeated in Micah 4:1-3. One must ask, “What is the point of recording such detail throughout the prophets unless it is actually going to happen?” Where is the glory in failed prophecies, or prophecies that are transferred from one people group to another without the covenant between the first two parties being fulfilled and set aside as promised?

If you believe that the church has replaced Israel in God’s redemptive plans, you have accepted a premise that says God cannot be trusted to complete what He has started, or that God has changed what He began in order to accommodate a fluctuating narrative that overlooks direct and purposeful promises to a particular group of people.

If He is willing to do that to Israel, how can we be sure He will not do that to the church as well? Such a ridiculous notion is incomprehensible when thought through. Be sound in your thinking by rejecting replacement theology. God has not rejected Israel. The word even explicitly says that in Romans 11.

Every promise made to Israel the nation will come about, exactly as the word says. The Gentiles have been graciously grafted into God’s redemptive workings. They have not replaced Israel. Rather, they have become a part of the commonwealth of Israel. Read and believe God’s word. In this, you are demonstrating faith in Him. His word is an expression of who He is.

*Lord God, thank You for Your faithfulness to Your people. How good and wonderful it is to know that even if we walk away from You, You will never abandon us. We are prone to wander, but You remain faithful even as we do. Thank You, O God, for Your steadfastness in remaining faithful to those You have covenanted with! Hallelujah and amen.*

**“When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, Acts 25:18**

The verbs need to be tweaked. More literally, it reads, “Concerning whom, having stood up, the accusers were bringing no charge which I was thinking” (CG).

Festus, still telling Agrippa what took place with Paul, just noted that on the next day, after Paul’s accusers had come to Caesarea, he convened a trial. Now, he notes, “Concerning whom.”

This is speaking of Paul, who was noted as “the man” of the previous verse. The case against Paul is being presented with the charges against him now being spoken forth. Next, it notes concerning those bringing the charges, “having stood up.”

It is a formal court procedure where the ones to speak stand to address the court. All others remain seated until called to speak. Of those standing up, Festus next says, “the accusers were bringing no charge which I was thinking.”

Based on the urgency of the Jew's complaints, he figured he had a real troublemaker or a capital offender on his hands. However, expecting accusations of being an agitator or someone who had committed a horrendous crime, he was left pondering what was so serious.

Because of this, it seems that his words are possibly asking, “Maybe you can shed some light on this King Agrippa.” Festus was stumped about how to handle such charges because they had nothing to do with Roman law. This became evident when Paul appealed to Caesar. Paul stood in Caesar’s court, as he said, “where I ought to be judged.”

Life application: Paul notes that those of the church must all appear before the Bema seat of Christ. We will all be judged for what we have done. There is only one thing that will be a source of rewards for us: things done in faith.

Our walk began in faith, believing that God sent Jesus to restore us to Himself. We didn’t see Jesus, we weren’t there at the resurrection, and we didn’t see Him ascend. Rather, we took those things on faith, along with everything else that we hold sacred to our walk with the Lord.

For example, we have the word of God, but we must believe that what it contains is truth. If we don’t have faith in the initial creation account as is recorded in Genesis, then we lack faith in God’s word. If we teach a long-term creation, something not in accord with the word, we are demonstrating that we do not trust the biblical narrative. Instead, we are believing something other than what it says, evolution, for example.

And yet, there is no evidence to support the evolutionary model. Thus, we are placing our faith in evolution above our faith in God’s word. For this, we will lose rewards. If we do something nice for another, but it is not done in faith, where can there be reward in that? People who do not believe in Jesus do nice things all the time, and yet they will receive no reward for their actions.

Everything comes down to faith. Be people of faith and live your life in that state. What you do, do with the aim and goal of pleasing God. This should start with knowing what is pleasing to Him. And that is found in His word.

Read the word, remember what it says, and apply it to your life. In this, you will be demonstrating faith. It logically follows, then, that you will receive rewards for what you have done when you stand at the bema of Christ. May it be so for you!

*Lord God, may we be willing to read Your word, remember Your word, and apply Your word to our daily walk before You. Help us to be people of faith who act in faith toward You in everything we do. We pray this to Your glory. Amen.*

**but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. Acts 25:19**

More literally, the Greek reads, “But certain questions concerning their own religion they had against him, and concerning a certain Jesus having been dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive” (CG).

In the previous verse, Festus told Agrippa that Paul’s accusers did not charge him with any of the crimes he had expected. He continues now, saying, “But certain questions concerning their own religion.”

Festus now uses the same basic word as that which Paul used in Acts 17:22. There it was *deisidaimonesteros*, and here it is *deisidaimonia*. They carry the same meaning, and each is only used one time in the Bible. It basically means a “dread of a deity.”

In essence, it refers to a religion or a superstition because of a fear of that deity. As Agrippa is a Jew, it is certain that Festus is using the term in a general sense, just as Paul did in Acts 17:22. It may not be Festus’s religion, but he acknowledges that it is Paul’s.

Some versions say “superstition” instead of “religion,” but that is not the intent. Festus was not there to insult King Agrippa but to acknowledge the religion of the Jews. It was such points of their theology that “they had against him.”

Festus was expecting some type of aggravated crime to be charged against Paul. Instead, however, they were spending their time trying to disassociate their beliefs from those of Paul. As has been seen in the past, the religion of the Jews was considered an acceptable religion under Roman rule (*religio licita*).



However, the Jews constantly attempted to separate faith in Jesus from their faith. If they could do this, it would mean that Christianity might be considered unacceptable (*religio illicita*). This would make Paul an offender against Rome. Every attempt thus far had failed, but they continued to press this angle of attack against Paul.

Their accusations were against Paul's interpretation of their religion "and concerning a certain Jesus having been dead."

The verb is a perfect participle. Festus had heard that Jesus was dead, and he had no reason to believe that wasn't true. Not accepting the premise of a resurrection, he assumed that if Jesus had died, He was still dead.

Until this point, the name "Jesus" hasn't been cited by Luke at all in the account. Despite this, it is apparent from the words of Festus that Jesus has been the subject of the entire situation. But, again, this Jesus was dead. Even Paul admitted he had died. To Festus, it was an axiom that when someone is dead, he stays dead.

Therefore, he uses the perfect participle. The results of the action continued even to the present time. On the other hand, this supposedly dead Jesus was One "whom Paul affirmed to be alive."

In this case, the verb is in the imperfect tense, which implies that despite what Festus had heard about Jesus dying, because Paul had mentioned it, he also kept insisting that He was alive. It seems that Festus is holding the entire scenario in contempt despite Paul's continued proclamation of the resurrection of Christ. The same blinders that covered the eyes of Israel's leaders also covered the eyes of this Roman governor. This agrees with the words of Paul found in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 –

"Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup> God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him."

Life application: Today, much of the world has heard about Jesus, including His death and resurrection. It is normally not an issue to speak about this with others and they already are aware of the details. "Sure, I have heard that. It's what Christians believe."

However, knowing that a Christian believes this does not mean that they accept the premise themselves. Christian/atheist debates happen at colleges and seminaries all the time. The atheists know what the Christians believe but simply deny it happened. There are people in church leadership positions and professors in Christian colleges who don't really believe the things they teach.

But this is the key and central point of the faith. It is the dividing line between who is saved and who is not saved. Paul goes into great detail concerning the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, but the initial premise, that Jesus rose from the dead, is the final part of the simple gospel.

Scripture proclaimed He would die, be buried, and resurrect. Faith in that is what saves. If these things were according to Scripture, it means that God knew the future when those things were written. Thus, He is the Creator God who transcends time.

If these things were according to Scripture, then it means that God had a plan set forth in advance. Thus, He is the Initiator of the process and the One who followed through with it each step of the way. Therefore, salvation is an act which is of the Lord alone. Because of this, it logically follows that there is one and only one way to be saved – His way.

The simple and easily ignored or dismissed claim that Jesus resurrected carries with it all of the weight and authority of the final decree of God for salvation. If you have ever wondered why such a basic and simple set of words is so greatly maligned by people, it is because, as simple as they are to understand, they are some of the most incredible words one could possibly accept.

Truly, only an act of faith that what is recorded in Scripture can bring one to accept them. As this is so, how pleasing it must be to God when we demonstrate that simple act of faith. As Christians, be people of faith. If you have believed that God could raise a man from the dead, then accepting the other words of Scripture should not be that difficult to accept as well.

*Lord God Almighty, what could we do that deserves Your salvation? The greatest achievements of man quickly fade away with time. The kindest gestures between humans are still tainted with the sin that resides within us. But to have faith that You can restore us to Yourself through the gospel of Jesus Christ is something completely beyond ourselves. In accepting the gospel, we are throwing ourselves totally at Your mercy. We*

*understand this and we believe. Thank You for the good news of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**“And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters. Acts 25:20**

A more literal translation is, “And I, being perplexed at the question concerning this, bid if he be willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these” (CG).

In the previous verse, Festus noted the dispute between the Jews and Paul. It concerned questions against him about their own religion, and about Jesus who had died but whom Paul affirmed to be alive. Because of these things, Festus continues, saying, “And I, being perplexed at the question concerning this.”

Festus uses a word translated here as “being perplexed,” *aporeó*, which means “at wit’s end,” or “at a complete loss.” There was more than doubt concerning the things he had heard. Rather, he simply didn't understand how to proceed.

This gives a reason for his now asking Agrippa, who was a Jew, to give insights on the matter and even maybe help in what judgment should be rendered. As for his judging the matter during the court session, because of his lack of ability to understand what the sides were arguing over, Festus “bid if he be willing to go to Jerusalem.”

Paul stood in Caesar’s court. That dealt with matters of Roman law and infractions committed under it. If nothing else, Festus knew that these disputes between Paul and the Jews had nothing to do with his jurisdiction.

Or, at best, the dispute may ultimately be judged in a Roman court, but only after the lesser issues between the parties were hammered out. Because of this, there might be a resolution to some of the issues in Jerusalem. If so, he asked if Paul was willing to go there “and there be judged concerning these.”

Before seeking Agrippa, which comes later, but also before Paul is sent to Rome, Festus made the suggestion of going to Jerusalem to have the matter revealed through a trial.

Some scholars see this as a statement of doubt as to Paul’s innocence. Others see it as a pretext Festus used based on verse 9, where it said that he wanted to do the Jews a favor. As it is impossible to know his true intentions, we can only speculate as to what his motives were. What seems likely is that he simply wanted to do the Jews a favor

while, at the same time, he wanted to get a more competent court setting to explain just what the Jews felt Paul had done wrong.

Life application: There are many things in Scripture that are uncertain, such as the motivation of Festus for asking Paul to go to Jerusalem. It is certain that he had no idea what to do about the dispute between the two parties. But his ultimate motivation for asking for a trial in Jerusalem cannot be known.

As such, speculation is necessary to comment further. However, when speculating, it is appropriate to identify it as such. Pastors will often make claims from the pulpit about things that simply cannot be known, but they state them without such qualifiers.

The problem with this is that the congregants probably have no idea that the pastor is speculating. From there, if they were awake and paying attention during the sermon, they will always think that what they heard is something right out of the Bible. This should not be.

Anytime a teacher or preacher is speculating, he should state it explicitly – or use words such as might have, may, etc., – to show that he is guessing about what he is saying. Further, it is never inappropriate to ask a pastor, preacher, or teacher to explain his words. He is there to teach. If he is teaching, he is also to be held accountable for his words if they do not align with Scripture.

At the same time, there is no need to be arrogant or overly wordy when asking to clarify what has been stated. Putting a teacher on the spot in an embarrassing manner is simply inappropriate. Have tact when asking for clarification.

*Lord God, help us to be sound in our doctrine and questioning of the things we hear concerning Your word. If we hear something that seems like it needs further clarification, may we use tact and courtesy as we dig to find a resolution to our questions. Help us in this so that we will be rightly instructed in Your word. Amen.*

**“But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar.” Acts 25:21**

In the previous verse, Festus noted that he had asked Paul whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem to be judged concerning the matters he was charged with. Festus now tells Agrippa, “But when Paul appealed to be reserved.”

The words “to be reserved” refer to Paul’s desire to be judged in Rome instead of Jerusalem. It was Paul’s appeal, and it was his right to so appeal. Because of this, the order was given by Festus (after checking with his counsel) to have him kept until that request could be effected. As for Paul’s appeal, it was “for the decision of Augustus.”

The words translated as “of Augustus” are *tou Sebastou* (τοῦ Σεβαστοῦ), literally, “the august.” Thus, it is a translation of the name Augustus. It is not a proper noun, but rather the title of the emperors of Rome. Augustus here is Nero. As a point of history, and which pertains directly to one of our 12 calendar months, Charles Ellicott explains the name Augustus –

“The title is the Greek equivalent, as seen in the name Sebaste (= Augusta) given to Samaria, for the epithet which, like our “his majesty,” had become a kind of official title of the Roman emperor. It had first been given by the Senate to Octavianus (Sueton. Aug. c. 7), and was adopted by his successors. As connected with ‘augur,’ it had originally, like Sebastos, a religious connotation. The month of August, dedicated to the first emperor as July had been dedicated to Julius, and the names of Augsburg and Sebastopol, are interesting as perpetuating its memory.”

Concerning Festus’s response to Paul’s appeal, he next tells Agrippa, “I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar.”

After consulting with his legal counsel, Festus determined that Paul was to go to Rome. He had exercised his legal right to be presented to Caesar. Therefore, he could not be sent to the leaders in Jerusalem without violating his rights as a Roman citizen.

As for the word translated as “decision,” it is *diagnósis*. It is a noun that is the same as our medical term. It is used only here in the New Testament. It means “judicial examination” or “decision.” It is a thorough examination, just as a doctor would do today.

Life application: Learning the etymological roots of our words today can actually help open up the Bible in wonderful ways. It can also help us understand our own language and why it is the way it is.

One good practice is to learn what the root of particular names is. For example, you might meet someone named Shoshanna. If you know that it is derived from the Hebrew word of the same spelling and that it means Lily, you now have an opportunity to engage them about Jesus –

“Shoshanna, what a beautiful name. Do you know what it means?”

“No.”

“It means Lily. It is a Hebrew word found in the Bible, such as in the love poem The Song of Songs.”

“Really, I didn’t know that! Wow! How did you know that?”

From there, you can then go on to tell this precious Lily about Jesus. You might be surprised at how many names in our language are derived from Hebrew and Greek words. Keep this in mind and try to remember these things. It is a marvelous way of starting a conversation that may change the direction of someone’s life.

*Lord God, thank You for Your wonderful word that is given to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus. Help us to use it in a manner that will bring glory to You by sharing its wonderful details with others. May we be attentive to this all the days of our lives. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I also would like to hear the man myself.”**

**“Tomorrow,” he said, “you shall hear him.” Acts 25:22**

A more literal translation is, “And Agrippa to Festus, ‘I was desiring also to hear the man.’ ‘Tomorrow,’ he says, ‘you shall hear him.’”

In the previous verse, Festus noted that Paul had appealed to Caesar. Therefore, he commanded that Paul be kept till he could be sent. Having said that, it next says, “And Agrippa to Festus.”

Luke leaves a verb out, making it seem as if the conversation is occurring right in front of the reader. Agrippa responds to Festus with the words, “I was desiring also to hear the man.”

The verb is imperfect indicative. Thus, it means that he had already wanted to hear Paul. His desire wasn’t formed at the time of this meeting. The Berean Literal Bible gives a good sense of the exchange, inserting the word “said” in italics, “Then Agrippa *said* to Festus, ‘I have been wanting also to hear the man myself.’”

Because Agrippa was a Jew, and because he knew more than what Festus would have known, and also because he had certainly heard about Jesus and the faith that had stemmed from Him, his curiosity piqued. He was surely excited to be able to speak to one of the known apostles of the faith.

As such, speaking to Paul would be a fantastic opportunity to spend at least a portion of his time finding out what the things he had heard about Jesus meant. In response, Festus obliges the king, granting him his desired audience. As it says, “‘Tomorrow,’ he says, ‘you shall hear him.’”

Life application: Even though Paul was not with Jesus during His early ministry, the words of the Lord to the apostles still apply to Paul. In Matthew 10, Jesus said –

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. <sup>17</sup> But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. <sup>18</sup> You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; <sup>20</sup> for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”

This is exactly what is occurring now. Paul has been delivered up to councils. He has been mistreated in the synagogues and by Israel’s leaders. He has been brought before governors, and now he is to be presented before a king. He is certainly being used as a testimony before Gentiles. During these events, we can be sure that the Spirit of the Father was with him and speaking in him.

Therefore, when we read Acts, we are reading things that were inspired by God. We can be certain that because of Luke’s careful attention to the details of his writings we have just what God wants us to know.

But remember to be careful to take Acts in its proper context. It is a descriptive account of what occurred. We are not being given any prescriptions to follow. Paul’s letters, which stem from his knowledge and life experiences, are given for our doctrine. Taking the Bible in the proper context will keep us from many flawed doctrines.

Therefore, as you read, keep asking what is being conveyed, to whom are the words directed, what is the dispensation in which it is occurring or prophesied to occur, and so

forth. In maintaining the proper context, you will be much sounder in your handling of Scripture.

Handle the Bible carefully and responsibly. It is a treasure for us if we do so. It can be a great harm to our doctrine and to others if we fail to do so. Remember the context as you read.

*Lord God, we know that we are saved by grace through faith. But we have a walk that must occur after that day. If we don't properly pursue Your word, our walk will not be in accord with Your will for us. So, help us in this, O God. Be with us as we study and consider Your wonderful word. Amen.*

**So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in. Acts 25:23**

In the previous verse, Agrippa said that he would like to hear Paul. Having said that, Festus responded that the king would hear him the next day. With that remembered, it now says, "So the next day."

Just as promised, Festus had the meeting prepared accordingly. He was careful to discharge his duties and to do so with a touch of panache. That is evident in the next words, "when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp."

It is a word found only here in Scripture, *phantasia*. It signifies pomp, imagination, outward appearance, etc. It is where we get our word fantasy from. The Pulpit Commentary notes, "It is of frequent use among medical writers for the outward appearance of diseases." It comes from *phantazó*, to cause to appear, make visible, etc. That is also only used once, in Hebrews 12:21, concerning the sight which Moses saw at Mount Sinai.

There was pageantry and showiness given to welcome the king and his wife as they "had entered the auditorium."

The word translated as auditorium is also used only here, *akroatérion*. It indicates the courtroom for hearing cases. As for the display in this hall, one can almost hear musicians playing as they do today with the arrival of distinguished guests. The scene would have been something Cecil B. DeMille could have studied for his next big film.



There were probably people bowing and standing by the chairs where the king and his wife would sit, ready to lend them a hand as they were then seated.

Along with their arrival also came “the commanders and the prominent men of the city.”

The word translated as commanders is the Greek word *chiliarchos*, commanders of thousands. The pomp wasn't just adorned on the bodies of the king and queen. Rather, it was also shown in the many high-level officers who were in attendance. It would be like a state visit filled with admirals and generals.

The prominent men of the city probably would have included civil officers and people of high influence such as businessmen, lawyers, etc.

Everything was arranged to elicit the sense of great honor being bestowed upon the king and his wife. However, with all of these notable people, the center of attention was actually not on any of them at all. Rather, it next says, “at Festus' command Paul was brought in.”

All of these people were gathered because the king had asked for a hearing with a prisoner. It was probably rather unexpected for some of those attending. Whatever they thought they were being called together for, they must have suddenly wondered what type of magic trick or interesting performance this prisoner could come up with to impress the visiting dignitary.

This verse shows the certain eyewitness nature of the event. It also has to be considered the highest of ironies to flow from Luke's pen. Here we have the flash and pomp of Agrippa and Bernice, Jews clinging to the things of this world, dressed in fine clothes and attended by followers of various sorts. And yet, they were bound under the yoke of the devil.

On the other hand, there stood Paul, the chained prisoner who had been freed in Christ from the world of sin. While they live lavishly, he had endured so much, suffering with the sufferings of Christ to bring a completely different type of life to the world's people. The pomp of these two is reminiscent of Luke 16:15 -

“You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

Life application: This gathering was certainly an immense chance for Paul to speak the gospel to the people of Caesarea. However, Charles Ellicott makes a most profound connection to this verse and that of Acts 12:20-23 –

“There is an almost tragic pathos in the thought, which must have been present to the mind of the historian, and perhaps, also, to that of others, that this display of the pride of state was exhibited in the very city that had witnessed the terrible chastisement of a like display in his father [Agrippa I]. The vice was inherited: the lesson had not been learnt.”

His thoughts support the idea of the self-inflicted generational curse. Too often, Christians get misled by the thought of a generational curse being laid upon themselves, as if God is somehow angry at them because of the misdeeds of their ancestors.

It is true that such misdeeds transfer from generation to generation. However, this is not something actively being brought upon people by God. Rather, such instances are passed on by parents who were unwilling to change from the sinful ways of their own parents. They then pass on the vices or abuses they learned to their own children. And the cycle continues.

Often, only with a clean break from the environment in which a person is found will there be a change in the direction of that person. In other words, in the debate of nature vs. nurture concerning how people will succeed or fail, it is nurture that leads to the seemingly incessant generational curse.

Once a person is taken out of that environment, either by chance, force, or personal choice, will he then have a possible change in direction? The new life will hopefully bring in new possibilities. The supposed curse is ended, not by God lifting His oppressive hand off the person, but by the person being removed from the oppressive hand of generational nurturing.

And of all of the changes that can occur within a person's life, the greatest is the change from being property of the devil to a saved believer in Christ. With this change, anything is possible in that new life. No wonder the devil is so intent on focusing his attention on young believers! This is a prime reason why discipleship must come quickly into the lives of those who come to Christ.

*Lord God, we thank You that, in Christ Jesus, all things are new. We can have a complete break from the lives we once lived. We can have a new direction from broken families,*

*failed societal norms, and cultural customs that are opposed to right living in Christ. May we look to the word, determine what is proper in our Christian life, and then conduct our lives according to how You direct us there. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And Festus said: “King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. Acts 25:24**

In the previous verse, the entrance of King Agrippa and Bernice was accompanied by much pomp. The audience included commanders and prominent men of the city. With that introduction, the narrative now continues directly into the words concerning Paul. Luke records, “And Festus said: ‘King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us.’”

Festus addresses Agrippa as the principal in the gathering. He then also notes all the men. He doesn’t say anything about Bernice in his address. Bengel seems to see this purposeful omission as a way of avoiding the presentation of a prisoner to a woman. That seems to stretch things. As Bernice is the wife of the king, she is implicitly included in the address to the king.

Regardless of this, however, Festus next notes, “you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me.”

The expression “the whole assembly of the Jews” includes the legal counsel, the Sanhedrin, and any others with which he had direct relations. It could even be inclusive of the entire nation, if he was told the specifics of Acts 22:22, where the whole assembly cried out for him to die.

The entire nation seemed to want Paul removed from the face of the earth. As Festus was the newly appointed governor, it was his duty to figure out what was going on and to administer justice to the nation he was appointed to lead. And yet, he was also responsible for the care of each and every Roman citizen under his authority. Therefore, he had to tread carefully in his handling of such an important matter. Understanding this, Festus next notes, “both at Jerusalem and here.”

This reveals that their petition to have him executed was not limited to his time in Jerusalem but also the meeting that was held at Caesarea. This is something that was unstated in Luke’s record of that meeting. Everywhere he went, the nation was in an

upheaval over the existence of this one man. It was a challenge that could not go unaddressed.

Therefore, he desired that the king himself hear the matter and consider what was to be done. As for the Jews, he next notes that wherever he went, they were “crying out that he was not fit to live any longer.”

There was the call for capital punishment upon a Roman citizen. This means the jurisdiction lay solely within Festus’ realm of authority. But so did the maintenance of the Jewish people. As this was true, a resolution had to be obtained, or things would only devolve over Paul’s state. This is especially true because Paul had been incarcerated for more than two years, and yet the matter before Festus continued to fester.

Life application: Festus had an obligation to secure the rights of the Roman citizens under him. This is true of leaders in America today. They are obligated to do what they can to secure the rights of citizens of the United States.

And yet, this has not been happening. US citizens have been attacked, beaten, robbed, raped, and murdered within the borders of the United States by a flood of illegal immigrants who have come across her borders. These illegals are not deported, many are simply released without a trial, and the rights of the citizens in obtaining justice are denied.

This has also been occurring in European nations. There is a global agenda to replace vast swaths of the population of these nations with people who have no rights to the benefits enjoyed by the citizens of any given nation. And yet, they are given benefits that the citizens are denied.

This is setting up the end times prophesied in the Bible. In Daniel 2, the Bible speaks of a line of kingdoms that would come upon the earth that would have control over the affairs of Israel. The fourth kingdom refers to the Roman Empire. It existed in the past, and it is being revived in our times. Daniel records this –

“And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, *that kingdom* will break in pieces and crush all the others. <sup>41</sup> Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. <sup>42</sup> And *as* the toes of the feet *were* partly of iron and partly of clay, so the

kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. <sup>43</sup>As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.” Daniel 2:40-43

The Roman Empire was formed from many people groups. They would not adhere to one another because their priorities, religions, and cultural expressions were not cohesive. Because of that, the empire could not stand. Learning from this lesson, the globalists have an agenda to destroy national sovereignty by flooding individual nations with people whose priorities are completely different than those within the nations they are coming to.

By doing this, the seed of these people will not intermingle properly. Chaos will be the inevitable result. Out of this chaos will come calamity, death, and destruction. This is the goal of the globalists. In reducing the population of producing people groups, there will be those who are more easily subjugated. Or, at least, this is the hoped-for intent.

However, the calamity coming upon the world will be greater than they can control. Isaiah prophesies that man will become as scarce as fine gold. Jesus says that if those days were not cut short, none would survive. What is happening in civilized nations of the world today is intentional, but its results will go beyond the ability of the globalists to control.

As you see your nation being destroyed by an influx of people who are not like you, it is depressing, even maddening. And yet, the Bible prophesied that it would be this way. Because of this, we know that the coming of the Lord is at hand. Despite the sadness of seeing longstanding nations destroyed, rejoice that a greater and eternal state lies ahead.

Man without Christ is hopeless. But thank God for Jesus. He provides a better hope and a new and eternal kingdom for those who await His coming.

*Heavenly Father, it is difficult to see the world devolve into the chaos produced by the rabid people who are in control. But we know that this is a part of what must occur before You come for Your people. Soon, the world will destroy itself because of its rejection of You. For those who wait for You, however, there is the prospect of eternal joy. Thank You for the hope we possess beyond this fallen, sin-filled world. Amen.*

**“But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him. Acts 25:25**

The words are better translated as, “And I, finding nothing he has done worthy of death, and he also himself having appealed to Augustus, I judged to send him” (CG).

Festus has just explained to Agrippa that the whole assembly of the Jews was in a snit over Paul and that they had petitioned him, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. However, Festus continues, saying, “And I, finding nothing he has done worthy of death.”

Depending on the source text, the verb is either a present or an aorist participle. Either way, the statement should be considered as an emphatic one, as Festus’ trial found the accuser’s case lacking. Their argument failed to sustain their charges. However, a monkey wrench was tossed into the situation, complicating things. Festus next tells Agrippa, “and he also himself having appealed to Augustus.”

As Paul had appealed to Augustus, Festus had to include a full report concerning the appeal that he made. It would make no sense for a prisoner to appeal something, claiming he was innocent, and yet he was then sent by Festus to Caesar without citing what evidence he had to support the claim.

However, Paul’s appeal was made because of where the location of the trial would be, meaning Caesarea, not Jerusalem. When Jerusalem was suggested, the appeal was made. This caused a certain amount of difficulty concerning what to report.

As such, and as Festus was not schooled in such matters concerning Jewish life, he sought King Agrippa’s assistance in the matter. This will be revealed in the next verses. For now, and because Paul had every right to appeal to Caesar, Festus next says, “I judged to send him.”

His judgment was actually exactly what had to take place. Paul, as a Roman, could not be denied his right to appeal, especially when it involved the matter of jurisdiction. Once the matter of moving the trial to Jerusalem was raised, it opened up the path to Caesar’s judgment seat.

Life application: As noted above, there is a difference in the tense of the first verb of the verse being evaluated. There are also a few other small differences in the Greek texts. They really don’t change the intent of what is said in any grand way, but it is still good to

know what is different and to try to determine how such things may have occurred. Note the difference in that first verb:

κατελάβομην [katelabomen]

καταλάβομενος [katalabomenos]

Imagine reading a paper and seeing, “I have risen to tell you about Jesus.” However, another paper about the same town hall meeting says, “I have arisen to tell you about Jesus.” That is a small difference, and the meaning is essentially unchanged. But you want to know how that change came about.

Studying the reason for scribal errors is an immense field. This is because there are innumerable texts to be referred to. They are also incomplete at times. Different handwriting styles, splotches, degradation of the document, and so forth can all make it difficult to know exactly what has been written.

Further, scribes are just people. They get tired, they get distracted, and so forth. Errors such as haplography, dittography, transposition, etc., can affect a text. Margin notes concerning texts may creep into the text itself by the error of the next scribe.

Watching videos or reading books about textual criticism can help you to understand what is going on and why. Too often, people take a faulty stand on such things, claiming that those who read one version or another are doing the devil’s bidding by reading a compromised translation. But those same people fail to understand that there are variations even in their own translation.

For example, the KJV is not a single translation without variation. There is the original 1611 edition, which is almost impossible for a modern reader to understand. John 3:16 alone will give you a headache –

"¶ For God so loued þe world, that he gaue his only begotten Sonne: that whosoeuer beleeueth in him, should not perish, but haue euerlasting life."

There is a Cambridge edition and an Oxford edition. There are innumerable changes between them. But more, if you decide on the Cambridge, there are variations in it. There are differences in the 1629, 1638, 1760, 1873, 1900, etc. editions.

If there is this much variation in a translation, imagine how much variation exists because of scribal errors in thousands of Greek texts. Critical scholars of manuscripts

should not be excoriated. They should be applauded for the tedious and thankless work they carry out to bring us the most accurate text possible.

God has, through the multitude of biblical texts available, ensured that we have His word. Our job is to study and show ourselves approved concerning this invaluable gift that He has safely maintained throughout the ages for His people to read and cherish. Praise God for His superior word!

*Lord God, we know that the contents of Scripture are a faithful and reliable testimony to what You have done and are doing in the stream of human existence. Thank You for those people who faithfully keep and maintain this word, doing their best to present it to us in an understandable way so that we can know You better with each page we turn. Amen.*

**“I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write. Acts 25:26**

Festus just noted to Agrippa that he had found nothing deserving of death in Paul. But more, because of the situation, Paul had appealed to Caesar. Therefore, Festus decided to send him. However, there is a problem with this, which he now explains with the words, “I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him.”

It was obvious there were no valid charges against Paul from the perspective of Roman law. He may have offended the Jews, but that was not something that concerned Rome in the slightest. However, having appealed to Caesar, he could not be denied his right to a trial there.

Imagine someone offending his employer at the local grocery store. That is a matter for the store to determine whether he should be fired or not. However, the store manager calls his friend the mayor and says he wants the guy arrested. The mayor calls them both in, finds out that this is a business matter where he has no jurisdiction, and says, “Are you willing to go back to the store for a trial?”

This won't do. The accused knows that the other employees promised to beat him to death if they got hold of him, and so he appeals to the governor, which is his right in this particular country. What is the mayor going to tell the governor? There are no legal charges against the guy, and yet he now falls under the protection of the state. This is



like what has happened to Paul. As such, Festus says, “Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa.”

With nothing certain to write in a necessary report to the court of Caesar, Festus saw an opportunity to use Agrippa as a way of alleviating the box he had gotten himself into. And the arrival of Agrippa made the calling of all of the others a valid reason to attend.

In other words, the pronoun “you” is plural. In essence, it says “before you all.” But the attention is especially on Agrippa. Festus is making an open explanation to the entire court, seemingly in hopes of having not just Agrippa but also anyone else who could provide input do so. Festus then says this would be “so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write.”

Here, the word translated as “examination” is a noun found only in this verse, *anakrisis*. It means a judicial examination or a preliminary inquiry. This is the purpose that Festus has for the king and witnesses to listen and consider what has taken place.

Concerning the term “my lord,” *kurio*, when speaking of Nero in the first clause, Vincent's Word Studies gives Luke an A+. He says it is “... an instance of Luke’s accuracy. The title ‘lord’ was refused by the first two emperors, Augustus and Tiberius. The emperors who followed accepted it. In the time of Domitian it was a recognized title. Antoninus Pius was the first who put it on his coins.”

Life application: Luke’s meticulous documenting of even simple terms like “my lord” shows his devotion to accuracy in what he has recorded. But this should not be surprising. If the Spirit inspired his writings, then they will be exactly what God wants in His word. It is certain that what is penned will be accurate in what the words convey.

It is true that there are many difficult verses and passages in Scripture. Things seem to be wrong, misworded, ill-placed, and so forth. But with careful study, we find that these things are not so. Rather, through such study, we find a perfection of thought and harmony of transmission that brings the entire Bible into a cohesive and amazingly constructed testimony to what God is doing in redemptive history, all centering on the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

When we see this, it will solidify, not weaken, our faith in what is penned there. Don’t be afraid to spend the necessary time checking things out. And don’t be afraid to question the text, as if it would mean you are somehow lacking faith that this is truly the word of God. Rather, question it all the more stringently.

Each time you find an answer to your question, you will be bolstered in your faith that it is what it claims to be! God is anticipating spiritual strength in His people. That comes through care, contemplation, testing, and proving. So be about it! In this, He will be pleased, and you will be more firmly set in your faith.

*Lord God, how wonderful it is to check out Your word and find that what we questioned has been validated through careful study. We are then strengthened in our faith, and we can have a greater resolve in the matters of faith that Your word proclaims. When we are grounded in Your word, we will be grounded in the Subject of Your word, our Lord Jesus! With this, nothing will pull us away from our devotion to You. Amen.*

**“For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him.” Acts 25:27**

In the previous verse, Festus noted that he had nothing certain to write to Caesar concerning Paul. Hence, he was looking for something to write based on the examination. With that, he next says, “For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him.”

Paul’s appeal to Rome placed Festus in a most embarrassing position. How could he send him to Rome without submitting a reason for sending him? Paul was tried by him, and yet he still found no way to specify any charges with which to justify elevating the matter to Caesar.

But Paul is the one who had appealed to Rome for his protection which was based on Festus’s suggestion to have him taken to Jerusalem for inquiry. As Jerusalem had no authority over him, and especially because they had failed to make any valid case against him, there was a vacuum left because of a person who had appealed to a higher authority, while at the same time, there was nothing with which to justify such an appeal.

For this reason, Festus’s words that it was “unreasonable to send” Paul as a prisoner to Rome are perfectly stated. Not only was it unreasonable, but it was also quite possibly career-ending for him. And yet, Paul had to be sent based on the decision of the trial.

Life application: It would make no sense for Festus to send Paul to Rome as a prisoner without charges laid against him. He would arrive in chains with a guard next to him, and they would ask, “What has this person done?” When the guard says, “I don’t know, they didn’t give me a reason,” it would cause a giant stir.

If you “send” the message of Jesus out to others, saying you are His bondservant, people may say, “Why are you telling me this? What authority over you does a dead guy have?” How are you going to explain Jesus’ authority to them?

It may seem like a silly proposition, but it is exactly why Peter says –

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” 1 Peter 3:15

Their response may be, “You claim to have a hope, you state that Jesus is your Lord, and you are His bondservant, and yet, you cannot explain why? What kind of hope is that!”

It is up to us to not only know these things are true but also how to explain to others that they are so. It can be hard at first. People ask unexpected questions that you may not be able to answer. You might feel silly when you cannot reply properly. But that is ok. The next time, you will be prepared for that answer. Another unusual question may arise, but don’t worry! Eventually, you will have an answer to every question that comes your way.

We all have to start somewhere, so don’t be afraid to start! Tell others about your hope. Unless they hear, they cannot also share in it.

*Glorious Lord God, give us the inner desire to get the saving message of Jesus out to others. Help us not to be timid or reticent. Instead, may we be willing and ready. There are people who need to hear this word. May we be a part of sharing it. Yes, Lord, help us in this noble endeavor. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

## CHAPTER 26

**Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You are permitted to speak for yourself.”**

**So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: Acts 26:1**

A more literal translation would be, “And Agrippa said to Paul, ‘It is permitted for you to speak for yourself.’ Then Paul, made his defense, having stretched out the hand” (CG).

The previous verse ended Chapter 25 with Festus noting that it was unreasonable to send a prisoner without specifying charges against him. Now, Chapter 26 begins with, “And Agrippa said to Paul.”

Scholars state that Agrippa was not in a superior position to Festus, but rather a different type of position. Therefore, his speaking first isn’t a yielding to his status. Instead, Agrippa, as the one who has requested the audience (25:22), and as the one who has been petitioned for assistance in the matter (25:26), is the one to grant Paul permission to speak. Understanding that, Agrippa says, “It is permitted for you to speak for yourself.”

Agrippa, having previously noted to Festus that he wanted to hear Paul, eagerly hands over to the chained apostle the right to speak. There is no introductory statement, no question added concerning the words of Festus, and no repetition of any of the charges of the Jews. One gets the sense that Agrippa truly was excitedly curious about Paul and what he had to say.

Having given the platform to Paul, it next says, “Then Paul, made his defense, having stretched out the hand.”

This stretching forth of the hand has already been seen by Paul in Acts 21:40 and by Alexander in Acts 19:33. Barnes notes, “This was the usual posture of orators or public speakers. The ancient statues are commonly made in this way, with the right hand extended. The dress of the ancients favored this. The long and loose robe, or outer garment, was fastened usually with a hook or clasp on the right shoulder, and thus left the arm at full liberty.”

As for Paul’s defense here, it is not one petitioning release. He was bound by law to go to Rome because of his appeal. Rather, he is repeating his case of innocence, knowing that it will be recorded for his trial in Rome.

Further, his appeal to Agrippa may ease the burden of other Christians in the future who would be subject to Agrippa's rulings. A third reason is that Paul was an evangelist. What better opportunity to speak out the message of Christ? See Luke 21:12, 13 where Jesus spoke of exactly such an opportunity.

Life application: There are always times in life when it seems inconvenient to stop and tell someone about Jesus. We may be busy, we may have other things on our minds, etc. And yet, if we let the chance pass, we are bound to find out that whatever was distracting us wasn't that big of a deal after all. But more, we will then consider that we missed our opportunity to tell that person about Jesus. The "I'll get it next time" never happens.

The message of Jesus is the only message that can redirect a person from condemnation to salvation. Without it, they will be lost forever. Let us remember this and use every opportunity to share the good news.

Remember this from day to day. Redirect your mind to make sharing the gospel a priority. The more you do it, the more you will be willing to do it. Like everything else, such things take mental effort to do. However, as you continue to share the good news, it will become more and more natural until it becomes a part of your daily life. So get started and continue on!

*Lord God, we often only get one chance to talk to a particular person. May we make talking about You a priority so that when we have that one-time meeting with someone, we at least can say we used it properly and told them what You have done for us. Help us not to be people who later regret neglecting this most important of all human interactions. It alone can make an eternal difference in their destiny. May we be willing to share it! Amen.*

**"I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, Acts 26:2**

The NKJV reverses the order of the words, thus confusing the flow of thought. A literal translation would be, "Concerning all which I am accused by Jews, King Agrippa, I have deemed myself blessed before you, being about to defend myself today" (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul was given the right to speak to the gathered council. From there, he stretched out his hand to do so. With that, he begins his words, saying, "Concerning all which I am accused by Jews, King Agrippa."

There is no article before “Jews.” He makes an overall statement about any Jew who has come forth to make an accusation against him, and any others who might find fault in him at any point in time.

His words indicate that he is not an enemy of his own people in any way, shape or form. This is especially pertinent because Agrippa is a Jew. Paul’s people have united against him, but their stand has no merit. Having said that, he continues his opening address, saying, “I have deemed myself blessed before you.”

His words demonstrate a cheerfulness that ran through him, as if a man who knew that this trial had no bearing on his final destiny. Instead, it was merely a way-station on the way to his desired evangelism in Rome. And even that was only a small portion of the race he was running on his way back to Christ who had appeared to Him on the road to Damascus.

All of this brought about a sense of joy that he could convey in his words to Agrippa. He was prepared to convey his thoughts to those he stood before, but especially Agrippa. With that stated, he next tells why he felt so blessed. He says this came about because he was “being about to defend myself today.”

A defense is exactly what he would be giving. Both in verse 1 and 2, the word *apologeomai* is used. It is His apologetic discourse which concerned the charges mentioned in Acts 24:5, 6, and which he had already answered on several occasions. In fact, the term *apologeomai* was used in Acts 24:10 when he first defended himself before Felix two years earlier.

His speech now will carry the same general substance that it did when he stood on the stairs in Jerusalem in Acts 22, but there will be less of a defense concerning apostasy and it will be more directed to his commission as an apostle and the divine assistance he received along the way.

Life application: To this day, Paul is maligned by his own people. The stain of being some type of heretic has been multiplied throughout the millennia so that, like Jesus, he is considered an absolute pariah to those who refer to him and his writings.

But, surprisingly, there are those who claim they follow Jesus and yet they reject Paul and his writings. What this means is that they are following “another Jesus” (2 Corinthians 11:4), and they have believed a different, meaning a false, gospel (Galatians

1:6-8). Adherents to this type of doctrine pick which books of the Bible they will adhere to or even which parts of books (such as Acts) they will accept.

They have, in their own deluded thinking, become the arbiters of God's word. This is a sad place to be. But it is actually not as uncommon as it might seem. Their ideas are extreme and obviously false, but the same is true with any teaching that ignores even a single prescriptive precept.

For example, the pastoral epistles are clear and explicit about who can be a pastor or deacon and who is excluded. And yet, those prescriptive precepts are ignored by innumerable denominations and churches. Is that stand really any different than that of those who reject any of Paul's writings? It may be less extreme, but it is still a pick and choose methodology that is harmful to the church.

Once any part of Scripture is taken out of its proper context we begin to fall into error. Let us be people who carefully consider context. Once the context is understood, we must then willingly be obedient to the precepts set forth within that context. In this, we will be people whose doctrine and adherence to that doctrine is fully pleasing to God.

*Glorious Lord God, may we carefully and meticulously consider Your word as we read and study it. From there, may we apply its precepts to our lives in the manner which You have determined for us. May we rest in the grace of our Lord and Savior, never assuming that we can do better than He did by reinserting the law which He alone fulfilled and annulled. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently. Acts 26:3**

More literally, the Greek reads, “Especially, you being a knower of all the customs of Jews, and also of questions. Therefore, I implore you patiently to hear me” (CG).

Paul had just noted that he was prepared to answer concerning all of the things that the Jews had accused him of. Now, he gives a reason why this was so, saying, “Especially, you being a knower of all the customs of Jews.”

The word translated as “knower” is *gnóstés*. It is a noun used only here in the New Testament. It is derived from the verb *ginóskó*, to know or perceive. Paul understood that Agrippa was perfectly familiar with the aspects of the law and of the traditions

which were built upon the law. This is summed up in the word translated as “customs,” which signifies the habits, institutes, rites, and so forth.

Paul found this pleasing because he was not talking to an uninformed audience as had been the case for the past two years. Rather, he finally had someone who could more fully grasp what he was doing, and he could convey this knowledge to the governor accordingly.

If nothing else, he could validate to the governor that what he was up to was not contrary to these customs. Further, he continues with, “and also of questions.”

The “questions” would be those areas that were subject to debate, just as Christians have. This is especially true in the matters by which the Pharisees and the Sadducees were divided. In this, Paul will speak not only as one who was a Pharisee with a hope but as a converted believer who possessed the surety of that hope.

As this was so, he would be careful to detail what he believed, why he believed it, why it was a rational point of debate, etc. As this may take time to fully express, he continues further with, “Therefore, I implore you patiently to hear me.”

Here is another word found only once in Scripture, *makrothumós*. It is a compound word derived from *makros*, of long duration or length, and *thumos*, an outburst of passion or wrath. As such, it is Paul’s way of petitioning for Agrippa to not blow up at him quickly, but to be patient and longsuffering as he detailed his journey of faith in Christ.

Therefore, he is asking for Agrippa’s patient ear, something he would get neither from his foes who opposed him nor from a non-Jew who would be wholly uninterested in such matters. The latter will be perfectly evident from Festus’s response to Paul’s discourse in Acts 26:24.

Life application: If one understands his audience, it is a great help to prepare words in advance for communicating what must be said. If you are preaching to a familiar crowd, you don’t need to explain yourself or what your intent is. However, you may still have to explain at some point during your talk the details of something more complicated that they may not have heard of before.

If you are talking to a crowd wholly unfamiliar with your subject matter, it may be best to start with a simple illustration concerning what you will be speaking of, building upon that so that your audience doesn’t get lost.



Obviously, if you are speaking to children, you need to talk on a level that they can grasp. This basic level of instruction may also be needed for politicians, especially those on the left, as well.

Whatever the state of the audience, being familiar with it and accommodating to their level of understanding is a key ticket to having them grasp what is being conveyed. Paul is taking advantage of this approach by speaking to Agrippa on a level that he is able to understand.

Whether Agrippa agrees with his viewpoint or not, at least Paul will be able to convey what he believes, why he believes it, and how his actions have been in accord with the customs and laws of his people and of Roman society. We, too, should speak in such a manner to ensure our thoughts are being properly conveyed to those we address.

*Lord God, the world has an incredible number of languages. Within those language groups are more divisions of thought, such as customs, laws, rites, rituals, etc. Unless we can properly relate to those people, how can we adequately communicate the gospel to them? Lord God, we pray for our missionaries who are in so many places around the world, asking that You give them wisdom and ability to effectively do their jobs through rightly understanding their target audiences. Thank You, O God. Amen.*

**“My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. Acts 26:4**

More literally, it says, “Therefore, indeed, the manner of my life from youth, having been from the beginning in my nation, in Jerusalem, all the Jews know” (CG).

Paul had just asked for Agrippa to patiently hear him as he gave his defense, knowing that Agrippa was an expert in all customs and questions concerning the Jews. With that having been stated, he next says, “Therefore, indeed, the manner of my life from youth.”

The word translated as “manner of life” is *biósis*. It is a noun derived from the verb *bioó*, to live. It is only found here in the New Testament. We use the term “bio” in the same way today: life; biological, biography, etc. In using this word, he then further defines his manner of life with the words “having been from the beginning.”

There are articles in the Greek of this verse that are not normally translated into English. Each word he has spoken so far has been intended to give a more precise statement

concerning his upbringing. For example, someone might say, “I was a surfer, a surfer from my youth, even for as long as I can remember.”

This is Paul’s way of establishing the surety of the life he lived in the eyes of Agrippa. Therefore, any changes to this will be all the more remarkable. In other words, when he gets to the explanation of his conversion, it will indicate a sudden, abrupt change in a person who was very focused in one direction his whole life.

Most people would tend to follow the same precise pattern unless there was a marked occurrence that subsequently changed their lives. To further bolster this deeply ingrained image of who he was, he then continues with “in my nation, in Jerusalem.”

He continues making a poignant statement concerning his state, now adding the special location which would only refine that state into who he eventually would become. Once again, it would be like saying, “I was a surfer, a surfer from my youth, even for as long as I can remember. It was in Hawaii, on the North Shore, at Waimea Bay.”

Paul will speak of his life in this early capacity elsewhere, such as in Galatians 1:14 and Philippians 3:5-6. His words to Agrippa are carefully stated to ensure the king is aware of exactly who Paul was as he grew. Thus, the change in him will be all the more remarkable when it is presented. Understanding that, he then finishes the thought with, “all the Jews know.”

It is a confirmatory statement that his words are truthful and can easily be verified. Saying, “all the Jews” doesn’t mean the entire nation of Jews. Instead, it is a phrase limited in its meaning and which refers to the leaders of the nation. Similar terminology is used in Mark 7:3; John 2:20, 3:25, 5:15; etc.; and in 1 Thessalonians 2:14.

Life application: Paul was set on a course of life that was unlikely to change. However, the Lord stepped in and revealed Himself to Paul. From that time on, the direction of his steps was completely different. He made a complete break from his old ways and set his eyes solely on Jesus.

Although we haven’t seen Jesus personally, as believers, we have met Him through His word. If we believe He has saved us, then why would we be any different than Paul in our attitude? Was the change in Paul any different than the change in us? He was lost, and then he was saved. We were lost, and then we were saved.

Do we really need a visual appearance of Jesus to spur us on to do great things? If so, why? What was lacking in our conversion? And if not, are we pursuing Jesus with all of who we are? If not, why are we not doing so?

None of us should say, “My conversion wasn’t that special and so my walk doesn’t need to be so great.” You are an individual, only you received your conversion, and only you can use your personal conversion and your new life for the glory of God. Therefore, use it! Bring God glory with every step you take. Have faith in all you do. And be grateful from moment to moment that you were saved by the precious blood of Jesus.

*Lord God, may we be willing to work out our salvation with our eyes fixed and focused on Jesus. Help each one of us to do our utmost with the salvation You have granted us because of Your great love, grace, and tender mercy. May we strive to do great things in return for what You have done for each of us. Amen.*

**“They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. Acts 26:5**

The words are more literally rendered, “Knowing me firstly, if they willed to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I live a Pharisee” (CG).

Paul just referred to his life in Jerusalem, even from his youth, stating that the Jews were aware of it. Now, to explain what he was like, he tells the king, “Knowing me firstly.” The word translated as “firstly” is an adverb signifying “from above.” It refers to a point before, as in the beginning or of old.

We often tend to think of time or events as horizontally occurring, but this view looks at them vertically. Hence, if heaven is above, things started there and came down to where we are now. We still use this terminology at times when we say something like, “We need to accomplish this task, starting from the top down.”

As for Paul’s words, this statement is one that must be true. This is because it could be easily verified by Agrippa. To lie about something like this would only harm his case, which, to this point, had nothing standing against it. It would be foolish in the extreme to make such a claim if it were untrue. Paul is indicating that the Jews were fully aware of his conduct, even from the first “if they willed to testify.”

In these words, there is a strong note in his favor. It is obvious they would not be willing to do so because they knew that their testimony would only bolster his case. But the

truth of the matter, according to Paul, is “that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I live a Pharisee.”

The word translated as “strictest” is *akribestatos*. It is the superlative and most accurate of all. It is only found here in the New Testament, and it is closely associated with the noun *akribeia*, which is found in Acts 22:3 where Paul said, “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.”

Another word that is introduced into the New Testament is found here as well, *thréskeia*, or religion. It refers to the reverence or worship of gods. Thus, it speaks of ritual acts, worship, religion, etc. Paul’s religion was Judaism, but he practiced it as a Pharisee.

Albert Barnes notes two pertinent points about this verse:

1. As he had lived during the early period of his life without crime; as his principles had been settled by the instruction of the most able of their teachers, it was to be presumed that his subsequent life had been of a similar character.
2. as he, at that period of his life, evinced the utmost zeal for the laws and customs of his country, it was to be presumed that he would not be found opposing or reviling them at any subsequent period. From the strictness and conscientiousness of his past life, he supposed that Agrippa might argue favorably respecting his subsequent conduct. A virtuous and religious course in early life is usually a sure pledge of virtue and integrity in subsequent years.

Life application: Paul made claims about his past conduct and religion in a court trial. If we mentally try to remember that our time after being saved is a period of time that will be judged, because it will be, then we can remind ourselves of the importance of being honest.

It is not uncommon to read or hear about accounts of pastors who have lied about their past achievements, such as being a fighter jet pilot or a Navy SEAL. These are things that can be verified. If they are not true, it is sure to make the news, simply because that is the kind of thing the news loves to focus on.

There are all kinds of other things we may claim that never really happened. Each one of these must be burned away at the judgment seat of Christ. As this is so, why would we want to continue to promote such falsehoods, engage in unholy activities, unjustly treat

others, and so forth? This is why it is good to keep reminding ourselves of our position in Christ and what that means.

We all fail in various ways, but we don't need to habitually do so. Keep your eyes on Jesus and remember His cross. Be willing to walk in a manner that will honor Him and testify faithfully to what He has done.

*O God, may our lives and actions be wholly dedicated to You throughout our days. Give us the wisdom to think about what lies ahead when we must stand before You. Help us to be circumspect in our living and focused on what is right and appropriate. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. Acts 26:6**

A literal rendering of the Greek is, “And now, upon a hope, the [promise] unto the fathers – a promise having been made by God – I have stood, being judged” (CG).

Paul's previous words to Agrippa were about his conduct before the Lord, having lived according to the strictest sect of Judaism, being a Pharisee. Having said that, he now says that the very hope of the Pharisee is the reason for his present state. He indicates this with the words, “And now, upon a hope.”

Paul says *ep elpidi*, (upon a hope). It gives the sense of “upon the basis of a hope.” There is no definite article before “hope” in the Greek. It is a noun, not a verb, which will be qualified as he continues. Hence, it is “a hope.” In other words, this was not the only hope the fathers possessed, but it was certainly the key hope. It was the hope called out in Acts 23:6 and which will again be explicitly stated in verse 26:8. It is the hope of the resurrection.

This is a hope that the Pharisees possessed. The Sadducees did not (Acts 23:8), and so it explains why he singled out his life as a Pharisee in his explanation of his past. With that stated, he next explains the hope he is referring to, saying, “the [promise] unto the fathers.”

The Greek anticipates the word promise. Literally, it says “the unto the fathers.” It defines what the hope he is referring to is. It is something given to the fathers. Some texts here include the word “our,” saying “our fathers.” As the hope was originally given

to Adam in Genesis 3:15, it would ultimately include everyone in attendance. If Paul is only speaking to the Jews, then it would be referring to only those in that particular line.

The latter, although it is what Paul will more fully explain in the coming verse, seems unlikely for several reasons. First, the hope was – in fact – given to Adam. It was not specifically stated later to Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. As such, Paul’s words, “our fathers,” would have to then be referring to those who received the law. At that time, the specific promise was given –

“You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I *am* the LORD.” Leviticus 18:5

Secondly, the promise of the resurrection remained a hope for non-Hebrew people even at the time of Job –

“For I know *that* my Redeemer lives,  
And He shall stand at last on the earth;  
<sup>26</sup> And after my skin is destroyed, this *I know*,  
That in my flesh I shall see God,  
<sup>27</sup> Whom I shall see for myself,  
And my eyes shall behold, and not another.  
*How* my heart yearns within me!” Job 19:25-27

In Job 1 and 2, Job and those with this hope were called “sons of God,” meaning that they were accepted by God because of their faith. A counterargument to this will be stated later. Despite the inclusion of the word “our” in some manuscripts, the thought is understandable enough. As for this hope Paul is referring to, which is based upon the promise, Paul next says it is “a promise having been made by God.”

God spoke of the coming Messiah in Genesis 3. It can be inferred that Adam understood that what he had lost (meaning life) would be restored to him from the naming of his wife Eve. The Hebrew name is Khavah, Life. Adam demonstrated faith in the restoration of life by naming her Eve. With that, God covered them with skins of animals, thus making a picture of what God would do in Christ. Adam accepted the promise as did others after him. Even as late as Job there were people who accepted it.

However, the world eventually forgot the knowledge of the true God to the point where He again intervened in human affairs by calling Moses and giving Israel the law through him. The words of Leviticus 18:5 were a sure promise to the people, “Do this and you

will live.” However, the history of Israel showed that nobody could do the things of the law.

Generations came and generations departed in death. Eventually, God spoke through Habakkuk to clarify the matter –

“Behold the proud,  
His soul is not upright in him;  
But the just shall live by his faith.” Habakkuk 2:4

God was telling Israel that they could not meet the demands of the law. This was, from the very start, evidenced in the fact that they were given the Day of Atonement. It was a day set aside for the forgiveness of sins. Everyone had to observe it, meaning that everyone needed that atonement. And it was a day based solely on faith that God was forgiving them.

Law observance without faith leads to pride. However, faith alone is what brought forgiveness of sin. Paul understood this. And so, the hope was actually more than simply the resurrection. Rather, the hope of the resurrection is ultimately based on the messianic promise of a coming Redeemer. Most people believe they are going to heaven. However, without the coming of the Messiah, that could not happen. Only in the coming of Jesus is the hope truly realized.

Paul knew this and he placed himself completely at the mercy of God in Christ. It is for this promise that he next says, “I have stood, being judged.”

The verb is a perfect participle. He stood being judged, and he continued to stand being judged. He would not waver in his convictions, even after two years in chains. Nor would he ever waiver in them. His hope of the resurrection was based on his faith that Jesus is the resurrection, as He Himself stated. Responding to Martha’s words at the grave of Lazarus, He said –

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.” John 11:25

Paul stood as an accused man for speaking of this hope. He was being judged for his stand. He would not waiver in his stand, even if it meant death. Where do you stand?

Life application: Earlier, it was noted that a counterargument to who “the fathers” is referring to would be given. Job was cited to show that the resurrection was his hope. However, Paul says this in Ephesians 2 –

“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—<sup>12</sup> that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Ephesians 2:11-13

Paul says that the Gentiles were without hope. And this is true. With the introduction of the law, the hope of God in Christ was narrowed down to the Hebrew people. Those outside of it were excluded from the promise.

This was not God being arbitrary and unfair. Rather, the world had sufficiently turned from Him that without His intervention once again into the stream of human existence, there would have been no knowledge of Him left at all. This is evident based on His words to Abraham about the turning of the Amorites in Genesis 15:16.

They were a people group like any other. Eventually, like all peoples, they turned from God so far that they needed to be eliminated. All other countries have followed this pattern. Israel was given grace when they were given the law. That may sound contradictory, but without that happening, they, too, would have faced God’s hand of wrath.

As noted above, the law provides mercy through the Day of Atonement. Thus, even if it is law, it came by God’s grace. The intent of the time of the law was to lead Israel (and, indeed, the whole world) to the understanding of the need for Jesus. Paul explains that in detail in Galatians.

In the next verse, Paul will note that the twelve tribes of the Jews earnestly served God because of this promise. However, that does not mean that the original promise was only given to them. Rather, it is probable that they had simply become the focus of it as it led to the coming Messiah.

Therefore, whether Paul was ultimately referring to Adam and those like him, or only the fathers who received the law, the same truth exists: The just shall live by faith. Adam did, Enoch did, Job did, and Abraham did as well. Such was the case with David and Samson.



And such was the case with Paul. The Jews who accused him are excluded from the promise because they failed to seek out God through His provision of Jesus.

Don't be like them! It is time for you to decide where you will hang your hat. Will you cling to the law and try to make God happy through your own effort, or will you trust in Jesus, who has done it all, so that you can stand justified before God based on faith in Him? Choose wisely.

*Lord God, how grateful we are to You for our Lord and Savior, Jesus. We put all our hope, trust, and faith in Him! Hallelujah and Amen.*

**“To this *promise* our twelve tribes, earnestly serving *God* night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews. Acts 26:7**

In the previous verse, Paul said, “And now, upon a hope, the [promise] unto the fathers – a promise having been made by God – I have stood, being judged.” He now continues with that thought, beginning with, “To this *promise* our twelve tribes.”

The word promise is inserted. It is the hope Paul spoke of, which is the promise made by God and to which the twelve tribes of the Jews were directed. Before going on, it is of note that Paul's words reflect one of several times in the New Testament which confirm, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that there are NO LOST TRIBES OF ISRAEL.

There are those of Israel who were lost, but of the tribes, there is no void. Paul, speaking many, many hundreds of years after the exile of Israel by Sennacherib, king of Assyria, notes the twelve tribes as existing and earnestly serving God. Members of almost all of the tribes are mentioned in Scripture after that exile, even in the New Testament. If there is one person left of a tribe, the tribe remains.

The word Paul uses that is translated as “twelve tribes” is found only once in Scripture, *dódekaphulon*. It comes from *dódeka*, twelve, and *phulé*, tribe. The other times the twelve tribes are mentioned, a variation using the word *dódeka* is used. Of these twelve tribes, Paul next says they were “earnestly serving *God* night and day.”

It is to the promise of the previous verse that these twelve tribes spent their time in this manner. The fact that this service was even conducted throughout the night is found in several places of Scripture, but Psalm 134 gives a clear enough witness to that fact –

“Behold, bless the LORD,  
All *you* servants of the LORD,  
Who by night stand in the house of the LORD!  
<sup>2</sup> Lift up your hands *in* the sanctuary,  
And bless the LORD.  
<sup>3</sup> The LORD who made heaven and earth  
Bless you from Zion!” Psalm 134

The word translated as “earnestly” is *en ektenei*. It is only found here in the New Testament. It indicates “in intensity.” This intense “serving” refers to the religious aspects of the Jewish nation, meaning the special worship that is derived from their Scriptures.

They conducted the required sacrifices, they observed the holy days, they participated in the pilgrim feasts, etc. The conduct of their lives was centered on this service and the purpose of it was that they had a “hope to attain” the promise through it.

The word translated as “attain” indicates arriving at a goal, a final end. Therefore, the promise must be more than just the resurrection, but what accompanies the resurrection. A resurrection to live forever in a white box would be an eternity of boredom. A resurrection to live forever on this earth in the state we are in would be an eternity of frustration. But a resurrection that allows man to behold the fullness of his infinite Creator as He ceaselessly reveals Himself to His creatures would be a resurrection of eternal wonder.

That is what the faithful of Israel looked forward to with intensity, and that is the promise that the twelve tribes hoped to attain. And Paul includes himself and his trial in that hope. As he says, “For this hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews.”

Paul has inextricably tied the charges against him by the Jews to the very thing that the twelve tribes hoped for. He has avowed that Christ is risen from the dead, and therefore, his hope in Christ cannot be sedition if it is true. Rather than sedition, it is submission to the fulfillment of the promise. Being accused by the Jews is then an implicit slap in the face of his accusers. They have failed to realize the very thing that the nation had hoped and striven for.

Life application: When asked what their religion is, people around the world will normally respond in whatever manner they were raised in. Some will say, “I am a Muslim.” Others, “I am a Buddhist.” Still others, “I am a Christian.”

However, when asked what that means, many of them will have no idea. They were born into a culture that is directed by a particular religion and so that is what they claim. They may know some of the basic rites of the religion, along with some of the cultural things that they do along with their religion, but they really have no idea what their claim of Islam, Buddhism, or Christianity actually teaches.

But there is a simple fact to remember which is that a person who has not received Christ is not a Christian. His claim is merely a cultural or family identification. A Christian is a follower of Christ. That comes from knowing who He is and what He has done, accepting the premise through belief, and being sealed with the Holy Spirit as a promise that God has saved him.

When you go out to evangelize, and you ask the question, “What do you believe about God?” if you are given the answer, “Oh, I’m a Christian,” you might want to ask more questions just to be sure. Many people raised as “Christians” have no idea what it means to be a Christian. Don’t assume. Instead, give the simple gospel and ask if they believe that. It can make an eternity of difference in that person’s life.

*Lord God, may we never assume that just because someone claims to be a Christian he actually is. Help us to remember to be clear and precise about what You have done. People need Jesus, not just a title that was bestowed upon them at birth. Help us to remember this as we speak to others. Amen.*

**“Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? Acts 26:8**

A more literal, even if a bit clunky, translation would be, “Why judge by you incredible if God raises *the* dead?”

Paul had just said to Agrippa the reason why he was being accused by the Jews, meaning his hope in the resurrection. With that, he next says to all at the hearing, “Why judge by you incredible if God raises *the* dead?”

Some versions make this a supposition rather than a statement of fact, such as, “that God should raise the dead.” But this isn’t correct. Paul is not asking it as if it were possible. He is stating it as an accomplished deed.

The “you” in this verse is plural. He is now not only speaking to Agrippa but to all of the people there. Agrippa was a Jew and his Scriptures testified to the fact that God could do it. Paul now says that He has done it. If Christ were not raised from the dead, then

Paul would not be on trial for spreading the gospel. Instead, he would still be waiting for the Messiah to come.

Those gathered to hear Paul simply needed to believe the content of his words. When we witness to others about Christ, we may put such a question forward as a supposition, but before we are done, we will put it forth as a statement of fact. It would be pointless to tell somebody that it was merely possible to raise someone from the dead. Rather, our testimony is only complete when we avow that it has happened.

To substantiate his claim, he will next give his own personal testimony.

Life application: Life is filled with possibilities. When debating an issue, someone may raise a possibility. A debate about creation or evolution, for example, may raise the possibility of the gap theory of creation in order to then justify a long-term creation, even opening the possibility of evolution.

And yet, unless such a theory is based in reality, it doesn't make it true. But people have been so conditioned to the supposed science of an old earth for the past several hundred years that the default belief is in a world that is billions of years old. To believe otherwise is to ignore the supposed specialists who know what they are talking about.

However, the Bible makes certain claims that are wholly incompatible with this notion. So, there is a dilemma that seemingly needs to be resolved. Enter the gap theory. Billions of years of time are shoved into the narrative between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2. From there, an entire narrative is developed to show how all those fossils showed up in our geologic record.

This is convenient and it then hopefully keeps theologians from looking stupid in the eyes of mainstream science. But the gap theory is unsupported by the Bible. Moreover, it is a theory that is totally unnecessary if the evidence for a short-term creation is considered.

We don't need man's inserted narrative in Scripture to accommodate unproven science. What we should be doing is testing Scripture that is verifiable and then saying to ourselves, "I will trust God's word and evaluate the difficult parts as they are written, comparing what we can know from what is stated in Scripture."

In doing this, we are not immediately dismissing either the evidence or Scripture. We are seeing if the two are compatible. Therefore, if you struggle with a short-term

creation, but want to trust what Scripture says, read what evidence is presented by short-term creationists. See if their discoveries suitably explain what is presented. If they do, then the problem rests with the generally accepted science of an old earth.

Be willing to check things out, but don't accept man's inserts into Scripture that are not at all supportable by either the written Hebrew or in a comparison with the rest of Scripture.

*Lord God, help us to rationally consider what is presented in Your word. May we be willing to take the time and effort to review those things that are difficult for us to understand and to learn from those who have spent their lives in pursuit of the knowledge that will help us to figure out where the truth of a matter lies concerning whatever issue we are struggling with. Amen.*

**“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Acts 26:9**

Paul had just asked those gathered to hear him why it should be thought incredible that God raises the dead. Now, he will speak of how he once was opposed to the message of Jesus being the Messiah. This will then lead to why he was converted in his thinking. Therefore, he begins this new line of thought with, “Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”

Paul's words demonstrate empathy towards those who persecute him, be it the Jews in Jerusalem or his audience here. The word “indeed” shows us this. It is something that any person who once didn't believe can do as well, such as, “Indeed, I used to think Christians were nuts, but then I met Christ and realized that I was wrong.”

The “many things” that he refers to here are those recorded before his conversion in Acts. He also alludes to them in passages such as Galatians 1:13 and 1 Timothy 1:13. The statement by Paul, though, clearly shows that he now identified with the One he once worked against.

He will explain this further as he continues, but by saying that he once thought it necessary to work against the name of Jesus of Nazareth, it means that he now no longer felt that way. Thus, he ties himself directly to the sect known as the Nazarenes, whose faith was in Jesus of Nazareth. This is the last time that Nazareth, or any form of the word tied to it, is found in the Bible.

Life application: Paul is giving a testimony of who he once was in order to help those listening to better understand who he now is. By following this approach, we can eliminate a lot of the baggage that people may carry with them.

People may have had a bad experience with Christians. Or they may have heard that Christians believe fairy tales, and so forth. By stating how you once perceived Christians or Christianity, you allow them to immediately start considering their own state in related matters. When they see that you are just an ordinary person like them and that you once felt just as they do, they will be more willing to stand and listen.

For example, if a person is an alcoholic and there is a reformed alcoholic with you, he will have a better opportunity to empathize with the alcoholic and then explain the freedom found in Jesus. So let him do the evangelizing.

If a person was brought up in a cult like the Jehovah's Witnesses, someone who is well-schooled in what they believe can chime in and begin a reasonable dialog that others may not be able to carry out. Empathy and identification are a strong means of helping break down barriers. So, do your best to find out where the commonality between you and a person lies, and then use that as you talk to them about Jesus.

*Heavenly Father, may our lives be used to glorify You. Even the things that were a part of our old lives can be used for a positive end, if we can fit them into conversations with others that will build up their confidence in who they can become in Christ. So, help us to wisely use our own past lives and experiences to help others move towards faith in You. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against *them*. Acts 26:10**

A bit more literally, the Greek reads, “Which also I did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I – I confined – in prisons, having received the authority from the chief priests, and they, being taken up, a vote I cast down against” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul acknowledged that he thought he must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Now, to explain what he meant, he says, “Which also I did in Jerusalem.”

Paul first specifically notes Jerusalem, certainly with the intent that it be known that his working against the name of Jesus wasn't just done in some far away corner. Rather, it was right in the center of the city of the Jews who now accused him.

In the same place where the apostles were gathered after the crucifixion of Jesus, and where they claimed He rose again and ascended to heaven, Paul actively worked out his misguided zeal against His followers. He acknowledges this, saying, "and many of the saints I – I confined – in prisons."

The plural "prisons" is an indirect way of indicating that not only did he work against them in Jerusalem proper, but in various other places as well. And more, his words are emphatic, "I – I confined – in prisons." He personally did this and therefore that would be known as well. And further, he explains that his authority was from the very seat of power that now stood against him, saying, "having received the authority from the chief priests."

The very people who were now persecuting him for his faith in Jesus and his witness among the Gentiles were the same people who granted him the authority to arrest the followers of the One he now proclaimed as God's Messiah.

After this, he says something that has caused confusion, and which has led many to assume that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. He says, "and they, being taken up, a vote I cast down against."

Charles Ellicott says, "The words show that St. Paul, though a 'young man' (see Note on Acts 7:58), must have been a member either of the Sanhedrin itself or of some tribunal with delegated authority."

However, this is not necessarily so. On the words, "I cast down against," Vincent's Word Studies notes, "Lit., laid down my vote. ... Some suppose that Paul here refers to casting his vote as a member of the Sanhedrim; in which case he must have been married and the father of a family. But there is no reason for believing this (compare 1 Corinthians 7:7, 1 Corinthians 7:8); and the phrase may be taken as expressing merely moral assent and approval."

Barnes concurs with this by saying, "Paul was not one of the council, nor, that we read of, in any office or place to judge any person; besides, the Jews are thought to have had no power of life and death; and that St. Stephen was slain rather in a popular tumult, than legally: but Paul may be said to do this, by carrying the suffrages or sentence to the

Roman man president, or any others, to get it executed (for so the words will bear); and howsoever, by his approving, rejoicing at, and delighting in their condemnation, (which was indeed giving his voice, as much as he could, against them), this was verified.”

The word he uses, *katapheró*, is used for the fourth and last time. All its uses have been in Acts (20:9 (x2), 25:7, and 26:10). It is a compound word coming from *kata*, meaning down, against, down from, by way of, etc., and *pheró*, to carry, bear, bring, conduct, etc. The exact intent of Paul’s words must be guessed at, but it is unlikely that it was the casting down of an actual vote, especially for death.

The Jews did not have the authority to put anyone to death. Therefore, at best, it would be a petition to ask Rome to execute them. But it is more likely that it was an assent that the people who were being judged should be found guilty and remain in prison or excluded from the assembly of the Jews.

The word translated as vote is first used here, *pséphos*. It simply means a pebble or stone. It will be seen twice again, in Revelation 2:17 where it is translated as “stone.” Paul may have actually cast down a stone or this may be a metaphor meaning giving assent, such as a nod or a “yes” vote on something. As this is the only time it is used this way in Scripture, there is not a lot to go on to be dogmatic concerning his intent.

Whatever the intent was, however, it was understandable to his audience, and it certainly was stated with the overall meaning of his being in opposition to the followers of the One he was now aligned with.

Life application: One can see the zeal that Paul had for persecuting the people of the Lord with his emphatic words “many of the saints I – I confined – in prisons.” Now that he was converted, he spent the same exceptionally directed energy in a new way wholly concentrated toward the cause of Christ.

So does this reflect your current state? What were you most excited about or geared toward before you came to Jesus? Have you taken even a portion of that energy and redirected it toward the cause of Christ? If not, why not consider that in the future? The Lord of all, Jesus, took on human flesh and came among those He created. He revealed the glory of the Lord to the world, and yet we, His creatures, crucified Him.

He allowed this to happen so that we could be made spotless and acceptable to God once again. If He had not done this for us, there would only be condemnation and destruction ahead for us. And yet, are our lives so unchanged even after this? How can



that be? Let us consider what God has done and redirect our energies to glorifying Jesus. May our lives and actions be responsibly geared towards the cause of Christ all our days.

*Yes Lord God! We praise You and thank You for what You have done for us. Help us to live out our lives in a manner that demonstrates true appreciation for what You have done in and through the giving of Jesus. We owe You our all in all. Help us to acknowledge this with lives that are dedicated to You for all of our days. Amen.*

**“And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities.**  
Acts 26:11

The words are not well translated. A more literal translation is, “And in all the synagogues, often punishing them, I – compelling to blaspheme. And exceedingly, being maniacal against them, I – pursuing – also until to the out cities” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul explained some of the things he did contrary to the name of Jesus, including shutting His followers up in prison, etc. He now says, “And in all the synagogues.”

These words show that his trip to Damascus in Acts 9 was not unique. Outside of Jerusalem, he also went to other areas. Saying, “in all the synagogues” indicates that he probably went throughout Judea, Samaria, and the area of Galilee.

Wherever people were reported as proclaiming Christ, he would head out on a mission to stop them. Upon seizing them, it next says, “often punishing them, I – compelling to blaspheme.”

The word translated as punishing, *timóreó*, is used here for the second and last time. Its first use was in Acts 22:5 where Paul described the same events when he defended himself before the large crowd in Jerusalem. HELPS Word Studies notes that the word signifies “to act as a guardian with the authority to mete out punishment.” Therefore, Paul felt he was exacting atonement against his perceived foes.

His words about compelling his adversaries to blaspheme were certainly intended not against “God” as he understood Him, but against the Messiah, Jesus, as he misunderstood Him. It could have included making people swear that they renounced

the notion that He was the Messiah, denying being a follower of the Lord, agreeing that Jesus was only an imposter, etc.

What Paul now calls blaspheming was, at the time of his actions, a service offered to God. Thus, he could claim as he did to Timothy that he acted in unbelief (1 Timothy 1:13). As far as his success in compelling them, it cannot be determined if he ever was ever able to make them blaspheme. The verb is in the imperfect tense. Thus, it indicates a continued action or an incomplete action. Therefore, it cannot be said that he had any success at all from this verse. Rather, as Charles Ellicott paraphrases these words, “I went on trying to compel them.”

From there, he next says, “And exceedingly, being maniacal against them.”

Here, he uses a word found only this one time in Scripture, *emmainomai*, translated as “being maniacal.” HELPS Word Studies says, “‘behave as a maniac’ – properly, locked in the frenzy of rage (fury), ... Here Paul describes his pre-conversion behavior as deranged (acting *completely irrational*).”

This is a description then of his emotional state which he refers to elsewhere as zeal (Galatians 1:14, Phil 3:6, etc.). Paul was like a possessed or deranged man. He was obsessed with his duty of stamping out what he perceived as the cult of the Nazarene. His words of Romans 10:1-4 which speak of his people, Israel, marvelously reflect how he was –

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. <sup>2</sup> For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. <sup>3</sup> For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. <sup>4</sup> For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

He was zealous for God, even exceedingly so. But his zeal was completely misdirected. Therefore, he next says, “I – pursuing – also until to the out cities.”

This shows that he now understood his actions to not have been proper. The word translated as “pursuing” is a negative one. His words show that, as he had actually persecuted others, what was happening to him by the Jewish leaders must therefore also be considered persecution. Their actions toward him were misguided.

Life application: Paul was so single-minded in his determination to persecute others over Jesus that he even went to the out cities to find and hunt down His followers. When he had his conversion, he did the exact opposite, but in the same way. He went to the out cities and passionately spoke of the goodness of God in Christ.

He relentlessly redirected his energies to sharing the good news wherever he went. What is it that we do when we travel outside of our own town? Vacation time should not be a time for ignoring conversations about Jesus. Instead, we should be just as passionate about telling the people we meet about Him as we are when we are in our own towns.

Let us not erect barriers to where we will share the gospel and where we will take a break from doing so. Rather, may our zeal well up in us at all times. One reason Paul was chosen was because Jesus knew he would be passionate at all times about his duties as an apostle.

In all honesty, He asks nothing less of us today. But He allows us to make our own minds up about how important our duties are to us. Let us stand worthy of our calling and be about the business of sharing this life-changing good news!

*Lord God Almighty, our actions reflect who we are and where our priorities lie. May we consider this and act responsibly with the days You have entrusted to us. May we be found pleasing in Your eyes on the day we stand before You. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, Acts 26:12**

The Greek more properly reads, “In which also, traveling to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests” (CG).

The words of this verse give additional information to what Paul just said. He noted that he was pursuing believers in Christ, even to the out-cities. He now says, “In which also.”

In other words, he is explaining one time in which he was engaged in going to a city outside of Israel proper. In this case, he was “traveling to Damascus.”

Damascus is north and east of Canaan. By highway from Jerusalem today, it is 197-miles that takes approximately 4 ¾ hours to drive. The account he will speak of is recorded in

Acts 9. In this excursion, he went “with authority and commission from the chief priests.”

The word translated as “commission,” *epitropé*, is found only here in the New Testament. It indicates designated authority, meaning full power to make a decision. What he decided was to be considered final.

Again, though he is giving a narrative of the past, he is also showing quite clearly that the actions of the chief priests were (and thus continue to be) wrong. He had their permission to do what he was doing, even if it was not legally appropriate according to Roman law.

Life application: Legal does not make right. Paul may have been given the legal right by his chief priests to take a certain action, but it does not mean that what he was doing was right by another standard that also existed.

Likewise, just because something is legal, like abortion, it does not mean that it is morally justifiable. But this is the claim of those who support the procedure. However, if you ask the same person if it is ok to have slaves, he will cry out, “Of course not!”

But having slaves was legal in the past. Therefore, according to their standard, having slaves was fully justifiable. From a biblical standpoint, slavery is far more tolerable than abortion, and yet one can see how those who are opposed to biblical morality will turn the world upside down to overthrow God’s better way of conducting the affairs of life.

Be sure to contemplate the moral arguments set before you from a biblical perspective. When you do, you will see that some things you thought were acceptable because some governmental authority said so are actually not acceptable by the greater standard set forth by God.

*Lord God, we need to evaluate the world from Your perspective, and then we need to make our moral judgments based on Your perfect standards. But if we don’t know Your word, how can we do this? Help us to want to know Your word more and more. Give us a hunger for it, pursuing its perfect design for our lives all of our days. Amen.*

**“at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. Acts 26:13**

A bit more precisely, the Greek reads, “Mid-day on the road, O king, I saw from heaven – beyond the brightness of the sun – a light having shone around me, and those journeying with me” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul noted that he was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. Now, he continues his words stating, “Mid-day on the road, O king.”

In Acts 22:6, Paul uses the term *peri mesēmbrian*, “about midday.” However, he now says *hēmeras mesēs*, or “day mid.” They mean essentially the same thing, but it shows that he was not peculiar about the specifics of time. It also shows that this is not simply a faked narrative where the author went back and copied what he had already said.

Instead, Luke is detailing Paul’s words which are focused less on the specific timing than on the event itself. He next says, “I saw from heaven.”

The light is from above. It wasn’t the sun itself, and it wasn’t something shining the reflection of the sun. Rather, its source is separate from and greater than that of the sun. Understanding this, he next says, “beyond the brightness of the sun.”

The words that what he saw was brighter than the sun are unique to this verse. The light was beyond anything in the heavens. The redeemed are said to shine magnificently in Daniel 12:3 and in Matthew 13:43. As this is so, how much more magnificently does the Lord shine in His exaltation.

As this glorious radiance exceeded even that of the sun in brilliancy, and because it was from heaven, Paul would have been completely overwhelmed in the splendor of the light, something he avows is the case, saying, “a light having shone around me, and those journeying with me.”

The light literally encompassed the men as they traveled. Imagine what their thoughts must have been at this time! Paul’s generality concerning the time of day is not where his detail is centered. Rather, he was giving those gathered an account that was focused on the magnificence of Christ.

Life application: It is not uncommon for people to take Paul’s words from the various times he tells about this divine visitation and look for a contradiction in what he is saying. They do this in order to diminish the power of Scripture in the eyes of those they are trying to deceive.

Some do it to dismiss Christianity altogether while some do it to call into question Paul's apostleship. When looking at individual translations, it is possible to come up with apparent contradictions in Paul's words. However, in the Greek, and in properly translated versions, those supposed contradictions are removed.

This is also the case with other parts of Scripture. For example, people will argue over Isaiah 7:14 which uses a word that does not necessarily mean "virgin" and then call into question the citation of that as "virgin" in the New Testament.

All of a sudden, it appears that Matthew has made an error. But Matthew is not citing the Hebrew text of Isaiah. Rather, he cites the Greek translation, the Septuagint, which predates the coming of Christ by hundreds of years and which was translated by Greek speaking Jews.

They knew that Jesus would be born of a virgin. That is why they chose a Greek word that means "virgin." So, you can see how deceivers, knowing full well that these things are so, will still try to trip people up and ruin their faith.

This is why it is important to study such things. In closely evaluating Scripture, you will see that God is carefully instructing His people in the details of the greatest story ever told. Above all else, the Bible is focused on the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Be confident in this. God has given us a sure and reliable word. Trust that it is so!

*Lord God, help us in our times of doubt or weakness to be strong in our faith. May we be about the business of being grounded in Your word and in a right application of it in our daily lives. Yes, help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**"And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' Acts 26:14**

In the previous verse, Paul told the king about the light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that was shining around him and those with him. He continues next with, "And when we all had fallen to the ground."

Again, Paul gives a bit more detail than in the past. He says that not only he fell to the ground, but those with him did as well. This was not stated by Luke in Acts 9, and Paul left it out of his words to those of Israel gathered before him in Acts 22.

Apparently, the light was so overwhelming that they were simply stunned by it to the point of bringing them to the ground. From there, he next says, “I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language.”

Paul specifically identifies the voice as being in Hebrew. This was unnecessary in Acts 9 and Acts 22. However, Paul is addressing a room filled with various people, all of whom would have spoken Greek, along with any other language they knew. Therefore, Paul continues with the words spoken to him, saying, “Saul, Saul.”

The spelling of the name of Saul in both Acts 9 and Acts 22 indicated a Hebrew, not a Greek, address. The Hebrew is SAOUL, the Greek is SAULOS. There was no need for him to tell the audience this in Acts 22 as they were Jews who listened to the account.

However, it may be that he specifically addresses the council with the words “in the Hebrew language” to let the non-Hebrews know that it was the Jewish Lord who spoke to him, thus definitively identifying to them that the Messiah is, in fact, Jewish.

Further, this is one of the many proofs that the NT was written not in Aramaic or Hebrew, but in Greek. If not, then this, and each other such instance, is a non-scriptural addition. In this case, it is the spelling of the name that indicates this to us. Of the words spoken by the voice to him, he next says, “why are you persecuting Me?”

Again, as in the past, the voice asks, “Why are you persecuting Me?” In fact, Paul had persecuted Christians. Therefore, an attack against the body is an attack against the head. Paul’s efforts were only hurting himself as the voice then tells him with the words, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

Rather, the Greek is less specific, saying, “Hard for you to kick against goads.” It is an exact repeat of Acts 9:5, and it is how a Hebrew would speak, normally using less definitive wording than a Greek to express the same thought. Of kicking against the goads, the scholars at Cambridge describe that action –

“The figure is from an ox, being driven on in his work. When restive or lazy, the driver pricks him, and in ignorance of the consequences, he kicks back, and so gets another wound. The words would imply that God had been guiding Saul towards the true light for some time before, and that this zeal for persecution was a resistance of the divine urging. It is not unusual for men who are moved to break away from old traditions at such times, by outward acts, to manifest even more zeal than before for their old

opinions, as if in fear lest they should be thought to be falling away. This may have been Saul's case, his kicking against the goads."

According to Vincent's Word Studies, this metaphor concerning the goads is not found in Hebrew writing, but it was common among Greek and Roman writings.

Life application: As noted above, the words of Paul in this verse, as recorded by Luke, clearly indicate that the New Testament was first penned in Greek. Paul conveyed his name in Hebrew in the past, but he does so in Greek now for the benefit of the hearer. From there Luke clearly expresses the Greek form, something unnecessary in the previous accounts of this event.

Instances like this are found throughout the New Testament as well –

*"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,"* which is translated, 'God with us.'" Matthew 1:23

"Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, 'Talitha, cumi,' which is translated, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise.'" Mark 5:41

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep *Gate* a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. John 5:2

And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.  
-Revelation 16:16

These are just a few examples. If the words were not originally penned in Greek, but rather in Hebrew (or Aramaic), such explanations would not be necessary. And more, their inclusion now would mean that the words are not inspired.

This is important because we can see the transfer of the redemptive message away from only Israel to the entire world. But this was initiated long before the writing of the gospels when the Greek translation of the Old Testament was made. That is what is most commonly cited in the New Testament.

God was preparing the world for the message of the Messiah to go out in the most common language of the day, Greek. From there, it would then be translated into other languages. Some alphabets, such as the Cyrillic, were actually developed for the purpose of bringing Scripture to the people of the world.



Because of the work of Christian ministries, the Cyrillic alphabet is now used from Mongolia and Russia even to Ukraine and Serbia, along with many other nations. To this day, new written alphabets are being developed by people groups that do not have a written alphabet. This is being done to share the good news about Jesus.

From the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament to the Greek of the New, the whole world is being given this wonderful treasure we call the Holy Bible in their own languages. Thanks be to God for those who are going forth to make this possible!

*Lord God Almighty, we lift up the missionaries who are sharing the good news of Jesus around the world. Give them wisdom and fortitude to continue on. May Your hand guide them and bless them each step of the way. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**“So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.**  
Acts 26:15

In the previous verse, Paul relayed that in his encounter with Jesus, the Lord had asked him why he was persecuting Him. He then said that it was hard to kick against goads. With that, Paul next says, “So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’”

Paul wasn’t grasping the situation. There was a light brighter than the sun gleaming all around him and those with him. From there the voice of someone speaking. This Person, who was obviously not overwhelmed by the light as Paul and the others had been, asked him a direct question, the answer to which should have been obvious.

But certainly because of cognitive dissonance, he could not get himself to accept the obvious. And so, he must have tried to think of every possible option other than it being Jesus whom he was persecuting. While his mind certainly raced with wonder about who it was that he had been persecuting, the response came with Jesus’ answer, “And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’”

The content of these words, when compared to Acts 22:8, reveals a few differences, but the major one between the two is that in 22:8, it said, “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.” Here, the words, “... of Nazareth” are left off.

The probable reason is because the jurisdiction of Herod’s reign included Nazareth. That is known from Luke 23:7. Paul probably withheld this detail from the conversation to keep from offending Herod, especially before an entire council who could then snicker at the situation.

The incredible thing for Paul is that he had been on his way to continue his attack against Jesus' followers, but now he was being addressed by the very Person he was working to eradicate from the minds of the people. Jesus was no longer a dead false preacher to him. Instead, He had suddenly become the risen Lord. The thought must have been terrifying.

Life application: When we gather as congregants of a church, we are doing so because there is a church, a body of people who belong to the Lord. Our gathering implies that we have a reason to do so, which is to remember, celebrate, worship, and learn about the One we are gathering together for.

Jesus isn't just a thought or a concept that should keep us living rightly. Rather, He is the One who prevailed over death. He is the Lord God. Our time in church meetings shouldn't be a time of simply learning how to live properly by getting away from wrong living. Our time should be a heartfelt appreciation for what God has done for us in the giving of Christ.

Remember this. Don't let your thoughts about Jesus get misdirected from the fact that He is ever present with you. In Him you live and move and have your being because He is God. Let your life be a continuous stream of conscious understanding that He is with you. He is there in the trials and in the good times. He is as close to you in intimacy as you allow Him to be. Consider this and live in intimate fellowship with Him from moment to moment.

*Lord God, may You be the Lord of our lives at all times. You are there when we gather as a church, but You are also there when we are alone on a walk. There is never a time You are not with us. Help us to remember this and to always have faith that You are with us. In this, may we live our lives accordingly and to Your glory. Amen.*

**“But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. Acts 26:16**

In the previous verse, Paul had asked the question, “Who are You, Lord.” Jesus then responded, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Now, with Paul's mind certainly overwhelmed with that thought, probably in absolute terror concerning what disaster must surely be coming upon him, Jesus continues, saying, “But rise and stand on your feet.”

The words which Paul conveys in this verse are much fuller in the sense of the commission during this divine visitation than were recorded in either Acts 9 or Acts 22. Paul is carefully orchestrating his words because of the audience that surrounds him. With that, he continues the Lord's words to him, saying, "for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you."

What Paul is saying is more of a condensed form of the first vision along with the words given to him through Ananias as well as from the trance that he referred to in Acts 22:17-21.

He is giving his report of the overall account in this manner in order to show that he was, in fact, chosen and designated to take the actions he had taken. As for the word that he uses here for "minister," is the same as that which he used when speaking of himself in 1 Corinthians 4:1, there translated as "servant" –

"Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."

It signifies an attendant, an underling, or a servant. HELPS Word Studies says of this word, "properly, a rower (a crewman on a boat), an 'under-rower' who mans the oars on a lower deck; (figuratively) a *subordinate* executing official orders, i.e. operating under direct (specific) orders."

Paul was appointed as Christ's underling to carry the message of the gospel to all those he would encounter. At this time, it was to a gathering of royals and high officials.

Life application: Paul's words convey what happened, even if they are condensed from several events that took place over time. As he is in a court setting, he needed to get to the point concerning his calling as well as his commission. Therefore, he began with the initial vision and then added information to that which was based on his original calling.

Depending on the forum in which you are standing, it may be appropriate to keep your words short and direct. If you are given a time limit, it is good that you stick to it. It is nice to be heard about a matter that is important to you, but it is also good to be brief and concise.

If you are given a time limit and you go beyond it to any measure at all, each word you speak will be taken in a different light than you intend. People will normally begin to

shut your words out and no longer care about what you have to say. This is because you have shown a disdain for their time or the rules by which you were asked to speak.

Let your words be carefully chosen but few in number. In this, you will generally have the greatest impact concerning what you are trying to relay to others.

*Lord God, help us to be direct and to the point in our conversations. May this especially be so when we share the gospel. Otherwise, the very people we desire to convert may eventually get worn out from our overzealous words and begin to tune us out. Help us to know when to speak, what to speak, and when to conclude so that we have the greatest chance of touching their lives with our words. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**'I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, Acts 26:17**

More literally it reads, “delivering you from the people and the Gentiles to whom now I send you” (CG).

Paul just explained his calling to those of the court in which he stood, noting that he had been called as a minister and a witness concerning Christ. He now continues that thought. Taken together, they read, “But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you, delivering you from the people and the Gentiles to whom now I send you.”

The words “delivering you from the people” refer to the Jewish people. That is inserted by the NKJV for clarity. However, simply saying “the people” is a way of specifically identifying them. The fact that they are mentioned indicates that he knew, right from the mouth of the Lord, that he would, in fact, be persecuted by them.

However, the Lord also let him know that he would be delivered from them. The trials which had been held against him were proofs of this very fact. Along with them, it next says, “and the Gentiles.”

The implication is that he would be likewise persecuted by them, exactly as has occurred throughout all of his time recorded in Acts.

Albert Barnes notes that “As the opposition of the Jews arose mainly from the fact that he had gone among the Gentiles, it was important to bring this part of his commission

into full view before Agrippa, and to show that the same Saviour who had miraculously converted him had commanded him to go and preach to them.”

Paul’s words are carefully selected to show the substance of his commission and the Source of it, meaning Jesus. It is this ministry to the Jews and Gentiles that Jesus next says, “to whom now I send you.”

In some manuscripts, there is an emphasis in his words where the “I” is in the emphatic position, “to whom I, I send you.” If that is the correct reading, it is the same words used by Jesus, *egō apostellō*, “I, I send,” that is seen in Matthew 10 when Jesus selected and commissioned the original apostles –

“Behold, I send [*egō apostellō*] you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” Matthew 10:16

For Paul, he now recounts his own calling. The voice from heaven was sending him out with a promise of deliverance. The purpose of the marvelous commission is to be found in the next verse.

Life application: Paul’s opening words to those in Galatia say –

“Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), <sup>2</sup> and all the brethren who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.” Galatians 1:1-5

Paul was commissioned to minister to both the Jews and the Gentiles, but his primary mission was to the Gentiles. Jesus said that He would deliver Paul from both. But the fact is that the people he ministered to also needed to be delivered from the Jews as well.

It is the main purpose of the book of Galatians, meaning holding to the grace of God in Christ and not being suckered into law observance by the Judaizers. They had come to Christ, having never observed the law. They were given the Spirit and were saved. But

along came the Judaizers who told them that they now needed to be circumcised and observe Moses.

In doing so, they would be setting aside the grace that originally saved them. It would mean they were obligated to the law and grace no longer was of any value to them. Their lives and actions would no longer be acceptable to God. At the Bema of Christ, all they could expect is judgment with no rewards, only loss.

Unfortunately, this infection has crept into the church time and again throughout the church age in various ways. Anytime someone falls back on the law for personal merit before God, he sets aside God's grace. With Israel called back to the land, everything Jewish has suddenly become popular with many in the church.

This is fine to an extent. But along with this fascination of what God is now doing in the people of Israel after two millennia comes a renewed call to law observance. The church that has carried the banner of God's grace in Christ has been duped, once again, into the heresy of the Judaizers.

Be on guard for this. God's grace is not for sale. God's grace cannot be earned. God's grace requires faith that He has done it all. Trust in this and do not allow yourself to be brought under the yoke of slavery to the law that got Israel into the position it has been in for eons. Rest in Jesus, revel in the grace He provides, and be appreciative to God for His tender mercies to His people through the finished, final, and forever work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Lord God, thank You for Your wonderful love, mercy, and grace that has been so marvelously revealed in the coming of Jesus. The burdens are lifted. We do not have to earn Your favor and we no longer have a fear of death. Praise You, O God, for what You have done. Amen.*

**“to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” Acts 26:18**

Though clunky, a literal translation would be, “to open their eyes – the turned – from darkness to light, and the authority of Satan unto God. They received forgiveness of sins and a lot among those having been sanctified – the faith in Me” (CG).

The previous verse is provided with the addition of the ongoing words of this verse, "...delivering you from the people and the Gentiles to whom now I send you, to open their eyes." "Their eyes" is thus referring to those to whom the Lord is sending Paul. Of them, and in particular the Gentiles to whom his main ministry was directed, the Lord next says, "the turned – from darkness to light."

Paul is to be the vehicle by which this change was to come about. The people of the world without Christ are in darkness. It is a state from which they could not bring themselves. There is no ability to discern the mystery of the gospel apart from it being specially revealed to a person. This was to become Paul's ministry.

And he was the perfect person to accomplish this. He was a living metaphor of these words. He was spiritually blind and he was made physically blind as well. However, he was brought into the light of Christ, and he was healed of his physical darkness at the same time. He was blind, but now he saw. He could fully empathize with those he ministered to because of this.

As for the change in a person who receives this light, Jesus continues His words, saying, "and the authority of Satan unto God."

The thoughts are completely tied together. If one is of Satan, he is blind, he is without light, and he is under the authority of Satan, not of God. This is seen from the first pages of Scripture, and it carries through in the words of Jesus and the apostles. It even goes through the book of Revelation until Satan is finally cast into the Lake of Fire.

John, in his first epistle, sums this thought up –

"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." 1 John 3:8, 9

Sin is the problem. Violating law is what brings about the imputation of sin. The devil uses law to lure man to fall into sin. However, once a person turns to God through Jesus Christ, he is brought into the light, his eyes are opened, and he can see. In God there is no darkness, one who is in Christ is also, therefore, no longer in darkness.

As noted, this theme follows from the earliest pages of the Bible to the very last pages. It literally permeates Scripture. As for those who are so turned, Paul continues, saying, “They received forgiveness of sins.”

Some translations make this clause subjunctive, “that they may receive.” Others make it a cause-and-effect type of thing, “for their receiving.” However, the verb is aorist. They have had their eyes opened, they have been brought into the light, and they have moved from the authority of the devil to that of God. Hence, they have received forgiveness of sins. With that, it next says, “and a lot.”

In the opening of the eyes and the turning to God from Satan, there is then forgiveness of sins. In turn, there is then a lot, meaning an inheritance, for them. An inheritance is something granted by another. In the case of those who come to Christ, it means salvation, eternal life, and a heavenly hope. This is all to be obtained by simple faith in Christ’s complete work. Paul explains this in Ephesians 1 –

“In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13, 14

This lot, or inheritance, is next said to be “among those having been sanctified.” It is as sure of a pronouncement of eternal salvation as any found in Scripture. The verb is a perfect participle, an accomplished fact wrought by the act of faith.

A perfect participle indicates something that occurred in the past and which has continuing results at the time it is being referred to. As this is a statement of fact, it is something that can be conveyed at any time into the future. It thus speaks of eternal salvation. Understanding this, Paul then notes what brought this about, meaning how it was appropriated, saying, “the faith in Me.”

That is wholly consistent with his words of Ephesians 1 noted above. Those who have believed are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. God Himself seals that person as an absolute guarantee. It is something to be collected by the one to whom the guarantee is given. God has promised and it will come to pass.

This is what Paul was called to do. He was to go out into the Gentile world, even with the knowledge that harm would face him. He had a mission and a calling which was under the authority of God through Christ.



As this was so, then his mission could not be thwarted by any power on earth. The fact that he was standing there on trial then could only be considered a part of the plan in which he was called to participate. Either these words concerning Paul are true, or they are not. If they are, then all of the fighting against Paul's doctrine by so many in the modern world is simply a fight against the Lord Himself.

Life application: When properly considered, the words of this verse, which are perfectly in accord with the rest of Scripture, clear up a lot of really bad doctrine. They show that the law has no part in one's salvation. No works are required to be saved or to continue to be saved.

They show that all people are separated from God when they do not have Jesus Christ. Either one is under the authority of the devil, or he belongs to God because of Christ. The words also tell us (based on the previous verses) that one must be presented with the gospel and a response must be made, believing what was heard.

Once belief occurs, the person is saved, eternally. These and other points of doctrine are clearly presented in what Paul has said in just a few words to those who listened to him. It is our duty to consider what Scripture is telling us and to accept it at face value. People need Jesus. Without him, they are lost.

Does this affect you or move your soul? You may be the only person who will ever have the opportunity to clearly explain the gospel to them. Be about it while you can. Tomorrow may be too late.

*Lord God, Your gospel is clearly presented in Scripture so that we can know what to tell others. Help us to convey the life-changing message clearly and responsibly to those we come in contact with. May we be willing to do this so that they can have the same hope of eternal life that we now possess. Amen.*

**“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, Acts 26:19**

Paul just finished repeating the words of Jesus that he had received during the vision. With that, he next says, “Therefore, King Agrippa.”

Paul once again specifically addresses Agrippa as he did in verse 13. The word translated as “Therefore,” *hothen*, is derived from two words signifying “where” and “then.” The older English translations of “Wherefore” or “Whereupon” give a good sense of the

intent. The meaning Paul is conveying is that he received this vision, and from that, he made his decision, saying, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.”

It is an astonishing set of words to be considered. Paul uses the verb *ginomai*, to become or come into being. The tense of the verb, being aorist, gives the sense of “I did not become disobedient.”

As Ellicott notes, “The language of the Apostle is significant in its bearing on the relations of God’s grace and man’s freedom. Even here, with the ‘vessel of election’ (Acts 9:15) ‘constrained’ by the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14), there was the possibility of disobedience. There was an act of will in passing from the previous state of rebellion to that of obedience.”

It is another testimony to the doctrine of free will in man. Paul’s choice of words clearly signifies that he could have, in fact, been disobedient to the vision. However, his choice was to comply with what he had been told. In essence, his words can be turned around to say, “How could anyone find fault in me for being obedient to such a message!”

It is reflective of the words of Isaiah 6 –

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:  
‘Whom shall I send,  
And who will go for Us?’  
Then I said, ‘Here *am* I! Send me.’” Isaiah 6:8

The doctrine of free will in man is seen time and again in such callings. Moses and Jonah are great examples of this. Jeremiah is as well.

As for the word translated as “vision,” it is *optasia*. It refers to an actual vision as opposed to a dream or some other non-specific vision. It is used in Luke 1:22 and is frequent in the Greek translation of the book of Daniel.

Life application: The words of Paul in this verse confirm the doctrine known as synergism. It signifies that man has his part in the conversion process. However, that, in turn, does not mean that man has any part in the salvation process. These are two separate things that some try to shove into one box in an attempt to justify the incorrect doctrine of monergism.

Monergism teaches that man has no part in the conversion process and that God alone converts a person. For example, the idea of being born again from a monergistic teaching says that God chooses a person, God regenerates that person, allowing him to believe (he is born again), and from there, he believes and is saved. The teaching is utter rubbish.

Rather, the conversion process is based on the salvation process. Jesus did everything necessary for man to be saved, minus nothing. However, with that process complete, His work must then be appropriated by those who hear. They can mock, oppose, or blaspheme what they hear (see Acts 18:6), a free-will choice. They can contemplate and check out what they hear (as in Acts 17:20), a free-will choice. They can simply hear and believe (think of Cornelius in Acts 10), a free-will choice. Etc.

With the salvation process complete, man is hopefully provided the chance to believe in what He has done. This is why we share the gospel, send out missionaries, etc. Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the word of God. If the doctrine of monergism was correct, none of this would be necessary. In fact, it would be a pointless waste of time. God's will cannot be thwarted. But the process must be carried out –

“But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

-2 Peter 3:8, 9

God truly wants all to change their minds about Him. But He does not change it for them. Rather, He asks those who believe the message to get about the business of sharing the gospel. Only through that avenue will others be saved. So, get about sharing the gospel.

*Heavenly Father, help us to take Your word in its proper light. When we are presented with a doctrine that is incorrect, may You help us to identify it, contemplate why it is so, and then turn from it to that which is correct. We are asking for Your guiding hand to be with us so that we will be properly trained followers of You. Amen.*

**“but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. Acts 26:20**

More literally, it reads, “but those in Damascus first and Jerusalem, and to all the region of Judea, and the Gentiles – I declared to reconsider and turn to God, practicing works worthy of reconsideration” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul said to Agrippa that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Having said that, he continues with a list of those he preached to and what his message was, saying, “but those in Damascus first.”

This is just what is recorded in Acts 9 –

“So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

<sup>20</sup> Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” Acts 9:19, 20

From there, Paul next says, “and Jerusalem.” This is the next recorded location in Acts 9 that Paul went to after leaving Damascus. That is seen in Acts 9:26 with the words “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem.” From there, Paul next notes, “and to all the region of Judea.”

These words may not be chronological. In Galatians 1, he says –

“Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup> And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which *were* in Christ. <sup>23</sup> But they were hearing only, ‘He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried to destroy.*’ <sup>24</sup> And they glorified God in me.” Galatians 1:21-24

There are two separate clauses in the words, “(but those in Damascus first and Jerusalem), (and to all the region of Judea, and the Gentiles).” This then alleviates any supposed contradiction with Galatians 1:22 if it is not chronological.

However, as Jerusalem is within the area of Judea, his statement now may be included in Acts 9:28 where it says, “So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.” If Paul went around the area outside of Jerusalem, then this would qualify. Or his words could include in later trips through the area when returning from missionary journeys. Whatever the intent, he next says, “and the Gentiles.”

These words encompass the majority of Paul’s time recorded in Acts. It is also the substance of almost all of his epistles. First and foremost, Paul is the apostle to the

Gentiles. This is explicitly stated in Romans 11:13, Galatians 2:8, 1 Timothy 2:7, and 2 Timothy 1:11.

Of these locations, Paul next describes what he did when at each, saying, “I declared to reconsider and turn to God.”

The word is *metanoieó*, usually translated as “repent.” However, the word repent is no longer used in that way by most people. Today, people think of the word repent as being akin to “turn from sin” or some such thing. That is not at all what the word means. It signifies “to change the mind.” For a single word that carries the meaning, “reconsider” gets the point across.

Paul told those who he addressed, both Jew and Gentile to reconsider, meaning about their thinking concerning God and their relationship with Him. When they have so reconsidered this, meaning coming to Jesus who is God’s Messiah and path to salvation, they should then be “practicing works worthy of reconsideration.”

Here, Paul uses the noun form of the verb just used, *metanoia*. It means “a change of mind.” After reconsidering what one believes about God, one should then demonstrate his reconsideration by doing things that are worthy of what he has reconsidered. Those things are explained by Paul in his epistles.

Paul’s explanation to King Agrippa shows that he did exactly as the divine vision had instructed. If the vision was true, then he could not have done anything wrong and worthy of persecution, except by those who would reject the very mandates of God given in the vision. Which is exactly what the Jews did.

Life application: The verb translated as “declared” is in the imperfect tense (meaning it was an ongoing thing) and, unlike many translations, it comes after, not before, the list of those who Paul declared to. As you can see, it is located just prior to the word “reconsider.” This sums up his long and continuous activity of declaring his message.

Paul’s use of the word “reconsider” should be evaluated further. What does he mean? Is he saying that a work is involved in his gospel? Based on his consistent message in the epistles, the answer is obviously, “No.”

The word is defined by James Strong as, “change my mind, change the inner man (particularly with reference to acceptance of the will of God), repent.” HELPS Word

Studies agrees, saying, “properly, ‘think differently *after*,’ ‘after a change of *mind*’; to *repent* (literally, ‘*think differently afterwards*’).”

The idea of this as making some sort of active change in one’s life is not at all what this is speaking of. It is a mental assertion that one is out of favor with God, and after hearing the message of the gospel, he will change his thinking about the path that he is on.

For a person who has heard of Jesus and rejected Him, it is to change his mind about Him being God’s path to salvation. For someone who has never heard of Jesus, his reconsideration is from whatever idea he had about God and a relationship with Him to acceptance of Christ and yielding to His will.

The obvious question is, “How can one yield to His will until after he has been told what His will is?” If His will is for us to have faith, turning to Christ from another belief, then salvation must precede any works. Yielding to His will for salvation requires hearing a salvation message and responding to it. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

Paul’s statement that man is saved by grace through faith must stand. If this is so, then the words “practicing works worthy of reconsideration” are logically placed last in this thought. From there, the next logical question is, “What if he doesn’t do works befitting of reconsideration? Does this mean he could then become ‘unsaved?’”

If salvation is a gift and if the sealing of the Holy Spirit is a guarantee, then those things cannot be conditional upon performance. Rather, they are conditional upon knowledge, which comes through proper instruction concerning the gospel.

As for “practicing works worthy of reconsideration,” that can only then be accomplished by 1) knowledge, and 2) willingness to do what is expected. It is unreasonable to assume that anyone who had no discipleship would do what the Bible expects of him. How could he?

Further, every person who has received Christ is on a different level than every other person. This is why we have Bible studies, commentaries, etc. It is to learn doctrine. If we never do this, then we will never mature and do the works that Paul says we need to do, but this logically cannot bear on our salvation. Instead, it must fall into some other category of the workings of God. And it does, Paul explains that in 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 and 2 Corinthians 5:9-11.

Understanding this, if anyone ever tells you that you can't be saved because you haven't done this or that (Sabbath observance, baptism, eating the wrong foods, being circumcised, etc.), tell them to get out of whatever cult they are in. You are saved by grace through faith. Only after that, comes the practicing of deeds worthy of the change in you that took place. Those things are up to you as you work out your own salvation through faith.

*Lord God, help us to carefully consider the meanings of words in Your word as they were originally intended to be understood. Over time, the meanings of our words may change, but the intent of the original word does not. So, help us to pay heed as we consider various translations and to discover why there are differences. When we find out which is correct, may we faithfully consider what You are saying from that proper context. Amen.*

**“For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill *me*. Acts 26:21**

A more literal translation is, “Because of these, the Jews, me – having seized – being in the temple, endeavored to kill” (CG).

To understand what Paul says in this verse, reviewing the previous two verses will help –

“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, <sup>20</sup> but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.”

Remembering that, Paul next says, “Because of these.”

Because of Paul's obedience to the heavenly vision in declaring to the Jews and then to the Gentiles that they should repent (meaning reconsider), turn to God, and do works befitting their reconsideration, he says, “the Jews, me – having seized.”

The truth is that the other apostles were still in Jerusalem and were telling the Jews throughout Israel to do the same things. However, they were not under the same scrutiny or threat that Paul was. Rather, the main brunt of the Jews' animosity towards him was his going to the Gentiles. That is perfectly evidenced in his speech in Acts 22 –

“Then He said to me, ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.’  
22 And they listened to him until this word, and *then* they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a *fellow* from the earth, for he is not fit to live!’”

-Acts 22:21, 22

As with so many Jews to this day, there is a hatred of the notion that anyone but them is right with God. It is almost as if they feel God owes them salvation because of who they are. Paul understood that this was not at all the case. Everyone needs Jesus, and without Him, no person can be saved. As for the Jews having seized him, he continues, saying, “being in the temple.”

That was specifically noted in Acts 21. He was there to announce the expiration of his days of purification when he was to make an offering. While there, he was accused by the Jews who cried out –

“Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” Acts 21:28

It was at that time that Paul notes that it was him they “endeavored to kill.” That is specifically recorded in Acts 21:36 where they were crying out, “Away with him.” The meaning is that they wanted the world to be rid of him. Only the intervention of the Roman guards saved Paul from being beaten to death or torn to pieces by the rabid crowd.

In these words, is a verb found nowhere else in Scripture, *peiraomai*, meaning to try, attempt, endeavor, etc. It is from the noun *peira*, an attempt, trial, experiment, etc. It was because of the attempt of the Jews to kill Paul, something they had no legal right to do, that the Roman soldiers acted.

There are two distinct supposed sins that Paul was guilty of in the minds of the Jews. It is these that led to their desire to kill him. One was that he preached to the Gentiles. How dare he attempt to elevate them to the same level as the sacred people Israel!

The second and more direct issue was that he preached Jesus. They could not come to allow themselves to believe that a Nazarene who wasn’t a great and mighty defender of their cause was the Messiah. They had rejected Him, and they wanted nothing more to do with him.



As noted, however, the other apostles were still in Jerusalem and were living out their lives. Paul visited them while in Jerusalem. However, they were tolerated, though probably mocked by those who rejected Jesus. They may have taken abuse in other ways, but nothing is written concerning the utter opposition to their message that is said have come against Paul.

As for the Greek verb translated as “kill” in this verse, it is *diacheirizomai*. It is only used two times in the New Testament. The other time is in Acts 5:30 when describing the killing of Jesus. It is not without coincidence that these are the only two uses of this word. They killed Him and they wanted to kill His messenger.

Life application: The message of Jesus is one that offends. It has offended the Jews for two thousand years. It has offended kings, governors, presidents, and other world leaders. It has offended religious leaders from innumerable other religions. It offends those who are morally offensive in their being. And so forth. They killed Jesus, they tried to kill Paul, they have killed faithful believers all along. Even now, once Christian nations are becoming increasingly hostile to the message of Jesus.

Because of this, it is not unlikely that if a bad actor gets enough power, he and those under his authority will try to kill their own citizens who hold fast to their faith in Christ Jesus. Think of it! The only possible way that man can be reconciled to God is not only rejected by many, but it is the reason for the killing of those who cling to Him.

Stand fast in your faith as so many have in the past. Don't let the woes of this life weaken or shake the precious treasure of faith that you possess. Jesus will be there waiting for you if you are called to make the ultimate sacrifice for your faith.

*Lord God, what an increasingly trying and difficult world we live in for believers. Help us to remain faithful to our faith in You. May we be willing to take whatever trials come our way with grace and acceptance. May we not waffle in or walk away from our faith. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**“Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come— Acts 26:22**

More literally, the words read, “Having obtained, therefore, help from God unto this day, I have stood, witnessing to small and great, saying nothing except what both the prophets and Moses spoke is coming to be” (CG).

Paul just noted that talking about what the Lord expects is the reason why the Jews seized him and tried to kill him. Now, he explains why he has been rescued from this, saying, “Having obtained, therefore, help from God unto this day.”

Despite the Jews trying to kill him, he has been rescued from them because God has been on his side. If this is so, then it means – by default – that God has not been on the side of the Jews. They had wronged him, but more, they were conducting their lives wrongly before God.

As for the word translated as “help,” it is *epikouria*. It is found only here in Scripture. It gives the idea of external help, but of one of greater ability or power to one of lesser ability or power. In this case, it is divine assistance being from God. Paul says that because of this external help, “I have stood.”

This isn’t speaking of his standing in the court but of his ability to continue with the task to which he was called. It is the same metaphor he uses numerous times elsewhere, such as –

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” Ephesians 6:11-13

Paul was firm and unwavering in his proclamation, standing because God was with him and, as he says, “witnessing to both small and great.”

These words show that Paul saw no distinction in any man after receiving his commission. To Christ, and therefore to him now, there was no Jew, Gentile, king, servant, male, female, wealthy, or poor, or any other distinction that would preclude him from sharing the gospel. Barnes states it this way –

“He passed by none because they were poor; and he was not deterred by the fear of the rich and the great from making known their sins and calling them to repentance. What an admirable illustration of the proper duties of a minister of the gospel!”

As for his witnessing, he next notes that he was “saying nothing except what both the prophets and Moses spoke is coming to be.”

This final clause shows Paul's understanding that the doctrine of the Messiah was fully testified to in the Old Testament. Christ's life, work, atoning death, etc. were all carefully detailed, starting from Moses and continuing through the prophets.

All of what Christ would come and do was carefully laid out in their writings. As such, Paul was simply testifying to what those written witnesses testified to. He used their own words for the message he proclaimed. All that Christ was set to do, and all that He did, was spoken of in advance. Because of this, Paul's testimony was not his at all but God's. He was speaking as God's ambassador, something he explicitly states in his own writings, such as –

“Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:20, 21

Life application: If you are speaking accurately concerning the faith as it is recorded in Scripture, how can you not be bold in your proclamation? If you really believe that the Bible is the word of God, and if you are conveying the message of the Bible properly, you are simply explaining what God has already proclaimed. So why should you be distressed, peevish, concerned, etc. about what you are saying?

If someone takes offense at your words, they are taking offense at God's word. There is no need to be belligerent in your approach, but there is also no shame in being imprisoned for your stand. God is right here with us. Therefore, He is right there with you in such an instance.

Just be sure that what you are saying is properly stated and in accord with His intent. And the only way to know that is not to listen to your preacher or teacher, accepting his words at face value. Rather, you must know the word well enough to accept or dismiss what you are being taught. Otherwise, you are not really proclaiming the truth of God's word. In other words, “READ AND KNOW YOUR BIBLE.”

*Glorious Lord God, people in many churches are taught erroneous doctrine, but they accept what they hear without checking. That is a sad testimony to their time in church. It is also a sad testimony to their willingness to know You properly. May we not be led astray in such ways. Rather, may we be willing to check what we are taught and hold fast only to that which matches what Your word states. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**“that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles.” Acts 26:23**

The words of Paul are very difficult to express literally. They read, “that passable, the Christ. That first from dead – resurrection – He is come to preach light to both our people and the Gentiles” (CG).

Paul had just noted that what he said was nothing other than those things that the prophets and Moses said would come. With that, he next says, “that passable, the Christ.”

The word to describe Christ is an adjective found only here in Scripture, *pathétos*. It signifies one destined to suffer. In other words, he was passible. Thayer’s says he was endued with the *capacity of suffering, capable of feeling*.

Paul clearly asserted in the previous verse that each of the points of doctrine that he was to convey to his hearers was to be found in the very Scriptures that Agrippa himself would be aware of.

That the Christ would suffer is found in numerous passages in the psalms, Isaiah, Daniel, Zechariah, etc. These things are often specifically stated. In type and in picture, they can be found throughout the writings of Moses and all the way throughout the rest of the Old Testament.

That the Christ was liable to suffer was something that was ignored by the Jews. They had only focused on His acts of conquest, triumph, and power. They looked at the Messiah as one that would fulfill all of the promises concerning restoration of the land to them, leading the nations, and so forth.

What they missed is that these very things are actually found through His suffering. First and foremost, His power is, in fact, shown forth in His weakness. This portion of His coming was to handle the sin problem in man. Only after that is taken care of can man be restored to God.

Having a nation of people whose sins are not atoned for to lead the nations would make no sense. But the Jews misunderstood this and thought that it was Moses and the sacrificial system that dealt with these things, being sufficient to make them acceptable to God. But those things only anticipated Christ’s more perfect work.

After His suffering, Paul next focuses on the resurrection. In both type and in explicit references, the Messiah is shown to not only suffer, but to rise. As he says, “That first from dead – resurrection.”

Paul’s words are succinct and precise. If the Messiah was to suffer and die an atoning death for the people, and yet He was also to rule forever as the Leader of the people, then either there is an absolute and irreconcilable disconnect between the two thoughts, or the Messiah would first die and then be raised to rule. This is seen in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Greek translation of Isaiah 53:11 – *From the labor of His soul He shall see light.*

The Masoretic Text, the Vulgate, and the Targums omit this section of the passage, but it is surely original. In type, the resurrection is seen in the lives of Isaac, Joseph, Benjamin, etc.

It should be noted that Christ was not the first to come back to life. Both Elijah and Elisha raised children. The widow’s son was raised by Jesus and then later Lazarus was as well. However, Jesus was the first who was resurrected to eternal life. The others were merely raised to restored life. According to Leviticus 18:5, His sinless perfection demanded that He must rise.

Paul next notes that it was out of Christ’s resurrection that “He is come to preach light to both our people and the Gentiles.”

The words are rather difficult to express in English and translations vary widely. However, the verbs, being present tense, are well expressed with the words “He is come to preach.”

It is the resurrection which brings light to those who sit in the shadow of death. All mankind knows that death awaits. It is a dark and futile life. It is an existence with no hope. However, with the coming of Christ, a new Light has dawned. Eternal life is promised to those who trust in Him, both Jew and Gentile.

As for the words “our people,” it simply says “people,” but the word “our” is implied in the word used, especially because Paul is speaking directly to Agrippa.

Life application: The timeline of Daniel 9 says that a certain number of years would pass and then, with seven years left in the given timeline, the Messiah would be cut off. The meaning is that He would die.

If the Messiah died, and there are seven more years to go before the restoration promised by God for Israel under the Messiah would take place, then it means, by default, that the Messiah must resurrect. There is no way around this. The Messiah cannot reign if He were to remain dead!

Therefore, there must be a reason why He would die. That reason is the key theological point to be found in Scripture. Sin. Sin must be dealt with first and foremost before restoration with God can come about. The law was introduced to demonstrate this. Only in the fulfillment of the law can man stand in a right relationship with God.

Without that, only darkness exists. But in the fulfillment of the law, the light is made manifest. As all people already bear Adam's sin, then no person could fulfill the law and be right with God because Adam's sin predates the law. Therefore, Christ came in sinless perfection. He then fulfilled the law. He now offers His sinless perfection to any who will simply believe. This is the Light which has come into the world. Believe that God has done it! Jesus has prevailed!

*Lord God, thank You for the giving of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. How grateful we are to You for the promise and surety of total restoration and eternal life because of what You have done through Him. Praises to You, O God! Amen.*

**Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" Acts 26:24**

It is another verse that is rather difficult to translate directly. More literally, and with a newly coined word to get the sense, it reads, "And he, defending himself *by* these, Festus said *with a* loud voice, 'You are maniacizing Paul! Your great letters turn you to mania.'"

Putting the previous verse with this one will provide clarity on the subject, "that passable, the Christ. That first from dead – resurrection – He is come to preach light to both our people and the Gentiles. And he, defending himself *by* these, Festus said *with a* loud voice, 'You are maniacizing Paul! Your great letters turn you to mania.'"

Note: The word "maniacizing" didn't exist until this translation was made. It is a present verbal form of maniac to match the Greek.

Paul was speaking of the human nature of Jesus the Christ, noting that He was passable or capable of suffering. In that human nature, he died but was the first to rise from the

dead. It is concerning this line of speaking that Luke refers to Paul with the words, “And he, defending himself *by* these.”

The meaning is that in the process of speaking out what would otherwise seem absolutely incredible, because it is beyond anyone’s common understanding, that he is interrupted. Luke notes that, “Festus said *with a loud voice*.”

In other words, Festus had been listening up to this point, probably enjoying Paul’s words, even if he wasn’t on the same page with him. But when Paul spoke concerning the resurrection from the dead, he could no longer contain himself and simply blurted out his next words, “You are maniacizing Paul!”

The words are those of an eyewitness testimony. Luke was probably there in attendance, but if he wasn’t, we can still imagine Paul and him laughing over the response of Festus as Paul brought the memory back to words.

If Luke was not present at the time, the animation of Paul’s words was still enough for Luke to perfectly describe the scene. As Festus is sitting in judgment, it seems almost ridiculous that he would burst out in the way he has. It would be just like a judge yelling at a defendant, “You’re nuts.”

Although he may think these things about people while sitting in judgment, it isn’t a common or expected type of reaction. It would even show that an unfavorable judgment could be the result, simply because of his own bias against Paul’s argument. Regardless of this, the words are blurted out, and the reason for them is given as well, “Your great letters turn you to mania.”

The word translated as letters is *gramma*. It signifies that which is drawn or written down. Thus, a letter. We use the same term today when we say something like, “He is a man of many letters.” The same word is used in John 7:15 to speak of Jesus’ great learning as well. Here, it is in the neuter plural, and therefore it gives the idea of the cumulative body of writings which Paul studied.

Festus may have known that the Jews held fast to their sacred writings as no other people, even more so than the highly educated Greeks. The Greeks were in the habit of studying but also writing. The Jews claimed that what they read wasn’t their own writings, but the writings of God. Therefore, they were studiers first and foremost of that which they claimed was divine.

Festus may have known this, and his conclusion was that Paul had gone over the deep end in studying, finding things in the writings which he mentally converted into an obsession and then insanity. Paul had spoken the very words that these writings proclaimed (verses 22, 23), but Festus was unable to accept what he proclaimed.

Although his comments were limited, it is apparent that the words of 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 rang true in Festus's case. What Paul saw as logical, reasonable, and fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ, Festus saw as both incredible and mentally unsound. He surely thought that Paul had, as it were, been overwhelmed through study.

It is of interest that Paul never makes an appeal to either Greek reason or intellect in this speech as he did in Acts 17:25. Instead, he has spoken only of what can be derived from Scripture and which would keep him legally within the confines of a sub-sect of Judaism (*religio licita*).

As a brain squiggle, the word translated as “mania” is from the noun *mania*. That is derived from the verb form also used in this verse and translated as “maniacizing.” It is only used here in the New Testament. It is, of course, the basis for our modern term “mania.”

Life application: There is a duality in the final acts of the finished work of Christ. There is the cross, and then there is the resurrection. Neither is a stand-alone act. The cross without the resurrection would be a pointless sacrifice. The resurrection is an unintelligible event unless it is preceded by the atoning death of Christ.

Sin is the problem. People are spiritually dead because of sin. People then physically die apart from Christ because that sin problem is not corrected. Christ was crucified, becoming an atoning sacrifice for the sins of man. But if Christ did not resurrect, it would mean that either He died in His own sin or that the sins of those He died for stuck to Him, tainting Him with their sin. Either way, the act would have been futile.

But because He had no sin, and because He was able to fully atone for the sins of others, their sin is removed from them forever. His body was the offering that made this possible. In Acts 2, Peter says of Jesus that “it was not possible that He should be held by” death. As the wages of sin is death, and as He had no sin, death could not hold Him. But more, because His perfection was fully sufficient to atone for our sin, death could not hold Him by that either.



Thus, it is an absolute proof that those who are saved will forever remain saved. In coming to Christ, our sin is once and forever immediately atoned for. There is no sin beyond the cleansing power of Jesus' blood. To claim that would then be to claim that Jesus' sacrifice was insufficient to purify. Such cannot be the case! All hail the glorious name of Jesus. Hooray for Jesus!

*Lord God, we thank You for what occurred in the giving of Your Son for our sin. Jesus! It is all about Jesus. Forgive us for making our lives and thoughts about us. We are merely the recipients of the gracious work that You have accomplished through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.*

**But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. Acts 26:25**

A more literal translation is, "And he says, 'I am not maniacizing, most excellent Festus. But I declare words of truth and sanity'" (CG).

In the previous verse, Festus blurted out, "You are maniacizing Paul! Your great letters turn you to mania." The meaning is that Paul was basically bonkers and that too much studying had driven him nuts. Now, Paul responds accordingly. Luke notes that with the words "And he says, 'I am not maniacizing.'"

Paul returns the same word to Festus that he had just used, *mainomai*. It is the verbal form of mania. With that, he adds, "most excellent Festus."

Instead of a sharp response like he gave to the High Priest in Acts 23:3, he gives the title of honor which Festus bore. He also did this to Felix in Acts 24:3. The word, *kratistos*, translated as "most excellent," is also the same as that found in Acts 23:26 in the introduction of the letter from Claudius Lysias to Felix.

It is an adjective coming from *kratos*, a word signifying might, strength, dominion, power, etc. Thus, it literally means "strongest." This is its last use in Scripture. After having respectfully disagreed, he next says, "But I declare words of truth and sanity."

Paul turns the thought around. Instead of being insane, he claims that what he has said is true and sane. The second word, translated as "sanity," is *sóphrosuné*. This is the first of three times it will be used in the New Testament. The other two uses are in 1 Timothy 2:9 & 2:15. It is derived from *sóphrón*, temperate, sober-minded, self-controlled, etc. It

specifically means “soundness of mind, i.e. (literally) sanity or (figuratively) self-control -- soberness, sobriety” (Strong’s).

While Festus has accused Paul of being bonkers, Paul says that his words are well-minded. Unfortunately, an insane person will normally not know that he is insane. And a person who is deluded will not know his own delusion. This is certainly so in religious matters.

However, Paul’s simple response is also not the response of a lunatic or a deluded person. Instead, a person who is deluded will normally not continue to handle the matter as Paul will in the verses to come.

It is to be noted, however, that a person who is passionate is often mistaken for a lunatic. Paul had an enormous zeal to stamp out Christianity. That was redirected to building up the faith. In the eyes of many, Martin Luther probably seemed to border on insanity, and yet, it was his passion that led him to research the truth. His passion was not misdirected, but properly placed. Paul is the same. In order to demonstrate this, he will next turn his argument to one who can substantiate the claims of Scripture, even if not their fulfillment.

Life application: Someone who had never been to a football game might think that some of the fans were nuts. At times, they might be right. But for the most part, the crazy attitude of the people can be attributed to a passion for the sport, their home team, and the desire to be the winners. That, along with letting go of the stresses of the work week, might lead people to think that the stadium was filled with lunatics.

Understanding that zeal for something does not always indicate being crazy, how do people perceive you and your faith in Jesus? There are people who stand on street corners and annoyingly yell out about Jesus. It is true that their approach may be out of place, but it may be that they just can’t contain themselves and want to express their joy in the Lord in the only way they can think of.

How do you express your faith? Do people even know you have faith in Jesus? If not, why not? If people think you are nuts for believing in an unseen God who supposedly came in the flesh two thousand years ago, how much more nutty are they for believing in a universe that popped itself into existence?

When you discover that faith in Jesus is both rational and reasonable, you should be excited to defend that with others. This is because if it is the truth, then those people

who do not yet believe are on their way to eternal separation from God. Without Jesus, they are lost. That should drive you to some extreme or another based on your makeup, but if it doesn't affect your life towards them, there is probably a problem with you. Maybe you are nuts. Remind yourself daily: "Don't be nuts. Share Jesus with someone!"

*Glorious Lord God, help us to be more and more passionate about Jesus each day that we live. As we learn more, consider Him and His work, and think about what He has done for us personally, may it affect us greatly – changing us from peevish people to bold believers. Give us a renewed passion for Jesus each day. Hooray for Jesus! Amen.*

**“For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. Acts 26:26**

Though a bit clunky, the words more literally read, “For the king understands concerning these, to whom also, declaiming, I speak. For none of these, I am persuaded – none – are hiding from him. For this is not having been done in a corner” (CG).

Paul, in his reply to Festus, just noted that he was not maniacizing, but spoke words of truth and reason. With that, he continues, saying, “For the king understands concerning these.”

Paul must have seen something in Agrippa's evaluation of the trial to know that he was following along with it and understanding it exactly as it was being presented. Further, Paul appeals to Agrippa's position, knowing that one with his background, upbringing, and leadership could not have been unaware of the converted Jews' belief in Christ.

In fact, verse 28 will show that he was aware of it when he uses the title “Christian.” Paul's appeal holds a two-fold purpose. It was first to show that Agrippa was fully aware of what Moses and the prophets had prophesied concerning a coming Messiah.

Second, Agrippa would be aware that for more than twenty-five years, there was a subset of Judaism that held to the fact that those prophecies had been fulfilled in the person of Jesus. He had come, He had taught, and Agrippa would be fully aware of it and of how the things He did, in fact, matched what the prophets had said.

Therefore, he continues using two verbs in a row, normally translated adverbially because it is difficult to find a suitable set of words to accomplish this. However, saying, “to whom also, declaiming, I speak,” satisfies the translation perfectly.

The word declaim means to deliver words in a rhetorical or impassioned way. Paul is doing just that as he boldly proclaims words of his conversion and his mission as an apostle of Christ. And more, his speech is something that has been openly and publicly proclaimed for many years. Therefore, he next says with emphasis, “For none of these, I am persuaded – none – are hiding from him.”

The repetition of the word *ou*, or none, is usually ignored because it isn't easily translatable, but it is an important part of Paul's appeal. He is not only saying that Agrippa is aware of the teachings of Christians concerning Christ, but he is completely and fully versed on the subject.

It wasn't as if the Christians taught the crucifixion but not the resurrection. It wasn't as if this was a secret teaching that had escaped everyone's notice. Rather, what believers in Jesus proclaimed was fully expressed with no secret or hidden agendas. Peter had openly spoken to the people at the temple. Paul had openly proclaimed Christ everywhere he went. And so forth. Paul reconfirms this with his next words, saying, “For this is not having been done in a corner.”

Jesus stated this same type of thing as is recorded in John 18:20. When He was standing before the high priest during the interrogation He endured, He said –

“I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing.”

The message of Christ was never intended to be hidden under a bed or a basket. Instead, it is a message that has been intended to be proclaimed from rooftops and throughout the world. Paul avows that Agrippa knew this and comprehended it as an axiom of the faith.

Life application: The message of Jesus is exactly what Paul states in this verse. It is not from a closed and secret society, but from a group of people who are passionate about sharing what had so profoundly changed and directed their lives.

It is a message that isn't to be peddled for money or pounded over someone's head. Instead, it is a message that is to be presented and allowed to sink into the recipient's head. Sometimes, this may take many visits or discussions while sometimes, it may happen with just a few words.

However the message is transmitted, it is a message that must be shared properly and that should be shared with conviction. People need Jesus. Without Him, there is no hope. But in Him, there is complete restoration and the promise of eternal life. Be sure to share this message. It will make an eternity of difference in those who accept it.

*Lord God, may we be willing to share the wonderful message of Jesus as often as we can and with as many as we can. May we be bold enough to share it again and again if necessary. Help us to not be overbearing. And yet, help us to not lose heart. May our words about Jesus be appropriate to each and every situation. Amen.*

**“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.”** Acts 26:27

In the previous verse, Paul noted to Festus that none of the things he was saying would have escaped the attention of Agrippa, since what he spoke of was not done in a corner. Now, he directs his attention and words directly to the king, saying, “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?”

Paul’s question is intended for a rebuttal to Festus’ accusation concerning his being insane. It is actually a rhetorical insinuation towards Agrippa. By asking this of him, it is intended to then highlight what any Jew would naturally believe.

But even more, Agrippa could not answer negatively. His position demanded that he avow the Scriptures as inspired and true, even if his interpretation of them may differ from Paul’s, just as a Sadducee’s might differ from that of a Pharisee.

And so, to avoid having Agrippa become forced into a theological debate which could only become a rabbit trail to the matter at hand, Paul immediately answers his own question in the affirmative, speaking for the king, saying, “I know that you do believe.”

The pressure that was imposed upon Agrippa is removed. The Scriptures existed and were the basis for the culture and religious life of the people. In the case of Paul’s question, it didn’t matter if Agrippa believed their source was from God (or if Agrippa had a varied interpretation, such as the differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees), and Paul didn’t give him a chance to elucidate an answer.

Instead, Paul’s wording was chosen to silence the accusation of Festus for the sake of his defense. It was a brilliant way for Paul to get Agrippa to respond to the immediate words and to consider the greater subject, that of Jesus.

However the words of Scripture came to be, the important point is that they existed and that the words they consist of perfectly align with the Christian teaching about Jesus being Israel's Messiah. That Paul's intent in the choice of his words worked properly will be seen in Agrippa's response.

Life application: There are all kinds of things, almost an infinite number, that are debated about Scripture. A few major points are whether Scripture is inspired by God, creation vs. evolution, the deity of Jesus, the literal historical nature of what is recorded in Scripture, etc.

From there, people will argue if certain books belong in Scripture or not, whether this text or that is the correct one or not, and so forth. Even within the same text, how a particular verse is to be translated is debated.

On and on it goes. But the main subjects are actually quite clear. For example, whether the Scriptures are inspired by God or not is debated. Coming to a resolution in one's mind can be a long and difficult process. Some people take what they are taught at face value and accept the inspiration of Scripture. Specifically, they take whichever books are included in their copy of Scripture as inspired.

For example, Mormons consider the Book of Mormon as inspired. In fact, Mormons may not know the Bible at all, but they will cling to the writings of Joseph Smith in the Book of Mormon, reading and memorizing them.

Catholics are taught that the books of the Apocrypha are inspired. Hence, their canon is larger than the sixty-six books of the Protestant canon. Some sects include the book of Enoch in their canon. How can someone arbitrarily dismiss the Book of Mormon or the Apocrypha if they don't even know what is stated in the Bible?

Likewise, how can a Mormon accept the Book of Mormon unless he knows what is stated in the Bible? People are generally willing to go so far with their thinking, but eventually, they just trust what they have been taught, assuming that it is correct.

This is true with doctrinal points such as the deity of Christ, the meaning of predestination, the timing of the rapture, etc. Although it is fine to start with a particular viewpoint (we all have to start somewhere), it is not acceptable to stick with it without checking. There is a point where each person must say, "I am accountable for what I believe, and I will check out what I have been told."

To not do this is the business of a fool. The Book of Mormon and the teaching of Scripture are, ultimately, incompatible. Likewise, either Christ is God or He is not. If He is, then one must reject the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses. If He is not, maybe they are the true church! And so forth. These are really important points that people are often faced with. Is watching TV shows more important than eternity with or without God?

Think! Study! Consider! Pray! Your eternal state really depends on how you live and conduct your life in the presence of Your Creator... well, that assumes there is a Creator. What if we just exploded into existence? Think! Study! Consider! Pray!

*O God, if You are there, and if You really hold man accountable for the life he lives, I pray to You to lead me to the truth. The Holy Bible claims to be Your word. It tells of Jesus. If He truly is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, I pray that You will lead me to a right and proper understanding of Him. I will start with the gospel. Open my heart, O God. Amen.*

**Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."**

Acts 26:28

A literal reading is much sparser in content, "And Agrippa to Paul: 'In a little, you persuade me to become a Christian!'" (CG).

Paul just asked Agrippa if he believed the prophets. He then immediately answered his own question, acknowledging that the king did. With that, a response comes from the king, "And Agrippa to Paul: 'In a little, you persuade me to become a Christian!'"

Agrippa's response shows full well that he was aware of the entire situation, exactly as Paul had said. He uses the term "Christian." So far, it has only been used once, in Acts 11:26, concerning the believers in Antioch, where the term was first used.

That term, however, had obviously become well known enough to become common, even by the king himself. It is believed by some that the term "Christian" is used in a negative sense and only later would it come into a positive one. It is assumed by some scholars that in each of the three times it is used in the Bible, it is stated as a term of derision. It is last used in 1 Peter 4:16.

Regardless of this, though, this is one of the highly debated verses in the Book of Acts. The words are difficult for even the greatest Greek scholars to be adamant about. The KJV inserts a presupposition and says, "...almost you persuade me." Other versions say,

“Do you think in such a short time you can persuade me...?” or “In brief, you are doing your best to persuade me...” One paraphrase says, “...you are making short work of my conversion: you are persuading me to become a Christian as suddenly as you yourself did.” Another scholar, considering the negative connotation of the word “Christian,” paraphrases this, “Thou wilt soon have me one of that despised sect.”

The Pulpit Commentary gives more ideas with these words – “Another difference of opinion is whether the words of Agrippa are to be taken ironically, or sarcastically, or jestingly, or whether they are to be taken seriously, as the words of a man shaken in his convictions and seriously impressed by what he had heard. The whole turn of the narrative seems to favor the latter view. Another view, started by Chrysostom, is that Agrippa used the words in one sense, and St. Paul (mistakenly or advisedly) took them in another.”

Finally, another scholar finds the intent to be, “By your appeal to the prophets you press me hard; you have got me into a corner. I am in a στενοχωρία, a narrow room; ‘I hardly know how to get out of it.’”

Reading all of these and considering each doesn’t get us any closer to knowing exactly what he meant. This includes adding in Paul’s coming response. Normally, it would show exactly what Agrippa was thinking, but as the Pulpit Commentary said, Paul may have simply ignored the response and restated it in order to continue to impress upon Agrippa the surety of his own convictions.

I have given the most literal translation and inserted an exclamation point. This could then be the king’s note of surprised rebuke, a highly dubious sense of questioning, or even an adamant confirmation that he could actually be swayed by Paul. An exclamation point allows for any of these options and more, just as the brevity of the wording does.

Life application: The Bible shows quite clearly that when the gospel is preached and the word is believed, salvation occurs. This is evidenced in Acts 10 at the conversion of Cornelius and those with him. It is also implied in Paul’s words in the following verses –

The gospel:

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4



A response of faith:

“In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13, 14

We have no idea what Agrippa’s heart accepted. If he believed with his words being a confirmation of that belief, then he was saved. If the record of his life after this is one of never living the way he should, that does not negate that he was saved, and that God sealed him with a guarantee of that salvation.

That is true for every person attending the court at that time. It is God who reads the heart of man. It is God who accepts the faith of a person. And it is God, who cannot err, who seals that person with the seal of the Holy Spirit. If you are fighting against the doctrine of eternal salvation, you are fighting against God’s decision, which He alone has the right to make.

Don’t fight against God. Straighten out your doctrine to align with His word and His will.

*Lord God, how faithful You are to Your unfaithful people. May we be sound in our thinking and reasonable in our theology. What You determine is an eternal decree. Help us to understand this and accept it. Your faithfulness is in no way negated by our unfaithfulness. You are the great and covenant-keeping Lord our God. Hallelujah and Amen!*

**And Paul said, “I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.”**  
Acts 26:29

A literal rendering would be, “And Paul said, I would wish to God, also in little and in much, not only you but also all those hearing me this day to become what manner I also am, besides these bonds” (CG).

Agrippa had just responded to Paul concerning what he had heard, saying, “In a little, you persuade me to become a Christian!” With that, Luke next records, “And Paul said, I would wish to God, also in little and in much.”

It is similar to our saying that “in any way, shape, or form.” The NIV assumes it is referring to time. Others take it to mean little and much discourse. Whatever Paul’s

exact intent, it was his hope as they listened, they would be converted and become like him.

Further, his response to the king's words could be either dismissive or a response based on a misunderstanding of what the king's intent really was. Whatever the king's intent was, Paul's was clear. It was Paul's great desire that what he next says would be realized, which is that "not only you but also all those hearing me this day."

Paul is speaking to Agrippa, but he is appealing to all in the room who are attending. He was willing to continue to work towards the conversion of anyone who listened and for whatever time it would take. This was his passionate appeal for any and all who heard him "to become what manner I also am."

Paul says this with the intent that they would be converted to Christ, devote their lives to Him, and be willing to stand before anyone and proclaim what He was willing to proclaim. Despite this, he adds in the carefully selected words, "besides these bonds."

Paul's hope was that they could do what he was doing and be like him in his life, but to do so freely and without the constraints that kept him bound and imprisoned. As for his appeal to the people, it is reminiscent of that made by Elijah in 1 Kings 18:21 and also of the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:16.

He desired that the people would not halter between two opinions and not be lukewarm in their zeal, but to believe and to carry that belief into lives of action.

Life application: People need Jesus. Paul was unashamed of his bonds, and he was willing to proclaim Jesus to those who were there to judge him. Whatever they could do to him was inconsequential in relation to what God would reward him with.

He understood that this life is merely a steppingstone to glory. If we could just have this same attitude, we wouldn't be living as if one foot was here and the other was in heaven. Rather, we would consider that we are already seated in the heavenly realms in Christ. Positionally, it is a done deal. Therefore, what can man do to us?

Let us consider this and be willing to speak out concerning the good news we possess. People need Jesus. Let us tell people about Jesus. Someday, our time to do so will be through. Let us use the day while it is light. May it be so, to the glory of God who has saved us.

*Lord God, give us the wisdom to consider our position in Christ and the gumption to then tell others about it. We have been redeemed. We are on the road to eternity with You. Nothing will change that, and so help us to express this to others while we have the time. May we not be slack in doing so. Yes, Lord, give us wisdom in this. Amen.*

**When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; Acts 26:30**

More literally, “And he, having said these, the king arose, and the governor, and Bernice, and those sitting with them” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul had just concluded his words to those gathered in the court. With his words complete, this verse starts with, “And he, having said these.”

These words are not in the Alexandrian text and are thus excluded from modern translations that use that source. Instead, it simply goes to the matter of the rising of the officials. Luke records that, saying, “the king arose, and the governor, and Bernice, and those sitting with them.”

The order of rank is the order in which they rose. First the king, then the governor, then Bernice, wife of the king. After that, all those other less distinguished fellows sitting with them. At the standing of the king, the trial was ended.

As for the final words of Paul from the previous verse, the word *desmos*, chains, will be used in an ironic manner in just a few more moments.

Life application: There is usually a set order in how such gatherings are conducted. It is not uncommon for someone to come before the arrival of the highest officials and tell others when they should stand, when they should sit, and so forth. This is to maintain a set dignity and to pay honor and respect to whoever is considered the greatest within the gathering.

In Luke 9, Jesus said –

“Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. <sup>47</sup> And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, <sup>48</sup> and said to them, “Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great.” Luke 9:46-48

The world runs by its own standards, and these vary within societies. But it is often the case that Jesus is not on the minds of the leaders. The life of Jesus is one that was of submission. He submitted Himself to the will of His Father. He submitted Himself to a physical human form. He submitted Himself as a baby under the care of fallible parents. He submitted Himself under the authority of the Law of Moses.

He also submitted Himself to the Jewish authorities and even the Roman authorities. This went to such an extreme that He allowed Himself to be beaten, rejected, and crucified. To this day, He implicitly submits Himself to each person who hears the gospel, giving them the opportunity to accept or reject His grace.

He doesn't force His goodness and His offering of eternal life on anyone. Paul acknowledged this by telling his hearers in this court that he "was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19). In other words, Paul could have retaken the reins of his life, rejecting Jesus.

Jesus, by giving every person the chance to accept or reject Him, has put Himself in the position of least of all. And yet, He is the Creator and Redeemer of humanity. Someday, every person who has made their decision will be judged according to the decision he has made. Paul notes this in Philippians 2 –

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, <sup>7</sup> but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

-Philippians 2:5-11

The God we serve graciously gives us the choice to live out our lives as we wish. When He sends judgment, it is often to correct us and turn us back to Him. At times, judgment is made final for those who have gone so far that there is no longer a remedy for them. This is true, for example, of the flood of Noah or Sodom and Gomorrah. But even that judgment is a self-inflicted wound.

Consider these things. Consider the goodness of God in Christ. He was willing to suffer for us so that we could be spared what we actually deserve. The great and exalted Lord of lords has done it all. Call out to Him for salvation, and in your salvation be continuously renewed in His goodness. Hooray for Jesus!

*Lord God, how difficult it is to admit that we are sinners in need of a Savior. And how incredible is the way in which we are saved. The cross is the ultimate expression of Your goodness to the people of the world. May we cling to the cross all our days as we await the return of our glorious Lord – Jesus. Thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, “This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains.” Acts 26:31**

A more literal translation would be, “And, having withdrawn, they spoke to one another, saying, ‘Nothing worthy of death or bonds is the man doing’” (CG).

With the substance of the trial complete, the previous verse noted that the king stood up. This was followed by the governor, Bernice, and the others. Now, Luke records, “And, having withdrawn, they spoke to one another, saying.”

The words here had to come from somewhere. It could be that Luke was allowed to listen as Paul’s recorder, or it could be that their deliberations were later secured by Luke from an official recorder or someone else. Either way, there was a private counsel, apart from Paul’s ears.

In their conversation, they make the ironic judgment that “Nothing worthy of death or bonds is the man doing.”

Paul concluded his deliberation noting his, *desmos*, bonds. That is now the same word they use in noting that he should be exonerated of any wrongdoing. In other words, Paul’s bonds which he held up as the thing that marked a difference between him and those in attendance, showed that there was really no difference at all except the gospel he proclaimed.

This account, once again, shows that Christianity within the Roman Empire was to be considered *religio licita*. Thus, it was acceptable for practice by any under its rule. For Paul, however, the story was not yet over. More would be required of him when he would stand before Caesar.

Life application: Luke meticulously continues to record the fact that Christianity is a valid extension of the redemptive narrative of the Jews recorded in their writings. This is significant because the Old Testament writings have proven true concerning the state of the people of Israel for 3500 years, both as a reliable historical narrative and as a prophetic indicator of their relationship with the Lord, both in the land and in exile.

Because Christianity was deemed an acceptable extension of Judaism, the claims of the apostles could not simply be dismissed as an aberration by the Jews. Each time they attempted to disassociate Jesus and what He signified to them as a people from their own religion, impartial witnesses – from within and without their culture – argued that the message concerning Him was wholly in accord with their writings and was not a separate, unconnected concept.

This was true of Peter and his message to the Jews, and it is true of Paul in his message that extended beyond the Jews to the Gentile world. The importance of this is that even if the Jews disagree with the message of Jesus, they cannot say that it was ever regarded as invalid by the authorities God placed over them.

As such, it stands as a witness against them that the message accepted by the nations is a message that they themselves have rejected. If it is the truth, they have no right to claim they were unaware of the matter. Jesus spoke of this to the nation, clearly and unambiguously, as is recorded in John 5. At the end of that chapter, He restates the matter –

“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. <sup>47</sup> But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” John 5:46, 47

This, then, is what Paul is referring to when writing to those in Rome while citing Scripture as a witness to the fact that they are without excuse –

“But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says:  
'I will provoke you to jealousy by *those who are* not a nation,  
I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.'  
<sup>20</sup> But Isaiah is very bold and says:  
'I was found by those who did not seek Me;  
I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.'  
<sup>21</sup> But to Israel he says:  
'All day long I have stretched out My hands  
To a disobedient and contrary people.'” Romans 10: 19-21

These things are instructive for us. If God has been faithful to this faithless nation, preserving them even in their rejection of Jesus, it tells us the surety that He will always be faithful to His covenant promises. Israel's faithlessness does not negate God's faithfulness. What does this tell you about your own times of failure before the Lord who has saved you?

Rest in your salvation. When you fail the Lord, pick yourself up, talk to Him about it, and get yourself back on the right path. He has saved you, you are forgiven, and He will bring you to Himself some wonderful day.

*Lord God, Your faithfulness is without limits. How can we not rejoice when we consider what You have done for us? We were lost and without hope and then came Jesus. We continue to fail You, and yet there is Jesus. Thank You, O God, for our Savior, our Mediator, and our Advocate. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." Acts 26:32**

In the previous verse, those gathered after the trial had said, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains." In this verse, it starts, "Then Agrippa said to Festus."

Festus had asked for advice and an opinion on the matter of Paul. That has now been rendered by Agrippa and it will give Festus the statement he needed to include with Paul's continued evaluation in the Roman court. The mutually agreed decision was that he was innocent. And more, Agrippa next says, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

Paul was innocent and should be walking free at this very moment. That could not yet happen, however. But at least Festus had something to include in the letter that would accompany Paul's case as it went to Caesar. He could say exactly what Agrippa had stated, thus excusing Paul's being sent to Rome as a legal technicality based on the appeal to Caesar.

Obviously, the appeal was the right thing to do for several reasons. The first is that it kept Paul from being released and put back in peril of the Jews. Second, it allowed for this very trial of Chapter 26 to have been held. Third, this will now allow for the continued spreading of the gospel along the way to Rome as well as into the areas of Rome by Paul (as will be seen in the next two chapters). Fourth, the trial before Agrippa brought the issue of Christianity to the forefront of the courts in the land of Israel.

No Jew could come forward and accuse the converts of being a subversive heretical sect in a Roman trial. The precedent has thus far been set and the Christian way of faith has found a legal footing in the courts of Rome. It would likewise be found legal in the final court of Caesar.

Any Caesar who came later, and who persecuted the Christians, would be found to be persecuting an established and already accepted faith within the empire. The work of Paul, by the direction of the Lord, ensured that everything was set to proceed in the most marvelous way for the expansion of the faith which is found in Jesus Christ.

Life application: When we see Christians persecuted for their faith, we might ask where the sense in their persecution rests. How could God allow them (or us!) to be treated so shamefully? Although it is a completely different context in which Jesus was speaking, the words remain true in other contexts as well when He said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing."

In the end, if we are saved, it may be troubling, painful, terrifying, and so forth to see Christians persecuted and tortured, but what happens to our bodies is actually very temporary and passing. In the end, the Spirit has given true believers life. They will be raised, and they will be given eternal joy in the presence of the Lord.

Paul is one such example, but the record of faithful martyrs for Christ has continued on unabated for two millennia. Those who truly are to be pitied are those whose faith is misdirected in heretical sects and false religions who die for their faith. They are the ones who will be eternally separated from God.

When a true Christian is persecuted, we can know that their troubles will be temporary and, in the end, he will be vindicated by the Lord who watches over those who are His. Let us take heart in this and remember that God has a plan that is being worked out. Paul's trials are leading to a furtherance of the gospel. Ours, if they come, will serve their own purpose in meeting God's plans and purposes.

*Heavenly Father, may our lives be used to glorify You at all times, even if suffering comes. Help us to keep our thoughts on what is eternal as we pass through this troubled and fallen world. We have a job to do in sharing the gospel and in being a witness to Your presence in our lives. Be with us and sustain us through our days. Amen.*



## CHAPTER 27

**And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to *one* named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. Acts 27:1**

Much more literally, the words read, “And when our sailing away to Italy was decided, they delivered both Paul and certain others, prisoners, *to a* centurion *by* name Julius, *of the Augustan cohort*” (CG).

Chapter 26 ended with the words of Agrippa noting that if Paul had not appealed to Caesar, he could have been released. However, he did appeal, and so Chapter 27 begins with, “And when our sailing away to Italy was decided.”

The narrative includes the first-person pronoun “our.” This connects the account all the way back to Acts 21:17. What we can infer is that Luke was probably there with Paul the entire time that he was in Caesarea. He may have even used this time in the compilation of the Gospel of Luke.

As for the travel to Rome, how the decision to sail was made isn’t explained. It could be that it was cheaper, quicker, safer, requiring less manpower, or for some other reason. Probably it was just the common way of delivering prisoners from this area as it was a seaport.

The fact that other prisoners were on board with him lends itself to the thought of traveling by ship. They could be more easily contained than going by land. The word *apopleo* is used here. It is from a compound word exactly meaning “sail away.” This is the fourth and last time it is seen. All have been in Acts in connection with Paul’s travels. In preparation for this sailing away, it next says, “they delivered both Paul and certain others, prisoners.”

The word translated as “others,” as in “certain others, prisoners,” is *heteros*. It means “another of a different kind.” In other words, Paul is singled out from the rest. Translating this as “certain other prisoners,” as the NKJV does, fails to provide any distinction. However, in saying “certain others, prisoners,” it helps the mind consider that there is, in fact, a distinction.

The choice of words used by Luke carries a note of his being conducted to Rome for a different reason than the others. His innocence has already been established, but his appeal made his appearance before Caesar a requirement, regardless of his innocence

or guilt. Understanding that, it next says, “*to a centurion by name Julius, of the Augustan cohort.*”

In the Greek, Luke uses four nouns and an adjective – centurion name Julius cohort Augustan. Therefore, a bit of insertion needs to take place for clarity. Julius is introduced here, and he is noted as a centurion of the Augustan Regiment.

There is much dispute as to exactly what this regiment is. The Greek reads, *speirēs Sebastēs*, or the cohort of Sebastos. Sebastos means venerated or august. It is a title of the Roman emperors. Thus, secondarily, it signifies Augustan, imperial. Albert Barnes gives his thought on this band, which is as logical and probable as any other view –

“It was a division in the Roman army consisting of from 400 to 600 men. This was called ‘Augustus’ band’ in honor of the Roman emperor Augustus, and was probably distinguished in some way for the care in enlisting or selecting them. The Augustine cohort or band is mentioned by Suetonius in his Life of Nero, ...”

Life application: Bible study is something that doesn’t just have to happen on Wednesday night at church. It can happen right in your own home each day as you pull out a commentary and read it along with the passage you are presently reading in the Bible.

As for Acts 27, there are 44 verses in the chapter. Following along for these 44 days with this commentary will provide insights into the contents of the chapter, the original Greek context of various words, the intent of the author, the life of Paul as he heads to Rome – including getting lost at sea in a great storm and getting shipwrecked on an island – and so much more. After that, Chapter 28 is comprised of just 31 more verses.

Be sure to spend the next 74 days with us as we search out the wonderful words of Scripture concerning the adventures of Paul as he shares the gospel to the Gentile world.

*Lord God Almighty, what a wonderful gift Your word is. Thank You for the exciting details of people who have gone before, and of stories of times past, that lead us to a better understanding of Your great work of redemption as it is revealed in and through the Person of Jesus Christ our Lord. Yes, Lord, thank You for this precious gift. Amen.*

**So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. Acts 27:2**

The Greek closely reads, “And having boarded a ship of Adramyttium, intending to sail unto among the regions of Asia, we headed out. Aristarchus, a Macedonian, being with us” (CG).

Chapter 27 began with a note concerning the anticipated departure of Paul, prisoners, and a centurion named Julius to Rome on a ship. That now continues with, “And having boarded a ship of Adramyttium.”

The word translated as “boarded” is *epibainó*. It is now used for the sixth and last time. It comes from two words meaning “upon” and “step.” Thus, it means “to step upon.” However, for simplicity and clarity, “having boarded” gives the proper sense.

Saying it is a ship of Adramyttium could mean either a ship originally built there or a ship that found its home harbor there. It is probably the latter. The ship was sailing on trade and was now returning to its home port which happened to be a stop on the way to Rome.

Adramyttium was a town on the coast of Mysia, opposite the island of Lesbos. It was on the Roman road which went from Assos and Troas to the cities of Pergamos, Ephesus, and Miletus. At the time, it was apparently a considerably important city.

With that noted, Luke continues the narrative, saying, “intending to sail unto among the regions of Asia, we headed out.” This is referring to the course of the ship as it set out, not the intent of Julius and those with him. Their intent was to get to Rome. However, the ship was a ship of business.

Rome would pay for the passage of Julius and the prisoners, but the ship would follow its own set course. If one were to hitchhike on the highway and a big rig stopped, the driver might say, Climb aboard! I’ll get you to Tupelo, but we’ll be making several out-of-the-way stops as we travel. This is the idea of Luke’s words now.

Later, verse 6 will note the change in ships for the continued journey to Rome. Transferring from one ship to another was common and it was seen in Paul’s earlier travels. This is no different than taking several buses, trains, or planes today in order to get to a final destination. Understanding this, it next says, “Aristarchus, a Macedonian, being with us.”

Aristarchus is now mentioned again. He had come to Jerusalem with Paul as was seen in Acts 20:4. It can be inferred that he had stayed with Paul, just like Luke did, for the

entire time that he was in Caesarea. He is probably going to head back to his home in Thessalonica now, but it is also possible that he wanted to continue on with Paul in all of his travels.

Either way, he will end up in Rome because of what lies ahead. Concerning this guy, there is speculation about his status with Paul at other times. In Colossians 4:10, he is called Paul's "fellow prisoner." That seems obvious on the surface, but in Romans 16:7, Paul calls Andronicus and Junia "my countrymen and my fellow prisoners."

However, Paul wasn't in prison when he wrote Romans. Further, in Philemon 1:23, 24, he calls Epaphras his "fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus," but he doesn't say this about Aristarchus who is also named.

For this reason, there is speculation as to what Paul is referring to, whether it is being a prisoner either at that time or at some other time (as being noted as a badge of honor), or of some other implied meaning in the word "prisoner."

No matter the intent, Luke is careful to mention Aristarchus as a part of those who traveled with himself, Paul, and any others despite him not being mentioned again in the book of Acts.

Life application: The idea that is being conveyed in the verse is that Rome is the ultimate destination of those heading out. However, they already know that the ship they are on will only go so far. As it goes, there may be stops along the way. Eventually, they will have to find another ship and continue on towards Rome, repeating this until they finally arrive.

For the Christian, we are on a journey. Our ultimate destination is decided, but we cannot get there directly at this time. However, each day that passes and each place we find ourselves brings us that much closer to our place of rest.

Let us suppose that each point along that trip has bearing on the quality of our time in our ultimate destination. If we fritter away our stops along the way, we will reduce the gain we might receive. If we live by faith and act according to that faith at each stop, we will increase the gain that comes to us when we finally arrive.

Is sightseeing really so important at each stop? Is marking out temporary pleasure what we want? Or is what we will receive at our ultimate destination our target with each passing day? Remembering that the good we receive is something that also pleases the

Lord. And so, let us use our time and location each moment of our days with our eyes directed to Jesus and our thoughts always considering Him. May it be so, to the glory of God who sent His Son into the world to bring us safely home to Himself.

*Lord God, help us to evaluate the time and place we find ourselves from day to day from a heavenly perspective. May we be faithful to do what is right, honoring You, and worthy of reward with each step we take on each new day. Help us to look at this life from a heavenly perspective. May it be so, to Your glory. Amen.*

**And the next *day* we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave *him* liberty to go to his friends and receive care.** Acts 27:3

A literal rendering of the Greek is, “And another day, we brought down at Sidon. And Julius, having treated Paul philanthropically, permitted him, having gone to his friends, to receive care” (CG).

Luke is in the process of describing the ongoing voyage from Caesarea to Rome. He continues that now with, “And another.”

The meaning is “another day.” Luke is highlighting what occurred on this particular day, which was like any other, except upon arrival, there will be friends of Paul at this location. Luke next says, “we brought down at Sidon.”

After this day of sailing, which was about 70 miles, it says they “brought down” at Sidon. The word is *katagó*. It comes from two other words, *kata* (down) and *ago*, (to lead or bring). It gives the idea of bringing the ship down from the deep water of the high seas to the land. It is used in Luke 5:11 concerning the Lake of Gennesaret.

The seas, even in the smaller body of water like the Sea of Galilee, are considered elevated above the shores where they meet the land. At this stop in Sidon, it says, “And Julius, having treated Paul philanthropically.”

The word is found only here in the New Testament, *philanthrópós*. It literally means in a man-loving way, thus humanely. Vincent’s Word Studies notes the fault in the KJV translation, which says “courteously” rather than kindly – “Courteous, from court, expresses rather polish of manners than real kindness.”

In other words, this wasn't an act of polished manners on Julius' part. Instead, it was a true act of humanity. Luke notes it as such with this special word. The regard by Luke for

Julius is evident in the term used. The philanthropic way in which he dealt with Paul is next stated. He “permitted him, having gone to his friends, to receive care.”

Julius was under no obligation to allow his charge to be allowed this. In fact, if Paul took off, he would be in serious trouble. It is obvious that this was not the result of an exchange of money or some other such thing. The use of the word *philanthrōpós* excludes such a notion. Rather, Paul probably said, “I have really good friends here.” Julius responded by allowing him to visit them.

Finally, one other unique word is used in these words. It is translated as “care.” It is the noun *epimeleia*. The Pulpit Commentary notes that it is a word “frequent in Xenophon and other classical writers ... It is in very common use among medical writers for the care and attention required by the sick. It is very probable that St. Paul was suffering from his long confinement at Caesarea, and that the [*epimeleia*] here mentioned has reference to his invalid state. This explains Julius’ humane concern for Paul.”

Life application: Luke is recording details of the interactions between Paul and Julius as they arise. As he continues, he will simply be called “the centurion.” However, Luke has specifically given his name to set the tone for the narrative. He is one who faithfully considered his duties, and yet, he will be seen to truly care for his charge, Paul.

If someone were to detail your interactions with others, how would the record reflect who you are? Are you faithful in doing your daily duties, honestly giving your employer a fair trade for the pay he gives you? If you are responsible for others, would the record show that you had concern for them or were you a jerk towards them?

Even if nobody is detailing your life for a book, the Lord is aware of your treatment of others. This is noted even under the law –

“You shall not oppress a hired servant *who is* poor and needy, *whether* one of your brethren or one of the aliens who *is* in your land within your gates. <sup>15</sup> Each day you shall give *him* his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he *is* poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the LORD, and it be sin to you.” Deuteronomy 24:14, 15

What we can infer from this is that the Lord is not only displeased with an uncaring or mean demeanor, but the opposite must be pleasing to Him. Each thing we do, each interaction we are involved in, reveals to the Lord our heart and intentions. Be careful to watch your life and conduct. The Lord surely is doing so.

*Lord God, help us in our times of interaction with others. May we be careful to treat them courteously and with respect. It is often the case that we let the trials and troubles of life get in the way of how we deal with others. So, Lord, be with us and keep us from being gruff, unfriendly, uncaring, and so forth. Help us to be good and faithful to those we interact with. Amen.*

**When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under *the shelter of Cyprus*, because the winds were contrary. Acts 27:4**

A literal rendering of the Greek is, “And thence, having gone up, we sailed under Cyprus, because of the winds being contrary” (CG).

Luke just detailed a stop at Sidon where the centurion, Julius, gave Paul the liberty to visit friends. With that stop complete, it now says, “And thence, having gone up, we sailed under Cyprus.” Luke meticulously described the events as they occurred. They left Sidon where it says they went up. Just as they had “brought down” at Sidon, meaning having gone from the sea to the land, they now go “up” from the land to the sea.

Once they had gone up, they headed for their next destination. However, to get there, Luke then says that they sailed under Cyprus.

In other words, it means to sail under the lee of Cyprus. The word used is *hupopleó*. It is only found here and in verse 7. It is apparently a very rare nautical term. This shows Luke’s great mastery of words and their proper use. He was a grand recorder of events. The reason for having sailed under Cyprus was “because of the winds being contrary.”

If the winds were agreeable, they would have gone on a direct course heading from Sidon to Mysia with the island of Cyprus on the left side. However, with a contrary wind, they went with Cyprus on their right side. Any violent winds would have then been broken off by the island and their travels would be much less dangerous and not as difficult as well.

Life application: Word studies are a marvelous way of getting the flavor of a passage from the Bible. There are many commentaries that are focused solely on word studies. These not only give mechanical information, like the types of words, the form in which they are presented, and so forth, but they will also often include so much more information, such as details about the secular use of those words at the time the Bible was written. They may also include how the word had previously been used and how it changed after biblical times, etc.

These things will give a much better understanding of what was on the mind of the biblical writers. Earlier uses of a word may still be applied in various ways, but later uses would not. So those later uses should be excluded from translations.

To take a word out of its contemporary context without a valid reason, is not sound. So, learning these things as you study will bring details to life in one's mind in a way that almost sets your feet in the room with the writer.

This is true with visiting the places where these things occurred. Seeing the land of Israel or going where Paul and the other missionaries went can really bring things to life. Today, with much of this available right online, you can even go on journeys through photos and videos.

Take advantage of what is out there. You will find that there is no end to new and exciting ways of interacting with the Bible.

*Lord God, what a blessed age we live in, where we can participate in so many things that relate to Your word. Without ever leaving our home, we can journey to Israel, we can learn what the contextual meaning of a particular word meant at the time of the prophets and apostles, and so much more. Thank You, O God, for the exciting resources we have to lead us to understanding Your word so intimately. Amen.*

**And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.** Acts 27:5

More literally, it reads, "And having sailed through the depth against Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra of Lycia" (CG).

Luke just noted that when they put out from Sidon, they had to sail under the lee of Cyprus due to contrary winds. This brought them between Cyprus and the main continent. He now notes, "And having sailed through the depth."

Here are a couple of rare words. One is found only here, *diapleó*. It comes from *dia* (through) and *pleó*, to sail. Thus, they are sailing through the deep. The next word, translated as deep, is found only in Matthew 18:6 and in this verse, *pelagos*. In Matthew 18:6, it says –



“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth [*pelagos*] of the sea.”

It signifies the high seas, meaning the deep. In this case, it is the depth of the waters north of Cyprus and south of the mainland. Thus, Luke says this is “against Cilicia and Pamphylia.”

These would have been the two major regions on which the sea borders. They would have been to the starboard, or right side of their ship, as they crossed through this deep area of ocean. From there, using the first-person plural, he says, “we came to Myra of Lycia.”

Myra was a city in the province of Lycia. This is in the southwest area of Asia Minor. It has “Phrygia and Pisidia on the north, the Mediterranean on the south, Pamphylia on the east, and Caria on the west” (Barnes).

Life application: Luke is specific in his use of wording. A lot of this information seems unnecessary, but by providing it, we find things that are verifiable. As such, we can reasonably conclude that the events recorded by him really took place. As such, Paul really left to be taken to Rome.

From there, they really were caught up in the storm that will be described. They really were stranded on a particular island, and so forth. As these things seem certain to have occurred, then we can be more assured that the details concerning the spread of the gospel, the writing of Paul’s letters by the apostle, the accuracy of how the church was established, etc., actually occurred as well.

Luke’s careful attention to particular words and details gives us a really confirming sense that all of this is reliable and accurate. Therefore, let us hold fast to the idea that Paul’s epistles are exactly what is inspired by God for our edification and instruction during this church age. Luke and his writings stand as a reliable and exemplary witness to this fact.

*Lord God Almighty, when we look into the contents, structure, and reliability of what is found in Scripture, it sure helps us to be confident that what it proclaims about Your plan of redemption is also sure and reliable. Thank You for those who have compiled it, preserved it, translated it, and evaluated it for us. Thank You, above all, for Jesus, the Subject of this wonderful gift. Amen.*

**There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board.**  
Acts 27:6

More precisely, it reads, “And there, the centurion having found a ship of Alexandria sailing to Italy, he placed us in it” (CG).

Having arrived in Myra of Lycia in the previous verse, it now says, “And there, the centurion.”

Luke had previously given the name of the centurion, Julius. However, he now reverts to using his official rank rather than his name. His identification was established, but it is appropriate to the narrative that Luke refers to him according to his capacity and rank as a soldier. Of him, Luke next says, “having found a ship of Alexandria.”

An Alexandrian ship most probably means a large container ship which was used to transport wheat from Alexandria to Rome, which was a regular occurrence during this period. As it is out of a direct route for this, the thought is that it was caught up in the same contrary winds that necessitated the ship Paul and Luke were on to also travel under the lee of Cyprus.

However, Ellicott notes, “A local inscription describes Myra as a ‘horrea,’ or store-house of corn (Lewin’s St. Paul, ii. p. 187), and the Alexandrian ship may therefore have gone thither to discharge part of its cargo.” Either way, the ship was heading in the direction they were going, which was that it was “sailing to Italy.”

As has been previously noted, traveling at the time was not unlike taking a bus or plane now. Although we normally have tickets to our final destination, that is not always the case, especially if we are on a walkabout on the way to our final destination.

The final destination for the centurion and those he was conducting was Italy. Whatever ship would get them closer with each stop is the one they would take. In this case, the Alexandrian ship was going all the way there to drop off the remaining portion of its cargo. This would avoid changing ships again. Therefore, “he placed us in it.”

Here is another word found only once in the New Testament, *embibazó*. It is also found in the Greek Translation of Proverbs 4:11. It is a nautical term used concerning embarking men on board a ship, but it is also a medical term used to indicate “placing patients in a bath” (Pulpit). Again, we see Luke’s mastery of words and the connection between his medical experience and his knowledge of nautical terms as well.

Life application: As noted, the word *embibazó* is also found in Proverbs 4:11. There it says –

“I have taught you in the way of wisdom;  
I have led you in right paths.”

In Proverbs 4, Solomon is writing as a father to his children, giving them words of instruction. The Lord included these words in Scripture, indicating that the wisdom to be drawn from them is universal in its application. Every person in every culture and time will benefit from the words found there.

Today, the progressive mindset is to reject things written by various people groups, such as anything from a white person, saying such wisdom is biased and finds its roots entrenched in racism. This is taught in schools, government, and business alike.

Even though the Bible was received by people in the Middle East, because of its heavy influence upon the white people of the world, and because they have used it to evangelize people groups around the world, progressives treat the Bible as a book derived from a concept of white supremacy.

But this is nonsense, and deep down they know it is. The Bible clearly claims in Acts 17 that all people are derived from one man. Skin color is something that changes throughout regions of the world. It even changes in some people as their skin goes from black to white because of vitiligo.

Although rare, a couple with a certain skin color may have a child with a completely different skin color. These things don't determine what a person is thinking or where he or she stands on a particular issue.

When it comes to the Bible, it is ultimately derived from God. Therefore, it is a book that exists as a manual for all people in order to conduct their lives in a manner that is right and pleasing to God. It is not a Jewish book, even if it was mostly Hebrew in its being transmitted and maintained.

It is not a Greek book, even if its concluding books were written in the Greek language. It is not a Western book, even if it was first accepted and most widely studied and passed on by Western societies after it was finally completed.

These ideas are incorrect. The Bible is a divinely inspired and God-centered book. It is that which brings about restoration between God and man. It is for this reason, not some other distractionary concept, that the progressives of the world hate it. They hate God, despising His moral character and being, and therefore, they hate the book that He has given to man.

Be aware of this when dealing with people who attack the Bible or the Christian portion of society. You need to address their disconnect between God and them first. Only after this is realized, will you have a chance to then correct them concerning their understanding of the importance of Scripture.

*Lord God, the world is so at enmity with those who love You and who uphold Your word as the message from You. Help us to correct their thinking about You. Help us to be wise in how we approach others as they challenge You, Your word, and those who love You. May we be able to open eyes that are dulled over concerning their need to see clearly. Amen.*

**When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under *the shelter of Crete* off Salmone.**

Acts 27:7

The Greek more literally reads, “And in many days, having sailed slowly and laboriously, having come against Cnidus, the wind not permitting us, we sailed under Crete against Salmone” (CG).

The previous verse noted that the centurion had found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy. Therefore, Paul and the others were put on that ship. It now says, “And in many days.” What defines “many days” is left unstated. However, it gives the sense that either things are going well, or things are going poorly. It isn’t until the arrival of the next words, “having sailed slowly and laboriously,” that the intent is drawn out.

The ship had left Myra on the way to Italy, but things began to devolve once at sea. The word translated as “slowly” is found only here in the Bible, *braduploeó*. It is a verb derived from *bradus*, meaning slow or slow of understanding and *pleó*, to sail. The other word, *molis*, is an adverb that HELPS Word Studies says gives the sense of “what barely happens.” It comes from *mogis*, or “laborious toil.” Thus, it is something that comes laboriously.

The intent here is to show how cumbersome the journey was at this point. The western winds continued to be too strong to work against and it was with real difficulty that Luke next says, “having come against Cnidus.”

This is a city which stood on a promontory bearing the same name located in Asia Minor. It is a little bit northwest of the island of Rhodes. Once they were off the shores of this place, Luke says, “the wind not permitting us, we sailed under Crete against Salmone.”

Because of the contrary winds that would not allow them to continue on as planned, they had to sail under Crete, just as they did with Cyprus. This would help break up the heavy winds and allow them to proceed, even if slowly and cumbersome. It was in this leeward spot that they traveled close to Salmone which is “the name of a promontory which formed the eastern extremity of the island of Crete” (Barnes).

Life application: A journey that should have taken a short time has suddenly become one that has taken an extended period as well as one that has come with a great amount of effort on the part of those in charge of the ship. In today’s lingo, we might say they were out there spinning their wheels.

How often this happens to us as well! Everyone understands the metaphor because it is something we all experience. We are all gassed up, the tires are new, there is nothing wrong with the transmission, and yet, when we step on the gas, there is no traction. What was supposed to be a simple day with various achievements suddenly becomes a day where there is more to do at the end of it than there was at the beginning.

And more, the things we planned on doing have all failed to come about. This is frustrating and it can cause us to want to just climb into bed and forget the day. It is at times like this that we should step back and consider things from a greater perspective.

It says in Galatians 4 –

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” Galatians 4:4, 5

God has a plan laid out. Certain things have transpired at key moments just as He has determined. And more things will come about at the exact moment He has already decided. For those in the church, there is the hope of the rapture –

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52

This event is more fully described by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4. This is one of the “times and seasons” referred to by Jesus in Acts 1:7 and then by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:1. In other words, God has a plan that is set out, it will come about at the exact moment He has already pre-determined. As such, our own days of seeming waste and wheel spinning are all factored into what He has already decided.

Therefore, let us not get overly frustrated. Instead, we can say, “Lord, today was a day of futility to me, but it was a day that has met Your expectations for Your plan nonetheless.”

When we have this perspective, we can then let go of the frustrations and accept that we are exactly where the Lord wants us and we have done exactly what He knew we would do in order to continue the stream of human existence as it is prepared for His next big event in the unfolding redemptive scenario. Yes. God has a plan and the things we do are a part of it. Rest in that at the end of a seemingly difficult day.

*Lord God, thank You that what we do is a part of Your great unfolding plan for the ages. Nothing is overlooked, nothing is unimportant, and all is coming about as it should. We can rest in that, knowing that You have it all under control. Amen.*

**Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.**  
Acts 27:8

More exactingly, it reads, “And laboriously lying beside it, we came to a certain place being called Fair Havens, which was near Lasaea City” (CG).

Luke just detailed the slow and difficult sailing they had encountered on the Alexandrian ship since leaving Myra. He continues that now with the words, “And laboriously lying beside it.”

This is referring to sailing under the shelter of Crete off the shores of Salmone. The word translated as laboriously was just used in the previous verse. Luke repeats it here, providing extra emphasis concerning the immensely trying voyage they were on.

He also uses another new word seen only here and then again in verse 13 for “lying beside it,” *paralegimai*. It is another nautical term, coming from *para*, beside, and *legó*, a word that originally meant “lay down to sleep.” Later, it was used in the sense of “laying an argument to rest.” It is as if the ship were lying beside the coast, struggling to move on as the contrary winds and waves fought against them.

After this laborious time of trial, Luke says, “we came to a certain place being called Fair Havens, which was near Lasaea City.”

It was with great difficulty that they were able to pass the promontory. Eventually, they made it and came to Fair Havens. This is found on the southeast part of Crete. It was a place where the ship could be harbored temporarily.

The word translated as “havens” is the plural of the Greek word *limén*. It is found only here and twice in verse 12. It signifies a harbor, port, or haven.

Barnes notes, “It is called by Stephen, the geographer, ‘the fair shore.’ It still retains the name which it formerly had. It is called in ancient Dutch and French Sailing Directions ‘the beautiful bay.’”

The city of Lasaea appears to be otherwise unknown by this spelling, but Luke records it as a place that was well-known at his time.

Life application: Luke’s detailed record of the sailing continues to allow the modern reader to follow along with a map and see exactly where the voyage went from and to. One can almost imagine the laborious efforts of fighting wind and water as the sailors worked to get the ship forward.

An interesting part of what Luke has written is noting the city of Lasaea. As stated, Luke’s spelling of it seems to be otherwise unknown, however, Wikipedia notes –

“Lasaea or Lasaia (Ancient Greek: Λασαία) was a city on the south coast of ancient Crete, near the roadstead of the ‘Fair Havens’ where apostle Paul landed. This place is not mentioned by any other writer, under this name but is probably the same as the Lisia of the Peutinger Table, 16 M.P. to the east of Gortyna. Some manuscripts have Lasea; others, Alassa. The Vulgate reads Thalassa, which Theodore Beza contended was the true name. According to the Stadiasmus Maris Magni, which calls the place Halas (Ἁλας), it had a harbour and was located 50 stadia from Leben and 80 stadia from Matala.”

A Hellenistic gravestone was found at this location which is pictured in the Wikipedia article. For much of history, since Luke penned his words, even until more recent times, the city was more or less unknown to scholars. And yet, Luke's record of it meant that it was there. By people getting out a spade and setting out in the area to search for it, evidence of it has been obtained.

If you are ever questioning the accuracy of what the Bible says because someone argues against it, be sure to do your own research. Don't just take people's arguments at face value. It is certain that there is a world full of people who are intent on destroying your faith.

Luke was a careful chronicler of the places and events he encountered. So give him a nod of trust as you continue your search for validation of something he has stated. Eventually, it will present itself. Someday, we will be able to thank him personally for his detailed writings that helped us know the story of how the church and the message of Jesus Christ spread out from the land of Israel to the inhabited world.

*Lord God, what a treat it is to read Your word and to consider the people and places that we read about. The word comes alive as we think about their struggles, their trials, their victories, and the hope that they possessed because of Your promise to the people of the world. What a wonderful record of Your guiding hand upon the process of redemption of mankind! Thank You for Your precious word. Amen.*

**Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, Acts 27:9**

A literal translation would be, "And much time having elapsed, and the sailing being already dangerous – and the Fast already passed by – Paul admonished" (CG).

With the ship at Fair Havens, near Lasaea, Luke next says, "And much time having elapsed."

This is referring to the constant delays experienced by the contrary winds while sailing and the time stopped in the harbor. All of this brought about a delay in the expected arrival in Rome, which was rather important at this time of year. The reason it is so is explained in Luke's next words, "and the sailing being already dangerous."



The word translated as dangerous is *episphalés*. It is found only here. It is derived from *epi*, upon, and *sphalló*, to trip or cause to fall. Thus, it means “upon the falling.” Thus, inevitable danger is to be expected.

The time of year brings about changes in weather. This is true in most parts of the world. For the sailors on the Mediterranean Sea, this change in season can become a matter of life and death. Just as in many parts of the world, storms arise that can bring about immense waves and contrary winds.

Where the men are now, this is the case. One marking of time to understand this is given by Luke from a Hebrew perspective, saying, “and the Fast already passed by.”

This is speaking of the Day of Atonement. It is called the Fast out of respect for the weighty nature of the day. Leviticus 23:32 says –

“It *shall be* to you a sabbath of *solemn* rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth *day* of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath.”

This day corresponds to the end of September or early October each year. Sailing at that time, and because of the nature of the ancient ships in particular, was considered very hazardous from around this feast all the way until the time of the Passover in the spring.

The routes, however, would be busy from Passover until the time around the next Day of Atonement. Luke, being the excellent chronicler that he was, made a mental note of the time of year and Paul’s insistence concerning what it meant. As he notes, because of the late time of year, “Paul admonished.”

His words are ahead, but the fact that he is giving counsel on sailing to experienced sailors makes it evident that he himself knew exactly what he was talking about. His words are surely from personal experience, having traveled extensively. It may even be that this is what he refers to in 2 Corinthians 11 –

“Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; <sup>26</sup> *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my* own countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren.”

-2 Corinthians 11:25, 26

One more point concerning these words is that Paul uses a new word in Scripture here, *paraineó*, translated as admonish. It means to exhort or advise. However, HELPS Word Studies notes that it is “to urge acknowledging what is praiseworthy, i.e. ‘recommend, advise, urge.’” It is an up close and personal form of admonishment. This word will only be seen again in verse 27:22.

Life application: There are things that we need to do in life. Not doing them can be costly. However, there is also the truth that it might become more costly to attempt to do them as well. Thus, one must choose between two difficult situations.

There are some who are risk takers. Such people can easily lose everything, but they can also become quite rich because others are holding back while the opportunities are available. There are those who are more conservative and who will generally save what they have, even if it doesn’t bring about larger gains, and even if it means short-term losses.

Both types are needed to run the world and no matter what we do, there will always be 20/20 hindsight to kick us and tell us we did the wrong thing, or to comfort us that we really were wise to act or not act.

But at the time of looking forward, what is the best option? The answer is, “Whichever includes the Lord.” He is not here to interfere in our decisions. Rather, what we should be doing is praying to Him, asking for His direction, and then deciding once we have included Him in the process. With that, we can be confident that what we have done was with Him having been consulted.

Whatever the outcome, we will know that we at least had Him in our decision-making process. As with all things at such times, we can then say, “The Lord’s will be done.” It is a truth no matter what the outcome and whether we pray or not. Therefore, we can be satisfied that we have done the right thing with no added regrets.

*Heavenly Father, help us to include You in our life’s decisions. We often get ahead of ourselves and jump into decisions without first petitioning You. In doing so, we cannot be satisfied with a negative outcome. And in a positive outcome, we may become boastful. Rather, let us not fret over losses when we first came to You, and may we never be arrogant in what You have blessed us with. May it be so, to Your glory. Amen.*

**saying, “Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.” Acts 27:10**

More literally, it reads, “saying to them, ‘Men, I discern that with damage and much loss, not only the cargo and the ship but also our lives – the voyage is going to be’” (CG).

The words of this verse continue the thought from the previous verse. There, it said, “And much time having elapsed, and the sailing being already dangerous – and the Fast already passed by – Paul admonished.” Now, Luke continues with, “saying to them, ‘Men, I discern.’”

His words are based on what he just said. In other words, Paul is not speaking some type of prophetic utterance. Rather, what he says is based on his perception of the situation in which those on the ship were in. The words “I discern” show this.

The Greek word *theóreo* is one that is based on observation “where people concentrate on the meaning of an action (performance)” (HELPS Word Studies). It is where our English word theater is derived from.

For several relevant examples, see John 4:19; John 12:19; and Acts 17:22. Each of these verses shows an inference made based on observation. Paul notes in 2 Corinthians 11:25 that he had been shipwrecked three times. He was aware of the winds of the Mediterranean after a lifetime of experience as well.

Therefore, it cannot be assumed that his comments are a prophecy. Instead, they are those of experience. As such, he continues with, “that with damage and much loss, not only the cargo and the ship but also our lives – the voyage is going to be.”

The “damage” that he speaks of is a new word in Scripture, *hubris*. It is where our modern term of the same spelling comes from, and it is normally applied to violence or rough treatment between people, but it is transferred in a metaphorical way to the inanimate here. It is only found three times in Scripture: here, in verse 21, and then in 2 Corinthians 12:10.

Along with that, another new word is introduced, *zémia*. It signifies a loss. HELPS Word Studies says “a ‘bad deal’ (unsuccessful business transaction) which results in a fine (penalty, forfeiture).” Taken together, the words are Paul’s way of sternly warning them.

This damage, according to him, will be for all concerned, including the ship and the people, meaning their very lives. However, and as already noted, he is speaking from his knowledge of the circumstances and not from prophecy. Their lives will be spared, but the ship and cargo will not be.

Life application: In the case of Paul's words in this verse, he clearly knew what was ahead for those who would venture into the sea at this time of year. And more, he is certainly basing his conclusion on the difficult sailing they had already faced. The prevailing winds were against them, and the time of the year meant that they were likely to get much more pronounced, even violent, in the days ahead.

If Paul's words were to be taken as under inspiration, he would have included the thought that the Lord or a messenger of the Lord came to him. He does this elsewhere at times, thus providing unambiguous testimony to his words. He does not do this here.

Unfortunately, it is as common as burgers at McDonald's for pastors, preachers, and teachers to claim a word from the Lord today. They speak as if they have a direct line to Jesus, and they act as if they receive texts and updates from Him regularly.

Assuredly, they do not. Jesus is not speaking to them. The word is written, and it is what we need to conduct our lives, direct our feet, and guide ministries. An astonishing thing to witness is to see a pastor tell of a word from the Lord, have it not come about as he claimed, and yet people continue to attend his church.

The same is true with people who predict the rapture (or something similar), claiming they are led by the Spirit or have received a message from the Lord, and who are then shown to be wrong, and yet their ministry suffers no harm in attendance. This reveals a cult-like attitude in those following the false teacher. Excuses are conjured up and accepted, and everything continues as if nothing ever happened.

Watch yourselves. Be careful what you will accept. And be sure to reject anyone who claims they have had communication with God or one of His messengers outside of His word. This is especially so when what they claim turns out to be untrue.

*Lord God, give us wisdom to know what is from You and what is from the doctrines of men. We can know this by reading and knowing Your word. So, help us to be about that, taking it in and applying it to our lives and thoughts throughout the days of our lives. Amen.*

**Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. Acts 27:11**

More literally, the Greek reads, “But the centurion rather trusted the pilot and the shipmaster than these spoken by Paul” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul noted from his personal experience and deduction that disaster lay ahead for the ship and the crew if the voyage to Rome was continued at this time. However, Paul’s views were not shared by all. As it next says, “But the centurion rather trusted the pilot and the shipmaster.”

This is not a failing on the part of the centurion. He may have surmised that Paul wanted to delay his trip to Rome for some reason. Further, the ship was under the authority of these other two. It would seem illogical for them to risk everything if they didn’t know what they were doing.

However, the centurion probably ignored the fact that these men may have had a lot of loss by simply staying in port and waiting for the season to turn more favorable in order to continue the journey. He had to weigh out the matter and come to a decision. In the end, he accepted the words of these above those of Paul.

Both of these positions are new to Scripture. The first is the *kubernétés*, or pilot. This is derived from the same source as a similar noun found in 1 Corinthians 12:28, *kubernésis*, someone who steers, which is then applied to one who governs or administrates. Thus, the *kubernétés* is a steersman, helmsman, or pilot. This word is only found here and in Revelation 18:17.

The next word is the *naukléros*, or shipmaster. It is found only here in the New Testament. It is derived from two words signifying ship and lot (as in a lot that is cast), and thus a clerk. Therefore, it speaks of the ship owner or shipmaster who hires out his ship.

Both of these men would normally be considered experienced enough to know what would be proper concerning the vessel they were in charge of. Therefore, the centurion accepted their words more “than these spoken by Paul.”

It will be an unfortunate choice. Paul will be sure to remind them of the consequences of not listening to him when disaster has fully come upon them.

Life application: The centurion, despite having sympathy for Paul, as was previously seen, was more willing to trust the judgment of the helmsman and the ship owner. He didn't consider the fact that the owner of the ship was surely under financial constraint.

The cargo was susceptible to being ruined if it sat too long and the shipmaster was paid by the owner. They would be more willing to take the chance of moving on because of this in order to find a more suitable harbor, or even make the entire journey to Rome, even with the associated dangers.

As noted, the centurion had to make a decision and he could not get inside of the heads and lives of the men who were making their arguments before him. He will, however, find out that Paul was a straight shooter. This is something that is important for us as Christians.

We need to be so trustworthy in what we say that people can take our words at face value. This is actually a charge for us from both Jesus and the apostles. We are told to let our yes be yes and our no be no. In other words, we are to speak and then perform according to our words. In this, we will be more reliable than even the steersman on a ship who must venture into the sea, risking life and/or property loss as he heads forth into the unknown.

As an interesting side note, the etymological root of our modern word cybernetics is from this same word, *kubernétés*. The word was first explained by Norbert Wiener, in his 1948 book of that title, noting it concerned the study of controlling and communicating in both the animal and the machine. This is true with the other word, *kubernésis*, as well. One can see the etymological root of cybernesis. Fun stuff, right out of the Bible.

*Lord God, may we be careful to include You in our major decisions of life. When we are faced with something that has more than one important avenue to take, and which could lead to unhappy results if we take the wrong one, may we remember to pray to You and ask for Your guidance. In this, we will at least know that we have Your hand with us as we continue down the path we ultimately take. To Your glory, we pray this. Amen.*

**And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, *and winter there.* Acts 27:12**

A more literal translation is, “And the harbor, being unsuitable to a wintering, the majority set counsel to go up thence also, if how they might be able, having arrived to Phoenix to winter – a harbor of Crete looking against southwest and against northwest” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul’s words concerning the state of the ship and the people on it were overridden by the pilot and the shipmaster. The centurion agreed with them instead. Therefore, a verse filled with rare words begins with, “And the harbor, being unsuitable.”

Luke uses an adjective found only here in the New Testament, *aneuthetos*. It is the negative of *euthetos*, or suitable. Thus, it signifies to be unsuitable. The harbor was not a proper place “to a wintering.”

It is a new noun found only here, *paracheimasia*. It indicates the state of spending the winter. The harbor in which they currently were positioned would face the coming winds of the wintertime and make it a less suitable place to be than an area sheltered from those same winds. As such, it next says, “the majority set counsel to go up thence also.”

Because of the less-than-ideal location, it appears that a majority vote was taken which decided that they would leave this harbor and continue to some other location more suitable for the winter months.

There are decisions that might properly be considered through a popular vote and there are those which should not be. In this case, what was popular was not what was right. A cold and bumpy time in a port is far better than a ship at the bottom of the sea. However, the majority made their voice known and that was “if how they might be able, having arrived to Phoenix.”

The fact that this terminology is used shows the impending doom from Luke’s hand. A risk is being taken and Luke is giving advance notice that it will not prove to be a great choice to make.

The place where they hope to reach would be *Phoinix*, or Phoenix, a location found only here in Scripture. Though a bit long, Ellicott gives a great description for us to consider –

“Phenice . . . which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.—The precise meaning of the phrase is that the harbour looked, as we say, down these winds, in the direction to which they blew—i.e., that it faced the north-east and

south-east, the words used being the names, not of points of the compass, but of the winds which blew from them. The harbour so described has been identified with the modern Lutro, on the east of the promontory of Kavos Muros, which looks eastward, and so corresponds to the interpretation just given of the words that describe it. The harbour is named by Ptolemy (iii. 17) as Phoenikous, and a city named Phoenix lay a few miles inland. It is still used as a harbour by Greek pirates, and was marked as such in the French admiralty charts of 1738; but, owing to the silting up of the sand, has become unsuitable for larger vessels. An inscription of the time of Nerva, of the nature of a votive tablet to Jupiter and Serapis, found near the spot, records the fact that it was erected by Epictetus, the tabularius, or agent, of the fleet to which the ship belonged, with the assistance of Dionysius of Alexandria, the pilot (the same word as that which St. Luke uses) of a ship which had as its sign (the same word as in Acts 28:4) the Isopharia. It is a natural inference from this that the Alexandrian ship (we note the Egyptian element in the dedication to Serapis, and possibly in the connection of the sign with the Pharos, or lighthouse of Alexandria) had anchored, and possibly wintered, at Phœnice, and that the tablet was a thank-offering for its preservation.”

The name Phoenix probably got its name from the palm tree, *phoinix*, which is indigenous to Crete. Of this location, those on the ship hoped to sail in order “to winter.”

It is another new word, *paracheimazó*. It is the verb form of the noun just used to describe “a wintering.” It will be seen three more times in Scripture. This location was more suitable because it was “a harbor of Crete looking against southwest and against northwest.”

This is the third and last use of the word, *limén*, a harbor or haven. Also, two more words found only here in Scripture are to be noted. The first is *lips*, signifying the southwest. It is an interesting word, coming from *leibó*, to pour. The reason for this name is that it is from this direction that the rains come. Therefore, it is as if the rains pour from there.

The other new word is *chóros*, the northwest. It is of Latin origin and signifies the area from which the winds blow. A harbor facing these directions would be more suitable for wintering than where they currently were, even if it was dangerous to leave where they were in order to get there.

Life application: Majority votes often fail to be the best choice. Uninformed people with a strong voice can override those who are knowledgeable because the knowledgeable are often more contemplative and less vocal about matters. They are also, more often



than not, in the minority. Those who don't think things through logically are aplenty in the world.

In governments that are based on the majority vote, people will often vote for things that are wholly unreasonable. This is true with committees and the like as well. Although majority votes may seem fair, it is usually best to steer away from them and allow those who are in charge to make the ultimate decisions for a matter.

These leaders may ask for a majority consideration, but then evaluate what was presented and amend or override what the majority wants. The world is not fair, but to leave decisions in the hands of the masses is not the best way of handling things. This will become evident to those on the ship in the verses ahead.

*Lord God, it is so wonderful to know that You alone are in charge of the process of the redemption of man. If it were up to us, even in the least part, things would not go well. How evident this is when pastors, churches, and denominations cannot even agree on what the word "grace" means. Help us to be obedient followers of Your word in all ways and at all times, yielding ourselves to what You have decided upon for us. Amen.*

**When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained *their* desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. Acts 27:13**

Although quite obscure in some of the wording, a more literal rendering of the Greek would be, "And Auster, having wafted, having thought to have obtained the purpose, having hoisted they laid beside near Crete" (CG).

Luke just noted that the majority had come together and decided they would try to reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete. This now will take place. The next words, therefore, say, "And Auster, having wafted."

The Greek word *notos* is used. It signifies the South. Thus, it implies here "the south wind." A single English word to describe that is Auster. It specifically refers to the south wind. Of this Auster, it is said to have "wafted."

Again, it is a single word used to describe another single word from the Greek, *hupopneó*. It is derived from *hupo*, under or about, and *pneo*, to breathe or blow (as the wind). This word is only found here in Scripture and apparently is found nowhere else in ancient Greek literature.

With this seemingly favorable turn of events, Luke next records, “having thought to have obtained the purpose.”

The word *prothesis* is used. It signifies a setting forth. In the synoptic gospels and in Hebrews, it is translated as “showbread,” meaning the bread set forth in the Tabernacle before the Lord. It comes from two words signifying “before” and “purposefully set forth.” Paul uses it several times in his epistles when referring to the purpose of God. It thus speaks of the providential workings of God. For example –

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose [*prothesis*].” Romans 8:28

These men, having received this wafting Auster, thought that their predetermined purpose of reaching Phoenix would be realized, therefore, it says, “having hoisted they laid beside near Crete.”

The words “having hoisted” are referring to the anchor that had been weighed in the harbor of Fair Havens. With this gentle Auster wafting away, the men thought this was their best chance to proceed, heading out and toward Phoenix. However, they carefully kept close to the island, knowing that things could devolve quickly if the winds turned contrary.

In these words, the second and last use of *paralegomai* is used, translated as “laid beside.” Luke used it in Acts 27:8 and now it is retired from Scripture. Also, there is a notable error to be found in some translations.

Older versions, and continuing on in the Douay-Rheims Bible, read differently, saying something like, “...when they had loosed from Asson, they sailed close by Crete.”

The error is assuming that the Greek word *assos*, which is found only here in Scripture, is speaking of a location known as Asson. However, this place was much further to the north. The error was corrected in the Geneva Bible, translating *asson* as “very near” or “close.” It is not a place being referred to, but the ship in relation to the coast.

The sailors, as noted above, kept close to the coast in order to not get swept out to sea if a seasonal storm suddenly arose and tossed them about.

Life application: As always, it is recommended that you read different translations of the Bible. People are fallible and errors are easy to make based on a lack of knowledge concerning words in the text, geography, metallurgy, gemology, etc.

Different people have different understandings of various subjects and may realize that something translated in one way is actually not possible. For example, the older versions of Deuteronomy 8:9 say something like the poorly rendered King James Version –

“A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass.”

Not understanding metallurgy, the KJV translated the Hebrew word signifying copper as brass. Brass cannot be dug from the ground as it is an alloy produced by man. What thou mayest dig from the ground is copper. That is then combined with zinc to produce brass, and – wah-lah – one has a great-sounding cymbal.

Be sure to not get captivated by a single translation. Thou mayest be misdirected in thy understanding of various subjects that arise within the pages of this precious gift, the Holy Bible.

*Glorious Lord God, how blessed we are to be living in a time when we can read fifty or more translations right on the internet, comparing what they say so that we can get a better understanding of how things should be properly translated in Your wonderful word. Thank You for the many resources available to us right at our fingertips. May we take full advantage of these things as we continue to learn and grow in Your word. Amen.*

**But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. Acts 27:14**

More literally, the words read, “And not long after, a typhonic wind cast against it, called Euroclydon” (CG).

In the last verse, it said, “And Auster, having wafted, having thought to have obtained the purpose, having hoisted they laid beside near Crete.” With that, complicated words are penned by Luke, beginning with, “And not long after.”

There was a fair wind from the south wafting along bringing the men satisfaction that the decision to leave Fair Havens was a good one. They were sailing along the coast of

Crete and moving in the right direction. However, it next says, “a typhonic wind cast against it.”

The Greek word, found only here in the Bible, is *tuphónikos*, a typhonic wind. It is etymologically connected to our modern word typhoon, but being an adjective, it doesn't name but rather describes the wind. The word comes from the noun *tuphón*, a hurricane or typhoon. Typhoon is the designation used today for those hurricanes that arise in the western Pacific.

These words are derived from the same root as *tuphó*, smoky, found in Matthew 12:20. One can think of the ocean spray being stirred up and giving it an appearance that is clouded or smoky.

This raging wind is described as having been cast against it. The question is, “Cast against what?”

Ellicott notes, “The Greek pronoun is in the feminine, and as the noun used for ship is, throughout the narrative, in the neuter, the difference of gender presents a difficulty. Grammatically the pronoun seems to refer to Crete, and if referred to it, the sentence admits of three possible constructions: (1) the wind drove us against Crete; or (2), blew against Crete; or (3), drove down on us from Crete.”

The first two go against what is later recorded, and so it is most likely speaking of the winds driving against Crete and blowing them off the shore, Crete being a feminine noun and the nearest antecedent. The wind that arose was so strong that it cast against Crete causing a swirling, typhonic action that literally blew the ship away from the coast they had been clinging to as they drove the ship towards Phoenix.

Understanding this, the verse finishes with the name of this type of wind. Luke said it is “called Euroclydon.”

This last word is variously rendered in manuscripts. Some say Euroclydon while others say Euroquilo. From there, translators use one designation or another, or they simply translate it as a Northeaster and avoid the trouble.

Which word is correct is argued. It appears nowhere else in the Bible. If Euroclydon is correct, then it may come from *euros*, wind, and *kludon*, wave. As such, it signifies a storm where winds just whip around forming battering waves, like a hurricane.

If Euraquilo is right, it might mean "...between Eurus, 'the E. S. E. wind,' and Aquilo, 'the north-wind, or, strictly, N. 1/3 E. Hence, E. N. E.'" (Vincent's Word Studies).

No matter what, the storm was a raging one and it bore down on the ship so tempestuously that it drove it away from Crete and into the open sea.

Life application: Studying the etymology of words is fun and increases one's knowledge of how languages develop and express themselves. Be sure to take time to look into this aspect of God's revealed word!

*Lord God, thank You for the pages of Scripture that reveal so much to us about the life and events of those who have gone before us, expending their time and energy with the intent of spreading the message of Jesus and the good news of His gospel. May we follow suit and be willing to set out with the aim and intent of telling others about it as well. Praises to You, O God, for this wonderful chance to be a part of the redemptive narrative as it continues to unfold! Amen.*

**So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let *her* drive.**

Acts 27:15

The Greek more closely reads, "And the ship, having been caught, and not being able to face the wind, having given way, we were borne" (CG).

In the previous verse, it was noted that a tempestuous storm, a Euroclydon, arose. This became problematic for those on the ship as Luke now notes, saying, "And the ship, having been caught."

With the storm raging from all sides, those on it were completely unable to proceed in order to escape from its clutches. There was certainly no way to make any headway to where they intended. Because of this, Luke continues, saying, "and not being able to face the wind."

The word is *antophthalmeó*, signifying, "I present my eye to." It is a nautical term found only here in the New Testament, coming from *anti* and *ophthalmos*, both words are easily identifiable and understandable, even today. Literally then, it gives the sense of "to look the wind in the eye."

One can imagine the raging wind, the rain, and the spray of the waves all being so forceful that it was simply blinding to the eye. And more, ancient ships would often have

an eye painted on each side of the bow. The modern nautical phrase to “sail into the eye of the wind’ comes from this. With it impossible to make headway, Luke records that “having given way, we were borne along.”

The word “we” shows a united effort was taken by everyone to get the boat to function properly, but it was impossible. And so, yielding to the superior force, they simply let the ship be borne along without any of their efforts, thus leaving their fate solely in the hands of the Lord.

Life application: As terrible as it seems for these sailors and passengers, our existence – even at this very moment – is very little different than theirs. We think we have our hands on the rudder of life and that we are navigating the waters by our own skill, carving our way into the future under the complete control we possess.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Even if things are peaceful around us, we have no control over the next seconds of our life, apart from the guiding hand of the Lord. Planes fly over most places on Earth. Parts fall off of planes from time to time. We cannot control that.

Meteors fall from the sky and land where they will. We have no power to direct where they will end up. Other people on the highway may be drunk and wind up in our windshield. Or they may drive through the wall of the building we are in, crushing us. We simply have no idea of what lies even a second ahead and each moment comes by the grace of God, whether we acknowledge it or not.

This includes each beat of our heart and each pulse of blood through our bodies. Let us not be arrogant about our control over life. That is a reality that does not exist. Rather, let us be humble and grateful to God for the safety we have possessed, acknowledging that it will continue only as long as He determines it to be so.

*Glorious Lord God, help us to be more in tune with the reality of this life, that we are wholly dependent upon You for our world, our economies, our personal safety, and even our own next breath. May we understand that all things are allowed according to Your plan and Your wisdom. May we walk humbly before You all our days, acknowledging Your providential care over us as we go. Amen.*

**And running under *the shelter of* an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. Acts 27:16**

A literal rendering would be, “And having run under a certain islet called Clauda, scarcely we were able to become controllers of the skiff” (CG).

The previous verse noted that the ship could not head into the wind and so those on board simply let it be borne along. Now, a verse filled with new and rare words is given. In it, Luke says, “And having run under a certain islet called Clauda.”

The first rare word is *hupotrechó*, signifying “to run under.” It is found only here in Scripture. Instead of running into this island, they were able to get the ship to sail past it by running under it. What they ran under is described by a word, *nésion*, that is translated as “islet.” This is the diminutive of *nésos*, an island. Thus, this is a little island, meaning and islet. It is also found only here in Scripture.

As for the islet, it is called Clauda. This is the only time it is mentioned. This name, Clauda, is one of various spellings found in different manuscripts. There is an island about 149 miles southwest of Crete that is today known as Gandos. This could possibly be the island that is referred to by Luke. There are a few other very small islands between these as well, such as the sister islands known as Paximadia Ena and Paximadia Duo.

Whichever island Luke is referring to, he says, “scarcely we were able to become controllers of the skiff.”

The word *perikratés*, an adjective which is again only found in this verse, signifies “having full command of.” Being an adjective, it would signify “controllers.” What they were attempting to control was the *skaphé*, or light boat. Hence, it is the ship’s skiff, a small landing boat. The obvious etymological connection between the words *skaphé* and skiff can be seen. This is the first of three times the word will be seen. All will be in this chapter.

The words show the united effort of all available hands. The word “we” appears to be all-inclusive, as any free person on the ship did his best to assist the crew in securing the skiff and helping out in whatever way he could.

The terminology Luke uses indicates that they had immense difficulty bringing in this little ship that was used for getting to shore when docked in an open harbor. The wind would have been raging and the boat itself was probably filled with a great deal of water. The challenge, which is seen in Luke’s words, was a great one.

Life application: One can almost sense the tension of those on board who worked to bring the skiff aboard the ship. But with the help of others besides the crew, the task was completed. There are times when we may be called, even if not verbally, to assist in a situation. It takes a truly uncaring person to idly sit by while others are carrying the weight of the moment.

Even if a person isn't physically able to help, there is something he or she can do. For example, a person seeing others struggling at a task can go to the galley and get something for those who are working to eat after they are done.

Standing around and gawking, in whatever situation one finds himself in, just adds to the clutter of the situation. If nothing else, words of encouragement or congratulations can be heaped upon those who are doing the hard work. Whatever it is you can do, don't be a bump on a log. Instead, be a person who is active in participating in the events that unfold before you. As it says in Ecclesiastes –

“Because of laziness the building decays,  
And through idleness of hands the house leaks.” Ecclesiastes 10:18

Do your best to not let the house around you (real or otherwise) decay because of slothfulness. Industry and hard work, even if it is mere moral support, is something that is needed in the world. A pat on the back or a letter or email of support from time to time is always appreciated.

*Lord God, may we be willing to share of ourselves in whatever way we can in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Help us, Lord, to be productive and helpful in this life we have been given. May it be so with You as the One who receives the glory for our efforts in living sound, productive, Christian lives. Amen.*

**When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven.**  
Acts 27:17

A literal rendering would be, “Which, having lifted, they used helps, undergirding the ship. And fearing lest they fall into the Syrtis, having lowered the tackle – thus they were borne” (CG).



The last verse revealed that the ship ran under Clauda and, at that time, they were able to secure the skiff, but with much difficulty. Now, concerning the skiff, it next says, “Which, having lifted.”

Once the skiff was brought near, they next lifted it onto the ship. The reason this was necessary was after lifting the skiff, “they used helps.”

The NKJV translates this verse using the word “cables.” Others say ropes, supports, under-girding, and so forth. Cables, or ropes, are exactly what was used, but the term is *boétheia* which literally means “assistance” or “help.”

HELPS Word Studies says, “It is a brand of help, especially *critical* assistance that meets an *urgent* situation.” This word is used just twice, here and in Hebrews 4:16, where we are told –

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help [*boétheia*] in time of need.”

The process of undergirding the ships in this manner is known as “frapping.” According to Albert Barnes, Falconer's Marine Dictionary describes the process, saying, “To frap a ship is to pass four or five turns of a large cable-laid rope round the hull or frame of a ship to support her in a great storm, or otherwise, when it is apprehended that she is not strong enough to resist the violent efforts of the sea.”

Barnes also cites an instance of frapping which was recorded in Lord Anson's voyage round the world, “They were obliged to throw overboard all their upper-deck guns, and take six turns of the cable round the ship to prevent her opening.” The reason for the frapping of the ship is that, without it, the ship would literally come apart at the seams in such a tempestuous storm.

Therefore, they used these helps in the process of “undergirding the ship.” This is another unique word in Scripture, *hupozónnumi*. It is a compound word coming from *hupo*, under, and *zónnumi*, to gird. Just as one might gird himself up to run, the ship is undergirded to keep from splitting apart and sinking. After this process was complete, Luke next notes, “And fearing lest they fall into the Syrtis.”

This was another anticipated problem that they feared. The Syrtis is described by Thayer's Greek Lexicon –

“...the name of two places in the African or Libyan Sea between Carthage and Cyrenaica, full of shallows and sandbanks, and therefore destructive to ships; the western Syrtis, between the islands Cercina and Meninx (or the promontories of Zeitha and Brachodes), was called Syrtis minor, the eastern (extending from the promontory of Cephalae on the Winers Grammar, to that of Boreum on the E.) was called Syrtis major (sinus Psyllicus); this latter must be the one referred to in Acts 27:17, for upon this the ship in which Paul was sailing might easily be cast after leaving Crete.”

The sands shift over time. Therefore, their exact location remained unknown from voyage to voyage. Should they hit the sands, the ship would stick fast and be torn apart in the waves and sand. Because of the danger, it says, “having lowered the tackle – thus they were borne.”

The NKJV says, “they struck sail and so were driven.” Ellicott notes that “The English fails to give the sense of the original. Had they struck sail altogether the ship would simply have drifted in the very direction which they were anxious to avoid. Some sail was absolutely necessary to keep the ship steady. What is meant is that they ‘lowered the ship’s gear,’ the spars and rigging, and especially, perhaps, the heavy yard and ropes which the ancient ships carried, and which would, in such a gale, make the ship top-heavy.”

Because of this, it would be their aim to sail as close to the wind as possible and head northwest. In doing so, they would be able to avoid the sands.

Life application: There is the normal routine of life, and then there are times when things seem to be bursting at the seams and that pressures and forces around us are beyond our ability to withstand.

It is at such times that sailors take drastic emergency methods to hold things together, even employing those passengers on the ship to assist. We should be no different. When it comes to trying times, we should be prepared to go into emergency mode. We can seek assistance from others that we would not normally dare ask help from, lest we inconvenience them.

We can gird ourselves up and prepare ourselves mentally for what lies ahead. And we should not fail to stop and pray for the Lord’s kind hand to be on us during our trials. No life is without trial, and none of us will safely navigate every journey we take. We should remember this and have our emergency kits of life ready to keep things together at all times.

Let the Lord be your Helps as you pass through the deep and stormy waters of affliction. No matter what the earthly outcome, He will be with you at the end. So, trust Him at all times.

*Lord God, may we be willing to place our lives in Your hands at all times. And when things get beyond our control, may we remember that You are there with us. You will safely carry us to fair shores of eternal peace. Even if this life gets tossed about, we are forever safely in Your hands. Thank You for this comforting reassurance. Amen.*

**And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next *day* they lightened the ship.** Acts 27:18

A more literal rendering of the Greek would be, “And we, being tempest-tossed violently, the following *day* they made a jettisoning” (CG).

In the previous verse, it noted that the crew had run ropes under the ship to hold it together and then lowered the tackle so that they would be driven. Now, Luke continues with, “And we, being tempest-tossed violently.”

Luke continues with new and rare words in this verse. The first is the adverb *sphodrós*, meaning “exceedingly.” It is found only here and is closely connected to the adverb *sphodra* which is much more common.

The word translated as tempest-tossed, *heimazó*, is also found only here. It means tempest-tossed or storm tossed. A single English word would fail to get both senses, and so a hyphenated word must suffice. Because of this terrifying state of things, it next says, “the following *day* they made a jettisoning.”

The word translated as following, *hexes*, is actually an adverb meaning subsequently or successively and signifying the next day. This is the last of five times it is seen in the New Testament. Also, the word translated as “a jettisoning” is a noun found only here, *ekbolé*. It signifies a throwing overboard and, thus, a jettisoning.

With the violence of the storm, the heavy rains, and the high seas, the weight of the ship needed to be lessened, or it was possible they would sink. Further, the chances of hitting a rock, reef, or the sands needed to be reduced.

In order to do this, they did their jettisoning. However, the verb is imperfect. It means that they started to throw and continued to do so. As we will see, the wheat was not

thrown over in hopes of at least saving the owners from suffering a complete loss. This will be seen in verse 38.

Life application: Some people are good at getting rid of unneeded things. Others hold onto them tightly, never wanting to part with a thing. Those who constantly toss things will often find they did so a bit too soon and wind up spending more time or money to get back what they actually needed.

Those who hold onto things forever often get so cluttered in their lives that they lose track of what they have and can't find what they need. Thus, they have to spend more time or money to obtain what they need, even though they already have it somewhere. If there is a perfect time to toss or keep, most people have not yet found it. However, it is something that Solomon says is necessary. He says there is –

“A time to gain,  
And a time to lose;  
A time to keep,  
And a time to throw away.” Ecclesiastes 3:6

If you are going to toss, at least see if someone else can use what you no longer need. There is no point in wasting things when someone else may benefit from what you have. You may save them some money, make a friend, or just help someone out of a difficult time.

*Lord God, help us to use wisdom in the use of our possessions so that they don't control us or bog our lives down with that which is ultimately unnecessary. And yet, help us to be wise and discerning and not wasteful as well. We are to save for our children's children. We can't do that if we are always buying stuff and tossing things away that have value. So, Lord, give us wisdom in the conduct of our lives in this regard. Amen.*

**On the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands.** Acts 27:19

A literal reading is much sparser in content, “And on the third, self-handed, the tackle of the ship we cast away” (CG).

In the previous verse, Luke noted that because the ship was exceedingly tempest-tossed, the ship was lightened. Now, his words continue with, “And on the third.”

The storm continued to rage which would have put a great strain on the ship, even with it having been lightened. Therefore, by the third day, more extreme measures were needed to take the stress off the hull. Therefore, on that day, Luke says, “self-handed, the tackle of the ship we cast away.”

Luke again uses a word unique to the Bible, *autocheir*. It comes from *autos*, a reflexive personal pronoun indicating self, and *cheir*, hand. In this case, it doesn't identify whose hands were involved. That is determined by the corresponding verb.

Luke next uses the word *skeué* to describe the tackle. It is akin to the word *skeuos* that was used in verse 27:17. It signifies the tackle, fittings, equipment, etc. As for the verb, there is a difference in the texts. Some say “they,” while others say “we.”

If the translation of we is correct, then it means that even the passengers were enlisted to assist in the lightening of the ship. If not, then only the crew did, and Luke simply made a note of the dire straits that would lead to such an extreme choice being made.

Either way, after three continued days of danger, they needed to again lighten the ship in hopes of finding some relief from the terrifying ordeal. Because of this, it says the ship's tackle was cast overboard.

As just noted, the word is *skeué*. It is found only here in the New Testament. Ellicott notes that in Greek it “is wider in its range than the English, and includes the beds and personal luggage and movables of all kinds. Even the sailors were ready to sacrifice for the chance of safety.”

Life application: To some extent we all hold onto the things of the world. Our attention may be focused a bit too much on people, pets, or possessions, consuming what should be our main devotion, which should be to the Lord.

Quite often, we hold onto things that are actually of less importance than we would otherwise realize in a time of true catastrophe or deprivation. A few examples from Scripture are Lamentations 4:1, Ezekiel 7:19, James 5:3-5, or 1 Peter 1:18. Also, the story in Matthew 19:16-22 gives us a good insight into how we hold onto that which is worthless. Psalm 119:37 is a good verse to redirect us from this.

This is a physical world, and it is a world where we need fellowship with others, food to keep ourselves going, clothing to protect us from the elements, and so forth. However, any of these (and so many more things!) can cause us to be misdirected in our thinking.

We begin to put trust in them and in our thoughts, they become some sort of lifeline that we feel we must have.

However, Scripture reveals that what we need above all else is the Lord. If He is our main hope, desire, and focus, the things of this world will not hold sway over us as they are inclined to do. So, let us remember the Lord in all things and at all times. In doing so, everything else will find its proper place.

*Lord God, how faithless we can be toward You. We get consumed with the things of this world and lose our focus and attention. Help us to remember You at all times and place You as the highest joy in our lives. With this, we will then rightly place all other things as we interact with them. May it be so, to Your glory. Amen!*

**Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.** Acts 27:20

A literal rendering would be, “And neither sun nor stars appearing for many days, and no little tempest lying upon, removed all remaining hope of us being saved” (CG).

Luke just noted that the tackle of the ship was thrown overboard. Ellicott noted that the word goes beyond the ship’s own tackle, but to anything moveable. However, even with this drastic measure, the narrative continues with, “And neither sun nor stars appearing for many days.”

Verse 27 will give an overall span of time that the storm raged around them, fourteen days. It was on the third day that they chucked the tackle overboard. Therefore, Luke’s words now indicate a period of another 9-11 days, depending on what he was thinking as he penned the narrative.

Such a span of time, while being completely tossed to and fro, and hearing the constant noise of the storm and groan of the ship, would wear out the hardiest of souls. Luke notes this was the case with the next words, “and no little tempest lying upon.”

The words “lying upon” are a literal translation of the word *epikeimai*. It is referring to the storm lying upon the ship (the verb is singular). It is as if the ship itself was bearing the entire burden of the ordeal and those inside were at the mercy of God upon the ship holding together. One can imagine what it would have been like for Noah and his family on the ark.

With this terrifying ordeal upon them, Luke says that this “removed all remaining hope of us being saved.”

In ancient times, there was no such thing as a compass, GPS, etc. Without such devices, they would have no idea at all where they were. The only way to reckon their location was to determine the placement of the sun, moon, and stars.

The overcast had deprived them of this, and so they could just as well have been on the moon as still in the Mediterranean Sea. It would leave them with a feeling of complete helplessness. Adding to the lack of knowing their location, the tempest continued to beat them mercilessly. The throwing over of the supplies and tackle implies that there was probably a leak in the hull that was gaining ground.

The people would be getting more and more tired of bailing and so the leak would be like the sword of Damocles over their heads, little by little gaining the advantage over the situation. Because of this, any hope of them getting through the ordeal and being saved was erased.

The metaphor of works-based salvation is perfectly seen in this verse. The more one works, the more futile the effort. The people on the ship had gone without food, they had given up on their goods, they had worked tirelessly in the midst of chaos, and they were no better off – and certainly worse off – than when the tempest started.

Life application: Life without assurance is the most hopeless place to be. But in Christ, there is always hope, and the promise of eternal life will carry the worn-out soul to assured rest. God did not send Jesus to provide His people with eternal insecurity.

No! He did not send Jesus to save us and then expect us to then keep on saving ourselves. That would mean that His initial salvation was not truly sufficient to save. Instead, Jesus did everything necessary to restore us to life and to continue to do so as long as we are in this body of death. He has promised, and He will deliver us from it.

*Lord God, give us the wisdom and the faith necessary to fully grasp what it means to be saved. Jesus has done the work. Our walk after coming to Him is to be one of gratitude, not insecurity and fear. Help us to realize that the battle has been won. Jesus has prevailed, and we are the recipients of His glorious deeds. May we rest in this assurance all our days! Amen.*

**But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. Acts 27:21**

More literally, “And being much abstinence then, Paul having stood in their midst, said, ‘Indeed, O men, you ought to have hearkened to me not to go up from Crete, and to gain this disaster and loss’” (CG).

In the previous verse, Luke noted that it had been many days without sun or stars while the tempest beat upon them. This led to the point where they had given up all hope. With that noted, he now records Paul’s words, beginning with, “And being much abstinence then.”

The abstinence from food that is mentioned here is probably as much because of having thrown over the equipment as for any other reason. This may have included much of the cooking equipment, and so the people on the ship would have been put on reduced rations of things that didn’t need to be cooked.

The Pulpit Commentary argues that the word translated as “abstinence,” *asitia*, “is only found here in the Bible; but it was the common medical term for loss of the appetite, and such is the most natural rendering here. There is nothing about ‘long abstinence’ in the text.”

Their comment, however, does not square with the words of Paul in verse 33. There was, in fact, a long abstinence and the people were certainly weak from the lack of food. Despite this, Paul was both strengthened in the Lord and an encouragement to them. But before he encourages, Luke says, “Paul having stood in their midst, said, ‘Indeed, O men, you ought to have hearkened to me.’”

This isn’t Paul rubbing their bad decision in their faces. Rather, it is an obvious truth that he did his best to get them to avoid disaster. They didn’t listen and his words were vindicated. As such, his coming words should be listened to and accepted. To remind them of what occurred before he gives his encouragement, he says he told them “not to go up from Crete.”

As has been seen several times in Acts, to depart from land is thought of as going up. That is akin to our terminology of heading out to the high seas. They were safely in a harbor, and they were warned not to go up from it. The reason Paul recommended staying was, as he says, “and to gain this disaster and loss.”



He uses the same two words that were introduced into the Bible in Acts 27:10, *hubris* and *zémia*, translated as disaster and loss. It may sound odd to say, “gain this disaster and loss,” but this is exactly what has happened. They have lost their cargo and ship, and have, in place of them, gained disaster and loss – at least experientially.

Again, Paul is not holding this tragedy over them. Instead, he is demonstrating to them that he isn't just a lunatic, incapable of making a reasonable deduction about the events which were certainly to come upon them.

This is readying them for his next words where he will prophesy to all on the ship. Being sane enough to make a reasonable recommendation concerning what would occur by leaving Crete, his words of prophecy would be taken, not as from a nut job, but from a person of sound mind.

Life application: When our words are found to be reliable, we will tend to be more likely to get the ears of others. If what we say is inconsistent, not based in reality, or false, the chances of people listening to us will normally be greatly diminished or non-existent.

Having said that, this doesn't seem to apply to politicians or sensationalist teachers, regardless of what they say. Such people can lie through their teeth or claim things that never happened, and their words are simply ignored by those who follow them. Instead, they want to hear certain things and will shut out any falsity that comes their way as if it isn't important.

Therefore, we need to really stand back and evaluate ourselves to determine if we are allowing lies to fill our minds simply because we agree with an overall agenda or approach to life. If so, we need to forcibly restrict ourselves from allowing this to happen.

What we should hear and accept is nothing but the truth. If we allow falsity of whatever kind to rule our thoughts, we are opening ourselves up to real trouble and even disaster. History has proven this true time and again. Be on guard concerning what you will accept and who you will listen to.

*Lord God, You expect us to be truthful. You also surely want us to only accept what is truthful. And so, Lord, give us wisdom to identify those times when we are willing to accept falsity, in order to weed that out of our lives. May our lives be dedicated to right thinking and words that are based upon reality and truth. Amen.*

**“And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. Acts 27:22**

A literal rendering of the Greek would be, “And now, I admonish you to be cheerful, for there will be no off-casting of soul from you, except the ship” (CG).

Paul had just noted that those on the ship should have listened to him and stayed in Crete. By doing so, they would not have incurred the damage and loss that was now being experienced. Now, having set forth that his words are worth listening to, he will provide good news to the worn-out people before him, saying, “And now, I admonish you.”

Paul uses the same word, translated as “admonish,” that Luke used to describe Paul’s words in verse 27:9 –

“And much time having elapsed, and the sailing being already dangerous – and the Fast already passed by – Paul admonished” (CG).

This is the second and last time the word is used in Scripture, *paraineó*. It means to exhort or advise. However, HELPS Word Studies notes that it is “to *urge acknowledging what is praiseworthy*, i.e. ‘recommend, advise, urge.’” It is an up close and personal form of admonishment.

One can see that when Luke penned Acts, he remembered Paul’s word and used it in verse 27:9 when giving his narrative about what Paul would say now in verse 27:22. Luke’s precision of recording events and even single words is highlighted in this. Next, Paul says for them, “to be cheerful.”

It is another new word in Scripture, *euthumeó*. HELPS Word Studies says it is used “to show *positive passion* as it proceeds from a sound disposition.” It will be used again in verse 27:25 and once in James 5:13.

The people were certainly disheartened and dejected of soul, having (as it said in verse 20) no hope of being saved. But Paul now tells them to have this positive passion and be cheery in their disposition because, as he next says, “for there will be no off-casting of soul from you, except the ship.”

And, once again, Luke uses a new word, *apobolé*. It comes from two words meaning “away” and “cast.” Thus, “off-casting” is an exacting translation. This word is found only one more time, in Romans 11:15 when speaking of Israel –

“For if their being cast away [*apobolé*] is the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead?”

As for Paul’s words to the people, the good news is that no person’s soul would be cast away. Every person aboard would survive the ordeal. However, the bad news is that the ship would be lost. This then would mean that all of the cargo would be lost as well.

Those who owned and operated the ship would receive their lives as a prize, but nothing more. It is not unlike the word of the Lord spoken to Jeremiah’s scribe, Baruch –

“The word that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written these words in a book at the instruction of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying, <sup>2</sup> ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: <sup>3</sup> “You said, ‘Woe is me now! For the LORD has added grief to my sorrow. I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.’”

<sup>4</sup> ‘Thus you shall say to him, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, what I have built I will break down, and what I have planted I will pluck up, that is, this whole land. <sup>5</sup> And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek *them*; for behold, I will bring adversity on all flesh,’ says the LORD. ‘But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go.’””” Jeremiah 45:1-5

Life application: For those who owned the ship and/or the cargo, the lesson is similar to that of Acts 27:19. What value are the things of the world in comparison to life itself? If the ship were saved, but the owner was lost, it would mean nothing to the owner that the ship was saved.

And, like those on the ship, the Lord has said that He would lose none of those who would come to Him. Difficult times have come to many, but in the end, all will safely arrive on the promised shores of His safe haven.

Should you be facing great loss in some way, remember that this is a fallen world and that difficult times are inevitable. But God promises us something better. Hold fast to that thought should things get out of control. Wonderful times of rest are ahead for the weary soul.

*Heavenly Father, may we hold fast to the sure promises that Your word has given us because of Jesus. No matter how good things are at any given moment, total loss or great sadness may be just around the corner. If we can remember to fix our eyes on Jesus now, then should such things come to pass, we will already have our attention focused properly. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**“For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, Acts 27:23**

A bit more literally, it reads, “For a messenger of the God stood by me this night, whose I am and whom I serve” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul told those gathered on the ship to be of good cheer because there would be no loss of life. Only the ship would be lost. Now, to explain how he knows this, he says, “For a messenger of the God.”

The Greek word *aggelos* means a messenger. It can be human or divine. In this case, there is no indication which it is. One could say, “Obviously it was a non-human angel from heaven because they are on a ship at sea.” However, it could be one of the two anointed ones noted in Zechariah 4, who are surely humans. As it is, a messenger of the God came to Paul and, he says, “stood by me this night.”

The words would otherwise be incredible unless one is willing to believe in the supernatural. How could a messenger come to a person on a ship that has been lost at sea for an extended period of time, even while the sea raged and roared around them?

And yet, this is the claim Paul has made. Therefore, those gathered must decide if he is bonkers or if he is telling the truth. The fact that the messenger waited this long, however, is its own sort of validation. Why would God allow the ship to be tossed around so long and then send a messenger, unless what he says to Paul is true?

The people had, as it said already, given up all hope of being saved. And yet, there is suddenly a ray of hope shining through to them. With their physical and mental strength completely used up, this would have a much more profound effect on them. Where their works had failed them, a note of grace is extended from above, and it has come from the God, as Paul says, “whose I am and whom I serve.”

Paul is a Hebrew. The people on the ship would probably have known this. But at least those in charge were aware of it. The words are not unlike the account of Jonah. There is

a difference, however. In Jonah, the remedy was to cast Jonah into the sea. That was an anticipatory type of Christ. With Paul, he is a servant of Christ Jesus.

Instead of being the instrument of the salvation of those on the ship, as Jonah was when he was cast into the sea, Paul's God will bring about their salvation apart from any effort of, or use for, Paul. The types of the past, seen in Jonah, are no longer needed. Christ has come. Paul serves Him, and He will provide the delivery.

Life application: Notice the difference in the KJV and NKJV in these words –

- KJV – the angel of God.
- NKJV – an angel of the God.

In the Greek, there is no article before angel (messenger), but there is one before God. Therefore, either way, the KJV is wrong. However, the NKJV, despite having the articles right, might lead someone to a false understanding of what the intent of Paul's words is. Look now at the difference between the placement of the words by the NKJV, the YLT, the SLT, and the CGT –

- NKJV – For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve.
- YLT – for there stood by me this night a messenger of God -- whose I am, and whom I serve.
- SLT – For the messenger of God stood by me in this night, whose I am, and whom I serve.
- CGV – For a messenger of the God stood by me this night, whose I am and whom I serve.

The NKJV directly connects the words “of the God” to “to whom I belong and whom I serve. This could then lead to a false conclusion, that Paul's God is one of many.

Regardless of the use of the article before God, the other three separate the thoughts. Thus, it separates the thought of God and man in the mind of the reader. The SLT and YLT chose not to include the word “the” before God.

This is a common way of treating the article when it is before God, especially in a verse where it is understood that there is one God. However, including the article as the CGT does is perfectly acceptable because of the separation of the God and Paul in the clauses.

As for the article before “messenger” in the SLT version, that is incorrect and should not have been included. Likewise, the word “there” in the YLT should have been italicized as it is not in the Greek. Despite this, the order of the words in the Greek is more closely matched by the YLT than the CGT.

Here is the exact order of the Greek:

παρέστη γάρ μοι τῆ νυκτὶ ταύτῃ ἄγγελος τοῦ θεοῦ οὗ εἶμι ᾧ καὶ λατρεύω  
(Stood by) for me the night this messenger the God whose (I am) whom and (I serve).

Now it is your turn to look at the words and see how you would make them fit both the intent and the English so that it is understandable. Test at 9. Be ready...

*Lord God Almighty, may we carefully and respectfully contemplate Your word. There is intent in how it is presented, but there is also a need for it to be understandable to us. Help us to have the two match in our minds so that our thoughts about You are correct. We want to know You and Your word intimately. So be with us in our time in fellowship with You through Your word. Amen.*

**“saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ Acts 27:24**

With a few tweaks, the Greek more closely reads, “Saying, ‘Fear not, Paul. It behooves you to stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those sailing with you’” (CG).

Paul just told those gathered with him that a messenger of the God stood by him. Now he continues his thought with, “Saying, ‘Fear not, Paul.’”

Similar words are seen throughout Scripture when reassurance is needed in one of God’s people. Daniel 10:12 and Matthew 28:5 are two examples prior to Paul’s time. Revelation 1:17 comes after his time, and it will also provide the same needed help for the apostle John.

Further, this address is more personal than many others as Paul is addressed by name. Along with this, the reason for the admonition is given, “It behooves you to stand before Caesar.”

In other words, this is what is predominantly on the Lord's mind concerning the entire ordeal, meaning the advancement of the gospel message, and that especially through Paul. God's foreknowledge of all things means that He knows exactly what is needed at every moment to direct the affairs of man according to His predetermined purposes.

Paul was an integral part of the plan at this point in time, and he would live through the ordeal in order to continue to effect the outcome of what God had determined. His salvation from this ordeal was necessary for these things to come about, but even more, and what certainly points to where Paul's prayers had actually been placed, he is told, "And behold, God has granted you all those sailing with you."

Paul's concern while on his knees in prayer was not for himself. It was for the lost souls on the ship who needed a Savior before they perished. If this ordeal could bring them to understand the truth of Paul's message, then so be it. And in fact, this is now promised.

Whether they accept the message or not, the validity of his words concerning his God could not be disputed. It is of note that the exact opposite of what occurs here is mentioned in Ezekiel 14:14, 14, 18, and 20. Paul's status was sufficient to save those around him, whereas the status of those in Ezekiel's time was only sufficient to save themselves.

Life application: One can consider the difference between the examples in Ezekiel 14 and those of Paul's situation here. In thinking about it, we can see that the law brings condemnation but God's grace in Christ brings salvation.

Those living under the law had the weight and burden of the law stacked against them. If they appealed to the law for their hope, they would find it only brings condemnation. However, even those under the law could appeal for God's mercy. David discovered this.

He knew that the law demanded satisfaction. Therefore, he didn't appeal to the law, lest he be swept away. When he was found to have done wrong, he appealed to God's forgiveness in his displaying of a heartfelt, internal remorse –

"Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
The God of my salvation,  
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.  
<sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips,  
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.  
<sup>16</sup> For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*;

You do not delight in burnt offering.  
<sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit,  
A broken and a contrite heart—  
These, O God, You will not despise.” Psalm 51:14-17

*Lord God, thank You for Your grace, displayed in the giving of Your Son for us. May we cling to the cross and lay the entirety of our sin there. May our hearts be purified through remorse at the wrongdoings we commit in Your presence as we proceed forward in our salvation. May we never use Your grace as a license to continue sinning. Amen.*

**“Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.**  
Acts 27:25

A literal translation is, “Therefore, be cheerful, men. For I believe God, that thus it will be even as it has been told me” (CG).

Paul just told those on the ship the good news that he and all on the ship would be spared. With that stated, he now says, “Therefore, be cheerful, men.”

Addressing them as men is asking them to act as men should act. But more, after the long days and nights of terrifying sounds and motions, lack of sleep, deprivation of food, and so forth, Paul’s words would have been like a glass of cold water in a hot dry desert.

To hear someone speak of being cheerful in such circumstances could only lighten the hearts of the others. Further, he continues with, “For I believe God.”

Those who knew Paul already understood this about him, but with his claim of having seen a messenger and having been given the promise of being saved, they could combine what they knew of his general faith with what he had specifically stated. If Paul continued to believe God at this point, then he would have no reason to have made up a story like this, the substance of his faith being “that thus it will be even as it has been told me.”

His words contain a perfect participle. It was told to him and the effects of what he was told continue on to the present time. Paul stands grounded in the reliability of the words that were spoken to him.



His words of encouragement to them are a sign of his faith in the sure promises of his God. In showing faith, he is implying that they should likewise have faith that his words are true. It would do no good to witness to another and not demonstrate confidence in what is being conveyed. As Bengel says, "Faith exercised towards the (word of the) angel of GOD, is exercised towards GOD."

Life application: Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Paul had not yet seen the salvation of those on the ship, but because of his faith in what God had conveyed to him, he had absolute faith that it would come about.

We believed the gospel, even though we didn't see Jesus die on the cross and return to life. This event became an anchor of hope for us. But how far will our faith then take us? God says that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Do we believe that when we are facing the greatest crisis? Will we believe it when our life is about to end?

For such times, the word says that God will raise the dead when He comes. Will we cling to that promise as our end draws near? We should be living out our faith from moment to moment, always trusting and always increasing our faith by acknowledging God's hand in everything that occurs. Eventually, nothing that would normally shake the hardest soul will faze us.

It is as much a mental attitude directed toward God and His promises as anything else. If we can trust that God raised Jesus from the dead, then we can continue to trust and consider everything else that God promises in His word. Let us do so in ever-increasing amounts.

*Lord God, may we steadfastly and resolutely cling to the promises in Your word, ever solidifying them in our consciences, even until they are as real to us as the ground under our feet. May Your word be a foundation for our lives at all times. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**"However, we must run aground on a certain island." Acts 27:26**

A literal rendering of the Greek is, "But we must fall onto a certain island" (CG).

Paul had just provided encouraging words to those gathered on the ship, noting that he was certain that what he was told by the messenger would come to pass. With that

good news stated, he prepares them for a challenge ahead, saying, “But we must fall onto a certain island.”

His words are given as confirmation that his story about the angel will be proven true. Not only was he spoken to and given assurances concerning the saving of the people and the loss of the ship, but he was also given a specific revelation to bolster his words.

He notes that they “must’ fall upon a certain island. The word is *dei*. HELPS Word Studies notes that it indicates what must happen. It is that which is inevitable by “absolute necessity.”

Paul is speaking as the ambassador of God. If Paul’s God is the true God, then His credentials will be verified when these things come to pass. The idea of what is occurring in this verse is the same as that found in John 20:31 where John says, “these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

Life application: How much proof do you need that what God says will come to pass will actually occur? We have the word recorded. It spoke of the coming Christ, and He came. The things prophesied about His first coming have been fulfilled.

It is true that this could all be an elaborate plan by a group of men to make events match their writings by making up the details of Jesus’ life. But there are so many things in the New Testament that intricately work into the writings that this hardly seems possible. There are many types of patterns that were never known about for centuries after the books were written.

And yet, people still question if the word is true. But suddenly, the Jewish people started to be called back to the land of Israel. They were then reestablished as a nation. The prophecies about these things occurring are found in both testaments.

The word is again proving itself true. However, even people within the church say that the Israel of today is merely an aberration or that these are not the true Jews who belong in the land. Imagine that! People who are supposed to accept the prophetic words in Scripture as a point of it validating itself deny what the word proclaimed!

How much evidence do you need to say, “This is the word of God, and I will trust it.”? Don’t be a doubting Thomas. Read the word, think about what it says, and see if what it proclaims matches what is going on in the world around you. If you are honest, you will

find that it does so in a thousand different ways. No! Even more. Have faith. We have a sure word.

*Lord God, may our hard hearts soften with the evidence that we see in Scripture. If we just read it and compare it with how things are in the world, we can clearly see that it is from You, and it is given to lead us back to You. May we carefully and thoughtfully consider this precious word all the days of our lives. Amen.*

**Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land.** Acts 27:27

A more literal rendering is, “And when *the* fourteenth night came, we – being carried through in the Adriatic – about the middle *of the* night, the sailors suspected some land to approach them” (CG).

Paul just told those on the ship that they must run aground on a certain island. Now, immediately after that, it says, “And when *the* fourteenth night came.” This fourteenth day is generally accepted to be from the time that they left Fair Havens. They had planned on a short trip from there to Phoenix, and yet they were quickly swept up into fourteen days of terror on the high seas.

The word translated as fourteenth is *tessareskaidekatos*. It is found only here and in verse 27:33. It is derived from three words, *tessares* (four), *kai* (and), and *dekatos* (tenth). On this fourteenth day, Luke next says, “we – being carried through in the Adriatic.”

The Adriatic Sea, or in Greek, “the Adria,” which is found only here in the New Testament, indicates an area larger than it now does. Today, the Adriatic Sea is the sea which is to the east of Italy, with Croatia, Montenegro, and Albania on the other shore.

However, the term here indicates the whole sea between Greece and Italy which included Sicily. Josephus wrote of his own shipwreck in the Adria, and he uses the area in the same sense as Luke does here. While being tossed about in this great, open body of water, it next says, “about the middle *of the* night.”

It is an approximation of the time, but the point of Luke’s words is that the sailors on the ship were busy doing their regular duties, even though the ship was being driven by the wind and waves. One of those regular duties was taking soundings and observing the

way the waves and tides were moving. While so engaged, it next says, “the sailors suspected some land to approach them.”

Here, Luke introduces a new word, *nautés*. It signifies a sailor or shipman. It will be seen again in verse 27:30 and once in Revelation 18:17. It comes from *naus*, a ship or vessel. That will be seen only in verse 27:41.

The sailors were trained to know the changes in the environment around them, including what was going on around and under them. While being tossed back and forth in this larger area at midnight on their fourteenth day, they could tell land was close by.

This was possibly because of hearing breakers or being able to determine the way the sea moves and appears closer to land. The wording is more nautical than many English translations which place the movement on the part of the ship as it approaches the land. Instead, the Greek puts the movement on the land as it approaches the ship.

Life application: The sailors were trained to tell what was going on around them in relation to the sea. An inexperienced person would not notice these subtle changes. This is true with any job.

A wastewater operator can tell by observing a sample of a million-gallon tank if the contents are healthy or not by simply checking the amount of dissolved oxygen that is in the tank and through a quick microscopic check of the types of bacteria that are thriving.

These things take experience and constant attention to what the job entails. The Bible is a manual for man to understand his surroundings, to get a comprehension of what is going on in relation to sin, to God’s prophetic timeline, and so forth. One cannot rightly pay attention to these things if he is not aware of what the manual says.

And more, one cannot tell what is his state, the state of his family, the state of his church, and even of the world around him if he is not carefully observing these things based on the knowledge the Bible provides. If constantly checking microorganisms in a sample of a tank of wastewater is important, how much more important is it for that same person to continuously check the state of his relationship with the Lord?

Let us pay heed and give the necessary time it takes each day to learn more about this most important of all issues.

*Lord God, may our lives be filled with pursuing the knowledge of You more and more. May we never fail to check with the Bible on issues relating to the things it teaches, becoming attuned to the state of things around us at all times. It is a sure way to keep from the harms that are bound to arise in this fallen world. Thank You for Your word, O God. Amen.*

**And they took soundings and found *it* to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found *it* to be fifteen fathoms.**

Acts 27:28

More literally, it reads, “And, having sounded, they found twenty fathoms. And having distanced a little, having sounded again, they found fifteen fathoms” (CG).

In the last verse, the sailors sensed that they were approaching land. To confirm this, it next says, “And, having sounded, they found twenty fathoms.”

Here are two words found only in this verse. Each is used twice by Luke. The first is *bolizó*. It is derived from *bolis*, a dart or a javelin. In this case, it is something like a dart that is attached to a line. When it is cast out, it sinks directly to the bottom.

The distance until it stops is then measured. That measurement is known as an *orguia*. This word signifies “outstretched.” HELPS Word Studies notes that it was “originally the distance between the tips of the left and right hands when *outstretched*; a *fathom*, the unit of measure (roughly) five to six feet long.”

Assuming six feet, the depth would then be about one hundred and twenty feet deep. Once that was determined, a baseline is now set to know if it is getting deeper or shallower. Thus, it next says, “And having distanced a little.”

This is a word used for the third and last time, *diistémi*. It signifies to set apart, make an interval, etc. It can be used for time, such as waiting for an hour to elapse, or space, such as being separated from another person. In this case, it includes both.

They waited a certain amount of time which would have meant a certain distance had been traversed. After this interval, Luke next records, “having sounded again, they found fifteen fathoms.”

The depth is now about ninety feet. By taking soundings and finding that the depth was decreasing, the logical deduction is that they were approaching land. It would be welcome to know that there was land nearby after such a long, agonizing time.

And yet, it would be a fearsome thing knowing that land was near while it was still the middle of the night. Due to Paul's words that they would be shipwrecked on some island, some level of fear factor may have set in, even if they had been assured that all would survive.

Life application: Paul had told those on the ship what would take place. Depending on who trusted his words, there would be anything from relief at the coming end of the ordeal to mild trepidation about how it would transpire, or even to fear in some measure knowing that any type of greeting may meet them, from a sandy shore to a rocky reef or a high cliff.

Paul was an apostle of Jesus. Because of this, he was conveying words that ultimately came from the Lord. Luke, for example, may have pulled out a harmonica and started playing a song, knowing that standing on firm, dry ground was not far off.

We have the words of Paul written down. At times, they have come directly from Jesus. At other times they came while being under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Either way, they have come from God. When Paul writes that God will receive those who have died in Christ, raising them from the dead and bringing them to Himself, how do we personally take the otherwise bad news of an incurable malady or disease?

Will you be filled with terror, mild trepidation, or will you pull out a harmonica and play a tune to the Lord? The attitude you display will reflect just how much you trust the words of Scripture which reveal the promises of God.

The words of Scripture are true. Unless the rapture occurs, we are all going to die. There is no escaping this. So don't be frustrated at the news that you or a saved loved one has come to the point where death is not far off. The Lord already has a plan for retrieving you or your loved one from that state. Without a doubt, it will come about.

*Lord God Almighty, You have the days of our lives already numbered and set. You know how our departure will come about at the end of this earthly life. And You already have the moment of our resurrection set and prepared. Why should we worry when we know these things are true? Hallelujah that You have a plan. Amen.*

**Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come. Acts 27:29**

The Greek more literally reads, “And fearing, lest perhaps we might fall into rough places, having cast four anchors out of the stern they were wishing for day to come” (CG).

In the previous verse, soundings had been taken, finding first twenty fathoms and then fifteen. Because of that, the sailors assumed land was not far off. As it was still night, it next says, “And fearing, lest perhaps we might fall into rough places.”

The word is *trachus*. It is used for the second and last time, having first been used in Luke 3:5. It signifies rough, rugged, or uneven. Saying “rocky” is a bit of a paraphrase, even if it is correct.

The sailors were afraid that the ship would crash onto an unfriendly reef or shore. If so, this could be disastrous for those on the ship. Therefore, they wanted to slow down the ship so that the force of such a crash would be lessened. To do this, it next says, “having cast four anchors out of the stern.”

Another word is used for the last time, *rhiptó*, to cast, scatter, etc. It gives the sense of sudden motion, as if in flinging. They had four anchors which they chucked out of the stern. This would increase the drag on the ship and cause it to lumber more slowly as it approached the land.

And more, the violence of the storm necessitated this full complement of anchors to be cast in. Doing this from the stern would eliminate the danger of having the ship swing around and be brought into any rock or reef. It would also mean that it would be in the best alignment for running the ship up onto any visible beach once daylight came. Along with that, it says, “they were wishing for day to come.”

The word used can mean to either wish or pray. As praying wouldn't make the day come any sooner, it probably is better translated as wish. However, even the sailors in Jonah's adventure did pray out to their gods. And Joshua did pray for the moon to stand still over the valley of Aijalon during his battle, so that translation is not out of the question.

Life application: Hebrews 6, using the word *agkura*, or anchor, says this –

“This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the *Presence* behind the veil, <sup>20</sup> where the forerunner has entered for us, *even* Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Hebrews 6:19, 20

If we truly possess the anchor of hope in Christ, we will never get swung around when troubles aplenty come our way. We will remain steadfast and properly directed, even in the greatest storms of life. The rocky shores may be out there, but our direction will remain unchanged, and we will have the certainty that God will direct us safely to the soft and pleasant shores of a land we have yet to see.

This doesn't mean we won't get there if our faith is weak. If we believe in Jesus, having received Him, we shall arrive. But think of the difference between Paul and maybe a new believer on the ship.

Paul had already been told they would be delivered. He knew it would come to pass, and there would be no question in his mind it was so. However, Sam Shipwright may have heard and believed the message of Jesus, but his hope was not yet as grounded as Paul's.

There he would be, fearful of the coming shoreline and the trials they might face once they were cast upon it. Paul's hope is grounded, and his anchor holds. Sam's is not and he is still like his own little ship being cast about on the waters of uncertainty.

How grounded is your faith? Do you completely and fully trust every word of Scripture and that it will come about just as you have read? Do you even know all the promises contained there? You can't, unless you read the Bible. And your faith can only increase through trusting the Lord with every aspect of your existence.

Have faith and read your Bible. This will be a great line that connects you to the anchor of hope that will rest your otherwise troubled soul.

*Lord God, may our faith be increased from day to day as we learn to trust You and Your word. Give us the desire to know You more and more. May our anchor hold fast and may the line of our knowledge and trust be sure and sound. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, Acts 27:30**



More exactly, it reads, “And the sailors, seeking to flee from the ship, and having let down the skiff into the sea, a pretext, as being about to extend anchors from the prow” (CG).

In the previous verse, the crew feared they would be dashed on rocks when they came to land, so they dropped four anchors from the stern, hoping for the day to come. Now, Luke continues with, “And the sailors, seeking to flee from the ship.”

Some translations add in the word of, and thus, “And of the sailors.” This would then indicate that it wasn’t all of them that were doing this. Though not in the original, this is likely the case. Some of the sailors had a plan to abandon the ship, leaving the rest to fend for themselves. Therefore, it next says, “and having let down the skiff into the sea.”

In order to make it appear that they wanted to doubly secure the ship, these sailors let down a skiff, probably the same smaller boat that had been hauled in during verses 16 & 17. However, Luke notes this was “a pretext.”

They were working cunningly to save themselves, figuring it was safer to take a small ship that could be more easily maneuvered as shore approached. Their pretext was to let down this skiff “as being about to extend anchors from the prow.”

Here is a new word, *próra*. It signifies the front of the ship, thus the bow or prow. It is derived from *pro*, to be in front of, which is where our modern prefix is derived from. One can see the logical movement from *pro* to *próra*, the prow.

The meaning of their action is that they were going to take anchors that were aboard it and carry them out from the ship a distance before dropping them in. This would allow for a greater angle on the line in relation to the ship.

However, the true intent was to take the skiff and get away from the massive hull of the larger ship which could come apart violently. In the skiff, they would find a spot that was safe to drive up to the shore saving themselves.

Life application: The actions of the sailors are a normal response by anyone who has only this life to look forward to. Even many Christians cling unnecessarily to this life, sacrificing personal dignity and respect for others in the process. It is the stuff of movies, but that is so because it is the normal human condition to want to save oneself, even at the expense of others.

However, there is another unnatural human condition that is often highlighted in books and movies: the self-sacrificing hero. The marine jumps on a grenade to save his friends, the father gives up his life for his family, or – most incredibly of all – the Creator becomes the Redeemer by uniting with His creation, sending His Son into the world to save it from the consequences of sin.

Because of Jesus, an eternal hope is given to those who believe in Him. From there, the Christian can faithfully trust that this life is not all there is. With an eternal hope, we should consider this life of far less value than that of betraying others to save ourselves for the sake of a temporary extension of our current walk in this fallen world.

*Lord God, may we not be selfish or peevish in the face of troubles or disaster. Instead, may we faithfully trust that the events of this world cannot separate us from the promise of eternal life in Christ. Therefore, may our actions reflect this and be honorable before the eyes of all. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” Acts 27:31**

A closer translation to the original is, “Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, If these don’t remain in the ship, you are not able to be saved” (CG).

In the previous verse, some of the sailors were putting out the skiff, pretending they were going to lay out anchors from the prow. However, seeing this was just a pretext to get away from the ship, “Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, If these don’t remain in the ship, you are not able to be saved.”

Depending on one’s view of what is occurring, the words of Paul here can be taken from a logical or a spiritual viewpoint. Is Paul saying that the abandonment of the sailors would mean that God’s wrath would be on the ship, thus bringing death to all?

Or is this logically saying that without the skills and abilities of the ship’s crew to navigate the vessel after the rising of the sun, death is the certain end as it would be in any such circumstance?

It is probably best to assume that Paul is making an obvious deduction. There were passengers, there were soldiers, there were prisoners, and there was at least one owner, all of whom would be left to handle the ship without the necessary skills

required for the task. And therefore, he speaks logically to the centurion and the sailors that disaster was just ahead without the crew's expertise.

The "you" here is emphatic, as if saying, "you yourselves." Even in the middle of the night, Paul was ever vigilant to observe the circumstances around him and to advise according to the wisdom he possessed.

After having rejected his advice at the beginning of the voyage, and after having been given the assurances concerning the words of the angel, the centurion would have to decide now if Paul's words were sufficiently reasonable.

Though long, Barnes' thoughts on this verse are worth citing –

1. That the certainty of an event does not render it improper to use means to obtain it.
2. that, though the event may be determined, yet the use of means may be indispensable to secure it. The event is not more certainly ordained than the means requisite to accomplish it.
3. that the doctrine of the divine purposes or decrees, making certain future events, does not make the use of man's agency unnecessary or improper. The means are determined as well as the end, and the one will not be secured without the other.
4. the same is true in regard to the decrees respecting salvation. The end is not determined without the means; and as God has resolved that his people shall be saved, so he has also determined the means. He has ordained that they shall repent, shall believe, shall be holy, and shall thus be saved.
5. we have in this case a full answer to the objection that a belief in the decrees of God will make people neglect the means of salvation, and lead to licentiousness. It has just the contrary tendency. Here is a case in which Paul certainly believed in the purpose of God to save these people; in which he was assured that it was fully determined; and yet the effect was not to produce indolence and unconcern, but to prompt him to use strenuous efforts to accomplish the very effect which God had determined should take place. So it is always. A belief that God has purposes of mercy; that he designs, and has always designed, to save some, will prompt to the use of all proper means to secure it. If we had no such evidence that God had any such purpose, effort would be vain. Where we have such evidence, it operates, as it did in the case of Paul, to produce great and strenuous endeavors to secure the object.

Life application: There are things we are able to do and there are things beyond our ability. When it comes to salvation, no man is able to save himself. The Bible takes this as an axiom. Apart from God's intervention, man is utterly corrupted before Him.

It is as if we are on a journey through a sea, being tossed about and where every moment could be our last. This is a truth we cannot deny. We are at the mercy of God alone for our next breath, and yet we must continue on until that final moment.

However, once death arrives, our fate will have been sealed. If we cut away from us the lifeline to God's provision, meaning Jesus Christ, we are not able to be saved. We have forsaken the only One who has proven Himself worthy before God, and who is then willing to be our Substitute before Him.

The centurion and the soldiers on the ship had a choice to make. Should they listen to God's appointed apostle and keep the sailors on board, making it possible for the ship to be saved, or should they allow things to continue without their needed experience.

Likewise, will we listen to the words of Scripture and receive Jesus, or will we attempt to go it alone? Let us use wisdom in this matter and call out to Jesus while we can. He is sure to deliver us safely to our place of rest and joy in the presence of God.

*Almighty God, may we not be foolish and squander away our days walking in darkness and without the light of the Lord to conduct us back to You. Rather, may we call out to Jesus and find the right and proper path that will bring us into Your glorious presence once again. Amen.*

**Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.** Acts 27:32

In the previous verse, Paul told the centurion and the sailors that if the crew were to get away on the skiff, the ship and those on it were not able to be saved. Therefore, heeding his advice, Luke records, "Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff."

The action here shows that they immediately accepted Paul's words. The skiff had probably already been completely lowered, but the sailors weren't yet on it. Luke records no arguments, no conversations, and no dispute by any party.

It is as if the centurion nodded his head and the soldiers simply cut away the skiff in a moment. This shows clearly that the centurion trusted Paul's faith in the message he had received from the angel enough to act as was needed.

Again, it is very similar to what occurred with Jonah. The skiff could have been useful later. It was contrary to sound reason to simply cut it away. Likewise, it was contrary to sound reason to dump a person overboard in hopes of calming a storm. But in both cases, those who were faced with a decision made it according to the word they had heard.

In this verse, two words are used for the last time. The first is *schoinion*. It signifies a cord or rope. Its only other use was in John 2:15 –

“When He had made a whip of cords [*schoinion*], He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables.”

The other word is *skaphé*, the skiff. All three of its uses were in this chapter. Once the ropes were cut, it says, “and let it fall off.” More precisely, “and let her fall away.” Like a ship, the skiff is a feminine noun. Her ropes were cut, and she fell away from the boat, proceeding on by herself.

Life application: The words of this verse are not unlike our own walk with the Lord. We are asked to do something which seems beyond reason, meaning to trust in the death of a Man from two thousand years ago in order to save us.

We have been told that He died in fulfillment of a law that we have never been under, but in doing so, He met the righteous requirements of God. From there, and proving that He did so, He rose again. It is otherwise incredible to consider, but this is what faith is, and this is what we are rewarded for. God looks for faith in His faithless creatures, so a little bit will do.

In receiving Jesus, we are cutting away our own source of attempts at personal salvation, and we are trusting in God’s provision alone. The soldiers had a choice. They could attempt to save themselves on a ship without someone to properly guide it – a picture of works-based salvation – or they could trust the word they had heard and do what seemed otherwise contrary to reason.

Be wise in how you proceed! Trust God’s word by trusting in Jesus. He can and He will deliver you on that day. Let us thank God for Jesus and praise His name forever and ever.

*Heavenly Father, we know that we will be found worthy to stand before You, not on our own merits, but on the merits of Christ Jesus who alone has fulfilled Your law. May we rest in Him, trust in Him, and be delivered by Him on that day. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored *them* all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. Acts 27:33**

More literally, it reads, “And until it was about to be day, Paul urged all to take food, saying, ‘Anticipating today, *the* fourteenth day, you continue undernourished, having taken nothing.’” (CG).

The previous verse noted the soldiers cutting away the skiff. At some point later, in the very early morning, Luke next records, “And until it was about to be day.”

This indicates the time between midnight and morning, not specifically the dawn itself. It is at some point very early in the day when the dawning is the next anticipated event in the daily progression of time. It is at this very early time that, “Paul urged all to take food.”

His advice for those gathered to eat surely wasn’t just as a means of strengthening the people, but it also would have served that great purpose of once again uniting the soldiers and sailors after what just happened.

Paul had a keen understanding of human nature, and he knew that there would certainly need to be a united effort on the part of both parties to ensure that everyone would be safe during the coming hours. A meal would bring a state of harmony which had been lacking through the long ordeal, and which could only have gotten worse with the cutting away of the skiff. Because of this tense state, Paul continued, “saying, ‘Anticipating today, *the* fourteenth day, you continue undernourished, having taken nothing.’”

The need to stop and eat a good meal begins to be evident first from the words “*the* fourteenth day.” They were anticipating the completion of two full weeks of constant battering by the wind and water. It would have been a harrowing ordeal for even the most seasoned sailor, but those fourteen days were, as he says, in an undernourished state.

The Greek word is not the usual word for “fasting” where one goes completely without eating. Rather, the word is *asitos*, an adjective that is only used here in Scripture. It is from the negative particle *a* along with the word *sitos*, signifying wheat or grain. Ellicott notes that they had taken “nothing beyond what was absolutely necessary to keep body and soul together.”

Life application: When people go without food, there are various ways they will handle it. Very few people will be unaffected by extended times of food deprivation. Some quickly get hangry (hungry combined with angry), while others just lay around lethargically, etc.

The point for most is that without food, things will not go as intended for the human physique. In Scripture, God’s word is equated to food, such as in Deuteronomy 8:3 –

“So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.”

Even Job understood this –

“I have not departed from the commandment of His lips;  
I have treasured the words of His mouth  
More than my necessary *food*.” Job 23:12

If we can have immediate and negative reactions to a lack of food for our physical bodies, shouldn’t we expect that without taking in God’s word, we can have immediate and negative reactions in our spiritual lives? Without coming to the word frequently, our minds are quickly diverted to contemplate the things of the world. In this, God becomes almost an afterthought. Eventually, He disappears from our thoughts altogether.

Let us consider this and choose to voluntarily feed ourselves on His word at least daily, and preferably more often than that. We eat two or three times a day. Shouldn’t we be feasting on the word equally as often? Stay in proper spiritual shape by tasting and seeing the Lord through His word!

“Oh, taste and see that the LORD *is* good;  
Blessed *is* the man *who* trusts in Him!  
<sup>9</sup> Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints!

*There is no want to those who fear Him.*

<sup>10</sup>The young lions lack and suffer hunger;

But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good *thing*.” Psalm 34:8-10

*Lord God, may we fill our lives daily with the nourishment that can only come from You through Your word. Help us to responsibly feed ourselves on what You have presented to us for our guidance, protection, and life. Yes, Lord, help us in this and be with us as we dine daily in this wonderful treasure. Amen.*

**“Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you.” Acts 27:34**

I translate this as, “Therefore, I encourage you to take food for this is for your salvation. For not a hair of the head of you will fall.” (CG).

Paul had just implored those gathered before to take food, noting that it was the fourteenth day that they had gone with little or no nourishment. Because of this, he continues with, “Therefore, I encourage you to take food.”

They need to eat. A time is coming very shortly when they would need to be strengthened both in body and in mind, something that eating food would do for them. He tells them all that “for this is for your salvation.”

Paul had already told them in verse 23 that he had been assured by an angel that all would come to safety, but now he shows that this doesn’t mean they were not to be participants in that truth. In telling them to eat, it was to ensure that they would have the strength for whatever ordeal may lie ahead.

The word he uses literally means “salvation,” but the context indicates that a different word such as “preservation” or “survival” is acceptable. The idea of salvation is most often connected to the eternal soul. That is not what Paul is saying. Rather, it is the salvation of life.

If they had already been told that they would all survive, and yet Paul indicates that this is for their salvation, then an obvious deduction would be that if they didn’t eat, they would have to be saved by those who did. Instead of living off the welfare of others, each should be responsible enough to eat and be prepared to rescue himself from the ordeal that was coming.



Either way, however, they would all be saved. And more, Paul says, “For not a hair of the head of you will fall.”

This is a proverbial saying used several times in Scripture and which even Jesus alludes to. See 1 Samuel 14:45; 2 Samuel 14:11; 1 Kings 1:52, Matthew 10:30, & Luke 21:18. As for the word “you,” it is plural. Every person would come through this ultimately unscathed.

However, it might be that those who didn’t eat would be so utterly exhausted that they might not physically recover for weeks, or they might face some other malady or embarrassment that eating would help avoid. Paul is using wisdom, based on the prophecy, to prepare those with him for the coming shipwreck.

Life application: The words of this verse call to mind the promises of the Bible which ask the same from us. Time and again, we are given exhortations. If we choose to reject them, then the harms that come upon us are actually self-inflicted wounds.

Jesus has promised salvation to those who believe in Him. This is an eternal decree of God, and thus salvation itself is eternal. One is sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of future redemption. And yet, what shape will we be in when we get to the end of this life?

We may have bodies worn out from abuses that the Bible warned us against. We may live lives filled with trials and troubles simply because we didn’t heed the word and apply it to our lives. Is this what we want?

And more, once we have been brought before Jesus, there will still be consequences for the lives we lived. This will be at the judgment seat of Christ where we will receive rewards or loss. Paul explicitly tells us that we will be saved, yet as through fire.

Paul is telling those on the ship what to do so that their earthly salvation will be easier than it otherwise might be without eating. His letters tell us that our eternal salvation will be better if we do what the word tells us to do as we live out our lives in Christ. Let us pay heed!

*Lord God, may we carefully consider our walk before You each day. Help us to include adherence to Your word in our daily decisions and actions of life. May we be fully prepared for the day we stand before You to receive our judgment for the lives we have lived. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken *it* he began to eat. Acts 27:35**

A more literal translation is, “And having said these, and having taken bread, he thanked God in sight *of* all. And having broken, he began to eat” (CG).

Paul had once again just urged those with him to take nourishment, reassuring them that they would all come through unscathed. With that stated, Luke next records, “And having said these.”

Paul will now turn his words into action. Thus, Luke redirects the mind of the reader from the spoken words to a tangible, visible manifestation of his faith in the word of the Lord. This is seen in the next words, “and having taken bread.”

Here are people that have been severely undernourished for two weeks. They were about to go through another ordeal that would test them to the limit of their ability if they were unprepared for it. Therefore, Paul reached for bread to turn his verbal urging into a visible one. Once it was in his hands, “he thanked God in sight *of* all.”

The Greek word is *eucharisteó*, the root of our modern-day word eucharist. It signifies to give thanks, and thus his actions are equivalent to saying grace. Once that was complete, Luke records, “And having broken, he began to eat.”

Paul set the example, certainly hoping it would transfer to all aboard. As prophesied, those who refused to eat would make it ashore safely, but it would be by the power of someone else who would have to expend his own energy in assisting those who were too weak to make it. This was certainly on Paul’s mind.

As for Paul’s actions, scholars vary on whether they think this was a memorial of the Lord’s Supper or not. The words of this verse are remarkably similar to those of Luke 22:19. However, the actions are the same as what Jesus did in Matthew 14:19 & 15:36. It is probably, therefore, comparable to a regular Jewish tradition.

Any relation to the Lord’s Supper would be personal to the one taking it and not an intentional connection for all to participate in. It would make no sense for Paul to do this, considering it to be a reenactment of the death of the Lord as described in 1 Corinthians 11, because that is intended for believers only.

The breaking of the bread, and thanking God for it as well, was in itself enough to impress in the minds of those in attendance of Paul's faith in God. Thus, it would stand as an encouragement to them all. He was unashamed of his faith in God and Paul's thanks would show that he was openly grateful for the mercy he had been promised concerning all aboard the ship.

Life application: Words are often effective in achieving a desired outcome, but there are times when words are not enough. Action must be taken to demonstrate that the words are reliable. As the greatest example of this, we can look at the words of Scripture.

God promised a Redeemer. Throughout the many books of the Old Testament, prophecies were made, telling Israel that He was coming. This gave the people hope. However, saying that this would happen doesn't change the state of things one iota without Him actually coming.

Therefore, as Paul says in Galatians 4:4, 5, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

God backed up His words with action. Thus, all of what the prophets proclaimed became a reality. Because of that, it wasn't just something Israel could accept and revel in, but it was something that all peoples of the world could now accept and partake of.

In like manner, we should be willing to follow up our words of promise with action that matches what we say. If we don't do this, people will look at us as unfaithful. Whether our words speak of small things or great, let us be willing to follow through with them as a testimony that we are reliable followers of Jesus Christ.

*Lord God, help us to be responsible in following through with the things we speak, so that we are considered trustworthy to those we encounter. If we are faithless as Christians, it will certainly bring a stain upon people's thoughts concerning You. Therefore, be with us and prompt us in our spirits to always be faithful in the things we say. Amen.*

**Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. Acts 27:36**

The Greek is less wordy than the NKJV, "And having been encouraged, they all also took food" (CG).

Paul just broke the bread, blessed it, and began to eat. Now, after hearing his words and seeing his confidence, it next says, “And having been encouraged.”

The word translated as encouraged, *euthumos*, is used for the second and last time. The first was in Acts 24:10. It comes from two words signifying good and passion. In this case, encouraged fits the context properly.

As for the situation on the ship, verse 20 was one of hopelessness. But now there is a contrasting attitude which permeated all of the people on the ship. Paul’s confidence, his prayer of gratitude, and the surely unruffled way in which he broke the bread and started eating had the intended calming effect on everyone aboard.

He knew they needed to eat before whatever trial lay ahead, and his actions brought that intended effect out perfectly. As it next says, “they all also took food.”

This would give them a happier attitude, more energy, and a renewed confidence in themselves. It would also mend any grumpy attitudes that may have arisen among those on the ship because of the stresses and trials that pressed each person.

The ship was now far better prepared to come to the shores which Paul was informed were ahead. When they got there, a more united group of people would be ready for whatever task was necessary to get to shore safely.

Life application: Paul’s conduct has been an example of one who can often save many. In battle, it only takes one heroic soul to press forward and instill in his comrades the desire to do so as well. In a church besought with troubles, one calm person can make all the difference in whether the congregation unites or divides.

Paul was a prisoner aboard the ship, and yet he led the way for even the non-prisoners to strive to rise above their present plight and to prepare for what lay ahead. As Paul’s inspiration and surety came from the Lord’s visit, the words of the psalmist are appropriate –

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,  
But to Your name give glory,  
Because of Your mercy,  
Because of Your truth.

<sup>2</sup> Why should the Gentiles say,  
“So where is their God?” Psalm 115:1, 2

How can you be an example to others during such times. Someone has to step forward and raise the banner to rally the troops. If not, hopelessness, despair, and defeat are just ahead. Be ready to stand confidently in the promises of the Lord, leading others to the joy of life that is found in the eternal hope of Jesus Christ our Lord!

*Lord God, in this world of loss, sadness, trial, and despair, we who know Jesus have the ability to encourage others that this life is not all there is. May we confidently do so, leading others to the same hope we possess. And Lord God, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship.** Acts 27:37

The Greek provides a stress on the people, offsetting them for effect, “And we were, all the souls in the ship, two hundred seventy-six” (CG).

In the previous verse, the people were encouraged by Paul’s example and took food. Now, to show the importance of what Paul had done, it next says, “And we were.”

Luke is preparing the mind for the next clause, which is offset, thus making it the main thought. Those words are, “all the souls in the ship.”

The human soul is important to God, and thus it was important to Paul and Luke. Those on the ship were destitute of strength and encouragement, but Paul was able to change that state. And it wasn’t a small ship with a few passengers on board.

Rather, it was a ship filled with people, each an individual who had the possibility of being redeemed by Jesus Christ through Paul’s ministry. Of these people, Luke says there were “two hundred seventy-six.”

The number is not without significance. The previous verse just said that “they all were encouraged.” This gives a number for the mind to grasp concerning how many “all” really was.

Luke was probably prompted at this time to continue with the exacting record that he had thus far been so careful with. Paul had a chance to demonstrate to such a large contingent of people that faith in God was not in vain. Luke felt it was worth taking the time to show that this one prisoner was able to change the attitude of so many people with a simple demonstration of that faith.

Further, the head count was probably made at this time to ensure that the same number was accounted for whenever they reached land. Coming in verse 44, it will say that all safely reached the land. How could one make that claim unless they knew how many heads there were?

The number of people is not exceptional for that time in history though. Josephus records that on a ship he was on, and which was also wrecked, there were 600 people aboard. Many have tried to find a spiritual symbolism in the number 276, some even to the point of being goofy, but none of these attempts have held up to scrutiny.

It is possible the number has a deeper significance, but even if not, it is an accurate record to account for the number who were then brought safely to land.

Life application: If the words and actions of Paul and Luke while on the ship, and later on the land, were effective enough, they could have actually brought all to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

Just think of the difference that could have made. Two hundred and seventy-six people go out to various locations, families, and settings (such as those going to prison). If each was then willing to share that same good news, the number of people who might come to Jesus could increase geometrically.

This is one of the reasons for the book of Acts. It is given to show how the church was established and grew. But each one of us is living in an ongoing setting of the progression of the church as it marches through time and history.

Each one of us can have an impact on the world in which we live, if we will simply hand out a tract, open our mouths to our friends, or support our local churches and their missionaries.

If not you, then who? Be a part of the continuing story that began in the book of Acts, and which will continue until the trumpet sounds and the church is called home to glory. Don't sit on your hands idling your time away! Be one who encourages others through your faith in Jesus Christ. Do it with cheer and do it today!

*Lord God, may we be a part of the great thing You are doing in the world as You build Your church. Help us not to be a chipped block on an outside wall of Your temple, but a shining stone that radiates out Your goodness to the world as we await the return of our Lord. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea. Acts 27:38**

The Greek more closely reads, “And having gorged food, they lightened the ship, casting out the wheat into the sea” (CG).

Paul’s words and actions encouraged all aboard the ship and so they all took food. Luke then noted that there were two hundred seventy-six on board. Having noted that, he next writes, “And having gorged food.”

This is a new and rare word, *korennumi*. It signifies to satisfy, having been fed to the full. Thus, to glut or sate. In this case, “gorged” seems to fit the situation. During the storm, they had eaten so little that they now hungrily gorged on what they could, filling themselves till they couldn’t eat anymore.

The only other use of this word is in 1 Corinthians 4:8 where Paul speaks facetiously concerning those in Corinth –

“You are already full [*korennumi*!]! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!”

More he said, “Already you are having gorged.” Those in Corinth felt they were superstars of the faith. They had filled themselves and remained in that state, or at least they thought so. As for the people on the ship, there is a reason why they gorged so heavily. It is because Luke next writes, “they lightened the ship.”

The word translated as “lightened” is *kouphizo*. It is used only here in the New Testament. It means exactly that, “to lighten.” This is just what the sailors did in Jonah 1:5, where the Greek translation of the Old Testament uses the same word. In this case, however, instead of a person, they were “casting out the wheat into the sea.”

It is now the third time that the ship has been lightened. There is a large amount of commentary and argumentation about what Luke means by *ton siton*, or “the wheat.” Some argue that it is the remaining food used for the crew.

They hadn’t eaten much in 14 days and so it would still be of considerable weight. Others argue that they wouldn’t throw over that which was already prepared because

they didn't know where they were going aground, and so it might be needed for food if they landed in a barren area.

Some argue it is the stores of wheat that had been held in hopes of saving a portion of the cargo in order to not have a complete loss to the owners. With the boat having been filled with water from the storm, the ship would need to be lightened as much as possible in order to safely run aground.

No matter what is correct, this wheat was tossed over at this time. Having gorged themselves, the sailors would not be as reticent to do this as they otherwise might have been.

Life application: Paul, speaking in a facetious manner to those in Corinth, jested that they were gorged on the things of Christ. Obviously this wasn't so. The church was filled with division and strife. Paul was writing to correct them and also to provide instruction to them.

Being Gentiles, they would have been unschooled in the Old Testament. Having only received verbal training from Paul, they would have been mere babes in understanding the things of God. And yet, they pranced around as if they were superstars of the faith.

Much of the writings of Paul and the other New Testament authors did not yet exist. Each letter adds to the body of knowledge that is needed to truly gorge on what God in Christ has done. As understanding all of these things, meaning both the Old and New Testaments, is necessary to fully understand what God has done, is doing, and will do, how can we claim to be superstars of the faith unless we know the word?

It is true that without knowing the word, many have been great missionaries or evangelists, but they cannot be considered superstars of the faith in the sense that they can then provide sound instruction to others. A superstar is someone who is fully versed in all aspects of his field and is both capable and determined to do it to the full extent of his abilities.

In your zeal to know the Lord, you must know the word. In your desire to share the Lord, you should know the right things to say. But after you have done so, you should be able to provide deeper instruction to those you have evangelized. These things take study and contemplation on the word. It is what God has given us to prepare us for every step of our walk in Christ. Read it carefully, prayerfully, and faithfully all the days of your life.



*Glorious Lord God, may we never neglect a good filling each day by gorging ourselves on Your word. May we be ready to pop at the end of each time we do, having filled ourselves enough to carry us sufficiently, until we return to it and dine on its sacred contents once again. May we hunger for this word each day. Amen.*

**When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, unto which they planned to run the ship if possible. Acts 27:39**

A more literal rendering would be, “And when day came, they knew not the land. And they noticed a certain bay having a shore, unto which they determined to drive out the ship, if they were able” (CG).

In the previous verse, the sailors filled themselves with food and then lightened the ship by throwing out the wheat. It next says, “And when day came, they knew not the land.” What they knew was coming because of having taken soundings, and possibly through other nautical clues has now come to pass. They had finally come near land after being lost at sea for two full weeks.

With land in sight, they would need to search for some suitable location to drive the ship ashore. Probably with minimal ability to steer because of having cast so much of the tackle overboard, this would not be a simple procedure, but it was still possible. In observing the land, it next says, “And they noticed a certain bay having a shore.”

The word translated as “shore” is the same as that used in Matthew 13 and John 21. It is simply a coast with a sandy or pebbled beach rather than rocks. On this shore in Acts 27, there is a spot in Malta now known as St. Paul’s Bay. It is where this is believed to have taken place. It is about seven miles from the great harbor now known as Valletta, which is the capital of Malta.

The sailors, if experienced enough, would have probably known the great harbor, but at this time they had no idea what the spot ahead of them was. However, it had a bay with a beach, and so they decided that it would be a good spot to run the ship aground. Therefore, it next says of this shore, “unto which they determined to drive out the ship, if they were able.”

The word used here, which speaks of running the ship aground is *exótheó*. This is its second and last use in the New Testament. Its first use was in Acts 7:45 under a completely different context when Stephen spoke of driving out the inhabitants of

Canaan. Here, they intend to “drive out” the life of the ship by thrusting it upon the shores of Malta.

Life application: In Ecclesiastes 3:1, Solomon says –

To everything *there is* a season,  
A time for every purpose under heaven.

When early settlers came to Florida, they left where they lived, cutting down trees suitable for their mission ahead. They then constructed rafts or boats from the logs which they proceeded to sail down the waterways of America until they arrived at whatever location they had set out for.

From there, they disassembled their raft or barge and dragged the wood to where they intended to homestead, using that wood to build their homes. Some of these older houses have many different species of northern wood totally foreign to Florida in them.

Today, those older homes are sold and restored or sold and torn down. The smart laborers, however, will save these unusual woods for other uses.

As for those on the ship, it was used as their means of livelihood until it was used as a means of simply staying alive. After that, it was determined that the boat was to be driven out of the sea and onto the shores of Malta. After that, it would be scrapped, and its parts repurposed for other things.

The point is that we cannot get too tied down to the things of this world. The uses that we have set for things in our lives change. The need for various possessions often ends. As Solomon says later in Ecclesiastes 3:6 –

“A time to gain,  
And a time to lose;  
A time to keep,  
And a time to throw away.”

Let us use the things of this world according to our needs, but we should not let them take over our lives and consume us. There is a time for us to depart from all things according to the necessary season. If we remember to thank God for what we possess, and to then thank God for the changes that come, we should be content in whatever our situation is.

“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: <sup>12</sup>I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

-Philippians 4:11-13

*Lord God, may we recognize that this world is not our home and that the things we possess and enjoy are just temporary trinkets and baubles that will pass away. The only thing we can truly hold onto is our hope in Christ Jesus. And what a hope it is – certain and trustworthy. Thank You for the precious hope we possess. Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**And they let go the anchors and left *them* in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore. Acts 27:40**

A more precise and literal rendering would be, “And the anchors, having detached, they left in the sea, simultaneously, having relaxed the ropes of the rudders. And having hoisted the foresail to the blowing, they held fast for the shore” (CG).

The last verse noted that they did not recognize the land that was ahead of them, but there was a bay with a shore that they decided to run the ship aground on. Therefore, it next says, “And the anchors, having detached.”

Many older versions, such as the KJV, really botch these words by saying that “they had taken up the anchors.” This is not at all what occurred. They were trying to lighten the ship, not increase its weight. A lighter ship would go further before getting stuck.

Instead, they released or cut away the anchors that they had previously set in the sea to help keep the ship running more steadily, slowly, and in a single direction. As the intention was to run up on shore in as light a manner as possible, there would be no benefit derived from pulling in the immense anchors. Understanding this, and still speaking of the anchors, it next says, “they left in the sea.”

The word translated as anchors is found first here in Scripture, *agkura*. It will be seen twice more in this chapter and once in Hebrews 6:19. It is pronounced *angkoorah*, and one can thus both see and hear the etymological root of our modern word. It is from the same root as *agkalé*, a bent arm when hugging or receiving a burden. The anchor thus has the appearance of two bent arms.

Of these words, the older translations continue the error by saying, “they *committed* themselves unto the sea.” In other words, they do not take this clause as referring to the anchors, but themselves, as if they just let the sea direct them. That is completely contrary to the coming words. The men had a plan, and it wasn’t to just leave their souls at the mercy of the seas.

Instead, they detached the anchors, let them drop into the deep, while “simultaneously, having relaxed the ropes of the rudders.”

By relaxing the rudders, they could get the ship to now steer in a direction they wanted, something not possible while they were tied. They would now use the ship as a targeted torpedo, heading as directly into the shore as possible.

The action of relaxing the rudder ropes means that they had previously pulled the rudders. This would keep them from getting fouled in the anchor lines. This type of ship had two large rudders that were like paddles (the word is plural).

After they were lifted out of the water, they would have been secured with ropes. Now, by loosing those ropes, the rudders would fall back into the sea to serve their purpose of steering the ship. With that done, it next says, “And having hoisted the foresail to the blowing.”

The word translated as foresail is *artemón*. It is only used here, but it matches the Italian and French word for the largest sail, the mainsail. However, it is generally agreed that this was not the main, but a foresail.

The reason is that if they were to ground the ship as intended, the foresail would be the logical choice for this task. It was at the front and would cause the ship to properly drive onto the beach in the most propitious manner. Once this sail was hoisted, it next says, “they held fast for the shore.”

With the ability to drive the ship through the use of manipulating the rudders and foresail, they would have a ship that could be directed toward the shore. Depending on the direction of the wind, it could be anything from a very easy task to one that took the skill and hands of the entire crew, but it could be done with their knowledge of the workings of the ship.

Life application: As noted, the fourth and final use of the word anchor is found in Hebrews 6 –

“This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the *Presence* behind the veil, <sup>20</sup> where the forerunner has entered for us, *even* Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” Hebrews 6:19-20

An anchor is dropped to hold a ship fast to its mooring. One can clearly see the intent of the author of Hebrews. We have a hope of reconciliation with God and of the resurrection of the dead because of Jesus Christ. This is not a dubious, ethereal hope that may or may not come about, such as, “My friend said he would come by tomorrow. I hope that will really happen.”

Rather, when we hear of the promises of God in Christ, our hope is absolutely anchored. Jesus has overcome death, and because He has, we too will (not maybe) be raised again to live forever in God’s presence. However, that is so only if you have believed the gospel. Be sure to accept God’s offer, and then be firm in your convictions that it will come to pass. By all means, it will. Hooray for Jesus!

*Lord God, we don’t need to worry about our future once we have come to Christ. It is a done deal because Your Spirit has sealed us for the day of redemption. Help us to confidently trust that our hope is certain and that it will be realized. Help us never to doubt. Jesus has prevailed. Our hope is sure. Hallelujah and Amen.*

**But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.** Acts 27:41

A more literal rendering is, “And having fallen into a place – two seas – they urged on the vessel, and, indeed, the prow having stuck fast remained immovable, and the stern was loosed under the force of the waves.” (CG).

In the previous verse, the anchors were abandoned to the sea and the rudders were loosed. After that the foresail was hoisted and the sailors headed the ship for the shore. With that, words that are filled with detail come rushing forth, beginning with, “And having fallen into a place.”

The words “having fallen,” as in English, signify “to encounter.” Someone might say, “I fell into trouble on the way home.” The meaning is that he encountered trouble on the way home. This is the intent here. They were heading like a speeding train to the coast,

but as they did so, they fell into a particular place that was unnoticed until it was too late, “two seas.”

Despite the great efforts of preparation, there was a problem which dashed their overall hopes. The ship was caught in a location where two seas met. The word so translated is rare, *dithalassos*, or literally “two seas.” It is found only here and one other known ancient Greek writing.

Luke is describing a ship coming in from the sea and heading into St. Paul’s Bay. There is a point of land, once called Koura Point, off to the left which was actually used as an aerial training aid in WWII.

To the right, there is a small island, previously known as Salmonetta. Nowadays it is called il-Gzejjer ta' san Pawl. The sailors must have thought that it was a part of Malta itself as it is very close to the main island. However, it is separated by a narrow channel about 100 yards wide.

It is at this point, the sailors probably realized there was trouble. Because of the obvious break between the land and this small island, Luke next records that “they urged on the vessel.” Most translations here say that they ran the ship aground, but that is a consequence of going through the two seas.

Rather, when they realized there was this shallow spot, they probably pulled the sail in as close to the wind as possible, raised the rudders a bit, and so forth. In other words, these skilled sailors saw every possibility of running aground. In hopes of avoiding that, they made like a jet fighter with movable wings, pulling them in close and working to eke out every bit of speed and remove every possible inch of contact with the seabed below.

The word used to describe this is *epokelló*. It is only used here in the Bible. It comes from *epi*, on or upon, and *okello*, to urge. The sense is that they forced the ship forward. Luke also uses another unique word here, *naus*, to describe the ship. It signifies a ship or vessel of considerable size. Luke is hinting at why the ship would have difficulty.

A smaller ship might get through, but this one was quite sizable. Therefore, despite their best efforts to break through the two seas, Luke next records, “and, indeed, the prow having stuck fast.”

This is the consequence of having passed through the two seas. The ship was too deep to pass through and it finally stuck fast. Here Luke uses the word *próra*, or prow, for the

second and last time. It was first used in Acts 27:30. It signifies the forward part, meaning the front, bow, prow, etc. of a ship.

To get a sense of the action, the Pulpit Commentary says that “When, however, she was just coming upon the beach for which she was making, she would come opposite to this open channel, and the sea from the north would break upon her and meet the sea on the south side of the island, where the ship was. Here, then, they ran the vessel aground.”

Also, Luke uses another unique word here, *ereidó*. It is of obscure affinity and means something like “to prop.” Therefore, used reflexively, it means to stick fast. One can see the ship racing through the two seas and the sailors can feel it touching upon the seabed. And so, they continue pulling the sheets, raising the rudders, and urging the ship on.

However, the prow of the ship suddenly jerks, indicating solid contact. With that, the stern would leap in an upward motion, causing the ship to prop upwards. The words are all very exciting and extremely detailed.

Of this word, *ereidó*, the Pulpit Commentary notes that it was common in classical Greek and is “not very different from its frequent medical meaning of a disease ‘fixing itself’ and ‘settling’ in some particular part of the body.” It is another clue to the authenticity of Luke’s authorship because of his use of words that have medical connections in order to describe other things.

Once the prow had stuck fast, Luke next records that the ship “remained immovable.” The word is *asaleutos*. It is only seen here and in Hebrews 12:28 which speaks of the unshakeable kingdom that we shall receive. It signifies to be unshakeable, immovable, etc.

The ship had come to a full stop, but it was not at the shore. Thus, there was a difficulty that would have to be dealt with quickly. This is because Luke next notes, “and the stern was loosed under the force of the waves.”

The word *prumna*, or stern, is used for the third and last time in the New Testament. It signifies the hinder part of the ship. Also, the word *bia*, force, is seen for the fourth and last time. All four uses were in Acts. It signifies violence, force, or strength. One can see an etymological connection to the word bio, the life force of things.

As for Luke's description, it is telling us that the constant battering of the waves upon the stern of the ship was quickly taking its toll. The entire hinder part of the ship, therefore, was loosed from the main body of the ship and would quickly disintegrate by this pummeling.

Life application: What is amazing is how accurately Luke's writings reflect what we can still see today. If one goes to Google Maps, he can almost insert himself into a ship as it heads for this disastrous spot where the two seas meet. Once at this location, the ship ran aground. The front of the ship got stuck in the seabed, and would not budge another inch.

Take time to go to such a map and look at the location. You can also see images by doing an image search. This will give you a better perspective of exactly what Luke is describing. Be sure that just because the words are from antiquity, it does not mean that they are either fables or somehow in error. We have a sure word that has proven the test of time.

Be confident that the word of God is reliable. Take it in daily and rejoice in the marvelous detail we have been given concerning real people and real events that have come together in the stream of history to be a part of the story of what God is doing in the process of the redemption of man.

*Lord God, what a marvelous word You have given us. It is as reliable as any book written at any time in history, even more so, because it has been protected by Your hand throughout the ages. We don't need to fret about whether the story of Jesus is true or not. No! Rather, we can be confident that our hope is sure, fixed, and immovable. Hooray for Jesus! Amen.*

**And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape.** Acts 27:42

A literal reading is much sparser in content, "And the soldiers' plan was that they should kill the prisoners, lest someone, having swam out, should escape" (CG).

In the previous verse, the ship ran aground with the prow stuck fast. With the beating of the waves, the stern loosened from the main hull. Thus, the ship could no longer be a place of safety. All would need to get off quickly. However, it next says, "And the soldiers' plan was that they should kill the prisoners."



Here is the second and last use of *desmótés*, prisoners. It was first seen in Acts 27:1. These would have included all of those bound, regardless of what category of prisoner may have been on the ship. In Acts 27:1, it noted that Paul, even if such a prisoner, was in a different category than the others. Thus, he was given certain liberties.

The obvious reason for wanting to kill the prisoners is that if they were to escape, then the soldiers would be held accountable for having allowed it. Thus, their lives would most likely be forfeited. The reason for wanting to kill the prisoners is next stated, saying, “lest someone, having swam out, should escape.”

The word translated as “someone” is in the singular. The concern was that even one escapee would be problematic. The word translated as “swam out,” *ekkolumbaó*, is exactly translated. The idea may either mean “swam out of reach,” “swam out of the water,” or something else. Such prisoners would have thus been out of the reach of the soldiers.

That leads to the word translated as escape, *diapheugó*. It is also unique to the New Testament. It literally signifies “flee through.” Therefore, it indicates a thorough escape. At this time, these men had arrived on an unidentified piece of land.

It will be seen that it is an island. However, at this time, that was unknown. A prisoner could swim out, flee through, and just keep going if it were a continent rather than an island. Therefore, these soldiers did not want to take such a risk.

Life application: It is obvious from these verses that the soldiers had a right to kill the prisoners in such a situation. As long as the bodies were accounted for, it appears it didn't matter if they were brought in dead or alive. This was an effective means of keeping prisoners in check.

It was thus a preventative measure. In today's world, such things are looked down on. Schools used to be places of discipline and learning. The threat of punishment or being expelled weighed upon the minds of students. However, the policies of the left only deal with matters after problems arise. Therefore, schools are no longer safe, they no longer are places of learning, and crime among students has skyrocketed.

This is also true with society in general. Everything has become a reaction, but there is no tolerance in the policies of the left for preventive measures. This is wholly unbiblical. The law was given for such people. As Paul says –

“But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, <sup>9</sup> knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, <sup>10</sup> for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, <sup>11</sup> according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.” 1 Timothy 1:8-11

The inclination of the human heart is bent toward evil. Thus, law is necessary. It, along with punishment prescribed by the law, is a preventive measure against those who would do such things. The left’s idea is grace first and hope for the best. This philosophy deals with a total misunderstanding of humanity because it has rejected the notion that man is inherently wicked. They have chucked the biblical model out of society, and they have thus cast out morality, decency, and restraint.

Be sure to never vote for or support anyone who holds to such views. You will only bring disaster upon yourself in the process.

*Lord God, how faithless we are as a people toward You. Humanity, when unrestrained, will naturally take the wrong path, committing more and more evil with each passing day. Help us to be responsible in how we teach, vote, and decide on how things should be done. May we include You and the lessons of Your word in all that we do. Amen.*

**But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from *their* purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump *overboard* first and get to land, Acts 27:43**

More literally, “And the centurion, desiring to save Paul, prevented their intent. And he commanded those being able to swim, having jumped away first, to depart to the land” (CG).

In the previous verse, Luke noted that it was the soldiers’ intent to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away. However, he now notes, “And the centurion.”

The centurion is Julius who was mentioned in Acts 27:1. He had grown to respect Paul and probably even more. At this point, they may even have been on the way to a friendship on some level. Along with that, after the events of the previous night, admiration may be a better word to describe how he viewed him. Therefore, it says that he was “desiring to save Paul.”

The word want, as used by the NKJV, doesn't really convey the intent of the word *boulomai*. HELPS Word Studies says, "... ('*resolutely* plan') is a strong term that underlines the predetermined (and determined) intention driving the planning (wishing, resolving)." He earnestly desired to save Paul. In so desiring, he "prevented their intent."

Here is a new word, closely connected to the word *boulomai* that Luke just used, *bouléma*. It signifies a preset and fully resolved plan. Julius is shown to have a sound head. He was first able to stop the soldiers from doing what they desired, assuming full responsibility for what might occur if any prisoners were to have escaped. Even in the confusion, he was able to continue to keep charge of them and to have them adhere to his commands.

Next, he logically divides those on the ship into two categories, as Luke next notes, "And he commanded those being able to swim, having jumped away first, to depart to the land."

Now Luke uses a word found only here in the New Testament, *aporiptó*. It comes from *apo*, away, and *rhiptó*, to throw, toss, or cast. Thus, it literally means "to cast away." Obviously, however, one doesn't pick himself up and toss, so "jump away" gives the proper sense of the word.

The centurion wanted anyone who could get to the shore under his own power to go first. They were to dive in and swim to land, but they could logically also be able to help anyone who couldn't swim and who had to dive in next. The way would be cleared for those who needed assistance to be methodically helped in order to get everyone safely to the shore.

But more, by preventing the soldiers from killing the prisoners, Julius became an active part in causing Paul's prophecy to be realized –

"Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you." <sup>35</sup> And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken *it* he began to eat. <sup>36</sup> Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. <sup>37</sup> And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship." Acts 27:34-37

Good job Julius.

Life application: There are natural leaders and there are followers. There are also those who are appointed to lead and those who are assigned to follow. Each has his own time and set purpose in how things will unfold. And yet, there are those who are appointed to follow who suddenly get thrown into a position where they must make leadership decisions.

This goes on all the time and the metal is tested when stressful or important moments arise. Those who lead may be removed for incompetence. Those who follow may suddenly rise to save the day. Each of us should be aware of those around us and try to figure out what their capabilities are.

In Judges 11, Jephthah was driven out of his home and away from his land. And yet, when a time of national crisis arose, he was called back to lead in the battle against Ammon. Likewise, Jesus was driven out by his people and rejected from what was his rightful due. However, He will be called back to save Israel in their time of great distress.

Let us consider how things are structured in the world of God's redemption and look to understand why He has done things the way He has. In the end, by understanding what He has done and is doing, we will get an amazingly insightful look into His mind, His heart, and His desire for the people of the world.

And more, we can learn about His faithfulness. He has covenanted with Israel. Despite their rejection of Him, He has remained faithful to His word. As this is so with Israel and based on a covenant cut with the blood of bulls and goats, how much more faithful do you suppose He will be to the covenant that has been cut with the blood of Jesus Christ.

If you struggle with the doctrine of eternal salvation, it may be because you are not seeing the bigger picture of what God has done and is doing. Trust Him! He is faithful and He will bring you to Himself. We serve the great God.

*Lord God, how good it is to know the surety of our salvation because of Your faithfulness. Despite our many failings, we have a sure and grounded hope of eternal life because of the full, final, finished, and forever work of Jesus Christ our Lord. Hooray for Jesus! Amen.*

**and the rest, some on boards and some on *parts* of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land. Acts 27:44**

A literal rendering of the Greek would be, "and the rest, indeed, some upon boards, and some upon anything from the ship. And thus it was all were saved upon the land" (CG).

In the previous verse, the centurion commanded that those who could swim should jump in and swim to land. Now, and still coming as a command from Julius, it says, “and the rest, indeed, some upon boards, and some upon anything from the ship.”

Those who couldn't swim grabbed up whatever planks or boards were loose, or whatever else would float that was freely obtainable, and they then dove in with those who could swim. The scene must have been quite chaotic as the remaining who supervised the effort stayed on the ship.

When it was determined that all had jumped in, the final people who had braved the oversight of the effort would have then jumped in and headed for shore. With that accomplished, it next says, “And thus it was all were saved upon the land.”

The distance to shore at this spot is not too great and with effort, all made it ashore in fulfillment of Paul's words from verse 22. The Pulpit Commentary cites the following to tie the Greek name of the island (Melita) in with Malta –

“And thus ended the eventful voyage of about four hundred and eighty miles (as laid down in the charts) from Clauda to the Point of Koura on the north coast of Malta. It is one of the striking proofs of the identity of Melita with Malta, that the rate at which it is calculated that a large ship laying to in a gale would drift in twenty-four hours, viz. thirty-six miles, multiplied by thirteen and a half (the number of days occupied by the voyage), gives four hundred and eighty-six miles as the whole distance. (36X13.5 = 486) Smith thinks that the coincidence between ‘the actual bearing of St. Paul's Bay from Clauda, and the direction in which the ship must have driven, with the wind blowing in the quarter we know it did,’ is, if possible, still more striking (pp. 127, 128).”

To close out this marvelous chapter, Matthew Henry states the following –

“The ship that had weathered the storm in the open sea, where it had room, is dashed to pieces when it sticks fast. Thus, if the heart fixes in the world in affection, and cleaving to it, it is lost. Satan's temptations beat against it, and it is gone; but as long as it keeps above the world, though tossed with cares and tumults, there is hope for it. They had the shore in view, yet suffered shipwreck in the harbour; thus we are taught never to be secure. Though there is great difficulty in the way of the promised salvation, it shall, without fail, be brought to pass. It will come to pass that whatever the trials and dangers may be, in due time all believers will get safely to heaven. Lord Jesus, thou hast assured us that none of thine shall perish. Thou wilt bring them all safe to the heavenly

shore. And what a pleasing landing will that be! Thou wilt present them to thy Father, and give thy Holy Spirit full possession of them for ever.”

Life application: When Paul prophesied that all on the ship would be saved, Luke then recorded the exact number. With the ship wrecked and coming apart, it was abandoned, and all aboard swam to shore. Every soul was saved, exactly fulfilling the words of Paul.

This is what the Bible does. It states things will come to pass, and then those things occur. This is possible because God, who created time, dwells outside of time. Because of this, He has a knowledge of all things immediately and intuitively. Nothing is hidden from Him.

As we have seen in human history, the Bible foretells and what it speaks of comes to pass. Because of this, why do we constantly doubt what the Bible promises but which lies yet ahead in time? Why do we feel it necessary to make excuses as to why Israel has been replaced by the church, thus nullifying in our doctrine the promises made to them of a future kingdom?

Why do we question God’s salvation of us when it occurred now that time has passed by? Is our salvation any less sure than the moment we first believed? Is God somehow competent to save, but not competent to keep on saving?

Let us trust the word, even if we haven’t completely sorted it out in our minds. As we learn more and see how the word is laid out, we can find more and more confidence in it. And so let us trust now and then continue to read and solidify our doctrine all the days of our lives. All the time, let us continue to fixedly trust our initial salvation. God saved. It is done. Hallelujah to God!

*Heavenly Father, may we hold fast to the promise of salvation that we first received, knowing from that moment that we were saved and that we shall always continue to be saved. Jesus did not endure the cross to provide us with eternal insecurity. No! Rather, we have been saved, we are saved, and we shall be saved unto the ages of ages. Hooray for Jesus! Amen.*

## CHAPTER 28

**Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta.**

Acts 28:1

A literal rendering of the Greek would be, “And, having been saved, then they knew that the island is called Malta.” (CG).

The last verse of the previous chapter noted that all had come to shore safely. With that, Chapter 28 begins with, “And, having been saved.”

The same word that was used to end Chapter 27 is again used here, *diasózó*. In that verse, it was an aorist verb, now it is an aorist participle –

And thus it was all were saved upon the land.

And, having been saved...

The task is complete, all having been brought safely and securely to the shores of the island. With that now complete, it next says, “then they knew that the island is called Malta.”

The Alexandrian text (NIV e.g.) says “we” rather than “they.” At the end of the previous chapter, the NIV says “everyone” instead of “they.” As Luke was present and he obviously survived, one would think that he would include himself in this and say “we.” However, he may be making himself an outside evaluator of the events at this time. Or he may still be referring to Julius and the other soldiers who were in charge of ensuring that all came to the island safely.

Either way, and regardless of this, all made it ashore and came safely to what they found out was the island of Malta. Although it is evident this is the true spot of landing, there is one other claim to the location of the wreck. In order to give all of the details, the lengthy commentary of Charles Ellicott is provided -

“There is no ground for questioning the current belief that this was the modern Malta, It was the only island known as Melita by the Greeks and Romans. The gale, which had been blowing for fourteen days since the ship left Crete, would drive her in that direction. The local features of St. Paul’s Bay agree closely, as has been seen, with the narrative in the Acts. There has from a very early date been a local tradition in favour of the belief. The Bay bears St. Paul’s name. A cave is pointed out as having given him

shelter. There has, however, been a rival claimant. In the Gulf of Venice, off the coast of Illyria, there is a small island, Meleta (now Meleda), which has been identified by some writers with the scene of St. Paul's shipwreck. The view is first mentioned by Constantino Porphyrogenitus, a Greek writer of the tenth century, and was revived in the last century by Padre Georgi, an ecclesiastic of the island. There is, however, not a shadow of evidence in its favour, beyond the similarity (riot [not?] identity) of name, and the mention of Adria in Acts 27:27. It has been shown, however, that that term was used with far too wide a range to be decisive on such a question; and against the view there are the facts (1) that it would almost have required a miracle to get the ship, with a north-east gale blowing strongly, up to the Illyrian coast of the Gulf of Venice; (2) that a ship would not naturally have wintered on that coast on its way from Alexandria to Puteoli (Acts 28:11); (3) that there has been no local tradition in its favour, as at Malta. The island of Malta was originally a Phoenician colony. It came under the power of Carthage in B.C. 402, and was ceded to Rome in B.C. 242. Its temple, dedicated to Juno, was rich enough to be an object of plunder to Verres, the Prætor of Sicily (Cic. In Verr. vv. 46)."

Life application: People naturally want things to apply to themselves if they are notable in some manner. It is certain that Malta is where the ship ran aground and there are few who would question this. And yet, there is a challenge to this because someone wanted to appear to have discovered something others didn't know, or maybe because there was pride in those in a different location that they were the focus of the biblical narrative.

This happens all the time. People in various cultures claim that they are the true Israelites who were exiled from the land. This is claimed by Mormons. It is claimed by British Israelism. It is claimed by various sects of the Church of God. And so forth. None of these are even close to reality, and yet the claims are made.

Also, it is often argued, even vehemently, that the New Testament was originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic despite there being no sound reason to claim this. And more, internal clues abound that it is not so.

These and ten thousand other such claims are made because people want to identify with one thing or another that they want to be true. This is unsound. It causes real problems with doctrine, and it causes divisions that should not exist.

We should be willing to objectively evaluate such things and come to reasonable conclusions concerning them. If we do, for sure our doctrine will be more properly



aligned with God's intent, and we will not grow into the cult-like mentality that so easily permeates our minds, our lives, and even controls our destinies.

Be wise and discerning and check out the things you hear, lest you get caught up into the strange doctrines that are warned against in the word (see Hebrews 13:9).

*Heavenly Father, may we not be led astray by odd, goofy, and irregular teachings that have no bearing on reality. Rather, may we be guided by Your Spirit and willing also to check all things and test them for accuracy. May it be so to Your glory! Amen.*

**And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.** Acts 28:2

A more literal translation, even if a tad clunky, is, "And the barbarians offered not the ordinary philanthropy to us. For having kindled a pyre, they received all of us through the rain that had come and through the cold." (CG).

The previous verse, which began the chapter, noted that those shipwrecked discovered that they had come to an island called Malta. Now, the words continue with, "And the barbarians." The word is *barbaros*, barbarians. It doesn't mean the same thing we think of today, meaning an uncivilized group of people or a backward culture.

Rather it indicates a foreigner who speaks neither Greek nor Latin. The NKJV "natives" is technically correct, but that is because they are on an island belonging to these people and translating it "foreigners" wouldn't make sense. Rather, those who are shipwrecked are the foreigners. Therefore, to keep the idea literal while not being confusing, simply translating this as barbarians is a sound option.

The term itself, *barbaros*, is of uncertain origin, but it is probably onomatopoeic for "unintelligible sounds." As they didn't speak one of the common languages, those who heard them speak might say it sounds like "bar bar." Of these oddly speaking people, it next says that they "offered not the ordinary philanthropy to us."

The Greek word translated as philanthropy is a transliteration of the Greek *philanthrópia*. It is derived from *philos*, an experience-based love, and *anthrópos*, man. Thus, it signifies love of mankind and, hence, benevolence. It is used here and one more time in Titus 3:4 when speaking of the love of Christ for mankind. This extra kindness they showed those shipwrecked is noted by Luke, saying, "For having kindled a fire, they received all of us."

Here is a new word, *pura*. It signifies a fire or a pile of burning fuel. Hence, it is a fire. It will be used in this and the next verse. One can see the etymological connection to our modern word pyre. The natives saw that the people were wet and probably quite chilled to the bone. And so, they got a fire going and began to tend to their needs accordingly. This tending to them was “through the rain that had come and through the cold.”

The word *dia* literally means through, as in the diameter of a circle being a line through it. Hence, it can be paraphrased as “because of” or “on account of.” As for the rain itself, the verb is a perfect participle. It had started to rain and that continued on as Luke’s description is presented. This continuous rain, along with the cold, would have made the soaked shipwreckees very cold, even to the point of hypothermia.

Some commentaries, probably to take up space or for some other strange reason, focus on the rain. As it wasn't mentioned before, it is claimed that the rain must have just started. However, being a perfect participle, this is not a sound analysis. But more, anyone who has been in a hurricane or similar type of storm is fully aware that the rains come and go continually.

The fact is that the people were wet, and they were cold. With the continued rain, that wouldn't change. There is no reason to go beyond this. The natives were hospitable, and they took care of the needs of their fellow men.

A little more history about the Malta of our current day is that it was colonized by the ancient Phoenicians/Canaanites who spoke a variation of the ancient Canaanite/Semitic tongue. There is a relation between today’s Maltese and the Lebanese dialect of Arabic.

Maltese is unique in that it is a Semitic tongue written with a Latin alphabet. It is the only Semitic-speaking nation in the European Union. It is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. It was temporarily conquered by the Muslims, but soon re-conquered by the Crusaders.

The language and the people are related to the Phoenicians of Hiram, friend of David. Those Phoenicians who remained in Lebanon became the Maronite Catholics, who were the only Arab group friendly toward the Jews. Hiram was a friend of David. Likewise, the Maltese remained Christian, though speaking a cognate of Arabic. The closeness of the island to North Africa would have helped the continuance of speaking in this tongue.

Several key historical points are – Eighty-eight percent of Maltese speak English, as well as their native tongue. The Crusaders were the ones to drive off the Muslims. The Turks

were destroyed on Malta. Napoleon besieged the place. Though they resisted British rule, they refused to surrender to the Nazis.

Life application: Malta is an island that identifies with Roman Catholicism. However, like the majority of adherents to this denomination, they have no personal relationship with Jesus. They have been deluded into the belief that by adhering to Roman Catholicism, they are heaven bound.

The same sentiment is found wherever this aberrant doctrine is taught. Like the belief of most Jews, Catholics live for this world and let their religious leaders worry about their afterlife, trusting that what they have been taught is all they need.

However, without a personal belief in the gospel, there will be no salvation for them. The pope himself mentions the words “the gospel” continuously. It is hard to find a formal or informal speech by him that does not include those words. And yet, it is likely he has no idea what the gospel of Jesus Christ is. His “gospel” is doing good works in order to somehow make God happy.

If the pope has not trusted the simple gospel of Jesus as it is laid out in Scripture, he is no closer to God than the most pagan person on the planet. Malta needs the good news in a desperate way. Be sure to include them in your prayers today, asking the Lord to direct faithful Christians who are excited about sharing the gospel to do so on Malta.

*Lord God Almighty, today we lift up the people of Malta who have been deceived that they are secure and heaven bound because of adherence to the Roman Catholic Church. May their hearts be softened and may their eyes be opened to their need for Jesus. And may an explosion of desiring to know You and Your word come about among them. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid *them* on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. Acts 28:3**

The Greek more closely reads, “And Paul, having bundled a multitude of kindling, and having laid upon the pyre, a viper – having come from the heat – seized his hand” (CG).

In the previous verse, the people on the island made a fire for the shipwrecked people because of the rain and cold. Now, Luke begins a short description of an unusual event concerning Paul. He begins with, “And Paul, having bundled a multitude of kindling.”

A couple of rare words are used here. The first is *sustrephó*, to gather or roll. It was seen in Matthew 17:22. This is the second and last use. Also, the word translated as kindling is found only here, *phruganon*. It signifies a dry stick for burning. Thus, a word like kindling, tinder, touchwood, etc. will suffice.

Those who argue for the other location being the spot of the shipwreck, as reviewed in the previous verse, note that there is no wood that grows on Malta. However, the word doesn't specifically imply wood from a tree.

Rather, in the area of the shipwreck, there are shrubs which are used for this very purpose. There is no reason at all to assume that Paul wasn't out gathering exactly this type of material or even driftwood that shows up on beaches all over the world.

Paul was making a bundle out of dried sticks he had found, gathering them together to bring for the fire. With that complete, Luke next says, "and having laid upon the pyre."

It is the same word found in the previous verse, *pura*. It signifies a pile of burning fuel. This is its second and last use in the New Testament. Paul has bundled up a pile of sticks and brought them back, laying them on this bonfire. With that, Luke next records that "a viper – having come from the heat – seized his hand."

This is the fifth and last use of *echidna*, or viper, in the New Testament. The other four verses were all quotes of John the Baptist or Jesus calling those who had come near them a "brood of vipers." The word signifies a venomous snake of some sort. This viper is said to have seized Paul's hand.

It is another unique word, *kathaptó*. It signifies to lay hold of, fasten onto, seize, etc. The snake probably felt the heat of the fire and darted to get away from it. As it did, it seized Paul's hand and would have immediately started pumping its venom into him.

These words bring in another complication. There are no indigenous vipers on Malta. Therefore, the claim is that this is not the true spot of the shipwreck. However, Malta was sparsely populated then. It is heavily populated now.

On the barrier island of Siesta Key, Florida, until the 1970s, there were poisonous snakes everywhere. However, as the population grew, they were eradicated. It is now very rare to see them on the island. Where there were once rattlers in abundance, none remain. Where water moccasins once hung from mangroves in almost every location, they are rarely seen anymore.

As far as the words noting that the viper seized his hand, it never says he was bitten by the viper, but it is implied, especially by the words of the next verse.

Life application: There are snake handling churches throughout the southern US. Deadly rattlers are brought out and passed around the congregation. At times, someone will get bit. Sometimes a person will die from the bite.

This practice is based on the words of Mark 16:17, 18 –

“And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

This is not sound practice. To actively drink poison or handle poisonous snakes is to test God in a way that is unnecessary. This account in Acts is the only time a snake is referred to in this manner in the Bible. There is never a time that it is recorded that someone drinks poison.

Until the Lord comes for His people, every person who has lived since His first coming has died or will die. There are innumerable ways to die. To assume that God is going to protect a person every time he picks up a poisonous snake or drinks something poisonous is, therefore, ridiculous. There is no need to test God in such ways. Instead, live your life safely, carefully, and with clear thinking. This will generally increase your lifespan. Snake handling... not so much.

*Lord God, help us to think clearly about how we conduct our lives in Your presence. There are things that we can do that may not be so smart. Rather, just because we can drive a car really fast, it doesn't mean that we should do so. Instead, may we live our lives circumspectly, doing things that are reasonable and prudent all our days. Amen.*

**So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live.” Acts 28:4**

A literal translation is, “And when the barbarians saw the beast hanging from his hand, they said to one another, ‘This man is altogether a murderer, whom, having been saved from the sea, the justice has not permitted to live’” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul went out gathering sticks to add to the bonfire. When he laid them on the fire, a viper came out and fastened on his hand. With that recorded, Luke next adds, “And when the barbarians saw the beast hanging from his hand.”

As is normally the case, it is a shocking sight to see a venomous snake. How much more when its fangs are embedded in the hand of someone? It is a sure sign that a great deal of misery and maybe even death lies ahead.

This is especially so because a snake may quickly bite, giving a small dose of poison, but one that latches onto someone will have time to pump all of its venom into its foe. This is the case with Paul. Therefore, “they said to one another, ‘This man is altogether a murderer.’”

As is common to most people of the world, when something bad happens, it is ascribed to karma or some other type of cosmic justice that keeps things in check. The Book of Job is a great study on this. In this case, the people saw the viper hanging from his hand, knew it was a poisonous snake that would kill him, and jumped to the conclusion that he must have deserved what had happened to him.

In this case, they made the illogical jump to the conclusion that he was a murderer. As such, they then said, “whom, having been saved from the sea, this justice has not permitted to live.”

Accepting that this was divine justice, though the sea failed to kill him, which was obviously (what else would one expect!) what should have been the case, the serpent was sent to complete the task. Of course, this was so! The tense of the verb, being aorist, states it as an accomplished fact. Literally “the justice to live not has permitted him,” or more directly, “he is dead.”

In their words, Justice, *diké* (deekay), is personified. Justice to these pagans was represented as a goddess, the daughter of Jupiter. It was her office to take vengeance or to inflict punishment for crimes. As such, they believed that the goddess, Justice, had rendered judgment and executed the criminal.

Life application: Though it may seem a bit superstitious to accept that the snake was a retributive punishment for some supposed crime of Paul, Jesus let those of Israel know that this thought is not entirely unfounded. In Matthew 5, while speaking to the people of Israel, we read His words, saying –

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’<sup>22</sup> But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”

-Matthew 5:21, 22

And again –

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:27, 28

One of the points of Jesus’ words is that God’s standard of measurement includes the thoughts and intents of the heart. If we are honest with ourselves, there isn’t one of us who has been perfect in such matters. Therefore, the standard of justice that God demands because of His own personal perfection has been violated. Because of this, we all are under a death sentence.

This doesn’t mean that we can expect a viper to come out and bite us, but it does mean that we can expect to be eternally separated from God for the corruption that exists within us. And more, we should accept that because of our corrupt state, we will have the resulting corruption of the world that surrounds us to afflict us at any given time.

Paul speaks of this in Romans. The perfect creation that God made was marred when man sinned. Now, the very forces of nature and the creatures in the world work against us at times. Time, along with the decay within us, also works against us, wearing us down. Our golden years are really not so golden, and death is only a heartbeat away.

Though we do not have to look at every catastrophe or accident as the hand of God actively working against us, looking to bring justice upon us, we can still know that this world is constructed in the way it is because of sin. And, therefore, we can expect bad things to happen at any given time.

Let us remember, however, that for those who are redeemed through Jesus, we have the expectation of a life that will be far more glorious than we can ever imagine. When we are removed once and forever from the presence of sin, things will be restored to a state that we cannot even conceive at this time. This is our great hope, and it has all been provided because of the goodness of God that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Lord God, may we hold fast to the hope set before us. Even in this terrible world of chaos and disaster, we see enough of the beauty and harmony of Your loving hand to assure us that something far better lies ahead for Your people. We know this is so and we long for that glorious day. Until then, may we never fail to praise You for Your goodness! Amen.*

**But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. Acts 28:5**

A literal rendering of the Greek is, “He indeed then, having shaken off the beast into the fire suffered nothing evil” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul had a viper latch onto his hand, and because of this, the people accused him of being a murderer whom justice had not allowed to live. However, Luke next records, “But he shook off the creature into the fire.”

Here is a word found for the second and last time, *apotinassó*. It signifies to brush away or shake away. The only other use was in Luke 9 –

“Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. <sup>5</sup>And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off [*apotinassó*] the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them.” Luke 9:4, 5

Luke’s words concerning Paul seem almost casual as if he was shaking the dust off his garments after a long walk in the wilderness. Despite it having been a viper and the people being sure he would keel over from the poison, he not only shook it off, but Luke next says, “and suffered no harm.”

The words here again imply that the snake was poisonous. Were it not so, there would be no need to give the details as they are recorded. As noted previously, these words are certainly given as a fulfillment of Mark 16:18.

Those words, as recorded in Mark, were spoken to those present with Christ. There is no reason to assume that they go any further than them. Snake-handling churches, poison-drinking churches, and the bizarre antics in charismatic churches have mistakenly and inappropriately taken such things out of context.

As a witness to this fact, one can take a bottle of poison into a snake handling church, and they won't drink it. One can take a snake into a poison drinking church, and they won't handle it. And one can take either into a charismatic church, and the people will



quickly exit the building. This is all hubbub involving terrible theology. The Bible bears witness to the miracles promised to the apostles. There is no need to go beyond that.

Life application: Why anyone feels the need to force the speaking of tongues is beyond comprehension. And yet, this is the standard in churches that supposedly speak in tongues. People have to be coaxed into doing what they would normally not do.

Does the Spirit need to be forced? Rather, the Spirit of God will overshadow, clothe, or come upon people in Scripture, guiding them without being forced to do so. As previously mentioned, snake handlers in churches die from time to time. The Spirit obviously wasn't condoning their actions if He allowed the people to die from what was, supposedly, a demonstration of His presence.

It is unreasonable to expect God to do things simply for show. There is no need to "prove" that God is among His people. If they are being obedient to His word and living rightly in His presence, He is there among them.

Be reasonable in your thinking, be diligent in your studies, and be ready to share the gospel with others at all times. Such things will be pleasing to God. But forcing yourself to speak in gibberish is not only ridiculous, it is unscriptural. Don't get caught up in unsound theology. Rather, get caught up in the wonder of God's precious word!

*Lord God, may our conduct before You be sound, reasonable, and honoring of You. Help us to think rightly and clearly about You at all times, bringing honor to You and leading others to a desire to pursue You more and more all their days. To Your glory, we pray. Amen.*

**However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. Acts 28:6**

More literally, it reads, "And they expected him about to be inflamed or to fall down dead suddenly. And they, upon much anticipating, and seeing nothing unusual happening to him, having turned about, they declared him to be a god" (CG).

Paul was just bitten by a viper, which he shook off into the fire and suffered no harm. Now, Luke continues with, "And they expected him about to be inflamed."

It is a unique word in Scripture, *pimpremi*. It is the usual medical word for inflammation in ancient Greek. It literally signified “to fire,” and thus a burning inflammation which includes swelling. They were sure Paul was a goner, so they watched, expecting him to be inflamed “or to fall down dead suddenly.”

This is the third and last use of *katapiptó*, to fall down, in the New Testament. All three uses come from Luke’s writings. Those on the island were aware of this particular viper and knew its effects. Hence, they fully expected Paul to keel over and die.

Luke uses the word *aphnó*, suddenly, to describe their expectation. This is the third and last time it is used. It referred to the sudden coming of the Spirit in Acts 2:2 which was accompanied by sound and wind. It also referred to a sudden earthquake in Acts 16:26 when Paul and Silas were in prison and their chains were loosed.

The islanders were expecting something just as sudden with Paul, however, Luke next records, “And they, upon much anticipating.”

The word translated as “anticipating” was a word known in Greek medical writings. It signifies to watch in expectation where mental direction is employed. The people were keeping an eye on Paul, fully expecting him to have one of these symptoms. But Luke continues the thought with, “and seeing nothing unusual happening to him.”

Here, the words translated as “nothing unusual” were also used by physicians to indicate unusual symptoms of a disease, including something fatal or deadly. The use of these medical terms gives a good indication of the authenticity of Luke's authorship.

He was a carefully observant man who was able to see the same traits in others as they watched for such symptoms as well. Because nothing untoward came upon Paul, Luke next records of the people, “having turned about, they declared him to be a god.”

These words include another word unique in Scripture, *metaballó*. As a paraphrase, it signifies to change one’s mind, but a literal translation is “to turn round” or “to turn about.” Just as a person will turn around to face another direction, so a person turns about in his mind when he changes his mind.

Instead of thinking of Paul as a murderer, they suddenly realized that he was instead rather extraordinary. Taking things a bit too far, however, they ascribed deity to him. It could be that they may have been thinking of the Greek deities like Apollo or Aesculapius who are depicted as subduing serpents.

Their minds surely raced, looking for a suitable conclusion. How could any mortal be bitten by a poisonous serpent and show no signs of it harming him?

Life application: This verse shows the fickle nature of the people which is found in all people everywhere. It is highlighted in Acts 14 as well but in the opposite sense. There, it said –

“Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian *language*, ‘The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!’ <sup>12</sup> And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup> Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out <sup>15</sup> and saying, ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, <sup>16</sup> who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. <sup>17</sup> Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.’ <sup>18</sup> And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.

<sup>19</sup> Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul *and dragged him* out of the city, supposing him to be dead.” Acts 14:11-19

In the eyes of those at Lystra, he went from being a god to being a dead man. On Malta, he went from being a dead man to being a god. In the case of their suddenly exclaiming Paul a god, their superstitions cannot be considered uncommon even in today’s world. We simply package them up differently.

It is human nature to want to deify things we don’t understand. But as Christians, we need to remember that there is one God. All else is a part of creation. We are never to ascribe deity to any created thing, we are to refrain from idolatry, and we are to promote God to His rightful position in our words to others.

In doing these things, we will be acting properly in the presence of our Creator.

*Lord God Almighty, You alone are worthy of all glory, honor, and praise. You are magnificent in Your being and You are caring for Your creatures. May we respond to You accordingly, giving You alone our heartfelt worship and adoration. Yes, glory to You, O God, in the highest! Amen.*

**In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. Acts 28:7**

The Greek more literally reads, “And in the surrounding area [lit: in the around that region], were parcels of the first of the island by name Publius, who having received us three days, lodged us hospitably” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul was seen to have not swollen up or keeled over from the snake bite. Because of this, the fickle islanders of Malta said he was a god. Now, Luke begins a new portion of the narrative, saying, “And in the surrounding area [lit: in the around that region].”

By God’s providence, they were shipwrecked in a particular place that would bring comfortable times to those who had been cast ashore. Despite the great trials and losses that were suffered by those who were shipwrecked, there would be a season of blessing to come upon them. This is first starting to be realized now because in that surrounding area, there “were parcels of the first of the island.”

The meaning of “first” is the principal man of the island. The adjective used to describe the person is *protos*. It means the first, or chief, and thus he is “the first man.” Ellicott notes –

“The term is found both in Greek and Latin inscriptions, at Malta, of the time of Augustus, as an official title.”

Score another point for Luke's accuracy. He is the chief ruler or magistrate appointed to oversee the population. Luke then notes, “by name Publius.”

This man’s name is a Latin one, literally: Poplios. It is known that Malta was rendered under the province of Sicily and so he would have been over the island, but under the Sicilian proconsul.

What we see in him then is a person who has received his job through appointment and not through a family line. This is indicated even more poignantly by the fact (as will be

seen) that his father is there. He would not be the chief man if the position was based on family. This man is said to have “received us three days.”

It is a new word in Scripture, *anadechomai*. It comes from *ana*, up or upwards, and *dechomai*, to receive or welcome. Thus, HELPS Word Studies says it signifies to “receive up to the limit” and thus “to welcome with gladness.”

They were whole-heartedly and enthusiastically received up by the chief man of the island. It is agreed that this did not mean the entire host from the ship, but rather a select few.

Despite being a prisoner, Paul was a Roman citizen and stood in high favor with Julius. Luke was a physician and, thus, a man of respect. It is probably these three and maybe a limited number of others who were brought in as guests for those three days until other arrangements could be made. . this time, Luke notes that he “lodged us hospitably”

The word translated as “hospitably,” *philophronós*, is an adverb found only here. It literally means, “acting from a *mind-set of personal affection*” HELPS Word Studies. In other words, this was not a formal thing that was required by custom, but an invitation because of truly having come to like them. It was probably brought on by the words of Julius to Publius about the exceptional character of Paul and Luke.

Life application: Luke writes in the first-person plural concerning this visit. Thus, he was there, and it is absolutely certain that Paul, as will be seen, was there as well. Because Paul was there, Julius would have been there also, being the lead soldier and personally responsible for Paul.

Nothing is said here, or anywhere else, about Julius being converted to the Christian faith. However, it is unlikely that he was not fully aware of every nuance of what it meant to be a Christian by the time his supervision of Paul was ended. He personally saw prophecies uttered and fulfilled. He will see miracles of healing in the verses ahead. If anyone ever knew it, certainly Julius did, since Paul would not have been silenced over his proclamation of the gospel, etc.

Because of this, either Julius was converted and that is purposefully left out of the narrative for whatever reason Luke deemed necessary, or the heart of Julius was soft towards Paul and hard toward the message Paul proclaimed.

The latter is not unusual. There are people who have remained friends for years, even friends of pastors and preachers, who find the faith of their good friend curious and maybe even a bit comical. And yet, they stay fast friends through it. And how many times has there been an effect on the stout unbeliever later in life?

We cannot know what effect we will have on others by giving the gospel and then simply sharing our lives together with those we know whether they readily accept our words at the start or wait decades to yield. We don't need to beat our faith into others. We simply need to share it and then let our lives be a testimony to those we know.

Let us never tire of living out the gospel that we have received. When the ball drops in the life of others, and it always does, they will know who to turn to if they are willing to once again hear the good news in their time of need.

*Lord God, may our faith be on display at all times for others to see and remember what we believe. But we need to first let them know what our faith entails. So, Lord, give us boldness to first share the message, and then to live it out from day to day from that point on. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. Acts 28:8**

The Greek, even if a tad clunky, more literally reads, “And it was, the father of Publius – afflicted with fevers and dysentery – who, lying toward Paul, having entered and having prayed, having laid the hands on him, healed him” (CG).

In the previous verse, Luke noted that there was a portion of land where the first of the island, Publius, lived. He invited Paul and others to stay with him for three days. Remembering that, it now says, “And it was.”

The Greek word *egeneto* is used to show the transition from one thing to another. In this, we can see that the divine hand is guiding the events of the matter. This transitional thought is then explained by Luke with the words, “the father of Publius – afflicted with fevers and dysentery.”

Publius has brought Paul, Luke, and whoever else was with them into his house. At some point, it was relayed to them that Publius' father was sick. The word translated as “fever” is in the plural. This plural use of “fevers” is believed to indicate a recurrent fever.

As such, it was a malady that afflicted him regularly. Along with his fevers, he had a case of dysentery. It is a word found only here in the New Testament, *dusenterion*. Luke is giving a precise medical diagnosis of the situation.

Ellicott notes that the plural “fevers” in “combination with dysentery would, according to Hippocrates, who also uses the plural form (Aph. vi. 3), make the case more than usually critical.” In his situation, the verse uses multiple participles which makes the narrative quite exciting, “who, lying toward Paul, having entered and having prayed, having laid the hands on him, healed him.”

It is carefully noted that as soon as Paul entered, he prayed. At the same time, he laid hands on the sick man. All of this was done in a carefully recorded way to show an absolute connection between Paul’s actions and the man’s healing.

This is especially noted by Luke to show that Paul had subordinated himself to the Lord. It is likely that this was stated here to show the contrast to the initial claim of the locals, noted in the previous account just a couple of verses earlier, that he was called a god.

This verse parallels the account of Peter in Acts 9:32-35. For further insights concerning this, refer to James 5:14, 15. Also, notice the very close sequence of events in this account of Paul’s snake bite and then healing of this man in comparison to Mark 16:18.

In the previous verse, Publius was first noted in the Bible. Now, he is seen for the second and last time. This is actually noteworthy because, in just a couple of verses, it will say that the duration of their time on Malta is a full three months.

Life application: We are told here that Paul prayed, laid hands on the sick man, and he was healed. The next verse will speak about more healings. By incorrectly taking these verses in a prescriptive manner, many have assumed that we too have been given such powers without any limits at all.

They claim healing over others as if they have a right to demand things from the Lord, or as if they are divine conduits for the powers of healing to flow through them. This is completely contrary to what is actually the case. It is presumptuous and it is a sinful attitude.

Paul was unable to heal himself and several others as is clearly indicated in his epistles. And more, Scripture never indicates that we have been given the apostolic powers of healing.

Rather, we have been given the intelligence to produce medicines. Also, societies have developed institutions to educate people to be doctors and nurses. We have likewise been given the honor to pray for the healing of others. If it is in the Lord's will to respond favorably, He will. But we should never claim such things as if we have the authority to tell the Spirit how and when to heal.

Use reason and intelligence when you pray for yourself and others. And, if you really want to be a part of the healing of others, go to school and learn how to do so. You can have a lifetime of positive effects on others, both physically and spiritually, if you are willing to put forth the effort.

*Lord God, thank You for our doctors, nurses, and others who are in the business of healing others. And thank You that we can also come to You for healing when it is in Your will to respond. May we never accuse You in our hearts when others get sick and die, knowing that this is a fallen world. In Christ, however, we have an eternal hope of life and health ahead of us! Amen.*

**So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed.** Acts 28:9

More exactly, it reads, "This, therefore, having occurred, also the others having infirmities in the island approached and were healed" (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul went into the sick father of Publius, prayed, and laid hands on him. With that, he was healed. Because of this, Luke continues, beginning with, "This, therefore, having occurred."

He is showing a consequence based on an action. Because of Paul's healing of the sick man, the word got out. This was the father of the leading citizen of the island and what occurred could not be hidden from the ears of the people. Once they realized Paul had the gift of healing, therefore, it next says, "also the others having infirmities in the island approached."

The article before others is necessary for the intent of what is being said. Some translations simply say, "others also." The inclusion of the article gives the sense that there was a rush upon Paul once the word had gotten out. In their coming to Paul with their infirmities, it then says, "and were healed."



This is, therefore, a tie back to Luke 5 where the word went out about Jesus' miracles to the point that everyone came to Him to be healed –

“Then He put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ Immediately the leprosy left him. <sup>14</sup> And He charged him to tell no one, ‘But go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as a testimony to them, just as Moses commanded.’

<sup>15</sup> However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. <sup>16</sup> So He Himself *often* withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.”

-Luke 5:13-16

Luke is making a direct connection between the healing powers of Jesus and those of Paul, demonstrating that the same power that was upon Jesus now rested upon Paul. The Spirit of God was confirming the message of Jesus to those on the island of Malta.

Of the words of this verse, the Geneva Bible says, “Although Paul was a captive, yet the power of God was not captive.”

Life application: The people of Malta came to Paul for healing of their physical bodies. But the point of such healing is to lead people to understand their need for spiritual healing. Paul and Luke would have made this perfectly clear to those on the island. This is the point of having such healing powers.

Today, those miracles are recorded in the Bible. There is no longer a need for such demonstrable proofs. The New Testament tells believers to trust in what the word says, having faith that the message about Jesus contained there is true.

Of all of the writings throughout the world, the Bible alone tells the complete message of how we got into the mess we are in, what God has been doing to get us out of it, and what He will do for those who accept that message.

It is written in such a way that it is self-validating and can be trusted. And so, why do we need miracles, signs, and wonders to choose or reject Jesus? We don't! This doesn't mean God cannot or will not heal people today, but such healing will come as He chooses, without the explicit nature of miracles that were needed before the Bible was complete.

To expect such things actually demonstrates a lack of faith, not the other way around. As it says, for example, in Romans 10:17, “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

We are expected to pick up the word, read it, test it to see if it is what it claims to be and then have faith in what it says. Don’t be captivated by those who claim to do miraculous things. They are a distraction from what God expects of His people. Evidence of this is that there are such supposed healers in other religions as well.

Is God working through them? No, He isn’t. Be careful what you believe and what you will accept. The word is reliable. Check it out and have faith in what it proclaims. Everything else is unnecessary eyewash.

*Lord God, may we not be led down wayward paths by false teachers. Help us to be attentive to Your word, ready to test what we are exposed to, and to reject those things that have no basis in what You would intend for us in our walk before You. May Your Spirit rest upon us and guide us. Yes, Lord, may it be so. Amen.*

**They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.** Acts 28:10

The words are much sparser in the Greek, and much must be inferred, “And who honored us many honors, and going up they laid upon for the necessity.” (CG).

The previous verse noted that the others on the island, having heard Paul healed Publius’ father, came to him with their diseases and were healed. Because of this, it next says, “And who honored us many honors.”

In other words, because Paul was able to heal them, and because he spent his time doing so, the kindness of Paul and Luke was rewarded by the people. The word translated as honor indicates a price. Vincent's Word Studies says –

“The word was applied to payments for professional services, and that fact may have influenced Luke in selecting it; but it is evidently not used in that sense here.”

Whether it was payment or gifts, honors of some tangible nature were bestowed upon them for their efforts. However, other scholars disagree. Some of them show concern that accepting compensation for their work would be a violation of Matthew 10 –

“These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. <sup>6</sup> But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ <sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. <sup>9</sup> Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, <sup>10</sup> nor bag for *your* journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.’” Matthew 10:5-10

There is absolutely no reason to accept that. Those words of Jesus were to the disciples, in Israel, under the time of the law, and for a specific purpose. If those words applied to the situation now, everything that Paul and Luke had done would be a violation of Jesus’ words because He said, “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles.” But this is the main focus of Paul’s ministry.

Such an evaluation is not a proper handling of Scripture. And more, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9:3-12 concerning the rights of accepting payment for such work. He also notes it to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:18 concerning receiving compensation.

It is stated explicitly and implicitly elsewhere as well. If those on the island felt that they should pay for the help they had received, and they freely offered it to those who had lost everything, then there is no reason to assume that Paul and Luke should not receive it – whether merely as a gift or as a sort of payment. Understanding this, it next says, “and going up they laid upon for the necessity.”

As noted above, the words are sparse. The meaning is that upon sailing (because to sail from land is considered going up), the same people from the island heaped everything necessary for the travel upon Paul and Luke.

This means that two separate things occurred. They were first rewarded for their efforts of healing the people, and then they were assisted in their continued traveling to Rome. Of this verse, the Geneva Bible says, “God does well to strangers for his children's sake.”

Life application: When reading the Bible, the context of what is being said must be maintained. For example, we cannot force the words of Jesus in the synoptic gospels into what is going on in the book of Acts and the epistles. Jesus was speaking to Israel, under the law, about matters of the law and of the kingdom to come.

Care must be taken to ensure that if something is cited from the gospels, that it actually applies to whatever point is being made. To not do so can form a logical contradiction in one's theology. For example, Jesus said –

“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. <sup>35</sup> For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.” Luke 21:34-36

People in the church will often cite these words, applying them to the life of believers today. Jesus' words in this passage are not intended for those of the church. He is speaking to the people of Israel who were under the law and in anticipation of the tribulation period which comes after the church age.

Those in the church during this dispensation do not need to pray that they will be counted worthy to escape those things. They will be taken out at the rapture before those days transpire. We also do not need to pray that we will be worthy to stand before the Son of Man. Rather –

“...giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. <sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1:12-14

Mixing matters between dispensations will always result in poor theology. Normally, it will result in a complete contradiction in what is said in Scripture. We are qualified to be partakers. We have been delivered! Read and apply the words of the Bible in their intended context and your doctrine will be sound.

*Almighty God, help us to rightly divide Your word. May our evaluation of it be based on what You are doing in history according to the dispensation in which events are being referred. In this, our understanding of what is being said will be proper. Help us always to remember the proper context as we seek out what is being conveyed. Amen.*

**After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. Acts 28:11**

The words are more literally translated, “And after three months, we went up in a ship having been wintered in the island, Alexandrian, figure-headed Dioscuri” (CG).

In the previous verse, Luke noted that the islanders honored Paul and him in many ways, noting that when they departed, they were provided things that were necessary. Now, Luke speaks of the actual departure, saying, “And after three months.”

This means that it was likely about early to mid-February. Some speculate it was as early as the month of January, others date it as late as March. The point is that they waited through the dangerous winter months while sailing was too hazardous.

The ship remained over the winter on the island until the time when it was safe to once again engage in commerce on the high seas. With the winter ending, the sailing would again be favorable. Therefore, Luke next notes, “we went up in a ship having been wintered in the island.”

Being a perfect participle, it means that the ship was wintered there, and it continued to winter there until the time that it could again go up to the high seas. This ship was heading in the right direction for the continued travel to Rome, and so it was employed for the next leg of the journey. Of this ship, Luke notes it was “Alexandrian, figure-headed Dioscuri.”

These words continue to show that Melita is, in fact, Malta. Malta would fall on the course from Alexandria to Italy, and so the identification of the ship as Alexandrian gives a good indication of the fact that the island was most likely Malta.

The word translated as figure-headed is *parasémos*. It comes from *para*, beside or by the side of, and *séma*, a sign or mark. Thus, a most literal translation would be “side-marked.” However, the intent is that of a figurehead.

Some ancient ships were side-marked with paintings, such as large eyes or other symbols like fighter jets display today. Others had carved images on them. Being the Dioscuri, it would seem likely these were carvings which then may have been highlighted with paint.

The word used to describe them is *Dioskouroi*, a word found only here in Scripture. It is derived from *Dios* which refers to Zeus, and the plural of *kouros*, boy. Thus, it means the two sons of Zeus and Leda, Castor and Pollux. They were the patrons of sailors.

Due to the nature of the word, the translation can be literal, Dioscuri, or any suitable translation that conveys the message, such as “twin gods,” “twin brothers,” “Castor and Pollux,” “the Castors,” “the sign of the Twins,” “the Heavenly Twins,” etc.

Each gives an acceptable description intended to convey what Luke meant with the single word *Dioskouroi*. Of these guardian deities of sailors, Ellicott notes –

“In Greek mythology, Zeus had rewarded their brotherly devotion by placing them among the stars as the Gemini, which were connected with the month of May in the signs of the Zodiac, and Poseidon (= Neptune) had given them power over the winds and waves that they might assist the shipwrecked. So in the *Helena* of Euripides they appear, in 1550–60, as promising a fair wind and a safe voyage. The figure-heads of the Greek and Roman ships were commonly placed both at the prow and the stern.”

What is unusual is that Luke has never noted the figurehead on any ship that they had sailed on in his previous accounts. And the number of ships would not have been small. For example, he notes that sometimes they changed ships while in a harbor, taking another to get to their intended destination. This would have been quite common, changing ships from one harbor to the next.

Despite this, the account now – when leaving Malta – is the only time a figurehead is described. Of this, Benson says, “And yet, in a ship having such an idolatrous image, Paul did not refuse to sail, considering it as being only the name of the ship.”

Paul was a prisoner being conducted to Rome, he had no choice in what ship he traveled, and it is certain that the majority, if not all, of the ships they had traveled on had figureheads. Therefore, it is irrelevant that it was an idolatrous image.

What seems likely is that Luke included this to show a contrast to what had occurred upon their arrival. As that ship certainly had a figurehead, and maybe even the same one as the ship they were now departing on (being the patron of sailors), such figureheads were irrelevant in providing protection to a ship.

The Lord had been with Paul, He had assured the safety of every person on the ship, He had followed through with that, and He had demonstrated His hand upon Paul when the viper bit him. He also continued to be with Paul as he laid hands upon the sick and healed them. And more, this journey to Rome is the fulfillment of the words of the Lord that Paul would bear witness at Rome (Acts 23:11).

Luke has, therefore, set a contrast to the effective workings of the Lord and the ineffective protection of false idols made by man's hands.

Life application: Despite Benson's comments not fitting the narrative, his words are correct that the images on the ship were idolatrous. People were putting their trust in something that is a part of creation rather than in the Creator.

The Bible mentions several constellations, acknowledging that they are as real as the planets. If God uses the constellations to tell a story, that is not the same thing as God allowing those things to be objects of worship or luck.

In Judges 9, Jotham uses the trees as an allegory. The Lord does this elsewhere as well. However, this doesn't mean that the trees have any power in and of themselves. They are simply used to convey a story or prophecy. We must be careful to distinguish between such things.

Also, it would be ludicrous to refuse to travel on a ship or airplane that has figureheads on it. Paul addresses such notions when dealing with foods sacrificed to idols in 1 Corinthians. Those things are nothing. As long as we remember that and have our hearts and minds directed to the Lord, we don't need to worry about what the world is doing.

Our hope is not in a carving, a painting, or a constellation. Rather, our hope is in the One who created all things and who has revealed Himself in Scripture and in the Person of Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Heavenly Father, we know that an idol is nothing at all. It cannot help and it cannot harm. When our eyes look to the stars and constellations, we see Your hand of creation, not deities that can help us with our problems or direct our futures. May we always remember these things and focus our hearts and attention on You alone. Amen.*

**And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days.** Acts 28:12

The verb is an aorist participle, "And having brought down at Syracuse, we stayed three days" (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul and those with him departed Malta after having been there for three months. Luke continues this next leg of the journey, beginning with, "And having brought down."

Departing on a ship is to go up to the high seas. When arriving at a new destination, one comes down again. The ship was brought down from the sea “at Syracuse.”

Syracuse, or *Surakousai* in Greek, is a city noted only here in the Bible. It is a city which was made famous during the Peloponnesian war. It was, and still is, a flourishing town of Sicily. It is 92 miles as the crow flies from Malta, but a bit more by boat because it is on the southeast corner of the coast of Sicily.

It can be reached in a bit over a day by boat. Ships bound from Alexandria on their way to Italy frequently put in there. It was one of the major ports of the Mediterranean world at this time. They probably stopped there to sell and offload wares and then pick up any other things or travelers for their continued voyage. Today Syracuse has a population of about 125,000.

Once the ship arrived there, Luke next notes that “we stayed three days.” The ship they were on had been at Malta over the winter. If the men were on the same ship when leaving Syracuse, it may be that it took three days to offload cargo and load on other things.

Or it may be that they switched ships to continue their journey to Rome and the first one departing took three days to get a booking on. Luke does not explain the matter either way but simply gives the duration of time they were in Syracuse. After three months on Malta, three days at this location would have flown by.

Life application: Speaking of flying by, the NKJV says the ship was “landing at Syracuse.” Not only is the tense of the verb wrong, but that can have more than one meaning. Landing at Syracuse may mean on the other side of the Atlantic!

Hancock International Airport is jointly owned by the military and the city. It is about five miles northeast of downtown Syracuse, in Onondaga County, New York.

The airport is off Interstate 81 near Mattydale, New York. Wikipedia says that “In 1927 Syracuse mayor Charles Hanna felt his city needed an airport. A location at Amboy in the town of Camillus, New York was purchased for \$50,000, and by 1928, the ‘Syracuse City Airport at Amboy’ was handling airmail.”

At the end of World War II, the United States Army Air Corps leased their bomber base near Mattydale, New York to the city. On September 17, 1949, the Clarence E. Hancock Airport opened to the public using a renovated machine shop as a terminal, and



replaced the airport at Amboy. To learn more about this airport at Syracuse, refer to their website on the internet.

This might sound like a pointless diversion concerning another location named Syracuse, but it is given to highlight the fact that there are innumerable locations in the United States that are named based on other locations, many are right out of the Bible.

The movement of people from one location to another, where there had not yet been a name given for the place necessitated those new locations be given names. Some are obvious, such as New York being named based on the movement of people from York in the UK. Others are obvious because of the connection to famous biblical sights, such as cities named Bethlehem in New York and Pennsylvania, and Canaan in Connecticut.

However, many other areas also have biblical names that may not be as famous. In Connecticut, there is Sharon, Gilead, Hebron, Mount Carmel, and so forth. This trend continues in many states throughout the US. A rich biblical heritage permeates the nation's founding. However, those traditions are quickly fading away. The prosperity of the people, and the movement to a non-biblical worldview, have erased much of the Christian heritage of the land.

If you are familiar with biblical names of people and places, you can use that familiarity to start conversations with people and form a connection between the name and its source. From there, you can then bring in the overall message of the Bible, that it is the story of God's plan of redemption of man from the power of sin and the devil to one focused on Jesus.

When they see a connection between their name or the name of their city with the Bible, they may want to know more. Be ready at all times to think of innovative ways to get people interested in knowing more about the word! It is the message that can change the eternal destiny of people from a not-so-happy ending to an eternity of delight.

*Lord God, help us to always be ready to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. May our words bring them to want to know more and to become interested in reading Your word. People need Jesus and the Bible tells us about Him. So, Lord, help us in this! Amen.*

**From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, Acts 28:13**

A more literal translation is, "From where, having gone around, we arrived at Rhegium. And after one day, having come upon an Auster, the second day we came to Puteoli" (CG).

Luke just noted that they had landed at Syracuse and stayed three days. Now, the journey to Rome continues with, "From where, having gone around."

The words "from where" refer to Syracuse which is on the southeast corner of Sicily. Leaving that port, they had to make a bit of a sweeping motion. Of the words, "having gone around," the KJV says, "And from thence we fetched a compass." The Berean Study Bible says, "From there we weighed anchor."

It is generally accepted that the Greek term is speaking of making a circuitous route around Sicily. As Syracuse is on the southeast corner of the island, and they need to head northward to the Italian peninsula, they set sail and worked off the coast of Sicily to reach their destination.

It was probably a west or a northwest wind at this time and this caused them to head out to sea in order to catch the winds while traveling north. Thus, one gets the idea of circling around, or going around, instead of traveling straight to their destination. From there, it next says, "we arrived at Rhegium."

Rhegium, now known as Reggio, is on the southwest extremity of the toe of Italy. According to Wikipedia, Reggio "commonly and officially referred to as Reggio Calabria, or simply Reggio by its inhabitants, is the largest city in Calabria as well as the seat of the Regional Council of Calabria. It has an estimated population between 150,000 and 200,000 and is the twenty-first most populous city in Italy, after Modena and other Italian cities, and the 100th most populated city in Europe. Reggio Calabria is located near the center of the Mediterranean and is known for its climate, ethnic and cultural diversity. It is the third economic centre of mainland Southern Italy. About 560,000 people live in the metropolitan area, recognised in 2015 by Italy as a metropolitan city."

The city is right at the southern opening of the Straits of Messina. These straits pass between Sicily and Italy. They connect the Tyrrhenian Sea to the north with the Ionian Sea to the south. At its narrowest point, it measures 1.9 miles in width. However, near the town of Messina the width is some 3.2 miles. It has a maximum depth of 830 feet.

Certainly because of the narrowness of the straits and the contrary wind, they stopped at Rhegium. However, Luke next records, “And after one day, having come upon an Auster.”

The words “having come upon” are from a word found only here in Scripture, *epiginomai*. It is derived from two words signifying “upon” and “to come about.” The word translated as Auster is the same word as in Acts 27:13, *notos*. It signifies the South and thus a south wind. A single English word which corresponds to this is Auster, a south wind. Once this favorable wind came upon them, it next says, “the second day we came to Puteoli.”

Here is another word unique to Scripture, *deuteraios*. It is derived from *deuteros*, second, and signifies the second day. With the favorable wind that came from the south, it allowed them to pass through the straits. Once through the straits, they were able to sail all the way to Puteoli.

This is the modern city known as Pozzuoli. It is located very near Naples and was once a port city. Today, however, it is too shallow for large ships to arrive at. Its name means “The wells.” Being known for its warm baths, it is supposed that is how it got its name. Some relevant information from the era that these men arrived there is found in Wikipedia –

“Puteoli became the great emporium for the Alexandrian grain ships and other ships from all over the Roman world. It also was the main hub for goods exported from Campania, including blown glass, mosaics, wrought iron, and marble. Lucilius wrote in about 125 BC that it was second only to Delos in importance, then the greatest harbour of the ancient world. Many inscriptions show that a polyglot population established companies (stationes) for trade and transport and formed professional guilds for arts, crafts and religious associations for foreign cults; they included Greeks from the islands and the coast of Asia, Jews and later Christians. Under the Roman Empire, it was the greatest emporium of foreign trade in all of Italy. Trade with Tyre was so important that the Tyrians established a factory there in 174.”

Life application: In one verse, travel has gone from Syracuse to Rhegium to Puteoli. The population of these three cities totals about four hundred thousand people. Think of how many of them may have never heard of Jesus. Now imagine that you encounter people just like them throughout the week or even every day. They may never have heard of Jesus. Who is going to tell them? If not you, then who?

If you are saved, hooray for Jesus in your life. But be sure to now tell others about what He has done for you, and indeed for all the people of the world. Without hearing about Him, people cannot be saved. Hopefully, you will be affected enough about their plight to at least try to share what you know.

*Lord God, help us to be responsible in sharing our faith in Jesus. We have family, friends, and acquaintances that need to hear the good news. We go to restaurants and are served by people that may have never been told the simple message of Your goodness to us in sending Jesus. Help us, O God, to faithfully proclaim what we know. Amen.*

**where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome.** Acts 28:14

The NKJV needs to be tweaked, “Where, having found brothers, we were called upon them to remain seven days. And so, to Rome, we came” (CG).

The previous verse revealed the travel from Rhegium to Puteoli. The narrative in Puteoli now begins with, “Where, having found brothers.”

Some scholars dismiss these brothers as being only brothers of Paul, meaning Jews. However, Luke is the author of this letter and the “we” clearly indicates that this is inclusive of himself.

Therefore, these were Christians who had already spread out as far as this city of Italy. In Hebrews 13:24, we read, “Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.”

If this was speaking of the church at Rome, it probably would have said so. In other words, “Those from Rome greet you.” For this reason, it is more than likely that these are merely believers in Italy in general who are being referred to.

Further, it only says “brothers,” not “the brothers.” In other words, it appears that upon their arrival, they didn't know that there were Christians there. Having found them, it next says, “we were called upon them to remain seven days.”

Somehow Paul and the others found out that these were fellow believers. They were greeted by them, and then they were called upon to stay a full week with them. This is the same length of time that they stayed at both Troas (20:6) and Tyre (21:4).

It appears that Julius the centurion had no problem allowing the additional time which was probably intended to allow at least one and maybe two Sunday gatherings with these Christians. It also may be that, as previously speculated, Julius himself may have been a convert.

With a week of fellowshiping with them, it next says, “And so, to Rome, we came.”

Some translations, along with the NKJV, say that they went toward Rome. Most versions, however, say that they came to Rome. The word can mean either, but the stress in the Greek is on the word came – “And so, to Rome, we came.” The entire 140-mile trip is summarized in this one sentence. Verse 15 merely explains the occurrence upon their arrival.

Life application: We don’t know how many people lived in Puteoli at the time, but it was a city with many people. And yet, these men found believers. It is unlikely this happened while sitting in a restaurant. It appears that Paul went to a synagogue and asked if there were any known Christians in the city.

It is hard to see how else they could have found them unless cities had boards with various people or activities listed which people could read and then contact those with similar interests. However they found these believers, they certainly made a concerted effort to do so.

When you are traveling, do you take time to attend church somewhere? Is meeting other Christians and sharing in the faith something that is important to you at all times, or is it just something you do in your local area because you are familiar with the people you attend with?

It is true that today we can attend church online or listen to podcasts at any time, even while on vacation, but are you even doing that? In other words, is taking a weekend off with the wife or family a time to ignore church? The two hours you spend on Sunday morning, even if just attending your church online, shouldn’t be ignored.

Be sure to include the Lord in your routine. In fact, with podcasts – tens of thousands of them available at your fingertips – you can attend church all day every day. Great preachers of the past, and those who are still alive today, are available for free online, including all of their sermons and studies.

Be sure to take full advantage of this marvelous time in which we live to get closer and closer to the Lord through whatever means are available to you. How blessed we are to have the ability to do so.

*Lord God, there are ten jillion things that come at us all day every day, vying for our attention. And yet, if we are wise, we will spend our time focusing on You, on Your word, and on fellowship with those who will keep us on the right path as we proceed. May we do this, to Your glory, O God. Amen.*

**And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.**  
Acts 28:15

The Greek is much more literally translated as, “And from there, the brothers, having heard these concerning us, came out to our meeting unto Appii Forum and Three Taverns – whom, Paul having seen, having thanked God, took courage” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul and his companions stayed in Puteoli for seven days and then came to Rome. Now, in explanation of that, it says, “And from there, the brothers, having heard these concerning us.”

Apparently, notification had been sent during their stay at Puteoli about the coming of Paul with details as to when he would arrive. In what is obviously eager anticipation, the church at Rome came out en masse as if welcoming a great hero of battle or government. Paul and those with him arrived in the outskirts of Rome and those awaiting him “came out to our meeting unto Appii Forum and Three Taverns.”

The reason why they would have gone no further than this is that he could have arrived by either canal or by road. Without being certain, this would be the point where the two parties could meet and they were sure to find with him.

This spot is said to be around 50 miles from Rome and is called this because of Appius Claudius who made the route from Rome to there. Hence, it is called the Appian Way. At that spot, there was a statue set up in his honor.

Such a place which had a statue set in this manner would be called, by the Romans, a *fora*. Hence, we use the term Appii Forum. Others came as far as the Three Inns, or the Three Taverns.

This was a bit closer to Rome, about 33 miles from it. It could be that these came to the lesser distance because of age, because of work, or because of some other reason. However, all of them came a full day's travel to welcome the man who had written to them the "Constitution of Christianity" about three years earlier. Because of this reception, Luke next records, "whom, Paul having seen, having thanked God, took courage."

Paul probably had no idea that such a greeting would meet him. In their appearance so far from Rome, it indicated that they felt a fraternal bond of love for him which was in no way diminished by his chains. The flock was there to welcome this shepherd of the faith without regard to any of the lies he had been subjected to by his false accusers.

A word found only here in Scripture is seen, *tharsos*. It signifies confidence or courage. It is derived from *thrasus*, bold. Luke continues to fill the pages of Scripture with rare or unique words.

Life application: Imagine the happiness that Paul must have felt at the reception he received. He was still a day's travel from where the congregation lived within the city, and yet they had made the extraordinary measure of coming a full day's journey out to receive him.

He and those with him had been on an exceptionally long and difficult journey. To have a reception such as was given him would have given him even more confidence than he could have imagined. Luke, too, would have been completely encouraged by this gesture.

Should you have the opportunity to welcome others in such a manner, or tend to them in an unusual way, your kindness will not go unnoticed, both with those you are tending to and to the Lord Himself. Think of ways you can extend yourself to others.

If someone is in the hospital, be sure to visit. If someone is ailing, check on him through a phone call or email. Letting people know you are thinking of them is letting them know you care about them. So, take the time to reach out to them.

*Lord God, thank You for those who are especially aware of the needy state of others and who extend themselves in various ways to tend to them. Help us to be more like this as well. May we be willing to show that others are important to us through the things we do and the assistance we provide. Amen.*

**Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him. Acts 28:16**

The NKJV is just a tad off in the tense of the final verb: “And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the commander of the army. And Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier guarding him” (CG).

In the previous verse, those in the church at Rome came out a day’s journey to meet him as he was entering the city. Now, the narrative continues with, “And when we came to Rome.”

The promise and prophecy of the Lord found in Acts 27:11 has been realized –

“But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.’”

With him having safely arrived, even if as a prisoner, Luke next notes that “the centurion delivered the prisoners to the commander of the army.”

Here is another word found only once in Scripture, *stratopedarches*. It is derived from *stratopedon*, an encamped army, and *archo*, to reign or rule.

Of note is that the name Julius was only mentioned in Acts 27:1 and 27:3. Other than that, he is called the centurion. The reason may be that this book may have been written for the purpose of being an official record of the establishment of Christianity within the parameters of Judaism.

As Judaism was officially sanctioned by Rome, then if Christianity was considered under the umbrella of Judaism, it would also be considered a religion sanctioned by Rome. In order to keep any hint of impropriety away from the actions of Julius, such as giving too much favoritism or privilege to Paul, his name is carefully left out of the record.

It could even be that after such a long time together with Paul, he became a believer himself. If so, then that could possibly cast a negative light on his dealings with Paul. As an officer, he would be required to execute his duties to Rome in an impartial manner. This is exactly how Luke details his conduct.



He is not mentioned by name even though a strong bond of respect had grown between him and his travel companion Paul. And so, it merely records now that it was “the centurion” who delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard. No special note is made concerning Paul. Luke lumps him in with all the others for the official handover to their new keeper.

With that complete, it next says, “And Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier guarding him.”

Even before the sentence ends, Paul’s status is brought back into the narrative, showing that he was considered a prisoner, even if he had certain privileges extended to him. For this, no reason is given.

If a letter accompanied him from Festus to allow this, it would probably have been stated as such. If it was because he was a Roman citizen, Luke may have said this as well. If it was because of him being a better class of prisoner, Luke would have certainly expressed it. However, the reason is left unstated.

Luke’s silence on why the treatment is granted to Paul speaks out loudly, allowing us room to speculate. Many scholars have stated their guesses. It could be that Julius himself noted Paul’s situation, his status, and his character to the captain of the guard.

If his time with Paul was fraught with grief, he would have said, “Watch this fellow, he’s as slippery as an eel.” If so, no such freedoms would have been forthcoming. Instead, it appears that a good word concerning Paul was passed on.

Whatever the truth of the matter, Julius had certainly heard the gospel numerous times in the months he had spent with Paul. He had seen the snake bite him on the night they were shipwrecked. He had seen the healings of the people on Malta, he had personally known the high and noteworthy character of Paul, and he had seen how Paul had held fast to the Lord he claimed to honor.

If Julius became a believer during his time with Paul, he must have been one whose faith was well grounded in the same hope of Christ that Paul had expressed. If he never came to faith in Christ, it would be hard to think of a person more worthy of condemnation on that great Day of Judgment than him.

He had been exposed to the Christian faith like few others ever had. He had accompanied the Lord’s personal choice to carry this wondrous message to the Gentile

world. We can look to see if his name is on the rolls of the redeemed shortly after we arrive there.

In Paul's confinement, he is given pretty much the same type of treatment that he had during his time in Caesarea. He would be chained directly to the soldier appointed to guard him. Together, they lived in their own dwelling as they awaited Paul's continued trial before the Roman government.

Life application: We are asked to accept the gospel by faith. We have the fully complete word of God to help us reason out our faith. It is not a blind step into darkness, but a bold step into God's revealed light. What more do we need?

We should not be anticipating signs to accompany our doubts or to help us make a decision for accepting or rejecting the gospel. Everything we need to make a reasonable conclusion about what God has done is available to us. In the pages of the Bible, may you find the hope that God has accomplished everything necessary to return you to Himself. And then may you make the wise decision to accept the simple gospel of your salvation.

Christ died for your sins according to Scripture. He was buried. He rose again on the third day, according to Scripture. Believe, to the saving of your soul!

*Lord God, within Your word is the simple message that You have done everything necessary to restore us to Yourself. Even if the Bible is a big and complicated book, the overall message is not. Jesus! We need Jesus who has done it all for us. Help us to have faith that it is so and to be saved through the good news found in Your word. Amen.*

**And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men *and* brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, Acts 28:17**

The Greek more closely reads, "And it was, after three days, Paul called together those being leaders of the Jews. And they, having come together, he said to them 'I – men, brothers – having done nothing against the people or the customs of our fathers, I was delivered a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans'" (CG).

In the previous verse, it noted that Paul was delivered with the prisoners to the captain of the guard. From there, he was permitted to dwell by himself with a soldier guarding

him. Now that he is in his accommodations but in bonds and guarded, it next says, “And it was, after three days.”

This is probably stated to show that he gave full attention to the Christians who so honorably greeted him before calling together the Jews. He spent enough time with them to get to know them, talk about all that had happened, and to answer any questions that they may have had. Now it was time to address his brothers according to the flesh. And so, it next says, “Paul called together those being leaders of the Jews.”

It was shown in Acts 18:2 that Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome, but that order had been allowed to lapse and the Jews had returned. Those who were the leaders were specified to come and meet with him.

The reason was certainly at least twofold. First, he would present them with the gospel, and he would also defend this stand for his faith as a believing Jew which resulted in his chains. Therefore, Luke next records, “And they, having come together, he said to them ‘I – men, brothers – having done nothing against the people or the customs of our fathers.’”

He begins with an emphatic “I.” He is ensuring right off the bat that they understand that any word that may have arrived against him was untrue. In order to make his defense, he then notes that everything he had done was in accord with both his life as a Jew and the heritage that made him a Jew.

There is a definite article before the word people. It is not “our people,” but literally, “the people.” It is the special mark that he fully identifies them as the chosen people and that he is among them. He was careful to be respectful of the people and their customs. Despite this, he next says, “I was delivered a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.”

Paul acknowledges that it is his own people who handed him over, as indicated in the words “from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.” It is an implication that he was betrayed by the leaders of “the people” despite his innocence concerning those things he had been accused of.

Life application: The people of any given nation are under the authority of those who are in charge. Therefore, whether they have done anything wrong individually, they bear the consequences of the decisions of the leaders.

There were probably many Germans before WWII who didn't know much about what was going on. They were living their lives like any normal people. Suddenly, a family would receive a note that the oldest son had been drafted into the army. A few months later, they receive a note that he had died in battle.

The decisions of the leaders have negatively impacted the lives of a family who really had no idea why their son was taken from them. In Israel, the people hailed Jesus as their Messiah on Palm Sunday. However, the leadership – those who stood for the nation – rejected Him. Despite many individuals heralding Jesus, He spoke to Jerusalem, meaning the leaders of the nation who represented the nation as a whole, saying –

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! <sup>38</sup> See! Your house is left to you desolate; <sup>39</sup> for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” Matthew 23:37-39

The leaders of the nation had Jesus crucified. Even after His resurrection, they continued to reject Him. In fulfillment of Jesus' words concerning the sign of Jonah (forty days representing forty years), the nation was destroyed, and the people were exiled.

The point is that in some nations, we can choose our leaders. We must choose wisely. If we put our fists in God's face and elect those who will not honor the Lord, negative consequences will result. If we elect leaders that are always getting the nation into wars, our sons and daughters may die in battle because of it.

Think through what you will do on election day. The leaders represent your nation before God. Choosing a bad leader may lead you to find yourself in bad circumstances.

*Glorious Lord God, as Christians, Jesus is our Head and Leader. However, we still have to live in this world until the day our placement changes. Help us to make wise decisions concerning our lives and the circumstances in which we find ourselves. May each of our decisions include You in the process. In this, we can hope for peace and tranquility through the days of our lives. Amen.*

**“who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. Acts 28:18**

A more literal rendering would be, “Who, having examined me, wanted to release, because nota reason of death being in me” (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul began his personal defense concerning his situation with the Jews in Jerusalem in his conversation with the Jews in Rome, noting that he was delivered into the hands of the Romans. Having said that, he now continues with, “Who, having examined me.”

This is a brief summary of a line of examinations, one leading to another, over the course of two years. But even without all of the details, it would be obvious that the Romans would have done a thorough job checking out the facts of the matter. However, even after this, they “wanted to release.”

Immediately following the words of his betrayal by his own countrymen, Paul acknowledges that the Romans had nothing worthy of charging him and releasing him would be the appropriate thing to do.

This again shows that what was found worthy of punishment by Jerusalem, meaning a matter of Jewish law, was not considered as such by Rome. Rome found his actions in accord with the freedom of religious expression granted to the Jews. In short, his faith was considered a subset of Judaism and was *religio licita*.

In review, this included Lysias, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. All had interrogated him, and all had been in agreement concerning his status. His innocence before Rome, while being hounded by the Jews, parallels that of Jesus, such as in Luke 23:4 & 14. Paul next says that their wanting to release him was “because nota reason of death being in me.”

The word translated as “nota” literally means “not one.” Therefore, nota is a single word to match the intent. There was not a single charge made against him that was sufficient for him to receive capital punishment, even if the Jews demanded that it should be so. Paul’s use of a present verb indicates that not only was he innocent, but he continued in that state even now. However, in the next verse, he will explain the reason why he remains in chains, despite his state of innocence.

Life application: The book of Acts has included a continuous stream of occasions where the Jews tried to disassociate the Christian faith from their religious system of belief. This has been countered, time and again, by the Roman government that God allowed to be the judge of such matters over Israel at the time.

One cannot rightfully say that because these were Romans making the decisions they are invalid. That would be to usurp what God had ordained. Israel is his people. It is the Lord who decided who would rule over them, be it their own king, the Babylonians, the Romans, or even Jesus of the future.

The Jews cannot have it both ways and say, “Yes, this, but not this.” Their very existence and continued existence are at the will of the Lord. How He determines it will be is up to Him. As the Roman government, who ruled over Israel at the time, determined that Christianity was an acceptable extension of the Jewish religion, it was so.

Hence, we have the written record of the growth of this valid extension of Judaism, the one that God determined should be in order to carry His message concerning Jesus to the nations. Anyone who argues against the doctrines of Paul or the other apostles is, therefore, arguing against what God had determined.

Be careful to not get swayed by the modern Judaizers who attack the gospel of salvation which is by grace through faith. Works are not included because God has done everything necessary to secure our salvation. We simply accept that, believe, and we are saved.

Along with the Judaizers, though, are those who add works after being saved in order to keep being saved. Judaizers front load the gospel, these back load it and say that we must “do” in order to continue in God’s favor. Even if people use a term like “easy believism” as a pejorative, this is exactly what God has ordained. We believe and are saved, and it is once and done.

Having said that, belief is actually not that easy. We have to put ourselves aside and trust in God alone to carry us back to Himself. Letting go of self is a hard thing to do. Despite this, the gospel truly is easy believism. There are no other strings attached. Thank God for the simplicity of being saved once we remove ourselves from the equation.

*Lord God, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord who has done everything necessary to restore us to You forever. Yes! Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.*

**“But when the Jews spoke against *it*, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation...” Acts 28:19**

A bit more literally, “And the Jews, contradicting, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar – not as having something charged against my nation.” (CG).

Paul, speaking to his countrymen in Rome, just noted that the Romans found nothing to charge Paul with and wanted to let him go. Now, his words continue, saying, “And the Jews, contradicting.”

Still sticking to the main facts only, Paul gives the reason why he was in Rome bound in chains and facing a trial before Caesar. It is because the Jews, meaning the leaders of the Jews, spoke against the proclamation of innocence which had been rendered by the Roman authorities.

This caused a problem for the governor who wanted to have harmony with those under his jurisdiction. This exchange was recorded in Acts 25 –

“But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, ‘Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?’

<sup>10</sup> So Paul said, ‘I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. <sup>11</sup> For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.’

<sup>12</sup> Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, ‘You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!’” Acts 25:9-12

Paul now recalls these facts for the ears of those in Rome, saying, “I was compelled to appeal to Caesar.”

The request of the Jews left him with no choice but to appeal to Rome. He doesn’t explain the details at this time, but the brevity is all that is needed for the purpose of the meeting. His delicacy concerning this matter becomes evident though, as he continues by saying, “not as having something charged against my nation.”

Instead of defending himself against those who wished him harm, he showed himself a patriotic Jew in the highest sense. Whether they knew he was a Pharisee or not isn’t stated, but it is probable. His speech and demeanor would show he was also well educated.

And yet, he shows that he never put his Roman citizenship above his ties to his Jewish brothers. Despite having been unfairly treated by his own countrymen, he waited until necessity demanded it before appealing to Rome. As the Pulpit Commentary notes –

“Undazzled by the splendor of Rome and the power of the Roman people, his heart is with his own despised nation, ‘that they might be saved.’ He wishes it to be well with them; he wants them to understand his position; he speaks to them as a kinsman and a brother. His appeal to Caesar had been of necessity - to save his life. But he was not going to accuse his brethren before the dominant race. His first desire was that they should be his friends, and share with him the hope of the gospel of Christ.”

Life application: Paul was clearly wronged by the leaders of his nation, and it was for the sake of the gospel. The Jews hated the thought that he was telling Gentiles that they had the same rights and benefits to the Lord God of Israel that they possessed.

And yet, they had spent not only their entire lives serving under the Law of Moses, but their nation, since its inception as the people of the Lord at Mount Sinai, had struggled under the law. Despite this, Paul was telling people who never had the law, who didn’t even know what the law demanded, that they were on equal footing with those who officiated at the temple on behalf of Israel.

This was, to them, intolerable. How dare a rogue Jew proclaim that their law was not binding on the nations because one of their people had died under that law and supposedly resurrected! It was incomprehensible, and to them, it was the epitome of blasphemy.

This same attitude permeates the Jewish mind and culture to this day. They alone believe that they are in God’s favor and that all others are a separate category. There are Jews, and there is everything else.

But Paul clearly shows that this is not the case. In fact, it is quite the opposite –

“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. <sup>26</sup> Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? <sup>27</sup> And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, *even with your* written *code* and circumcision, *are* a transgressor of the law? <sup>28</sup> For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the



flesh; <sup>29</sup> but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.”  
-Romans 2:25-29

The time of the law served its purpose. That time ended when Christ died in fulfillment of it. Now, something new has been ushered in. Be sure to live for God apart from personal merit. If you inject yourself into the equation, you are saying that what He has done wasn't enough. Don't be so deluded as that. Think rightly. Praise God in Christ for having done it all!

*Lord God, we don't need to worry about how we can be pleasing to You. Your word tells us the simple means by which it comes about. When we trust in the all-sufficient work of Jesus, You are satisfied with that. Thank You for the simplicity of the gospel, O God. Amen.*

**“For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see *you* and speak with *you*, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.”** Acts 28:20

A literal reading says, “For this cause, therefore, I called you – to see and to speak – because for the hope of Israel, this chain surrounds me” (CG).

Paul had just told the Jews visiting him in his confinement that he was compelled to appeal to Caesar even though he had no accusation against his nation. Now, he continues, saying, “For this cause, therefore, I called you.”

This is based on verse 17 where it says he called the leaders of the Jews. A message would have been sent to the local synagogue(s) imploring them to come and consult with him. That is seen in the next words which are briefly stated, “to see and to speak.”

The words are certainly to be taken as personal. He didn't want to send a letter or have a messenger convey his words to them. Rather, he wanted to look them in the eyes, see their faces, and carry on a dialogue with them.

What he had to say was something that would naturally elicit questions from his listeners. To , a letter or a messenger who would speak out the substance of Paul's word, would only lead to many back-and-forth trips. Instead, by meeting with them, he would cut all of that out. He would also remove any chance of misperception of his words. When a question arose, he could answer it right then and there.

And so, he tells them the substance of why he called them in this manner, saying, “because for the hope of Israel, this chain surrounds me.”

Paul explicitly states the reason for having called them together. He had been sent to Rome as an innocent man who appealed for his right to exercise his faith which was recognized by Rome, but not by his own countrymen.

In order to reveal the substance of his faith, he speaks of the hope of Israel. It is a term explicitly stated twice by Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 14:8 and 17:13. In both instances, the term is ascribed to the Lord, Yehovah. The Hebrew word is *miqveh*, something waited for. The coming of the Messiah was always understood to be that hope.

Paul was telling them that the Lord’s Messiah had arrived, and it was the reason for the chain surrounding him. The word chain is in the singular. It indicates that there was a Roman guard right there with him to whom one of his hands, probably his right, was chained.

What is rather interesting is the structure of the Greek used to describe the type of punishment noted. The same word is used in both Mark 9:42 and Luke 17:2 to indicate a millstone hung around the neck. However, here the subject and object are reversed.

It is Paul who is said to be bound in the chain. This same structure is also found in Hebrews 5:2 when speaking of the high priest –

“He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness [literally: weakness surrounds him].”

The Pulpit Commentary thus paraphrases this verse as, “I have asked you to come to me because this chain which binds me is not a token of a renegade Israelite who has come to Rome to accuse his nation before the heathen master, but of a faithful Israelite, who has endured bondage rather than forsake the hope of his fathers.”

Life application: Paul’s approach to conversing with these Jews is one that we should do our best to emulate when sharing the gospel. It is fine to hand out tracts, and sometimes that is the best way to act. Likewise, an email or a personal letter may be what the situation calls for.

However, if you can personally talk to a person about the gospel, or about a doctrinal matter that needs to be addressed, doing so face-to-face is the preferred option. When

questions arise, you can see the facial expression, hear the tone of the voice, and so forth. In this, you can sense whether the person is scared, tense, frustrated, angry, etc. From there, you can adjust your conversation to make them less apprehensive.

And more, you can then avoid misperceptions of what is being said. An email carries no emotion, and it can easily be misunderstood because of this. It is also frustrating to ask a question and then have to wait. Therefore, the more you can communicate personally, the more likely you are to avoid such troubles that easily arise. John understood this –

“Having many things to write to you, I did not wish *to do so* with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.”

-2 John 1:12

*Lord God, may our time discussing You with others be fruitful and productive. Help us to wisely use the resources available to us to share the good news and to provide sound instruction. And help us to not exclude the personal touch of face-to-face communication if possible. A lot can get done when we are willing to spend our time just opening up to others in a friendly conversation. Help us in this, O God. Amen.*

**Then they said to him, “We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. Acts 28:21**

A literal reading says, “And they said to him, ‘We neither received letters concerning you from Judea nor any of the brothers having come reported or said anything evil concerning you’” (CG).

Paul just finished explaining why he had called the Jews to meet with him. During that time, he noted that the Jews spoke against him and his message. In response to this, Luke records, “And they said to him, ‘We neither received letters concerning you from Judea.’”

It may seem surprising that it appears from their words that the leaders in Jerusalem simply gave up on the attempt to kill him. However, it would be contrary to their existence to be caught attempting to have a Roman citizen killed in Rome itself, especially over a religious matter.

Further, they may never have expected Paul to even call upon the Jews in Rome. As he was bound as a prisoner, they may have assumed that he wouldn’t have the opportunity to even make a case among the Jews of the dispersion.

No matter what, they were more concerned about their own dealings in Israel and in Jerusalem than they were with what went on in the nations. This is evident because these Jews continue, saying, “nor any of the brothers having come reported or said anything evil concerning you.”

It would be hard to imagine no Jews had arrived from Jerusalem over the past months, and yet nobody showed up at the synagogue to speak badly about Paul or the Christian message that was being carried to the nations.

But their words seem to mean that, apparently, Jews had arrived since Paul’s voyage began, and it may be that they had even talked about Paul, but not in a negative way. About him, there was no word of either caution or concern, even if there was talk about his faith. It is this to which these Jews will next comment.

Life application: It is evident from the words of this verse that the Jewish leaders who were so against Paul’s message concerning Jesus were more interested in keeping their local position and power than they were in dealing with real transgressions. If Paul was a murderer, it is certain they would have sent out letters telling the Roman authorities to find this guy and deal with him.

However, the matter that bothered them about Paul was that he was telling the Gentiles a message of a personal relationship with God apart from going through the law that they administered. To pursue Paul outside of Israel would have brought in many questions concerning the “exclusivity” of their faith that would then put them at further odds with the rulers of the Roman empire.

And so, they simply dropped the matter about Paul in order to keep themselves from controversy. But being leaders of the people, they spoke for the people. Like during the times of the kings, when there was a good king, the people were blessed by the Lord. When there was an evil king, the people faced the Lord’s wrath.

Israel rejected Jesus because the leaders first rejected Him. This is what brought their condemnation upon them, and it is what continues to keep them at enmity with God even to this day. Until they (those in the leadership positions of Israel) acknowledge Jesus as Lord, they will continue to suffer. The book is written. The outcome is certain. And the pattern is set.

Even though the nations of the world are not in the same covenant relationship with the Lord as Israel is, it is evident that the Lord is judging nations based on the actions of

their leaders. Be sure when you vote, not to choose a leader who is a pervert, degenerate, etc. Things cannot go well for a nation when the leader is doing what is contrary to what God would have that nation doing.

*Lord God, may our lives as citizens of the nations in which we live be honoring of You. If the leaders we choose are godly, we can expect things will go better for the nation than if we choose someone who is morally corrupt. Help us wake up to this truth and to appoint over us leaders who will act rightly before You. Amen.*

**“But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.” Acts 28:22**

A bit more literally, “And we deem it worthy to hear from you what you think, indeed, for concerning this sect it is known to us that everywhere it is contradicted” (CG).

In the previous verse, the Jews let Paul know that they had not received any letters from Judea nor any bad reports from those who traveled from there. Now, they next show their curiosity about Paul’s message, saying, “And we deem it worthy to hear from you what you think.”

These leaders had heard about the message of Christianity and they wanted to hear it explained by the person who seemed to be the main voice behind it. This was probably more interesting to them now that they had heard the Jews in Jerusalem were after him.

Seeing the chain around him and a guard standing right there made it a true point of curiosity that they wanted to see satisfactorily resolved in their own minds. And so they continue, saying, “indeed, for concerning this sect.”

They especially deem it worthy to hear what Paul thinks because they use the same term, *hairesis*, as was used by the lawyer Tertullus during Paul’s trial. It is the root of the modern word heresy, but this is not the intent at Paul’s time. It deals with the matter of a personal choice within the confines of the overall religion. Hence, there were sects of Pharisees and sects of Sadducees, etc.

In Paul’s case, he was of the sect known as the Christians, specifically followers of Jesus. The term Christian comes from the Greek word signifying Christ which bears the same meaning as the Hebrew word Messiah. Both mean Anointed One.

In Israel, there were many “messiahs,” over their history. Therefore, one needed to know specifically who was being heralded as the Messiah. Paul proclaimed Jesus. Of Paul’s sect, the Jews next say, “it is known to us that everywhere it is contradicted.”

These words are a fulfillment of Luke 2 which was prophesied by Simeon –

“Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, ‘Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against <sup>35</sup> (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.’” Luke 2:34, 35

Wherever Jews went, or whoever had come to them from elsewhere, they had been speaking against this sect of Jews, and apparently Gentiles, who were proclaiming its teachings. This is evident throughout the book of Acts. Paul, from the start, was considered a pariah because of his proclamation that God had done all the work and that anyone who simply believed could be saved based on that faith.

Life application: Nothing has changed to this day. In some ways, it is becoming more like it was at the beginning. Anyone who proclaims the risen Christ is demeaned and spoken against. The days when the gospel was proclaimed freely and without intimidation seem forever behind us.

This is because man simply cannot accept that grace means grace. It is deeply rooted in us that we must do something to be right with God. When a person finds out that the things he has done do not merit God’s favor, it puts up a wall of frustration and enmity. “How could God not see what great things I have done! I am worthy of His attention! How dare someone tell me that I am not good enough and will never be good enough to merit His favor!”

But this is what the Bible teaches. What we cannot merit on our own, God has accomplished for us. He has set the path that leads back to Him, and that path is found in accepting the message of Jesus Christ through faith. We follow Jesus because He is God. To say that what Jesus did isn’t enough is to say that God Himself has not done enough. It is an act of replacing God with self.

Don’t be caught up in such lies of the devil. They have been used since the very beginning of man’s time on earth, and they are what brought us all this trouble. Trust God! He has done it! Trust Jesus who is the Lord God!

*Lord God Almighty, You have done what we can never do. You merit what we can never merit on our own. To You alone, we give our praise, adoration, and glory. You have brought us back to Yourself through Jesus. Hallelujah for Jesus! Hallelujah and Amen.*

**So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.**

Acts 28:23

A literal rendering of the Greek would be, “And, having appointed him a day, they came – many – to him, to the accommodation, to whom he set forth, fully testifying the kingdom of God, and persuading them about Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets from morning until evening” (CG).

In the previous verse, the Jews told Paul that they wanted to hear from him about his sect, knowing that it was spoken against everywhere. Having requested this, it next says, “And, having appointed him a day, they came.”

Paul probably happily agreed to have a chance to tell of his faith. In fact, he was probably overjoyed at the prospect of it. Instead of just telling people to come by at will though, a day was appointed for them to meet and to bring any who would be willing to listen. On that day, it says “many” came.

The word translated as many is *pleiόν*. It is a comparative form that, in English, would be typified by the use of “er” on a word. If one said, “they were great in number,” it would mean they were “greater in number.”

In essence, it means that more than was anticipated actually showed up. It is the same thing as has been seen at other times. When Paul was to talk about the coming of Christ, the halls would be filled for the first gathering. A good example of this is the account in Acts 13:42-48. Of this multitude in Rome, it says they came “to him, to the accommodation.”

This is a new word, *xenia*. It is found only here and in Philemon 1:22. It is derived from *xenos*, signifying foreign or a stranger. Thus, *xenia* signifies hospitality which then gives the sense of an accommodation. When this great number had arrived, Paul then began to convey his message. As Luke says, “to whom he set forth, fully testifying the kingdom of God.”

Paul proclaimed Christ, His kingdom, and all that this entailed. Having already written Galatians, Romans, and his letters to the Corinthians, he would be well prepared to speak through the most detailed of theological matters concerning Christ.

And just as he did even in those letters, he gave New Covenant theology as he had received from Jesus and from what he knew from his own training. Therefore, he was speaking to them “and persuading them about Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets.”

In other words, he simply went to their own writings in order to demonstrate that what he was saying was both plausible and fully supportable from Scripture, all of it. From both the law and from the prophets, meaning the entire body of Scripture, Jesus is on prominent display. Paul was able to show them this. Therefore, if God gave them these writings, and if they testified to the work of Jesus, then there could be no doubt that they at least had to consider the plausibility that Paul was correct.

This is one of the obvious reasons that Paul was selected for the position he was given. Jesus instructed him directly through revelation –

“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. <sup>12</sup> For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Galatians 1:11, 12

However, Paul would be asked things during his ministry that Jesus probably did not talk to him about personally. But because of his great wealth of knowledge from Scripture, being a Pharisee, along with inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he could then convey things that were carefully reasoned out. The synergistic working together of Paul, the word, and the Spirit would be evident, just as it is when we read his epistles today.

Once those gathered got to that point, having heard the words of Paul and seen how they match what their own writings stated, they would then need to turn the head knowledge into an active faith. The end of the verse shows the length to which Paul was ready to go to make his point. They met “from morning until evening.”

Paul was willing to speak fully, completely, and at length concerning his beliefs in the Messiah who had come. The Messiah’s name is Jesus.



Life application: As with Paul, it must still be the same with us today. We cannot expect revelation from Scripture to be directly infused into our heads. We need to first read and know what Scripture says.

Paul originally had known the writings and yet he didn't know Jesus. He was supernaturally called to be an apostle for a specific purpose. Once he realized, however, that Jesus was the Lord, he was then able to take his giant wealth of knowledge and reexplain the coming of Jesus in accord with the Scriptures.

Today, we are told about Jesus, and by faith in what we hear, we are saved. What happens after that is up to us. How deep do we want to dive into the knowledge of God in Christ? The more we read and learn the Bible, the more we will be able to then unpackage what God is telling us.

However, we can come to erroneous conclusions concerning what is being conveyed. And so, in our study of the word, we need to pray to God that His Spirit will direct us and keep us from what is incorrect. We should also pray that if we are incorrect, that He will alert us to this. From there, we should then drop any pride and accept that we were wrong, correcting our doctrine accordingly.

The study of the knowledge of God through understanding Scripture is a lifelong task. Let us get about it. Our days are numbered and they are few. Let us spend them wisely.

*Heavenly Father, be with us as we read and contemplate Your word. Help us to be logical and precise in how we interpret it. Should we come to wrong conclusions, please send us correction so that we will not be at fault in regard to Your precious and sacred word. It speaks of Jesus, and we desire to know Him correctly, intimately, and completely. To Your glory. Amen.*

**And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.**

Acts 28:24

A literal rendering of the Greek would be, "And these, indeed, were persuaded these *by* speakings, and those disbelieved" (CG).

In the previous verse, the Jews came to where Paul was staying, and he spent the entire day persuading those listening concerning Jesus. He did this right from the Law of Moses and the Prophets. Now Luke records the results. He says, "And these, indeed, were persuaded *by* these speakings."

Luke uses the same word just used in the previous verse and translated as “persuading.” Paul actively attempted to persuade his audience. The verb here is passive and is rightly translated as “were persuaded” rather than simply “believed.”

They went through a process of hearing the word of God and then being persuaded by what they heard. From there, Luke then records the state of the others with the words, “and those disbelieved.”

The verb is now active, and so, “...some were persuaded, and some disbelieved.” The context tells us that this was a voluntary act of free will to search out what is being conveyed concerning the message of Christ. And being persuaded still does not mean believing. If it did, the verb would have been active.

Paul reasoned with them, and they were persuaded that his conclusions were correct, but that does not mean that they accepted them. They could have said, “Yes, these Scriptures clearly indicate that what Paul says is correct, we just don’t believe the Scriptures.” Once information is conveyed, it has to be processed and then it is decided whether it will be trusted or not.

Thus, what Paul says in Romans 10:17 is borne out, “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” After this verse, nothing is said about any of these Jews actually believing. In fact, Paul’s words seem to imply that none did.

There were some who were persuaded and some who simply disbelieved. Those who disbelieved may have said, “If you accept this nonsense, you are out of the synagogue.” From there, they may have walked away from Paul’s reasonings. If that were the case, it would mirror what John wrote in his gospel narrative, citing some of the same Scriptures that Paul will next cite –

But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, <sup>38</sup> that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke:

“Lord, who has believed our report?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”

<sup>39</sup> Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

<sup>40</sup> “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,

Lest they should see with *their* eyes,

Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn,

So that I should heal them.”

<sup>41</sup> These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; <sup>43</sup> for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

-John 12:37-43

Life application: The Calvinistic model of salvation is that God first regenerates a person to believe. After that, the person then believes. And then, from that point, he is saved. This excludes any act of reasoning on the part of the individual, and it also excludes free will.

But this is not what the Bible teaches. If Paul believed that nonsense, he would not have spent the entire day reasoning with these people. He would not have even called them to his place of accommodation. What would be the point? In fact, what would be the point of telling anyone about Jesus at all?

But rather, the Bible is a book of reasoning out what it says has happened concerning the fall of man and what God has done to correct that event. Man chose to turn from God, and for the rest of the Bible, God's redemptive plan is slowly and meticulously unfolded, showing us what He has done, is doing, and will continue to do to restore man to Himself.

If God was just going to regenerate a certain group, saving them after doing so, the Bible would be a galactically huge waste of effort. He could do that apart from the words of Scripture. Hold fast the truth that we need to share the message of Jesus with others. If we fail to do so, and nobody else steps up and does so, those people will not be saved.

Be a hero of the faith today! While Calvinists sit smugly in a church teaching nonsense and figuring that God will regenerate those whom He has elected, you can go out and do what is right, telling others the good news about Jesus.

*Heavenly Father, help us to be responsible in our theology, understanding that You have given us Your word to read it, consider it, and carefully contemplate its truths so that we will properly conduct our lives before You all our days! Amen.*

**So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers,**  
Acts 28:25

A more literal translation is, “And being non-symphonic with one another, they were departing, Paul having said one word, ‘That rightly the Holy Spirit spoke through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers,’” (CG).

In the previous verse, and without indicating whether any actually believed Paul’s words in their hearts, it said, “And these, indeed, were persuaded these by speakings, and those disbelieved.”

There were some who were persuaded Paul’s analysis was correct, whether they believed or not. On the other hand, there were those who simply disbelieved. The state of these people is next described by Luke, saying, “And being non-symphonic with one another.”

It is an adjective found only here in Scripture, *asymphónos*. It is derived from the negative particle *a* and the adjective *sumphónos*, to be harmonious or agreeable. One can see the etymological root of the word symphony in it. With the negative particle beginning it, the word thus indicates “non-symphonic.”

Not agreeing among themselves seems to point to more than just happily agreeing to disagree. Instead, it shows a complete schism between the two that necessitates the next words of Paul which come as “they were departing.”

The verb is imperfect showing that the day is winding down and the people are getting ready to leave, all the while disagreeing with one another. Therefore, Luke continues, saying, “Paul having said one word, ‘That rightly the Holy Spirit spoke through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers.’”

Some texts say, “your fathers.” Paul, not including himself in this thought seems hard to imagine, but either way, he – acting just as Moses and the prophets after him – proclaims the word of the Lord to the stubborn and rebellious people of Israel.

In this case, he cites Isaiah, but he also shows that Isaiah was not merely speaking on his own behalf but on that of the Lord. This is evidenced in the words, “the Holy Spirit spoke...” But more poignantly, Paul says that He spoke “rightly.”

In other words, the message from God through Isaiah was as relevant at Paul’s time as it was when Isaiah proclaimed it to their ancestors. But there is more underlying his words. Not only is he saying that Isaiah proclaimed certain words to Israel, but that the words he spoke support his position, not theirs!

It is Paul who claims to be in line with the intent of Scripture and thus that of God. It is they who are rebelling against God by rebelling against the message of Christ. What Paul will quote lies ahead, but if he is quoting Scripture against Israel, it means he is quoting God's word against them. The word of the Lord is set, and it has context and purpose that Paul is saying applies directly to those who have rejected his message of Jesus the Messiah.

Life application: To this day, Israel is not listening to the words of their own Scriptures. The very words that have established them as a people are ignored or manipulated according to the situation at hand.

In other words, it is not uncommon to hear Jewish speakers in government quote Scripture when it fits with their opinion of how things are at the time, regardless of the context of what is actually said in that passage. But if one is to rightly apply context concerning what is being said about Israel of today, and cite that to (or about) the Jewish people, you are bound to get knocked on the head, cursed, or otherwise accused of being an antisemite.

Paul is disliked by the Jewish people because he clearly, precisely, and unambiguously excoriates his people for their rejection of God's provision in Christ. They malign Jesus, curse His name, and want nothing to do with Him.

And yet, He is the One who was promised to restore them and give them life. But the problem rests with Jesus' greater purposes, which are clearly laid out in the words of Isaiah –

“And now the LORD says,  
Who formed Me from the womb *to be* His Servant,  
To bring Jacob back to Him,  
So that Israel is gathered to Him  
(For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD,  
And My God shall be My strength),  
<sup>6</sup>Indeed He says,  
'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,  
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,  
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'” Isaiah 49:5, 6

The Jewish people as a whole perceive themselves as God's gift to the world, and they feel that only they are worthy of participating in His prophetic plan and sharing in His salvation. When Jesus brought the need for salvation from sin into the equation, the people rejected Him, feeling that they were secure from sin because of the provision found in the Mosaic code.

Then, once Gentiles were brought into the equation as being just as acceptable as the Jews to be brought into God's redemptive plans, the Jews went ballistic in their thinking, completely rejecting any hint of what their own Scriptures state. Paul will show them this in the verses ahead.

This state of "feelings of superiority" is not one isolated to the Jews alone. There are many people groups and cultures on the planet who think they are God's favored people and superior over all others. The difference is that the nation of Israel received God's word, maintained it, and then incorrectly identified what it is conveying to them and the people of the world.

Because of this, they have had – and will continue to face – many evils. In the days ahead, they will enter into a time of disaster so great that it will make what has come upon them for the past two thousand years pale in comparison. And this fate will be shared by all the peoples of the world.

Let us be found right with Jesus before that day comes. And be sure, it is coming. The book is written. Find your safety in the goodness of God in Christ. Do it today!

*Lord God Almighty, we know dire times are coming upon the whole world. But You have offered Your people – those who have come to Jesus – a better hope. We thank You. It is not that we are any better than any others, but that Christ, in whom we are, is our place of safety. Thank You for Jesus Christ, our Lord, who has made us acceptable to You. Amen.*

**saying,**

**'Go to this people and say:**

**"Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand;**

**And seeing you will see, and not perceive; Acts 28:26**

The Greek more closely reads, "saying, 'Go to this people and say, "News you will hear and not understand. And seeing you will see and not perceive.'" (CG).

Because the Jews couldn't agree among themselves, even after Paul had shown them the truth of Jesus being the Messiah right from their own Scriptures, Paul had told them that the Holy Spirit had rightly spoken to the fathers through Isaiah. Luke next records the words of Isaiah that Paul uttered.

The quote is pretty much verbatim from the Greek translation of Isaiah 6:9, 10. It is cited in Matthew (13:13), Mark (4:12), and Luke (8:10) as a quote from Jesus. It is also cited by John (12:40) to explain why Jesus' ministry was rejected by Israel. It was not He who had failed them, but they who had rejected Him. As for the quote here in Acts, Luke records Paul's words, beginning with, "saying, 'Go to this people and say.'"

Notice the words don't say, "Go to MY people and say." At the time of Isaiah, the Lord was speaking to the prophet about their continued rebellion against Him. This was still true in Paul's time.

The words of Hosea had come true in the past, and they had once again been fulfilled in their rejection of Christ (see Hosea chapter 1). Israel was rejected because they first rejected Him. The prophets of old had spoken to Israel, calling them to repentance, but they refused to heed. Thus, they were exiled.

When in His covenant mercy they were returned, they had the words of the prophets who all spoke of the coming Christ. They then had His incarnation, His ministry, His cross, and His resurrection. And yet, as a collective whole, they had once again rejected their God. They were now *lo-ammi*, NOT MY PEOPLE, because they were no longer His people; and they were *lo-ruhamah*, NO MERCY, because they would no longer receive His compassion.

As for the words of the Lord through Isaiah, they begin with, "News you will hear and not understand."

Many translations make the first word a verb. It is not. It is a noun as in "a hearing." Thus, it speaks of a report, news, a rumor, etc. The Lord gives the news to His people, and they fail to understand what has been reported. Isaiah next said, "And seeing you will see and not perceive."

This time, it is a present participle verb, "seeing." They would hear the news and not understand what was being conveyed. Then, when the news came about, they would see it as it happened and not perceive what was happening because they did not understand the news when it was told to them.

This was true in their times of judgment, and it was true in the coming of the Messiah. Israel had all the news they needed to discern the times, but they lacked the understanding to know that what they had heard and saw was of immediate importance to them. Jesus alluded to this as He approached Jerusalem on Palm Sunday –

“Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, <sup>42</sup> saying, ‘If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup> For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, <sup>44</sup> and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.’” Luke 19:41-44

Life application: The Bible is a book of news. Like a newspaper, it has published information for us to read, consider, and then act upon. However, if we pick up a paper and read it and don’t consider what it says, we may get stuck in traffic, even though the paper warned there would be construction work at a certain place during the coming week.

This is one of innumerable examples of failing to pay heed to what is reported in the daily paper. Because of this, we may have many griefs, much loss, and tough times. Considering that the Bible is God’s manual for humanity to know Him, what He expects, and how to be right with Him, if we fail to pay heed to it, we will be the ones to suffer.

Israel failed to properly tune their minds and their thinking to the words the Lord spoke to them through His holy men. Because of this, they have suffered greatly. Let us learn from their example and pay heed to what God has given us in His word. In doing so, things will go well for us. In failing to do so, we can expect things will not go so well. Be wise! Heed the word!

*Lord God, help us to read and consider Your word all our days. May we be attentive to it in our daily lives, our interactions with others, and in our thoughts about You – meaning in prayers, praises, supplications, and confessions. Help us to live before You appropriately all our days. Amen.*

**For the hearts of this people have grown dull.**

***Their ears are hard of hearing,***

***And their eyes they have closed,***

***Lest they should see with *their* eyes and hear with *their* ears,***



**Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn,  
So that I should heal them.” Acts 28:27**

A literal rendering of the Greek is:

“For has fattened, the heart of this people,  
And the ears, sluggishly they hear,  
And their eyes, they have closed –  
Lest when the eyes: they should see,  
And the ears: they should hear,  
And the heart: they should understand,  
And they should turn.  
And I will heal them” (CG).

Paul began citing Isaiah in the previous verse. He continues citing the prophet now. He begins with, “For has fattened, the heart of this people.”

The word heart is singular. The nation had a national fattening of its collective heart. The word he uses is seen for the second and last time, *pachunó*. It signifies to fatten, thicken, and thus become stupid, dull, and/or unfeeling.

In Scripture, the heart is the seat of reason and understanding. HELPS Word Studies says, “the *affective* center of our being” and the *capacity of moral preference (volitional desire, choice; see P. Hughs, 2 Cor, 354); ‘desire-producer that makes us tick’ (G. Archer), i.e our ‘desire-decisions’ that establish who we really are.”*

Israel’s collective heart, which controlled their very center of being, had grown fat like a man about to keel over from a heart attack in a moral sense. This was true at the time of Isaiah, but Paul says that it continued to be true in them those many hundreds of years later.

Next, it says, “And the ears, sluggishly they hear.” It is a word used for the second and last time in the New Testament, *bareós*. It signifies heavily or with difficulty or something done in a sluggish manner.

The words are still speaking of the people of Israel collectively, as if they had two ears. Their hearing became heavy, like a person who was sleepy and no longer listened to the sound around him.

The Lord was speaking, but they were not listening. With their moral compass fattened over, they could no longer hear the difference between right and wrong when it was spoken. It next says, “And their eyes, they have closed.”

In their slumbering state, because of the moral degradation that they were tolerating, they could no longer see the difference between right and wrong. They simply closed their eyes and failed to acknowledge wickedness or holiness.

Therefore, as is always the case when in such a state, they took the carnally appealing path of wickedness and rejected the right and moral path found in Christ’s coming. Now because of being in such a depraved state, Paul continues with Isaiah’s words, providing four subjunctives to explain the state they were in. The first is, “Lest when the eyes: they should see.”

Instead of speaking of the people directly, he speaks of their faculties. The first is the eyes. Essentially, Isaiah is saying: What would be the case if the eyes start seeing? They don’t see now because they are closed. But what would happen if they were opened? But it will not happen. It next says, “And the ears: they should hear.”

It is the second subjunctive: What would be the case if the ear suddenly opened up and started hearing – no longer being heavy and sluggish? What would happen if the ears started listening? The Lord knows it will not come about. From there, he turns to the third subjunctive, “And the heart: they should understand.”

It is the single heart of the nation. What would be the situation of the heart of the people if their eyes started seeing and their ears started hearing? It would begin to understand. Israel had done this to themselves, and the Lord speaks of that as being the case. He knows that their heart will not understand.

Therefore, the Lord through Isaiah speaks of their state, knowing that within them it is an impossible thought. From there, the Lord states, based on such an otherwise impossible change in them, “And they should turn.”

It is the fourth subjunctive, and the meaning is, “What if Israel should come to himself?” But they can’t because they have placed themselves in such an impossible state that, on their own, it simply cannot happen. However, despite this state, the Lord’s response through Isaiah is, “And I will heal them.”

Many translations continue translating these words as a subjunctive, “and I should heal them.” This is incorrect. The words are future indicative, “And I will heal them.”

To understand what is going on, the verse needs to be looked at from a higher perspective. It has a most important chiasmic structure to it which reveals a marvelous truth in the last clause.

First it notes hearts/ears/eyes; it then turns around and notes eyes/ears/hearts. As seen, the dullness referred to comes from the idea of becoming thick through fatness. Thus, the fat around their heart caused them to fail to understand.

Collective Israel was numbed to the things of God. The people had shut their ears to His word, and they had closed their eyes completely, shutting out anything but what they wished to see.

These actions are laid solely at the feet of the people. It is not the Lord who closed their eyes, which might somehow be inferred if only evaluating verse 26. Rather, this was a voluntary act of the national free will. This is perfectly evident from the beginning word “For” (Greek: *gar*), and the interim word “lest” (Greek: *me*).

It is Israel that turned from the Lord, and it is they who would suffer the consequences. However, the last clause, “And I will heal them,” is explained by Bengel –

“... in Isaiah the Hebrew accent makes the fullest stop of the hemistich after ἐπιστρέψωσι [*epistrephosi*], should be converted [and so ἰάσομαι [*iasomai*] becomes distinguished from the contingent relation of the previous verbs, and is made a positive assertion].”

Note: *epistrephosi* (should turn) is the last word in the Greek of the previous clause.

What Bengel is saying is that translators tend to make the last clause contingent upon the rest of the verse: “If they did this, then I will do that.” However, the clauses are actually not connected at all in this way. Rather, it should be read as -

“For has fattened, the heart of this people,  
And the ears, sluggishly they hear,  
And their eyes, they have closed –  
Lest when the eyes: they should see,  
And the ears: they should hear,

And the heart: they should understand,  
And they should turn.  
And I will heal them.”

In other words, this is a prophecy based on the hardness of the hearts of the Jewish people. Their hearts have grown dull, their ears are hard of hearing, their eyes have closed. Now the Lord will take action to heal them.

In the previous clauses is found the truth that if they did see, hear, and understand, they would be healed. But on their own, this won't happen. The “WILL” of the final clause, being in the future indicative, makes it a positive assertion, *kai iasomai autous* – “AND I WILL HEAL THEM.”

This then means that the Lord's plans for Israel are judgment leading to repentance. Explained differently, a second exile leading to restoration. It has never been the purpose of God to reject the nation of Israel who rejected Him. Instead, it was, is, and continues to be the purpose of God to bring about their healing and restoration.

The chiasmic structure of the verse is a vital clue that shows that the last clause is independent of the others.

The Expositor's Greek Testament notes, “It is significant that Luke the physician should thus cite as almost the last words of his record a prophecy ending with *ἰάσομαι* [*iasomai*] = I WILL.”

The great Physician will heal in His own perfect timing. The Lord, through Isaiah and as cited by Paul, notes that it will come about.

Life application: It is not hard to see our own nations as resembling that of Israel. This is especially so watching the liberal left conduct their affairs. Their hearts are totally fattened to the plight of the unborn, those harmed by crime, and the injustice of over-taxation.

Their ears cannot hear cries for justice or right conduct. Their eyes are closed to anything moral and upright, instead they alight upon wickedness and perversion, drawing it into their mind and becoming more depraved with each day that passes.

There is a point where this state will no longer change. The people become so depraved that nothing will change them. When this state arrives, only judgment is left for them.

This was the state at the time of the flood. It is the state that Jesus says the world will be like before He returns. And this state includes Israel ever since they rejected Jesus.

The prophecy, as it is recorded in Acts, shows that they will not voluntarily turn to the right path, meaning calling on Jesus, until the Lord acts. This is exactly what the Bible says is coming. The prophets proclaim it and the book of Revelation places His actions on prominent display.

The purpose of the tribulation period is to bring Israel to the point where they will finally turn and call out to the Lord. This will not be an action initiated by them. Rather, the tribulation and resulting judgment is His action that then results in their turning.

We do not save ourselves. Jesus did the work, we then turn to Him, and in our turning, we are saved. The process is of the Lord. We acknowledge that and He heals. This is how it is at all times.

The Lord is the One to receive the credit for salvation. There are no works involved. Rather, there is an appeal for mercy based upon His goodness. When the turning comes and the appeal is made, God heals.

*Lord God, help us to understand that we cannot work our way back to You. We are corrupt and incapable of doing what is needed to please You. But Jesus has done it all. When we realize that our judgment was laid upon Him, how can we not turn to You? Thank You, O God, for Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**“Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” Acts 28:28**

More literally, it reads, “Therefore, be it known to you that the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear” (CG).

Paul just completed citing the words of Isaiah, noting the hardened state of the Jewish nation. A time will come when they will hear the gospel, but at this time, they are in a state where they are unwilling – as a nation – to accept it. Therefore, Paul next says, “Therefore, be it known to you.”

He is speaking to his people, the Jews, who had come to hear his words as was recorded in the previous verses. They had asked to hear Paul on the subject, he appointed a day

for them to come and meet, and he had spent the entire day going over the evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. However, they could not mutually agree on his words.

It was because of this that he cited his words of Isaiah to them. With that done, he continues his words to them now, saying, “that the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles.”

Unlike many translations, the tense of the verb is aorist, not present. Paul has been proclaiming the message of Jesus to the Gentiles for years. He would continue to do so as well. With that stated, he next changes to the future tense, saying, “and they will hear.”

The message was sent. Paul knows personally that they had received it openly. However, he also knows that even in the future, the Gentiles will hear and respond. This then is set in parallel to his citation of Isaiah in the previous verse –

- 27. And I will heal them [the Jewish nation].
- 28. And they will hear [the Gentiles].

God’s plan will come about for both Jew and Gentile. His foreknowledge of these matters is on prominent display.

Understanding that the Jews were going to be healed of their stubborn refusal, a “healing” which would first require being cut off from God’s family and mercy for an unknown duration, God would do a new thing during that period.

It actually began at the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch as recorded in Acts 8. It was then especially highlighted at the house of Cornelius in Acts 10. From there, it had been growing in movement since that time under the auspices of Paul's amazing apostleship.

The salvation of God in Christ would go fully to the Gentiles of the world. The new thing then is a prominent focus of the plan of redemption being worked not through and for the Jews, but through and for the Gentiles. This is painstakingly explained by Paul in Romans 9-11.

The result of the salvation of God being sent to the Gentiles is that they will hear it. But this means more than having audible sounds resonate in their ears. The word is used figuratively “to hear God's voice which prompts Him to birth faith within” (HELPS Word

Studies). They will hear the message, and they will respond in faith, believing and being saved.

Paul's words in the future tense, then, were more than an assertion of expectancy. They form a prophetic utterance. He had seen the hope and joy of the Gentiles as they heard the message of Christ proclaimed. He was aware of the prophecies of Scripture which told of their coming trust in the Lord and the resulting blessing upon them (Isaiah 49:6, e.g.), and he was filled with the Spirit of God as he uttered the words which would secure for God a church led by the Gentiles and which has endured for almost two thousand years.

As we approach the sure end of this dispensation, the words of the previous verse are now ready to come true. God said He would heal them. At this time, Jews are now turning to Christ in an immense way. Someday the nation as a whole, as identified in the singular during Isaiah's quote, will come to pass. The plan of the ages is coming to its fulfillment now in our very lifetime.

Life application: The first chapters of Joshua, especially Chapters 3 and 4, typologically anticipate the time when Israel will, as a nation, finally come to Christ. Throughout the Old Testament, both in typology and in clear prophetic utterances, the national salvation of Israel is clearly seen.

It is hard to imagine how people in the church today cannot accept this. There was a time when the Jews were so scattered as a people that it seemed impossible that they could ever be regathered as a nation.

And more, the land of Israel was so barren and useless that nobody thought it would ever have any value again. Though inhabited by some, it was a land of utter desolation, heat, and almost no productivity at all.

However, God began to stir the heart of the Jewish people. They began to return there and work the land so that it began to be productive. During this time, those in the church who accepted the words of Scripture concerning the return of the Jews to the land as being literal began to support the process.

The modern Zionist movement is not an aberration. Rather, it is the fulfillment of God's utterances, found right in His word. Let us accept that God is doing something great in the world. Despite Israel's unfaithfulness to Him, the Lord is demonstrating His

faithfulness to them. In doing so, He is showing us that His word is true and that He can be trusted in the greater promises He has given to us.

The hope of eternal life is not a pipe dream for people to relieve their sadness concerning the futility of existence. Rather, it is a principle tenet promised to the people of God as is recorded in His sacred word. He is faithful and He will do it. Thank God for Jesus who has made this possible.

*Lord God Almighty, You have spoken and Your word is true. What it proclaims will come to pass. We can be absolutely certain of this. You have shown us time and again, right from Your word, that You can be trusted. Why should we not consider that the future promises are equally reliable? We do! Praise to You, O God. We trust Your word because we trust You! Amen.*

**And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. Acts 28:29**

More literally, it reads, "And he, having said these, the Jews departed, having much disputation among themselves" (CG).

In the previous verse, Paul proclaimed to the Jews who had heard his presentation of Christ Jesus, "Therefore, be it known to you that the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear" (CG).

Now, Luke records, "And he, having said these, the Jews departed."

This verse is omitted in some manuscripts, and it is missing from some modern translations because of that (such as the ESV). Doctrinally, it doesn't change anything either way.

However, if it belongs in the Bible, and it seems unlikely that such a verse would be arbitrarily added, it shows that some Jews were convinced of the truth of the matter concerning Christ, or they at least wanted to search out the matter further. That is indicated in the next words, "having much disputation among themselves."

In this clause is a word found only here in Scripture, *suzétésis*. It is a noun referring to a disputation or a mutual questioning. These Jews found themselves questioning what Paul had shown them from Scripture, and there was not an agreement fully decided among them.



Such a dispute would lead, as it always did, to a dividing of the people. There would be some coming to salvation while others continued on the path to condemnation. As Romans 11:5 says that there is a remnant of Jews saved by grace, and as Romans was written for the maintenance of the entire Gentile-led church age, then it remains true that the Jews have not been rejected entirely.

The dispute among them remains to this day, but the movement of the Spirit among the Jews is expanding almost exponentially. The truth of salvation through the shed blood of Christ is finally taking deep roots among His long-wayward people. Healing for the nation is coming and Christ is coming to reign among them.

Until then, this dispute continues on. Many who come to Christ are shunned by family and friends, but Jesus told them that such a cost was to be expected.

Life application: In a society where Christ is openly accepted, one can expect less trouble coming to salvation through faith in the gospel. In fact, quite often exactly the opposite is the case. When a person makes a commitment to Christ, the family rejoices, but when Jesus is rejected, there is true sadness at the anticipated loss.

However, even in openly Christian societies, there are those who come to Jesus out of Islam or Judaism and the family is often angry. Depending on the family, it may even mean excommunication or death.

Muslims, in particular, have a written code that calls for those who leave the faith to be killed. It is not always carried out, but that is because they are not fulfilling the writings of their own religion. For example, this is what it says in Wikipedia concerning this matter –

“Death penalty is the traditional form of punishment for both male and female apostates for leaving Islam. Ja‘fari or Imāmī school – Male apostates must be executed, while female apostates must be held in solitary confinement until they repent and return to Islam. Apostasy from Islam is considered a hudud crime.”

This leaves people with an obvious dilemma. Will they be true to the false religion they were born into, eventually being cast into the Lake of Fire for rejecting Christ, or will they take the chance of being killed for the sake of Jesus but find eternal life through His shed blood?

Judaism doesn't have any such written code to kill those who depart from their faith, and quite often, Jews don't profess any faith in God at all. And more, Jews can become Buddhists, Muslims, etc. without losing their status as Jews. However, many Jews say that when a Jew converts and accepts Jesus, he or she is no longer a Jew.

This is a problem that must be considered. Messianic Jews, however, say that they become "completed Jews" when they come to Christ. They now possess the fulfillment of what their ancient culture always hoped for. In coming to Jesus, they are reconciled to God and are on the heavenly path to glory.

So, choices must be made at times. But the right choice is always to come to Jesus. Only He is the path that God has given for fallen man to be saved. This is the Christian message because it is the message of the Bible.

But that brings us to another sad development within the broader label of "Christian." Liberal churches have now largely rejected what Scripture says. They now say that God accepts people from many paths and that Christ is not the exclusive way to be saved.

Unfortunately for them, they are not true Christians who proclaim this. They will find themselves taking an eternal swim in the Lake of Fire along with all who reject Jesus. Be sure to get the boxes right. There is the "Jesus is the way to be saved" box, and there are all others that lead to condemnation. Be sure to find yourself in the right one.

*Lord God, You have sent Your Son into the world to bring us back to Yourself. He paid a high price to redeem us. How can we tread upon the precious blood of Christ through rejecting the offer, or diminishing the act, by saying that there is another path? We cannot! We proclaim that Jesus is Lord and that every knee will bow to Him. Some in salvation and others in condemnation. But we proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord! Amen.*

**Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, Acts 28:30**

The Greek more literally reads, "And Paul remained a whole biennium in a personal rental, and welcomed all coming unto him" (CG).

In the previous verse, it was seen that as the Jews departed Paul's house, they had a disputation among themselves. That leads into the next verse which leaves out Paul's name in some manuscripts. For example, the ESV reads –

“He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him.” ESV

Other than that, the various manuscripts generally agree. And so, after the Jews departed, this verse commences, beginning with, “And Paul remained a whole biennium.”

The word *dietia* is used for the second and last time here. It was seen first in Acts 24:27. It signifies a period of two years. A single English word to describe it is biennium. However, the Greek word is defined by Strong’s Concordance, saying, “according to ancient practice this means any period between one and two years.”

Therefore, Luke includes the word *holos*, whole, to ensure that a full biennium is what is being conveyed. As *holos* is the etymological root of our modern word “whole,” the translation “whole biennium” is as literal as one can get.

Of this time frame, it next lets us know that Paul remained “in a personal rental.” Again, we have words that are exactly translated from the Greek *idiō misthōmati*. The word *idios* is an adjective signifying “one’s own.” Thus, a single adjective to translate would be “personal.” The next word, *misthōma*, is only found here in Scripture. It signifies a rented house or a hired dwelling. Thus, the single word “rental” fits perfectly.

Luke’s use of words tells us that while awaiting his trial, Paul rented his own place. He wanted to have the liberty of engaging with others in a decent accommodation. This is reflected in the next words, “and welcomed all coming unto him.”

The verb is imperfect, indicating that people came and kept coming. He freely welcomed those who wanted to know about the things of God in Christ, and he did so repeatedly.

As for the word “welcomed, it is the Greek word *apodechomai*. This is its seventh and last use. It literally means “received from.” It is a way of signifying a glad reception. Paul was excited about people’s interest in his apostleship and message, and he never failed to heartily receive them.

Life application: At first, and from the brevity of these words, it might appear that these two years were wasted as far as true evangelism goes. But this is the furthest thing from the truth.

The often-seen theme of the Book of Acts was Paul winding his way throughout the nations and being quickly expelled from many localities by hostiles, particularly Jews opposed to his message. By being in his own rented house, he was able to receive any and all who wished to talk to him about the message he proclaimed.

The word “all” is to be taken all inclusively. He could freely talk to Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or slave owner, etc. He would be free to speak clearly, without interruption, and to substantiate his words by turning to Scripture.

Whatever this house was, be it a small room or a larger full house, it would certainly have been filled day and night by any who were curious to learn from this immense storehouse of wisdom concerning God’s word. As the Geneva Bible comments on this verse, “The word of God cannot be bound.”

How willing are you to welcome people into your life when a matter concerning the gospel or proper doctrine arises? Will you open your time up for them, or will you simply tell them to check with your pastor or Bible teacher and be done with it?

The more willing you are to share what you know, the more you will learn yourself. The old adage that you never learn as much as when you become a teacher is true. Once you start telling others about Jesus and about proper biblical doctrine, you will find yourself searching out answers and learning more than you ever thought you would.

So be welcoming! Take people into your life and be willing to instruct them on what you know.

*Lord God, help us to be giving of ourselves and our time, especially when it comes to sharing the good news about Jesus. May our homes be open, and may our embrace be welcoming as we encounter those curious about our faith. We pray this to Your glory. Amen.*

**preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him. Acts 28:31**

A more literal rendering is, “Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching these about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness – unrestrictedly” (CG).

In the previous verse, it was noted that Paul dwelt two full years in his own rental while receiving all who came to him. With that remembered, we now come to the final verse

in this marvelous book called Acts. It finds Paul busily doing what he was called to do so many years earlier by his Lord. Luke notes he was “Proclaiming the kingdom of God.”

It is a certainty that if there is a kingdom, then there must be a king over that kingdom. This final verse of Acts dispels the false teaching that Jesus is not a reigning King over the church and that the kingdom only refers to an earthly kingdom that Jesus will reign over during the millennium.

Paul teaches the present reality of the Christian kingdom numerous times, and he also speaks of it as a future reality. This is not unlike salvation itself. We are saved for a future state of eternal existence that we do not now fully possess. And so, salvation is both a present reality as well as a future hope. This is true with sanctification, etc.

As for the kingdom being a present reality, Paul says elsewhere –

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1:13, 14

Such doctrine as this concerning the kingdom constitutes what Paul would have said to those in his rental in Rome. With that, Luke next records, “and teaching these about the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Again, if there is a kingdom, there is a king. In the case of the Kingdom of God, its King is the Lord Jesus Christ. This precept is not to be ignored. Jesus fills innumerable roles for His people. He is their Savior, Redeemer, Hope, Lord, Passover, Shepherd, etc.

Each of these roles helps us to better understand and appreciate what God in Christ has done. Paul would have spent innumerable hours explaining these things to anyone who came by to hear the good news or to receive doctrine concerning these.

But considering that Paul was proclaiming this kingdom right in Rome, it is telling us that despite having real human governments and authorities placed over us and to whom we are to be subject (Romans 13:1-7), we have a higher allegiance and an eternal hope that is grounded in Jesus Christ.

Paul’s words could have caused a lot of trouble if they were taken out of the greater context of his teachings. But with a Roman guard standing right there, the context

would have been maintained and any accusations against him could easily have been cast aside.

The guard could testify that Paul's proclamations concerning King Jesus were a future hope, as well as a present state that called for him to yield to the authorities over him at the same time. Thus, Paul was safe in his proclamation. And it was a proclamation that he made "with all boldness."

Paul never shied away from saying exactly what was proper and appropriate. In Galatians 2, it was seen that Peter was stepping back from the gospel and being led astray by the false teachings of the Judaizers. When that happened, Paul gave him an earful –

"Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; <sup>12</sup> for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. <sup>13</sup> And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before *them* all, 'If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? <sup>15</sup> We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, <sup>16</sup> knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.'" Galatians 2:11-16

This is the type of boldness that defined the apostle Paul. He was unashamed to stand against those who would compromise the gospel, even if it included an apostle who had lived with and experienced the first-hand workings of the Lord Jesus. When Peter shied away from what he was called to proclaim, Paul boldly corrected him.

To this day, Paul's epistles continue to do this for us. If we, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, are willing to hold to the word faithfully, we will proclaim what God has inspired through Paul, never waffling on what he has set forth for us.

Luke next finishes the book of Acts with true flair. His writings have introduced an enormous number of rare words, some are only found within the pages of Scripture. Of Paul's bold proclamations, Luke finishes the book with the word *akólutós*, unrestrictedly.

It is an adverb found only here, coming from the negative particle *α*, and *kóluó*, to hinder, prevent, debar, etc. Thus, it signifies unhindered, unrestricted, etc. A single adverb to appropriately carry the sense would be “unrestrictedly.”

Paul was not forbidden to speak, and he faithfully used his privileges to boldly proclaim the goodness of God by sending Jesus to do all things prophesied, even from the earliest pages of Scripture.

Life application: In his own hired quarters, Paul could preach of the kingdom of God and teach from copies of the Scriptures that he surely possessed. His words would speak of all of the things which pointed to and spoke of Jesus.

The fullness of this message, however, has not yet been fully searched out. Paul merely opened up the eyes of the Gentiles to the Word of God and to the power of His salvation. He proclaimed it with confidence because he was a Jew who was regarded as a Jew, teaching a valid interpretation of the Jewish religious system which was considered legitimate under Roman law.

Because of his place and position, John Gill states -

“...not the Roman emperor, nor the Roman senate, nor any other magistrate; nor could the Jews hinder him, nor was his mouth to be stopped by any; nor could the open door of the Gospel be shut, or its course be impeded; for though the apostle was bound, the word of God was not.”

Paul was left unhindered in his speech and teachings. In reality, it was the sweetest spot for the man to be in. He was doing what he loved most, and he was doing it in the very center of the Gentile nations that he had been called to minister to.

With this, the book of Acts has come to its completion. For those who have followed along in the original publication of this commentary, it has taken you through 1007 verses, one per day, equaling a time of study and contemplation of 2.76 years. Your time with me has been most appreciated.

For those who came in later or who will read this in the future, thank you for sharing in the book of Acts. May God bless you as you read and study it and the rest of the body of Scripture all the days of your life.

This work would not have been possible without the following people who voluntarily assisted in ensuring it would make it to those who have followed along, doing this every single day over the past 1007 days:

Joey D'Andrea  
Bob Hart  
Daniel Higgins  
Mike the Web guy  
Wade Nolen

May the grace of God be with you always.

*Lord God, thank You for the book of Acts, one of the sixty-six best books in Your precious word. And above all, thank You for Jesus Christ our Lord who is the center and focus of Acts, and indeed all of Scripture. Thank You for our precious Lord Jesus. Hallelujah and Amen.*