

The New Testament for Schools

# THE ACTS

PART I. CHAPTERS I-XV

*WHITHAM*



RIVINGTONS

**THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**

**PART I**

**CHAPTERS I-XV**

EDITED BY THE REV. A. R. WHITHAM, M.A.

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IN THE TEXT OF THE REVISED VERSION  
WITH INTRODUCTION, MAPS, NOTES, QUESTIONS,  
SUBJECTS FOR STUDY AND INDEX

PART I. CHAPTERS I-XV

BY

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## PREFATORY NOTE

**THIS** edition of the Acts of the Apostles in English is intended for the Middle and Upper Forms of Schools, and aims at supplying information on modern lines, but from a Christian standpoint, and in harmony with the general teaching of the Christian Church.

It has been thought convenient to summarise in the short introductions a good deal of the matter which is distributed in the notes. But the notes will be found, it is hoped, full enough to furnish sufficient help in all the ordinary difficulties of the text, without the labour of constant reference to other parts of the book.

The questions at the end of each chapter will be found useful for class work, especially for written answers. Subjects for further study, with a few suggestions as to authorities easy to be consulted, have also been added.

The text is that of the Revised Version, by special permission of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.



## The Acts and its Author

THIS book, which is the only contemporary record we possess of the beginnings of the Christian Church, appears in antiquity under several titles, "Acts," "Acts of the Apostles," "Acts of the holy Apostles," etc. It is plainly a **Title and selected history only**; for of all the Twelve the **Plan** doings of St. Peter alone are described with any fullness, and of the others, nothing but the names are mentioned, with the exception of St. John (iii., iv., viii.) and St. James (xii.). The larger part of the book is concerned with the acts of St. Paul, while two episodes deal with the work of St. Stephen and St. Philip, who belonged to the Seven; other prominent characters are St. Barnabas and St. James of Jerusalem, who may be described as apostles only in a secondary sense. Even in the case of St. Peter and St. Paul there is no attempt at a complete history. The writer evidently aims, by a series of selected pictures, to give his readers an idea of the founding and gradual expansion of the Church during the first thirty years, beginning at Jerusalem, extending through Judæa and Samaria, and thence to Antioch and the Gentile world (chiefly in Asia Minor and round the coasts of the Ægean Sea), until in the last chapter Rome, the world's capital, is reached.

The opening verses clearly connect the book with the third Gospel. It is dedicated to the same person, Theophilus, and "the former treatise" is alluded to. It begins by **Authorship** describing more fully the event with which the Gospel concluded, the Ascension of the Saviour, and is evidently intended as a continuation of the Gospel. The style of the two books is similar, and the same characteristic words and phrases occur in both. The presumption is that both were the work of one author. And with this agrees the tradition of the Church, ascribing both to St. Luke. This tradition

may be traced at least as early as the latter part of the second century. St. Irenæus, Tertullian, and St. Clement of Alexandria are clear witnesses to it. The book is quoted in the contemporary letter describing the martyrdoms of Christians at Lyons and Vienne in the year 177. Its name occurs in the Muratorian Canon, the earliest list (180) in existence of the canonical books of the New Testament. We may assume with practical certainty that the author was St. Luke.

Our knowledge of St. Luke is derived almost entirely from a few allusions in the New Testament and from deductions

**St. Luke.** drawn from these. The Greek form of his name, Lucas, is possibly shortened from the Roman name Lucanus. St. Paul in Col. iv. 14 (written from Rome during his first imprisonment, 59 or 60 A.D.) speaks of Luke as one of those with him who send greetings. His name comes after those who are described as being "of the circumcision," i.e. Jews by birth, from which it is gathered that he was a Gentile. St. Paul describes him by the affectionate title "the beloved physician," and there are frequent instances both in the Gospel and the Acts of medical interest and knowledge, and of the use of correct medical and surgical terms. In the companion epistle addressed to Philemon, Luke is again mentioned as a "fellow-worker." In St. Paul's last epistle (2 Tim. iv. 11), Luke appears as the only one of his friends who had remained faithful during his second imprisonment: "Only Luke is with me." From the introductory verses of the Gospel it is gathered that the writer had not been personally a follower of Jesus Christ, but had received the faith from others, who were eye-witnesses. Possibly he owed his conversion to St. Paul, but this is not very probable. Eusebius in his *Church History* (ii. 11) states that Luke was a native of Antioch. Other suggestions are that this means the Antioch in Pisidia or that he sprang from Philippi.

Both Scripture and tradition show that he must have been for many years the close companion and fellow-worker of St. Paul. In the record of St. Paul's journeys in the Acts there are certain passages where "we" is used instead of

“they.” It is usually concluded from these that the writer is indicating his own personal presence. The first “we” passage extends from Acts xvi. 10 to 17, from which it seems that St. Luke joined the company of St. Paul at Troas on the second missionary journey and accompanied him to Philippi, and that he probably remained in that city to consolidate and continue the Apostle’s work after his departure. Significantly enough, the first person is resumed in xx. 5, St. Paul’s second visit to Philippi, six years later, and continues from there at intervals during the rest of the book. Thus it is probable that St. Luke left Philippi with the Apostle, accompanied him on his journey to Jerusalem, was with him during his trials and imprisonment at Cæsarea, shared his voyage and shipwreck, and came with him to Rome, where, as we have seen, he appears at his side in the Epistles. The occasional lapses into “they” in this latter part of the Acts apparently do not necessarily mean that the writer was absent. “We” seems to be used quite naturally of occurrences in which he remembers vividly his own personal interest or co-operation. St. Luke has been identified by some with the unnamed “brother, whose praise in the gospel is spread through all the churches” (2 Cor. viii. 18). Possibly also it is he whom St. Paul addresses as “true yoke-fellow” in writing to the Philippian Church (Phil. iv. 3). He may have left Rome for a time during the two years of St. Paul’s first imprisonment, to visit the scene of his former work at Philippi, and returned later. Tradition places his death in Bithynia, though whether he died a martyr or not is doubtful. He seems from both Gospel and Acts to have had some special acquaintance with the household of the Herods, and he may for a time have been a court physician.

All that we can gather about St. Luke suggests a singularly gracious, tender, and large-hearted personality, refined, cultivated, and scholarly. The Greek both of the Gospel and Acts is the most classical and literary in  
Character.  
 the New Testament. The nearest resemblance to it is that of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which the early tradition of

the Church of Alexandria also ascribed to his authorship. St. Luke appears deeply imbued with St. Paul's characteristic ideas. Himself a Gentile, he shows the greatest interest in the spread of the Gospel to the Gentile world, and in the assertion of its catholic nature and essential liberty in contrast with Jewish narrowness and prejudice. Both Gospel and Acts are pervaded by an atmosphere of joy and hope. St. Luke pauses frequently in his record to note the happy growth of the Church: and he is careful to suggest how persecutions and reverses tended to the spread of Christian influence.

The book ends with the record of St. Paul's two years in Rome, ending probably in 60 A.D. It is natural to suppose that it was completed not long after this date. **Date.** It was evidently, however, written after the Gospel, and its date must therefore depend upon that assigned to the former work. If St. Luke was with St. Paul both at Cæsarea and at Rome, there would be leisure for him to compile both the books.

As to the sources of information which St. Luke made use of in his composition of the Acts, it is clear that the record of St. Paul's journeys and later speeches must have **Sources of the Acts.** been drawn largely from his own reminiscences, and probably from notes made at the time, and also from the memory of St. Paul himself and the members of his circle of intimate friends. From St. Paul must have come directly the account of his conversion; probably also some information about St. Stephen's work and martyrdom. For the episodes of St. Philip and Cornelius, it is not unlikely that St. Luke gained something from personal acquaintance with both of them at Cæsarea. For the description of the Church at Jerusalem in the earlier chapters, in which scholars have noted more of a Hebrew style than in the later part of the book, St. Luke may have had access to some written record. But so close was the intimacy and co-operation of the founders and early teachers of the Church, that there is no reason to suppose that he might not have derived all his knowledge (as

in the case of the Gospel) from those who actually witnessed and took part in the events he describes.

The unity of the Acts has been disputed, but on very insufficient grounds. It bears the marks of a finished whole, with a definite plan, written by one who not only had a purpose, but knew how to carry it out with great literary skill. The "we" passages, which some writers have imagined to belong to a different writer from the rest of the book, do not at all present the appearance of interpolations or the interweaving of different authorities. The style is the same, and the explanation suggested above is quite adequate to explain this feature. Unity.

The trustworthiness of the Acts has again often been attacked, largely in the interest of one or another preconceived theory. There are, indeed, some outstanding difficulties, e.g. the passage about the insurrection of Theudas (v. 36, see notes), and the apparent discrepancies with St. Paul's own statements in Gal. i.-ii. about his visits to Jerusalem and his relations with the other Apostles. And again, there are remarkable omissions in St. Luke's narrative: e.g. there is no allusion to St. Paul's Epistles; and the Apostle's list of his sufferings (2 Cor. xi. 24-27) contains matters unrecorded in the Acts. But these omissions may be discounted by the selected character of St. Luke's narrative. Moreover, he may have omitted or condensed in cases where he had himself little or imperfect information. And there is no question that the portrait of St. Paul sketched with so much personal devotion in the Acts agrees thoroughly with that which the Apostle involuntarily gives of himself in his letters. Trustworthiness.

On the other hand, in recent years, the general accuracy and trustworthiness of St. Luke's narrative have been remarkably demonstrated, especially by the researches of Prof. W. M. Ramsay. The topography of the Acts has been investigated and verified, and the exactness of the writer's knowledge of Roman officials, government, and terminology has been demonstrated. Attention is drawn to these points

in the notes, and Ramsay's *The Church in the Roman Empire*, and *St. Paul, the Traveller and Roman Citizen* may be consulted. R. B. Rackham's *Acts of the Apostles* in the series of *Oxford Commentaries* is a most valuable book for the English reader. See also Dr. A. C. Headlam's article on the Acts in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*.

The text of the Acts is contained in all the principal ancient MSS. of the New Testament. The chief problem connected with the book lies in the interesting variations found in what is called the "Bezan," or sometimes the "Western" text. The principal authority for these variations is the MS. called D. 1, or *Codex Bezae*, a writing of the sixth century, named after the famous sixteenth-century reformer, Theodore Beza, and now in the possession of the University of Cambridge. The text of the Acts in this MS. differs very considerably from that usually current. These differences are often of the nature of expansions, and in some cases give very interesting further information, which is probably accurate. They are not now regarded by scholars as mere interpolations, but as probably pointing to the existence of an independent edition of the Acts. Some have supposed that the author himself may have produced two different texts of his work; or even that the Bezan text is the more original of the two. Allusions to some of the more remarkable Bezan variations will be found in the notes.

### The Jews and the Roman Empire

IN order to understand any ancient book, it is necessary to know something of its contemporary history. The events and conditions of the age help not only to understand the allusions it contains, but to reconstruct the atmosphere in which it was produced. In the case of the Acts, we must know the condition of Palestine and the Jewish people, and also something of the Empire of Rome, in which they were included.

Ever since their Captivity in Babylon (586-537 B.C.) the Jews of Palestine had been under the rule of foreign masters. Persia, Greece, Egypt, and Syria had in turn been their overlords. The nearest approach to national independence was under the Hasmonæan or Maccabæan princes, the descendants of the priest Mattathias who with his heroic sons had headed the great and successful national revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes, a Greek king of Syria who had tried to suppress the Jewish religion and to force Hellenism on the Jews. Simon the Maccabee (142-135) had practically ruled as an independent sovereign, though protected by Rome under treaty.

Palestine  
after the  
Captivity.

Palestine at the time of the Acts was no longer, as in Old Testament days, divided among the twelve tribes, or into the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, but into the following divisions.

West of the Jordan there was the northern district of Galilee, with a very mixed population, the majority perhaps being Gentiles, and the larger towns principally inhabited by Syrian Greeks. The Jewish Galileans were a hardy and vigorous race, strongly national in feeling, enthusiastic, and religious, though despised by the Jews of the south for their supposed lack of learning and refinement and their rustic speech.

Divisions of  
the Country.

Next came Samaria, a district depopulated by the Assyrians and recolonised by heathen settlers (2 Kings xvii.). Originally idolaters, they had embraced the Jewish religion as far as they understood it, venerating the five books of Moses, and professing to be the true descendants of the patriarchs. The Jews, on their return from the Captivity, had refused to allow the Samaritans to share in the rebuilding of the Temple. The Samaritans established a rival Temple and priesthood. In consequence the two peoples became bitterly hostile and were constantly at feud with each other.

South of Samaria was Judæa, with its capital, Jerusalem, the real centre and stronghold of Jewish religion and national feeling.

On the east of Jordan lay the northern districts of Ituræa and Trachonitis, a wild and mountainous country.

Further south was the region of Peræa, united politically with Galilee.

South of the Dead Sea lay the district of Idumæa, the ancient country of the Edomites.

All these divisions of Palestine before the time of the opening of the Acts had passed directly or indirectly under the rule of Rome. It was inevitable that this should have happened, for Palestine, though secluded and somewhat inaccessible in its interior, lay on one of the world's great highways of war and trade, between Syria and Egypt, and therefore the possession of it was of the greatest military and commercial importance.

As the dynasty of the Maccabees grew weaker in the first century B.C., Antipater, the governor of Idumæa, began to

**The Rise of  
the Herods.**

intrigue with Rome, and brought about the siege and capture of Jerusalem by Pompey in 63 B.C.

The son of Antipater, Herod, called "the Great," obtained in 40 B.C. the title of "King of the Jews" from the Roman Senate. Before he could transform this title into a reality, he had to take Jerusalem by storm in 37 B.C. Here he reigned till 4 B.C., dying shortly after the birth of our Lord. He showed himself a powerful, but crafty and cruel ruler. The Jews hated him, notwithstanding his rebuilding the Temple magnificently in marble and gold, both for his half-heathen descent from the Edomites, his allegiance to Rome, and his tolerance of idolatry. Herod's dominion extended over the whole of Palestine, but he ruled only by favour of Rome. Roman power made itself felt, notably in the census which St. Luke mentions (ii. 1), by which each provincial had to register his name and property and take an oath of allegiance to the Roman Emperor, Augustus.

Herod the Great, with the consent of Rome, divided his kingdom between his three sons. They ruled under the title, not of kings, but of "tetrarchs." Philip received Ituræa and Trachonitis. Herod Antipas had Galilee (excluding the coast)



and Peræa. Archelaus was the ruler of Judæa, Samaria, and Idumæa. His cruelties gave Rome her opportunity. Augustus deposed him in A.D. 6, and his dominion became the Roman province of Judæa. This was placed under the immediate rule of the Emperor (see p. xviii), and was governed by a *procurator*, who had command of a considerable military force, and resided as a rule at Cæsarea, but came to Jerusalem to enforce order at the great Jewish festivals.

Herod Antipas, the king who beheaded St. John the Baptist, and before whom our Lord appeared at His trial, reigned till 39 A.D., when he was deposed by the Romans and banished. Philip governed his own tetrarchy till his death in 34, after which it was joined for a short time to the Roman province of Syria.

Antipas was succeeded after an interval by a grandson of Herod the Great, Herod Agrippa I., who reigned from 39 to 44 A.D. He had been brought up at Rome, imprisoned by Tiberius, but released by Caligula, who gave him the title of king and the tetrarchy of Philip. In 41 the next Emperor, Claudius, gave him all the rest of Palestine, and for three years no Roman procurator was appointed. Agrippa I. was the Herod who murdered St. James and put St. Peter in prison, and whose death at Cæsarea is described in Acts xii. Though loyal to Rome, he was a staunch supporter of his Jewish subjects and their religion. He prevented the Emperor Caligula from his mad project of setting up his own statue in the Temple at Jerusalem, and he himself conformed with great punctiliousness to Jewish customs and ceremonies. The Jews forgave him his Edomite descent, and regarded his reign as a national triumph, ridding them, as it did for the time, from the presence of a Roman governor.

He was succeeded to a limited extent by his brother, Herod Agrippa II., the last "King of the Jews." It was he before whom St. Paul made his great defence (xxvi.). He too was an ardent supporter of Judaism, but also a firm friend of Rome. After endeavouring in vain to prevent the final

rebellion of the Jews, he retired to Rome and died in private life in the year 100 A.D.

Thus partly as a vassal kingdom, and partly as a province governed by a Roman official, Palestine during the whole period of the Acts formed part of the Roman Empire. This Empire included all the countries round the Mediterranean. Its northern boundaries were the Rhine and the Danube; on the south it extended to the African deserts. On the west the only boundary was the Atlantic, while eastward it included the whole of Asia Minor and Syria. The whole of this vast district was governed directly from Rome, and it was knit to the capital by a great system of roads, which made travel easy and fashionable, and which played an important part in the early spread of the Gospel.

The provinces under the rule of Rome were divided into two classes, called "senatorial" and "imperial." The former, nominally under the rule of the Roman Senate, as in the days of the Republic, were governed by ex-magistrates of Rome, called "proconsuls"; the latter, which included the more recent and the more turbulent provinces, were under an imperial governor—the larger ones, like Syria, under a *legatus*, the smaller ones, like Judæa, under a *procurator*. These imperial provinces were kept in order by garrisons of Roman soldiers; but both classes of province were really ruled by the Emperor, and their governors looked to him for instructions. All the provinces paid taxes to Rome—chiefly the *tributum capitis*, or poll-tax, and the *tributum soli*, a percentage on the produce of the land. These taxes were "farmed"—i.e. the privilege of collecting them was sold to the highest bidder, who exacted the tax and made what he could for himself at the same time.

There was no system of representative government, but certain privileges were highly valued and helped to cement the different elements in the provinces in their allegiance to Rome. The greatest privilege was the "civitas," or Roman citizenship, which was conferred upon individuals or families

for eminent services to Rome, or sometimes, indeed, obtained by bribery. Some of the towns of the Empire were Roman "colonies," in which had often been settled a number of veteran soldiers, who were Roman citizens, and brought with them the Latin language and the institutions and atmosphere of Rome. Certain other towns and cities had also lesser privileges of liberty and self-government.

One of the secrets of Roman administration was the liberality which she displayed towards the various local and national customs and institutions of the subject peoples. Though the Emperors were exceedingly suspicious of anything that looked like sedition, or any private association of men which might try to act independently of the State, local courts of justice were allowed to retain their powers, subject to appeal to the governor or to Rome, and religions which were thought to be harmless in themselves were tolerated and even safeguarded. The religions of the Empire were multitudinous, and only those which appeared to be seditious or immoral were persecuted. The Roman gods were indeed widely worshipped, and it was the fashion to identify them with similar deities of the Greeks or barbarians. Various Oriental cults had a wide popularity, especially that of Mithras, the sun-god of Persia (represented as an armed warrior slaying a bull), who was the favourite divinity of the Roman armies. The educated classes, indeed, though tolerating and taking part in the various heathen worships, were generally unbelievers, and philosophy had largely taken the place of religion with the serious-minded, especially Stoicism, with its high ideals and strict discipline of life. The only attempt made by Roman authorities to encourage a universal religion was the establishment, especially in Asia Minor, of the worship of the Emperor, as the embodiment of the genius and the rule of Rome.

Roman  
Tolerance.

In this vast and tolerant political organisation the Jews were compelled to take their place, and they were treated on the whole with great consideration. Their religion was a *religio licita*, and the sanctity of the Temple was respected. In

every place where there was a sufficient number of Jews, the synagogues were permitted to exist as centres of worship and instruction and administration of justice. The local councils of elders and the great Jerusalem Council of the Sanhedrin continued to exercise their powers, though the latter was no longer permitted to pass the sentence of death. The high priest retained his ancient office and dignity, though the Romans as a rule appointed or deposed him and kept the custody of his vestments. Jewish prejudice against idolatry was scrupulously respected. Even the legionaries were compelled to remove the eagles from their standards within Jerusalem.

Nevertheless the Jews never acquiesced in Roman rule; Judæa was accounted a difficult province, and the intense national feeling of its inhabitants brought them often into collision with the governors. Pontius Pilate (26-36) was extremely unpopular, and was finally summoned to Rome to account for his violence and bloodshed. An insurrection under Theudas occurred during the governorship of Cuspius Fadus (44-46). Similar outbreaks took place under his successor, Tiberius Alexander (47-48), himself a Jew by race. Cumanus (48-52) had to deal with something like open warfare between the Jews and the Samaritans, and was himself deposed and banished. Felix (52-57) misgoverned his province, and was recalled to Rome, and only saved by the influence of his brother Pallas. Under his rule occurred the insurrection mentioned in Acts xxi. 38. Porcius Festus, his successor, only governed for a short time, and though a better ruler, did not succeed in quieting the Jews. After the brief procuratorship of Albinus came Gessius Florus (62), under whom broke out in 66 the final insurrection which began the great war with Rome, ending in 70 A.D. by the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersal of the Jews.

The Jews, bitterly hostile to the Gentile world, and always on the verge of revolt against their Roman masters, were by no means united among themselves. Party spirit and controversy were rife. Two great parties stand out prominently

in the New Testament—the Pharisees, strong nationalists, and fanatically zealous of the Law, priding themselves on keeping both it and the traditions with punctilious exactness. There were among them many earnest and righteous men, but as a class they were marked by bigotry, vanity, and hypocrisy; making much of externals, they were blind to the real meaning of the Scriptures which they championed. Against them stand the Sadducees, who took a more easy-going and worldly view of the separateness of Israel. They were willing to acquiesce in the rule of Rome, were wealthy and prosperous, and at this time had gained possession of the high priesthood and most of the priestly influence. In theory they regarded righteousness as more important than ceremonial, but in practice they were as bad as the Pharisees. Their religious outlook was mean and unspiritual, they disparaged the prophets, denied the resurrection, and refused to believe in angels and spirits. Other parties were those of the Zealots and the Herodians. The former were frantic nationalists, ready to take up the sword against Rome. They originated from the rising headed by Judas of Galilee, who raised the standard of revolt against Rome, when Judæa became a Roman province and a second census with a view to taxation was imposed. The Herodians were the exact opposite, and were definitely in favour of submission to Herod and to Roman lordship. From the Zealots sprang a still more violent party, known as the Sicarii or “dagger-men,” who became prominent during the governorship of Cumanus, not only as political assassins, but brigands and general murderers. The procurators tried vainly to suppress them; in some cases even connived at and made use of their excesses. This same spirit of faction and bloodshed was displayed in Jewish politics even to the end. During the final siege of Jerusalem the defenders were divided into hostile camps that fought with one another until the streets ran with blood.

Jewish  
Parties.

The Roman Emperors during the period of the Acts were Tiberius, 14-37, a man of great ability as an administrator,

but gloomy, mysterious, and cruel, who, in 19 A.D., expelled all Jews from Italy; Caligula or Caius, 37-41, a madman, who, as we have seen, was restrained with difficulty from driving the Jews to desperation by setting up his own image in the Temple and the synagogues; Claudius, 41-54, was the friend of Agrippa, and a ruler who endeavoured to conciliate the Jews, though he too, as recorded in Acts xviii. 2, on one occasion expelled them from Rome; Nero, 54-68, perhaps the most mad of a dynasty of madmen, seems to have treated the Jews with considerable leniency, perhaps through the influence of his favourite Poppæa.

The animosity of the Jews against their masters and the Gentile world in general found vent in exaggerated and fantastic dreams of a coming Messianic age. The hope of the Messiah, which had died down in the years after the Return, revived in the last century and a half before Christ, partly through the influence of the Book of Daniel, and also of other "Apocalyptic" books. Such were the *Jewish Sibylline Oracles*, written about 140 B.C., the *Psalter of Solomon*, 40-30 B.C., and the *Book of the Similitudes of Enoch*, of about the same date or a little earlier. This last had a wide circulation; it speaks clearly of the Messiah as one pre-existing before he comes into the world and as the "Son of Man."

The older prophecies of the Old Testament, with their splendid conceptions of the Messiah as King and Priest of humanity, as the One who would redeem Israel and the world through suffering, were distorted or neglected. A totally erroneous conception of the Messiah and His Kingdom had become prevalent. When our Lord spoke of "the kingdom of heaven," or "kingdom of God," He was using a phrase which was already in every one's mouth, but His teaching concerning that kingdom was fundamentally different from that which was inspired by the seething passions of His contemporaries. They had drawn for themselves a picture of the Messiah and His kingdom something on these lines. In

the midst of increasing darkness and distress for Israel, the prophet Elijah was to return from heaven, and after three days of bringing new order into the world, would anoint the Messiah. He would be a supernatural conqueror who would fight against and destroy miraculously the armies of Rome, and reduce the Gentile world to slavery. Then would begin the golden age of His kingdom. The lost tribes would be found again; the faithful departed of Israel would rise from the dead. By these wild imaginings, which the Jews imagined to be the fulfilling of the Scriptures, they flattered their own pride and their hatred of the Gentiles. Anything more different in spirit from the pictures of Isaiah and the other prophets can scarcely be conceived. To them the restored Israel was to be the light of the Gentiles, a source of true religion, healing, and peace to a world sunk in darkness and idolatry.

The teaching of our Lord was built upon these old true foundations of prophecy; but even His own disciples long clung obstinately to the more popular ideas of earthly glory and triumph. Hence the difficulty which the disciples felt when He spoke to them of His Passion, and their despondent state before His Resurrection. "The offence of the Cross" was the greatest stumbling-block to the Jewish world, when the disciples, at last enlightened, went forth, as recorded in the Acts, to preach the true Messiah.

This dark picture of national delusion, and degradation of the ideals of the Old Testament, has indeed another and brighter side. Without doubt there were some in Israel who had studied the prophets to better purpose, and were prepared in a humble and teachable spirit to accept our Lord's teaching. Such had been the Blessed Mother, Simeon, and Anna, besides many nameless ones who recognised in Jesus the hope of Israel and the world.

Nor must it be forgotten that the Judaism of Palestine was not the only Jewish element with which the Apostles had to deal. The Jews had settled in all parts of the Empire, still retaining their separate existence, institutions, and religion.

These Jews of the "Dispersion," as it was called, are from the first prominent in the Acts. The first hearers of the Gospel on the Day of Pentecost included foreign Jews of many nations, some, no doubt, only staying in Jerusalem for the festival, but others permanently resident there. Their admission to the Christian Church soon caused difficulties of administration (Acts vi.). Many of them were Greek-speaking Jews, whom St. Luke calls "Hellenists." These had no doubt come into close contact with Greek society and thought, and in many cases were more liberal-minded than the Jews of Jerusalem. They were ready to see good in the Gentile world, and through their influence, in part at least, the Church realised her mission as catholic rather than exclusively Jewish.

The strict Pharisaic Jew was hated and satirised by the Gentile, and regarded as an intolerant and impossible person, a view for which there was some justification. But the more liberal school of Judaism was attracting many thoughtful heathen searchers after truth. The synagogues found worshippers among devout Gentiles, who, whether they actually embraced Judaism or not, were impressed, amidst the failure of heathen religion and philosophy, by the spirituality of Jewish theology and the profound moral teaching of the Old Testament. It was among these "God-fearers," as they were called, that St. Paul and others of the Apostles and teachers found sympathetic hearers, when they were repudiated and cursed by the narrow-minded pupils of Pharisaic bigotry and intolerance.

### Chronological Table

It is not possible to give a certain chronology for the events of the Acts. The primary difficulty is the date of the conversion of St. Paul, which may have been either in 32 or 35. (See article on "New Testament Chronology" in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*.) The latter perhaps allows too long a space



for the events of Acts i.-vii., and the following table adopts the earlier date, following the excellent chronology given in Rackham's *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. cxii.-cxv.

Tiberius, Emperor, 14-37. [Herod Antipas, 4 B.C.-37.]	Day of Pentecost, 29. Conversion of St. Paul, 32. First Visit to Jerusalem, 35.
Caligula, Emperor, 37-41.	
Claudius, Emperor, 41-54. Felix, procurator, 52-57. [Herod Agrippa, I., 41-44. " " II., 53- ]	Second " " 45. First Missionary Journey, 46. Council at Jerusalem, 48. Second Missionary Journey, 48-51.
Nero, Emperor, 54-68. Festus, procurator, 57-61.	Third " " 51-55. Imprisonment of St. Paul at Cæsarea, 55-57. St. Paul's Journey to Rome, 57-58. St. Paul's Imprisonment at Rome, 58-60.

### Synopsis of the Acts

#### I. *Introduction.*

- The Continuation of the Gospel.
- The Ascension.
- The Days of Waiting.
- The Election of Matthias.

#### II. *The Church at Jerusalem.*

- The Coming of the Holy Spirit.
- St. Peter's Sermon.
- The Foundation of the Church.
- A Miracle of Healing.
- St. Peter's Sermon in Solomon's Porch.
- St. Peter and St. John before the Sanhedrin.
- Threats and Defiance.
- The Church's Appeal to God and His Answer.
- The Unity and Charity of the Church.

**II. *The Church at Jerusalem—contd.*****Insincerity of Ananias and Sapphira.****The Apostolic Powers.****The Apostles again arrested.****The Counsel of Gamaliel.****Ordination of the Seven.****The Arrest of St. Stephen.****St. Stephen's Defence.****St. Stephen's Martyrdom.****III. *The Spread of the Church beyond Judæa.*****The First Persecution and its Effects.****Simon, the Sorcerer of Samaria.****Philip baptizes an Ethiopian.****Saul's Vision of Jesus.****Saul's Baptism and Witness.****Saul at Jerusalem.****St. Peter's Visitation of the Church.****Cornelius the Centurion.****St. Peter's Vision.****Declaration of the Gospel to Cornelius.****St. Peter's Defence.****A Gentile Church at Antioch.****Herod's Persecution.****The Pride and Death of Herod.****IV. *The First Missionary Journey.*****Cyprus visited.****Preaching at Antioch in Pisidia.****The Jews reject the Gospel.****Preaching and Persecution at Iconium.****A Miracle at Lystra.****Persecution and Return.**

**V. *The Problem of the Gentiles.***

Mission to Jerusalem.  
The Council of Jerusalem.  
The Council's Decision.

**VI. *The Second Missionary Journey.***

Separation of St. Paul and St. Barnabas.  
Timothy.  
The Call to Macedonia.  
Preaching at Philippi.  
Attack on the Apostles.  
Preaching and Persecution at Thessalonica.  
Preaching at Beroëa.  
St. Paul at Athens.  
St. Paul's Speech at Athens.  
Foundation of the Church at Corinth.  
St. Paul and Gallio.  
St. Paul leaves Corinth.

**VII. *The Third Missionary Journey.***

Apollos.  
Ephesus ; the Disciples of the Baptist.  
St. Paul's Success at Ephesus.  
Heathen Riot at Ephesus.  
St. Paul in Macedonia and Greece.  
The Eucharist at Troas.  
Troas to Miletus.  
St. Paul's Charge to the Elders of Ephesus.  
The Journey to Jerusalem.

VIII. *The Sufferings of St. Paul.*

- Attempt to conciliate Jewish Christians.
- Jewish Attack on St. Paul.
- St. Paul's Defence before Israel.
- St. Paul appeals to his Roman Citizenship.
- St. Paul before the Sanhedrin.
- St. Paul sent to Cæsarea.
- Trial of St. Paul before Felix.
- St. Paul and Felix.
- Trial of St. Paul before Festus.
- St. Paul before Agrippa.
- St. Paul's Defence before Agrippa and Festus.

IX. *St. Paul's Journey to Rome.*

- The Voyage and the Storm.
- The Shipwreck.
- St. Paul at Malta.
- Last Stages of the Journey.

X. *St. Paul in Rome.*

- St. Paul and the Jews of Rome.
- St. Paul's Work in Rome.

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

## I. Introduction

*The Continuation of the Gospel (i., 1-5)*

1 THE <sup>1</sup>former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and  
2 to teach, until the day in which he was received up, after that he had given commandment through the <sup>2</sup>Holy Ghost unto the apostles

<sup>1</sup> Gr. *first*.

<sup>2</sup> Or, *Holy Spirit*: and so throughout this book.

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i. 1 **The former treatise.** Without doubt this refers to the Gospel according to St. Luke, also dedicated to Theophilus. The two books are certainly by the same writer, and are closely connected.

**Theophilus.** Nothing is known of this person beyond what can be gathered from the opening verses of the Gospel, where he is addressed by the title "most excellent," a title given to those in high office, e.g. the Roman procurator of Judæa is so addressed, Acts xxiii. 26, xxiv. 3. And he is spoken of as having already received Christian instruction. Some have thought that the name, which means "Lover of God," was merely a general address to any Christian believer. But much more probably it is a proper name.

**began both to do and to teach.** The words are very significant. The acts and words of Jesus on earth were but the beginning of His work among men, the inauguration of the new era of the Gospel. They were continued without break in the doings and teaching of His Apostles, and though His visible presence was removed, it was He Himself still who was the real Worker and Teacher.

2 **commandment.** The nature of this commandment may be seen by referring to the Gospels: St. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20; St. Mark xvi. 15, 16; St. Luke xxiv. 47, 48; St. John xx. 21, xxi. 15-17.

**through the Holy Ghost.** The Holy Ghost, or Spirit, is indissolubly united with the Father and the Son in the Unity of the Trinity. Jesus in His Divine nature is the Eternal Son of the Father; but in His human nature He was endowed and consecrated by a special outpouring of the Holy Ghost, who descended upon Him at His Baptism. Through this He, as man, taught with infallible truth His fellowmen, healed their infirmities, forgave them their sins, united

whom he had chosen: to whom he also shewed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing <sup>1 Gr.</sup> unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking <sup>presented.</sup> the things concerning the kingdom of God:

them to Himself. The commission to the Apostles to evangelise the world and establish the Christian Church is thus by the living link of the Holy Spirit united with the personal work of the Incarnate Son. Cp. especially St. John xx. 22.

**the Apostles whom he had chosen.** Our Lord had chosen out of His disciples a company of twelve, whom He trained in the knowledge of Himself and of His teaching, with the definite purpose of sending them forth to continue His work. The title "Apostle," literally, one "sent forth," an envoy or commissioner, was given them by Himself (St. Luke vi. 13). The word was already familiar to the Jews, as applied to any one sent officially from Jerusalem on some religious mission, e.g. to collect the Temple tribute.

**3 by many proofs.** The word for "proofs" is a strong one, hence rendered in A.V. "infallible proofs": such evidence as could not be gainsaid or explained away. He not only appeared before their eyes, walked and talked and ate with them, but even invited them to touch His body that they might have perfect certainty of its objective reality.

**by the space of forty days.** The appearances were not continuous during this period, but occurred at intervals in different surroundings and to various witnesses. Some ten or eleven such appearances may be collected from the Gospels and St. Paul's statements in I Cor. xv. St. Luke here corrects what might wrongly have been deduced from the very compressed narrative of his Gospel. From xxiv. 36-51 it might conceivably have been thought that all the appearances and the Ascension itself took place on the same day, as no notes of time are given.

**the things concerning the Kingdom of God.** The Kingdom of God was the great subject of the preaching of Jesus Christ. The prophets of the O.T. had foretold the coming of God Himself upon earth and the establishment of a new era, in which the sovereignty of God would be acknowledged by all; a kingdom of peace and righteousness and happiness under the divinely anointed Deliverer or Messiah. Cp. Is. ix. 6-7, xxxii.; Dan. ii. 44, vii. 9-27; Zech. xiv. 9. This kingdom was the eager hope of the later Jews, but they entirely perverted its meaning. They imagined it as a great world-empire, in which the Messiah would crush the Romans and reduce all the Gentiles to servitude, and reign at Jerusalem over a restored and triumphant Israel.

Our Lord devoted Himself to the teaching of a truer conception of this kingdom. It was not to be a worldly triumph of Judaism, but a

4 and, <sup>1</sup>being assembled together with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, *said he*, ye <sup>1</sup>Or, *eating with them.*  
 5 heard from me: for John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized <sup>2</sup>with the Holy <sup>3</sup>Or, *in.* Ghost not many days hence.

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new relation between God and man, beginning inwardly in the soul, by repentance and a new birth; but also manifested outwardly in a new world-wide society, the Catholic Church, which, like leaven, would permeate and influence the world, and, like the mustard seed, from very small beginnings, would grow to something very great. It was to establish and develop this "kingdom of God" in the world that our Lord was now sending forth and empowering His Apostles. We are not told in detail what the teaching was that He gave during these forty days. But we may reasonably look upon the developments seen in the Acts, the organisation of the Church, the sacraments, the ministry, the admission of the Gentiles to the full privileges of the Gospel, as being based upon these instructions given after the Resurrection.

**4 being assembled together with them.** The word "assembled" is a very rare one, and of rather uncertain meaning. It has been interpreted also to mean "while eating with them." Cp. St. Luke xxiv. 41-43; St. John xxi.; and Acts x. 41.

**not to depart from Jerusalem.** St. Luke does not allude to the going of the disciples to Galilee, which is clearly mentioned in St. Matt. xxviii., St. Mark xvi. 7, and St. John xxi. He concentrates attention on the great event of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Jerusalem.

**the promise of the Father.** This is a definite link with the closing verses of St. Luke's Gospel, where the same expression is used. Its meaning is to be disclosed in the next chapter.

**ye heard from me.** As e.g. in St. Luke xii. 12; St. John xiv. 16, 17, 26, xv. 26, xvi. 7-14.

**5 for John indeed baptized with water.** Each of the four Gospels contains an account of this baptism of John, the herald of Christ. Baptism, immersion in water, was a rite familiar to the Jews. Proselytes from the Gentiles to Judaism were so baptized. John's baptism belonged to the Old Testament dispensation, and was a sign of repentance, in preparation for the Christ and the Kingdom of God. It could not, however, admit to this kingdom: those so baptized when they became Christians received Christian baptism. Nor could it, like the sacraments of the Church, confer forgiveness or grace. The baptism "with the Holy Ghost" belonged to the sphere not of symbols but of realities. It was the endowment of the believer with a new gift of Divine life and power.

*The Ascension* (i. 6-11)

They therefore, when they were come together, asked him, <sup>6</sup> saying, Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to <sup>7</sup> know times or seasons, which the Father hath <sup>1</sup> set within his own authority. But ye shall receive <sup>8</sup> power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in

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<sup>6</sup> **Lord, dost thou at this time, etc.** The Apostles were still possessed by the contemporary ideas of the Messianic Kingdom. They thought of it as the deliverance of Israel from her servitude to the Romans; and not only the restoration of her ancient freedom and independence, but the assumption of her sovereignty (which they thought the prophets had foretold) over all the kingdoms of the world.

<sup>7</sup> **It is not for you to know, etc.** This rebuke is entirely in accordance with our Lord's teaching before His Passion, as to the course of the future. He had taught on that same Mount of Olives where they were assembled (v. 12) that the time of His Second Coming in glory was unknown to the angels, and even to the Son Himself in His human nature. It was hidden in the secrets of the Father.

<sup>8</sup> **But ye shall receive power.** The important thing for the Apostles was not that they should know or be able to foretell the mysteries of the future; but that their human weakness and ignorance should be strengthened and enlightened by a supernatural gift of power from God Himself, that they might be able to accomplish the work for which they were being sent.

**ye shall be my witnesses, etc.** This is the simple and central feature of the apostolic office. The Apostles had to bear their personal witness before men that they had themselves seen the risen Christ, that they had the absolute conviction of their reason and their senses that He had conquered death and lived again in His risen Body. See below v. 22, and generally the sermons of the Apostles recorded in the Acts. And this witness, first to be delivered at Jerusalem, was to be carried in widening circles, until it had been brought before all mankind. The Jews, as the ancient people of God, were first to have the privilege of hearing the truth; but it was a message for every nation of the world. Cp. St. Matt. xxviii. 19. The order of districts to receive the Gospel is followed exactly in the Acts; indeed the whole book is the development of this one sentence.



all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the  
 9 earth. And when he had said these things, as they were  
 looking, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of  
 10 their sight. And while they were looking stedfastly into  
 heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white  
 11 apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand  
 ye looking into heaven? this Jesus, which was received up  
 from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye  
 beheld him going into heaven.

**9 he was taken up.** St. Luke had already recorded the Ascension at the end of his Gospel. Here he describes it again, with a little more detail, evidently seeing in it the link between heaven and earth, between the powers and activities of the glorified Christ and the work of His Church on earth. The Ascension was not the end of our Lord's work for men, but a new beginning, the inauguration of His kingdom on earth, of which He Himself is head in heaven.

The event is described with great simplicity and reserve. Eyewitnesses related what they actually saw happen. It is idle to complain, as some have done, that we have no right to assume that "heaven" is above the sky. God in His revelation to men deals with them as they are, in accordance with the stage of knowledge they have reached, and in accordance with their own natural instincts. In no other way could the Apostles have received ocular demonstration of the fact that Christ in His human nature had returned to the glory of the Father, except by seeing Him enter that sky to which men instinctively look up as the abode of God.

**10 two men stood by them in white apparel.** So also it is recorded in the Gospels that the fact of the Resurrection was announced to the women by angels. White clothing was anciently associated with joy and festivity.

**11 why stand ye looking into heaven.** So again the women who visited the sepulchre on Easter morning had been turned away by the angels, from a mere wonder-struck gazing at the empty tomb to the duty of bearing the news to others. Here the Apostles are gently reminded that their work lies before them on earth, the preparation for the great return of the ascended Lord.

**in like manner.** The Second Advent of Christ will be in many ways very different from His departure: but it will at least be alike in this, that He will appear again in His human nature. He will be the same "Son of man." It is noticeable that the angels speak of Him by His human name "Jesus." Cp. Heb. xiii. 8.

*The Days of Waiting* (i. 12-14)

Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called 12 Olivet, which is nigh unto Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey off. And when they were come in, they went up into the upper 13 chamber, where they were abiding; both Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphæus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas *the son* of James. 14 These all with one accord continued stedfastly in prayer, 14

**12 the Mount called Olivet.** The Mount of Olives on the east side of Jerusalem would be full of memories to the disciples. There the Lord had ridden in triumph from Bethany and had wept over Jerusalem and its coming doom; there He had spoken the great discourse about His Second Coming and the end of the world; and there too was the garden of Gethsemane, the scene of His agony, His arrest, and the failure and flight of His followers.

**a sabbath day's journey off.** On the Sabbath a Jew was permitted only to walk for a short distance, about 2000 yards. It has been thought that this expression implies that the Ascension took place on a Sabbath, or Saturday. But probably "a Sabbath day's journey" was a common phrase. The Church, reckoning the forty days exactly from Easter, has fixed Thursday as the day for the commemoration of the Ascension, ten days before Pentecost.

**13 the upper chamber.** Evidently some well-known room, possibly that in which the Last Supper had been held, though the word in the original is different. It may have been in the house of Mary, the mother of St. Mark, which appears (xii.) as a place of Christian assemblage.

**both Peter and John, etc.** The list of the names of the Eleven is the same as in St. Luke vi.—with a slight variation in the order. Bartholomew is probably the same as St. John's Nathanael. The title Zealot means that Simon had belonged at some time to the party of extreme Jewish nationalists, which arose at the time of the rebellion of Judas of Galilee (A.D. 6) against the Roman taxation. The alternative title, "the Cananean" (SS. Matthew and Mark), is the Aramaic equivalent of Zealot, and has nothing to do with Canaan. Judas the son of James, apparently the same as the Thaddæus of St. Matthew and St. Mark, is not to be identified with Jude, the brother of the Lord, the author of the epistle. (See below.)

**14 continued stedfastly in prayer.** St. Luke xxiv. 53 mentions the Temple as the place of this prayer. (See below iii. 1.)

<sup>1</sup>with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, <sup>1</sup> Or, with certain women.  
and with his brethren.

*The Election of Matthias* (i. 15-26)

15 And in these days Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren, and said (and there was a multitude of

with the women. Probably among them were the women whom St. Luke had mentioned previously (viii. 2-3) as accompanying Jesus from Galilee. From the first, Christianity gave a new dignity and prominence to women. They appear in the Gospels, especially in St. Luke, as the most faithful and loved disciples of the Lord; and in the latter part of the N.T. as eager and zealous Christian workers.

**Mary the mother of Jesus.** This is the last allusion in the N.T. to the Blessed Virgin, and it is characteristic of St. Luke to mention her, for he alone has recorded the circumstances of the Incarnation, having probably received them directly from herself. Separated from her Son during His later ministry, she stood by His Cross, and was commended by His dying words to the care of St. John. Tradition tells that she spent the latter part of her life at Ephesus, though no doubt she remained at Jerusalem until the Apostles left the city, and would be revered by all Christians as the mother of the Church, as she was also *Theotokos*,—the mother of Him who was truly God.

**his brethren.** The names of these "brethren" are given in the Gospels as James, Joseph, Judas and Simon. St. John tells us (vii. 5) that during our Lord's ministry they did not believe in Him. But a change came upon them after the Resurrection, no doubt through the influence of James, to whom the risen Lord had appeared (1 Cor. xv. 7). It is clear, however, that none of them belonged to the Twelve.

A controversy has existed since the early days of the Church as to this relationship between them and our Lord. The constant and almost unanimous belief of the Church has been that St. Mary was "Ever-Virgin," and had no other children but our Lord. Two theories have been held by the orthodox as to these brethren: (1) that they were the sons of a sister of the Blessed Virgin, and thus cousins of our Lord, cousins being often spoken of as brethren; (2) that they were the sons of St. Joseph by a former wife, before he became the husband of Mary. This seems the more probable, and is the earliest explanation. Of the four, nothing further is known of Joseph and Simon, but James became exceedingly prominent in the Church of Jerusalem, and he and Judas were probably the authors of the two epistles that bear their names.

15 Peter stood up. St. Peter's name stands at the head of the lists

<sup>1</sup>persons gathered together, about a hundred and twenty), <sup>16</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gr. *names*. Brethren, it was needful that the scripture should be fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost spake before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who was guide to them

that took Jesus. For he was numbered among us, <sup>17</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Or, *lot*. and received his <sup>2</sup>portion in this ministry. (Now <sup>18</sup> this man obtained a field with the reward of his iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the <sup>19</sup> dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch that in their language that field was called Akeldama, that is, The field of blood.) For <sup>20</sup> it is written in the book of Psalms,

of the Twelve; and from the first after his restoration (St. John *xxi*.) he takes the first place and the lead.

**about a hundred and twenty.** This was the number of the believers in Jerusalem: but there were many more in different places, and especially in Galilee. St. Paul (1 Cor. *xv*.) mentions an appearance of the risen Lord to "more than five hundred brethren at once." The word "Brethren" should be noted. All believers are henceforth one family.

**16 it was needful that the Scripture should be fulfilled.** The discourses of our Lord to the disciples after His Resurrection, as well as before, dwelt much on a right understanding of the O.T., especially as bearing on the sufferings of the Christ. St. Peter and the waiting disciples were evidently pondering these matters, and realising the purpose of God as unfolded in prophecy. The psalms about to be quoted, *lxix*. and *cix*., describe the persecutions of the Righteous, and the retribution which is to fall on his enemies. The writers were inspired by the Holy Ghost, and though the words may have referred to some contemporary events, they were "fulfilled," i.e. gained their full and deepest meaning, in the Passion and Death of the One who is alone truly "righteous."

**18 Now this man obtained a field, etc.** This explanation is parenthetical, the words of the writer, not part of St. Peter's speech. St. Luke's account of the miserable end of Judas Iscariot differs somewhat from that given by St. Matthew (*xxvii*.), who states that the traitor hanged himself, and the field was purchased by the chief priests with his blood money. Probably the two versions would be reconcilable if we knew all the circumstances. Perhaps Judas had intended to buy the field, and the priests only completed the purchase. He may have hanged himself on this actual spot, and by the breaking of the rope died in the dreadful manner described in the text.

**19 Akeldama.** Originally the ground had been known as the Potters'

Let his habitation be made desolate,  
And let no man dwell therein ;

and,

His <sup>1</sup>office let another take.

<sup>1</sup> Gr. *over-  
seership.*

- 21 Of the men therefore which have companied with us all the  
time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out <sup>2</sup>among us,  
22 beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day <sup>3</sup>Or, *over.*  
that he was received up from us, of these must one  
23 become a witness with us of his resurrection. And they put  
forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was surnamed

Field. The tragedy which took place in connection with it led to the popular change of name. "Their language" means Aramaic, lit. Syrian, the dialect of Hebrew which the later Jews spoke, and which is used in some parts of the book of Daniel.

20 **Let his habitation be made desolate.** Ps. llix. 25. One of the curses pronounced upon the malignant persecutors of the righteous. These "curses" of the Psalms must not be understood as merely expressions of the desire of the sufferer for vengeance, but as a vivid way of setting forth the divine retribution. If God is the moral Governor of the world, it is certain that He must punish the evil-doer. His righteousness is vindicated in this as truly as in the final rewarding of the godly.

St. Peter sees in these words of Scripture a picture of the disappointment of Judas' covetousness and ambition. He had sold his Master in order to buy this "habitation" for himself, and it had become desolate, a byword, a name of horror, a place only "to bury strangers in."

**His office let another take.** Ps. cix. 8. The original word means "oversight," and is connected with *episcopos*, the later name for a bishop. Hence the older English translations render the word "bishoprick." For instances in O.T. of such deposition of the unworthy holder of an office, see the cases of the priest Eli and his family (2 Sam. iii.) and of Shebna, the royal treasurer (Is. xxii.), whose place was taken by Eliakim. St. Peter sees in the quotation a justification, perhaps a command, for the election of another Apostle to take the office of Judas.

21 **went in and went out.** A familiar Hebrew expression for social intercourse and familiarity. Cp. 1 Sam. xviii. 13.

22 **a witness with us of his resurrection.** See above v. 8. Whatever functions might in the future be performed by the Twelve as rulers of the Church, their primary work was felt to be, in accordance with the Lord's words, simply that of witness to the great foundation fact on which their preaching was to be based, the Resurrection of Jesus.

23 **Joseph called Barsabbas.** Barsabbas is a patronymic, "son of

**Justus, and Matthias.** And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, **24** which knowest the hearts of all men, shew of these two the one whom thou hast chosen, to take the place in this ministry and **25** apostleship, from which Judas fell away, that he <sup>1 Or. unto.</sup> might go to his own place. And they gave lots <sup>1</sup>for **26**

Sabbas." He had also, like many Jews, a Roman name, Justus. Nothing more is certainly known of him, though Eusebius the Church historian has preserved traditions that he had been one of the Seventy, and that in later life the Lord's Resurrection promise (St. Mark xvi.) was in his case literally fulfilled, as he drank of a poisoned cup, but received no hurt.

**Matthias** ("gift of Jehovah") is otherwise unknown. Eusebius states that he also was one of the Seventy. Tradition makes him a labourer for Christ in Ethiopia.

**24 Thou, Lord.** This prayer was apparently addressed to the Ascended Christ; as "Lord" was the customary Christian form of address to Him. The Apostles had known from their experience of His earthly life that He knew the hearts of men; and as His choice of them had been His own personal act, so now they appeal to Him to show which of the two candidates He Himself has already chosen.

**25 ministry**, i.e. the function of "ministering" or service: a favourite word with the N.T. writers to describe with humility the office of those who were put in charge of the Church: perhaps with reference to our Lord's own words, St. Matt. xx. 28.

**his own place.** What that "place" was which was suited to the character and crime of Judas is left in solemn obscurity. But there can be little doubt that in the minds of the Apostles it was Gehenna, the place of final loss. Judas is probably the only one in whose case the Church has felt practically certain that his end was without hope.

**26 And they gave forth lots.** The Apostles were still living, until the Day of Pentecost, under the Old Covenant. And the casting of lots was the recognised O.T. method of deciding such a question as this. It was not an appeal to chance, but to the overruling providence of God (Prov. xvi. 33). But this was the last occasion on which we read of such a method being followed. The "lots" were probably consulted by writing the name of each man on a tablet, and shaking the tablets in a vessel until one or the other jumped out. Some have thought from the form of words used that the election was by ballot, each Apostle writing a name on a tablet, and the choice being decided by a majority. But this is not so probable.

them; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

## CHAPTER I

### *Questions*

1. How does St. Luke connect the Acts with his Gospel?
2. What is the meaning of "the Kingdom of God"?
3. What was the relation of John's Baptism to the Kingdom?
4. What are the last recorded words of our Lord?
5. Write out the names of the Apostles, and explain any differences in the lists of them.
6. What prophecies did St. Peter quote with regard to the failure of Judas?
7. Compare the account of the end of Judas with that given by St. Matthew.
8. Why was the vacancy in the Twelve filled up?
9. What was the method employed? Illustrate it from the O.T.

### *Subjects for Study*

1. The events of the Forty Days.  
Swete, *Appearances of the Lord after the Passion*.  
Moberly, *Sayings of the Great Forty Days*.
2. The importance of the Ascension.  
Milligan, *The Ascension of Our Lord*.
3. The early conception of the office of the Apostles.  
Lightfoot, *Epistle to the Galatians*, Excursus on "Name and Office of an Apostle."

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he was numbered with the eleven apostles. The number twelve was felt by the Jews to be sacred, as the number of perfection, the number of the twelve tribes; and in this case it had the additional sanction of the Lord's own original institution.

## II. The Church at Jerusalem

### *The Coming of the Holy Spirit* (ii. 1-13)

And when the day of Pentecost <sup>1</sup>was now come, they were <sup>1</sup>all together in one place. And suddenly there <sup>2</sup>came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues <sup>3</sup><sup>2</sup>parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy <sup>4</sup>Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

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ii. 1 **The day of Pentecost.** This was the second great festival of the Jewish year; called in the O.T. "the feast of weeks," seven weeks after the Passover. The later name is derived from the Greek for "fifty," the festival being kept on the fiftieth day from the Passover Sabbath. On the day after that Sabbath the first ears of the coming harvest were offered in the Temple (Lev. xxiii. 10, 11), and on Pentecost two loaves made of the new corn were offered. Thus Pentecost was of the nature of a harvest festival. The Jews also regarded it as a commemoration of the giving of the Law on Sinai. It was one of the three times in the year when Israelites were required to present themselves at the Temple; and Jerusalem would be full of pilgrims and festivity.<sup>1</sup>

2 **the rushing of a mighty wind.** Both wind and fire are natural symbols of the presence and power of God; and they appear as such in the O.T., especially the latter. Cp. Ex. iii.; 1 Kings xix.; Pss. civ. 4, cxlviii. 8. On this occasion they were impressive outward signs of the new Divine gift bestowed on men.

3 **tongues parting asunder.** This mysterious fire which appeared divided itself into separate tongue-shaped flames which rested on the head of each individual believer. It was the baptism of the Holy Ghost, which John had foretold (St. Matt. iii. 11), under the outward form of fire, which purifies, warms, and quickens life.

4 **And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.** The writer makes

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the corresponding festival in the Christian Church is Whitsunday, derived probably from the white robes of the newly baptized, the eve of this day being one of the most usual times of administering Baptism in the early Church. Others have derived it from 'wit' or wisdom, the first of the Holy Spirit's gifts.



5 Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men,

no attempt to explain the theology of this great event. He simply describes, no doubt from the word of eye-witnesses, what was seen and heard, and the conclusion that was formed as to its meaning. It was the fulfilment certainly of the Saviour's promise of "power," a new endowment of human nature by the coming of the Life-giver, the Third Person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit was sent directly from the ascended Jesus (*v.* 33). As in His human nature He had received at His baptism the full indwelling of the Spirit, so now He communicated this gift to believers, individually and collectively, and in this way dwelt Himself within them. The event opens a new era for humanity. As at the creation of man the gift of rational life was breathed into him by God (*Gen.* ii.), lifting Him above the animals; so now man is carried to a higher stage of development by personal union with God in Christ, through His Spirit. The first results of this new order are seen in the events that follow: the startling utterances of "other tongues," and the boldness and eloquence with which those who had fled in terror at the arrest, had been broken-hearted at the Crucifixion, and even after the Resurrection still clung to mistaken Jewish ideas of the Kingdom, were now able to face opposition and bear their witness to Christ.

**other tongues.** There has been much controversy as to the exact nature of this gift. It is indeed one of the puzzles of the N.T. Speaking with tongues is alluded to by St. Paul in 1 Cor. xii.-xiv. as a well-known and much coveted spiritual gift, but which, though he shared in it himself, he tends rather to disparage in contrast with more "edifying" gifts, especially charity. From his allusions it seems clear that this speaking with tongues in the Corinthian Church was a species of ecstatic utterance of divine praises, impressive, but not intelligible to the hearers. This might be quite well described, as in *v.* 11, as the utterance of "the mighty works of God." But the narrative (*vv.* 6, 8, 11) also seems to imply that this utterance on the Day of Pentecost was (1) in various foreign languages, naturally unknown to the speakers, and that (2) it was understood by the different foreigners who heard their own languages spoken. And this has been the usual interpretation that the Church has placed upon the narrative. (Cp. the Preface for Whitsuntide in the Communion Service, but see note below on *v.* 6.) A phenomenon of this sort is not without parallel in abnormal psychical states; and it is quite possible that on this occasion actual speaking in other languages was one of the features of this ecstatic utterance. But if so, it seems to have been only of a temporary character. There is no evidence that the Apostles in their missionary journeys had supernatural knowledge of other languages.

from every nation under heaven. And when this sound was heard, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we, every man in our own language, wherein we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judæa and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia,

**5 from every nation under heaven.** This is not indeed to be understood as verbally accurate, but as a general way of describing the multitude of countries and languages among which the Jewish Dispersion was found. There were representatives of these foreign Jews from every quarter of the known world residing at that time in Jerusalem, and of course to these must be added the pilgrims from other countries who were thronging the city for the festival.

**6 speaking in his own language.** In addition to what has been said above about this speaking with tongues, it may be suggested that this utterance of the Holy Spirit was understood intuitively by the receptive hearer, through some deeper channel than that of listening to articulate speech. Spirit spoke to spirit more or less directly. The hearer felt the appeal; it seemed to come to him in his own native tongue, even though the words might be strange to him.

**7 Galilæans.** The people of Galilee were mostly rougher and more uneducated than the Jews of Jerusalem, or even than those who had mixed with the civilisation of other countries. Galilæans were the most unlikely people, in the contemptuous judgment of the people of Jerusalem, to show extraordinary gifts of eloquence or learning.

**9 Parthians and Medes, etc.** This enumeration of nations is very interesting, and no doubt the narrative is designedly a parallel to the lists of nations in Gen. x., and the confusion of tongues in Gen. xi. If it is followed with a map, the general idea will be seen to be that of a circular summary of the countries best known to the Jews, beginning in the east, travelling northwards and westwards, and then returning southwards. Parthia, Media, and Elam were ancient kingdoms of the East, reaching from the south of the Caspian Sea to the Tigris, the district where the ten tribes had been carried captive. Mesopotamia was the region of an old civilisation between the Tigris and the Euphrates, from whence had come Abram, the ancestor of Israel. In later days it was the place of captivity of Judah and Benjamin, under the empire of Babylon. Many Jews had remained in these districts, and

10 in Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about  
 Cyrene, and sojourners from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,  
 11 Cretans and Arabians, we do hear them speaking in our tongues  
 12 the mighty works of God. And they were all amazed, and were  
 13 perplexed, saying one to another, What meaneth this? But  
 others mocking said, They are filled with new wine.

*St. Peter's Sermon (ii. 14-36)*

14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and  
 spake forth unto them, *saying*, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that  
 dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and give ear unto

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they were full of Jewish influence and prosperity. Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia were typical of the whole of Asia Minor (Asia means the Roman province of that name on the western coast). Egypt was full of Jews, especially Alexandria, which was probably the most learned and influential centre of Judaism outside Palestine. Libya was the ancient name of Africa, as far as it was known at that time; and Cyrene was a famous and beautiful city, of which the population was largely composed of Jews. "Sojourners from Rome" were those whose home was in the great capital, but who for the present were visiting Judæa; the "proselytes" were those of Gentile birth who had been attracted to the Jewish religion. Crete was typical of the islands of the Eastern Mediterranean, and Arabia was a wide expression including all that lay south and east of Judæa.

13 **They are filled with new wine.** Literally "sweet"; a technical name said to have been given to the first exuded juice of the ripe grapes before they were crushed in the winepress. Drunkenness was not uncommon at Jewish festivals, but as St. Peter shows (*v.* 15), the charge in this case was unworthy and unfounded.

14 **But Peter, standing up with the eleven.** St. Peter is the spokesman, but his speech is the united testimony of the Twelve. It is a loud and definite utterance of the great message on behalf of all. The similarity of the language with that of St. Peter's first epistle has often been noted, and illustrates the authenticity of the speech. But, as is probably the case with all the recorded speeches of the N.T., the writer has no doubt given only a condensed form of what the Apostle actually said. It was the fashion of ancient writers even when only giving a brief summary, to couch it in direct narration (*oratio recta*), as being more vivid and artistic. The speech falls roughly into three divisions:



- 18 Yea and on my <sup>1</sup>servants and on my <sup>2</sup>handmaidens in those days  
 Will I pour forth of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.
- 19 And I will shew wonders in the heaven above,  
 And signs on the earth beneath;  
 Blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:
- 20 The sun shall be turned into darkness,  
 And the moon into blood,  
 Before the day of the Lord come,  
 That great and notable *day*:

<sup>1</sup> Gr.*bondmen.*<sup>2</sup> Gr. *bondmaidens.*


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by some one or other inspired prophet, all men in days to come would be prophets, and in direct communication with the author of all truth. Cp. the similar prophecy of Jeremiah (xxxii. 34).

**visions . . . dreams.** These were the two normal and recognised ways in which the O.T. prophets looked for their inspiration and guidance from God. Illustrations of both may easily be collected. A significant passage is Num. xii. 6-8, where the special pre-eminence of Moses is said to be that God speaks with him directly, without the interposition of either vision or dream.

**18 Yea and on my servants, etc.** The universal character of this great spiritual gift is seen in that even slaves will share in it. This is a remarkable anticipation of the equality of souls as taught in the N.T. See Col. iii. 11.

**19 Blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke.** Metaphors derived from what is awful and mysterious in nature and human events—wars and destructions and natural portents (such as the earthquake and the volcano).

**20 The sun shall be turned into darkness.** Not only on earth, but even in those things which men count to be most stable and certain, the heavenly bodies, there will be signs of a great catastrophe. Such predictions are common in the prophets, and our Lord Himself gave similar warnings, whether they are to be understood literally or metaphorically. Cp. St. Matt. xxiv. 29.

**the day of the Lord.** The day of the open revelation of God upon earth, the day of judgment and retribution, in which His righteousness will be fully and finally seen. The coming of this day is the constant theme of the prophets. The Jews misinterpreted it to mean the day of the overthrow of the Gentiles and of the temporal glory of Israel. Doubtless this prophecy had more than one fulfilment: the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and after this time by the Romans,

And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on the name of 21  
the Lord shall be saved.

Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man 22  
<sup>1 Gr. powers.</sup> approved of God unto you by <sup>1</sup>mighty works and  
wonders and signs, which God did by him in the  
midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; him, being delivered 23  
up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge  
<sup>1 Or, men  
without  
the law.</sup> of God, ye by the hand of <sup>2</sup>lawless men did crucify  
and slay: whom God raised up, having loosed the 24  
pangs of death: because it was not possible that he

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St. Peter evidently understands it of the day of Christ's exaltation, and the offer of the Gospel invitation.

21 **whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord.** Joel no doubt meant by this that the Gentile world, as well as Israel, would find preservation in the great day of God's appearing, by sincerely approaching Him in faith and prayer. To call on God's name is a regular expression for belief and worship. The appropriateness of this prophecy to the message and the invitation which St. Peter was about to deliver, is evident.

22 **by mighty works and wonders and signs.** These are all significant words describing the miracles of Christ: "mighty works," literally "powers," i.e. works which show a supernatural power over nature or man, e.g. the curing of diseases; "wonders," i.e. startling manifestations, such as the stilling of the storm; "signs," i.e. miracles viewed from the standpoint of their spiritual significance, e.g. the God-head of Christ, and the meaning of His coming on earth. "Signs" is St. John's favourite word for miracles.

23 **the determinate counsel,** etc. It is impossible with our limited faculties to harmonise this Divine foreknowledge with the personal responsibility of man. But the facts are clearly stated side by side. God had ordained the Passion as the means by which He would glorify His Son and redeem mankind. (Cp. Rev. xiii. 8.) On the other hand, those who crucified Jesus were guilty of the greatest of crimes. Evil in God's providence was compelled in spite of itself to serve His good purposes.

24 **having loosed the pangs of death.** A quotation from Ps. xviii. 5. The original has "cords of Sheol," an obvious metaphor for the power of death. The Septuagint, which is quoted here, has the more expressive word "pangs," i.e. the pains of travail, suggesting that the sufferings of death would be the way of bringing to birth a great and unlooked-for result.

25 should be holden of it. For David saith concerning him,

I beheld the Lord always before my face ;  
For he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved :

26 Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced ;  
Moreover my flesh also shall dwell in hope :

27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, <sup>1 Or,</sup>  
Neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see *tabernacle.*  
corruption.

28 Thou madest known unto me the ways of life ; <sup>2 Or, in</sup>  
Thou shalt make me full of gladness <sup>2</sup>with thy *thy pre-*  
countenance. *sence.*

29 Brethren, I may say unto you freely of the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb  
30 is with us unto this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of

25 For David saith concerning him. Ps. xvi. 8-11. This psalm is one of the clearest expressions in O.T. of the hope of man's resurrection. It seems unquestionable that the writer contemplated restored life in soul and body after death. "Hades," the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Sheol," is simply the region of the after-death, the unseen, unknown residence of the soul, apart from any question of future rewards and punishments. The soul of the "holy one" is not to be left there; nor will his "flesh," his bodily frame, pass away into corruption, into nothingness. The natural presumption would be that the writer of the psalm was speaking of himself, but, as St. Peter proceeds to show, no fulfilment of this sort had taken place in the case of David. Whether he or another wrote the psalm, the argument would hold equally. Who then is "the holy one"? The Jews referred it to the Messiah, and Christian instinct has always recognised in the picture of the Righteous in the Psalms, persecuted, and triumphing over death, the figure of Christ Himself.

29 the patriarch David; so called, as being the head of the royal line of Judah. He was buried "in the city of David" (1 Kings ii. 10), i.e. Mount Zion. Cp. Neh. iii. 16.

30 knowing that God had sworn. The reference is to the great promise made by Nathan to David (2 Sam. vii.) of the perpetuity of the royal succession in his family, and of the special relationship between God Himself and David's son: "I will be his father, and he shall

the fruit of his loins <sup>1</sup>he would set *one* upon his throne; he <sup>2</sup>foreseeing *this* spake of the resurrection of the Christ, <sup>3</sup>that neither was he left in Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus did God raise up, <sup>4</sup>whereof we all are witnesses. Being therefore <sup>5</sup>by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath poured forth this which ye see and hear. For David ascended not into the heavens: but he saith himself,

The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,  
Till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet. 35

Let <sup>6</sup>all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, <sup>7</sup>that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified. 36

be my son." This promise is constantly referred to in the later O.T. writings, and it coloured the whole course of Messianic prophecy.

**31 nor did his flesh see corruption.** The Church has always believed that the body of our Lord, being indissolubly united to His Divinity, was preserved in the grave from all touch of decay. In any case St. Peter could scarcely have insisted on this point, had it not been part of the apostolic message that the body which was seen after the Resurrection was identical with the one buried by Joseph of Arimathæa, however changed and glorified.

**34 The Lord said unto my Lord.** Ps. cx. 1. This psalm was recognised by the Jews as referring to the Messiah, who is spoken of by the writer as "my Lord" (*Adonai*). Our Lord Himself had quoted it as a proof that the Messiah was more than the mere human son of David (St. Matt. xxii. 43). A father would not address his son as "my Lord." As in the previous quotation, St. Peter insists that a higher fulfilment of the promise of this exaltation to God's right hand must be sought for than in the glories of David himself. David had not risen bodily from the dead, nor had he bodily ascended to heaven.

**36 God hath made him both Lord and Christ.** Speaking to Jews, who expected the Messiah, St. Peter's object is to show that this despised and crucified Jesus of Nazareth is proved by His Resurrection and Ascension to be the Messiah, the Christ, and "Lord" of mankind. He dwells upon the *human* aspect of Christ. In His Divinity as the Eternal Son of God, we know Jesus to be essentially "Lord." But here St. Peter is only insisting upon Jesus being "Lord" in His human nature, having been divinely exalted to this position. "God hath made Him both Lord and Christ." This is the point usually dwelt



*The Foundation of the Church* (ii. 37-47)

87 Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter *said* unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy

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on in the sermons in the Acts. The fuller teaching of the essential Deity of Christ is expounded in the Epistles; but it is implicit throughout the N.T. Cp. Acts ix. 20.

38 **Repent ye.** In answer to the cry of the stricken conscience, the first word is that with which the Baptist and our Lord had begun their ministry. The beginning of reconciliation with God must be repentance, a complete change of mind, sorrow for past sin, and a resolute turning away from it to God. But this is not sufficient for forgiveness. The penitent must be baptized. He must receive the sacrament which admits him into the new fellowship of faith in Jesus Christ.

**in the name of Jesus Christ.** The actual formula of Baptism which the Church has always used is that given by the Lord Himself, "in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (St. Matt. xxviii. 19). The allusions in the Acts to baptism in the name of Jesus are not necessarily inconsistent with this. "In the Name of Jesus" is probably a general expression for Christian Baptism, in contrast with the baptism of John; it implies belief in Jesus, and acceptance of Him as the Christ and the revealer of God to man. "Name" in Scripture means that which is known about an individual. It is much more than a mere appellation.

**unto the remission of your sins.** Christian Baptism received with repentance and faith carries with it the complete and present forgiveness of all sins. This was a new thing in the relations between God and man. There was no absolution on earth for grievous sins under the Old Covenant. The sin-offerings could only be offered for such sins as were the result of ignorance, or for which complete restitution between man and man was possible. Only a special revelation through a prophet could absolve an individual sinner for a wilful breach of one of God's commandments, as in the case of David (2 Sam. xii.). This inadequacy of the Old Covenant is clearly stated in Acts xiii. 38-39.

**the gift of the Holy Ghost,** i.e. the same gift which had just been bestowed visibly on the Apostles and their company. It appears in the N.T. as a further endowment in completion of Baptism, bestowed by the laying on of hands. See Acts viii. 17, and notes.

Ghost. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to **39** all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call  
<sup>1</sup> Or, *having re-* unto him. And with many other words he testified, **40**  
*ceived.* and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from  
 this crooked generation. They then <sup>1</sup>that received **41**  
<sup>2</sup> Or, *in* his word were baptized: and there were added  
*fellowship.* *unto them* in that day about three thousand souls.  
 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and **42**  
<sup>2</sup>fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.

**39 to your children**, etc. The meaning apparently is not merely succeeding generations, but the actual children at the time of those who were addressed. Hence the Church has always practised the baptism of infants.

**all that are afar off**. This must be understood not only to refer to Jews who were in other countries, but to the Gentile world. From the very beginning there was implied in the apostolic message the catholicity of the Church, and the universality of the call of God.

**40 this crooked generation**. An O.T. expression, implying moral perversion; a fitting description of the generation that had fought against the truth and crucified the Righteous.

**42 And they continued stedfastly**, etc. This concise description of the four characteristics of the new society, the Christian Church, is worthy of careful study. The first is unity of belief. The newly baptized submitted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles. They accepted and held firmly the truths which the Apostles delivered concerning God, His revelation of Himself in Christ, and the gifts and work of the Holy Spirit. This is clear from the fact that at a very early date we find "Creeds," definite statements of Christian belief, used to express the faith of candidates for Baptism. Thus the first note of the Church implies *authority*. Christians do not form their beliefs for themselves, but accept them as given by the Apostles, who received them from the Lord Himself.

The next characteristic is "fellowship." The baptized were not so many converted individuals, but a brotherhood, a society with a common life and common aims, animated by the Holy Spirit, whom they had received, and bound together by the supernatural tie of charity. Hence unity, both outward and inward, was from the beginning insisted upon as of primary importance in the life of the Church. Cp. 1 Cor. i. 10-17. This unity was safeguarded by the rule of the Apostles, and those whom they appointed.

Thirdly stands "the breaking of bread," by which undoubtedly ~~is~~ meant the partaking of the sacrament of the Eucharist or Holy

43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and  
 44 signs were done <sup>1</sup>by the apostles<sup>2</sup>. And all that  
 believed were together, and had all things common; <sup>1</sup>Or, *through*.  
 45 and they sold their possessions and goods, and <sup>2</sup>Many  
 parted them to all, according as any man had need. <sup>ancient</sup>  
 46 And day by day, continuing stedfastly with one accord <sup>authorities</sup>  
 in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they did <sup>add in Jeru-</sup>  
<sup>salem; and</sup>  
<sup>great fear</sup>  
<sup>was upon all.</sup>

Communion, which Christ Himself had instituted, and which appears from the beginning as the distinctive rite and act of worship of the Christian Church. At first this sacrament seems to have been celebrated in close connection with, or even as part of, the common meal called the Agapé or love-feast, held in the houses of Christians by turn, and to which all contributed according to their means. But this was very soon changed, largely by the authority of St. Paul (1 Cor. xi.). The Eucharist was entirely separated from the Agapé and celebrated at a different time, usually in the early morning.

Lastly, there was steadfast continuance in "the prayers," by which evidently is meant some definite order of worship and intercession. At first probably the regular services of the Temple formed the leading feature in this: but it would not be long before Christian devotion began to develop liturgical services of its own. Cp. Acts xiii. 2.

Thus the Creed, the organisation, the Sacraments, the ordered worship of the Church are all contained in nucleus in this brief description of the first Christian believers.

44 had all things common. Our Lord Himself had dwelt often and solemnly upon the danger of riches, and the evil of selfishness. But there is no evidence that either He or the Apostles commanded as a general rule either renunciation of property or communism. This action of the first believers was the spontaneous expression of the new life which they felt themselves to have entered upon, the new relationship binding them together as brethren in one common family. It evidently produced a great impression of sincerity upon the outside world, and perhaps for the moment showed, as nothing else could have done, the enthusiasm and the love of the believers. But its duration was apparently short.

46 they did take their food, etc. This probably includes both the spiritual food of the Eucharist referred to in the previous words, and the ordinary food for the body, which now had a new consecration, the body having a new value and a new hope through the Resurrection. "Singleness of heart" means sincerity of purpose. We can scarcely miss the atmosphere of joy which pervades all this description of the Church; it was the new birth and second spring-time for humanity.

take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And <sup>47</sup> the Lord added <sup>1</sup>to them day by day those that were being saved.

<sup>1</sup> Gr. together.

## CHAPTER II

### *Questions*

1. What was "the day of Pentecost" ?
2. Describe the outward signs which accompanied the coming of the Holy Spirit.
3. What do you understand to be the meaning of the speaking with tongues ?
4. What prophecy does St. Peter connect with the giving of the Spirit ?
5. How does St. Peter prove the Resurrection of Christ (1) from the O.T. ; (2) from experience ?
6. What were the conditions of entrance into the Christian Church ?
7. Explain carefully the four characteristics of the Church.
8. Describe and explain the Communism of the first Christians.

### *Subjects for Study*

1. The coming of the Holy Spirit.
  - (a) its contrast with previous comings in O.T.
  - (b) its connection with the Incarnation.

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<sup>47</sup> those that were being saved. There is no touch in the original of the Calvinism that appears in the A.V. translation. It was no arbitrary choice that called new members into the Christian society. Those whose hearts were ready to accept salvation through Christ, who had repentance and faith, and in whom the work of salvation had therefore begun, were led by Christ Himself to Baptism.

(c) its bearing on human nature.

(d) its bearing on the Church.

Hutchings, *Person and Work of the Holy Ghost*.

Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*.

2. The four notes of the Church.

Swete, *The Holy Catholic Church*.

Lock, *Essay in Lux Mundi*.

Stone, *The Christian Church*.

"Church," in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*.

### *A Miracle of Healing* (iii. 1-11)

1 Now Peter and John were going up into the temple at the hour  
3 of prayer, *being* the ninth hour. And a certain man that was  
lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily  
at the door of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms

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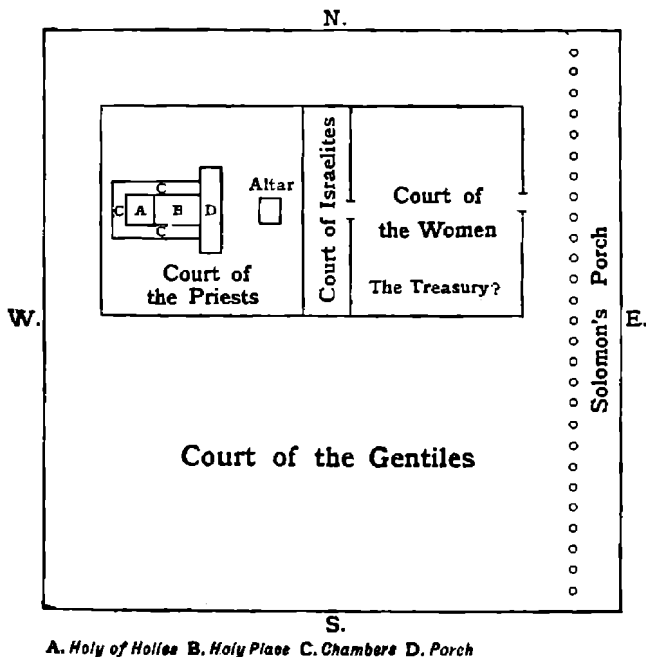
iii. The last chapter closed with an almost idyllic picture of the first days of the Church: mutual love and fellowship within; and without, a general feeling of mingled awe and approval. No breach had as yet taken place between Judaism and the new society, though no doubt it was being jealously watched by the official rulers. The Temple was still the natural centre of Christian prayer.

But a heavy change was at hand; a miracle wrought by St. Peter and St. John was the inauguration of attack and persecution. St. Luke had already spoken (ii. 43) of "wonders and signs" done by the Apostles. He now proceeds to narrate in detail this work of healing which was to prove a turning-point in the apostolic history.

1 **the ninth hour.** About 3 P.M. It was probably the time of the evening sacrifice and incense. Other recognised hours of prayer at which many would assemble were the third and sixth hours.

2 **the door of the temple which is called Beautiful.** The name is not found elsewhere, but this door is generally supposed to have been one that led from the Court of the Gentiles into that of the Women, the place where worshippers usually assembled in front of the flight of steps leading into the sacred enclosure where the sacrifices were offered. It may have been the door of the east side, which is described by Josephus as made of costly Corinthian bronze.

of them that entered into the temple ; who seeing Peter and John <sup>3</sup> about to go into the temple, asked to receive an alms. And <sup>4</sup> Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something <sup>5</sup> from them. But Peter said, Silver and gold have I none ; but <sup>6</sup> what I have, that give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. And he took him by the right hand, and raised <sup>7</sup> him up : and immediately his feet and his ankle-bones received



<sup>7</sup> his feet and ankle-bones. The words in the original are technical terms of surgery, and illustrate both St. Luke's medical knowledge and the interest he took in the exact nature of the miracle wrought.

8 strength. And leaping up, he stood, and began to walk ; and he entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and  
9 praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising  
10 God : and they took knowledge of him, that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple : and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

11 And as he held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the <sup>1</sup>porch that is called Solomon's, <sup>1</sup> Or, greatly wondering. *portico.*

*St. Peter's Sermon in Solomon's Porch (iii. 12-26)*

12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this <sup>2</sup>man ? or <sup>1</sup> Or, *thing.* why fasten ye your eyes on us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made him to walk ?  
13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God

**11 the porch that is called Solomon's.** This was a portico or cloistered walk on the east of the Court of the Gentiles. Evidently the lame man had first entered joyfully into the Temple to join the worshippers (v. 8). Presently the news spread, and as he, with the two Apostles, returned, they were met by this excited crowd who had rushed into this outer porch. Their presence gave St. Peter the opportunity to explain the meaning of the miracle, and to make his second great public testimony to Jesus.

**12 he answered unto the people, etc.** This second discourse of St. Peter to the Jews of Jerusalem does not fall into very well-marked divisions, but it is a powerful and eloquent appeal to those who cherished the Messianic hope. The leading thoughts are as follows :—

1. It is the crucified and risen Jesus who has performed this miracle (vv. 12-16).

2. Those who crucified Him in their ignorance have still the opportunity of repentance, forgiveness, and acceptance by Jesus (vv. 17-21).

3. Jesus is the Christ foretold by prophecy ; and the opportunity of accepting Him is offered first to His own people of Israel (vv. 22-26).

of our fathers, hath glorified his <sup>1</sup>Servant Jesus; whom  
<sup>1</sup> Or, *Child*: ye delivered up, and denied before the face of  
 and so in Pilate, when he had determined to release him.  
 v. 26; iv. But ye denied the Holy and Righteous One, <sup>14</sup>  
 27, 30. See and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you,  
 Matt. xii. and killed the <sup>2</sup>Prince of life; whom God raised from <sup>15</sup>  
 18; Is. xlii. and killed the <sup>2</sup>Prince of life; whom God raised from <sup>15</sup>  
 1; lii. 13; the dead; <sup>3</sup>whereof we are witnesses. And <sup>4</sup>by faith <sup>16</sup>  
 liii. 11. in his name hath his name made this man strong,  
<sup>2</sup> Or, *Author*. whom ye behold and know: yea, the faith which is  
<sup>3</sup> Or, *of* whom. through him hath given him this perfect soundness in  
<sup>4</sup> Or, *on the* ground of. the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot <sup>17</sup>

**13 his servant Jesus.** The title "servant" is deliberately chosen, as the marginal references suggest, in order to identify Jesus with the "Servant of the Lord," who is foretold in the latter part of Isaiah; the servant who is to accomplish what Israel has failed to do; to be the prophet of the Gentiles, the restorer of stricken and enslaved humanity; the sufferer, the sin-bearer, and the intercessor. Some have considered that this picture of the servant of the Lord is intended to represent the ideal Israel, in contrast with the failure of the actual Israel to rise to their vocation. But the whole description in Isaiah is so intensely personal, in chap. liii. especially, that there can be no doubt that Christian instinct from the first was justified in claiming these passages as direct prophecy of the personal Christ.

**14 the Prince of life.** This profound and suggestive title is capable of more than one shade of meaning. As the word "prince" literally means one who leads an army, it has been interpreted here to mean the first to rise from the dead. But another legitimate meaning is "author," as in the expression "author of their salvation" (Heb. ii. 10). Hence the title probably means that not only is Jesus "the first-fruits of them that slept," but that He is this because He Himself is the source of life, its originator and restorer. Cp. St. John i. 4, v. 26, xi. 25.

**16 his name made this man strong.** The cure had been performed by the actual invocation of "the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." But there is no thought in this of a charm, or of any inherent power in the utterance of a particular word. (See Acts xix. 13 for the discomfiture of those who tried to use our Lord's name in this way.) The "name" means all that is revealed to faith concerning Jesus, as e.g. that He is "the Holy and Righteous One," and "the Prince of Life." The faith of the Apostles relying on what they knew and believed of Jesus has accomplished the miracle.



18 that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But the things which God foreshewed by the mouth of all the prophets, 19 that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the 20 presence of the Lord; and that he may send the Christ 21 who hath been appointed for you, *even* Jesus: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things,

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18 by the mouth of all the prophets. Our Lord's exposition of the O.T. Scriptures after His Resurrection had dwelt especially upon the predictions of a *suffering* Messiah: an aspect which popular Jewish belief ignored. Cp. St. Luke xxiv. 25-27, 45-46. In addition to such direct predictions as Is. liii., a deeper view of prophecy would take in the meaning of the sacrifices, the typical sufferings of O.T. prophets like Jeremiah, and the constant theme of the Psalms—the persecution and hatred directed against the Righteous.

19 that so there may come seasons of refreshing. It is not quite clear whether these seasons are to be identified with the actual second coming of Christ spoken of in the next verse. St. Peter may have been expecting this in the near future; but in any case a fulfilment of his promise would certainly be found in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, refreshing, comforting, restoring human nature, so vividly described in the great Christian hymns *Veni Creator*, and *Veni Sancte Spiritus*.

20 and that he may send the Christ. The words certainly seem to imply that the Second Advent has not a fixed and immutable date, but is conditioned in some mysterious way by human repentance and preparation for the great event. Cp. 2 St. Peter iii. 12 (marg. R.V.), and Rev. vi. 1-10, where all creation and the souls of the martyrs combine to pray for the coming of Christ: a prayer re-echoed in Rev. xxii. 17, 20.

21 the times of restoration of all things. The highest Hebrew thought always looked forward to a great restoration of humanity and of nature itself. The Scriptures begin by teaching the fall of man and a consequent curse on nature, but they point on to recovery in the future. All the prophets whose writings have been preserved had some vision of this; notably Isaiah in such chapters as xi., xxv., xxxii., xxxv., liv., lx., lxi., lxx.-lxxvi., and Jeremiah in chap. xxxi. This hope was associated with the coming kingdom of the Messiah. Our Lord spoke of "the regeneration," the new birth of all things (St. Matt. xix. 28). St. Peter connects this great consummation with the second coming of Christ. Cp. Rom. viii. 18-25, and Rev. xxi.

whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began. Moses indeed said, A prophet shall <sup>22</sup> the Lord God raise up unto you from among your brethren,

<sup>1</sup> Or, as he raised up me. <sup>23</sup> like unto me; to him shall ye hearken in all things whatsoever he shall speak unto you. And it shall be, <sup>24</sup> that every soul, which shall not hearken to that prophet, shall be utterly destroyed from among the people. Yea and all the prophets from Samuel and them that

followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these <sup>25</sup> days. Ye are the sons of the prophets, and of the <sup>26</sup> *covenanted*. covenant which God <sup>27</sup> made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the families

**which have been since the world began.** The first person in Scripture spoken of as a prophet is Abraham (Gen. xx. 7); but it is implied here that there had been a succession of inspired interpreters of God and His purposes to men through all time. Cp. the similar words in the Benedictus (St. Luke i. 70).

**22 Moses indeed said.** Deut. xviii. 15. A remarkable and much noted prophecy, referring primarily to the succession of prophets who were to follow Moses, but commonly interpreted by the Jews of the Messiah. Moses himself was said to be superior to the ordinary prophets, in his direct communication with God and his open vision of Him; and his successor is foretold as being "like" unto him, and with even more absolute and universal authority. Cp. Deut. xxxiv. 10-12.

John the Baptist was asked, "Art thou the prophet?" and our Lord, after the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, was hailed by the multitudes as "the prophet that cometh into the world" (St. John i. 21, vi. 14).

**24 all the prophets from Samuel.** Although, as stated above, there had been prophets from the beginning of the world, the line of definite and "official" prophets was held to begin with Samuel, the great restorer of Israel, and the reputed founder of the prophetic schools, or "sons of the prophets," men who were called and trained for that special purpose.

**25 saying unto Abraham.** Gen. xxi. 18, etc. The covenant with Abraham is described in Gen. xv.: the Divine promise, ratified by a sacrifice, was that the land of the Canaanites would be given to Abraham's seed. The wider promise of blessing to all the families of the earth first given in Gen. xii., was frequently renewed. St. Peter now proclaims that deliverance from sin will be the great feature of this bless-

of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Servant, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.

### CHAPTER III

#### *Questions*

1. Describe the miracle at the gate " Beautiful."
2. What is the meaning of " his Servant Jesus " ?
3. What other titles does St. Peter give to our Lord ?
4. What promises are attached to the call to repentance ?
5. What prophecies did St. Peter quote on this occasion ?
6. Show the general appropriateness of this speech as an appeal to Israel.

#### *Subjects for Study*

1. The apostolic miracles.  
Collect and compare with those of the Gospels.  
Newman, *Essays on Miracles*, I.
2. The " restoration of all things."  
" Eschatology " in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*.  
Beet, *The Last Things*.

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ing: that Israel will first have the opportunity of sharing in it; and that the condition of so doing will be the acceptance of Jesus as the Christ.

26 **having raised up his Servant.** The " raising up " must primarily refer to the prophecy quoted in v. 22, as it precedes the word " sent "; but no doubt there is a secondary allusion in the speaker's mind to the Resurrection also.

## 3. Messianic prophecy.

Briggs, *Messianic Prophecy*.

Bruce, *Chief End of Revelation*.

Oesterley, *Evolution of the Messianic Idea*.

"Prophecy" in Hastings' and Murray's *Dictionaries of the Bible*.

*St. Peter and St. John arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin*

(iv. 1-12)

And as they spake unto the people, <sup>1</sup>the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, being sore troubled because they taught the people, and proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in ward unto the morrow : for it was now

<sup>1</sup> Some ancient authorities read *the chief priests*.

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iv. 1 **And as they spake unto the people.** St. Peter's speech was apparently broken short by the intervention of the religious authorities. This excited crowd gave the latter the opportunity they had been waiting for. Hitherto the popularity of the new movement, and the respect it inspired, had prevented them from showing open hostility.

**the captain of the temple.** In his Gospel (xxii.) St. Luke speaks of "captains." This official would be the highest, and in command of the Temple guard of armed Levites, with their officers.

**the Sadducees.** To this party belonged the high priest, and most of the influential priestly families (see v. 17). The name was probably derived from Zadok, the high priest of Solomon's time. The party had become prominent in the later period of Jewish history, and was opposed both religiously and politically to the Pharisees. The Sadducees were for the most part worldly and wealthy, and many of them made large incomes from the trade in the Temple courts, which our Lord had denounced. Strangely enough for a priestly sect, they professed to consider the ceremonial law as of less importance than moral duty ; but their practice was sadly at variance with this. They rejected the "tradition of the elders," which was held in such high esteem by

4 eventide. But many of them that heard the word believed ; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

5 And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers and  
6 elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem ; and

Pharisees and Scribes ; and denied both the resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels and spirits. They appear in the Gospels as endeavouring to refute our Lord on the question of the resurrection, and as convicted by Him of neither understanding " the Scriptures nor the power of God." They acquiesced in the rule of Rome and of Herod from worldly expediency, and did not share the national ideals of the Pharisees and of the Jews in general.

Their indignation against the Apostles was not only caused by fear of popular disturbance, but because the teaching of the resurrection of the dead was particularly obnoxious to them. These same Sadducean priests had, as we learn from St. Matthew, bribed the soldiers who guarded the Holy Sepulchre to spread the false report that our Lord's disciples had stolen His body. But it is significant that they were unable to silence the witness of the Apostles by tracing or producing the body. They had no weapons except lies and violence.

4 **the number of the men.** The Greek for " men " is masculine, as in the accounts of our Lord's feeding of the multitudes ; and consequently we may gather that the total number of believers, including women and other members of baptized families, was considerably more than 5000.

5 **their rulers and elders and scribes.** This was evidently a formal meeting of the Sanhedrin, or Seventy, the highest council of the Jews, which tried the most important cases, and had before the Roman occupation the power of life and death. Tradition connected it with the seventy elders appointed by Moses in the wilderness, but it was really a post-Captivity institution. The high priest was president, and there were other *ex officio* members from the priesthood, the heads of the twenty-four priestly " courses." " Elders " was a general name for the members of this, as well as the lesser local councils, a title that passed into the use of the Christian Church. The " scribes " were the professional class of copyers and expounders of the Law. The title was known before the Captivity ; but it was during and after that period, in the absence of " prophets," that the scribes attained their great prominence ; and in our Lord's time their influence dominated the religion of the Jews. It was they who had gradually collected " the tradition of the elders," a vast body of interpretations and per-versions of the Law. They had shared with the Pharisees in our Lord's

Annas the high priest *was there*, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, By what <sup>7</sup> power, or in what name, have ye done this? Then Peter, filled <sup>8</sup> with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, <sup>9</sup> and elders, if we this day are examined concerning a good deed done to an impotent man, <sup>1</sup>by what means this man is <sup>2</sup>made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all <sup>10</sup> the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, *even* in <sup>3</sup>him doth this man stand here before you whole. He is the stone which was set at <sup>11</sup> nought of you the builders, which was made the head of the

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heaviest denunciations (St. Matt. xxiii.). Their presence in the Sanhedrin was natural, as they were the accredited interpreters of the Law, which was supposed to cover every problem of religion and society. They thus occupied the place of the trained lawyer as well as the theologian.

<sup>6</sup> **Annas the high priest.** He was still in the mind of the Jews the legal high priest, though he had been deposed by the Romans in A.D. 15. (See St. Luke iii. 2 and S. John xviii. 13, etc.) He seems to have been a man of great and evil influence.

**Caiaphas.** This was Joseph Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, whom the Romans recognised as high priest.

**John and Alexander.** These were evidently well known in their day, though now they are nothing but names. It has been conjectured that they were sons of Annas.

<sup>9</sup> **a good deed done to an impotent man.** There is a touch of satire in this description of the crime for which the apostles had been arraigned. Cp. our Lord's question whether it was lawful to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath Day.

<sup>10</sup> **whom ye crucified.** To appreciate the significance of this, and the daring of the speaker, it must be remembered that these were the very men who (probably only a few months or weeks before) had wickedly and illegally condemned Jesus to death—a deliberate judicial murder which they had plotted to bring about. It was Caiaphas who had presided at the meeting of the Sanhedrin on Good Friday morning.

<sup>11</sup> **He is the stone, etc.** This is an allusion to the well-known verse, **Ps. cxviii. 22.** Our Lord Himself had quoted it with reference to

**19 corner.** And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved.

*Threats and Defiance (iv. 13-22)*

**18** Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been

Himself in the Temple in Holy Week. St. Peter refers to it again in his first epistle (1 St. Peter ii. 4-8). The original reference in the Psalm seems to have been to the nation of Israel, apparently rejected at the Captivity, but restored and set in a place of honour and strength. The Psalm was one of those selected to be sung at the great Jewish festivals, and its arrangement shows it to have been a welcome to the pilgrims entering the Temple. The Jews, however, associated this "Stone" with the personal Messiah (cp. Is. xxviii. 16), and it is in this sense that both our Lord and the apostles used the quotation. Christ, rejected by men, has become by His Resurrection the corner-stone, that which binds two walls together, the bond of union for both Jewish and Gentile believers (Eph. ii. 19-22).

**12 neither is there any other name.** St. Peter passes from the actual miracle, done in the name of Jesus, to the declaration of the supremacy and absolute claim of the ascended Lord. He is the only source of "salvation," i.e. of the "making whole," the restoring of human nature, the cleansing from sin, and the deliverance from death. No other "name," i.e. no other professed revelation from God, whether true but imperfect, like Judaism, or false like heathen religions, can "save" men.

**13 unlearned and ignorant men.** They were not what we should call "illiterate"; for all Jews were taught in their synagogues to read the Scriptures; but they had never been trained in the schools of eminent Jewish teachers. The same charge was brought against the Lord Himself (St. John vii. 15). They would thus, in the eyes of the scribes and rulers, be quite unqualified to teach. But the case of such a prophet as Amos (Amos vii. 14-15) might have given them a more liberal view. The word "ignorant" (from which our "idiot" is derived) properly means merely one in a private capacity, i.e. having no office or rank.

**they took knowledge of them, etc.** It is quite inadequate to interpret this as if it only meant that they now recognised the two Apostles as having been personal companions of Jesus. They recognised some-

with Jesus. And seeing the man which was healed standing 14  
 with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they 15  
 had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred  
 among themselves, saying; What shall we do to these 16  
<sup>1 Gr. sign.</sup> men? for that indeed a notable <sup>1</sup>miracle hath been  
 wrought through them, is manifest to all that dwell  
 in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no 17  
 further among the people, let us threaten them, that they speak  
 henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and 18  
 charged them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.  
 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it 19  
 be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto  
 God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw 20  
 and heard. And they, when they had further threatened them, 21  
 let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because  
 of the people; for all men glorified God for that which was done.  
 For the man was more than forty years old, on whom this <sup>1</sup>miracle 22  
 of healing was wrought.

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thing also of the courage and sincerity of their Master in the Apostles' outspoken utterances. They had feared and hated Him, and tried to silence Him, and they now perceive that His spirit lives on in His disciples.

16 **What shall we do to these men?** The same insincerity and indifference to truth and justice is seen in this discussion as in those recorded in the Gospels, e.g. the answer to our Lord's question as to the mission of John the Baptist. They fear to punish the Apostles lest they should shock and anger the people; but they have no desire to find out what the miracle really *means*: they only want to save their own dignity.

19 **Whether it be right,** etc. This noble answer was no light one for the Apostles to make. Reverence for religious rulers and obedience to their precepts were implanted from childhood in the Jewish mind. But they deliberately appeal here from the earthly tribunal to God Himself, the source of its authority.

20 **the things which we saw and heard.** This was the inherent strength of the Apostles' teaching. They were not so much propounding their own conclusions, or teaching theology, as simply witnessing on the evidence of their own eyes and ears. They had seen the risen Christ and heard His words. They had seen Him ascend into heaven. Conscience forbade them to be silent.



*The Church's Appeal to God, and His Answer* (iv. 23-31)

- 23 And being let go, they came to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and the elders  
 24 had said unto them. And they, when they heard it, lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, O <sup>1</sup>Lord, <sup>2</sup>thou that didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is : <sup>3</sup>who by the Holy Ghost, *by* the mouth of our father David thy servant, didst say,
- Why did the Gentiles rage,  
 And the peoples <sup>4</sup>imagine vain things ?
- 26 The kings of the earth set themselves in array,  
 And the rulers were gathered together,  
 Against the Lord, and against his <sup>5</sup>Anointed :
- <sup>1</sup> Or, *Master.*  
<sup>2</sup> Or, *thou art he that did make.*  
<sup>3</sup> The Greek text in this clause is somewhat uncertain.  
<sup>4</sup> Or, *meditate.*  
<sup>5</sup> Gr. *Christ.*

24 lifted up their voice to God with one accord. It is significant that the first corporate utterance of the Christian Church, when first confronted by the opposition of the world, is expressed in the words of the Psalms. From the beginning Christians seem to have adopted the Psalter, the Jewish book of "praises," as the expression of their own faith and thanksgiving. And as forms of worship developed, it was the Psalter that formed the foundation of the daily services, as it still continues to do. Christians did not merely find instinctively that the Psalms expressed their own sufferings and aspirations and hopes; they interpreted them throughout as referring to Christ. His was the voice of the Righteous that speaks in the Psalter: it was His sufferings and His triumph that are there recorded in imperishable poetry. And this quotation from the second Psalm is a good example of the way in which Christians interpreted all the Psalms.

**O Lord.** This is evidently addressed to God the Father (see v. 27): notice the more exact rendering "Master" in the margin. Christ is indeed sometimes called by that title in the N.T., but the usual address to Him is the ordinary word for "Lord" (*Kurios*).

25 *by the mouth of our father David.* Traditionally the whole Psalter was spoken of both by Jews and Christians as the work of David. Some of the Psalms obviously from their contents belong to a much later date; and scholars have estimated very variously the amount of really Davidic poetry in the book, some even denying it altogether. Probably there is a nucleus that belongs to the time of David; but the majority of the Psalms belong to the period of the second Temple. The question of authorship makes really no difference as far as the

for of a truth in this city against thy holy Servant 27  
 Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius  
 Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were  
 gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy 28  
 counsel foreordained to come to pass. And now, Lord, 29  
 look upon their threatenings: and grant unto thy <sup>1</sup>ser-  
 vants to speak thy word with all boldness, while  
 thou stretchest forth thy hand to heal; and that 30  
 signs and wonders may be done through the name of  
 thy holy Servant Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place 31

<sup>1</sup> Gr. *bond-  
servants.*

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Messianic interpretation of the Psalms is concerned (except possibly in the one case of Ps. cx.). The original purpose of Psalm ii. seems to have been to support and encourage the Davidic monarchy at some crisis of national peril. The heathen nations were setting themselves in array to overthrow the throne of the son of David, whether Solomon, or more probably some later monarch of his line. The Psalmist speaks of the King as the "Anointed" (the same word as Messiah or Christ): he has divine authority: his kingship rests upon an immutable decree of Jehovah, who has said of him, "Thou art my son." The reference is to the great promise of 2 Sam. vii.

The assembled Church recognises in this picture a deeper significance and fulfilment designed by the Holy Spirit. The Anointed One is Jesus Christ. The rage of Israel, Herod, and the Romans against Him has proved futile. Their attacks, though outwardly successful, were only fulfilling the Divine purpose, and leading to the triumph of the Messiah.

**27 whom thou didst anoint.** Jesus at His Baptism had been in His human nature anointed by the Holy Spirit (oil is frequently in Scripture used as a symbol for the Spirit), so that He was the Messiah, or Christ, the Divinely appointed Prophet, Priest, and King of humanity. Anointing in the O.T. was the outward sign of conferring all these three offices.

**29 look upon their threatenings.** The Church feels herself to be in the same position as the Lord Himself. His Passion is, as it were, being renewed in the sufferings of His followers. She prays that again the Divine decree may be vindicated, as it had been in the Resurrection of Christ; that the courage of her witness and her miracles of healing may prove again that all those who attack and persecute are but "imagining vain things."

**31 the place was shaken, etc.** Perhaps by an earthquake; but it was recognised as a palpable sign of God's presence and approval; and

was shaken wherein they were gathered together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

*The Unity and Charity of the Church* (iv. 32-37)

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one of *them* said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus<sup>1</sup>: and great grace was upon them all. For neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need.

<sup>1</sup> Some ancient authorities add *Christ*.

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something like a renewal of the Day of Pentecost was experienced. There was a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and a still greater boldness to bear witness to Jesus.

**32** *And the multitude of them that believed.* St. Luke here again, as at the end of ii., pauses to sketch the beauty of those early days of the Church, the unity of the believers, their generosity and unselfishness, the power of the apostolic preaching, and the clear evidence of supernatural grace in the whole community.

**34** *for as many as were possessors, etc.* Combining this with the more general statement of v. 32, we may gather concerning this community of goods, (1) that there was a universal spirit of unselfish liberality; every one was willing to share what he had, and not to press any private claim on it; (2) that the wealthier Christians sold their possessions—a very great sacrifice, for a Jew held inherited property to be peculiarly sacred—and placed the sums realised at the disposal of the Apostles. It is also seen clearly from v. 4 that this sale was entirely voluntary. As a matter of fact, no such communism is recorded in any other Christian centre but Jerusalem: it was not required of any believer: it did not permanently relieve the poverty of the poorer Christians at Jerusalem. Nevertheless its value was great for the time as a conclusive proof of the new spirit which animated the society of believers in Christ.

And Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas <sup>36</sup>  
 (which is, being interpreted, Son of <sup>1</sup>exhortation),  
<sup>1</sup> Or, *con-* a Levite, a man of Cyprus by race, having a field, <sup>37</sup>  
*solation.* sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the  
 apostles' feet.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Questions*

1. Describe the different individuals and classes who were concerned in the first attack on the Apostles.
2. What was St. Peter's reply to the question of the Sanhedrin ?
3. Describe the attitude of the Sanhedrin, after listening to St. Peter.
4. How did the Apostles reply when forbidden to teach ?
5. What was the united prayer of the Church in the face of the threats of the rulers ?
6. What psalm is quoted in the prayer, and with what interpretation ?
7. How does St. Luke describe the Christian Church at this moment ?

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**36 And Joseph, etc.** One striking example of this Christian sincerity and liberality is now described with great conciseness. The giver was destined to great eminence in the Church for his spiritual gifts. He was the companion of St. Paul in his first missionary journey, and he himself was known by the title of "apostle."

**Son of exhortation.** See margin. The Greek word, with which is connected the title "Paraclete" or "Comforter," has in it both shades of meaning. St. Barnabas used his gifts of eloquence and personal influence for the comforting and encouraging of others.

**a Levite.** One of the tribe of Levi ; but the law of Moses forbidding Levites to have possessions of land had fallen into disuse. He belonged to the Jews of the Dispersion, his birthplace being in the island of Cyprus

*Subject for Study*

The Christian interpretation of the Psalms.

Kirkpatrick, *Introduction to the Psalms in Cambridge Bible*.

Neale and Littledale, *Commentary on the Psalms*.

Benson, *War-Songs of the Prince of Peace*.

Whitham, *Christian Use of the Psalter*.

*The Insincerity of Ananias and Sapphira (v. 1-11)*

1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife,  
 2 sold a possession, and kept back *part* of the price, his wife  
 also being privy to it, and brought a certain  
 3 part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter <sup>1 Or, de-</sup>  
 said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart <sup>ceive.</sup>  
 to <sup>1</sup>lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the  
 4 price of the land? Whiles it remained, did it not remain

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v. The sincerity of the author is shown in his putting on record this terrible incident side by side with what might seem an almost ideal picture of the spirituality of the first Christians. The tares among the wheat, the bad as well as the good in the net, the traitor among the Twelve, were warnings known already that "the corruption of man's heart" would show itself even in the purest surroundings, and in the presence of the most exalted ideals. Ananias and Sapphira had apparently made the great choice, and thrown in their lot with the disciples of Jesus. But they were not "converted." Their conduct was swayed by lower motives. Apparently their vanity led them to pretend that they were giving all, and making as great sacrifice as any in the Church; while they clung secretly to their possessions, and kept part of them back. They tried to make the best of both worlds, and they lost both.

3 to lie to the Holy Ghost. The acted lie of Ananias was worse than deceit between man and man in the ordinary intercourse of life, bad though that is; it was really an attempt to deceive the personal Holy Spirit who animated the Christian community, and from whom had proceeded all these impulses of charity and self-sacrifice, which Ananias and his wife were counterfeiting.

thine own ? and after it was sold, was it not in thy power ? How is it that thou hast conceived this thing in thy heart ? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And **5** Ananias hearing these words fell down and gave up the ghost : and great fear came upon all that heard it. And the <sup>1</sup>young **6** men arose and wrapped him round, and they carried <sup>1</sup> Gr. **7** him out and buried him. *younger.*

And it was about the space of three hours after, **7** when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter **8** answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much. And she said, Yea, for so much. But Peter *said* unto her, How is **9** it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord ? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and they shall carry thee out. And she fell down **10** immediately at his feet, and gave up the ghost : and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon the whole **11** church, and upon all that heard these things.

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**4** thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. Thus indirectly it is proved that the Holy Spirit is personally God ; and if so, co-equal with the Father and the Son. Christianity knows nothing of ranks and degrees of godhead, such as were characteristic of polytheism and heathen theology.

**9** to tempt the Spirit of the Lord. To "tempt God" is an expression applied in Scripture to any profane, irreverent, or presumptuous conduct ; in this case it is the attempt to deceive God as if He were "such a one as ourselves." It should be noticed how strongly the *personality* of the Holy Spirit is brought out in this passage. It would be meaningless to speak of "lying to" or "tempting" a mere influence or tendency. The Holy Spirit is a distinct Person in the unity of the Godhead.

**11** great fear. The death of Ananias might conceivably have been regarded as the result of sudden terror or remorse at being seen through and exposed. But the death of his wife, following so closely, and foretold by St. Peter, showed conclusively that in both cases death was a Divine judgment, a tremendous warning against hypocrisy and tampering with holy things, "the powers of the world to come." This judgment was pronounced by the Apostles, and may be regarded as an example of the "retaining" of sins, a power which, equally with that of forgiveness, had been given them by our Lord Himself (St. John xx. 23).

**the whole church.** This is the first appearance in the Acts of this

*The Apostolic Powers (v. 12-16)*

12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people ; and they were all with one accord  
 13 in Solomon's porch. But of the rest durst no man join himself to them : howbeit the people magnified  
 14 them ; <sup>1</sup>and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women ; inso-  
 16 much that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that, as Peter came by, at the least his shadow might

<sup>1</sup> Or, and there were the more added to them, believing on the Lord.

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name (*ecclesia*) of the Christian community. It occurs twice in St. Matthew's Gospel (xvi. 18, xviii. 17). It was a word commonly used among the Greeks for the formal assemblage of citizens for deliberation and legislation. Among the Jews it had been used to translate the Hebrew *qahal*, the sacred congregation of Israel. Its exact meaning is a company "called out," and so it has a special appropriateness to the society called out and separated from the world by Baptism and the gift of the Spirit to bear witness to Christ by its faith and worship, and to live the new life of grace.

12 **And by the hands of the apostles, etc.** This summary of the miracles and influence of the Twelve (no others as yet were called "apostles") follows naturally on the record of the miraculous insight of St. Peter into the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira, and the Divine judgment pronounced by him upon them. In spite of the threatenings of the Sanhedrin, the Twelve continued boldly to teach in a public place, Solomon's porch (see note on iii. 11). Their teaching was accompanied by miracles similar to those performed by Christ Himself.

13 **But of the rest durst no man, etc.** This statement is at first sight a little ambiguous. But it clearly cannot mean, in the face of v. 14, that fear of the apostolic powers prevented a general conversion of the Jews. The whole of this section is concerned with the commanding position occupied by the Twelve, and St. Luke's meaning probably is that no one dared to encroach on this, or attempt to set himself on an equality with the Apostles.

15 **insomuch, etc.** This statement seems to follow directly on the words, "the people magnified them." So great was the reputation of the Twelve, and especially of St. Peter, that the sick were brought to them, as they had been to the Lord Himself.

**his shadow might overshadow.** It is not indeed stated that this was effectual in working cures ; but the faith and enthusiasm of the multi-

overshadow some one of them. And there also came together 16 the multitude from the cities round about Jerusalem, bringing sick folk, and them that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

*The Apostles again Arrested and Tried (v. 17-32)*

But the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him 17 (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy, and laid hands on the apostles, and put them in public 18 ward. But an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison 19

tude is vividly shown by the fact. And we may compare the cure wrought by touching the hem of our Lord's garment, and those spoken of in Acts xix. 11-12. The principle involved in such miracles is, after all, that of the Incarnation itself. Supernatural gifts are given to men through the medium of natural things.

16 **them that were vexed with unclean spirits.** The Jews attributed disease, especially madness and epilepsy, to the "possession" of the sufferer's personality by evil spirits. Our Lord in the Gospels certainly sanctions this belief, and acts accordingly. And the possibility of such an invasion of human nature must not be lightly dismissed. Modern psychical research and the experiences of missionaries tend to show that it is by no means impossible, and may be far more frequent than a materialistic age imagines. "Unclean" is used in this connection simply as a general word for what is morally evil.

17 **But the high priest rose up, etc.** The movement was spreading beyond the limits of Jerusalem, as seen in the previous verses, and in the eyes of the priestly party was becoming very serious. The "jealousy" spoken of shows that it was not so much care either for religion or the public peace that caused this new attack on the Apostles, as party spirit, the dread of the undermining of their own position, and the teaching of the doctrine of the Resurrection which the Sadducees hated.

18 **in public ward,** i.e. in some common prison used for the temporary custody of the accused.

**an angel of the Lord.** A similar Divine interposition is more vividly described later in the case of St. Peter (xii.). "The angel of the Lord" was a title familiar from its O.T. use, sometimes applied to a visible appearance of a heavenly messenger, as is



20 doors, and brought them out, and said, Go ye, and stand and speak  
 21 in the temple to the people all the words of this Life. And when  
 they heard *this*, they entered into the temple about daybreak,  
 and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with  
 him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the  
 children of Israel, and sent to the prison-house to have them  
 22 brought. But the officers that came found them not in the prison;  
 23 and they returned, and told, saying, The prison-house we found  
 shut in all safety, and the keepers standing at the doors: but  
 24 when we had opened, we found no man within. Now when the  
 captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words,  
 they were much perplexed concerning them whereunto this would  
 25 grow. And there came one and told them, Behold, the men  
 whom ye put in the prison are in the temple standing and teaching  
 26 the people. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought  
 them, *but* without violence; for they feared the people, lest they  
 27 should be stoned. And when they had brought them, they set  
 28 them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying,  
 We straitly charged you not to teach in this name: and behold,  
 ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and intend to bring

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apparently the case here; sometimes to the unseen power of an angel manifested in some great judgment, like the smiting of Sennacherib's army.

20 **all the words of this Life.** A remarkable and suggestive description of the preaching of the Gospel. It is a definite message, to be declared in full, concerning a new gift to man. This gift is Life, renewing body and soul; a new spiritual life even in this present world, "eternal life in the midst of time," and leading on to the resurrection. The risen Jesus is Himself "the Resurrection and the Life."

21 **all the senate of the children of Israel.** This may be only a further description of the "council" or Sanhedrin, or it may imply the presence of other chosen "elders" or chief men of Israel, who were summoned to assist in the deliberation of any matter of critical importance.

24 **the captain of the temple.** See above, iv. 1.

<sup>1</sup> Or, *at.*  
<sup>2</sup> Some ancient authorities add *in him.*  
<sup>3</sup> Gr. *sayings.*  
<sup>4</sup> Some ancient authorities read *and God hath given the Holy Ghost to them that obey him.*

this man's blood upon us. But Peter and the <sup>29</sup> apostles answered and said, We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised <sup>30</sup> up Jesus, whom ye slew, hanging him on a tree. Him did God exalt <sup>1</sup>with his right hand *to be* a Prince <sup>31</sup> and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. And we are witnesses<sup>2</sup> of these <sup>32</sup> things; <sup>4</sup>and *so is* the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

*The Counsel of Gamaliel (v. 33-42)*

But they, when they heard this, were cut to the heart, and <sup>33</sup>

**29 But Peter and the apostles answered and said.** St. Peter was probably the spokesman, but the eleven assented, and corroborated what he said. This brief speech is a summary of the two previously recorded in iii. and iv. The chief emphasis is again laid on the fact of the Resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. Previously St. Peter had spoken of Him as "the Prince of life": here He is called Prince absolutely, the head and leader of His Church. "With his right hand" is a Hebrew metaphor for a great and triumphant demonstration of favour and power.

**31 to give repentance to Israel,** i.e. the opportunity or possibility of repentance. Man cannot repent in the true sense, i.e. turn himself to God, without God's grace. A repentance which God will accept is as much His gift as that of "remission of sins."

**32 and so is the Holy Ghost,** etc. If this is the correct reading, St. Peter and the Apostles are appealing not only to their own personal knowledge of facts about Jesus, but to the actual proofs of His power as seen in the new life, and the new spiritual gifts manifest in believers. This witness of the Holy Spirit in the Church was to be, after the death of the actual eye-witnesses of the Resurrection, the great and ever-growing testimony to the truth of the Gospel.

**33 cut to the heart.** A very strong expression, literally, "sawn asunder." There was no mistaking the words and the temper of the Apostles; they were torture to the hearers. But the result was not repentance, as in the case of the multitude in ii. 37, but a murderous fury. The Sanhedrin were on the point of adding another judicial crime to the Crucifixion, as they did later in the case of St. Stephen.

34 were minded to slay them. But there stood up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in honour of all the people, and commanded to put the men forth a little 35 while. And he said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to 36 yourselves as touching these men, what ye are about to do. For before these days rose up Theudas, giving himself out to be some-

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34 a Pharisee. This is the first appearance in the Acts of the Pharisees, who are so prominent in the Gospels. They were the most prominent religious party of the time, having originated in the second century B.C. out of the party of the *Chasidim*, or "holy ones," who had opposed the attempt of the Greek kings of Antioch to Hellenise the Jews and abolish their religion. The name "Pharisee" apparently means "separated." They were strong upholders of the narrowest Jewish ideals of the separateness of their nation, and of the national hopes of overthrowing the Romans and achieving independence and empire. They were most strict in their observance of the ceremonial law and of all the traditions of the elders, and were ostentatious in the practices of religion. Though their general spirit was one of narrowness, self-conceit, and hypocrisy, they included in their ranks many men of uprightness and holiness, and their outlook was wider and more spiritual than that of the Sadducees. In particular they were strong believers in the resurrection of the dead, and it may have been for that reason that, in contrast with the Sadducean priesthood, they had not as yet taken any decided line against the Apostles, whose central teaching was that of the Resurrection.

**Gamaliel.** Something is known of this man from external sources. He belonged to the more liberal school of Jewish thought, though a strict Pharisee, and inculcated a kind attitude towards strangers and Gentiles. He was a student of Greek literature, and was famed for his holiness and purity of life as well as his learning. "Doctor of the law" means more exactly a "teacher of the law." But Gamaliel's greatest fame is connected with his pupil, Saul of Tarsus, afterwards the Apostle St. Paul (Acts xxii. 3). His advice on this occasion to the Sanhedrin does not indeed show any personal leaning to the new teaching, but was simply a wise opportunism, intended to preserve his fellow-rulers from committing some rash act, which might embroil them with Rome and defeat its own ends.

36 Theudas. This allusion is one of the standing difficulties in the Acts. It has been commonly assumed that the reference is to the rebellion of one Theudas, recorded by Josephus (*Ant.* xx. 5, 1). He led a crowd of followers to the Jordan, which he promised to divide miraculously like Elijah and Elisha; but his company was scattered by an armed force

body ; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves : who was slain, and all, as many as obeyed him, were dispersed, and came to nought. After this man rose up Judas of 37 Galilee in the days of the enrolment, and drew away *some of the* people after him : he also perished ; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered abroad. And now I say unto you, Refrain 38 from these men, and let them alone : for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will be overthrown : but if it is of God, ye will 39 not be able to overthrow them ; lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God. And to him they agreed : and when 40 they had called the apostles unto them, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. They therefore departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing 41 that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name. And every day, in the temple and at home, they ceased not to 42 teach and to preach Jesus *as* the Christ.

under Fadus, the Roman procurator. But this took place at a much later date : Fadus did not become procurator till A.D. 44, whereas Gamaliel places this insurrection of Theudas before that of Judas, which was in A.D. 6. Various explanations have been given, e.g. that St. Luke has recorded Gamaliel's words wrongly, or that Josephus made a mistake, or that there were two distinct rebellions under men of the same name. In the absence of other information it is impossible to decide the matter ; but probably the last explanation is the best.

**37 Judas of Galilee.** This rebellion is well known. It took place when Judæa was made a Roman province, after the deposition of Archelaus. The " enrolment " was a census of the inhabitants made by Quirinius, governor of Syria, with a view to taxation. (Cp. St. Luke ii. 1-2 with notes in St. Luke's Gospel in this series). From this rebellion rose the party of Zealots, or extreme nationalists, to which Simon, one of the Twelve, had once belonged.

**40 they beat them.** A common Jewish punishment ; forty stripes was the maximum allowed in the Law (Deut. xxv. 3). Jewish punctiliousness administered only thirty-nine, lest inadvertently too many should be given ! The ignominy of this unjust punishment was counted by the Apostles as an honour. They were suffering, not for evil doings, but simply " for the Name," i.e. because they were disciples of Jesus.

## CHAPTER V

*Questions*

1. What exactly was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira ?
2. What teaching about the Holy Spirit does this narrative contain ?
3. How does St. Luke describe the commanding position of the Apostles in the early Church ?
4. Describe the second attack of the Jewish rulers upon the Apostles.
5. What do you know of Gamaliel, Theudas, and Judas of Galilee ?
6. State and criticise the advice given by Gamaliel to the Sanhedrin.
7. What was the effect of this persecution upon the Apostles ?

*Subjects for Study*

1. Jewish sects and rulers.  
     Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*.  
     Stanley, *History of the Jewish Church*.  
     Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*,  
         and *The Temple and its Services*.
2. Parallels in O.T. and N.T. to the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira.  
     See 2 Kings i., ii. 23-24, v. 27 ; Jeremiah xxviii. ;  
     Acts xiii. 9-11.

*The Ordination of the Seven (vi. 1-7)*

Now in these days, when the number of the disciples was multi-<sup>1</sup>plying, there arose a murmuring of the <sup>1</sup>Grecian Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. And <sup>2</sup>the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not <sup>2</sup>fit that we should forsake the word of God, and <sup>3</sup>serve tables. <sup>4</sup>Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But <sup>4</sup>we will continue stedfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased <sup>5</sup>the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen,

<sup>1</sup> Gr. *Hellenists.*

<sup>2</sup> Gr. *pleasing.*

<sup>3</sup> Or, *minister to tables.*

<sup>4</sup> Some ancient authorities read *But, brethren, look ye out from among you.*

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vi. 1 **the Grecian Jews**, i.e. the Greek-speaking Jews, who, though now living in Jerusalem, had sprung from families of the Dispersion. There would naturally be some jealousy between them and the Hebrew-speaking Jews, who had remained in Palestine. Even the extraordinary love and mutual goodwill of the early Christian Church was unable to prevent this from occasionally showing itself. The "Hellenists" suspected that some favouritism was being shown to the Hebrews.

**the daily ministration.** Evidently there was a daily distribution of food provided from the common fund among those who were unable to maintain themselves, especially the widows and orphans who had lost their natural bread-winners. The synagogues had provided some means of support for such cases; and the Christian Church from the first arranged some organised charity for them. At a later date, as we see from 1 Tim. v., a formal roll of widows was drawn up, for which the qualifications were age, piety, and the lack of relations who might provide for them.

**2. and the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them.** The twelve Apostles, hitherto personally responsible for all the rule and organisation of the Church, recognise that the time has come, as with Moses in the wilderness (Ex. xviii., Num. xi.), for some delegation of authority. The step they propose to take is of the greatest importance, for it marks the beginning of Ordination, and the first stage in the development of an official ministry of the Church.

a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and 6 Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the

**3 Look ye out therefore, brethren, etc.** All the details of this method of appointment should be carefully noted. The first step is taken by the Apostles themselves; the call to the new office comes from them. The candidates are then to be chosen by the popular consent, and they must have certain qualifications: "good report," i.e. reputation; marked spiritual gifts, and also practical ability—"wisdom." But these things do not suffice to make a man an accredited minister of the Church. The actual ordination must again come from above. It is "we," the Apostles, and not the popular voice, that confer the authority and consecration. And how this was done is seen in v. 6.

**4 But we will continue, etc.** The Apostles recognise that their proper work is two-fold. They are the intercessors, those whose duty it is to pray continually for the advance of Christ's kingdom. And this prayer would naturally centre in the characteristic Christian act of worship, "the breaking of the bread." The Apostles doubtless at first were alone the celebrants of this service; and in all the liturgies of the Church, intercession for the world, and especially for Christians, living and departed, is an essential feature, as in the Prayer for the Church Militant in our Communion Office, and the similar prayers in the Canon of the Mass. And the second duty of the apostolate is "the ministry of the word," not the ministry of food, "the serving of tables," but the teaching and preaching of the truth they had learned from Jesus Himself, and in which they were further instructed by His Spirit.

**5 and they chose Stephen, etc.** Only Stephen and Philip are mentioned again. Of the others nothing is known, except the tradition that Nicolas fell away and founded the sect of the Nicolaitans denounced in the Revelation. All the names are Greek, which would suggest that they were all Hellenists, or "Grecian Jews," but this is by no means certain, as Jews often had a Gentile as well as a Jewish name. Nicolas, "a proselyte," was not a Jew at all, but one of the Gentiles who had been attracted to the Jewish religion, and had probably been circumcised.

**whom they set before the apostles.** This was a formal presentation of the chosen candidates, such as still forms the opening part of the Ordination service of the Church. Publicity and common consent are important requisites for being admitted to the ministry.

apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

6 and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. These two actions have always been recognised in the Church as necessary for a valid ordination. There must be prayer for the spiritual gift required for the exercise of the ministry; and there must be the laying on of hands, as an outward, sacramental sign of the actual conveyance of that gift. The imposition of hands was quite familiar from its O.T. use and associations. When the tribe of Levi was set apart, in lieu of the first-born, to perform priestly service on behalf of Israel, the Levites were to be "presented before the Lord," and the children of Israel were to lay their hands on them (Num. viii. 10). So also Joshua received the laying on of hands from Moses (Num. xxvii. 23), and in consequence was "full of the spirit of wisdom" (Deut. xxxiv. 9).

That this appointment of the Seven was a formal act of ordination for a definite office in the Church is certain. But it is not so clear what this office actually was. Christian tradition has made it the office of Deacons, the third order in the ministry, which appears in the later epistles. And the care of the poor and the stewardship of the funds of the Church were in early times considered the chief part of the Deacon's office. But it is clear that though the Seven were appointed primarily for this purpose, their powers extended much further; they performed spiritual functions of baptizing and preaching (see notes on viii. 14-17). Nor are they ever called Deacons in Scripture. Probably we shall be right in concluding that this was a special office suited to the time, carefully recorded because it set the type of all subsequent ordination in the Church.

7 a great company of the priests, etc. This is a remarkable statement. It shows that the rank and file of the Jewish priesthood did not share the bitterness and self-seeking of the Sadducean families who had gained possession of the highest offices. These humbler priests had open minds, and recognised in the teaching of the Cross the fulfilment of the types and shadows, the sacrifices and purifications, which they themselves had ministered. They submitted themselves to the rule of the faith, and their accession to the Church must have been a great source of strength.



*The Arrest of St. Stephen (vi. 8-15)*

8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, wrought great wonders  
 9 and signs among the people. But there arose certain of them  
 that were of the synagogue called *the synagogue* of the Libertines,  
 and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of them of  
 10 Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able  
 11 to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake. Then  
 they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blas-  
 12 phemous words against Moses, and *against* God. And they  
 stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came

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9 But there arose certain of them, etc. Various elements combined in this opposition to St. Stephen; and it is scarcely likely that they all worshipped jointly in one synagogue. The Greek is a little ambiguous, like the English, and may mean that the members of more than one synagogue were involved. But at least they had one feature in common. They all belonged, remarkably enough, to the Jews of the Dispersion. Perhaps St. Stephen as a Hellenist had specially addressed himself to such hearers; but they showed themselves on this occasion as narrow and bigoted as the Jews of Palestine. The Libertines—literally “freedmen”—were the Jews of Rome, who, originally slaves—probably those carried by Pompey to Rome in 63 B.C.—had been afterwards set free. They formed a large colony in Rome, and evidently even at Jerusalem retained their name and coherence. The Cyrenians were Jews from the district of Cyrene in North Africa (see ii. 10). The Alexandrian Jews formed a large part of the population of that great cosmopolitan centre of learning and trade. “Asia” is the Roman province of that name in the west of Asia Minor. Among the men of Cilicia was certainly one who is presently to be introduced on the scene, destined to be greater than St. Stephen himself—Saul of Tarsus.

11 then they suborned men, etc. The attack on St. Stephen presents several parallels to that on our Lord Himself. He had been accused of blasphemy by the instrumentality of bribed spies and informers. And when put on His trial before the Sanhedrin, false witnesses were brought forward to charge Him with predicting the destruction of the Temple and the overthrow of the Law of Moses. Probably some expressions which St. Stephen had made use of, as in our Lord's case, were perverted into charges of blasphemy. He may have spoken boldly of the catholic nature of the Gospel, of true worship being no longer limited to one place on earth, and of the calling of the Gentiles to full privileges.

upon him, and seized him, and brought him into the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to 13 speak words against this holy place, and the law : for we have 14 heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us. And all that sat in the council, fastening their eyes on him, 15 saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

## CHAPTER VI

### *Questions*

1. Describe carefully the appointment of the Seven.
2. From what sources did the attack on St. Stephen arise ?
3. What charge was brought against him ?
4. Compare the attack on St. Stephen with that upon our Lord.

### *Subject for Study*

Ordination in the early Church.

Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*.

Gore, *The Church and the Ministry*.

Swete, *Essays on the Early History of the Church and the Ministry*.

15 saw his face. This remarkable description must have come from an eye-witness, and that eye-witness can scarcely have been any one else than Saul of Tarsus. He remembered vividly in after years the enraptured countenance of the accused, bright perhaps already with supernatural radiance from that heavenly world which he was presently to see with open vision.

*St. Stephen's Defence* (vii. 1-53)

- 1 And the high priest said, Are these things so? And he said,  
 2 Brethren and fathers, hearken. The God of glory appeared unto

vii. This defence of St. Stephen is the longest speech in the Acts, and is unique in character. It resembles most in its tone and arrangement the historical Psalms lxxviii. and cvi. Commentators have described and analysed it in different ways. There are indeed no set divisions, and its argument may be viewed in more than one light. But speaking generally, it is clear that St. Stephen's object in his review of the history of Israel is to point out (1) that a Divine purpose ran throughout it, of which the consummation would be found in Jesus Christ. This would probably have been brought out more clearly had the speech not been cut short by a burst of indignation on the part of the speaker, and of fury on that of his judges. (2) Throughout their Divinely guided history, Israel had resisted and rebelled against God's appointed guides, especially Moses, whom St. Stephen evidently regards as a type of Christ, and against His law. And the climax of this "resisting the Holy Ghost" had been the crucifixion of Jesus.

Incidentally other truths are suggested, which are really the answer to the charges brought against St. Stephen. He shows that God's revelation and gifts had never been tied to a single spot on earth. Abraham in his wanderings; Joseph and Israel in Egypt; Moses and Israel in the wilderness, had been alike the objects of God's providence and the recipients of His grace. And he suggests also that the superstitious reverence and finality which the Jews attached to the Temple and the Law were not in accordance with the actual teaching of the Scriptures. Moses himself had spoken of a prophet yet to come. Isaiah had warned against supposing that God's presence could be confined within any sanctuary, however magnificent.

The whole tone of the speech, and the method in which the different historical events are handled and summarised, is said to be in accordance with the style of the Alexandrine Jews, and especially of Philo, and to suggest that St. Stephen himself was an Alexandrine. A similar use is made of the O.T. history in the books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus; and both of these are Alexandrine productions. Cp. Wisd. x., and especially Ecclus. xlv. onwards. There are several apparent discrepancies between St. Stephen's summary and the record of the O.T. Some may be due to traditional additions or explanations familiar to the Jews, others to actual variations in the text of the O.T. There was at this time no fixed or standard text, as is shown by the many variations between the present Hebrew and the Septuagint.

- 2 The God of glory. An expression that does not occur elsewhere,

our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy land, **3** and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldæans, and **4** dwelt in Haran : and from thence, when his father was dead, God removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell : and he **5** gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on : and he promised that he would give it to him in possession, and to his seed after him, when *as yet* he had no child. And God **6** spake on this wise, that his seed should sojourn in a 'strange land, and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil, four hundred years. And the nation to which they shall be **7**

except in Ps. xxix. 3. The nearest parallel is the title " Lord of glory," applied to Jesus Christ (1 Cor. ii. 8, St. Jas. ii. 1). " Glory " may refer to the supernatural light and splendour which accompanied the visible manifestations of God, as e.g. in the bright cloud of the Tabernacle, and at the Nativity and the Transfiguration.

**before he dwelt in Haran.** The original habitation of the family of Abraham was Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. xi. 28), probably to be identified with Mugir on the Euphrates, the ruins of which have been recently investigated, and include those of a temple to the moon-goddess. There is no mention in the O.T. of an appearance of God to Abraham at Ur; but such an event would explain his first migration northwards to Haran, the Carrhæ of the Romans.

**4 God removed him into this land.** It is at this point that the history of God's dealings with Abraham begins in Gen. xii. It was a great turning-point in the record of revelation, the beginning of the separation of one family to be definitely the people of God.

**6 And God spake on this wise.** Gen. xv., where is recorded the mysterious making of a covenant between God and Abraham. The Divine presence appeared in the form of a " smoking furnace and a burning torch," passing between the portions of Abraham's sacrifice.

**four hundred years.** St. Stephen is probably speaking in round numbers, in agreement with Gen. xv. 13. The actual duration of the Egyptian bondage is given as four hundred and thirty years in Ex. xii. 40; though ancient interpreters explained this to mean the whole period from Abraham to the Exodus. Cp. Gal. iii. 17.

**7 and serve me in this place.** St. Stephen is combining two passages, Gen. xv. 14 and Ex. iii. 12, where Mount Sinai is mentioned as the place of " serving " God.

in bondage will I judge, said God : and after that shall they  
 8 come forth, and serve me in this place. And he gave him the  
 covenant of circumcision : and so *Abraham* begat Isaac, and  
 circumcised him the eighth day ; and Isaac *begat* Jacob, and  
 9 Jacob the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, moved with  
 10 jealousy against Joseph, sold him into Egypt : and God was with  
 him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him  
 favour and wisdom before Pharaoh king of Egypt ; and he made  
 11 him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now there came  
 a famine over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction : and  
 12 our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that  
 there was corn in Egypt, he sent forth our fathers the first time.  
 13 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren ;  
 14 and Joseph's race became manifest unto Pharaoh. And Joseph  
 sent, and called to him Jacob his father, and all his kindred,  
 15 threescore and fifteen souls. And Jacob went down into Egypt ;  
 16 and he died, himself, and our fathers ; and they were carried

8 **And he gave him the covenant of circumcision.** This is recorded in Gen. xvii. A covenant usually means an agreement between two parties ; but God's covenants are gifts to which man has no claim in himself. Nevertheless God may attach a condition—something which man must perform as his part. Here it was the outward rite of circumcision, which marked off henceforth the descendants of Abraham as a separated people, with special privileges from God.

9 **moved with jealousy against Joseph.** Joseph, the most remarkable and beautiful figure in Genesis, is scarcely mentioned in the rest of the Bible, except in Ps. cv. He is briefly alluded to in Ecclus. xlix. 15. St. Stephen is perhaps making him prominent here as a type of Christ: cruelly treated by his brethren, and yet exalted, and becoming their saviour.

14 **threescore and fifteen souls.** Again St. Stephen is apparently following tradition. The O.T. gives the number as seventy. Probably the additional number is intended to include the children and grandchildren of Joseph.

16 **and they were carried over unto Shechem.** According to Gen. l. Jacob was buried in the cave of Machpelah at Hebron. But Joseph was buried at Shechem (Josh. xxiv. 32), and tradition made this the grave also of the other sons of Jacob.

over unto Shechem, and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a price in silver of the sons of <sup>1</sup>Hamor in Shechem. <sup>1</sup> Gr. *Emmor.* But as the time of the promise drew nigh, which God <sup>17</sup> vouchsafed unto Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till there arose another king over Egypt, <sup>18</sup> which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly <sup>19</sup> with our race, and evil entreated our fathers, that <sup>2</sup>they should cast out their babes to the end they might not <sup>3</sup>live. At which season Moses was born, <sup>20</sup> and was <sup>4</sup>exceeding fair; and he was nourished

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in the tomb that Abraham bought, etc. Here again is an apparent discrepancy with Genesis. It was the cave of Machpelah that Abraham bought (Gen. xxiii.); the land in Shechem, bought of the sons of Hamor, was purchased by Jacob (Gen. xxxiii. 19).

17 the promise, i.e. that the descendants of Abraham should possess the land of Canaan.

18 till there arose another king over Egypt. This was a change of dynasty. The Pharaoh under whom Jacob and his descendants settled in Egypt probably belonged to the usurping dynasty of the Hyksos, or "Shepherd-kings," a Semitic race, and hence inclined to favour a pastoral family of like blood with themselves. Later the Hyksos were expelled by the descendants of the ancient native kings of Egypt; and the Israelites were now looked upon with suspicion and dislike. This hostile attitude came to a head under the Pharaoh of the oppression, probably the great Rameses II., who endeavoured to break the spirit of the Israelites by forced labour, and to diminish their numbers by killing their male children.

which knew not Joseph, i.e. he did not look favourably upon the Israelites, disregarding the great services which Joseph had in his lifetime rendered to Egypt, and the fame he had left behind him.

19 dealt subtilly, i.e. plotted against them with craft.

that they should cast out their babes. According to Ex. i. this was done by the express command of the Pharaoh. But the Greek is somewhat ambiguous, and only expresses the result of the oppression, viz. the casting out of the children, without specifically stating (as the English version does) who were the actual doers of the deed.

20 At which season Moses was born. The great deliverer was raised up to meet the crisis. St. Stephen gives especial prominence to Moses, and seems to emphasise the points in his career which make him a parallel to, and a type of Christ: his love of his brethren, his patience

21 three months in his father's house : and when he was cast out,  
 Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her  
 22 own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of  
 the Egyptians ; and he was mighty in his words and works.  
 23 But when he was well-nigh forty years old, it came into  
 24 his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And  
 seeing one of *them* suffer wrong, he defended him, and  
 25 avenged him that was oppressed, smiting the Egyptian : and  
 he supposed that his brethren understood how that  
 God by his hand was giving them <sup>1</sup> deliverance ; <sup>1</sup> Or, *salvation*.  
 26 but they understood not. And the day following  
 he appeared unto them as they strove, and would have set them  
 at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren ; why do ye wrong one  
 27 to another ? But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him  
 away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us ?  
 28 Wouldest thou kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday ?  
 29 And Moses fled at this saying, and became a sojourner in the land  
 30 of Midian, where he begat two sons. And when forty years

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with them ; their rejection of him, and constant disobedience and rebellions ; his high calling to be a ruler and deliverer ; his miracles ; his office as the mediator ; and the ultimate triumph of his work, in spite of human opposition.

22 **instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.** This is an addition to the brief record of Ex. ii. It is most probable that Moses, being brought up at the Egyptian court by the Pharaoh's daughter, would have the education of a prince, and would be trained in the science and literature of the most learned and gifted nation of the time. Tradition also says that he was a soldier, and conducted with success a campaign against the Ethiopians.

29 **the land of Midian.** The Midianites were a powerful and numerous desert tribe that inhabited the peninsula of Sinai and the east of the Gulf of Akaba. It was with one of their priest-rulers, Jethro, that Moses found a home. He married the priest's daughter Zipporah, and had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer ("sojourner" and "help of God").

30 **And when forty years were fulfilled.** Moses was now eighty years old, and Jewish tradition divided his life into three periods of forty years, in Egypt, in Midian, and the period of the Exodus. See Ex. vii. 7 and Deut. xxxiv. 7.

were fulfilled, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. And when Moses saw it, 31 he wondered at the sight : and as he drew near to behold, there came a voice of the Lord, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of 32 Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. And Moses trembled, and durst not behold. And the Lord said unto him, Loose the shoes 33 from thy feet : for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. I have surely seen the affliction of my people which is 34 in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I am come down to deliver them : and now come, I will send thee into Egypt. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler 35 and a judge ? him hath God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. This man led them 36 forth, having wrought wonders and signs in Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years. This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, 37 A prophet shall God raise up unto you from among your

<sup>1</sup> Gr. redeemer.

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an angel appeared to him. This "angel" represented Jehovah, and his voice is spoken of as that of God Himself (v. 31). The Christian fathers regarded these appearances as being really appearances of the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word or Son of God, before the Incarnation.

35 This Moses whom they refused. The parallel between Moses and Christ is here and in the next verse very plainly suggested. He whom they scornfully rejected as "ruler and judge" was proved to be more, a deliverer or "redeemer" (marg.). As our Lord Himself expressed it, "the stone which the builders rejected was made the head of the corner." Cp. Is. liii. 3 and 11-12.

36 wonders and signs, e.g. the plagues in Egypt; the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea; the giving of manna in the wilderness, and the water from the rock.

37 A prophet shall God raise up. See iii. 22. Moses himself had foretold that the great prophet to come should be like him. St. Stephen implies that He is like him not only in His office and His miracles, but in His sufferings and rejection.



38 brethren, <sup>1</sup>like unto me. This is he that was in the  
<sup>2</sup>church in the wilderness with the angel which  
 spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our  
 fathers : who received living oracles to give unto  
 39 us : to whom our fathers would not be obedient,  
 but thrust him from them, and turned back in their  
 40 hearts unto Egypt, saying unto Aaron, Make us gods which shall  
 go before us : for as for this Moses, which led us forth out of the  
 41 land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And they  
 made a calf in those days, and brought a sacrifice unto the idol,  
 42 and rejoiced in the works of their hands. But God turned, and  
 gave them up to serve the host of heaven ; as it is written in the  
 book of the prophets,

<sup>1</sup> Or, as he  
 raised up  
 me.

<sup>2</sup> Or, con-  
 gregation.

Did ye offer unto me slain beasts and sacrifices  
 Forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel ?

**38 the church in the wilderness.** The word implies more than a mere gathering or assemblage. The Israelites who were with Moses at Mount Sinai were a sacred people, separated from the world. Cp. Ex. xix. 5-6, "a peculiar treasure—a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

**with the angel which spake to him.** See note on v. 30. St. Stephen's speech is marked by many references to angels. Cp. v. 53.

**living oracles, i.e. the Law.** "Oracles" are sacred communications from God to man. They are called "living," as proceeding from the living God, and therefore no mere dead traditions, but laws adapted to the needs of human life, and by obedience to which man might live a right life here and be put in the way to life eternal.

**42 But God turned.** It is implied here, as in Ezek. xx. 13-26, that the unrecorded period of the thirty-eight years' wandering in the wilderness (between Num. xiv. and xx.) was marked by idolatry and general apostasy from the laws given at Mount Sinai. And this is represented as a Divine punishment. Men guilty of disobedience to God's commandments were punished by the hard discipline of going their own way, and learning how unprofitable it was.

**the host of heaven.** The sun and moon and stars : the most universal objects of the ancient idolatries. Most of the divinities of the ancient world were personifications of various heavenly bodies, e.g. Baal, of the sun.

**as it is written in the book of the prophets.** Amos v. 25-27. All the

And ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch,  
 And the star of the god Rephan,  
 The figures which ye made to worship them :  
 And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

63

Our fathers had the tabernacle of the testimony in the wilderness, 44

prophets were included in one roll in Jewish usage. The quotation presents some difficulties, both in its variations from the Hebrew text and in the sense in which St. Stephen appeals to it.

St. Stephen is quoting freely from the Septuagint. The Hebrew text (see R.V.) has "Siccuth your king," instead of "the tabernacle of Moloch." The word "Siccuth," thought to be an Assyrian deity, may also mean "tabernacles," i.e. the portable shrines in which the images of idols were carried. Moloch, the idol whom the Israelites worshipped with human sacrifices, literally means "king." Again, the Hebrew has "Chiun your images, the star of your God," instead of "Rephan." The latter is unknown, and may be due simply to mistranslation in the Septuagint. Chiun was probably an Assyrian god represented by a star. Thirdly, both Hebrew and Septuagint have "beyond Damascus" instead of "beyond Babylon." Here St. Stephen may have made the change purposely, as history had proved where the place of exile would be, which the prophet Amos had only expressed vaguely.

These variations need not make any alteration in the general meaning of the quotation, but St. Stephen seems to be using it in a different sense from that of the prophet. Amos is thought by most scholars to be arguing that sacrifices to Jehovah were not essential, inasmuch as they had not been offered for forty years in the wilderness. St. Stephen however uses the words as an indictment of Israel for their apostasy in the wilderness, in disobeying the commands to offer sacrifice. And it is by no means certain that this is not after all the right interpretation of the prophet.

Again, it is not quite clear what is the meaning to be attached to "taking up," etc. It may mean (1) simply that the Israelites substituted these false worships for that of Jehovah, or (2) that they were to be compelled, having forsaken Jehovah, to carry the images of the Assyrian gods in their exile.

The passage is a good example both of the difficulty of harmonising the different versions of the O.T. and of the freedom which Jewish interpreters allowed themselves. But the general meaning of St. Stephen is clear enough. Israel had shown their disobedience by forsaking "the living oracles," and had in consequence fallen into degrading idolatries.

44 the tabernacle of the testimony. The Tabernacle, whose con-

even as he appointed who spake unto Moses, that he should make  
 45 it according to the figure that he had seen. Which also our fathers,  
 in their turn, brought in with <sup>1</sup>Joshua when they <sup>1</sup> Gr. *Jesus*.  
 entered on the possession of the nations, which God  
 thrust out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David ;  
 46 who found favour in the sight of God, and asked to find a habita-  
 47 tion for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him a house.  
 48 Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in *houses* made with hands ;  
 as saith the prophet,

49 The heaven is my throne,  
 And the earth the footstool of my feet :  
 What manner of house will ye build me ? saith the Lord :  
 Or what is the place of my rest ?  
 50 Did not my hand make all these things ?

struction is described in Ex. xxv.-xxvii., was the shrine of the ark which contained the tables of the Ten Commandments, which were the foundation principles of the Law. These tables were called "the testimony," because they were the witness and evidence of God's special revelation of Himself to Israel.

according to the figure that he had seen. The Tabernacle is described as an earthly copy of a heavenly pattern or archetype (Ex. xxv. 9). Its plan and all its details were designed to convey spiritual truth as to the relations between God and His people. These are worked out in the Epistle to the Hebrews. See Heb. viii. 5, and ix.

St. Stephen is probably dwelling on the movements of the Tabernacle from place to place, as a proof that God's presence is not tied to any particular spot. He dwells with His people, wherever they are.

48 Howbeit the Most High, etc. Here St. Stephen's meaning becomes clearer. He had been accused of disloyalty to the Temple. But he reminds his hearers that God cannot be contained in any building. He is greater than heaven and earth. Though the building of the Temple by Solomon had been Divinely sanctioned and blest, it was superstition to imagine that God could be confined within its walls, or that He could not manifest Himself in other ways. Similarly Jeremiah before him had warned the Jews against imagining that the possession of the Temple was the be-all and end-all of their religion. He had prophesied both the destruction of the Temple (vii. 14) and the coming of a new age when the ark of the covenant itself would be no more (iii. 16).

as saith the prophet. Isaiah lxvi. 1-2.

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? and they killed them which shewed before of the coming of the Righteous One; of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers; ye who received the law <sup>1</sup>as it was ordained by angels, and kept it not.

<sup>1</sup> Or, as the ordinance of angels. Gr. unto ordinances of angels.

*The Martyrdom of St. Stephen (vii. 54-viii. 1)*

Now when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man stand-

**51 Ye stiffnecked.** Here the speaker breaks his argument by a burst of righteous indignation. "Stiffnecked," a frequent metaphor in the O.T., derived from oxen unruly under the yoke, and meaning obstinately disobedient. "Uncircumcised in heart and ears," i.e. though outwardly circumcised, they were lacking in true obedience. Their will was unconverted: their ears were closed to Divine truth.

**resist the Holy Ghost.** Cp. Is. lxiii. 10.

**55 Jesus standing on the right hand of God.** The ascended Lord is usually described as "sitting" on the right hand of God (cp. Ps. cx. 1), the attitude of king and judge. Here St. Stephen beholds Him *standing* as champion of His persecuted servants, and as a priest in intercession.

**56 the Son of man.** With this exception, this title (Dan. vii. 13) is used only by our Lord of Himself in the N.T. It occurs significantly in this description of the first appearance of Christ after His Ascension. Truly God in His essential nature, He has united Himself permanently with human nature, and so is for ever the Son of Man as well as the Son of God, combining two natures in one person. And because He is man, He is a perfect and acceptable mediator between God and man, the eternal high priest of humanity, as described in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

**57 rushed upon him with one accord.** There does not appear even to have been a formal sentence of death. The judges, seized with un-governable fury, became themselves the murderers of St. Stephen.

ing on the right hand of God. But they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and rushed upon him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon *the Lord*, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their

The Jews had lost, under Roman rule, their power of life and death. So this was an illegal as well as a violent act. That it was not inquired into and punished seems only explicable on the supposition that at this time Judæa was without a Roman *procurator*. It depends on the date of St. Stephen's martyrdom. Pilate was not recalled till A.D. 36.

**58 stoned him.** This was the recognised punishment for blasphemy (Lev. xxiv. 13-16). The condemned was taken outside the city and thrown down from a height; the witnesses had to throw the first stone (Deut. xvii. 7), and then all the onlookers threw stones until the victim was covered with a heap.

**laid down their garments.** This was apparently part of the official act of the witnesses in throwing the first stone; and the guarding of their outer garments was also definitely assigned to some chosen individual. In this case it was Saul of Tarsus, whose name St. Luke introduces so dramatically, afterwards to be the great apostle St. Paul. The vivid description of St. Stephen's last moments may have been derived directly from him.

**59 Lord Jesus.** St. Stephen addresses the ascended Lord, whom he had just seen in vision. He clearly regards him as God, the Hearer of prayer, and the Lord and Master of human souls.

**60 Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.** This touching appeal is like that of our Lord Himself in the first word from the Cross (St. Luke xxiii. 34). It is in striking contrast with the cry for justice of the O.T. martyr, Zechariah (2 Chron. xxiv. 22).

**he fell asleep.** The change which the Gospel had brought in the attitude of the righteous sufferer is seen in the last utterances of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. So, too, the Christian's outlook upon death shows a change. Death is only a falling asleep to this world. It is not the end, for the Resurrection of Jesus has thrown light upon it, and it is recognised as the passage to life eternal. The early Christians habitually spoke of death as only sleep.

charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was consenting unto his death.

## CHAPTER VII

### *Questions*

1. What are the underlying arguments in St. Stephen's speech ?
2. What is the importance of Abraham in the history of revelation ?
3. What discrepancy is there between St. Stephen's account of the burial of the patriarchs, and that in Genesis ?
4. What are the events in the life of Moses which St. Stephen selects for emphasis ?
5. What parallel is apparently intended between Moses and Christ ?
6. How does St. Stephen describe the early idolatries of the Israelites ?
7. What prophet does he quote on this subject, and with what variations ?

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viii. **1 And Saul was consenting unto his death.** Saul was apparently a member of the Sanhedrin. Though described as a "young man," he might well be between thirty and forty years of age. He was one of those who were responsible directly for this judicial murder. His will had consented to it, and he showed his approval by the official act of guarding the witnesses' clothes. He fully confessed his responsibility on later occasions. See Acts xxii. 19, 20, and xxvi. 10. At this time a bigoted Pharisee, he looked upon Christians as dangerous heretics, false to the most sacred traditions of Judaism, and St. Stephen as one of their ringleaders, whom to kill was a righteous act. See 1 Tim. i. 13.

8. What was "the tabernacle of witness" ?

9. How does St. Stephen reprove the superstitious veneration for the Temple ?

10. Describe and comment on St. Stephen's vision and his last words.

*Subjects for Study*

1. The differences between St. Stephen's narrative and that of the O.T.

Rackham, *Acts of the Apostles*.

2. The value of the O.T. "types."

"Type" in Murray's *Bible Dictionary*.

„ „ Arnold and Scannell's *Catholic Dictionary*.

### III. The Spread of the Church beyond Judæa

*The First Persecution and its Effects* (viii. 1-8)

1 And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem ; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the

viii. 1 **And there arose on that day**, etc. The general goodwill and admiration felt towards the Christian Church, owing, no doubt, to the charity of its members and the works of healing performed by them, which St. Luke has previously alluded to, was already giving way under the influence of Pharisaic bigotry and Sadducean officialdom. The murder of Stephen was the sign for a sudden and general outburst against Christians. The majority fled from Jerusalem for their life. The Apostles, however, remained at their post, and were apparently for the present unmolested ; perhaps because they were not Hellenists, and their devotion to the Law and the Temple was well known.

apostles. And devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him. But Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

They therefore that were scattered abroad went about preaching the word. And Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and

**2 And devout men buried Stephen.** The expression is remarkable, and seems to imply that St. Stephen was buried not by Christian hands (owing to the sudden blaze of persecution), but by Jews of the better sort, who were impressed by the holiness of his life and his end. The word "devout" is usually applied to careful Jewish observance of the Law. Burying the dead was a good work to which the pious Jew attached the greatest importance. The "great lamentation" points to the same conclusion: for Christians would have regarded this martyrdom as a victory of faith, and an occasion for praise and thanksgiving rather than for the wailings which were characteristic of Jewish mourning.

**3 But Saul laid waste the church.** This sudden prominence of Saul is remarkable. The chief priests must have recognised in his fiery character and his zeal for Judaism convenient instruments for their purpose. Doubtless they conferred on him at once a commission to inquire into the matter, and examine and arrest all the suspected. He could scarcely have done this without definite authority. A further commission was given to him at his own request a little later (ix. 1-2). He used his authority with the utmost virulence, "laying waste," like an infuriated wild beast, and dragging off his victims promiscuously to the official prison, there to wait a trial.

**4 They therefore that were scattered abroad, etc.** The effect of persecution was to increase the spread of the Gospel. The refugees became missionaries. The martyrdom of St. Stephen was thus a great turning-point in the history of the Church. It inaugurated, in a non-official and spontaneous manner, the evangelising of the peoples outside the limits of strict Judaism, and marks a stage in the growing witness of which the Lord Himself had spoken before His Ascension (i. 8).

**5 Philip.** Philip, the next in order of the Seven, stands out in this chapter as the great pioneer of the new movement of the Gospel, preaching to and baptizing first the alien Samaritans, and then a Gentile, the Ethiopian eunuch. He shows the same gifts of eloquence and courage and miracles that had appeared in the proto-martyr.

**the city of Samaria.** The O.T. city called Samaria, the capital of the kingdom of the ten tribes, had been rebuilt by Herod the Great,



6 proclaimed unto them the Christ. And the multitudes gave heed with one accord unto the things that were spoken by Philip, when they heard, and saw the signs 7 which he did. <sup>1</sup>For *from* many of those which had unclean spirits, they came out, crying with a loud voice: and many that were palsied, and that were 8 lame, were healed. And there was much joy in that city.

<sup>1</sup> Or, *For many of those which had unclean spirits that cried with a loud voice came forth.*

*Simon the Sorcerer of Samaria and the Gift of the Holy Spirit*  
(viii. 9-25)

9 But there was a certain man, Simon by name, which beforetime in the city used sorcery, and amazed the <sup>2</sup>people of Samaria, giving out

<sup>2</sup> Gr. *nation.*

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and called Sebaste, in honour of Augustus (in Greek, Sebastos). It had given its older name to the whole central district of Palestine, between Galilee and Judæa. The Samaritans were a mixed race, largely descended from the heathen colonists introduced from Assyria, after the deportation of the ten tribes (2 Kings xvii.). These aliens were originally worshippers of various idols, but believing with most of the peoples of antiquity that each country had its own tutelary god, they had petitioned the King of Assyria to send them a priest of Israel to teach them how to propitiate Jehovah. For a time they had worshipped Jehovah side by side with their own divinities, but at some time before the return of the Jews of Jerusalem from exile, they had abandoned the latter. They asked to be allowed to take part in the rebuilding of the Temple, and when this was refused they established an opposition Temple, with a priesthood and sacrifices of their own, on Mount Gerizim. They became very hostile to the Jews, and were despised and hated by the latter.

and proclaimed unto them the Christ. The Samaritans venerated the five books of Moses, though they rejected the prophets. They looked for the Messiah to come, and our Lord Himself had proclaimed to them His Messiahship at Sychar (St. John iv.). No doubt many of them remembered this, and were prepared to accept readily the preaching of Philip.

9 **Simon.** This man is the first representative in the N.T. of a class widely spread at the time, and of immense influence. It was an age in which the older religions were losing their hold, and were failing to satisfy men; and as usual in such periods, people turned to philosophy

that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is that power of God which is called Great. And they gave heed to him, because that of long time he had amazed them with his sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. And Simon also himself believed: and being baptized, he continued with Philip; and beholding signs and great miracles wrought, he was amazed.

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or superstition, or both. Craving to know more of the future, and of what lies beyond the veil of material things, they gave a ready ear to astrologers, wizards, magicians, and professors of every occult art. And this world-wide influence, based to some extent on scientific knowledge, but much more on imposture and desire of gain, was to prove one of the most bitter antagonists of the Gospel.

The description of Simon is remarkable, especially in view of what tradition relates of his subsequent history. He was evidently not only a professional "magus" or sorcerer, but one who made extravagant and unusual claims for himself. The people of Samaria had taken him at his own valuation, and were convinced that he was more than man, either the Messiah, or some exalted angelic being, who possessed divine power. He no doubt performed what appeared to be miracles, either by conjuring or imposture. Possibly also he possessed "psychic" gifts, and gave the impression of having power over the world of spirits. It is interesting to compare the account given by early Christian writers of Simon. They describe him as the founder of the Gnostics, and as the first to teach the theory of "aeons" or emanations from the Godhead, by which most of the Gnostics, rejecting the Incarnation, endeavoured to explain the possibility of connection between God and the world. And Simon represented himself as being the greatest of these "aeons," and claimed divine honours both for himself and his wife, Helen.

**13 And Simon also himself believed.** It is clear from what follows that Simon's "belief" was not that of the heart which produces a change of life. He was merely "amazed" at the miracles wrought by Philip. He thought the evangelist to be a wizard of greater powers than himself, and he was eager to learn the secret of these. But he must have been able to put on for the moment the appearance of sincerity, and so obtain Baptism, and pose as a devoted follower of the new teacher

14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard  
that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto  
15 them Peter and John : who, when they were come down, prayed  
16 for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost : for as yet he  
was fallen upon none of them : only they had been baptized into  
17 the name of the Lord Jesus. Then laid they their hands on  
18 them, and they received the Holy Ghost. Now when Simon  
saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the

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14-17 they sent unto them Peter and John, etc. This is a remarkable incident, and as it is introduced without explanation, we must assume that this laying on of hands was already part of the established practice of the Church, whether commanded directly by the Lord Himself or taught after Pentecost by the Holy Spirit. With this passage should be compared xix. 1-7. It seems clear that while Baptism admitted a believer into the Christian society, and into union with Christ, it required to be completed by the definite endowment of the indwelling Spirit. Each believer thus received his share in the Pentecostal gift. And this gift was *normally* given through the apostolate, though it might on occasion be bestowed directly without human intervention (x. 44). Philip had converted and baptized the Samaritans, but it needed this action of the apostles to make them fully Christians. The Church has always identified this apostolic laying on of hands with Confirmation, administered in the West by bishops only, in the East by anointing with oil that has received the bishop's blessing.

18 Now when Simon saw, etc. It seems evident that some outward and extraordinary sign of the possession of new spiritual powers was seen in the case of those who had received this laying on of hands. In x. 46 and xix. 6 this sign was "speaking with tongues and prophesying," and probably it was the same at Samaria. To understand Simon's attitude, it must be remembered that possession by spirits or divinities, producing superhuman effects of ecstasy or miraculous knowledge, was familiar to the heathen world of the time (cp. xvi. 16). A mere on-looker might misunderstand the miraculous spiritual gifts of the early Christians as being of the same nature, ignoring the fact that these proceeded from the Holy Spirit, that they had a profoundly moral and religious character, and were exercised to the glory of the one true and only God. Simon apparently took simply the heathen view of these manifestations, and was anxious himself to be able to communicate them to others, for his own personal glory. Though baptized he was still at heart a "sorcerer," and desirous to "amaze" men by his powers.

<sup>1</sup>Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give <sup>11</sup> me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But <sup>20</sup> Peter said unto him, Thy silver perish with thee, because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money. Thou hast neither part nor <sup>21</sup> lot in this <sup>2</sup>matter: for thy heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this thy wicked- <sup>22</sup> ness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee. For I see <sup>23</sup> that thou <sup>3</sup>art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. And Simon answered and said, Pray ye <sup>24</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Some ancient authorities omit *Holy*.  
<sup>2</sup> Gr. word.  
<sup>3</sup> Or, *will become gall* (or, *a gall root*) of bitterness and a bond of iniquity.

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he offered them money. Simon's knowledge of the general ways of wizards and enchanters led him to suppose that these possessors of miraculous powers had their price, and that he had only to offer enough to be initiated into the secret, and to buy for himself the position of an apostle. Hence the name "simony" has become attached to the sin of purchasing or selling any spiritual office in the Church.

<sup>20</sup> because thou hast thought, etc. St. Peter's indignant words show that Simon's attitude was absolutely inconsistent with true belief. The gift that he coveted was not a personal one; though ministered by the Apostles, it came directly from God Himself, and only in answer to prayer (v. 15). To try to buy it showed not only a total misconception of its nature, but a state of heart entirely alien from the Spirit of Christ.

<sup>23</sup> thou art in the gall of bitterness, etc. Hebrew expressions suggested by Deut. xxix. 18 and Is. lviii. 6. Simon's spiritual condition is compared to a bitter and poisonous plant, and to the slavery of a man fast bound by his sins. The R.V. margin would make St. Peter's words prophetic of the evil influence that Simon would exert by his profane Gnostic teaching. Legend says that afterwards Simon taught in Rome, and was there the adversary of St. Peter, and that he met his death by trying to fly in the air, as a proof of his own higher powers.

<sup>24</sup> Pray ye for me, etc. The apparent piety of Simon's request must be discounted by the fact that he was only desirous to escape the consequences of St. Peter's curse. He does not really profess penitence, but merely wants to avoid being harmed by one whom he still regards as only a great magician.

for me to the Lord, that none of the things which ye have spoken come upon me.

- 25 They therefore, when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

*Philip Baptizes an Ethiopian* (viii. 26-40)

- 26 But an angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go <sup>1</sup>toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza: the same is desert. <sup>1</sup> Or, at noon.
- 27 And he arose and went: and behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was over all her treasure, who had come to

**26 But an angel of the Lord spake unto Philip.** This second incident in the evangelistic work of Philip marks a new and startling extension of the Gospel. It was he first who had ventured to admit to the Church the hated and outcast Samaritans. Now he is called to instruct and baptize one of the heathen world, a presage of the future free admission of the Gentiles into the Church.

**the way that goeth down, etc.** This must have been a considerable journey. Samaria is some thirty miles north of Jerusalem, and it is fifty or sixty miles on from Jerusalem to Gaza. There are two roads between these two latter places: one going south to Hebron, and then westward to Gaza; the other going west to Askelon, and thence by the sea to Gaza. It is not clear which of these roads is intended, as the words "the same is desert" may apply either to the road or to Gaza itself. If the former, the road was probably *via* Hebron. But Gaza might be described as "desert," because although there was at the time a flourishing city of Gaza, this was a new city built on the coast, since the destruction of the ancient one in 96 B.C. by Alexander the Maccaean. This latter, two miles inland, still remained in ruins. The coast road, passing through three of the five ancient cities of the Philistines, was a very important thoroughfare and trading route between Egypt, Palestine, and Syria.

**27 a man of Ethiopia.** Ethiopia was a general name applied to the vast country south of Egypt, including Nubia and Abyssinia. Candace's capital was probably Meroe, in the district now called the Soudan. Pliny states that this kingdom was ruled by a succession of queens who bore the name or title of Candace.

Jerusalem for to worship ; and he was returning and sitting in 28 his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit 29 said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And 30 Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest ? And he said, How 31 can I, except some one shall guide me ? And he besought Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the place of the scripture 32 which he was reading was this,

He was led as a sheep to the slaughter ;  
And as a lamb before his shearer is dumb,  
So he openeth not his mouth :

**for to worship.** Evidently this Ethiopian official was one of the many in the Gentile world of the time who had been attracted by the Jewish religion. He had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, perhaps to one of the feasts, and had joined as far as was allowable for him in the worship of Israel. He would be counted among " those that feared God," but would not probably be eligible for actual admission as a proselyte into the sacred congregation of Israel. But he had evidently been able to purchase a copy of the Scriptures in the Septuagint version commonly used in Egypt. Greek literature had penetrated into Ethiopia as early as the third century B.C., and a high official like this eunuch would be quite familiar with that language.

**31 How can I, except some one shall guide me.** The Scriptures, both O.T. and N.T., were never intended for primary instruction. They were written for those who already knew the fundamentals of their religion. To understand them profitably, it is usually necessary that some guidance should be given to the reader, and that by one who is in sympathy with their message and acquainted with the Church's interpretation of them. And in this instance the inquirer had lighted upon what he found a peculiarly difficult passage, but one of the greatest importance for understanding the whole bearing of the O.T.

**32 Now the place of the scripture.** Is. liii. 7-8. The most remarkable and significant of all the O.T. prophecies ; the picture of " the Servant of the Lord," despised, suffering, done to death, but by his very sufferings making atonement for the sins of men, and winning victory and exaltation and a renewal of life. The passage differs considerably in the Septuagint from the Hebrew, and the interpretation of some of the phrases as they stand in the Greek is by no means certain.

- 33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away ;  
 His generation who shall declare ?  
 For his life is taken from the earth.
- 34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom

33 **In his humiliation, etc.** The Hebrew as translated in R.V. is quite clear. The prophet is describing the unjust judgment passed upon the righteous Servant of the Lord, and the callousness of the men of his generation towards his death. But the version in the text has been more usually interpreted to mean that owing to the voluntary humiliation of the Servant, the judgment passed upon him by men was "taken away," i.e. "reserved." God judged him differently from men.

**His generation who shall declare ?** These words were interpreted by the Christian fathers to refer to the Divine nature of the sufferer, Christ—His eternal generation as the Son of God, which is beyond human powers of understanding. Modern interpreters rather understand "generation" to mean the spiritual offspring of the Servant, the multitude of His disciples in time to come, "the great multitude that no man can number." This thought would correspond with the conclusions of Pss. xxii. and lxix.

**For his life is taken from the earth.** Following the line of interpretation suggested above, these words would mean more than that the Servant was put to a violent death. His life was taken from the earth to pass into a higher region ; his death was a triumph.

34 **of whom speaketh the prophet this ?** The eunuch's question goes to the root of the matter. Who is this Servant of the Lord ? More than one explanation has been offered by Jews and by modern interpreters. Some have seen in the passage a description of the persecutions of the prophet Jeremiah. Others have explained it as a personification of the nation of Israel, in its ideal righteousness, suffering, exiled, apparently destroyed, but Divinely restored. Neither interpretation can be considered as in the least adequate to the passage, especially to its insistence on the efficacy of these sufferings for the bearing of human sin. The Jews of later time shrank from applying the picture to the Messiah, owing to their false conception of Him as an earthly conqueror. But Christian interpreters from the first saw in the suffering sin-bearer a direct prophecy of the Passion and Death and Glory of Jesus Christ. Indeed it is difficult to see how any Christian believer can evade this, the obvious interpretation. Philip, at least, had no doubt on the matter ; fortunately for the inquirer, who would hardly have been led to Baptism by the hesitating guidance of some modern writers.

<sup>1</sup> Some ancient authorities insert, wholly or in part, v. 37, *And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*

speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other? And Philip opened his mouth, and **35** beginning from this scripture, preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on the way, they came **36** unto a certain water; and the eunuch saith, Behold, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? <sup>1</sup> And he commanded the chariot to **38** stand still: and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the **39** water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found **40** at Azotus: and passing through he preached the gospel to all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea.

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**36 what doth hinder me to be baptized?** Clearly Philip's proclamation of Jesus as the fulfilment of prophecy, and the bearer of human sin, had included in it the teaching of Baptism as the entrance into the Church and the means of forgiveness and regeneration. Verse 37 (see margin) is certainly omitted in all the principal MSS. except D, and it is more easy to understand how it might naturally have been interpolated, than how, if originally written by St. Luke, it could have been removed. The candidate for Baptism from the earliest times had to make a public profession of his new faith, and from this practice arose the formal creeds of the Church. This profession, as far as it can be traced back, was a confession of belief in the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, based upon the formula of Baptism (St. Matt. xxviii. 19). But there is a freshness and originality in the omitted verse which suggests that perhaps, after all, it is authentic, and dates back to a time even earlier than that of the formal profession, which soon became universal in the Church.

**39 the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip.** The phrase is reminiscent of the experiences of some of the prophets of the O.T., especially Ezekiel (viii. 3, xl. 1-2). Cp. also 1 Kings xviii. 12, 2 Kings ii. 16. We know too little of the possibilities of spiritual power over matter to justify us in dismissing such a description as a mere metaphor for sudden disappearance.

**he went on his way rejoicing.** The story seems to us unfinished, and we should like to know more, as to when and how the eunuch received



## CHAPTER VIII

*Questions*

1. What was the effect of the martyrdom of St. Stephen on the Church and on its enemies ?
2. What do you know of Simon the Sorcerer ?
3. What was the purpose and meaning of the mission of St. Peter and St. John to Samaria ?
4. Describe the meeting of St. Philip with the Ethiopian.
5. What passage of Scripture was the Ethiopian reading, and how did St. Philip explain it ?
6. What verse in the description of the Ethiopian's baptism is omitted in R.V. ? How does this verse illustrate the practice of the Church in Baptism ?
7. What is the importance of St. Philip's work in the expansion of the Church ?
8. What do we know of St. Philip after the baptism of the Ethiopian ?

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the "laying on of hands" and other Christian privileges. It was never the manner of the early Church to baptize a man and then leave him to himself. But doubtless the eunuch made other visits to Palestine, and tradition makes him instrumental in founding the Church which has from an early date existed in Abyssinia.

40 **Azotus.** The ancient Philistine city, called in the O.T. Ashdod.

**Cæsarea**, the Roman capital of the province. Here Philip seems to have remained (see xxi. 8).

*Subjects for Study*

1. The practice of Confirmation and its meaning.

*Dictionary of Christian Antiquities.* "Imposition of hands."

Mason, *Relation of Confirmation to Baptism.*

Hall, *Confirmation in Oxford Library of Practical Theology.*

2. The interpretation of Isaiah liii.

Pusey, *The Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah according to Jewish Interpreters.*

*Isaiah* in Cambridge Bible.

Kirkpatrick, *Doctrine of the Prophets.*

*Saul's Vision of Jesus (ix. 1-9)*

But Saul, yet breathing threatening and slaughter against the 1 disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and asked of him

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ix. From this point onwards the Acts is largely the history of Saul, or St. Paul, as Christians have learned to call him. And first is described the supernatural event which turned him from the fanatical persecutor so vividly portrayed in the earliest notices of him, to be the lifelong devoted servant and apostle of Jesus Christ. Saul was a man of extraordinary personality and powers, one of the world's great men, who, whatever line he had followed, would have been sure to make his mark. His previous history and training had prepared him to take a leading place in his age. He belonged by birth to the Jews of the Dispersion; Tarsus, one of the great cities of the world, was his native place. It was famous for its university, and here Saul had evidently received a liberal education and become familiar with Greek literature. By birth also he was a Roman citizen, his family having probably received this coveted privilege for some eminent services to Rome. But these were only secondary influences in making him what he was. Saul was above all a Jew, a Pharisee, and that of the strictest sort. He had studied the Law and the traditions at Jerusalem, in the school of Gamaliel, the most eminent Jewish teacher of the time (see above, v. 34). His aims and ideals were those of the orthodox and conservative party, infused with his own burning zeal and enthusiasm. He was probably at this time, as we have seen, a member of the Sanhedrin,

**2** letters to Damascus unto the synagogues, that if he found any that were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring **3** them bound to Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, it came to pass that he drew nigh unto Damascus : and suddenly there shone

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and in the prime of life and powers. Blazing with righteous indignation, as he thought it, against the followers of Jesus, and devoting all his strength of character and his influence with men to their extirpation, he might well seem the last person in the world to become a Christian, and still less likely to become the most powerful apostle, teacher, and thinker that the Church has ever known.

**1 yet breathing threatening and slaughter.** This vivid description of the wrath of Saul is important as helping to prove that as yet he had no hesitation as to the righteousness of his persecution. He was not troubled by any doubts of conscience. Doubtless after the amazing experience which shortly befell him, he would remember all too well the defence of Stephen, his vision, and his wonderful death. But as yet these things had not moved him, though they may have had a "sub-conscious" effect.

**letters to Damascus.** Damascus, the ancient and beautiful capital of Syria, had clearly become known already as a stronghold of the disciples of Christ, and apparently next in importance in that respect to Jerusalem. These Damascene Christians would be converted Jews, who still adhered to the synagogues, as those of Jerusalem did to the Temple. Saul, with characteristic courage and thoroughness, was determined to root out this nest of misbelievers ; and he sought for formal authority from the high priest. Judaism was not only a nationality which preserved its identity and separateness in all the countries of the empire, and even beyond. It was a powerful ecclesiastical organisation. The high priest and the Sanhedrin exercised a recognised authority over all synagogues, however distant ; and the sending of envoys and authoritative letters from Jerusalem was quite usual, and was permitted by the Romans, who only reserved to the Emperor and his governors the right of hearing appeals, if a Jew thought himself unjustly treated.

**2 any that were of the Way.** This was one of the earliest Christian descriptions of the new life which was followed by believers. Christianity was the way of life, guiding men by its teaching, and refreshing them with its sacraments from Baptism to death. Our Lord had suggested, no doubt, this aspect of the Gospel by His teaching about "the narrow way."

**3 and suddenly there shone round about him a light out of heaven.** This momentous occurrence is described three times in the Acts (ix.,

round about him a light out of heaven : and he fell upon the earth, **4** and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ? And he said, Who art thou, Lord ? And he *said*, **5** I am Jesus whom thou persecutest : but rise, and enter into **6** the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the **7** men that journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the <sup>1</sup>voice, but beholding no man. And Saul arose from **8**  
<sup>1</sup> Or, *sound*. the earth ; and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing ; and they led him by the hand, and brought him into

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xxii., xxvi.) with slight variations. All the accounts must have been ultimately derived from Saul himself, and should be carefully compared. Two phenomena stand out clearly in them all—the *light* and the *voice*. These were certainly *objective* : they were seen and heard. It was a breaking in of the supernatural world upon this world of nature, so that human senses of eye and ear were affected by it. Saul's companions saw the light (xxii. 9), though he saw more in it than they did. They also apparently heard the voice, but could not, as he did, distinguish any words. The description does not in the least suggest a flash of lightning or a peal of thunder. No merely natural explanation is adequate. It seems clear also that Saul was convinced that he saw in that flash of light a figure, the form of the glorified and ascended Jesus. Though not actually stated in the accounts, there are frequent allusions to this appearance (see ix. 17, xxii. 14, xxvi. 19 ; 1 Cor. ix. 1, xv. 8). It was so vivid and convincing that Saul regarded it as being an appearance of the risen Christ parallel to those seen by the witnesses of the Resurrection, and qualifying him to be an apostle as one of those who had actually seen the Lord after He had risen from the dead.

**4 why persecutest thou me ?** In persecuting the followers of Jesus, Saul was in reality persecuting Jesus Himself, who was in union with them by His Spirit. The pathetic personal appeal, with its reiteration of the man's name, seems to imply that in some mysterious sense the heavenly Christ was still suffering with His people. His Passion was being renewed in them. The words that follow in A.V., "It is hard for thee," etc., belong really to the third account (see note on xxvi. 14). The further words, "And he trembling and astonished," etc., are partly an interpolation and partly introduced from xxii. 10.

**7 hearing the voice.** This appears at first sight inconsistent with xxii. 9, but probably what is meant in the first account is that they

9 Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink.

*Saul's Baptism and Witness to Jesus (ix. 10-25)*

10 Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias ;  
and the Lord said unto him in a vision, Ananias. And he said,  
11 Behold, I *am here*, Lord. And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and  
go to the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house  
of Judas for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus : for behold, he  
12 prayeth ; and he hath seen a man named Ananias coming in,  
and laying his hands on him, that he might receive his sight.  
13 But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many of this  
14 man, how much evil he did to thy saints at Jerusalem : and  
here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call

heard a noise accompanying the light : while the second one means that they heard no articulate words (cp. St. John xii. 29).

" Where I heard noise and you saw flame,  
Some one man knew God called his name."

10 **Ananias.** Further described in xxii. 12. He was a converted Jew, and probably the head of the Christian congregation at Damascus. Tradition makes him one of the seventy disciples of St. Luke x.

**the Lord,** i.e. Jesus Christ. This appearance, like others later to Saul himself (xviii. 9, xxii. 17, xxiii. 11), was perhaps not a sensible and objective one like that on the road to Damascus, but a communication inwardly to the soul, which appeared, as in dreams, to be actually before the eyes, like the "visions" of the prophets in the O.T.

11 **the street which is called Straight.** This street is still pointed out unmistakably in Damascus. It runs through the city from east to west.

13 **thy saints.** This is one of the regular titles in the N.T. for the members of the Christian Church. It expresses the calling and the ideal of Christians. They are called to be "holy," i.e. consecrated to God, and aiming at purity and righteousness of life. The ancient calling of Israel to be "holy to the Lord" is taken up with a fuller meaning into the Christian Church. (Cp. 1 St. Peter i. 15-16, ii. 9.)

upon thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way : for **15**  
 he is a <sup>1</sup>chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name  
 before the Gentiles and kings, and the children  
 of Israel : for I will shew him how many things **16**  
 he must suffer for my name's sake. And Ananias departed, **17**  
 and entered into the house ; and laying his hands on him,  
 said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, who appeared  
 unto thee in the way which thou camest, hath sent me, that  
 thou mayest receive thy sight, and be filled with the  
 Holy Ghost. And straightway there fell from his eyes as it **18**

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**15 he is a chosen vessel** : literally " a vessel of choice " (a Hebraism). The metaphor is often used in the O.T. Men are spoken of as " vessels," i.e. made for His own purposes by God, as a potter fashions his clay. It is implied that Saul has a special vocation from the Lord Jesus for the work which is described in the words that follow ; a vocation indeed which he might have resisted and refused, but which in the eternal counsels was intended for him.

**16 how many things he must suffer.** Greater in the sight of the Lord than all that Saul had in the future either to learn or to do, was his call to suffer. Suffering is the highest vocation, and the most perfect witness to Christ (cp. 2 Cor. xi. 23-28).

**17 laying his hands on him.** As we have already noticed, this imposition of hands was an outward sign which had different meanings and purposes according to circumstances and the intention of the doer. Here it was neither for the conferring of the Holy Spirit, as Saul was not yet baptized, nor, still less, for the imparting of an office in the Church, which would come later. It was an act of preliminary blessing and acceptance by the Church, preparatory to Saul's admission into full fellowship. So in the same way he is addressed by the affectionate title of " brother," the name by which all Christians addressed one another. And as we see from v. 18, the laying on of hands was also the means of a gift of healing—the restoring of sight.

**18 as it were scales.** The word seems to have been a technical medical term for a film growing over the eyes. The light from heaven had apparently had a physical effect on Saul's vision, which was visibly removed after the laying on of hands : the films were seen to drop from his seared and blinded eyes.

**and was baptized.** Cp. the fuller statement of xxii. 16. Baptism is throughout the N.T. the one and only means of admission into the

were scales, and he received his sight; and he arose and was 19 baptized; and he took food and was strengthened.

And he was certain days with the disciples which were at 20 Damascus. And straightway in the synagogues he proclaimed 21 Jesus, that he is the Son of God. And all that heard him were

fellowship of the Church. A man might be truly penitent and converted, like Saul; or even, like Cornelius, manifest supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, but Baptism was not therefore judged unnecessary. Such dispositions or gifts were regarded not as taking its place, but as proof that the man was qualified to receive so high a privilege as Baptism.

**19 he took food.** Without doubt Baptism was followed by the sacramental laying on of hands as in Acts viii., and probably this food which the new member of the Church received was in the first place the Holy Eucharist, and then the bodily food of which Saul, worn out by these tremendous experiences and his three days' agony of fasting and prayer, must have stood much in need.

**And he was certain days.** St. Luke's history here is very much condensed. He omits altogether a fact which we have indubitably from Saul himself in Gal. i. 17, namely, that immediately after his baptism he went away into Arabia. From the context it has been gathered that this was not for the purpose of preaching his new faith, but for retirement and solitary pondering over his great experiences. Here, in the deserts, he would learn more of the meaning of the vision by prayer and direct communing with God, and by study of the Scriptures in the new light now thrown upon them. Just as Saul had been converted by the direct intervention of Jesus Christ Himself, so he learned the mysteries of the faith, not from the original Apostles, but at first hand from the same Source in the deserts of Arabia. Perhaps St. Luke's "certain days" means a short preliminary stay at Damascus before the visit to Arabia, which is likely enough in itself, though not alluded to in Gal. i. Saul's preaching in the synagogues probably took place after the return from Arabia (see note on v. 23). "Straightway" need not mean more than "in the next place."

**20 in the synagogues.** This is the first time in the Acts that the synagogues are definitely mentioned as the scene of Christian preaching, though perhaps St. Stephen had preached in them at Jerusalem (vi.). There was probably as yet no definite separation of the Christians at Damascus from the Jewish worship; and Saul, as a distinguished Pharisee, would no doubt be invited to speak after the reading of the Scriptures, as Christ Himself had spoken (St. Luke iv.).

**the Son of God.** From the first the Apostles had believed Jesus to

amazed, and said, Is not this he that in Jerusalem made havoc of them which called on this name? and he had come hither for this intent, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests. But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded **23** the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is the Christ.

And when many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel **23** together to kill him: but their plot became known to Saul. And **24** they watched the gates also day and night that they might kill him: but his disciples took him by night, and let him down **25** through the wall, lowering him in a basket.

be the Son of God and Divine, and worshipped Him as such, but there is a marked reserve in the earlier sermons in the Acts, addressed to Jews. Jesus is spoken of simply as the Christ, and the Servant of Jehovah foretold by the prophets. Saul, fresh from his intimate communion with God in Arabia, strikes a bolder note, and proclaims in the synagogues the essential Deity of His Master as God's only Son.

**23 many days.** In contrast with the "certain days" of v. 19, this expression probably covers the whole period of Saul's visit to Arabia and his preaching at Damascus, which he himself states (Gal. i. 18) to have been three years.

**the Jews took counsel together.** This was the beginning of the bitter personal hostility to Saul which he had to suffer from the Jews all the rest of his life. The majority, probably, of the Christians at Damascus were Jews by birth, but the name now becomes more and more attached to the definitely anti-Christian Jewish opposition—the sense in which St. John so frequently uses it in his Gospel.

**24 And they watched the gates also.** This incident is alluded to by the Apostle himself in 2 Cor. xi. 32-33. It seems that the Jewish plotters secured the co-operation of the Governor of Damascus, to whom they no doubt represented Saul as a very dangerous person. Damascus sometimes belonged to the Romans, and sometimes to the Arab kings of Petra. At this time it was under the rule of one of the latter, Hareth or Aretas.

**25 his disciples.** A significant phrase. Saul's personality had already attracted to himself a number of Christian followers. Some years later he had to repudiate with vehemence the formation of a party in the Corinthian Church calling themselves "of Paul" (1 Cor. i. 12, 13).



*Saul at Jerusalem (ix. 26-30)*

26 And when he was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself  
to the disciples : and they were all afraid of him, not believing  
27 that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought  
him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the  
Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how at  
28 Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. And he  
29 was with them going in and going out at Jerusalem, preaching  
boldly in the name of the Lord : and he spake and disputed

**lowering him in a basket.** In 2 Cor. xi. the Apostle seems to allude to this escape as a typical example of "weakness." He evidently felt it as a humiliating experience. His sensitive nature may have led him afterwards to regard it as a cowardly concession to the fear of his followers, or even to his own. But the allusion is so brief that it is impossible to be certain as to his exact meaning.

**26 And when he was come to Jerusalem.** This visit is alluded to in Gal. i. 18-19, where its purpose is stated to have been "to visit" St. Peter, the recognised head of the Apostles and the chief ruler of the Church. It is certainly remarkable that during the time which had elapsed since Saul's conversion, so little seems to have been known about him at Jerusalem. His sincerity was doubted, and at first he was not admitted to Christian fellowship. This can perhaps be accounted for by the scattered and terrified condition to which the persecution after St. Stephen's death had reduced the Church at Jerusalem.

**27 But Barnabas took him, etc.** Barnabas, already described in iv. 36, 37, appears here in the characteristic part of a peacemaker. He seems to have been well informed as to the facts of Saul's conversion and his work at Damascus. The only "Apostles" at Jerusalem were, according to Gal. i., St. Peter and "James, the Lord's brother," who appears later as the head of the Church at Jerusalem. He was not one of the original Twelve, but he, like Barnabas, came to be known by the title of "apostle."

**28 And he was with them going in and going out.** The phrase was one commonly used to describe open and familiar intercourse (cp. i. 21 and 1 Sam. xviii. 13, 16). St. Barnabas's introduction of Saul seems to have resulted in the latter being recognised as an equal by the Apostles. His stay at Jerusalem, however, according to Gal. i., was only fifteen days.

against the <sup>1</sup>Grecian Jews; but they went about to kill him.

<sup>1</sup> Gr. And when the brethren knew it, they brought him **30**  
*Hellenists.* down to Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

*St. Peter's Visitation of the Church (ix. 31-43)*

So the church throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria **31**

<sup>1</sup> Gr. had peace, being <sup>1</sup>edified; and, walking <sup>2</sup>in the fear  
*built up.* of the Lord and <sup>2</sup>in the comfort of the Holy Ghost,  
<sup>1</sup> Or, by. was multiplied.

And it came to pass, as Peter went throughout all parts, he **32**

**29 the Grecian Jews.** It is significant that Saul seems at once to have devoted himself to carrying on the special work of the martyr Stephen among the Hellenists, and to have been himself in danger of a like fate at their hands. He was encouraged on this occasion to escape from his peril by a vision of the Lord (see xxii. 17-21.).

**30 sent him forth to Tarsus.** See Gal. i. 21. This unrecorded stay in Saul's own native place lasted some seven years, until he was brought to Antioch by St. Barnabas (xi. 25).

**31 So the church, etc.** St. Luke, before proceeding to the next most important section of the acts of St. Peter, gives one of his characteristic and joyful pictures of the progress of the Church (cp. ii. 42-47, iv. 32-35, vi. 7). R.V. has restored the true reading "church" for "churches." Though separate congregations might be spoken of as "churches," from the first it was realised that the Church was one and the same everywhere, and that each congregation was but the local embodiment of the one universal Church. This is the first mention of the Church in Galilee; by this time the Gospel had taken root in the whole of Palestine. St. Luke's description shows that the progress was both inward and outward. The Church was being "built up"—increasing, that is, in understanding of the faith and the practice of the Christian life; it was also being "multiplied," growing in numbers. Church life was marked by reverence, "the fear of the Lord," and by the supernatural joy and enthusiasm given by the indwelling Spirit.

Some external causes may have contributed to this period of "peace." The chief persecutor was removed. The Jews were too much occupied by their own religious troubles to disturb the Christians. Caligula had ordered his own statue to be erected in the Temple; and the fear of this profanation was only removed by his assassination in A.D. 41.

**32 as Peter went throughout all parts.** The interest of the narrative now shifts from the figure of Saul to that of St. Peter. He appears

33 came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Æneas, which had kept his bed 34 eight years; for he was palsied. And Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ healeth thee: arise and make thy bed. 35 And straightway he arose. And all that dwelt at Lydda and in Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called <sup>1</sup>Dorcas; this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. <sup>1</sup> That is, *Gazelle.* 37 And it came to pass in those days, that she fell sick, and died: and when they had washed her, they laid her in an 38 upper chamber. And as Lydda was nigh unto Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men unto him,

as exercising a general oversight over the Church in Palestine, and making a sort of visitation, like a bishop; which led him (x.) to take the most important step as yet ventured in the Church, the admission of the Gentiles to full Christian privileges, and the breaking down of the separation between them and the Jews. At first, however, this visitation does not seem to have been of a missionary character. St. Peter was intending only to visit the different Christian congregations.

**Lydda.** A large village on the road from Jerusalem to Joppa, called Lod in 1 Chron. viii. 12. Æneas was probably one of the Christian community, though this is not certain. His restoration from paralysis recalls the similar miracles of our Lord Himself, and no doubt was felt, in the light of later events, to be a type of the power of the Gospel to restore those who, like the Gentiles, were fast bound by sin.

**34 make thy bed.** A sign that the cure was complete, like our Lord's commanding the sufferer at Bethesda (St. John v.) to carry his bed. Æneas was now able to do for himself what he had to depend for eight years on the ministration of others to do for him.

**35 Sharon,** the plain which lay between the Mediterranean coast and the low hills (*Shephelah*). It is a beautiful district, famed for its flowers and fertility.

**36 Joppa.** The modern Jaffa, the only Jewish seaport on the coast of Palestine; famous in the O.T. for the importation of the cedar-wood from Tyre for building Solomon's Temple. This is the first miracle of the raising of the dead to life recorded in the Church after our Lord's Ascension. It is vividly and pathetically described; and the account was probably derived from St. Peter himself.

intreating him, Delay not to come on unto us. And Peter arose **39** and went with them. And when he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, **40** and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning to the body, he said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes; and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and raised her up; **41** and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And **42** it became known throughout all Joppa: and many believed on the Lord. And it came to pass, that he abode many days in **43** Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

## CHAPTER IX

### *Questions*

1. Explain the mission of Saul to Damascus.
2. Describe the experience that befell him on the way.
3. What was the Lord's answer to the doubts of Ananias?
4. Why was it necessary for Saul to be baptized?
5. What further particulars about the events that followed Saul's conversion are found in Gal. i.?
6. What were Saul's experiences on his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion?
7. What miracles were wrought by St. Peter in the course of his visitation of the Church?

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**40 kneeled down and prayed.** Our Lord's miracles of raising the dead differ from this in two respects. He spoke at once with the word of authority; and he touched the dead body, in the case both of the daughter of Jairus and the widow's son at Nain.

**43 with one Simon a tanner.** Tanning was an "unclean" trade. It marked a distinct break with Jewish prejudice for St. Peter to lodge with Simon.

8. With what miracles of our Lord may they be compared or contrasted ?

*Subject for Study*

1. Apparent discrepancies between St. Luke's account and Gal. i.

Rackham, *Acts of the Apostles*.

Lightfoot, *Galatians. St. Paul and the Three*.

*Cornelius the Centurion (x. 1-8)*

Now *there was* a certain man in Cæsarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of the band called the Italian

x. This chapter is of great importance. It records the greatest turning-point in the official attitude of the rulers of the Church towards the Gentile world. The chief problem before the Church, composed as it was originally entirely of Jews by birth, was the realisation of her essential catholicity, as the Church of all nations alike. Our Lord had certainly spoken often of the incoming of the Gentiles ; and to preach to " all the nations " was part of His great commission to His Apostles. But this involved so complete a change in the ordinary Jewish outlook that it is scarcely to be wondered at that no attempt at first was made to realise it. The conversion of the Samaritans had been accepted ; but the Samaritans were, after all, circumcised and keepers of the Law of Moses, though regarded as outcasts and schismatics. The only instance of the baptism of a Gentile hitherto had been that of the Ethiopian eunuch, which was an act performed in answer to a special revelation. The time had now come for an official movement in this direction, and this chapter records how St. Peter, the acknowledged head of the Apostles, was guided to make it.

**1 Cæsarea.** This city on the coast had been enlarged and improved by Herod the Great. He built a fine harbour, a palace for himself, and an amphitheatre. Its population was largely composed of Gentiles, and it became the Roman capital of the province and the seat of government. A large garrison was maintained there. At this time there was no Roman procurator, but Herod Agrippa I. reigned as representative of the Romans.

**Cornelius.** The name suggests that he was a Roman. A centurion

<sup>1</sup>band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his <sup>2</sup> house, who gave much alms to the people, and <sup>3</sup> Or, *cohort* prayed to God alway. He saw in a vision openly, <sup>4</sup> as it were about the ninth hour of the day, an angel of God coming in unto him, and saying to him, Cornelius. And he, fastening his eyes upon him, and being affrighted, <sup>5</sup> said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are gone up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and fetch one Simon, who is sur-

is literally one who commands a hundred. But although he would in this respect correspond to our "captain," in the Roman army his position was rather that of a non-commissioned officer, who had been raised from the ranks by merit. It is remarkable how well centurions figure in the N.T. They were evidently picked men of solid qualities, and some of them at least were sincerely religious.

**the band called the Italian band.** The margin "cohort" is the technical name for this division of the army. It consisted of six hundred soldiers; and ten cohorts formed a "legion." This particular cohort must have been called "Italian" because originally raised in Italy, and therefore of high dignity, as its members would be Roman citizens. Inscriptions have been discovered which corroborate this title "Italian." (See Rackham, *Acts*, p. 146, note.)

**2 a devout man, etc.** This is the usual description of one of that class of Gentiles who had been attracted to the Jewish religion. Without actually becoming "proselytes," or receiving circumcision, they worshipped in the synagogues, and followed the pious practices of Jews. Cornelius and his whole household, i.e. both his family and his slaves, were evidently well known (*v.* 22) as "God-fearers" of position and repute. The three characteristic Jewish religious acts were prayer, almsgiving, and fasting; and Cornelius was devoted to the two first of these at least ("fasting" in *v.* 30 is apparently an erroneous reading in A.V.).

**3 openly.** This was not a dream: the angel actually appeared to him, as St. Gabriel had appeared to Zacharias and to the Blessed Virgin.

**the ninth hour.** See *v.* 30. This was one of the regular Jewish hours of prayer. (Note on iii. 1.)

6 named Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose  
7 house is by the sea side. And when the angel that spake unto  
him was departed, he called two of his household-servants,  
8 and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;  
and having rehearsed all things unto them, he sent them  
to Joppa.

*St. Peter's Vision (x. 9-23)*

9 Now on the morrow, as they were on their journey, and drew  
nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray,  
10 about the sixth hour: and he became hungry, and desired to  
11 eat: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance; and he  
beholdeth the heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending,  
as it were a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth:  
12 wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts and creeping  
13 things of the earth and fowls of the heaven. And there came a  
14 voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill and eat. But Peter said, Not so,

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4 for a memorial before God. The word and the thought occur frequently in the O.T. For example, the meal-offering of fine flour, oil, and incense is spoken of as a "memorial" (Lev. ii.). In human language a "memorial" may be described as some act by which man may call God to "remember" him. Our Lord raised the idea to still higher significance when He spoke of the Eucharist as performed for the "remembrance" of Himself, i.e. to call the Father to remember His Son's Sacrifice.

9 the housetop. The roofs of Eastern houses were usually flat, approached by an outside staircase, and protected by railings or parapet. They were very commonly used for prayer or rest. The sixth hour, i.e. noon, was a regular Jewish hour of prayer. Peter had probably not yet broken his fast.

11 a trance. A state of abstraction from the ordinary externals of life, and in that respect like sleep, but unlike it because the intelligence remains awake, and is rendered more keenly susceptible to communications from the spiritual world.

Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common and unclean. And a voice *came* unto him again the second time, 15 What God hath cleansed, make not thou common. And this 16

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**14 anything that is common or unclean.** "Common" literally means that which is used by all. The Jew applied the word in a somewhat contemptuous manner to things which the Gentile ate without question, but which were forbidden to his sacred and separated nation. The distinction between clean and unclean foods was, of course, one of the ordinances of the Law (Lev. xi., Deut. xiv.). Its purpose may have been partly hygienic, as some at least of the forbidden meats (such as pork) are often unwholesome in a hot climate. It may also have been intended as a moral discipline. The Jews, separated to be a holy nation, must not indulge themselves indiscriminately in any kind of food they desired. But doubtless the main purpose, for which it certainly proved most effective, was to prevent the Jews from mingling in social observances with the heathen, which might easily have led them into idolatry, for a Gentile feast was usually associated with the service of some idol. This idea of separation grew stronger in the later period of Jewish history; to eat at the same table even with a Gentile was forbidden; and the Jews in consequence were regarded as the most unsociable of mankind. St. Peter had, of course, been brought up in this circle of ideas, and the suggestion in the trance that he should appease his hunger by eating of any unclean bird or animal he repudiated with something like horror, even though the word seemed to come to him from heaven. The outburst is characteristic of the Peter of the Gospels.

**15 What God hath cleansed, etc.** There is nothing in God's creation which is essentially unclean or evil. All was created originally "very good." Man's sin and his proneness to temptation had rendered necessary a temporary restriction. But now the Incarnation had again cleansed created things. To call anything henceforth "unclean" in the Jewish sense was to set oneself against God. Our Lord, as St. Mark clearly points out, had Himself by His own authority swept away the old distinction. Evil lies not in material things, but in the heart of man. See St. Mark vii. 14-23, especially the evangelist's comment in v. 19. "This he said, making all meats clean" (R.V.). But St. Peter had either forgotten this, or failed to realise its meaning. But the real question at issue, as he was presently to see, was whether there is any real distinction in *mankind* in view of the Gospel of the Incarnation, whether Gentiles can be considered as "unclean," or whether they are to be received fully and without distinction to Christian fellowship. The answer is the same as in the case of meats. The



was done thrice : and straightway the vessel was received up into heaven.

17 Now while Peter was much perplexed in himself what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men that were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood  
18 before the gate, and called and asked whether Simon, which was  
19 surnamed Peter, were lodging there. And while Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek  
20 thee. But arise, and get thee down, and go with them, nothing  
21 doubting : for I have sent them. And Peter went down to the men, and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek : what is the cause  
22 wherefore ye are come ? And they said, Cornelius a centurion, a righteous man and one that feareth God, and well reported of by all the nation of the Jews, was warned *of God* by a holy angel  
23 to send for thee into his house, and to hear words from thee. So he called them in and lodged them.

*The Declaration of the Gospel to Cornelius and his Baptism*

(x. 23-48)

And on the morrow he arose and went forth with them, and certain of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

Incarnation is the redemption of all men alike, and all are on an equal footing before Christ.

19 **the Spirit said unto him.** The personality of the Holy Spirit is clearly brought out in this verse ; but it can only be a matter of speculation as to how precisely His message came to St. Peter. It is sufficient to see that the conscience of the Apostle clearly recognised it as a Divine communication, which he had no right to resist.

23 **So he called them in and lodged them.** St. Peter, with characteristic impetuosity in obeying a call, showed at once that he had taken in the Divine lesson, and was prepared to accept these Gentiles on terms of friendship, and to give them hospitality.

**certain of the brethren.** These were six in number (xi. 12), members of the Christian Church in Joppa, and doubtless all Jews by birth. Their presence with St. Peter evidently shows the feeling of the great importance of the occasion, and the need of witnesses.

And on the morrow <sup>1</sup>they entered into Cæsarea. And Cor- 24  
<sup>1</sup> Some  
ancient  
authorities  
read *he*.  
 nelius was waiting for them, having called together 25  
 his kinsmen and his near friends. And when it came 26  
 to pass that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and  
 fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But 26  
 Peter raised him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am  
 a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and 27  
 findeth many come together: and he said unto 28  
<sup>1</sup> Or, *how*  
*unlawful*  
*it is for a*  
*man, etc.*  
 them, Ye yourselves know <sup>2</sup>how that it is an  
 unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to join  
 himself or come unto one of another nation; and  
 yet unto me hath God shewed that I should not call any  
 man common or unclean: wherefore also I came without gain- 29  
 saying, when I was sent for. I ask therefore with what intent  
 ye sent for me. And Cornelius said, Four days ago, until this 30  
 hour, I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer in my house; and  
 behold, a man stood before me in bright apparel, and saith, 31  
 Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remem-  
 brance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call 32  
 unto thee Simon, who is surnamed Peter; he lodgeth in the house  
 of Simon a tanner, by the sea side. Forthwith therefore I sent 33  
 to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now

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**25 worshipped him.** Such Oriental prostrations were very unusual for a Roman—especially for a Roman citizen and official in the presence of a Jew. They show the intense earnestness of Cornelius and his belief that St. Peter was a direct messenger to him from God. But in the eyes of Christians such reverence was only befitting to God Himself. St. Peter repudiates it, and wishes to speak to Cornelius on the common footing of humanity. Even angels decline such acts of worship (Rev. xix. 10, xxii. 9).

**29 I ask therefore, etc.** St. Peter knew already in substance why Cornelius had sent for him. But the occasion was so serious, the break which he himself was making (as he points out, 28-29) with Jewish prejudice so remarkable, that he wished to have a formal statement from Cornelius himself, especially for the benefit of all the assembled witnesses.

**33 the Lord.** The general use of this word in the Acts, and the contrast with "God" in the previous words, suggests that Cornelius

therefore we are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all things that have been commanded thee of the Lord. And Peter opened his mouth and said,

Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him.

<sup>1</sup>The word which he sent unto the children of

<sup>1</sup> Many ancient authorities read *He sent the word unto.*

means by "the Lord," Jesus Christ. Without doubt he had heard already about the Saviour (see v. 37), and recognised St. Peter as an apostle from Him.

**34 opened his mouth.** A phrase implying some formal and authoritative utterance. Cp. St. Matt. v. 2; Acts viii. 35.

The unfinished sermon which follows is of the greatest interest as the first declaration of the Gospel to the Gentiles, to those indeed, in this case, who were familiar both with the hopes of Judaism and the appearance of Christ, but who in the eyes of Jews, and probably of most Jewish Christians at the time, were outside the Covenant.

St. Peter declares—

(1) The equality of all men in the sight of God;

(2) The main facts about the office and the ministry of Jesus, His Passion and Resurrection; the commission to the Apostles His witnesses;

(3) The offer of the forgiveness of sin through faith in Him.

**no respecter of persons.** See Deut. x. 17. The phrase or its equivalent occurs frequently in the O.T. It was the standing abuse in the administration of justice, that judges often "accepted persons," i.e. showed partiality, either because they had been bribed or for personal reasons. Judges are warned in Ex. xxiii. 3-9 against showing favour either to a rich man because he is rich or a poor man in pity for his poverty. St. Peter means here that God is absolutely fair—every man stands before Him on an equality, and is judged according to his deserts.

**35 is acceptable to him.** Both the context and the general sense of the N.T. show that this means not that such religion in itself is sufficient for salvation, but that it renders a man "acceptable" as one suitable to be admitted to the one way of salvation, i.e. to the Christian Church through Baptism. The "fear" of God shows the right inward attitude of reverence and obedience, and "working righteousness" proves the man's sincerity. By these things, like Cornelius, he may prepare himself for the fuller knowledge and the gifts of the Spirit.

Israel, preaching <sup>1</sup>good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)—that saying ye yourselves know, which was published throughout all Judæa, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; *even* Jesus of Nazareth, how that God anointed him with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the country of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom also they slew, hanging him on a tree. Him God raised up the third day, and gave him to be made manifest, not to all the people, but unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, *even* to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he charged us to preach unto

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**36 good tidings of peace**, i.e. peace between man and God, and as a consequence peace between Gentile and Jew.

**Lord of all**. Both of all things and of all men. The title implies the Divinity of Christ, and the absolute universality of the message of the Gospel. Cp. St. Matt. xxviii. 18-19.

**37 that saying**. The Greek implies not merely something uttered by men's lips, but a "subject" or "matter" which is declared with authority.

**38 even Jesus of Nazareth**. The "word" (v. 36) and the "saying" are alike summed up in the name of Jesus. His personality, not merely His teaching, is the sum of the great Divine revelation.

**God anointed him, etc.** This is the explanation of the title "Christ." Jesus in His humanity had received full authority from God the Father as the prophet, priest, and king of men. All these offices in the O.T. were conferred by anointing. The "power" is further explained in the following verses—it was power to overcome physical and moral evil, and to conquer death.

**who went about doing good, etc.** This statement is interesting as the earliest allusion to the ministry and miracles of Jesus. There could scarcely be a more beautiful and effective summary of the narratives which were afterwards to be compiled in the Gospels (not yet written).

**41 who did eat and drink with him**. See St. Luke xxiv. 41-43, and note on Acts i. 4. We notice here, as elsewhere, the stress laid upon the witness to the reality of the Resurrection which was the foundation of the office and the work of an Apostle.

the people, and to testify that this is he which is ordained of God  
 43 to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him bear all the prophets  
 witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him  
 shall receive remission of sins.

44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all  
 45 them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision  
 which believed were amazed, as many as came with Peter, be-  
 cause that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy  
 46 Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify  
 47 God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid the water,  
 that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy

42 the Judge of quick and dead. Cp. St. John v. 22-27. "Quick and dead" implies again universality of authority. It was a claim which would specially appeal to Gentile hearers. The exalted human Jesus was the appointed Judge of all souls, living or departed. Jew and Gentile were alike responsible to Him. It is noteworthy that St. Paul, in his speech at Athens (Acts xvii.) to a heathen audience, not even acquainted with the facts of the Christian faith, as these were, lays special stress upon the universal judgment of all men by the Risen Christ.

43 all the prophets. Cp. iii. 24. It is meant not so much that each individual prophet predicted this, but that it is the general teaching of prophecy that forgiveness for all will be possible in the days of the Messiah. For special passages we may compare Jer. xxxi. 33-34; Joel ii. 32; Micah vii. 18, 19.

44 the Holy Ghost fell on all, etc. The sermon was suddenly interrupted by a supernatural event. The miracle of Pentecost was renewed. The same spiritual gift which was normally given after Baptism by the laying on of hands was bestowed on the Gentiles, and showed its presence by the outward sign of the "speaking with tongues" and the inspired utterance of praises of God. It was a proof that could not be gainsaid that the Gentiles were equally acceptable with the Jews as sharers in the Gospel.

47 Can any man forbid the water. St. Peter regards this outpouring of the Spirit, not as a substitute for Baptism, but as unmistakable evidence that those who had just received it were suited and acceptable as members of the Church, and though uncircumcised must be admitted freely by Baptism into Christian fellowship. They needed not first to become Jews in order that they might be made Christians.

Ghost as well as we ? And he commanded them to be baptized <sup>48</sup> in the name of Jesus Christ. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

## CHAPTER X

### *Questions*

1. What are we told about the religion of Cornelius ?
2. Describe St. Peter's vision at Joppa.
3. What is meant by "unclean" food ?
4. Why was it remarkable that St. Peter should go to visit Cornelius ?
5. Summarise St. Peter's sermon to Cornelius, and show its appropriateness to Gentile hearers.
6. What miraculous sign showed that Cornelius and his household were acceptable to God ?
7. Why were Cornelius and his household baptized ?
8. What is the great importance of this baptism in the history of the Church ?

<sup>48</sup> in the name of Jesus Christ. See note on ii. 38.

**to tarry certain days.** These days were no doubt spent in further instruction and encouragement of the new converts. And Philip, one of the Seven, was apparently residing now at Cæsarea, and he would carry on this work after St. Peter left.

This incident of the baptism of Cornelius illustrates in a significant way the office of the Church as the Divinely appointed means of spreading the Gospel. Cornelius was visited by an angel, but even an angel was not commissioned to instruct him in the Christian faith. For that he was directed to the Church and her official ministers.

*Subjects for Study*

1. The centurions of the New Testament.

To be studied by the help of a Concordance.

2. The difficulty of the early Church as to the acceptance of the Gentiles.

Hort, *Judaistic Christianity*.

3. The Christology of St. Peter's sermon.

The first epistle of St. Peter.

Liddon, *Divinity of our Lord*, vi.

*St. Peter's Defence of the Baptism of Cornelius (xi. 1-18)*

1 Now the apostles and the brethren that were in Judæa heard  
2 that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. And  
when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of  
3 the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest  
4 in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. But Peter  
began, and expounded *the matter* unto them in order, saying,  
5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw

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xi. 2 **they that were of the circumcision.** Literally this must mean Jewish Christians, i.e. the whole Church at Jerusalem. But St. Luke seems to be referring rather to a party than to the whole body; from which it may be gathered that opinion was somewhat divided. Those who attacked St. Peter were the strict upholders of the narrow idea of the Church as being bound by the Law of Moses. This is seen in the fact that they did not accuse him of baptizing Gentiles, but of breaking the Jewish rule of separation with regard to them. Probably they did not deny that Gentiles might become members of the Christian Church, but maintained that in order to do so they must first be circumcised and conform in all particulars to the Jewish Law. This was the point of the subsequent controversies, as we see in chapter xv. and in the attacks on St. Paul by the Judaisers—as, for example, in connection with the Galatian Church.

a vision, a certain vessel descending, as it were a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even unto me: upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw the fourfooted beasts of the earth and wild beasts and creeping things and fowls of the heaven. And I heard also a voice saying unto me, Rise, Peter; kill and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath ever entered into my mouth. But a voice answered the second time out of heaven, What God hath cleansed, make not thou common. And this was done thrice: and all were drawn up again into heaven. And behold, forthwith three men stood before the house in which we were, having been sent from Cæsarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, making no distinction. And these six brethren also accompanied me; and we entered into the man's house: and he told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house, and saying, Send to Joppa, and fetch Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, even as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. If then God gave unto them the like gift as *he did* also unto us, when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I, that I could withstand God? And when they heard these things, they held their peace,

12 **these six brethren.** Evidently these had accompanied St. Peter to Jerusalem, and were prepared to witness to his statements.

16 **And I remembered.** See i. 5 and note.

17 **who was I, etc.** St. Peter's humility comes out strongly in this defence. He does not in the least presume on his position as the chief of the Apostles, nor attempt to sweep the controversy aside by an assertion of authority. He tells the whole story, to be judged on its merits, and only pleads in his own defence the certain guidance of the Holy Spirit and the irrefutable evidence of God's approval shown in the gift given to Cornelius and his company.

18 **Then to the Gentiles also, etc.** The lesser question of Jewish separateness is for the moment swallowed up in the greater matter of



and glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life.

*The Growth of a Gentile Church at Antioch (xi. 19-26)*

19 They therefore that were scattered abroad upon the tribulation that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phœnicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to none save only  
20 to Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the

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the full acceptance of the Gentiles, though it was destined to be raised again later on with great bitterness and persistence.

repentance unto life. That is, repentance which makes it possible for man to win eternal life. Repentance is the necessary qualification for Baptism, and Baptism admits into the Church, in which eternal life is a present possession for the believer.

19 They therefore that were scattered abroad. The historian here returns to the narrative of events following the martyrdom of Stephen. See viii. 4. He has already shown how it led to the conversion of the Samaritans, and the baptism of the first Gentile, the Ethiopian eunuch. He now proceeds to an event of the highest importance, the formation of the first great centre of Gentile Christianity at Antioch.

**Phœnicia.** These missionaries seem to have gone northward along the coast road; and at a later time we notice fruit of their labours in the Christian communities in Tyre and Ptolemais and Sidon (xxi. 4, 7; xxvii. 3). Others went by sea to the important island of Cyprus, from which St. Barnabas had originally come.

**Antioch.** At this time the third greatest city of the empire, ranking next to Rome and Alexandria; the capital of the province of Syria. It had been founded about 300 B.C. by Seleucus Nicator, who had admitted a large number of Jews to its citizenship. It was situated on the Orontes, on the main trade route to Assyria, while its seaport Seleucia gave it access to the Mediterranean. Herod the Great had improved and beautified it. The inhabitants were somewhat turbulent, and were noted both for their wit and their immorality.

20 spake unto the Greeks also. This was a great turning-point in the missionary activity of the Church. The margin "Hellenists" is supported by considerable MS. authority; but it would have been no

<sup>1</sup>Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of 21  
<sup>1</sup> Many the Lord was with them: and a great number  
 ancient that believed turned unto the Lord. And the 22  
 authorities read *Gre-* report concerning them came to the ears of the  
*cian Jews.* church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent  
<sup>2</sup> Some forth Barnabas as far as Antioch: who, when 23  
 ancient he was come, and had seen the grace of God,  
 authorities read *that* was glad; and he exhorted them all, <sup>2</sup>that with  
*they would* purpose of heart they would cleave unto the  
*cleave unto* Lord: for he was a good man, and full of the 24  
*the purpose* Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was  
*of their* added unto the Lord. And he went forth to Tarsus 25  
*heart in* to seek for Saul: and when he had found him, he 26  
*the Lord.* brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that even

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new thing to have preached to them, and the subsequent course of events shows pretty clearly that it is the heathen Greeks, and not the Greek-speaking Jews, who are meant. No doubt these new converts would have belonged to the class of "God-fearers," those attracted already to the Jewish religion and worshippers in the synagogue, but not circumcised proselytes.

**22 they sent forth Barnabas.** As on the earlier occasion of the conversion of the Samaritans, an apostolic delegate was sent to examine and guide in these new circumstances. Barnabas was a singularly happy choice. His peace-making and conciliatory disposition supplied just the influence that was needed. St. Luke's description of him is very significant. He was "good," i.e. not merely a morally righteous man, but one of kindly disposition, a "gentleman," as the word implies. He had notable spiritual gifts and that grasp of Divine truth which lifted him above personal prejudices and Jewish narrowness. He welcomed the new development, rejoiced in it, and used his gift of "exhortation" (or "consolation") to encourage and confirm the Gentile believers and unite them with the Jewish members of the Church.

**25 to seek for Saul.** This was Barnabas's most important contribution to the development of the Church at Antioch. He remembered the converted persecutor, and recognised that his personality and gifts were just what were needed. Henceforth Saul was closely associated with the Antiochian Church, and from that as his headquarters he started on all his subsequent missionary journeys.

**26 And the disciples were called Christians, etc.** This again marks

for a whole year they were gathered together <sup>1</sup>with the church, and taught much people; and that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. <sup>1</sup> Gr. *in*.

27 Now in these days there came down prophets from Jerusalem

an important turning-point. The followers of the new religion were noticed and distinguished from the Jews by a distinct name. Without much doubt the title was given them by the populace of Antioch, who were famous for their readiness to satirise and to invent nicknames. The believers themselves had not used this name, but spoke of themselves as "the brethren," or "the saints," or "the disciples," and their religion as "the Way." The Jews had only contemptuously called them "Nazarenes." Some have suggested that the name originated at the court of the Roman "legate" or governor; and it certainly became early the official Roman name for the believers. It has also been suggested that the original title was "Christians," from a Greek word meaning "good," applied in derision. But there seems no reason to doubt that from the first it was derived from "Christ." The title "Christian" is only twice used in the N.T.—contemptuously by Agrippa in Acts xxvi. 28, and in 1 St. Peter iv. 16, with evident allusion to the official Roman use of it, as in itself an accusation under which men might be put to death.

27 prophets. A prophet is literally a "forth-teller," one who speaks forth with authority messages he has received from God. The prophets of the O.T. did not necessarily predict the future, though this they often did directly or indirectly. Rather they declared God's will and purpose with regard to present events, or they set forth the laws of His working as seen in the past, and therefore as giving guidance for the future. There were professional prophets, called "sons of the prophets," who were trained in the exercise of this office. And there were others, like Amos, who, without training, recognised the Divine call, and felt themselves inspired to declare God's truth to men. The author of all true prophecy is the Holy Spirit, but there appears to be a psychological fitness in some men more than others to receive His communications. So even bad men like Balaam might receive and utter true prophecies. And the prophet's own individuality was never altogether overridden by his inspiration. He spoke in accordance with his own character, learning, and mental attitude.

The Jews regarded prophecy as having ceased for some four centuries before Christ; but they looked forward to a revival of it. And the gift reappeared at the birth of the Lord. The Christian canticles, *Benedictus*, *Magnificat*, and *Nunc Dimittis* are of that nature. John the Baptist was clearly a prophet. And prophecy was a marked feature

unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, **28**

of the early Christian Church, fully recognised and much valued. It might appear as a gift of any Christian, whether man or woman, learned or simple, in accordance with the prophecy of Joel. (See ii. 17-18 and notes.)

But besides the more general exercise of the gift, it is clear both from N.T. and early Christian writings that for some time at least there existed in the Church a more or less clearly defined order of "prophets," who tended to become a professional class. The position of these prophets is one of the most controverted questions of early Christian history. They are ranked by St. Paul next to "apostles" in 1 Cor. xii. 29, Eph. iv. 11, and some have thought they were an order of Church ministers, appointed not by ordination, but supernaturally by the Holy Spirit's call, and existing side by side for a time with the official and ordained ministry. The Montanists in the third century endeavoured to restore this order of prophets, making them superior to bishops. But it must be noticed that prophecy was a gift which might belong to an Apostle or to the humblest member of the Church. By these "prophets" spoken of in the text we need not understand any definite order of officials, but rather men who, whatever their exact place in the Church, had shown that they possessed and regularly exercised the gift of prophecy in an eminent degree.

**28 And there stood up**, i.e. in the Christian assembly for worship and instruction. Revelations seem often to have been made to those who had the gift of prophecy, at the time of the meeting of the Church. (Cp. 1 Cor. xiv. 29-32.)

**signified**. Probably using some significant action, as the O.T. prophets repeatedly did, and as this same Agabus did on a later occasion (xxi. 11).

**by the Spirit**, i.e. it was recognised both by the prophet and his hearers that this prediction was one supernaturally communicated. We know so little of this gift that it is impossible to conjecture what outward evidence of this was perceived, if any: perhaps there was a peculiar ecstatic state which was well known. If so, we can understand how later on the professional prophet might counterfeit such a condition and deceive others, or even himself, and so the "prophet" gradually fell into disrepute.

**a great famine**. The Emperor Claudius reigned from 41 to 54. This famine is probably the one described by Josephus as occurring in Palestine about the year 45. Tacitus and other historians also allude to famines during this reign. "All the world" means no doubt the Roman Empire, as in St. Luke ii. 1. A prophecy of coming famine

and signified by the Spirit that there should be a great famine over all <sup>1</sup>the world : which came to pass in the days of Claudius. And the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send <sup>2</sup>relief unto the brethren that dwelt in Judæa : which also they did, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

<sup>1</sup> Gr. *the inhabited earth.*

<sup>2</sup> Gr. *for ministry.*

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would enable believers to prepare for it, and was an act of Divine mercy. Cp. the seven years of famine in Egypt, foretold by Joseph (Gen. xli.).

**29 determined to send relief.** The community of goods had evidently not been established in the Church of Antioch. The collection for Judæa was a free-will offering according to each individual's means. Why Judæa was selected may have been due to respect for the Mother-Church of Christendom and to the influence of Barnabas and Saul, or it may have been because the Judæan Christians were known to be generally poor and likely to suffer excessively in a famine. Communism at Jerusalem had not had the effect of permanently relieving the poor.

**30 the elders.** The first mention of these officials, who were destined to play such an important part in the government of the Church, and whose precise position has been a cause of much controversy. Without doubt the name "elder" or "presbyter" was derived from the synagogue. Each synagogue had its body of elders, who presided over the services, and formed also a local court for the administration of justice. Something analogous to this must have been established very early in the Christian Church. Each congregation had its elders, appointed no doubt by the laying on of hands and prayer. (Cp. xiv. 23 and xx. 17, etc.) These elders were also called "episcopi," overseers. Doubtless they were responsible for the services, and in the absence of an Apostle would teach, preach, and administer the sacraments, especially the Holy Communion, and preside at the Agape. Their position and qualifications are described in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. At a later date the individual "elder" became the officer who had the pastoral charge of a Christian community, though the stages by which this change came about from a member of a council to an official corresponding to a parish priest are very obscure. In the letters of St. Ignatius (about 108 A.D.) the presbyters are still the council of the bishop. It is clear that in the course of the second century the name "episcopus" became definitely attached to the bishop, and ceased to be applied to the presbyter. As the Apostles passed away, the bishop took the position of the Apostle with exclusive power of laying on of hands in Confirmation and Ordination. The word "priest" is simply a shortened form of "presbyter."

## CHAPTER XI

*Questions*

1. What was the effect in Judæa of St. Peter's action with regard to Cornelius ?
2. What important steps in the development of the Church took place at Antioch ?
3. What was the origin of the name " Christian " ?
4. What is meant by " prophets " and by " elders " ?

*Subjects for Study*

1. The position of the " prophet " in the Christian Church.  
Study N.T. references.  
The *Didache*, translated in Lightfoot's and Harmer's  
*Apostolic Fathers*.  
Joyce, *The Inspiration of Prophecy*.
2. The origin of the official ministry of the Church.  
Gore, *The Church and the Ministry*.  
Moberly, *Ministerial Priesthood*.  
Lightfoot, *Philippians*.  
Whitham, *Holy Orders*.  
,, *History of the Christian Church*.

*Herod's Persecution of the Church (xii. 1-19)*

Now about that time Herod the king put forth his hands to afflict certain of the church. And he killed James the brother

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xii. 1 **Herod the king.** This was Herod Agrippa 1., the grandson of Herod the Great. He had spent his early life in Rome, with varying fortunes. Imprisoned and put in chains by Tiberius, he had been released by Caligula and made king, in 37, of Northern Palestine, Galilee, and Peræa, and presented with a golden chain equal in weight to the iron one he had previously worn. This golden chain he afterwards gave to the Temple treasury. In 41 Claudius gave him Samaria and Judæa, and he reigned thus over the territory of his grandfather till 44, without any Roman procurator. His policy was to ingratiate himself with the Jews, and in every way to support their religion, being himself most punctilious in offering sacrifice and in other religious observances, and opposing any attempt to introduce the Emperor-worship which had been such a menace to the Jews during the reign of Caligula. Doubtless this attack on the leading men of the Christian Church was part of the same policy. The Church had never recovered its early popularity at Jerusalem after the death of St. Stephen, and it was becoming more and more obnoxious to the Jewish people and their leaders.

2 **James the brother of John.** This was the son of Zebedee, who with his brother John had been among the first called of the Twelve; our Lord had named them "Boanerges" = sons of thunder, probably in allusion to their eager, fiery disposition, which appears on more than one occasion in the Gospels. This James must be distinguished from the James who appears prominently in the Acts from xii. 17 onwards as the head of the Church in Jerusalem, and also from another James, the son of Alphæus, who was one of the Twelve. We know nothing of the career of this James the brother of John; but either he was the only one of the Twelve now left with St. Peter at Jerusalem, or he had by his zeal especially drawn the hatred of the Jews upon himself, and so was singled out by Herod as his first victim. He was the first of the Apostles to suffer martyrdom, and our Lord's prediction that he should indeed drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism (St. Matt. xx. 23; St. Mark x. 39) was thus fulfilled. The manner of his execution, "with the sword," suggests that he was condemned as a political offender, or a rebel against the sovereignty of Herod, for stoning would have been the Jewish punishment for a religious offence.

of John with the sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. And *those* were the days of unleavened bread. And when he had taken him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to guard him ; intending after the Passover to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in the prison : but prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him. And when Herod was about to bring him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains : and guards before the door kept the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shined in the cell : and he smote Peter on the side, and awoke him, saying, Rise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And he did so. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed ; and he wist not that it was true which was done <sup>1</sup>by the angel, but thought he saw a vision. And when they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth into the city ; which opened to them of its own accord :

<sup>1</sup> Or, through.

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**3 the days of unleavened bread**, i.e. the feast of the Passover, which lasted from the 14th to the 21st of Nisan or Abib, the first Jewish month (March—April), during which no Jew may taste anything leavened, i.e. made with yeast. The observance was, like the Passover Supper, a commemoration of the great deliverance of Israel from Egypt. See Ex. xii. 15-20 and 39. The Christians in Jerusalem would be keeping this festival also as the memorial of the Lord's Resurrection. It was to them not only Passover-tide, but Easter.

**4 four quaternions**, i.e. four sets of four soldiers each, keeping continuous watch by day and night, one quaternion relieving another. Two of the four soldiers were on guard outside the prison door, and the other two inside the cell, with the prisoner attached to them by chains. St. Peter had on a previous occasion been miraculously delivered from prison (v. 19-20), but it would seem impossible for this to happen again with such stringent precautions.

**after the Passover**, because no blood might be shed during Passover-time ; and Herod was a scrupulous observer of Jewish customs.



and they went out, and passed on through one street; and  
 11 straightway the angel departed from him. And when Peter was  
 come to himself, he said, Now I know of a truth, that the Lord  
 hath sent forth his angel and delivered me out of the hand of  
 Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.  
 12 And when he had considered *the thing*, he came to the house of  
 Mary the mother of John whose surname was Mark; where many  
 13 were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked  
 at the door of the gate, a maid came to answer, named Rhoda.  
 14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for joy,  
 15 but ran in, and told that Peter stood before the gate. And they  
 said unto her, Thou art mad. But she confidently affirmed that  
 16 it was even so. And they said, It is his angel. But Peter con-

10 the first and second ward, i.e. the two doors which were each guarded by one of the soldiers. The "iron gate" was the outer gate of the prison, which opened for them without any human hand to unbar it. The Bezan text, which has many interesting variations, adds that there were "seven steps" leading down from this gate into the city.

The whole of this narrative is remarkably vivid in its detail and the swiftness of its action. It must have been derived from St. Peter himself. No merely natural explanation can account for the facts. They must either be accepted as they stand, as a Divine answer to the earnest prayer of the Church, or rejected as a fable. And if rejected, how is the deliverance of St. Peter to be accounted for?

"Whether a change were wrought i' the shows o' the world,  
 Whether the change came from our minds which see  
 Of shows o' the world so much as and no more  
 Than God wills for His purpose—

—I know not; such was the effect."

BROWNING: *A Death in the Desert.*

12 the house of Mary. This was evidently at the time one of the chief Christian centres in Jerusalem. It has been thought that here was "the upper room" sacred to Christian memories (see i. 13). This Mary was closely related to St. Barnabas, and she was evidently, from the description of her house and its portress, a person of position and wealth. Her son, John Mark, was afterwards the companion first of St. Paul, and then of St. Peter, and the author of the second Gospel.

15 It is his angel. This has generally been explained by the belief of the Jews that each man has his own guardian angel. This is cer-

tinued knocking : and when they had opened, they saw him, and were amazed. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him forth out of the prison. And he said, Tell these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went to another place. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the guards, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judæa to Cæsarea, and tarried there.

<sup>1</sup> Gr. led away to death.

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tainly the teaching of the Christian Church (cp. St. Matt. xviii. 10). But it is not clear that it was a Jewish belief, though it may easily have developed out of the elaborate teaching respecting angels in the later period of Jewish history. (Cp. Tobit v. 21.) The Christians of Mary's house may have thought that such a guardian angel would bear a resemblance to the person himself; or they may have used the word more vaguely to mean St. Peter's disembodied spirit.

**17 Tell these things unto James.** This James was not one of the Twelve, but is described as "the Lord's brother." See note on i. 14. An appearance of the risen Lord had been vouchsafed to him (1 Cor. xv.).

This James, from this time onwards, appears as the head of the Church in Jerusalem, occupying a position quite analogous to that of a bishop. He was greatly respected even by the unbelieving Jews for his piety and strict conformity to the Law and was known as "James the Just." Nevertheless, he suffered martyrdom, rather than deny Christ, probably about the year 61, as described both by Eusebius (ii. 23) and by Josephus.

**went to another place.** No doubt the name was purposely withheld by St. Luke. It may have been Rome. Unquestionably St. Peter suffered martyrdom at Rome; and Roman Catholic historians make him bishop of Rome for twenty-five years. But it is more probable that his immediate refuge was Antioch. Cp. Gal. ii. That St. Peter was bishop of Antioch before proceeding to Rome is an ancient and trustworthy tradition.

**19 Cæsarea.** Herod went there to hold games in honour of the Emperor Claudius, who had just returned from his expedition to Britain, and also to receive the ambassadors from Phœnicia, as described in the next section.

*The Pride and Death of Herod (xii. 20-25)*

20 Now he was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon :  
 and they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus  
 the king's chamberlain their friend, they asked for peace, because  
 21 their country was fed from the king's country. And upon a  
 set day Herod arrayed himself in royal apparel, and sat on the  
 22 throne and made an oration unto them. And the  
 people shouted, *saying*, The voice of a god, and not <sup>1 Or, *judgement-seat*.</sup>  
 23 of a man. And immediately an angel of the Lord  
 smote him, because he gave not God the glory : and he was eaten  
 of worms, and gave up the ghost.

20 **them of Tyre and Sidon.** These cities had lost their ancient greatness, and were now simply free cities of the Roman Empire. But they were still important for their Mediterranean trade. It is not recorded what was the cause of Herod's high displeasure; but evidently it was very inconvenient to these cities, which, having only a narrow strip of territory, depended much on Palestine for supplies. Probably Rome itself absorbed all the exported corn from Egypt, and the Phœnicians could not obtain supplies by sea.

**having made Blastus . . . their friend,** literally, "having persuaded him," no doubt in the usual manner, by a handsome bribe.

21 **in royal apparel.** Josephus (*Ant.* xix. 8. 2) gives a fuller account of this event. He describes the robe which the king wore as being wholly made of silver, and having a splendid appearance as it flashed in the rays of the rising sun.

22 **The voice of a god.** This was a piece of characteristic heathen flattery, common enough in an age that was deifying and worshipping the Emperors even in their lifetime. What it was worth is shown by the fact that the death of Herod was the occasion of riotous public rejoicings! His favouritism of the Jews was much resented by his heathen subjects.

23 **he gave not God the glory.** Herod, with his thorough knowledge of the Jewish religion and his careful outward observance of it, was much more guilty of pride and profanity in accepting such a title than a heathen ruler would have been.

**he was eaten of worms.** This same horrible disease is said to have carried off Antiochus Epiphanes, Galerius, the persecutor of the Church, and Philip II. of Spain.

Many  
ancient  
authorities  
read to  
Jerusalem.

But the word of God grew and multiplied. 24  
And Barnabas and Saul returned <sup>1</sup>from Jerusalem, 25  
when they had fulfilled their ministration, taking  
with them John whose surname was Mark.

## CHAPTER XII

### *Questions*

1. Who was "Herod the king," the persecutor of the Church ?
2. What do you know of "James the brother of John" ?
3. Describe the manner of St. Peter's release from prison.
4. "Shew these things unto James." Who was this James ?
5. What do you know of the later history of St. Peter ?
6. What account is given of the death of Herod ?

### *Subjects for Study*

1. The brethren of the Lord.

Lightfoot, *Galatians*.

Article in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*.

2. The work of St. Peter, after Acts xii.

Edmundson, *The Early Roman Church*.

Lightfoot, *Galatians*. *St. Paul and the Three*.

Hort, *Judaistic Christianity*.

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**25 returned from Jerusalem.** The marginal reading "to" is difficult at first sight to explain; but it is possibly correct, the meaning being that they returned to Jerusalem from Antioch, and then, having disposed of the alms which they had brought, they took away with them John Mark.

## IV. St. Paul's First Missionary Journey

### *Cyprus Visited* (xiii. 1-12)

- 1 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers, Barnabas, and Symeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen the foster-brother of

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xiii. 1 **Antioch.** See p. 101. The second part of the Acts, dealing almost entirely with the work of Saul, or, as he is now exclusively called, Paul, begins at this point. Antioch, rather than Jerusalem, appears as the headquarters of this missionary activity among the Gentile world.

**prophets and teachers.** For prophets see p. 105. The "teachers" in the Christian Church would occupy a position analogous to that of the scribes of Judaism. Teaching as to the Christian faith and the Christian life was one of the offices of the Church specially commanded by our Lord (St. Matt. xxviii. 19, 20). The spiritual gift of teaching might be, and no doubt was, exercised by Christian rulers of any class and order, e.g. some of the order of presbyters were teachers (1 Tim. v. 17). But it seems that there was also from early days an official class of accredited "teachers," as alluded to both here and in 1 Cor. xii. 28 and Eph. iv. 11.

**Barnabas, etc.** These five, mentioned by name, were apparently the ruling body of the Church of Antioch, corresponding to the council of James and the elders at Jerusalem. Though no one individual at Antioch is alluded to as the ruler or bishop of the Church, it does not follow that there was none. From the first, even before the local episcopate was universally adopted, either an Apostle, or one who stood in the place of an Apostle, seems to have presided over the ruling council. In this case, as Barnabas is mentioned first, it seems most probable that for the time he occupied this position. See xi. 22.

Symeon, Lucius, and Manaen are otherwise unknown. The surname "Niger," black, would suggest that Symeon was a native of Africa, and both he and Lucius probably were among those first evangelists who carried the Gospel to Antioch (xi. 20). Manaen (Heb. Menahem) was apparently a man of high social rank: "foster-brother" seems to have been a recognised title for a specially intimate friend of a king. This description is one of the many little touches in St. Luke's writings which show him to have been well acquainted with the court of the Herods. Saul, it will be remembered, had been brought personally by Barnabas from Tarsus, to assist in the work of building up the Antiochian Church (xi. 25-26).

Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

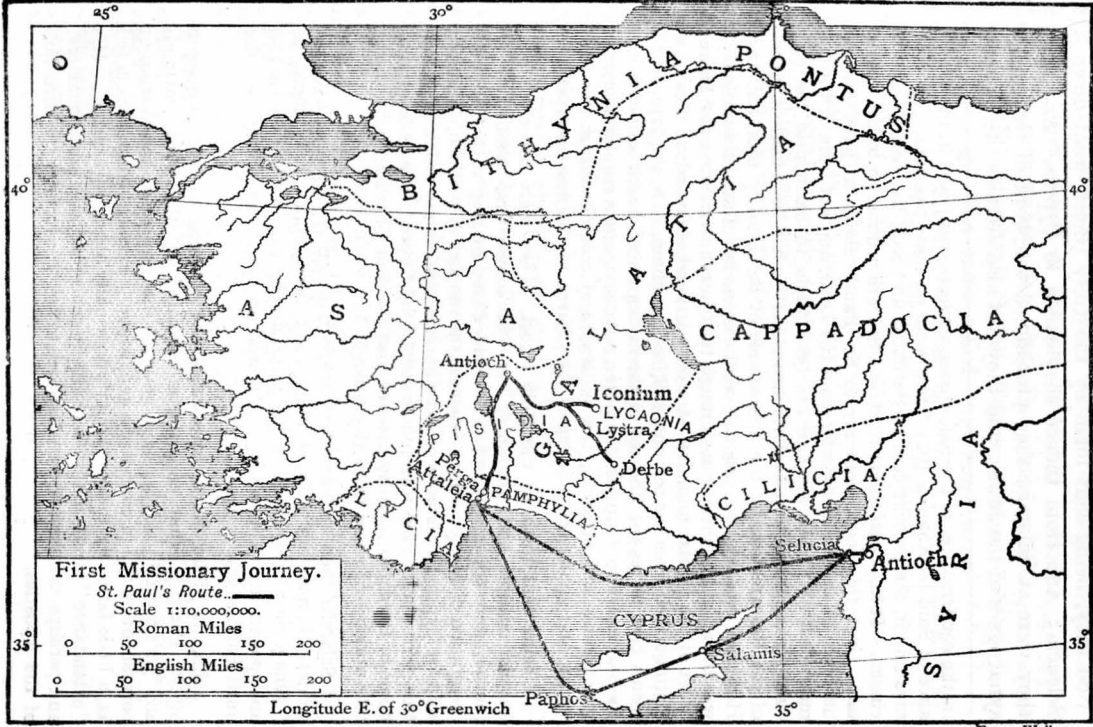
**2 And as they ministered.** The word used for "ministering" (*liturgising*) is an interesting one. In classical Greek it was applied to special gifts or services rendered by individuals to the State. In the N.T. it is used of public offices of worship to God, or of service in God's name to men. But it seems especially connected with the priestly work of prayer and worship and sacrifice, from which the word "liturgy" came to be applied, as it still is in the Eastern Church, to the Holy Eucharist, and in a looser way in the West to the public forms of prayer in general. Here it seems to be implied that these prophets and teachers were engaged in a regular and orderly system of Divine worship, in which, of course, the celebration of the Eucharist would be the central and daily feature.

**and fasted.** This addition seems to imply that the occasion described was a time of special retirement and devotion—perhaps of the nature of a "Retreat." By fasting in the early Church was generally meant the abstinence from all food until the afternoon or evening. The strict Jews observed two fasts in the week, Monday and Thursday. Our Lord laid down no rules for fasting, though His words implied that it would be continued as a religious practice (St. Matt. vi. 16-18; St. Mark ii. 20). Fasting has been almost universally recognised as an expression of sorrow and penitence, and also valued as a means of self-discipline and of subduing the flesh to the spirit, in order that the soul may be freer to discern and obey spiritual influences.

**the Holy Ghost said.** Probably this means that one of the "prophets" of the company was impelled by the Holy Ghost to utter this command, and it was recognised by the others as authoritative.

**Separate me Barnabas and Saul.** The phrase was familiar from the O.T. as meaning the setting apart of individuals for some special and Divinely appointed ministry, e.g. the Levites, Aaron, and his sons. In this case Saul at least knew beforehand by revelation that he had been called to some special work in the conversion of the Gentile world (cp. xxvi. 16-18 and Gal. i. 15, 16). The time had now come when this call would be openly revealed, and definitely sanctioned by the Church.

**3 laid their hands on them.** This sacramental act of the imposition of hands has already appeared in the ordination of the Seven (vi.),



Emery Walker sc.

So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, went down to 4 Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when 5 they were at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John as their attend-

in the confirmation of the Samaritan converts (viii.), and in the acceptance of Saul by Ananias (ix.). See notes on these passages. Its exact meaning in the present case of Barnabas and Saul has been much discussed. It has been thought to be a definite ordination to the apostolate. But this seems contrary to St. Paul's claim to have received his office as an apostle directly from the Lord, and not from or through man (Gal. i. 1). An attempt has been made to harmonise the difficulty by supposing that St. Paul means that he had been made a witness of the Resurrection by the appearance of the Lord to him, and from Him had received his original commission, but that this ordination was the appointment of him through the Church to the first and highest order of the regular ministry—the outward and ecclesiastical “call,” as distinguished from the personal call (see Rackham, *Acts*, p. 192). But it seems best to regard this act of the laying on of hands as being of a special, and indeed unique, character, not conveying a regular office, but sanctioning and attesting the supernatural commission of the Holy Spirit, and giving the blessing of the Church to the new enterprise.

**4 being sent forth by the Holy Ghost.** They were conscious of a Divine mission and guidance, but the course and details of the journey were apparently left to be decided step by step as the prophetic inspiration directed. From Seleucia, the seaport of Antioch, they took ship for Cyprus, a distance of some hundred and thirty miles. Perhaps this preliminary step was influenced (1) by Cyprus being the original home of Barnabas; (2) by the fact that the first Christian missionaries to Antioch had come from that island.

**5 Salamis,** then an important seaport, but now deserted, near the modern Famagusta. There must have been many Jews there, as “synagogues” (here only in the plural among the Greek cities visited) are spoken of. Apparently there was no preaching to the Gentiles until Paphos was reached.

**John,** i.e. John Mark, afterwards the evangelist, and companion of St. Peter. What capacity is indicated by the word “attendant” is uncertain. It is the same word that is used of the *chassan* or permanent official in charge of a synagogue. Perhaps John Mark acted as, a little later, the deacon would who usually attended a bishop. His “attendance” would doubtless be chiefly concerned with sacred matters; and perhaps he administered Baptism to new converts at the direction of the Apostles.



6 ant. And when they had gone through the whole island unto Paphos, they found a certain <sup>1</sup>sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus; which <sup>1</sup>Gr. *Magus*: as in <sup>1</sup>Matt. ii. 1, 7, 16. was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of understanding. The same called unto him Barnabas and Saul, and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the <sup>1</sup>sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn aside the proconsul from the faith. But

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6 Paphos. This was the capital of the island and the seat of the Roman government. The older Greek town, noted for its great temple of Aphrodite (Venus) and her immoral worship, was a little distance away from this the "new Paphos."

they found a certain sorcerer. This was the first encounter of the Apostles with the hostile Gentile world, and it is vividly described. The episode of Simon Magus (with the notes on viii.) should be compared. Bar-Jesus means literally "son of Joshua" or Jesus. He seems to have combined the magic and astrology of an Oriental magus with the claim to Divine inspiration which marked a Jewish "prophet." He was in the train of the Roman governor, as was not unusual in that age of mingled scepticism and superstition, and possessed some influence over his master, which he was anxious to keep.

7 the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The official title, "proconsul," literally one who had previously held at Rome the highest civil office of "consul," signified a governor sent by the Roman senate to administer a province. Cyprus had originally, like Judæa, been one of the provinces directly under the Emperor, but Augustus had exchanged it with the senate for Dalmatia. These senatorial provinces were usually the older and more settled parts of the Empire which did not require a large military force to keep them in order. St. Luke, therefore, gives the proper official title of the time to the governor. The name of Sergius Paulus as proconsul has been recently discovered in an inscription in Cyprus. St. Luke's description of him as "a man of understanding" implies one of mental acuteness. He appears in the narrative as a man of open mind, and a sincere seeker after truth.

8 Elymas the sorcerer, etc. Elymas resembles an Arabic word meaning "wise," and may be intended as an interpretation of "sorcerer" (magus). Another reading of the name is "Etoimas" (ready). But the exact force of the phrase is uncertain.

the faith, as in vi. 7, meaning the whole body of truth, the Gospel of Christ, as presented by the preaching of the Apostles—the faith in its objective sense, as offered to men for belief.

Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Ghost, fastened his eyes on him, and said, O full of all guile and all villany, thou son of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun <sup>1</sup>for a season. And immediately there <sup>1</sup>Or, *until*. fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul, <sup>12</sup>when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

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**9 But Saul, who is also called Paul.** Hitherto the Apostle has been called by his Hebrew name Saul, but from this point he appears in the rest of the N.T. by the Roman name of Paul. All his epistles he writes in that name. What is the meaning of the change, and why it occurs here has been often discussed. Some have imagined that he adopted this name in compliment to his distinguished Gentile hearer, Sergius Paulus—a very unlikely suggestion. There can be little doubt that the Apostle had both names before his conversion. It was common enough for Jews of the Dispersion to have a Latin or Greek name in addition to their Hebrew one, often resembling it in sound or meaning. And this would be specially likely in the case of one who was a Roman citizen. As Saul realised his call to be “the Apostle of the Gentiles,” he may have preferred to be known henceforth in the Church by his Gentile name. But why is it so suddenly introduced here without explanation? The key is probably to be found in St. Luke’s artistic sense of a dramatic situation. The incident at Paphos was the inauguration of Saul’s ministry to the Gentiles—the first time that he presented the Gospel to a great Roman official, and confronted and defeated the opposition of the great pagan system of magic and imposture.

**10 O full of all guile, etc.** This tremendous outburst of moral indignation, which is expressly stated to have been inspired by the Holy Ghost (*v.* 9), was directed not against mere human error, but like our Lord’s denunciations, against insincerity and deceit. The sorcerer was seeking his own ends under cover of sacred pretensions. For “thou son of the devil,” cp. our Lord’s own words to the Jews of Jerusalem (St. John viii. 44).

**11 a mist and a darkness.** The words are not synonymous, but express the gradual approach of blindness—first the dimmed vision, and then the total loss of sight.

**12 Then the proconsul . . . believed.** It is not stated that he was

*The Preaching at Antioch in Pisidia* (xiii. 13-43)

13 Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came  
to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departed from them and  
14 returned to Jerusalem. But they, passing through from Perga,

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actually baptized, but at least he was convinced of the Divine authority of the speakers and the truth of their message.

**13 Now Paul and his company.** It is very significant that whereas before St. Barnabas has been mentioned first, St. Paul now seems to take the lead. There were probably more with them than those who are actually named.

**Perga in Pamphylia.** The seaport of this important place was Attalia, a distance of some two hundred miles from Paphos, a long voyage across the open sea for ancient shipping, which preferred whenever possible to hug the coast, having no compass or charts, and a rig which did not allow a ship to sail close to the wind.

**and John departed from them.** No reason is given for this departure, but St. Paul showed afterwards by his refusal to take John Mark again with him (xv. 38), that he regarded it as a real failure of faith or courage. It is generally conjectured that John Mark had not yet risen to St. Paul's ideal of preaching to the Gentiles, and when he saw where this journey might lead, he decided to return home to his Jewish family and surroundings.

**14 passing through from Perga.** There is no record of any preaching at Perga until the return journey (xiv. 25). It was a low-lying, unhealthy district, and it has been conjectured with some probability (by Professor Ramsay) that St. Paul was here stricken down by illness, and when he recovered sufficiently, it was thought best to push on at once into the higher ground of the interior. This, as will be seen, opens the question as to whether this district of Asia Minor to which they proceeded was the Galatia to whose Christians St. Paul afterwards addressed the Epistle to the Galatians.

It was a wild and mountainous district, difficult for travellers, and formed the southern part of the country anciently called Phrygia. It had since B.C. 25 been included in the Roman province of Galatia. More exactly, however, the name Galatia was applied to the region further north, whose chief city was Ancyra, and which in the third century B.C. had been taken possession of by Celtic or Gallic invaders. Formerly it was supposed that the Epistle to the Galatians was addressed to these Northern Galatians, of whose conversion there is no record in the Acts. But modern scholars, led by Professor Ramsay, incline to the conclusion that the "Galatians" were the people of Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, into which district St. Paul and his company proceeded from Perga.

came to Antioch of Pisidia ; and they went into the synagogue

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This, of course, gives a new interest to the Epistle to the Galatians, and particularly to the statement in iv. 13, that it was " because of an infirmity of the flesh " that St. Paul first preached the Gospel to them.

Apparently, then, this preaching which is about to be described was not in the original design of the Apostles ; but it was St. Paul's illness at Perga that led to their undertaking it. What was the object of the landing at Perga is only a matter of conjecture ; it has been thought that they had in mind to strike the road running from east to west across Asia Minor, and follow it to the coast, to Ephesus.

**Antioch in Pisidia.** This was an important city, founded originally by Seleucus, the Greek King of Syria, about 300 B.C. A place of Hellenic civilisation and beauty, it had been made a Roman " colony " by Augustus, and was therefore bound by special ties to Rome, having Latin as its official language. There was also a large Jewish colony. It was thus a cosmopolitan centre, though remote among the mountains of Asia Minor, having in its population the varied elements of Phrygians, Greeks, Jews, and Romans, the last being descendants of the soldiers whom Augustus had planted there as colonists.

**the synagogue.** This was, and is, a universal Jewish institution, dating from the captivity in Babylon. As sacrifice could only be offered in the Temple at Jerusalem, and the exiles were debarred from this, they established meeting-places for regular prayer, reading, and instruction. This institution was transferred to Palestine on their return, and it became a permanent feature of Jewish religion both there and in the various foreign countries where Jews settled. The synagogue was the place in every town and village for (1) worship on the Sabbath and other fixed days, including Monday and Thursday in each week ; (2) the administration of justice by the local court of elders, a form of self-government which the liberality of Roman provincial rule was ready to sanction ; (3) the instruction of Jewish children. It was under the charge of elders called " rulers of the synagogue," one of whom was appointed as head. There was also a permanent official, the Chazzan, who took care of the building and its contents, and was responsible for teaching the children to read the Scriptures.

The synagogue was a plain rectangular building containing as its chief furniture the " Holy Ark," a chest with the rolls of the Scripture, before which there was a veil and a perpetual lamp, a platform or pulpit, on which the reader or preacher stood, and seats for the congregation. The principal seats faced the people, and were a coveted distinction for elders and Rabbis. The sexes were divided, the women being placed behind a lattice or in a gallery. No special

- 15 on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the
- 16 people, say on. And Paul stood up, and beckoning with the hand said,
- 17 Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, hearken. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they sojourned in the land of Egypt, and with a high arm led he

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ordination was required for ministering; the rulers of the synagogue chose the officiants, naturally giving the preference to a priest or any distinguished Rabbi. The service followed a fixed liturgical order. It began with prayer and the recitation of the *Shema* ("Hear!"), the Jewish Creed (Deut. vi. 4-9, xi. 13-21; Num. xv. 37-41). After this followed "the Benedictions," interwoven with prayers. Then followed the most solemn part of the service, the reading of a lesson from the Law in the original Hebrew, which was then translated aloud into the vernacular or paraphrased by an interpreter. Then last came a lesson from the prophets and a sermon.

16-41. This, the first recorded sermon of St. Paul, is no doubt condensed. It was customary for ancient writers, even when only giving a summary of what was said by a speaker, to couch it in "*oratio recta*." The sermon falls into three divisions:

(1) vv. 16-25. A sketch of the history of the chosen people from the Egyptian deliverance to the kingdom of David, leading up to the fulfilment of the great promise to David in the birth of his descendant Jesus, proclaimed to Israel by John the Baptist.

(2) vv. 26-37. The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus, who is not only son of David, but also son of God, in fulfilment of prophecy.

(3) vv. 38-41. The offer through Jesus of the full forgiveness of sins, and a solemn warning against rejection of it.

**16 ye that fear God.** This was the class of Gentile attendants at the synagogue already alluded to. They were those who had been attracted to the theology and religion of Judaism, and were in sympathy with its monotheism in contrast with the Gentile religions, but had not all of them taken the step of becoming "proselytes." It was this class that seems to have furnished the most sympathetic audience of St. Paul on his journeys.

**17 with a high arm.** The phrase is a reminiscence of the descriptions of the Exodus (Ex. xiii. 14, etc., xiv. 8), portraying the power and splendour of Israel's Divine deliverance, and the miracles that prepared for it and accompanied it.

them forth out of it. And for about the time of forty years <sup>18</sup> suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of <sup>19</sup> Canaan, he gave *them* their land for an inheritance, for about four hundred and fifty years: and after <sup>20</sup> these things he gave *them* judges until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they asked for a king: <sup>21</sup> and God gave unto them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for the space of forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised <sup>22</sup> up David to be their king; to whom also he bare witness, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after <sup>23</sup> my own heart, who shall do all my <sup>2</sup>will. Of this man's seed hath God according to promise brought unto Israel a

<sup>1</sup> Many ancient authorities read *bare* he *them* as a nursing-father in the wilderness. See Deut. i. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Gr. *wills*.

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<sup>18</sup> suffered he their manners. God was patient with all their murmurings and rebellions, as described in Exodus and Numbers. The reading in the margin (which only differs in the Greek by a single letter) describes the fatherly care with which Israel was preserved and provided for in the wilderness. Cp. Deut. i. 31 and the beautiful description in Hosea xi. 1-4.

<sup>19</sup> seven nations. As in Deut. vii. 1. The most important were the Amorites, or *Amurru*, who dwelt in the highlands of Palestine; the Canaanites of the lowlands, the sea-coast, and the Jordan valley; and the Hittites, apparently a branch of the remarkable people who invaded Syria and Babylonia from Asia Minor, but whose progress southward was checked by the great Egyptian conqueror Rameses II.

for about four hundred and fifty years. This statement as corrected in R.V. seems to refer to the period from Abraham to the conquest of Canaan by Joshua (cp. Gal. iii. 17). But these statements are only in round numbers, and the exact chronology is uncertain.

<sup>21</sup> And afterward they asked for a king. As described in 1 Sam. viii.

<sup>22</sup> I have found David, etc. A combination of 1 Sam. xiii. 14 and Ps. lxxxix. 20.

<sup>23</sup> God according to promise. An allusion to the great promise made by the prophet Nathan to David (2 Sam. vii.) of the perpetuity of his royal line—a promise which colours all the subsequent thought and prophecy of the O.T. (cp. St. Luke i. 32). The lineal descent of Jesus Christ from David through his legal father Joseph is traced in

- 24 Saviour, Jesus ; when John had first preached <sup>1</sup>before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.
- 25 And as John was fulfilling his course, he said, What <sup>1</sup>Gr. *before* suppose ye that I am ? I am not *he*. But behold, <sup>the face of his</sup> entering in. there cometh one after me, the shoes of whose feet
- 26 I am not worthy to unloose. Brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and those among you that fear God, to us is the
- 27 word of this salvation sent forth. For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, fulfilled *them* by
- 28 condemning *him*. And though they found no cause of death in
- 29 *him*, yet asked they of Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all things that were written of him, they took
- 30 him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. But God
- 31 raised him from the dead : and he was seen for many days of them that came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are
- 32 now his witnesses unto the people. And we bring you good
- 33 tidings of the promise made unto the fathers, how that God hath fulfilled the same unto our children, in that he raised up Jesus ; as also it is written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this

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the genealogies of St. Matthew and St. Luke. His mother, Mary, was probably also of the line of David.

25 **What suppose ye that I am ?** This statement of the Baptist is not quoted from the Gospels, which were not yet written, but no doubt was handed down in the oral teaching of the Church. The nearest Gospel parallel is in St. John i. 19-27.

33 **unto our children.** This is a more difficult reading than that of A.V., "unto us their children." The words seem to look forward to the more general acceptance of the Gospel in the future by those who were the real children of Abraham and the patriarchs, being men of faith, whether Jews by race or not. (Cp. Gal. iii. 26, 29.)

**in that he raised up Jesus.** As the Resurrection is dealt with expressly in v. 34, this phrase may refer to the Incarnation, the appearance of Jesus in the world as the Christ, the anointed Son of God.

**Thou art my Son, etc.** The second Psalm describes the confidence of a king of David's line that all the attacks of his heathen foes will be brought to naught, because he has the assurance of God's promise, the Divine "decree," which makes him God's Son (cp. 2 Sam. vii. 14),

day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised **34** him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he hath spoken on this wise, I will give you the holy and sure *blessings* of David. Because he saith also **35** in another *psalm*, Thou wilt not give thy Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had **36** <sup>1</sup>in his own generation served the counsel of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption : but he whom God raised up saw no **37** corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, **38** brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins : and by him every one that **39**

<sup>1</sup> Or, *served his own generation by the counsel of God, fell on sleep.*  
Or, *served his own generation, fell on sleep by the counsel of God.*

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and the Lord of all the heathen world. This is the first time in the N.T. that this text is applied to our Lord, and the first time that He is definitely spoken of as "the Son of God" in the apostolic sermons in the Acts (cp. however ix. 20). "This day" may be interpreted in various ways, e.g. of the declaration from heaven at our Lord's baptism that He was the Son of God ; or of the proof of this which was given by His bodily Resurrection (cp. Rom. i. 4). The Christian fathers also interpret "this day" to mean "eternity," the one unending day of the Divine Sonship, as the Son of God is eternally begotten of the Father.

**34 now no more to return to corruption.** See Ps. xvi. 10 and Acts ii. 27. One meaning of this is brought out in *vv.* 35-37. Our Lord's Body, being united to His Divinity, was preserved without corruption in the grave. But He is "no more to return to corruption," not in the sense that His Body had ever experienced it, but simply as never to die or be buried again : "corruption" in this verse being equivalent to the "grave," or to the Hebrew "Sheol."

**I will give you,** etc. Is. lv. 3 (Septuagint version). This in the original prophecy refers to the promise to David's line, already referred to above. St. Paul expands it to include the certainty of the Resurrection and eternal life, which David, in Ps. xvi., looks forward to with confident hope. On *vv.* 35-36 see notes on the similar passage in St. Peter's sermon (ii. 25-31).

**38 remission of sins.** With this important declaration cp. ii. 38 and notes. The O.T. ordinances had aimed at awakening man to a sense of sin and the need of forgiveness ; but they could give no absolution.



believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not  
 40 be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that  
 come upon *you*, which is spoken in the prophets ;

41 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and <sup>1</sup>perish ; <sup>1</sup> Or, *vanish away.*

For I work a work in your days,

A work which ye shall in no wise believe, if one declare it  
 unto you.

42 And as they went out, they besought that these words might  
 43 be spoken to them the next sabbath. Now when the synagogue  
 broke up, many of the Jews and of the devout proselytes followed  
 Paul and Barnabas : who, speaking to them, urged them to con-  
 tinue in the grace of God.

It was a new thing upon earth when our Lord proclaimed the forgive-  
 ness of sins, and bade the Apostles put it in the forefront of their message  
 (St. Luke xxiv. 47). It is clear from the Epistles to the Galatians and  
 the Romans that St. Paul felt profoundly this aspect of the Gospel,  
 which answered to the agonies of his own spiritual experiences (cp.  
 Rom. vii. 18-25 ; Gal. ii.). The word "justified" signifies being  
 "declared just," i.e. innocent, and so "pardoned."

41 **Behold, ye despisers, etc.** Habakkuk i. 5. The original warning  
 of the prophet was addressed not only to Israel, but to "the nations."  
 The Divine "work" which he foresaw was the conquering advance of  
 the Babylonians or "Chaldeans." Men refused to "believe" that  
 this was coming, or that it was a Divine judgment.

43 **the devout proselytes.** This apparently means those of the  
 "God-fearing" class (v. 16) who had actually joined the ranks of  
 Judaism. Contrast this with "the Gentiles" of v. 48. They were the  
 first to be influenced.

**to continue in the grace of God.** It has not been stated that any  
 as yet had been baptized. So the grace alluded to must be that "pre-  
 venient" grace of God which comes before sacraments, and which the  
 Apostles recognised as working already in these hearers, and preparing  
 them to be Christians.

*The Jews reject the Gospel and persecute its Preachers* (xiii. 44-52)

And the next sabbath almost the whole city was gathered to-<sup>44</sup>  
 gether to hear the word of <sup>1</sup>God. But when the <sup>45</sup>  
<sup>1</sup> Many ancient authorities read *the Lord.* Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with  
 jealousy, and contradicted the things which were  
 spoken by Paul, and <sup>2</sup>blasphemed. And Paul and <sup>46</sup>  
<sup>3</sup> Or, *railed.* Barnabas spake out boldly, and said, It was neces-  
 sary that the word of God should first be spoken to  
 you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves un-  
 worthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath <sup>47</sup>  
 the Lord commanded us, *saying,*

I have set thee for a light of the Gentiles,

That thou shouldest be for salvation unto the uttermost  
 part of the earth.

<sup>45</sup> they were filled with jealousy. Evidently the sight of the eager multitudes, largely composed of Gentiles who were not even "God-fearers," raised the narrow-minded jealousy of the Jews. They thought their exclusive religious privileges were being undermined, and they were angry that "unclean" outcasts, as they regarded the Gentiles, should have any interest in what they thought concerned Israel alone.

**blasphemed.** This usually means in the N.T. to curse or speak evil of Christ Himself.

<sup>46</sup> spake out boldly. It was a great turning-point, and the Apostles, Barnabas equally with Paul, pronounce the Jews apostate. By their own deliberate choice they were rejecting the great hope of Israel and condemning themselves. The Divine invitation is now offered to the Gentiles. And this is in accordance with the teaching of the prophets, who had foretold that the Messiah would be the salvation of Gentile as well as Jew.

<sup>47</sup> I have set thee for a light of the Gentiles. Is. xlix. 6. The prophet is speaking of "the Servant of the Lord," the great figure which stands out prominently in the latter part of the book of Isaiah, meaning (1) the nation of Israel; (2) the ideal Israel; (3) the personal Messiah, who will accomplish all that Israel has failed to do. The phrase "light of the Gentiles" had already been used in reference to Jesus Christ in the *Nunc Dimittis* (St. Luke ii. 32).

48 And as the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of <sup>1</sup>God: and as many as were ordained to  
 49 eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was <sup>1</sup>Many ancient authorities read *the Lord.*  
 50 spread abroad throughout all the region. But the Jews urged on the devout women of honourable estate, and the chief men of the city, and stirred up  
 a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and cast them out of  
 51 their borders. But they shook off the dust of their feet against  
 52 them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Questions

1. Describe the circumstances of the sending forth of Barnabas and Saul from Antioch.
2. Trace the course of this journey as far as recorded in chap. xiii.
3. What opposition was met with at Paphos, and how was it dealt with ?
4. What is the probable significance of Saul's change of name ?

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48 **as many as were ordained to eternal life.** The word "ordained" does not refer to unalterable decrees of God, as though He had chosen some to be saved and not others. It rather describes the attitude of the persons themselves. They were "ordered," "arranged," drawn up like an army, with their faces towards life eternal.

50 **the devout women,** etc. Women in high position, the wives or relations of Roman officials, seem to have been at this time specially attracted to Judaism. And their influence would naturally be considerable.

**the chief men,** i.e. magistrates and other officials. In Roman colonies there were generally two chief rulers called *duumviri*.

51 **they shook off the dust.** As commanded by our Lord to the Twelve (St. Matt. x. 14). It was a recognised Jewish sign of separation from evil or heathen society.

5. Describe the course of service in a Jewish synagogue.
6. What sort of place was Antioch in Pisidia? Describe its geographical position.
7. Give a summary of St. Paul's sermon at this place.
8. In what ways does this sermon resemble previous discourses in the Acts?
9. What new features does it contain?
10. What was the result of the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews of Antioch?

*Subject for Study*

1. Who were the Galatians to whom the Epistle was addressed?

Lightfoot, *Galatians*.

Ramsay, *Church in the Roman Empire*.

Lake, *Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*.

*Preaching and Persecution at Iconium (xiv. 1-7)*

And it came to pass in Iconium, that they entered together into <sup>1</sup> the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of Jews and of Greeks believed. But the Jews that were <sup>2</sup> disobedient stirred up the souls of the Gentiles, and made them

xiv. 1 **Iconium.** This was an important Phrygian city, on the borders of Lycaonia, of which district it became afterwards the capital. It was on the great trade road between Ephesus and the East. Iconium in later days became a Roman colony, but when St. Paul visited it, it had not been Latinised like Antioch, and the Gentile inhabitants were mostly of the original Phrygian stock; but as they had come under the influence of Greek civilisation, they are spoken of under the general name of "Greeks." There was evidently here also an influential Jewish settlement.

<sup>2</sup> **the Jews that were disobedient**, i.e. those who deliberately rejected the Gospel. So St. Paul speaks (Rom. i. 5, xvi. 26) of the Christian

3 evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore they  
 tarried *there* speaking boldly in the Lord, which bare witness unto  
 the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by  
 4 their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided; and  
 5 part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when  
 there was made an onset both of the Gentiles and of the Jews  
 with their rulers, to entreat them shamefully, and to stone them,  
 6 they became aware of it, and fled unto the cities of Lycaonia,  
 7 Lystra and Derbe, and the region round about: and there they  
 preached the gospel.

*A Miracle at Lystra and its Effects (xiv. 8-18)*

8 And at Lystra there sat a certain man, impotent in his feet,  
 a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked.

faith as demanding "obedience" among all nations. Being God's  
 offer of salvation to all men, to reject it is an act of defiance against  
 God.

3 **Long time therefore, etc.** The connection does not seem clear, and  
 it has been conjectured that there is some omission in the text. The  
 Bezan or Western text gives a different reading in v. 2, and adds, "but  
 the Lord quickly gave peace," which would explain the "therefore."

4 **But the multitude of the city was divided.** It is remarkable what a  
 sensation the apostolic preaching created in Iconium. It affected the  
 whole population, and divided them into two opposing parties. The  
 Jews seem throughout to have taken the lead in the attack, enlisting  
 on its side the city magistrates (v. 5), and threatening to inflict on  
 the Apostles the Jewish punishment for blasphemy, stoning to death.  
 Phrygia was always a region in which religion excited men's passions,  
 and some of the strangest of ancient worships originated or flourished  
 there. In the second and third centuries it was the home of the first  
 great Christian schism, that of the Montanists.

6 **fled unto the cities.** Thus they followed the directions of our Lord  
 to the Twelve (St. Matt. x. 23): not to court martyrdom, but to escape,  
 if possible, that their work might not be interrupted.

8 **Lystra.** The site of this city has recently been discovered, some  
 twenty-two miles S.S.W. of Iconium. It was a Roman colony, and had  
 become an important place as a garrison town. There were evidently  
 very few Jews there, as no synagogue is mentioned. The Apostles

The same heard Paul speaking : who, fastening his eyes upon him, <sup>9</sup> and seeing that he had faith to be <sup>1</sup>made whole, said <sup>10</sup>  
<sup>1</sup> Or, *saved*. with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped up and walked. And when the multitude saw what <sup>11</sup> Paul had done, they lifted up their voice, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, <sup>2</sup>Jupiter; and <sup>12</sup> <sup>1</sup> Gr. *Zeus*. Paul, <sup>3</sup>Mercury, because he was the chief speaker. <sup>13</sup>  
<sup>2</sup> Gr. *Hermes*. And the priest of <sup>2</sup>Jupiter whose *temple* was before the city, brought oxen and garlands unto

seem at once to have addressed their message to the heathen populace, speaking to them in the open air, probably in the market-place, or in the open space before the city gates.

<sup>11</sup> **the speech of Lycaonia.** The people were no doubt bilingual, and St. Paul had been addressing them in Greek; but in their intense excitement at the miracle, they broke out in their native Phrygian tongue. It seems that the Apostles did not understand what they said, and it was not till later that they perceived (*v.* 14) the religious honours which the people were about to pay them.

**The gods are come down to us.** It was a constant pagan tradition that the gods at times appeared in human likeness; and among the people of country districts like Lycaonia, the old beliefs were still active, and had not been undermined by the scepticism which ruled in more refined circles. The people of this district had moreover a legend of their own, that Jupiter and Mercury had appeared once to two simple old Phrygian peasants, Philemon and Baucis.

<sup>12</sup> **And they called Barnabas, Jupiter, etc.** Evidently Barnabas was the taller and more stately of the two, and his dignified silence suggested to the excited crowds "the father of gods and men," while the little, eager, eloquent Paul seemed to be like Mercury, the messenger of the gods. The names of the two gods are Greek, Zeus and Hermes. The Phrygians had probably not actually adopted either the Greek or Roman religion, but they had, as was common, identified two native divinities of their own with these Hellenic gods, just as the Romans had done before them.

<sup>13</sup> **Jupiter whose temple, etc.** This Jupiter was no doubt regarded as the tutelary divinity of Lystra, and his temple was outside the walls, before the city gates, which he was supposed to protect.

the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the multitudes.  
 14 But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they  
 rent their garments, and sprang forth among the multitude,  
 15 crying out and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We  
 also are men of like <sup>1</sup>passions with you, and bring  
 you good tidings, that ye should turn from these <sup>1</sup>Or.  
 vain things unto the living God, who made the <sup>nature.</sup>  
 16 heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that in them is: who  
 in the generations gone by suffered all the nations to walk

**the gates.** It is uncertain what gates are meant, those of the city, or of the house where the Apostles were staying, or of the temple. The last is the most probable. It has been conjectured that the day was actually a festival of Zeus, for which the crowds had assembled, and that the lame man had been sitting at the temple gate. The priest would therefore have the oxen ready, decorated with the usual garlands of flowers; and on the sudden impulse caused by the miracle, he led them from the usual place of sacrifice within the temple enclosure down to the gates, so that they might be sacrificed there in honour of the supposed divine visitants.

**14 crying out and saying, etc.** Idolatry was as abhorrent to a Jew as to a Christian, and to be made themselves the object of idolatrous worship moved the Apostles to intense indignation. The rending of their clothes was a sign, familiar to the Jews, of grief or of anger at some great sin, especially blasphemy.

The speech which follows (*vv.* 15-17) is notable as being, like that of St. Paul at Athens (*xvii.*), an example of an apostolic address to a purely heathen audience, who knew nothing either of Law or of prophets. It appeals to what St. Paul considered the fundamental truths of natural religion, which the heathen might have recognised by being true to the light of their own conscience, without any special revelation (*cp.* Rom. i. 19-20): the unity of God, His work in creation, the witness of nature to His goodness, and His desire that men should know Him and be reconciled to Him.

**these vain things,** i.e. idols, usually described in this way in O.T. as things "empty," lifeless, without power.

**16 suffered all the nations, etc.,** i.e. He did not plainly interfere, by miracles or direct revelation, with the self-willed life of the heathen. But it is implied in the next words, that they might, had they listened even to conscience and the witness of nature, have known better than to worship idols.

in their own ways. **And yet he left not himself without witness, 17** in that he did good, and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness. **And with 18** these sayings scarce restrained they the multitudes from doing sacrifice unto them.

*Persecution : the Journey completed (xiv. 19-28)*

But there came Jews thither from Antioch and Iconium : and 19 having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul, and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But as the 20 disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and entered into the city : and on the morrow he went forth with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had 21 made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, and to Iconium,

**17 and gave you from heaven, etc.** From the poetical style of this verse it has been thought that St. Paul may actually have been quoting from some heathen hymn, perhaps one that was actually being sung at this festival at Lystra.

**19 having persuaded the multitudes.** The heathen of Lystra, somewhat sore and disappointed at the Apostles' repudiation of being gods, fell an easy prey to the slanders of the Jews. No doubt the latter represented the Apostles as being sorcerers and blasphemers, who had done a miracle by the help of demons, and whose presence was really a danger to the city.

**20 the disciples.** This must mean the converts already made by the preaching of the Apostles. Among them would no doubt be Timothy (see xvi. 1), the son of the pious Jewess Eunice, afterwards the companion and coadjutor of St. Paul.

**he rose up.** There is something miraculous about this recovery of St. Paul ; especially as he was able on the next day to undertake a journey of thirty miles. This is no doubt the stoning to which he alludes in his great list of sufferings for Christ (2 Cor. xi. 25).

**Derbe,** south-east of Lystra, a small town, but of political importance, being on the frontier of the province, and having been honoured by Claudius, and called by him Claudio-Derbe. Among the "many disciples" made there, was no doubt "Gaius of Derbe," afterwards a travel-companion of St. Paul (xx. 4).

**21 they returned.** It must have been a courageous act to go back to the places where they had suffered so much, especially as Derbe was



22 and to Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting  
 them to continue in the faith, and that through many tribulations  
 23 we must enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had  
 appointed for them elders in every church, and had prayed with  
 fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had  
 24 believed. And they passed through Pisidia, and came to Pam-  
 25 phylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they  
 26 went down to Attalia ; and thence they sailed to Antioch, from  
 whence they had been committed to the grace of God for the  
 27 work which they had fulfilled. And when they were come, and  
 had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all things that  
 God had done with them, and how that he had opened a door of  
 28 faith unto the Gentiles. And they tarried no little time with  
 the disciples.

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on the high road to Antioch, and they might easily have returned that way to their base. They do not seem to have been molested on the return journey. They confined their ministrations to those who had already become disciples. Popular fury had spent itself, and probably the Roman officials had issued warnings against any further rioting. It was only at Antioch and Iconium that the persecution had been of an official character, and it has been conjectured that new magistrates may have come into office in the interim.

23 appointed for them elders. See note on xi. 30. The word "appointed" does not in itself imply anything more than election ; but it became a regular word for ecclesiastical ordination, and this, as we know from other N.T. references, was always performed by the laying on of hands with prayer.

25 Perga. This place had been left untouched on the first visit, owing probably, as already suggested, to St. Paul's illness. It now in its turn becomes the scene of preaching, though with what success is not stated. It was a centre of idolatry, being, like Ephesus, famous for its temple of Artemis, styled "the Queen of Perga."

## CHAPTER XIV

*Questions*

1. Describe the part played by the Jews in the persecution of the Apostles at Iconium and Lystra.
2. What style of argument did St. Paul address to his would-be worshippers at Lystra ?
3. Describe the return journey from Derbe to Antioch.

*Subject for Study*

The attitude of St. Paul towards the heathen religions.

Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen*.

Westcott, *The Gospel of Life*.

Sanday and Headlam, *Epistle to the Romans*.

Liddon, *Epistle to the Romans*.

## V. The Problem of the Gentiles

### *Mission to Jerusalem (xv. 1-5)*

- 1 And certain men came down from Judæa and taught the brethren, *saying*, Except ye be circumcised after the custom of
- 

xv. This chapter marks a crisis in the life of St. Paul, and indeed in the development of the Church. The whole question of the nature of Christianity was involved. Is it only a development of Judaism, or is it Catholic? The Christians of Jerusalem were all Jews, and they still thought of themselves as belonging to the sacred theocracy of Israel, and bound by all the laws and restrictions which separated it from the Gentile world. In becoming Christians they had not ceased to be Jews; they had only recognised in Jesus the promised Messiah in whom the hope of Israel was realised. That this Gospel was to be preached to the Gentiles had already indeed been recognised; prophecy had foretold it, the Lord Himself had commanded it, the Samaritans had been converted and baptized, and finally, after some protest, the admission of Cornelius and his household (who were already "God-fearers") had been acquiesced in. But the Jewish Christian still regarded the Gentile convert as being admitted into the Jewish theocracy, and therefore bound by all its laws and traditions. Without circumcision and the observance of the ceremonial law the Gentile was still an unclean person, and a Jew could not even eat with him.

The growth of the great Church of Antioch brought matters to a head. There it was well known that Gentile converts were accepted without circumcision or any obligation to keep the ceremonial law, and that Jewish and Gentile Christians lived, ate, and worshipped together on a footing of perfect equality, simply because they were Christians. To the stricter party of Jewish Christians at Jerusalem such a state of things was abhorrent.

**1 certain men came down from Judæa.** The Bezan text states that these were converted Pharisees, which seems very probable in view of v. 5. It is not clear whether they claimed official authority. If Gal. ii. 12 refers to these events, they had come "from James"; but he certainly repudiated them (xv. 24). Their teaching stated the position with uncompromising bluntness. For a Gentile to be saved as a Christian, he must be circumcised, become a Jew, as well as be baptized. Such teaching, if accepted, would clearly have wrecked the Church of Antioch, separating it into Jewish and Gentile schisms, and would have completely altered the future history of the whole Church.

Moses, ye cannot be saved. And when Paul and Barnabas had **3** no small dissension and questioning with them, *the brethren* appointed that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. They therefore, being brought on their way by **3** the church, passed through both Phœnicia and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles : and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, **4** they were received of the church and the apostles and the elders, and they rehearsed all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who be- **5** lieved, saying, It is needful to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses.

**2 should go up to Jerusalem.** This embassy to Jerusalem must be regarded, not as an appeal to a central authority, but rather as a call for a conference in which these matters at issue might be discussed. St. Paul was too sure of his ground and of his own apostolic authority to submit to the dictation of Jerusalem. This is probably the visit to which he refers in Gal. ii., a passage that should be carefully compared. There he states that he "went up by revelation"; i.e. he had received a special Divine intimation, in addition to the general wish of the Church of Antioch. Among the "certain other" who went with him (according to Gal. ii.) was Titus, a Greek and uncircumcised, afterwards well known in the Church. It is uncertain from St. Paul's impassioned account whether Titus submitted to circumcision or not; but it is clear that if it was done, it was a concession for the sake of peace, and not an act of submission to the extreme party at Jerusalem.

**3 Phœnicia and Samaria.** The embassy must have gone by the coast road from Antioch, and they evidently found Christian churches established in different centres on the route, at such places as Tyre, Sidon, and Cæsarea, where, as well as in Samaria, the position taken by the Church of Antioch was thoroughly sympathised with. But there is no mention of such "joy" at Jerusalem, where their reception was official, but more formal.

**5 But there rose up, etc.** The attitude of the Pharisee-Christians was uncompromising. The Gentile converts must submit to the whole Law. To St. Paul this demand was fatal to the whole conception of the liberty of the Church; and it must be resisted to the full. In the interval between this preliminary meeting, however, and the Council that followed, he seems, from Gal. ii. 7-10, to have come to a private under-

*The Council of Jerusalem (xv. 6-21)*

6 And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to  
7 consider of this matter. And when there had been much ques-  
tioning, Peter rose up, and said unto them,

Brethren, ye know how that <sup>1 Gr. from</sup> <sup>early days.</sup> a good while ago  
God made choicē among you, that by my mouth  
the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and  
8 believe. And God, which knoweth the heart, bare them witness,  
9 giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us ; and he made  
no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by  
10 faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, that ye should put a

standing with St. Peter, St. John, and St. James, who recognised that the signs of God's grace in the Gentile Church were too evident to be resisted.

6 **And the apostles and the elders, etc.** It seems from *vv.* 12 and 22 that, in addition to these official rulers of the Church, there was a general assemblage of believers at this Council. It does not appear whether they joined in the discussion, but clearly their consent was given to the decision.

7 **that by my mouth, etc.** The reference is, of course, to the baptism of Cornelius and his friends at Cæsarea (chap. x.). There the gift of the Holy Ghost, with its supernatural signs even before Baptism, was evidence from God Himself that the Gentiles, though uncircumcised, were as fit as the Jews to be admitted to the privileges of the Gospel.

9 **cleansing their hearts by faith.** The outward "cleansing" by circumcision and the ceremonial of the Law which the Pharisees wished to impose on the Gentiles had been rendered unnecessary by the inward cleansing of the heart by faith, i.e. by a new attitude of the soul towards God. The influence of St. Paul is probably to be seen in these words. The thought is characteristic of his teaching of "justification by faith."

10 **why tempt ye God.** The phrase is applied to any irreverent or presumptuous conduct towards God, especially setting up one's own human judgment against His. God had clearly shown that He accepted the Gentiles, as they were, without circumcision or the observance of the Law. To seek now to impose it on them is to set at naught the clear indications of His will.

yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved 11 through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they.

And all the multitude kept silence; and they hearkened unto 12 Barnabas and Paul rehearsing what signs and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held 13 their peace, James answered, saying,

Brethren, hearken unto me: Symeon hath rehearsed how 14 first God did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people

which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. A remarkable admission, very much again in the style of St. Paul. Nothing less than perfect obedience could satisfy the requirements of the Law, and this human infirmity could not perform. Moreover the Law gave no help; it could give neither life nor grace. It could only command and condemn. This is St. Paul's teaching throughout, especially in the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. The natural conclusion of the argument would be that Jewish as well as Gentile Christians are set free from the requirements of the Law. St. Peter does not go so far, for Jewish Christianity was not ready for such a revolution. But his statement here and in the next verse lays the foundation for it. Jews and Gentiles alike must look for salvation not in the observance of outward precepts, but in the free gift of grace from Jesus Christ. Cp. Gal. ii. 15-21; Rom. iii. 19-31.

13 James answered, saying, etc. For James, see note on xii. 17. This speech of St. James is quite different in style from the Pauline utterances of St. Peter. It has a definitely Hebrew tone, in its O.T. language, and its reference to prophecy, and even in the Jewish form "Symeon," by which he prefers to speak of St. Peter. St. Luke was very possibly present himself at this Council, and has faithfully recorded the different styles of the speakers. There are also some verbal coincidences between St. James' speech and his Epistle (see e.g. St. James ii. 7).

14 a people for his name. This and similar phrases are usually applied in O.T. to the sacred nation of Israel. They are the people who bear the name of Jehovah, i.e. are entrusted with His revelation of Himself, and are called to be witnesses to it, and to set forth His glory. St. James applies the same description to the calling of the Gentile Cornelius, the first "visiting" of the Gentiles by God. He implies that the Gentiles are now equally with the Jews the people of God.

- 15 for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets ; as it is written,
- 16 After these things I will return,  
And I will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen ;  
And I will build again the ruins thereof,  
And I will set it up :
- 17 That the residue of men may seek after the Lord,  
And all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called,
- 18 Saith the Lord, <sup>1</sup>who maketh these things known from the beginning of the world.
- 19 Wherefore my judgement is, that we trouble not them

<sup>1</sup> Or, who doeth these things which were known.

15 as it is written. The quotation is from Amos ix. 11, 12. It is singular that St. James should quote it practically in the words of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew. It is impossible to be certain whether the Hebrew text of St. James' day corresponded exactly with the present text. But the Septuagint was perhaps chosen because it showed more clearly the future calling of the Gentiles. The Hebrew, instead of " that the residue of men may seek after the Lord " (v. 17), reads " that they (i.e. Israel) may possess the remnant of Edom."

The general meaning of the prophecy is this: The prophet has been describing the casting away and scattering of disobedient Israel, the overthrow of its kingdom and temporal glory. But after this comes the promise of restoration. The tabernacle or tent of David, a poetical description of the Davidic monarchy, will be re-established, i.e. by the Messiah, and will be a centre of Divine worship for all the Gentiles, who with the Israelites will form one united people of God.

18 Saith the Lord. St. James gives a different turn to the conclusion of the prophecy: the wording of this verse is somewhat similar to Is. xlv. 21.

19 Wherefore my judgement is, etc. This opinion of St. James, which was adopted by the Council over which he was presiding, presents unusual difficulties. The common interpretation is that the Gentile Christians ought to abstain from four things which would specially wound the conscience of their Jewish brethren, and render Christian intercourse impossible. The third and fourth of these seem to be concerned with Jewish practices about food. To taste blood was forbidden in O.T. from the days of Noah onwards (Gen. ix. 4). And to ensure abstinence from this, the Jew would only partake of meat which had

which from among the Gentiles turn to God ; but that we <sup>1</sup>write **20**  
 unto them, that they abstain from the pollutions  
<sup>1</sup> Or, en- of idols, and from fornication, and from what is  
 join them. strangled, and from blood. For Moses from genera- **21**  
 tions of old hath in every city them that preach him, being read  
 in the synagogues every sabbath.

been killed in such a way as to allow all the blood to escape. The animal must therefore not be killed by strangling. The first prohibition also may be interpreted of food, because meat which had first been offered in sacrifice to an idol was regularly eaten by the Gentiles, though to the Jew it was a "pollution." By eating it he would seem to be sharing indirectly in the sacrificial worship of the heathen. (Cp. 1 Cor. x. 20, 21.) But the second precept, against fornication, seems to come in a different category altogether : it is a moral rather than a ceremonial offence. This difficulty may be overcome by assuming that what is referred to is the impurity which was regularly practised in the heathen temples as part of the worship of the idol. But this explanation does not seem altogether adequate.

On the other hand, the interpretation of these four restrictions as referring to ceremonial has been challenged altogether by some scholars. In addition to the difficulty of the second one, it is remarkable that St. Paul, in writing to Corinthians and Romans on this very question of partaking of meats offered to idols, discusses the question without any reference to this previous decision of the Council (Rom. xiv. ; 1 Cor. x.). Indeed, with the exception of Acts xvi. 4 and xxi. 25, there is no further allusion to this decision in the N.T.

It has therefore been suggested that possibly these restrictions were moral rather than ceremonial. The Bezan text omits the third restriction, "things strangled," altogether, and adds a general moral precept, "do not to others what you would not have them do to you." On this interpretation the Gentile Christians are being simply warned against what the early Church regarded as the three great moral offences, idolatry, impurity, murder—offences for which excommunication was imposed, and confession and penance required before the sinner could be restored. This interpretation has the merit of simplicity ; but probably it is too simple, and the first and more usual explanation had perhaps better be adopted, in spite of its obvious difficulties.

**21 For Moses from generations of old.** The exact force of this statement is also disputed. The most natural explanation is that the Gentile Christian will understand readily what these restrictions refer to, for the Law of Moses, in which they are contained, is everywhere



*The Council's Decision (xv. 22-35)*

22 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men out of their company, and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; *namely*, Judas called  
 23 Barsabbas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: and they wrote *thus* by them, The apostles and the elder brethren unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and  
 24 Cilicia, greeting: Forasmuch as we have heard that certain  
 1 which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls; to whom we gave no  
 25 commandment; it seemed good unto us, having ancient authorities omit which went out.  
 come to one accord, to choose out men and send them  
 26 unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus  
 27 Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who themselves  
 28 also shall tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no

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read and explained. (This, if the correct interpretation, makes in favour of the four necessary things being ceremonial. Grave moral offences would scarcely need the explanation of the Mosaic Law.)

Or St. James' meaning might be that no disrespect is intended to Moses by relaxing the Law for Gentile converts. Jewish Christians will continue as of old to hear his commandments read every Sabbath in the synagogue, and will continue to keep them.

22 **Judas . . . and Silas.** Nothing further is known of Judas. He was probably a Jew of Jerusalem, perhaps the brother of the Joseph Barsabbas of i. 23. Silas, judging from his Roman name, a contraction of Silvanus, was probably a Jew of the Dispersion. He was a Roman citizen (xvi. 37) and the future companion of St. Paul. (See also i St. Peter v. 12.)

24 **to whom we gave no commandment.** The disturbers of the peace of Antioch are here clearly repudiated by the Church of Jerusalem. Their mission had been without any official sanction.

28 **For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us.** It is evidently claimed that the decision of the Council had been inspired by the Holy Ghost. The members of the Council were conscious of a Divine leading; and they no doubt relied on the promise of the Lord Himself that the

greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain <sup>29</sup> from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, it shall be well with you. Fare ye well.

So they, when they were dismissed, came down to Antioch; <sup>30</sup> <sup>1</sup> Or, and having gathered the multitude together, <sup>2</sup> *exhortation.* they delivered the epistle. And when they <sup>31</sup> <sup>3</sup> Or, had read it, they rejoiced for the <sup>4</sup> *comforted.* <sup>5</sup> *consolation.* And Judas and Silas, being themselves also pro- <sup>32</sup> phets, <sup>6</sup> *exhorted* the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had spent <sup>33</sup> some time *there*, they were dismissed in peace from the brethren unto those that had sent them forth.<sup>8</sup> But Paul and Barnabas tarried in Antioch, teaching <sup>35</sup> and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

## VI. The Second Missionary Journey

### *Separation of Paul and Barnabas (xv. 36-41)*

And after some days Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us return <sup>36</sup> now and visit the brethren in every city wherein we proclaimed

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Holy Spirit should be the guide of the Church collectively. (Cp. St. John xvi. 13.)

The decision follows closely the lines laid down by St. James, without going further into the larger questions of the relation of the Law to the Gospel, or the obligations of Hebrew Christians. The letter is couched in most tactful and sympathetic language. The Bezan text adds to it the precept (characteristic of St. Peter's first Epistle) "going on in the Holy Spirit."

The effect produced on the Church of Antioch was most favourable. But the controversy was by no means dead. For the rest of his life St. Paul was pursued by the machinations and malice of the Judaisers, of which his Epistles bear abundant trace.

<sup>33</sup> they were dismissed in peace. This refers to some formal and official act of dismissal by the Church. Whether the marginal *v. 34* is retained or not, it seems clear (from *v. 40*) that Silas remained at Antioch, though the actual work for which he had come had been formally concluded.

37 the word of the Lord, *and see* how they fare. And Barnabas was  
38 minded to take with them John also, who was called Mark. But  
Paul thought not good to take with them him who withdrew  
from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.  
39 And there arose a sharp contention, so that they parted asunder  
one from the other, and Barnabas took Mark with him, and sailed  
40 away unto Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas, and went forth, being  
41 commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he  
went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

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37 **And Barnabas was minded**, etc. It must be remembered that Barnabas was a near relation of John Mark, probably his cousin (Col. iv. 10), and this fact may have influenced him in his strong desire to give the younger man another opportunity of missionary work.

38 **But Paul thought not good**, etc. The words imply that this was a matter of conscience with St. Paul, and not of personal feeling. His work was too sacred and too near his heart for it to be endangered by the possibility of another failure.

39 **Cyprus**. This was St. Barnabas' native place, and here he had preached with St. Paul at the beginning of the first journey. He no doubt took this opportunity of consolidating the Christian work which had already begun in the island. But we hear no more of him in the N.T. Later, writing to the Corinthians, St. Paul alludes to him as an example of a fellow-worker (1 Cor. ix. 6). It is clear also that St. Paul became reconciled to John Mark and recognised his worth. In his second imprisonment at Rome he asks for his presence and help (2 Tim. iv. 11).

40 **being commended**. It might perhaps be gathered that the sympathy of the Church of Antioch was more with St. Paul than with St. Barnabas. At any rate, in the case of the former there was a formal service of dismissal and commendation.

41 **And he went through Syria and Cilicia**. Cilicia had been the scene of St. Paul's earlier labours for some seven years before he had been summoned by Barnabas to Antioch, and he was now able to revisit the different Christian churches, and "confirm," i.e. strengthen, them by teaching and encouragement. He would no doubt follow the road from Antioch to Tarsus, skirting the coast, and then from Tarsus turn north to the pass through the mountains called the Cilician Gates. Thence he would approach in reverse order the churches of Galatia, founded in the first journey.

## CHAPTER XV

*Questions*

1. Describe the events which led to the Council of Jerusalem.
2. What great issues were involved in this controversy ?
3. Summarise and compare the speeches of St. Peter and St. James at the Council.
4. State and discuss the meaning of the Council's decision.
5. What was the result of the Council ?
6. Describe the beginnings of St. Paul's second missionary journey.

*Subjects for Study*

1. The later history of Hebrew Christianity.

Hort, *Judaistic Christianity*.

2. The relation of Acts xv. to Galatians ii.

Lightfoot, *Galatians*.

Rackham, *Acts of the Apostles*.

*Epistle to the Galatians* in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*.

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